

Zeitschrift: Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie
Band: 105 (2015)
Heft: 2

Artikel: The Union of Utrecht among the Christian world communions : a comparative perspective
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-583629>

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The Union of Utrecht among the Christian World Communities: a Comparative Perspective

Dick Schoon

1. Introduction

One hundred and twenty-five years ago, in 1889, the Declaration of Utrecht was signed in the residence of the Archbishop of Utrecht, Johannes Heykamp. In 1914, exactly one hundred years ago, Utrecht's old clandestine church – the hidden church – was replaced by the Cathedral Church of St. Gertrude. Both events can be seen as signs of a new consciousness that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to characterize the Dutch Old Catholic Church. It considered itself the national Catholic church which, unlike its Roman Catholic sister church, did not oppose modernization but actually embraced it in an attempt to sustain the Catholic tradition in the old, decentralized way of government. Indeed, even today, the Dutch Old Catholic Church is still officially known as the Roman Catholic Church of the Old Episcopal Clergy.

The first draft of this contribution was entitled “Globalization in the nineteenth century”. Although the term “globalization” dates from the late twentieth century, with the economic and social circumstances of the time, and so can only be applied anachronistically to the nineteenth century, the Bishops' Declaration represented an honest attempt to take into consideration the entire Catholic Church worldwide, and the creation of the Union of Utrecht sought to bring it into relationship with the tradition of Catholic faith of the past nineteen centuries.

In this essay, I will first summarise the Declaration of Utrecht. After this, in order to get a better picture of what the character of the Union was intended to be, I will explore the reasons why the bishops began their collaboration in 1889. Thirdly, other international church relationships from roughly the same time period will be briefly considered and compared with the Union of Utrecht. Finally, a few conclusions will be drawn.

2. The Utrecht Bishops' Declaration

The Utrecht Bishops' Declaration, which was signed in 1889 by the then five bishops of the Old Catholic churches in the Netherlands, Germany

and Switzerland, was, as its title indicates, a “declaration to the Catholic Church.” Two other documents were published along with the declaration, rules of protocol that regulate the functioning of the bishops’ conference, and an agreement about the contact bishops would have with each other.¹ Both of these last documents were adjusted in 1952 and 1974, while the declaration itself remains unaltered. These documents laid the foundations of the Union of Utrecht, although this term only later came into vogue.²

The Declaration consists of eight points, prefaced by an opening statement in which the bishops presented themselves to the wider Catholic Church and explained their decision to meet on a regular basis. The bishops had reached their decision “in consideration of affairs of mutual interest, in consultation with our fellow helpers, counsellors and theologians.”³ They had found it appropriate at their first meeting

“to summarize in a common declaration the ecclesiastical principles on which we have hitherto exercised and will continue to exercise our episcopal ministry, and which we have repeatedly had occasion to state in individual declarations.”

This summary constituted the Utrecht Declaration. The eight articles which follow deal mainly with the Old Catholic Bishops’ theological differences with the church in Rome. In the first article the familiar affirma-

¹ The three documents were published in Dutch with a preface by archbishop Johannes Heykamp as: *Mededeelingen aangaande de Conferentie der Bisschoppen*, gehouden te Utrecht 24 september 1889, n.p. 1889, 11 pp. Also published in: *De Oud-Katholiek* [hereafter abbreviated as OK] 5 (1889), 101–104. For a synoptic presentation of the German version of the three documents of the so-called “Utrechter Konvention” of 1889, 1952 and 1974 see: Urs von Arx, ‘Der ekklesiologische Charakter der Utrechter Union’, in: *IKZ* 84 (1994) 20–61, here 38–61. – With thanks to Susan Polstra (Amsterdam) and Dr Charlotte Methuen (Glasgow) for translating and correcting the English version.

