



## **Metropolitan Hilarion: working at an ecclesiastical institution is also a service to the Church**



*On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 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 from 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:** Vladyka, the State Duma elections are only a week away. Only a third of Russians, according to a recent Russian Public Opinion Research Center poll, consider the debate an important stage in the preparation of the State Duma elections. We are talking about TV debates. More than half of respondents (58%) said that the debate is nothing more than a show. How do you feel about political debates? Do you watch them?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** As a rule, I don't watch political debates, firstly, because I don't have enough time, and secondly, because people often shout at debates, shout over each other, and sometimes it's not even clear what they are talking about. I think that the political process, of course, involves both: debates as such and the fact that the politicians should participate in these debates, but, first of all, each

person who goes to vote should determine for himself which of the political leaders, which of the political parties he likes, and make his choice in accordance with the voice of his conscience.

We in the Russian Orthodox Church never participate directly in the political struggle. We never tell our believers: vote for one party or another. The only thing we try to remind everyone of is that we, as the Church, are interested in stability in our state, in preserving lasting civil, inter-confessional and inter-ethnic peace. Therefore, we will support the political force that makes its efforts to ensure that this peace is preserved and strengthened. If there are several such political forces, we will support them all.

**E. Gracheva:** Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke to students in Volgograd and said that "the Russian Orthodox Church is under serious pressure from the United States of America, whose goal is to shake the unity of Orthodox Churches." In your opinion, Vladyka, does the Russian Orthodox Church have any mechanisms in place today to stop this interference of foreign states that Sergey Lavrov is talking about?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Let's take a look at what is happening in the world and at the fruits of the United States' foreign policy activities. Very often, unfortunately, the well-known principle known as "divide and conquer" is applied in American politics, that is, the stake is made on dividing people, on deepening the conflict. We can see it in the Middle East and we see it in Ukraine.

The Russian Orthodox Church is a power that is called by its very nature to consolidate and unite people, including those who live in various countries. This Church is seen as a geopolitical opponent for the United States, whether we like it or not. As a matter of fact, it is precisely this order - to dismember the Russian Church - that was executed by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople when he invaded Ukraine. He has carried out this order to the fullest.

Today, the Ukrainian society is divided not only on the grounds of language, not only on the grounds of political orientation, but also on religious grounds. Patriarch Bartholomew promised to heal the schism, but instead of healing the schism, it deepened. He promised to unite Orthodox believers, but instead of unification, there was further division and polarization. Using the principle of "dividing and conquering", it is impossible to achieve either unification or consolidation. The Russian Orthodox Church plays a consolidating role throughout the post-Soviet space. Even in situations where there are conflicts between states, the Church continues to unite people. That is why it is a thorn in the side of those politicians who use the principle of "dividing and conquering".

How does the Church respond to this? It responds to this as it has always responded: it continues to fulfill its saving mission, continues to bring the word of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world, and continues to unite people. It continues to remind them of love, of faith, that it is impossible to build a lasting civil

peace based on division, and most importantly, it reminds them that in addition to material values, there are also spiritual values in a person's life. It opens up to each person a dimension in life that is revealed only through communion with God.

**E. Gracheva:** Meanwhile, the world's media continue to discuss the incoming news from Afghanistan. Every hour, we hear of reports of terrorist attacks, we hear about mass evacuation of the population, however, what went almost unnoticed was the news about one of the first decisions of the Taliban\* (\*The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation) after coming to power, namely, they banned music, declared that it was forbidden in Islam. A question for you, as both: a theologian and musician: what could be the answer to this?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I think the question should be addressed to our Islamic theologians. I don't think music is forbidden in Islam as such. It may be banned in radical Islam, but I hope that our Muslim leaders will be able to clarify this issue. As far as I know, music has never been banned in Russian Islam.

