

**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@moehlerinstitut.de

Communiqué – Vienna 2008

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group held its fifth session from 19 to 23 November 2008. At the invitation of the “Pro Oriente” Foundation it met in the Don Bosco House in Vienna. At the beginning of the meeting, the members of the Working Group were welcomed by the president of the “Pro Oriente” Foundation, Dr. Johann Marte, who underlined the common interests of the Foundation and the Working Group with regard to Orthodox-Catholic dialogue. In the framework of an evening organized by the “Pro Oriente” Foundation two members of the Working Group, Prof. Dr. Job Getcha and Prof. Dr. Hervé Legrand (both from Paris), gave public lectures analyzing the present stage and the remaining challenges of the dialogue. It became clear that questions of ecclesiology and church structure are the essential aspects on which further work is required in Orthodox-Catholic dialogue.

The fifth session of the Working Group was devoted to the subject of the “Doctrine and Practice of Primacy from the 16th to the 19th century”. In this way the group continued its series of discussions attempting by means of a chronological review of church history to identify and analyze the development of the understanding and practice of primacy. This year the Working Group dealt with aspects of the role of the papacy in the post-Reformation period, on the one hand, and, on the other, with the development of primatial and synodal structures within the Orthodox Church in the Ottoman and Russian Empires.

Although the authority of the papacy was emphatically questioned by the Reformers, the Council of Trent (1545-63) did not deal directly with papal primacy and thus left open the question of the authority of the pope. The reforms initiated by the Council of Trent in the fields of liturgy, catechesis and theological education nevertheless led to a centralization of doctrinal authority in the Catholic church that gave the Roman See a higher degree of importance. From that time onwards, loyalty to the papacy became a characteristic of Catholic identity.

The question of how we deal today with the characteristics of our identity which have developed in the course of history needs further analysis in the dialogue between Orthodox and Catholics. Here account must also be taken of the images we have of one another and whether these images correspond to the way our partners in dialogue see themselves.

In the Ottoman Empire, the structure of the “Rum-Millet” led to centralization in the life of the Orthodox Church. Hence the Ottoman period led to a significant increase in the importance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the expense of the other Orthodox patriarchates, which were subordinate to the Ecumenical Patriarch according to civil law. As a theological principle, however, synodality was never totally absent from the consciousness of the Church.

The development of nationalism in the 19th century resulted frequently in a lack of respect for fundamental ecclesiological principles in our churches. The territorial principle was replaced in part by an ethnic principle, whereupon, for example, a council in Constantinople in 1872 reacted by condemning ethnophyletism.

More than in almost any other country, the Orthodox Church in Russia has experienced all possible ups and downs, times of support and times of persecution by the state authorities. Its history thus clearly shows the influence of political factors on the church, but also relativises their effect because, even during periods of very strong state control, the church was able to preserve a rich spiritual life.

Our historical studies have shown that political and cultural factors had a strong influence on church structures in both East and West. This means that historical analysis must adopt a multidisciplinary approach that also takes account of factors which, although they have no dogmatic significance, still influence the factual ecclesiology of the churches. Many problems, such as the exercise of secular power, the tendency to centralization and the later strong emphasis on national identity, can be observed in both East and West. These problems require common answers which can only be found by means of a differentiated historical analysis.

The churches in East and West were often confronted with the same temptation of combining church leadership with secular power. This confusion has reinforced primatial authority at the expense of synodal structures. Although synodality was very much in the background at that time it was never completely absent from the consciousness of the church as a theological principle.

When interpreting history, we must beware of idealization. Our progress is not helped when we look for examples in history which are intended to confirm our ideal conceptions. So the mere existence of synods is not a sufficient argument to demonstrate that the principle of synodality was in fact put into practice.

The example of the theological correspondence between Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II and the Reformation theologians in Tuebingen in the late 16th century shows the difficulty of a dialogue which is not based on a common theological vocabulary. Historical analysis of the correspondence makes it clear that for a dialogue to succeed mutual agreement on the criteria for church unity is required. This would include not only confessional issues but also ecclesiological principles.

Every theological dialogue also has a hermeneutical dimension and must therefore take account of the linguistic differences, the ways of thinking and the specific emphases of the different traditions. The hermeneutical method can reveal different approaches which for their part express the riches of the faith and are not mutually exclusive. In our endeavor for a mutual understanding of our theological and canonical expressions, we must therefore take advantage of the instruments of modern hermeneutics which can help us to situate the expressions from the past in their historical context, to identify their lasting value by liberating them from anachronisms, and thus to try to make their intention relevant for today ("relecture").

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group was founded in Paderborn (Germany) in 2004. The Working Group consists of 26 theologians, 13 Orthodox and 13 Catholic (from Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine and the USA). The co-presidents are bishop Dr Ignatije (Midić) of Braničevo (Serbia) and bishop Dr Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg (Germany). The second meeting of the Working Group was held in November 2005 in the Penteli monastery in Athens (Greece), the third in December 2006 in the Benedictine monastery of Chevetogne (Belgium), and the fourth in November 2007 in Belgrade (Serbia).

At the end of the meeting the members of the Working Group met with the Catholic Archbishop of Vienna, Christoph Cardinal Schoenborn, and other representatives of various Christian churches and communities in Vienna for mutual information about the aims of the Working Group and the ecumenical relationships in Vienna. On behalf of the participants Bishop Dr Gerhard Feige thanked the Archbishop of Vienna and the "Pro Oriente" Foundation for their hospitality and

financial support of the meeting. The next meeting of the Working Group has been planned for November 2009, probably in Damascus.

Additional information:

On the Orthodox side, the following persons participated in the meeting of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group in Vienna: Bishop Ignatije (Midić) of Braničevo; Marios Begzos, Athens; Job Getcha, Paris; Cyril Hovorun, Kiev; Assaad Kattan, Münster; Nikolaos Loudovikos, Thessaloniki; Paul Meyendorff, Crestwood/N.Y.; Grigorios Papathomas, Tallinn; Vladan Perišić, Belgrade; Mariyan Stoyadinov, Veliko Tarnovo.

On the Catholic side, the following participants were present: Bishop Gerhard Feige, Magdeburg; Thomas Bremer, Münster; Hyacinthe Destivelle, Paris; Edward Farrugia, Rome; Basilius J. Groen, Graz; Pieter Kohonen, 's-Hertogenbosch; Hervé Legrand, Paris; Johannes Oeldemann, Paderborn; Rudolf Prokschi, Vienna; Wolfgang Thönissen, Paderborn.

