



DECR Chairman: The Macedonian Orthodox Church cannot be equated with Ukrainian schismatics



On May 29th, 2022, on the program "Church and the World" on the channel "Russia 24", Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk answered questions from the presenter Ekaterina Gracheva and viewers.

E. Gracheva : Hello! This is the program "Church and the World" on the TV channel "Russia 24". We are addressing questions to the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Hello, Vladyka!

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

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the pioneers of the USSR in our country, they are going to recreate or, let's say, create a new movement similar to this Soviet movement. What do you think about it? Is there any alternative for the Church to come forward as a replacement for the new pioneer movement?

Metropolitan Hilarion : I have bad memories of the pioneer movement. Firstly, it was not a movement, but coercion: everyone was forced to put on pioneer ties, to join the pioneers. Secondly, it had a pronounced atheistic character, like all Soviet ideology. I do not think that we should revive state atheism, those children's and youth organizations that existed in Soviet times and were built on the imposition of atheistic ideology on children and youth.

As for youth movements in general and movements aimed at uniting children, then, of course, there is such a positive experience, including in modern Russia. Of course, the Church also has such an experience. We have many young people in the Church. This widespread stereotype that only old ladies attend church services does not correspond to our current reality at all.

I can tell from my parish in Ordynka: we have a very active youth movement, about fifty active young people constantly attend church services, participate in various parish events, and regularly gather together on holidays and on Sundays. They meet not only with priests, but also with other interesting people.

Of course, the same can be said about children. Many parishes have Sunday schools for children and camps for kids. What the Church can give is very important for children and youth. Therefore, of course, the Church welcomes the creation of those youth movements and associations that, firstly, have a religious component in themselves, and secondly, educate patriotism in children and youth.

E. Gracheva: Recently, the Patriarchate of Constantinople has recognized the so-called Macedonian Church. It broke away from the Serbian Church back in 1967, that is, it took more than half a century for this recognition to occur. Is it appropriate to compare this with the recognition by Constantinople of the newly created schismatic "Ukrainian Church"? Or are these completely different stories that can not be compared?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This comparison, I think, is not entirely correct, because, firstly, the Macedonian Orthodox Church cannot be put on the same level as the Ukrainian schismatics, who do not have canonical ordinations. This is one of the reasons why we cannot recognize them as legitimate clergy. Secondly, the process of recognition was quite different.

Let me remind you that there was no dialogue between the Ukrainian schismatics and the Russian Orthodox Church. There were some attempts at this dialogue, which were suppressed by the then Ukrainian authorities. In the end, Constantinople unilaterally legitimized the Ukrainian split. Moreover, Constantinople actually tried to delegitimize the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. All this was done against the will of both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church itself. In other words, Constantinople, simply to the detriment of the Russian Orthodox Church and the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, supported the schism.

Here the situation is different: there was already a dialogue between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and

the Serbian Church, from which it separated in 1967. It has already become known that the restoration of Eucharistic communion between the Macedonian Church and the Serbian Church is being prepared. Then Constantinople, in order to recall its supposedly preemptive rights, decided to get ahead of the Serbian Church and announced the recognition of the hierarchy of the Macedonian Church. At the same time, there is one problem: the Greeks are categorically opposed to this Church using the word "Macedonia" in its name, because Macedonia is the name of one of the provinces in Greece. If you remember, there was a very long history regarding the name of the state of North Macedonia, the Greeks did not recognize this name for many years. So, the Patriarch of Constantinople declared that this Church should not use the word "Macedonian" in its name, but should be called the Ohrid Archbishopric.

The most important event that has taken place is not the recognition by Constantinople, but the restoration of communion between the Macedonian Church and the Serbian Church. The Macedonian Church in the status in which it existed before 1967, that is, in the status of broad autonomy within the Serbian Orthodox Church, is now recognized by the Serbian Orthodox Church. Further negotiations about her future, including her possible autocephaly, will take place between the Serbian and Macedonian Orthodox Churches. This is the cardinal difference between the situation with the Ukrainian schismatics and the situation with the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, amid the events in Ukraine, Western companies are winding down or freezing their activities in Russia. Someone, however, is reopening, like OBI construction hypermarkets. They opened before the season. On the basis of the Renault plant, updated Moskvich cars will be produced. They promise that it will be the most modern electric car. McDonalds left Russia, they officially announced this the other day. Are you ready to move around in a new model of Moskvich? Will you have worries about, say, McDonald 's leaving Russia? Did you have any favorite dishes there?

