Interview of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk to Interfax news agency

Your Eminence, recently the Lutheran Archbishop of Turku, Kari Mäkinen, stated that the Russian Orthodox Church has suspended dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland because of the differences concerning the situation of sex and gender minorities. Can you comment on this statement?

The dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland began in 1970. For the past period, many theological and other issues were discussed and a number of joint documents were adopted to reveal the views of the two Churches on various theological and social issues. The next round of the dialogue was to discuss issues of Christian anthropology, that is, the teachings on man and his relations with God and the world around him.

In recent years, the Protestant community in the West has experienced a serious crisis as many communities have reconsidered some important provisions of the Christian theological and moral teaching. The impact made by liberal secularism on church life has led some Protestant communities in the West to make a decision to establish female priesthood and female episcopate. It has considerably complicated our theological dialogues with them since their aim was to bring Orthodox Churches and Protestant communities closer together, not to divide them. Another step was made by the decision of several Protestant communities to bless same-sex unions. As a result, dialogue with them has become impossible.

This practice is directly contrary to the Christian morality and the moral norms on which the gospel's teaching is based. The rejection of fundamental ethical norms erodes the notions of sin and virtue and deprives people of moral guidelines, making them helpless in face of their own passions.

The discussion on the above-mentioned issues has recently intensified in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland as well. Their consideration as part of the theological dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church could make a certain contribution to the elaboration of appropriate arguments. Regrettably, the Finnish side has proved unprepared for discussing these issues in the language of theology rather than practical expediency, on the basis of the common church tradition and Christian teaching on morality.

As His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia noted during his meeting with Archbishop Kari Mäkinen on September 2014 in Moscow, today each church is facing a serious moral choice to stay

faithful to Christ or to evade its historical calling, which is to lead people to salvation. The answer to this choice will have to be given before the future generations and before God.

A full-scale theological dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, as it was in previous decades, has proved impossible today. Nevertheless, the Russian Orthodox Church hopes to preserve and develop relations with this Church in the task of social service, peacemaking and other areas.*On September 16, the 13th plenary session of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches began its work in Amman, Jordan. What is the aim of the Commission's work? What questions will be considered by the plenary session?*

The Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches was established in 1979 as a platform for discussing theological issues significant for the both Churches. The Commission, which includes an equal number of representatives of Local Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, began its work in 1980.

For its more than 30 years of work, the Joint Commission adopted a number of joint documents: "The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Holy Trinity", "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church", "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church", which have revealed many common points in the teaching of the two Churches on sacraments. Of special importance is the document signed in 1993 in Balamand: "Uniatism: as a Method of Union of the Past and Present Search for Full Communion", in which the Catholics officially agreed for the first time that *unia*, that is, Rome's policy of subjecting Eastern Churches to itself, failed to contribute to rapprochement between the Orthodox and the Catholics but, quite the contrary, proved to draw them even further away from each other. The document resolutely condemns any forms of proselytism on the part of the Catholic with regard to the Orthodox.

Regrettably, this document successful from the theoretical perspective has failed to solve the problems in relations between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics, which resulted from the revival of Uniate church structures in western Ukraine, Romania and other countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The aggravation of Orthodox-Catholic relations which took place against this background interrupted the work of the Joint Commission for a long time to be resumed only in 2006.

At present the Joint Commission is engaged in discussing the teaching on primacy and synodality in the Church, on which the Catholics and the Orthodox have many disagreements. In the Roman Catholic Church and in Orthodox Churches, different ecclesiological models have developed through centuries: one centralized and based on the recognition of the universal jurisdiction of the pope of Rome and the other based on the idea of conciliar communion of autocephalous Local Churches. The Commission is to identify differences between these two models and to show what they have in common.

In the process of preparations for the meeting, the Russian Orthodox Church has worked out an official stand on the issue of primacy in the Universal Church. An appropriate document was adopted by the Holy Synod at its meeting on December 25, 2013. It sets forth the traditional Orthodox point of view on this issue, based on abundant patristic sources.

In our view, the meeting of the Joint Commission should not result in adoption of a compromise document but rather in an honest and theologically correct exposure of differences between the teaching on primacy and synodality in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions and a search for the common points which may become a basis for continuation of the dialogue in the future.

Besides, I consider it important that the Commission should revisit the problem of *unia* as it did not complete the discussion on it in 2000 because of the acute differences between the sides concerning pastoral and canonical consequences of *Unia*. Since *Unia* still remains a bleeding wound on the body of the Christendom, as the recent events in Ukraine and extremely politicized statements of Ukrainian Greek-Catholic leaders have shown, this theme needs to be revisited.

Finally, being in the Middle East, in a country bordering, in particular, on Iraq and Syria, one cannot help speaking out about the frightful situation in which the Middle East Christians have found themselves. In Iraq, there is genocide against the Christian population. Most Christians have had to leave their country after Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown, while radical Islamists are trying to finish off the remaining ones. The fate of Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo who was kidnapped a year and half ago and who was a member of the Joint Commission for Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue, remains unknown, just as the fate of Metropolitan Mar Gregory Ibrahim who was in the same car with him at the moment of kidnapping.

At a time when we are discussing our theological differences, thousands of Christians – Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant – are shedding blood for the faith in Christ. Such representative gathering as the Joint Commission assembled in Amman cannot stand aside from their suffering and should raise its authoritative voice in their defence.

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