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Kirchliche Chronik

Ausserordentliche Sitzung der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz (IBK) in Utrecht, 14. bis 18. September 2014

Im Vorfeld des 31. Internationalen Altkatholikenkongresses versammelte sich die IBK zu einer Sitzung, um zusammen mit Vertretern befreundeter Kirchen eine offizielle Stellungnahme zu der von der Kommission für Glaube und Kirchenverfassung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen (ÖRK) veröffentlichten Studie «Die Kirche. Auf dem Weg zu einer gemeinsamen Vision» (deutsche Ausgabe: Gütersloh/Paderborn 2014) zu erarbeiten. Hier wird die englische Originalfassung der Stellungnahme dokumentiert.

UvA

Introduction

In a spirit of prayer and fellowship, the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht met with bishops of the *Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente*, the *Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church* and the *Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites*, who responded to an invitation to participate in an extraordinary session of the former body, at the *Landelijk Dienstencentrum* of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, at Utrecht, from 14 till 18 September 2014. The context of this meeting was provided by the celebration of the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches (1889).

The goal of the meeting was to formulate a response to the questions posed to the churches by the convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, published by the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order (Faith and Order Paper 214, WCC Publications, Geneva 2013). To this purpose, the meeting benefited from presentations by the Rev. Canon John Gibaut, Director of the Commission of Faith and Order, introducing the document and its background. By discussing the text in this manner, the bishops of the participating churches, joined by theological advisors, sought to engage in a next stage of their 'pilgrimage of justice and peace', travelling together as catholic churches that intend to live together in a global communion of communions of churches.

It was the second time that bishops of these churches met (the first time was in 2010) and it was the first time that they jointly discussed a reaction to a World Council of Churches document. Some of our churches are in full communion with each other or engaged in an official dialogue. Together, we represent churches in the catholic tradition, attempting to jointly articulate the faith and practice of the Early Church for a new age, recognising each other in this endeavour, and hence seeking to be catholic churches in communion.

For this response, the five questions asked by the Commission on Faith and Order in the document's introduction (p. 3) will serve as a guideline.

1. To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?

The representatives of the three churches recognise a common ecclesiological vision in *The Church*. Our churches particularly welcome:

- the fundamental role that is given to communion (*koinonia*) ecclesiology,
- the importance given to the local church, as a eucharistic *communio* around a bishop, encompassing all the faithful in a given place, discerning the life of faith in communion, characterised by a life of *diakonia*, *leitourgia* and *martyria*, through an interplay of episcopacy and synodality;
- the consequent understanding of the ‘universal’ church as a conciliar communion of communions;
- the way in which the ordained ministry is treated and the emphasis placed on the exercise of *episkope* in its personal, collegial, and communal dimensions;
- the way in which contextuality is stressed, which implies respect for a legitimate diversity within a relationship of communion;
- the document’s underlining of the church’s mission and service in the world, understanding the church as ‘sign and servant’ of God’s kingdom.

In this way, we recognise in *The Church* an adequate and authentic articulation of the faith and order of the Early Church for today.

2. To what extent does this text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

The text moves beyond mere formal recognition between churches towards the possibility of speaking out together in society and practically working together in the service for the world. If the text is widely accepted, it could help to bring in contact not only churches with similar ecclesiologies, such as the churches involved in the meeting, but it could also forge unexpected connections with churches which do not seem to share the same kind of understanding of the church at first sight. This text will help growth in unity, when the text and the responses to it will be shared widely, such as has happened in the reception process of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982).

3. What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?

Our discussion of this text challenges us already, as we hear each other’s interpretations of the document in the context of the different religious, social, economic and political situations of our churches. The document’s emphasis on the *missio Dei* is challenging all our churches. Examples of such challenges are the following: Old Catholics are challenged to develop a broader sense and understanding of mission (proclaiming the gospel in a multicultural and multireligious society) and of the church as a moral/ethical communion (in the broad sense as advocated in chapter IV of *The Church*). To the IFI, the document could be helpful for strengthening its theological self-understanding in relation to the current process of renewal

of its constitution and canons, in order to relate their ecclesiology more strongly to their contemporary challenges. The long-standing experiences of the Mar Thoma Church in a multicultural and multi-religious environment could be made fruitful for dealing with more recent experiences of pluralist societies in Europe.

