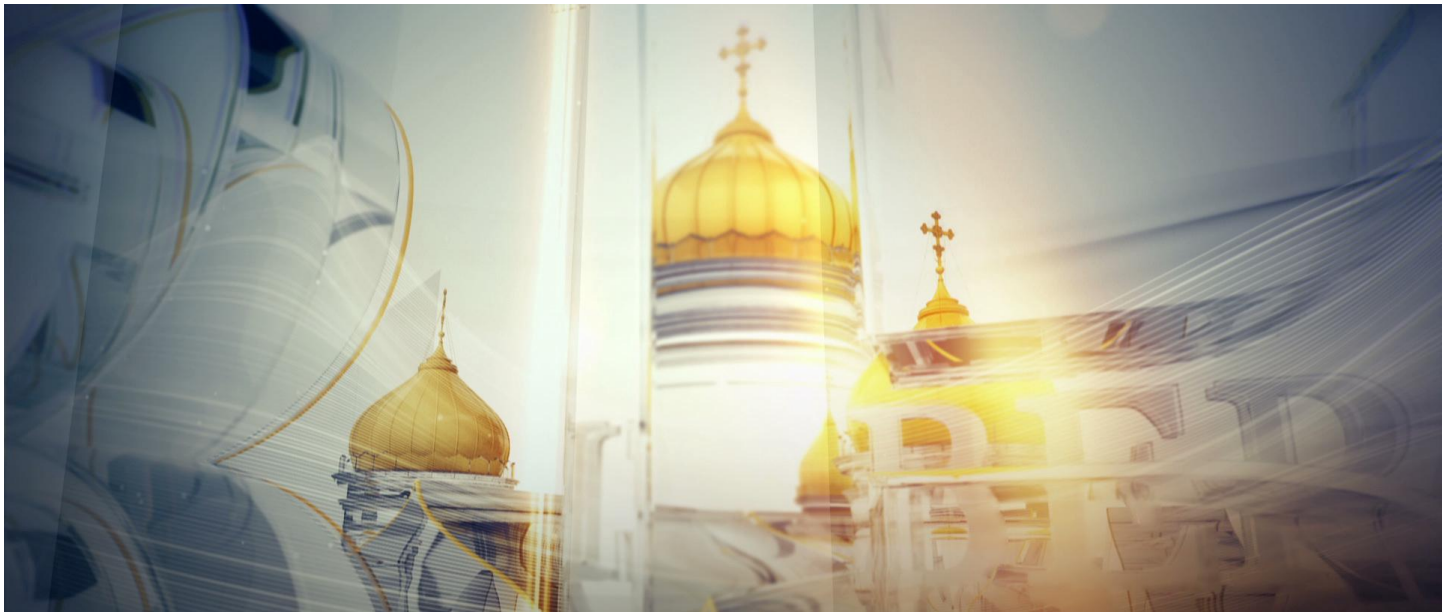
DECR Chairman: it is important for the representatives of largest Christian Churches to communicate with each other in this critical moment



On March 27, 2022, in the program “The Church and the World” on the channel “Russia 24”, the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, answered questions fr om the host Ekaterina Gracheva and viewers.

E. Gracheva: Hello! This is the program "Church and the World" on the TV channel "Russia 24". Every weekend here we address questions to the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Hello, Vladyka!

Metropolitan Hilarion: Hello , Catherine! Hello dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: The main news for the Russian Orthodox Church this week is the session of the Holy Synod held on March 24. Are you satisfied with how representative it was? Did everyone get to it? Most importantly, what decisions were made there?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We now live in such conditions when not all members of the Synod can come to Moscow. Therefore, for this meeting, the possibility of remote participation was envisaged and I think, the subsequent ones will also operate in the same way. One of the solutions that we proposed for the future Council of Bishops is for the remote participation to be an option.

