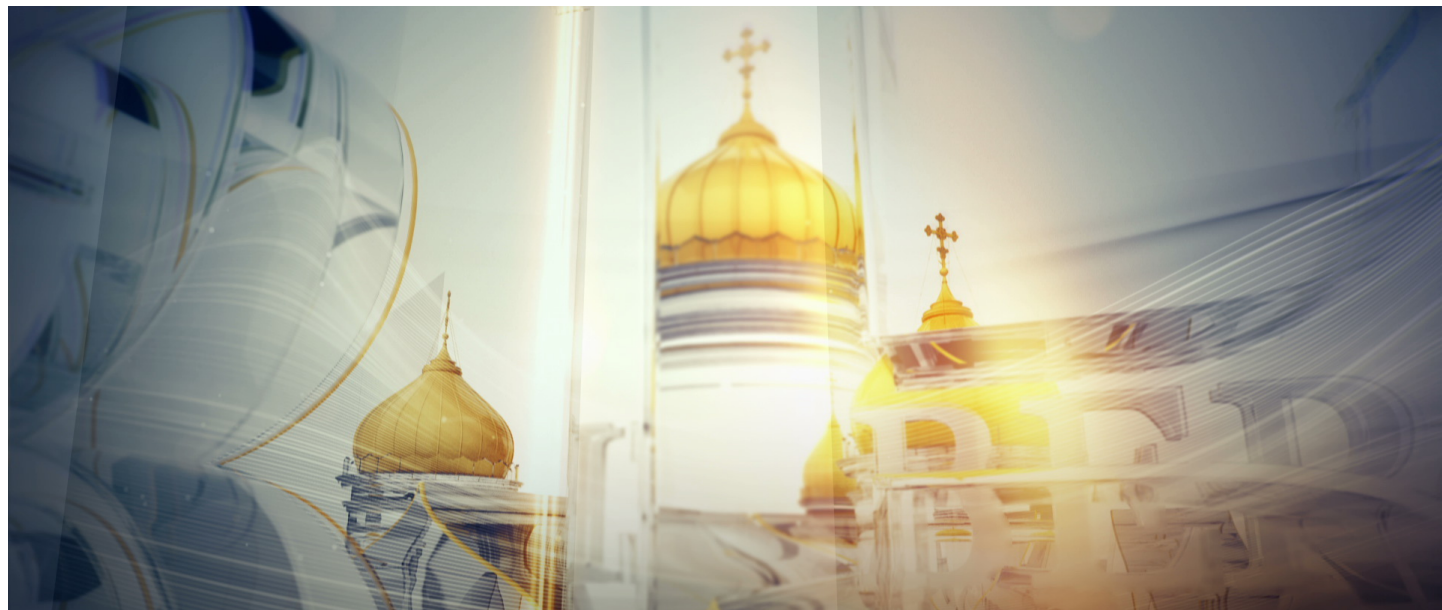




Metropolitan Hilarion: doctrinal truths are not the fruit of a human consensus, but the revelation of God



On February 21st, 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, Ekaterina! Hello, dear brothers and sisters!

E. Gracheva: I would like to start with Serbia: several news stories (all related to the Church) came from this country at once. First, Patriarch Kirill was awarded the highest state award of Serbia by order of the President. It is not often that spiritual leaders receive such high recognition. Why did Patriarch Kirill receive this award?

Metropolitan Hilarion: His Holiness Patriarch Kirill has been awarded the State Award of Serbia in connection with the outstanding contribution he has made and continues to make to relations between Russia and Serbia. The beautification of the main shrine of the Serbian people, the Cathedral of St. Sava in Belgrade, became a visible evidence of this participation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill. This

grandiose project was realized due to the support of the Russian state at the request of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

E. Gracheva: In Serbia, a new Patriarch was elected this week, Metropolitan Porfiry of Zagreb and Ljubljana - this is the main news for the Serbian Orthodox Church. What significance do these elections have for the entire Orthodox world? The procedure for choosing the head of the Serbian Church is also quite interesting. Tell us more about how these elections are being held.

