



Your Eminence, secular people often view your position in the Patriarchate as a foreign minister. Is there a certain misunderstanding? What are the powers of the DECR chairman?

The powers of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate traditionally include the whole sphere of external church activity. First and foremost, it is the sphere of inter-Orthodox Church relations and brotherly contacts with autocephalous (independent) local Orthodox Churches which number 14 today, besides the Russian Orthodox Church. I am pleased to say

Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants. Unfortunately, the centuries of living in division have brought about major differences between these confessions and the Orthodox Church in theological issues and regarding the challenges of the modern secular world. Our Church has never worked and does not work toward certain unification with heterodox confessions at the expense of compromises in religious issues. On the contrary, we use inter-Christian dialogue as a means to evidence the truth of the Orthodoxy. At the same time, together with our heterodox brothers we look for points of contact

that contacts between local Orthodox Churches have intensified of late, and the convocation of a Pan-Orthodox Council, which raises numerous questions, is currently on the agenda. Our task is to ensure strict compliance with the consensus principle at the Council so that the interests of all churches are taken into account and that the Council should safeguard against new divisions.

The second guideline of the Department's work is inter-Christian relations, i.e. dialogue with other Christian confessions – the ancient Eastern Churches (such as the Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian Churches),

METROPOLITAN HILARION: ANY CONSTRUCTION BEGINS WITH FOUNDATION

in such issues as morality and the common expression of Christians' faith in the face of growing secularism. It turns out that in these issues we have more in common with representatives of the communities that have kept ties with the ancient church tradition than with liberal confessions.

Another sphere of responsibility of the Department has expanded of late - outreach to compatriots abroad. It envisages holding various congresses and symposiums and interaction at various levels with our compatriots who are dispersed throughout the world.

The Department also pays much attention to the problem of persecution of Christians in various countries of the world and to inter-religious dialogue, which becomes specifically important in such a situation.

You took monastic vows and began your ministry in Lithuania. How did the country and its people influence the young priest?

I have very warm recollections of the years I spent in Lithuania. They were both my

first experience of monastic life, my first experience in service before the altar of God, and the first ministerial experience. I served there for nearly five years. I was a monk at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius for 18 months. Then I was appointed a parish priest in a village where ten people gathered for the Sunday liturgy and thirty people for Easter.

At Epiphany I toured the neighboring villages in a horse-drawn cart or by hitching a ride to sprinkle holy water on the believers' homes. I visited many people who lived in abject poverty.

I ministered in Kaunas in 1990-1991. It was the time of the breakup of the USSR. Lithuania proclaimed independence and stated its readiness to defend it. Troops entered Vilnius and occupied the television center. There were fatalities among the civilians. I was asked to make an address on Kaunas television which still remained in Lithuanians' hands, and I agreed. At that time, I had no thoughts about any political interests; the most important thing was to

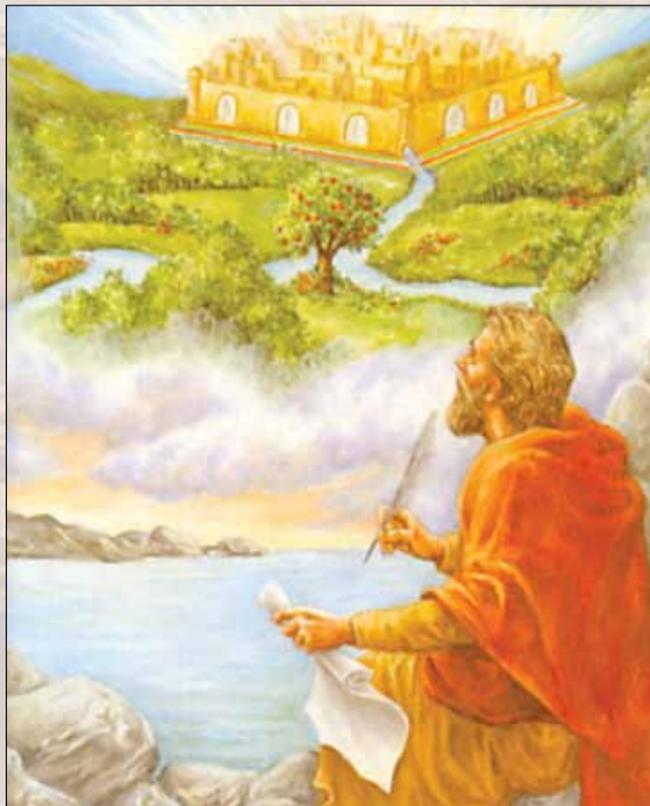
Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) of Volokolamsk, Vicar bishop of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, is chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR), Moscow Patriarchate, and a permanent member of the Holy Synod. He is also chairman of the Synodal Biblical and Theological Commission and rector of the Church of the Mother of God Icon called "Consolation of All the Afflicted" in Moscow's Bolshaya Ordynka Street. Also, he is rector of the Sts Cyril and Methodius Church School for Post-Graduate and Doctoral Stud-

