

LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME ?

What do you do when the ground slips under your feet and your life's work crumbles away before your eyes? The appointment of a lady bishop back in 1993 confronted the high church movement in the Church of Norway with just this predicament. The sacramental structure of the Church was irreparably gone! In this situation one must look in two directions and ask: First, can I bear the costs of breaking up? Particularly for clergy with families, irresponsible action was and is ill advised. The next question is: Where to go?

In the second part of the 1990s these issues posed unpleasant challenges to laity and clergy in the Norwegian Church Union. In the end some stayed in the Church of Norway, while others went to Rome and yet others formed the Nordic Catholic Church. Ten years later I am the Bishop of the Nordic Catholic Church and I would like to present this alternative to you in case the game is up also in the Church of England after the meetings of the General Synod in 2012.

If looking for a new ecclesial home, most of us abhor the idea of creating a new church. Moreover, moving to a new place becomes easier if one can bring along the old furniture. These two conditions were responsibly met in our negotiations with the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC). In our initial talks in 1999, we as former members of the Church of Norway were allowed to bring with us «our Lutheran heritage to the extent that it has embraced and transmitted the faith of the Undivided Church». Having thus secured some basic elements of our patrimony, we committed ourselves to the doctrines of the seven Ecumenical Councils and other essential aspects of the Undivided Church. In short, we metaphorically took our furniture with us into a new home built on Catholic foundations. Looking back, this arrangement has served us and the PNCC well. Ecumenically important is that the validity of our ministry and sacraments is recognised by the Roman Catholic Church.

However, at the turn of the millenium the development within the Union of Utrecht took a sad twist. A new generation of Old Catholic bishops – many of them converts from the Roman Catholic Church – introduced a modernising agenda embracing the ordination and consecration of women to Holy Orders and solemnising of same-sex relationships. As the PNCC opposed these developments, she was expelled from the Union of Utrecht in 2003. Thus left alone as the only Old Catholic Church still to hold the Declaration of Utrecht as a normative document of faith, the PNCC began to prepare an alternative ecclesial structure.

In 2008 the PNCC Bishops unanimously signed the doctrinal basis for the so-called Union of Scranton. As a standard for future agreements with church bodies who wish to unite with the PNCC, this document restates the principles of the Declaration of Utrecht,

adding a rejection of women clergy and the blessing of same-sex unions. The document designates the new union as based upon a so-called eucharistic ecclesiology. Each member church is understood as a communion of people gathered around a bishop in apostolic succession as its center of unity. Doctrinally bound to the faith of the Undivided Church of the first millennium, each local church is seen as a complete church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place.

On this basis, there can be unity in diversity. Communion among the member churches does not require from each church in the union the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion or liturgical practice characteristic of the PNCC, but it implies that each church believes the other churches to hold the essentials of the Catholic faith.

The Nordic Catholic Church was the first to join in the Union of Scranton. Presently we have five parishes in Norway and a developing community in Stockholm, Sweden. Moreover, work is being initiated in Germany and elsewhere. Our activities outside Scandinavia take place in cooperation with the PNCC within the framework of the Union of Scranton.

Hopefully, my intention in presenting our work to readers of *New Directions* is plain to see. If Anglo-Catholics are not given a proper place in the Church of England, we invite you to consider the Union of Scranton as a way out of your predicament. It is a waste of time to lament things that have been irretrievably lost. It may take some hard effort to build a new home, but good constructive work keeps one happy. Moreover, the Christian promise gives us hope and the strength to live with imperfection.