Metropolitan Hilarion: Orthodox and Catholics are united in the perception of same-sex unions as a sinful phenomenon



On March 27th, 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", where 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: I want to start with the story of Archpriest Andrey Vinarsky in Khabarovsk, who was prosecuted for repeated violation of the rules of mass protests. He was detained near his home. I will remind for those who do not know that he took an active part in rallies in support of ex-Governor Sergei Furgal. He openly says that his detention and this criminal case are a consequence of his active civic position. What do you think, Vladyka, about this whole case and how does the Church explain the prohibition of the clergy to express their civil position, if such a ban exists?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In the Russian Orthodox Church, as in other Orthodox Churches, there is a

rule: if a clergyman wants to take any active actions, he must ask for the blessing of his ruling bishop. If he has not received such a blessing, then he should understand that the ruling bishop may be dissatisfied with his activity, which is carried out outside the Church, especially if the priest is in civilian clothes and his activity is political in nature.

I have absolutely no intention of interfering in the affairs of the diocese. I think that the diocesan bishop made a responsible decision on the totality of all factors. The press very often does not know all the factors, because it usually happens like this: a certain fact is thrown out to the surface and on its basis they judge the behavior of a person, priest, bishop. We don't know the whole set of factors and all the details – whether this was the only act for which the bishop punished this priest, or whether there were other acts.

If we talk in general about the political activity of clergymen, then no one forbids a clergyman to express this or that civil position. They can do this in a blog or in a printed publication. Every cleric is a citizen of his own country, and he has the right to express his opinion. We do not have a church-wide ban on people expressing their opinions anywhere. But if, for example, a person participates in unauthorized rallies, if he gets behind bars on charges of a criminal or administrative offense, then this may entail canonical consequences because a clergyman has to perform services according to a schedule, and if he is in prison, what happens to his parish? Who will perform the services? When a bishop makes such decisions, he has to take all these factors into account.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, we have discussed the so-called "new ethics" on a recent program. Obviously, Catholics are also concerned about this issue. The Vatican issued a document - the decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which explains whether it is possible to bless same-sex marriages. I will read what is written here: "There is absolutely no reason to believe that homosexual unions are in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and the family." In other words, the Vatican does not bless same-sex unions, nor does it exclude individual blessing of people who are in same-sex relationships. Pope Francis has agreed to publish this document. Maybe I don't understand something, but how can this be regarded? Not to bless on the Church level but to do it individually?

Metropolitan Hilarion: If I understand correctly, this document states that the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church regarding same-sex unions is identical to that of the Orthodox Church. We cannot accept same-sex cohabitation as a marriage in any form or under any form, with all the consequences that follow fr om this rejection. Accordingly, neither a wedding nor any other blessing of a same-sex couple can be performed – this is the official position of the Catholic Church, which remains unchanged.

As far as I was able to understand the meaning of this document, it says this: people who are in same-sex unions cannot receive the blessing of the Church in any form. This does not exclude a chance for each of them individually to receive the blessing of the Church – not for cohabitation, but simply a blessing. For example, people who have a homosexual orientation also come to our Church. Each of them can approach the priest and receive a blessing from him, and the priest cannot refuse him this. But if this person says: Father, bless me for same-sex cohabitation, then, of course, the priest will refuse. This is how I understand what is being said [in the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith – ed.].

E. Gracheva: What you say can be understood as a blessing for confession and communion. But when a person is preparing for communion or confession, does he tell himself inwardly that he will no longer commit this sin? Suppose a person was mistaken, but then he confessed it. And if he persists in his sin, then how can a priest – whether Orthodox or Catholic - absolve him from it?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This is a question that concerns exclusively the relationship between a person and a priest, which is decided in confession, and not in public space. What is unacceptable from the point of view of the Church, and here we have a full agreement between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church: is the same-sex cohabitation. That cohabitation is unacceptable, it is a sin from the point of view of the Church. Accordingly, if two men or two women come to a priest, whether Orthodox or Catholic, and ask for some form of blessing for cohabitation, this blessing will not be given. If a person comes to a priest separately - simply to receive a blessing, then the priest will not reject him (or her), just as we do not reject people who commit other sins. Each of these people individually come to the Church, they approach the priest for a blessing, for confession. We do not bless their sinful way of life, but we do bless the person. We tell him: if you want to be saved, you must give up the sinful way of life.

