

**Presentatie AOCICC-rapport *Belonging together in Europe. A joint statement on aspects of ecclesiology and mission*, aangeboden aan de ACC-15, Auckland New Zealand 2012.**

Your grace, Mister Chair, brothers and sisters in Christ,

I would like to thank this Council for inviting the oldcatholics of the Union of Utrecht again to its meeting. I bring you greetings from the president of the Union of Utrecht, archbishop dr. Joris Vercammen, of my predecessor to the previous three meetings of the ACC and now bishop of the Swiss oldcatholic church, dr. Harald Rein, and of all the other members of the international oldcatholic bishops' conference and their churches. We pray the Almighty God that he may grant you and us wisdom, strength and patience in proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It always has been and still is a privilege for the oldcatholic churches to participate in gatherings of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Though they are not members of this Communion, they are in - what was called in 1931 - 'intercommunion' with the Church of England, which was somewhere during the fifties of the 20th century called a relationship of full communion and that was extended to all Anglican Churches. The Bonn Agreement of 1931 states - as you can read on page 68 of your pack - that 'each communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own' and that 'each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian Faith.'

With regard to the final report of the AOCICC as you find it in this pack, I would like to make a few remarks, which I hope not only apply to the specific context of the churches involved, namely the Anglican and Old Catholic Churches on the European continent, but also may have some relevance for the Anglican Churches elsewhere in the world.

My first remark relates to the background of the Bonn Agreement of 1931. For the Old Catholics the dialogue with the Church of England was intended and actually started in the last quarter of the 19th century not as a bi-lateral dialogue, but as a tri-lateral negotiation, which also included the Orthodox Churches. The aim was to reunite the synodically and episcopally organized churches of Europe, from Russia in the east to the Anglican Churches on the British isles in the west. This reunion was meant to be a catholic answer to the centralizing tendencies within the Roman Catholic Church during the second half of the 19th century. Though these tri-lateral talks became bi-lateral, due to the political changes in Russia during and after World War I, and led to the Bonn Agreement of 1931 with the Church of England alone, the Old Catholics always kept a unity with the Orthodox Churches in view. In this perspective they recognized the Church of England as *the* catholic church in England, and later the other Anglican Churches as *the* Catholic Churches in their respective countries.

The second remark relates to the development of both churchfamilies, Anglican and Old Catholic, on the European continent since 1931. The Anglicans who were ministered from London formed in 1980 the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe, as did the Episcopal parishes, who came together in the Convocation of American Churches in Europe, each with its own bishop. In the course of time the Anglican chaplaincies and parishes not only reached out to expat English speaking people on the continent, but to local people too, forming lasting parishes. This led to the strange phenomenon of the five different jurisdictions in continental Europe: the four Anglican jurisdictions of the Church of England, the Episcopal Church, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Lusitanian Church in Portugal; and the Old Catholic Churches in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland. All these churches are in full communion with each other, but largely operating on their own.

For the Old Catholics this is a reality, but an increasingly undesirable one, because it is in conflict with ecclesiological principles of the ancient church to which the Old Catholics - hence their name - refer to. The Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops' Conference sees the local church as the representation of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church', which manifests itself [I quote nr. 16, page 74] 'in each fellowship and communion of people, which by the reconciliation in Jesus Christ and by the outpouring and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit is constituted as a unity in a given place around the bishop with the eucharist as its centre.'

The most important question to be answered in my opinion is that of church unity at the basic level of the church, that is the diocese. If Old Catholics and Anglicans in the same place or the same land share the same faith, it is only logical that they should share the same synodical and episcopal organization too. In the view of the Old Catholics, the sharing of the sacraments is not a pragmatic gesture of hospitality or christian kindness, but real 'communio' in the sense of the Orthodox theology, that is: the Church celebrating and participating in the life of the Tri-une God. Living together in the same territory requires the development a full visible unity for the churches in Europe, thus forming the Catholic Church of Europe.

The AOCICC therefore asks the governing bodies of both churches to include this task in a new mandate to be given to the next AOCICC.

+ Dirk Jan Schoon, bishop of Haarlem