Metropolitan Hilarion: Most Christians who lived in Iraq have had to leave that land

On January 30, 2021, in the Church and World program shown on Saturdays and Sundays by Russia- 24, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relation (DECR), answered questions fr om anchor Ekaterina Gracheva.

E. Gracheva: Hallo, Ekaterina Gracheva is with you. It is the time for the Rossiya-24 Church and the World program in which we weekly discuss major events in Russia and the world with Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations. Good afternoon, Your Eminence!

Metropolitan Hilarion: Good afternoon, Ekaterina! Good afternoon, dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: I would like to begin with the events of 23 January - the non-sanctioned actions of the opposition, which took place in streets of Russian cities, and what many point out - in these very streets, an unprecedented number of underage children were seen, who were actively called through social

networks to take to streets - also quite a new phenomenon in our country. With what do you connect this unprecedented interest in politics of our country's citizens of under the age of 18?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think that what should be in point is not the interest of minors in politics but that children and adolescents are consciously involved not in politics but a political confrontation, in actions dangerous for their health and safety. I proceed fr om what I have heard from my assistants who are about 30 and who have small children. One of them told me that his 8-years old daughter suddenly began to speak at dinner about Navalny, about the need to take to streets, to support something. He asked, 'Where have you taken in all this from'? It turned out that she took it from TikTok, on which she is a subscriber.

The involvement of children and adolescents in political actions is an inadmissible violation of civil law and order and the culprits should bear responsibility for it. Indeed, there are many social problems and we can and must struggle with them together. Indeed, the corruption in itself is very high in some state and bureaucratic structures. But is it not a reason for calling adolescents to take to streets.

I recall the situation developed in the Russian Empire on the eve of the revolution with the emergence of all kinds of revolutionaries and propagandists. Some of them were sitting inside the country while many stayed abroad, in safe and peaceful Switzerland, sending proclamations from there to Russia to instigate a revolution. What did they complain about, what did they lament about, what did they call to? First of all, they spoke about corruption, about the tsars living in rich palaces, and that all this wealth should be taken away from them and distributed to the poor. We are aware of to what the revolution led. It is my deep conviction that a state should develop evolutionally, not revolutionally. We should not repeat the mistakes of our history but rather solve our social problems together, the whole lot of us.

E. Gracheva: Among those who actively called minors to take to streets were Pussy Riot activists. I have recalled them this week also in connection with this: the point is that in Poland a trial has been opened of activists who placed a poster - an image of Virgin Mary with a rainbow nimbus and according to the Polish Criminal Code they are facing a two-year imprisonment term for it as an insult against religious beliefs. We all remember that when 9 years ago there was a similar trial of Pussy Riot, human rights advocates came to their defense in Russia and the world, and now this process is taking place in

Poland not quietly but in full silence of the media. How would you explain it?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Fist, it appears to me very offensive and vexing that the rainbow, this beautiful natural phenomenon perceived by the Old Testament as the symbol of covenant between the human and God is adopted by the LGBT community and is seen now as a symbol of same-sex relationships. I think it is a great mistake.

Secondly, I regard as inadmissible and sacrilegious the use of the LGBT symbols together with Christian ones. If what is in point is an image of the Mother of God (moreover the Icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa is venerated by all Poles and by the way in the Orthodox Church as well, in particular, in the Russian Church) pasted together with symbols of a way of life rejected and condemned by the Church, then it is certainly seen as a blasphemy and sacrilege. And there is nothing surprising that in Poland, a traditionally Catholic country, all this has been seen precisely so, with the case ending in a trial.

E. Gracheva: Your Eminence, recently the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations held a meeting, at which you spoke about the importance of theological education and the need to broaden it in the country. A clarification should be made here: what is in point - theological education for the clergy or the teaching of theology in secular educational institutions?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In this case what is in point is theological education in secular educational institutions. Theology is one of the humanitarian sciences and as such it is recognized today by the Russian scientific community. There were debates with some saying that theology is not a science, but now these debates are over and theology is included in the classification of scientific specialties. It means that theology is to have all the rights in the secular educational space enjoyed by other humanitarian sciences, be it philosophy or history or literature.

