



## Metropolitan Hilarion: It is in the preaching of Christ and His teaching that the moral power of the Church lies

*On August 3, 2013, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk as host of the Church and the World talk show on Vesti-24 TV network had as his guest Nikolay V. Kotrelev, a historian of Russian philosophy and literature and expert in the Silver Age of Russian culture.*

**N. Kotrelev:** We seem to see another peak of animosity felt by many in our society and, most importantly, by its leading part towards the Church. It is present not only in the life of Russia today but certainly in the life of the European civilization. What should the Church bless and even initiate in this situation? Shouldn't the Church speak of developing a special Christian church culture in the mass media space? For instance, instead of publishing the *Radonezh* newspaper or *Thomas* intellectual magazine, to initiate what in Europe is called a newspaper of national format, like today's *Kommersant* or yesterday's *Pravda*. That is, a newspaper that lives just as the other ones while resting upon the Church, the Holy Tradition and being faithful to Scriptures. Similarly, on the television there must be a full-fledged church channel embracing the whole space of the country. Don't you think it's time to do it?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** First of all, I am not inclined to dramatize the situation. I do not agree that we are facing a peak of animosity on the part of society, its elite and the intelligentsia towards the Church. Still, I think (and can feel from my own experience) that on the whole our people and society treat the Church absolutely positively. There is a certain scum, a shallow element linked with the stand taken by specific people and perhaps some political and intellectual forces displeased with the fact that the Church occupies today a very solid, significant and noticeable place in our society. I do agree with you though that the Church should occupy a much more visible and meaningful place.

Now, concerning the media policy. Of course, the Church is actively present in the media space. We have our own TV channels, not one but several – 'Spas', 'Soyuz', 'Glas' and 'Radost Moya'. They have different air times and different viewships. It is another matter if we take state-run and central TV

channels. In my view, the presence of the Church on them is very insufficient. Look at the airtimes of the TV programs. Are there many among them that are either created on behalf of the Church or speak of the Church? They are very few. There is at best one program a week on a TV channel.

Certainly, it does not correspond to the role the Church plays in our society today. I speak expansively, meaning not only the Orthodox Church but also other traditional confessions, which in some way are present too in the information space and this, I believe, insufficiently too.

**N. Kotrelev:** I am delighted at your optimism and should admit I envy it... I remember well the time when my grandmother would say to her friend, 'You know, we have been to All-Night Vigil today and there were as many as five young people'. I remember how I suddenly saw my friends from the university and not only from the university. I remember old women groaning over the onset of the youth who gave no space for them to stand or sit freely but only to stand shoulder by shoulder. Unfortunately, very many of those who came to the Church in the 60s and 70s failed to stand the test of the Church. They left becoming open atheists and always aggressive at that. They came out in the same state in which they came in: we know everything better than the Church and the Church should listen to us. The alienation happened because the Church is much broader than any intellectual stratum, and in this sense, she is certainly subject to criticism by frustrated hopes. This criticism, I know for sure, is inherited as those who failed the church test have raised their children (many of them claiming to be Christians) as very tough and insensitive critics of the Church. In this situation, it seems to me that everything is not as optimistic as Your Eminence maintain.

In this connection, it is necessary to create – and lay people themselves should be aware of it, but the Church should also push them in this direction – some structures for the society to live in, including on the central TV channels, for preaching the word of God rather than sorcery.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** First, I will again disagree with you in assessing the scale of the moods you have mentioned. I cannot say very many of those who came to the Church in the 60s and 70s have failed the test of the Church and fallen away and become critical... I myself came to the Church in the late 70s. Although we belong to different generations, I in a sense am already a veteran of the church service and I remember both the late 70s and the early 80s. And I should say at least in my generation I

do not know of anybody who, once having come to the Church then left it – all have stayed in it. They went through various moments, various moods and the critical element sometimes prevailed and sometimes was put aside but their personal attraction to the Church has remained.

It seems to me that it is very important to understand here that the Church is a many-level organism in which each can find his own level. I believe the most important thing in the Church is not what lies on the surface but what is there in the depth. Say, a lay person may disagree with this or that attitude of a particular church leader while preserving love of the Church, being profoundly in-churched and living a truly Christian life. It seems to me that it is important that these different levels should be differentiated.

What does the Church exist for? – to save people, to save them from sin, the devil and all that is associated in our life with evil, vice and what, as we say, leads to the destruction of the human soul. And the Church does it in many ways. The one who wishes to follow the path of salvation will surely find one's own niche in the Church, not only as a passive believer but also an active participant in church life. The Church is a whole enormous organism embracing people of various views and worldviews including those who are capable of constructive criticism of the Church.

