



In Defense of the Rights of Old Catholics in the United States

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Primate and Archbishop of the United States

Old Catholic Church in the United States

Let me simply say that as Old Catholics in North and South America, we have a Natural Right to practice our religion; and as such, we have a Right to our own Church with our own Synod of Bishops.

For the record, I vehemently object to the current *laissez-faire* policy of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht to refer American Old Catholics (and all those Christians whose spiritual journey has led them to the Old Catholic Church) to the Episcopal Church in the United States. While the 1931 Bonn Agreement acknowledges full Communion between the ancient See of Canterbury (the Church of England and now the worldwide Anglican Communion) and the ancient See of Utrecht (and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht), there can only be full Communion when the respective Churches maintain their own distinct ecclesial identity as autonomous Churches without "requiring from either communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith." Since

the (Protestant) Episcopal Church in the United States is a Church of the Anglican Communion, it is not an Old Catholic Church. Needless to say, full Communion does not mean that each Church should become the other, or become confused with the other. In fact, the concept of full Communion between Churches is contingent upon the philosophical assumption that each respective Church continues its own particular ecclesial culture, doctrinal expressions, sacramental devotions and liturgical practices, as the Bonn Agreement clearly indicates.

Thus, it is not only utterly absurd but entirely disrespectful for the Archbishop of Utrecht, whom we regard as the Primate of the Old Catholic Church, to counsel American Old Catholics and other Christians seeking the Old Catholic Church in the United States to go to the Episcopal Church. It is God, the Holy Spirit, that leads us in our Christian life and in our spiritual journey; therefore, it is terribly presumptuous to think that anyone in the Church—bishop, priest or lay person—can contradict the authentic and personal spiritual journey of any individual Christian. It is the duty of the Church and her ministers to assist the faithful in fulfilling their calling in the Church and to assist the individual Christian in his or her spiritual discernment, respecting the relationship between the soul and the Lord, as a spiritual dialogue between the bride and the Divine Bridegroom.

Indeed, this current and confusing advice from Utrecht, that one must become Episcopalian in order to become Old Catholic, must be abandoned. If this were said of

any other established or mainstream Church, it would be an outrage. Furthermore, this counsel is prejudicial, and it clearly demonstrates that Utrecht has no concern for Old Catholics in the United States and one can only deduce that he wishes to cool down the fervor of the ancient Catholic faith in North and South America by confusing it with Episcopalianism and having our people absorbed by the Episcopal Church. But, this is truly an outrage! As Old Catholics, we are a religious minority in the United States, and we cherish our ancient faith and practices so much that we would die for them, as our Savior died for us. Indeed, as Old Catholics, we must defend our ancient faith and Church! By analogy, who could imagine the pope saying to Roman Catholics two or three centuries ago when Roman Catholicism was a minority religion in the United States, that they should become Episcopalian in order to become Roman Catholic?

The late Archbishop Dr. S. Tilewa Johnson, when he was Primate of the Church of the Province of West Africa (Anglican Communion) recognized that it is not only demeaning and disrespectful to ask Old Catholics to become Episcopalian in order to live and worship as Old Catholics, but it is religious discrimination. The late Primate also viewed the position of Utrecht as "Eurocentric" and "patronizing," in a fashion much like the way African Christians were treated by the "Colonial powers." Thus, in objection to the current position of Utrecht and in order to support the Old Catholic Confederation and its minority voice, Archbishop Johnson published his historic proclamation on Christmas Day 2013, recognizing the Old Catholic Churches of the Old

Catholic Confederation as authentically Old Catholic with a Right to exist and to be regarded as an authentic Old Catholic Church under the terms of the Bonn Agreement.

Needless to say, American Old Catholics are not Episcopalian! We are also not Roman Catholic, and we are not what is sometimes termed as "Independent" (Roman) Catholic. We are Old Catholic Christians, and we have an unequivocal and constitutional right to be Old Catholic in the United States. As American Old Catholics, we have our own Hierarchy and our own Code of Canon Law in the Old Catholic Confederation, and we must put an end to this unintelligible need for "guidance" and recognition from the See of Utrecht or the Union of Utrecht. The Synod of Bishops of the Old Catholic Confederation must be respected and treated as brothers and equals with the Bishops of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht so that we can work together for the kingdom of God.

In fact, it appears that those who are most obsessed with Utrecht are not even Old Catholic: they are, for the most part, Roman Catholic in faith and practice, who have separated from the Roman Catholic Church for one reason or another but have not embraced the Old Catholic faith and practices. Thus, it is this group of Christians, who generally refer to themselves as "Independent" Catholics, who seem to be consumed with Utrecht and its recognition; and this is essentially because: 1) they do not have an organized ecclesial structure, 2) they appear to have an ecclesial inferiority complex, and 3) they lack of a clear ecclesial identity because they are existing apart from their

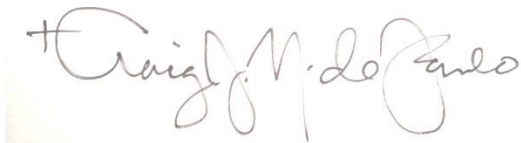
ecclesial foundation. Certainly, it would be preposterous and blatantly disrespectful to use the term “Old Catholic” for the sake of convenience simply because one has left the Roman Catholic Church, but this is often what one finds in the chaotic landscape of the so-called “Independent movement” within the United States.

To be Old Catholic is to be a Christian who accepts the apostolic faith of the First Seven Ecumenical Councils of the Ancient Church. Unlike Eastern Orthodox Christians, the Old Catholic follows the liturgical tradition developed in the West, but our ancient faith is lived in the modern world. Thus, the Old Catholic is orthodox in faith and traditional in worship while maintaining a liberal theological anthropology in our adherence to the apostolic primacy of conscience. While the Old Catholic Church is clearly a *via media* between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, it is also viewed as a middle way between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. As such, the Old Catholic Church is truly an ecumenical Church, and it could even be understood as an ecclesial witness for unity among all Christians.

Now, while we certainly respect the Archbishop of Utrecht as the Primate of the Old Catholic Church and President of the Union of Utrecht, the Old Catholic Church in the United States is a national Church of its own with its own Synod of Bishops, with the same academic and ecclesiastical credentials, Apostolic Succession and Episcopal-Synodal polity, which exists whether it is recognized or not by Utrecht. Moreover, the very idea of that one Synod such as the Union of Utrecht should have centralized

authority and control over another Synod completely violates Old Catholic ecclesiology founded upon the Ancient Church and the patristic tradition.

As bishops, clergy and lay people, it is our responsibility to know ourselves in order to defend our rights as Old Catholic Christians. We have a beautiful, joyful and ancient Church in which we are called to an authentic experience of faith, hope and love in the modern world today.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig J. N. de Paulo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

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Old Catholic Church in the United States
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