

**...that they may be one, as we are one. (John 17,11)**

*Adress to IFI- supreme council of Bishops*

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### **Introduction**

40 years ago, on September 22nd, 1965, an agreement of intercommunion between the IFI and the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic churches was signed. Nevertheless we didn't plan a great celebration of this Anniversary, we are fully aware of its significance for the Old Catholic churches. My presence here can be seen as a token of that awareness and as the concrete expression of our willingness to make more out of the agreement than we did until now.

Our Brother, Supreme Bishop Tomas Millamena, expresses his feelings in comparable words, as he said in his message to the Synod of the Dutch Old Catholic Church in November 2003: *the signing of the concordat attests to our communion in doing the mission of God. It is an affirmation of our "oneness" and "togetherness" as the people of God. There is no doubt in my mind that God wants us to be together. God wants us to be united. God wants us to be a community of believers who, despite physical distance of time and space, are knit together in faith, in love and purpose, and in action. And even though we have been unsuccessfull in meaningly nurturing this partnership in the almost four decades of its existence, the Holy Spirit who works within us and among us is calling us to make the beauty of the concordat flourish, and to flourish beautifully.*

In other words: there is some work to do, also when a little bit of work is already been done as well. The flowers of the concordat don't yet flourish, but they also aren't dead. Maybe it is not much, but in any case and anyway a fact to be mentioned.

It was a great pleasure for me to be able to accept the invitation of His Grace the Supreme Bishop to deliver the sermon yesterday morning during the opening eucharist of your Assembly. It was also a great honour to be invited to address you, beloved brother bishops, during this evening. I accepted this invitation with pleasure because it offers me the opportunity to inform you about your partner in that Vienna-agreement and to give a rough sketch of the old catholic phenomenon.

### **1. The Old-Catholic Movement**

Nevertheless the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands is much older, the name *old catholic* appeared only during the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the movement of those catholic christians who protested against what they saw being unauthorised novelties into catholic ecclesiology. Those novelties were initiated by the the Roman Catholic Church herself and concern the dogma's of the immaculate conception of Mary (1854) and the infallibility and the world-wide jurisdiction of the pope (first vatican concil - 1871). More recently the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was added (1950).

A critical lecture of history makes clear that the context in which those dogma's came into being, was affected by attempts to strengthen the central authority within the church. Against those attempts the old-catholic movement poses the model of the old church, in which diversity was accepted as the normal situation and more-over as an expression of the creativity of the creator. Comparing the Roman Catholic Church and the Old Catholic communion of churches with one another, one can say that both can be regarded as the heirs of two genuinely catholic traditions: one that regards the authority of the Roman Pontiff as decisive, and another that regards the authority of a universal council as final. The Old Catholic Churches position themselves - thus - in the second, historically less successful position.

## 1.1 The Declaration of Utrecht

The bishops who founded the Union of Utrecht met with that aim in 1889 in Utrecht. They agreed on a declaration, in which they laid down what they held in common and formulated criteria on how to go on with one another. They also made a constitution for the Union of Utrecht, which in principle is thought to be an assembly of bishops to inform one another.

The bishops' declaration of 1889 states the undivided Church of the first centuries being the foundation of the Old Catholic Churches.

On this basis the dogma of the papal infallibility and his universal jurisdiction is rejected. The pope is however recognized as the 'primus inter pares' (the first among his equals, in other words: the bishop who has an honorary priority).

The importance of the Holy Eucharist for the church is concentrated on what one held in common and not on the difference.

All contacts with dissidents and theologians of other confessions, had to be truthfully dealt with. The unity of the church must be refound through exchange of thoughts and through a real interest and participation in one another's context and genuine way of being a Christian. A strong priority is put on the ecumenical challenge that asks for a clear commitment.

The declaration ended with a Christologically coloured paragraph about the increasing contemporary indifference in faith, what – speaking out of a European context – can be seen as an appeal to get involved in moral and spiritual discussion of that moment. In fact the declaration witnesses from the church's openness to society and culture, to both moral and religious issues and her commitment to the evangelization of society.

The Declaration of Utrecht became the foundation for an increasing growing together, based on the shared principles while each church retained its own relative autonomy. The Union not only promoted the reciprocal integration and the forming of a shared identity of the Old Catholic Churches, but also proved to be of importance for the Old Catholic participation with the later ecumenical movement. It also became clear that only those Bishops and Churches they represented who were admitted to the Union could rightly call themselves Old Catholic.

