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Opening Address: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Anglican – Old Catholic Communion

Geoffrey Rowell

I have been particularly asked to say something about Anglicanism in Europe today, as part of the context in which to set the reflections of this Conference on Ecclesiology and Mission. I want to do this by first of all remembering the context of the Bonn Agreement of 1931, then recalling the important paper ‘An Assessment of the Bonn Agreement’ by Archbishop Robert Runcie, delivered in 1981 to mark 50 years of the Bonn Agreement in 1981,¹ and finally commenting on the present situation of Anglicanism in Europe from the particular perspective of the Church of England Diocese in Europe of which I have been bishop for ten years since my commissioning by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Archbishop George Carey) in St Margaret’s, Westminster, on St Luke’s Day, 2001 and my enthronement in Gibraltar Cathedral on All Saints’ Day that year.

I. The Bonn Agreement of 1931 had as its remote ancestor the Bonn Conferences of 1874 and 1875 in which Old Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and a few Protestants met together under the presidency of Dr Döllinger. Amongst the English representatives was Bishop Harold Browne of Winchester, who had for many years been a staunch member of the Anglo-Continental Society, which had as one of its primary aims that of drawing together all episcopal non-Roman Churches.² As Bishop Browne’s biographer notes, in words that still have a degree of truth in them, ‘the sympathies of the average Englishman are not easily excited on behalf of foreign churches or distant efforts for a reform in religious faith and usage ... we find it very hard to overcome the barrier of our insularity.’³

¹ Text in GORDON HUELIN (ed.), *Old Catholics and Anglicans 1931–1981: To commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of Intercommunion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 1–9. It is worth noting that this 50th anniversary volume is described as commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of intercommunion, indicating something that falls short of ‘full, visible unity’.

² GEORGE WILLIAM KITCHIN, *Edward Harold Browne, DD, Lord Bishop of Winchester, A Memoir* (London: John Murray, 1895), pp. 182–3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Browne was therefore unusual in his commitment to the ideals of the Society, and even more unusual in a proposal that he made in 1856 to the Lower House of Convocation, that an 'Anglican missionary bishop should be placed at Constantinople who might befriend and instruct the bishops of the Armenian and other Christian churches lying under the dominion of the Turk.'⁴ Browne saw the Anglican Church as a model of reformed Episcopal National Churches across Europe and beyond.⁵ He established a firm friendship with Döllinger and, describing himself as 'an old-fashioned English High Churchman', said that he found more from which he would want to distance himself in the 'three extreme parties of the Church of England' than from anything he had heard of amongst the Old Catholics.⁶ He sent warm greetings when Bishop Herzog was consecrated as the first Bishop of the 'Swiss Christian Catholic Church', and later welcomed him, together with Bishop Reinkens, to his residence Farnham Castle and an informal conference was held. Archbishop Maclagan of York summed up Browne's vision as 'influencing religious life abroad, and trying to bring Churches nearer to each other, and to get them on one platform of evangelic zeal and truth and of a common apostolic order'⁷ – not far from the theme of this Conference on Ecclesiology and Mission.

The devastating effects of the First World War had marked consequences for the life of the churches in Europe, not least for the Anglican presence. English congregations had existed continuously in places like Antwerp since before the Reformation, and in 1633 the Bishop of London was given jurisdiction by order of the Privy Council over all English congregations outside England – a natural choice as the bishop of the great port city looking towards congregations often concentrated in the port cities and neighbouring places in northern Europe (the English congregation in Hamburg celebrates its 400th anniversary in 2012). In 1842 the southern part of Europe had been formed into an extra-provincial diocese as the Diocese of Gibraltar, the Bishop of London retaining oversight of congregations in north and central Europe. The effect of the First World War and the Russian revolution had meant that many previously flourishing congregations had ceased to exist and church buildings had disappeared. But this was just one small aspect of the consequences of war and

⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

⁵ Ibid., p. 231.

⁶ Ibid., p. 410.

