

At the University of Innsbruck, Austria, on June 11-12, 2018

the Institute for Practical Theology and Roman Law organized a symposium on the topic

„Contributions of the Churches and Religious Communities to Society and State

This was the third time that two professors of the University of Innsbruck organized a symposium for churches, religious and confessional communities - gathering the country's historical larger churches as well as the newer smaller religious communities at one table, requesting each to present their report about the given topic.



In Austria there are 16 registered churches and religious communities as well as 8 confessional communities, the Unification Church being the youngest among them (acquiring such status in June 2015).

At the Symposium the following 16 churches and confessional communities had representatives present: The Roman-Catholic Church, the Austrian Protestant Church, the Islamic Community of Faith, the Ecumenical Patriarchy of Austria, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Christian Community of Austria, the New Apostolic Church, the Bahai Community, the Old Catholic Church, the Israelite Religious Community, the Syrian-Orthodox Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, the Old Alevites, the Seven-Day Adventists, the

Austrian Buddhist Religious Community and, last but not least, the Unification Church, which was represented by myself.

One after the other, representatives of each church and/or confessional community gave their report about their contributions to society and state. The bigger churches - such as the Catholic and the Lutheran Churches - reported about their social activities, schools, kindergartens and their contributions to tourism (attracted by their many historical buildings), art and culture.

The smaller churches and confessional communities emphasized the moral support they offer to their members and families; also, that their members often join bigger social organisations as volunteers, in order to help people in need, because of their members being highly motivated to do good.

Several representatives of smaller groups pointed out, that what is most needed today are family values, practised by God-loving families. It was clear that the loss of moral values and family values is the most threatening problem in today's western societies and that religious communities are challenged to stop that downward trend.

The attitude towards politics differed between representatives present: from liberal to conservative, to totally anti-political - like in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Presenting the Unification Church, I first pointed out that the most rampant problems of today's society are: religious and moral decay, as well as family breakdown. As these themes had already been mentioned by others, it was easy to refer back to them and to offer solutions: first by re-awakening people's spirituality through the Divine Principle and encouraging the world's religions, and second by strengthening the family, through re-defining the value of the family and offering marriage-blessings to people of all religions of the world - which gives the opportunity to create a true family movement, beyond everyone's religious affiliation. Thirdly, I mentioned that through the SunHak Peace Prize, Mother Moon set a clear precedence to support protection of the environment. Finally, I pointed out our various peace activities influencing society, carried out by UPF, WFWP and CARP.

In conclusion each representative was asked to make a final statement. The atmosphere had meanwhile become friendly and conciliatory. My statement was: "As we come closer to our origin, God, our theological differences will become less and less important".

Reflections of Walter Waldhäusl – our community leader for Tirol and Vorarlberg - and myself were: that some years ago smaller religious communities were attacked by the main religions; whereas today we are able to sit at one table and to listen to one another. That means we that a big step has already been taken towards building CIG together, by cooperating in building strong families and bringing back family-values into society.

Walter Waldhäusl's impression: "During those 2 days I felt that the representatives of the various churches and confessional communities are my brothers [and sisters] with whom we could exchange our opinions and realize that we have so much in common!" The 2-day symposium was indeed a very good way, to get to know the representatives of the various religious communities.

Those presentations will be eventually published in a book. Also, the contributions to the previous two symposiums are in the process of being published. (D. Zöhrer: “Exchange among Religious Communities. Religious Education in Schools.” Johannes Stampf: “How do Religions deal with Fundamentalism”)

Submitted by Elisabeth Cook



Group picture of the representatives of religions and religious communities