

**Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group – Groupe de travail orthodoxe-catholique Saint-Irénéé
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 – Belgrade 2007

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group met from 31 October to 4 November 2007 in Serbia for its fourth session on the invitation of its Orthodox Co-president, Bishop Dr Ignatije (Midić) of Braničevo. The meeting opened with an encounter at the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade where the members of the Working Group were welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty, Bishop Dr Irinej (Bulović) of Bačka, and the Catholic Archbishop in Belgrade, Stanislav Hočevar. The members of the group then traveled to Velika Plana where the working sessions were held. The Pokajnica Monastery there provided an opportunity for a spiritual link between the meeting and the prayers of the Monastic community.

The theme of the Working Group's fourth session was "Doctrine and Practice of the Primacy in the Middle Ages". It continued the series of discussions that had started at the last meeting in Chevetogne, examining the doctrine of primacy in the context of the concrete exercise of primacy. The meeting this year discussed the developments connected with the Gregorian Reform, the conflict between papacy and conciliarism in the West, the significance of the Union Councils of Lyon (1274) and Ferrara-Florence (1438-39), as well as statements of Eastern and Western theologians of that period.

It was noted that it is not possible to describe the development of the role of the bishop of Rome and the origin of the idea of a central papal office in the Church without taking into account the political and social conditions of the Middle Ages. The Gregorian Reform was guided by the concern to eliminate abuses in the Western church. During this process, the popes of the period increasingly limited the influence of secular rulers on the church and thus acquired more and more authority. The Orthodox attending this meeting took a critical view of the growing power thus gained by the Roman bishops, as this also had consequences for their role in the church as a whole; but they acknowledged the positive intentions behind the Gregorian Reform. The central role of the Pope in the West, however, resulted not only from the dispute with secular authorities, but was also strengthened by the development of new cultural and spiritual structures, such as the mendicant orders and the universities.

Against this background, the primatial function that was already exercised by the bishop of Rome in the first millennium changed fundamentally in the Middle Ages. The Pope increasingly assumed functions that had originally been those of the local bishop. Appeals were made directly to the Pope and he intervened when problems arose in a local church. This explains why the popes of that time increasingly claimed to exercise an episcopal function in relation to the universal church. Thus the awareness of the distinction between episcopal and primatial tasks was lost.

The Councils of Lyon II and Ferrara-Florence must also be understood in their historical context. As an attempt to reestablish the unity of the Church, the Council of Florence was a failure. It is a positive factor, however, that the questions discussed at this council constitute a programme for

dialogue, and that those present mutually recognized one another without question as the Church and discussed with one another as equals.

Among the factors that led to the division between the Orthodox and the Catholics – in addition to dogmatic and liturgical differences – one should not underestimate the canonical problems. The emergence of parallel ecclesiastical structures is linked to the awareness of a confrontation between two churches fed by theological differences. Only after such hierarchical structures had been established was the schism between East and West complete. The question of how the development of parallel episcopal structures at the time of the Crusades should be evaluated needs more careful historical examination in order to clarify with what intention Latin bishops were appointed in the East.

The conversations as a whole made it clear that to understand decisive statements about the papacy in the Middle Ages it is absolutely necessary to take into account the particular historical context, their importance at their own time, and also the history of their effects. A distinction must be made between the practice of primacy as it developed in reaction to particular historical circumstances and the nature of primacy. A way must therefore be found to surmount certain positions of the past and to integrate the essential elements that have been preserved in both traditions into a common understanding of primacy. Along these lines, the members of the Working Group discussed how primacy could be exercised after full communion has been achieved.

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group was founded in Paderborn (Germany) in 2004. 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 (from 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 (Greece) and the third in December 2006 in the Benedictine monastery of Chevetogne (Belgium).

At the end of the meeting the members of the Working Group attended eucharistic celebrations at Orthodox and Catholic churches in Belgrade. On behalf of the participants Bishop Dr Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg (Germany), the Catholic Co-president of the Working Group, thanked the host Bishop of Braničevo for his hospitality, as well as “Renovabis” and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for their financial support of the meeting. The next meeting of the Working Group has been planned for November 2008 in Vienna (Austria).

