Metropolitan Hilarion: the pandemic must not be used to acquire profit



On June 5th, 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: I greet you fr om St. Petersburg. The International Economic Forum (SPIEF) is taking place in the northern capital these days, so we are separated by 600 kilometers. One could wonder, what connection does the Church have with economics? However, only fr om the name it may seem that SPIEF is exclusively dedicated to the issues of economics. That, of course, is not true. The Forum is also focused on the social function of business, and on medicine at a time of a pandemic, and, of course, on the world politics. That is where I would like to start. It is noteworthy, as it seems to me, that the largest delegation to SPIEF this year is the US delegation. First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov commented on it this way: “It seems to me that the tougher the rhetoric and the steeper the

sanctions, the more people come to see, apparently, how they are coping here.” Perhaps, in the case of the United States, the matter is different: it is just that politics and business follow different paths. What do you think?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Business and politics cannot follow different paths, they are too closely interconnected. It is enough to follow how the indexes on the stock exchanges jump or fall after various statements from different politicians. The entire campaign that was conducted around the construction of Nord Stream also shows how closely business and politics are intertwined.

Moreover, I would like to say that politics and religion are also closely intertwined. We observe this in the international events that take place in the religious and ecclesiastical sphere. We remember well how, under the influence of the American administration, the schismatic structure in Ukraine was legalized. We see how America support this schismatic structure with all its might. Recently, the US Secretary of State visited Ukraine and met only with the leader of Ukrainian schismatics. He did not meet with the head of the canonical Orthodox Church or with representatives of other religious confessions - only with the schismatic leader, because this so-called “church” is a creature of the United States of America and is aimed at driving a wedge between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. Not only politically, but also religiously.

Let's hope that the decisions that will be made at the economic forum will generally serve to improve the economic situation, especially on the eve of the much-anticipated summit of the presidents of Russia and the United States.

E. Gracheva: The journalists are, of course, looking forward to these negotiations. Even those who are not interested in politics are aware from the media on all continents of the complicated relations between Moscow and Washington. What do you expect from this meeting? Wh ere do Russia and the United States still have points of contact?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We have much more points of contact than it might seem at first glance. It is enough to remember that we are neighbors. We are separated by only four kilometers of the Bering Strait - the distance that one brave Russian woman swam. Not so long ago I re-read Metropolitan Clement's book on Orthodoxy in Alaska. Of course, it's amazing how much work our Russian missionaries put into preaching among the local population. The Russian spiritual mission in Alaska had operated for more than a hundred years and had borne many good results.

There are many things that unite us. We have a common Christian culture, a common Christian heritage. But perhaps the most important thing to say in the current situation is that Russia and the United States, as two major powers, which are often referred to as superpowers, are directly

responsible for maintaining world peace. The fragile balance that has now been achieved rests primarily on good relations between several major players - the United States, Russia, China and a number of other countries. If these balances are maintained, if countries are able to observe their interests, but at the same time not destroy world peace, then this is probably the most important thing that can be achieved at the upcoming meeting of the two presidents, and at subsequent negotiations, which, of course, will be held at the highest level and at other levels.

E. Gracheva: This year a record number of pharmaceutical companies are represented at the forum in St. Petersburg. A lot of sessions are dedicated specifically to medicine and pharmaceuticals. Over the past year of the pandemic, the Forbes list has been replenished with nine new dollar billionaires. In your opinion, Vladyka, is this positive or negative news?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I have already expressed my private opinion in our program, I emphasize that this is my personal opinion, and not the position of the Russian Orthodox Church. The virus that has now infected the whole world is of artificial origin. I am not a virologist, so this is nothing more than a guess, but it is now shared by many. Moreover, many are now talking about the fact that the virus is a new type of biological weapon. With the help of this weapon, as we see now, it is very easy to bring down the economies of different countries, reduce their population, change demographic trends for the worse. In short, this is a weapon, and we cannot exclude its use in the future by certain countries willing to achieve their interests and damage other states.

In addition, it also turns into a powerful weapon for those people who want to cash in on someone else's grief. Today we see how not just pharmaceutical companies are enriched, but also individuals who use this situation to make profit on it. This has always been the case in the history of mankind: when people were in trouble, there were those who made a profit from this trouble. It is no coincidence that now it is said that the income received by these few people would be enough to vaccinate the population of large countries, for example, India.