## 1.2 Theological and spiritual vision

### - *Eucharistic communion*

Within the church all are in communion with one another around the surrender of life by Jesus Christ. That surrender of life is the highest expression of the love of God. Defeated by sin of men, he remained faithful to the love out of which he lived. In this love he was confirmed by the Father himself who redeemed our Lord Jesus from the death. His resurrection is a token of the everlasting love that is the source of life for all Mankind and for the whole creation. That means that sin doesn't have the last word, but that reconciliation and communion is always possible. "Church" is always at the service of 'reconciliation', always on the road to restore communion between God and men and among mankind itself. Communion is to be distinguished from uniformity. Communion is unity in diversity. *Distinctions in position and places are there to manifest the unity in differences and reflect in that way the being of the triune God.* That's true for both individuals and local communities. God's creativity is too great to be reflected by only one individual believer but also by only one single church. To experience the full richness of God's Love it is necessary that we are in communion with one another and that churches share their faith with one another. *This ecclesiological opening, that can be carried back to orthodox theologians and to the Church fathers is recently more and more elaborated by Old Catholic theologians as the special mark of Old Catholic ecclesiology.*

### - *Apostolic succession*

The apostolic succession *deals with the continuation of the whole life of the church community by word and sacrament through the years and ages. So we consider the*

*apostolic succession as the process of the handing over of belief in which the whole Church is involved. In this process the ministry has a special responsibility and task, caring for the continuation in time of the mission of Jesus Christ and his apostles. It has to do with the responsibility that no other faith than that of the apostles, who are the witnesses of Jesus' life, suffering, death and resurrection, should be the foundation of the church. Within the catholic tradition that responsibility took shape in the episcopacy in particular and in the ministry in general. Catholic ministry has to do with representing Christ within the community in the sense of being the guarantee the community remains open to Christ. That's the background on which the bishops appear being the successors of the apostles and therefore being responsible for the continuity between the church of the apostles and the one we live in at a particular moment in history.*

But apostolicity not only has to deal with continuity in time, it also has to do with solidarity among the christians worldwide. From this point of view episcopacy is also a token of the universal communion in which the church is called to live in. The bishop also represents the world-wide communion of the universal church on the local level. He or she is the crossing of the local and the universal church, he or she is a point of encounter and therefore the initiator of solidarity. *This aspect of the apostolicity manifests itself in the Old Catholic Communion in the Bishops conferences. To that they have to inform one another about the occurring spiritual, liturgical and sacramental life in their dioceses, to reflect together on how to deal with questions which arise in the progression of the tradition of faith and to decide how to relate to other churches and denominations.*

#### - *Conciliarity*

The notion of conciliarity has to do with being together on the way in search for truth. Instead of one central instance that should decide about what is true and what not, the opinion of the old catholic ecclesiology is that we have to do that together. It is also the old church of the first centuries that shows us how to deal with this question of finding out what's true and what is not.

Remaining in the truth has to do both with being confident to the tradition and to develop the tradition time and time again within the actual context. It is a challenge for the church as a whole. It is important that bishops, being the ones who take care of the unity of the church, meet one another in councils in order to create the possibility to discuss actual challenges with which the work of the evangelization is confronted. Those councils have to take decisions about the christian faith within the concrete context of particular historical periods and cultures. Those decisions however must be received by the church itself. This means that what the bishops decided is to be the object of a deliberation-process on all levels of the church.

Conciliarity is thus the process of the common responsibility of all christians for being in their own cultures and societies true witnesses of the love of God as it was showed in Jezus' life, death and resurrection. Once thus said, it is a small step to the autonomy of the local church. Not that the local church can decide about the truth on its own, but it is responsible, together with all other local churches, for the translation of the truth of the gospel in its own cultural context.

#### - *The reference to the Early and Undivided Church*

Reference to the origins is important for all renewal movements. The bishops who gathered in Utrecht in 1889, saw in this principle a possibility to defend the truth of the tradition against some evolutions in the Roman-Catholic Church which they rejected as being irresponsible. This principle is even noticed in the name of the *Old-Catholic church*.

Concerning faith and life, Old-Catholics refer to the New Testament, the seven ecumenical councils and the writings of the Fathers. These events took place in the first ten centuries. All important dogmatic questions and questions concerning ecclesiastical life and organization were discussed. Decisions were taken as far as possible on a basis of consent. The councils, which were prepared in many regional synods, took the responsibility for their

conclusions with which they fortified the unity of the Church. For that reason one trusted and believed that the Holy Spirit was an active participant in the process of decision-taking.

Concerning ecclesiastical structures and ecclesiology the “old church” is not only source of inspiration but also a criterion. However the New Testament does not give us many indications about ecclesiastical life. Only the writings of Saint Paul give some view on the congregational life and the pleasure and the sorrow of the apostle about it. These letters are not richly endowed with data about rules ordering church life and ministry.

