

Bogoljub Šijaković / Aleksandar Raković

The University and Serbian Theology

The Historical and Educational Context of the Establishment of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade
(research, documentation, bibliography)

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Faculty of Orthodox Theology
University of Belgrade

Bogoljub Šijaković • Aleksandar Raković

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Higher Education of the Serbian Orthodox Church 1899–1936: Roads and Crossroads

Preface

The higher education of the Serbian Orthodox Church is one of the issues insufficiently explored and understood in the church history. From the turn of the centuries until World War I the attempts of establishing the faculties of theology in the Kingdom of Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire were addressed occasionally. The ideas, actual proposals and initiatives for the establishment of the higher theological education of the Serbian people in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia have never been compared.

In this book I have tried to present and analyse the history of the idea of the establishment of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the Serbian people in the period of the first four decades of the 20th century, as well as the rivalry between the school centres in Belgrade and Sremski Karlovci, and conflicts between the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade and the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb, dilemmas that some leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church had on the character of the higher theological education which are reflected in their proposal on the establishment of a spiritual academy and the recognition of the level of the faculty to the Serbian Orthodox Seminary in Sremski Karlovci (Karlovci Seminary) and the Orthodox Theological Institute in Zadar (Zadar Seminary) in accordance with the laws of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after they ceased to operate.

This book is structured in the same way. The Preface is followed by an introductory chapter *Brief over-*

view of the education of Serbian theologians in the 19th and early 20th century. The Chapter *Long way to the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade 1899–1920* presents dilemmas, debates and discussions about the establishment of the faculty of Orthodox theology at the newly founded University of Belgrade, reasons for delaying the opening of the faculty until the World War I and the political and academic reasons for its establishment immediately after the founding of Yugoslav state. This chapter does not address the school program of the newly established Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade because this institution deserves a separate monograph that would highlight its history. Chapter *Karlovci Seminary — a step from the level of the faculty 1914–1920* presents the actual proposals of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and Karlovci Seminary to the authorities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes to elevate the seminary to the level of the faculty. This chapter shows that the Karlovci Seminary was abolished during the fight between the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade and the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb over its heritage. During its existence, despite several attempts, Karlovci Seminary did not acquire the level of the faculty, and was not transformed into any of the aforementioned faculties of theology. The next chapter *Short existence of the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb 1920–1924* depicts political reasons leading to the establishment and abolition of this faculty, highlighting the conflicts between this

faculty and the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade. The chapter *Faculty of theology and / or spiritual academy 1922–1936* presents the dilemma of the Serbian Orthodox Church on the character of the higher education for its clergy, the idea of abolishing the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade which would be replaced by a spiritual academy, but also the idea of a spiritual academy as a higher school for educating monks which would coexist with the Orthodox Faculty of Theology. The next chapter *Subsequent recognition of the faculty level to Karlovci Seminary and Zadar Seminary 1925–1933* explains the reasons which led to the recognizing the level of the faculty to all professional schools. Next is the *Conclusion* followed by *Bibliography, Index and Notes about the author*.

The research of archival material was done in the Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ), the Archives of Serbia (AS) and the Archives of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade (APBF). The research of the newspapers and periodicals was done at the National Library of Serbia, University Library in Belgrade, Library of the Archives of Serbia and the Library of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade. I have also used historiographical literature. I made photo material by myself or received it from the collections and archives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Archives of Yugoslavia, Archives of Serbia, Serbian

Academy Sciences and Arts, Matica Srpska, Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, Belgrade City Museum and Historical Archives of Negotin. Three photos were taken from an online collection of the Congress Library in Washington.

The cross-reference of data from archival and library materials, primary and secondary literature, showed that the used sources provided valuable and relevant information of the highest importance to the research of the topic *Higher Education of the Serbian Orthodox Church 1899–1936: Roads and Crossroads*.

