



The Passions in Orthodox perception are deeply imbued with the theme of the Resurrection and radiant Paschal joy

Metropolitan Hilarion's interview to the Romfea.gr church news portal.

- Your Eminence, I would like to begin with a question about your oratorio which has been recently performed in the church of Agia Irini in Constantinople in the presence of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It is based on the story in the Gospel of St. Matthews about the last days of Jesus Christ on earth. Tell us a few words about the oratorio which has been met with such a great response throughout the Orthodox world.

- The genre of 'Passions' so popular in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches is not customary for the Orthodox culture. The most famous work in this genre is *St. Matthews Passions* by Johann Sebastian Bach. There were also other works on this theme but they all came from the Western culture. In the history of the Orthodox Church there has been no precedent for the theme of Christ's Passions to be reflected in a composition for an orchestra, soloists and a choir. Now the public, both Orthodox and non-Orthodox, has an opportunity to take in precisely Orthodox understanding of the Lord's Passions represented in the genre of oratorio.

This composition consists of four parts: the Last Supper, Trial, Crucifixion and Burial. It is based on the structure of the Twelve Gospels service celebrated on the Great Thursday. During the oratorio, the Gospel of St. Matthews Chapters 26 and 27 are read almost fully and between the Gospel's reading symphonic music and singing are heard.

It should be mentioned that the Orthodox view of the Passions and Crucifixion is different from that of the West, which traces back to the Renaissance. Western images of the Crucifixion in which Christ is depicted still alive and suffering emphasize the realistic element and the emotional compassion for the Lord's Passions, whereas the Orthodox icon of the Crucifixion, in which we see Christ already dead, an Orthodox Christian is invited to experience not so much emotions as a spiritual reflection on the mystery exposed through the suffering of the God-Man and His death. Without the Passions and death there will be no Pascha and Resurrection. Therefore the Passions in Orthodox perception are deeply imbued with the theme of the Resurrection and radiant Paschal joy. This is what I wanted to convey first of all through

my music.

- What did you feel at the moment when your oratorio resounded in the church of Agia Irini in Constantinople?

- In the walls of the ancient cathedral of Agia Irini you are awed by the magnificence of the events of church history that took place in them. Here, at the Second Ecumenical Council the Orthodoxy theology triumphed over Arianism. It became possible thanks first of all to the selfless efforts of St. Gregory the Theologian. The name of this saint is especially dear to me as I bore his name before I took monastic vows. And I studied the writings of St. Gregory for many years. I hold it extremely dear that my oratorio inspired by the Passions Week services resounded in anticipation of the liturgical remembrance of the Passions of Christ under the shadow of the ancient mosaic cross within these walls.

- Your Eminence, you are certainly a church leader who enjoys a great authority since Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said this about you: 'Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, whom God has endowed with many gifts and talents, is an excellent theologian and remarkable musician, very energetic church leader and the right hand of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia'. With this recognition coming from the Ecumenical Patriarch, what responsibility is placed on you for Orthodoxy and, in a broader perspective, for pan-Christian unity?

- Every bishop of the Orthodox Church should unite the flock in Christ and work tirelessly for the preservation of unity of the Universal Church. The post of head of the Department for External Church Relations places a double responsibility for the preservation of Orthodox unity. The department is a primary link between the Russian Orthodox Church and all other Local Churches. Many parameters of inter-church relations are determined here. On my part, I am ready to use all the abilities given me by God for this responsible service.

- Your Eminence, we closely follow your rapid preparations for the visit of the First Bishop of the Orthodox Church to Russia. What does it mean for the Russian Orthodox Church?

- The visit of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew to the Russian Orthodox Church means a

reinforcement of the positive dynamic in relations between the two Churches and reaffirmation of the good will of the two great Patriarchs for cooperation and a step towards building new inter-church contacts in which primary importance is assigned to the catholic principle of the Church. We are looking forward to the coming of His Holiness and are ready to do everything to make his visit as successful as possible.

- Your Eminence, we have been in the process of preparations for a Holy and Great Council of the Eastern Orthodox Church for many years now. When in your opinion will it take place? What is its significance for Orthodoxy and the Christian world of the 21st century?

- The Council is possible only after the items on its agenda are given preliminary agreed decisions by Pan-Orthodox Conferences. The resumption of pan-Orthodox cooperation, which has become possible thanks to the joint decision made by Primates and representatives of Orthodox Autocephalous Churches at their meeting in Constantinople in October 2008, and the constructive course of the pre-council process give us hope that God willing we can reach the point of convening the Council in foreseeable future. The Pan-Orthodox Council will serve not only to solve important problems of Orthodoxy but also to express a consolidated common Orthodox position on the pressing problems of today.

- What is the primary task of a Christian in our time and what would be the contribution of Russian spirituality in this era of the decline of truth, the era of materialism, technologies, secularism and globalization?

- In our time just as in any other, every Christian is called to bear witness to Christ by the very way of his or her life. Everyone has one's own talents given by God. But it is important that one should devote one's talents to God so that they could work in one's life and service.

Such characteristics of our era as materialism and secularism do not help of course to reveal the truth, but in this era too, if there is a wish, one can live in harmony with one's faith. The life of a person according to the faith can change the lives of many around him. Russian saint Seraphim of Sarov said, 'Seek the spirit of peace and thousands around you will be saved'. 'Seeking' or accumulating the spirit of peace is the goal of Christian life, as St. Seraphim said. As long as this spirit is present in the world this world will live.

The Church of Christ is not a political or public organization called to struggle against some processes or for some things in society. But the Church can and must, through its witness and pro-active position, expose the truth about the human being which was revealed by Christ. The voice of the Church should become the voice of public conscience and consciousness called to prevent the civilized world from turning away from the human image as designed by God.

- Your Eminence, what would you like to convey in conclusion of the interview to the Greeks and all the readers of Romfea.gr?

- To all the Greeks, our brother and sisters in Christ, and all the readers of Romfea.gr I convey a Paschal greeting and wishes of spiritual strength in every trial. Christ is Risen!

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