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Catholicity, Apostolicity, the Trinity and the Eucharist in Old Catholic Ecclesiology

Mattijs Ploeger

1. The Old Catholic Ecclesiological Tradition

To understand the Old Catholic ecclesiological tradition, it is helpful to distinguish three periods within its development. As all historical periods, these are not clear-cut in time. Neither can we say that the ideas prevailing in one period are entirely absent in one or both of the others. The three periods only serve as an aid to understand the gradual establishment of a consistent Old Catholic ecclesiology.

The first period: Different backgrounds coming together

The first period is the time before the Old Catholic Churches found each other in a common theological approach. One has to keep in mind that the various Old Catholic Churches come from different backgrounds. These backgrounds resulted into different theological approaches, which are partly still recognisable.

Historically, for example, the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands had hardly any interest in defining itself as a Church separated from Rome. The Dutch Church has originated from a gradual deepening rift between two groups of Catholics within the Netherlands over a long period of time, particularly during the seventeenth century. The fact that the 'Schism of Utrecht' is called that, and is dated exactly in 1723, obscures the fact that Dutch Old Catholic self-understanding has, at least until the second half of the nineteenth century, not been defined as being a church separated from Rome. One could rather say that, in the eighteenth century and a large part of the nineteenth, Dutch Old Catholic ecclesiology was determined by tenacious efforts to prove that the Dutch Old Catholics were a legitimate part of the Roman Catholic Church. They upheld their own ecclesiological tradition, rooted in such movements as Conciliarism and Episcopatism, as legitimate opinions within the Catholic Church.¹

¹ Dick J. Schoon, *Van bisschoppelijke Cleresie tot Oud-Katholieke Kerk. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Nederland in de 19de eeuw* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2004).

The German-speaking Old Catholic Churches have another history. Unlike the Dutch Church, which formally claims to be the continuation of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands including its historic episcopal sees, the Churches in Germany, Switzerland and Austria (and later Czechoslovakia) established themselves as provisional dioceses (*Notkirchen*) for those Catholics who could not accept the new dogmas of the First Vatican Council (1870) on the Pope's universal jurisdiction and infallibility. It is understandable that the ecclesiology of these Churches was shaped by a conscious self-understanding including the need for practical reforms, whereas the Dutch were used to their opposite attitude of emphasising their conformity with Roman Catholic theology and practice.

Not surprisingly, when these Churches joined each other in the Union of Utrecht (1889), it took some decades before mutual trust and, on that basis, a common theological, ecclesiological, and – to a certain extent – spiritual approach was reached. These decades between 1889 and the mid-1920s are the first of the three periods I would like to distinguish in the formation of what the Swiss theologian Urs von Arx (born 1943) has called 'the Old Catholic mainstream theology'.²

A third group of Old Catholic Churches has still another background. They joined the Union of Utrecht because of issues which can be summarised under the heading of 'ethnicity'. The most notable example of this group is the Polish National Catholic Church in America and Canada, which emerged out of the desire to live Polish Catholic spirituality under Polish clergy and bishops. Again, this different background resulted in a different approach to theology, ecclesiology, and spirituality. One effect is that at least the American Church has never understood itself along lines comparable to the German-speaking tradition of Old Catholicism. Unlike the Dutch Church, which in the period already mentioned, between 1889 and the mid-1920s, wholeheartedly became a member of the Old Catholic movement, the American Church has not really been integrated theologically, ecclesologically, and spiritually into the Union,³ which partly explains why it has recently ceased to be a member Church of the Union of Utrecht.

² Urs von Arx, 'The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht', in: Paul Avis (ed.), *The Christian Church: An Introduction to the Major Traditions* (London: SPCK, 2002), pp. 157–185, at p. 160.

³ Cf. Urs von Arx, 'Strukturreform der Utrechter Union – verschiedene Denkmotive', *IKZ* 87 (1997), pp. 87–115, at p. 114.

The second period: A stable and self-conscious Old Catholic mainstream theology

As the first period in the history of Old Catholic ecclesiology I have identified the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, in which the Dutch and the German-speaking traditions were confronted with each other and gradually merged into the ‘mainstream’ Old Catholic theological approach. The second period is the time in which this mainstream theology was dominant, approximately from the nineteen twenties to the nineteen seventies. It is a period marked by a stable, self-conscious Old Catholic self-understanding. This period is personified by Andreas Rinkel (1889–1979), who was the Archbishop of Utrecht during the long period from 1937 to 1970. His friend and colleague, Urs Küry (1901–1976), Bishop of the Old Catholic Church (*Christkatholische Kirche*) of Switzerland from 1955 to 1972, is the other key representative of this period.

The third period: Continuity and variety, Orthodox influences

The third period within the Old Catholic ecclesiological tradition has grown from the second, but is marked by two characteristics of its own. On the one hand, from the 1970s onwards, the stability and self-consciousness of Old Catholic mainstream theology has given way to a greater variety of approaches, so that it has become more difficult to identify the main line of Old Catholic theology, ecclesiology, and spirituality.⁴ On the other hand, there has always been – and there still is – a school which continues the ‘Old Catholic *proprium*’ of the first and second periods,⁵ but in a way recognisably influenced by Orthodox ecclesiological thought, particularly its school of ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’.

