

Thirteen Annual Ecclesiological Investigations Conference

“Stolen Churches” or “Bridges to Orthodoxy”? Impulses for Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches

Stuttgart (Germany), 19-21. July 2019



About the Conference

In many respects, the history of Christianity is as much a history of division as it is of unity. In the past two millennia all too many Christian churches and traditions moved away from one another and went their own individual paths. We are living in exciting times in which these paths are beginning to intersect once again in multiple ways. Through recent developments in ecumenical dialogue, separated Christian churches have begun to appreciate anew that what they share in common is, or at least should be, far more important than what divides them. While ecumenical dialogue has not resulted in full visible ecclesial unity (and more recent debates have questioned whether this is even necessary or desirable, and have spoken instead of closer union and partial communion as alternatives ends for ecumenism to pursue), what has emerged is a new climate of improved relations between churches which once were sworn enemies.

Beside the important gains made through multilateral dialogues between multiple churches, which have made much progress due to ecumenical organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), churches have also gained a great deal through bilateral dialogues. This can prove especially fruitful in healing wounds of the past. Today, there is almost every possible combination of bilateral dialogue that might be imagined.

And yet, one of the rare yet vital exceptions is dialogue between the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches. These Churches have endured a very complex and at times tense relationship with one another (not simply theological but also political and ethnic).

In many cases these tense relationships remain still to this day. Indeed, they have even in some cases increased in difficulty in various contexts (e.g. in the Ukrainian context). One of the key stumbling blocks between these churches concerns the widely differing perceptions of what these Eastern Catholic Churches represent and their disparate views. Regardless of historical accuracy, many Orthodox Christians refer to these churches as “stolen” (despite the fact that most of these churches did not even emerge from so-called processes of ‘unitianism’ nor ‘proselytism’), while on the Catholic side they are seen as bridges to the Orthodox traditions (a perspective which, again, many Orthodox strongly reject).

Acknowledging this situation, we decided to name our conference **“Stolen Churches” or “Bridges to Orthodoxy”? Impulses for Theological Dialogue Between Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches**. We are aware that this title theme may strike some as somewhat provocative but it serves to illustrate the differing and polarized positions on both sides with regard to the ecclesial status of Eastern Catholic Churches. We hope that this conference will help draw out the subjectivity of differing ecclesiological

standpoints with regard to the status of these churches and therefore help move toward an ecumenically-oriented breakthrough in understanding. It is our intention to provide the opportunity for theological impulses to emerge that we hope would result in advancing bilateral dialogue between these two traditions (while acknowledging of course that, *de facto*, the Eastern Catholic Churches are part of the Roman Catholic Church).

The intention behind this conference, therefore, is to encourage and promote much needed theological engagement for the furtherance of dialogue between Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches. We seek to gather together official representatives of both these Christian traditions, as well as scholars (especially theologians and historians) and political representatives from the differing contexts where the tensions are greatest to see if we can help move dialogue and relations forward in this area. Delving deeper into what shapes and maintains differing ecclesiological perspectives, partners in dialogue might come to appreciate the sources of divisions and the sensitivities involved in helping to overcome ecclesial stand-offs of key historical moments as well as in recent decades.

Call for Papers

We invite individual papers as well as panel proposals (panels to contain a maximum of four speakers) on the following themes

- 1. The History of the Eastern Catholic Churches from different perspectives**
2. Theological differences and similarities
- 3. Ecclesiological differences and similarities**
4. Liturgical differences and similarities
- 5. Doctrinal differences and similarities**
6. Political aspects and differing geographical and ethnic contextual factors
- 7. Ecumenical efforts, progress, studies and documentation – historically and in recent and contemporary times**
8. Experiences of other churches in the bilateral dialogue as well as other ideas that would help move dialogue, understanding, interaction and engagement between the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches forward.

We would, of course, welcome further suggestions on additional themes, topics and relevant questions. The proceedings of the conference (that, of course, meet the required editorial and scholarly requirements) will be published with Palgrave Macmillan in the “Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue” series (which has published 16 important volumes since its inception in 2015 – including recent volumes exploring *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue*, *Vatican II’s Impact on Ecumenism and the Church’s engagement with the wider world*, and *Vatican II and Catholicism Engaging other Faiths and the Ecumenical Legacy of the Cappadocian Fathers*).

Network Background

The event would be a joint initiative between the Academy Rottenburg-Stuttgart, Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network (EI Network, see www.ei-research.net) and many additional partners. More detailed information about past events organised by the EI can be viewed concerning our Assisi 2012 event, involving over 255 participant from 55 different nations: [Where We Dwell in Common: Pathways for Dialogue in the 21st Century](#), our 2013 event [Religion, Authority and the State: From Constantine to the Secular and Beyond](#); our Oxford 2014 conference on [Hope in the Ecumenical Future](#); and our 2015 gathering at Georgetown University and the Washington National Cathedral: [Vatican II: Remembering the Future – Ecumenical, Interfaith and Secular Explorations of the Council’s Legacy and Promise](#) at which Cardinals Tauran and Tagle spoke and Cardinal Kasper spoke and presided and preached (you can find videos of the plenary sessions alongside photos from throughout the event’s duration on these websites).

In July, 2016 we met in China, in Hong Kong to explore [Christianity and Religions in China: Past, Present, Future](#), where, among our keynote speakers were the Anglican Archbishop Paul Kwong, Bishop Michael Yeung of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong and a host of scholars and practitioners from around the globe – we were especially pleased that a majority of presentations were by those working in or working on Asian contexts. Our most recent events commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, taking the theme of [The Reformation and Global Reconciliation](#), held in Germany at the University of Jena in 2017 and The Church and Migration: Global In-Difference?, which was organized with multiple ecumenical partners at the University of Toronto in June, 2018 and was opened by Cardinal Collins. Other events have taken place in Dayton-Ohio (US), Leuven (Belgium), Utrecht (Netherlands), Durham (England), Hawarden (Wales) and Kottayam (India).

Conference Website: oec.dialogue.group