
The inaugural address of Hus Beatitude, Metropolitan Sawa inauguration of the Chair of Orthodox Theology of The University in Białystok

Elpis 1/1, 283-289

1999

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**THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS
OF
HIS BEATITUDE, METROPOLITAN
SAWA
INAUGURATION
OF THE
CHAIR OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY IN BIALYSTOK**

Your Magnificence, Rector of the University in Bialystok

Representatives of the High Senate

Your Excellencies:

Madam Wojewodo

Mr. President

Esteemed brothers in the clergy

Ladies and Gentlemen

:

Today, in this university auditorium, we are experiencing a most unusual event, an historic event, which bespeaks not only of Bialystok and the Region of Bialystok, but which bespeaks of the history of our Polish Orthodox Church and of our Polish Commonwealth. Today we are inaugurating the Chair of Orthodox Theology of the University in Bialystok. This means that a new stage in the development of Orthodox Theology in Poland is beginning, and is an indefeasible witness of the progress which has been accomplished in the process of the normalization of the conditions of life in our country. This fact has

untold meaning for the Orthodox Church, but also expresses the new singularity of this particular university itself. Today this university becomes an authentic „university”, in the full meaning of the term, as it was understood in the founding of all the great and venerable universities of Europe, all of which expounded the theology of the respective Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches. The University in Białystok thus is elevated in dignity. The meaning of this is invaluable and incalculable, all the more so, because the University of Białystok is situated on this specific territory which is the Region of Białystok, a region which is diverse religiously and ethnically. This City of Białystok is the largest agglomeration of Orthodox Christians in all of Poland, not to mention the entire Southeast of the Województwo of Podlasie.

Thanking Almighty God for this gift, I feel obliged, at this inauguration of the Chair of Orthodox Theology of the University in Białystok, to express the most sincere words of gratitude to His Magnificence, Professor Adam Jamroz, Rector of the University in Białystok, as well as to the High Senate, for passing the resolution calling for the establishment of this Chair of Orthodox Theology. So too, the Ministry of Education for granting it's permission to open this Chair, as well as the authorities of the Województwo of Podlasie and of the City of Białystok, and everyone who supported the ideal of opening this Chair of Orthodox Theology.

In this joyous evening, in a most particular way, I wish to express our gratitude to Mr. Jerzy Giedroń, for his significant openness and support of the ideal of calling for the Chair of Orthodox Theology specifically here, in Białystok. May God reward him and everyone for thier contribution. The prayers of the Orthodox Church are with you.

The teaching of theology, from the very inception of organized education, was an integral part of an university education. This is as it was throughout all of Christian history, and this is as it still is in democratic societies.

The particular development of the theological sciences was marked in the period between the XIIth and the XVth centuries. It was during this period that the first university in Poland was founded, in the year 1364, in Krakow. The university had forty-two chairs; eleven of them were theological. This university radiated in the humanistic and

theological sciences. In the XVth century the university could boast such names as Mateusz of Krakow, who advocated the Reformation, Jakub of Paradyż, Pawel Wlodkovic, as well as Jan Dlugosz and Franciszek Skoryny who played an important role in the Commonwealth.

Of a similar character were the Academies of Ostrog and Kiev. Piotr Mohyla, comprehending the significance of the theological sciences established his Orthodox Theological College in 1631, which later expanded into the Mohileanum Academy, which emanated theologians to all of Europe.

The role of the universities and of the theological sciences was appreciated by all our kings, bishops, aristocrats and noblemen. One of the points in the Cossack Instruction to the Sejm of the Commonwealth, in 1670, pertained to the equality of the Orthodox Academy with the Jagiellonian University and the University of Vilnius. Furthermore, Piotr Doroszenko demanded that the king grant his permission for the erection of a center of higher education in Lvov, which would „Give preference to the Ruthenian peoples”.

Theology was also taught in the schools conducted by the Orthodox Brotherhoods. Such great names as Cyril Lukaris, Jan Borecki, Melecjusz Smotrycki exposed the theological sciences in the school of the Orthodox Brotherhood in Vilnius, founded in 1584. The graduates of these schools would later occupy the highest offices in the Orthodox Church.

Let us not forget that theology was always regarded as being the „Crown of all knowledge”. What then is theology, and what is its mission?

Theology is the knowledge of God which comes from God, leads toward God, and is for God. This is how Orthodox Dogma understands Sacred Theology. It's mission is to expose that which pertains to the Divine, and those truths which God revealed to mankind. Theology has it's foundation in Divine Revelation, it enlists the soul and the intellect, and serves to build harmony and order in the theologian, in mankind, and in the world; this implies that the study of theology has profound influence on human life, in every capacity: on man's religious, moral and social life. Theology satiates the hunger of the intellect, whereas it answers all the questions of the human mind: Who am I? Where do I

come from? Why was I created? To what purpose does the world exist? What is the meaning of life? Etc. Theology answers all these questions, while, at the same time, reveals the transcendental dimension of mankind, showing the dignity of mankind which is due to his unique relationship with God. This is revealed in the fact that man was created „In the Image and Likeness of God”.