As this paper is devoted to ‘Catholicity, Apostolicity, Trinitarian and Eucharistic Concepts of the Church’, the specific Old Catholic approach to catholicity and apostolicity will be largely found in the second period,

⁴ Urs von Arx calls these different approaches ‘no longer unquestionably recognisably Old Catholic’ (nicht mehr unbedingt erkennbar altkatholisch); Urs von Arx, ‘Der orthodox-altkatholische Dialog. Anmerkungen zu einer schwierigen Rezeption’, *IKZ* 89 (1997), pp. 184–224, at p. 188.

⁵ Von Arx, ‘Der orthodox-altkatholische Dialog’, p. 187 (altkatholisches *Proprium*).

whereas for trinitarian and eucharistic concepts of the Church we will have to turn to the third period.

2. Catholicity

Qualitative catholicity

The representatives of Old Catholic mainstream theology are united in their approach of catholicity in its ‘qualitative’ rather than its ‘quantative’ meaning.⁶ Andreas Rinkel, for example, says that catholicity should not be seen as a geographic, but as a soteriological term. Catholicity does not mean that the Church is a uniform institution geographically, but it means that it is the Church’s mission to bring salvation to all. Within this theological or soteriological unity, there is room for local variety and adaptation. Rinkel pleads ‘unity without uniformity’.⁷ In a similar way, Urs Küry says that the Church is not catholic because it is present everywhere, but because, wherever it is present, it lives ‘according to the whole’, that is, it lives the whole faith. According to Küry, the affirmation that the Church is catholic means that wherever the Church is, it is the catholic Church. In other words, every local Church is the catholic Church if – or because – it lives the whole faith. In a secondary sense, catholicity does have to do with geographical universality, in this respect, that the catholicity of all local Churches is the same catholicity. The fullness of Christ is present “‘in all places” in essentially the same way’.⁸

The catholicity of all local Churches

This ‘qualitative’ understanding of catholicity is taken up by the contemporary Old Catholic school of *Lokalkirchenekklesiologie* or *Ortskirchenekklesiologie* (ecclesiology of the local Church). This ecclesiology regards the catholic Church as the local Church, understood as the diocese, regardless of whether it consists of one community or a smaller or larger number

⁶ Urs Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche. Ihre Geschichte, ihre Lehre, ihr Anliegen*, Die Kirchen der Welt 3 (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1966), p. 263.

⁷ Andreas Rinkel, ‘Dogmatische theologie’, mimeographed edition 1956, vol. III, pp. 178, 191 (eenheid zonder uniformiteit), 221, 226–227.

⁸ Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche*, pp. 263 (dem Ganzen gemäss), 264 (‘an allen Orten’ in gleicher [wesensähnlicher] Weise).

of parishes. Each local Church – comprising the entire people of God in its area or ‘place’ (*Ort*), with all its various charisms and ministries, including the ministries of the bishop, the presbyterium and the deacons – is the catholic Church. And because each such local Church is the *same* catholic Church, all local Churches are in communion with each other.⁹

This ecclesiology of the local Church can be traced back to the first period in the history of Old Catholic ecclesiology, that is, the period before the emergence of an international Old Catholic mainstream theology. Both the origins of the Dutch Church and the origins of the German-speaking Churches include this fundamental principle of regarding the Church primarily as the *local* – diocesan or national – Church. The eighteenth-century efforts of the Dutch Church to defend the independent rights of the local Church were rooted in the conviction that jurisdiction is essentially given to the whole Church, to the whole people of God, who grant its exercise to the diocesan bishop.¹⁰ The late nineteenth-century efforts of the German-speaking Old Catholics to come to terms with ecclesial identity as opposed to the ‘new’ self-understanding of the Roman Catholic Church after 1870 were rooted in the conviction that every diocese – every local Church – is the catholic Church.¹¹ Both traditions have in common that the local Church is regarded as the basic entity of ecclesiological thought. It is therefore not surprising that the Dutch primarily jurisdictional, canonist approach and the perhaps more theological approach of the German-speaking Churches were able to find each other in the international Old Catholic mainstream theology.

⁹ This principle can be found e.g. in: Kurt Stalder, *Die Wirklichkeit Christi erfahren. Ekklesiologische Untersuchungen und ihre Bedeutung für die Existenz von Kirche heute* (Zürich: Benziger, 1984), pp. 107, 212–213, 117, 206, 241–242.

¹⁰ Jan Hallebeek, *Alonso ‘el Tostado’: His doctrine on jurisdiction and its influence in the Church of Utrecht*, Publicatieserie Stichting Oud-Katholiek Seminarie 29 (Amersfoort: Stichting Centraal Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis, 1997); Jan Hallebeek, ‘Die Autonomie der Ortskirche im Denken von Zeger Bernard von Espen’, *IKZ* 92 (2002), pp. 7699.

¹¹ This insight can be traced back to the first German Old Catholic bishop, Joseph Hubert Reinkens (1821–1896); cf. Herwig Aldenhoven, ‘Das ekklesiologische Selbstverständnis der Altkatholischen Kirchen’, *Österreichisches Archiv für Kirchenrecht* 31 (1980), pp. 401–430, at pp. 410–411; Urs von Arx, ‘Der ekklesiologische Charakter der Utrechter Union’, *IKZ* 84 (1994), pp. 20–61, at p. 32 n. 19.

Catholicity defined

What is the definition of this ‘qualitative’ catholicity of every local Church? The two classical representatives of Old Catholic mainstream theology – Rinkel and Küry – define catholicity along these three lines: faith or doctrine, organisation or ministry, and liturgy or sacraments.¹² Again according to Rinkel and Küry, these three aspects of the Church’s catholicity have to be seen in the light of the Early Church.

