



Metropolitan Hilarion: Orthodox rite is an integral part of the entire worldview of an Orthodox believer

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, speaking on 10 July 2010 on the Church and the World TV program, answered questions from numerous viewers concerning the ritual side in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church.

First of all, His Eminence Hilarion pointed to a basic difference between the Western – Protestant and the Eastern – Orthodox perception of the liturgy: 'The Orthodox rite is an integral part of the entire worldview held by an Orthodox believer and the Orthodox Church. Some Protestant churches in the West are deprived of Christian symbols; there are neither icons, nor crosses. And the liturgy, accordingly, is almost fully devoid of the ritual side as people sing hymns and psalms while the priest reads a sermon and the organ plays. After that all go away. In the Orthodox Church the liturgy is perceived altogether differently: for us it is first of all the participation in the upper world. We believe that the liturgy we celebrate on earth is only part of the divine mystery which continues unceasingly in heaven and we can participate in it as well. During the Divine Liturgy, prayers are lifted up when the priest enters the sanctuary and asks God: "Make this our entrance to be an entrance of holy angels", that is, angels enter the sanctuary together with the priest. Our liturgy, just as icon, is profoundly symbolic. Hence the development of various rites which can be described as a 'choreography of the liturgy' with the bows of the clergy and deacons and incensing. It is a certain synthesis of arts which includes church frescos, icons and church music'.

Asked about the extent in which the church rite can be brought nearer to real life with the purpose making it more intelligible for modern people, the archpastor answered, 'The ritual aspect of the church life has always developed and continues developing. The liturgy as celebrated today is not quite the same as it was in the 5th or the 12th century in Byzantium. Many things have remained the same, for instance, prayers, in particular, the Liturgies (which today's lay people do not hear because they are read by the priest in the sanctuary). But many things have gradually changed: the liturgy lives its own life and there is a certain development going on within it.

'The ritual aspect of the Church is like the life of man: everything happens in it naturally. Some rites may die out with time, may go out of use to be replaced by new ones. It is very important for the church leadership to see to it that the ritual creativity is not sent self-floating; otherwise there will be different rites in different places, as it is already happening today. This development has nothing bad in itself if the clergy or laity do not invent some rites of their own which claimed to become part of the tradition. Some parishioners take innovations as part of the church statute, though they are in fact amateur

products', His Eminence explained.

He also explained to the viewers where the dividing line runs between the use of rite in Orthodox faith and the belief in rite growing into superstition, 'Belief in rite is when a person concentrates not on the essence of Orthodox faith but on some purely external sides of church life; when he thinks that to be Orthodox means to jump into an ice hole on the Epiphany Day or to bake Ester cakes and paint eggs on Easter or to go to a cemetery on the Day of the Dead. Such a person does not think about the meaning of being Orthodox which lies in the Orthodox way of life, in building one's family according to the gospel's ethical north, in being guided in one's professional life by the principle of religious life, etc. On the contrary, the belief in rite is when things secondary and accessory come to the fore while the most important and essential things are ignored'.

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