



Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church: Many Protestant communities do not even try to really preach Christian values in secular society but rather prefer to adapt to its standards

Among the themes His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia dealt with in his report to the Bishops' conference on 2 February 2010, were problems arising in relations with the Protestant community. 'Unfortunately, in recent years the Russian Church has seen ever fewer co-workers in the field of preserving the Christian heritage among Protestant communities', His Holiness stated.

According to Patriarch Kirill, the problem is a rapid liberalization of the Protestant world as many Protestant communities do not only fail to really preach Christian values in secular society but rather prefer to adapt to its standards. The liberalization of ethical norms has been vividly manifested in particular in the blessing of the so-called 'same-sex unions' and in the ordination and episcopal consecration of open homosexuals. For this reason the Moscow Patriarchate has had to suspend its relations with the Episcopal Church in the USA and the Lutheran Church in Sweden.

"We have just experienced a new dramatic situation when the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, with which we have maintained manifold contacts and planned to celebrate the 50th anniversary of theological dialogue, elected as its president Ms. Margot Kaessmann, a Lutheran bishop', His Holiness continued, adding, 'The very fact of female priesthood and episcopate among Protestants is not a new one for us. As far back as 1976, our Church's Holy Synod expressed its opinion about female priesthood in principle, stating that 'we see no grounds for objecting against any decision concerning this matter (female priesthood) in those confessions which do not recognize priesthood as a sacrament and where, from the Orthodox perspective, the sacramental priesthood is absent as such altogether'. Nevertheless, we continued our dialogue in the hope to gradually overcome the doctrinal differences on the solid basis of the norms of faith and church order in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church".

The election of Margot Kaessmann as head of a national Protestant community shows that this community is not ready to assume commitments stemming from its dialogue with Orthodox Churches in the field that affects the very core of this dialogue, His Holiness stressed, adding, 'We accompanied our reaction to these developments with a testimony that we respect the right of this community to take decisions it believes necessary but at the same time we state with sorrow that the 50-year long dialogue has not kept our Protestant brothers and sisters from a step which has taken us even farther away from

our common doctrinal basis’.

‘What has happened has clearly revealed a fundamental difference between Orthodoxy and Protestantism and highlighted a major underlying problem: Orthodoxy safeguards the norm of apostolic faith and church order as sealed in the Holy Tradition of the Church and sees as its task to continually actualize this norm in carrying out its pastoral and missionary efforts. Whereas in Protestantism, in fulfilling the same tasks, it is allowed to develop a theology which itself reforms this norm. Clearly, the search for doctrinal consensuses, as they were sought with regard, for instance, to Baptism, the Eucharist and Ministry within a multilateral dialogue initiated in its time by the World Council of Churches, becomes meaningless because any consensus can come under the threat of destruction by a innovation or an interpretation which will challenge the very meaning of these agreements’.

Therefore, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church believes, in the dialogue with Protestant partners an attempt should be made to clarify the very possibility of overcoming the fundamental difference between Orthodoxy and Protestantism. If it proves impossible today, there are still many other important topics which have no direct bearing on the achievement of unity in faith and church order but which are important from the viewpoint of peace, justice, the preservation of God’s creation and other problems requiring joint actions of those who believe in the Holy Trinity.

‘We highly appreciate the long-standing friendly relations with the German Protestants and assess the experience of theological dialogue as unique and certainly needful and useful in the future’, His Holiness said, adding, ‘But in connection with the above, we believe it necessary to discuss with our German partners a possibility for re-formatting our bilateral relations so that these relations may take into account the existing realities, on one hand, and may preserve the positive achievements of the 50-year long dialogue and develop them for the common good, on the other’.

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