

Bonner Querschnitte

Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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Schirmacher congratulates the Pro Oriente Foundation on being awarded the Klaus Hemmerle Prize in Aachen Cathedral

(Bonn, 24.02.2026) In a solemn ceremony in Aachen Cathedral, the Vienna-based Pro Oriente Foundation was awarded the Klaus Hemmerle Prize of the Focolare Movement, named after the late Bishop of Aachen and awarded every two years. The host and Hemmerle's successor, Bishop Dr Helmut Dieser, warmly welcomed the guests. The award recognises the foundation's decades of commitment to understanding between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.

In front of high-ranking guests from the Church and politics, the organisation was honoured as an indispensable player for peace in Europe and the Middle East. A highlight was the greeting from Hendrik Wüst, Minister President of North Rhine-Westphalia, read out by a representative of the State Chancellery. The musical accompaniment was once again provided by the classical ensemble UNI-SUONO Hamburg.



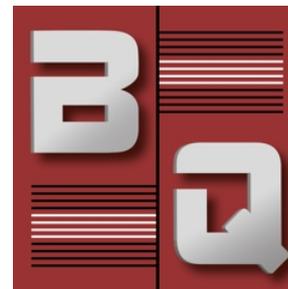
The main players at the award ceremony © IIRF/Martin Warnecke

The laudator, Archbishop Job Getcha, Metropolitan of Pisidia (in Turkey), is co-chair of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, together with Cardinal Kurt Koch. In his laudatory speech, he described the foundation as a 'beacon of theological dialogue'. He emphasised that Pro Oriente does much more than purely academic exchange. The archbishop was particularly impressed by the foundation's commitment to the younger generation. Through ecumenical workshops and forums, the foundation contributes to 'transforming despair and fragmentation into hope, a sense of belonging

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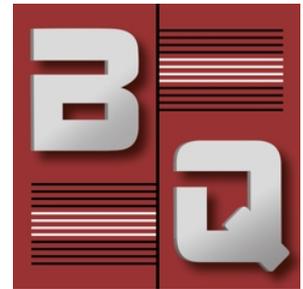
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and a shared commitment to the common good', especially in crisis regions such as Ukraine and the Middle East.

The president of the Pro Oriente Foundation, Clemens Koja, accepted the award with gratitude. He emphasised that the prize was not only a retrospective of what had been achieved, but above all an 'incentive to continue on the path we have taken'. He said that working with young people in the East and West was particularly close to his heart. The award encourages us to "open up spaces for dialogue where visible or invisible boundaries prevent people from different churches from perceiving each other as sisters and brothers in faith," Koja said in his acceptance speech.

In addition to Koja, the foundation was represented by his predecessor as president, Alfons Kloss, Secretary General Bernd Mussinghoff and Project Coordinator Viola Raheb.

The Focolare Movement is one of the new spiritual movements that have emerged in Christian churches over the last 80 years. Its origins date back to 1943 in Trento. It is now represented in more than 180 countries around the world. Its goal is to bring the spirit of unity and brotherhood more strongly into the Church and society and into all areas of human life.

In addition to a greeting read out by the president of the Focolare Movement, Dr Margaret Karam, the movement was represented by the delegates for the four German-speaking countries, Dr Ursula Schmidt and Roberto Rossi Schmidt from Vienna. Among the guests at the award ceremony was the Bishop of Graz, Wilhelm Krautwaschl, who emphasised the Austrian Church's connection with the foundation, which was established in 1964 by Cardinal Franz König.

The Klaus Hemmerle Prize commemorates the Bishop of Aachen, who died in 1994 and was regarded as a passionate bridge-builder between religions and world views. Previous winners include Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople (2008), leprosy doctor Ruth Pfau (2014), Muslim AIDS doctor Noorjehan Abdul Majid from Mozambique (2016) and the late former German Chief Rabbi Henry Brandt (2018). In 2020, the award went to Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos), former head of the Orthodox Church of Albania, who died last year; in 2022, it will go to former Po-



The Bishop of Aachen, Dr. Helmut Dieser, and Thomas Schirmacher admire the award © IIRF/Martin Warnecke

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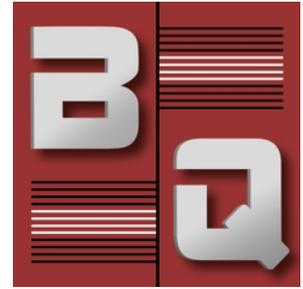
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lish Prime Minister Hannah Suchocka; and most recently, in 2024, it will go to Canadian-Czech Cardinal Michael Czerny.

Schirmmacher had already congratulated previous award winners in Aachen Cathedral.

The ecclesiastical foundation Pro Oriente was founded during the Second Vatican Council in 1964 by the then Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König. According to the information provided, its focus is on promoting cooperation between the Eastern and Western Churches. Pro Oriente has repeatedly provided strong impetus for reconciliation processes in various regions of the world, according to the Focolare Movement. It was particularly impressed by its contribution to understanding and cooperation throughout society, especially with regard to future generations.

Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** The main players at the award ceremony © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- **Photo 2:** The Bishop of Aachen, Dr. Helmut Dieser, and Thomas Schirmmacher admire the award © IIRF/Martin Warnecke
- “Bishop Schirmmacher congratulates Cardinal Czerny”: <https://thomasschirmmacher.net/?p=22168>
- “Archbishop Anastasios is one of the most important Missions and Religious Studies Scholars – Schirmmacher congratulates his ‘fatherly friend’ on the Hemmerle Prize”: <https://thomasschirmmacher.net/?p=16000>

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