You remember that the coronavirus pandemic lasted for two years, and people could not come because of this. Now they can't come because of traffic restrictions. Our Church is large, multinational, we have dioceses in Ukraine, and in Belarus, and in the Baltic States, and in Central Asia, and in the far abroad. Of course, it is impossible to guarantee that now, under the current circumstances, everyone will be able to come to the Council of Bishops. Therefore, at a meeting of the Synod, we discussed this topic and came to an understanding that it is necessary to prescribe, including in the Charter of the Russian Orthodox Church, the rules for remote participation in the event that a person cannot arrive in person. Such rules will be drawn up and appropriate clarifications will be included in the Charter of the Russian Orthodox Church.

E. Gracheva: Did the Synod raise the issue of Ukraine, assistance to refugees?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course, in the current situation, we could not ignore the topic of Ukraine, primarily in its humanitarian aspect. We talked about how to intensify work to help refugees, because refugees arrive both in the Russian Federation and in other countries. They receive assistance, including with the participation of the Church. The Synodal Department for Charity and Social Service provides help on a daily basis: fundraisers, medicine, food, essentials have been announced. All this is collected centrally and then delivered to the republics of Donbass and to various dioceses on the territory of Ukraine.

It must be said that this humanitarian aspect of the crisis is taken very seriously by the Church, because the Church, first of all, cares about the well-being of people, about helping them. This applies not only to spiritual assistance, but in those cases wh ere necessary - material assistance. Many dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia are involved in collecting aid for refugees. Many provide shelter to refugees, including in monasteries and churches. Wherever it is possible to accommodate refugees, they are given asylum.

Of course, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is doing a great job of helping refugees on the territory of Ukraine. For those refugees who find themselves in European countries, assistance is provided by the Local Orthodox Churches, in particular, the Polish Church and the Romanian Church.

E. Gracheva: On March 25, Pope Francis performed (as it is officially called) the solemn act of consecrating Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary. What does this act actually mean? How did the Russian Orthodox Church react to it?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This is an event that matters, first of all, for the Catholic Church, where there is a tradition dating back to the Fatima Appearance of the Mother of God. According to the testimonies of three children, of whom two died, and one survived and lived a long life, the Mother of God appeared to them and gave them various instructions, which were later written down by this surviving girl. She became a nun, her name was Sister Lucia. One of the instructions that were received, according to Sister Lucia, fr om the Virgin Mary was that Russia should be consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary. Such acts of solemn consecration have already been undertaken by former Roman pontiffs, notably by Pope John Paul II .

Now, in the context of the current crisis, the conflict in Ukraine, many episcopal conferences of the Catholic Church have appealed to the Pope to resume this act of consecration of the whole world, including Russia and Ukraine, to the Virgin Mary.

Something similar is happening in the Orthodox Church, because not so long ago, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed the entire flock of the Russian Orthodox Church with a call to read daily a prayer canon to the Most Holy Theotokos, adding to it a prayer for the restoration of peace in Ukraine, that is, Catholic believers in their own way , and Orthodox believers in their own way turn to the One whom our great poet Lermontov called "the warm Intercessor of the cold world." People turn their prayers to Her in the hope that peace will be restored, that life will be able to return to normal again. Such prayers are offered both in Russia and Ukraine.

E. Gracheva: Meanwhile , the other day there was a meeting, negotiations between Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis: for the first time in history, they spoke online, remotely. I don't remember precedents for this. What were these negotiations about? Did you attend them?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I attended them and, in a sense, prepared these negotiations. They, of course, were also devoted to the topic of Ukraine, because the Pope has repeatedly spoken out on this topic recently, and the Patriarch has spoken out on this topic, too. It was very important for the representatives of the largest Christian Churches to communicate with each other precisely at this critical moment.

You know that a meeting is being prepared between the Pope and the Patriarch, which I hope will take place during this year. This will be a personal meeting. But since events are developing very rapidly, it was necessary, without waiting for this meeting, for the two Primates to communicate with each other and discuss what is happening.

First of all, of course, the heads of Churches stressed that every effort must be made to resolve disagreements peacefully. For relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, such negotiations, such personal meetings, albeit in a remote format, are very important. And the fact that the remote format was chosen is again due to the circumstances of the present time and the urgency of the negotiations that were held.

