"An attempt to rewrite history" - Metropolitan Hilarion shares his thoughts on the the bill that excludes Russians from the list of indigenous peoples of Ukraine



On June 26th, 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: Vladyka, I would like to start with Ukraine, wh ere the office of President Zelensky submitted a bill on indigenous peoples for consideration by the Verkhovna Rada. In fact, if this law is adopted, Russians will lose the right to call themselves the indigenous people of Ukraine. President Putin has already expressed his opinion about this and drew a parallel with the Nazi Germany, saying that the next step would be to to start "measuring skulls". What do you think, if the law is adopted, what will it ultimately lead to? Do you share President Putin's harsh assessment of this bill?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I agree that if a state leader wants to maintain stability in his country, if he wants every inhabitant of this country to feel like a full-fledged citizen, then there should be no division into indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. I do not presume to judge the political situation that has led to this decision. Unfortunately, for many years now I have not been able to enter Ukraine and see people close to me, of whom there are many. However, I imagine, for example, if the Russian leader wanted to divide the peoples inhabiting Russia into indigenous and non-indigenous. What would this lead to? To the disintegration of the country. It is impossible to make statements about the preservation of the integrity of the state and at the same time divide citizens into indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Of course, this is a blow aimed primarily at the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Accordingly, this blow is aimed at Donbass, at those people who speak Russian, but at the same time are patriots of their country, citizens of their country, and have Ukrainian passports. It turns out that the Ukrainian authorities do not need these people. I cannot imagine how both options are possible: to maintain the integrity of the state, and at the same time to divide people into first-class and second-class citizens.

If we talk about history, the exclusion of Russians fr om the indigenous peoples of Ukraine is a complete nonsense, because we know that Kievan Rus' did exist, and Kiev was the capital of a single Russian state. Back then there was no Ukraine - it was a single group of people. Gradually, over the centuries, the national self-identity of the Ukrainian people developed, which ultimately led to the creation of an independent state of Ukraine. We do not dispute the right of the Ukrainian people to have their own state, to live within their state borders, but history cannot be rewritten. One cannot pretend that Kievan Rus' did not exist or that Kiev was not the capital of a single Russian state.

E. Gracheva: Deputies of the State Duma fr om the "United Russia" party have submitted for consideration a bill, according to which the surrogacy market in Russia will be closed for foreigners. Also, according to this bill, our citizens will be able to use such services only if they are legally married or if it is a single woman who wants to adopt. In other words, Philip Kirkorov, for example, would not have succeeded in adopting two children if he wanted to do this after the ratification of the law. What do you think of this initiative? Can it really change the demographic situation in the country?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Orthodox Church as a whole has a negative attitude towards surrogate motherhood. This is stated in the "Basics of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church." After that, a special document was adopted that speaks of the baptism of children born of surrogate mothers. Therefore, I think we will welcome measures aimed at limiting surrogacy, but we cannot go into the details here.

The Orthodox Church takes traditional positions: we believe that a woman who either gave birth to children, or adopted them, can call herself a mother - this is a real mother. In the same way, the real father is either the person from whom the children were born, or the one who adopted them. This is a

very simple, I would say, traditional, classical concept, which the Orthodox Church cannot change even under the influence of all sorts of modern trends, even in connection with the development of new biotechnologies.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, what about men who want to become fathers? Suppose his wife died or a girlfriend, they managed to freeze the biomaterial, and now he wants to have children from this woman.

Metropolitan Hilarion: You know, it is impossible to give an answer to all occasions. If such a man comes to the priest, the priest will find something to advise him, but we oppose surrogacy per se. We do not believe that this is a solution to the problem of childlessness, a solution to the problem for single men or women. We consider this to be a violation of the Divine order. Therefore, we cannot approve of surrogacy itself in any form. But, I repeat, this is the position of the Church, which extends to people of the Church. We do not undertake to judge those people who do not associate themselves with the Church in any way. They have their own moral standards, their own moral norms. For them, our opinion is not a decree or authority.