ies. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk is a privat-docent of the theological department at the University of Freiburg, Switzerland, Oxford University Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Theology of the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute and a member of the Russian presidential Council for Interaction with Religious Organizations. He has written more than 30 books on theology and church history, which have been translated into different languages and repeatedly reissued, as well as musical compositions for choir and symphony orchestra.

prevent a group of people from committing bloodshed and save the lives of others. I spoke on television and urged the soldiers not to shoot at unarmed people in case they were given such an order. Thank God, we managed to avoid further bloodshed.

It was a very interesting time, the time of gradual emergence of freedoms, including freedoms for religious life and preaching. In Kaunas one of my first missionary activities was to visit the nearest Russian school, where I volunteered to teach children. At first the school administration was apprehensive. I was told there had been no such lessons in the Soviet school and that it was not possible. But one day, the school director went to the church to baptize her granddaughter. I offered her a "bargain": I baptize her granddaughter and she lets me conduct at least one lesson in any class. This is what we agreed to. I conducted one lesson, then another and then other classes asked me to teach. Eventually, I took up all the ten classes of the school. That is, aside from a minister's workweek, I was fully employed as a schoolteacher. Then I had invitations from other schools. I quickly understood that I could not cope alone and imparted my knowledge of Scripture to my parishioners, who followed suit and began to teach at schools. A very interesting time it was. I have very warm recollections of it today, and whenever I visit Lithuania, I feel as though I am in my homeland.

What is the Russian diaspora and the Orthodox Church situation in Lithuania?



The Orthodox tradition in Lithuania is 800 years old. In modern Lithuania, it is the Russian-speaking population that largely professes Orthodox Christianity, in the first instance Russians, Belarussians and Ukrainians, so it is well-represented in the large cities such as Vilnius, Klaipeda and Visaginas. However, there are also Orthodox Lithuanians, and some Orthodox churches conduct services in Lithuanian. According to the census, Lithuania has more than 130,000 Orthodox believers.

There is the diocese of Vilna and Lithuania in the republic, currently led by Archbishop Innokenty. In 1996, the diocese was officially registered as "the Orthodox Church in Lithuania." It comprises 50 parishes divided into three deaneries. As far as I know, the diocese is not short of priests. It runs a monastery and a convent. Some schools have Sunday classes for children from Orthodox families, and a number of Russian-language schools offer religion as a subject. The diocese takes care of the preservation and renovation of churches, and receives annual subsidies from the state for these tasks.

An overwhelming majority of Russians in the republic – who number over 200,000 – have Lithuanian citizenship. It is the only Baltic republic which adopted the so-called zero option of the citizenship law, i.e. those who were resident on the territory of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic were granted citizenship in the new Lithuania.

The persecution of believers and the church came to an end in the late 1980s. When

you were dean of the Annunciation Cathedral in Kaunas, Sigitas Tamkevicius was rector of the local Catholic seminary who had recently returned from prison and exile. Please tell us about him.

I first met Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius in 1989, when he was appointed rector of the Kaunas theological seminary. I was a young priest then. I asked Father Sigitas where he had been before, meaning his previous parish and post. He answered, "I have been in prison." In those years, prisoners of conscience, including clerics, were returning from prisons and penal colonies. Tamkevicius was one of them. He was arrested in 1983 for conducting religious education and secret activities aimed at protecting believers' rights, and spent five years in Perm and Mordovian penal colonies.

In the new historical conditions, Archbishop Tamkevicius is continuing his uncompromising defense of the freedom of faith and the Christian principles of public morals in his country; he tirelessly urges the powerful ones of this world to heed the voice of conscience in making decisions and do as required by public good, not selfish interests. Many Lithuanians take him seriously.

The first ever visit of Russia's First Hierarchy to Poland took place in August 2012. Although 600,000 Orthodox believers live there, it wasn't merely a pastoral visit. Regrettably, Russian and European public opinion was focused on less significant events. How do you think relations between the peoples of Russia and Poland might develop in the future?

I cannot agree that Russian and European public opinion ignored His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's visit to Poland. Many large mass media outlets reported the event. For example, the popular channel Euronews closely monitored the Russian Patriarch's first visit to Poland. It was broadly discussed by public circles in Russia, Poland and other states, and mostly drew positive comments.

