

Celebrating the Union of Utrecht : from its 25th to its 125th anniversary

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Celebrating the Union of Utrecht – from its 25th to its 125th Anniversary

Angela Berlis

In his pastoral letter for Lent 1890 the Swiss bishop Eduard Herzog discussed the recently founded Union of Utrecht.¹ Herzog pointed to the special relationship between him and Bishop Joseph Hubert Reinkens, who had consecrated him as a bishop in 1876, and to the communion between the German and the Swiss Old Catholic Church.² “Less lively,” according to Herzog, were the contacts with the Dutch Old Catholic Church, although through the German Old Catholic Church this church was also very close to the Swiss Old Catholic Church.³ In Herzog’s view, it had been Döllinger’s statement at the first congress of the fledgling Old Catholic movement in 1871 that had brought the Dutch church into the picture: the Dutch church was a “legitimate (existing) Catholic Church” and could be recognized as such.⁴

Since the foundation of the Union of Utrecht in 1889, these relationships of recognition and communion have been viewed as a form of “prelude”. From an ecclesiological point of view, however, the year 1876 could – by virtue of the consecration of Herzog by Reinkens – be seen as establishing a relationship of living communion between two bishops and their churches.⁵ Both Reinkens and Herzog would later play a major role

¹ With thanks to Dr Charlotte Methuen (Glasgow) for her comments on this article.

² Eduard Herzog, ‘Die Utrechter Konvention’, in: idem, *Hirtenbriefe aus den Jahren 1887–1901*, Aarau (Emil Wirz) 1901, 58–74, here 61.

³ Ibid. In 1889, Herzog gave a paper in Lucerne about the Church in the Netherlands, which in his view changed the attitude of the Dutch Old Catholics towards him: [Eduard Herzog], ‘Die altkatholische Kirche Hollands’, in: *Der Katholik* 12 (1889), 105–109; 113–118.

⁴ Herzog, ‘Utrechter Konvention’ (see note 2), 62.

⁵ The relationship between the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and the German and the Swiss churches developed in different ways before 1889. The Dutch Church supported the German Old Catholic movement in 1872 through confirmations and in 1873 through the consecration of the first bishop (Reinkens), but the Dutch were initially hesitant to enter into a deeper relationship: “So [sc. with the consecration in 1876] wurde also das äussere und innere Band, das die drei Kirchen Hollands, Deutschlands und der Schweiz zusammenknüpfte, gelegt. Trotzdem scheute sich die

in the developments that led to the foundation of the Union of Utrecht. Today, the Union of Utrecht is part of our understanding of being Old Catholic. This sense of belonging together has grown and has deepened since its inception. How has it been supported and shaped by celebrations of the anniversaries of the Union of Utrecht?

Historical Anniversaries – History and Functions

Certain aspects play a role in the celebration of an anniversary: first, an anniversary presupposes an optimistic understanding of history: “Die im Jubiläum inszenierte Geschichte ist kein auf ein Verfallsdatum zulaufender Niedergang, sondern ein mit Hoffnungen und Wünschen besetzter Merkposten.”⁶ Such a celebration therefore expresses the expectation of stability. Secondly, the tradition which is enacted through the celebration has to be a living one, and one which seems to be worthy of being preserved and capable of being developed in the future. With this, thirdly, the celebrating institution demonstrates both its claim to a continued existence and its sustainability. This claim for the future implies the claim of an authoritative interpretation of the past. In turn, this claiming of the past presupposes that competing patterns of interpretation will be marginalized for the sake of a coherent narrative. The overall aim of such a celebration is a form of institutional reassurance. The celebration is not about the past as such, but about the enacting of the past as one’s own history (Eigengeschichte) which informs the present; this has both a retrospective and a prospective purpose, in processes of appropriation and mediation of the “pool of traditions” (Traditionsfundus):

“Diese Zurichtung der Vergangenheit auf die Eigengeschichte bedeutet, dass Jubiläen in weitaus geringerem Masse darüber informieren, wie es einmal gewesen ist, sondern vor allem etwas über die Erinnerungssituation und den in ihr praktizierten Zugriff auf die Geschichte aussagen: im retrospektiven Sinn, indem deutlich wird, welche Elemente des Traditionsfundus der institutionellen Eigengeschichte aktualisiert und inszeniert werden, welche der Vergessenheit anheimfallen oder bewusst ausgeklammert werden; unter pro-

Utrechter Kirche, dieses Band enger zu knüpfen.” C.G. van Riel, ‘Die Bischofskonferenz und die Bischofserklärung zu Utrecht vom Jahre 1889’, in: *IKZ* 20 (1939), 129–136, here 130.

⁶ Winfried Müller et al. (eds.), *Das historische Jubiläum. Genese, Ordnungsleistung und Inszenierungsgeschichte eines institutionellen Mechanismus*, Münster (LIT) 2004, 3.

spektivem Aspekt, welche programmatischen Botschaften mit der Inszenierung von Teilelementen des Traditionsfundus im Prozess der Selbstgenerierung vermittelt werden sollen.”⁷

Memory is in this way demonstrated to be a social event, connected to collective identity. The past is symbolically made present in popular “realms of memory” (Pierre Nora).

The mechanism of marking historical anniversaries has developed through time: from the idea of a jubilee year (Leviticus 25, 8–55) developed the medieval “holy” year, combined with a papal indulgence. In the early modern period this gave rise to secular celebrations of centennial or bicentennial anniversaries – for instance of the foundation of universities – on the one hand and, on the other, specifically confessional⁸ celebrations such as the “anniversaries” of the Reformation marked from 1617. These are still celebrated today, as can be seen in the 2017 Reformation anniversary and in the “holy years” of the Roman Catholic Church proclaimed by the pope, of which the next begins on 8 December 2015. In the 19th century, anniversaries of the foundation of cities became a popular expression of *bürgerliche* festal culture; here national-patriotic historical pageants were central. Historic figures such as Schiller, Goethe, Gutenberg, Luther, and Boniface came to be seen as cultural and national heroes. However, anniversaries relating to family history or individual employment were also part of this festal culture. The reasons for this flourishing of anniversaries were manifold. They arose from a new experience of time, which had developed through the early modern period⁹, together with the acceleration of historical change experienced as a result of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848. Moreover, since the Enlightenment, a different view of history developed: a turning away from a “pattern of interpreting history in terms of salvation history” or providential intervention to the “understanding of history as a space of human experience and evolution”.¹⁰ The 19th century was marked by an “anniversary boom”¹¹, which critics

⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁸ Müller speaks of “konfessionskulturelle Ausprägungen”. Ibid., 24.