⁷ Ibid., p. 418.

revolution. Before the First World War the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 had given an impetus to world evangelization and also to ecumenical relations. This was picked up in the Lambeth Conference of 1920, with its Appeal to All Christian People. Cosmo Gordon Lang, then Archbishop of York, was Chair of the Reunion Committee, and was initially despondent about any positive outcome, telling his mother that 'it seems humanly impossible to get a crowd of Bishops representing every possible point of view, and already disclosing great cleavages of principle to unite in any proposals short of mere platitudes.'⁸ Yet it was Lang who tried to lift the Conference to a greater vision, believing that it was 'useless to consider projects and proposals in different parts of the world until we had agreed upon the ideal of unity that we must seek'. It was an appeal to overcome the sin of disunity, and the Encyclical Letter which prefaced the Appeal spoke of the Reunion of Christendom 'not as a laudable ambition or a beautiful dream, but as an imperative necessity'.⁹ The goal was a re-united Catholic Church 'within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ'. In words taking up the Lambeth Quadrilateral, such unity rested upon a 'whole-hearted acceptance' of the Holy Scriptures, the Creeds, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and a Ministry with Apostolic authority. The Episcopate was seen as providing 'the best instrument for maintaining the unity and continuity of the Church.'¹⁰ It was Lang, both at York and at Canterbury, who took a leading role in taking forward the ecumenical enterprise, not least in endorsing the Bonn Agreement in 1931. The context of the Appeal to All Christian People also included closer relations between Anglicans and the Orthodox Churches, not least in the recognition of Anglican Orders, led by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1922 with its official declaration that 'as before the Orthodox Church, the Ordinations of the Anglican Episcopal Confession of Bishops, priests and deacons, possess the same validity as the those of the Roman, Old Catholic and Armenian Churches possess, inasmuch as all essentials are found in them which are held indispensable from the Orthodox point of view for the

⁸ JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART, *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), p. 267.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

recognition of the “Charisma” of the priesthood, derived from the Apostolic Succession.’¹¹

The Lambeth Conference of 1930 was attended by an Old Catholic delegation (the Archbishop of Utrecht and the bishops of Haarlem and Deventer, who were described somewhat condescendingly as ‘very humble-looking little gentlemen in their frock-coats, in contrast with the resplendent Orthodox’).¹² Arthur Cayley Headlam, the Bishop of Gloucester, chaired the sub-committee on relations with Episcopal Churches. The International Old Catholic Bishops’ Conference (IBC) had, following Dutch acceptance of Anglican orders in 1925, ratified that decision on behalf of all Old Catholic churches. There was a proposal for a Joint Commission on Doctrine, the Archbishop of Utrecht hoping that both Anglican and Orthodox Churches would come to discuss the question of reunion at the International Old Catholics’ Congress in Vienna in 1931, and hoping that the Joint Commission on Doctrine could meet before then.¹³ It did so meet in Bonn (in recognition of the earlier meetings in 1874 and 1875). The Bishop of Fulham (the Bishop of London’s suffragan for his jurisdiction of North and Central Europe) was the other Anglican episcopal member. Not only is the Bonn Agreement remarkable for its brevity, the meeting which led to it was even briefer, lasting by one day (July 2nd) – and it was said, by Claude Beaufort Moss, another Anglican delegate, that it could have been done in only half an hour were it not for some Evangelical difficulties.¹⁴ The Evangelical member of the Anglican delegation, the Revd George Francis Graham-Brown, Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford (and shortly afterwards consecrated as Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem),

¹¹ Ibid., p. 283. The declaration was subsequently affirmed by the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Alexandria, the Church of Cyprus, and by Romania in 1936. Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece were on the way to according a similar recognition, when the outbreak of the Second World War interrupted the process.

¹² LOCKART, op. cit., p. 346.

¹³ RONALD CLAUD DUDLEY JASPER, *Arthur Cayley Headlam, Life and Letters of a Bishop* (London: Faith Press, 1960), p. 210. The Lambeth Conference passed three resolutions (35, a, b, and c), thanking the Old Catholic delegation for their presence, requesting the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of Utrecht to appoint representatives to a Doctrinal Commission to discuss points of agreement and difference between them, and stating that the Lambeth Conference agreed that there was nothing in the Declaration of Utrecht inconsistent with the teaching of the Church of England: CLAUDE BEAUFORT MOSS, *The Old Catholic Movement, its Origins and History* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948), p. 341.

