'Religion and Political Culture' Conference in Rome

On 29 September 2009, a 'Religion and Political Culture' Conference took place in Rome on the initiative of the Pontifical Gregorian University and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Taking part in the discussion were religious, political and public figures from Russia, Ukraine, Germany, Italy, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania. The Moscow Patriarchate was represented by the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church archimandrite Kirill (Govorun), deputy chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate hieromonk Philip (Ryabykh), and professor of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation A. Zubov.

Participants in the Conference discussed religious roots of the European political tradition and its present state.

It was noted in particular that many European politicians and representatives of different worldviews recognize the leading role of Christianity in the past history of the continent, but deny it this role for the present and future of Europe. The adherents of this view believe that the state and public support of this or that religion would bring about the infringement of rights of other faiths and worldviews and would ruin the priority of the value of human being over social and political institutions.

The participants disagreed with this approach and pointed out that the recognition of the rights of human beings by the states and international organizations was based on the notion of man laid and supported by Christianity. Moreover, many public institutions and traditions in Western countries are also rooted in the Christian teaching on the world and man. The speakers at the conference came to a conclusion that the struggle against Christianity in Europe would bring about the destruction of European culture and the model of social development. The participants called for the lack of fear in defining European political and cultural identity on the basis of Christian values.

A. Zubov told in his report about the development of relations between the Church and the state in Russia in the 20th century.

Hieromonk Philip noted in his intervention at the conference the necessity to overcome prejudice and gaps in the comprehension of social and political processes in the different regions of Europe for the sake of shaping a single European civilizational space. He believes that the East and the West of Europe should respect each other as separate spiritual and political centers with equal value for the European civilization. The West could not only share its experience with the East, but also get inspired by its positive experience and its ideas. The Russian Orthodox Church, which is the core of the East European region, sets forth an idea of linking human rights with religious tradition and morality. The DECR MP deputy chairman thinks that this position could be sought-for in the West.

While summing up the discussion, archimandrite Kirill (Govorun) noted that the return of Europe to its Christian roots could become a factor that would unite all European people.

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