

Russian Orthodox Theological Education in the Soviet Union

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For the past ten years, Russian Orthodox theological education in the Soviet Union has been maintained at a consistent level, with little noticeable change. Events of the past few months indicate that conditions may be improving slightly. The Russian religious situation could, of course, experience a rapid shift away from the relative stability of the present period of collective leadership in the Kremlin, but it appears likely that theological education can continue to develop in the coming years.

The formal training of clergy throughout the Soviet Union went into eclipse shortly after the Revolution of 1917. It was not until the alliance of Church and State during World War II that plans were made to reopen the long-closed seminaries and theological academies of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Moscow Theological Academy was the first to be reorganized, admitting students again in the autumn of 1944. A year later, the Leningrad Theological Academy was reopened, and by 1946 the reestablishment of a full system of seminaries was under way. The following years saw the rebirth of seminaries at Kiev, Minsk (in Belorussia), Saratov (on the Volga), Stavropol (in the Caucasus), Volynia (in the Ukraine), Odessa (on the Black Sea), Leningrad, and Moscow (at the Trinity – St. Sergius Lavra in nearby Zagorsk). Thousands of students passed through these schools during the honeymoon in Church-State relations which followed the War. The revival of pressure on the Russian Orthodox Church, during Khrushchev's later years in power, led to the closure of many of these institutions, and when the present Soviet leadership came to power (1964), only three seminaries (Moscow, Leningrad, and Odessa) and the two academies (Moscow and Leningrad) were still open. Moscow and Leningrad were well established, but the seminary at Odessa had lost its facilities and had been forced to find new quarters in the Monastery of the Assumption.

The past decade has seen the extension of the Church's *modus vivendi* with the State to the institutions of theological training. It has been a period of *status quo*, in which the growth and development of theological education has been very gradual. The present situation does show signs of

change, however, and a guarded optimism about the next decade is reasonable.

The Moscow Theological Seminary and Academy, at Zagorsk, is the largest institution for religious training in the Soviet Union. In the 1973-1974 academic year, it has 302 resident students and 600 correspondence students. The resident students fall into three categories. The Seminary, which is the basic course of study, has 180 students. The Academy has 95 students, who are engaged in graduate study. A third category, of post-graduate students, called the *Aspirantura*, has 27 students this year. The students in the Seminary are all Soviet citizens, but the Academy has two Bulgarians, two Serbs, and a Romanian among its students, as well as one student each from the Georgian and Armenian Churches. Students in the Seminary must be between the ages of 18 and 30, while students in the Academy may be as old as 35. Students are usually ordained during their seminary years, and by the fourth and final year of the seminary course, 90 per cent are ordained. Students are not exempted from military service and are often drafted during their first or second year. Virtually 100 per cent return from the service to complete their course of study. It appears to be a general practice that ordained students are not drafted, but this is a matter for the officials in the student's home town to determine. Military service for students in the Academy is deferred and they usually do not serve if they are ordained. Students in the correspondence course may be of any age. All but two of this year's 600 are ordained. For the most part, this course consists of men who have been ordained without the benefit of formal theological education and are now seeking to improve their skills. After completion of the seminary course by correspondence, many go on to the academy course, by the same procedure. Students in the *Aspirantura* do not receive a degree at the end of their course of study, and are usually working towards either a teaching career or the ecumenical and overseas work of the Patriarchate. Last year, in addition to the regular graduation of students from the Seminary and the award of the degree of Candidate in Theology to those who finished the Academy, there were awarded three degrees of Master of Theology and two Doctorates. These latter are awarded on the basis of books and other scholarly work. Six students finished the *Aspirantura* in 1973.

The Library of the Moscow Theological Seminary and Academy contains 270,000 volumes. Roughly half are pre-revolutionary, and about 15 per cent are in languages other than Russian.

There are 46 members of the faculty, of whom 37 are in holy orders. In addition, there are seven special instructors in such fields as art and music. There are five women on the faculty.

The seminary and academy courses each lasts for four years, while the *Aspirantura* is for three. Students begin the year in early September, and examinations are in the second half of May. Examinations are oral, in the usual Russian fashion. No thesis is required for seminary students, but academy students are expected to produce a relatively thorough dissertation. There are 30 subjects taught in the seminary and 27 in the academy. Some are taught for a single year, while others are for the full three years. All students study Latin and Greek in seminary and Hebrew is added in the academy curriculum. All students must study either English, French, or German. There is no training in Christian-Marxist dialogue, but all students study the history, Constitution, and laws of the Soviet Union. The greatest emphasis is placed upon the traditional disciplines – Bible, Church History, Theology, Liturgics, and Homiletics. Students come with very little background in the study of church matters and must be taught many subjects from scratch. Much time is spent on the study of Church Slavonic, history of the Slavonic Language, and modern Russian style.

The school is located in the Trinity – St. Sergius Lavra, and has the benefit of a lovely setting, the wise presence of many holy monks, and the exposure to tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the Soviet Union. The Monastery is in the small city of Zagorsk, some 70 km to the northeast of Moscow. It is close enough to Moscow to be convenient, and far enough away to permit peace and quiet.