In my opinion, the positive dynamic in Russian-Polish relations that have begun to

show in the recent times will continue. It is gratifying that the Russian Orthodox Church made its contribution to the rapprochement between the two peoples. During his visit to Poland, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, together with the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference Archbishop Jozef Michalik, made a joint statement to the peoples of Russia and Poland reflecting our common Christian approach to bilateral relations. This historic address became an important contribution to the normalization of Russian-Polish relations which have a long record of strife, misunderstanding, armed conflicts and religious disputes.

We sometimes hear questions and even rebukes regarding what gives the two Churches the right to act as peacekeepers and offer ways of overcoming mutual mistrust. Both Russia and Poland are Slav countries with deep roots in Christianity. We are very close ethnically and culturally. I'm deeply convinced that spiritual affinity is the only solid foundation upon which we can build a productive and open relationship



between the peoples of our countries. For its part, the Russian Orthodox Church is ready to make all efforts towards maintaining peace and accord between Russians and Poles.

The persecution of Christians is one of the most acute problems of the modern world. News about "legal" incarcerations and reckless murders is reported daily. The well-being of the North and the Baltic region against this background gives no reason for complacency. Yet it seems our societies do not wish to hear

about the persecution of Christian believers all over the world, although the public quickly shows its indignation at other matters.

What is the cause of this ambiguity, this double morality? Is it aggressive secularism or the relationships between Christians?

There are several reasons here. Firstly, it is Europe's loss of its Christian identity and the aggressive intrusion of secular notions into society. This has also affected certain Christian creeds and eroded their notions of traditional values. As a result, we encounter double standards: there is the lobbying of extreme liberalism on the one hand, and deliberate unwillingness to hear about the infringement upon Christians' rights on the other. Consequently, the press deliberately distorts or suppresses the facts concerning the persecution of Christians. The Syrian conflict can serve as an example, with western mass media conducting an information war and preferring to deliberately suppress the problem of the persecution and murder of Christians by militants from various radical groups. Tens of thousands of Christians find themselves in a humanitarian catastrophe; many are killed by the most brutal methods, and acts of terror against them continue unabated. The West prefers to keep silent about it. But there are still some honest reporters who try to tell the truth, otherwise we would know nothing about the fate of Syrian Christians. As an example, I would like to mention Russia 24 channel reporter Anastasia Popova, whom the president recently awarded with a medal for bravery. May God let the West have more such honest and courageous journalists.

In the autumn of 2012, part of the Russian public expressed serious concern about the situation regarding a Russian-Sudanese family in Finland. Regrettably, our domestic routine, with tuberculosis and venereal diseases in children, teen drug abuse and homelessness, does not often become a subject of special attention on the part of the society. In this connection how does the Church feel about this political and legal initiative popularly known as "juvenile justice?"

Juvenile justice has been broadly discussed in society recently. The Church does not stand aside from these discussions. It is

concerned about the regrettable overregulation of parent-child relations by government bodies which may dismantle the family as a social institution. There were cases of unjustified interference in family life under the pretext of protecting children's rights.

The advocates of juvenile justice emphasize that introducing this system for



underage offenders is quite justified, as it gives up repressive measures of influence upon children and returns them to the fold. Adequate programs allegedly correct the behavior of "problem" children more effectively than penal colonies for juvenile delinquents which leave them branded for life.

Yet it is right to say that a family cannot live in constant fear that somebody might come and take away their child, for example under the pretext that the standard of living in a family does not meet the needs of the child.

Recently, the phrase "creative class" has come into the vernacular, meaning a certain stratum of citizens with superior quality of

thinking compared with the rest, "non-creative" Russians. Sadly, quite a few people take this formula seriously, including with respect to themselves. While taking an ironic view of this, we cannot but ask a quite serious question: what is the measure to test a modern person's ability to build his and his country's future?

This measure is responsibility. Building the future of one's country or family is only possible for a person who feels responsibility for this future, in the first place responsibility before God. As St Paul said "... whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him" (Colossians 1, 16-17). Addressing the contemporary

representatives of the "ruling class," St Gregory the Theologian wrote: "It is with Christ that you command, with Christ that you govern, from Him that you have received the sword."

He who assumes responsibility for the future of others should be gifted with special sense of self-sacrifice and special self-denial. Public activities and politics should not be an end in itself or a breeding ground to espouse pride, greed or other vices. St. John Chrysostom says: "A true king is he who conquers anger and jealousy and voluptuousness and subjects everything to the laws of God and

does not allow the passion for pleasure to prevail in his soul."

