Metropolitan Hilarion: The schismatic "OCU" has not gained real independence



On March 20th, 2021, on The Church and the World TV program shown on Saturdays and Sundays on "Rossiya-24", Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), answered questions fr om the anchor Ekaterina Gracheva.

E. Gracheva: Hello! This is the time of the program "The Church and the World" on the TV channel "Rossia 24", wh ere we talk weekly with the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Hello, Vladyka!

Metropolitan Hilarion: Hello, Ekaterina! Hello, dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: The Ukrainian Orthodox Church conducts religious processions throughout the entire country. I have a question: is the purpose of this event of a religious nature, or is it a political event similar to the one conducted by the faithful in defense of the canonical Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro?

Metropolitan Hilarion: A religious procession is always a religious event. At the same time, in such situations as the one you described, it can have political overtones – due to the special critical situation in which the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been in for several years.

We remember exactly what happened. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the national Church of Ukraine, it is the Church of the majority of the Ukrainian population, but the previous President of Ukraine, Petr Poroshenko, decided to create a "new church" completely independent of the Russian Orthodox Church. To do this, he used the "services" of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. The " new church "was created on the basis of a schismatic group that has existed since the early 90s and has no legitimacy from the point of view of Orthodox canons, that is, it is just a group of impostors who were declared a" church", whereas the canonical Church, which has more than 12 thousand parishes, several hundred monasteries, more than a hundred bishops and millions of believers, was actually outlawed. A law was passed, which is now suspended, but not canceled, on the forced renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the "Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine". Although in reality it's not the Russian Church, and it consists of Ukrainians: they have Ukrainian passports, they were born in Ukraine, they are patriots of their country.

This law requires that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church be renamed. Why is this unacceptable from the Church's point of view? First, because the Church chooses its own name. Secondly, because any forced renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the current conditions will lead to the fact that it will have to re-register all its dioceses and parishes, which means that in each specific place there will be pressure on the faithful, on priests, on bishops to re-register and move to the schismatic structure.

Therefore, in order to protect their Church, their shrines, believers go to religious processions. This is an example of a peaceful march, not rallies or demonstrations. While being a religious procession, it is also a signal to politicians. I think that the events in Montenegro have shown very well how effective such actions can be.

E. Gracheva: On the topic of interaction between Church and secular authorities: Filaret Denisenko, who leads the Ukrainian "schismatic church", appealed to President Zelensky to request a new tomos from Constantinople. I feel that we discussed this tomos just yesterday. Why did he displease Filaret Denisenko and what does he expect from Constantinople now?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Maybe our viewers have already forgotten what a "tomos" is. Let me remind you that a ‘tomos’ is a document that indicates that a particular Church has received autocephaly, that is, full independence. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople wanted to grant such a tomos to the entire Ukrainian Orthodox Church, but the Ukrainian Church did not ask for such a document, because it wants to remain in unity with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Since Patriarch Bartholomew had an order from the then President of Ukraine Poroshenko, for whom it was necessary to win the elections (which in the end, as we know, did not happen), the Patriarch of

Constantinople had to give a tomos to those who accepted it – Ukrainian schismatics. Moreover, not all Ukrainian schismatics accepted it: the head of the Ukrainian schism, Filaret Denisenko, who calls himself the "patriarch of Kiev", did not accept this tomos. He stated that in reality there is no real independence granted, that is, the" Ukrainian church", according to this tomos, is not given the status of a Patriarchate, it is largely dependent on Constantinople. For example, Constantinople has the final word in any church court, that is, any cleric of this "Orthodox church of Ukraine" can complain about his bishop to the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the final decision will be made not in Kiev, but in Istanbul. This is not the case in the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which de facto is independent, that is, no decisions of the judicial structures of the Bishops' Council of the Ukrainian Church can be challenged in Moscow. But in Istanbul, the decisions of the so-called "Orthodox Church of Ukraine", created by Constantinople on the basis of schismatics, can be disputed.

Filaret Denisenko, who is an experienced church diplomat, saw the shortcomings of this tomos and reminded his schismatic community that the real autocephaly has different configurations, and the real autocephalous Church has different rights.

