

Student Philosophical Society of Kazan Theological Academy at the End of the XIX - Early XX Centuries

Pelageya N. Panaitova, Artem P. Solovev

Abstract: The paper is devoted to the institutional analysis of the student philosophical society activity at the Kazan Theological Academy in the late XIX - early XX centuries. The study notes that the development of philosophy in a theological educational institution in itself is a contradiction since philosophy involves a critical attitude towards religion. But it was precisely at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries that interest in philosophy at Russian theological schools increased. At the same time, a philosophical circle society for students appeared only in the Kazan Theological Academy. Within the framework of our work, we use a constructionist and neoinstitutional approaches, which assume that institutions are formal and informal "rules of the game", norms of interaction within certain social interactions. As a result, it is concluded that the activities of the student society were determined both by its charter and by those special goals set by the theological education in Russia at that time. We have determined that one of the main goals was to teach the methods of philosophical criticism of future Orthodox theologians. It is also revealed that the topics that were discussed at meetings of the philosophical society were determined by the public resonance that they had. The topics related to modern literature and religious doctrine of Leo Tolstoy were presented as the main problems for the reports. This agenda also largely depended on the research topics of the leaders of the student philosophical society who were the professors of the Kazan Theological Academy.

Keywords: Kazan Theological Academy, philosophy in Russia, student philosophical society, neoinstitutionalism, constructionism, an institution of knowledge.

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of forming a philosophical circle in a religious school looks somewhat ambivalent, especially when it comes to the 19th century. On the one hand, philosophy has always been under suspicion. It implies the ability to think critically, and any criticism in its ultimate development is fraught with freethinking. The main goal of the theological school is to educate worthy shepherds, for whom creed and common sense should be indisputable landmarks. Of course, theological academies had to develop church sciences. But science as such in its foundation contains a requirement for a critical rethinking of previous achievements. And this forces an element of criticism into a spiritual school, which is necessary both for apologetic purposes and for a somewhat dangerous, but moderately necessary self-criticism.

This defines the main problem of our study, which consists of the need to explain how the philosophical society of

students of a confessional educational institution, which is also an institution of knowledge, is possible

II. METHODS

One of the main methodological approaches of our study is constructionism, in which knowledge is understood as a social construct. Moreover, social institutions that determine the nature of knowledge, which in turn affects the change in social institutions in general and knowledge institutions in particular, are of importance. We focus on the interpretation of constructionism proposed by W. Burr [1]. From her point of view, it is worth noting among the basic principles of constructionism the need for a critical attitude to knowledge taken as proved, as well as the requirement for the relationship between knowledge and a social act [1, p.3- 5]. In addition, constructionism also presupposes that knowledge is always based on a social process and cannot exist outside this process. The critic of constructionism J. Hacking is close to such understanding of it [2].

Constructionism assumes that knowledge is generated by social institutions implementing social projects in order to legitimize this knowledge as normative, "natural" for knowledge institutions. In our work, such a knowledge institution is the Kazan Theological Academy, which carried out its activities from 1842 to 1921. Its formal task was to prepare professional theologians and church administrators whose function was to substantiate religious knowledge in the framework of Orthodox theology. At the same time, the academy teachers themselves saw the protection of Orthodoxy from atheism and materialism through the search for truth as their goal. In this sense, the student philosophical society in the academy can be regarded as the intersection point of the social and epistemological interests of religious figures of the Russian Empire and professors of the Kazan Theological Academy. To some extent, our approach here turns out to be close to the radical constructionism of Bruno Latour, for which even scientific knowledge is not the result of logical and methodological justification, but the product of communication between specific scientists within the framework of the factual interpretation practices [3, p. 166]. This seems even more true with respect to theology than with respect to the natural sciences, which have been investigated by Latour.

Also in our study, we proceed from the fact that the institutions that determine the nature of constructed knowledge are changed themselves under the influence of this knowledge.

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This happens because institutions are not organisations, but "rules of the game," the norms of activity of these institutions. Constructionism in our work is complemented by a neoinstitutional approach [4] [5] [6]. This suggests that, under the influence of changing knowledge, the functioning norms of the theological academy itself, and its institutional aspect changed, which led to the need for a student philosophical society.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The duality of the goals of higher spiritual education, on the one hand, and the suspicious attitude to philosophy and student circles on the other should have attracted the close attention of researchers. But literature devoted to the activities of student philosophical circles in theological academies is extremely scarce. One of the studies considering this topic is an article by N.Yu. Sukhova about student circles (not only philosophical) in theological academies in the 1890–1910s. [7]

According to Sukhova, in 1897 "a student philosophical circle was founded at the Kazan Theological Academy (under the guidance of professor of metaphysics V.I. Nesmelov and professor of logic and psychology A.N. Potekhin)" [7, p.156]. It was in 1897 when Bishop Anthony (Khrapovitsky) was the rector of the Kazan Theological Academy, and who, through his scientific work and pedagogical activity, contributed to the formation of the Kazan philosophical spiritual and academic school. Just this year, he was ordained as a bishop and turned out to be the first rector of the Kazan Theological Academy in the rank of eparch. It is possible that it was precisely a bishop that he felt the possibility of the unhindered establishment of a philosophical circle society at the academy. Of particular importance is the fact of the communication of Bishop Anthony with students of the Kazan Theological Academy. The biographer of Bishop Anthony characterized him this way: "There were special receptions for students with tea drinking after dinner, which happened, except for holidays, almost daily. <...> A conversation ensued over tea, which always began somehow simply, perhaps even in a humorous tone, but led by the highly respected Fr. rector, who, as if from a crowded bowl, poured streams of edification, resolving perplexing questions and an abyss of all kinds of references and quotes on science. <...> As we know, many students, not taking part in the conversations, went to these evenings only to listen to them" [8, p.230-231].