Metropolitan Hilarion: I must say that the procedure for electing a Patriarch in Serbia is quite complicated: not one candidate is elected, but three. Any diocesan bishop with at least five years' experience in managing the diocese can become a candidate for the Patriarchate. Accordingly, this is about thirty candidates, of which three are elected. All three are elected in order. Then one of the three candidates is chosen by lot.

This time the lot fell to Metropolitan Porfiry of Zagreb and Ljubljana, whom we know very well. I've known him personally for many years. I met him once, both in Serbia and Croatia, when I visited it. Our relations are the warmest and most friendly. I very much hope that under the new Serbian Patriarch, relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Church will continue to be fraternal, warm and constructive. We really need each other's support. I think that this is a worthy election, which will serve to further strengthen our good relations. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill was the first to congratulate the newly elected Patriarch Porphyry immediately after his election.

Metropolitan and now Patriarch Porfiry is one of the most famous hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He is 59 years old. He graduated from the University of Belgrade and studied theology at the University of Athens. He is a Doctor of Theology, having defended his doctoral dissertation on the theology of St. Paul the Apostle and St. John Chrysostom. He is a recognized Church leader with great authority.

I think that this election will be very well received not only in Serbia, but also in the entire Orthodox world. I also had the opportunity, following our Most Holy Patriarch, to congratulate the newly elected Patriarch Porfiry of Serbia by telephone and wish him God's help in his high and responsible Primacy.

E. Gracheva: Recently, five years have passed since the meeting of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis in Havana. I would like to ask you what this meeting has changed – if anything – in relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and what has been done over the past five years?

Metropolitan Hilarion: Relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox

Church have been developing steadily for several decades. Certain difficulties arose in the early 1990s, when the Catholic Church took various steps aimed at expanding its missionary influence in the canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. A joint commission was set up to deal with controversial cases that could cause tension in relations between the two Churches. Gradually, this situation was resolved. Then there was an agreement on a meeting between Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II. This meeting was scheduled, the date and time were already determined, but the parties failed to agree on a joint statement. Therefore, the meeting was postponed, and in fact-canceled.

In 2016, five years ago, such a meeting took place. Of course, there was already another Patriarch in Moscow and another Pope in Rome. This meeting took place in Havana and was not of a theological nature: the conversation focused primarily on the situation of Christians in the Middle East. Five years have passed since then. This is not to say that the situation of Christians in the Middle East has changed for the better, with the possible exception of Syria, where thanks to the actions of the Russian army, it was possible to expel terrorists from the main territory of the country. Now there is a gradual slow restoration of normal life in this country.

Together with the Catholic side, we are developing joint projects in the fields of charity and social service, as well as in the cultural sphere. The fifth anniversary of the Havana meeting was marked by a meeting that we held online this time. On the Catholic side, Cardinal Kurt Koch, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, participated; on our side, I and other representatives of the Department for External Church Relations participated. We discussed the pandemic situation that the whole world is currently facing, and shared our experience of surviving and working as pastors.

E. Gracheva: The other day it became known that the European Parliament calls on Ukraine to ban the Mirotvorets ("Peacemaker") website. Despite its peaceful name, this resource has long been a symbol of intimidation and aggression against politicians and Church figures, and in general to anyone whose position differs from that of Ukrainian radicals. All those who are included in the site's lists are now called "traitors to Ukraine". In this regard, can we expect that the seizure of Orthodox churches in Ukraine in Europe will be given a fair assessment?

Metropolitan Hilarion: The site with the deceptive name "Mirotvorets" is actually a resource that is aimed at inciting hostility and hatred. Personal data is posted there, and not only citizens of Ukraine, but also citizens of Russia and other countries. They are laid out precisely in order to make them a target, and not only for attacks in virtual space, but also for very real actions in real space. Therefore, the call to ban this resource is very correct. But the response that has already been heard from representatives of the Ukrainian authorities is alarming. It was said, for example, that The Verkhovna Rada cannot ban this resource. The Ukrainian authorities may ban some TV channels, but not this website. I think that if there

was a desire, they could ban it as well. Let's hope that this website will cease to exist, as it is a tool for inciting hatred and hostility.

