Metropolitan Hilarion: We are always close to our flock



On May 22nd, 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 Church and the World TV program on "Rossiya 24" channel, where every talk weekly with Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations. Hello, Vladyka!

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

E. Gracheva: Unfortunately, we have to start this program with a difficult topic. A terrible tragedy happened in Kazan: people in a terrible condition are still in the intensive care, children and teachers were killed. After this tragedy, some are again calling for the return the death penalty, and, in particular, for crimes of this kind against children. The Duma proposes to limit the circulation of weapons among the civilian population. For example, Zhirinovsky says that the media should not cover such news at all, so as not to provoke other shooters to such crimes. Does the Church have a recipe for how to work with troubled teenagers (a shooter was a 19-year young man), and how to prevent such tragedies?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First, I would like to express my most sincere condolences to everyone who has lost their loved ones. The death of a loved one is always a great tragedy and a great loss, and when

it comes to children, it is a disaster for people. His Holiness the Patriarch immediately expressed condolences as soon as the news became known, and Metropolitan Kirill of Kazan and Tatarstan met with the parents of the victims, as did the Mufti of Tatarstan Kamil Khazrat Samigullin. Spiritual leaders were with those who suffered and lost their loved ones, and this in itself speaks of how the Church and religious organizations view such tragedies. We are always close to our flock, always close to our people.

If we talk about how to prevent such tragedies, then, I think, much of what has been said here is quite fair. This, of course, also applies to limiting the circulation of weapons, because a young man should not be able to receive firearms for a free use, so that he can then walk and kill people. Maybe some rules should be introduced for hunting, because it was a hunting weapon. It seems to me that hunting as an entertainment or a hobby should be banned altogether. If hunting is necessary in order to reduce the population of certain animals, then this should be done by professionals who are specially appointed for this and receive a special license.

If we are talking about preventing such cases in general, then, of course, we need to pay more attention to the spiritual and moral education of students. The footage of the first interrogation of the person we are talking about was shown – it was a horrific footage. First, he expresses himself exclusively in obscenities, secondly, he gives the impression of being mentally unbalanced, and thirdly, he says things that make one’s hair stick up: that a monster woke up in him and that he fees like God and hates everyone.

Educational work at schools should be carried out, probably, at a different level. After all, we have repeatedly raised the question of why representatives of traditional religions are not admitted to schools. Why can't a priest come to school and talk to children? Why can't an Islamic leader come to school and meet the children? What's bad about it? What are the bad things that we could teach children? They say we have a secular school system. Well, it's great that it is a secular school system, but why is it impossible for children to learn at least the very basics of religious traditions? I think that if we cannot completely prevent such cases, then at least we must do everything to minimize the threat.

E. Gracheva: Recently, Patriarch Kirill spoke at the State Duma and again raised the sensitive topic of abortions in the country. His Holiness said: “Abortion is part of the free health insurance system. We will never agree with this. " And earlier, just a few days before that, His Holiness suggested that women who want to abandon a child or have an abortion – should give birth and give their children to the Church. Does this appeal have a legal basis for the implementation of such plan?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I was present at the State Duma when His Holiness the Patriarch addressed the State Duma deputies and heard him speak. Of course, these words are uttered by the Patriarch not

only on his own behalf, but on behalf of the entire Church, which he heads. The Patriarch said that we are now mourning the victims of the coronavirus pandemic, but tend to forget about the daily human sacrifices that are made due to the fact that we have legalized abortions and included them in the system of free medical education. The Patriarch said that pregnancy is not a disease that would require the elimination of the fetus fr om the mother's womb.

Thank God, the number of abortions is gradually decreasing, but abortion should not be such an easily accessible procedure, and especially free, because everything must be done to protect the lives of the unborn children. The specific solution proposed by the Patriarch does not contradict the legislation, because such children will be adopted. In addition, the Church has shelters for children, there are children's institutions in many monasteries, especially convents, so if we are given children, we will find an opportunity to educate them. It is very important that the life of these unborn children is preserved, and then we will take care of them.

