

The Declaration of Scranton

Official Commentary

Preface

As can be seen in its content, the Declaration of Scranton of 2008 is modeled heavily on the 1889 Declaration of Utrecht of the Old Catholic Churches. This is true not only in its content, but also in the reason for its coming to fruition.

The Declaration of Utrecht was written as a statement of faith for the Old Catholic Churches. The Churches that were involved in its writing were the Old Catholic Churches of Holland, Germany and Switzerland. This declaration was later accepted by the Old Catholic Church of Austria, which was also in existence at the time.¹ The Declaration of Utrecht served as a model of unity for these Churches and from it the Union of Utrecht was born. From that time forward the Declaration of Utrecht served as a standard for those churches that sought consecration of bishops and acceptance into the Union of Utrecht.

Before his consecration in 1907 Bishop Francis Hodur was required to assent to the tenets of the Declaration of Utrecht and was required to sign it. This Declaration remains as one of the normative documents of faith for Polish National Catholics.²

Regrettably, many of the Old Catholic Churches have begun to look upon the Declaration of Utrecht as merely a historical artifact and not as a basis of faith. This view has led these churches to deviate from the faith of the Undivided Church that was expounded in the Declaration of Utrecht. This deviation became irreconcilable when these Churches attempted to ordain women to Holy Orders and solemnize same-sex unions.³

Because of this development within the Union of Utrecht, the Polish National Catholic Church is separated from the errant Churches of that Union since 2003. As it would seem, the Polish National Catholic Church is the only remaining Church that still holds the Declaration of Utrecht as a true document of faith for Old Catholics.

Subsequent to this separation from the Union of Utrecht, the Polish National Catholic Church has been approached by other religious bodies that desire to become Catholic Churches in the fullest sense. They express a desire to hold the traditional Catholic beliefs and practices of the Ancient Church (Church of the first millennium); this includes the Polish National Catholic understanding of the papal office.

The Polish National Catholic Church found herself in a similar position as the Church of Utrecht did in 1889. That Old Catholic Church of Utrecht had existed since 1724 and had remained constant in her profession of the traditional Catholic faith.⁴ When approached by other religious bodies that had the same understanding of the Catholic faith and a desire to unite with Utrecht while still maintaining their autonomy, a document was needed to articulate such a relationship among them. Hence, the Declaration of Utrecht was written.

Similarly, the Polish National Catholic Church, in existence since 1897, has been steadfast in upholding the traditional Catholic faith. Other religious bodies have been approaching the Polish National Catholic Church with a desire to share in this understanding of the faith and to have an autonomous Catholic Church of their own. The Polish National Catholic Church found it necessary to expand the Declaration of Utrecht, clarifying points of Catholic understanding that were not addressed in the original document, especially those dealing with the issues that brought about the fracture in the Union of Utrecht. It is for this reason that the Declaration of Scranton was written. It is held as a normative document of faith of the Polish National Catholic Church and is the standard for future agreements with those who wish to unite with us in the Union of Scranton.

Commentary on the Declaration of Scranton

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The first paragraph is taken directly from the Declaration of Utrecht. The Polish National Catholic Church continues to strongly hold to this foundational understanding of what is true and proper Catholic belief.⁵ This paragraph lays down the principle upon which the faith of the Church is understood. The Polish National Catholic Church continues to profess the faith of the Early Church, upholding the formulated Creeds and the accepted doctrinal teachings of the Ecumenical Councils of the Undivided Church as Magisterial foundations of our faith.

The second paragraph is taken directly from the Declaration of Utrecht as a statement of the Polish National Catholic Church's understanding of the role and office of the Bishop of Rome. The Polish National Catholic Church has held this understanding even before the signing of the Declaration of Utrecht by Bishop Hodur in 1907. The First Synod of 1904 speaks to this when the Polish National Catholic Church officially rejected the dogma of infallibility and universal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome.⁶

The third paragraph is taken directly from the Declaration of Utrecht. The Immaculate Conception as a dogma is rejected because of the belief of the Polish National Catholic Church that the Bishop of Rome cannot infallibly declare articles of faith for the whole Church, since as stated above the Polish National Catholic Church rejects the infallibility and universal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome. However, the teaching of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a doctrine that has been held throughout the history of the Church and, likewise found in Polish National Catholic teaching.

