



Archbishop Hilarion's letter to Chairperson of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany Dr. Margot Kassmann and Head of the Department for ecumenical relations and ministries abroad of the Evangelical Church in Germany Bishop Martin Schindehutte

Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, sent the following 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 Dr. Martin Schindehutte. The letter deals with the prospects of dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany.

Dear Dr. Kassmann:

Dear Dr. Schindehutte:

On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia I thank you for your letter of 13 November 2009. His Holiness regrets the cancellation of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of theological dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany. The decision to cancel the celebration has been taken by the ECG without any agreeing on our part.

A ground for this decision was, according to you, my statement on the recent election of the chairperson of the ECG Council. Indeed, I expressed my disappointment over this election. However, it is hardly possible to call my words "improper" as there was nothing contempting for the ECG in them. It seems to me that any person is entitled to express his or her opinion on this or that matter, and especially on such an important matter.

You have justly noted that the ordained women in the ECG have not prevented our meetings and discussions in the past. There were grounds for this. Over thirty years ago the Holy Synod of our Church expressed its principle opinion on the ordination of women, "we do not see any grounds for objection against any decision on this matter in the confessions that do not recognize priesthood as a sacrament, and, from the Orthodox point of view, there is no sacramental priesthood in them as such" (A Message of the Holy Synod to the 5th Assembly of the World Council of Churches and its results", The Journal of

the Moscow Patriarchate, 1976, No. 4, p. 9).

Although we have not recognized the existence of priesthood in the Protestant congregations earlier and, consequently, have not recognized them as "churches" in the sense in which we understand this word, we maintained dialogue with them in the form "church-church." However, the situation has changed, as a woman has become the chairperson of the ECG. This raises a principal question of a prospect of maintaining dialogue in the mentioned form. This election shows that in spite of the fifty-years-long dialogue with Orthodoxy, the other side has gone along the way that dramatically aggravates the differences between our traditions. Naturally, a principle question can be posed. What is the meaning of our dialogue if its outcome is not the earlier declared by both sides movement towards each other, but a movement of at least one of the participants in the dialogue in the opposite direction? Besides, we cannot but take into account the opinion of our believers to whom meetings and talks with the church chaired by a woman are absolutely inadmissible.

Under the circumstances I have decided not to go to Germany to take part in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of our dialogue. However, I was willing to send to the celebration in Berlin my deputy as head of the DECR delegation. The Moscow part of the celebration should have been held on the earlier planned high level, and we would have been sincerely happy to see our friend of many years' standing, Bishop Wolfgang Huber as head of the ECG delegation. Unfortunately, the new ECG leadership has cancelled all celebrations and has not deemed it necessary even to contact me.

Contrary to the allegations of certain Russian mass media, neither I, nor any of my staff members have ever said anything about "the severance of relations" with the Evangelical Church in Germany. We highly appreciate friendly relations of many years' standing with the German Protestants and believe the experience of the theological dialogue to prove useful in the future.

I regret that the jubilee of our dialogue that has brought so many good fruits in the past has become its end in the form in which it has been maintained for fifty years. However, the main reason of this are the processes that have been going on within Western Protestantism for several decades, rather than 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 prompt us to bring witness about the authentic Christian tradition to our brothers and sisters in the spirit of Christian love.

Even wider at present is becoming the gap between the traditional Christian Churches and the congregations of Western Christians that have embarked on the road of liberalizing the dogma, church order and moral norms to satisfy modern secular standards. This is not the fault of the Orthodox who

have not made any step backward from their Protestant brothers and sisters during the years of the dialogue, but have honoured their commitments.

Having made the decision to elect a woman the head of the Church, the ECG had determined its choice. We are willing to consider this choice as an ECG internal affair. However, as we are talking about the dialogue, in which our Church should take part, we reserve the right to make decision on the expedience of continuing the dialogue and of the forms in which our cooperation should be maintained.

I would consider it useful to discuss the situation calmly as some time passes. For this objective, I am prepared to visit Germany next spring.

Respectfully,

/+Hilarion/

Archbishop of Volokolamsk

Chairman

Department for External Church Relations

Moscow Patriarchate

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