Man, therefore, is a person of exceptional value. Theological truths help the person to realize this value, and to understand the meaning of his life, not only of his life here on this Earth, but also in the dimension of eternity, and together with all other persons he is on the road toward attaining the fullness of his humanity and that which we consider happiness. From this we can understand the place of sacred theology together with the other sciences, as well as the place of sacred theology among the other sciences in the coursework of the university.

Orthodox Theology has been taught, and continues to be taught, at the universities of Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Finland, Slovakia, at Oxford and in Munich. In 1990, Orthodox Theology returned to the universities of Russia. Professor Hamilkar Alivizatos, at the 1st Conference of Orthodox Theology, which was held in Athens in 1936, noting the presence of Orthodox Theology Chairs and Sections at the various universities stated, „At the beginning of the XIXth century, Orthodox Theology gained it's proper position in the universities of Orthodox nations, which is very important and reflects the level of contemporary culture.”

At that same conference, the Rector of the University of Athens, Professor Giorgios Papamichael said:

„Our University of Athens, from it's inception, had a Section of Sacred Theology, which gives testimony to the fact that the Church of Greece alone could not have consolidated the work of theologians by only individual and disjoint theological activity (...). It is clear that the scientific exposition of theology is able to make progress primarily in the context of the university. Furthermore, it is clear that the university itself would not have the right to be considered perfect or complete, as a place of higher education, were it not for the place of sacred theology on a par with the other subjects which are taught at the university. For this reason, the Department of Theology of the University of Athens, is under the same roof as the other departments of the university; is on a

par with all the other departments of the university; is perceived by our academicians as being in every way equal in dignity with all the other departments of the university; and in the academic conscience, being free from prejudice, considers it proper, to regard sacred theology as having the most honorable of all positions among the humanistic sciences (...). Due to this cooperation of the sciences, the university is able to provide for the hunger of the human soul for truth (...). Our university, cognizant of the pinnacle role which our Department of Theology has played in the progress of science, accredits the Department of Theology with the first place among all our departments" („*Elpis*" 11:1937, pp. 52-54).

Inaugurating the Chair of Orthodox Theology of the University in Bialystok, I am behoved to recall the day of February 8th, 1925, seventy-four years ago, when the College of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw was opened, and which was to work effectively until the outbreak of World War II. The College of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw played a venerable role in the life of the Orthodox Church in Poland and throughout the world. It was considered to be one of the best schools of Orthodox Theology in the world. Among its professors were the most renowned names; among them: Nicholas Arseniev, Archimandrite (St.)Gregory Peradze, Jan Ogijenko, Michael Zyzykin, and others. The graduates of the College of Orthodox Theology of the University of Warsaw came to occupy the most distinguished offices and became the leaders of the Orthodox Church in Poland, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Constantinople, Serbia and America. We pray that God will grant us His blessing, that the Chair which we are inaugurating today will be equally fruitful and will be a worthy continuation of the legacy to which we are heir.

The Chair of Orthodox Theology of the University in Bialystok inaugurates its work with a staff of five members. They will be disseminators of Orthodox dogmatic theology, pastoral theology, practical theology, ecumenical theology, and history. At the very beginning, they will provide informational service to anyone and everyone interested in becoming familiar with the science of Orthodox Theology. In the future, aside from theology, the Chair is going to be working toward preparing students for work in the Church, this including catechists, staff workers, and social workers. These are the

needs of our age; our Church is eager to meet these contemporary needs.

The Chair of Orthodox Theology desires to serve everyone with openness and understanding, but particularly, to be a source of encouragement in the pursuit of further development and scholarly work, especially as regards theologians and clergymen, but inclusive of all those who are filled with the fire of living faith.

We desire, in a spirit of service, to be open to the needs of our neighbours in the East. We desire to fulfill our scholarly and didactic role by extending ourselves to the community-at-large, through meetings, lectures, and publications; all of which ought to serve toward uniting people and expanding their intellectual horizons, while serving the scientific subject of faith and life. Our times are witness to legion anomalies, expressed in disturbing social phenomena, whose foundation is a false conception of spirituality, with an admixture of paganistic ascription.

In its scholarly, scientific and didactic work, the Chair of Orthodox Theology of the University in Białystok intends to provide representation of the contribution of the Orthodox Church, through lectures, seminars, symposia, and the so called „practical activities”. We shall work toward developing cooperation between the staff of the Chair of Orthodox Theology and the remaining staff of the university, as well as all the young people who are students of the university, in a spirit of faith and love, in accordance with the words of Saint John the Apostle: „Let us love one another, whereas love comes from God and anyone who engages in love, knows God” (I Jn. IV: 7).

The program of the Chair of Orthodox Theology will be carried-out, under the supervision of the Rector and Senate of the university, in strict cooperation with the Church, cultivating its millennial wisdom and traditions.

With unwaivering faith in Divine assistance, and with the aforementioned convictions, the Chair of Orthodox Theology of the University in Białystok begins its work with the belief that God's blessing, and the help of well-disposed souls goes with us and shall steadfastly abide by us, in this honorable endeavour.

I thank each and everyone for your presence, and for being with us, to share with us our joy. This is our mutual joy. May God reward you!

In closing, I wish to inform, that the Chair of Orthodox Theology shall be under the patronage of three great Theologians and Fathers of the Church: Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John the Golden Tongued, whose feast will be celebrated on February 12th. May they be our guides and intercessors in the work which we begin today.