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Russian Orthodox Leader Defends Europe's Roots

Says Excluding Christianity Isn't Path to a Friendlier Continent

ROME, SEPT. 15, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Excluding signs of Christian civilization from Europe does not make it a place friendlier to non-Christians, says a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external Church relations, made this claim when he spoke at the opening session of an OSCE meeting on anti-Christian violence. The meeting was held Monday in Rome.

"There is a simple axiom, understandable to every educated European," Hilarion proposed. "European civilization is a culture that has developed on a Christian foundation. Today Europe, and indeed the entire OSCE region, has acquired a clearly expressed multicultural nature, having become a place of contact between peoples and religions from all over the world. Yet, does this mean that the cultural and religious diversity of Europe definitely threatens her Christian roots? Not at all."

The metropolitan pointed to a "basic danger" of "attempting to use religious diversity as an excuse to exclude signs of Christian civilization from the public and political realities of the continent, as though this would make our continent friendlier towards non-Christians."

In fact, he said, this separation endangers the representatives of any religion.

"I am convinced that society, which has renounced its spiritual heritage under the pretext of the radical separation of religious life from public life, becomes vulnerable to the spirit of enmity in relation to representatives of any religion," Hilarion stated. "This indeed does create an atmosphere of intolerance in relation to Christians, as well as to representatives of other traditional religions."

The Russian Orthodox representative went on to illustrate his point with several examples, including regulations in Spain for primary school sex education, in which pupils are "indoctrinated with views on sexual relations which are totally inconsistent with the religious beliefs of their parents." Other examples are attacks on the Christian defense of unborn children, the dying, or marriage between one man and one woman, he noted.

"People who ignore or infringe on the rights and legitimate interests of Christians are often guided by secular maximalism, that is, they proceed from the notion that religion is no more than the personal affair of the individual and does not have a social dimension," he explained.

Metropolitan Hilarion acknowledged that a model of peaceful inter-civilizational coexistence is "a difficult theoretical and practical task." But, he said, a model is needed "not only in the OSCE region but also throughout the world, including those places where Christians feel themselves to be especially vulnerable."

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