We very clearly distinguish between theology as a rational science and theology as an academic discipline taught in theological educational institutions. We maintain that we are not going to set up and

turn a chair of theology in a secular university into something like a church pulpit. These chairs are established not to preach a particular religion but to give those who study at a university an opportunity to study theology along with other humanitarian sciences so that they should not be ignorant in this area as we often see among people of my and senior generations, among those who had no opportunity for a systemic theological education, who are ignorant of elementary things about religions and confuse religious notions. It is for closing these lacunas that theology is established in the secular educational space.

E. Gracheva: We just remember that your proposal to introduce Basic Orthodoxy for preschoolers - which you suggested in our program - provoked a storm of criticism in some mass media opposing the ROC. There is a news that has glimpsed here and I would like to discuss it with you. In the Advanced Training Institute of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia a course of natal astrology has been opened. It has promised to potential students to be trained for skills necessary for work as astrologists. The university quickly denied it; the announcement was removed from its website but the very fact that this initiative was formalized shows indeed that this area of knowledge enjoys a heightened interest in the country. How would you comment it?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First of all, I would like to say that faith and superstition are two opposite and mutually exclusive phenomena. The Church has always struggled with superstitions and spoke against superstitions. Wh ere there is no Church, wh ere there is no true religious faith, superstitions blossom forth. We often see that the same people who struggle against the Church are also engaged in the propaganda of astrology or other false sciences.

Astrology is a typical pseudo-science. We have managed to prove that theology is a real scientific area while astrology is a typical pseudo-science based on deception. However much horoscopes are published in newspapers, on websites or in social networks, we, representatives of the Church, will always insist that there is nothing behind it but deception. Even if these horoscopes are created to tune a person' to a positive mood by making him check in the morning his Zodiac sign's prognosis for the day and is told that everything will be all right and he is elated; he goes to work and does what his horoscope prescribes, he develops an impression that his horoscope really influences his life and he should listen to its recommendations. Actually, it is deception and self-deception. The Church has always said and will say so.

E. Gracheva: Your Eminence, recently you have met with the head of the Rossotrudnichestvo (Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation), Yevgeny Primakov and discussed the work of Russian Orthodox Church parishes abroad. How much does the Church today need the help of a federal agency in this matter? On what funds our Orthodox churches in other countries live and are they well off?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This agency is not engaged in financing the parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in other countries. It is engaged in creating centers for the Russian culture and language but the cooperation of parishes with it very often does exist. And it is quite natural because many people come both to church and centers established by the agency. Therefore, the cooperation here is quite natural.

If the point is how our parishes abroad are doing, then, at least from my own long-standing experience of service abroad and visits to parishes in other countries, I can say that on the whole their life is rather poor. There are richer parishes and poorer ones but most of our priests who live abroad have a secular job while they are very often given either no or a symbolic reward for their priestly duties.

E. Gracheva: On February 1, Patriarch Kirill will mark the 12th anniversary of his enthronement. In the situation of the ongoing pandemic, will Patriarch Kirill celebrate this date this year? If he will, what events are planned? And what does the Patriarch himself, in his talks with you, call the most important achievements made in this period and, possibly, the main achievement of the last year?

Metropolitan Hilarion: His Holiness the Patriarch will celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the Church of Christ the Saviour but unfortunately few bishops will manage to concelebrate since the strict quarantine restrictions are still preventing it. For instance, I will not be able to concelebrate because of my recent contact with a person who has been found infected with the coronavirus.

To speak of the achievements for the 12 years in the Patriarchal Office, these achievements are many. I would single out the most importance ones - it is the church governance reform that has radically

changed all this system and given rise to the Church's rebirth, which has affected first all the major cities, but now has extend to upcountry. Now we have bishops who live not only in capital cities but also in regional centers and visit remote settlements and villages. This process of church rebirth through the reform of church governance under Patriarch Kirill has received a new impetus.

We will not be able to concelebrate with His Holiness the Patriarch but we all will pray for him on that day and ask God to grant him many more years of peaceful and happy Patriarchal Ministry.

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

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Ekaterina.

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In the second part of the program, Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions from TV viewers that came to the website of the Church and the World program.

Question: During one of the programs, you spoke about the differences between traditional Orthodoxy and non-Chalcedonian Churches (Armenians and Copts). Thank you very much for the very clear explanation. I have another question. In old times, the Orthodox Church was at odds with the Nestorians. What is the difference between the Nestorian church and Orthodoxy and has it survived in the Middle East? Is there a group of Nestorian churches?