⁹ Müller sees this as a “Veruhrzeitlichung” and “Durchdringung des Alltags mit der Kalenderzeit”. Ibid., 50.

¹⁰ Müller speaks of “Verabschiedung heilsgeschichtlicher Deutungsmuster” and of “Erschließung der Geschichte als Erfahrungs- und Entfaltungsraum des Menschen”. Ibid., 51.

¹¹ “Jubiläumsboom”. Ibid., 54.

saw as a “festival epidemic”¹². It affected all parts of the society; historic sites gained a symbolically charged importance. Today, the celebration of anniversaries is part of cultural normality. Anniversaries are omnipresent; they structure time and mark change; they contribute to the shaping of both tradition and identity.¹³

In this paper I shall offer an overview how of the anniversaries of the founding of the Union of Utrecht have been celebrated.¹⁴ For the understanding of belonging together, the communion of the bishops of the International Bishops’ Conference, founded in 1989, was of utmost ecclesiological importance. It found its expression in symbolic acts such as the other bishops’ presence at each others’ consecrations and in their laying-on-of hands; but also in other acts such as the admission of candidates for priesthood to the training institute of another Old Catholic church, the recognition and admission of priests from another diocese; in the exchange of pastoral letters, other central publications and important information; and in regular meetings. Alongside the mutual interactions between the Old Catholic bishops, the International Old Catholics’ congresses also played a major role. Since 1890, with a very few exceptions, these have taken place regularly, generally every two to four years. Other means of supporting a sense of community include the academic journal “Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift” (*IKZ*) and its predecessor, the “Revue Internationale de Théologie” (founded in 1893), and, from the 1950s onwards, the international associations: of Old Catholic theologians (International Theologians Conference), of lay people (Old Catholic Lay Forum), and for common missionary and diaconal causes. It is not possible here to offer a history of all of them.¹⁵ In this paper, I shall restrict myself to the question how the foundation of the Union of Utrecht was celebrated after 25, 50, 100 and 125 years. The main focus will be how with each of

¹² “Festseuche”. *Ibid.*, 57.

¹³ See Christel Köhle-Hezinger, ‘Wie weiblich ist das Jubiläum?’, in: R. Johanna Regnath et al. (eds.), *Eroberung der Geschichte. Frauen und Tradition*, Hamburg (Lit) 2007, 87–104, here 104.

¹⁴ For this paper, I shall draw primarily on sources found in the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift (IKZ)*. Further research on this topic could usefully draw on the journals published in each Old Catholic Church and on manuscripts or other archival sources.

¹⁵ The international meetings of women’s and youth organisations which took place at International Old Catholic Congresses from the first half of the 20th century onwards, are not discussed here.

these celebrations a collective identity was defined, marked and maintained, and in particular on how past and future were related to each other in order to give shape to the shared present.

1889 to 1939: Laying the Historical Foundation for a Collective Identity

In 1914, from the original founders of the Union of Utrecht, only Bishop Herzog was still alive. The memory of the early years was still fresh in oral tradition or in written personal recollections, and Herzog himself later published several reminiscences.¹⁶ The 25th anniversary of the Union of Utrecht fell just in the time of the beginning of the First World War. It was commemorated locally, if it was commemorated at all.¹⁷

Indeed, between 1913 and 1920 the International Bishops Conference was not able to meet.¹⁸ At their first meeting after the war, the Old Catholic bishops gathered in Utrecht, but the bishops from the United States, Poland and the former Habsburg territories were not able to be present. In their declaration from this meeting, dated 29 April 1920, the bishops referred first to the 50th anniversary of the First Vatican Council and to the Roman Catholic *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1917), through which the juridical primacy of the Pope had been, in their view, translated into “the form of binding laws”.¹⁹ The bishops also looked forward, to the 200th anniversary of the election of Cornelis Steenoven (1661–1725) to the archbishopric of Utrecht in 1723, which would be marked in 1923. They distanced themselves formally from Arnold Harris Mathew (1852–1919), who had been consecrated bishop in 1908 in St. Gertrude’s in Utrecht, but who had soon begun to act against the Convention of Utrecht, consecrating bishops with-

¹⁶ Eduard Herzog, ‘Internationale kirchliche Beziehungen der christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz’, in: *IKZ* 9 (1919), 112–126; idem, ‘Die Utrechter Kirche und der Altkatholizismus’, in: *IKZ* 13 (1923), 26–32.

¹⁷ There is a photograph of a commemoration in Hilversum: Paul Dirkse (ed.), *Kunst uit Oud-Katholieke Kerken*, Utrecht (Catharijneconvent), Utrecht 1989, 61. Eleven young girls, dressed in white, bear on a *tableau vivant* the text of Vincentius of Lerins (in Dutch): “we believe that which has been believed always, everywhere and by all.” Faith is symbolized by a girl in the midst holding a big cross in her left hand.

¹⁸ See ‘Kundgebung der am 28. und 29. April 1920 zu Utrecht versammelten altkatholischen Bischöfe’, in: *IKZ* 10 (1920), 89–96, here 89.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

out the agreement with his Old Catholic brother bishops. Ties with Mathew had been officially severed in 1913. The IBC now declared that his consecration had been obtained *mala fide* and that it was consequently null and void, and they distanced themselves from all his “successors”.²⁰ As can be seen from the bishops’ 1920 declaration, their minds were focussed on events other than the 25th anniversary.