The same biographer establishes the following fact: "Actually, Vladyka's speciality was philosophy, and he was more willing than others to talk on philosophical topics; under his leadership, a religious and philosophical circle of students was formed at the academy, where essays have been read and philosophical issues have been discussed" [8, p.247].

In the journal of the Kazan Theological Academy "The Orthodox Interlocutor" for 1900, one can find a message about the opening of the student philosophical society: "On December 1899, with the permission of Archbishop Arseny and the academic authorities, the Philosophical Society was organized among the students of the academy, which set the task to themselves to study philosophical issues and spread interest to philosophical knowledge in the student community. The Charter of the Society was developed in relation to the Charter of the same circle at the Moscow Theological

Academy. The community is under the supervision of the eminent rector, senior members and full members" [9, p.111] According to the announcement on the opening of the student philosophical society on December 17, 1899, such teachers of the Academy became its members and mentors: V.I. Nesmelov, A.K. Volkov, A.F. Gusev, A.N. Potekhin, and V.A. Nikolsky. This list of mentors who have decided to take part in the activities of a philosophical society is obvious. Nesmelov, an outstanding philosopher and theologian, taught metaphysics at the Kazan Theological Academy. Volkov and Gusev are the oldest mentors, the first of whom taught the history of philosophy, the second - accusatory theology. Potekhin taught a course in logic and psychology, and Nikolsky taught moral theology. Upon that, apparently, most actively participating among the teachers in the society was Nesmelov, but during the first year, their topics were determined by the interests of the Academy rector, Bishop Anthony. In addition to personal interest, the participation of the academy's mentors in the activities of the society was determined by the provisions of the charter, which in the manuscript version was preserved in the academy's archive. The very first article of the charter pointed out that the task of society is "the study of philosophical issues and the spread of interest in philosophy among students" [10, p.52]. And in the third paragraph, the obligatory participation of teachers in the work of the society was just stipulated. And if it to prepare and read essays, and also to keep minutes of meetings, were the duties of students (members of the society), then teachers (leading members) should "help students in choosing topics and manuals for essays, consider theses of these essays and resolve various theoretical and practical difficulties of students" [10, p.52]. According to the charter, regular meetings were supposed to be held at least twice a month. Society meetings were divided into regular and extraordinary [10, p.52]. Extraordinary meetings were held at the beginning and end of the year, as well as on special occasions. Mostly they had an organizational and reporting character. Regular meetings consisted of three parts: scientific, business and musical. In the framework of the scientific part, the charter prescribed a discussion of a well-prepared essay on a topic approved by the society and the rector of the academy. If the essay was not planned, it was proposed to discuss individual philosophical issues without a pre-prepared essay [10, p.53]. The latter resembled a scientific discussion, while the discussion of an abstract is the defense of a thesis. The business part of ordinary meetings included the solution of current organizational issues, and the musical part was "the performance of vocal and instrumental plays" [10, p.53]. The charter did not stipulate a specific time for holding meetings of the company. Each time, a date was pre-assigned. The meetings, judging by the manuscripts of the protocols, took place in the evening, mostly from 19.00 to 21.00. They were held on different days of the week: out of 19 dated meetings (21 topics of abstracts and discussions are known in all), 3 were on Monday, 2 on Tuesday and Wednesday, 7 on Thursday, and 5 on Friday. What is obvious - at the end of the week, it was more convenient to schedule meetings. However, the meetings did not take place on Saturday and Sunday.

In the early years the topics of reports at meetings of the student philosophical society, as will be seen later, mainly revolved around topics related to criticism of the religious and philosophical teachings of L.N. Tolstoy, the dogma of redemption and the question of the meaning of life. Separate reports concerned the philosophy of V.S. Soloviev and historical and philosophical dynamics. But these were rather exceptions, which confirm the rule that the topics mentioned above can be called "Antonievsko-Nesmelovskye". The list of topics of the reports clearly outlines the range of interests of the rector Bishop Anthony (Khrapovitsky) and his associate and constant interlocutor Professor Nesmelov.

