

**Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group – Groupe de travail orthodoxe-catholique Saint-Irénée
Gemeinsamer orthodox-katholischer Arbeitskreis Sankt Irenäus**

Orthodox Co-secretary:

Prof. Dr. Nikolaos **Loudovikos**
Hortiatis 57010
Thessaloniki
Greece / Griechenland
Phone: +30-2310-348004
Telefax: +30-2310-300360
E-mail: nloudovikos@aeath.gr

Catholic Co-secretary:

Dr. Johannes **Oeldemann**
Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut f. Ökumenik
Leostr. 19 a, 33098 Paderborn
Germany / Deutschland
Phone: +49-5251-8729804
Telefax: +49-5251-280210
E-Mail: J.Oeldemann@moechlerinstitut.de

Communiqué – Chevetogne 2006

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group met from 29 November to 3 December 2006 in the Benedictine monastery of Chevetogne (Belgium) for its third session. At the beginning the abbot of the monastery, P. Philipp Vanderheyden, and the local Roman Catholic bishop, Msgr. André-Mutien Léonard of Namur, welcomed the members of the Working Group. The meeting took place during the visit of Pope Benedict XVI. to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I., a fact which inspired the Working Group in their efforts for the rapprochement between the Catholic and the Orthodox Church.

The theme of the Working Group's third session was "Doctrine and Practice of the Primacy in the First Millennium". The work included papers on different periods and various exemplary events from that time as well as a common study of source texts. It became clear that the primacy is not a random organizational form of church administration, but belongs to the essence of the Church. The writings of the church fathers, based on the Holy Scriptures, show that there is a charism of the primate, whose special task is to safeguard the unity of the Church. This task must be accomplished on the different levels of church life. Therefore there are primatial functions on the level of the local, the regional and patriarchal churches as well as on the level of the whole Church. In the first millennium these primatial functions were always rooted in synodical structures. Therefore one cannot legitimately discuss primacy without discussing synodality, nor deal with synodality without dealing with primacy.

Concerning the primacy of the bishop of Rome the studies showed that there is no uniform understanding of the Roman Primacy in the first millennium. The different models came out of specific historical contexts and therefore met particular needs of the age which cannot be generalized or transposed into our time. Although there was no uniform ecclesiological conception, we can identify a general awareness in the first millennium that the bishop of Rome enjoyed a primacy in the church as a whole. The canons of Sardica, which were agreed upon by East and West, accorded the bishop of Rome the right to order a new trial in a different jurisdiction when cases were appealed to him. The practice of primacy in the first millennium is reflected not only in the canons of the early church councils, but also in other texts of the period, such as Pope Gregory the Great's letters to the four eastern patriarchs.

The Working Group reckons that the correlation between the "first" (protos) and the other bishops as expressed in the 34th Apostolic Canon – which supports an ecclesiology rooted in the mystery of the Trinity – is a promising criterion for the organization of the communion of local churches, not only on regional and patriarchal, but also on the level of the whole Church.

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group was founded in Paderborn (Germany) in 2004. The Group understands itself to be an international, long term theological Working Group which transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries. The Working Group consists of 13 Orthodox theologians (belonging to the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch, Moscow, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, the Orthodox Churches of Greece, Poland, Slovakia and Estonia as well as to the

Orthodox Church in America) and 13 Catholic theologians (belonging to the Catholic Church in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and the USA). The second meeting of the Working Group was held in November 2005 in the Penteli monastery in Athens at the invitation of the Church of Greece.

At the end of the meeting in Chevetogne bishop Dr. Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg (Germany), the Working Group's Catholic Co-president, thanked the monastic community of Chevetogne for their hospitality and the Belgian ecumenical organization "Unitas" for the financial support of the meeting. At the invitation of the Working Group's Orthodox Co-president, bishop Dr. Ignatije (Midić) of Braničevo (Serbia), the next meeting will be held in November 2007 in Serbia.

