Metropolitan Hilarion: theological teaching is dynamically developing in Moscow



On September 4th, 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E. Gracheva: This week, the US military had completely withdrawn fr om Afghanistan, and now the Taliban, which is banned in Russia, came to power there. What is the position of the Russian Orthodox Church on these recent events in Afghanistan? Does the Church intend to make contact with the Taliban?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I would like to remind you that the Afghan epic has been going on for more than forty years. Fr om 1979 to 1989, the so-called limited contingent of Soviet troops was present in

Afghanistan. Its number ranged from 81 thousand when introduced in 1979 to 120 thousand – this is the maximum size in 1986.

I remember this time very well, because I was then a conscript and served in the army. Of course, many people who were drafted for military service were afraid that they would end up in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union then supported the Afghan leadership precisely so that terrorists and the Taliban would not come to power. And it was the opposition force supported by the Americans that fought against the then Afghan government and against the contingent of Soviet troops.

After the withdrawal of the contingent from Afghanistan under Gorbachev, the civil war resumed, as a result of which the Taliban came to power for several years. Then the Americans entered Afghanistan, and the United States supported the regime that relied on them.

And now, as soon as the Americans had withdrawn their troops, the Taliban has returned to power. Of course, this fact, which concerns the entire international community, cannot but concern the Russian Orthodox Church. We are concerned about the fate of the few remaining Christians in Afghanistan. I think the right decision for them would be to leave the country.

We are worried about how the situation will develop in the border countries. Of course, we are concerned that terrorism will be "exported" from Afghanistan to other countries, including our country. Therefore, I think that there are many reasons for concern, and our Church has no reasons to enter into direct contact with the Taliban yet.

At the same time, I would like to remind you that history knows cases when terrorist organizations turned into political parties, when they abandoned the methods of terror. It is enough to recall the so-called Irish Republican Army, which was a terrorist organization, and then turned into a political party. You can also give other examples. Therefore, I would like to hope that those who have now come to power in Afghanistan will abandon the methods of power struggle that they resorted to in the past.

We pray that, despite all that has happened, there will be lasting peace in Afghanistan and in the countries bordering it.

E. Gracheva: We have seen horrific images of the evacuation organized by US soldiers from Kabul airport. We saw footage of the terrorist attack that claimed two hundred lives. The extremists have now taken control of part of the border with Tajikistan, wh ere our 201st military base is located. To what extent do you think our country is in danger of being drawn into a military conflict in Afghanistan?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We have heard the statement of the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey

Viktorovich Lavrov that Russia will fulfill its obligations under the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). I think that this is an exhaustive explanation, which shows what position Russia will take in relation to what is happening now in Afghanistan.

Of course, I very much hope that Russia will not introduce a limited contingent of troops there, as it did under the Soviet Union. I very much hope that our citizens will not give their lives, as Soviet conscripts gave their lives in the late 70s and 80s. But at the same time, Russia must protect its borders, the security of its citizens, and therefore a very strong security system must be created, which will also include countries bordering Afghanistan and Russia. Here, of course, the Collective Security Treaty, I hope, will play a role.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, last week you received the Foreign Ministry's badge of distinction from your colleague, Sergey Lavrov. What does this award mean to you personally? What is your relationship with Sergey Viktorovich? Does it ever happen that you check whether you are on the same page with him on important international issues before communicating with journalists?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Over the long years of his tenure as Minister of Foreign Affairs and my tenure as Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, we have developed a very good, constructive and trusting relationship. When it comes to highly important issues, Sergei Viktorovich communicates directly with His Holiness the Patriarch: they meet in person, discuss the international agenda. And on current issues, I often have to communicate with Sergey Viktorovich or his deputies. It's not so much about checking whether we're "on the same page". The point is that the Church should have an understanding of what is being done on the state line, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should have an understanding of what interests the Church has in the external field.

