Metropolitan Hilarion: The Gospel does not provide answers for all occasions, but offers guidelines to help us know the will of God



On May 29th, 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 questions and answers on the program "The Church and the World" on the channel "Rossiya 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, Catherine! Hello dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: More and more countries are opening their borders for tourists before the holiday season (somewhere it is already underway), because the population is being vaccinated. Here is some interesting data fr om a survey conducted by the SuperJob portal about whether people are willingly getting vaccinated in our country. It turned out that every fifth Russian is ready to get vaccinated if it gives him the opportunity to cross the border and go abroad. 42 percent of Russians do not want to be vaccinated. At the same time, for example, entire states are waiting for our vaccine. In the small state of

San Marino, thanks to the fact that everyone is now vaccinated with Sputnik V, restrictions have been completely lifted and the country is open to tourists. Why do you think our citizens will only get vaccinated if it, for example, makes it possible to go abroad? How do you explain this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I will express my personal opinion. I emphasize that this is not the opinion of the Russian Orthodox Church, but my personal opinion. I think this virus is of an artificial origin. I think that the same forces that launched it are also interested in the development of the anti-vaccination campaign. It is precisely ‘a campaign’, because various Telegram channels and bloggers oppose vaccinations and vaccines, and a massive campaign of propaganda against vaccines is being conducted on the Internet.

Unfortunately, this campaign has an impact on the minds of people. People are afraid to get vaccinated, they do not trust vaccines, many simply refuse to get vaccinated. Our President, in his annual message, made a direct appeal to the population: get vaccinated. Unfortunately, however, even the President's word remains unheard by many. In my opinion, the risk of vaccination for health is not comparable to the risk of the disease itself. Unfortunately, people who have not been ill themselves, have not lost their loved ones or have not seen how seriously ill other people are, are not able to evaluate the degree of this danger, this risk. When the trouble befalls, however, then it is often too late. My opinion: it is better not to wait until the trouble comes, but to do everything in order to prevent it.

E. Gracheva: I conducted such a survey among my acquaintances, and many more unwilling to get vaccinated turned out to be among the church-going people. Many argue that they have not received a blessing for it by their spiritual father.

Metropolitan Hilarion: We have such clerics, priests, who, unfortunately, dissuade people fr om being vaccinated. There are also priests who do not observe any hygienic measures. The Patriarch said that we must keep a distance, disinfect the spoon for Communion, and these priests ignore all this, because they have their own mind, their own view. The Church is not an army. We cannot compel priests to do what the hierarchy says. Unfortunately, we also encounter this in the Church, a propaganda against vaccinations exists within it, too.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, recently an interview with Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople was broadcast on the Georgian television, wh ere he spoke quite a lot about the Russian Orthodox Church and, in particular, about Patriarch Kirill. Generally, it was not very positive. He accused the Russian Orthodox Church of claiming primacy in the Orthodox world and accuses it of granting autocephaly to Abkhazia. He made a number of other harsh statements. For example, he accused the Moscow Patriarchate of following the ideology of the “Third Rome”. Have you seen the transcript of this interview? What do you think about this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I saw the transcript of this interview. The Patriarch answered in Greek, he was asked questions in Georgian, and he said things that did not correspond to reality. Unfortunately, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople is increasingly saying things that do not correspond to reality. Either he is not competent in the matters he is discussing, or he is telling a deliberate lie. Maybe he has such advisers who tell him things that do not correspond to reality.

For example, he claims that the Russian Church in Abkhazia has a bishop, but the Russian Church does not have a bishop in Abkhazia. Look at the calendar of the Russian Church, and you will see that we do not have a bishop in Abkhazia - neither on paper, nor in reality. Not a single Russian bishop, as far as I know, has even appeared in Abkhazia over the past many years. So why tell a lie when it is very easy to refute it with facts?

Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople made a very big mistake: he granted autocephaly to the schismatics in Ukraine and is now looking for arguments to justify his lawless and anti-canonical deed. These arguments have largely continued to fall on deaf ears. Some points are taken from history. For instance, the old theory of "Moscow being the third Rome", which, by the way, was voiced at one time by the Patriarchs of Constantinople. This theory does not have any power or relevance for us, however. The Russian Orthodox Church has repeatedly stressed at the official level that it respects the integrity of the canonical territory of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Any attempt to accuse us of interfering in the affairs of the Georgian Church is a lie.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, in the last program we discussed with you the topic of abortions and how the Russian Orthodox Church deals with it, how it calls for giving children to the Church instead of killing them in the wombs. Here is another statement that is widely covered by the media: The Russian Orthodox Church is calling for the creation of a legal basis for the adoption of frozen embryos in Russia and wants to try to prohibit in the future the cryopreservation of embryos altogether. How is is potential procedure for adopting someone's frozen embryos seen in the Russian Orthodox Church?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The opinion that you just quoted was voiced at a Church conference by clergymen who do not have an official status and expressed it as a private opinion. Therefore, we are not talking about the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church. The official position of the Russian Orthodox Church is voiced by the Russian Patriarch or persons authorized by him.

Nevertheless, such a discussion is really taking place in the Church. It proceeds from the fact that for us, an embryo, that is, the human embryo, has the same rights as any person who has already been born. We insist that the concept of human rights must be extended to embryos. Accordingly, we consider manipulations with embryos, the use of embryos as biomaterial, unacceptable. We believe that

the life of a human embryo should be legally protected. Our task is to give birth to those who have every right come into this world.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, now is the beginning of a hot season for university applicants. They have no time for rest, they go to get their degrees, and many continue their studies, for example, at the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies. Exams are coming soon. Recently, the Russian Orthodox University named after St. John the Theologian held an Olympiad for school pupils, it was called "In the beginning was the Word." The pupils demonstrated great results there. Why does an Orthodox university need such Olympiads? They are supported by the Presidential Grants Fund. What is the general difference between an Orthodox university and any other secular educational institution? Perhaps few know, but there are now a very large number of departments at Orthodox universities: for journalism and many other specialties. Why do Church universities take this ‘bread’ from secular ones?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We do not take bread from anyone, but there are several categories of universities and several different forms of involving the Church in the education system. First, the Church has its own educational institutions, such as theological seminaries and academies or the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies. These are educational institutions wh ere we teach future clergy and Church workers. We also have Church schools of higher education, which are essentially universities. For example, the Russian University named after St. John the Theologian or the Orthodox University of St. Tikhon. In each of them there is a pastoral department, but it is only one of the departments, whereas other departments are not aimed at the education of either pastors or church workers. They provide a full-fledged secular education, these are state-accredited universities, which means that students receive a diploma and can then work in their fields, while receiving a certain amount of knowledge on Orthodox topics in the process of training.

There is another way to involve religious organizations in education - this is what is now called theology in the secular educational space, that is, these are theological faculties of secular universities, theological departments, and various theological programs.

Therefore, if we briefly formulate the difference between Orthodox education and secular education, then I think that the quality of Orthodox education today is quite close to secular education. This is evidenced by the fact that our main theological schools received state accreditation. Of course, the Orthodox, religious component plays an important role in the learning process. Even if a person studies secular sciences, he receives a truly universal university education.

E. Gracheva: The British government is going to prohibit conversion therapy by law. If I understand correctly, if, for example, a priest wants to dissuade a gay or a lesbian person from further relations and

convince him to create a full-fledged family, then this priest can be prosecuted by law. Do I understand it correctly?

Metropolitan Hilarion: You understand it correctly. This is another step aimed at establishing in the British society standards that have been imposed on it for a long time, namely, the normalization of those forms of sexual behavior that until recently have been considered non-traditional and which are condemned by many religious denominations , including Orthodoxy, Catholicism, Islam and in a number of other religious denominations.

What is a conversion therapy? For example, a person comes to us and says that he feels in himself homosexual inclinations. We are trying to work with this person. We tell him that a person's inclinations can be different, and they can change at different times, but nevertheless God calls each person to create a family and give life to future generations. A family, from the point of view of the Church, is a union between a man and a woman. A union that is not capable of reproduction cannot be called a family - this is a very simple criterion. Even if a person feels homosexual tendencies in himself, but at the same time he has the opportunity to lead a normal, healthy lifestyle and create a family, we welcome this. We know of many cases (I personally know from my pastoral practice) when people who had homosexual inclinations and confessed this to priests, nevertheless created healthy heterosexual families and are happy in marriage. They have children and have overcome this attraction in themselves.

