



Metropolitan Hilarion: Events in Ukraine have shown that the structures created by Patriarch Bartholomew are unviable

On July 6, 2019, during the Church and the World talk show broadcast on Saturdays and Sundays by Russia 24 TV channel, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, answered questions from the channel presenter Ekaterina Gracheva.

E.Gracheva: Your Eminence, Filaret Denisenko, who called himself ‘patriarch of Kiev and all Rus’ stated that he was restoring ‘the Kiev Patriarchate’ and that he is altogether disappointed in the idea of ‘Orthodox Church of Ukraine’. What is it – a schism within a schism? What is going on in Ukraine now?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There were attempts to deceive Filaret Denisenko. First, he was deceived by Poroshenko, then by Patriarch Bartholomew and after that by a man who nominated him as ‘primate’ of this new pseudo-church structure which was created with the help of Peter Poroshenko and Patriarch Bartholomew.

‘Tomos’, which was given by the Patriarch of Constantinople, limits the rights of the newly created structure so much that actually it cannot be called autocephalous. And Filaret Denisenko, who still is well-versed in the matters of canon law, now says that it is in no way an autocephalous church; moreover, it is not canonical because it is not recognized by thirteen Local Orthodox Churches. He is the last one who would be expected to utter such words about the canonicity of the structure he himself has begotten...

His discontent with his actual removal from the first place in it has led him, a man who was 90 a few months ago, to stating that he restores the so-called ‘Kiev patriarchate’ and does not recognize the newly created pseudo-church structure – ‘OCU’. The men, who were ‘ordained’ by Denisenko in their time and who now constitute the backbone of ‘the OCU’ have not supported him. Those who have are only two false bishops, but he is still going to create on their basis a new ‘church’, more precisely, to simply re-create what he created earlier and called ‘Kiev patriarchate’. He said, we will consecrate bishops and we will have the real national Ukrainian ‘church’, not some church of Moscow or Constantinople. This is what in fact is going on.

It shows once again how poorly considered was the plan of Patriarch Bartholomew who ‘restored’

Filaret's episcopal rank by giving him a carte blanche to do what he is doing now. But in the outcome, the structure created by Patriarch Bartholomew is not viable, as it has already begun dividing into segments.

E.Gracheva: Your Eminence, let us now move to Russian news. In Russian regions it is suggested that the so-called 'lazy underprovided' people – those who consider themselves poor but have a plot of land that can be sold or square meters of housing that can be rented. Do you think our society is ready to review the criteria of poverty – the criteria which define who is underprivileged and needs support?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I think society is ready not for this but for the state's greater support of the poor. And if a low income is established in a particular family, then it is a sufficient ground for giving aid to this family.

Who will judge whether these underprivileged people are lazy or not? Some experts, connoisseurs in manual work, will come? Most likely, some officials will come and make a formal approach to a concrete situation, as it happens so often. I believe, the realization of such proposals will not increase the state budget but can do damage to people with low income. The task is to see to it that there are much fewer low-income families, rather than to increase their number by depriving them of state support.

Therefore, I think that such initiatives are doomed to failure beforehand.

E.Gracheva: Your Eminence, in the end of June it will be 65 years since the first ever nuclear power plant started working in Obninsk. For those in the world who did not know that there was a catastrophe in Chernobyl it became known through the popular serial which is already included in the list of the 250 best serials of all times and nations. I mean 'Chernobyl' was made by Americans and the British. Even many Russian critics note the soundness of how the Soviet everyday life and the characters and heroes are reflected in the serial.

Why has it happened so that others have made better films about our history? Does it offend you, Your Eminence, that it was not a Russian art director who has made such a serial?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I remember that there were Russian films about Chernobyl, too. Besides, I heard and read much criticism addressed to this new American serial. The criticism stemmed in particular from specialists in nuclear energy, from eyewitnesses of what happened. They pointed in particular to various inaccuracies in the enactment of events. Despite all this, I think the very fact of the appearance of such a serial testifies to the unflagging interest in the theme.

Personally, I could not see this serial. To be more precise, I saw the first 20 minutes of the first episode.

It was on a plane but then the plane began to land and further on I simply had other things to do. Generally, I very rarely have an opportunity for watching any films.

