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Words from Archbishop Joris Vercammen

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In 2005 the International Bishops' Conference made the decision to invite theologians from the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and the Episcopal Church to join with a few theologians of the Old-Catholic churches of the Union of Utrecht, for a conference on "Catholicism and globalization." The conference stated that talks about sisterhood between the churches will remain inauthentic if we are not interested in each other's social circumstances.

Our world is changing radically under the influence of the processes of Globalisation, and hence the relationship between our churches is changing. This makes the need of redefining our relationship an urgent issue. The question is what it means to affirm our intercommunion with one another, against the background of the reality of globalization. Moreover, all three of us define ourselves in terms of being catholic churches or a communion of catholic churches, and this makes the question even more penetrating.

The question of being catholic has to do with two crucial questions. The first one is about the vision of the Church and its relationship to the world as the people's home. The church is called to proclaim the gospel, as it is the liberating message for all people of all cultures. This message of redemption and hope must be integrated into all these different cultures. The art of being unified is to give space to the differences in our cultures and at the same time to cultivate the gospel as the gift that we have in common. It is this kind of solidarity which holds "the art of catholicity."

The second question is about how we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not some kind of theory, nor a philosophy, but a practice; it is an invitation to follow Christ in the concrete circumstances of our life and world. The real question is how the exodus and the resurrection will happen again in our world and in our times.

Those who are aware of these questions cannot remain indifferent to the situation where globalization processes have provoked our beloved world. Globalisation concerns many aspects of the life of individuals and communities: economic, social, political, ethical, religious, and governmental issues are all included. And, moreover, through all these issues we

are connected with one another. Globalisation has increased the mutual responsibility we have for one another substantially. We can no longer stand back, and if we are ready to take this responsibility the world could become a better place for all people.

That is exactly the challenge theologians confront us with: How will we take the responsibility in order to be reliable to one another and to our world? It was the aim of this theological working party to define the theological background against which the responsibility can take shape. The results show us ways that now must be reclaimed by our churches in order to intensify our relationship until it will become a real sisterhood. At that moment we may say we became more “catholic”!

I would like this publication to be dedicated to our beloved brother Bishop Ramento, who gave his life for the sake of the poor. His firm readiness to defend the poorest people and his freedom to witness to God’s preferential option for them are signs of the Holy Spirit among us. These are the reasons that the International Bishops’ Conference of the Union of Utrecht decided to integrate Bishop Alberto Ramento into their commemoration calendar. We want to give thanks to God’s greatness that he gave us such a dedicated priest and bishop, and we pray and hope that at least some of his strength and joy may be ours as well.

I want to pay tribute to the members of the working party, who achieved much during the three years of the project. Without knowing one another and with only some general knowledge of each other’s situations, they became a team that was able to formulate some important advice to our churches. I want to express our gratitude especially to Professor Dr. Franz Segbers, who, serving as the president of the working party, was also the engine that moved the whole project. Friendly and decisive, he took the group along a probably unexpected way to discover our catholicity again.

I want to thank our brother Bishop Christopher Epting. Without his help and support this project would not have been finished. Bishop Epting certainly has many good things to commemorate on the occasion of his retirement, which coincides with the publication of these papers. Nevertheless I hope he will remember this booklet as one of the small but not trivial issues he helped to come to light.

I want to give thanks to Bishop Godefredo David, the Obispo Maximo of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, because without his collaboration this project would not have been possible. Through him I want to thank all our Filipino brothers and sisters for their friendship and faith. In the contacts with them we learned how our faith in Jesus Christ can be spontaneous and

joyful. I hope this project was only the beginning of a theological cooperation that will lead us to the deepening of the sisterhood among our churches.

We hope to communicate the results of this theological reflection to the broader and ongoing discussion that takes place within the ecumenical community. We hope to take some more initiatives in cooperation with the World Council of Churches. But we certainly do hope that the contents of this publication will be communicated to the priests and the congregations of our churches. In this respect I want to pay attention to the smaller booklet on Bishop Alberto Ramento, which will be published in different languages and which aims to inform a broader constituency.

As we learn from this publication that the Eucharist is the key to transforming the world in a home for all people, we pray that He who gave his life for us will guide us to respect each other and truly love one another. We pray that He may make us real “Catholics” within our globalized world.