



## **Metropolitan Hilarion's interview to Glas TV Company in Odessa**

*In his talk with the Open Studio anchorman of the Glas TV Company, Leonid Suschenko, Metropolitan Hilarion was asked questions about music and philosophy, religion and spirituality, church canonical unity and other vital matters.*

**L. Suschenko:** Your Eminence, we are talking at a time when His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia continues his visit to Odessa. In spite of the fact that journalists, historians and theologians will probably keep analyzing the visit for days ahead, I would like to ask you to make already now a preliminary conclusion outlining the most important result of this visit.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I would not outline the main result of the visit now, but would rather indicate its main theme. It is this: it is a pastoral visitation of His Holiness the Patriarch. As soon as he set foot on the Ukrainian land, he was asked about the purpose of the visit. And the Patriarch answered: 'No purpose' because it is his work. He is a Patriarch, and Ukraine is a part of the canonical territory of the great Russian Orthodox Church. The Patriarch is the first pastor of the Ukrainian people, and he comes to visit his own flock. There is no special purpose here. The Patriarch has to come to his flock and he will.

As for the main theme, the leitmotif of what has been voiced here in His Holiness the Patriarch's speeches and in greetings and good wishes, including toasts during various repasts, is the overcoming of the schism. The schism is a wound on the body of the Church. The task is to overcome it and to help those who have separated themselves from the Church to realize the harmfulness of being in a schism and to come back to the Church's fold.

**L. S.:** Your Eminence, when you gave a press conference during you visit to Dniepropetrovsk in the spring, asked about the schism, you made I believe a very precise statement that 'schism is no longer in fashion'. Does it mean that now it is the time not to scatter but to 'gather stones',

**M. H.:** It is the time to 'gather stones' and to consolidate people. Certainly, it should have been done earlier but you remember the early 90s when the great country fell apart to give rise to independent states – a process important in itself but it is a political process which should not affect church life. The Church lives now under different laws; it has different borders, which have never been defined by political new entities. If Local Orthodox Churches were to be divided in accordance with the number of countries which belong to their canonical territory, there would have been not fifteen Local Orthodox Churches but one hundred fifty, and they would not have been powerful and consolidated but weak and scattered. Suffice it to say that the Patriarchate of Alexandria incorporates some fifty countries in Africa, while the Patriarchate of Jerusalem three states and the Patriarchate of Antioch two states.

The Russian Orthodox Church was forming for over ten centuries. It was born in the baptismal font of St. Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles not in Moscow but in Kiev. Kiev is the cradle of our Church. Therefore, you cannot divide what has been built for over ten centuries, the more so for purely political and opportunistic considerations. The schism is a purely political project. It was a project of the then Ukrainian government aiming to give a great legitimacy to the emergence of an independent Ukrainian state. An utterly ridiculous slogan was invented that 'an independent country should have an independent Church' and promoted. Regrettably the state connived at the schism because without this attitude the schism would have never developed so much as it did in the 90s. This political project was consonant with the political situation but, fortunately, this conjuncture is now in the past. Today many of those in the schism including those who serve it as priests and bishops are aware that they are not members of a canonical Church, that their 'sacraments' are not valid. Now the understanding is growing in the schism that the time has come to put an end to it and to come back to the canonical Church and engage themselves in creation rather than destruction.

**L. S.:** Your Eminence, recently the mass media has often used the term 'secularization'. Secular in Latin means 'temporal'. The forces working in this direction seek to declare that religion cannot and should not influence the life of society. We know the consequences from the experience of Stalin's time of militant atheism. Is it possible to conduct dialogue with those who seek secularization?

**M. H.:** This dialogue is not only possible but also necessary except for cases where these people themselves refuse to enter into dialogue and adopt an aggressive and militant attitude. I believe church representatives should be in dialogue with the entire surrounding world. If we think of the apostolic times and the apostolic feat we will see that this feat consisted in their going out to a world alien to them and

often even hostile in order to preach Christ not at all in a place where they were expected. Very often this preaching ended in martyrdom.

Today we should not be euphoric about the fact that the Church is reviving, churches are being built and many people are joining the Church. At hierarchical or patriarchal services we see thousands of people attending, and an impression can be created that the Christianization of our countries have been completed and that our people are already enlightened with the light of Christian faith. But if this seemingly great number of church-goers is compared with the whole population, if you compare the number of nominal Orthodox believers with the real number of parishioners who are fully aware of their faith, the difference will be very great. Therefore, the Church today faces an enormous educational and missionary task, of which the Patriarch keeps reminding us. It is necessary to conduct dialogue with the external world including representatives of the secular worldview – a dialogue which is not theological but philosophical, devoted to the question of the future of humanity.

