



Metropolitan Hilarion: the discussion on Ukraine is not over

On 29 February 2020, during the Church and the World talk show at Russia-24 news channel, broadcast by Saturdays and Sundays, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), answered questions from channel presenter Ekaterina Gracheva.

E.Gracheva: Hello! It is the Church and the World program. We are talking with the DECR chairman, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, about the major events in our country and in the world. How do you do, Your Eminence!

Metropolitan Hilarion: How do you do, Ekaterina. How do you do, dear brothers and sisters.

E.Gracheva: Your Eminence, I know that just before our recording, there was a major meeting of the Interreligious Council in Russia and the Inter-Christian Committee. It was initiated by Patriarch Kirill, and the aim was to discuss amendments to the Constitution and proposals for introducing them. What exactly did you discuss?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First, I would like to say something about these two organizations. The ICR is an organization that unites the traditional religions, namely, Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. The ICCC is an organization that unites the Christian confessions in our country and the neighbouring countries. Therefore, for the first time these two organizations met and did it on the initiative of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill precisely for the aim of discussing amendments to the Constitution.

What the religious leaders were speaking about? It was in the first place the fact that constitutions in many countries mention God or the faith in God and that the traditional confessions in our country are united by the idea of God as the Creator. Then it was also mentioned that it is necessary to fix constitutionally the idea of marriage as the union of man and woman. It is what was absent from the agenda in 1993 when our Constitution was created because at that time nobody posed the question of what marriage is. Nowadays this question is posed, and not so much in our country as abroad. But since we have a law whereby the marriages concluded abroad are recognized in the Russian Federation and among these marriages there can now be a same-sex union as well, a constitutionally fixed notion of marriage is needed as precisely the union of man and woman.

I remember that not so long ago a new Constitution was adopted in Hungary, and these two

amendments have been made to it, namely, the mention of God and the mention of marriage as the union of man and woman. However, it has provoked a deep discontent of the European authorities in Brussels, and a landing party of European commissars was sent to Hungary to dissuade the prime minister of Hungary from adopting these amendments. Nevertheless, these amendments were adopted as reflecting a consensus of the basic population of Hungary.

I think, the amendments proposed now by the traditional confessions and Christian denominations reflect as well the consensus of a majority of the population of our country.

E. Gracheva: Well, Brussels is no example for us to follow but, within our country, who does comprise the largest opposition to the amendments to the Constitution put forward by the Church? From whom does this resistance come?

Metropolitan Hilarion: So far, we have not encountered any resistance. Perhaps, it will emerge within the next few days, but so far everybody we have contacted, including even representatives of the Communist Party, have supported the idea to include a mention of God in the Constitution.

E. Gracheva: Is there an idea to introduce an amendment to the Family Code of the Russian Federation? Look at the stormy discussion that has broken out over, for instance, the term “civil marriage”; one representative of the Church has even called it “prostitution gratis”, and it was followed by a very loud discussion. Does the Church wish to fix the notion of “civil marriage”?

Metropolitan Hilarion: As far as the civil marriage is concerned, if it is understood as a registered union of man and woman, which was not blessed by the Church, then such a union is recognized by our Church as the Russian Orthodox Church’s “Basic Social Concept” states. As for the words you have mentioned, they have really provoked a great storm; there was a discussion in both the internet and mass media including printed ones. It even seemed to me proper to apologize for those words, though I did not do it. But as it was made by an official representative of the Church, it seemed to me proper to apologize to those women who were insulted by those words.

I think all the traditional confessions in our country are united by the concern to preserve in society the idea of marriage as a union of man and woman and the idea of marriage as a union that presupposes marital fidelity. As far as church rules are concerned, from the Church’s point of view, a valid marriage is a marriage blessed by the Church. But as far as our official documents are concerned, along with wedded marriages there are marriages which cannot be wedded in the Church for a very simple reason that only one half of this marriage belongs to the Orthodox Church. That is to say, if, for instance, it is a marriage between a Muslim man and an Orthodox woman, or between an Orthodox Christian and an atheist, then such a marriage cannot be blessed by the Church.

At the same time, we also remember the words of St. Paul who says that an unbelieving husband is blessed by a believing wife. And we understand as well that there are cases when a priest has to show pastoral condensation considering the existential situation of spouses.

E.Gracheva: But if a couple is not registered, you would not permit them to take communion, would you?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We have a rule whereby spouses should first register their marriage and then we will marry them.

E.Gracheva: You have recently come back from Amman where this week there has been a meeting of heads of Local Orthodox Churches. And, notably, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was expected, was not seen at it as he did not come and, more than that, he condemned this meeting. What did provoke his criticism? And generally, is it possible to speak of some pan-Orthodox unity after that?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The inter-Orthodox meeting in Amman took place on the initiative of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. For you to understand his role in the Orthodox Church I will remind you that Christianity was born precisely in that land which we call the Holy Land, and essentially the Church of Jerusalem was the very first Christian Church. It was from Jerusalem that Christianity began spreading to other lands.