The fourth paragraph in the Declaration of Scranton is a response to the 1950 Roman Catholic dogmatization of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary – that is, at the end of her earthly life Mary was taken body and soul into heaven. The teaching of the Assumption\Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a doctrine that has been held throughout the history of the Church and, likewise, found in Polish National Catholic teaching.⁷ The dogmatization of this teaching is the point at issue. The Polish National Catholic Church does not recognize the authority of the Bishop of Rome to make such a universal declaration.⁸

These statements in no way affect the traditional Catholic devotion that is given to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Polish National Catholic Church. She is the “Theotokos,” the true Mother of God, through whom our Savior Jesus Christ was born into the world.⁹ She has strong intercessory power and we seek her prayers and intercession on behalf of ourselves, the Church and the world.

The fifth paragraph addresses the issues that have caused much dissention and division throughout the Christian world and, in fact, brought about the fracture in the Union of Utrecht.¹⁰ As stated in paragraph one of the Declaration of Scranton, the Polish National Catholic Church holds firm to the understanding and decisions of the Undivided Church in regard to these issues. The Polish National Catholic Church rejects the ordination of women to the three-fold office of diaconate, presbyterate and episcopate in concord with the practice of the Undivided Church, the teaching on Apostolic Succession¹¹ and Ministry, and the living Tradition of the Church.¹² The Polish National Catholic Church also rejects the blessing of same-sex unions.¹³ These innovations are contrary to Holy Scripture and not in conformity with the teaching and praxis of the Ancient Church.

The sixth paragraph is taken directly from the Declaration of Utrecht and is retained because the Polish National Catholic Church has always affirmed, maintained and taught the traditional Catholic belief in the Eucharist. In the Holy Eucharist the Risen Christ is really and substantially present. When we receive Holy Communion, we receive our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Himself. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the central act of worship for the Church during which we are united with Christ and each other.¹⁴

The seventh and eighth paragraphs are similar to those within the Declaration of Utrecht. They are included because the Polish National Catholic Church desires to continue to pursue ecumenical

endeavors, seeking the unity of the Church as prayed for by our Lord Jesus Christ:¹⁵ “That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” *John 17:21 NRSV* While being a guardian of the deposit of faith that has been entrusted to us as Catholics, the Polish National Catholic Church continues to reach out to others in the spirit of love and understanding. The fact of division within the Church is not consistent with what was intended by our Lord, thus the Polish National Catholic Church encourages theologians and priests to strive for unity, remembering the words of St. Paul: “now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.” *1 Corinthians 1:10 NRSV*

The ninth paragraph points to a goal not yet attained. Humbly seeking God’s grace, the Polish National Catholic Church stands in the conviction that unbelief and indifference can be overcome by maintaining and professing the precious faith that has been handed down to us. With truth, work and struggle we will succeed.¹⁶ In so doing we hope to fulfill the Great Commission given to us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.” *Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV*

¹ CB Moss – “The Old Catholic Movement” SPCK, London, 1964, pages 279-280.

² Since its organization the Polish National Catholic Church has always held the faith of the Undivided Church. With its entry into the Union of Utrecht the PNCC understands the Declaration of Utrecht to be in conformity with the Early Church and therefore its forms part of PNCC ecclesiology. cf. Requirements for Communion with the PNCC, May 2009.

³ Several Churches of the Union of Utrecht attempted to ordain women to Holy Orders in the 1990’s and later began to solemnize same-sex unions and on November 20, 2003, during a meeting of the International Bishops Conference in Prague, the PNCC was removed from this union because of their refusal to endorse and accept these deviations from Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Church which is foundational to the Declaration of Utrecht.

⁴ The Church of Utrecht broke with the Roman Catholic Church over the issue of the authority of the Cathedral Chapter apart from Vatican influence to elect their own bishop. The Cathedral Chapter did eventually elect its own bishop, Cornelius van Steenoven, who was consecrated by Bishop Varlet. cf. CB Moss “The Old Catholic Movement” – chapter 7 – The Breach with Rome.

⁵ St. Vincent of Lerins – A Commonitory For The Antiquity Of The Catholic Faith Against The Profane Novelties Of All Heresies, chapter 2 paragraph 6.

