

Meeting at Bose of the theological study group Saint Ireneus

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Members of the St Ireneus Group in Bose

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Official press release of the St Ireneus Group at Bose 2012

On 31 October–4 November the 9th annual meeting of the “Orthodox-Catholic mixed theological study group Saint Ireneus” was held in Bose; it centered on the topic “Primacy and synodality as reflected in the decisions of the Council of the Russian Church in 1917–1918 and in Vatican Council II.

The **St Ireneus Group** was founded in 2004 on the initiative of the bishop of Magdeburg and of the Institute Johann-Adam-Möhler of Paderborn, with the aim of aiding through theological studies the official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches.

Twenty-six theologians from all parts of Europe and the United States, thirteen Catholic and thirteen Orthodox, are members of the Group, which so far has met regularly every year.

The members of the St Ireneus Group have not received any official mandate from their Churches, but in faithfulness to their own tradition they intend to study together, in a spirit of fraternal exchange and mutual listening, the theological points that still constitute an obstacle to full communion between the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church and to explore possible ways of approaching closer one another.

The results of the discussion of the St Ireneus Group are then offered to theological research and to the dialogue between the Churches.

In past years the St Ireneus Group met in Greece (Athens), Belgium (Chevetogne), Serbia (Belgrade), Austria (Vienna), (Ukraine (Kiev), Germany (Magdeburg), and Russia (St Petersburg). The definitions of Vatican Council I on the primacy of the bishop of Rome have been studied, as well as Orthodox reactions to this council in various regions (Russia, Middle East, Romania). The understanding of primacy in the Russian Orthodox Church has been examined, and the propositions of other study groups have been studied, with the aim of a convergent view on this problem.

In welcoming the guests at the beginning of the session, the prior of Bose, **Enzo Bianchi**, expressed the community’s commitment in accompanying with prayer their reflections on a topic like that of the primacy, which remains an obstacle, but also an opportunity of conversion on the way towards full communion between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. Vatican Council II, “an event inspired by the Holy Spirit”, “has profoundly changed our understanding of the mystery of the Church as communion, opening the possibility of a dialogue in love with the Orthodox Church”. Now “through a practice of communion” we must go “along the road toward full communion”.

In the Bose meeting, led by the two co-residents, metropolitan **John Yazigi** of the patriarchate of Antioch and bishop **Gerhard Feige** of Magdeburg, the Council of Moscow in 1917–1918 and its model of church government, which organically combines primacy and synodality, were studied. The ecclesiology of Vatican Council II was examined (the role of bishops as a complement to the definition on papal primacy at Vatican Council I; the sacramentality of the episcopal ministry and the meaning of the episcopate’s collegiality; the present synodal structures of the Catholic Church) and how the Orthodox see this ecclesiology and its practice. Finally, open problems for both traditions were indicated in view of a full realization of authentic church communion.

After vespers for All Saints the bishop of Biella, **Gabriele Mana**, greeted the members of the Group, thanking the gathered theologians for their work and recalling that, in the light of Vatican Council II, “the ecclesial climate in which a particular Church lives is communion: with the sister Churches and with Rome”. Bishop **Mansueto Bianchi**, president of the Commission for ecumenism and dialogue of the Italian Bishops’ Conference, which generously contributed towards this meeting, in his letter to the Catholic co-president, bishop Gerhard Feige, congratulated the Group on the topics chosen, which start out from “the consensus reached between Catholics and Orthodox” in a “perspective of eucharistic ecclesiology of communion”. He hoped that “the work of the Group might contribute to the exchange that is taking place,

making a further step forward towards understanding between our Churches. What counts in this moment is that the dialogue continues and that, together with the theological dialogue, trust, esteem, friendship may increase, that, in short, an ecumenism of the heart may develop. Such ecumenism is made of fraternal gestures and meetings and lovingly spurs on the work of theologians”.

The theological discussions took place in a climate of prayer and sharing with the community. Before ending their work the members of the Group had the possibility of a collatio with br Enzo on the sense of a monastic life among Christians belonging to different confessions.

Besides the two co-presidents, the Group consists of twelve Orthodox members: the co-secretary fr. Nikolaos Loudovikos (Orthodox Church of Greece); archimandrite Job Getcha, archimandrite Grigorios Papathomas (Ecumenical patriarchate); Assaad Elias Kattan (Patriarchate of Antioch); archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, fr. Vladimir Khoulap, fr. Vladimir Shmaliy (Moscow Patriarchate); fr. Mihai Sasaujan and fr. Daniel Benga (Romanian Orthodox Church); Paul Meyendorff (Orthodox Church of America); fr. Vladan Perišić (Serbian Orthodox Church); Mariyan Stoyadinov (Bulgarian Orthodox Church); and of twelve Catholic members: the co-secretary Johannes Oeldemann (Institute Johann-Adam-Möhler, Paderborn); Thomas Bremer (Münster); fr. Hyacinthe Destivelle op (St Petersburg); fr. Edward G. Farrugia sj (Rome); Zygfryd Glaeser (Opole, Poland); Basilius J. Groen (Graz); Pieter Kohnen (Department for ecumenical affairs of the Dutch Bishops' Conference); br. Adalberto Mainardi (Bose Monastery); fr. Hervé Legrand op (Paris); fr. Rudolf Prokschi (Vienna); fr. Ronald G. Roberson csp (Secretary for ecumenical affairs of the American Bishops' Conference); Wolfgang Thönissen (Paderborn).

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