For doctrine to be ‘catholic’, Rinkel requires it to be in tune with Scripture interpreted according to what he calls ‘the line of faith (*Glaubenslinie*) Nicaea – Constantinople – Chalcedon’. What he means is that ‘catholic’ faith has to be biblical faith, interpreted within the context of the trinitarian and christological dogmas of the Early Church. For Rinkel, the Nicene creed is both the *necessary* and the *only necessary* profession of the catholic faith.¹³ This understanding of the catholicity of the faith as the faith of the Early Church is elaborated by Küry in his understanding of ecumenism. For Küry, the Old Catholic approach to ecumenism is what he calls ‘the ecumenism of the Early Church’ (*die altkirchliche Ökumene*). When each Church reforms itself according to the basic principles of the Early Church, in the end every Church will recognise every other Church as essentially identical.¹⁴ Thus, catholicity is first to be regained by each Church reforming itself according to the pattern of the Early Church, so that full communion between the Churches can be realised by recognising the already present catholicity of the other Church as theologically – not necessarily culturally¹⁵ – identical with one’s own.

Catholicity of organisation or ministry is in the Old Catholic tradition always defined by allegiance to the threefold apostolic ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons. In the context of this paper, this theme will be treated briefly as we come to the apostolic succession. Moreover, a separate paper on episcopacy will be presented during this conference.

¹² Rinkel, ‘Dogmatische theologie’, vol. III, pp. 219, 221, 231; Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche*, p. 264.

¹³ Rinkel, ‘Dogmatische theologie’, vol. III, 233–235; Andreas Rinkel, ‘Unsere Probleme im ökumenischen theologischen Gespräch’, *IKZ* 38 (1948), pp. 236–250.

¹⁴ Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche*, pp. 361–362.

¹⁵ Von Arx, ‘Der ekklesiologische Charakter’, p. 33.

Catholicity of liturgy or sacraments means, in the light of the Early Church and again according to Rinkel and Küry, the primacy of Baptism and the Eucharist. The Old Catholic understands the Church to be a visible Church. Baptism, says Rinkel, is ‘the widest boundary of the *one* Church’. In a sense, every baptised person belongs to the catholic Church. But, as Rinkel says, ‘The fullness of Christian life is more than membership by baptism [...] and that fullness is not everywhere present to the same extent’. For Rinkel, the Eucharist is the sacrament in which the Church experiences a ‘double *koinonia*’ – with the Lord and with one another.¹⁶ For Küry, the life of the Church is situated between Baptism as its basis and the Eucharist as its summit.¹⁷ Later in this paper I will deal more fully with this sacramental understanding of the Church.

Conclusion

The Old Catholic understanding of catholicity is closely linked to the Old Catholic emphasis on the local Church. The local Church, understood as the diocese, is the catholic Church. Because (and insofar as) catholicity is the same in all local Churches, catholicity also implies communion between the local Churches. Consequently, the particularly Old Catholic view of ecumenism is for local catholic Churches to recognise other local catholic Churches as having the same catholicity. Marks of catholicity are trinitarian faith, apostolic ministry, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

3. Apostolicity

From an ecclesiological and ecumenical perspective, the ‘apostolic succession’ is the most challenging aspect of the apostolicity of the Church. One of the theological and practical barriers between Churches remains the ordained ministry, particularly the question whether or not the ministry should be ‘in the apostolic succession’, and the question what ‘ministry in the apostolic succession’ means.

¹⁶ Rinkel, ‘Dogmatische theologie’, vol. III, pp. 229, 244; vol. IV, p. 108.

¹⁷ Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche*, p. 217.

The meaning of 'apostolic succession'

From the beginning of their existence as Churches no longer in communion with Rome, the Old Catholic Churches have retained the ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons. Tendencies – which arose for example at the emergence of the Swiss Church – to regard episcopal ministry as a relic from centralist Roman Catholic times which should be abolished, have from the outset been countered by the awareness of the Old Catholic theological leaders that the Old Catholic Churches should, in Küry's words, not be based upon political liberalism (*Liberalismus*) but upon 'catholic ecclesiogenesis' (*katholische Kirchwerdung*).¹⁸

In what sense do these bishops, priests, and deacons stand 'in the apostolic succession'? It is the continuous conviction of the Old Catholic ecclesiological tradition that apostolicity and 'apostolic succession' are characteristics of the Church as a whole, the whole people of God. The Church is apostolic, says Rinkel, when it is the same Church as the Church of the apostles. For this apostolicity, the 'apostolic succession' is not the only criterion, neither is it its guarantee. Catholicity, holiness, and unity are equally important when a Church wants to be apostolic.¹⁹

How, then, is 'apostolic succession' understood? Historically, Rinkel makes a distinction between three interpretations: firstly, the continuity of bishops in one particular *see* that was founded by an apostle; secondly, the continuity of the *functions* of every apostle, which are exercised by every bishop; and thirdly, the 'transmission' of apostolic 'power' through *ordination*. Rinkel is particularly critical of the latter interpretation, which he calls the 'mechanical', 'sacerdotal' theory of the 'golden channel' that detaches the ministry from the Church of which it should be an integral part. Rinkel affirms the second interpretation: apostolic succession as continuity between what the apostles did and what the bishops do. Moreover, he calls apostolic succession the expression, through the bishop, of the apostolicity of the *Church*. He emphasises the insoluble bond between the Church and the bishop – *nulla ecclesia sine episcopo* and *nullus episcopus sine ecclesia* – and regards the apostolic succession as the sign that the whole Church remains faithful to the apostolic tradition.²⁰

¹⁸ Urs Küry, *Hirtenbriefe* (Allschwil: Christkatholischer Schriften-Verlag, 1978), p. 230.

