



## **Metropolitan Hilarion: the two largest Christian Churches must cooperate - this is the imperative of the times**



*On December 25th, 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 other day you were at the Vatican, where you met with Pope Francis, in fact you have just returned from there. Earlier, Pope Francis said that he did not rule out a possibility that he could come to Moscow very soon, he even called Patriarch Kirill his brother in an interview with journalists. “You don't need protocols to have a dialogue with your brother. A brother is a brother”- he said. Does Patriarch Kirill treat Pope Francis in the same way - as a brother?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Patriarch Kirill met with Pope Francis in 2016. I was present at that meeting, it lasted more than two hours. I think, it really showed a brotherly fellowship. There was no talk about rapprochement, about unification, as many now suspect that secret negotiations are underway. No secret negotiations are being held, no unification is planned, but the fact that the two largest Christian Churches should interact is now quite obvious. The main topic of the meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill in Havana was the situation of Christians in the Middle East. Unfortunately, this situation remains very difficult. In a number of countries in the Middle East, Christianity not only declined, but actually ceased to exist. This is a tragic situation for millions of Christians. The joint efforts of the two largest Christian Churches aimed to alleviate their situation is the imperative of the times.

**E. Gracheva:** Is it worth waiting for the next meeting between Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** We have talked about this, preparations for such a meeting are underway. When all the details regarding the time and place of the meeting have been agreed, we will announce it. It is too early to announce this now.

**E. Gracheva:** It was not long ago that we looked back at the difficult year 2020 and everything that it brought: a pandemic, human losses, a heavy load on our medical system. It seems to me that 2021 was not very eventful for the Russian Orthodox Church? Perhaps, I'm wrong? What are your feelings about this?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** This year was not rich in terms of mass events, since they were canceled by the sanitary authorities. However, we were able to commemorate Saint Alexander Nevsky, whose 800th birthday was celebrated by the Russian Orthodox Church throughout the year. We held celebrations in September in St. Petersburg. In December, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill completed the year of memory of Alexander Nevsky with a solemn divine service at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. In addition, we prayerfully and privately celebrated the 75th anniversary of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. The main celebrations on this occasion have been postponed to 2022 and will take place in May, if the epidemic situation allows it.

For the Church, the year was not easy in the sense that many people, especially representatives of the older generation (and this, let's say frankly, is our main demographic), were deprived of the opportunity to participate in divine services. We tried to do a lot for them: the priests came to the house of the elderly, listened to confessions and distributed Communion.

In addition, we tried to actively develop the broadcast of divine services on the Internet, through the Spas TV channel and other media, so that people would not be cut off from the Church, even though they cannot physically come to services.

We have also mastered the technologies of remote communication at the level of the highest church leadership: this year, for the first time in our history, we held a meeting of the Holy Synod in an online format. Many of the meetings that needed to be held were organized online. I think that this method of communication will be in demand in the future.

**E. Gracheva:** In our country, towards the end of the year, we remember important events. December 25 marks exactly 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is clear that this did not happen overnight, the prerequisites were there earlier, but it was on December 25 that the flag of the Soviet Union was lowered on the building of the Senate Palace of the Moscow Kremlin. The current President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, spoke about these events in an interview. He said: "I have often heard criticism in my address that I lament the collapse of the Soviet Union. First, and most importantly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 25 million Russian people ended up living abroad in one night, this is really one of the biggest catastrophes of the 20th century." Vladyka, do you consider

the collapse of the Soviet Union one of the biggest catastrophes of the 20th century?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** His Holiness Patriarch Kirill also said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a disaster. Indeed, for millions of people it had become a disaster, primarily for the Russian people who had found themselves outside their Fatherland. We see that for thirty years there has been a gradual and rather massive exodus of Russian people from neighboring states that were once part of a single state. This is a great tragedy for people and families.

If we talk about the collapse of the Soviet Union, then, like many believers, my memories of the Soviet Union are connected, among other things, with the fact that atheism was implanted by the state authorities in Soviet times. I believe that this was not just a mistake of the Soviet regime, but a crime against the Russian people.