The Rector of the Seminary and Academy is Archbishop Vladimir (Sabodan) of Dmitrov, former Rector of the Odessa Seminary and former Bishop of Chernigov. Archbishop Vladimir, who was born near Kiev, is young and scholarly, and is a graduate of the Leningrad Theological Academy. He has been a Bishop for eight years, and was elevated to the rank of Archbishop in 1973. The best known scholar of the faculty is Archpriest Alexei Ostapov, the Secretary of the Academic Council. The Inspector, who is in charge of the discipline and non-academic life of the students, is Archimandrite Alexander.

This year, there are signs of healthy growth at Zagorsk. There were four candidates for each opening, and lack of facilities forced the school to turn down many a promising young man. In spite of this, the Seminary was able to form two first year classes, thereby substantially increasing the number of incoming students. Ten of the new students came with institute diplomas and two others entered the Seminary with two institute diplomas behind them. There are also some students with some university training. Those with sufficient background are allowed to go directly into the Academy, but they still have to pass all of the Seminary examinations during their first year.

An additional sign of growth is the fact that the number of resident students has risen from 240 to over 300 in the past five years, and the number of correspondence students has risen from 400 to 600 in the same period.

The Leningrad Theological Seminary and Academy is housed in the building which served the St. Petersburg Seminary before the Revolution, in the Alexander Nevsky Lavra. It is in the midst of a cultured city, and has a correspondingly more worldly atmosphere than its sister school at Zagorsk. The curriculum is almost precisely the same, but the outlook is somewhat more Western at Leningrad.

This year, the Leningrad Seminary has 125 students, and the Academy has 52. There is no *Aspirantura* or correspondence course. There are 23 foreign students – from Ethiopia, Japan, India, USA, and several from the Eastern Bloc. Recent years have seen students from Greece, Cyprus, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, as well. Foreign students are usually sent to the Leningrad Academy rather than to the Moscow Academy.

This year, as was the case at the Moscow Seminary, the Leningrad Seminary had many more applicants than places (130 for 35 openings). The quality of the students was higher than in previous years, and one incoming student is a graduate of Leningrad State University. More than 80 per cent of the entering students graduate, and rarely does a student fail to return from his military service. In the Academy, however, there is not such a strong motivation, and only 28 students applied for the 25 openings this year. In addition, only about one third of those who enter the Academy will complete the degree of Candidate in Theology.

The Library, as of the beginning of 1974, has 117,307 books in Russian and 30,501 books in other languages. Roughly 75 per cent are pre-revolutionary, and 80 per cent are on religious subjects. It is adequately staffed but lacks shelf space.

The faculty of 31 includes five professors, six lecturers, and twenty instructors. Dr. N. D. Uspensky, Professor of Liturgics, and Archpriest M. K. Speransky, Professor of New Testament, are well known throughout the Orthodox world. Professors L. A. Voronov and N. A. Zabolotsky are familiar faces in international ecumenical gatherings. The Rector is Bishop Meliton (Soloviev) of Tikhvin, a Bishop of pastoral rather than academic background. The Inspector is Archpriest V. I. Sorokin, an expert on Western Churches and lecturer in Hebrew. Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad and Novgorod, who has an apartment in the Seminary building, has taken a great personal interest in the institution, often leads the services in the Seminary church, and generally watches over the school and its students.

In Odessa, the Seminary opened the 1973-1974 academic year with 117 students. Under the Rectorship of Archimandrite Agafangel, the school has shown a steady existence in recent years. The student body is drawn almost entirely from the Ukraine, where the largest concentration of working churches is to be found. The curriculum is the same as at the other two seminaries. There are no foreign students and no other programme than the regular seminary course. The faculty consists of sixteen professors and lecturers, nine of whom are ordained. The library is limited, but is generally adequate for the needs of the students.

A student's life revolves around the church, the refectory, the dormitory, and the single classroom used by his class. Students are divided into duty groups, and take turns serving at the many services. One day in ten, each student assists at the 6 a.m. Liturgy. Classes begin at 9 a.m. The students stay in the room assigned to their particular class, and the faculty members move around. In this way, the student's classroom desk becomes his study desk, and the classroom doubles as a study hall. Lunch, at 2.30 p.m., is eaten in silence, as lives of the saints are read. The rest of the day is devoted to study or recreation. Accommodations are in dormitory rooms, with half a dozen or more students to a room. Life is spartan, but the food is plentiful and good. The greatest complaint from the students is the lack of study materials. Lecture notes, prepared by the faculty members, are distributed in typewritten copies. There are rarely enough, however, to go around, and students must share books.

Theological education in the Orthodox seminaries and academies of Russia is, by necessity, highly conservative. These schools are preparing young men to go out into highly difficult situations, in which a single church may have to serve many thousands of believers. The young priest will spend most of his time on the sacramental life of his flock, and the current system prepares him for that kind of ministry. The education is heavy on dogmatics, liturgics, and the priestly arts. There is little philosophy or psychology, and no sociology or counselling. Teaching of the Bible is primarily dogmatic, and modern Biblical scholarship is not presented. It is true that materials are lacking. The Church clearly desires, however, to produce priests who will throw themselves completely into their huge tasks, rather than sit pondering. The theological education system of the Russian Orthodox Church is succeeding in its task and it shows signs of slowly improving and expanding its work. It is limited by the society in which it exists, and it is limited by the goals it has set for itself. Within these bounds, however, nearly 1,200 young men are training to serve millions of faithful, to uphold a mighty tradition, and to hold firmly to a well defined faith.