¹⁹ Rinkel, 'Dogmatische theologie', vol. III, pp. 196, 227.

²⁰ Rinkel, 'Dogmatische theologie', vol. III, pp. 192, 193, 202, 205, 237–241.

Regarding non-episcopal ministry or ministry not standing in the traditional apostolic succession, Rinkel refrains from a verdict. He says that we should not construct such a closed concept of ministry that ‘it renders the work of the Holy Spirit, which reveals itself in other Churches without this so-called apostolic succession, incomprehensible’. On the other hand, Rinkel has always considered episcopal ministry to be essential. In view of the recent ecumenical use of the term *episkope*, it is interesting to note that Rinkel never accepted bearers of *episkope* if their functions were only *administrative* or based upon ecclesiastical *law*. For him, episcopal ministry should be regarded as *essential* to any concept of Church and ministry.²¹

The present Old Catholic position on ‘apostolic succession’

We can conclude that Rinkel had a balanced view of the apostolic succession. On the other hand we may ask whether this nuanced approach has had any practical advantage compared to a more traditional ‘pipe-line’ theory. In practice, the Old Catholic Church has always emphasised episcopal ministry in the apostolic succession. It is hard to tell whether or not contemporary Old Catholic ecclesiologists allow a wider interpretation of the concept of ‘succession’. It is true that, as the Dutch theologian Martien Parmentier (born 1947) has written, the clarity of Rinkel’s statements ‘has not so often been heard in Old Catholic circles over the last twenty years’.²² But it is equally true that the Old Catholic Church has, until now, upheld its allegiance to episcopacy in the apostolic succession.

In the meantime, it should be noted that Old Catholic ecclesiologists – perhaps avoiding the question of the *necessity* of episcopacy – have contributed to reflections about the ways of *exercising* the ministry of a bishop.²³ And perhaps I may add that Old Catholic bishops have tried to

²¹ Rinkel, ‘Dogmatische theologie’, vol. III, pp. 238, 241; vol. IV, p. 161.

²² Martien Parmentier, ‘Die altkatholische Ekklesiologie und das Porvoodokument’, *IKZ* 90 (2000), pp. 30–49, at p. 45.

²³ Cf., e.g., Jan Visser, ‘Episcopus oecumenicus’, in: Coen van Kasteel, Peter J. Maan, Martien F.G. Parmentier (eds.), *Kracht in zwakheid van een kleine wereldkerk. De Oud-Katholieke Unie van Utrecht* (Amersfoort: Stichting Centraal Oud-Katholiek Boekhuis, 1982), pp. 89–100; Jan Visser, ‘Episcopacy Today: An Old Catholic View’, in: Peter Moore (ed.), *Bishops: But What Kind? Reflections on Episcopacy* (London: SPCK, 1982), pp. 41–50.

live episcopacy in such a way that it contributed to the ecclesiological and ecumenical understanding of what episcopacy might mean.

Nevertheless, it remains unclear what the actual position of Old Catholic ecclesiology is when it comes to the ecumenically pressing question of ministry within or outside the traditional apostolic succession. As the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue text suggests, the Old Catholic Church has a broad interpretation of apostolic succession in the sense of ‘apostolic tradition’, but regards and maintains the (traditional) episcopal succession as the expression of this (broader) apostolic tradition.²⁴ In other words, it seems that Rinkel’s balanced but firm line is continued in present-day Old Catholic ecclesiology. As the German theologian Günter Esser (born 1949) has said, Old Catholic theology has still to clarify ‘how the ministry of the bishop is to be classified within the tension between the “esse” and the “bene esse” of the Church’.²⁵

Conclusion

Under the heading of ‘apostolicity’, I have confined myself to some thoughts on the Old Catholic interpretation of the apostolic succession. Apostolic succession has to do with the whole Church, not just with the ordained ministry. In this sense, apostolic succession is the continuity between the Church of the apostles and the present Church. In its more restricted sense, apostolic succession has to do with the ordained *ministry*, but still in this sense, that the apostolic ministry of the bishop expresses the apostolicity of his *Church*. The ordained ministry is part of the apostolic succession because there is continuity between the tasks of the apostles and the tasks of the bishops. Although this comes close to an understanding of apostolic succession as ‘apostolic tradition’, the Old Catholic Church has

²⁴ Urs von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia auf altchristlicher Basis. Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der gemeinsamen Texte des orthodox-alkatholischen Dialogs 1975–1987 mit französischer und englischer Übersetzung*, Beiheft zu IKZ 79 (1989), pp. 74–75. For a critical Old Catholic assessment of this text see Christian Oeyen, ‘Ekklesiologische Fragen in den orthodox-alkatholischen Kommissionstexten’, IKZ 79 (1989), pp. 237–265, at p. 245.

²⁵ Günter Esser, ‘Anmerkungen zum alkatholisch-lutherischen Dialog’, in: Hans Gerny, Harald Rein, Maja Weyermann (eds.), *Die Wurzel aller Theologie: Sentire cum Ecclesia. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Urs von Arx* (Bern: Stämpfli, 2003), pp. 348–365, at p. 364 (wie das Bischofsamt [...] in den Spannungsbogen zwischen ‘esse’ und ‘bene esse’ der Kirche einzuordnen ist).

always maintained the historic episcopate in the apostolic succession (in its traditional sense) as the expression of this apostolic tradition. It seems that this traditional aspect of the apostolic succession is, although no more than a part, still an indispensable part of the Old Catholic interpretation of apostolicity.