The Russian Orthodox Church has a Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Ministry, headed by the Bishop Panteleimon of Vereya. In this program, we have already talked many times about the activities of this Department, wh ere there is even a hotline which one can call and ask for help. Therefore, if a woman is faced with a choice - to have an abortion or not, if she is ready to not do it, but to give her child to the Church, then one can call, agree on everything in advance and the Church will take care of both the woman and the child.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, the other day President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on awarding you the Order of Alexander Nevsky with the wording: "For your great contribution to the development of international and interfaith relations and many years of conscientious work." I congratulate you on this honorary order. Also, recently the Department for External Church Relations celebrated its 75th anniversary, and a documentary about you was released. Until recently, I was convinced that your Department is the Church analogue of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but in your interview you say that you feel more like the Minister of Defense of the Russian Orthodox Church. Explain what you mean, please.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course, I used a metaphor. The Department for External Church Relations is a synodal institution that was created in 1946, when the Church was just recovering fr om two decades of the most severe persecution and from the War, when our entire country rose from the ashes after four years of War. The Department was created with the aim of establishing contacts with other Christian organizations, with other religions, as well as with our compatriots abroad, because in the 20-30s, the ties between the official Church and compatriots abroad were practically interrupted. Then it was a small institution, consisting of several employees. Gradually it grew. For nearly 20 years, the Department for External Church Relations was headed by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, and for 12 years

I have been heading it.

Why am I talking about the fact that more and more often we feel not as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but as the Ministry of Defense? Because lately we have been more and more engaged in defending the sacred borders of our Church. In the geopolitical situation that has developed today, the same forces that are working against Russia are working against the Russian Orthodox Church. They work to weaken, dismember, to tear away from it those historical parts that are inextricably linked with it, in particular, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Everything that has been happening in recent years in the inter-Orthodox relations is connected precisely with this struggle. Therefore, in recent years, unfortunately, we have turned from a diplomatic Department of the Church into a kind of Church-defense department. We guard, protect and defend the legacy which was not created by us, but that which we received from more than ten centuries of the existence of our Church, from our ancestors. And we believe that no one is given the right to plunder this legacy, as our opponents are trying to do.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, since you have mentioned the schism and the defensive function of the canonical Orthodox Church: for sure, the Russian Orthodox Church should have been given ground for reflection by the visit of the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Kiev, because he met not only with the political establishment, but found time for a meeting with "Metropolitan" Epiphany, ignoring the leadership of the canonical Church. And after that - by coincidence or not - a new wave of seizure of the canonical churches swept through the country. Do you see an American trace in this, or is it a coincidence?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course, this is not a coincidence, and the fact that the US Secretary of State met with the leader of the schism, but did not meet with any other religious leader - neither the head of the canonical Church, nor any Muslim or Jewish leaders - once again testifies to the fact that that the so-called ‘OCU’, headed by the so-called “Metropolitan” (in fact, the false metropolitan) Epiphany, is a US project, a political project from start to finish. This is not something that was born in the depths of the Church life, but something that was created by the Americans in order to once again embody the principle by which they are guided and by which they act - divide and rule. The division that had already taken place at the political level now took place at the Church level, and the person who carried out this American plan was Patriarch Bartholomew. His dependence on America is also quite obvious, everyone knows it, and, in fact, nobody is hiding it.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, I cannot but raise the topic of aggravation in the Holy Land, in the Middle East - rockets are flying from both Hamas and Israel, the number of victims is already in the hundreds, and 90% of them are civilians. This conflict has been going on for decades. Does the Russian Orthodox Church see any way out of this Palestinian impasse? Wh ere could this restarting point be?

Metropolitan Hilarion: If the decisions that have been made through the UN for a long time are implemented, then ultimately a stable Palestinian state will be created, adjacent to the state of Israel, which will be able to peacefully coexist with it. If, however, the unilateral support of one side or the other continues, then, unfortunately, an escalation of hostilities can be expected in the future. The sooner a political solution is found so that both Israelis and Palestinians can live on this land, the better it will be for both.

I would like to emphasize that the Russian Orthodox Church always calls for peace, we pray for peace in Jerusalem, and the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem makes great efforts to reconcile both sides. The Church is often said to be outside or above these kinds of conflicts, but what does it mean to be above conflicts? This means not taking one side or the other. The Church is always with the people, with the suffering people. And whenever there is another outbreak of violence, the Church makes efforts to stop it as soon as possible, so that people would live in peace and harmony.

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

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Catherine.

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

Question from Zhanna Korsukova from Lithuania: Hello, Vladyka, thank you for the film on Normandie-Niémen. My father, Vasily Aleksandrovich Egorov, was among the mechanical technicians who handed over the planes to the French pilots. My name is connected with this event. Thanks again for this very interesting and important work!