The building of the future can only be entrusted to him who makes public expediency and social good the cornerstone of his actions, for whom high ideals are not merely a pleasant-sounding phrase; they manifest themselves even

in seemingly insignificant matters and daily “trifles,” such as everyday behavior, relations with neighbors, conscientious work, and observing the rules of communal life, not to mention observing the laws of the land.

All construction begins with the foundation. A foolish man builds his house upon the sand. A wise man builds his house upon the rock (see Matthew 7, 24-27). Jesus is the stone... “the only one who can save people.” (Acts 4, 11).

The future can be likened to our common home. The happiness of each individual and humanity as a whole depends on what comprises its foundation.

Last Easter Pavel Lungin’s film The Conductor was shown in Russia. It tells the story of guest performances by a group of musicians in Jerusalem, where the first night of the St Matthew Passion oratorio was to take place. The film sets the Gospel story of suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to music which you had written for it. What place does music have in your life and your mission?

After taking monastic vows I was sure I had closed the musical chapter of my life once and for all. I was rather radical when I was twenty. I assumed I had given up music for good. But “man supposes and God disposes.” At some point the period of radicalism seemed to pass, and I gradually began to enjoy once again listening to classical music. However, I never occupied myself with it actively. It was only in 2006 that something suddenly changed in me and I began to compose music.

To me, music reflects the state of the soul and is an important medium for conveying the good news of the Church. It is a special language which can convey the loftiest feelings and which does not require special training in order to be understood – it is sufficient to have a soul and a heart open to these feelings. The language of music gives people the opportunity to communicate at the profoundest level where words are no longer necessary.

Music is one of the forms of sermon and mission. I use it as a means to convey the good news of the Gospel. Bringing home to people the image of live Christ was my main objective when I was writing “St Matthew Passion.”

Now we have a question about Petersburg, our northern Alexandria. What significance does this city have for the Christian Church? What significance does it hold for European civilization?

Petersburg was conceived by Peter the Great as a European capital. It is known that in his time everything of Russian origin was regarded as obsolete, not up to the spirit of time and Enlightenment standards – almost in the same way as nowadays. In this sense, the new capital in the beginning of the 18th century broke off from Old Russia and its Byzantine heritage. The architecture of St Petersburg, including its churches, tried to emulate the best European style – English, Dutch and German at first and then French and Italian. It was an endeavour to Europeanize Orthodoxy, with the view of distancing Russia from the prevailing Byzantine heritage in Eastern Christianity. Peter the Great and his followers seemed to entertain hopes of creating a new and original Russian Orthodoxy.

It is obvious today that this attempt was only partially successful, because Italian patterns in church architecture and music were alien to our culture. Although they have lasted for three centuries, they are increasingly re-appraised in a critical manner. Churches are ubiquitously built in Old Russia style, and it is only rarely that European classicism is used, for example, if so required by architectural ensemble. I dare to assume that the “Petersburg period” in

Russian history has come to an end.

On the other hand, Petersburg remains our favorite northern capital. To my mind, it is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It continues to be a bridge between Russia and the West. Petersburg is associated with Dostoyevsky and Pushkin works. I believe Pushkin’s words from the Bronze Horseman about “a window to Europe” can carry not only geographical, but also cultural meaning. Petersburg became such a window for Russia.



Young hieromonk Hilarion in Lithuania

This issue of Amber Bridge is to be published in mid-March, i.e. by Forgiveness Sunday which falls on March 17, New Style, this year. It will be read in all the countries of the Baltic region. What would be Your Eminence’s final thoughts to the readers of Amber Bridge?

Forgiveness is a basic principle of being, by which a person should live daily, on the strength of his faith in the All-Forgiving God. As a result of the “humanization” which has taken

place in the past century and a half, the virtue of forgiveness has been stripped of religious substance and harnessed solely personal relationships. Thus in practical terms it has become a mere means to an end. Simultaneously its interpretation has changed: whereas people used to forgive each other solely “for the sake of God”, i.e. selflessly, by the commandment to love, they now do it out from a “humanistic” perspective; a person may be undecided as to the extent to which he should forgive his neighbor or if he should forgive at all.

I would like to wish the readers of your magazine to consider the religious meaning of forgiveness ahead of Forgiveness Sunday. I am sure that Christian forgiveness “for the sake of God” will open up to us a far broader horizon in improving relations with our neighbors – family members, relatives, friends and colleagues. It will be a decisive step on the way to the God,

who cannot be known without forgiving our enemies, ill-wishers and those who have insulted or hurt us.

I wish God’s help to all Amber Bridge magazine readers

+ *Hilarion*

Metropolitan Hilarion