Opening of the society and the report of student Feofilaktov (IV year) on the topic "Analysis of the teachings of Count L.N. Tolstoy on cognition" took place on December 17, 1899. On January 21 and February 9, 1900, a report by A. A. Vorontsov "The Psychological Theory of Atonement" [10, p.58–65] was represented. Alexander Alexandrovich Vorontsov (died in 1919) was a priest. It is necessary to say especially about him: he was born in the city of Astrakhan in the family of the seminary teacher Alexander Ivanovich Vorontsov. In 1890 he graduated from the Astrakhan Theological College as the first student, in 1896 the Astrakhan Theological Seminary as the first student, in 1900 - the Kazan Theological Academy with a candidate of theology degree with the right to obtain a master's degree without a new oral test. Subsequently, he was an associate professor in the department of pastoral theology and homiletics at the Kazan Theological Academy and a member of the committee of the Kazan Society for Sobriety.

On March 8, 1900, a report "Analysis of the main idea in the philosophical worldview of L.N. Tolstoy" was represented. The author of this report is not identified up today. On March 23, 1900 (Thursday) the report by V. Talankin (third-year student) "On the meaning of life" was represented [10, p.68]. On October 2, 1901, there was represented the report by Stefan Spirin "Is Christian morality selfless?" [10, p. 36–39]. It is interesting that in the future this graduate of the academy will become an active figure in the pro-Soviet Orthodox renewal movement.

On October 19, 1901, K. Ostrovidov's report "The Psychology of "Dissatisfied People" in Gorky's Works or in "Pursuit of the Meaning of Life" took place [10, p.31–35]. The fate of the speaker is quite well researched and is in striking contrast to the fate of the previous one: Konstantin Aleksandrovich Ostrovidov is now known to historians and in the church community as a priest bishop Victor (Ostrovidov), who was not only a disciple of Nesmelov, but also a remarkable missionary, rector of the Trinity-Sergius Lavra during the Civil War, Bishop of Vyatka, Sverdlovsk, and Izhevsk. He died in exile in 1934 after years of imprisonment in concentration camps.

On November 2, 1901, a report by Aleksandr Alekseevich Lebedev "Gorky and Pascal in resolving the issue of the meaning of life (an attempt at criticism)" [11, p. 154–155]. The second report, which was devoted to the Nietzschean position of the writer M. Gorky, was made by a man who in the future would suffer from the Soviet regime, like Bishop Victor.

On November 27 and December 13, 1901, there were reading and analysis of "Critics of Dogmatic Theology" by Leo Tolstoy [11, p.155-157]. This "reading" was a collective work and discussion, the handwritten protocols of which have

yet to be explored and investigated separately. This is all the more important because the discussion has taken place at a time when the statement of the Holy Synod on the fall of Count Tolstoy from the Church has been discussed. And it also gave a more active interest in the work of Tolstoy at meetings of the society.

On December 10, 1901, it was followed by the report of M. Kornievsky "A brief study of the basic principles of the theory of art by L. Tolstoy and the experience of their study (according to the book of L. Tolstoy "What is art?")" [11, p.157-160].

On January 17, 1902, the report of Fr. Petr Kushtalov "Patriotism and Christianity" [10, p.3-6] was represented. Priest Petr Ivanovich Kushtalov has graduated from the Voronezh Seminary in 1889. The report of Fr. Peter was attended by the rector of the Academy, Bishop Alexy, and professors Nesmelov, Potekhin, Nikolsky, and priest Druzhinin [10, p.4]. The main idea developed by the speaker is the opposite of true and national patriotism (egoism) while recognizing true patriotism as completely Christian, contrary to the opinion of L.N. Tolstoy. Thus, for almost two months, discussion at meetings of society was centred around Tolstoy's teachings.

On February 21, 1902 "Philosophy and literary circle society of students of the Kazan Theological Academy" held a literary, musical and vocal N. V. Gogol commemoration meeting [10, p.19–20]. Its materials were attached to the materials of the student philosophical society.

On March 18, 1902, there was represented the report by Fedor Sergeevich Sungurov "The Relationship between Aesthetic and Religious Feelings" [10, 13]. On October 28, 1902 (Monday) the report by K. Ostrovidov "The spiritual element of world reality" has been red [12,14,16].

In the folder with the materials of the student philosophical society of the Kazan Theological Academy, there are two more reports that are not yet possible to date, the authors of these reports are also unknown. Their themes are as follows: "What progress can be found in the historical change of philosophical doctrines?" [10, p. 28–29] and "An Essay on the Philosophical Views of V. S. Soloviev" [10, 15].

IV. SUMMARY

Thus, the activities of the student society were determined both directly by its charter, which determined the "rules of the game," and by the special goals set by the theological education, the interests of the leaders of society, and their informal networks in the study of the philosophical component of theology. It was revealed that the topics discussed at the meetings of the philosophical society were determined by the public resonance that they had. The topics related to modern (at the time) literature and religious doctrine of Leo Tolstoy were presented as the main problems for the reports. This agenda also depended to a large extent on the research topics of the academy teachers who directed the student philosophical society.

V. CONCLUSION

The study of activities and topics of discussions at the meetings of the student philosophical society of the Kazan



Theological Academy has significant potential for further clarification of how the institutions that generate knowledge change themselves under the influence of that knowledge. And this makes it possible to reveal how communication on philosophical problems changes theological knowledge. This seems possible precisely within the framework of applying an approach combining constructionism with a neoinstitutional approach within the framework of social epistemology.

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