The International Old Catholic Congresses of this period served both to articulate and construct a common understanding of the past, often in the context of strong reactions against contemporary Roman Catholicism, and to formulate common theological and ecumenical goals for the future.²¹ In 1928, at the 11th International Old Catholic Congress in Utrecht, for example, the German lay leader Johann Friedrich von Schulte (1827–1914) was referred to as “the German Van Espen”. This was a reference to the attempts by both the Flemish canon lawyer, Zeger Bernard van Espen (1646–1728), in the 18th century, and the canon lawyer Johann Friedrich von Schulte in the 19th, to protect the rights of the ancient Catholic church. During the 1928 congress, the 200th anniversary of the death of Zeger Bernard van Espen was commemorated; a long line of cars took participants from Utrecht to his tomb in the St. Joriskerk in Amersfoort.²² This appropriation of Zeger Bernard van Espen by all Old Catholics, not

²⁰ Ibid., 94–96. See also Christoph Schuler, *The Mathew Affair. The failure to establish an Old Catholic Church in England in the context of Anglican Old Catholic relations between 1902 and 1925*, Amersfoort (Stichting Centraal Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis) 1997.

²¹ For example, the Congress in 1928 included a paper on the Declaration of Utrecht (1889) by Adolf Kury, but also a paper considering international collaboration in the care for Old Catholics living in the diaspora (by Engelbertus Lagerwey), the ecumenical movement (Conference in Lausanne, by Andreas Rinkel) and papers relating to other churches and movements (amongst them one by Friedrich Heiler). See *Alt-Katholisches Volksblatt* 59 (1928), 298–300; *De Oud-Katholiek* 44 (1928), 221, 226–237, 245–248, 250–251, 253–265. During the 1920s, the modern Ecumenical Movement came together in three main movements: the International Missionary Council, the Life and Work Movement, and the Faith and Order Movement; for the Old Catholics, the latter was always considered to be the most important. In 1930, the Swiss bishop Adolf Kury called on all Old Catholic Churches to support these movements by informing lay and clergy about their intentions. In Kury’s view these movements were consistent with the ecumenical interests of the Old Catholic movement. See *IKZ* 20 (1930), 42–44.

²² *De Oud-Katholiek* 44 (1928), 278.

only the Dutch,²³ implying as it did the comparison between two important canon lawyers, suggested a certain continuity between the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and the post-Vatican I Old Catholic churches: both had to defend their ancient rights against Rome; and both shared an ideal of church reform rooted in their understanding of the Ancient Church.²⁴ This not only bound together the different histories of Old Catholicism in relation to a joint past, but also emphasized the shared Old Catholic identity, not only in this period after the First World War, but also for the future. During the congress, some reference to the *genius loci* was also made: the significance of Utrecht related not only to the history of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and to the earlier Union of Utrecht of 1579,²⁵ but also to the reform-orientated pope Adrian VI (1459–1523), born in Utrecht as Adriaan Florensz, who – as the president of the local Congress committee Cornelis Adrianus Mittelbeck (1870–1940) added ironically – “did not know anything about his own infallibility”.²⁶ A visit to the *Paushuize* (pope’s house) in Utrecht was part of the programme.

In 1939, the Union of Utrecht turned 50. Again, the anniversary was overshadowed by world politics and by growing tensions within the Old Catholic communion:²⁷ after outbreak of the Second World War, commu-

²³ See for example Erwin Kreuzer, ‘Auf den Spuren Bernhards van Espen’, in: *De Oud-Katholiek* 44 (1928), 231: “So fühlen wir uns über Konstanz, Bonn und Wien bis in die lebendige Gegenwart hinein durch Hontheim und van Swieten dem Manne [sc. Van Espen] verbunden, über dem sich vor zweihundert Jahren in Amersfoort das Grab schloss. Und was er uns unbewusst durch seine Schüler für die Zukunft schenkte, das erwuchs ihm selbst in der Gemeinschaft der Kirche von Utrecht.” Erwin Kreuzer (1878–1953), then vicar in Freiburg (Germany), was secretary of the permanent congress-committee.

²⁴ See Angela Berlis, ‘Das Nachwirken Zeger Bernhard van Espens in der alt-katholischen Kirche Deutschlands mit besonderem Blick auf Johann Friedrich von Schulte’, in: Guido Cooman et al. (eds.), *Zeger-Bernard van Espen at the Crossroads of Canon Law. History, Theology and Church-State Relations*, Louvain (Peeters) 2003, 375–404.

²⁵ See *De Oud-Katholiek* 44 (1928), 247. The ‘Union of Utrecht’ of 1579 was the treaty which unified the northern provinces of the Netherlands in 1579 against the Spanish Habsburgs. This treaty is regarded as marking the foundation of the Republic of the United Netherlands.

²⁶ *De Oud-Katholiek* 44 (1928), 245–248, 250–251, 253–265, here 247.

²⁷ At the International Old Catholic Congress in 1938 in Zürich, the Swiss professor Urs Küry spoke about the “Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der international-alt-katholischen und der ökumenischen Zusammenarbeit”. Cf. *IKZ* 28 (1938), 300–314.

nication between the member churches and between the bishops became difficult, both due to war conditions, but also because of censorship.²⁸ Nonetheless, in 1939 the Dutch professor of Church history at the Old Catholic Seminary in Amersfoort, Cornelis Gerardus van Riel (1886–1939), looked back on the past fifty years and reflected on the meaning of “1889” for the subsequent spiritual and theological development of the Dutch Old Catholic Church. In his eyes, the Bishops’ Conference of 1889 marked “one of the most critical moments” in the history of the Dutch church, which evolved into an “intellectual revolution”; this involved a return to the spiritual heritage of the church from the 18th century onwards combined with a process of discernment between essentials and secondary.²⁹ This “crisis” was, as Van Riel emphasized, triggered by the impulses of the then leading German and Swiss Old Catholic theologians. In a contemporary situation of growing tension, with his article, Van Riel appealed to “1889” as a critical but decisive moment in history, which laid the ground for union.³⁰

The Congress witnessed considerable controversy: German-Swiss relations were already tense because of the fear that Switzerland might be annexed, as Austria had been through the *Anschluss*. The German bishop Erwin Kreuzer reacted sharply to both the paper by Urs Küry and the paper by Cornelis G. van Riel about “Kirche und Volk”. Cf. *IKZ* 28 (1938), 289–300. His reaction (*ibid.*, 315) made clear the differing views within the Union of Utrecht, regarding the relationship between church and people, and particularly ‘Volkstum’, the (critical) role of the church towards the *völkische* state or similar questions. The differences were on the table but were not really discussed either at the Congress and after it. See Matthias Ring, “*Katholisch und deutsch*”. *Die alt-katholische Kirche Deutschlands und der Nationalsozialismus*, Bonn (Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag) 2008, 641–652.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, 350–366; 641–652; 728–733; Fred Smit, ‘Andreas Rinkel (1889–1979)’, in: *idem et al., Adjutorio Redemptoris. Dr. Andreas Rinkel, Aartsbisschop van Utrecht (1889–1979)*, Amersfoort (Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis) 1987, 3–197.