I could not make my own idea about the quality of this serial from the 20 minutes I saw it. But I very well remember the event itself. I remember how information about the explosion in the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant was hushed up for a long time and later some information began to be published about it. Later, as I have mentioned, even a film was made. I remember it; it was very fearful and showed the scale of the tragedy.

It should be understood that though the tragedy happened 30 years ago, its consequences are still there. During one of his visits to Ukraine, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill visited the place of the Chernobyl catastrophe, and we saw a ghost city, Pripyat, in which houses stood with gaping windows, empty rooms in which nobody had lived for already three scores of years. In Belarus, a whole zone has appeared from which people have been resettled so that they may not suffer from radioactive infection.

The Chernobyl catastrophe is a very great tragedy based, most probably, on human factor. At least I remember how five years ago I had a guest in my talk show, Major-General Nikolay Tarakanov, who in his time became one of the liquidators of the accident at the Chernobyl NPP. He related what happened there and expressed his opinion about the causes which led to the tragedy. In particular, he said that nuclear plant experiments were carried out by those who had no right to do them, did not received appropriate licences, a that play with fire ultimately led to an explosion.

I remember that talk show very well; I remember the story told by that man and I think that it is not at all accidental that the theme of the Chernobyl catastrophe even after thirty years continues to provoke a lively interest.

I would like to draw your attention to one more fact. When this serial came out, a great many people saw it, but in addition to it, many people also rushed to bookstores and literarily swept away all the available books about the accident at the Chernobyl NPP. I think, it is also important that some did not limit themselves to seeing the serial but would go further on and find out more from books, including eyewitnesses' testimonies and from scientific research in this terrible tragedy.

E.Gracheva: A news that has come from the Vatican. Pope Francis of Rome, for the first time in history, has appointed women as consultants of the Standing Secretariat of the Synod. Two of them are nuns; they already work in the Vatican structures, and one of them is a secular representative, an associate professor in Rome. How many women work on the administrative staff of the Russian Orthodox Church? As far as I know, none... If it is so, why are they not represented?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The information that there are no women in the administrative system of the Russian Orthodox Church is wrong. A great many women occupy high and important posts in the Church. For instance, there is Sister Xenia, who is mother superior of one of the convents in Moscow and also the chief legal consultant of the Russian Orthodox Church. She attends all the meetings of the Supreme Church Council, and when legal questions arise, we turn to her for advice.

There is Mother Superior Theophania, who is abbess of another major convent in Moscow, in which the relics of the Blessed Matrona of Moscow rest and the flow of pilgrims to the convent is not wearing out. At the same time, she heads the main church hotel at the walls of the St. Daniel monastery. There are many other examples, in particular, Mother Superior Sophia, abbess of the Novodevichy convent in St. Petersburg.

There are also women, who, being Orthodox Christian and members of the Church, play an important part in our public and social life. For instance, Anna Yuryevna Kuznetsova, who is a priest's wife, has been working for several years now as the Presidential Commissioner of the Child's Rights.

In the central staff of the Moscow Patriarchate, there are many nuns. I do not know their exact number but it is sufficient for controlling the whole document circulation. I can say that if I, for instance, write a report to His Holiness the Patriarch, occasionally I may get it back from some matushka who will point to mistakes that had crept in it. I correct these mistakes and hand in the report for the second time.

Therefore, if we speak about the administration system in the Russian Orthodox Church as a whole, one can point out that women play an important role in it. A woman may be a mother superior of a convent, and if she is the mother superior, it is not only nuns who obey her, but also priests who serve in her convent. A woman can be the conductor of a church choir, and most of our church choral teams are headed not by men but women. A woman can be a professor at a church educational institution, a candidate or doctor of theology. That is to say, almost all the possibilities are open for women in the Church, except for priesthood and episcopate. This is because Jesus Christ chose only men as His apostles, and according to the direct succession from the apostles, the ordination has reached bishops in our days, while women have never participated in this system.

