



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk's interview to RIA Novosti news agency

The Patriarchal Council for Culture, established by the Holy Synod Decision of March 5, 2010, is called to help the Church and museum workers to deal with the problem of returning church valuables and prevent the turning of culture into a destructive anti-culture. Why this Council has been set up precisely at this time and what for is the theme of an interview given to the RIA Novosti news agency by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, permanent member of the Holy Synod and chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations.

- Your Eminence, what is the reason for the Holy Synod's decision to establish a Patriarchal Council for Culture? How is it linked with the debate concerning the return of valuables kept in museums to the Church?

- I believe the decision to establish a Patriarch Council for Culture to be very wise and timely. Indeed, the problem of relations between the Church and culture is very acute today.

Many of us remember the time when a dead wall was erected between the Church and culture, when it was impressed on people that culture and art serve progress whereas the Church is a mud box for failures and old women 'who seek consolation in religion'.

Today we seem to have moved rather far from that. But the wall has not been fully eliminated. Relapses of the old disease occasionally act up again, and the muddy ideology, on which the Church was set off against culture in the Soviet time, has not been overcome fully.

- Today some ask: Can the Church preserve the cultural valuables, ancient icons and church vessels which are kept in museums?

- I will answer by asking: why cannot she? Is it not the Church who has created these valuables? It is not the Church who has been their careful keeper for centuries? Were they created rather for museums and storerooms then for the Church?

A church must be a church, not a museum. The place of an icon is not in a museum but in an acting church. The place of the Eucharistic cup or paten is on the altar, not in a glass showcase.

It does not mean that old churches representing architectural monuments cannot function at the same

time as museums and that icons kept in a museum church cannot be placed under security.

The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir is placed in St. Nicholas's-at-Tolmachi, but St. Nicholas's itself is part of the Tretyakov museum compound, and the icon is under round-the-clock observation by specialists. So, there are positive examples of cooperation between the Church and museum workers. But there must be much more of these examples.

It is important that the Church and museum workers should deal with the problem of preserving church valuables together. An exchange of open letters and mutual accusations will hardly help to deal with this problem effectively. A more constructive approach would lie in direct dialogue between the Church and museum workers. This dialogue can be carried out within the framework of the Patriarchal Council for Culture.

- Clearly, the theme of relations between religion and culture is not limited to the question of church valuables. What other areas will the Council be concerned with?

- No, it does not. Today a wide field is opening up for cooperation between the Church and musicians, painters, writers, poets, architects, actors and art directors. The world of culture and art is open for the Church and seeks her attention and participation. Direct dialogue with people of this world, a possibility for them to communicate with the patriarch and discuss together with him various joint projects – all this will become a reality within the Patriarchal Council for Culture.

It seems to me that within the Patriarch Council for Culture there will be several independent areas and a fairly wide range of themes will be discussed. The restoration of monuments of church architecture, as well as icons and works of applied art, in particular, will probably occupy a substantial place on the newly-established Council's agenda.

The Council could give attention to such areas of culture as literature and poetry, painting and applied art, architecture both religious and secular, cinematography and television. In each of these areas there are their own problems and everywhere the Church can be of tangible benefit.

It seems to me that among the very important areas is that of the Church's participation in the musical life of countries in the post-Soviet space. We should move from one-time events, such as festivals or particular concerts, to a systematic planning of such events. The Church should promote the popularization of the musical works which carry a positive spiritual and moral message, giving special attention to Russian musical tradition and supporting young composers and performers.

Along with spiritual culture, the Council will give attention to physical culture as well. Cooperation

between the Church and the world of sports will clearly be among the Council's concerns. This cooperation is especially relevant today.

- There have been no 'Patriarchal Councils' in the Russian Church so far. Why has the Primate come to head this new structure? And how will the Council's membership be formed?

- It is quite logical to have the Council led by the Patriarch since any other level would not be appropriate today considering the scale of tasks facing the Church in her dialogue with the world of culture.

The membership of the Council will be adopted by the next session of the Holy Synod. Clearly, the Council will include people of creative professions as well as church workers who are linked with the world of culture in this or that way.

Archimandrite Tikhon Shevkunov, father superior of the Sretensky Monastery, who is a film director by education, has been appointed as secretary of the Council.

- What would you answer to those who have suspected that the Church, by creating a Patriarchal Council for Culture, seeks to take culture under control, acting as censor or ideologue?

- The point is not control or censure. The point is constructive cooperation between the Church and those representatives of the world of culture who wish this cooperation.

The Church does not impose anything on anybody but only offers her participation and assistance to those who wish it.

The Church does not have 'an ideology' of her own unless it is viewed as ideology that she is called to save people, to make their life better, purer and brighter. And this is unachievable without having a spiritual and moral pivot.

Culture is not neutral spiritually and morally. It can carry both a positive and negative moral message and can equally create and destroy. If the Church does not participate in the development of cultural life in the country, culture faces a risk of turning into an anti-culture, as was repeatedly the case in the past.

We should avoid the mistakes of the past and eliminate the wall erected between the Church and culture during the Soviet times.

At the same time, we should create a model of such relations between the Church and culture as to avoid putting any fetters on the development of culture but rather to create an additional potential for its comprehensive development and flourishing.

Olga Lipich, interviewer

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