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CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX MEETING NOTES PRIMACY OF CHARITY

Reflection Continues on Bishop of Rome in 1st Millennium

VIENNA, Austria, SEPT. 29, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Orthodox and Catholic theologians studying one of the main issues on the road to full unity -- the role of the pope -- have concluded their meeting with the resolve to continue studying, and with an emphasis on the "primacy of charity."

The International Mixed Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church concluded its six-day meeting in Vienna on Monday.

In this 12th plenary session, the commission has been examining the same theme that drew them together in 2009: "The Role of the Bishop of Rome in the Communion of the Church in the First Millennium." This theme obviously has great ramifications for the ecumenical process, since in the first millennium (before the Great Schism of 1054), there was no split between the Catholic and Orthodox.

During a Eucharistic celebration presided over by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna, the cardinal affirmed in his homily, "We have and we need a primacy in the canonical sense, but above all there is the primacy of charity."

"All canonical dispositions in the Church serve this primacy of love (agape)," he added.

A communiqué that was released at the end of the meeting noted that 23 Catholic members of the commission took part in the gathering, and representations from all the Orthodox Churches, except the Patriarchate of Bulgaria.

The participating Orthodox Churches included: the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the Patriarchate of Antioch, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Patriarchate of Moscow, the Patriarchate of Serbia, the Patriarchate of Romania, the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Poland, the Church of Albania and the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

The Catholic co-president of the meeting was for the first time Archbishop Kurt Koch, the new president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He was appointed to that role in July. The Orthodox co-president was Metropolitan Ioannis Zizioulas of Pergamum.

At the opening session on Sept. 22, Cardinal Schönborn and Metropolitan Michael of Austria of the Ecumenical Patriarchate both gave welcoming addresses in which they stressed the importance of Vienna's place in the history of Christianity.

The co-presidents relayed to the participants the words of Benedict XVI and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the occasion of the meeting.

Authentic testimony

In his Sept. 22 general audience, the Pope appealed, "I exhort everyone to pray intensely for the efforts of the commission and for a continuous development and consolidation of peace among the baptized, so that we can give the world an ever more authentic evangelical testimony."

In a celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Metropolitan Michael of Austria underlined "the close collaboration between Orthodox and Catholics in Austria and in Vienna in particular, expressing the wish that the Lord's prayer 'that all may be one' (Jn 17:21) be a reality in the search for the unity of his Church."

The commission continued its discussion on the Bishop of Rome in the 1st Millennium, based on the consideration of a draft text, which is being used as a working document. The commission decided that the document still needs further revisions.

The commission also decided to form a sub-commission to begin consideration "of the theological and ecclesiological aspects of primacy in its relation to synodality," the communiqué reported.

It noted that this sub-commission will submit its work to the joint coordinating committee of the commission, which will meet next year.

During the meeting, participants were informed of the death of Monsignor Eleuterio Fortino, co-secretary of the joint commission since its inception, and they offered prayers for the repose of his soul.

The communiqué concluded that this meeting "was marked by a spirit of friendship and trustful collaboration."

It added that the participants "strongly commend the continuing work of the dialogue to the prayers of the faithful."

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