



**Church Rebels: From The History Of The Kazan Theological Seminary**

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**ABSTRACT**

The article deals with the issue of rebelliousness and protest activity of the Kazan Theological Seminary students in the late XIXth - early XXth centuries. For a long time, this topic was not touched upon in the context of church historical research. The reason for this was both the weakness of the church-historical science that was defeated in the Soviet period, and the specifics of the ideological paradigm that dominates in Russian Orthodox Church. The author, using the example of the Kazan Theological Seminary, describes the psychological atmosphere that reigned in the educational institution during 1892 - 1907, and tries to identify the distinctive features of the protest movement of seminarians, as well as to determine its forms, dynamics and direction. A particular importance is given to the problem of Christian morality crisis, which has embraced not only church youth, but also the hierarchy, and the leadership of the educational institution. The assessment is given concerning the influence on the seminary by the external revolutionary atmosphere and urban students. Among the most significant moments is the answer to the question: why those who were preparing for spiritual pastor career adopted the deviant forms of behavior actively, participated in murders and armed clashes with government troops. The work is based on original sources.

**Key words:** history, protest, youth, church, revolt, revolution, religion.



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the late XIXth - early XXth century educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church were in a serious crisis. Despite the Synod concern for material provision to the academies, seminaries and schools, their students rebelled (It is important to note that during the period indicated, 1850-1917). In particular, it concerned spiritual seminaries, which were considered as secondary schools. The Kazan Theological Seminary in this sense has become one of the most radical. Seminarians refused to study theology and classical sciences, but willingly read political and philosophical literature, without escaping the temptation to join the fashionable Marxism for that period. Gradually this led not only to the infusion of some of them into revolutionary organizations like the Socialist-Revolutionary Party or RSDRP, but also to the creation of conspiratorial protest associations within the walls of a religious educational institution. The response measures of the leadership did not differ in diversity and in the overwhelming majority of cases were limited to the expulsion of a group of rebellious pupils, a restriction in food and imprisonment. Thus, the antagonism of superiors and students increasingly plunged the spiritual school into a crisis that peaked during the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907.

## **2. METHODS**

1. Historical-genetic method (HGM). HGM allowed to trace the transformation of the Kazan seminarians protest over time: from inception to extinction;
2. Historical-comparative method (HCM). HCM is based on the principle of analogy, which made it possible to carry out a comparative analysis of student dissatisfaction manifestations depending on a particular stage;
3. Historical-system method (HSM). Through the HSM, the protest movement of seminarians seems to be an integral phenomenon, correlating with contemporary social realities.

## **3. RESULTS**

The development of conflict potential in the Kazan Theological Seminary at the turn of the XIX-XX centuries was determined by the combination of external and internal causes. The most obvious factors include excessive control of the church hierarchy over seminarians, student interest for revolutionary ideas, the propaganda of revolutionary



students. Nevertheless, it is advisable to identify other catalysts. In particular, the discrepancy between the improving provision of students and the increase of their number at the institution under study. Despite the fact that the evaluation of well-being level among certain groups of people who lived in the past traditionally seems to be a difficult matter (Vasudevan , 1988), in our case there is documentary evidence that the seminary fell into the Malthusian trap, and its already difficult situation was further aggravated synergetic effect conditioned by a high number of pupils (more than 350 people) in a limited area (The case about opening according to the staff of theological seminaries concerning the position of the 3rd inspector's assistant of the seminary (started on September 10, 1898, completed on January 25, 1899)) and their youthful age, which is characterized by high emotional energy and motivation. This predetermined the activation of the protest trigger mechanism. In this case, we see the confirmation of relative deprivation theory (Devis, 1969).