The main characteristic of the first Christian communities is its eschatological and charismatic character. The eschatological character can be observed in the attitude of watchfulness, that is typical for the early communities. Because of that watchfulness the communities were blessed with many charismatic gifts as well. Paul does his best to organize community life in a way that all those gifts become a real enrichment for the whole community and each member of it. He enlarged the notion charisma in a way that also other functions and tasks within the community can be seen as charismata. The most important thing he does is surely that he makes all charismata subordinate to love. Saint Paul sees the growth of the Christian communities as a sign from the Holy Spirit, who gives his gifts to all members in order that all should benefit from them.

## **2. The Members of the Union of Utrecht**

From the point of their foundation three types of churches can be found within the Union of Utrecht.

The first type only has one representative within the communion. It is the Dutch church that issued from a conflict between the chapter of Utrecht and Rome about the appointment of a new archbishop of Utrecht in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As a matter of fact the church of Utrecht is the continuation of the mediaeval church that was founded by Saint Willibrord at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The Roman Catholic church developed itself also from that mediaeval church being the successor of that part that didn't share the point of view of the Utrecht chapter.

In a second type those churches can be clustered that issued from the protest-movement against the papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction of the pope. Those decisions were made at the first vatican council. A strong movement opposed because those new dogmas were seen as being in contradiction with the tradition. But this movement was not strong enough to influence the decision-making process at the council, although many scholars and church-men were involved. After the decisions were made this movement was expelled from the Roman Catholic church and had no other choice than founding “emergency-dioceses”. Actually such was the case in Germany and Switzerland. Later on also churches in Austria, the Czech Republic and Croatia were founded.

The third type is represented by those churches that issued from an emancipation movement. That was the case among the Polish Migrants in the United States of America at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They felt they were not respected enough by the Roman church and founded their own independent catholic church. The Polish Catholic Church in Poland was founded by that American church and is a member of the Union of Utrecht.

## **3. The ecumenical relations**

One article of the 8 articles of the Declaration of Utrecht (the founding declaration for our communion of churches) concerns the ecumenical involvement of the Old Catholics. As a matter of principle an Old Catholic Church is ecumenical involved and open to other Christians. Already in 1874 and 1875 special ecumenical conferences were organized by the Old Catholics with the cooperation of the Orthodox churches and churches of the Anglican communion. The aim was to discuss the denominational differences in view of a theological consensus as the ground for the church communion. In the opinion of the organizers of the meetings, reunion of the churches had to be based on the decisions of faith made by the

undivided church. The faith of the old, undivided, church is the basis for the reunion of the churches. Although those ecumenical conferences didn't achieve concrete results, they would prove to be of great importance for the church. At least there was the expression of an ecumenical calling that is experienced by the Old Catholic Churches until nowadays.

Therefore it was quite normal representatives of the Old Catholic Churches were found among the Christians who founded all important ecumenical bodies as there are e.g. Faith and Order and the World Council of Churches.

That ecumenical involvement had concrete results for the communion of the Union of Utrecht as well. In 1931 an agreement of full communion was signed with the Anglican Churches with which we have a very strong relationship until now. The permanent joint working party in which our two communions work together is the place where common projects are worked out.

We also have a very long tradition in de dialogue with the orthodox churches. As a result of that tradition of more than 100 years, in 1987 a consensus about all important theological matters was achieved. Unfortunately it didn't lead to full communion because of the orthodox rejection of the ordination of women that was initiated in 1996 in the majority of the Old Catholic Churches. Nevertheless also together with the ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople we have a joint working party with the objective to find out how our similar views on the most important aspects of the Christian faith can lead to more practical cooperation.

We also resumed the dialogue with the Roman Catholic church, that in fact began in the late sixties. All important questions that divide us from the church with which we have many things in common too, are on the agenda of a joint commission. This commission was a joint initiative of the president of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and myself. In the past several pastoral agreements were reached on the level of different local churches, although none of these agreements were ever accepted by the Vatican.

Last but not least, I can add that some Old Catholic theologians and theologians of the Church of Sweden have met one another in order to sound out the possibilities for a formal theological dialogue.

#### **4. The history of the contacts between the IFI and the Union of Utrecht**

Already in 1904 Gregorio Aglipay wrote to Bishop Herzog of Switzerland with the request to recognize his new church. Probably bishop Herzog answered him with the request to become more informed about the church doctrine and the church life. In 1906 Bishop Herzog informed the Swiss Synod that he hadn't received the clarifications he requested for and in 1909 he declared the negotiations with the IFI were blocked. Later on, the publications of the lay-theologian Isabelo de los Reyes caused doubts about the dogmatic belief of the new church and therefore the contact came to an end.