² Urs von Arx, referring to Z-a [Zelenka, pseudonym of Erwin Kreuzer], ‘Die Gemeinschaft von Utrecht’, in: *Deutscher Merkur* 31 (1900) 61–63, esp. 62, suggests that the name appeared for the first time around 1900. Cf. Urs von Arx, ‘Vorwort’, in: idem / Maja Weyermann (eds.), *Statut der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz (IBK). Offizielle Ausgabe in fünf Sprachen*, Beiheft zu *IKZ* 91 (2001) 3–11, here p. 3, note 3; idem, ‘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, 157–185.

³ This and the following quotes in this paragraph can be found in: von Arx / Weyermann (eds.), *Statut* (see note 2), 40–42 (The Declaration of Utrecht).

tion by Vincent of Lérins forms the starting point for defining universal religious truth: “We hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all; that is truly and properly catholic.” That religious truth, the Bishops affirmed, had been articulated “in the ecumenical symbols and in the universally accepted dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical synods held in the undivided Church of the first millennium.” The next three points dismissed the infallibility of the Pope and his claim to primacy over a universal jurisdiction, the dogma of the Virgin Mary’s immaculate conception from 1854, and a number of other papal statements, including the bull *Unigenitus* (1713), the bull *Auctorem Fidei* (1794) and the *Syllabus* (1864), were all dismissed as being in conflict with the Old Catholic faith. In a fifth point the bishops indicated that they dismissed the decisions of the Council of Trent on church discipline, and only accepted the Council’s doctrinal statements in as far as they did not conflict with the doctrine of the ancient church. The sixth article concerned their position on the eucharist; the seventh expressed hope for the reunification of the various churches; and in the eighth and final article the bishops expressed the hope that they could withstand the damage of “unbelief and that indifference which is the worst evil of our day,” by faithfully holding true to the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

3. Reasons for the bishops’ collaboration

The Declaration shows that the bishops felt closely connected to the Catholic tradition as it had developed in the nineteenth century, and that it was not their intention to create a new polity. The Declaration was intended to provide the bishops with a form of accountability for the performance of their duties as bishops, and presented this as in keeping with the pre-1870 Catholic tradition. However, this did not alter the fact that in reality the bishops were creating a new structure – namely, their international bishops conference – which had not previously existed in the canon law of the Catholic Church. For, what collective form did the bishops now adopt? Not a church province; the Dutch church had had that form since its establishment in 1559 (and still does), while the German and Swiss churches had been set up as *Notkirchen*, temporary, or emergency churches, in the hope that the church in Rome would quickly see the error of its ways and that differences over Vatican dogmas would be laid to rest.

In order better to understand the character of this new Union of Utrecht and its bishops' conference, it is helpful to explore the reasons why the bishops decided to collaborate. I will here mention five.

The first was the shared protest against the policy of the church of Rome. The protest of the German and Swiss Old Catholics against the decisions of the First Vatican Council had not led to any kind of reconciliation, just as the almost two centuries long battle of the Dutch church against Rome had not brought a solution to their conflict any closer. This meant that they had a common opponent. Similarly, just as the Dutch Old Catholics had maintained the apostolic succession in the consecration of her bishops during the eighteenth century, the validity of which was also recognized by Rome, the Old Catholics in Germany and Switzerland had also organized themselves in a synodical-episcopal structure within this valid apostolic succession.⁴

The second reason for their collaboration was more pragmatic. Because the Old Catholic churches in Switzerland and in Germany had not gained the significant following for which they had hoped, they remained relatively small, very like the Dutch Church of the Old Episcopal Clergy. Because of these small numbers the bishops found themselves almost forced into some form of collaboration if they were not to run the risk of becoming completely isolated or of turning into a sect.