²⁹ “Diese Konferenz ist einer der kritischsten Momente in der Geschichte der ‘Alten Klerisei’ gewesen, deren Gedankenleben in jenen Tagen eine Evolution durchmachte, die in mancher Hinsicht einer geistigen Revolution gleichkam.” C. G. van Riel, ‘Die Bischofskonferenz und die Bischofserklärung’, in: *IKZ* 29 (1939), 129–136; *idem*, ‘Die Bischofskonferenz 1889 und ihre Bedeutung für die altkatholische Kirche der Niederlande’, in: *IKZ* 29 (1939), 137–145, here 137 and 143. Van Riel died in the same year. His obituary by the Swiss Bishop Adolf Küry is published in: *IKZ* 29 (1939), 172–3.

³⁰ In the same year another – systematic-theological – contribution was published in the *IKZ*, relating to the Union of Utrecht: Andreas Rinkel, ‘Wort Gottes und Tradition in der altkatholischen Kirche unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Utrechter Konvention’, in: *IKZ* 29 (1939), 51–61.

After 1945: Rebuilding and Rebalancing

After the Second World War, the work of rebuilding trust and collaboration was at the fore. In 1950, the International Old Catholic Theologians' conference was founded, with the first meeting held in Amersfoort, the Netherlands. This offered a meaningful starting point. Other forms of common life continued, including the international Congresses: the first post-war Congress was held in Hilversum, the Netherlands, in 1948. The main challenge was the rebuilding of the church and its mission, but it was also necessary to rebuild the Union's internal relationships after the war. The desire to do so found expression in the oratorio "Das Lied der Einheit", composed for the Congress by the bishop of Deventer, Engelbertus Lagerwey (text) and Alex de Jong (music).³¹ This wish for unity was not only directed towards internal reconciliation of Old Catholic Churches but also externally. Thus, several weeks before the foundation of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam on 23 August 1948, the Old Catholic Congress reflected on the role of Old Catholicism within the ecumenical movement.³²

In addition to Congresses and other traditional forms of collaboration, from the late 1950s onwards new ways of working together were created, for example on the missionary field, where ministry was shared between Anglican and Old Catholic institutions from several countries. Around the 75th anniversary of the Union of Utrecht in 1964, relations of Full Communion were established with the *Igreja Lusitana Católica Apostólica Evangélica* in Portugal and the *Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal* in Spain, which joined the Anglican Communion, and the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*.³³

It is apparent that throughout its history, the founding of the Union of Utrecht has been seen by Old Catholics as a significant historical event. In the first 50 years, however the Union of Utrecht as such did not form the focus for celebration. This was primarily because the anniversaries fell in

³¹ See Bericht über den XV. Internationalen Altkatholiken Kongress, 17.–21. August 1948 in Hilversum-Holland, in: *IKZ* 38 (1948), 217–321, here 314.

³² See Adolf Kürty, 'Die ökumenische Bewegung', in: *IKZ* 38 (1948), 228–236; Andreas Rinkel, 'Unsere Probleme im ökumenischen theologischen Gespräch', in: *IKZ* 38 (1948), 236–248.

³³ See E. W. Heese, 'Die Philippinische Unabhängige Kirche', in: *IKZ* 54 (1964), 57–82, and *ibid.*, 251 (about the churches in Portugal and Spain); see also note 52 below.

historical periods during which other matters were more important and big international celebrations impossible for organisational and economic reasons. Other historic events, such as the memory of the First Vatican Council and the commemoration of significant people or events – as the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the election of Cornelis Steenoven, or of the death of Z. B. van Espen, the marking of St. Willibrord (ca. 658–739), the first bishop of Utrecht, and also the ecumenical effort – received more attention. However, these commemorations and appropriations also contributed to the formation of a shared Old Catholic identity, which was experienced and expressed at the International Old Catholic Congresses. Moreover, through the shared exploration of questions of theological and ecumenical interest, the encounter between bishops, theologians and lay people at these congresses also helped to shape an experience of belonging together. However, at times – as became all too apparent during the 1930s – these encounters also revealed painful differences and failures.

1989 – Celebration with Tensions

On the occasion of the centenary of the Union of Utrecht, the time had come to look back at the history of the Union. Fred Smit (1938–1990), rector of St. Engelmundus, IJmuiden and lecturer at the Old Catholic Seminary of Utrecht, undertook a detailed historical reconstruction of the pre-history and history of the Union of Utrecht to 1909. Since oral witnesses reaching back to the origins of the Union were no longer available, this research was based on archival material, primarily that which Smit found in Dutch archives. Smit did not gloss over the difficulties of the period between 1876 and 1909; rather, he made more explicit the problems at which Herzog, Van Riel and others had only hinted in their memoirs: the reasons why the Dutch bishops were not willing to consecrate Eduard Herzog in 1876, the differences between the Dutch and the German-speaking churches in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and their contacts in that period to similar movements in Italy, Spain, the United States,³⁴ and Poland, all of which sought contact to and communion with

³⁴ See Angela Berlis, 'Franciszek Hodur und die alt-katholischen Bischöfe der Utrechter Union bis 1907', in: Jacka Jeziorsky (Hg.), *Biskup Franciszek Hodur (1866–1953). Życie – Dokonania – Znaczenie*. Materiały seminarium naukowego Olsztyn 1–2 III 2000 r., Olsztyn (Studio Poligrafii Komputerowej) 2001, 73–91.

