# Metropolitan Hilarion: The Church teaches people love rather than tolerance



*On July 31st, 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 Relations (DECR), answered questions fr om the anchor Ekaterina Gracheva.*

**E. Gracheva:** Hello! This is the time of the program "The Church and the World" on the TV channel "Rossia 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:** This week we celebrated the feast of the 1033rd anniversary of the Baptism of Rus'. The events were held throughout the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church – in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. In Kiev, a religious procession was held near the Kiev Pechersk Lavra. I would like to ask you about the conditions under which it was held. Were there any obstacles in its way?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The Day of the Baptism of Rus' is a holiday for the entire multi-million-strong Russian Orthodox Church. It is no coincidence that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia sent greetings on this holiday to the Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

This is a holiday of three countries, because all three countries have their spiritual roots in the Kiev baptismal font of the Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Prince Vladimir. The procession, which is timed to coincide with the Day of the Baptism of Rus' and is performed in Kiev, each time attracts thousands of people. In previous years, it was 300 thousand people. This year, according to estimates of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, about 350 thousand people gathered for the procession. They marched to the walls of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra to demonstrate their faith, their will for unity, because the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is still the largest religious structure of Ukraine, the most numerous denomination in Ukraine. This was clearly demonstrated by the religious procession that took place once again.

But this Church is subjected to undeserved attacks, harassment, and persecution because it seeks to preserve unity with the Russian Orthodox Church. This unity has historical roots, it is conditioned by our common faith and common history. In terms of the Church structure, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is independent, it is self-governing, that is, no decisions regarding the Ukrainian Church are made in Moscow. It elects its own Primate and bishops, and these elections are not coordinated with Moscow. It is financially and administratively independent. The only thing that remains to be the historical connection with the center in Moscow is the commemoration of the Patriarch during the Divine services and confirmation of the election of the Ukrainian Primate by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its entire episcopate, clergy and ecclesiastical people are united in their desire to keep in touch with the Russian Church. All this was very clearly demonstrated by the religious procession that took place in Kiev. As far as we know, no special obstacles were created. People passed through the streets of the city. Although, of course, it was not without malicious and unfair attacks in the Ukrainian press.

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, in the Ukrainian city of Novomirgorod, a children's team called "Hitlerites" participated in street basketball competitions during the celebration of the city Day. Can we say with confidence that a generation of young people has already grown up in Ukraine, a generation brought up with a new understanding of history and new textbooks?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Unfortunately, I haven't been to Ukraine for a long time, because the former Ukrainian authorities didn't let me go there, and the current ones don't let me in either. Therefore, it is difficult for me to judge what is happening in the country that is so dear to me, except by media reports. But, of course, these messages are greatly disturbing. The rewriting of history that is taking place in order to please the current political realities of Ukraine is also alarming. Because I remember very well the times when all sorts of robbers were announced as heroes, for example, Emelyan Pugachev, Stepan Razin – these people were announced heroes. Something similar is happening in Ukraine right now. Bandera, Petlyura and others are now proclaimed heroes. For some children's sports team, even Hitler turned out to be a hero. This is highly upsetting and alarming.

I think that despite all the political turbulences that are taking place right now, we have a common and unified history, which is, of course, especially evident when we remember events of historical importance, including when once again we all remembered the Baptism of Rus'. 1033 years have passed since this event, and we continue to preserve our Church unity. I think that's the most important thing. Political circumstances are changing, but the connection between the three fraternal peoples: Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian will remain forever, and it is ensured, among other things, by our Church unity, which is also not given to anyone to destroy.

**E. Gracheva:** In a recent broadcast, I asked you a question about the threat of a Church schism in Belarus based on the model developed in Ukraine. You then replied that you do not see any prerequisites for this today. But, nevertheless, I would like to return to this topic in the light of the news that the former presidential candidate of Belarus Svetlana Tikhanovskaya recently visited the Church of St. Cyril of Turov in Brooklyn (New York). The fact is that it belongs not to the canonical Belarusian Church, but to the schismatic one. How would you comment on this visit and why exactly to the schismatics, in your opinion, has Svetlana Tikhanovskaya decided to go?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The schismatic structures that exist in many countries of the world represent a kind of "underground Orthodoxy". This is not real Orthodoxy, but "fake Orthodoxy". These are structures that declare themselves to belong to the Orthodox Church. There, "priests" wear the same vestments as priests in the canonical Church. "Bishops" are dressed in the same way as bishops in the canonical Church. But in fact, fr om the point of view of Church canons, these structures have grace-free sacraments, that is, if a child is brought to be baptized in this "church", baptism is not performed. If someone comes to this" church " to receive Communion, they cannot receive it, for there is no real Communion among the schismatics. Those people do not partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, but of simple bread and wine. Therefore, every Church schism is based on deception. Splits were most often caused by political reasons, and now they are caused by political reasons. But we should be well aware that "fake Orthodoxy" is not the same as Orthodoxy, just as fake news is not the same as news about a real event. It is based on lies.