E. Gracheva: In other words, the sin of man is condemned, but the man himself is not condemned?

Metropolitan Hilarion: That's right.

E. Gracheva: More to the question of the "new ethics". The Senate and Assembly of the state of California in the United States had proposed a bill that will make gender-neutral departments of children's toys in supermarkets. That is, if now there are toys for girls here, and for boys there, then from now on it will be considered (at least in this state) discrimination on the basis of gender among children. Accordingly, the toys will be mixed. I honestly don't understand how children's toy departments are related to orientation. I loved construction kits and cars, but because of this, I didn't grow up "disoriented". What do you think, why do we need such initiatives at all? Is there any connection between what toys to play as a child and who to be later: a boy or a girl, to love boys or to be attracted to

girls?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Unfortunately, the connection here is the most direct. We are talking about the fact that in America, as in some other Western countries, the so – called gender ideology is being imposed, which assumes that a person's gender is not something that is given to him by God, but something that he can choose for himself. There is a theory that is now accepted as an axiom in some countries and, as we see, in some states of America, according to which the psychological sex of a person may not coincide with his biological sex, and this ideology is now being imposed at the level of school and even preschool age.

After all, it's not just about mixing all the toys in a pile, so that the cars along with the dolls are in the same department and there are no departments for boys and girls. We are talking about creating gender-neutral toys that will be some kind of sexless creatures – neither boys nor girls. There will be neither Kai nor Gerda, but asexual creatures with average names. All this is done in order to instill in children from a very early age the idea that gender is something conditional, something that can be changed. This is also done because it is aimed at maintaining this false stereotype and now the whole industry, which involves psychologists, psychiatrists, sexologists, endocrinologists, plastic surgeons - this is a giant industry, similar to the gun industry in America. Just as the arms lobby dictates its terms to politicians, so this lobby dictates its terms to politicians and demands more and more new measures to expand the influence of this ideology.

What the influence of this ideology leads to, we already see. On a recent program, we discussed the results of a Gallup poll, which showed that the number of people who identify as LGBT is steadily growing: if earlier they were 3 percent, now they are more than 5 percent. This is an average figure for all ages, and if we talk about young people, this figure is much higher: it reaches about 15 percent. This is not the result of biological processes, but of the influence of ideology.

E. Gracheva: While California is concerned about which shelves will have toys for boys and which ones for girls, we are implementing bills of a different kind: Vladimir Putin signed a document that removes the age lim it from federal officials appointed by the president in the country. What does this mean: that there are still not enough highly qualified and experienced personnel in Russia, and practice shows this? Or something else?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Now there are different interpretations and speculations about this law. I would like to draw your attention to only one aspect, namely, that people age very differently. There are people who are no longer capable of anything at the age of 60, and there are those who, at 70 or even 80, are able to perform important functions and hold responsible positions. I think that if a person is in good physical and intellectual condition, and is able to continue his service, then why should there be any

restrictions that are artificially imposed on him?

In the Church, for example, there is a rule according to which every bishop and parish rector must submit a request for retirement upon reaching the age of 75 –t his is significantly higher than the average retirement age in the country. But even after this age, he can continue his ministry if the Hierarchy decides that he remains fit for Church service. Therefore, we are not surprised by such legislative initiatives. I think that every person who wants to work for the good of his country, if his physical and mental strength allows it, should have the right to do so.