We always say that the ministry of bishops and priests is the ministry of fatherhood. In a family, there is a father, a mother and children, and the fact that only man can become father is not discrimination against woman because only woman can become mother. Certainly, in the western liberal society, there are various models: there are the so-called same-sex families; in some places, father and mother are not even mentioned but called Parent No. 1 or Parent No. 2. But we, I think, cannot accept it.

In the Church, there is the ministry of spiritual fatherhood, but there is also the ministry of spiritual

motherhood expressed in particular in the fact that only a woman can become an abbess of a convent.

E.Gracheva: Your Eminence, you have just enumerated who conclude that either nuns or a matushka, a priest's wife, can be undergraduate or post-graduate. And if I have, say, a secular education, but I know foreign languages, what post could I claim? Are there such structures in our Church and abroad?

Metropolitan Hilarion: There is a Department for External Church Relations in which people with knowledge of foreign languages are in a great demand. In fact, our whole language service are women. They translate documents; go with us on business trips, especially with those who do not command other languages. If you have not graduated from, for instance, Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies, of course, you cannot teach theology, but no one can prevent you from entering this institution and graduating from it. If you have a musical education, you can become a church precentor. If you have an education in arts, you can become an icon-painter and paint a church, an iconostasis.

That is to say, we actually have a great number of ministries. No active woman in our Church remains uncalled.

E.Gracheva: Or women can participate in social initiatives, in programs that come from the Church. In news, a figure has been recently voiced: 224 parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate are now developing new social initiatives. They are so many. What is the essence of these projects?

Metropolitan Hilarion: In the first place, 224 are parishes that have launched social projects, and it is not including those that already had such initiatives, and there are thousands of such parishes. A great number of parish communities (I will not say, each one), are engaged in various social charitable efforts. Orthodox parishes run asylums for lonely mothers and orphanages. There are parishes that patronize psycho-neurological or other social institutions. There are parishes that arrange clubs for work with drug-addicts and people suffering from alcoholic dependence. There are parishes engaged in aid to the homeless.

The Russian Orthodox Church has a whole Synodal department engaged in social service and charitable work. They have registered some 4500 various initiatives at specific parishes.

What does it speak of? – That the Church is engaged not only in the pastoral care of its flock but also in care of people's life, welfare and in care of the poor.

We, for instance, not only appeal to ban abortion but also help expectant mothers who have found themselves in a difficult situation and who are often persuaded to make an abortion. It even happens so that an expectant mother comes to a priest and says, 'I have to make an abortion because I cannot

support the baby. And the priest answers, 'Do give birth to your baby, and we will support it'.

E.Gracheva: Your Eminence, thank you very much for this talk.

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Ekaterina.

In the second part of his talk show, Metropolitan Hilarion answered questions from TV viewers, which came to the site of the Church and the World program.

Question: What is the Orthodox Church's attitude to the work of Berdyaev? Was he an Orthodox man?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Russian religious philosopher Nikolay Aleksandrovich Berdyaev was a profoundly religious Orthodox believer, at least, in the last years of his life. I had an opportunity to visit the house in Clamart, a suburb in Paris, where Berdyaev lived and where he had a chapel in which he prayed and to which a priest came sometimes to celebrate in it.

If we speak of Berdyaev's creative work, it should be noted that it was deeply imbued with Christian ideas. Not always and not in all things did Berdyaev agree with the church interpretation of some dogmata and moral truths. Nevertheless, his thought was profoundly Christian in its spirit: he expounded on very many philosophical themes precisely from the Christian perspective.

He also made an analysis of the work of Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky and wrote a brilliant work entitled 'The World Outlook of Dostoyevsky', which makes an accent on precisely the religiosity of the great Russian writer and the Christian roots of his thinking. Berdyaev reflected on other problems as well, for instance, the problem of freedom of will and on how human freedom relates to a person's responsibility for personal actions. Berdyaev has an excellent book entitled 'The Origins and Meaning of Russian Communism', in which he shows that communist ideology in its time came to replace not capitalism but religion and, essentially, communism is an anti-religion. There are many other interesting themes that Berdyaev expounded in his philosophical work.

I would like to conclude this talk show with the words of St. Paul, which Berdyaev liked to cite: 'For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty' (Gal. 5:13).

I wish you all the best, and may the Lord preserve all of you.

