Metropolitan Hilarion: It is important that fundamental moral principles are not violated in the process of scientific research



On May 15th, 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 relation (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 talk weekly with the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Hello, Vladyka!

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

E. Gracheva: This time I would like to start with some notable international news. Notable, because the United States of America has officially recognized the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire on the level of President Joseph Biden one hundred years after the event. But not all Armenians appreciated this step. For example, the editor-in-chief of RT and MIA Rossiya Segodnya, Margarita Simonyan, called it a "handout" and said that for a hundred years the United States did not recognize the obvious because of the geopolitical situation, and now, when the situation has changed, they made this recognition. How do you, Vladyka, evaluate the importance and timeliness of this statement by Joseph

Biden?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In this case, I would say: better late than never, because historical realities of this kind, no matter how sad they are, must be recognized, and things must be called by their proper names. I do not think that now in Turkey anyone will suffer fr om the fact that the obvious fact of the tragedy that took place in the late 19th - early 20th centuries, when more than a million Armenians became victims of the genocide in the Ottoman Empire, will be recognized at the international level. Just like the Asia Minor catastrophe that occurred after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, when several hundred thousand representatives of the Greek diaspora were forced to move fr om Turkey to Greece - all these events are sad and tragic. There are similar events in our history.

Concealment of such events or belittling their significance and scale will not lead to either reconciliation or harmony in society. On the contrary, I am deeply convinced that historical realities should be called by their proper names. Even a hundred years later, but it is necessary to assess those actions so that they would never be repeated in the future.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, not so long ago the scientific world was excited by the news of the creation of a chimeric embryo of a monkey and a human. Scientists took a blastocyst from a monkey, implanted human cells into it, then this blastocyst developed into a chimeric embryo from biomaterials of both species. The goal of this scientific experiment is to create organs for human transplantation. Similar experiments on animals were carried out earlier, but for the first time such a chimera of the monkey-human embryo was created. Do you think that the desire of mankind to create organs in order to prolong the life of people with the help of such experiments is justified?

Metropolitan Hilarion: On the one hand, the lack of donor organs is an obvious problem faced by many medical institutions around the world. Accordingly, the search for new methods for the regeneration, reproduction or production of such organs is an urgent problem of modern medicine.

On the other hand, any experiments that involve the crossing of human biomaterial and animal biomaterial have a certain ethical background, and they are far from always acceptable from a moral point of view. Unfortunately, such experiments can also have the opposite effect: they can lead to the fact that in the foreseeable or distant future, certain human-animal hybrids will be created for specific purposes, for example, to improve human health. Experiments of this kind are unacceptable from the point of view of the Church. Therefore, there is always a question, wh ere and when will science stop, what boundaries will it go over, and what boundaries will remain not crossed? If fundamental moral principles are not violated, then the Church will not object to such experiences. But if there is an invasion of what the Church recognizes as the jurisdiction of the Lord God Himself, then the Church will ring the alarm.

E. Gracheva: Another serious controversial discussion is always conducted over the admissibility / inadmissibility of using aborted embryos for scientific purposes, for experiments. It is known that for more than one decade this material has been used to obtain stem cells in the beauty industry. Now, in the same way, it is used to grow donor organs. Is it possible to separate these two directions? And can the Church give an answer, which is a greater sin: to use cells of already killed embryos as material or to interbreed animals and humans in order to grow such ape-men chimeras?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We cannot say which sin here is greater. Moreover, we are very often accused of interfering wh ere we should not interfere. We are told: go about your Church affairs, your business is to baptize, marry and conduct church funerals, whereas we will develop science. We disagree with this approach in principle, because we believe that the Church has the right to assess phenomena that have a certain moral background and moral basis.

On the other hand, as Church people, we are, of course, not specialists in the field of medicine and should not interfere in the issues that belong to the field of doctors. But, again, if we talk about the permissibility or inadmissibility of the use of human embryos from a moral point of view, then we believe that any manipulations with embryos are unacceptable, because the Church recognizes the embryo - a human embryo - as a person. Even if this is still an undeveloped person, we believe that the life of every embryo should be protected both at the legislative level and by the doctors themselves. We consider morally unacceptable the use of embryos to create certain tissues, as well as the use of organs taken from human embryos, since this requires an abortion, which is murder. We also consider it unacceptable from a moral point of view to manufacture on an industrial scale any material that will be used for adults, but was taken from human embryos.