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

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: Please tell us what was the essence of Justinian's Church ideology called "symphony" and what influence did the Church have on Roman society? Was the Church able to influence the institution of slavery in any way?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In this question, we are talking about the era of the Emperor Justinian, when the idea of a symphony between state and Church was formulated. In one of his novels, the Emperor Justinian said that God gave mankind two powers: royal power and priestly power. The Church authorities take care of the souls of people, and the state authorities should take care of their material and physical well-being, and there should be a symphony between the state and the Church authorities, that is, an agreement (the Greek word "symphony" means "agreement"). This means that the state supports and protects the Church, and the Church supports the state, providing it, first of all, with spiritual support.

Historians argue about how fully this ideal of symphony was realized in the Byzantine Empire of Justinian's time and after, drawing attention to the fact that very often the relations between these two branches of power, spiritual and state, were not equal. It was not uncommon for emperors to interfere in Church affairs. The same Emperor Justinian tried to decide not only secular matters, but also purely spiritual matters. Other emperors, for example, proposed doctrinal formulas to reconcile warring parties within the same Church. On the other hand, the Church was often blamed that it interferes in politics.

In general, the idea that the Church should not interfere in politics is quite new, it appeared when the state became secular. The Byzantine state did not perceive itself as a secular state. The power of the

emperor was perceived as sacred, the emperor received a mandate for his kingdom through a Church blessing – anointing for his reign. Therefore, the emperor did not consider himself a secular ruler.

If we talk about how the Church influenced the institution of slavery, then I think that it is the influence of the Church that can explain why the institution of slavery was finally abolished. This did not happen immediately, of course, and not in the Byzantine Empire, but much later, however, it was the Christian doctrine of human freedom and dignity that formed the basis of the new world order, under which slavery was gradually abolished in different countries.

Note that Jesus Christ was not a social reformer, He did not call for the abolition of slavery, He did not call for any social or social reforms at all. He called for each person to reform their soul. But in the long run, it was Christianity that influenced humanity in such a way that slavery was gradually abolished.

Question: I only go to church on big holidays. I work 6 days a week, Sunday is reserved for household chores. But every day I try to reed prayers from the prayer book in front of the icon and ask the Lord's forgiveness for my rare visits to church. Do you think the Lord will forgive me?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It's hard for me to answer your question. It is good that you pray at home, but it seems to me that by not attending church, you are depriving yourself of something very important and very essential in church life. If you are an Orthodox Christian, find the opportunity to visit the church. It is not necessary to do this on a Sunday: there are holidays that fall on normal days of the week. There are, after all, days off when you can come to church, confess, take communion, and attend the Liturgy. If you want, you can always find time to visit the chuch.

Prayer in the church and prayer at home are not the same thing. Of course, God always listens to us, but we come to church not only to pray, but first of all to take part in the Church's sacraments, to confess and receive Communion. No one and nothing can replace you the Communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself enters into us with His Body and with His Blood. Nothing can replace this, not even the prayer at home.

Question: I have recently started attending church, but I realized that I didn't know much about the rules of behavior in it (especially during the Liturgy). I would like to know when to cross myself and when to kneel. Is there any literature on this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Such literature exists, it is quite extensive and is now freely available both in bookstores and on the Internet. In addition, there is, for example, such a format as a Liturgy with explanations. You can type online "Liturgy with explanations" and see how the priest performs the Service and explains the sequence of actions, one by one. After all, it is very important not only to know

what to do, when to cross yourself and get on your knees – I think you will learn this very easily if you just observe how others do and do the same, but the most important thing is to understand the meaning of the service. What is the Divine Liturgy, why does it last two hours or more (in some cases), what hymns are included in it, and what is their meaning. This is much more difficult and important than just mastering the external rules. There is also literature for this now.

Start with the Orthodox Catechism, with books on the Liturgy, explaining what the Divine Liturgy is, and I think you will quickly master this wisdom, and also the rules of external behavior in the church.

I would like to conclude this program with the words of St. Apostle Paul: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Eph. 4: 32).

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

DECR Communication Service

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