As for the form, the riot was recorded within the walls of the educational institution in 1892 for the first time. Therefore, if it is possible to speak about the opposition, it was spontaneous and primitive one. But the reading circle by Sergei Stepnitsky, who appeared at the seminary in 1895, was already a fundamentally different form. The union demonstrated the transformation of church youth worldview, which was not in the mainstream of the religious picture of the world, but belonged to modern natural science concepts (Soldatov, 1985). Thus, we also observe one of the original forms of protest. However, the center of its gravity was based not so much on the public-opposition, as on a hidden intellectual plane. Nevertheless, it was an epochal turn in the minds of young men who graduated from the church environment, and who still preserved the remnants of religious upbringing (For more information read the following: I. Manchester, 2008.). However, on the wave of all-Russian student unrest that began in the spring of 1899 and reached a special heat by the spring of 1901, the protest activities of Kazan seminarians turned into bitter riots once again. According to the sources the moods of spiritual institution students were heated by the students of the Imperial Kazan University and the Veterinary Institute. In its turn, the leadership of the seminary made a lot of efforts to improve the material support of students, to reduce the growing tension and to achieve the loyalty of the wards (Representations by the Rector of the Kazan Seminary



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Archimandrite Cyril to His Eminence Arseny, 1899). But by the beginning of the XX century it was not enough, because in many ways the seminar protest passed the point of no return, and the educational policy of the administration remained short-sighted and definitely repressive. The sources inform that a conflict inside a seminary could be avoided, if not for the principle position of the rector Archimandrite Cyril (Lopatin), who demanded apologies from the students. But he did not change it even in the conditions of the information received about the seminarians preparing for it. However, repressive measures have had an effect for a while. And by the spring of 1901, in spite of the fierce confrontation, the protest mood of the seminarians was somewhat weakened in the city of revolutionary and anti-revolutionary forces.

But already on the eve of the First Russian Revolution of 1905-1907 the sleeping opposition energy turns into the institutionalization of the protest within the framework of a well-known protest organization - the Temporary Central Organizational Council of Seminarists. This association claimed the status of All-Russian one and aimed to act as a united front against the educational policy of the Holy Synod. The organizers decided to demand the reform of the seminaries according to modern pedagogical principles, excluding the domination of classical forms and placing the achievements of science and technology at the head of the educational process. And although this experiment was naturally unsuccessful, it demonstrated the potential of seminarians in the issues of constructive opposition to the church system (Titlinov , 1925). It is important to note that the students of Kazan University played a special role in the construction of the Temporary Central Organizational Council of the seminarians. The sources retained the name of one of them - Alexander Dubov. Being a graduate of the Kaluga seminary, A. Dubov also developed the project of the organization, and he also was the author of the Council first appeals.

The revolutionary events brought back the seminar protest to the expressive channel once again. From now on, leadership did not belong to intellectual seminarians. It belonged to young men who were ready for terrorist attacks, armed confrontation with government forces, murders and pogroms (Report of KGZhU head to the Kazan Governor No. 322 issued on November 12, 1908). This clearly manifested itself in October 1905, when according to sources the seminarians actually started a battle with



the tsarist troops in the center of Kazan. Then they were joined not only by secular students, but also by the students of the Kazan Theological Academy.

Meanwhile church power also departed from the Christian principles of humanism and compassion, and was deaf to the appeals of that part of the seminarians who offered the dialogue instead of total confrontation at a decisive moment. In this case, the subjective factor, pointed out by R. Kozellek (Kosellek , 1989), clearly demonstrated its importance. The church government tried not to change, but to reverse the situation, contrary to common sense, showing the commitment to corporate ethics and its utilitarian interests. Thus, the hierarchs were completely at loss in the face of rioting youth, losing credibility and initiative in the rapidly developing crisis processes.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The discussion of the problem of riots and revolutionary activity of Orthodox seminarians of the late Russian Empire in the scientific community is conditionally divided into three stages: before the October Revolution of 1917, the Soviet period and the modern period.

Until 1917, both the representatives of church authorities and teaching corporations, as well as the intellectuals, tried to comprehend this problem. However, this did not result in serious scientific research and in-depth analysis. The group of Russian thinkers, whose works were published in a single collection entitled "Milestones" (1909) can be regarded as an exception. Among them, N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov and others. These philosophers (each in his own way) revealed the boundaries of the indicated phenomenon and determined its origins - a historical breakthrough and the loss of compendium status of the unshakable norms of world understanding and behavior by Christianity.

