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Original paper



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Regulating Restrictions on the Reading of Books by Students of Orthodox Theological Seminaries in the First Years after the 1867 Reform of Theological Education

Abstract

The article examines the introduction of restrictions on the reading of anti-religious and anti-social literature by students of Orthodox theological seminaries following the 1867 Reform of Theological Education. The reform brought a rethinking of the system of governance of Orthodox theological seminaries both at the central level, where the Educational Committee of the Synod was established, and locally, as seminary governing boards were granted broad autonomy, including in matters of library acquisition and the organisation of extracurricular reading. The discovery of seminarians reading “harmful” literature in the very first year after the reform put the entire system to the test. The article demonstrates how, over the course of several years, the Educational Committee was forced to move from recommendations addressed to individual seminary governing boards to circular decrees and the introduction of mandatory *Rules Concerning the Acquisition of Books for Students’ Libraries and the Procedure for Their Reading by Students* (1872). The article



asks why seminary governing boards were unable to make effective use of the autonomy granted to them and why “prohibited literature” came to occupy an ambiguous position. The case of J.W. Draper’s *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, which was deemed “harmful” by Synodal officials, is used to examine the variety of situations surrounding a particular book. The article demonstrates that members of seminary governing boards responsible for acquiring books generally placed orders based on titles without familiarising themselves with the contents. It was in this way that “harmful” new publications, such as Draper’s book, first published in 1862, found their way into students’ libraries. At the same time, teachers were capable of reflecting on the degree to which particular well-known works were undesirable for students to read, including articles by V.G. Belinsky and N.A. Dobrolyubov. Their assessments differed radically, ranging from including such works in the curriculum to removing them from circulation. Even the 1870 circular decree of the Synod prohibiting seminarians from reading works by literary critics failed to resolve the situation. Thus, the principle of broad autonomy for seminary governing boards established in the 1867 Charter inevitably proved problematic in practice. In the case of book restrictions, there was no consensus as to what could be considered “harmful” or “inconsistent with the aims of theological education”, either among members of the Educational Committee or among teachers.

Keywords:

Orthodox Theological Seminary; 1867 Reform of Theological Education; Bureaucratic practices; Educational Committee of the Holy Synod; History of reading; Prohibited literature

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In 1876, the revolutionary journal *Vperyod!*, published in London under the editorship of P.L. Lavrov, carried an anonymous correspondence from Vologda devoted to an audit of the local theological seminary by S.V. Kersky, a member of the Educational Committee of the Holy Synod. The immediate reason for the extraordinary audit in the autumn of 1875 was the political trial of two of its graduates, V.M. Dyakov and A.I. Siryakov¹. Among other things, the anonymous correspondent described a comic episode in the course of the “persecution”. One of the students told the auditor that he had read the book *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (1862) by the American philosopher J.W. Draper. The seminary inspector, E.L. Prozorovsky, then “rushed” into the classroom and announced: “...whoever is found with a prohibited book such as Draper’s will be severely punished. The students asked him to tell them which books should be considered impermissible. The resourceful Prozorovsky replied: ‘It is none of your business to know this; you simply must not read them!’ <...> ...neither clever nor wise: do not read prohibited books, but do not even try to know which ones are prohibited!”²

The correspondent assumed that the inspector’s refusal to identify the prohibited books was motivated by the belief that the seminarians would immediately begin reading precisely those works. In reality, the situation was considerably more complicated. E.L. Prozorovsky, however much he might have wished to do so, could not answer the question, since there simply was no Synod-approved list of books prohibited for seminarians to read. The inspector’s sudden appearance in the classroom may indicate that he himself had first learned from the auditor that Draper’s book was “impermissible” right before speaking with the students.

Despite the absence of an official list or criteria by which theological seminary instructors could determine which works were “harmful,” officials of the Educational Committee systematically used the concept of “books inconsistent with the aims of theological education and upbringing”³. At the same time, some seminaries had instructions for inspectors, who were expected to prevent students from reading books “permeated

¹ Михайлов Б.Г. Предвестники бури. Очерки о революционных народниках-вологжанях. Архангельск, 1977. 121 с.

² Из Вологды // Вперед! 1876. № 31. Ст. 228.

³ РГИА. Ф. 797. Оп. 42. I отд. 2 стол. Д. 56. Л. 3 об.



by a spirit of denial of religious truths and preaching principles harmful to the public order”⁴. Finally, “the reading of books and works not permitted” sometimes appeared in students’ codes of conduct alongside other “impermissible pursuits,” such as “playing cards, singing indecent songs, smoking tobacco, and consuming intoxicating beverages”⁵. Explicitly formulated prohibitions on reading, however, were rather exceptional among the rules and instructions prepared by the pedagogical assemblies of theological seminaries. For example, the rules for students of the St. Petersburg Theological Seminary contained only § 22, which literally repeated § 135 of the 1867 Statute⁶ and required students to read, on the recommendation of their instructors, books “having a close bearing on the subjects of study”⁷. Thus, there was undoubtedly a widespread conviction among members of the Educational Committee of the Holy Synod and teachers in the seminaries that certain books could be dangerous and that seminarians should be prohibited from reading them. In practice, however, both the introduction of such prohibitions and their implementation posed numerous difficulties. As will be demonstrated below, the very definition of a “harmful” work differed not only from one seminary to another but even among officials of the Synod.