¹⁴ JASPER, op. cit., p. 215; C.B. MOSS, op. cit., p. 342.

wrote the first draft of the formula, which originally contained five sections. Bishop Adolf Küry for the Old Catholics thought that only the first two sections were necessary, and did not wish any new confession of faith to be drawn up. Finally, after an evening's consideration, the text as we have it was finally agreed, the third clause about intercommunion being largely taken from Graham-Brown's first draft, reflecting his Evangelical concern not to be required to accept every aspect of doctrine, sacramental devotion and liturgical practice of the Old Catholic churches.¹⁵ After the text had been endorsed by the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference at Vienna on September 7th 1931, Headlam presented it to the bishops of the Convocation of Canterbury in January 1932. It was a short debate, Headlam commenting, 'I think that was partly due to the excellence of the tactics I adopted. I read a very long speech which set their Lordships into a comfortable sleep, and they were in such an excellent temper in consequence that they were prepared to accept the motion almost without discussion!'¹⁶ Moss comments that in the debate in the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury, a bishop said that what was proposed was intercommunion not union, to which the Bishop of Lincoln replied that 'intercommunion was union, the only sort of union that they wanted, the only sort of union that was possible.'¹⁷ Moss goes on to comment that the Bonn Agreement is based on three principles: Dogmatic Unity, Mutual Recognition, and Independent Co-operation¹⁸ – which clearly leaves a number of questions unanswered in relation to ecclesiology, mission and full visible unity.

II. When Archbishop Robert Runcie made his assessment of the Bonn Agreement for its fiftieth anniversary in 1981, he responded in part to the Swiss theologian, Lukas Vischer, who had commented that he wished to defend 'the ecclesiology implicit in the agreement' as 'perhaps the soundest basis for real progress in the ecumenical movement.'¹⁹ Archbishop Runcie said that this was high praise from a former Director of the Faith and Order Secretariat of the World Council of Churches, but went on to comment, 'most Anglicans will not be aware that there is an implicit

¹⁵ MOSS, pp. 346–7.

¹⁶ JASPER, op. cit., 218.

¹⁷ MOSS, op. cit., p. 347.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 349.

¹⁹ HUELIN, op. cit., p. 2.

ecclesiology in the Bonn Agreement.’ This was in large part due, he argued, to an ecclesiological deficit in Anglican thinking.

A coherent and systematic Anglican approach to ecclesiology is urgently needed, both for Anglican self-definition and for the development of our relationship with other Churches. When we look at Anglican appeals for ‘intercommunion’ with Rome and the Orthodox, or at the way in which decisions have been taken about the ordination of women, we look almost in vain for an Anglican exposition of a theology of the church local and universal... It is not easy to get contemporary Anglicans to realize that any theology of the church is important. It is a cinderella subject amongst us.²⁰

Yet, that had not always been the case, Archbishop Runcie went on, citing Richard Hooker with his concern to defend Anglican ecclesial polity against both Papists and Puritans in the late sixteenth century (and he could have added others, such as John Bramhall, Archbishop of Armagh, who had had to consider Anglican ecclesiology when in exile in Paris during the Commonwealth period of the mid-seventeenth century – Hooker’s ecclesiology did not work so well in a Parisian ghetto with Anglican episcopal order abolished in England). John Keble, William Palmer, and the so-called ‘branch theory’ among the Tractarians, certainly dealt with ecclesiology – and there have been others that have thought seriously about Anglican ecclesiology. Recent events in the Anglican Communion since Robert Runcie’s archiepiscopate have forced ecclesiology higher up the agenda: the consecration of women bishops in America, Canada and New Zealand; the fall-out from the consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson, a divorced man in an open same-sex partnership; questions relating to authority and primacy within the Anglican Communion; the relation between the local and the universal aspects of the Church. An important article by Dr Colin Podmore, ‘A Tale of Two Churches: The Ecclesiologies of The Episcopal Church and the Church of England Compared’²¹, has underlined the significant ecclesiological differences between The Episcopal Church (USA) and the Church of England (and the rest of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion) in relation to the authority of bishops,

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 2, 3.