4. A Trinitarian Concept of the Church

The basis for the Old Catholic understanding of catholicity and apostolicity was found in the second period of the history of Old Catholic ecclesiology – the period of the international Old Catholic mainstream theology from the nineteen twenties to the seventies. For the trinitarian and eucharistic concepts of the Church we have to turn to the third period, the period from the seventies onwards, in which, on the one hand, Old Catholic self-understanding became less unified in its expressions, but in which, on the other hand, a school of trinitarian and eucharistic ecclesiology developed out of the previous period, stimulated particularly by Orthodox ecclesiological thought.

An ethos of communion

Within Old Catholic ecclesiology, it has been the Swiss theologian Kurt Stalder (1912–1996) who first introduced the following consistent line of thought – that Christian faith means reconciliation of God with humankind, and of humans with one another; that, therefore, salvation can be described as the restoration of communion; that the fullness of this communion is the inner-trinitarian communion of love; and that Christian living-in-communion is participation in the inner-trinitarian life. The scriptural basis of this trinitarian ecclesiology is John 17:22, where Jesus says to the Father, ‘The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one’. Trinitarian ecclesiology interprets this as participation of the divine persons in each other *and* participation of all Christians in this trinitarian communion.²⁶

²⁶ Stalder, *Die Wirklichkeit Christi erfahren*, p. 83 and passim.

Probably one of the best-known *Orthodox* theologians who uphold such an ecclesiology is John Zizioulas.²⁷ It is the ethos of his concept that also pervades the ecclesiological thought of many Old Catholic authors over the last decades. This kind of ecclesiology not only stems from a combination of trinitarian doctrine and ecclesiological thought, but includes an approach to anthropology and sociology that is consistent with the general thinking in terms of communion. Therefore, trinitarian ecclesiology is an ethos, or even a world view, rather than just ideas about the Church. What is involved is, for example, a concept of personhood as determined by being-in-communion with others, a concept of Christian salvation as restoration of communion, and a concept of Church as – so to speak – the ‘proof’ of the reality of this restored communion between God and humankind, and between people amongst each other. Trinitarian ecclesiology is one of those approaches to the Church which refuse to think about the Church as a sacralised or clericalised entity separate from other compartments of life and world. Trinitarian ecclesiology – as a fundamental soteriology, ecclesiology, sociology, and anthropology of communion – presents itself as a world view, as an overall interpretation of God and humanity.

Practical consequences of a trinitarian ecclesiology

Practical consequences of Old Catholic trinitarian ecclesiology include the following. In the first place, this trinitarian approach ‘opens up’ ecclesiology in the direction of anthropology and sociology. If women and men are created in the image of God, they are created in the image of the *trinitarian* God, and therefore they are created on the basis of, and with a view to, being-in-communion. In such an ecclesiology the Church is not seen as a sacralised compartment of reality, but – so to speak – as a model for communion in its widest sense. Stalder, for example, has called the Church a ‘paradigm for humanity and life’.²⁸ The same meaning has the biblical statement that the Church is the ‘first fruits’ of salvation.²⁹

²⁷ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians 4 (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

²⁸ Stalder, *Die Wirklichkeit Christi erfahren*, p. 280 (Paradigma für Menschheit und Leben).

²⁹ Cf. 2 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4.

Salvation – understood as the restoration of communion – will only be fulfilled when the whole creation has been taken up into this trinitarian communion. This eschatological fulfillment of salvation can be described in two ways: *the Church will have ceased to be, or the whole creation will be 'Church'*. The latter formulation, more than the former, testifies to an understanding of the Church that transcends the obvious, reduced, sacralised, and marginalised understanding of the Church in the direction of an understanding of the Church as the divine-human communion that still has to grow until it embraces all creation.³⁰

A second consequence of a trinitarian ecclesiology is the interpretation, for example given by the Dutch theologian Jan Visser (born 1931), that the Church should have the same characteristics as the Trinity. The Trinity is marked by unity-in-plurality, held together by a bond of love. According to this trinitarian pattern, the Church should also be a communion in which variety is held together in unity by the bond of love.³¹

A third consequence has been worked out by the theologian Herwig Aldenhoven (1933–2002), who was born in Austria but studied and worked in Switzerland. He translates the theology of the inner-trinitarian love between the divine persons into an ecclesiology of 'love' between the local Churches. He understands the local Church as a 'corporate personality' that has to listen to, talk to, and help the other 'corporate personalities'. From a trinitarian concept of the Church he derives an interpretation of the Church in terms of openness, reciprocity, and equality.³²

Conclusion

Contemporary Old Catholic theology has been largely influenced by a trinitarian approach to the Church. More fundamentally, this results in an understanding of Christian salvation as the restoration of communion. The Old Catholic theological view of humanity, society, and the Church reflects what Zizioulas has called 'being as communion'. More

³⁰ Cf. Aldenhoven, 'Das ekklesiologische Selbstverständnis', pp. 407–408.

³¹ Jan Visser, 'Christ sein heute im Namen des Vaters und des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes', *IKZ* 68 (1978), pp. 137–147.

³² Herwig Aldenhoven, 'Trinitarische Analogien und Ortskirchenekklesiologie', *IKZ* 92 (2002), pp. 65–75.

practically, Old Catholic ecclesiology has used this trinitarian approach to emphasise variety within unity. As the divine persons are different, but united in love, the members of the Church who share this trinitarian life are also different, yet united. Moreover, each local Church has its own characteristics, while it is still united to all other local Churches in the one bond of love.

