

U.S. follows Western ideology on rights

MOSCOW - A Russian Orthodox leader said U.S. government attitudes toward religious freedom follow a Western “ideology of human rights.”

“U.S. experts are superficial and biased when judging the Orthodox Church’s approach to understanding human rights and the problems of church-state relations,” said Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations.

“As a political mechanism, democracy makes it possible for various value systems to coexist. It isn’t identical to the ideology developed in the West, without other civilizations and cultures being taken into account,” he said.

The Orthodox official told the state-owned Rossijskaya Gazeta weekly April 6 that he had sent a late-March letter to the U.S. ambassador to Russia in response to claims in a U.S. State Department report that religious minorities face discrimination in Russia.

Metropolitan Kirill said he had informed William Burns, the U.S. ambassador, that the Orthodox Church was concerned about a “radical-liberal interpretation of human rights” and would condemn human rights notions that “humiliate human dignity and undermine conventional ethical principles.”

“Support for same-sex marriages, drug addiction, prostitution and death by lethal injection in the West shouldn’t be made the criterion of democracy in society,” Metropolitan Kirill added. “Nor should they make everyone think they’re useful, right and ethically acceptable.”

The 2006 Annual Report on Religious Freedom, which covered 197 countries, said the Russian government “generally respected” religious freedom but failed to prevent restrictions by local authorities.

It said Russian Orthodox clergy had opposed publicly any expansion by Catholic, Protestant and other non-Orthodox communities and added that Russia’s 1997 freedom of conscience law continued to put nontraditional religious groups at a serious disadvantage.

As examples, it cited anti-Semitism and “negative popular attitudes” toward Muslims, as well as discrimination against Lutherans, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Scientologists.