²¹ *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 10.1 (2008), pp. 34–70; reprinted in the special Lambeth Conference issue of *The International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*: ‘Communion, Covenant and Canon Law’, 8.2 (2008), pp. 124–154.

dioceses and the General Convention in America, on the one hand, and bishops in Synod in the Church of England, on the other.

Archbishop Runcie went on to point out that one of the most remarkable developments in ecumenical theology at the time when he was writing was ‘an almost unnoticed convergence in ecclesiology: the church as a Eucharistic communion of local churches.’²² Even though that is the case, it remains true, as Archbishop Runcie notes, that ‘unconscious differences in the understanding of the church make agreement on other issues impossible.’²³ Runcie honestly admits that ‘if the implicit ecclesiological insight of the Bonn Agreement is profound, the actual impact of the Agreement has been frankly disappointing.’ Some of this is the consequence of geographical and cultural separation, but Runcie notes Lukas Vischer’s comment that ‘the agreement establishes not communion but intercommunion’²⁴ – a point we have already noted as being made at the time when the Agreement was accepted by the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury.

Archbishop Runcie went on to cite his predecessor, Michael Ramsey’s call to explore ‘the implications of full communion in the Church of God’ in the context of what was then called the Wider Episcopal Fellowship. What are the implications for Anglicans of communion with the United Churches of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and now with the churches who have entered into the Porvoo Agreement? There are questions to be asked there, as well as between Anglicans and Old Catholics. What is the appropriate instrumentality for this – an instrumentality that does not overload ecclesial structures that are often already overstretched in terms of both human and financial resources? Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) which the Church of England has entered into in England have often foundered by an overload of bureaucracy, as I remember learning when I was Bishop of Basingstoke in the Diocese of Winchester, from a good priest who served in an LEP listing all the additional meetings he had to attend because it was an LEP: his own district church council, the team ministry council (Anglican), the local partner church’s meetings, and the meeting of ecumenical oversight set up by the respective partner churches. I was not surprised that he had almost come to the conclusion

²² HUELIN, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

that this plethora of meetings hampered rather than enabled the mission of the church.

III. What then of mission in Europe and our joint responsibility as churches in communion? The Diocese in Europe, brought into being in 1980, by the coming together of the Bishop of London's Jurisdiction in North and Central Europe and the Diocese of Gibraltar, has now had over thirty years of common life. It has grown, and grown in part because of the movement into Europe of UK citizens, not all Anglicans certainly, but English-speaking, many of whom wishing to worship look for English language congregations, and who are willing, as a recent Diocesan survey showed, to travel far further than in England to be part of a familiar church fellowship. Likewise, many non-Anglicans who are English speaking find their home within what is an Anglican structure. On a recent visit to one of our chaplaincies in the Netherlands I found that only the chaplain and myself as the visiting diocesan bishop were Anglican. This hospitality can be valuable, but can also create tensions. But besides those from the UK, who may form the majority of the congregations in Spain or southwest France, there are those from America, Australia and many parts of Africa. There are significant Nigerian congregations in Padova and Macciarata in Italy, and many other congregations in which Nigerians, Ghanaians or Kenyans form a significant part of the membership. Ordinands of the diocese come now from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Likewise, without being a proselytising church, we find significant numbers of those from local national backgrounds wishing to join with us, attracted perhaps by a tradition of Christianity which is pastoral, liturgical and sacramental.