From my point of view, the collapse of the Russian Empire was the real tragedy that predetermined all other tragedies of the 20th century for our state. The Russian Empire was the state where many peoples lived in peace and harmony. Russia was at the peak of its economic development, was one of the fastest growing countries in the world. All this was finished when the Bolsheviks came to power. We know very well what followed this: the revolution, the Red Terror, the Great Terror, mass repressions, dispossession, decossackization, persecution of the Church and many other calamities that befell our people.

**E. Gracheva:** Everyone is now busy making forecasts for 2022. Danish Saxo Bank made a list of interesting "outrageous predictions". According to the bank, there are ten of them. Among the main phobias for 2022, especially those of the Danes, are: the likelihood of a new round of the Cold War, a space race (hypersound and space are in the spotlight here); young people may leave the Facebook platform to protest the dissemination of personal data. Also, Saxo Bank does not exclude a constitutional crisis after the midterm elections in the United States, and a key breakthrough in biomedicine, which in the long term will extend the reproductive age of mankind and the total life expectancy up to 25 years. Vladyka, what forecast would you give for the next year? What could be the next year's "shocking predictions" in your opinion?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It seems to me that the most dangerous thing that could be expected and that should be avoided by all means is another round of the arms race, confrontation and escalation of the conflict between the nuclear superpowers. If this can be avoided, if it is possible to maintain stability throughout the world and the stable development of mankind, then this will already be a wonderful result of the next year.

If we talk about how young people will react to the actions of various platforms, then, as far as I can judge, observing what is happening in the media sphere, young people get carried away with one platform for some time, then they switch to another platform. I think that the peak of interest in Facebook is really in the past. If there is no mass exodus of young people from Facebook, then, probably, the number of people who use this social network will still gradually decrease. They will move to some other platform.

If we talk about life expectancy, then we welcome the achievements of medicine aimed at increasing the life expectancy of people, but, on the other hand, as a Church, we always remind that the main thing is not the number of years lived, but the quality of life. Therefore, making sure that people are healthy, feel good, and live a full life is the common task of both the state and the Church.

As for medical technologies, it must be understood that if people's lives get artificially prolonged at once for, say, 25 or 30 years, as this bank predicts, this could lead to a very serious economic crisis. Therefore, most likely, even if some miraculous methods of prolonging life for such a long period are found, they will be introduced gradually.

**E. Gracheva:** Vladyka, quite a long holidays period awaits us now. Traditionally, at this time, there is a growing interest in watching movies and TV series on online platforms. There is news related to this: the Ministry of Internal Affairs will evaluate Netflix for compliance with the gay propaganda law. Earlier, Ombudswoman Olga Baranets complained that now there is a lot of content with LGBT propaganda and a 16+ mark, although such series should be labeled differently. Do you have a Netflix subscription? What movies and TV shows have you watched on Netflix?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** I have a Netflix subscription. When I have free time, I use this service to watch movies and TV shows. From what I remember, I the film "Two Popes" really

stands out: it was made with great respect for the Catholic Church and beautifully filmed, I watched it with pleasure. In addition, I have watched some episodes of the TV series "The Crown", dedicated to the British royal family. It is also very well filmed. It was interesting to me, because I know some of the characters personally, starting from Queen Elizabeth, Princes Philip and Charles, Princess Margaret and a number of other people. Therefore, I watched this series with interest.

As for LGBT content on Netflix, it really does exist there, and in series that are aimed at young people. For example, there is a TV series "Elite", which speaks about the life of a certain elite school in Spain, and there is a lot of other similar content.

**E. Gracheva:** I see, Vladyka, that you are watching all the new items that come out. I have long wanted to ask if you had any desire to become a co-author of a series about the Russian Orthodox Church?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It would be interesting to create a series about the life of the Russian Orthodox Church, because the life of the Church remains a closed or even taboo topic for many. Many do not know how priests live and what do they do. Of course, I would prefer that the series about the life of the Russian Orthodox Church would not concern the Patriarch, members of the Holy Synod, or in general what is called the official Church, but that the real life of a priest would be shown in it - very little is written and said about this, little is known.

