

ENGLAND

ARC forum in London paves road to rebirth of West

CULTURE

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There is a growing sense of the inexorable decline of Western civilisation. Despite the optimism of the elites running our societies, who try to sell the obvious signs of crisis as an opportunity for a "great reset", reality doesn't lie: demographic collapse, rapid

deindustrialisation and economic decline, growing violence linked to uncontrolled immigration, cultural desertification, lack of credibility of the political class (see German elections for latest example) are phenomena that speak for themselves.

Fortunately, there are those who are tackling the problem of how to reverse the trend, and it was a pleasant discovery last week in London to realise that they are a minority, but a significant and well-prepared one. From 17 to 19 February, the second conference of the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) was held, which defines itself as 'an international movement with a vision for a better world, where empowered citizens take responsibility and work together to make their families, communities and nations thrive and prosper'.

In fact, it was a mega-gathering of political, cultural, economic and religious leaders, mainly from the Anglo-Saxon world, who can be placed in the realm of conservatism, however approximate that definition may be. Nearly 150 speakers - from the Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson to the "sceptical environmentalist" Bjorn Lomborg, from the Somali-born academic Ayaan Hirsi Ali to the American Catholic Bishop Robert Barron, from the former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott to the former President of the Hungarian Republic Katalin Novak - who took turns over three days to speak on five fundamental themes: the state of our civilisation, social responsibility, free enterprise, energy and the environment, identity in the digital age; over 4,000 participants who had many opportunities for mutual understanding, exchange and collaboration.

It is a movement that is indeed growing, if it is true that the number of participants has tripled compared to the first edition of the ARC Conference two years ago, and a third edition is already in the pipeline in just over a year, in June 2026. Certainly, the wind blowing from the United States is also helping to give strength to this movement, which challenges the cornerstones of the ideology currently dominant in the West and seeks to lay the foundations for a radical transformation of society.

In addition to the extraordinary fact that such a meeting was possible and that it was so well attended, two very positive aspects should be highlighted.

Although the discussion necessarily focused on political decisions and government policies, there is a widespread awareness that the change needed is fundamentally cultural. Political choices are not merely technical issues, but the result of an understanding of the human person. In this respect, the questions raised during the sessions dedicated to identity in the digital age are very interesting, because today there

is perhaps nothing more challenging for man than artificial intelligence and all that it implies. The brevity of the talks may not have allowed an in-depth analysis of all the issues, but certainly gave the audience many ideas to think about.

The second important aspect is the shared awareness that the foundation of Western civilisation, to which we must return, is the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is no coincidence that there were various representatives from the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant worlds, with a significant Jewish presence. The aim is not to build a new civilisation, but to return to the true roots of the West, religious and cultural roots that have been betrayed and rejected by the political and cultural elite in power today.

Listening to many of the speeches, it seemed that the challenge to non-believers issued by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on 1 April 2005 from Subiaco, in his last (memorable) speech before being elected Pope, had been taken up: 'Live as if God existed'. Ratzinger explained how the attempt to find common moral values for humanity, typical of the culture of the Enlightenment, had failed miserably: "The attempt, taken to the extreme, to organise human affairs completely without reference to God - said the future Benedict XVI - leads us ever closer to the edge of the abyss, to the total marginalisation of man". This abyss is becoming more and more evident today, as mentioned at the beginning. Ratzinger therefore overturned the "axiom of the Enlightenment" and proposed: "Even those who cannot find a way to accept God should nevertheless try to live and lead their lives *"veluti si Deus daretur"*, as if God existed. (...) In this way, no one is restricted in his freedom, but all our things find a support and a criterion that they urgently need".

It is therefore reassuring to know that there are many opinion leaders who have become aware of what is at stake and of the path to be followed, for example by putting the natural family and the identity of peoples back at the centre, and by rejecting gender ideology, immigrationism and extreme environmentalism, which are destroying our society and the possibility of a dignified future.

There is an important lesson to be learnt, however, and it comes from the UK: in the early 1990s, the then British Prime Minister John Major launched the 'Back to Basics' campaign, a return to traditional values. It was intended as a response to the rapid social changes that were deteriorating the education and health systems, as well as civil coexistence. As we can see today, the campaign was a complete failure. One reason was undoubtedly the superficiality of the campaign, which did not have the courage to go beyond certain political proposals.

But there is another, much more important aspect: the fact that certain values cannot be imposed from above, by decree. And it is difficult to embody values if the source from which they come is not present and alive. In Italy in the 1950s and 60s, when Catholic culture was still dominant in society, it was easy even for non-Catholics to believe in marriage, the natural family, openness to life and respect for its sacredness. Today, the dominant culture is very different, and it is difficult to propose values in the abstract when there are no communities living the truth from which those values flow. The ARC conference shows that there are many people of good will who recognise the importance of God's presence and influence in history and who ask, consciously or not, for this presence to be made manifest.

This is a fact that the Church in particular must keep in mind, because this is her mission: not to find political, economic and social solutions that suit everyone, but to proclaim Christ who is present today in our midst to save mankind from their sin.