

THEOBALT

Standing committee

Meeting in S:t Petersburg, the 2nd of February 2002
in the Metropolitan building of the Alexander of Neva
Lavra

Participants

Rt Rev Biörn Fjärstedt, moderator	Church of Sweden
Rt Rev Rimantas Norvila	Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania
Father Varsanofiusz Doroszkiewicz	Orthodox Church in Poland
Rt Rev Jonas Jonson	Church of Sweden
Rev Mette Trankjaer	Lutheran Church of Denmark
Rt Rev Ilkka Kantola	Lutheran Church of Finland
Deacon Andrei Eliseev	Russian Orthodox Church

The committee was cordially greeted by His Eminence the Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, who expressed his joy and appreciation of the possibility to receive the Theobalt committee in his diocese. This was the first ecumenical meeting ever taking place at Alexander Nevskij Lavra. The Metropolitan described how the premises had been given back to the church after the political changes during the recent decade. Before it was used for the manufacturing of weapons, which had left the building in a very poor condition.

The Metropolitan continued by giving a short presentation of the Russian Orthodox Church mentioning among other things that the church is financially dependent but to a great extent also carried by the generosity of the believers. He also talked about his own long time engagement in the ecumenical work.

Further the Metropolitan touched upon the problems that the church is facing today, especially in relation to the widely spread materialistic way of living. The church has a great mission in guiding people to an alternative source for happiness. Finally the Metropolitan stressed the importance for education, saying that the churches have a great task lying ahead of them, as children and youngsters are the future of the church.

On behalf of the committee Bishop Biörn Fjärstedt reciprocated the speech of the Metropolitan expressing appreciation and gratitude for the hospitality extended to the committee, which becomes an encouraging support for the Theobalt idea. Being invited to participate the meeting, the Metropolitan attended during the first item on the agenda.

1. Looking back at 2001

- a) The document 'Theobalt 2001 – a summary' which has been distributed in advance is commented. A general conclusion is that idea of Theobalt is getting more and more established in the area. The attitude from the churches is more open and positive.
- b) In the discussions special attention is drawn to the conference Theobalt V. It is noted that the theme '*Churches around the Baltic – their contribution to the region in a changing context*' has been enlightened in a good way but also in a broad perspective. The need to follow up the conference through seminars with a more narrow approach is emphasized.
- c) A report from the meeting in September 2001 with the Theobalt contact persons of the churches is distributed and commented. Almost all network churches have appointed a contact person, which is indicating that this system is progressing, which is verified by many of the contact persons.

2. The project plan – comments and suggestions

- a) The diocese of Visby has adopted a project plan for Theobalt for the period 2001 – 2004. It is presented with short comments. In a discussion it is pointed out that uniting Europe is not only a political process but also a social challenge holding many problems. The basic question is still: Who is your neighbour? What does that mean for the Theobalt work? How can we show that Christian are practical and caring people? In that respect Life and Work may be as important as Faith and Order.
- b) Four aspects are particularly noted as priorities for 2002:
 - Seminars to follow up the theme of Theobalt V
 - Important that the churches gain a deeper knowledge about each other
 - Exchange of experience of social care as Christian mission
 - Links to other networks should be developed
- c) In order to promote a deeper learning among the Theobalt churches and make it known to Church people in general a study programme shall be outlined. The concept is attached to the Nordic Folk High School idea, which gives a very flexible system focusing particularly on the students contribution with their own life experience as point of departure. The study programme will be developed in co-operation between representatives from the three church traditions. The idea is not to establish an institution of our own but to integrate it through separate courses in the curriculum of another school.

3. Seminars during 2002

- a) It was unanimously agreed that the theme from Thebalt V has to be followed up in seminars with an attempt to make the perspective more narrow and concrete. A possible way could be to arrange seminars on national or regional level. In this way the participants of the conference

and the contact persons can contribute by preparing and attending the seminars, perhaps also act as moderators.

Stress was laid on two aspects to be observed in the coming discussions:

- The original values of the union, peace and bridge building, must be emphasized by the churches
- The risk that the churches are contributing to isolation by promoting national interests and identities.

The standing committee suggests that a seminar on the role of the churches in relation to the enlargement of the European Union should be arranged in Poland. The contact persons from the three national churches are encouraged to assume the responsibility for the preparations together with the Theobalt coordination office in Visby. The office of the EU Commission in Warsaw should be invited to be a partner in the seminar. It is suggested that the seminar is performed during autumn 2002.

- b) There is a proposal to arrange a seminar on the relation between Christianity and Islam. In this preparatory stage, contacts have been taken with CEC, which has expressed a very positive attitude to such a seminar in the Baltic area.

It is the opinion of the standing committee that this theme is of a high priority from a general point of view. However, for the moment it can not be regarded as an urgent issue for the Baltic region in particular. Therefore, right now it seems most reasonable to wait and see how trends are developing in society on this point. At the same time it takes Theobalt into the field of religious dialogue and it has to be reflected upon what that means from the point of view of the network as a common ecumenical platform.

This standpoint should be communicated to CEC. If CEC decides to take an initiative in this respect, practical assistance can be given from the Theobalt coordination office.

4. Theobalt homepage

The homepage was presented. The following adjustments were suggested:

- No separate presentation of the three church traditions shall be given on the homepage. Instead reference should be made to the homepages of the different churches within the network
- The headline 'Faith' should be removed and substituted with 'Prayers and Hymns' with the purpose to enter contributions from the church traditions. Audible music and choir singing can be added.
- Add another headline for people's statements, reflections and prayers.
- A guest book shall be available together with a counter for visitors on the homepage

From a general point of view the homepage was approved. The need for bringing it up to date regularly and frequently was stressed.