5. A Eucharistic Concept of the Church

Eucharistic Church and ecclesial Eucharist

When we finally turn to a eucharistic concept of the Church, it is important to define what this does and does not imply. What a eucharistic concept of the Church does *not* mean is a reduction of the Church to its 'liturgical' aspect. The Eucharist is not interpreted as just one of the seven sacraments, or as a 'liturgical' event apart from the other aspects of the life of the Church.

What we are talking about is an interpretation of the Church that is 'eucharistic', and an interpretation of the Eucharist that is 'ecclesial'. The Eucharist is regarded as the main gathering of the whole people of God, being brought together and thereby constituted as a community, and, moreover, constituted as the body of Christ by partaking in the body of Christ. In a eucharistic ecclesiology, the eucharistic and the ecclesial meanings of the biblical image 'body of Christ' are inseparable. Celebrating the Eucharist is always celebrating our being Church, *the Church* – hence the primacy of the *local* Church in most eucharistic ecclesiologies. In such an ecclesiology, *koinonia* (communion) with the body and blood of Christ is not just an individual 'means of grace', but the communal *koinonia* with Christ and, inseparably, with each other. Thus, to understand a eucharistic concept of the Church, we have first to understand the ecclesial concept of the Eucharist. One could even say that the awareness of a eucharistic ecclesiology is present as soon as one has caught the ecclesial meaning of the Eucharist.

In such an understanding, the Eucharist pervades all aspects of the life of the Church. The Eucharist (*leitourgia*) is both the source and the highest manifestation of the Church as a community (*koinonia*), of its trinitarian faith (*kerugma*), and of its call to share the good gifts of God (*diakonia*). At the Eucharist everything originates that is characteristic of the Church. For example, in a eucharistic ecclesiology, the ministry is understood to be primarily the service of presiding over the gathering of the whole people of

God in such a way that all (lay and clerical) charisms are enabled to contribute their part to the whole. The way eucharistic ecclesiology works is that the *liturgical* function of (in this case) the ministry becomes paradigmatic for the understanding of the ministry *in all its other spheres of work*. That is, ministry – in pastoral care, in ecclesial administration – is seen as ‘presiding’ and ‘enabling’ rather than as exercising rights and competences. In other words, a eucharistic ecclesiology uses the ecclesial, communal understanding of the Eucharist as the paradigm for everything the Church is and does.

Incompatible with a eucharistic ecclesiology is, therefore, an understanding of Eucharist and liturgy as an isolated compartment of the life of the Church. Opposing such a ‘sacralised’ and hence often clericalised and individualised understanding of the liturgy, eucharistic ecclesiology offers an ‘unliturgical’ concept of liturgy – liturgy not as an isolated act of worship, but as the inclusive event of being Church together. The consequences which this ecclesial understanding of liturgy has for the actual shape and style of the liturgy is, although related, nevertheless a different area of thought and discussion.

Rediscovery of the eucharistic-ecclesiological paradigm

The twentieth-century rediscovery of such an understanding of both Church and Eucharist has to do with the rediscovery of the patristic patterns of theological thought. In order to appreciate a eucharistic ecclesiology it is necessary to overcome the – commonly called ‘medieval’ – patterns of clericalism and sacramentalism, as well as – commonly called ‘modern’ – individualism. In patristic thought and practice, the Church as the whole people of God, the ministry, and the sacraments still formed one coherent concept of ecclesiality, imbedded in a coherent concept of salvation. It is the rediscovery of this concept – for example, by the Liturgical Movement and the *nouvelle théologie* – which has paved the way for a eucharistic ecclesiology in Western Christianity.

Not surprisingly, Eastern Christianity, with its probably closer relationship to patristic ways of thought, has taken the lead in creating a eucharistic-ecclesiological theory. The names of Nikolaj Afanasiev and John Zizioulas are the most famous in this respect.³³ In Roman Catholi-

³³ Cf. Nicolas Afanassieff, *L'Église du Saint-Esprit* (Paris: Cerf, 1975; originally in Russian: Paris 1971); Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.

cism, authors such as Henri de Lubac and Joseph Ratzinger have thoroughly committed themselves to this way of thinking about Church and Eucharist.³⁴ The same is true of Anglicans such as Gregory Dix in the past and Rowan Williams in the present,³⁵ and of Protestants such as the Swiss Reformed Jean-Jacques von Allmen and the American Lutheran Gordon Lathrop.³⁶ After this list of ecumenical names it will come as no surprise that the eucharistic approach to the Church and the ecclesial approach to the Eucharist have also proved to be valuable in ecumenical dialogue.³⁷

The place of eucharistic ecclesiology within Old Catholic ecclesiology

The Old Catholic ecclesiology of the first half of the twentieth century cannot be regarded as an explicitly eucharistic ecclesiology. There was an emphasis on the Church as the whole people of God, on the local Church as having priority over the universal Church, and lively interest in the Eucharist, but it had not yet come to a formulation in terms of a eucharistic ecclesiology. In recent decades, this has changed considerably. An important document as the 2001 rewriting of the Statute of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference describes in its preamble the Church as a fellowship and communion of people, which by the reconciliation in Jesus Christ and by the outpouring and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit is constituted as a unity in a given place around a bishop with the eucharist as its center.³⁸

³⁴ Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum. L'Eucharistie et l'Eglise au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier, 1944); Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969) and later works such as *Zur Gemeinschaft gerufen. Kirche heute verstehen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991).