It is not accidental that we have created an Inter-Council Presence as a mechanism which prepares decisions for Bishops' Councils. Participating in it are lay people, critically-minded people who help us, clergy, to look at ourselves from the side. Constructive criticism is very helpful. Non-constructive criticism, demagoguery and slander against the Church cannot help.

**N. Kotrelev:** Of course, the complexity of the church people is isomorphic with the complex structure of society itself. For this reason, there must be instruments of communication in society which, though present today, if not indifferent, are pseudo-indifferent because the pressure on the Church and the church flock is made by the very way of life imposed by the state-run TV channels. This pressure can be much stronger than political pressure proper because it inculcates in people also on the subconscious level the ways of ordering life unacceptable for the Church. For this reason, the response should be given in the same format.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It seems to me that the message of very many TV programs, mass media articles and advertising, which occupies an important part of the television time, is addressed to the man of consumer society. In this way, there is a conscious effort to cultivate the consumer attitude to life. Life is seen as a certain market of goods and services in which each can use whatever he wishes beginning from advertised shampoos, gels, cosmetics and products of all kinds. And it ends in people trained to see life in the consumer perspective alone.

The ideals, which used to be present in Russian literature including the literature of the Silver Age, which I know you hold dear, the ideals of selflessness are now disappearing from the human language and from the conceptual apparatus as a whole, thus making a radical impact on human life.

As regards the family, few people think today about starting a family as a way of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Normally, man and woman come together to live together and to promote their interests together, individual and common, and all this, unfortunately, has as one of its cause the influence of the ideology assimilated, like it or not, through the mass media and education system.

I believe the Church has a great role to play here. Certainly, our church TV channels and Orthodox mass media are insufficient. There must be a very clear message coming from the Church and conveyed through the mass media. You and I are now using this opportunity, so I personally have nothing to complain about: I am granted a TV air on our state-run channel, and we can talk about our heartaches and interests. I know that viewers do respond to this kind of talk. But I believe we could do much more to let people know about the real church life, about the positive contribution the Church makes to societal life, not only about the scum which is occasionally thrown in the mass media and which consciously or unconsciously depreciates and smears the image of the Church and eventually alienate people from the Church.

**N. Kotrelev:** A simple argument: the Church has proved to be one of the newsmakers equal in its rights and values to those who produced such news as ‘a famous actress drank too much yesterday’, or

'another mayor jailed for bribery', etc. that is, it is the world, homogeneous and unstructured qualitatively, the less so morally, destroys the human society. Therefore, it occurs to me as a lay person that pastoral theology today should include not only spiritual guidance for the church flock which is already in-churched but also the mass media problems you have described so well, including those of advertising this life in falsehood. Indeed, the largest part, some 99 percent, of an advertising text is a pure lie evident to both who write and commission it. Advertising is all built on exaggeration, on purely deceptive strategies.

That is to say, the church people and the Supreme Church Authority are facing the problem of criticism to be levelled against the civilization which is evidently non-churched.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** We criticize this civilization but we cannot build our pastoral work and preaching on criticism alone. Here we should certainly follow the example of Jesus Christ who criticized particular segments of the contemporary society, doing it sharply and severely. For instance, He criticized the Pharisees who distorted religious truths and appeared to substitute outer devotion for inner profound faith in God.

The critical element is present in the Church's preaching but I believe we should first of all bring goodness and light to people, bring Christ to them. Regrettably, the preaching of Christ today is not often heard in the public space. Basically, we speak of Christ in sermons in churches for quite a narrow circle of already in-churched Christians. There is a tremendous number of people, including in our country, who claim to be Orthodox and to belong to the Orthodox Church while being not properly initiated to the Church. If they do not come to church for divine service, they will hear little about Christ through the mass media and books.

I think one of the ways of restoring the nationwide public recognition to the Church, which she should use, is to intensify the preaching of what is the essence of the Church's life, namely, Christ, His personality and His teaching. In this lies our power. In this lies that attractive image which can give to people not something abstract but a concrete image of Man who lived on earth and Who has given us an example of how we should live – the Man Who was God incarnate Himself.

It is in this, in the preaching of Christ and His teaching that the power of the Church lies and will always lie. I am confident that precisely this will help us overcome all the crises including the crisis in relations between church and society.

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