Metropolitan Hilarion: People's expectations of the State relate primarily to social justice



On April 17th, 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: Vladyka, President Vladimir Putin will deliver the Address to the Federal Assembly next week. Last year, immediately after this Address, the pandemic began, and we were all locked up. No one could have imagined then, a year ago, that the world would change dramatically in these twelve months. Under these circumstances, what do you think will be the message to the Federal Assembly? Valentina Matvienko even said that it would "formulate a new coordinate system in Russia." Do you agree with this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The President's address, I think, will first of all reflect the experience that the

country has gained during this year. Indeed, when the previous message was announced, no one knew what would happen, but now it has happened, and we must positively evaluate the work of our health authorities, as well as those people who helped create effective coronavirus vaccines in a short time. I very much hope that the President's address will pay tribute to the people who worked heroically throughout this year, and first of all, to our doctors and epidemiologists who developed the vaccine.

Since every year the president's address determines the direction of the country's development, then in this case, due attention will be paid to social issues, that is, how people live now, how to improve their financial situation, what measures will be introduced for this purpose, and, as a rule, during the announcement of the message, such measures are usually announced. Therefore, the message is always an event for a certain category of people who are directly affected by these innovations.

Certainly, the address will also pay attention to the foreign policy situation, which has not improved over the past year, but has somewhat worsened. The changes that have taken place, for example, in the United States of America, are not encouraging, as is the overall international situation; the tension that continues to increase between Russia and the Western world – I hope that this will also be addressed in the president's speech.

E. Gracheva: With regard to social policy, it is necessary, unfortunately, to note the decline in real incomes of Russians. According to recent surveys, 68 percent of Russians (the highest figure since 2006) believe that the state is obliged to take care of them and provide them with a decent lifestyle. What do these numbers mean? Isn't this evidence that we are returning to the socialist ideology?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I don't think we are returning to the socialist ideology, but these figures show that the population has certain expectations for the state. They concern, first of all, social justice: against the background of falling incomes of the population, assistance fr om the state is required, especially for the poor, pensioners, and large families – I hope this set of issues will also be reflected in the president's address to the Federal Assembly, and in the internal policy of our state in general.

We must not forget that independence in foreign policy inevitably comes at the cost of some losses in the internal situation. The fact that Russia has been under sanctions for several years cannot contribute to the growth of household incomes. Accordingly, the state's task is to correct this imbalance so that people's lives do not get worse.

E. Gracheva: In Ukraine, a million signatures were collected by a petition fr om believers to President Zelensky as the guarantor of the Constitution: they ask him to repeal discriminatory laws against the canonical Church. In this case, a million signatures is a lot or a little?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think a million signatures is a lot. A million is the population of an entire large city. In this case, we are talking about believers who collected signatures not online, not on the Internet, but put real signatures on sheets of paper. A large group of people with huge boxes brought these signatures to the office of the Ukrainian president.

What was the reason for such an action? The fact that even in the time of Poroshenko, a discriminatory law was adopted, according to which a religious organization that has its center outside of Ukraine must have the name of this center in its name. In other words, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church should be renamed to the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine. But the Ukrainian Orthodox Church opposes this for a number of reasons. First, the real center of this Church is not in Moscow, but in Kiev, it is a self-governing Church. It independently determines its internal and foreign policy, elects bishops without the consent of Moscow, elects the head of the Church itself, and is in no way dependent on the Russian Church either financially, administratively, or in any other respect, that is, it is the national Church of Ukraine. Renaming it to “the Russian Church” is completely unfair. It consists not of Russians, but of Ukrainians. Its members are Ukrainians by passport, by birth, they are patriots of their country.

Why was this law created? In order to discriminate against the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and to declare it illegal and in a situation of political confrontation between Ukraine and Russia. That's why this legislative initiative was initiated under Poroshenko. Under Zelensky, this law was suspended, but not repealed. Therefore, the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church collected signatures all over the country asking the president to repeal this discriminatory law.