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Zhanna, for reminding you of yourself. When I served in Kaunas more than 30 years ago, we worked together, you were the editor of the Kaunas Vestnik newspaper, but, of course, I did not know that you were connected with those whom I tried to talk about in my film. It was shown on the “Rossiya 24” TV channel during the days when we were preparing for the Victory Day celebrations.

Indeed, this is a very important and glorious episode of the Great Patriotic War, when French pilots and mechanics worked side by side with Russian pilots, fighting for the liberation of our Motherland and for the liberation of Europe from fascism. God grant that these pages of history will not be forgotten either in Russia, or in Lithuania, wh ere you live, or in France.

Question: I greatly offended a person whom I love. I cannot forgive myself, I am tormented by a feeling

of guilt. What should I do, what must be done in order to forgive oneself?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First, you need to ask forgiveness from the person you have offended. Secondly, it is highly desirable, if you are a believer and a churchgoer, to go to the confession and confess your sin to a priest. I think if you do these two important things, then the feeling of guilt will leave you.

Question: I would like to ask why God says: Do not create an idol for yourself (Ex. 20.4), but at the same time asks to worship only Him? Is God so ambitious that He commands to worship Him, and is this not considered creating an idol in the person of God?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This is a strange question, in my opinion, even absurd. When God says that there is no need to worship idols, we are talking about false idols, false gods. God calls to believe only in Him, the Creator of the whole world, in the One who cares about us, who watches over us, who gave us life, in whose hands both our life and our death are preserved. This is the One whom we should worship. As for the false gods - and this applies not only to pagan gods, but also to those false idols that people often create for themselves - we are called not to worship them, but, on the contrary, to avoid this worship in every possible way. This is why the Church has fought against paganism for centuries. That is why the Church today reminds us that there is only one God in Heaven, whom we are all called to worship.

Question: Vladyka, hello. I was baptized into the Orthodox faith at birth. Due to circumstances, I found myself in the Jewish messianic community for a long time. Now I go to church again, trying to learn more about the traditions and customs of Orthodoxy, and therefore I had a question about the need for re-baptism. Please, tell me: what should I do in this case? I really hope that I will not be excommunicated for this sin.

Metropolitan Hilarion: If you were baptized in the Orthodox Church as a child, then there is no need for you to be baptized again. Moreover, there is no “rebaptism” in the Church. In the Creed we say: I confess one baptism for the remission of sins. That is, if you were baptized, then this Sacrament is not washed away by anything, and you can simply return to the Church through confession and repentance. You have always remained a baptized person, you have simply evaded the Church for a while, and now you are returning to it.

Question: I was proposed by a man who is 18 years older. I believe, this is a very big age difference, but the man is very nice, smart, wealthy, has his own business. How do you feel about marriages with such a big age gap? In this situation, people might call it a marriage of convenience. Will such a union be sinful?

Metropolitan Hilarion: By itself, the age difference, even a significant one, is not an obstacle to marriage. If this is a marriage of convenience, then it is very likely that it will be insolvent and sooner or later disintegrate. However, if this is a marriage for love, then the age difference should not be an obstacle. Therefore, you must first of all listen to what your heart tells you, and not to what the people around you say. If you really love this person and are ready to connect your life with him, if you feel that he sincerely loves you, then I think that there are no obstacles to your marriage.

We always say that before making a decision about marriage, you need to think very carefully, get to know each other very well and not rush into this decision so as not to make a mistake. I would like to advise you the same.

Question: Vladyka, how to survive parting with a very close and dear person?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It depends on the parting. If this person has passed to another world, then first of all you must pray for him. Through this prayer, you will feel a connection with him. If this person left you or went on a long voyage, then, of course, you should pray for his health and wait for his return. If this person continues to live, but you parted with him once and for all - on his or on your initiative, and your reunion with him is not expected, then you need to pray that God will help you to endure this separation and find the strength to overcome the feeling of loneliness. I think that if you go to church more often, participate in the divine services, communicate with priests, with members of the church community, the very participation in the life of the Church will help you to endure the ordeal that you are facing.

I would like to end this broadcast with the words from the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians: Forgive one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4.32).

I wish you all the best and may the Lord bless you all.

DECR Communication Service

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