This is an anthropological dispute, if you like. We should not discuss the existence or non-existence of God, though it is an important issue as well, but speak about what future awaits our people and on what values they will build their life, and this has a direct bearing on the question of the existence of God. Are there absolute spiritual and moral values or they do not exist? Can a person define for oneself the scale of spiritual and moral values to live up to, or should one be guided by the divine commandments? Everything depends on this choice. For instance, it determines a person's understanding of the family, the importance of bearing children, whether a woman will have an abortion or not. In the final analysis, this choice will determine whether our population will increase or decrease. The population growth is a sign of the spiritual health of a nation, while a decrease in the population is a sign of a spiritual disease. It is a very simple law. If the statistics show that the population is decreasing it means that something is wrong with our morals; it means that our value guidelines have changed; it means that something has to be done. This is what we should discuss with representatives of the secular worldview.

**L. S.:** In one of your interviews I noticed the way in which you defined the difference of religious and secular worldviews. You compared the notion of 'sin' in them and said that the word 'sin' cannot be translated into the secular language as 'guilt' because it is a psychological definition. I believe the Orthodox perception of the world simply cannot be translated into the secular language and put on a secular platform.

**M. H.:** Yes, but we should translate our terminology into a language understandable for secular people. Take, for instance, the notion of sin. Indeed, it cannot be translated into a secular language in a simple way. In the secular language there is a notion of crime as a violation of law which entails a due

punishment. The notion of guilt really belongs to psychology, but a person, having committed an offense, may or may not experience the feeling of guilt. The notion of sin is meaningful only in a certain absolute scale of spiritual and moral values. This absolute scale is not defined by a person for himself. It is a scale defined by the divine commandments and the spiritual and moral paradigm. In this case, the term 'sin' acquired a very important meaning making a person understand whether what he has done is a sin or not, whether he should repent or not.

**L. S.: A few words about education, if I may. You have visited all the continents of our planet, over 70 countries. You are a graduate of Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary, Moscow Conservatoire, Oxford University and University of Freiburg in Switzerland. You speak many languages... Such is your fortune thanks to your talent and diligence, or any young man can take such a course?**

**M. H.:** I think it is important that every young man should take care of his own spiritual and intellectual development. Unfortunately, very many people today live as if by inertia, on an 'autopilot'. He finishes school, graduates from university and that terminates his development. He lives further on as life treats him, without taking each day and each hour of his life as a certain lesson. It seems to me that a person who has a creative approach to reality around him still continues his education after graduation from university or even two or three universities, because life presents daily a great deal of very diverse lessons. If a person has a thirst for knowledge, a thirst for learning something new all the time, he will continue developing and perfecting himself. If he does not have such a thirst he should concern himself with developing it.

**L. S.: Do you think the theological schools need a perestroika today?**

**M. H.:** Such perestroika is already underway. It is really required because many of our schools continue to live according to old patterns which existed in the Soviet and even pre-Revolution time. Today the educational process in the West is based first of all on an approach seeking to develop a student's ability to carry out independent research. Our educational process is reduced to making a student listen to lectures and then reproduce at an exam what he heard as exactly as possible. This is a passive and non-creative process. At Oxford University, where I studied, there is no such notion as discipline at all but the notion of module on which the so-called Bologna System is based. A module is a certain discipline or a topic studied not through lectures but mostly through a student's reading a great number of books and writing a thesis. These methods taken together comprise a module for which you receive a

mark. It teaches one to think independently and organize one's time. In Oxford you are not obliged to attend lectures. Truancy is not punishable, but students are keen to attend lectures because they understand that otherwise they would not be able to pass an exam.

**L. S.:** Continuing the theme of youth, I would like to recall your press conference in Lipetsk last March. Asked about a possibility to predict the end of the world, you answered, 'I believe it is to no one's advantage to predict the end of the world. If you predict the end of the world and it does not come, you will be called a deceiver. And if you predict that there will be no end of the world and it does happen then nobody will have time for you'. Thank you for this ironic answer. Do you think our clergy today should show more wit?