I would like to point out that many historians and theologians have written about the education of Serbian theologians abroad and mentioned, in the wider context of religious and secular education, the higher theological education of the Serbian people in the 19th century and the first four decades of the 20th century: Đoko Slijepčević, Čedomir Drašković, Nikola Gavrilović, Dimitrije Kalezić, Predrag Puzović, Radmila Radić, Radomir Rakić, Sofija Božić, Ljubodrag Popović, Urs von Arx and others.

Special thanks to Professor Bogoljub Šijaković, the co-author of the book *The University and Serbian Theology*, for the ongoing support and valuable advice as well as to the reviewers of the book: Professor Ljubodrag Dimić, Professor Radovan Bigović (1956–2012) and Professor Ilija Marić. I also express my gratitude to Sanja Nikolić for English translation.

A. R.

Conclusion

Although the initiative for the establishment of the faculty of theology was launched in the Serbian public in mid-19th century, the lack of scientific and professional staff hindered the realization of this idea. At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the scientific and professional community was divided over the status of the higher theological education. The Commission for drafting a law on transforming the Great School to the University in 1899 issued a provisional decision on the establishment of the Faculty of Theology at the new University. The leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia thought it needed a spiritual academy of the Russian type and this idea was supported by a part of scientific and professional elite which was against the idea that the faculty of theology should be equal to the other faculties of the University of Belgrade.

The Law of the University of 1905 provided for the establishment of a spiritual academy with a special status at the University of Belgrade. This lawful decision was never implemented. Dispute about the faculty of theology or spiritual academy at the University of Belgrade or outside it was restored in 1907 when relevant, but completely segregated, opinions of the leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church started speaking in favour of the faculty of theology.

It was only in 1909 when the first generation of the students of the reformed high-school theological education in Serbia graduated, that the student core of the faculty of theology could be created. The lasting debate between the state leadership and the

Serbian Orthodox Church about the status of the higher theological education in Serbia and the Balkan Wars prolonged the development of a new initiative for the establishment of the faculty of theology until 1914. This time the idea was to establish the faculty of theology in the form of a Department of Theology or Department of History and Religion at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade. Further debate was temporarily interrupted by World War I.

Belgrade was not the only promoter of the institutionalization of the higher Orthodox Theological education in Serbia. This idea appeared in 1900 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Sremski Karlovci, which was another centre of Serbian Orthodoxy. There was also a dilemma of whether a higher theological school should be established as a faculty or a spiritual academy.

In the first decade of the 20th century the Karlovci Seminary was improving its status as well as its scientific and professional staff from year to year. The teaching staff potential was the power that Belgrade did not have. The turning point came in 1912 when the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy reached some kind of understanding which was supposed to strengthen the position of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci and weaken the influence of Serbian political parties in Hungary. In 1914, the leadership of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci believed that all the necessary scientific, technical and political requirements were met

for transformation of the Karlovci Seminary to the faculty of theology. The elaborate on this issue was sent to the competent state authorities, but the initiative was terminated by World War I just as it was the case in Serbia.

As of 1903 there were those who supported the idea of raising the Karlovci Seminary to the level of the faculty of Orthodox theology of the University of Zagreb. This type of solution was proposed in Zagreb during World War I. It showed the commitment to the unity of South Slavs in the territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since then, Zagreb became a serious contender in the field of higher Orthodox theological education, although less prominent than Belgrade and Sremski Karlovci at that point.

Some tragic, and some fortunate circumstances that followed the world disaster, gave additional weight to the reasons for introducing the faculty of theology to the University of Belgrade. Russian refugee academics and Serbian theologians from Karlovci Seminary helped filling scientific and professional teaching positions in Belgrade. The tragedy of Russia and the Yugoslav unification accelerated the final decision on the establishment of the faculty of theology in Belgrade. Thanks to the historical circumstances, the problem of teaching staff which Serbia had in the past twenty years was finally resolved.