4. How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?

If a church recognises itself in this text, as we do, it probably has an ecclesial self-understanding that we might be able to recognise as ‘catholic’ in the sense of the Bonn Agreement, as well as in the sense of subsequent ecumenical statements by bilateral dialogues of the Old Catholic Church.

The text of the 1931 Anglican – Old Catholic Bonn Agreement was used in 1961 (and onwards) for the establishment of communion between the IFI and the Churches of the Anglican Communion, in 1965 in order to establish communion between the Old Catholic Churches, the IFI, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church. Further documents of bilateral dialogues of the Old Catholic Church include: the documents of the dialogue with the Orthodox Church (Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis, 1989), with the Roman Catholic Church (Kirche und Kirchengemeinschaft, 2009), with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church (Sanghitiri, Hippolytus and Munnar Statements, 2011–2014), and with the Church of Sweden (Uppsala and Utrecht on the way to communion, 2013).

Such joint recognition of the vision of *The Church* implies the recognition of each other’s catholicity and the joint search for a fully shared ecclesial life (along the lines of the communion ecclesiology of The Church: one eucharistic gathering around one bishop in one place). This search includes the discernment of possible common institutional structures, which should enhance the churches’ shared life in communion, while leaving room for legitimate diversity for cultural and practical reasons. This is in line with the principle of ‘one bishop in one place’. Should other churches be able to recognise themselves in the ecclesiological vision outlined in *The Church* to the same extent as we do, such joint recognition of the same ecclesiological vision provides a venture point for discerning being in communion.

5. What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?

- We are looking forward to learning the responses of other churches to this document. Therefore we would favour a reception process similar to that of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, in terms of the publication and analysis of the responses of the churches to *The Church*.
- We would like to receive further guidance regarding possible procedural aspects of common reflections on moral and ethical questions that divide the churches in our present time.

- We would advise churches and the WCC to continue to make use of the experiences of minority churches and to ascertain their inclusion into accounts of the history and presence of Christian churches in ecumenical endeavour. In this way, these churches' rich and significant experiences regarding working together with other churches can be made available as a resource for others. As representatives of such churches, we consider sharing these experiences as one of our gifts to the ecumenical movement.

Participants

Old Catholic Union of Utrecht:

Most Rev. Dr. Joris Vercammen, Archbishop of Utrecht (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)

Rt. Rev. Dr. Dirk Jan Schoon, Bishop of Haarlem (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)

Rt. Rev. Dr. Matthias Ring, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Old Catholics in Germany

Rt. Rev. Dr. Harald Rein, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland

Rt. Rev. Dr. John Okoro, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Austria

Rt. Rev. Dušan Hejbal, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic

Rt. Rev. Dr. Wiktor Wysoczański, Bishop of the Diocese of Warsaw and Prime Bishop of the Polish Catholic Church.

Iglesia Filipina Independiente:

Most Rev. Ephraim Fajutagana, Obispo Maximo

Rt. Rev. Delfin Callao Jr., Bishop of Agusans and Surigao Sur

Rt. Rev. Ronelio Fabriquier, Bishop of Romblon and Mindoros.

Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church:

Rt. Rev. Dr. Carlos López Lozano, Diocesan Bishop.

Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar (observer):

Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, Bishop of the Chennai-Bangalore Diocese.

Old Catholic Mariavite Church (observer):

Rt. Rev. Ludwik Jabłoński, Bishop of the Diocese of Warsaw-Płock and Prime Bishop.

Permanent observer to the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury:

Rt. Rev. Michael Burrows, Bishop of Cashel and Ossory (Church of Ireland) (excused).