E. Gracheva: There were also consultations, international negotiations, let's call them that, between Patriarch Kirill and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Did they also talk about Ukraine or did they raise some other topics?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We also talked about Ukraine, and it was also a very important meeting, because the Patriarch and the Archbishop of Canterbury met in person during the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to the UK, but that was already many years ago. They then established a very good personal relationship, which was maintained through correspondence.

But in the current conditions, of course, it was very important that the head of the Russian Orthodox Church and the head of the Anglican Communion would talk about what is happening. It must be said that the

Anglican Church in Great Britain has the status of a state Church, just as the Russian Church in the post-Petrine period once had the status of a state Church in the Russian Empire and the emperor was considered the head of the Church, but there was no Patriarch at all, and the Holy Synod acted as if under the emperor. Something similar still exists in Great Britain, that is, there the Church of England has a state status, the Archbishop of Canterbury and a number of other bishops sit in the House of Lords and can directly influence political processes.

The Archbishop of Canterbury not only heads the Church of England, but also the so-called Anglican Communion, that is, the community of Anglican Churches in different countries of the world. First of all, these are Churches located in the former colonies of Great Britain, in Africa and other parts of the world, but they are also parishes scattered all over the world.

Why are these meetings important now? Because we have found ourselves in two completely different information spaces. You remember that in recent weeks Russian TV channels have been shut down in the West, and in response, Western media have been shut down in Russia. We now live in two completely different information spaces, that is, for example, here in Russia we receive one information, and those who are in the West, whether it be the Pope of Rome or the Archbishop of Canterbury, receive completely different information. In practice, these two information fields do not touch each other.

Therefore, such dialogues, including with the help of remote communication means, are, first of all, an opportunity to exchange information. Very often, interlocutors learn from each other what they, due to this isolation between the two worlds, cannot otherwise learn.

In the second part of the program, Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions from viewers, received on the website of the Church and the World program.

Question: I have been donating blood for free for many years, and now I have begun preparations for receiving the title of Honorary Donor of Russia, which entitles me to annual cash payments and a number of benefits. But I have doubts about the expediency of obtaining such a title. Donation, it seems to me, is a good deed, as well as a secret one. Those who get my blood don't know wh ere it comes fr om. And if I receive a reward for this here, on earth, then I should not expect anything from the Lord?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course, donation is a very good deed. If rewards, some kind of compensation are given for this, then this should not be refused. Yes, the Lord said “when you do alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” and “do not blow your trumpet” (see Matt. 6.2-3), but this was said about those people who do good deeds for show. In this case, this is not the case. You donate blood because you want to help people. And if the state in response wants to mark you with something, then this is absolutely not necessary to refuse.

Question: Hello, Vladyka Hilarion! Can I use not an Orthodox Bible, but a Protestant one? They contain clear texts in Russian. How accurate are the texts of Protestant editions?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The question here is not about the edition, but about the translation that you use. If this is a Synodal translation of the Bible, but published by Protestants, then this Bible is no different from the Bible published by the Moscow Patriarchate, except that it does not contain the so-called "non-canonical books" - these are the books of the Old Testament that were not included in the Jewish canon, but which are included in the Slavic Bible, in the Greek, in the Latin and in the Russian Bible.

If some other translation is used in this edition, then here I cannot give you any guarantees of accuracy and reliability, because translations are now very different. Sometimes there are translations that just don't match the text. There are even blasphemous translations. Therefore, first of all, you need to look at what kind of translation are you using.

Until now, the most reliable and approved translation is the so-called Synodal Translation, which was made under the guidance of the Holy Synod throughout almost the entire 19th century. This is a translation used by many Russian Protestant denominations, but not all.

Question: In the hospital wh ere I work, there is a patient, a baby. During childbirth, the doctor injured him. The kid is actually in a coma from the moment of birth. The brain is silent, no reactions. According to the law, it is necessary to stop resuscitation, with which his parents have agreed. But the doctors refuse to do this: they inject adrenaline to make the heart beat, they keep the baby on a ventilator. Vladyka, I read about the position of the Church on this issue. But don't misunderstand me: I no longer have the strength to see the tears of his parents and the suffering of the little person. Please help with with a piece of advice.