Whenever I visit foreign countries, I meet with the Ambassadors of the Russian Federation and get information from them about how Orthodox believers live in this country. Very often we discuss the general context of the international situation. All this is important, because although the Church is separate from the state, it has its own agenda and interests, but at the same time we all live in the same world. We can't help but react to the events that are happening.

Therefore, when we meet with Sergey Viktorovich, we usually discuss a very wide range of topics. In this case, we couldn't help but touch on the situation in Afghanistan. We couldn't help but touch on the situation in the Middle East and Africa as a whole, wh ere Christians are being persecuted in different countries with varying degrees of severity. We are grateful to our Foreign Ministry for the fact that the issue of persecution of Christians is now constantly voiced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to our Ministry of Foreign Affairs and personally to Sergey Viktorovich for the, I would say, unique relations that have developed between our departments.

E. Gracheva: The school year has begun. That includes the theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church. I can't help but ask you, as the rector of the Institute of Postgraduate Studies, what can you say about the new set of your students? How do they differ from the previous ones? What can we say about the new educational programs?

Metropolitan HILARION: First, I would like to say that unlike a number of universities, including those that operate within the Church, which complain about the lack of applicants, there is no such shortage at our educational institution. We accepted a very good group of students. I'll be meeting them in a few days. After a whole year of working remotely, we are now going to work full-time. Although, of course, we will continue to strictly observe sanitary measures in order to minimize the risk of contracting a coronavirus infection as much as possible. We have decided to allow full-time education for students who have been vaccinated, and those who have not been vaccinated will be taught remotely.

Secondly, I would like to say that in general, the new academic year starts well for theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church. We hope that the pandemic will subside and that we will be able to teach our students and postgraduates full-time.

We thank the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation for its very constructive approach to the subject of theology, to teaching theology not only at religious educational institutions, but also at secular educational institutions. As the Chairman of the Scientific and Educational Theological Association, which now unites 70 universities, I can say that the teaching of theology is developing very dynamically.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, in conclusion, let us speak a little bit about Ukraine. Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople had recently visited this country. His visit ostentatiously received the status of a state visit. He met with President Vladimir Zelensky, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada. Together with the "head of the new autocephalous church", he performed a divine service. However, there were other processes on the streets in parallel with this. Thousands of believers openly opposed the visit of this Church hierarch. What is really happening to believers in Ukraine right now? Aren't ordinary Ukrainians tired of the topic of Church schism?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In connection with this visit, I would like to recall the words from the Gospel of John: "Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep." (John 10: 1-2).

Patriarch Bartholomew arrived in a country wh ere most Orthodox believers do not recognize him as their pastor. He literally had to go through the back door to the Verkhovna Rada, because there was a crowd of believers who do not recognize him as their pastor and protested against his visit.

This visit was made at the invitation of the state authorities and at the invitation of schismatics. But the majority of Orthodox believers not only ignored this visit, but also very clearly showed that Patriarch Bartholomew is not a pastor for them.

All this shows that Patriarch Bartholomew made a mistake in 2018 that he does not want to repent of. Now Patriarch Bartholomew, demonstrating an extraordinary wishful thinking, comes to a group of schismatics and says: here is the real Church, and there [in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church] are just some titular bishops. The Church, which has more than 12,000 parishes, more than 250 monasteries, more than 100 bishops and millions of believers, is simply ignored by Patriarch Bartholomew, because he pretends that it does not exist. This is an absurd and shameful situation. In this situation, only one person is guilty – Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

As the saying goes," By their fruits you will know them " (Mt 7: 16). This shameful visit of Patriarch Bartholomew to Ukraine was a demonstration for the whole world of the fruits of the deeds he had committed.

E. Gracheva: Thank you so much 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: I would like to ask you for a clarification. It is believed that Jesus redeemed original sin with His sacrifice. However, despite this atonement, people are still born with original sin, and the adoption of Christianity and strict observance of Church canons does not cancel our innate sinfulness. Is that true?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I will try to explain this rather complex and perhaps not always clear point of Christian doctrine by using a medical analogy.