In the 4th century when Christianity became in fact the established religion of the Roman Empire and the city of Constantinople founded by Emperor Constantine became the official capital city of the empire, the Churches' order was established to exist to this day. In this order, the first place was occupied by Rome, the second one by Constantinople, while Jerusalem found itself only in the fifth place because at that time it was just a center of pilgrimage, not some large capital city with state structures or bodies.

That was how it took shape since that period, and after Rome and Constantinople broke off their communion in the 11th century, the Patriarch of Constantinople found himself to be the first in the family of Orthodox Churches, while the Patriarch of Jerusalem shifted from the fifth to the fourth place. But historically, I will repeat, it was the Church of Jerusalem that was the first, that is, it is called the Mother of all Churches.

Due to the fact that now the Patriarch of Constantinople, after all he did in Ukraine, has kept himself aloof from the settlement of the problem that has arisen, the Patriarch of Jerusalem has taken an initiative to bring together all those who wished to respond to his invitation. Five Churches out of the fourteen generally recognized ones responded to his invitation, so, including the Church of Jerusalem,

there were six Churches. And at the same time, four Churches were represented by delegations led by their Primates, and two Churches were represented by delegations without Primates.

Various issues were discussed including the situation in Ukraine. There was a strong speech by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy who explained why the Ukrainian Church refused to recognize the so-called “autocephaly” granted by the Patriarchate of Constantinople and who spoke generally about the developments in Ukraine.

Metropolitan Anfilohije of Montenegro from the Serbian Orthodox Church spoke about the present developments in Montenegro, where the authorities have adopted a discriminatory law that can be used to tear away property from the canonical Church and hand it over to the schismatics. We discussed the situation in Northern Macedonia where the Patriarch of Constantinople could soon make decisions similar to those he did with regard to Ukraine.

As a result, it was agreed that it was necessary to continue inter-Orthodox consultations, that another meeting should be held before the year is out, that this meeting should be open for all the universally recognized Orthodox Churches and that among others Patriarch Bartholomew should be invited to it.

E.Gracheva: Why did the rest ignore this trip?

Metropolitan Hilarion: For various reasons. The Greek Churches, such as that of Greece and Alexandria, ignored this meeting for the same reason as the Patriarch of Constantinople condemned it and out of solidarity with the Patriarch of Constantinople. There is a pan-Greek solidarity, which in many cases makes Greek Churches act synchronously. In this case it was actualized and was not a surprise for us.

The Church of Antioch did not come to this conference for the reason that it is in conflict with the Church of Jerusalem, which convened the conference. The conflict emerged because the Church of Jerusalem founded a parish in Qatar but Qatar, from the point of view of the Church of Antioch, is her canonical territory. That is to say, it was because of a single parish that a breakoff of communion happened between the two Churches. And now imagine our situation when Constantinople tried to tear over 12 thousand parishes away from us.

E.Gracheva: I am listening to all this, and for any viewer who hears it, it resembles a TV serial, political at that, like “House of Cards”. There is a “House of Cards”, but what we see is like a “House of Churches”. To stop this, somebody has to be the first to stop. Can the Russian Orthodox Church be the side that will be the first to stop?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The point is that we have done nothing; we have nothing to stop. The actions, which have produced all this division, were committed by one man – the Patriarch of Constantinople. We have torn nothing away from anybody; we do not encroach upon anything; we are just preserving our Church in the historical boundaries in which it has taken shape. We follow the will of our flock, our episcopate, and our flock in both Russia and Ukraine and in other parts of the Russian Church, have a firm wish to preserve this unity – a unity that is over one thousand years old.

Therefore, the question here is not who will stop but how all this will continue and in what else the Patriarch of Constantinople may end in his claims now not only to universal power, but also to infallibility. You know, there is a saying *Roma locuta, causa finita* – “Rome has spoken, the discussion is over”, but now we are told that whatever decision the Patriarch of Constantinople makes, everybody should just obey, that is to say, “Istanbul has spoken, the discussion is over”. But the discussion over Ukraine is not over. Istanbul has spoken by issuing a tomos but people have rejected it: the episcopate, the clergy have rejected it, and it means that the discussion is not over; it means, the story will continue.

As for the serial, you know that there are serials coming out today about the fall of Constantinople. Quite recently a serial of this kind has come out; coming out are also serials about Popes of Rome. I think that someday our story will also come out as a serial, but we wish that this serial could have a happy end, that is to say, that everything could end happily for us all.

E.Gracheva: Thank you very much Your Eminence, for this talk.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Yekaterina.

In the second part of the program, Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions from TV viewers who had sent them to the Church and the World program website.

DECR Communication Service

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/45641/>