Metropolitan Hilarion: creative activity is for me a “by-product” of serving the Church

On June 12th, 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", wh ere 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: Literally just now, our channel hosted a solemn ceremony of presenting the State Awards. You are among the laureates. First of all, on behalf of our entire channel, we congratulate you on this high award. Tell us please, for which of your works was this prize awarded? What achievements do you personally consider to be the most significant?

Metropolitan Hilarion: First of all, I would like to cordially congratulate us and all our TV viewers on this wonderful holiday - the Day of Russia. I am very glad that the State Prizes are awarded on this day, which are presented personally by the President of the Russian Federation. I sincerely congratulate

those who have received these awards.

I was very pleased to be in such a wonderful company. Among the awardees there are three people whom I know closely - our wonderful singer Hibla Gerzmava, who has repeatedly performed my music and with whom we hold a true friendship; then there is an outstanding virologist Alexander Leonidovich Ginzburg, who earned this award and received it together with his colleagues, because at a difficult moment for our Fatherland, when the dangerous virus penetrated us from abroad, he managed to mobilize the forces of his fellow virologists in order to create the first vaccine against coronavirus worldwide. Finally, I would like to cordially congratulate Faina Yakovlevna Zakharova, who has been working in the field of charity for many years and helped many children. Together with her and the Life Line Foundation she heads, we are implementing a program to help Syrian children who have lost limbs or eyesight, or became disabled during the bloody Syrian war.

You asked about my creative achievements. It seems to me, that if we talk about books, perhaps the most significant thing that I have written is a 6-volume study entitled *Jesus Christ: His Life and Teaching* . I have devoted five years to this work. I have re-read the Holy Gospel many times in the original language in which it was written - in Greek. I have also compared almost all the Gospel narratives that have parallels. In order to write this work, I needed to read over a thousand books and articles. These are mainly books in foreign languages - in English, Italian, Greek, German and others, books by scholars focusing on the Holy Scriptures.

Speaking about my musical compositions, the most famous of them is the oratorio "St. Matthew Passion". It was written in 2006 and has been performed more than 150 times in many cities of Russia and in foreign countries. Sometimes I learn about these performances from news reports. Therefore, this composition, once based on the model of an Orthodox Church service – not for worship, but for concert performance – is now living its own life.

I would also like to say something else. All this rather diverse creative activity of mine is kind of a by-product of the main ministry that I have been carrying out for forty years. I was 15 years old when I made the decision to take the path of serving God. I have been following this path for forty years, serving the Church, and the Church has never disappointed me. It is the Church that has been my main source of inspiration for all these forty years.

E. Gracheva: What do you think, Vladyka, except for the State Awards, what other prizes in Russia have retained their authority? Previously, for instance, there was the "Song of the Year" competition - it was considered prestigious. Now there are many awards, that are of a very different caliber. Men in women's dresses came to the recent sensational Muz-TV award: Philip Kirkorov (who, by the way, is the People's Artist of Russia and a laureate of the Order of Honor) came with another singer, holding hands,

in a wedding convertible. There were a lot of things. Roskomnadzor has already begun checking the Muz-TV channel for gay propaganda. In this program we often discuss what is happening in the West, but how would you evaluate that which is happening on Russian television?

Metropolitan Hilarion: It is with great regret that I observe what is happening. I see that gay propaganda is carried out not only in the open, but also in a variety of more hidden ways. In fact, in Western art, cinema, music, show business, there are rules that not only do not allow anything contrary to gay propaganda to be expressed, but in fact require that this propaganda be carried out. Sometimes, as it were, imperceptibly and latently, but this is done in order to inspire people with the idea that this is a normal way of life, one of the variants of the norm, and that the LGBT movement deserves all kinds of support.

I happened to watch the performance of the group that won the Eurovision Song Contest, this is an Italian group. All this looked, in my opinion, very strange and even, I would say, rather disgusting. Some effeminate half-naked men, painted in incomprehensible colors, with painted nails, with tattoos. This is not a direct gay propaganda, but it is, nevertheless, quite frank, and I will be very sorry if such standards prevail on the Russian stage.

But in pop music there are art pieces of a high class, including works that carry a positive, spiritual and moral message, and there is a lot that corrupts, fosters bad taste and implants so-called Western values that are alien to our Russian Orthodox worldview. I would really like to believe that our art will remain free of these so-called "values".