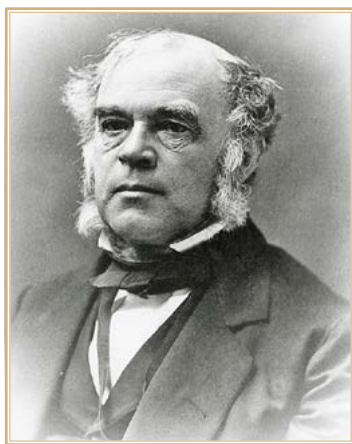
The prohibition of reading books that had been approved by the censorship authorities and were formally available to all subjects of the Russian Empire was not unique to the ecclesiastical administration and did not concern only students of educational institutions. In the 1870s, the status of a particular publication could be uncertain and could involve additional parameters: for whom and under what conditions was a book prohibited or permitted? For example, two publications recommended by the Educational Committee as manuals for liturgics – J.A. Martigny’s *Dictionnaire des antiquités chrétiennes* (1865) and F.K. Schmidt’s *Liturgik der christl. Katholischen Religion* (1840) – turned out not to have been approved for sale in Russia by the Foreign Censorship Committee, something of which the Synodal officials were unaware. A theological seminary

⁴ Керский С.В. Преобразование духовно-учебных заведений Орловской епархии в 1872 году. СПб., 1872. С. 52.

⁵ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 17. Д. 45. Л. 109 об.

⁶ Statutes and staff regulations of theological seminaries and schools, most highly approved on 14 may 1867. СПб., 1867. С. 29.

⁷ Commemorative book of the St. Petersburg Theological Seminary. СПб., 1873. С. 37.



John William Draper.
From open sources

rector could acquire them on condition that he sign an undertaking not to transfer the books to third parties, which rendered the purchase of manuals for the institution's reference library essentially pointless⁸.

Of course, it was common knowledge that there were publications expressly "prohibited from circulation and reprinting in Russia," whose reading and dissemination constituted a criminal offense. At the same time, the *Alphabetical Catalogue* of such literature, printed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1876, was not publicly available and contained only 423 works published from the 1800s through the first half of the 1870s⁹. Ordinary readers could rely only on the censor's approval, but even this did not guarantee that a publication was actually permitted. Thus, the literature of the Chaikovsky Circle was published with forged censorship endorsements¹⁰. In 1874, an investigation into the "going to the people" movement produced a *List of Those Books Which Propagandists Distribute among the People and Generally among Young People* (the "General Slezkin List"), which included six books that had passed preliminary censorship and three books of more than ten printer's sheets that did not require censorship approval.

⁸ Керский С.В. Преобразование духовно-учебных заведений Архангельской епархии (в 1870 г.). СПб, 1870. С. 48.

⁹ Alphabetical catalogue of books in the Russian language prohibited from circulation and reprinting in Russia. По 1 июня 1876. СПб., 1876.

¹⁰ For example, L.A. Tikhomirov's *Tale of the Four Brothers* was published under the cover title *A Happy Encounter, or Love of the Motherland*, with the false imprint "Permitted by the Censors. Moscow, 29 May 1875".



The list itself and the status of the publications included in it became a subject of dispute for several years between the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery and the Main Administration for Press Affairs. The problem was so acute that in 1875 even the prosecution authorities did not understand on what grounds people could be punished for distributing books that had been approved by the censors but were nevertheless deemed dangerous and routinely confiscated by the police¹¹. N.I. Naumov's book *Strength Breaks Strength*, from the Slezkin List, was found by the gendarmes in A.I. Siryakov's apartment during the 1872/73 academic year, but the discovery had no consequences at the time¹².

Thus, uncertainty and a lack of precise information about the status of a particular publication were generally characteristic of the period under consideration. In the case of seminarians, however, violating a reading prohibition entailed punishment, ranging from "standing at the dining-room door" to expulsion with a record of "disapproved conduct" and a notation of "extreme unreliability" if the student demonstrated "incorrigibility," as happened successively to Shimanovsky, a student of the Kyiv Theological Seminary¹³. In 1871, the Educational Committee formulated eight categories of disciplinary violations requiring immediate expulsion from a theological seminary. In addition to drunkenness, theft, and proven sexual misconduct, they included "the dissemination, in any manner whatsoever, of teachings deemed harmful by existing laws, etc." and "an immoral and anti-religious tendency manifested in explicit statements and actions"¹⁴. In practice, these provisions were applied to the reading and discussion with fellow students of "harmful" books, as well as to the writing of compositions based on them. Having studied the reports submitted by seminaries to the Synod concerning expelled students between 1868 and 1876, Yu.P. Orlova established that such cases accounted for 13% of all expulsions¹⁵.

¹¹ РГИА. Ф. 776. Оп. 11. 1874. Д. 96. Л. 23–24 об.

¹² РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 17. Д. 46. Л. 141.

¹³ РГИА. Ф. 797. Оп. 41. I отд. II стол. Д. 2. Л. 79–80.

¹⁴ Journal of the educational committee under the Holy Synod, with considerations on questions relating to the organization of the educational department in theological seminaries in 1871. СПб., 1873. С. 129.