Permanent observer to the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht on behalf of the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, USA:

Rt. Rev. W. Michie Klusmeyer, Bishop of West Virginia (excused).

Theological advisors:

Rev. Prof. Angela Berlis, Vice-Dean of the Theological Faculty, University of Bern (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland)

Rev. Dr. John Gibaut, Director of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order (Anglican Church of Canada)

Rev. Dr. Mattijs Ploeger, Principal of the Old Catholic Seminary, Utrecht University (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)

Very Rev. Dr. Eleuterio J. Revollido, Rector of Aglipay Central Theological Seminary, Urdaneta City (Iglesia Filipina Independiente)

Rev. Prof. Peter-Ben Smit, Professor of Ancient Catholic Church Structures, Utrecht University (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands).

Staff:

Rev. Karol Babi, assistant to Prime Bishop Jabłoński (Old Catholic Mariavite Church)

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Rev. Bernd Wallet, assistant to Archbishop Vercammen (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands)

Maja Weyermann, communication officer of the International Bishops' Conference (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland).

Union of Utrecht, website

Die Altkatholische Bischofskonferenz in Rom

Am 30. Oktober hielt sich die Internationale Altkatholische Bischofskonferenz (IBK) zum ersten Mal zu einem Arbeitsbesuch in Rom auf. Hauptpunkte waren ein Gespräch mit Kardinal Kurt Koch, dem Präsidenten des Päpstlichen Rates zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen, sowie weiteren Mitarbeitern des Rates und die anschliessende Privataudienz bei Papst Franziskus.

Arbeitsbesuch beim Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen

Im Gespräch mit Kardinal Koch informierten sich die Vertreter der Römisch-Katholischen und der Altkatholischen Kirche gegenseitig über die laufenden bilateralen Dialoge. Kardinal Koch betonte dabei auch, dass der Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen die Inhalte der Dialoge mit verschiedenen Kirchen regelmässig auf ihre Übereinstimmung hin überprüfen würde. Dies sei eine Frage der Glaubwürdigkeit gegenüber den Dialogpartnern.

Anschliessend sprachen die beiden Delegationen über die weitere Arbeit am gemeinsamen Dialog. Mit dem 2009 veröffentlichten Kommissionsbericht «Kir-

che und Kirchengemeinschaft» ist ein erster Teil der Gespräche abgeschlossen worden. Nun befasst sich die Dialogkommission mit den noch offenen Fragen wie Bezeugungsinstanzen (das heisst: Auf welchen Traditionen beruhen Lehrmeinungen der Kirchen und wie werden sie begründet?), der päpstlichen Unfehlbarkeit, dem Verhältnis Ortskirche – Universalkirche und der Mariologie. In welcher Form diese Texte den schon bestehenden Bericht ergänzen sollen, wird die Dialogkommission zu beraten haben.

Beiden Delegationen war natürlich bewusst, dass es neben den alten auch neue Hindernisse zu überwinden gilt. Der neue Umgang der Altkatholischen Kirchen mit ethischen Fragen und die Öffnung des apostolischen Amtes für Frauen stellen grosse Herausforderungen dar. Diese Fragen spielen aber auch zwischen Rom und anderen Dialogpartnern eine Rolle, wie Kardinal Koch bestätigte. Das Besondere an den Altkatholischen Kirchen sei aber, dass sie diese Fragen innerhalb der katholischen Praxis angehen wollten.

Dem altkatholischen Vorschlag, Zwischenziele für den Dialog zu formulieren, stand Kardinal Koch nicht abweisend gegenüber. Er betonte aber, dass das Endziel dabei nicht aus den Augen verloren werden dürfe. Dafür müsse man sich eine mosaische Spiritualität aneignen und sich mit vollem Einsatz und mit Geduld und Hoffnung für das grosse Ziel einsetzen, auch wenn man es selbst vielleicht nicht mehr erleben werde.

