

The ACOC and the Old Catholic Movement

The Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church (ACOC) is part of the autocephalous (self-ruling) Old Catholic Church movement, which has its origins in the Catholic Church of The Netherlands, founded by St. Willibrord in the Seventh Century. Through the centuries the Church in the Netherlands enjoyed relative autonomy from Rome. The Cathedral Chapter in Utrecht had formally been granted authority to elect its own bishops in 1145 A.D., with freedom to conduct its own affairs confirmed in 1215 and again in 1520. In 1723, however, a definitive break with Rome took place over the imposition of a bishop from Rome as well as challenges to freedom of inquiry and conscience, highly valued by the Dutch Church.

The spread of the Old Catholic churches internationally came out of the reform movement stemming from the debated issues of the Vatican Council I of 1869-70. A number of European delegations had left the council in disagreement over the impending votes on centralizing authority in Rome, and in particular promulgating the doctrine of papal infallibility, being promoted by Pope Pius IX. A series of meetings were held during the next three years under the leadership of Dr. Ignatz von Dollinger, Germany's foremost Roman Catholic theologian, resulting in the formation of a group of autonomous Catholic churches with Apostolic Succession who would relate with one another in collegial cooperation.

The bishops elected by the newly forming churches received episcopal consecration from the Church of the Netherlands, based in Utrecht, which had now been a fully autonomous Catholic church for some 150 years. The new jurisdictions came to be known as "Old Catholic" in reference to their insistence upon return to the basic tenets of Apostolic Christianity including collegial style of relationships, as defined by the seven Ecumenical Councils of the undivided eastern and western Christian churches. The beliefs of the Old Catholic churches were spelled out in a series of Statements beginning in 1874.

The Old Catholic independent church movement came to the United States as early as the 1880s through the work of missionaries from both England and Europe, as well as from autonomous eastern churches. Bishop DeLandes Berghes, an Austrian nobleman ordained in the Old Catholic Church of Austria and then consecrated a bishop by the head of the Old Catholic Church of England, Bishop Arnold Harris Mathew, was sent to North America in 1914. He actively built the church on this continent and engaged in ecumenical ministry, serving for instance as the co-consecrator of the first Episcopal bishop of Cuba. In 1916 he consecrated two other bishops to expand the ministries, William Francis Brothers and Carmel Henry Carfora, from whom the ACOC derives its lines of Apostolic Succession. Archbishop Carfora energetically expanded the movement in North America until his death in 1958.

The sister churches of today in North America have diverse liturgical and ministerial styles. The leadership and representatives of the churches of the European (Utrecht) Union meet on a regular basis in collegial dialogues to work on pastoral and theological

issues of common concern. The ACOC maintains friendly communications with the Union and works closely with other churches with whom the Union is in intercommunion, especially the Episcopal (ECUSA) and Evangelical Lutheran churches. The autonomous North American churches of Old Catholic heritage relate to one another by such means as conferences of churches, concordats of intercommunion and cooperative outreach in ministry.

For more information, please see the history page of the Apostolic Catholic Orthodox Church @ www.apostoliccatholicorthodox.wordpress.com