

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

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The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group met from 4th to 8th November 2009 for its sixth session in Kiev at the invitation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). During a meeting with His Beatitude Metropolitan Volodymyr of Kiev and all Ukraine the members of the group expressed their deep gratitude for the hospitality and the possibility to meet in the Monastery of the Caves.

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group consists of 26 theologians, 13 Orthodox and 13 Catholic from different European countries and the USA. It was founded in Paderborn (Germany) in 2004 and has held meetings in Athens (Greece), Chevetogne (Belgium), Belgrade (Serbia) and Vienna (Austria). The theme of the Working Group's sixth session was "The First Vatican Council – its historical context and the meaning of its definitions". It continued the series of discussions examining the doctrine of primacy in the context of the concrete exercise of primacy. The results of the common studies were formulated in the following theses:

1. The definitions of the first Vatican Council can only be understood rightly if one takes into account their historical context, which had a strong influence on the formulation of the dogmas of the universal jurisdiction and the infallibility of the pope. The Catholic Church in Western Europe in the second half of the 19th century found itself confronted by three challenges: an ecclesiological challenge expressed primarily in Gallicanism, a political challenge from the increasing state control of the Church, and an intellectual challenge from developments in modern science.
2. In Gallicanism (from Gaul, meaning France) the conception of conciliarism, aiming at subordinating the pope to the council, was revived and transformed by emphasizing the autonomy of national churches. The Gallican ideas, especially widespread in France, took a similar form in Febronianism in Germany (named after Febronius, pseudonym of the auxiliary bishop of Trier, Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim). Both Gallicanism and Febronianism were condemned by the popes of that time.
3. In the political realm, the Catholic Church found itself confronted, on the one hand, by fundamental changes in the relationship between state and church, such as the rupture between throne and altar in Germany, the instrumentalisation of the church by the state in France and in the Habsburg empire (especially under Emperor Joseph II and hence known as "Josephism"), and the loss of papal territories in Italy which deprived the pope much of his freedom of action. On the other hand, the Church was confronted by a growing influence of liberalism, which was associated in many European countries with the strong anticlericalism of governments with a secular approach.
4. The intellectual challenge consisted in the development of the modern natural sciences, in the criticism of religion in philosophy and arts, and in the application of the historical-critical method to Holy Scripture. This challenge called for a reconsideration of the relationship between faith and reason.

5. In contrast to the challenges listed above, in the countries north of the Alps the ultramontane movement developed which emphasized the necessity of being guided by the pope who lived in Rome “beyond the mountains” (ultramontane). Under Gregory XVI (1831-46) and Pius IX (1846-78) the papacy itself became one of the main actors in the ultramontane movement.

6. The ultramontane movement, supported by the new possibilities of communication which made it possible for papal declarations to be received directly by a wide public, strengthened the emotional ties of the faithful with Rome. In addition, the central role of Rome was reinforced by the missionary expansion of that time which relativised the importance of national borders. Increasingly the pope became the primary figure symbolizing the Catholic Church with whom many Catholics worldwide identified themselves.

7. Ultramontanism was not only a movement of reaction but can also be considered a form of the Church’s adaptation to the constraints of modern society. Through a reorientation towards Rome, which led to a strengthening of the powers of the papacy, the Church tried to respond to the French Revolution and its consequences (the disappearance of the imperial state church, the re-drawing of the map of the French dioceses and the sacking of all their bishops).

8. Although the First Vatican Council was primarily a response to the phenomena in Western society which have been mentioned, one should not forget its Eastern dimension. The approach of the Christian East, which placed more emphasis on the rights of the local churches, was raised at the Council above all by the bishops of the Eastern Catholic churches present there who – like a minority of the Latin bishops – failed to get the Council to consider their reservations.

9. Due to the changes in church structures in the course of the 19th century resulting from politics, the Catholic Church at the First Vatican Council strengthened the authority of the pope and enabled him to intervene in local church structures in order to preserve the unity of the church at critical moments. The acts of the Council show that universal jurisdiction does not mean that the pope becomes an absolute monarch, because he remains bound by Divine law and natural law and has to respect the rights of the bishops and the decisions of the councils.

10. The First Vatican Council defined the infallibility of the pope in a very particular sense. The pope can pronounce a doctrine of faith and morals infallibly only under precisely formulated conditions. Furthermore, he cannot pronounce a new teaching but can only give a more detailed formulation of a doctrine already rooted in the faith of the Church (*depositum fidei*). The relationship between the infallibility of the Church and the infallibility of the pope requires more investigation.

11. Due to the interruption of the council as a result of political circumstances, the First Vatican Council does not provide a complete ecclesiology, especially with regard to the role of bishops, metropolitans, patriarchs, synods, the laity, etc. Therefore, Vatican I cannot be considered to be the final word on the question. In addition, further study is needed on the way in which the dogmas of Vatican I were actualized subsequently in the canonical tradition and practice of the Catholic Church.

12. There is a need to develop a glossary of terms used in the documents of the council, providing definitions of technical terms such as *potestas immediata*, *plenitudo potestatis*, etc., and also explaining the different nuances of meaning when a concept is expressed in Greek or Latin, etc. Besides, there is also the problem of translation, for example the term “infallibility” is translated to different languages in different ways. This gives rise to different connotations (e.g. “sinlessness” in Russian, “freedom from error” in Greek) which need to be taken into account in the debate on papal infallibility.

13. The various interpretations of Vatican I among Catholics and Orthodox point to the need to develop a common historiography of the period. Agreement on the historical facts will facilitate greater understanding of the meaning of the council’s teaching. Furthermore its teaching needs to be re-articulated in view of the needs of the present day.

On behalf of the participants, the Co-secretaries thanked the Department for External Church Affairs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, headed by Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, for organizing the meeting, as well as “Renovabis” and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for their financial support. At the invitation of the Working Group’s Catholic Co-president, Bishop Dr. Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg, the next meeting is planned for November 2010 in Magdeburg (Germany) and will deal with the reactions from the Orthodox to the First Vatican Council and its reception within the Catholic Church.