If we talk about the seizure of churches, then, of course, these events need a fair assessment from those who are fighting for human rights. In fact, in Ukraine, under President Poroshenko, there was a government-initiated persecution of Orthodox Christians, who were thrown out of churches; priests were thrown out on the street with young children. All this is recorded and known, these facts were published in the press, but Western human rights defenders, with rare exceptions, prefer to keep silent about it. This is very sad, because it shows double standards in the field of information policy.

E. Gracheva: The Ukrainian Orthodox Church recently told how Elder Zosima healed the Donetsk Metropolitan from coronavirus. Metropolitan Hilarion of Donetsk himself spoke about this miraculous help: he was lying with bilateral pneumonia, Elder Zosima, who had passed away twenty years ago, appeared to him in a dream, and the next morning the bishop realized that he was well again. Now the monastery promises to record this fact in the chronicle for further glorification of the elder. Vladyka, we are usually used to the fact that the miracles that the Church tells us about happened in the distant past, not to our contemporaries. Do you believe that what has happened is a miracle?

Metropolitan Hilarion: I have no reason to doubt the miracle that took place, if my brother Metropolitan Hilarion of Donetsk testifies to it. But I would like to emphasize that miracles happen all the time in the life of the Church. Miracles happen in the lives of many people, but they are not always made public. But I would like to remind you that a miracle is not an indispensable criterion for the sanctity of a particular person, just as it is not an indispensable requirement for the sanctity of a person to be recorded. There are people who have been canonized as saints, but it is not known about any miracles that they have been performed during their lives or after death. On the other hand, there are people who are not canonized as saints, but at the same time certain miracles are associated with them.

The Church has never made miracles a criterion of sanctity. The Lord Jesus Christ, for example, had performed many miracles. He healed people and cast out demons from those who were possessed, but when "the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him and demanded a sign from heaven from Him, tempting Him" (Mark 8.11), He refused to perform a miracle for the sake of a miracle. "Likewise the chief priests, with the scribes, elders, and Pharisees, mocked and said, 'He saved others, but he cannot save himself; if he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him'" (Mt 27: 41-42). Faith is more likely the cause of miracles, and it is no coincidence that the Lord Jesus Christ asked people who asked Him for healing: do you believe that I can do this? And to those who were healed, He said, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace."

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

Metropolitan Hilarion: Thank you, Ekaterina.

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: Jesus said to His apostles, "Whatever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth, it will be loosed in heaven" (Mt 18.18). From this we can conclude that the apostles and their followers were given a certain freedom to create a creed of their own accord by the consensus of the majority of Church members. Thus, the Church was given the opportunity to change the doctrine of faith to suit certain circumstances, allowing certain actions, even if they contradict the canons. For example, same-sex marriage, women priests, etc. Many Protestant churches actively use this. Does this mean that decisions that do not conform to the canons are accepted by God?

Metropolitan Hilarion: This question reflects a very peculiar understanding of the commandment that the Lord gave to His apostles. First, the words of Jesus Christ cannot be seen as an indication of the dogmatic teaching of the Church. The dogmatic teaching of the Church is not the fruit of consensus, it is a revealed teaching. We believe in One God in the Holy Trinity, because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself revealed it to us, and not because the majority in the Church voted for it.

No doctrinal truths are the product of a consensus alone, they are revealed by God. A consensus or majority was sometimes necessary to bring out these revealed truths, as was the case, for example, at Ecumenical Councils. When a heretic appeared who proclaimed a doctrine that was foreign to the Church, the Church Fathers gathered and discussed, analyzed the writings of this heretic, and then voted for or against it. Then, indeed, decisions were made either by majority or consensus.