In addition to these two somewhat negative reasons, the bishops also made several positive points, which represented substantive points of agreement between them. First, there was the desire to cleanse the church of what were considered increasingly problematic, or even misleading, customs, such as compulsory confession, mandatory celibacy, or exclusion of lay people from the responsibility of running the church. Older Old Catholic historiography suggests that in the nineteenth century, the Dutch Church of the Old Episcopal Clergy was following a relatively conservative course in comparison with Old Catholics in Germany, which in turn was more conservative than the Old Catholic (or Christian Catholic) Church in Switzerland. They are said to have taken this approach in order to keep the break with Rome, which lasted for nearly two centuries, from

⁴ Until 1918, the Old Catholics in the Habsburg Empire were not allowed by the civil authorities to elect a bishop. Cf. Fred Smit, '100 jaar Unie van Utrecht, een geschiedenis', in: *OK* 105 (1989), 23–24, 35–36, 48–50, 59–60, 71–72, 86, 101–103, 141; *OK* 106 (1990), 4–5. Here *OK* 105 (1989), 59–60.

becoming even larger than it already was.⁵ However, this is only partly true, for serious internal conflicts meant that from around 1870 the Dutch Church was not able to act strongly.⁶ In addition, even before the Vatican Council and the resulting Old Catholic protests, voices could be heard in the Netherlands calling for the mass to be celebrated in the vernacular, for certain antiquated customs to be done away with, and for lay people to have more input in the governing of the church. It would take until 1885 for the Dutch Church to solve their internal problems and it was only then that they could finally initiate the desired reforms.⁷

The fourth reason for collaboration was the common orientation towards “the ancient church” understood to be the undivided church of the first ten centuries.⁸ Inspiration for this orientation, and especially the contacts to the Orthodox and to Anglicans, came about through the collaboration between the Dutch Church and the German and Swiss Old Catholics, and resulted specifically from the two so-called *Unionskonferenzen* in Bonn organized in 1874 and 1875 by the Munich church historian Ignaz von Döllinger.⁹ While no Dutch Old Catholics took part in these conferences and they were severely criticized by the Bishop of Haarlem, Casparus Johannes Rinkel,¹⁰ fifteen years later their deliberations provided im-

⁵ The Dutch Old Catholic bishops took a conservative stand in three major topics: the abolition of compulsory celibacy for the clergy; the contact with the Anglicans; and the rupture with Rome. Cf. Fred Smit, ‘Die weitere Entwicklung der Utrechter Union (der altkatholischen Bischöfe) von 1889 bis 1909’, in: IKZ 79 (1989) 104–135, here 104.

⁶ See for this point my doctoral dissertation: Dick J. Schoon, *Van bisschoppelijke Cleresie tot Oud-Katholieke Kerk. Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Nederland in de 19^{de} eeuw*, Nijmegen (Valkhof Pers) 2004, 585–587.

⁷ Ibid., 584–710, here 667–681.

⁸ Jan Visser considers the ideal of the ancient church to have functioned as a hermeneutic principle to find the truth. Cf. Jan Visser, *Het ideaal van de ‘Ecclesia primitiva’ in het Jansenisme en het Oud-Katholicisme* (Publicatieserie Stichting Oud-Katholiek Seminarie, 11), Amersfoort (Stichting Oud-katholiek Seminarie) 1980.

⁹ On these conferences see: Bericht über die 1874 und 1875 zu Bonn gehaltenen Unions-Conferenzen. Herausgegeben von Heinrich Reusch. Neudruck der Ausgabe in zwei Bänden von 1874 und 1875 mit einer Einführung von Günther Esser, Bonn (Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag) 2002.