E. Gracheva: Now let us move from our men in women's dresses to their men in dresses. I'm talking about Europe now. In late May, the German Bundestag rejected a bill on gender identity. A similar law had previously failed in the Spanish parliament. To understand those who do not know what this law would mean: had the document been adopted, it would have allowed anyone to change the gender in all documents, up to the birth certificate, simply by application - without surgery, without hormone therapy. What can you say about this, Vladyka?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Living in Russia, we very often do not realize the scale of the problem that Western society is facing today. The so-called gender reassignment, which occurs today in a variety of ways, is essentially a deception, because it is impossible for a person to change their sex. One can change their appearance, or eir secondary sexual characteristics, but a man can never turn into a full-fledged woman, who, for example, could conceive and give birth to a child, and a woman will never turn into a full-fledged man. That is, all this from start to finish is a deception, and an expensive deception that cripples people. Now all this in a number of countries is becoming available for children: boys and girls. This is a huge tragedy.

However, another thing is happening. Today you can “turn” (I am using this word in quotation marks) from a man to a woman or from a woman to a man simply by changing your passport. That is, you can say that you, being a man, now consider yourself a woman and vice versa, and everyone around you should pretend that this change has taken place. This is reminiscent of the famous fairy tale about the naked king, who, while being naked, was convinced that he was beautifully dressed. The duty of everyone around him was to inform him how beautiful he was in his royal clothes. So, something similar is happening in the West today. A person can, even without doing any surgical operations, even without changing his appearance, simply declare that he has "turned" from a man to a woman or from a woman to a man, and everyone around would have to pretend that this had really happened.

E. Gracheva: And the theater? In your opinion, does the institute of theatre still serve the people? Should it take into account the context of the time and bring the modern idols of millions onto the stage? The news that Olga Buzova would play on the stage of the Moscow Art Theater had a wide resonance. What do you say? Would you go to her performance?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think that the management of any theatre, for any roles that require not just professional actors, but some new approaches, has the right to invite people who are not directly related to theatrical art. It is not always that only professional theatrical actors play in theaters; sometimes people from outside are invited for various purposes.

I must admit that I am very far from theatrical art. For example, I’ve only visited the Moscow Art Theater just once, when my work "St. Matthew Passion" was performed there. Once again, I was at the Theater of Nations at the invitation of Yevgeny Mironov, who, together with Chulpan Khamatova, acted in a play dedicated to Mikhail Gorbachev and Raisa Maksimovna. It was very interesting for me, because I remember very well the era when Gorbachev ruled the Soviet Union and Raisa Maksimovna was the first lady. This was just the time of my formation as a clergyman. I was very interested in how these two of our wonderful actors restored the era with the means of theatrical art.

As for your question whether I would go to a play with Olga Buzova's participation – I cannot answer. If an invitation comes, I will consider it..

E. Gracheva: In conclusion, let us turn to the results of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum: Finance Minister Anton Siluanov announced that the dollar will be excluded from the currency component of the National Welfare Fund, which is 40 billion. Almost all economists have already spoken about this. I wonder if the Russian Orthodox Church conducts any transactions in foreign currency? If so, which one?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Russian Orthodox Church is a multinational Church, and a variety of currencies are used on the canonical territory of our Church. If in Russia we keep our money in rubles and pay in rubles, then in other countries we keep money and pay in the currency that exists in these countries. This is quite natural. On the territory of the European Union, parishes and dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church have accounts in euros, and, for example, in the United States, they use accounts in dollars. In addition, there are situations when it is necessary, for example, to settle accounts with foreign partners in foreign currency.

I am very surprised by the fact that sometimes in Russia prices are indicated and transactions are carried out in foreign currency. For example, shortly before the pandemic, I flew abroad, I had several suitcases and had to pay for the excess. I was sent to the ticket office and it turned out that at the ticket office of Sheremetyevo airport, and it was an Aeroflot flight, excess baggage was paid for in euros. I then asked a question: why, in fact, prices are set in euros, if it is a Russian airport and a Russian airline, but no one gave me an answer to this.