The question of whether it is permissible to use certain cell lines in the manufacture of vaccines or cosmetics, seems to me, should be discussed separately in each specific case: what exactly and how it was used, for what purposes, how much time has passed, etc. This question is not as simple and straightforward as it might seem to some. If in our time people use this topic in order to dissuade people from vaccinations, then you need to listen very carefully to their arguments and understand how consistent they are.

E. Gracheva: You say that everyone is used to thinking that the tasks of the Church are only to baptize, marry and conduct funeral, but it turns out that today the Church is also concerned with the issue of casting out demons. A lot of noise has arisen around the document you have announced, which regulates the practice of exorcism. The document that is being prepared, you said, contains both the history of this practice and proposals for its unification, and the fact that you cannot share the details before the official publication made it more intriguing. Will you tell us in our program at least some details

of this document before speculation has grown to a large scale?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There is nothing particularly intriguing here. It's just that in the Church, since the apostolic times, even since the time of Jesus Christ, there has been a practice of casting out demons. First, we believe that demons or evil spirits actually exist, although many do not believe in this at all. Secondly, we believe that a demon can be cast out of a person. When we read the Gospel, we see that Jesus Christ cast out demons from people. We see that He endowed His disciples with the right and authority, the ability and power to cast out demons. We know from the history of the Christian Church that almost always there was a special ministry of the so-called exorcists in it: as a rule, these were priests, and in a later era - mainly monks with holy orders, who read special incantatory prayers for those possessed by evil spirits. Even in the ancient liturgical rites, there are such prayers. Over time, this practice, in a sense, went underground.

What's going on now? For example, I recently read, preparing for this program, the publication of the BBC Russian Service, which tells about a certain man who calls himself the servant of God Peter. Allegedly, he studied for some time at a theological seminary, whether he graduated from it or not - we do not know whether he received the priesthood, but nevertheless he goes to cemeteries and "casts out demons." What prayers or spells he reads, what effect do these prayers have - we do not know any of this. He says that he had received a blessing of some archimandrite, but we always say that any activity of this kind should be carried out primarily with the blessing of the ruling bishop of the diocese wh ere this exorcist lives.

We do not think that laypeople can do this, even if they studied at a theological seminary for some time. If a clergyman who has extensive experience in discerning spirits, as the Holy Scriptures says, is ready to take on this task, then first of all he must receive a blessing for this from his ruling bishop. This is stated in the document.

The document also says that this activity should be free of charge: a priest should not take money for it. Thirdly, we consider the existing liturgical rites (there are several of them, they are quite different in their content) and give recommendations which of them can be used [when casting out demons - ed.].

E. Gracheva: For those who have not encountered demons, who are generally skeptical about all this, could you please give a real example, when an exorcism session helped to expel demons or evil spirits from the premises?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I have never practiced exorcism, but I can give you an example from my

pastoral practice, when my participation helped to solve this kind of problem. Here was the problem: I was then serving as a priest in Lithuania, a literature teacher from a Russian school came to me and told me that she was engaged in spiritual sessions, evoking the spirit of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. "Anton Pavlovich Chekhov" began to appear to her and then he started to tear the wallpaper in the apartment, throw books off the shelves, break dishes. She would come into the apartment and see that everything was upside down. In general, she was in such a state that she was almost close to suicide.

I came to her house, consecrated the apartment, sprinkled it with holy water. Then he invited the whole family to the church, they confessed and received Communion, and this "Chekhov" was blown away like a wind. Someone might say - these are hallucinations, she should have gone to a psychiatrist. But from a Church point of view, in this case we are talking about a demon, a demon who appeared in the image of Chekhov. Why did he appear like this? Because this woman created the conditions for him to appear to her that way. The demon will not just come up to a person and enter him, if this person himself does not open a door or a window for this creature. This door or a window opens if a person is engaged in various spiritual practices, goes to psychics or witches, if he uses horoscopes and builds his life on this foundation. All these phenomena, which the Church has always opposed, allow the demonic power to access the soul and heart of man.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka. We will follow your recommendations on how to not let demonic power into our lives.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Catherine.

In the second part of the program, Metropolitan Hilarion answered the questions of TV viewers, which were received on the website of the Church and the World program.