¹⁵ Орлова Ю.П. Реформа духовного образования 1860–1870-х гг. и нравственный облик служителя церкви в представлениях членов семинарского сообщества // Новое прошлое. 2024. № 1. С. 53–54.



Nikolai Ivanovich Naumov.

From open sources

The aim of this article is to analyze the practices of controlling seminarians' reading and the logic behind the introduction of prohibitions under conditions of uncertainty. Behind the seemingly simple question of why the Educational Committee of the Holy Synod did not prepare a list of books prohibited for theological students, or at least instructions for their teachers defining the concept of "harmful" literature, lies a series of issues concerning the specific features of the 1867 reform of theological education and the bureaucratic practices employed in its implementation. It is necessary to examine precisely how a book came to be assigned the status of "harmful" and why that status was not self-evident to all participants in the educational process. As a point of departure, I will analyze the vicissitudes surrounding the circulation and use of J.W. Draper's *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* as reflected in the reports of auditors of the Educational Committee of the Holy Synod. I will then discuss the fate of the circular prohibition issued by D.A. Tolstoy, the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, concerning the works of V.G. Belinsky and N.A. Dobrolyubov. Finally, the article will examine the *Rules Concerning the Acquisition of Books for the Student Libraries of Theological Seminaries and Schools and the Procedure for Their Reading by Students* of 1872, which likewise failed to prevent seminarians from reading prohibited books.

In 1867, as a result of the reform of theological education, the Educational Committee was established under the Synod, and for the first time its membership included full-time auditors¹⁶. In the very first year,

¹⁶ See: *Ферапонт (Широков), (иером.) Система ревизий духовно-учебных заведений во 2-й пол. XIX — нач. XX в. // Христианское чтение. 2024. № 2. С. 253—260.*



during an audit of the Kostroma Theological Seminary, I.A. Nenarokomov, Chief Secretary of the Synod, discovered that a second-year student had been reading Draper's work, the Russian translation of which had been published only a year earlier. In his audit report, I.A. Nenarokomov unequivocally described it as a book "...published without preliminary censorship and, as is well known, distinguished by a harmful tendency, particularly for theological students"¹⁷. From his point of view, the case was especially egregious because the seminarian had borrowed the book from the seminary's own student library.

It is important to clarify that the Synod did not exercise control over seminary libraries, which, moreover, were quite often supplemented by random donations. According to § 106 of the 1867 Statute, the selection of books for the reference library was the responsibility of the pedagogical assembly of the seminary board¹⁸. On March 24, 1870, by a Synodal resolution, the boards were advised to pay "special attention to the <...> tendency" of publications acquired for their libraries, but this qualification applied only to secular periodicals¹⁹. The Educational Committee itself included textbooks and manuals in course curricula that were mandatory for acquisition²⁰. The Synod also regularly received petitions for permission to use particular books as teaching aids in theological educational institutions; when such petitions received a favorable resolution, circular decrees were distributed accordingly²¹. Thus, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, the Educational Committee, as an institution responsible for recommending literature for children's reading²², was still in the process of formation and, even within institutions under its jurisdiction, regulated only textbooks.

¹⁷ Ненарокомов И.А. О ревизии Костромской семинарии и тамошнего духовного училища (в декабре 1867 г.). СПб., 1868. С. 10.

¹⁸ Statutes and staff regulations of theological seminaries. С. 21.

¹⁹ Collection of decrees of the Holy Synod for 1867–1874 concerning the organization of theological seminaries and schools, in accordance with the requirements of the theological-school statutes most highly approved on 14 may 1867. СПб., 1875. С. 105.

²⁰ For example, in 1868, K. Petrov's *An Attempt at a Concise Outline of the Theory of Literature* was recommended for the Russian literature class. РГИА. Ф. 796. Оп. 149. Д. 388. Л. 50–58.

²¹ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 9. Д. 80. Л. 46–47.

²² See: Лучкина О.А. Силуэты руководителей детского чтения: священник, министр, генерал и другие // Детские чтения. 2012. № 2. С. 117–121.



Dmitry Andreevich Tolstoy. Artist I. N. Kramskoi.
From open sources

According to § 144 of the Statute, a student library was not mandatory, but it could be established by a decision of the seminary board, which was also required to formulate rules governing its acquisition and operation, subject to approval by the diocesan bishop²³. At the Kostroma Seminary, responsibility for acquiring books for the student library was assigned to one of the instructors, who was to compile a list of publications, have it approved by the board, and then, after receiving the bishop's approval, purchase the books. He compiled the list not on the recommendations of the teachers, "each according to his own subject," as envisaged by § 135 of the Statute, which regulated seminarians' reading, but "on the basis of booksellers' catalogues and advertisements published in newspapers"²⁴. Apparently, neither the members of the board nor the Bishop of Kostroma, Ignatius (Bryanchaninov), unlike I.A. Nenarokomov, knew that Draper's book acquired for the student library was of a "harmful tendency". The St. Petersburg official wrote in his report: "...the students of the Kostroma Seminary, as far as their reading is concerned, are left more or less to themselves and to various unsafe contingencies"; otherwise, "Draper's book could not have appeared in the hands of a student". He demanded that it be removed from the student library and that the rules for purchasing books be revised so as to prevent the future

²³ Statutes and staff regulations of theological seminaries. C. 31.