Metropolitan Hilarion: As for Moskvich, I can't say anything until it appears and we try it out.

With regard to McDonald 's , I can say that I have no regrets about his leaving Russia, since I have never used the services of this establishment for at least the last twenty or twenty-five years. Maybe, when I was a student, I sometimes went to McDonald's for the sake of saving money, but it seems to me that the food that was offered is basically not in the category of healthy food: it is poorly absorbed by the body, leads to weight gain. It is no coincidence that in those countries wh ere the culture of fast food is widespread, the main representative of which is McDonald 's, people are usually overweight . I have been to the US many times and have seen many young and middle-aged people there who are obese, which is directly related to the fact that they constantly eat at McDonald 's and other establishments that offer fast food.

Therefore, I am a supporter of healthy eating. This applies not only to homemade food, but also to catering establishments. I hope that Russia will be able to create a worthy alternative to McDonald 's and that healthy food will be offered in those establishments that will appear.

E. Gracheva: Now to the news from the United States of America, home of McDonald's. On May 13, Jen Psaki was replaced by Karine Jean-Pierre as White House press secretary. Jean-Pierre is not the first black female press secretary, but she is the first not even LGBT, but LGBTQ+, to take the post of press secretary. Are you familiar with Karin, with some of her early statements? What do you know about her? What do you expect from this press secretary?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I don't know her, just as I didn't know the previous White House press secretary. To be honest, I don't expect anything good from the new White House press secretary. Moreover, such an appointment is in line with the propaganda of the LGBT community, with which our Church cannot in any way agree. This applies to any country in the world where our Church is present, including the United States of America. We definitely do not welcome the activities of this community. I believe that the appointment of a representative of this community to such public posts once again testifies to the moral degradation of society in those countries where this happens.

E. Gracheva : Vladimir Zelensky spoke remotely at the opening ceremony of the Cannes Film Festival. You are a big movie lover and stay tuned for new pictures. What do you think, should cinema and cinematography be free from politics and is it even possible under modern conditions?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Firstly, I don't consider myself a big movies fan and I can't say that I follow the news, but since I fly a lot, I sometimes watch some new films on the plane. Cinema, probably, cannot be completely free from politics, because one way or another, politicians use various types of art for their own purposes, including (and above all) cinema, because cinema is the most mass art form.

I remember that in Soviet times cinema was used in our country to support the Soviet ideology, including the atheistic one. Now in the West, cinema is being used to uphold the standards that they are trying hard to normalize, in particular to support the LGBT community, and in some cases to attack religion and the Church. You and I in one of the recent broadcasts discussed the latest film by Paul Verhoeven, where the Catholic Church and Catholic female monasticism are depicted in a caricature light. I think that all this refers to a certain ideological struggle that is unfolding, including on the political front, and inevitably finds its reflection in film production.

E. Gracheva: For example, at the Cannes Film Festival this year, the delegation from Russia is not officially present: they were not allowed to participate. Should Russia, Russian directors take part in film festivals if the official delegation is not allowed there? What do you think?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think that one should never knock on a closed door. There are many open doors

left: there are domestic film festivals, and it is necessary to present the latest of our movies there.

E. Gracheva: Vladyka, and now to the questions of this week's viewers. Question: Could Judas Iscariot have escape his act of betrayal through human free will? If so, how then would the prophecy be fulfilled?"

Metropolitan Hilarion: The holy fathers, in particular, St. John of Damascus, who lived in the 8th century, said: God knows everything, but does not predetermine everything. The future is as open to God as the present. When God gives revelation to people, in particular, to the prophets, he lifts a veil before them, closing the events of the future from other people. But this does not mean at all that these events are predetermined, that some person, for example, is born in order to commit some lawless deed.

The classic answer to this question is the book of the prophet Jonah, which is found in the Old Testament. It tells about how God commanded the prophet to go to the city of Nineveh and say that this city would be destroyed by God for his iniquities, and the prophet refused to go, because he knew that God was merciful and if people repent, then the prophecy would not be fulfilled. This is a rather long story about how he refused to fulfill the will of God, refused to fulfill this mission. He got on a ship that was moving in the other direction, a storm broke out and he was thrown into the sea, where he was swallowed by a whale. Finally, God commands him to go to this city and say what the people need to hear. Indeed, people heard the voice of God, repented, declared a three-day fast, mourned over their sins, and God canceled the punishment that had already been announced by Him.