Metropolitan Hilarion: I would like to clarify that the Russian Orthodox Church is against euthanasia, that is, against what is classified a assisted suicide: when a person who is conscious wants to end his suffering or end his life, and with the help of doctors he receives such a dose of lethal drugs that stop his life. The Orthodox Church consistently opposes this.

But the Orthodox Church does not say that it is necessary by artificial means to prolong a person's life at all costs. There are situations when a person actually dies, but with the help of artificial means they continue to support him in a kind of alive state. This only makes sense if there is hope that the person will come out of the coma and be able to return to life. If such hope disappears, then after some time, doctors decide to disconnect him from the equipment that artificially prolongs life.

Question: I have recently started studying the Bible. Of course, this is a very difficult task, requiring some effort to understand. However, when I got to the book of Songs of Solomon, I was very much surprised by the fact that there are erotic scenes in the Bible. In general, the content of this book, as it were, does not fit into the Holy Scriptures, as it seemed to me. Please tell me what this book means for us believers? How should it be understood?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There are very different interpretations of this book. There are symbolic interpretations when, for example, it is said that Christ and the Church are represented under the images of the bride and groom in this book. In the Old Testament tradition, there was such an interpretation that God

and the people of Israel were represented under these images.

However, this book also has a literal meaning. These are really love outpourings of a man and a woman who love each other very much, who are the bride and groom. Indeed, there is that erotic element in this book that confuses some and inspires others.

After all, the Church has never spoken out against marriage, against marital cohabitation, against sexual life within the framework of a marriage union. I never said that such a sex life in itself is sinful. On the contrary, when the sacrament of matrimony is performed, the priest prays that the spouses be granted chastity and the bed would be blameless. Chastity here does not at all mean abstinence from married life. Therefore, like all biblical books, the book of the Song of Solomon can be interpreted both literally and allegorically.

E. Gracheva: Now, a different question from viewers. Is it a sin to watch the news on TV every day during Great Lent?

Metropolitan Hilarion: We must watch the news now to be aware of what is happening. Another thing is that the time of Great Lent is the time when we are called first of all to focus on the inner life, on prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, I think that news can be watched, but in the required amount, so as not to break away from life, and devote most of the time to spiritual life.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, do you use bank cards? Is it possible for an Orthodox person to work in a bank?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course, I use bank cards and I don't see why an Orthodox person cannot work in a bank. I am familiar with a number of bank employees, many of them are Orthodox people.

E. Gracheva: Do monks need and can they go to serve in the army?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Monks do not need and should not go to serve in the army, except in special circumstances. We know from history that among the disciples of St. Sergius of Radonezh there were two schemamonks who participated in the fighting, and they were glorified as saints. They were Alexander Peresvet and Andrey Oslyabya .

E. Gracheva: What is love and how to distinguish it from passion? How not to make a mistake here?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Love is a feeling that persists regardless of external circumstances and has a sacrificial character. Love can come and go. Falling in love or passion may develop into love, firstly, over time, secondly, after two loving people go through some trials together and remain faithful to each other, and thirdly, of course, love is tested by time. This is the secret of marriage. When the bride and groom meet, they are usually young, outwardly attractive to each other, but this external attraction must either pass with time, or it will develop into something completely different: into some kind of inner, emotional, spiritual intimacy. In the Orthodox understanding, a marriage union is exactly the union that is based on lasting, long-term and sacrificial love.

E. Gracheva: What about a person who loves his spouse, has been living with him for a long time, but is overwhelmed by a feeling of love for another person?

Metropolitan Hilarion: If this is a marital union, then any love outside of this union poses a threat to it. Therefore, a person must work on himself in order to simply categorically prevent this from happening.

E. Gracheva: Thank you very much, Vladyka, for answering our questions and those of the viewers.

Metropolitan Hilarion: I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of Jesus Christ from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Matthew 5.7). I wish you all the best and God bless you all.

DECR Communication Service

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