

THE DECLARATION OF UTRECHT

September 24, 1889

In the name of the Most Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

John Heykamp, Archbishop of Utrecht.
Caspar John Rinkel, Bishop of Haarlem,
Cornelius Diependaal, Bishop of Deventer,
Joseph Hubert Reinkens, Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Germany,
Edward Herzog, Bishop of the Christian-Catholic Church of Switzerland,

assembled in the arch-episcopal residence at Utrecht on the twenty-fourth day of September, 1889, after invocation of the Holy Spirit, address the following Declaration to the Catholic Church.

Being assembled for a conference in response to an invitation from the undersigned Archbishop of Utrecht, we have resolved henceforth to meet from time to time for consultations on subjects of common interest, in conjunction with our assistants, councilors, and theologians.

We deem it appropriate at this our first meeting to summarize in a common declaration the ecclesiastical principles on which we have hitherto exercised and will continue to exercise our episcopal ministry, and which we have repeatedly had occasion to state in individual declarations.

(1) We adhere to the principle of the ancient Church laid down by St Vincent of Lérins in these terms: *'Id tenemus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est; hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum'* [Let us hold fast to what has been believed everywhere, always and by all; for this is truly and properly Catholic]. Therefore we abide by the faith of the ancient Church as it is formulated in the ecumenical symbols and in the universally accepted dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical synods held in the undivided Church of the first millennium.¹¹

(2) We therefore reject as contradicting the faith of the ancient Church and destroying her constitution, the Vatican decrees, promulgated July 18, 1870, concerning the infallibility and the universal episcopate or ecclesiastical plenitude of power of the Roman Pope. This, however, does not prevent us from acknowledging the historic primacy which several ecumenical councils and the Fathers of the ancient Church with the assent of the whole Church have attributed to the Bishop of Rome by recognizing him as the *primus inter pares* [first among equals].

(3) We also reject the dogma of the Immaculate Conception promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1854 as being without foundation in Holy Scriptures and the tradition of the first centuries.

(4) As for the other dogmatic decrees issued by the Bishops of Rome in the last centuries, the bulls *Unigenitus* and *Auctorem fidei*, the Syllabus of 1864 etc., we reject them on all such points as are in contradiction with the doctrine of the ancient Church, and do not recognize them as binding. Moreover we renew all those protests which the ancient Catholic Church of Holland has made against Rome in the past.

(5) We refuse to accept the decisions of the Council of Trent in matters of discipline, and we accept its dogmatic decisions only insofar as they agree with the teaching of the ancient Church.

(6) Considering that the Holy Eucharist has always been the true focal point of worship in the Catholic Church, we consider it our duty to declare that we maintain in all faithfulness and without deviation the ancient Catholic doctrine concerning the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, by believing that we receive the Body and the Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ Himself under the species of bread and wine.

The Eucharistic celebration in the Church is neither a continual repetition nor a renewal of the expiatory sacrifice which Christ offered once and for all on the Cross; the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, however, consists in its being the perpetual commemoration of that sacrifice and a real representation, being enacted on earth, of the one offering which Christ according to Heb. 9:11-12 continuously makes in heaven for the salvation of redeemed humanity, by appearing now for us in the presence of God (Heb. 9:24).

This being the character of the Eucharist in relation to Christ's sacrifice, it is at the same time a sacrificial meal, by means of which the faithful, in receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord, have communion with one another (1 Cor. 10:17).

(7) We hope that the theologians, while maintaining the faith of the undivided Church, will succeed in their efforts to establish an agreement on the differences that have arisen since the divisions of the Church. We urge the priests under our jurisdiction in the first place to stress, both by preaching and by religious instruction, the essential Christian truths professed in common by all the divided confessions, carefully to avoid, in discussing still existing differences, any violation of truth or charity, and, in word and deed, to set an example to the members of our parishes of how to act towards people of a different belief in a way that is in accordance with the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is the Savior of us all.

(8) We believe that it is in faithfully maintaining the teaching of Jesus Christ, while rejecting all the errors that have been added to it through human sin, as well as rejecting all the abuses in ecclesiastical matters and hierarchical tendencies, that we shall best counteract unbelief and that religious indifference which is the worst evil of our day.

Given at Utrecht, the 24th September 1889.

Note. – This is a fresh translation made from the German original (cf. IKZ 84, 1994, p. 40-42). The first English translation of the Declaration of Utrecht was published in The Foreign Church Chronicle and Review 13 (1889) pp. 225-227. The most widely circulated translation is to be found in C.B. Moss, The Old Catholic Movement, London, 21964, 281f. Moss claims his somewhat paraphrasing translation to have been accepted by the Old Catholic bishops as correct. It was already published in the Report of the Lambeth Conference of 1930, p. 142 (with minor orthographical and other variations). It should be noted that his quasi-official English version reproduces an abbreviated text without the introductory section, as it was in use in Old Catholic circles around 1930.