

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

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Communiqué – Thessaloniki 2013

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group met for its tenth session from 13 to 17 November 2013 at the University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki, Greece. The 2013 meeting was chaired by the Catholic Co-president of the Working Group, Bishop Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg, Chairman of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference. The position of Orthodox Co-president was vacant because in the period since the last meeting, the Orthodox Co-president, Metropolitan John (Yazigi), head of the European Diocese of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (Paris), was elected Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. Archbishop-elect Job (Getcha) of Telmessos, future head of the Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe within the Ecumenical Patriarchate and already a member of the group, was elected and agreed to serve as the new Orthodox Co-president.

The first session of the meeting was opened with the participation of Archimandrite Stephanos Tolios, the chancellor of the Metropolis of Thessaloniki. On November 15, Metropolitan Elpidophoros of Prusa visited the meeting and extended the blessings of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. Later on the same day, Metropolitan Anthimos of Thessaloniki appeared personally during one session and greeted the members. The group was particularly grateful to Fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos of the University Ecclesiastical Academy for arranging its kind hospitality and financial support.

During this year's meeting the members discussed papers on the relationship between history and theology, conciliarity and primacy in modern theological discourse, and more specifically in the thought of Yves Congar and Olivier Clément, Orthodox reactions to Vatican II in general and to *Lumen gentium* in particular. The members also examined a draft text summarizing the group's findings during its first ten years. The results of the lectures and intensive discussions were summarized by the members in the following theses:

History and Theology

(1) The Christian faith is inconceivable without reference to history, because God's revelation in Jesus Christ also took place at a specific historical moment. God's saving action for human beings does not occur apart from time and space, but in the midst of human history. Therefore, the self-understanding, theology and preaching of the Church are also marked by history.

(2) Although dogmas are binding doctrinal statements of the Church, they are historically conditioned in the sense that they are reactions to a specific historical challenge in a concrete context and in a given language. Therefore, dogmas are limited both formally and in content, because they are never an exhaustive expression of what they witness and attempt to say.

(3) For theologians, Church history is not an auxiliary discipline, but has considerable theological significance. The Church's past should be neither idealized nor downplayed. Historical studies aim to uncover where Christians, including bishops and theologians, have remained faithful to the Gospel and where – consciously or unconsciously – they have distorted it.

(4) When examining the causes and consequences of church divisions, we must take account of the role played not only by theology, but also by historical, social and cultural factors. Church historical research must not succumb to the temptation of justifying the history of one's church, but should rather be concerned to better understand other traditions according to their own logic.

(5) Unbiased research into the history of the Church and theology has helped to bring about a new view of the controversial issues dividing the churches and to an improvement in their relations. Concrete examples of this include: the work on the Christological controversies over the decisions of the councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451); the new evaluation of the schism of 1054; the agreement between Catholics and Lutherans on basic principles of the doctrine of justification; and the joint presentation of the history of the reformation in the 2013 document by the International Catholic-Lutheran dialogue commission. These examples show that historical research can be important for the "healing of memories".

(6) The results of research in Church history can bear more fruit within the churches if they are received not only by the experts, but on all levels of the Church: by the Church leadership, in theological education and research, as well as in parishes and monasteries.

Conciliarity and Primacy in contemporary theological thought

(7) Historical and sociological data often challenge the established ways of understanding the Church. One should be prepared to revise them in the light of the historical facts. This may also affect our thinking about primacy and conciliarity, and may contribute to their reconsideration by both sides of the dialogue.

(8) The truth can only be approached through the hearing of the Gospel and the other Christian traditions. Thus we note two ecclesiological trends: primarily conciliar in the East and primarily primatial in the West. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can coexist in a creative tension which could leave space for legitimate diversity. As Niels Bohr said, "the opposite of a true statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth can be another profound truth".

(9) Any restoration of full communion between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches will require on the part of both churches a strengthening of conciliar structures and a renewed understanding of a universal primacy serving communion among the local churches.

Orthodox Reactions to Vatican II

(10) In general, Vatican II was welcomed by the Orthodox as a positive step in the direction of conciliarity. However, from the Orthodox perspective, it did not go far enough in reconsidering the dogmas of the infallibility and primacy of the Pope, established at Vatican I.

(11) Reading the text of *Lumen gentium* raised for the Orthodox the question of the relationship between the infallibility of the Pope and the infallibility of the Church. Infallibility is better understood if we take into consideration the charisms of all the members of the Church. In this sense, *Lumen gentium* does open a horizon towards a theology of communion, which helps to embed the question of infallibility within the broader framework of the whole people of God and the communion of bishops.

(12) Vatican II also had the effect of stimulating reflection by Orthodox theologians on the issues their own church was facing at that time, and made possible an official theological dialogue with the Catholic Church.

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group is composed of 26 theologians, 13 Orthodox and 13 Catholics, from a number of European countries and the USA. It was established in 2004 at Paderborn (Germany), and has since then had meetings in Athens (Greece), Chevetogne (Belgium), Belgrade (Serbia), Vienna (Austria), Kiev (Ukraine), Magdeburg (Germany), Saint Petersburg (Russia), and Bose (Italy). In Thessaloniki it was agreed to hold the next meeting of the Working Group in November 2014 in Malta.