In 1963, however, Archbishop Rinkel and Bishop U. Küry wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury there was no reason not to declare that the IFI is a true catholic church and a genuine witness to the gospel and to the church of the apostles and the first millennium. Following Archbishop Rinkel, there was no reason not to enter in an Agreement of Full Communion with this church. The theological work, done by the IFI with the help of the ECUSA during the fourties and the early fifties, bore fruits!

As a consequence of that point of view the churches of the Union of Utrecht also entered in full-communion with the IFI in 1965.

#### **5. An Old Catholic Point of view on the IFI**

From an Old-Catholic point of view the coming into being of the IFI is a very interesting event. As a matter of fact the founding of the IFI was a clear attempt to call into being a local church, rooted in the catholic faith and inculturated in the Philippine culture and society. May I make some remarks on this point.

- The IFI connects the idea to be a local church, or a communion of local churches, with being a church for the Philippine nation. From this point of view the IFI can be seen as a “nationalistic church” issued from the continuing struggle for emancipation of the Philippine people. God called the IFI into being because of his love for the Philippine people, as he calls other Christians and other churches as well to commit themselves to the sake of the Philippine people. Nationalism is synonymous with the commitment to the struggle for emancipation of the Philippine people. Within the Old Catholic tradition we also meet this kind of commitment as e.g. the founders of the Polish church did break away from the RCC because of their involvement with Polish migrants in the USA. And I think this isn't the only example of paying respect to the own people one can find within the old catholic tradition. However “nationalism” can have a bad sound for Christian ears because of its possible connotation with “exclusiveness”. But “nationalism” doesn't have to be exclusive, it can be a reaction to the exclusion of your own people and therefore a request to include them too. I heard how the Obispo Maximo explained it in a very clear way, as he was confronted with a question about this issue on the part of Dutch youngsters. He said: “ Our nationalism does not exclude people, but is an appeal to include also our own people with the attempt to realize a society of justice and peace.” From this point of view ‘nationalism’ could be understood as a humanism that has a double aim: on the one hand to honour the own culture and country, and on the other hand to open your own culture to the richness of other cultures. I think, we in Europe, have to emphasize this second aspect nowadays. But you have to hold the two aspects together. A good sense of nationalism doesn't make the own nation absolute, but is searching for deepening the inculturation of the gospel. You have to be loyal both to the Christian tradition one receives and to the own culture. That's the real challenge in enculturating the gospel. As it emphasizes the role of the local church, the inculturation of the gospel is an important issue within the Old Catholic ecclesiology. This inculturation always evokes tension on the side of the gospel as well as on the side of the culture. This tension is a particular and important challenge for the integrity of a local church.

- Another aspect of its identity as a local church, is the concrete solidarity with the poor and the oppressed people in the Philippines. The IFI doesn't turn a deaf ear to the need of the people, on the contrary the IFI is ready to welcome the calling of our Lord through the situation of the poor and the marginalized. Also from this point of view the IFI really is a local church, a church of all Philippine people, also of that great part that is oppressed and is longing for liberation.

It is interesting to observe the main part that was played by lay-people with the foundation of the church. The revolution, of which the IFI issued as the only tangible result, was headed by lay-people and in fact the founder of the church is a lay-man (Isabelo de les Reyes). That is a phenomenon with which Old Catholics are familiar too, because the influence of lay-people within the Old Catholic movement has always been strong. As a matter of fact it is the basis for the synodality of the church, that also can be found within the early church as one of the main aspects of its organization.

- The foundation of the IFI also was an act of reform against the dramatic growth of a kind of ‘catholicism’ full of superstition and simony. It was a kind of ‘catholicism’ that aims at an uncounscious faith for which people dare not take any responsibility and is to be seen as an aspect of a more general attempt to dominate people's culture. From this point of view the coming into being of the IFI was an attempt to give back their faith to the Philippine people. The attempts to integrate indigenous elements into the liturgy, as we also experienced yesterday, seems to me a very interesting experiment within this context. The Old Catholic tradition too aims at well-considered devotion and liturgy within the concrete cultural context.

- Moreover we have to mention that the “Philippine schism” was propelled by the complete disregard of the Vatican to the legitimate clamour of the Philippino clergy for justice as they were excluded from ecclesiastical offices. As a matter of fact this can be seen as a rejection of a local church in refusing the challenge of the enculturation of the Christian tradition.

