



Metropolitan Hilarion: For me as rector it is very important to meet our future students

From September 3 to 7, entrants to the Sts Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate School will take entrance examinations. In his interview to Taday.ru, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk in his capacity of rector of an educational institution, explains the purpose of his interview with each entrant, his expectations of future students and prospects for the Post-Graduate's school international cooperation.

- Your Eminence, the Sts Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate School will begin entrance exams on the 3d of September. One of these exams will consist in an interview with you. What are the important things you wish to see in an entrant? How do you manage to find out within a few-minutes interview whether one is ready or not to study at the Post-Graduate School? What is it that the interview should reveal in the first place?

- An interview with the rector is the final stage of the entrance examinations. By this time entrants have already taken all the exams and demonstrated their knowledge, skills and erudition. The examination commission prepares for me its recommendations for admitting or rejecting entrants to our School. It does not mean, however, that the interview is only a formal procedure. For me as rector, it is very important to meet our future students, to hear and see them. Knowledge, skills, intellect, culture, academic performance – all these are necessary elements for studies in the Church Post-Graduate and Doctoral School, but these are still not sufficient. We have to be sure that the entrants are prepared to serve in the Church, that they are spiritually and morally mature people, motivated, aware of the difficulties they should await, and we want to know an entrant's vision of his further life. It is important that we should not make a mistake in our choice, but it is also important that the choice of an entrant should be correct, so that the studies may be beneficial for them themselves both intellectually and spiritually.

- You have repeatedly stated the importance and even the need to master foreign languages. But not all the entrants may have a good command of modern and especially ancient

languages. Is it possible for an entrant with a poor command of a foreign language but with a great and sincere desire to study to be admitted?

Yes, a good command of both ancient and modern foreign languages is an important condition for entering the Church Post-Graduate and Doctoral School. The research work of a theologian today is actually unthinkable without reference to Christian sources and the knowledge of the present state of world theological scholarship, which in fact presupposes the command of ancient and modern European languages. We admit students for Master's, Candidate's and to Doctor's programs (according to Western and Russian patterns). It means that our entrants have already mastered the Master's or at least Baccalaureate's level of the higher theological education. It is absolutely impossible to image a situation where a person who wishes to write a Candidate's thesis, say, on Biblical studies, does not know Hebrew or Greek, in case of a thesis on Greek patristics.

At the same time, we use a differentiated approach to entrants to the Post-Graduate and Doctoral School. Our demands concerning ancient languages are less strict towards those who enter the Master's program for external church relations or plans to write a Candidate's paper on Russian history. However, our demands for the command of a modern foreign language (normally, English, but in some cases German or French) are the same for to all. An entrant has to show the level of command defined by the state Baccalaureate's standard. We do all that is possible to offer our students opportunities for raising their linguistic level and for studying a language they did not study before, both modern and ancient. As an exception (provided an entrant's other marks were excellent) we admit those whose linguistic skills are not high enough provided they make a considerable progress within a year.

The School is closely associated with the Department for External Church Relations. Can we say that it trains future staff of the Department? What can its graduates expect with regard to employment?

In our School there is a Chair of External Church Relations. I am its head. It is a unique unit which no other educational institution of the Russian Orthodox Church has. Its students study all the fields of the external service carried out by the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as foreign languages, international

relations, world politics, history and theory of diplomacy, ecclesial and secular protocol. The chair is an academic platform on which topical issues of inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian relations and interreligious dialogue are studied.

The knowledge given by the Post-Graduate's Chair of External Church Relations is very much in demand in the DECR. Along with theoretical studies, the students undertake practical training in various units of the Department, thus having an opportunity to watch from within the work of the church diplomatic department and to participate in it. In the course of their practical training, we can see a student's attitude to work, his efficiency and ability to fulfil tasks on his own.

The work of the Department is consistently broadening to embrace ever new areas. We need new resources, young people well-versed in theological and general humanitarian disciplines and having a good command of foreign languages. Those of our students who show the required level of professional training and sincere desire to serve in the field of external church work certainly have a chance to be employed by the Department.

The School's professors are good specialists in their areas. Many of them teach elsewhere and are extremely busy. That is to say, for them the Post-Graduate School is not the only place of work. Students can also work or serve at parishes. How is it possible to receive full-fledged training if both 'parties' are so busy?

Since its inception, the Post-Graduate School has increased the number of staff and professors for whom our school is the main place of work. Others have given more time to the School's affairs simply for the objective reason that the students and educational programs have increased in number. We have managed to raise the salary for our staff and to introduce stimulating bonuses, but nobody can prohibit our professors from co-working in other educational and research institutions.

Many clergy are trained and many clergy and laity from Russian regions are going to be trained in our

school. They often come from the metropolises and dioceses which have theological seminaries. The personnel trained in our School by excellent specialists, upon their return to their dioceses, are able to initiate the reinforcement of intellectual and academic work among the local clergy.

The Church Post-Graduate School seeks to help talented people, clergy and laity of our Church, among other things, to relieve their overburden so that they could have more time for research work. I believe the measures we take allow organizing a full-fledged educational and research process.

Which higher educational institution does the School cooperates with and what are possibilities for in-depth training, for instance, in other countries?

At present the Church Post-Graduate School maintains close cooperation with some key universities in Russia and other countries. We have signed cooperation agreements with the Russian State Humanitarian University, Moscow State Linguistic University, Russian State Social University and Russian Christian Humanitarian Academy. Underway is the development of a joint Master's program with the Moscow University's Department of Philosophy.

I would like to note that we do not have as our task to sign as many agreements as possible. It is not an end in itself. I am interested in a real quality content of every new agreement. The point is first of all to establish professor and student exchanges, that is, to give students opportunities for studying in two educational institutions at the same time. We should share the best we have and gain access to the best our friends and partners have. The outcome is quality education and high professional skills.

The same principle lies in the establishment of our international contacts. Our maximum program for today is not merely to send students for in-depth training to other countries but to send them in concrete universities to concrete professors and to set them concrete tasks. In this sense, a personal approach is required: it is necessary to organize the training of a talented student correctly so that in his major subject he could be introduced to the best achievements of theological scholarship and could grow into

a quality scholar, a specialist in his field or qualified worker.

Therefore, we in the Post-Graduate School give special attention to the training of our students in other countries. On regular basis we send our students to Freiburg University and maintain cooperation with the Free University of Amsterdam, the St. Adalbert Foundation for the Research of the Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary. We have sought opportunities to send our students for training in Great Britain, Italy, Germany, Greece and other countries. With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and under my leadership, the Post-Graduate School runs a commission for selecting students of the Russian Orthodox Church's theological schools for studies abroad.

Interview was taken by Ms. O. Bogdanova

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/53791/>