Soviet historical science has moved away from philosophical problems and has concentrated on practical aspects. Due to this, as the case may be, Soviet historians distinguished the general and particular that was characteristic of the seminar protest movement. The class of contradictions, which was quite natural given the fact that the pressure of ideology in the humanities during the Soviet period was decisive and directly influenced the results of the research undertaken was of particular importance. At the present stage, the rejection of this paradigm has not occurred yet, because,



despite serious shortcomings, Soviet researchers have done much to determine the cause of the seminar protest. So, their works have material, household, psychological and ideological factors. For example, G.N. Wolfson, perhaps for the first time, noted the important fact that the seminarians were overwhelmingly from the families of poor priests, whose daily life and status differed little from the peasant one. Therefore, social motives in the activities of church youth, burdened with heavy memories of childhood, sometimes became decisive ones. At the same time, after 1991, when the ideological influence began to weaken, and Russian historians were given the opportunity to get acquainted with the developments of their Western colleagues, the field of research search expanded. Besides, historians have moved from the study of the seminar movement as a whole to the local level, using rich regional archives. Thus, the works on provincial seminaries appeared containing unique information on the moods at specific educational institutions. T.A. Pavlenko attempted to comprehend the results of these studies in 2009, taking into account the experience of foreign colleagues. The historian prepared a voluminous thesis, based on the approach of the conflict psychology. This work summed up the long-term research of historians, defined the list of factors that influenced the degree of protest in a particular seminary, and also continued the discussion about the reasons explaining why the period of the late XIXth - early XXth century became a peculiar phenomenon for the educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was sharply manifested and completed even before the revolution of 1917.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Thus, the protest movement of the Kazan seminarians was a single process that had internal stages, each of which predetermined the specifics of the protest forms and directions. Its nature is endo-exogenous one. We managed to determine the private features of the Kazan seminarians protest who distinguished it from other similar ones. It is about the number of students increase during the period marked by the unresolved issues of everyday life. The expansion of the educational and living space did not occur almost, which led to crowding, the growth of intraspecific aggression (in accordance with the law of the ethological balance by Conrad Lorenz) and competition. Under these conditions, infectious diseases spread actively. They worsened the psychological



climate at the school, prompted the pupils to go to direct confrontation with their superiors. It is indicative that the higher ecclesiastical authority did not solve this problem fundamentally, in contrast to the provision with food, which was quite bearable. Among other things, Kazan Seminary was located near the university. This contributed to the virtually unhindered ideological influence of revolutionary students on church youth. Among the first ones there were many graduates of seminaries, who, of course, paid special attention to their fellow students studied nearby.

However, it is obvious that the severity of the crisis was largely conditioned by the secularization of public and individual consciousness, the departure from religious attitudes and previous moral guidelines in interpersonal and group relations. In the conditions of the revolutionary situation aggravation, the previous behavioral guidelines lost their importance, and the struggle for power neutralized any forms of constructive interaction. This made it possible to reach out to the front concerning the internal church process elements whose behavior is not at all compatible with Christian morality, ready with weapons or with a pen in their hands to defend their rights uncompromisingly in the sense that was inherent for the new thinking of Russian intelligentsia during the early 20th century.

## **6. SUMMARY**

With the passage of time, new aspects are revealed, to which a close attention will have to be paid in the further study of the stated topic. Among them is the issue of recruiting and the rights of the teaching corporation of the seminary, and the evaluation of the academic performance of opposition seminarists, and their class origin, etc. The comparative analysis of various seminary protests in the framework of new methodological approaches is of particular importance. Besides, the issue of the protest movement of higher ecclesiastical educational institutions, the spiritual academies, remains unstudied. By the way, today there is not a single work devoted to this problem nowadays. Therefore, the stated scientific problem is far from being exhausted. In the long run, its solution will make it possible to understand deeper the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, the psychology of its leadership and rank-and-file members, and the way they changed after the century.



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