the young Union of Utrecht. Smit also documented failures, such as the attempt to found an Old Catholic diocese in the United Kingdom and the controversies surrounding Arnold Harris Mathew.³⁵

In 1989, the minutes of the meeting of the bishops in 1889 were finally published. These revealed the different theological approaches which lay behind the text of the Utrecht declaration of 1889.³⁶ The celebration of the centenary took place in Utrecht on 22 and 23 September 1989; many Old Catholics and ecumenical guests from around the world participated in this celebration.³⁷ There was a festive celebration in the *Domkerk*, until the 16th century the Cathedral, and since then a Reformed church, attended by representatives of other churches, the state and the royal family. This was accompanied by other events, including a study day on the role of women in the church, organized by the Dutch Old Catholic Women's organisation, which concluded with an agapecelebration.³⁸ An exhibition in the museum for religious history in Utrecht, the *Catharijneconvent*, documented the rich history of the Old Catholic movement, mainly from the point of view of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, including many material objects from its past.³⁹ The editor-in-chief of the *IKZ*, Hans Frei (1922–2011), also

³⁵ See Fred Smit, 'Meinungsverschiedenheiten zwischen den altkatholischen Kirchen Deutschlands, Hollands und der Schweiz im Jahre 1876', in: *IKZ* 71 (1981), 65–120; idem, 'Die weitere Entwicklung der Utrechter Union (der altkatholischen Bischöfe) von 1889 bis 1909', in: *IKZ* 79 (1989), 104–135. A comprehensive study of the history of the Union of Utrecht, considering these developments and their theological implications, has yet to be undertaken. For a relatively popular account, with some inaccuracies, see: Christian Flügel, *Die Utrechter Union und die Geschichte ihrer Kirchen*, Norderstedt (Books on Demand) 2014 (2nd edition).

³⁶ 'Protokoll der Bischofs-Konferenz in Utrecht in der bischöflichen Wohnung, den 24. September 1889', in: *IKZ* 79 (1989), 84–103 (with comments by the Swiss theologian Kurt Stalder).

³⁷ The Polish National Catholic Church of the United States even called for a "1889–1989 Anniversary Pilgrimage to Poland and Holland". Joseph Nieminski, 'The Significance of the Centenary of the Union of Utrecht for the Members of the Polish National Catholic Church in America and Canada', in: *IKZ* 79 (1989), 162–173, here 170–173.

³⁸ See E. Maas-van der Bijl, 'Vrouwen vieren 100 jaar Unie met symposium', in: *De Oud-Katholiek* 105 (1989), 120–121.

³⁹ Dirkse, *Kunst* (see note 17). This richly illustrated catalogue of an exhibition marking the centenary of the Union of Utrecht includes a contribution on its art and artefacts, a historical essay by Fred Smit and a more systematic consideration of what the Old Catholic Church stands for by Bert Wirix.

invited several authors to consider the meaning of the foundation of the Union of Utrecht.⁴⁰

The *IKZ* articles revealed some of the tensions which existed within the Union of Utrecht at the time of the centenary. Marinus Kok (1916–1999), Archbishop emeritus of Utrecht, placed the history of the Union of Utrecht within the context of episcopatism and conciliarism from the ancient church onwards; he urged clarification of the “essentials of faith” mentioned in the Bonn Agreement (1931), which brought about full Communion between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Anglican Communion.⁴¹ Kok also emphasised that the bishops should act *together* as “living witnesses of faith”.⁴² He was concerned about the unity within the Union of Utrecht, which he saw endangered by two key issues: the discussions of women’s ordination and their consequences, and the different emphases placed by the Union’s members with respect to ecumenical partners, and specifically the Memorandum of Understanding (“Vereinbarung”) between the German Old Catholic Church and the Evangelische Kirche in Germany (EKD).⁴³ Many of those present at the

⁴⁰ Cf. Smit, ‘weitere Entwicklung’ (see note 34); Marinus Kok, ‘100 Jahre Utrechter Union: Rückblick und Ausblick’, in: *IKZ* 79 (1989), 145–174; Nieminski, ‘Significance’ (see note 34); Jan Visser, ‘Kirchenstruktur und Glaubensvermittlung’, in: *IKZ* 79 (1989), 174–191, focussing on thesis 8 of the Declaration of Utrecht; Sigisbert Kraft, ‘Die neugefasste Weiheliturgie der altkatholischen Kirchen und ihre ekklesiologische Bedeutung’, in: *IKZ* 79 (1989), 192–203. Kraft’s contribution considers recent liturgical developments within the Union of Utrecht. A further article, published several years later, also offers a historical reconstruction of aspects of the history of the Union of Utrecht, although it did not take into account recent publications in Dutch: Christian Oeyen, ‘Wie ist die Utrechter Union entstanden?’, in: Jan Hallebeek/Bert Wirix (red.), *Met het oog op morgen. Ecclesiologische beschouwingen aangeboden aan Jan Visser*, Zoetermeer (Boekencentrum) 1996, 108–115.

⁴¹ “Es muss deutlich ausgesprochen werden, was die ‘essentials of Christian faith’ sind ... oder wenn man es anders sagen will: Was genau unter dem Glauben der alten Kirche verstanden wird. Dabei ist es nicht genug, den Ausspruch von Vincentius von Lerinum zu zitieren.” Kok, ‘100 Jahre’ (see note 40), 160.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 161. Kok had quite a pessimistic view about the future; see also: Marinus Kok, ‘Unie van Utrecht: Vanwaar – waarheen?’, in: Hallebeek/Wirix (red.), *Met het oog op morgen* (see note 40), 103–107.

