Metropolitan Hilarion: Politically correct rules must never interfere with that which is sacred to millions of people



The chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion answered questions put to him by the presenter of The Church and the World programme Yekaterina Gracheva which was broadcast on 23rd January 2021 on Rossia-24.

Ye. Gracheva: Hello. This is The Church and the World on Rossia-24 where we will be putting questions to the chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Hilarion. Hello, Your Eminence.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Hello, Yekaterina. Hello, dear brothers and sisters.

Gracheva: Within Russia so called ‘Covid passports’ are being issued – this is a document with information on vaccinations against coronavirus, if they have been done. It’s possible that this passport will be necessary, for example, even for travel abroad. There are reasonable concerns that not having this official document will lead to the violation of the rights of those who have not had the vaccination. What is the Church’s position regarding this and your own view? Is this passport necessary?

MH: I think that here I should formulate my own personal stance as the position of the Church on this issue has yet to be discussed at a session of the Holy Synod. Our common position, however, should be

that there should be no discrimination against citizens regardless of whether they have had the vaccination against coronavirus or not.

It is another issue whether airlines choose to introduce whatever rules and then countries may introduce these rules, and then it will be down to each person how to decide how he or she should adapt to these rules. I can foresee a situation whereby vaccinations and vaccine certificates will not only be required from people, but also, for example, whereby Western countries will not recognize the Russian vaccine but will only recognize their own vaccines and will require Russian citizens to receive vaccines that have been certified in the West. If this happens, then serious problems will arise with our citizens travelling in Western countries. But so far, we do not have such a situation as the borders are in fact closed.

Gracheva: At the end of last year, we discussed the possibility of raising income tax for the wealthy so this money should go where it is intended, that is, on medical aid for gravely ill children. It has been reported that Vladimir Putin has signed a decree for the setting up of a foundation to support children suffering from rare diseases and that the head of this foundation will be Father Alexander Tkachenko, the founder of the first children's hospice in Russia. In reality we have a situation whereby a priest is in charge of a state foundation with a budget of tens of millions of roubles. We may ask in this regard whether it is possible to combine ministry to God with the mission of an official.

MH: Firstly, this is not the 'mission of an official', but aid to children. Father Alexander Tkachenko has distinguished himself in this field as he set up the first hospice in Russia to help sick children and for his work he has been awarded a state prize by the Russian Federation. I believe this to be a very proper decision.

Secondly, when there was talk of income tax being raised and the money going to children, unfortunately, I heard a lot of sceptical feedback from some people. They said that it was obvious none of this would go to the children and that it would all end up in the pockets of officials. So, when I heard that in charge of this foundation would be a respected person, a priest with an irreproachable reputation, someone, as I have already said, who has distinguished himself not as an official but in the field of aid to children, then I was genuinely glad to hear this. As the foundation is headed by such people (there are also there famous actors such as Chulpan Khamatova and well-known charity donors) we may hope that this money will indeed reach the children and the situation in which children now live with grave illnesses will be radically improved thanks to this help from the state.

Gracheva: Your Eminence, I would like to return to the news about Andrei Kuraev. The protodeacon intends to contest the decision by the ecclesiastical court which has deprived him of his clerical rank. Kuraev has told journalists that the court case brought against him was held in secret, he did not know

what the accusations were until the last moment and that he did not have enough time to acquaint himself with the documentation of the court. Moreover, he has stated to journalists that he will lodge his appeal not with the churchwide ecclesiastical court but with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Please tell us why Andrei Kuraev was deprived of his clerical rank and what will happen if he makes an appeal to Patriarch Bartholomew.

MH: He can lodge his appeal wherever he likes, even with the 'World League of Sexual Reforms', as once advised the famous protagonist of The Golden Calf Ostap Bender to another of the novel's protagonists Panikovsky when he declared that his girlfriend no longer loved him. There have been more than enough opportunities for the now former deacon Andrei Kuraev to lodge an appeal with the churchwide ecclesiastical court or to right a letter of repentance to the Patriarch. He was suspended from serving back in April of last year and has had months to think about his further fate. He was invited to the ecclesiastical court – nothing there happened behind closed doors. He was invited three times, but he did not appear in court and this is why this decision was taken. I believe this decision will not be reviewed but he can appeal wherever he likes and to whoever he likes.