¹⁰ Casparus Johannes Rinkel, *Kroniek van gebeurtenissen betreffende de oud-katholieken inzonderheid in Nederland [1845–1894]*, ingeleid en geannoteerd door Dick Schoon, Nijmegen (Valkhof Pers) 2006, 259, 263–264, 282–283, 358.

portant components for the Bishops' Declaration, which the Dutch bishops – including Rinkel – were able to sign.¹¹

The espousal of the ideal of the ancient, undivided church of the first ten centuries was reason enough for the Old Catholic churches to orient themselves towards other churches which were considered Catholic in nature and which had also liberated themselves from the alleged evils of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, there were representatives from the Orthodox and Anglican churches at the *Unionskonferenzen*. The German and Swiss bishops quickly entered into agreements with Anglicans in England and the United States, through which they affirmed a practical sharing in the administration of the sacraments. These ecumenical deliberations, which from the Old Catholic point of view were intended to be trilateral – that is, to include the Orthodox churches – led in 1931 to the Bonn Agreement, the formal recognition of intercommunion, later full communion, with the Anglicans. Urs von Arx has argued that there were a number of reasons why a trilateral scheme of union did not come into effect.¹²

In addition to the desire for practical reforms in the life of the church, and its fundamental ideal of a return to the old church, a fifth reason for collaboration was the shared ecclesiological principle of the local church.¹³ This was integral to all the ecumenical contacts of the Old Catholic churches from 1889, and it eventually formed the basis for the *Statute of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference*, which was drawn up in 2000.¹⁴ According to this principle, the church comes to full realization of itself whenever the faithful, clergy and laity, celebrate the Eucharist around the bishop.¹⁵ In this way the diocese is considered to be a full realization of what is called in the Creed “the one, holy, catholic and apos-

¹¹ Smit, *Entwicklung* (see note 5), 108–109.

¹² See Urs von Arx, *The Historical Background to the Bonn Agreement*, unpublished lecture at the Anglican – Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, Leeds 2005.

¹³ Cf. Kurt Stalder, *Die Wirklichkeit Christi erfahren. Ekklesiologische Untersuchungen und ihre Bedeutungen für die Existenz von Kirche heute*, Zürich (Benziger) 1984, especially 110–125, 193–238. For a defence of the rights of the local church of Utrecht during the 18th century, see: Jan Y.H.A. Jacobs, *Joan Christiaan van Erckel (1654–1734), pleitbezorger voor een locale kerk*, Amsterdam (Holland Universiteits Pers) 1981.

¹⁴ Cf. von Arx / Weyermann (eds.), *Statut* (see note 2).

¹⁵ Cf. Mattijs Ploeger, ‘Catholicity, apostolicity, the Trinity and the Eucharist in Old Catholic theology’, in: Urs von Arx / Paul Avis / Mattijs Ploeger (eds.), *Towards further Convergence: Anglican and Old Catholic Ecclesiologies*. The papers of the

tolic church.” Its catholicity is not determined by its numbers or geographical spread, but by its quality, that is by the way in which it fulfils its soteriological task and allows all people to share in the salvation of Jesus Christ. In order to fulfil that mission well, a church may stand in communion with other churches and in that way can form church provinces, patriarchates, and ultimately the global – or, in Roman Catholic terms, universal – Church. However, these supralocal connections can never take away the autonomy of the local catholic church, and they must serve its functioning.

These five reasons help to place the beginnings of the Union of Utrecht at the end of the nineteenth century in a context from which it is possible to explore the other international church relationships that developed during the same period.

4. Other international church relationships

Perhaps the first question is: what do we mean by an international church relationship? The Christian faith has never been defined by borders, and the question of the international organization of the church or churches has always been an issue.¹⁶ In Western Europe the Roman Catholic Church has through the ages had a clear international aspect that has given it stature at various times and in various ways. In the East, the Orthodox churches recognize themselves as ‘family’ and can gather as pan-Orthodox synod under the presidency of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.¹⁷ From the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation, the Protestant churches, although they were mainly nationally organized, always retained some international contacts, or at least tried to do so. In the latter

Anglican – Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference, Leeds, 29 August – 2 September 2005 = Beiheft zu IKZ 96 (2006) 7–27.

¹⁶ The study on the ecumenical movement starts with an introduction entitled: ‘Division and the search for unity prior to the Reformation; cf. Ruth Rouse / Stephen Charles Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1948*, Geneva (WCC) 1986, 1–24. The ecumenical movement during the last half century is the subject of: Harold E. Fey, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1948–1968*, Geneva (WCC) 1986.