And to answer your question as a musician, I think that forbidding people to listen to music is the same as forbidding them to drink water. You can probably do without water, you can teach people to drink something else instead of water and thereby maintain the vitality of the body, but music is such a natural and integral part of human existence that it is difficult for me to imagine how a person can live without music at all. Of course, people have very different musical tastes: some listen to classical music, others – pop, others-rap, but one way or another, it is difficult for people to do without music. This is a very important part of a person's life.

It seems to me that the task of religion in general is not to impoverish a person's life, but to enrich it. I do not undertake to speak about Islam, because, again, let our Muslim brothers tell us about it. But if we talk, for example, about Christianity, we can see what a colossal influence Christianity has had on the development of culture. Not only for the development of human morality and spirituality, but also for the development of culture. This includes painting, architecture, poetry, literature, and music. Christianity gave a huge boost to the development of human culture. And to this day, we still enjoy the fruits of what was created on the basis of Christian culture. So, of course, I am very sorry for those people who, living in Afghanistan, will be deprived of the opportunity to listen to music. But, unfortunately, this is not the worst thing that can be feared in connection with the coming to power of the Taliban\* (\*The Taliban is a terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation).

**E. Gracheva:** Meanwhile, in the European Union, the EU has announced coronavirus vaccination for

79% of the adult population. In other words, it announced full vaccination. In fact, this means the abolition of all restrictions on travel within the European Union. Our Sputnik vaccine is still not recognized there. Many Russians still take crooked routes, but this summer they made their way to European resorts. Do you believe that our Sputnik will soon be officially recognized, or do you still see it as a political decision to delay the recognition of our vaccine for so long?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The fact that the European Union does not recognize the Russian vaccine is caused solely by the political situation and has nothing to do with reality. I think this is due to the fact that artificial obstacles are being created at all levels in the EU countries for interaction with Russia, so that Russian citizens couldn't come to the EU countries. If there is a recognition of the Russian vaccine in the West, it will happen simultaneously or almost simultaneously with the recognition of Western vaccines in Russia, because most likely this will be a mutually beneficial and mutually acceptable political decision. But if we talk about vaccination in general, I think that 70% is a very good indicator, which should lead to the fact that in Western countries the pandemic will decline and sooner or later stop. I think that when we reach the same level, it will decline.

I often hear from our parishioners: when will all this end? I think that the answer to this question can be given by our epidemiologists, our health authorities, and they are now speaking with one voice: this will all end or decline when 70 percent or more of the population becomes firmly immune to the coronavirus. And immunity is primarily due to vaccinations. We are still far from this level, so we can foresee that the pandemic will continue in our country.

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, in conclusion, I would like to ask you to comment on one of the capital's news items. In the subway, a man in the vestments of a priest begged for alms from passengers, and those who refused to give him money, he filthily insulted. Of course, it was captured on video, distributed on social networks. Now this is a viral story. Does the Church react to such impostors in any way? How to distinguish a true priest from a false one? Do I need to report them to the police, for example?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I think that such people can and should be reported to the police, and it is very easy to distinguish a true priest from a false one. There are words of the Lord Jesus Christ: "By their fruits you will know them" (Mt 7: 16). Real priests do not sit and ask for alms. They go about their priestly business. They get rewarded for it. But all sorts of impostors who put on priestly vestments, crosses, while not having ordained to holy orders can of course perform all sorts of similar acts. They can ask for alms. There are even cases when false priests offer to perform certain sacred rites, for example, to bury the deceased or to consecrate a car. Here, of course, Orthodox believers need to be very careful. You should always contact parishes first. Not some obscure institutions and structures, but parishes of the Church with authentic priests.

**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 the questions of viewers received on the website of the program The Church and the World.*

**Question:** The Gospel of Matthew contains two phrases: "when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Mt 6.6) and "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven." (Mt 10.32-33). What must I do in this situation: should I openly tell people around me about God or, perhaps, I need to practice my faith secretly?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The Lord Jesus Christ is talking about two different things here. In the first case, it says that prayer should not be demonstrative and ostentatious, as was the case in the practice of the Pharisees, who stopped in the streets and began to pray so that people would praise them. We don't have to do anything ostentatious. Not only should we not show off our prayers, but we should also not give alms in a such a demonstrative way. This is what Christ says: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt 6.3), because if you receive the reward of men, if you receive their praise, you will deprive yourself of the reward of God.