I have already spoken on this programme how I genuinely am sorrow over what has happened to Andrei Kuraev. At one time he did many good things for the Church. As a result of his books and lectures many people found God, but at a certain moment he went in the opposite direction and now with his slander against the Church he drives many people away from God, from religion and from the Church. This is why nothing in essence any longer connects him to the Church. The fact that he has been deprived of his clerical rank is a logical outcome of his activities, and if he continues these activities in the same spirit, then it is most likely that he will be excommunicated from the Church.

It is never too late to stop; it is never too late to repent. I vey much hope that he will change his attitude towards the Church, towards her hierarchy, towards religion in general and will yet embark on the path of repentance.

Gracheva: At the opening of the new session of the US Congress one of the members of the House of Representatives Emmanuel Cleaver read aloud what he called a 'politically correct prayer'. Instead of 'in the name of God', he said 'in the name of the monotheistic God, Brahma, and gods known by many names', and at the end, which is quite interesting, as well as the usual 'amen', he added 'and a woman', that is, he seemed to have heard in the word 'amen' the word 'men' and so decided in the interests of equality to mention women as well. Some Republicans have already expressed their indignation regarding this prayer. From the Church's point of view is this modern-day variant appropriate or is it just pure blasphemy?

MH: I believe that this does of course verge on blasphemy as there should be proper limits to all things.

Even politically correct rules must never interfere with that which is sacred to millions of people. We Christians believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not gender-neutral names, but for the feminist movement these names are no longer applicable. Therefore, they have changed the teaching on the Trinity, on God, and have begun to call God by other names and pronouns, including feminine ones. Now some politicians consider it their duty to fall in line with these crazy (in my opinion) woke rules. Let me say again: from the Church's perspective all of this is an impermissible interference in that which is sacred for millions of people.

Gracheva: To continue the topic of respecting minority rights and wokeness: the speaker of the House of Representatives in the US has stated that from now on there will be no place in Congress for such 'obsolete' notions as mother, father, daughter and so on. All pronouns and terms will be gender-neutral. Instead of 'chairman, there will simply be 'chair', instead of 'grandson' or 'granddaughter', there will simply be 'grandchild' and so on. Many people have already stated their indignation at this proposal. I would like to ask you whether it really is important, from the Christian perspective, what people are called?

MH: From the Christian perspective, I suppose it doesn't matter if, for example, I call you not a woman but a 'female person' or some other gender-neutral noun. But I do think that it would not be at all very ethical with regard to you. I would readily accept it if you thought this to be a violation of your rights as a woman.

Of course, in English there is a problem which is not encountered in many other languages. In Russian there are the masculine and feminine genders. As a rule, we use the feminine gender for things associated with women and the masculine gender for things associated with men, although there can be exceptions, such, for example, the word 'professor' in Russian, although of the masculine gender, can be used for both men and women. The Russian word for 'writer' can also be used for both men and women, although there is in Russian a separate word to denote a female writer. But some women writers object to the use of this word, preferring the word denoting a male writer. To a significant degree this is all a matter of taste. Marina Tsvetaeva, as I recall, used to say that she was not a poetess, but a poet.

But when all of this is transferred from the arena merely of taste to the political arena, we are then dealing with something far more serious because the disappearance from the political vocabulary of such basic notions as mother, father, son, daughter, brother and sister testifies not merely to a new trend or new tastes but to the direct and conscious dismantling of the traditional family way of life. And here there is of course great cause for concern for both the US Congress and American society as a whole as it is true that, in spite of political trends and wokeness, American society is at heart deeply traditional.

In America there are many families who believe in God, many large families where there is a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, a brother and a sister and who have no intention whatsoever of giving up these words or their traditional family way of life. The further the political elite moves away from the people and the further political discussion is removed from what people live and breath by, then the harder it will be later for American politicians to cling onto power.

Gracheva: Thank you very much, Your Eminence, for answering our questions.

MH: Thank you, Yekaterina.

In the second part of the programme metropolitan Hilarion answered viewers' questions that were put to him via the The Church and the World website.

Question: Are you still composing music? May I propose the text of a song for a church choir without music? Could you please advise me who I should go to with this?

MH: I stopped composing music in 2012 soon after I was appointed to the position of chairman of the Department of External Church Relations. Only once since then – in 2018 – have I composed a church hymn.