⁴³ In 1987, the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue Commission had finished its work after twelve years. Kok wrote: “Man kan keinen ehrlichen und liebevollen Dialog mit Konstantinopel und Rom führen und dann auch noch versuchen, die reformatorischen Kirchen miteinzubeziehen.” Kok, ‘100 Jahre’, 160. At the centenary, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Damaskinos (born as Vasileos Papandreou,

celebration of the centenary found themselves wondering whether the Union of Utrecht could survive these tensions.⁴⁴

During the 1990s the discussions about women's ordination intensified and the tensions associated with them increased. The opposition of the Polish National Church (PNCC) in the United States and Canada was well known, and several attempts were made to intensify contacts to and discussions with the PNCC.⁴⁵ In 1993, for the first and still only time, an International Old Catholic Theologians Conference was held in the United States, on the theme "Dimensions of the Union of Utrecht". The intention was to meet with Polish National Catholics to discuss theological questions, but this was disappointed, as only very few clergy were permitted by their PNCC bishops to participate in the encounter with the European Old Catholics.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the plan to avoid speaking about the ques-

1936–2011), since 1982 as Metropolitan based in Switzerland, gave the main address. See Metropolitan Damaskinos [Papandreou], 'Die Bedeutung der Utrechter Union aus orthodoxer Sicht', in: *Orthodoxes Forum* 4 (1990), 139–149. His words were received with criticism by the audience, because he identified both the full communion of the Old Catholics with Anglicans, which had existed since 1931, and the Memorandum of Understanding between the German Old Catholic Church and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland as stumbling blocks for Orthodox-Old Catholic relations.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Bernhard Heitz, 'Ende oder Wende? 100 Jahre Utrechter Union – 24.9.1889 – 24.9.1989', in: *Christen heute* 33 (1989) 9, 10–11; see also the letter by Herwig Aldenhoven, '“Ende einer Union?” und die Tatsachen', in: *ibid.*, 21–22 (followed by a note of the editor and an official documentation by the Geerman diocese, in: *ibid.*, 22). The issue of gender was a key theme in: Heidi Herborn, '100 Jahre Utrechter Union. Nicht ganz respektlose Betrachtung einer feierlichen Versammlung durch eine weibliche Brille', in: *Christen heute* 33 (1989) 11, 10–11.

⁴⁵ A representative from the PNCC was also invited to participate in an official study day of the Dutch Old Catholic Church about women's ordination in the Netherlands: James Flynn, 'Het antwoord van de Amerikaanse zusterkerk', in: *“De Haagse teksten”. Referaten en beschouwingen op de studiedagen “Vrouw en kerkelijk ambt”, 18–20 januari 1994*, Amersfoort (Oud-Katholiek Seminarie) 1995, 49–67.

⁴⁶ See the report by Daniel Konrad, 'Dimensionen der Utrechter Union', in: *IKZ* 84 (1994), 7–19; Urs von Arx, 'Der ekklesiologische Charakter der Utrechter Union', in: *IKZ* 84 (1994), 20–61. Jonathan Emil Trela (1945–1997), professor at Savonarola Theological Seminary of the PNCC and pastor of Holy Name of Jesus parish in Schenectady, NY, also gave a paper, entitled "The Nature of the Church Amid the Churches"; it was not published, but is summarised in the report (p. 8–12); Jan Visser, 'Ökumene – Welt – Utrechter Union: Die Aufgabe der altkatholischen Kirche', in: *IKZ* 84 (1994), 92–113; Jan Hallebeek, 'Canon Law Aspects of the Utrecht Union', in: *IKZ* 84 (1994), 114–127. Other contributions were given by Thaddäus A. Schnitker, considering the identity of the Union of Utrecht in the past and the future, and by the

tion of the ordination of women as such for not giving the impression as wanting to “convert” PNCC-members to the point of view of many European Old Catholics did not succeed, as the question of women’s ordination was the permanent undertone at this conference.

The tensions within the Union of Utrecht deepened in the 1990s:⁴⁷ the Bishops Conference (IBC) held two conferences on women’s ordination in 1991 and 1997 and tried to stimulate a process of reflection and decision making; at the same time, the Old Catholics’ ecumenical partners and churches in communion experienced similar developments. In 1994, the Church of England ordained its first female priests, while the pope sought to hinder further discussion of the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church. In the same year, the German Old Catholic synod reiterated its decision, first passed in 1991, in favour of opening up the threefold ministry to women. In 1996, the first women were priested in Germany, and the German bishop and the German church were put under a moratorium by the IBC. The PNCC subsequently reacted strongly to those Old Catholic churches – Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands – which began to ordain women by withdrawing from communion, and later, in 2003, left the Union of Utrecht.⁴⁸ In 2009, the PNCC produced a new foundational text, the “Declaration of Scranton”, drawn mainly from the Declaration of Utrecht (1889) with additional remarks on women’s ordination and ethical questions.⁴⁹ This text articulates the PNCC’s claim to be the only Old Catholic Church to preserve the “true” Old Catholic heritage. It is striking that similar claims to the authoritative interpretation of the past, aiming to claim the future, can be found also in other

bishops Wiktor Wysoczanski (Warsaw, *in absentia*) and John Swantek (Scranton), on the spirituality of the Polish Old Catholics in Poland and in the United States. For the history of the church in Poland, which is a daughter church of the PNCC: Wiktor Wysoczanski, ‘Die Polnisch-Katholische Kirche als Mitglied der Utrechter Union: Entstehung, Geschichte, Rechtslage’, in: *IKZ* 95 (2005), 157–201.

⁴⁷ For the historical development in broader context see Angela Berlis, ‘Women’s Ordination in the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht’, in: Ian Jones et al. (eds.), *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches: International Perspectives*, London (T&T Clark) 2008, 144–154.

⁴⁸ See: Erklärung der PNCC zur Beziehung mit der Utrechter Union, in: *IKZ* 97 (2007), 214–217.

⁴⁹ See: [Urs von Arx], ‘PNCC beschliesst Neufassung der Utrechter Erklärung von 1889’, in: *IKZ* 98 (2008), 242–247. This contains the text of the “Declaration of Scranton”, with a critical commentary by Urs von Arx.

churches founded at this time, for example the “continuing Anglican Churches” in the USA.

