



Metropolitan Hilarion leads commencement ceremony in Moscow theological schools

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Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, took part in the commencement ceremony traditionally held by the Moscow Theological Academy on its patronal feast on October 14. Present at the ceremony were Archbishop Yevgeny, rector of Moscow Theological Seminary and Academy, Bishop Anthony of Moravici, representative of the Patriarch of Serbia to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Bishop Ambrose of Gatchina, rector of St. Petersburg Orthodox Theological Academy, and the academy's faculty and students.

The assembly was shown a film devoted to the 325th anniversary of the Moscow theological schools, after which the rector declared the commencement ceremony open and gave the floor to Metropolitan Hilarion.

The DECR chairman conveyed to the assembly a blessing and festive greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and delivered a commencement speech on Theology as Thanksgiving.

He said that as a graduate of the Moscow Theological Academy he held it very dear as the students of this theological school in St. Sergius's Monastery of the Trinity could not only just attend lectures and read textbooks but also appreciate theology as an experience of the vision of God and contemplation of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

He stressed that theology should be inseparably linked with the life of the Church and her Tradition. Only in this case it will be authentic. 'Only he can bear witness to the Gift who has received it; otherwise his witness will be false because he will bear witness to what he does not know', he said. Theology as an experience of life in God requires serious ascetic efforts, continued moral purification and constant spiritual work.

It does not mean however, he said, that theology is a lot of chosen saints. 'Witness to Christ crucified and raised from the dead, to Christ offering His Body and Blood to the faithful, is the basis of life for any Christian and the more so for a clergyman. Every priest is called to be a theologian, a witness to Christ, that is, in some way a holy father today'. He also noted that theology as an experience of spiritual life should not be opposed to academic theology, saying, 'Theology is unique. It includes science and art

and practice and a living experience while being more than all these components since it is based on the experience of Living God Who absolutely transcends all that He has created'.

Metropolitan Hilarion also spoke about the most important tasks facing his Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission, especially the priority task to compile a new Orthodox Catechesis.

In conclusion of his speech, His Eminence called students to study theology 'not only by reason but also by heart, not only in classes but also beyond them' and expressed a wish that the pastors to be make theology their personal spiritual experience.

Bishop Anthony greeted the assembly on behalf of representatives of Local Orthodox Churches. He said that just as the Feast of the Protecting Veil of Our Lady united the Greek and Slavic nations in the 9th century, so today the Moscow Theological Academy protected by the Mother of God unites Orthodox students from various countries of the world.

In his speech of greetings, Bishop Ambrose said that today, just as in the days of St. Sergius, graduates of the Moscow theological schools depart for various parts of the motherland for service bringing with them the experience they received in St. Sergius's Monastery of the Trinity. He expressed the wish 'that all the knowledge we seek to give and you seek to receive in these theological schools may be used first of all to show the image of God in this world thus multiplying goodness and love'.

Speeches of greetings were also made by the head of the department for relations with public organizations under the Presidential Envoy in Central Russia, Ms. M. Belogubova, the pro-rector of Moscow Medical and Stomatological University, Academician K. Dzugaev, and the chairman of the Meta Education Foundation, Ms. V. Sigaeva.

In conclusion of the commencement ceremony, several professors and students as well as benefactors were presented with Patriarchal awards.

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