



## **DECR Chairman expounds position of the Russian Orthodox Church on the prospects of dialogue with the Evangelical Church in Germany in his letter to the ECG leadership**

Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, sent a letter to the chairperson of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany Dr. Margot Kassmann and the head of the Department for ecumenical relations and ministries abroad of the Evangelical Church in Germany Bishop Martin Schindehutte. On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia he expressed regret over cancellation of festivities dedicated to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the theological dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany. The decision to cancel the festivities has been taken by the ECG unilaterally.

Archbishop Hilarion recalls an opinion expressed by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church on the ordination of women. There were no objections against any decision of this matter in the confessions that do not recognize ordination as a sacrament, and the ordained women in the ECG had not prevented our meetings and discussions in the past. Although the ordained priesthood in the Protestant Churches has not been recognized, a dialogue with some of them had been maintained in the form of "church-church."

The DECR chairman writes that the situation has changed at present, as a woman has become a chairperson of the ECG, thus raising a principal question of a prospect of maintaining dialogue in the mentioned form. "What is the meaning of our dialogue if its outcome is not the earlier declared movement towards each other, but a movement of at least one of the participants in the dialogue to the opposite direction?", archbishop Hilarion asks. He believes it impossible not to take the opinion of Orthodox Christians into account as any meeting or talk with a church chaired by a women are absolutely inadmissible to them.

Archbishop Hilarion said that the Russian Orthodox Church highly appreciated the friendly relations of many years' standing with the German protestants and, contrary to the allegations of certain Russian mass media, neither he, nor any of the DECR staff members ever said anything about "the severance of relations" with the Evangelical Church in Germany. He expressed his regret for the jubilee of the dialogue that has brought many good fruits in the past to become its end in the form in which it had been maintained for fifty years. However, the DECR chairman sees the main reason in the processes that have been going on within the Western Protestantism for several decades, rather than in any

pronouncements made quite recently.

The Russian Orthodox Church is worrying about the growing influence of the secular approach to the development of theology and ecclesiastical life in the Protestant congregations. The liberalization of moral standards and departure from the apostolic rules in organizing the life of the church prompts Orthodox Christians to bring witness about the authentic Christian tradition to their brothers and sisters, doing it in the spirit of Christian love.

"Having made the decision to elect a woman the head of the Church, the ECG had determined its choice," archbishop Hilarion wrote and expressed his willingness to visit Germany next spring to discuss the situation.

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/58046/>