**M. H.:** A person either has a sense of humour or he does not have it. A priest should never act as a jester. He should not put upon a mask of wit. Humour is a natural component of human life; it is like a spice for a dish. Some dishes need pepper or salt while others do not. Therefore, if a priest in an appropriate situation recalls something witty he can say it, and there will be no sin in it, since it is a natural manifestation of human thinking. But one should not try to intersperse one's speech with pepper or salt if the speech does not need them.

**L. S.:** Some people of letters say that the best examples of the Odessa humour are not based on the fact that people in Odessa like to be witty but because it is a special form of thinking.

**M. H.:** The Odessa humour is unique. Suffice it to read '12 Chairs' by Ilf and Petrov – a work imbued with the Odessa humour from beginning to end and with the Odessa perception of the world to appreciate its humour. For people in Odessa, humour is natural. It is one of the manifestations of their love of life and, if you like, creative approach to life and even cosmopolitanism, in a good sense of this word, which has always been characteristic of this city.

**L. S.:** You are author of 700 publications and books on theology and history. You have written 'The Life and Teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian'... Can our today's life give birth to saints?

**M. H.:** It can and it does. Among us are people who will be someday included by the Church in the

assembly of saints. A saint is a one who aims his entire life at fulfilling the divine commandments. There have always been and will always be such people. The question of their recognition by the Church is a secondary one in a certain sense. We know that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were a great number of Russia's new martyrs and confessors, who suffered for Christ in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other republics of the former Soviet Union. The names and life stories of some of them are well known but very many of them will never become known because they died in obscurity; there are no surviving records of their interrogations or only false records have survived. But the Lord knows of every one's feat and sanctity. Both in times of persecution and in times favourable for the Church, there have always been and will be saints. Moreover, the emergence of such theologians as Sts Gregory the Theologian or Ignaty Brianchaninov is not limited to a particular century. Our century needs the emergence of such people. I believe they already exist and the Church will canonize them some day.

**L. S.: In the lifetime of our saints including Ignaty Brianchaninov, the notion of ecumenism was considered in a humanitarian context as a desire of Christians of various confessions to unite around eternal values. Today it is given the status of heresy or apostasy. And you, how will you describe this term today?**

**M. H.:** The very notion of ecumenism was born in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For a long time it was used to describe the desire of various Christian confessions to converge. But there is also a different understanding of ecumenism. The Protestant understanding is that all the existing confessions are actually branches of one tree, that the Church in itself is not visible, representing the totality of various confessions ('the theory of branches'). The task in this case is seen in attempts to gradually unite them all to make the invisible Church visible. It is a heretical understanding, and the Orthodox Christians by no means share it.

We believe the Church exists and has visible boundaries, and the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, which we confess in the Creed, is the Orthodox Church, and we are its members. In dialogue with other Christian confessions we set ourselves first of all the missionary task. We bear witness before the Protestants, Anglicans and Catholics to the Tradition of the early undivided Church and say that the way to unity lies through the return to this Tradition, and there is no other way. All the novelties that have appeared in history, all the heresies that have emerged in the second millennium should be overcome. Our non-Orthodox brothers should reject them so that they may be united with the one undivided and ever canonical Church. In this lies the meaning of our dialogue with non-Orthodox Churches.

**L. S.: The oratorio 'Passions According to St. Matthews' that you have composed was played in many cities of the world including our city's Philharmonic Society. Tell me please, what is**

## **the primary difference between the attitude of an Orthodox musician to the theme of the Passions of Christ and that of the West?**

**M. H.:** In the Orthodox understanding, the Passions of Christ are always linked with the Resurrection of Christ. If you read the liturgical texts for the Passion Week, you will see that these two themes always intertwine in them. Even in the crucifix, Christ in the Orthodox tradition is always depicted as already dead. His suffering is left in the background, as we see Christ in His divine glory. This glory reveals the One Who died and suffered for our sins to rise from the dead and open the way to resurrection for the whole human race.

In the Western tradition, especially since the Renaissance, the theme of Christ's suffering was given a very sensual and anthropocentric meaning. Christ was depicted with his eyes open, suffering and with drops of blood... A certain modern quintessence of this understanding was expressed in Mal Gibson's film 'The Passions', in which this naturalistic point was shown very vividly. The Orthodox tradition avoids such naturalism. It calls the faithful first of all not to empathize with the Saviour emotionally and sensually but to ascend mentally to the divine providence which first led to the creation of man and then to the incarnation of God Himself so that His suffering may atone the sins of humanity and give us all eternal life.

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