E. Gracheva: In other words, as a secular person, I see it in such a way that they requested a divorce certificate and after some time they ask for a second certificate. Is that true?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Not exactly. They requested a certificate of independence, and they got it. And those who received it are happy with it today. In other words, they say: yes, in the future we will ask for the status of the Patriarchate, but not now, this is enough for us now. But since Filaret Denisenko was thrown out of this process, because he called himself a patriarch and did not lead the new "schismatic church", already legitimized by Constantinople, he is essentially out of the game. He declared himself the head of another structure – the so-called "Kiev Patriarchate". That is, there are now not one, but two schisms in Ukraine. First, there is the so-called "OCU – Orthodox Church of Ukraine", which was legalized by Patriarch Bartholomew. Secondly, there is another schism, which is called the "Kiev Patriarchate", and it is headed by Filaret Denisenko. Filaret Denisenko is recognized by Constantinople as a bishop, but not as a Patriarch. In general, Constantinople has made such a mess in Ukraine that now even the Ukrainians themselves find it very difficult to understand what is happening.

E. Gracheva: It is difficult for me to understand this issue, even though we have devoted so many programs to the topic of the schism. Ukraine is one of those countries that refuses to buy the Russian vaccine, despite the open calls of a number of politicians not to sacrifice people's lives for the sake of political games. The rest of Europe and Latin America, as well as other countries, are actively introducing Russian vaccines, which are now continuing their journey around the world. However, there are issues with the AstraZeneca and Pzifer vaccines: European countries have for now stopped using the AstraZeneca vaccine. I have another question for you as a representative of the Russian Orthodox

Church: how many clergy and secular employees in the structure of the Russian Orthodox Church have been vaccinated so far?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We do not keep statistics on people who have been vaccinated, whether they are bishops, clergy or laity. I know that some were vaccinated, some were not. Moreover , some of those who are not vaccinated do not do it for health reasons, some do not do it as a precaution, and some are recommended by doctors to not yet get a vaccine. Some do not want to be vaccinated for ideological reasons.

In this case, we must respect the choice of each person. We have said from the very beginning that vaccination should be voluntary, it cannot be compulsory. Another thing is that we must remember our responsibility not only in relation to ourselves, but also in relation to others. When some people say to me: I am not afraid of getting infected, because if I get infected, I will either recover or die – in either case it will be the will of God. Of course, you can agree or disagree with this, but this is a personal position of a person in relation to their own life. But what about the people around you? What about those who can be infected by an unvaccinated person – a potential carrier of this virus?

I think that every person should make a decision about vaccination based not only on their own beliefs, their view of their own life prospects, but also on the fact that any vaccinated person ceases to be a potential threat to other people. Here's something to remember.

I have already said on our program that I got ill during the very first wave of coronavirus. Shortly after Pascha last year, I got sick. After recovering, I had antibodies in my blood. When I was offered the opportunity to get vaccinated in early autumn, I immediately agreed. Not only because it would keep me safe to some extent, but also because it will keep the people around me safe.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, a viral story is now being discussed all over Internet: in Dagestan, a court deprived a woman of parental rights for three children. According to media reports, at the trial, the ex-husband (who, by the way, did not pay her alimony, posted incriminating posts on social networks saying that the ex-wife does not wear a hijab, has tattoos, a short haircut, etc.) motivated this by the fact that she leads a lifestyle that does not comply with the rules of behavior of a mother with several children. The court took this into account. I remember that you have shared examples of cases when the guardianship authorities came home and checked, for instance, whether there was a set of certain groceries in the refrigerator. They did not find oranges and took away the kids. This shouldn't happen. Do you think the presence of tattoos on the body or the absence of a hijab on the head can be a sufficient reason to take away someone’s children?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course it can't. But it is always very difficult to comment on court decisions,

because judges and investigators see one picture, and the picture that is published in the press may be completely different. We can only know part of the truth from the press. I would very much like to hope that the courts ' decisions on such issues will be fair and will take into account the whole set of factors. Of course, if the decision was based only on the fact that a woman does not wear a hijab or that she has tattoos and piercings, then, of course, this would not be a sufficient reason to deprive her of parental rights. There's also the question of her husband's behavior. Judging by the publications, he did not pay alimony and even beat his wife. The question is how fair this court decision is. Therefore, I very much hope that all factors will be taken into account in the final decision.

It should be not only about a woman's responsibility for her appearance and behavior, but also about the man's responsibility for the family. If a man did not pay alimony, if he beat his wife, then this is already enough reason to doubt that the children were transferred to him fairly.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka, for answering our questions and speaking openly about everything.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Ekaterina.

