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POPE WELCOMES GROWING INTEREST IN ORTHODOX MEETING

Christian Leaders Reflect on Communion, Solitude

ROME, SEPT. 9, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A papal message to an annual meeting on Orthodox spirituality noted growing participation in the event and praised the choice for this year's theme.

A message signed by Benedict XVI's secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, commended the 18th International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality. The four-day symposium at the Bose monastery in Italy concludes on Saturday.

This year's theme is "communion and solitude," and the scholars -- representing Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants -- are considering insight offered by Christian tradition into these polar opposites, which are vital dimensions of the spiritual life.

The Holy Father noted the theme, saying it is "rich in ideas for further reflection and also of great pastoral and cultural timeliness."

The papal message also invited the participants to "turn their gaze to the Blessed Virgin Mary and, guided by her, to contemplate Christ the perfect model of harmony between communion and solitude, in whom subsists the One and Triune God."

Voice of leaders

Several messages came from other high-ranking Orthodox and Catholic leaders, including the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. The patriarch also praised the theme, noting that "solitude and silence ultimately instruct us in the proper way of relating to and being in communion with others."

He reflected: "As a community that is monastic in nature and ecumenical at heart, we recognize that the two elements that will be discussed at this year's annual conference are at once your experiences and expectations as you lead a life of fellowship and prayer. In many ways, your monastic life demonstrates the yearning and understanding of monks and nuns through the centuries, from the early desert fathers and mothers to the cenobitic and eremitic practitioners of the undivided Church of the first millennium, down to the priories and nunneries across confessional borders in our own day."

For his part, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia recalled in his message that "both solitude, withdrawing from the world, and openness to communion with one's neighbor have always been considered necessary spiritual practices in the way of salvation. The Savior himself gave us the example of the harmonious union of common life and solitude."

"In Russian monasticism, a balance has always been sought between common life and solitude, because of the awareness that both withdrawal from the seductions of the world as well as community service are of equal importance in the life of the Christian," he continued. "The world must see that the gifts of the Holy Spirit transfiguring human life abound also today among those who seek to live according to the Gospel, as they did among the men of prayer of past centuries."