²⁴ Ненарокомов И.А. О ревизии Костромской семинарии. С. 10.



Bishop Ignatius Bryanchaninov.
From open sources

acquisition of works “whose content and soundness of tendency are unknown to the board”²⁵. Since, during his inspection of the library, the auditors found no other “harmful” books, and among the secular journals, which likewise caused concern among members of the Educational Committee²⁶, the seminary subscribed only to the *Journal of the Ministry of Public Education* and “...another [journal] in the field of the natural sciences”²⁷, Draper’s work had indeed entered the student library simply because the librarian who ordered it was unaware of its contents.

If the appearance of Draper’s book at the Kostroma Seminary was accidental, in other seminaries it could have formed part of a deliberate strategy by teachers to acquire advanced literature at the height of the discussion and implementation of the reform of theological education. Thus, at the Tiflis Theological Seminary, a group of young teachers compiled a list of books for the student library that included a collected edition of the works of J.-J. Rousseau, Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, and two books by J.W. Draper – *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* and *Thoughts on the Future Civil Policy of America* (1866). The inspector, future Rector, Archimandrite Valentin (Kuznetsov), who supported their acquisition and even donated the substantial sum of 200 rubles for this

²⁵ Ibid. C. 10–11.

²⁶ Ibid. C. 10–11.

²⁷ Ненарокомов И.А. О ревизии Костромской семинарии. С. 11.



Georg Gottfried Gervinus.
From open sources

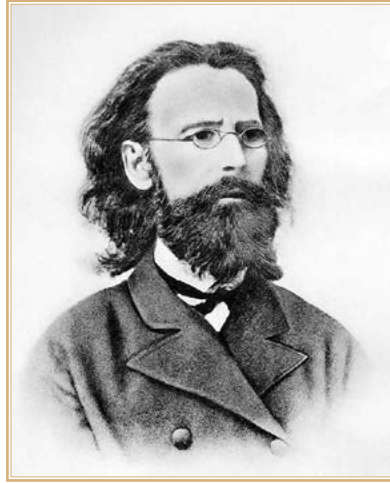
purpose, was, in the opinion of the auditor S.V. Kersky, like his colleague in Kostroma, “ordering books without having any idea of their contents or suitability”²⁸. The other teachers, however, were perfectly aware of the “tendency” of the publications they had ordered. Some of these books, including Draper’s works, were removed from the student library shortly before the arrival of the auditor I.K. Zinchenko in Tiflis in September 1872, although editions that apparently seemed less dangerous to the librarian remained there. Among the “considerable” number of books “inconsistent with the aims of theological education,” the auditor named E. Pfeiffer’s *Über das Genossenschaftswesen* (1866), A.P. Shchapov’s *The Social and Pedagogical Conditions of the Intellectual Development of the Russian People* (1870), and G.G. Gervinus’s *History of the Nineteenth Century from the Time of the Congress of Vienna*²⁹. After the student library was purged in 1872, Tiflis seminarians began borrowing “prohibited books,” including works by Draper, Darwin, and Chernyshevsky, from the city public library³⁰.

Between these two extreme cases of the circulation of Draper’s work in Kostroma and Tiflis, several other examples of its presence among students of theological seminaries can be situated. In 1868, the same I.A. Nenarokomov found two books in the student library of the Ryazan Theological

²⁸ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 9. Д. 71. Л. 139 об.

²⁹ Ibid. Л. 138 об.

³⁰ Ibid. Л. 134.



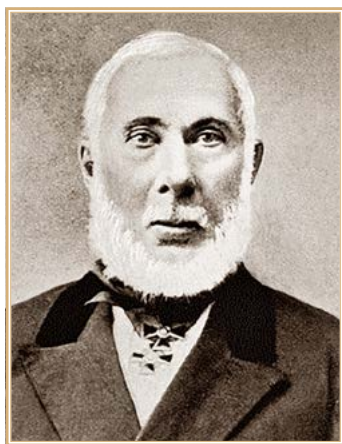
Afanasy Prokofievich Shchapov.
From open sources

Seminary that “positively cannot be tolerated” – namely, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* and W. Zimmermann’s *Electromagnetism* (1862). In this case, his reference to the 1867 audit is particularly revealing: Draper’s book was “already known to the Educational Committee from my report”³¹. The juxtaposition of the two publications finally makes it possible to identify the criterion that the auditor apparently used when assigning certain works to the category of “harmful” literature. Both books contained anti-clerical and anti-religious ideas; moreover, the latter prompted the well-known theologian D.F. Golubinsky to publish a pamphlet entitled *An Examination and Refutation of the False Opinion Concerning the Ark of the Covenant (Against Zimmermann’s Book Electromagnetism)*³².

That reading *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* could indeed provoke anti-clerical sentiments among seminarians, or reinforce attitudes that had already developed, can be seen from the article *The Connection between the Beginning of European Civilization and Its Present Condition*, written by M. Kolchin, a student of the Arkhangelsk Theological Seminary, for the underground handwritten journal *Razvitie* in 1874. The article is essentially a brief summary of the opening chapters of Draper’s book, although the author nowhere cited Draper; the source

³¹ Ненарокомов И.А. О ревизии Рязанской семинарии и тамошних духовных училищ (в феврале и марте 1868 г.). СПб, 1868. С. 11.