But a dogma became a dogma not because the majority decided so, but because the Holy Spirit revealed truths to the Church. After all, there have been councils in the history of the Church that adopted erroneous or heretical teaching by a majority vote. For example, the "robber council" of 449, which had all the outward signs of an Ecumenical Council, was convened as an Ecumenical Council, but proclaimed a heretical Monophysite teaching. Two years later, a new Council was convened, which also proclaimed the Orthodox faith by a majority vote.

These words of Jesus Christ refer to the disciplinary authority of the Church. It is true that the Lord entrusted this power to the apostles and their successors, but it does not allow them to change either their creed or their moral teaching. And the questions that you have listed, for example, about same-sex unions, relate to the moral teaching of the Church, which cannot be changed. If we talk about the female priesthood, then, again, this is a question that relates to the very foundations of the Church

system. Here, the Church cannot, at its own discretion – even by a majority vote – make changes that would radically change the ecclesiastical order – the system established during the time of Jesus Christ and His apostles, among whom, as is well known, there was not a single woman. Just as there were no women among the bishops or priests of the ancient Church.

Question: Dear Metropolitan Hilarion, why does the Church consider abortion a sin when scientists have proven that early termination of pregnancy does not pose a threat to the female body? I know women who have had several abortions and feel great, but giving birth every year is bad for their health. When calling for reproduction, Church representatives do not think about the consequences of constant childbirth.

Metropolitan Hilarion: This is a very strange question. I do not know women who have had abortions and feel fine, but I do know a lot of women who come to confession and repent of their abortions, throughout their lives. Years, decades pass, she is already an old woman, but when she comes to confession, she cannot forgive herself for this sin, because she understands that she committed murder.

The problem here is not in the female body. The problem is that abortion is the murder of an unborn person. There may not be any harm to the female body, or it may be because some women who had abortions could not give birth to children later for various physiological reasons. However, the Church does not prohibit abortion not because it can harm the female body, but because it is the murder of an unborn person. From the point of view of the Church, it is no different from the murder of an already born person – it is the same sin and the same crime.

Question: Can an Orthodox person pray in a Catholic church? Or can one go to a synagogue sometimes, without praying there?

Metropolitan Hilarion: An Orthodox Christian can pray in a Catholic church under certain circumstances, for example, if there is no Orthodox church nearby, or if he or she is visiting a Catholic church where some revered Orthodox shrine is located. I started my priestly ministry and monastic life in the Holy Spirit Monastery in Vilnius, where the wonderworking Ostrobram Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos is located right above the city gates. It is clearly visible from the street through the glass, but it is located inside a Catholic chapel. Both Catholics and Orthodox people come to her to pray there, and they are very happy to see the icon. Quite often they stand there next to each other. Some of our misguided zealots say that an Orthodox person cannot pray next to a Catholic, apparently considering such prayers unacceptable. But for Orthodox Christians, for whom this icon, I repeat, is also revered (we have a celebration of this icon in our calendar), there is no other way to pray in front of it, except to go to this Catholic chapel, kneel there, or just stand in front of this icon and pray. There's nothing wrong with

that. The Apostle Paul says, "Pray without ceasing "(1 Thess. 5.17). If you can pray without ceasing in the bus, in the subway, why can't an Orthodox Christian pray in a Catholic church? Another thing is that an Orthodox Christian should not receive communion in a Catholic church and participate in the sacraments of the Catholic Church, because there is no Eucharistic communion between Orthodox and Catholics.

If we talk about going to the synagogue, I think that Orthodox Christians should visit it Moreover, they will not be welcome in the synagogue, because the Jews do not recognize Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God, and the dogma of the Incarnation of God is the cornerstone of the Orthodox faith.

I would like to conclude this transmission with the words of the Apostle Paul from the First Epistle to the Corinthians: "All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful to me, but not all things edify" (1 Corinthians 10.23).

DECR Communication Service

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/61520/>