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

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

*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:** Why isn't there a religious political party in the Russian Federation that would represent the interests of our Church and all Orthodox believers?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** For the reason that the Church does not bless the creation of a separate party that would represent its interests. The Church is open to people of different political orientations. When we annually hold the World Russian People's Council under the auspices of the Patriarch and under his chairmanship, the leaders and representatives of political parties that are present in the State Duma, including, by the way, the Communist Party, speak there.

We believe that the interests of the Church are the interests of the people, therefore we do not believe that any one political party should represent our interests. If this happens, then we will effectively exclude representatives of other political parties from the Church, and we do not want to do this. The Church is open to everyone. Its interests, as well as the interests of the people, can be represented by any political party.

**Question:** St. John the Evangelist says the following: " If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." (John 11:48). How is this to be understood in a historical context? After all, Judea was already under the rule of the Roman Empire.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** It is one thing to be under power, and another thing to be under occupation. The Romans eventually came in 70 AD. They destroyed Jerusalem, captured all of Judea. Many Jews were forced to leave their country. This is what the high priests feared when they uttered the phrase you quoted.

**Question:** I have not a question, but rather a desire to share my observations with you. I sometimes go to church to light a candle for the repose of someone's soul, to make a donation. At the same time, I hear sermons in some language with a big number of archaic terms, definitely not from the modern Russian language. The atmosphere in churches is gloomy. There is no feeling that you have come into contact with a light that gives hope and

confidence. Sorry, but this is just my opinion. Perhaps practicing believers like the fact that the Russian Church lives in the 18th century.

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** Of course, the Church does not live in the 18th century, but in the 21st century. The Church lives the same life as the entire world around it. Members of the Church are not followers of outdated teachings, but people who live in the world, work alongside you in the same jobs, and are modern people.

Sermons in the Church are delivered in a modern language, but the divine service is really performed in an old language - Church Slavonic, which is far from understandable to everyone, and especially to people who, like you, come to church only to light a candle. If you went to church all the time and studied the literature on the Orthodox service, you would see that it is filled with deep meaning, and most importantly, you would see the beauty of the Orthodox worship. At the moment, it seems, it is not revealed at all to you.

If you invite a person who, from childhood, only listened to pop music or rap, to a classical music concert, to Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 or Brahms's Symphony No. 4, then, probably, such a person would be very bored and think that all this was interesting only in the 19th century. In fact, a lot depends on your spiritual and aesthetic education and self-education. If you want to discover the beauty of Orthodox divine services, then there are all the possibilities for this now.

**Question:** Some of my acquaintances, in order to find out the answer to a specific everyday question, resort to this practice: they spontaneously open the Gospel on any page and, based on what they have read, make up their mind for further actions. Is such behaviour correct? Is it acceptable?

**Metropolitan Hilarion:** The man who lived in your city of St. Petersburg in the 19th century, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, had the same habit. He opened the Gospel in a random place, read it and then made his own conclusions. But this was not a magical practice, he did not try to find answers to all life questions in this way. He just opened the Gospel and looked to see if there was anything there that would give him some clue. In many cases, the Lord spoke to him through a specific text about those matters which he needed to know. So there



is nothing wrong or vicious in this practice.

Every time we come into contact with the Gospel, open this Holy Book, we can learn something from it. One just does not need to treat the Gospel as a talisman and try every time to randomly open it and draw conclusions from it regarding various specific situations. It is much more correct to read the Gospel daily, regularly. Read it, for example, by chapter or by one pericope every day, setting yourself up in this way for the day ahead.

The Lord will always, through the Gospel, suggest what you need to know about yourself, about your loved ones, about God and about the circumstances that you will face. If your mind and heart are filled with the Gospel (and this is exactly what Dostoevsky did: he read the Gospel constantly, never parted with it, it always lay on his table and he not only sometimes opened it in a random place, but also constantly, regularly read it), then in this case you will constantly receive various tips from God through the Gospel, which will greatly help you in your daily life.

I would like to end this episode with the words with which the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel of Mark, began His sermon: "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1.14).

I wish you all the best. Take care of yourself, take care of your loved ones and may the upcoming year 2022 be good, happy and blessed for all of us.

May God keep you all.

*DECR Communication Service*