¹⁷ Cf. Constantin G. Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement. Documents and Statements 1902–1975*, Geneva (WCC) 1978; Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Orthodox visions of Ecumenism. Statements, messages and reports on the Ecumenical Movement 1902–1992*, Geneva (WCC) 1994.

half of the nineteenth century, however, six international associations of churches developed. Besides the Union of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches, the other five were, in chronological order: the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops (1867); the Alliance of Reformed Churches (1875); the Methodist Ecumenical Conference (1876); the International Congregational Council (1891); and the Baptist World Congress (1891). I will discuss each briefly.¹⁸

4.1 The first *Lambeth Conference*, a meeting of all the Anglican bishops, named after the Archbishop of Canterbury's palace in London where it took place, met in 1867. Originally its task was to offer a context for the shared discussion of issues which had arisen within the Anglican Communion.¹⁹ The gathering had no jurisdiction over the individual churches, nor did it see itself as a synod. The second conference, in 1878, considered contacts with the emerging Old Catholic movement "and other persons in the Continent of Europe who have renounced their allegiance to the Church of Rome and are desirous of forming some connection with the Anglican Church, either English or American."²⁰ But it was only at the third conference, in 1888, that ecumenical collaboration was expressly put on the agenda. Committees were set up to deal with the relationships with various churches, including the Old Catholics, the Scandinavian Lutherans, the Reformed churches and the Eastern churches. The so-called Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1886 was accepted in somewhat modified form by the Lambeth Conference in 1888. It presented four criteria for religious unity or "home reunion", as it was described: the Holy Scripture

¹⁸ For a general overview: Henry Renaud Turner Brandreth, 'Approaches of the churches towards each other in the nineteenth century', in: Rouse / Neill, *History* (see note 16), 261–306. Though the Lutheran churches made efforts to create a worldwide organization during the 19th century, the Lutheran World Federation dates from 1927 and is therefore not treated in this article. Cf. Bengt Wadensjö, *Toward a World Lutheran Communion. Developments in Lutheran Cooperation up to 1929*, Karlskrona (Abrahamsons) 1971; Jens Holger Schjørring / Prasanna Kumari / Norman A. Hjelm (eds.), *From Federation to Communion. The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, Minneapolis MN (Fortress) 1997.

¹⁹ Randall T. Davidson, *The Lambeth Conferences of 1867, 1878, and 1888. With the Official Reports and Resolutions, together with the Sermons preached at the Conferences*, London (SPCK) 1889. On the motive that gave rise to the first Lambeth Conference: Edward Carpenter, *Cantuar. The Archbishops in their Office*, ed. Adrian Hastings, London (Mowbray) ³1997, 312–333.

²⁰ Brandreth, *Approaches* (see note 18), 264.

as “containing all things necessary to salvation” and as rule and ultimate standard for the faith; the Apostles’ Creed as the creed for baptism and the Nicene Creed as adequate expression of the Christian faith; the two sacraments that Christ himself instituted, baptism and holy communion; and the historic episcopate, “locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.”²¹

From this short description of the early Lambeth Conferences, it can be surmised that its main purpose was to address issues within and between the Anglican churches and to establish a basis for their unity. It did not regard itself as a synod and it was only in 1888 that it began to consider ecumenical questions.²² The difference between it and the churches of the Union of Utrecht is obvious: whereas the Union churches saw themselves as continuation of the pre-Vatican Catholic Church, and as such retained their distinct Catholic character in church structure and church life, the churches of the Anglican Communion regarded themselves as Reformed Catholic or Catholic Reformed. The Communion itself reflected the relationships of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in

²¹ Cf. G.R. Evans / J. Robert Wright (eds.), *The Anglican Tradition. A Handbook of Sources*, London (SPCK) 1991, 345–346.