However, the political reasons which always played an important role in the united Yugoslav state should not be ignored. Serbian elite, which came out of World War I as a big winner and dominated Yugoslav political and state scene, was not expected to let the Roman Catholics prevail, at least not in the part of the religious issues, if higher theological education could be considered as only a "part". The Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology in Zagreb had existed for centuries, and the lack of Faculty of Or-

thodox Theology in Belgrade brought into question even the equality of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a new rival in a unified Yugoslav state. Especially then when Vatican was stubbornly refusing to accept the Yugoslav unity and destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Without scientific theology the Serbian Orthodox Church would eventually fall behind the Roman Catholic Church. Such an outcome would be bad in a multinational state such as Yugoslavia where each religious issue was inseparable from the national. Serbian political and scientific elite did not allow such a failure. The fact is that even in these circles there was little resistance towards the faculty of Orthodox theology.

Croat representatives who took part in a debate in the Provisional National Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, supported the opening of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade. This was done in good faith, but the background was somewhat political. If the Faculty of Orthodox Theology had remained outside the university, it would have been quite possible that the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology in Zagreb would be removed from the University of Zagreb. After all, it was discussed. In a newly-founded Yugoslav state, the sides needed to be equal and it was better and smarter to add than to remove.

Therefore, the Government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes made an important move and established the Faculty of Orthodox Theology as an integral and equal part of the University of Belgrade. This faculty was given greater importance than the newly-founded Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology of the University of Zagreb. The Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade expected the abolition of its counterpart in Zagreb and was working on that wishing to suppress the competition and take over the teaching staff. At the same

time, the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology started a pretentious initiative for annulment of the scientific status of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade.

During 1919 and 1920, Karlovci Seminary unsuccessfully tried to acquire the level of the faculty on three occasions. This school was closed in 1920 and was not formally transformed to either of the faculties of Orthodox theology despite the strong pressure to be transformed to the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb.

The establishment of the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology of the University of Zagreb in 1920 was politically motivated. It was supposed to be yet another symbol of Yugoslav centralism. When the political situation and the Serbo-Croat relations in the new Yugoslav state deteriorated, the future of the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb was brought into question, and later sealed as a contribution to the improvement of bad ethnic relations.

The Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb had too many enemies and opponents. Some of them had already been and others were forced to become so due to the political circumstances in the country: the Roman Catholic Church, some bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, University of Belgrade and its Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Serbian wing of the Democratic Party, and even the University of Zagreb. Troubled by various difficulties and pressures which made the work of the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb impossible, and its very existence the burden for the state, Yugoslav centralist also agreed to the abolition of the faculty. The procedure of abolishing the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology lasted until April 1924.

When it seemed that the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade was devoid of any competi-

tion and that its future was in no way threatened, at the end of 1923, the leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church raised the question of the abolition of the faculty and the establishment of a completely new spiritual academy. The reasons were insufficiently elaborated and the initiative faded away in the spring of 1924. Further elaboration of the initiative showed that the academy was supposed to coexist with the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. In 1933, the Serbian Orthodox Church decided to establish a spiritual academy, but the decision was implemented.

The destinies of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb and the Karlovci Seminary were so entwined in 1919 that in several post-war years it was impossible to consider them separately. The better the perspectives were for some, the worse they were for others. The Karlovci Seminary was destroyed as collateral damage in the battle between two faculties of theology over its heritage.

To regulate the qualifications of the clerical staff, the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, after obtaining the positive opinion of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade in 1933, retroactively recognized the level of the faculty not only to the Karlovci Seminary but also to the Zadar Seminary which was closed in 1919.

Finally, and this is especially important, according to the regulations of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes / Yugoslavia, four Orthodox schools had the status of the faculty: the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Belgrade, the Faculty of Eastern Orthodox Theology in Zagreb, the Serbian Orthodox Seminary in Sremski Karlovci and the Orthodox Theological Institute in Zadar.

Regardless of the competition between these schools and occasional misunderstandings between their professors, local bishops, faculties and univer-

sities, the continuity of the idea of establishing and strengthening of the scientific theology of the Serbian people through higher schools of the Serbian Orthodox Church remains indisputable. During two

and a half decades of the Serbian history (1900–1924), Sremski Karlovci, Belgrade and Zagreb were the three flows of a unique idea that at the end of this period met in the Serbian and Yugoslav capital.



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