Von altkatholischer Seite wurde auch die Möglichkeit angesprochen, dass altkatholische Beobachter bei anderen Dialogen und bei Bischofssynoden mit einbezogen werden würden. Dadurch könnten Inhalte eingebracht werden, mit denen die Altkatholischen Kirchen bereits viel Erfahrung hätten. Auch auf diesen Vorschlag reagierte Kardinal Koch positiv.

Privataudienz bei Papst Franziskus

Im Anschluss an den Arbeitsbesuch bei Kardinal Koch begleiteten dieser und sein Mitarbeiter Msgr. Matthias Türk, der Co-Sekretär der Dialogkommission, die altkatholische Delegation unter der Leitung von Erzbischof Joris Vercammen zur Privataudienz bei Papst Franziskus. Genau 125 Jahre nach der Gründung der Utrechter Union war dies der erste Besuch der Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz beim Bischof von Rom.

Nach der persönlichen Begrüssung wandte sich der Präsident der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz, Erzbischof Vercammen, mit einer Ansprache an den Papst. Er fasste zusammen, was in den bilateralen Beziehungen erreicht worden sei, seit 1966 der Weg für einen Dialog zwischen den beiden Kirchen geebnet worden ist. Er stellte aber auch fest, wie viel Arbeit noch zu leisten ist, um die wichtigen Fragen zu lösen, die die beiden Kirchen noch immer trennen.

Erzbischof Vercammen betonte auch, dass die altkatholischen Bischöfe immer die einzigartige Stellung des Bischofs von Rom innerhalb der ganzen Kirche anerkannt hätten. Sie seien überzeugt, dass das Amt des Bischofs von Rom als *primus inter pares* eine höhere moralische Autorität haben würde, wenn es in die

Synodalität der Bischöfe, die ihre jeweiligen katholischen Ortskirchen repräsentieren, eingebettet wäre.

Papst Franziskus betonte in seiner Ansprache, dass dieser Besuch eine wertvolle Gelegenheit sei, die gemeinsame ökumenische Reise zu reflektieren. Es sei möglich geworden, aufgrund eines tieferen gegenseitigen Verständnisses und praktischer Zusammenarbeit neue Brücken zu bauen. In vielen Themen sei ein Konsens gefunden worden und die Unterschiede seien genauer herausgearbeitet und in neue Kontexte gesetzt worden.

Eine gemeinsame Zukunft in Europa könne nur über den Weg der Bekehrung, der Versöhnung und des Friedens gefunden werden. Dies betonten sowohl Papst Franziskus als auch Erzbischof Vercauteren. «Es ist eine spirituelle Reise von Begegnung zu Freundschaft, von Freundschaft zu Brüderlichkeit und von Brüderlichkeit zu Gemeinschaft. Unterwegs ist Veränderung unvermeidlich. Wir müssen immer bereit sein, auf den Heiligen Geist zu hören, der uns in die Wahrheit führt», so der Papst.

Nach den Grussworten wurden Papst Franziskus im Rahmen von persönlichen Begegnungen die Missale aller altkatholischen Kirchen mit Widmungen als Geschenk überreicht.

Nach der Audienz besuchte die Bischofskonferenz mit Kardinal Koch das Grab des Apostels Petrus in der Nekropole des Petersdoms, wo gemeinsam ein Vaterunser gebetet wurde.

Der Besuch im Vatikan endete mit einem zwanglosen Mittagessen mit Kardinal Koch und Mons. Türk im Gästehaus, in dem die Delegation untergebracht war. Bei ausgezeichnete italienischer Küche war hier Zeit für persönliche Gespräche, die auch den menschlichen Kontakt vertieften.