²² The Lambeth Conference of 1888 stated on the Old Catholic Churches on the European continent in its resolution 15: “(A) That this Conference recognises with thankfulness the dignified and independent position of the Old Catholic Church of Holland, and looks to more frequent brotherly intercourse to remove many of the barriers which at present separate us. (B) That we regard it as a duty to promote friendly relations with the Old Catholic Community in Germany, and with the ‘Christian Catholic Church’ in Switzerland, not only out of sympathy with them, but also in thankfulness to God Who has strengthened them to suffer for the truth under great discouragements, difficulties, and temptations; and that we offer them the privileges recommended by the Committee under the conditions specified in its Report. (C) That the sacrifices made by the Old Catholics in Austria, deserve our sympathy, and that we hope, when their organisation is sufficiently tried and complete, a more formal relation may be found possible. (D) That, with regard to the reformers in Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal, struggling to free themselves from the burden of unlawful terms of communion, we trust that they may be enabled to adopt such sound forms of doctrine and discipline, and to secure such Catholic organisation as will permit us to give them a fuller recognition.” Cf. Davidson, *Lambeth Conferences* (see note 19), 282. Also on internet: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1888/resolution-15.aspx?author=Lambeth+Conference&year=1888> [24.3.2015].

the USA, to the Anglican daughter churches overseas, particularly in the British Empire.

4.2 In 1875, a group of Reformed churches, mainly from America and Scotland, established the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System, which in 1970 merged with the International Congregationalist Council to form the *World Alliance of Reformed Churches*. This Alliance held its first general meeting two years later in Edinburgh.²³ The foundation of the Alliance was the acceptance of Holy Scripture as authoritative and the acceptance of the *Consensus of Reformed Confessions*, a general agreement of Presbyterian principles. Attempts to draft a doctrinal document that all the participating churches could sign proved futile. As the term 'Alliance', implied, the unity of the churches, or their reunification, was not high on their agenda. The Alliance was particularly concerned to foster practical cooperation between Reformed missionary organizations from different countries in the areas where they were working.

4.3 The *Methodist Ecumenical Conferences* began in 1881 with 28 delegates from Methodist churches in 20 countries and from then on would meet about every ten years, just as the Lambeth Conference. Here also it was stated from the very beginning that:

"The conference is not for legislative purposes, for it will have no authority to legislate. It is not for controversies, for Methodism has no doctrinal differences. It is not for an attempt to harmonize the various polities and usages of the several branches of the one great Methodist family, for Methodism has always striven for unity rather than uniformity. It is not, in one word, for consolidation but for co-operation. It is to devise such means for prosecuting our home and foreign work as will result in the greatest economy and efficiency, to promote fraternity, to increase the moral and evangelical power of a common Methodism, and to secure the speedy conversion of the world."²⁴

4.4 In the 1870s the Congregationalist churches also made several attempts at organizing an international body. Like the Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Congregationalist initiative began in English speaking

²³ Marcel Pradervand, *A Century of Service. A History of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1875–1975*, Edinburgh (Saint Andrew) 1975.

²⁴ William J. Townsend, *The story of Methodist Union*, London (Milner) [1906?], 121–122. Quoted after Brandreth, *Approaches* (see note 18), 266–267.

countries, in this case America and Canada, with positive reactions from England, Wales and Australia. The first *International Congregationalist Council* was held in London in 1891, followed by gatherings in 1899 and 1908. Ecumenical issues were not on the agenda, but they did play a role in the background.