³² Голубинский Д.Ф. Разбор и опровержение ложного мнения о Кивоте Завета (Против книги Циммермана «Об электричестве и магнетизме»). М., 1862.



Dmitry Fedorovich Golubinsky.
From open sources

of the composition was nevertheless identified by the seminary inspector V.N. Shuisky³³.

Kolchin's article begins as a disjointed summary of the third and fourth chapters of the book, dealing with the development of religion beginning with India and Egypt, which the author described as the "starting point of European civilization"³⁴. Kolchin used this material to compare Hinduism and Christianity: if modern man regards the dogmas of Hinduism and Buddhism as "invention, fantasy, <..> the product of contemplation of nature," then in 500 years "people of the distant future will laugh at our religious views"³⁵. Clearly, the prediction of the degeneration of Christianity, as well as the radical claim by a third-year student that all progressive thinkers of the past, from Socrates to Erasmus, had been atheists, ran counter to the "aim of theological education".

Thus, the identification of Draper's book as "harmful" from the very first year of the audits was based on its potentially anti-religious content. The logic underlying I.A. Nenarokomov's assessment can be understood by examining another auditor, I.K. Zinchenko's analysis of the German educator K. Oppel's *The Ancient Wonderland of the Pyramids* (1868), which he ordered removed from the student library of the Vyatka Seminary in 1871. Although he recognized the work as one of the "best books

³³ РГИА. Ф. 797. Оп. 44. Д. 8. Л. 345 об.

³⁴ РИГА. Ф. 1410. Оп. 1. Д. 62. Л. 133.

³⁵ Ibid. Л. 134–134 об.



for reading,” he judged its “tendency” to be “completely contrary to the tasks and aims of seminary education”. What the auditor objected to specifically was the scientific explanation of the Ten Plagues of Egypt as natural phenomena caused by the climatic conditions of Egypt. The circumstances under which this book had been acquired for the students were analogous to those in which Draper’s work had entered the Kostroma Seminary library: the inspector had recommended Oppel’s book “on the basis of its title alone,” and the board ordered it without “knowing its contents”³⁶. The five years that had passed since the implementation of the 1867 reform had not changed the instructors’ approach to ordering books. They still did not read themselves what they acquired for their students, relying instead on titles and booksellers’ advertisements.

In the same year, 1871, I. K. Zinchenko discovered Draper’s *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* at the Kursk Theological Seminary. Judging by the records of books issued from the student library, more than half of the students had read “the works of Draper, Darwin, Belinsky, Owen, and others,” which affected the “direction of consciousness”: “In some theological student compositions <..> there is such an abundance of information on natural history that they could be called exercises in this latter subject”. Surprisingly, in his report the auditor placed the responsibility entirely on the teachers: “It was from books, of course, and not from their instructors, that the students acquired <..> these views”³⁷.

I.K. Zinchenko’s leniency was prompted by a precedent. As early as 1868, a student named Gorokhovtsev had established a fee-based library from his own books, which the inspector promptly discovered and closed. Significantly, some of the books – works by V.G. Belinsky and H.T. Buckle – were immediately transferred by the board to the reference library, while several others were handed over to the inspector for examination and a determination of “whether they contain articles not subject to being read by students”³⁸. In addition to the journals *Sovremennik* and *Delo*, these included books entitled *Civil Marriage* and *Association of the*

³⁶ Зинченко И.К. Отчет по обозрению духовно-учебных заведений Вятской епархии (1871 г.). СПб., 1871. С. 36–37.

³⁷ Зинченко И.К. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Курской епархии (1870 г.). СПб., 1871. С. 36.

³⁸ Ibid. С. 40.



Robert Owen.
From open sources

*Working Class*³⁹, whose contents were evidently unknown to the teachers. In this case, the question was whether to leave the books with Gorokhovtsev if they proved harmless or to transfer them to the reference library until his graduation. Thus, the teachers of the Kursk Theological Seminary had demonstrated timely vigilance, distinguishing them from most of their colleagues, who continued to treat their students' reading with carelessness.

In his report, I.K. Zinchenko expressed a paradoxical thought: "the removal of books from the student library <..> cannot completely eliminate the harm caused to the seminary in educational and formative terms by the circulation of these books among the students"⁴⁰. This comment was probably prompted by the fact that, by the time of the audit, members of the Educational Committee had already gained experience in removing books from seminary libraries and were able to assess the results.

In the spring of 1870, the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod used a circular decree for the first time to regulate the reading of particular authors in the reformed seminaries. On April 4, 1870, it was prohibited to use articles by V.G. Belinsky and N.A. Dobrolyubov in teaching the course

³⁹ In the first case, this may refer either to the novel *Civil Marriage*, published under the pseudonym N-y M-va (1867), or to a play by N.I. Chernyavsky (1867); in the second, to E. Pfeiffer's book *Über Genossenschaftswesen*, which was included in the list of books at the Tiflis Seminary.