The situation in Belarus differs fr om the situation in Ukraine in that there is no split in Belarus itself. The schismatic structures that exist are all located abroad. There are different personalities there. I recall that a few years ago there was a certain false hierarch with the title of Baranovichi and Brooklyn. They live mainly in the United States, but have nothing to do with either the real Orthodoxy or the real Belarusian people. The Belarusian people have made their choice. They do it every day when attending divine services in the Belarusian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. There is no will of the Church people either to split or to separate fr om the Russian Orthodox Church, but only the will of opposition politicians to divide the people and the Church, because they are well aware that if the

Church is split, it will also contribute to a split in society, and this is what they seem to be trying to achieve.

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, a serious scandal broke out on the Internet the other day after the publication of a video wh ere a woman expels children with special needs from a playground in the Leningrad region. She told the caregivers (I quote): "You will move out of here. You won't be walking around here. You have your own yard and we must first find out whether you can walk there with children with such features." Have you seen this video? As a pastor, what would you say to this woman? What is the Church doing to foster tolerance for disabled citizens?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The Church teaches love, rather than tolerance. We always remind people that in the eyes of God, all of them have value: both physically attractive, physically repulsive, and those who have some special features of development. For God, all are dear, all are His children.

The same goes for the Church. The Church never pushes anyone away. The Church accepts into its fold all who wish to be its members. For the Church, there are no disabled people, because the Church embraces everyone with its love. But, unfortunately, not all people in our country are able to perceive each other exactly as the Church calls for it. Not everyone is able to see another person with God's eyes and not with their own human eyes.

I would like to express my hope that there will be a growing understanding in our society that we are all equal, we are all one, and in the eyes of God we are all precious; that we will all provide adequate support to people with special mental or physical development.

A great deal is being done in the Church for this purpose. Conditions are being created for disabled people to attend services: we are making ramps for those who move in wheelchairs. For example, at the church wh ere I serve, we celebrate a special Liturgy for children with special needs. People come to us from boarding schools, from neuropsychiatric dispensaries. We serve a special Liturgy for them, and then we hold a children's feast.

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, another piece of news needs to be discussed. I would like to ask you to comment on it. At the beginning of the summer, children judoists from Kyrgyzstan went to a boarding house on Lake Issyk-Kul for sports training. A 9-year-old Russian boy, Ivan, returned from it while being covered in bruises. He told his parents that other children had mobbed him because he was Russian and Orthodox, and forced him to read the Quran. Dozens of teenagers participated in these bullying with the complete connivance of the coach. I know that this scandal has reached the Patriarch himself. What was the reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church to this?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia responded to this event. I would like to read out a few words from the letter he sent to this boy: "Having shown courage and bravery, you were not afraid of impudent ridicule and bullying from your peers and resolutely defended your faith, defended what is dear and valuable to you. Your deed, courage and firmness are worthy of all support. Millions of your brothers and sisters in Christ in Russia and in other countries empathize with you at this difficult moment – none of those who learned about this situation remained indifferent". Further, His Holiness the Patriarch recalls that Christians have always been persecuted, that the true strength of the spirit lies in generosity, patience and the willingness to forgive those who have offended us, and recalls the words of the Gospel: "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33).

I think that this reaction is quite consistent with how all the faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church feel about this. We believe that everyone has the right to freedom of religion. Everyone, regardless of whether they live in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Ukraine or any other country in the world, has the right not only to profess their faith, but also to express it publicly.

Today, it is Christianity that is the most persecuted religion, although it is still the most numerous religion on the planet. Unfortunately, conflict situations often arise wh ere Christians co-exist with Muslims. We must speak directly about this – not to cast a shadow on Islam, but to call on both political leaders and Islamic leaders to educate their flock, including young people, in the spirit of love and tolerance.

This is happening in Russia: we have a very close and healthy interaction between Christians, Muslims and representatives of other religious traditions. I very much hope that the same mutual understanding and cooperation will be established in other countries.