It seems to me that a very important task for the entire world community in the coming years is to develop mechanisms that would minimize the risks from this kind of viruses.

First, biological weapons must be banned, and a mechanism must be developed to identify those responsible for the emergence and proliferation of such weapons.

Secondly, a system of international solidarity should be created, which would exclude the possibility of using vaccines as an instrument of pressure on certain countries, or an instrument of marginalization of certain countries. We are also seeing this now. We see how, for example, Russian vaccines, which have proven their effectiveness, have already been adopted and actively used in many countries of the world,

and in some countries (for example, in the European Union) they have not yet received permission for use. This is obviously due to the political situation. There can be no other answer to the question of why this is happening. I think that such incidents should be excluded and a mechanism should be created to exclude them in the future.

Finally, third: vaccines should not be fortified by people who not only develop them, but also take measures to prevent other vaccines from gaining access to people. If there is a misfortune like the one that has happened now with the whole world, it is necessary that all countries show solidarity with each other. A mechanism should be developed that would allow countries to act in solidarity, and not to the detriment of another country, profiting from someone else's misfortune. I think that religious leaders could also contribute to the discussion on this issue.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, a plenum of the Inter-Council Presence of the Church has been taking place in Moscow these days. On the eve of this plenum, you told me that it was very important and that there would be adopted a number of key documents that are related not only to the Church, but also to everyone. Which of the decisions of this plenum would you single out? What exactly are we talking about?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Inter-Council Presence is a forum of the Church and the public in which bishops, priests, monastics and laity participate on an equal footing. In total, there are about 200 people, each of whom has one vote.

The Inter-Council Presence was created in order to prepare documents for the Councils of Bishops. The plenum that had taken place worked out several documents that will be presented at the Bishops' Council. These are still projects, one cannot speak of them as valid documents. After they are read at the Council of Bishops, they may be revised in some way, approved by the Council of Bishops and then they will receive their final, official status.

Among the documents that were discussed at the last plenum, firstly, there was a document on the value of human life from the moment of conception, which was developed by the Commission on Theology and Theological Education. It continues the discussion that was raised in the "Basics of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church" and is aimed at protecting human life from the moment of conception. In this document we say that life has value not only when a person is born, but also before it; that not only babies who are born need legal protection, but also those who are still in the womb.

At the plenum they also looked at a draft document on the blessing of soldiers for a feat of arms. This document grew out of a discussion within the Church about whether the consecration of military weapons is possible or impossible. For example, can a priest come to some nuclear facility and

consecrate an atomic bomb. Questions of this kind were raised within the Church and this document tries to answer them. Its main message is this: we do not sanctify weapons of mass destruction and do not sanctify weapons as a means of killing people, but the Church blesses the soldiers for a feat of arms, blesses them along with the weapons that they carry. It is no coincidence that in the iconography we even see warrior martyrs represented with weapons, for example, St. George the Victorious with a spear or some noble princes with a sword.

Another issue considered at the plenum of the Inter-Council Presence is a document focused on which professions are compatible and which are incompatible with the priestly ministry. We know that in Russia most priests receive a salary from the parish and do not have a secular job. But in foreign countries, including those wh ere, for example, I had to carry out pastoral ministry - in Austria, Hungary, Great Britain, Belgium - many of our priests are forced to get a secular job. This document seeks to determine what kind of secular activity is compatible with the ministry of a priest, and what is incompatible.

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

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: Dear Vladyka, very often people who were on the verge of death (because of an illness, plane crash, earthquake, tsunami, etc.) and who were saved by some miracle, say: "God saved me." But among the tens of millions of those who died in the war, were there no more worthy ones who were not saved? Weren't the priests killed by the Soviet regime more worthy of physical salvation? Please explain how one must understand this situation.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Firstly, the word “salvation” in the Christian context is used primarily for the salvation of the soul, and not for the salvation of the body. When we say that Christ is our Savior, that He saved and redeemed us, then we are talking about salvation that touches our soul. Many people perished and it was through this death, for example, through martyrdom, that they received salvation. The people you mention, including the new Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church, would not have become martyrs, and some of them, perhaps, would not have received salvation if they had not passed through the crucible of trials, if in those trials they had not shown firmness, if through martyrdom they had not received not only salvation, but also the crown of holiness.