Maja Weyermann

Kommunikationsbeauftragte der IBK

Die Ansprachen des Erzbischofs von Utrecht und des Papstes:

Holy Father

The Feast of Saint Willibrord in the year 1966 was a very historical one. For on the 7th of November of that year, Bernard Cardinal Alfrink, the Roman-Catholic Archbishop in Utrecht, came to the cathedral church of his brother, Andreas Rinkel, the Old-Catholic Archbishop of Utrecht, in order to read a letter written by Augustin Cardinal Bea, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. In his letter, Cardinal Bea stressed Rome's readiness to get involved in a process of dialogue with the Old-Catholic Church of the Netherlands and with the other churches of the Old-Catholic Union of Utrecht. It was intended to be an open dialogue, freed from earlier conditions. The enthusiasm was great. It was a historic moment.

Since that time, a lot of work has been done by a lot of people on both sides. As a result, our relationship with the Roman-Catholic Church has improved in all our countries. A lot of effort has been put in both the bilateral dialogues at a local level and at an international level. In this respect, the ongoing work of the joint

international dialogue group must be mentioned. On the initiative of Walter Cardinal Kasper and my predecessor, Archbishop Antonius Jan Glazemaker, the work started in 2003, resulting in a document that has been praised for its theological depth and for its pragmatic approach to the questions that still divide us. The document, entitled *The Church and Ecclesial Communion*, describes the fundamental ecclesiological insights we share. Following the method of ‘the differentiated consensus’, they were able to identify our common understanding of the Church. The document states that the conflict between our communion and the Roman church “represents an inner-catholic problem” (nr. 2) and concludes that it “also bears the traits of a family feud” (nr. 87). In any case, our difference of opinion is an inner catholic issue. While the good news of this report is that we recognise one another as belonging to the same family, the bad news it brings is that there are still some very important questions left that divide us. A lot of work remains to be done. We are glad, therefore, that Kurt Cardinal Koch has invited the present phase of the International Roman-Catholic – Old-Catholic Dialogue to explore these challenging questions in-depth.

And now anno Domini 2014, 48 years after that memorable year 1966, all the Old-Catholic bishops of the Union of Utrecht are here, with you, Holy Father, for the first time in history. Over the last 125 years, the Old-Catholic bishops have sought to co-operate as truly catholic bishops leading their catholic churches in an openness to the whole ecumenical endeavour. In the Declaration of Utrecht, signed 125 years ago, we continue to recognise the unique position of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, within the whole of the Church. In Old-Catholic ecclesiology ever since, we have sought to explore how this office could have primacy for all the churches worldwide, as a personal sign of the unity the local churches share. In our ecclesiology we stress the fact that the office of the Bishop of Rome does not have a universal jurisdiction. On the contrary, we believe that the Bishop of Rome as the *primus inter pares* would have a higher moral authority if he were embedded within the synodality of the bishops, representing their local catholic churches. We are convinced that your ministry has an extremely important role to play within the ecumenical developments that are necessary in helping every local church to proclaim the gospel in the modern world. We remain grateful for the invitation for the joint reflection on the role of the Bishop of Rome already expressed by Pope Saint John Paul II in *Ut unum sint*, and repeated by Your Holiness in his exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (nr. 32). We do our best to contribute to this highly important question.

In Old-Catholic ecclesiology we refer to the Ancient Church that offers us the inspirational guidelines to shape the church in our time. Being a post-tridentine phenomenon we try, together with others, to represent this ecclesiological tradition within the Western Church to which we belong.

As Old-Catholics, we consider ourselves the heirs of the ideals of those committed catholics, who during the last centuries found themselves in conflict with the See of Rome because of developments within the whole of the catholic church. They did not aim to be separated from Rome, but found themselves separated from

the church they loved. Standing on their shoulders, we have inherited their spirituality that is characterised by a deep belief in God's grace, calling the whole of the baptised people to participate in God's commitment for the salvation of every human being. We see this spirituality reflected in a synodical-episcopal structure of each local catholic church that implies a practice of critical openness to the developments within humanity. This double solidarity both with God and with humankind is at the heart of the old-catholic charisma.

Working together with our brothers and sisters in all the churches, we humbly try to contribute to the catholicity of the church, which is the gift of God's solidarity, practiced by the people of God. That catholicity requires a 'conversio ad Dominum' by all of us.