³⁵ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Black, 1945); Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology, Challenges in Contemporary Theology 7* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

³⁶ Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Essai sur le repas du Seigneur* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1966); Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress, 1999).

³⁷ For example in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* ('Lima' 1982) and in many bilateral dialogues.

³⁸ Urs von Arx, Maja Weyermann (eds.), *Statut der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz (IBK). Offizielle Ausgabe in fünf Sprachen, Beiheft zu IKZ 91* (2001), pp. 28–29.

Such a phrase can be regarded as a eucharistic ecclesiology in a nutshell. It is both christological and pneumatological, it affirms the local Church, and it has an episcopal and eucharistic focus. This phrase in the International Bishops' Conference's Statute is the outcome of several decades during which the local, episcopal, and eucharistic understanding of the Church has become dominant in at least one 'school' of Old Catholic ecclesiology.

Characteristics of a eucharistic ecclesiology

What is the shape of this Old Catholic eucharistic ecclesiology? This can be sketched briefly by referring to the view of the German theologian Werner Küppers (1905–1980), who was the first Old Catholic theologian to offer a consistent eucharistic ecclesiology. According to Küppers, liturgy is the corporate celebration in which the Church as the body of Christ, and the Head of this body, Christ, act together. Particularly the Eucharist is the event in which Christians are united with Christ and with each other. The fact that the Eucharist is the central manifestation of the Church does not mean, Küppers says, that the Church is nothing but the eucharistic celebration. Rather, from the Eucharist the Church lives its life of community and self-giving for others.³⁹

Within this 'celebrating' Church, the bishop is the primary liturgical 'celebrant'. He presides over the liturgy of the Church – and therefore over the Church – understood as the local, episcopal, celebrating Church (the diocese). Priests and deacons are the representatives of the bishops. In the centre of such a eucharistic ecclesiology is not the 'sacerdotal' priest with his 'power' to consecrate and to absolve – together with an understanding of episcopacy reduced to the 'power' to confirm and ordain – but the bishop as the communal and collegial presider of his laity and clergy. Such an ecclesiology, Küppers says, is exciting, because it re-lives and makes visible the ecclesial reality of the Early Church – the local Church of the whole people of God, with its deacons, presbyterium, and bishop united in the common eucharistic celebration.⁴⁰

³⁹ Werner Küppers, 'Symbolik der Alt-Katholischen Kirche', in: Werner Küppers, Peter Hauptmann, Friedrich Baser, *Symbolik der kleineren Kirchen, Freikirchen und Sekten des Westens*, Symbolik der Religionen 11 (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1964), pp. 1–27; Werner Küppers, 'Leben in Gemeinschaft', *IKZ* 65 (1975), pp. 50–59.

⁴⁰ Küppers, 'Symbolik', p. 23; Werner Küppers, "'Das Amt der Einheit". Theologische Erwägungen zum Bischofsamt', *IKZ* 61 (1971), pp. 243–256.

Other aspects of a eucharistic ecclesiology can be found in the works of more recent Old Catholic theologians. Kurt Stalder, Herwig Aldenhoven, and Urs von Arx are among those who have offered an ecclesiology in which the Trinity, salvation, communion, the Church, ministry, and the Eucharist are interdependent and mutually explain each other. They also have developed an understanding of the supralocal Church that is in tune with the local emphasis of most eucharistic ecclesiologies. The relationship between the local and the wider Church is expressed by the contact between the bishops, amongst whom metropolitans, patriarchs, and in the end the Bishop of Rome have a primacy on different levels. Such a primacy does not rule out the local, diocesan Church as the basic entity of the Church, but enables the local Churches to express their communion and to continually find the truth in a process of conciliarity.⁴¹

The brokenness of Christianity into denominations is probably the biggest challenge to the consistency of a eucharistic ecclesiology. The ideal situation of a 'local Church' celebrating the Eucharist around its bishop does not actually exist. Within the area of the local Church, there are many denominational Churches. Firstly, Old Catholic eucharistic ecclesiology regards this as an inconsistency and anomaly. Secondly, this situation strengthens the conviction that ecumenism should in the first place be a process towards full communion on the local level. Ecumenism should be the process leading towards one Church in one place. The next step is that the local Churches in the various places recognise each other as fundamentally 'the same Church'. This recognition establishes the communion between the local Churches.⁴²

Finally, if the Church is understood eucharistically and the Eucharist is understood ecclesially, ecclesial communion and eucharistic communion are essentially the same. This means that in the Old Catholic eucharistic-ecclesiological school there is no room for official terms of intercommunion other than full communion. This is not to say that these theologians do not allow Christians from other Churches to receive communion in the Old Catholic Church. As Aldenhoven has written, the ecumenical situation of separated denominational Churches being in a process of rapproche-

⁴¹ Cf. Urs von Arx, 'Ein 'Petrusamt' in der Communio der Kirchen. Erwägungen aus altkatholischer Perspektive', *IKZ* 93 (2003), pp. 1–42.

⁴² Cf. von Arx, 'Der ekklesiologische Charakter', p. 34.

ment leads to the acceptance of an inconsistency between not refusing eucharistic communion to anybody, from whatever ecclesial communion he or she may come, and at the same time maintaining the theological conviction that eucharistic and ecclesial communion are identical.⁴³

Conclusion

We can conclude that at the moment eucharistic ecclesiology is the leading 'school' within Old Catholic ecclesiology.⁴⁴ It sees itself as a continuation and systematisation of the Old Catholic theological history. It is close to Orthodox and Anglican eucharistic-ecclesiological thought, and bears similarity to non-centralist interpretations of Roman Catholic *communio*-ecclesiology. It combines fundamental theological thought about the Church with the empirical reality of the celebrating Church, and may be seen as an Old Catholic contribution to rethinking Church, sacraments, and ministry in the ecumenical context.