We should also note the question of overlapping jurisdictions between Anglicans in Europe – the Convocation of American Churches of some ten chaplaincies, there for historical reasons in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Italy; the two very small Iberian churches whose origins are not dissimilar from those Roman Catholics who called themselves Old Catholics after Vatican I: the Lusitanian Church in Portugal, with congregations in Lisbon, Porto and Nova de Gaia, served by some nine clergy; and the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church (IERE) with again a relatively small number of clergy and congregations worshipping largely in Spanish. These were recognised as churches in 1980, the same year as the Diocese in Europe in its present form came into being, and for that reason the ecclesiological relationship between those churches and the Diocese in Europe was never fully set out, though in the past we have had a priest of the

Lusitanian Church serve as an archdeacon in the Diocese, and Bishop Fernando of that church was part of the triumvirate (with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London) who made my appointment as Bishop in Europe (which is not a Crown Appointment and does not go through the Prime Minister's Office, but is a unique episcopal appointment in the Church of England).

All in all, there are some three hundred congregations across Europe and beyond, served by some 150 clergy, stipendiary, part-stipendiary and non-stipendiary, according to the ability of local congregations to pay. Ecumenical relations are important and always have been to the Diocese. In many places in France and Spain we use Roman Catholic churches with the blessing of the local bishop. In other places in France we can worship in a church of the *Eglise Réformée*. In Finland the Porvoo Agreement has meant that two priests from the Church of Finland have been able to share in ministry to the Anglican congregation. In Finland also there is a community of refugees from the Southern Sudan who are ministered to by a priest from the Sudan and with support from the Finnish Church. In this context the local agreements we have with the Old Catholics for the seafarers ministry in Vlissingen, and the airport ministry at Schiphol Airport are valuable as expressions of joint ministry. So too there is the covenant agreement with the Old Catholic church in the Czech Republic, which was necessary both as a means of legal recognition from the secular authorities, and as an expression and outworking of being churches in communion.

As we seek to work out new steps in giving further substance to our being churches in communion, who are called to mission, I believe that we build best by local projects and agreements, and by thinking through the ecclesiological implications of both culture and diaspora. There is a tension between what I need to do as bishop of a dispersed diocese in seeking to counteract the centrifugal and congregationalist pressures that are always present, in order to build up a real sense of unity and identity, and the many different local ecumenical agreements which we honour. The Diocese in Europe is a growing diocese. The number of congregations has doubled since its inception. It is a Diocese of the Church of England and serves to remind a somewhat parochial Church of England of a wider European dimension, not least in the context of ecumenical relations.

When I became Bishop in Europe in 2001 I knew about the Old Catholic churches because I was a church historian. I had never met an Old Catholic, except I think for a brief encounter with one or two Old Catholic

bishops at episcopal consecrations. If that is the case for someone such as myself with a long commitment to ecumenism, and with a strong sense of the history of the church, it is inevitably going to be even more so with almost all of my colleagues as bishops and clergy, let alone lay people. That is part of the reality with which we have to live, and ten years on from my becoming Bishop in Europe I can truly say that it is good to have had these years of encounter with Old Catholics, and that I believe we can look for still more opportunities in which we can work together in mission in a Europe that is increasingly secular, though secular in different ways in different countries. I also believe that in any projects we seek to do together we need to be aware of the need to carry congregations with us – bishops cannot simply deliver by the signing of agreements – and we need to be aware of the history that has brought us to this point, which is why I have started where I did, so that we can be reminded of the history that has shaped our relationships as well as the challenges to us as to how that history is taken forward.

The Right Revd Dr Geoffrey Rowell (born 1943 in Alton/Hants GB) was Fellow, Chaplain and Tutor of Keble College, Oxford, 1972–94, and Suffragan Bishop of Basingstoke, Diocese of Winchester, 1994–2001. He became Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe in 2001. Dr Rowell is the author or editor of several books and has served on numerous Anglican bodies, including the Church of England's Doctrine and Liturgical Commissions, and the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations, of which he was the Vice-Chair. He is an editor of the International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church.

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Einführung in die Anglikanisch – Altkatholische Theologenkonferenz von 2011 stellt – vor dem Hintergrund einer impliziten Ekklesiologie – einige geschichtliche Überlegungen zur Entstehung der Bonner Vereinbarung von 1931 und der zur Kirche von England gehörigen «Diocese in Europe» an; diese ist heute eine Partnerin der Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union in Europa.