As an Irish missionary Saint Willibrord was sent to the European continent in order to organise its evangelisation. In 698 he came to Rome to be consecrated 'archbishop of the Frisians', and therefore he is considered to be the first bishop of Utrecht. He really needed the support of the See of Rome for the commission entrusted to him by the Lord. To us, our presence here today is a clear expression of our adherence to the See of Rome, to you, Holy Father, and to our ongoing commitment to the church and its catholicity worldwide. We humbly offer Your Holiness this commitment, in the sincere belief that our solidarity with the See of Rome is strengthening this catholicity.

Holy Father, we pray that our Lord may bless your ministry. And please be assured of our prayers for your office, next week, on the feast of Saint Willibrord.

Your Grace, Eminence, Your Excellencies

I am pleased to welcome you, the members of the Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht, as your visit offers us a valuable opportunity to reflect on our shared ecumenical journey.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council's Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which inaugurated a new era of ecumenical dialogue and expressed the enduring commitment of the Catholic Church to seek the unity of Christ's disciples. For all of us, the International Roman Catholic/Old Catholic Dialogue Commission plays a significant role in seeking ever greater fidelity to the Lord's prayer, "that all may be one" (cf. Jn 17:21). It has been possible to build new bridges of a more profound mutual understanding and practical co-operation. Convergences and consensus have been found, and differences have been better identified and set in new contexts.

While we rejoice whenever we take steps towards a stronger communion in faith and life, we are also saddened when we recognize that in the course of time new disagreements between us have emerged. The theological and ecclesiological questions that arose during our separation are now more difficult to overcome due to the increasing distance between us on matters of ministry and ethical discernment.

The challenge for Catholics and Old Catholics, then, is to persevere in substantive theological dialogue and to walk together, to pray together and to work together.

er in a deeper spirit of conversion towards all that Christ intends for his Church. In this separation there have been, on the part of both sides, grave sins and human faults. In a spirit of mutual forgiveness and humble repentance, we need now to strengthen our desire for reconciliation and peace. The path towards unity begins with a change of heart, an interior conversion (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4). It is a spiritual journey from encounter to friendship, from friendship to brotherhood, from brotherhood to communion. Along the way, change is inevitable. We must always be willing to listen to and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth (cf. Jn 16:13).

In the meantime, in the heart of Europe, which is so confused about its own identity and vocation, there are many areas in which Catholics and Old Catholics can collaborate in meeting the profound spiritual crisis affecting individuals and societies. There is a thirst for God. There is a profound desire to recover a sense of purpose in life. There is an urgent need for a convincing witness to the truth and values of the Gospel. In this we can support and encourage one another, especially at the level of parishes and local communities. In fact, the soul of ecumenism lies in a “change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 8). In prayer for and with one another our differences are taken up and overcome in fidelity to the Lord and his Gospel.

I am always aware that “the holy task of reconciling all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ transcends human energies and abilities” (*ibid*, 24). Our hope is rooted in the prayer of Christ himself for the Church. Let us immerse ourselves evermore in that prayer so that our efforts may always be sustained and guided by divine grace.

59. Ordentliche Bistumssynode des Katholischen Bistums der Alt-Katholischen Kirche in Deutschland

Die Synode, die vom 2. bis 5. Oktober 2014 in Mainz tagte, befasste sich u.a. mit mehreren Anträgen zum Thema Ehe. So wurde beschlossen, dass künftig im Falle des Scheiterns der Ehe Pfarrer und Pfarrerinnen nicht mehr vom Verlust ihres Amtes bedroht sind. Die bisherige Regelung, wonach betroffene Geistliche nur mit Erlaubnis des Bischofs weiterhin im Amt bleiben können, fand schon seit Jahren keine Anwendung mehr und wurde deshalb gestrichen. Damit gilt in der Frage von Scheidung und kirchlicher Wiederheirat keine Sonderregelung für Geistliche. Grundsätzlich kennt die altkatholische Kirche die Möglichkeit einer zweiten kirchlichen Eheschliessung.

