‘Argumenty I Fakty’ Internet Portal: ‘Marketing Technologies are Unacceptable to the Church’

– The Church today is speaking even more about the importance of the dialogue with the youth. However, the age of eighteen-twenty is very controversial. It is the age at which an opinion of parents and teachers looses its authority for a young person who seeks freedom in everything and is exposed to the influence of strangers, such as friends, popular musicians, leaders of public movements, etc. Should the Church do something to attract young people? Should it seek a special approach to them?

– I believe that the search for real freedom is a worthy thing not only for young people but also for all those who are seeking the true life. The Church appreciates the aspiration of the young to freedom and independence, as Christians have never been the adherents of the submissiveness to the reality in which they live and which bears the apparent traces of sin.

At the same time, the search for freedom, unfortunately, do not always bring people to their cherished goals. Young people often take permissiveness and nihilism for freedom. As a result, after a natural dependence of their parents up to a certain age they become slaves of consumers’ worldview and brute instincts that the slavery exploits. Therefore the Church offers its experience of the search for freedom to the youth with the words of the Saviour: “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (Jn 8:32). While helping young people to seek real freedom, the Church is willing to speak with them in the language that they understand.

– Your Eminence, what was your main problem when you were eighteen?

– I was a churchgoer for some years, as I began to attend at the sanctuary at the age of fifteen, and I realized that the main things to which I was striving were here, in the Church. My family thought that I would become a musician after eleven years in the Gnesin Musical School, and I entered the Composers’ Department of the Conservatoire right after the Musical School. There was a practice in the 1980s to call up the students for military service, and I spent two years in the Frontier Guards orchestra. I did not forget the Church and tried to attend church services whenever I had an opportunity to do so, up to the absence without leave. During my service in the army I knew for sure that the Church was

more important to me than music. I retuned to the Conservatoire for two months after my demobilization, collected my documents, and joined a monastery. I have never regretted it.

– Young people who go to church are often ‘grounded’ in the history and life of the Church, but are lacking Christian spirit and Christian attitude to the neighbour. What advice would you give to these people? How can the Church solve this problem?

– The belonging to the Church of not only a young person, but of any Orthodox believer, should find its expression not in the knowledge of the life of the Church, which is important, but first of all in the irreplaceable aspiration to the main thing, which the Church offers, – the new life in Christ. The experience of the real communion with God that a believer receives in the church sacraments and prayer gives him strength to change, to transform himself and finally to become a true man. A true man in the Orthodox understanding is a person of full value who clearly comprehends the meaning of life and wishes to realize himself in the love of the neighbour and in creative work. It is not often that you can meet such people in the modern world struck by different ulcers, people who give example of the true sacrificial love that you wish to follow. Yet, there is always such example in the Church – our Lord Jesus Christ. He is a safe landmark for the young people at all times. The human person becomes permeated by the spirit of the Church if he tries to be like Him in his life. There are many places today where the youth can gain this experience, such as discussion clubs, youth camps, or different social projects. Young people should attend them, meet with one another, develop their experience of prayer, communion, and common work to the glory of God. Come and act!

– Information plays the leading role in society today. The Protestants in the USA buy TV time, distribute leaflets, put advertisements in the streets, place their banners in the Internet, arrange shows and build entertainment centers to attract parishioners. In other words, they “pitch” the church through marketing technologies. How should the Orthodox Church announce herself in the information society? What is inadmissible to her?

– The educational activity of the Russian Orthodox Church among different strata of population in the modern information society presupposes constant renewal of the form of missionary ministry and active use of the information space, including various modern technologies.

Today as never before the Church has to seek and find unconventional solutions. Even more important is an ability to present the experience of the apostolic and patristic tradition in the language that our contemporaries understand. In society, which has almost forgotten the commandment of love of the neighbour and in which indifference prevails, including indifference to religious questions, the Church is called to encourage the indifferent to turn to the Gospel and help them implement Christian values in their everyday life. A form of the sermon can change in accordance with modern challenges, but its

content is intransient. Because only the conscious faith, rather than the imposed worldview or ideology, is effective in the cause of salvation, and any coercive pressure on the human being, be it marketing technologies or neurolinguistic programming, is unacceptable to the Orthodox Church. In the long run, these technologies produce a countereffect: they do not attract, but alienate people.

– Your Eminence, you will open a series of lectures on 'The Foundations of the Orthodox Worldview" in the Polytechnical Museum on October 6. Share a secret of what you going to talk with the youth?

– First of all, I would have liked to know what the young people expect of the lectures, what are their concerns, and what they would like to know about the Church. I do not know how to do it in the best way. I would suggest to the organizers to give questionnaires to the audience in which they could indicate their preferences. I assume that these lectures are for the secular young people who trust the Church and wish to know her views on different problems of modern life, and therefore I think it helpful to discuss the subjects that could be summarized under the title "Christianity in the Modern World." I shall be happy just to answer any questions from the audience.

– What do you think about the purpose of such lectures and what results can be expected?

– The main purpose is to understand the position of another person. I am confident that many conflicts in the world, in the families, and deep inside people, could be remove if we always show our wish to know and understand our neighbour, a colleague, and a relative. For a Muslim to understand an Orthodox, and for the Orthodox to understand a non-believer, efforts should be exerted, and genuine interest should be shown to another person. In this case we shall discover that we have much more in common and less that separates us.

I hope that all those attending the lectures will be able to come to a deeper understanding of what Orthodoxy is today, of the feelings of a common Orthodox believer in today's life, of his thoughts and actions. This will help to affirm Christian spirit and Christian love of the neighbour among young people.

– It was very difficult to get any information about the Church during Soviet time. People "break" through to her in all possible ways, such as copying prayers by hand, or keeping icons brought from abroad. In one of your interviews you said that as you had no opportunity to have the Holy Scriptures while you served in the army, you learned the Gospel according to John by heart. Doesn't accessible information damage the Church? What one gets easily, is less valued.

– It is easier to get knowledge of God and the Church now than it was in the Soviet time. Many people outside the Church who sought God, but did not know about Him, now have an opportunity to be introduced to the Gospel and find the fullness of Christian life in the Church.

The publication of the works of Church Fathers, liturgical literature, books on the history of the Church allow the believers to learn about the treasures of the Orthodox thought. Many who have read these publications received invaluable help in the solution of their spiritual problems. We can only thank God for this.

The abundance of information gives many new opportunities, but is fraught with dangers. For instance, there appeared many ‘near-church’ and pseudo-church publications which can exert harmful influence on those people who have just come to the faith and have not enough experience that would allow them to discern real information from the false one.

Another matter of concern is certain people who study religious literature in depth but forget about the main thing – the life in accordance with the commandments of Christ and prayer. It is this, rather than wide reading and erudition, that leads us to salvation.

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