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: I listened to the "Ave Maria" song on WhatsApp in Aramaic. As indicated in the description for the video, this is the language of Jesus Christ. Until that moment, I was sure that the language of Christ was Hebrew. Vladyka Hilarion, please answer, what language did Jesus Christ speak?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This is a question that is being discussed in modern New Testament scholarship. The relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic in the time of Jesus Christ is about the same as now the relationship between Church Slavonic and spoken Russian. Some scholars believe that Hebrew was used during the time of Jesus Christ, at least in some places or in some villages. Others believe that Hebrew was used only in worship, when reading and interpreting Holy Scripture, in disputes between rabbis or in teaching, and the spoken language was Aramaic.

For example, the Gospel of Mark brings to us three short phrases of the Lord Jesus Christ in their original sound, rendered in Greek letters. All three of these phrases are Aramaic.

The book of Acts tells that with the money that Judas received for betrayal, a land was bought, which was called the land of blood, and the sound, again, in the Aramaic language of this phrase – “akeldam”

is given. That is, from these small inserts into the original text of the Gospel, we see that after all, the spoken language at the time of Jesus Christ was Aramaic.

Question: Hello, Vladyka! Thank you for your work for the good of the Church in international relations. The Lord says in the Gospel that love and unity between the apostles is one of the criteria for the truth of the Church. How does this relate to known problems between different Orthodox Churches?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Gospel says a lot that is the norm for us, but we do not fulfill these norms, and this applies not only to the personal life of each person. If we fulfilled all the gospel standards, we would not have to go to confession and repent of not following the commandments of Jesus Christ. And since we all sin, we all have to repent.

But sins are not only personal, there are also sins of a group or collective. Unfortunately, no church organization is immune from making some wrong decisions or acting to the detriment of another church organization if these conflict situations are transferred to the relationship between church organizations. The point is that the Church is made up of living people. Just as a conflict can arise between two people, a conflict can also arise between two or more groups of people.

Question: I would like to know why the second and fourth commandments are not observed in Orthodoxy, that is, the worship of icons and the observance of the Sabbath? In the Bible, everything is clearly written about this.

Metropolitan Hilarion: In Orthodoxy, both the second and the fourth commandments are observed. If you think that they are not observed, then most likely you have read some kind of polemical or sectarian literature.

The second commandment of the Law of Moses speaks of the inadmissibility of the deification of idols, the worship of idols. Icons have nothing to do with idols. A huge literature has been written about this. If you are not familiar with it, read it. I can recommend Leonid Uspensky's book *Theology of the Icon in the Orthodox Church*. It is very clearly written there why it is impossible to equate the worship of icons with the worship of idols, which is forbidden in the Old Testament.

If we talk about the observance of the Sabbath, then yes, indeed, in the form in which the observance of the Sabbath is commanded in the Old Testament, it is not observed. Nevertheless, Saturday is an important liturgical day, and Great Saturday, the day when we remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His burial, is a very special liturgical day, and we perceive the Old Testament Saturday - the day of rest - as a prototype of this day when the Lord rested from all His works.

Question: Dear Vladyka Hilarion, I have been going to church on Sundays for a whole year, but I still have not understood anything about what is happening at the services. I bought a Bible, began to read and then stopped, because everything was not clear. With prayers I have the same trouble: I start to read a prayer and do not understand the meaning. Vladyka, what should I do next? How to pray and how to understand what is happening in the church?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In order to understand what is happening in the church, one year may not be enough. I have been going to church for more than forty years and still do not understand everything that is happening in the Orthodox divine service. I have written a whole book about the Liturgy in order, first of all, to understand for myself the theological meaning of the liturgical texts.

If you do not understand the Slavic language, you can find the liturgical texts on the Internet, including all the rites of the Liturgy in Russian. Also, you can find an Orthodox prayer book in Russian and read prayers in Russian if you do not understand them in Slavonic.

As for the Bible, in order to understand it, you must start not from the beginning, but from the part called the New Testament. This section opens with the four Gospels. If you read these four Gospels, you will understand everything, there is nothing incomprehensible there. You will discover the depth and beauty of Christianity, which will then be revealed to you through everything else: through worship, prayer, the whole structure of Church life.

I would like to conclude this program with the words that the Lord Jesus Christ uttered at the Last Supper: “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

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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