

The Polyphonic Theology of the Church Fathers, Heidelberg, Germany, 9-12 October 2014

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Prof. Dr. Dres. H. c. Christoph Marschies (Humboldt University Berlin, Germany) in collaboration with Prof. Dr. Michael Welker (Heidelberg University, Germany) initiated an international project to which about 25 international scholars of high profile were invited to participate. The purpose of the project is to gain a new and nuanced perspective on the theology of 19 church fathers: Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Eusebius, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, Theodoret of Cyrus, Boethius, Isidore, Maximus the Confessor and John Damascene. Research on these theologians has often been centred on their individual theologies, on person-to-person relations and on group relations. Duals have predominantly been used to explain their profiles (biblical versus philosophical, individual versus ecclesial traditions etc.). The endeavour of the project was to move beyond such perspectives in order to explore the structured plurality which provides the works of the Church Fathers with a canonical texture comparable to the biblical canon which combines coherence and complexity and offers a polyphony of perspectives of great and nuanced orienting powers. The presenters tried to identify not only the uniqueness of an individual father among the other fathers, but significant communalities and differences to some of the other Church Fathers with respect to the concentration on theological topics and forms of thought and methodology.

A central question which guided the research and discourse of this project relate to the authorization of theological thoughts and statements. Which strategies to achieve such authorization are necessary and which persons play a central part, both explicitly and in later ways? In order to pursue this line of research the scholars involved in the project were invited to look for direct references by other Church Fathers to the individual thinker or, if possible, to his references to other Church Fathers and their work. It was planned to move beyond the evaluation of self-descriptions and to look for thematic concentrations and specific methodological operations which characterize individual

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uniqueness and complex relations and significant differences in the broad field the Church Fathers' teaching.

The first meeting related to this project took place in Heidelberg, Germany, from 9th to 11th of October 2014 at International Wissenschaftsforum of the University of Heidelberg. It were presented papers on Justin Martyr (Jörg Ulrich, Halle-Wittenberg University, Germany), Irenaeus of Lyon (John Behr, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, USA and Enrico Norelli, Geneva University, Switzerland), Clement of Alexandria (Judith L. Kovacs, University of Virginia, USA), Tertullian (Katharina Greschat, Ruhr University Bochum, Germany), Origen (Christoph Marksches, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany), Cyprian of Chartage (Andreas Merkt, Regensburg University, Germany), Eusebius of Caesarea (Basel University, Switzerland), Gregory of Nazianzus (Theodoros Alexopoulos, Bern University, Switzerland), Gregory of Nyssa (Thomas Böhm, Albert-Ludwig University Freiburg, Germany), John Chrysostom (Daniel Buda, Faith and Order, world Council of Churches and Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania), Augustine (Volker Henning Drecoll, Tübingen University and Michael Welker Heidelberg University, Germany), Leo the Great (Dietmar Wyrwa, Humboldt University), Theodoret of Cyrus (Silke-Petra Bergian, Zürich University, Switzerland), Boethius (Claudio Moreschini, Pisa University, Italy), Isidore of Seville (Jan Bobbe, Humboldt University), Maximus the Confessor (Vladimir Bashkirau, Minsk Academy of Theology, Belarus and Daniel Munteanu, Bamberg University) and John Damascene (Cyril Hovorun, Yale University, USA).

The next conference related with this project will take place between 12th and 15th November 2015 in Berlin, Germany.