E. Gracheva: On the eve of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Ukraine's independence, Zelensky invites Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and Pope Francis to the country. Do you think they will accept this invitation? If they accept it and come, what message will it send to the entire Orthodox world?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I don't want to be a fortune teller, but I think that Patriarch Bartholomew will accept this invitation, and Pope Francis will not. Patriarch Bartholomew is a man who is soaring in the clouds of his illusions, ambitions and emotions, who seems to have lost touch with reality, because he passes off his fantasies as reality. For example, he turns a blind eye to the fact that in Ukraine there is a multi-million-strong Church with 12,5 thousand parishes, more than 100 bishops, more than 250 monasteries and millions of believers. He claims that this Church does not seem to exist, but there is a certain other "church", which he put together from two schismatic groups.

Patriarch Bartholomew will go, obviously, to once again demonstrate to the world that the "church" that exists in Ukraine is the so – called "autocephalous church" that he created, but the reality shows

otherwise. Patriarch Bartholomew made a big mistake, and, unfortunately, he does not want to and cannot admit this mistake. He will take various actions to convince the world that it was not his fault, but that everyone around him was wrong.

Pope Francis, on the other hand,thinks realistically and understands that if he is invited to Ukraine, he will inevitably be drawn into some form of recognition of schismatics. I don't think he'll do it.

In addition, we must not forget that the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church treats Pope Francis himself and the Pope in general quite skeptically, and sometimes even openly negatively. For example, the head of this Church, Archbishop Sviatoslav (Shevchuk), has repeatedly said in his speeches that the Havana Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill was directed against the Ukrainian Greek Catholics and dealt them a blow, and he has spoken very negatively about it and continues to speak negatively about the fact that the Roman Pontiff conducts a direct dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church.

E. Gracheva: On the Internet, an American resident Ben Kirby had gained more than 250 thousand subscribers thanks to posts in which he reveals what Catholic and Protestant clergy wear. Apparently, they wear very expensive things that cost several thousands of dollars. I remember when one of our priests was caught having expensive clothes, he had to justify himself and close his Instagram. Do you think that priests should share details of their everyday life in public? How do you buy clothes for yourself: via the Internet or you can be found at shopping centers looking for clothes?

Metropolitan Hilarion: You won't find me at shopping malls looking for clothes – I wear special clothes like now, that is made in special places. There are no brands for it, just good or bad tailors. If you can find a good tailor, it means that the clothes will be comfortable, will fit well, will not crumple. And if the tailor is mediocre, then the clothes will be not of good quality, the collar will squeeze or something else will not meet the standards.

Speaking in general about how priests dress, those who wear civilian clothes, in my opinion, should be dressed modestly, so as not to cause temptation, because so many people look not at the inner, but at the outer. They judge by the appearance what kind of priest he is, what kind of wealth he has. Unfortunately, in our time, priests are viewed from this point of view that is sometimes quite biased. Therefore, I would recommend that priests, if they have some expensive things, do not show off these items, do not flaunt them, and in any case, do not post pictures with them on.Instagram, Facebook or other social networks. And it's even better not to have them and not to wear them in the first place.

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: Can I pray for a deceased relative, who was unbaptized and an unbeliever during his life? What prayer should I pray and wh ere should I put the candle for his soul?

Metropolitan Hilarion: You can pray for any person: for a believer, for an unbeliever, for a friend, for an enemy. Everyone needs to pray, even if they don't realize it, including the unbelievers. Therefore, we can and even have the duty to pray for non-believers, if they were our friends, relatives or relatives. Another thing is that during the church service there is no such practice as prayer for non-believers and the unbaptized: neither those who are alive nor the ones deceased. Accordingly, you cannot order a memorial service for your deceased unbaptized relative, but you can pray for them in your own words, both at home and at church during the service. You can put candles for him in the same place wh ere candles are placed for people who are baptized. In addition, there is an ancient custom, according to which one may distribute alms in memory of the deceased person, regardless of his religion– this will also benefit his soul.