Metropolitan Hilarion: As for the Churches going back to the Nestorian tradition, only one of them has survived. It is the Assyrian Church of the East. It has its center in Iraq; most of its followers live in the USA and in other continents because, unfortunately, the situation in Iraq is such that most of Christians

have had to leave that land.

As far as the teaching of this church is concerned, it does not call itself Nestorian. Its teaching though is very similar to that which was proclaimed by Nestorius. The essence of this teaching is the following. Nestorius said that the Son of God and the Man Jesus Christ are two different subjects and they co-existed in the same person in this way: the Divine Son came to dwell in the human Jesus Christ like in a temple.

This understanding of the merger of the two natures in Jesus Christ was recognized as heretical and condemned by the Third Ecumenical Council. Accordingly, the Assyrian Church of the East accepts only two Ecumenical Councils, the First and the Second, and rejects the Third.

The condemnation of Nestorius was very important for us because it was emphasized that Jesus Christ is one undivided Person. Yes, He has two natures, Divine and Human, but these natures do not split Jesus Christ into two subjects. Jesus Christ in His manifestations is always God and at the same time is man. What happens is what holy fathers described as mutual penetration of the two natures, when the human nature of Christ is proved wholly deified, that is to say, imbued by His Divine nature. That is why the Nestorian heresy was condemned in its time.

Question: In the Gospel's prayer there are words addressed to the Lord '… and lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil'. However, it is known that devil tempts us all and Christ, too. The Lord never tempts anybody. He can vouchsafe a temptation by the evil one but He Himself does not tempt. And in this text, God actually is made equal to devil. Isn't it a blasphemy against the Lord? I am a professional translator and I can see here a purely translation mistake and to somehow correct it makes sense.

Metropolitan Hilarion: The point is that the Lord's Prayer cited in the Gospel is given in it in Greek. It was uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ in the Aramean language, that it to say, what we have in the Gospel is already a translation, but the translation that we make into Russian as well as translations into

other languages are made from the Greek original. The Greek text has precisely these words: ‘and lead us not into temptation’.

The holy fathers tell us that temptation may be of different kinds. More often, devil tempts man but it happens that God vouchsafes temptations to humans so that having stood against the trial hard and fast, they will become more perfect in good. If we open the Book of Job, we will see that devil approaches God asking for His permission to lead Job into temptation.

Therefore, the interdependency here is complicated enough but in any case we should not alter the words of Holy Scriptures. If they have reached us in the form they did then Holy Scriptures should be translated as accurately as possible.

Question: Can one’s own grandmother be the godmother of her grandson?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Yes, she can. There can be no obstacles.

Question: Hallo, I live in Germany and I have no opportunity so far for ordering your six-volume edition about the life and teaching of Christ. Are there any plans to publish a digital version of this six- volumes edition and the two-volume edition about Orthodoxy?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The both books are available in digital versions at the portal ‘Jesus’ as well as my own site Hilarion.ru.

Question: Your Eminence, I have read your book ‘Uncomfortable Questions about Religion and the Church’. I have this question: Why do you pay so much attention to intimate issues, such as gender change (and describe them in all the details)? Why is the Church always interested in revealing topics?

Your book may happen to be read even by children, and you describe such things in them. It was unpleasant for me to read them.

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think it will be even more unpleasant for you if your child will sometime wish to undergo an operation for changing the gender. The information contained in my book is taken from open sources. Anyone can look into the internet through any search system and to type ‘gender change operation’ and you will see the rolling out of several websites of clinics that perform this operation. And they describe how this operation is carried out.

When I was asked this question for the first time, I went to one of such sites to avoid being accused of groundlessness and I was terrified by what I read there. Indeed, many think that a change of the gender is simply a person, who was, say, a man, just wished to become a woman, and doctors helped him to become a woman. Actually it is not so. What is described on the websites of these clinics and what I have reproduced in my book very clearly shows that no change of the gender really takes place. The man is maimed; some of his organs are cut off and some similarity of different ones are sewn on, making him to believe that he changed his gender, and psychologists help him to believe it. Actually, it is not his gender that is changed but only some external secondary sexual characters and he does not at all become a person of the different gender. This is what I wanted to explain in my book. I think it is very important to explain what happens in reality.

I would like to conclude this program with words from the Frist Letter of St. Peter: ‘Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen’ (2 Pet. 3:18).

I wish you all the best. Take care of yourselves and your relatives and may the Lord preserve you all’.

DECR Communication Service

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