As for the text which you propose for the church choir, then it would probably be best to go to the choir director of the church which you attend. On a different note, church hymns are composed for definite canonical texts and to propose one's own composition for it to be performed in church would be impossible. If you want it to be performed on a concert stage, then you could offer it to a composer who would write the music for this text.

Question: Did Jesus know that Judas would betray him? And what would have happened had he not been betrayed? And if not Judas, then would someone else have done this? Jesus says that the one closest to him is the one who will suffer most for him. Did not Judas suffer most of all? He is, after all, cursed for all eternity. I cannot believe that Jesus has condemned him forever. It seems to that Jesus chose him as the strongest of all the disciples and entrusted him with betraying him.

MH: This question reflects a point of view encountered in some works of art. In particular, if you listen to the rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar, read Leonid Andreyev's story Judas Iscariot or Bulgakov's Master and Margarita, then you will see that this view is in some way or another reflected in these works.

From the Church's perspective Judas is first and foremost a traitor, and not because Jesus appointed him as such, but because Judas himself chose this path. When Jesus chose the twelve apostles, he gave each of them an equal chance to become his disciple. Moreover, he endowed each of them with a miraculous power. Even in Jesus' lifetime they were able to perform miracles, including Judas. He had no more and no less gifts than the other disciples, and he was entrusted with the apostles' treasury. Yet at a certain moment the idea of betrayal matured within his soul. There are various explanations as to why this happened. Some believe that he was tempted by money as he was always in its presence and perhaps he stole from the treasury. Or perhaps other ideas entered his head as to how to live best using the community's money. Be that as it may, this could be one of the reasons.

Another reason could that be that he was disenchanted with Jesus. He may have expected Jesus to become a king because he constantly spoke of the kingdom of heaven. He could have hoped that he, Judas, and the other disciples would have been given political power. He saw that nothing of the sort was happening, that Jesus had entered Jerusalem in glory but received no political power, that the clouds had gathered over Jesus and that the religious elite disliked him. And so he decided to betray the Saviour.

Indeed, Jesus knew about this, he sensed it. He even intimated to Judas that he knew about it. He uttered these strange words: "Do quickly what you are going to do" (Jn 13.27). But he said this not so that Judas would commit an act of betrayal at his command, but in all probability to stop the traitor at the last moment as until the crime had not been committed, then Judas could have stopped. This did not happen. Moreover, after the crime had been committed, Judas could have returned to Jesus, could have prostrated himself before the cross upon which he was crucified, he could have returned to the apostolic community and repented, but he did not of this. He exacerbated his sin with yet one more grave sin, that of suicide.

This is why the Church has no doubts in this regard and gives a very clear answer: Judas was intended for the apostolic mission, but he voluntarily and consciously rejected this mission, instead choosing betrayal. This is one example of how human free will can hinder God in saving him.

Question: Is marriage to a Muslim a sin?

MH: We cannot say that marriage to a Muslim is a sin but that this type of marriage cannot receive the Church's blessing either in the sacrament of marriage or in any other form. We call upon our faithful to enter into marriage with those of the same faith. Why? Because a common faith strengthens the family above all. If a man and a woman, husband and wife belong to the same Church, they can attend this Church together, then can take their children there, they can bring their children up in the Church. Imagine that the husband is a Muslim and his wife is a Christian. This can be a constant source of

conflict between them. Who should the children believe, in what faith will they be brought up in if their mother says that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and the faither says that Jesus Christ is one of the prophets? Practice shows that in these mixed families conflicts often arise on the grounds of religion. I say this about a marriage that has yet to be concluded.

If we are to speak of a marriage that has already been concluded, then the Church would never say that this marriage must be dissolved. On the contrary, the Church encourages the Orthodox half of the married couple to preserve the integrity of marriage in any way possible, to observe marital fidelity and to bring the children up in the Orthodox faith.

We know that many young people have gotten married without fully realizing what religion they belong to. And then it may happen, for example, that the husband takes his Islamic faith more seriously, gets to know it better and realizes that his wife has by contrast become a more zealous Christian than she was before. In this instance, if the marriage has already taken place, the Church calls upon the couple to make every effort to preserve it.

I would like to conclude this programme with the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: “For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband” (1 Cor 7.14).

I wish you all that is good. Take care of yourselves, those close to you and may the Lord preserve you all.

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