4.5 The idea of a Baptist World Congress dated from the end of the eighteenth century, but it was not until more than a century later, in 1905, that 23 countries sent delegates to the first conference in London. The *Baptist World Alliance* that was then established has as goals: “1) to express and promote unity and fellowship among them; 2) to secure and defend religious freedom; 3) to proclaim the great principles of our common faith.”²⁵

4.6 The Lutheran Churches, in contrast, because of their complex national church identities did not form their World Federation until after the Second World War, and so are beyond the scope of my story.²⁶ One might also say that under Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) the Roman Catholic Church organized itself as a new form of international religious association, the most obvious manifestation of which was the First Vatican Council. This was a complex development in the course of which concordats were agreed with a number of national states, such as Russia 1847, Spain 1851 and Portugal 1857, which also accorded some independence to orders and congregations. Efforts to come to a concordat with the German speaking countries were only successful in the case of Austria (1855–1870).²⁷

The Declaration of Utrecht needs to be placed in the context of these developments in other churches and a growing internationalisation.

²⁵ Alfred C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists*, London 1947, 250.

²⁶ See note 18.

²⁷ See for a concise description of the developments within the Roman Catholic Church during the 19th century: Klaus Schatz, *Vaticanum I*, 3 vols., Paderborn (Schöningh) 1992–1994, here vol. 1, 1–34. The chapter is entitled: “Der Sieg des Ultramontanismus”.

5. Conclusions

The Union of Utrecht demonstrates similarities and differences to these other processes. The most obvious similarity is the very fact that other churches were also organizing themselves internationally. This was without a doubt a result of social, economic and technical developments in the nineteenth century which made it possible for churches to orient themselves more internationally. Thus, for instance, mobility increased because of better transportation and communication. Moreover, nineteenth-century colonialism divided Africa and Asia between mainly European powers, and this had an impact on blossoming international trade. Through colonialism, Western culture, and, through mission organizations, also the Christian faith, became present across the world. While the Roman Catholic Church possessed adequate structures with its mission congregations, the need for collaboration and consistency presented itself to the other churches and acted as a catalyst in the establishment of the Anglicans' Lambeth conferences as well as the World Alliance of the Reformed churches.

With these similarities we also see the most important differences. What stands out is that the establishment of the Union of Utrecht was a matter for continental Europe, whereas the initiatives for the other church associations mainly came from America, and often had their initial gatherings in London. Another important difference is that the Protestant churches sought collaboration in order to counteract competition in mission areas, and this caused the church to take a more pragmatic approach, while the Old Catholic churches were hardly concerned with missions. Rather, their collaboration in the Union of Utrecht stemmed mainly from the doctrinal conflict with the church in Rome, and in particular a differing view of Catholic ecclesiology. The emphasis that the Old Catholics put on the local church and its relative autonomy meant that the church did not get involved in what it considered the internal affairs of local churches in other countries. And apart from the Old Catholics' limited man- and womanpower in terms of numbers of church members, the countries in which they were organized had few colonies in which they were able to do mission work.

The ecclesiological vision of the basic unit of the church seems to me the most important difference between the Old Catholics and the other international church associations that emerged around the end of the nineteenth century. From its very beginning, the focus of the Union of Utrecht

was the reunification of the churches, beginning with the church in Rome, but soon also with the Orthodox and the Anglicans. The ecumenical aspect of this focus would continue to determine the history of the Union of Utrecht, and to this day it forms one of its most important characteristics.

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Mit der Utrechter Erklärung (1889) schlossen sich die Bischöfe verschiedener alt-katholischer Kirchen zusammen zur «Utrechter Union», wie sie später genannt wurde. Zuerst geht der Beitrag kurz auf den Inhalt der Utrechter Erklärung ein. Anschliessend nennt er fünf mögliche Gründe für den Zusammenschluss. Etwa zeitgleich mit dem Zusammenschluss zur Utrechter Union formierten sich weitere weltweite Kirchenverbände, deren fünf kurz skizziert werden: die Lambeth Konferenz der anglikanischen Bischöfe (1867), der Reformierte Weltbund (WARC, 1875), die Methodistische Konferenz (1876), der Internationale Kongregationalistische Rat (1891) und der Baptistische Weltbund (1891). Der Vergleich dieser Kirchenverbände mit der alt-katholischen Utrechter Union erhellt den ekklesiologischen Charakter der Utrechter Union.