6. Early Church, Local Church, Whole Church

The Old Catholic approach to the themes treated in this paper is marked by the following characteristics. In the first place, the Early Church plays a major role in all concepts. Catholicity is understood as qualitative continuity with the faith of patristic times, apostolicity as essential identity with the tradition of the Early Church, while the trinitarian and eucharistic concepts of the Church try to live patristic concepts of salvation and Church.

Secondly, the local Church, understood as the diocese, is seen as the basic ecclesiological entity. Catholicity is understood as a qualification of the local Church, which can recognise the same catholicity in all other local Churches. Apostolic succession belongs to the local Church and its bishop – there is no apostolic ministry which is not in some sense rooted in a local Church. Trinitarian ecclesiology leads to an understanding of the local Churches as corporate personalities in communion with each

⁴³ Herwig Aldenhoven, 'Einladung zur Eucharistie – Eucharistiegemeinschaft – Kirchengemeinschaft', *IKZ* 77 (1987), pp. 257–265.

⁴⁴ For a phenomenology of some other 'schools', see von Arx, 'Strukturreform der Utrechter Union', pp. 114–115.

other through the bond of love. Eucharistic ecclesiology regards the local, episcopal, eucharistic community as the Church.

A third common characteristic is the insistence that 'Church' is not the leadership of the Church, or the organisational framework of the Church, but the whole Church, the whole people of God. Catholicity and apostolicity are marks of the Church as a living community. Only secondarily are they marks of a part of the Church, such as its ordained ministry. Trinitarian ecclesiology, starting from God's own 'being as communion', emphasises the fundamentally communal character of the Christian faith and Church. Finally, in a eucharistic ecclesiology the communal celebration is regarded as identical with 'Church'.

This is the contribution of Old Catholic ecclesiology to the ecumenical understanding of the Church. Its vision, rooted in the ecclesiality of the Early Church, is a united Church, understood as a worldwide communion of local catholic and apostolic Churches, experiencing unity-in-diversity as the whole people of God, by participation in the eucharistic feast of divine-human love.⁴⁵

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Aufgrund der unterschiedlichen Herkunftsbedingungen der in der Utrechter Union vereinigten Kirchen hat sich erst mit der Zeit eine altkatholische *mainstream*-Ekklesiologie entwickelt. Sie ist durch einen ortskirchlichen Ansatz geprägt, der in der Reflexion über die Begriffe Katholizität und Apostolizität durchgehalten worden ist: Im Raum der Ortskirche, d.h. des Bistums, sind die primären Manifestationen dessen, was die Kirche («qualitativ») katholisch und apostolisch macht, zu erkennen. Punkto Apostolizität ist in der altkatholischen *mainstream*-Ekklesiologie eine breite, inhaltliche Auffassung anzutreffen (im Sinne des ökumenischen Begriffs *apostolic tradition*), wozu aber, als *eines* der Elemente der Apostolizität, auch die apostolische Sukzession der Bischöfe gehört.

In neuerer Zeit wird die Ortskirche (deren Verbindung mit anderen, «theologisch» – nicht notwendigerweise kulturell – identischen Ortskirchen stets vorausgesetzt wird) von ihrem eucharistischen Lebenszentrum her bestimmt, wobei ihre innere Strukturiertheit in Einheit und Pluralität die Gemeinschaft des dreieinigen Gottes widerspiegelt. Die trinitarischen und eucharistischen Ansätze zur Ekklesiologie gründen auf

⁴⁵ The author wishes to thank the Revd Professor Dr Urs von Arx (Bern), Professor Dr Jan Hallebeek (Amsterdam/Utrecht), and Professor Dr Anton Houtepen (Utrecht) for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper as well as Ms Ineke Smit (Leiden) for her assistance in preparing the English text.

einem «Ethos der Kommunion», in dem *koinōnia/communio* als wesentlich für Gottes trinitarisches Wesen selbst verstanden wird, aber auch für sein Ziel der Menschheit und Schöpfung einschliessenden Versöhnung – welche Letztere in der Eucharistie sakramental vorweggenommen wird und so in der Kirche proleptisch zur Geltung kommt. Deshalb verweist eine trinitarische und eucharistische Ekklesiologie über die Kirche hinaus auf Gott und die Welt, die Menschheit und die Gesellschaft.

Für diesen Typ der altkatholischen Ekklesiologie mit ihren Wurzeln im Kirchenverständnis der patristischen Zeit fallen eucharistische und ekklesiale Gemeinschaft zusammen. Angesichts der nach wie vor bestehenden konfessionellen Trennungen einerseits und des Wunsches nach Konkretisierung der wechselseitigen Anerkennung der Taufe in einer vorläufigen Abendmahlsgemeinschaft andererseits entsteht eine wohl unumgängliche Spannung zwischen Praxis und eucharistisch-ekklesiologischem Prinzip. Diese Inkonsistenz ist (im Bewusstsein der Anomalie, die theologisch nicht überspielt werden sollte) auszuhalten, wenn die einander als Christen Anerkennenden die volle sichtbare Kirchengemeinschaft suchen.