Diskutiert wurde auf der Synode auch das Verhältnis von Ehe und gleichgeschlechtlichen Partnerschaften, und zwar vor dem Hintergrund, dass in der altkatholischen Kirche schon seit Längerem gleichgeschlechtliche Partnerschaften gesegnet werden. Soll das Sakrament der Ehe auch für gleichgeschlechtliche Partnerschaften möglich sein? Was also konstituiert eine christliche Ehe? Die damit

verbundenen theologischen und anthropologischen Fragen sollen künftig in der ganzen Kirche in einem intensiven Diskussionsprozess erörtert werden, wie Bischof Dr. Matthias Ring forderte.

Christen heute 58 (2014) 278 f.

150-Jahr-Feier der Kirche St. Peter und Paul in Bern

Die erste katholische Kirche nach der Reformation wurde im Kanton Bern, dessen gleichnamige Hauptstadt 1848 Bundesstadt geworden war, in den Jahren 1857–1864 errichtet. Den privilegierten Platz neben dem Rathaus hatte der Grosse Rat des Standes Bern unentgeltlich zur Verfügung gestellt. Die heute als eines der wichtigsten Zeugnisse der dogmatischen Neugotik in der Schweiz geltende Kirche konnte nur dank zahlreicher in- und ausländischer Spender gebaut werden, wozu auch die Schweizerische Bundesversammlung einen namhaften Beitrag leistete, sollten doch auch die aus den katholischen Kantonen stammenden eidgenössischen Parlamentarier der beiden Kammern (National- und Ständerat) während der Sessionen ihren Gottesdienst feiern können. Dass die Kirche in den Wirrnissen des Kulturkampfes nur von der christkatholischen Kirchgemeinde gebraucht wurde, die sich mittlerweile organisiert hatte, und schliesslich in ihren Besitz übergang, hat begreiflicherweise tiefe und lange dauernde Verletzungen hervorgerufen.

Umso erfreulicher war es, dass an dem von Bischof Dr. Harald Rein geleiteten abendlichen Festgottesdienst am 13. November 2014 – auf den Tag genau 150 Jahre nach dem ersten Hochamt – unter den zahlreichen ökumenischen Gästen der Kleine Kirchenrat, die Exekutive der Römisch-katholischen Gesamtkirchengemeinde Bern, in corpore anwesend war. Ansprachen hielten der bernische Kirchendirektor Christoph Neuhaus und der Präsident der Bundesversammlung, Nationalratspräsident Ruedi Lustenberger (LU). Als Prediger war der Erzbischof von Utrecht, Dr. Joris Vercammen, eingeladen.

Beim Gottesdienst wurde auch die neu renovierte Krypta gesegnet und wieder in Gebrauch genommen. Hier haben immer wieder andere Konfessionen Gastrecht genossen – derzeit die Eritreische Orthodoxe Gemeinde Bern, zuvor während langer Jahre die Serbische Orthodoxe Gemeinde Bern, was auch die Anwesenheit des neuen Bischofs für die Schweiz, H. H. Andrej Čilerdžić (Wien), erklärt.

Im Vorfeld des Gottesdienstes organisierte das Departement für Christkatholische Theologie der Universität Bern einen Studiennachmittag zum Thema «Französischer Fremdling, geistliche Heimat», bei dem historische, kunstgeschichtliche, spirituelle und ökumenische Aspekte der Berner Kirche und ihrer Geschichte und möglichen Zukunft zur Sprache kamen. Referate hielten die Kirchenhistorikerin Prof. Dr. Angela Berlis, ihr wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter Martin Bürgin, der Kunsthistoriker Dr. Jan Straub (alle Bern), die Liturgiewissenschaftlerin Dr. Gunda Brüske (Fribourg) und Pfr. Stanko Marković (Bern), dessen serbische orthodoxe Gemeinde während Jahren die Kirche mitbenutzt hatte.

UvA