E. Gracheva: Continuing the theme of children. Fresh news: the children's ombudsman proposes to introduce lifelong supervision of pedophiles in Russia and to put special stamps in their passports. This topic is again becoming acute and urgent: she announced frightening figures to the President. Figures showing that the number of especially grave crimes of sexual nature, for instance, against orphans, has grown in Russia 20 times in five years, and crimes against sexual inviolability have grown 26 times. How can we protect children? Will a passport stamping measure be effective?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Any measures aimed at protecting children should be welcomed. I do not think we should be particularly concerned about pedophiles having a “clean” passport or about them having the freedom of movement. It is much more important to protect children. Therefore, the proposals that have come from Anna Yuryevna Kuznetsova, as a rule, are very reasonable, balanced and based on facts. The facts indicate that, unfortunately, the situation with this in our Fatherland is very unfavorable, otherwise the numbers would not have grown exponentially in five years. This means that one needs to do something, take some extraordinary measures.

Indeed, protecting children from pedophiles is primarily the task of the state. Even if a person has been punished and served his term, this does not mean that he has ceased to be dangerous. This does not mean that he has lost his vicious tendency. This does not mean that he cannot commit the crime again. Therefore, there really should be a strict control over such people. This should be done, I think, by the relevant law enforcement agencies.

E. Gracheva: There have been proposals for forced castration of pedophiles. What do you think of it?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think that such measures are hardly possible in a civilized state, but it is quite possible and necessary for such people to be under constant control.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, we have received rather revolutionary news about the "unification of Catholics and Orthodox". This information was published by one Orthodox hierarch of Constantinople. He said that Orthodox and Catholics are in fact already united, but now this will be formalized - on paper. What is it about?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We do not always know what the hierarchs of Constantinople are talking about. We do not always know what happens in the margins of the Phanar. What plans they are working on - we also do not always know.

Recently the Patriarch of Constantinople has started to see himself as the arbiter of the destiny of Orthodoxy. He believes that he can single-handedly make some decisions, so if he makes a single-handed decision that the Orthodox Church is reunited with the Catholic Church, then there is nothing to be surprised about. After he had made the sole decision that Ukraine, as it turns out, has always been the canonical territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and that that Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has 12,500 parishes, more than 100 bishops, more than 250 monasteries - does not allegedly exist at all. I think that in light of such absurd and anti-canonical decisions it will not be surprising if the Patriarch of Constantinople, without the consent of other Local Churches, without solving those many questions, which are on the agenda of the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, would simply announce that a reunion has taken place, and would sign some kind of paper. For us, for the Russian Orthodox Church, this paper will mean nothing.

Here's what I would like to tell you about: since the year 2000, I have participated in the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, in the dialogue, presided by the Constantinople. And already in the year 2000, the topic of the unification was put on the agenda of that dialogue.

We spoke about how the Union is an unacceptable method in the relationship between the two Churches. We didn't agree on anything back then in 2000, the dialogue was interrupted for several years, and then, at the insistence of Constantinople, the dialogue was resumed, but not on the topic of the unification, but on the topic of primacy in the universal Church. And from my point of view, the policy pursued by Constantinople in this dialogue was not aimed to achieve unification of the Orthodox and Catholics but by borrowing the Catholic model to create the same model in the Orthodox Church. In other words, to make us agree to the appearance of a certain infallible ‘Pope’ who would make unilateral decisions with all of us having to obey him. In our Orthodox Church, there has never been anything like this, thank God, and I believe will never be. And now we see this ugly attempt by Constantinople to

introduce papal authority in the Orthodox Church, we see wh ere this attempt has led already. It led to a schism in the world Orthodoxy.

E. Gracheva: And under what conditions, then, in the opinion of the Russian Orthodox Church, a unification between Orthodox and Catholics is possible?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think that the unification is impossible under any circumstances, although we know those points, which divide Orthodox and Catholics, those points have accumulated over the centuries. There are also questions of a dogmatic nature - a question of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Or a question of the veneration of the Most Holy Theotokos, who is venerated in both traditions, but in different ways. Then there is probably the main dividing issue - the authority of the Pope in the Church. We cannot accept such a model of Church order as to have one man who is considered to be infallible, who will have power over all the Church Councils. We speak of the Church as Catholic and Apostolic. Under catholicity we understand what in the secular language could be called the collective consciousness of the Church: in our Local Churches, the Patriarch is accountable to the Bishops' Council, rather than the Bishops' Council is accountable to the Patriarch.