2014 – Towards a New Self-Assurance

The marking of the 125th anniversary of the Declaration of Utrecht was officially connected to the 31st International Old Catholic Congress in Utrecht. It was characterised by a certain ambiguity concerning the historical narrative. On the one hand, more historical material than ever before is available now, enabling more detailed historical knowledge about the coming into being of the Union of Utrecht and its development through time.⁵⁰ On the other hand, with the exception of a brief celebration at the *Frans huis* (“French house”) in Utrecht, formerly the residence of the Archbishop of Utrecht, where the Utrecht Declaration was signed, which took place before the beginning of the Congress and was open only to invited guests,⁵¹ the Congress itself presented the historical memory of and theological reflection about the Union of Utrecht only through catchphrases. Many quite superficial references to the Union of Utrecht were made, but there was little historical analysis or theological reflection of its role.⁵²

⁵⁰ For example: in recent years, the correspondence of the first Swiss bishop, Eduard Herzog, has been transcribed by Dr Ewald Kessler (Heidelberg), lic. theol. et phil. Hubert Huppertz (Everswinkel) and Dr Max Munzinger (Basel); this will provide us with new insights. A particularly interesting aspect within this archival corpus is the correspondence of Herzog with his German colleague Joseph Hubert Reinkens (a commentated edition will be published by Martin Bürgin and myself), but Herzog also corresponded with many other people in Switzerland and abroad. Bishop Herzog’s correspondence offers insights into events which were not reported in newspapers or other publications, and reveals internal conflicts and disagreements between early Old Catholics which were hidden as far as possible from the outside world. This offers insights into the polemical situation of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Ultramontane publications of that period loved to publish information about the Old Catholics which could be used against them, and finding division and difference among Old Catholics was one of the ways by which they played down the importance of the Old Catholic movement. Contemporary, confidential letters therefore add substantial information to what we know about the past.

⁵¹ See about this celebration: *IKZ* 105 (2015), 52–71. At the Congress, a very short overview of the history and theology of Old Catholicism was presented to the Symposium for Ecumenical Guests by Mattijs Ploeger; see his ‘The Churches of the Union of Utrecht in an Ecumenical Context’, in: *IKZ* 105 (2015), 31–37.

⁵² For example, recent research on the history of polycentric Christianity considers movements of local intellectual elites who started Catholic movements and

Rather, the Congress focussed on celebrating Old Catholic identity in the 21st century in a festive, playful way. Through video clips, representatives of other churches affirmed the importance of Old Catholicism in today's ecumenism. Modern multimedia presentations, some with a chat show format, were used extensively, and workshops on current issues in politics and society issues were held. The Congress centred on three key themes: being Old Catholic means “openness”, “commitment”, “participation”.⁵³ Much emphasis was laid on the *attitude*, or spirituality, of being a Christian in the Old Catholic mould.

This emphasis on a Christian lifestyle could be observed both in the encounter with the Swiss deacon Karin Schaub (born 1960), whose true-to-life radio sermons seem to appeal strongly to contemporary people, and in the only key note lecture, given by the orthodox theologian John Chrysavgis (born 1958), with its call to a way of living “that reflects spiritual values, that communicates generosity and gratitude.”⁵⁴

churches independent from Rome in the late 19th and early 20th century. The leaders of several of these were in contact with Bishop Eduard Herzog and the Old Catholic Bishops' Conference. The most famous was Gregorio Aglipay (1860–1940) in the Philippines. See Peter-Ben Smit, *Old Catholic and Philippine Independent Ecclesiologies in History. The Catholic Church in Every Place*, Leiden (Brill) 2011. See also Adrian Hermann, ‘Transregional Contacts Between Independent Catholic Churches in Asia Around 1900: The Case of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and the Independent Catholics of Ceylon’, in: Ciprian Burlacioiu/Adrian Hermann (eds.), *Veränderte Landkarten. Auf dem Weg zu einer polyzentrischen Geschichte des Weltchristentums*. FS Klaus Koschorke zum 65. Geburtstag, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz) 2013, 139–150; idem, ‘Transnational Networks of Philippine Intellectuals and the Emergence of an Indigenous-Christian Public Sphere Around 1900’, in: Klaus Koschorke/Adrian Hermann (eds.), *Polycentric Structures in the History of World Christianity / Polyzentrische Strukturen in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums*, Wiesbaden (Harrassowitz) 2014, 193–203. To a polycentric history of Catholic movements also belong the *Igreja Lusitana Católica Apostólica Evangélica* in Portugal and *Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal* in Spain, which joined the Anglican Communion and are in full communion with the Old Catholic Churches.

⁵³ The English Congress brochure (<http://www.okcongres2014.com/fman/25.pdf>; it is no longer available) translated the three key themes with “susceptibility, commitment, participation”. “Susceptibility” is in my opinion not an appropriate translation. The documentation of the congress can be found in *IKZ 105* (2015) 1, 1–71, as well as on: http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/445/congress_2014 (visited 25 May 2015).

⁵⁴ John Chrysavgis, ‘On Earth as in Heaven. Transforming Perspectives and Practices’, in: *IKZ 105* (2015), 24–30, here 30.

The focus of the 2014 Congress was – in comparison to earlier Congresses – more on individual experience, and there was much less space for reflection on synodical processes. Many participants returned home after this celebration with a positive feeling; many experienced community. However, the Congress was too much a singular event to be able to develop strategies for the future.⁵⁵ Why was there no declaration by the whole Congress concerning the 125th anniversary of the Union of Utrecht? Why was there only a letter from the bishops of the Union of Utrecht before the Congress? Were the three key themes only understood as relating to individual behaviour, or were they intended to stimulate a more collective reflection about how to act together in the future? The Statutes of the IBC (2001) say in their preamble that the Union of Utrecht is a union of churches and their bishops.⁵⁶ How can the unity of these churches become visible if not through the participants at an International Congress of Old Catholics? In the future a combination of both aspects – individual *and* synodical – seems essential to express the nature of the Old Catholic church as both episcopally led and synodically governed.