⁴⁰ Зинченко И.К. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Курской епархии. С. 40.



in literature, and seminary boards were ordered to remove their works from the libraries⁴¹. The occasion was a discussion of the reports of diocesan bishops for the 1867/68 academic year, one of which stated that the critics' articles had been used by a teacher in literature classes⁴². Apparently, this was not an isolated case. In the 1868/69 academic year, when no official curriculum for the subject had yet been developed, the teacher of the history of Russian literature at the Podolia Seminary devoted an entire lesson to the study of Belinsky, placing him between N.V. Gogol and the Slavophiles⁴³. In the same year, 1868, S.V. Kersky found collected works by Belinsky and Dobrolyubov, as well as D.I. Pisarev, in the student library of the Kharkov Seminary, but did not consider it necessary to comment on the matter in any way. This is particularly noteworthy because in 1867 the library, founded by students in 1862 and initially replenished and controlled exclusively by them, had been purged at the inspector's recommendation, and books "inconsistent with the aims of theological education" had been removed from it: D.H. Lewis's *The Physiology of Common Life*, as well as the journals *Sovremennik* and *Russkoye Slovo*⁴⁴. Thus, at that point, neither the teachers nor the auditor regarded the reading of Belinsky and Dobrolyubov as problematic.

In the neighboring Kherson Diocese, S.V. Kersky recorded a more complicated situation in 1868: the student library contained works by V.G. Belinsky, but the inspector did not issue them to students because he did not consider them "harmless." "Certain works by Pushkin" were placed in the same category as Belinsky. Apparently, this policy provoked conflicts, as the inspector refused to issue students books recommended by their instructors if, in his view, they did not correspond to "the understanding of the students of the seminary (for example, works on the natural sciences) or to the liturgical seasons (for example, novels and stories during periods of fasting)". The auditor apparently regarded this as an abuse of authority and recommended that all disputed questions concerning the issuance of books be referred to the seminary board⁴⁵.

⁴¹ РГИА. Ф. 797. Оп. 40. Д. 37. Л. 2.

⁴² Ibid. Л. 1.

⁴³ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 9. Отчеты. Раздел 1. Д. 61. Л. 263 об.

⁴⁴ Керский С.В. Преобразование духовно-учебных заведений Харьковской епархии (в 1868 году). СПб., 1868. С. 26–27.

⁴⁵ Ibid. С. 43.

The problematic status of Belinsky's works was discussed in the same year by the board of the Astrakhan Seminary, which decided to transfer them from the student library to the reference library, together with the journal *Sovremennik*⁴⁶. Thus, the recently published work by Draper, apparently little known to seminary instructors, did not raise questions among them, unlike the writings of the critic of the 1840s, whose appropriateness for student reading they were prepared to debate.

In 1869, auditor S.V. Kersky, who had previously paid no attention to Belinsky and Dobrolyubov, "recommended" that the rector of the Perm Seminary discuss with the board the question of the works by these authors that he had found in the student library: "whether such works can safely remain in circulation among the students"⁴⁷. The change in his attitude toward the critics' articles was probably prompted by the discussion of audit reports within the Educational Committee, but it is worth noting how mildly the recommendation was phrased in this case. On S.V. Kersky's report, the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod, D.A. Tolstoy, left an unequivocal comment: "There is nothing to discuss; simply order that they be transferred to the reference library and not issued to students"⁴⁸. The Educational Committee was then left only to include this remark in the list of resolutions adopted on the results of the audit⁴⁹.

Apparently, even later the works of V.G. Belinsky did not seem as dangerous to members of the Educational Committee as they did to the Chief Procurator. For example, in 1874 the Educational Committee considered admitting K. Petrov's *Russian Historical Reader* (1873) for use in seminaries as a teaching aid. It contained three quotations from V.G. Belinsky and references to his works as commentary. The Educational Committee found "nothing particular" in the quotations and approved the reader⁵⁰. It may therefore be assumed that D.A. Tolstoy's personal opinion played a decisive role in the circular prohibition of Belinsky

⁴⁶ Ненарокомов И.А. О ревизии Астраханской семинарии и тамошнего духовного училища (в феврале 1868 г.). СПб., 1868. С. 12.

⁴⁷ Керский С.В. Преобразование духовно-учебных заведений Пермской епархии (в 1869 г.). СПб., 1871. С. 53.

⁴⁸ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 9. 1869. Д. 1. Л. 22.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Л. 31а.

⁵⁰ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 9. Д. 80. Л. 60.



and Dobrolyubov, whereas Synodal officials generally preferred milder methods of regulating reading, leaving teachers the autonomy envisaged by the 1867 Statute.

The effectiveness of circular decrees was generally rather low, since they reached the seminaries with delays, often just gathering dust in the offices of diocesan bishops. Moreover, instructors at theological seminaries, already burdened with other duties, had little time to undertake a thorough review of their libraries. Thus, during the 1871 inspection of the Vyatka Seminary, I.K. Zinchenko investigated the suicide of a student in the middle division in December 1870. Although the doctor who conducted the autopsy concluded that the seminarian had taken his own life because of an “acute brain disorder,” the auditor decided to examine the suicide victim’s “intellectual” and “moral” life. For this purpose, he used the records of books issued from the student library, among which he found “books both empty and worthwhile, both consistent with the aims of education and instruction in theological educational institutions and inconsistent with them,” including works by Belinsky⁵¹. It is noteworthy that almost a year after the circular decree of April 4, 1870, the collected works of the critic were still in the student library, so the auditor was forced to request their removal along with R. Owen’s *A New View of Society; or, Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human Character*, P.K. Shchebalsky’s *Readings from Russian History*, F.M. Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, and V. Hugo’s *Les Misérables*⁵². Thus, the circular decree of the Chief Procurator of the Holy Synod had remained unimplemented at the Vyatka Theological Seminary for a full year, but no punishment followed; the only measure taken was the auditor’s demand that the catalogue of books in the student library finally be reviewed.

