

**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 – Cluj-Napoca 2022

The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group gathered for its eighteenth annual meeting from 12 to 16 October 2022 at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the “Babeş-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca. The 2022 meeting was chaired by the Orthodox co-president Metropolitan Serafim (Joantă) of Germany, Central and Northern Europe (Romanian Orthodox Church), and by the Catholic co-president Bishop Gerhard Feige of Magdeburg.

At the opening session, the Working Group was welcomed by Archbishop Andrei Andreicuț, Metropolitan of Cluj, Maramureş and Sălaj, by the Vicar Bishop Benedict Bistrițeanul, and by the Dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty Archimandrite Teofil Tia. After greetings offered by the two co-presidents, the co-secretaries introduced the work of the Group to the gathered professors and students of the Theological Faculty.

At its first plenary, the Group welcomed two new members: Sister Susan Wood from Toronto, Canada, and Andrea Riedl from Dresden, Germany, both Roman Catholic. Presbyter Ioan Vasile Leb from the Orthodox Theological Faculty of Cluj attended as an invited speaker. Also participating as observers were three doctoral students from the same Theological Faculty.

The program of the eighteenth annual meeting focused on “Schisms in Church History: Historical Analysis and Implications for the Methodology of Today’s Ecumenical Dialogue”. Discussions centered on historical, doctrinal, and pastoral factors. Four presentations addressed concrete examples of schisms in the early Church and early medieval period. A special session dealt with the current war in Ukraine, which raises important ecclesiological issues. The concluding lecture addressed the hermeneutical and methodological challenges for ecumenical dialogue. Each presentation was followed by one or two formal responses and by general discussions.

The reflections of this year’s meeting were summarized by the participants in the following theses:

(1) The Church has an unchanging spiritual dimension and a worldly, structurally changeable dimension. Both belong together, but must be distinguished from each other, even if this is often difficult. The Church is aware of God’s love for humanity and knows that his will for salvation includes all people. It is at the service of Christ’s redemptive work and must not impede people’s access to the kingdom of God through its worldly structures, but must work to ensure that as many people as possible attain salvation through its mission.

(2) The Donatist controversy (311-) allowed Augustine to distinguish schism from heresy, a distinction that Cyprian did not make clearly: Augustine understood schism as a break in communion, and considered heresy moreover as a betrayal of true faith.

(3) The Donatist controversy provided an opportunity for Augustine to defend the value of baptism performed by schismatics. Any baptism received in the name of the Trinity, he affirmed, remains that of Christ even through unworthy ministers. Augustine thus justified the Roman practice that allowed the later Latin tradition to distinguish between the validity and liceity of the sacraments. The Orthodox Church, following the teachings of Basil the Great, has a similar tradition, though not employing these categories.

(4) However, Cyprian's position, in which the baptism of heretics was considered 'invalid', continued to be defended in some regions of the Roman Empire and underpins the current practice of non-recognition of baptism, in some Churches, leading to continuing division.

(5) In the so-called Acacian Schism (484-519), which concerned the reception of the Council of Chalcedon (451), theological, hierarchical and political disputes were combined. The actors in the schism did not make sufficient effort to understand the dogmatic positions of the other side and their arguments, so that no substantive discussion could take place. Mutual accusations of a dogmatic and canonical nature led to the breaking of communion by removing each other from the diptychs.

(6) Although the resolution of the Acacian Schism reestablished communion between the Patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople, it did not lead to the restoration of full communion with the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Throughout the conflict with Constantinople, the Roman Church was primarily concerned in its claim to primacy, without taking into account the concrete situation and the theological traditions of the Eastern patriarchates.

(7) Two fundamental areas of ecclesiastical conflict from the pre-Constantinian period – dogma and hierarchy – were joined by a third from the 4th century onwards: the question of the role of the emperor in ecclesiastical processes. The troubles related to Donatism are one of the first examples of the imperial authorities becoming directly involved in Christian controversies. In the centuries that followed, emperors became increasingly involved in Church affairs, including for example the convening of councils, the enforcing of their decrees, as well as the installation and deposition of bishops.