We all want our children to be born healthy. But children, as a rule, inherit a lot from their parents. They inherit from their parents not only positive, but also negative qualities, and this applies to both the human

body and the soul.

For example, we know that if the parents were inclined to be overweight, then the child may also show a tendency to be overweight. If the parents had a predisposition to heart disease, then the child may also have the same predisposition to heart disease.

Moreover, many traits of parents ' character are passed on to their children, and not only through upbringing, but also through genes. These are fairly obvious medical facts.

If we talk about sinfulness, then sinfulness is also transmitted from parents to children. This also applies to the sinful way of life, and some sinful inclinations. There's nothing we can do about it. And it is transmitted not only from our parents, but from grandparents, from generation to generation.

What we can do is constantly work on ourselves. For example, if a person has a tendency to some physical diseases, he goes to the doctor and can apply some preventive measures so that this disease does not develop. The same applies to our spiritual and spiritual constitution. This is why we are given life, so that we can live out all the negative things in ourselves and accumulate the positive things in ourselves. Through the voluntary and conscious refusal to commit sins, we become closer to God. Through confession, we repent for our sins. Through communion, we are cleansed from sinful filth and united with God. All this is a cure for the innate sinfulness, the bad inheritance that we receive from our ancestors and which is called original sin.

In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed us from original sin, but in order for us to fully participate in this redemption, so that this redemption would affect our lives, we must constantly work on ourselves.

Question: Despite the fact that I have been going to church regularly for many years, praying fervently in the church, venerating icons, lighting candles and submitting notes with prayers, I do not participate in the Sacraments – I do not confess or receive communion. Is it true that this behavior is not enough to save my soul? However, I face an insurmountable obstacle to the complex rules of preparation: the long reading of the prayer rule before communion, the canons, the confession itself, and the need to fast. What should I do?

Metropolitan Hilarion:I think that the prayer rule before the Holy Communion is not so long. It is quite possible to read it in half an hour. You don't have to read the canons. But if you have never confessed, you should overcome the fear of confession and go to confession. This is just like a person who, for example, has a toothache and needs to treat a tooth: whether you want it or not, you need to go to the

dentist. And it is necessary to overcome the fear of the dentist, because, although the procedure itself may be unpleasant, but its consequences will be beneficial for the body. The same applies to confession as spiritual healing.

And there is no substitute for communion, because through communion the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Incarnate God Himself, enters into the body, soul, and blood of a person. His Blood becomes our blood and His Flesh becomes our flesh. This is the key to our salvation and eternal life. You can't replace it with anything else: neither candles, nor venerating icons, nor notes.

Question: Tell me, please, whether it is necessary to baptize our children in the church of the Russian Orthodox Church, if they were baptized in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 1996 and 2005 in Ukraine?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The answer is very simple. If it was the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, then, of course, they do not need to be re-baptized. And if it was the schismatic church, then they should be re-baptized, because we do not recognize the "sacraments" of schismatics.

Question: I live alone and suffer unbearably from loneliness. The priest, with whom I shared my feelings and worries, gave me a strange and incomprehensible advice: not to fill my head with various stupid fantasies, but to go to a monastery. These words greatly confused and upset me, because I do not imagine myself a nun, but I dream of loving and being loved, having children. Please tell us how to find a decent man and get married.

Metropolitan Hilarion: There are two questions here, and they are very different. You can only enter a monastery if you have a vocation to monasticism. If you do not have this vocation, then you should not even think about it, and the priest gave you erroneous advice in this case.

But how to find a man is a question that is more difficult for me to answer. I know a lot of cases when people met at church during or after divine services or at some parish classes while reading the Bible together. Unions that come together in this way are very often strong and durable.

I really hope that you can find your love. Go to church more often, and look closely at those male parishioners who participate in the service. Go to catechism classes, Sunday school, and Bible study classes. I hope that you will find your destiny there..

I would like to conclude this episode with the words of the Apostle Paul in the epistle to the Ephesians: "...walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Eph. 5.2).

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

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/87982/