In 1872, Belinsky’s works were still in the student library of the Orel Seminary, although the rector claimed that they were not issued to students⁵³. The rector may well have been telling the truth in this case, but the seminarians themselves admitted to the auditor that they borrowed

⁵¹ Зинченко И.К. Отчет по обозрению духовно-учебных заведений Вятской епархии (1871 г.). С. 62.

⁵² Ibid. С. 37.

⁵³ Керский С.В. Преобразование духовно-учебных заведений Орловской епархии в 1872 году. С. 67.



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From open sources

Belinsky and Pisarev from the city's public libraries⁵⁴. Most likely, as in the case of the Vologda seminarian who read Draper, they did not think that such an admission could harm them – that is, they were unaware of the prohibition on reading Belinsky.

The experience of prohibiting Belinsky's works by D.A. Tolstoy's circular decree demonstrates why combating undesirable literature through direct prohibitions was futile, as was compiling any list of books at the level of the Educational Committee. At the same time, the concern shown by some seminary boards about the status of Belinsky's works even before Tolstoy's decree demonstrates that control over reading was not always a weak point requiring intervention by auditors from the capital. Particularly revealing is the case of the Podolia Seminary, where in December 1867 the board discovered the existence of an "organization" consisting of four students engaged in distributing books "that shake the foundations of Church and society and divert the younger generation from serious preparation for future activity". They turned out to be "hardened activists" in the distribution of books on "geology, physiology, <...> the question of the position of women in society, and the natural and social sciences in general"⁵⁵. The auditor learned all these details on the spot, since the rector's report to the Synod for the 1867/68 academic year

⁵⁴ Ibid. С. 52.

⁵⁵ Зинченко И.К. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Подольской епархии 1871 года. СПб., 1872. С. 4.



mentioned only that students “observed to have a penchant for reading harmful books” had been invited to submit petitions for dismissal⁵⁶. Thus, as in many other cases, seminary boards preferred to conceal problematic situations, reporting the bare minimum of information to St. Petersburg and creating the impression that they had not noticed them at all.

At a time when auditors of the Educational Committee had to deal with “harmful” books virtually by hand, their reports could have served as guidelines for seminary boards and instructors. Printed versions of the reports, after being discussed by the Educational Committee, were circulated to seminaries and diocesan heads precisely for this purpose⁵⁷. Although references to the reports do indeed occur in the records of seminary boards, there is insufficient evidence to assess the effectiveness of this measure. Thus, among the records of the Simbirsk Seminary board for 1870, I.K. Zinchenko found an order from the rector instructing members of the board to familiarize themselves with the reports, which had been sent to them for the first time that February, and to discuss what “could be applied” to the Simbirsk Seminary. As a result, none of the teachers prepared a written document summarizing the recommendations, and the meeting ended with a “verbal agreement of the assembly to follow the auditors’ instructions in practice”⁵⁸. In 1875, the report of auditor S.I. Miropolsky contained an irritated comment concerning persistent mistakes in the organization of written assignments: “The question of compositions <...> has long since been explained in detail and thoroughly in the auditors’ reports. This means that our reports are either not read here, or they do not wish to take them into consideration and use them as guidance. But it is tiresome and wearisome to repeat the same thing over and over”⁵⁹. This emotional exclamation could be applied to many other aspects of seminary life that auditors attempted to correct.

In the case of students’ reading of undesirable literature and the lack of control over books on the part of instructors, the problem itself was

⁵⁶ РГИА. Ф. 802. Оп. 9. Отчеты. Раздел 1. Д. 61. Л. 16.

⁵⁷ See: Орлова Ю.П. Ревизоры Учебного комитета при Св. Синоде как агенты реформы духовного образования 1867 года // Вестник ТвГУ. Серия «История». 2025. № 1 (73). С. 111.

⁵⁸ Зинченко И.К. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Симбирской епархии в 1873 году. СПб., 1874. С. 4.

⁵⁹ Миропольский С.И. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Подольской епархии 1875 года. СПб., 1876. С. 12.

not identified by the auditors immediately. In fact, between 1867 and 1870, the auditing reports mention only Draper and Belinsky. The turning point came with I.K. Zinchenko's inspections in late 1870 and early 1871. In five of the six seminaries he visited – the Kursk, Chernigov, Vyatka, Kazan, and Podolia seminaries – problems were identified with the composition of the libraries and the “tendency” of the students. In his report on the Volhynia Seminary, the auditor even considered it necessary to state: “I did not find in the student library of the Volhynia Seminary any books in direct contradiction to the task of seminary education and upbringing, unless novels are counted as such”⁶⁰. This contrasts sharply with the reports of S.I. Lebedev, who was inspecting nine other dioceses at the same time: only in his report on the Kaluga Seminary did he mention a purge of the student library undertaken by the teachers themselves. Of ten publications deemed “unsuitable” for seminarians to read, some were transferred to the reference library – D.G. Lewis's *History of Philosophy* and *The Physiology of Common Life* – while others were prohibited from being issued: P.K. Shchebalsky's *Readings from Russian History*, D.M. Shchepkin's *On the Sources and Forms of Russian Mythology* (1859–1861), and *Microcosm: Thoughts on the Natural and Microcosmus: an essay concerning man and his relation to the world* by Lotze (1867)⁶¹.

