

**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 – Bose 2012

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group met for its ninth session from 31 October to 4 November 2012 at the Monastery of Bose (Northern Italy). On behalf of the Monastic Community of Bose, to which brothers and sisters from various denominations belong, its prior, Enzo Bianchi, welcomed the members of the Working Group and wished them a successful meeting. The daily Liturgy of the Hours of the Bose Community provided a spiritual atmosphere which all participants found enriching. The local bishop, Bishop Gabriele Mana of Biella, expressed his appreciation of the ecumenical commitment of the Bose Community and conveyed greetings to the members of the Working Group on behalf of the Italian Bishops' Conference.

Chaired by the two Co-presidents of the Working Group, Bishop Dr Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg, Chairman of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the German Catholic Bishops' Conference, and Metropolitan Dr John Yazigi, head of the European Diocese of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch (Paris), the members discussed at this year's session the relationship between primacy and synodality in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. After having looked at the historical development from the Early Church to the 19th century at their previous meetings, they focused their attention this time on the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church of 1917/18, and on the Second Vatican Council. The results of the lectures and intensive discussions were summarized by the members in the following theses:

(1) The Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church 1917/18 was a response both to external historical circumstances (democratic upheavals in society, etc.) and to the necessity of reforms within the Church. The Council consisted not only of bishops, but also of priests and lay people, because the alienation between bishops and parishes seemed to be so great that urgent pastoral questions had to be discussed and decided upon with the participation of priests and lay people. At the same time, it was acknowledged, even from within the Church, that priests and lay people need to be involved in church reform processes. This participation was theologically founded on the doctrine of *sobornost'* and the Pauline image of the Church as the Body of Christ.

(2) Against the background of 200 years of state dominance over the Church ("synodal epoch") the Russian Local Council 1917/18 developed a model of church leadership combining primatial (restoration of the Patriarchate) and synodal elements. Because of the Bolshevik Revolution and its consequences this concept could not be implemented in the Russian Church. Nonetheless, it is still relevant today with regard to the relationship between primacy and synodality, which takes different forms in the individual autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

(3) In the interest of better understanding we must take account of the fact that identical words sometimes describe different ecclesial realities. Terms used by both sides which describe varying realities – whether in the course of history or at the same period – have to be clearly defined. This is particularly true for well-known terms such as catholicity, primacy, synodality, collegiality and conciliarity. The term *sobornost'*, for example, can today be understood in the sense of catholicity or of conciliarity, but it is strongly influenced by the philosophical and theological context in 19th century Russia. Similarly, one must beware of understanding the concept of primacy in the sense of centralization or the concept of synodality in the sense of decentralization.

(4) The Second Vatican Council was marked by the desire of the Fathers of the Council "to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful" and "to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 1). In this sense the Council understood itself as a pastoral council, not wishing to issue condemnations (*anathema*) but rather to present church teaching in a positive way to the modern world. The Council's statements are binding and guiding for the Catholic Church, but beyond that they also have ecumenical relevance.

(5) Like all Councils, Vatican II also received the previous Councils. Vatican II picked up the question of how the episcopate is understood and its relationship to the Pope, which had remained open at Vatican I, and tried to find an answer. In doing so the Fathers of the Council took up the definitions of Vatican I on papal primacy and supplemented them by emphasizing the role of the bishops. At the reception of the statements of Vatican I, a number of reservations which had been expressed there by the minority were also taken into consideration and integrated into the statements of Vatican II on papal primacy. This was intended to create a balance between primacy and collegiality.

(6) The Constitution on the Church "Lumen gentium" refers back to the Early Church and emphasizes the sacramentality of the ministry of the bishop and the significance of the collegiality of the bishops, thus leading Catholic ecclesiology closer to the Orthodox position. By means of structural changes the office of the bishop was strengthened, even though many people regard, for example, the competences of bishops' conferences in the current form as unsatisfactory. In addition, the implementation of "Lumen gentium" in canon law only partially corresponds to the ideals of the Council. This leads to a continuing discussion within the Catholic Church about the relationship between primacy and synodality.

(7) The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first document adopted by the Second Vatican Council. It took up liturgical concerns which had already been prepared over a longer period and expressed the desire for renewal of Christian life. At the implementation of the liturgical reform, difficulties arose because of the lack of balance between primatial authority (Pope, Curia) and synodal structures (bishops' conferences, individual bishops, etc.).

(8) In its Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches the Second Vatican Council clearly strengthened the status of the Eastern Patriarchates within the Catholic Church. However, this decree did not succeed in clearly defining the significance of the Eastern Patriarchates and their relationship to the Latin Church. The Eastern Catholic Patriarchs want to exercise their jurisdiction (*potestas*) outside the area of their Patriarchate as well, in order to preserve their spiritual traditions.

(9) Orthodox voices on Vatican II appreciate the stronger emphasis on the collegiality of the bishops, but gain the impression from reading "Lumen gentium" that the college of bishops is always dependent on the Pope, whereas the Pope on his part does not depend upon the college. Also the fact that the infallibility of the Church is very closely bound to the office of the Pope is problematical from the Orthodox point of view. It is a fundamental problem that the documents of both Vatican I and Vatican II are often perceived statically and the dynamic development of the Catholic Church before and after the councils is hardly taken into consideration. The question of the perception of Vatican II by the Orthodox Church needs further intensive study.

(10) An important aspect of our reflection on the relationship between primacy and conciliarity consisted in the question of how to safeguard a close correlation between the communion of the churches and the collegiality of the bishops. The bishops are witnesses of the faith of their churches, but also bear responsibility for the Church as a whole. The charisma they have received in the sacrament of episcopal ordination makes them servants to the whole communion – not just in their own local church, but also between the local churches, as it is signified by the laying on of hands by the neighboring bishops. The hierarchy may not be separated from the Body of the Church. It is a relatively recent phenomenon that there are bishops with no specific relationship to a local church. Thus the question was raised in advance of Vatican I and also of the Moscow Council of 1917/18 whether only diocesan bishops should be allowed to take part in the Council *ex officio*. The existence of titular, vicar and auxiliary bishops in the Catholic Church and in some Orthodox Churches does not belong to the ancient tradition and presents an ecclesiological problem.

(11) The history of reception of Vatican II up to the present shows that one has not succeeded in balancing the existing tendency towards centralization in the Catholic Church. A similar problem is posed in the Orthodox Church, where the autocephalous and autonomous churches have difficulties in their cooperation and in the practical implementation of synodality.

At the end of the meeting the two Co-presidents thanked the Monastic Community of Bose for its hospitality and the Italian Bishops' Conference for the financial support of the meeting.

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) and Saint Petersburg (Russia). In Bose it was agreed to hold the next meeting of the Working Group in November 2013 in Thessaloniki.