Question: Dear Vladyka! I would like to ask you a question regarding the Blessed Virgin Mary. Why did the Lord God choose her - a Jewish girl, and not, say, a Roman or a Hellenic person? And how could she remain a virgin when she was married?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Christian tradition answers your question as follows. God chose one particular nation to be the bearer of the true faith, and that was the Jewish people. The first part of the Bible, which is called the Old Testament, is devoted to the history of the relationship of this nation with God. From this story we learn that God revealed Himself to the Old Testament righteous people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants. Then God intervened in a special way in the fate of those people, when, for example, he called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of the Egyptian captivity. For a long time this nation was ruled by people appointed by God. And then, when they chose a king for themselves, the assignment to the kingdom was also carried out through the anointing, and

the prophets anointed kings.

The prophets proclaimed to the people the will of God, including the prophecy that the Messiah - Christ would be born among the people of Israel, that He would be born not from a simple woman, but from the Virgin. This prediction is contained in the book of the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isa. 7.14). This birth of Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary and from the Holy Spirit without the participation of a husband is one of the fundamental tenets of the Christian Church. We confess this dogma in the Creed and believe that a miracle of God took place, that the Lord came to us from the Virgin and through the Virgin, but, as the Holy Fathers teach and as the liturgical texts tell us, without breaking the seals of virginity.

Question: How does the Church evaluate the act of a person who deliberately goes to death for the sake of saving others (for example, by closing an embrasure or a grenade)? After all, he dies voluntarily and actually commits suicide. Does the difference with ordinary suicide lie only in motives?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The difference in motives is the key in this case. Suicide is when a person tries to kill humself if, for example, he is tired of living, or offended by someone, or for some other reason. Then this act is a mortal sin, because a person kills himself and does not leave himself time for repentance: he does not have time to ask for forgiveness, he dies at the moment of committing this sin.

If a person closes an embrasure with himself or throws himself on a grenade, then he does this in order to save the lives of other people. From the point of view of the Church, this is not only not suicide, but, on the contrary, a feat. With regard to such people, the Church always recalls the words of Jesus Christ: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (John 15.13).

Question: Hello, Vladyka! Please tell me what kind of Orthodox theological and philosophical literature do you recommend to read?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I cannot give you a list of literature to read right now. I can only say that Orthodox Christians are encouraged to read the Gospel every day, at least one chapter at a time, and other scriptures of the New Testament, in particular, the epistles of the Apostle Paul. We also encourage our believers to read the works of the holy fathers - these are theologians of the Christian Church who lived and worked from the 2nd century onwards. In addition, there is a fair amount of contemporary theological literature that is available in bookstores and on the Internet.

I remember my childhood (I lived and was raised in Soviet times): there was no Gospel, no Bible, no religious literature in bookstores. It was banned, and the Internet, of course, did not yet exist. Now all this is there, everything is available and nothing prevents you from reading Christian Orthodox

literature.

Question: I believe in God, but I am embarrassed when some high-ranking Church officials interfere in politics, and especially when they criticize the Soviet period of our history.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Maybe this is directed at me. Probably because I tend to criticize the Soviet period of our history. I am not criticizing the period, but the mistakes that were made then. For example, as soon as the Bolsheviks came to power, they began the persecution of the Church, which continued for seventy years. Sometimes the persecution became bloody, the priests were physically exterminated, and sometimes it was just government pressure on the Church. During the entire Soviet period, this pressure existed. We cannot say that it was correct, justified. We believe this was a mistake. Many other mistakes have been committed, and concealing these mistakes is not at all our task.

If we talk about interference in politics, then we do not interfere in it, namely, we do not interfere in the political struggle. We do not say for which party or for which person to vote - each person chooses this independently. Among the members of the Church there are people who profess a variety of ideologies, sympathize with different politicians or political parties. We would lose a lot of people if we identified ourselves with this or that political party or program. In this respect, we certainly do not get involved in politics.

But the Church believes that she has the right to assess both the events of a political nature that took place in the past and those that are taking place in the present. Moreover, such assessments are of value only for the people of the Church. For those who do not belong to the Church, naturally, our judgment has no value.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul from the Epistle to Titus: “To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. ”(Titus 1.15).

I wish you all the best. Take care of yourself, take care of your loved ones and may the Lord protect you all.

DECR Communication Service

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