In his latest report on the inspection of the Kazan Seminary, I.K. Zinchenko referred to his experience inspecting the Chernigov, Kursk, and Vyatka seminaries to conclude that the problem of “the purposeless, and sometimes harmful, reading by seminary students of books unrelated to their classwork” was widespread, and that instructors had no “full possibility” of eliminating it⁶². Zinchenko's observations produced two results. First, his colleagues on the Educational Committee began to monitor undesirable reading more closely, as comments concerning books appeared increasingly often in auditors' reports from this point onward. Second, in 1872 the Educational Committee deemed it necessary to develop mandatory *Rules Concerning the Acquisition of Books for*

⁶⁰ Зинченко И.К. Отчет по обозрению духовно-учебных заведений Волынской епархии (1871 г.). СПб., 1872. С. 82.

⁶¹ Лебедев С.И. О ревизии Калужской семинарии и духовного училища (в декабре 1871 года). СПб., 1872. С. 7.

⁶² Зинченко И.К. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Казанской епархии 1871 года. СПб., 1872. С. 38.



Student Libraries and the Procedure for Their Reading by Students, thereby moving against the spirit of the 1867 Statute and intervening in an area that the seminaries themselves were supposed to control. Referring to the auditors' reports, the Educational Committee stated the problem explicitly: students "frequently read books that correspond neither to their age nor to their understanding, nor, in general, to the aims of theological education and upbringing," while teachers "do not pay due attention to this matter and sometimes order books for student libraries without first familiarizing themselves with their content and tendency." The boards were instructed to review the books in their student libraries, not to purchase books "whose contents are unknown to the administrative authorities and instructors," and to place students' visits to public libraries under the supervision of the inspectorate⁶³.

As with the 1870 circular decree, the implementation of these rules depended on the situation in each particular diocese. For example, at the Novgorod Seminary, the catalogues of the student library were reviewed immediately after the Synod's decree, but no "harmful" books were found there⁶⁴. At the Kharkov Seminary in 1874, I. K. Zinchenko discovered that although the board had instructed the teachers as early as 1872 to "immediately review the books available in the student library <...>, nothing has yet been done by the instructors." The auditor found in the student library the journals *Delo*, *Sovremennik*, and *Vestnik Evropy*, "novels by Spielhagen published by *Delo*, Auerbach, as well as Schweizer's *Emma*"⁶⁵. The degree to which the Synod's directives were actually implemented and the presence of "harmful" books in the library are, in both cases, logically correlated.

The analysis of the introduction of restrictions on the reading of certain literature by students of Orthodox theological seminaries reveals the bureaucratic processes within the ecclesiastical administration during the first years after the beginning of the reform of theological education. The principle of broad autonomy for seminary boards embodied in the 1867 Statute, under which they were expected to resolve independently

⁶³ РГИА. Ф. 797. Оп. 42. I отд. 2 стол. Д. 56. Л. 3 об.

⁶⁴ Лебедев С.И. О ревизии духовно-учебных заведений в Новгороде (в 1873 году). Отчет. СПб., 1874. С. 7.

⁶⁵ Зинченко И.К. Отчет о ревизии духовно-учебных заведений Харьковской епархии (1874 г.). СПб., 1875. С. 17.

numerous issues concerning the internal life of their educational institutions, inevitably encountered difficulties in practice. Some teachers went too far in their pedagogical experiments, while others did not wish to exercise this autonomy at all, waiting instead for instructions from St. Petersburg. In the case of book prohibitions, there was no consistent understanding of what could be considered “harmful” or “inconsistent with the aims of theological education,” even among members of the Educational Committee, let alone among teachers. If the anti-religious character of a particular work was not always easy for instructors to determine – especially since they lacked the time and opportunity to keep track of every new publication on the book market – then “anti-social” works of the late 1860s and early 1870s remained even further beyond their attention. It cannot be said that the problem was completely ignored by seminary boards. The situation in each educational institution depended on numerous factors, although the decisive factor was the position of the rector and board members concerning the control of students’ reading. For its part, the Educational Committee, whose members did not immediately grasp the seriousness of the problem, employed various means to address it during the first years after the reform. The degree of direct intervention by the Synod through circular decrees increased as auditors repeatedly encountered the same “harmful” books and gradually lost faith in the autonomy of seminary boards or in printed reports as an effective form of governance in theological education. Even Synodal circular decrees could, for various reasons, be ignored locally. Thus, despite the severe punishments imposed on theological seminary students for reading prohibited books, this area continued to remain a sphere of uncertainty for both students and teachers, ultimately producing cases like the one described in the journal *Vperyod!*: neither the seminarians nor the inspectorate could have suspected that they were reading a “harmful” book.

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Conflict of interests

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