In the second sentence you quoted, the Lord speaks of a public confession of faith in Him. This is what the Church has always called for. We are saying that the Lord Jesus Christ created the Church not only for "home use". There are, of course, situations where people must keep their Christian faith secret in order to save their lives. As, for example, in Soviet times, many people believed secretly: they went to church, but this was not advertised and it was hidden in every possible way. Or, as is now the case in some Muslim countries, Christians have to hide their faith. But in our country, there is no need to hide your faith, and you need to speak to non-believers and people with little faith if they are ready to hear you. Here you must feel for yourself whether a person wants to hear a word about faith from you or not. If he doesn't want to, then don't tell him. And if you feel that they're ready to hear you, then speak up.

**Question:** I have been interested in Christianity for several years, and I read books about Orthodoxy, including yours. I have an interest in Orthodoxy, and I try to keep the commandments as much as possible, but I can't go any further than that. I feel embarrassed to pray, even though I know it shouldn't be like this. It is not the prayer itself that causes embarrassment, but rather the inability to pray. I want to become a believer, but I feel that there is no real faith yet. What should I do in this situation?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It seems to me that without prayer, faith cannot be complete, because prayer is communion with God. In order to communicate with God, you do not need to learn something or be able to do something. Everything that is needed will come by itself. When you communicate with an interesting person, you do not ask yourself the question: how to communicate with them, what to ask. You start asking questions and get answers. You can communicate with God in the same way. It is absolutely not necessary to know the Church Slavonic language or any special rules to communicate with God. Just start speaking to God in your own words. In the shortest possible way, pray to Him and ask for His help.

And in order to learn how to pray, there are very simple manuals. They are called the "Orthodox Prayer Books" and contain those prayers that were composed in ancient times by saints. If you learn to read these prayers not just mechanically and without understanding the meaning, but by putting your own thoughts and feelings into their content, then gradually through such reading you will learn to pray. Prayer is the foundation of spiritual life, because through prayer we have a direct, living connection with God. Through prayer, we ask Him questions and get answers from Him.

**Question:** Jesus Christ said that anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. However, our Church does allow people to remarry. Why?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Our Church does not always allow people to remarry. Only under certain conditions. Namely – in the event of death of one of the spouses or in the event that one of the parties in the broken marriage turns out to be innocent of this breakup. In this case, a person can get the right to a second marriage and a wedding. And, in exceptional cases, for a third marriage.

**Question:** I don't know what to do with the Orthodox magazines and newspapers that I have been buying in the church shop for many years. I don't dare just throw them in the rubbish container. What should I do?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I recommend that you get a shredder – this is a device that cuts paper. I use it regularly for my business correspondence.

**Question:** You have repeatedly told us about the interesting and complex work carried out by the Department for External Church Relations that you lead. What qualities should an applicant have for a job at this Department? What kind of education should I have, and what foreign languages should I

speak?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** First of all, it requires ecclesiastical awareness. We do not employ non-church people, because a person who works at a Church institution must be devoted to the Church, perceive their work not just as a job, but as a service to the Church.

In addition, since we are mainly engaged in international activities, knowledge of foreign languages is really required here in most cases. I mostly mean English, which is now a universal language for communication. For some areas, these are other languages, such as Greek for communicating with a number of Orthodox Churches, and Italian for communicating with the Catholic Church. Of course, when we hire an employee, we study their biography, look at what languages they speak, and offer them to work in the direction in which they can bring the greatest benefit in accordance with their interests and competencies.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul in the epistle to the Hebrews: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11.6).

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

*DECR Communication Service*

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