



Metropolitan Hilarion answers questions of Estonian mass media

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On 15 September 2010, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, currently on a visit to Estonia with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, met with representatives of the Estonian mass media. Press conference took place at the Narva City Assembly premises.

Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions of the correspondents of "Estonian Radio-4", "Viru Prospect", "Narva", "Narvskaya Gazeta", and "Gorod" newspapers, "Opinion" portal, and "TV Narva" and TBN-Baltia channels.

Taking part in press conference were protodeacon Andrei Kilin of the Cathedral of the Resurrection and Bishop Lazar of Narva, a vicar of the Estonian Metropolia.

Answering the question about the themes to be discussed at his meeting with the Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet, the DECR chairman said:

"The major theme of discussion with the authorities of the Republic of Estonia, the authorities of Tallinn and other cities is the situation of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. This Church can develop freely and bring witness about Orthodox on the land of Estonia.

"At the same time, there are problems that the Church inherited from the recent past, for instance, its property. The EOC (Moscow Patriarchate) disposes of property that it takes on a long-term lease. This lease could last fifty years, but the state or municipal authorities, rather than the Church, have the right of ownership. I have discussed this problem with Tallinn Mayor Edgar Savisaar and will discuss it during other forthcoming meetings."

As to his visit to Narva, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

"Today, Bishop Merkury, chairman of the Department for Religious Education and Catechization, Bishop Lazar, and myself celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the majestic Cathedral of the Resurrection in Narva to mark the 120th anniversary of its foundation by the Russian Emperor Alexander II and the German Emperor Wilhelm. This historical church has seen a lot, and I was happy to celebrate it, to meet with the worshippers, to learn how Orthodox Christians live here, to talk with Bishop Lazar and to meet with the city authorities.

A correspondent of the "News of Orthodoxy" programme of TBN TV channel asked Metropolitan Hilarion to comment on his remark made at the concert on September 12, namely, that "The Russian and Estonian people are doomed to friendship."

"I believe that a task of the Church is to reconcile people, Metropolitan Hilarion answered. – Certainly, the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has a special mission to fulfill, as it cares for the ethnic Russians and Estonians. Divine services are celebrated in different parishes either in the Church Slavonic, or the Estonian, or in both languages. The sermons are delivered in Russian and Estonian. Indeed, this multinational Church is capable of reconciling people.

"We know about difficult relations between Russia and Estonia in the recent twenty years. Political difficulties that we still encounter are related to the certain events happened in the early 1990s, when the Soviet Union disintegrated, and independent states were established on its territory, Russia and Estonia among them. A difficult period of the re-division of property and the spheres of influence began. The enormous geopolitical changes of those years have affected not only politics, but also people's destinies. WE know that many families are divided by political frontier: the parents live in one state, while their children in another.

"Under the circumstances the Church is playing the most important part of reconciliation and consolidation. I believe that any move to the rapprochement between Estonia and Russia would be timely and necessary. I am confident that Russia and Estonia are doomed to friendship as they are neighbouring countries. Enmity and confrontation would bring only evil to them, while good and constructive relations will be for their benefit.

The next question was asked about the rebuilding of the lost church in Narva and construction of the new ones. The journalist was interested in the opportunities of the Russian Orthodox Church for material support of such initiatives. The DECR chairman answered:

"The Russian Orthodox Church has resources, though, as a rule, the Church does not have money of her own and invites sponsors. There are many generous people at present, and many businessmen understand the necessity and importance of the rebuilding and construction of churches. I believe it very important to have as many churches in Narva as the Orthodox Christians need. I give my full support to Bishop Lazar's efforts in this regard, for instance, to build a new church."

Bishop Lazar explained that the point in rebuilding the Cathedral of the Transfiguration in Narva. As the most part of the old Narva, it was razed to the ground during World War II. He added that it had been the oldest building of our city. It was built as a Catholic church, then became a Lutheran church, and later – an Orthodox church. A new Cathedral of the Transfiguration could have marked the beginning of

restoration of the entire old city. We do not have at present, and we cannot resign ourselves to the thought of this city, once a most beautiful in Europe, remaining obliterated.

Metropolitan Hilarion was asked of his opinion of the ways for bridging a gap between the Church and society in certain countries, for instance, in Russia after the tragic events happened in the 20th century. The DECR chairman answered:

"It is very important for people to know their history. However, Orthodoxy is not only a part of history, or a historical relic of the past. Orthodoxy is a way of life, to which the Church is calling all people today and will do it tomorrow.

"I believe that atheism has no future. Atheism is an ideology that can be imposed upon people for a certain period of time and kept up by repressions. When a repressive regime disappears, atheism remains without any strength of its own for reproduction. Human soul is religious by its nature. People search for the meaning of life and for justification of that what happens to them. It is impossible to an atheist to find this meaning.

"Therefore Orthodoxy, Christianity, and religion as such still play an important part in human life, while atheism will die out little by little. I believe this process to be irreversible.

"If people want to become believers, efforts are required of both sides. On the one hand, people should get interested in religious issues and ask themselves about the meaning of life, and about the Church: what is the purpose of its existence and what does it give to people? On the other hand, representatives of the Church, including clergymen and laymen, should be able to explain to the outsiders what is, why it is needed, and what it gives to people.

"Many people think they need the Church only when a baby is born to baptize it, or to marry the newly-weds in the church, or to have a burial service for their dead. Yet we can see on many examples that the Church can become a spiritual home for people and fill their lives with spiritual contents that non-religious people usually lack.

"Often enough, people see the meaning of life in success and money. Those having good intentions say they live for their families. None of these values alone can make people happy and justify their life on the earth. If people do not see the higher meaning of their lives and do not believe that eternity awaits them, their life lack meaning and, being comfortably off and successful, healthy and young, they are lost in this life as they do not understand its meaning.

"The Church can give answers to these questions. Yet, these are not questions that could be answered

by turning the pages of a book. The Church gives answers to concrete people, as one answer does not fit all. Each human person comes to the Church in his own way and gets an answer he needs to understand the meaning of his life.

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