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

Question: God is one, but in three persons. How should I understand this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: According to the teaching of the Christian Church, God is One. We begin our Creed with the words "I believe in One God." If you literally translate these words from the Slavic language, they sound like this:"I believe in a singular God." The word" one "in Slavic means "one". That is, we believe in one God, not three gods. But then the Symbol of Faith elaborates this belief in the One God and says that we believe in the Father Almighty – Creator of heaven and earth, and in the Lord Jesus Christ – the Only Begotten Son of God, and in the Holy Spirit, that is, we confess that the One God exists in three persons.

A lot of theological works have been written on this topic. They were written in ancient times, although now theologians are trying to explain this issue, too. This is actually not so easy to explain, but it is not a theory that theologians invented in the Middle Ages, as some think, but something that was originally laid down in the Gospel message by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. If you read the Gospel, you will see that Jesus Christ is constantly talking about His Father. He promises His disciples that He will send them the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who will come and guide them into all truth. When He leaves His disciples and bids them farewell, He says to them: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28.19). But the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three Gods, but one God who exists in three persons. These three persons were revealed to mankind, for example, when Jesus Christ came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. Then the people saw the Son of God descending into the waters of the Jordan, they heard the voice of God the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3: 17), and they saw the Holy Spirit descending on the head of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was the theophany of the Holy Trinity that people saw. There were other similar theophanies.

That is why we say that the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is revealed by God . It is impossible to understand it with ordinary human consciousness. To partake of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, one must live in the Church, discover for oneself through prayer who the Father is, who the Son is, and who the Holy Spirit is. Then gradually this dogma of the Holy Trinity will be revealed to a person in the experience of the Church.

Question: What would have happened if Judas had not betrayed Christ?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We do not know this, because history, as we know, does not permit subjunctive mood. However, we know that Jesus Christ is the Incarnate Son of God. He did not come here to live a beautiful and long life, but to die for the sins of the people. Therefore, the redemptive feat for which He came would have been accomplished regardless of whether Judas had betrayed Him or not. After all, the chief priests and scribes who wanted to capture Jesus and put Him to death would have done so without Judas's help, meaning that Judas was not a necessary link in the chain. He voluntarily assumed the functions of a traitor, but neither the Lord Jesus Christ nor the providence of God required this of him.

Some readers of the Gospel think that Judas was meant to be a traitor, that some fateful necessity led him to do so, but the Church does not think so. The Church believes that everyone has free will. There is no person who is predestined to sin or treachery, but each person makes his own choice independently.

The Lord warned Judas that He knew about his intentions, as we can see from the Gospel narrative. He made these warnings in order, perhaps, to stop Judas. Not because He wanted to save His own life, but because He wanted to save His disciple from being betrayed and from being killed. But the final choice was made by Judas himself. In the same way, when each person stands at a crossroads, facing a choice between good and evil, he makes his own independent choice, and this choice is not predetermined by the will of God.

Question: I do not understand the phrase: "Judge not, that you may not be judged "(Mt. 7:1). Could you please explain it in greater detail?

Metropolitan Hilarion: To understand this phrase, you need to look at the Person who said it. The Lord Jesus Christ, as we see Him in the Gospel, did not condemn people. He could condemn sin, He could tell people what was sin and what wasn't sin, but He never condemned sinners. When they brought to Him a woman taken in adultery, who according to the law of Moses should have been stoned, He did not condemn her. But to those who questioned Him, He said, "Whoever is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." I think this is the visible image that clearly illustrates what Jesus Christ says: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged."(Matthew 7.1). Why? Because there is a judgment of God, and there is a judgment of men. Very often, the human judgment is biased or erroneous. Very often we judge by the appearance, not knowing what is happening inside the person. And most importantly, no one gave us the right to judge another person. We must first judge ourselves. If we want to correct someone, we should correct ourselves, not other people. You can condemn a sin, but not a sinner. If you see that a person is living in sin, and this person comes to you for consultations, then you, as a Christian, can and even must tell him that he is living in sin, that his behavior is sinful. At the same time, you should not judge the person himself.

When a person comes to the priest for a convession, he names his sins, the priest hears these sins, but at the same time he sees how sin is separated from the person, and does not condemn him. He reads the prayer and absolves or frees this person from sins. This is how the Lord Jesus Christ Himself worked and how the Church works.

I would like to end this program with the words of the Apostle Paul in his epistle Ephesians: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32).

I wish you all the best and may God protect you all!

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