The same thing could have happened to Judas if he had repented, and he could have repented before committing the betrayal, and even after committing it. Not just to repent, that is, to come to the high priests and throw money at them, but to repent before the community against which he sinned, and before the Man against whom he sinned. He could stand at the Cross of Christ. Holy Scriptures would have been fulfilled in any case, because if a traitor was needed, then some other person would be found. In addition, the Lord Jesus Christ consciously went to death and His death could have taken place without Judas: Judas was not a necessary component in this whole story.

E. Gracheva: Question: "I was baptized in 1984. My godparents, due to their age, do not remember my name given at baptism, and give different options. Someone says that they gave the name Inna. Others claim that the name was Nina. What should I do in such a situation?"

Metropolitan Hilarion: I have come across such situations. Usually I advised in such a case to go to the priest and get a blessing to bear this or that name. Then, with this name, approach both Sacraments of confession and communion.

E. Gracheva: Question: “Is it possible to baptize children without the consent of the husband, if he is a Muslim? The kids are familiar with the Bible, attend church services, but dad does not engage in spiritual development, he does not allow them to be baptized. What should I do? I don’t want to leave children without God in their hearts.”

Metropolitan Hilarion: Of course , children can be baptized if you are ready to take responsibility for their Christian upbringing. If this is possible in your family, if you are ready to take on such responsibility, then children can be baptized. Especially if children are drawn to the Church, if they are interested in it, if they themselves want to be Christians. Unfortunately, I do not know what age the children in question are. But, first of all, we always put forward one main condition: if children are to be baptized, then they must then be brought up in the Orthodox faith. They should not be baptized if they will obviously be brought up, for example, in Islam.

E. Gracheva: I know one couple where the reason for the divorce was that the father is an atheist, whereas the mother is Orthodox. She baptized the child without informing her husband. Do you think the desire to baptize a child at any cost is worth sacrificing a family and marriage?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Frankly , I suspect that this was not the reason, but an excuse. You know the difference between an excuse and a reason. Any event can serve as an occasion for something that is already overdue in itself, and for something that has some deeper and more diverse causes. Maybe this family was already on the verge of disintegration, and this event simply put an end to the process that had been going on for a long time. I do not know that.

I do not think that one should sacrifice one's family for the sake of baptism, but, on the other hand, one cannot sacrifice one's faith for the sake of the family. If we are talking about faith, then for the sake of faith, you can sacrifice anything. Therefore, here, I think, each person needs, first of all, to test his conscience, to peer into all the circumstances, and they are very different in each particular family. Just like Christians are different, and Muslims are different. There are Muslims who are tolerant of the fact that members of their families go to church, and there are those who are aggressive about this. All this must also be taken into account.

E. Gracheva: Question: “Once, on the advice of a friend of mine, I visited a *starets* who gave me instructions. At the same time, he called these instructions the will of the Lord. I confess that his words greatly embarrassed, puzzled and even frightened me. My question is: will everything said by this priest necessarily come true and is it possible to beg God for another way, another outcome?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I am very wary of those elders who pass off their statements as the will of God. I've known the elders, whom I consider saints and some of them have been canonized, I wrote a book about them called "Saints of Our Days". There I talk about six elders with whom I personally communicated, whom I personally knew. Four of them are today canonized as saints. I can say that not one of these elders, either in a conversation with me or, as far as I know, in a conversation with other people, insisted that what they said was the will of God.

Genuine elders always respect human freedom. They can give advice, recommendations, but they always leave the final decision to the person himself. Therefore, I don't know what kind of elder we are talking about here, whether this priest was really an elder, but I would advise you to be very careful with those people who say: "I tell you the will of God and either you do as I tell you, or God will punish you." This is an un-Christian approach, and this is not the approach of a true elder.

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

Metropolitan Hilarion : Thank you , Ekaterina.

Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to end today's show with the words of the Apostle Paul from the letter to the Galatians: *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."* (Gal. 6.9).

I wish you all the best and God bless you all!

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