



Interreligious conference on Family in Crisis opens in Vienna

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An interreligious conference on Family in Crisis has begun its work on December 7, 2011, in Vienna, Austria. Among its participants is a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations. The delegation includes Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for the far-abroad countries, Archpriest Vladimir Tyschuk, rector of St. Nicholas's in Vienna, Fr. Dimitry Pershin, chairman of the commission on bio-ethics of the youth department, Deacon Dimitry Safonov of the DECR, Mr. A. Komov of the World Congress of Families in Russia, Mr. G. Slobin, deputy director of the Family Welfare psychological service, and Ms. I. Protaschuk, a qualified teacher.

The conference at its opening was addressed by Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, Archbishop of Vienna, Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, and Dr. Pokorny, Mayor of Vienna's cultural adviser.

In his greeting remarks, Metropolitan Hilarion pointed to the important mission of the family, which is impeded in the modern world by a false understanding of freedom equalizing this most important institution with other 'unions' and forms of cohabitation or partnership. According to His Eminence, the crisis of the modern family and the demographic problem cannot be explained by economic reasons alone. 'The loss of spiritual guidelines and the moral system of coordinates as well as egoism have generated a deviation from the ideals of sanctity of family life and purity in relations between man and woman. Only the marriage built on biblical love, mutual support between the spouses, self-sacrifice and bringing children up in obedience to parents compelling them to take care of their children can serve as a basis for good family relations and demographic well-being', he said.

The first session of the conference was devoted to the theme 'Family and Religious Community'. The moderator of the session, Metropolitan Hilarion, in his remarks substantiated in detail the traditional view of the institution of family. He pointed to the threats to traditional morality: 'Values based on the religious moral ideal are subjected to systematic profanation while new moral norms, not rooted in tradition and contradicting the very human nature, are implanted in the masses. Millions of unborn babies are deprived of life while old people and incurable patients are offered "the right to a dignified death", that is, euthanasia'. He stressed the need to preserve the institution of family by all means so that there may be

a future. 'The decay of family is a delayed-action mine capable of undermining the moral basis of whole generations. The family based on marriage is the solid foundation of any state', he said.

Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev spoke on the role of religion in strengthening the institution of family and family values. He pointed to the divine nature of the origin of the family, saying, 'The religious life prompts us that marriage and family are not a mere union of two people but a mystery of the development of the spouses' personalities when husband and wife are no longer two atoms independent of each other but a new organism. It is a living organism', he said. According to the priest, the modern world is losing its roots in religious tradition and reliance on the age-old religious experience of the previous generations including in the area of family and marriage: 'There is a process of seeing things as purely biological – a view in which the anatomic principle has prevailed where originally it belonged to the spiritual one'.

Rabbi Goldschmidt outlined the Judaic view of the family. Ms. Protaschuk, a member of the Russian delegation, spoke of the experience of teaching children to look for the history of their kin and families.

Closing the session, Metropolitan Hilarion expressed hope that the conference would become the first in the series of such meetings and pointed to the need to publish all the speeches made during the conference.

The second session of the conference chaired by Cardinal Schoenborn was devoted to the law concerning family relations. Ms. Gudrun Kugler shared an experience of opposing the LGBT community's lobbying. Mr. Komov, a member of the Russian delegation, related a story of how opponents of the traditional family substitute the notion of husband and wife and mother and father seeking to promote anti-family norms in international legislation.

The third session dealing with the Ethics of Sexual Relations was chaired by Rabbi Goldschmidt. The participants discussed medical and biological aspects of family ethics and the attitude to contraception and abortion and to homosexual unions. They also dwelt on the negative impact made by the mass culture on the institution of family and recognized the need to promote the understanding of the sanctity of marriage. Fr. Dimitry Pershin shared his reflections on modern reproductive technologies.

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