But there are many other dividing points that have accumulated over almost a thousand-year history of our separate existence and we must be very sober in assessing those differences. It is necessary to make a rational assessment of the differences, and we are ready to discuss them within the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue, but not a dialogue that is actually turned into manipulation. What Constantinople was engaged in the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue in the last years was an attempt to manipulate Local Orthodox Churches with the aim to recognize the model in which the Patriarch of Constantinople would receive some exclusive powers.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka, for clarifying this issue to us.

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: The Church categorically forbids a woman to have an abortion, as if it were some kind of a terrible crime. The embryo in a woman's body is not yet a child; it has no soul. I am sure that the soul appears at the moment of birth. To have an abortion or not is a private matter for every woman, and the Church should not interfere in the process of making such a decision.

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Church does not interfere with anything at all. The Church is simply stating its position. You think that a child has a soul only at the moment of birth - this is your personal opinion. And the Church has a different opinion: the Church believes that an unborn baby is still a baby, a person, a living being, and not a part of a woman's body, and every person has the right to be born. Therefore, the Church has consistently opposed abortion.

At the same time, the Church does not impose anything on anyone. If you do not belong to the Church, you can do whatever you please. But if you consider yourself to be a member of the Church, then we cannot talk about the fact that the Church “interferes” in something. The Church has its own specific rules. If you want to follow these rules, then you can be a member of the Church. If you want to kill children, then you have no place in the Church. Then look for a place for yourself in some other religious organization that, for example, recognizes abortion. If there is one.

Regarding whether a baby has a soul: ask many mothers who have carried and given birth to children, and they will tell you how, for example, a child responds to music or to the stress experienced by the mother. The child already lives his own life, reacts to what is happening while still being in the womb. This would be impossible if he did not have a soul. His soul grows with the growth of his body. When the child leaves the mother's womb, his body is already fully formed, and the soul is still in the stage of formation. But to say that the unborn baby is some kind of soulless creature is completely unfair. The Church does not agree with this position.

Question: Is it possible to have an abortion if a girl becomes pregnant as a result of rape? What is the opinion of the Church in this case?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The opinion of the Church is that even if a girl becomes pregnant as a result of rape, this is not a reason to have an abortion, because a child is a living being. We have experience of working with girls who bore a child, gave birth to him, and then this child brought them happiness. From the point of view of the Church, every human life has an absolute value, regardless of the circumstances under which conception took place.

Question: During our life we have to go through a series of trials, and sometimes even sufferings. Not everyone can handle it all. Personally, when I lost my family, I lost the meaning of my life. At the same time, I do not think that we live only for banal reproduction and further endurance of the measured time. Vladyka, what can become the meaning of life if only my loved ones have always been my main priority, and the rest of the world is of secondary importance?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I will give you one example from the history of the Church. There are many such examples, but I will give just one. Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna was the sister of the last

Russian Empress Alexandra Feodorovna. She was married for the first time to the Moscow Governor-General, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich. She loved him very much. They had a strong family. However, this man's body was torn to pieces by a terrorist's bomb. She collected pieces of his body with her own hands.

One could ask: what remains for a woman after she has lost what was most dear to herself? She found the strength to completely change her life. She invested all her personal funds in the creation of the monastic centres of charity and for the rest of her life, until she was shot by the Bolshevik authorities, she served the sick and the poor - they became for her those neighbors for whom she gave her life.

I really hope that you, too, will be able to find the meaning of life in serving your neighbors whom the Lord will send you.

Question: Vladyka, hello! I would like to ask you to clarify the rules of the Church for commemorating the dead. Funeral services, litias, memorial notes ... What's the point of all this?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Church calls on us to pray for each other. Of course, someone can say: what is the point of praying if God already knows everything; why should we pray for a person, if God will either help him or not. Are we kinder or better than God who knows what this person needs?

However, God calls us to pray for each other, because through this we express our love for our loved ones. We know many cases from history, when, for example, the prayer of a mother saved children from death, when the prayer of a person clearly influenced the fate of another person.

If we talk about prayers for the departed, then for us there are no dead people at all. When a person close to us passes into another world, he continues to live there. He also, and perhaps even more than during his lifetime, needs our prayers. Therefore, through our prayer for a dead person, we show love for him, continue to care for him. In addition, through this prayer, we feel a living connection with this person. Therefore, this prayer is needed not only for him, but also for us.

I would like to conclude this program with the words of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Gospel of John: "A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world."(John 16:21).

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

DECR Communication Service

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