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

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Thank you, Ekaterina.

*In the second part of the program, Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions from viewers that were sent to the website of the Church and the World program.*

**Question:** Christ made the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. But I had a question, and to whom was this sacrifice made: God or the devil? Is there an unambiguous answer to this question in the Orthodox faith?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** There is no clear answer to this question. The word "redemption" literally

means "ransom" in Greek. But to whom was this ransom offered? The Fathers of the IV century argued about this. For example, some Fathers believed that this ransom was offered to the devil, while others, in particular, St. Gregory the Theologian, said: “Who is the devil to demand a ransom from God?”

Ultimately, the doctrine of atonement can be summarized as follows: The Lord Jesus Christ redeemed us from the legal curse, that is, He took the blame for our sins, He took responsibility for our sins. He suffered on the cross, and this death was redemptive for the entire human race.

And to the question of who this sacrifice was made to, we do not give a clear answer. In Western Catholic theology, there is a theory that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was a satisfaction of justice towards God the Father. The essence of this theory is that every sin of a person, every mistake made by a person, is a violation of Divine justice. And no amount of human sacrifice could have redeemed the entire debt that humanity owed to God the Father. Therefore, the sacrifice of the Son of God was required, who by His death redeemed the sins of men. The form in which this doctrine of satisfaction is presented in Western theology, in particular by Anselm of Canterbury, is rejected by us.

We are saying that the Lord Savior's death on the cross was not a satisfaction of Divine justice; it was not caused by the fact that God was angry with humanity and this anger had to be satisfied somehow. It was caused by the love of God the Father and God the Son for the entire human race. It was a sacrifice of love that the Lord Jesus Christ offered for the entire human race and for every human being.

**Question:** Help us understand this situation: why ask for something in prayer, if everything still happens according to the will of God? As I understand it, someone's desire coincides with the will of God, and someone’s does not. I prayed very hard for the recovery of someone close to me, but it didn't help. It turns out that nothing depends on our prayer, am I right?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I would like to clarify a few points. First, we don't pray just because we want to ask God for something. We pray primarily because we want to communicate with God. If you have a husband and children, you communicate with your husband and children not only because it is necessary for something, useful, or you want to get something specific from them. You communicate with them because you are one family, because you are interested in them, because communication itself brings you joy. The same goes for prayer. Prayer is the communion of a Christian with God, and prayer itself brings joy, regardless of what we can receive from God in response to this prayer.

The second point is that God hears all our prayers, but doesn't always answer our prayers the way we want Him to. Often children ask their parents for something that their parents cannot or do not want to give them for some reason of their own. Children are offended, capricious, but parents insist on their own. God's love for us is both paternal and maternal. The Lord takes care of us, and He knows better

than we do what we need at every certain moment.

The third thing I would like to say is that if we want to receive something from God, we should not hesitate to ask for it. The Lord Jesus Christ has a wonderful parable about a pesky widow who went to the judge and asked to resolve a case, and the judge was not interested in this widow, because she had nothing to pay. He refused her for a long time. But since she was constantly coming up to him, constantly knocking on his door, he said: since she is so persistent, I will fulfill her request.

Why did the Lord use this parable? He certainly does not compare God with an unrighteous judge. But He says: even if an unrighteous judge responds to a request that is repeatedly expressed, how can the Lord not hear His children who diligently pray to Him?

**Question:** Vladyka, hello! I am an Italian, a Catholic, and I want to go to the Orthodox Church, but for some reason the Orthodox churches I visited were very skeptical, with obvious distrust of my request. Is Orthodoxy only for the Slavic and Greek peoples? What is the reason, in your opinion, for such a reaction? Maybe I'm doing something wrong? Thank you so much for your reply.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The Orthodox Church has a rule that was established by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and formulated by the Apostle Paul: "There is neither Greek nor Jew in the Church." In the Church, people are not divided into nationalities. The Church exists for people of all nationalities. We have, for example, a priest in Moscow, a full-blooded Italian. He once came to Russia, converted to Orthodoxy, and has been serving as a priest for many years.

If you've received such a reaction, then I think you're just out of luck. I recommend that you go to the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Catherine in Rome, and I am sure that they will talk to you there and give you all the necessary help.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul from the Epistle to Ephesians: "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma." (Ephesians 5:2).

I wish you all the best and may God protect you all.

*DECR Communication Service*

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