⁶ Resolution, 1st PNCC Synod (1904): “Regarding other Christian communities, we declare that we do not condemn any of them, indeed we sympathize with each, insofar as it has as its purpose the ennoblement and sanctification of the person and to carry the Gospel and the peace of Jesus to humankind, but we cannot agree to the pretensions of whatsoever confession that only it is the steward of God’s graces and that only its teachers are true sowers of God’s seeds, for from what we see from the history of the Christian Church, Popes erred, what one regarded as truth another cast aside, Councils, that is gatherings of teachers and the whole Christian world, erred, the most learned erred and they mutually accused each other of mistakes, and the human being, the individual and the collective, that is, humanity, will err so long as he will live, since the human will possess the infallible complete truth only then when he unites with the source of truth, God. For this reason therefore we regard the relationship of the Pope and his Church to Jesus Christ, so far as we know it from the Holy Scriptures, as unfounded, based on falsity and bad will, and the dogma of Roman infallibility as blasphemy against God.” The Polish National Catholic Church: Minutes of the First Eleven General Synods 1904-1963, East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002, page 27.

⁷ “The Church does not recognize the recent dogmas of an immaculate conception and bodily assumption of the Mother of God. But it celebrates the entry of the Mother of God into eternal life and solemnly observes the festival of her dormition.” *The Road to Unity: A collection of agreed statements of the joint Old Catholic – Orthodox Theological Commissions*, Scranton, PA, March 1990, page 185

⁸ The Polish National Catholic Church does not raise this teaching to the level of dogma. On November 4, 1950 the PNCC Bishops issued a statement “About The Dogma” in *God’s Field*, volume 26, number 44: “...It was not until the 19th Century that the Popes had reminded themselves that dogmas present remarkable opportunities to strengthen their power and their importance in the Christian world. ... This dogma is an artificial creation of theologians, writers and politicians from the papal camp. For 400 years nothing definite has been said in the Catholic world about the assumption of the Mother of Christ into heaven with her body and soul. There is no mention of this in the Holy Scriptures. This matter was never discussed at the General Church Councils not at any particular synod. None of the well known theologians or philosophers of the post Apostolic Age, such as: Tertulian, Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, in the west and in the east, Clement of Alexandria, Origin, and the Three Capadocians, that is, the two Gregories and Basil the Great, have written anything about it...” Signed by Prime Bishop Francis Hodur, Rt. Rev. John Jasinski, Rt. Rev. John Misiaszek and Rt. Rev. Joseph Lesniak.

⁹ “The Church believes that the divine and human natures are hypostatically united in Jesus Christ. It accordingly believes also that the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth not to a human being merely but to the God-man Jesus Christ and that she is, therefore, truly Mother of God as the 3rd Ecumenical Council defined and the 5th Ecumenical Council confirmed. According to St. John of Damascus, the name “Mother of God” (theotokos) “embraces the whole mystery of the divine plan of salvation.” *The Road to Unity: A collection of agreed statements of the joint Old Catholic – Orthodox Theological Commissions*, Scranton, PA, March 1990, page 183.

Third Ecumenical Council – Ephesus A.D. 431 - The XII Anathematisms of St. Cyril against Nestorius: “If anyone will not confess that the Emmanuel is very God, and that therefore the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God (theotokos) inasmuch as in the flesh she bore the Word of God made flesh [as it is written, “The Word was made flesh”]: let him be anathema.”

Fifth Ecumenical Council – II Constantinople A.D. 553 – The Capitula of the Council: VI “If anyone shall not call in a true acception, but only in a false acception, the holy, glorious, and ever-virgin Mary, the Mother of God, or shall call her so only in a relative sense, believing that she bare only a simple man and that God the Word was not incarnate of her, but that the incarnation of God the Word resulted only from the fact that he united himself to the man who was born [of her]; if he shall calumniate the Holy Synod of Chalcedon as though it had asserted the Virgin to be Mother of God according to the impious sense of Theodore; or if anyone shall call her the mother of a man or the Mother of Christ, as if Christ were not God, and shall not confess that she is exactly and truly the Mother of God, because that God the Word who before all ages was begotten of the Father was in these last days made flesh and born of her, and if anyone shall not confess that in this sense the holy Synod of Chalcedon acknowledged her to be the Mother of God: let him be anathema.”