Question: Do you think it is right to combine all religions together and create one faith? This is not serving our Lord God! How does the Orthodox Church allow this? Shouldn't the clergy consult the elders on such important matters? Has any elder blessed such actions of the Orthodox Church? Uniting with the servants of the devil, calling Catholics brothers, even though the wicked one himself will be born out of them… Why do you support this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I read out the question as it came to us. You seem to have some kind of mess in your head. You probably started with some anti-church or schismatic Internet resources that suggest that someone in the Orthodox Church wants to unite all faiths into one.

No one in the Orthodox Church has such a desire. We conduct a dialogue with representatives of other religions or other Christian confessions not in order to unite all faiths into one, but first of all to explain to these people – whether they are Muslims, Jews, Buddhists or representatives of other Christian traditions – our position, as well as to hear their position. We hear their position not in order to change our faith, but simply because any communication requires dialogue. We can't turn a dialogue into a monologue. We in the Orthodox Church are deeply convinced of the salvific nature of our faith. We always tell our believers that there is no salvation outside of the Church. When we talk about the Church, we do not mean any abstract Church, but a very specific Church – the Orthodox Church, which we profess in the Symbol of Faith.

If some schismatics or adventurers suggest to you that there are hierarchs in the Church who dream of uniting all Churches or all faiths into one, then the people who suggest this to you are provocateurs, and it is a pity that you listen to such voices. It is a pity that you read such Internet resources and listen to all this nonsense.

Question: If a person is an Old Believer only by baptism and sometimes visits our Orthodox church, to what extent can he participate in the life of the Church? Can he participate in the Church's Sacraments? For example, is it possible to marry an Old Believer, or does he have to accept our faith?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Here are two questions in one. First – if a person is an Old Believer only by baptism, but in fact he participates in the life of the Orthodox Church, then this means that in fact he is an Orthodox person. Then we treat him as an Orthodox person: he comes to confession, receives Communion, and the fact that he was baptized in the Old Believers is not decisive for us.

If we talk about whether a wedding with an Old Believer is possible,then this is another topic. If this Old Believer was baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, then such a wedding is possible. In the Russian Orthodox Church, it is allowed to marry Christians of other confessions, including Old Believers, as well as Catholics and Protestants. Although with regard to Protestants, a very thorough study is required of what kind of Protestant confession this person belongs to and whether he really was baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, because, unfortunately, today there are Protestant communities wh ere even such a baptism does not exist. At the same time, an indispensable condition is that the children of such a married couple are brought up in the Orthodox faith.

Question: Don’t you notice too much state propaganda of the nuclear family lifestyle? All the advertising, entertainment, travel imply a “family vacation”. When applying for a job and at the job itself, you can also face discrimination if you are a single person. Isn't it the right time to reduce the degree of propaganda, to understand and explain to everyone that the absence of a partner and children is not a crime, but the circumstances of life or a conscious private choice of a person?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I believe that any discrimination against an unmarried man or unmarried woman just because they do not have a family is unacceptable. At the same time, I completely disagree with the fact that there is too much state propaganda of the nuclear family lifestyle. On the contrary, I consider this propaganda insufficient. I almost never watch TV shows on our central channels, but if I ever switch on a TV series, I find that there is no real promotion of the family lifestyle there. On the contrary, quite often these shows speak about adultery. If a married couple is shown there, it is usually a couple with one child, not two or three. Thus, on the contrary, I believe that it would be necessary to promote a healthy family, including those with many children, including on our central TV channels. I

disagree with you on this point. I think that not enough is being done to promote a healthy family lifestyle.

But once again, no one should be discriminated against on the basis of whether they have children or not, whether they have many or few children. This, indeed, applies to the circumstances of each person's life, and these circumstances are different for everyone.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians: "Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife." (1 Corinthians 7: 27).

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

DECR Communication Service

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