So, in the UK it will now be legally prohibited. That is, a priest will not be able to create on the basis of his parish a group similar to those which, for example, operate at our parishes and help people to get rid of homosexual inclinations, create a healthy and strong family, and receive spiritual support.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka, for sharing your thoughts on recent news.

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: Vladyka, why aren't the church funeral services performed for the unbaptized? Is baptism so important to God? It is much more important for a person to live correctly. My husband died unbaptized, but he led a godly life and did not commit mortal sins. The priest refused to pray for him at a church.

Metropolitan Hilarion: God cares about every person: both the baptized and the unbaptized. It matters for God how a person behaves, how he lives. This applies to both the baptized and unbaptized.

But Church sacraments apply only to those people who have received baptism, as well as Church rituals. If a person was not baptized during his lifetime, why should he have a funeral service at a church? What will it give him? After all, a person had enough time to be baptized and through this first sacrament to gain access to all other sacraments. If he did not do this during his lifetime, then either he did not want it, or something prevented him. In this case, we leave the posthumous fate of a person in the hands of God. You can pray for him at home, but the church funeral service is not performed in such cases. In this case the priest did the right thing.

Question: Hello, Vladyka! I am an unbaptized person, but nevertheless I believe in God, and after one of your recent programs, when you said that demons get to people when people themselves open doors for them and that this happens with all sorcerers and healers, I had a question : if this has happened, how does one expel these demons?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The most effective means of preventing demons from approaching or attacking you is the sacrament of Baptism. If you believe in God and trust the Orthodox Church, then what prevents you from becoming a full-fledged believing baptized person? Probably, nothing. Of course, you need to familiarize yourself with the basics of the Orthodox faith. Read the Catechism and other Christian literature. You can only come to the Church consciously. The very sacrament of Baptism begins with the fact that the priest reads incantatory prayers and he prays that the devil would lose power over a person.

If you are an unbaptized person, then it is difficult for me to give you any advice other than what I have already advised in one of the previous programs, namely, never contact magicians, healers, or psychics, do not believe horoscopes. Try to lead a life wh ere demons would not approach you through all those things that I have listed.

Question: Why don't any of the women like me? Why does no one need me? I can't get to know a woman or a girl. What should I do?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It is difficult for me to give you advice. I think it is very important for you to be a member of the Church community. I don't know if you are a member of the parish or not. Very often, young and even middle-aged or older people get to know each other in the parish (again, I don't know what age you are), often get to know each other either at a service or afterwards. For example, some parishes have tea or Bible study sessions after services. The very existence of a parish community contributes to the fact that a person could find the right life partner and this union of marriage would be sealed by the blessing of the Church.

There are, of course, other ways to get to know each other. For example, now there are Orthodox

dating sites. You can create a profile on one of these sites and then get acquainted with a girl, with whom, perhaps, sooner or later you will be able to enter into a marriage union, which I sincerely and wholeheartedly wish you.

Question: Do you think that person's desires are in his power? If a person has a strong desire, is it possible to resist it? If so – how? How to force yourself to think not about your desires, but the will of God? Wh ere can you find the determination to not be led by your desires and needs? Is there a need to change all your desires for the desires of God? How to distinguish a need from an addiction?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There are many questions in one. I will try to answer briefly. There is something that corresponds to the will of God, and there is something that does not correspond to the will of God. If we want to be happy, prosperous, if we want our life to be full, then we are called to do the will of God. In order to know the will of God, you need to read the Holy Gospel and check your life with what Christ had commanded us. In the Gospel, Christ does not give instructions for all occasions, but He gives spiritual and moral guidelines. By following them. we can almost accurately guess the will of God in a particular case.

And what happens to a person who does not want to fulfill the will of God or who has developed some kind of sinful dependence and cannot overcome it? This is the question that each person asks himself: how far are we ready to go in order to overcome our human sinful attraction to something that does not correspond to the will of God, and sacrifice our human desire or attraction in order to fulfill the will of God?

It is no coincidence that the Christian life is called a heroic deed, a feat, and it is no coincidence that people who have reached great heights on the Christian path are called “podvizhniks” – champions of piety. The feat consists primarily of overcoming sinful inclinations, addictions and passions in oneself, while listening to the will of God and trying to fulfill it. This is the essence of the Christian life.

I would like to conclude this broadcast with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Gospel of John: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4.24).

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

DECR Communication Service

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