Secondly, I would like to say that God acts selectively. We never know why God saves some people from sudden death, and does not save others, why some people die in a war, while others survive. One thing I can tell you is that God has prepared his own path for every person. God cares about every

person and does everything to ensure that his soul does not perish. For this, He not only gave His commandments, which He calls us to follow, but He Himself became incarnate and was made a Man in order to take on Himself the blame for the sins of people, so that people could shift their guilt onto Him, so that they could confess their sins to Him and receive from Him redemption, forgiveness and salvation.

Question: Dear Vladyka, please tell me what the position of the Church is with regard to dances in professional activities and to dances that take place at weddings, restaurants and clubs. Some say: what is the point of music, if one cannot dance? Do you think they are right?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think they are wrong, since the Church does not prohibit dancing as such. We know from the Holy Scriptures that in the Old Testament dances were one of the parts of the liturgical cult: King David, whom we glorify as a prophet and psalmist, danced in front of the ark of the Lord, in this way he expressed his religious feelings.

Of course, when people dance at weddings, they are not expressing religious feelings, but this does not mean that these dances should be prohibited. Moreover, if we talk about professional dances, for example, about ballet. The Church does not advocate that ballet should be banned. On the contrary, among the Orthodox believers there are a lot of people who dance. I personally know our very famous Russian ballerina, who is a deeply religious person and who, in the program “Faces of the Church” (we run this program on the TV channel “Spas”), told how her professional activity is fueled by her religious spiritual life. Therefore, there is nothing incompatible with spiritual life in the profession of a dancer or a ballerina.

Question: Vladyka, I decided to tell you about one sad incident that greatly changed my attitude towards the Church. When my dad died (and that is already a great grief), the priest took five thousand rubles for the funeral. For my family, this is a lot of money, since I am raising two children alone without a husband. I live in a small town and my salary is not comparable to wages in Moscow. You said in your programs that the funeral services are free and that there are no set prices for the rituals. Are priests not ashamed to profit from someone else's grief?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There is one more question here: "How much do priests earn?" I'll combine the answers to both questions.

As the Apostle Paul said, the clergymen partake of the offerings of the sanctuary (1 Cor. 9:13), that is, from the Altar. Therefore, priests earn a living for themselves and their families by their own labor, that is, the work of a priest cannot be free. As a rule, priests receive salaries from the parishes. For example, in Moscow a priest can receive from a parish 30 or 40 thousand rubles, somewhere maybe more. In the

villages, of course, a priest receives much less. There are such parishes wh ere the priest does not receive a salary at all, but lives on what he earns, that is, he receives money from the performance of the so-called sacramental needs: weddings, baptisms and funeral services.

When I say that Church sacraments and ceremonies should be performed free of charge, I am not saying that priests should not be paid at all. First of all, I am saying that a priest must not extort money from people, he should not impose any conditions, that is, for example, if you told the priest: “I do not have that kind of money” and he would then refuse to conduct the funeral for your father, then, from my point of view, such priest would have committed a crime. If you did not have such a conversation with the priest, but simply you or someone on your behalf asked how much it costs and you were assigned that price, then it is another matter. That is, a priest should not set a price for a Sacrament or a ceremony and demand that this amount is paid. This is the first thing.

The second thing is that in churches there should be no price tags. If we are talking about a church book, a candle or some object of church utensils, for example, a cross, then, of course, these objects are sold for money. But if we are talking about a sacrament or rite, then their performance should not be conditioned by the price list, while the priest can tell you a certain recommended amount. This is not an amount that you are obliged to pay or which he will certainly demand from you, but an amount that you can pay if you want. In addition, you should also take into account the fact that during the performance of many Church sacraments and rites there is a choir, and the singers also need to be paid for their work. As a rule, if a priest designates a particular amount, then he takes into account all the participants in this event.

I would like to conclude this program with the words from the Gospel of Luke: "But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you." (Luke 11:41).

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

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/87405/