Conclusion

The history of the Union of Utrecht can certainly be told as the story of how a group of churches was drawn together on the basis of their orientation towards the Ancient Church and on the basis of shared experiences within the Latin Church, and how they shaped a shared history and a shared narrative. This history also shows how long it takes to engage deeply with different insights – spiritual, theological, academic – and to allow these to influence each other's thinking. Several factors supported the strengthening of the bonds between the Dutch and the German-speaking Old Catholics from the 19th into the 20th century: exchange of students and priests, friendships, theological exchange, a feeling of being united in the fight against ultramontanism and Rome. These also helped to establish deeper relations between Old Catholics across Europe, while deepening

⁵⁵ This is also affirmed by Antonius Jan Glazemaker (born 1931), Archbishop emeritus of Utrecht: “Deelnemers hadden het gevoel dat het ergens over ging, het sloeg aan. Je kunt echter geen strategie ontwikkelen uit een dergelijk evenement”; cf. *De Oud-Katholiek* 131 (2015), 5. See also Urs von Arx, ‘Editorial’, in: *IKZ* 105 (2015) 1, 1–2, here 2.

⁵⁶ Preamble A.1. Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops United in the Union of Utrecht, in: *Beiheft zu IKZ* 91 (2001), 28.

relationships with Old Catholics further afield turned out to be more difficult, not least because of the lack of contact both in theological reflection and debates about current issues. The history of the Union of Utrecht is not one of harmony, but of a growing symphony. In this symphony, conflicts and failures have also played – and will continue to play – a role. They can be considered as key elements of processes of clarification and learning, of the shaping of tradition and identity.

At the beginning of this paper three different aspects or functions of celebrating anniversaries were discussed. These were: the expectation of stability grounded in an optimistic view on history, the experience of living tradition, and the sustainability of the institution which is being celebrated.

Celebrations enact and interpret the past as a firm foundation for the present and for the future. In this paper we have seen that the key anniversaries of the Union of Utrecht in the first half of the 20th century took place in difficult economic and political circumstances. Nonetheless, the Congresses offered a forum for the continuous process of understanding what Old Catholicism stood for. The centenary celebration took place at a time when tensions were affecting the Union of Utrecht. In comparison, the 125th anniversary seemed a more light-hearted event, less concerned with the current political, economic or church political situation. With regard to the first aspect, the expectation of stability based on a historical understanding, all the celebrations have been marked by a perspective on history which emphasized the continuity of the past with the situation today.⁵⁷ However, whereas earlier celebrations really engaged with Old Catholic history and marked it with Old Catholic “milestones”, whether events or persons, history played only a minor role in the 2014 celebration. Here, the encounter with (the stories of) living persons and with contemporary questions was much more in the foreground, whereas the historical aspects were presented only to select groups. The second aspect, the experience of tradition as a living tradition which opens the way to the future, was probably most intensively discussed in the celebration of the Union of Utrecht’s centenary in 1989. In this phase, the Union – not least in the light of the discussion about the ordination of women to the priesthood – dealt with the question of how tradition was to be interpreted in order to pave a way

⁵⁷ The celebration of the Eucharist is always at the centre of anniversaries like this: it connects, both on a collective and on an individual level, past, present and future in memory, anamnesis, real presence.

for a common future. In 1989, the third aspect of an anniversary celebration, a coherent narrative, with a claim to validity for the future, received more attention than ever before. At the same time, more historical study and theological reflection on the role of the Union of Utrecht was also undertaken in 1989 than it had been before. In this period, work on a new set of statutes for the bishops' conference also took place.⁵⁸

In 2014, the future of the Union of Utrecht seemed unquestioned, but there was also an awareness of major changes, both already started and still before us.⁵⁹ The future task of congresses and celebrations will be to embed the institution's self-understanding and self-assurance, as defined by bishops and other senior (lay and theological) leaders, in a more structured synodical process. This should manifest the key ideas of what it means to be the church in an Old Catholic manner from past and present, bringing these together with individual experience in an attempt to formulate a collective identity for the future.

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⁵⁸ See 'Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops United in the Union of Utrecht', in: *Beiheft zu IKZ* 91 (2001), 28–42.

⁵⁹ In his sermon during the celebration, the Swiss bishop Harald Rein (born 1957) highlighted the Old Catholics' new ecumenical partners in dialogue, including the Church of Sweden and the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and also discussed the challenges posed by overlapping jurisdictions in Continental Europe particularly when responding to migration; cf. *IKZ* 105 (2015), 41–44, here 44.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die Feier von Jubiläen dient Institutionen zur Selbstvergewisserung, Traditionsbildung und Identitätsstiftung. Bei einem Jubiläum werden Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft miteinander verbunden: Geschichte wird im Sinne der Kontinuität und als Garant zukünftiger Stabilität verstanden; die Vergangenheit wird reklamiert und vergegenwärtigt als gemeinsame Tradition und gemeinsames Narrativ für die jetzt Lebenden; der Anspruch auf Fortdauer und Zukunftsfähigkeit wird geltend gemacht.

Der Beitrag skizziert, wie die Utrechter Union den 25., den 50., den 100. und den 125. Jahrestag ihrer Gründung jeweils vor dem Hintergrund spezifischer politischer und kirchlicher Zeitfragen beging. Die bisherigen Jubiläen waren von einer historischen Rückbesinnung geprägt – am wenigsten gilt dies für die 125-Jahr-Feier im Jahr 2014. Die Diskussion über die Grenzen und Möglichkeiten einer als lebendig verstandenen Tradition war am stärksten bei der 100-Jahr-Feier 1989, was damals zugleich auch die Frage der Zukunft der Utrechter Union ins Spiel brachte. Im Vergleich dazu war die 125-Jahr-Feier ein Event, das zwar den Anwesenden als Einzelnen viele Anregungen für verantwortungsvolles Handeln im Bereich aktueller politischer und ethischer Fragen mit auf den Weg gab und die Begegnung mit lebenden Identifikationsfiguren ermöglichte, aber im Hinblick auf die Deutung und Aneignung der Geschichte wenig Anknüpfungspunkte bot. Bei künftigen Jubiläen und Kongressen sollte eine Verknüpfung von individueller und gemeinschaftlich-synodaler Ebene gesucht und so der strategische Aspekt einer kollektiv verantworteten und zukunftsorientierten Deutung altkatholischer Identität wieder stärker in den Vordergrund gerückt werden.