(8) In any schismatic group, there are likely to be not only negative, but also some positive elements. Schisms may preserve valuable truths and emphases. The ideal solution is to harness the good and to channel the energy of the given movement in the spirit of the Gospel. A cogent example of this approach is provided by the way in which Basil the Great and Macarius (Macarius-Symeon, pseudo-Macarius) responded to the Eustathian and Messalian monastic movements, respectively. Rather than reacting only in negative terms, they corrected the errors of these radical ascetics constructively and with pastoral sensitivity. To put it another way, the challenge of schism demands both the rigor of clarity and the ardor of charity.

(9) Schisms develop in stages that are not easily discernible. In our search for unity, there is a need for the most objective possible historical analyses and differentiations on the respective causes and deeper reasons for estrangement, conflict, division, and solidification into schism.

(10) There cannot be a reconciled future of our Churches without a change in our optics. Unity demands the ability to recognize legitimate manifestations of faith in unfamiliar forms and expressed in unfamiliar language and through unfamiliar practices. That change can be achieved, among other things, by writing the history of our Churches together, not only by pointing out divisions and schisms, but also by highlighting biases and bringing to the fore points of convergence and stories of encounter.

(11) The schismatic 'other' is best approached through an attitude of trust and not of suspicion. This means rather than seeking first to condemn and exclude, we should begin with an assumption of good intention and underlying harmony, even when some correction or distancing proves necessary.

(12) Schisms regard different aspects of the Church's tradition. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the unalterable essentials of faith (Tradition) and local and cultural aspects (traditions), which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Separations often originally concern secondary aspects that are subsequently exaggerated and justified dogmatically.

(13) The nature and definition of schism requires further articulation and reflection. This includes *inter alia* the question of how to describe a schism, the outward forms of schism (e.g., break in communion, establishment of competing hierarchies, etc.), and the impact of pre-existing

differences and extra-ecclesial factors. Recent research invites us to deepen the analysis of schisms historically. Although schisms may be caused by non-dogmatic reasons, they have always been justified by theological positions. These justifications tend to dogmatize disputes which have often not expressed cultural, socio-political, and psychological factors. In this regard, it would be useful to formulate a typology of schisms.

(14) A reflection on the ecumenical dialogues has shown that so far there is no agreed model of Church unity. The Orthodox-Catholic dialogue has concentrated on overcoming differences in doctrine. However, greater attention must be paid to questions of identity, which are shaped, above all, by forms of piety, culture, and language, since they are a powerful factor for the respective Churches' self-understanding. Therefore, the goals of ecclesial unity need to be clarified.

(15) Although the Orthodox-Catholic dialogue has not been sufficiently received by our Churches, it has had important consequences for their life. Examples include providing Catholic Church buildings to local Orthodox communities in the diaspora, joint decisions by Orthodox and Catholic bishops to establish local dialogue bodies, new regulations on mutual recognition of baptism and on mixed marriages, changes in Catholic canon law, and the willingness of Pope Francis to deepen dialogue with the Orthodox Church.

(16) It is imperative for our dialogue to distinguish between dogmatic factors, theological but non-dogmatic factors, and non-theological factors. The relationship to the nation, for example, is not a dogmatic issue; however, the clarification of this question requires theological reflection.

(17) Doctrinal dialogues alone cannot achieve unity. To be in communion also implies being able to make common decisions concerning the expression of our faith and the witness to the Gospel in today's societies. It is worth remembering as well that dogma is inseparable from spiritual life. Dogma without the spiritual life is ideology. Spiritual life without dogma is pietism. Both dogma and spiritual life are forms of mediating and living the Gospel. Only when ecumenical discussions are grounded in life in Christ will the quest for unity be realized.



The Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group is composed of 26 theologians, 13 Orthodox and 13 Catholics, from a number of European countries, the Middle East, and the Americas. It was established in 2004 at Paderborn (Germany), and has met since then in Athens (Greece), Chevetogne (Belgium), Belgrade (Serbia), Vienna (Austria), Kyiv (Ukraine), Magdeburg (Germany), Saint Petersburg (Russia), Bose (Italy), Thessaloniki (Greece), Rabat (Malta), on Halki near Istanbul (Turkey), Taizé (France), Caraiman (Romania), Graz (Austria), Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Rome (Italy), and Cluj-Napoca (Romania). It was decided in Cluj-Napoca to hold the next meeting of the Irenaeus Group in June 2023 in Lebanon.