¹⁰ 2006 *The Constitution and Laws of the PNCC*: “As of November 20, 2003 the Polish National Catholic Church of America and Canada is no longer in Communion with or affiliated with the Churches of the Union of Utrecht, except for the Polish Catholic Church in Poland. Therefore, the Polish National Catholic Church does not endorse any actions or decisions of the International Bishops Conference of the Churches of the Union of Utrecht. Nonetheless, the Polish National Catholic Church still holds the Declaration of Utrecht as a normative document of faith.” Signed by Most Rev. Robert Nemkovich, Rt. Rev. Thomas Gnat, Rt. Rev. Thaddeus Peplowski and Rt. Rev. Jan Dawidziuk - page 5

¹¹ “The apostles and, therefore, their legitimate successors are the persons to whom Christ entrusted the duty of forming in His name, among all nations and for all ages, the Holy Catholic Church. The Polish National Catholic Church was organized within this historic continuity, descended from the Holy Catholic Church that our Lord Jesus Christ established after His Resurrection in Jerusalem. The Polish National Catholic Church mirrors the same organizational principles that Christ gave to the apostles. It possesses and safeguards the same faith that He

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deposited with them; it believes in the doctrine, governance and worship of the primitive Apostolic Church.”
Apostolic Succession In The Polish National Catholic Church, PNCC Church Doctrine Commission, 2007.

¹² 2006 The Constitution and Laws of the PNCC : Termination of Intercommunion “The XV General Synod of the Polish National Catholic Church by majority vote 312 to 106 ratified the position of its Prime Bishop and adopted a resolution stating that the Polish National Catholic Church regretfully acknowledges and confirms the fact that by their unilateral action, the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America and the Anglican Church of Canada have effectively terminated sacramental intercommunion with the Polish National Catholic Church.” – page 64.

¹³ “Given the clear teachings of Scripture and Tradition, the Church cannot in any way approve of or condone homosexual conduct. Some, perhaps, may object that such a stance, in this day and age, is not “pastoral,” for it presumes to make a judgment that a homosexual “lifestyle” is wrong because it is inconsistent with Christian sexual ethics and morality. However, a genuinely pastoral approach to this moral disorder – as indeed to any other ethical problem, such as adultery or fornication among heterosexual persons – requires that the Church uphold the truth. The Church would fail in its duty if it either explicitly or implicitly agreed to call something “good” that is inherently evil. For this reason, the CDC [Church Doctrine Commission] categorically rejects and deplores the ecclesiastical “blessing” of homosexual “unions” or “partnerships.” Churches and ecclesial communities that have adopted this practice not only act in a way that is inconsistent with Christian morality but also seriously complicate efforts to promote Christian unity, for their action constitutes a grave obstacle to the establishment of full communion.” 21st PNCC Synod statement “Called to Faithfulness: The Church and Homosexual Conduct”, 2002, page 4.

¹⁴ “In bread and wine, which are consecrated and changed in the Eucharist, the Lord himself is really and truly present in a supernatural way and imparts himself to the faithful. Bread and wine are, after the consecration, the Body and Blood of Christ and not mere symbols of his body and blood. “The bread and wine are not images of the Body and Blood of the Lord – certainly not! – but the deified Body of the Lord himself; the Lord himself said: ‘This is’ not the image of my body but ‘my body’ and not the image of my blood, but ‘my blood’ (John of Damascus). According to the proclamation of the 7th Ecumenical Synod “neither the Lord nor the Apostles and Father have called the bloodless sacrifice offered by the priest an image, but the Body and Blood themselves ... before the consecration they were called images, after the consecration they are called, in an actual sense, Body and Blood of Christ; this is what they are and believed to be.” The Road to Unity: A collection of agreed statements of the joint Old Catholic – Orthodox Theological Commissions, Scranton, PA, March 1990, page 215 paragraph 3

⁶th General Synod of the PNCC (1931) “Also accepted unanimously on a motion by the same clergyman [Father Rudolf Zabek] was the teaching presented in the paper by Bishop Franciszek Hodur on the sacrament of the altar, or the Eucharist. The Bishop considered three principal theories about the presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the altar, namely, the teaching of the physical, real presence, of the real, spiritual or sacramental presence, and of the treating of Holy Communion as a venerable memorial of the Last Supper, consumed by Jesus Christ with his disciples in the day before the Passion. The National Church teaches that Jesus Christ is present in the Eucharist in actuality, spiritually, in a sacramental manner.” The Polish National Catholic Church: Minutes of the First Eleven General Synods 1904-1963, East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002, page 179.

¹⁵ Joint Declaration on Unity – PNCC-RC Dialogue, May 2006: “we the members of the Polish National Catholic-Roman Catholic dialogue wish to reaffirm our resolve to overcome what still divides us, and to state clearly that our goal is full communion between our churches. We wish to emphasize that “full communion” does not imply absorption or uniformity, but a unity that fully recognizes differing traditions that are consistent with our common apostolic faith.”

¹⁶ This is the motto of the PNCC that was adopted in 1921 at the 4th PNCC General Synod.