- Concluding I think we can say that the IFI and the Old Catholic Churches have indeed many things in common concerning their theology, ecclesiology and spirituality. Also the IFI refers to the early church with the basic decisions on the faith as there are: the Nicene Creed, the holy Trinity, the seven sacraments, the threefold ministry of Bishop, priest and deacon. Episcopacy is seen as the guarantee for the Christian faith and for the unity of the Christian community. The church is seen as a communion and as a communion-promoting reality by the IFI. Moreover there is the emphasis on the local church and the attempt to integrate the gospel within the own culture. There is the synodality, that was affirmed in a very clear way, in the statute of the church of 1977. There are the attempts to be together on the way with other churches from all over the world, what means: conciliarity.

I think I do not exaggerate when concluding that the IFI and the Old Catholic Churches, however issued from completely different contexts and situations, have very much in common. I’m not the only one who states that. In his report about his visit to the IFI on the occasion of the centennial, the primate of Australia, Archbishop Peter Carnley wrote: “The old catholic movement in Europe had a good deal in common with the IFI, given his own resistance to papal infallibility and the dominating and exclusive claims of the Roman Catholic Church in its ultramontane phase.”(p.5)

## 6. Planning the future

The agreement of full communion between our churches was clearly not a mistake, it was the consequence of the reality itself that was recognized by both parties. In 1985, on the occasion of the Old Catholic Congress in Münster (Germany), bishop Tito Pasco put that so few was done for the implementation of the agreement that he was afraid the agreement was at a dead end. After 20 years of agreement our churches did not yet become more familiar with one another.

Some people were impressed by his address and by his appeal. Since 1985 something has changed. Our mission-organization began to support several IFI-projects. Father de Boer and his wife lectured at the seminary of Iloilo during two years. Father Franz Murbach was very involved in several projects. It became usual that the Obispo Maximo attended several Old Catholic events (centennial of the Union of Utrecht, Old Catholic congress, ...) Bishop Estrella participated in my consecration as bishop in 2000 (at that moment he was the bishop of Palawan with which there is a special link). I also would like to mention the Archbishops’ involvement in being “the third depository party of documents” together with the Obispo Maximo for the peace-talks with the National Democratic Front. Moreover the archbishop sees himself as the representative of the Obispo Maximo concerning matters about Prof. Joma Sison, who lives in exile in Utrecht. There was the hosting of the IFI-centennial celebration in Utrecht. Following a joint initiative of the Obispo Maximo and myself, the IBC sendd Dr. Rein to lecture at your seminaries. During the last decades there were several publications concerning the IFI in our church magazines.

One can put that we became real partner-churches of one another. We share friendship and goods with one another. But partners should also share their ideas and thoughts with one another, not only with the aim to learn from one another but also in order to share their creativity. That is the way, to put it in brief: it is my personal conviction that time has come to get more involved with one another on the level of content. We have to develop our common ecclesiology of “independent catholicity” on the background of the globalized world in which the universal church should take shape. Several questions must be reflected on. There is the question of the concrete shape of the conciliarity and community among churches. There is

the point of the importance of being a local church which is as much as possible committed to the own culture and society. Further on there is the question about how to be the continuation of the church of the apostles and how to refer to the early church as a main hermeneutical principle. And there are more questions to ask within the context of shaping a catholic identity that has some relevance to the modern world. It is my strong conviction that precisely churches of the southern and the northern world should reflect together on those questions because of the solidarity without which any witness can be authentic.

With this reflection, as well as e.g. with our concrete commitment to peace and justice, we contribute to the future of the church and of the proclamation of the gospel in our modern societies.

My concrete proposal is to organize a joint theological working party with theologians of the IFI, of the Union of Utrecht and eventually also with some of the ECUSA. That working party could have a concrete target: publishing an interesting report after two or three years. It could be entitled: "being catholic in a global world"! I'm sure that such a report could attract the attention of several theological and ecclesiastical circles.

### **Conclusion**

In his address to the Dutch synod in 2003, His Grace Prime-Bishop Tomas Millemena says: *Yes, I pray for a covenant that is more than a beautifully written agreement printed in dry parchment but rather a living testimony of our love for our common mission as children of God and members of the one Body of Christ.*

Concluding this lecture I must say I do not have anything to add to the intention His Grace expresses except for my approval of it. Within the last twenty years our agreement became more concrete than it was before, but also there are several important tasks left now within the project of building up the communion between our churches. I wish that the solidarity and the friendship that grew between us, may be deepened by the reflection on our common identity. That we may be one and grow in the joint witness of the richness of the gospel in order to obey the mission, Our Lord entrusted us, to make all people to his disciples.