

# **The Declaration of Utrecht**

## **September 24, 1889**

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The ECC warmly embraces the Declaration of Utrecht (below) as one of our founding documents.

In doing so we express our solidarity with the two streams of non-Roman Catholicism which came together in 1889 to form the Union of Utrecht. The first is the independent Dutch Catholic Church, which was formed in the early eighteenth century. The Dutch Catholic Church asserted its ancient and historic rights against encroachment from the Roman papacy, rights which included the election of bishops by the local church. For over two centuries the Dutch Catholic Church provided an indigenous expression of Catholicism for the Dutch people. This strand of non-Roman Catholicism later merged with a second strand. This second expression was a result of Catholics in Austria, Switzerland, Germany, and elsewhere who could not, in good conscience, accept some of the decisions of the First Vatican Council in 1870, most notably the definitions of papal infallibility and papal primacy of jurisdiction. The Union of Utrecht represents the consolidation of these two movements into what is commonly called in English the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. The Old Catholic Union of Utrecht has been a vibrant witness to broadening understandings of what it means to be part of the larger church Catholic. The Union of Utrecht has been in communion with the Anglican Churches since 1931, including mutual consecration of bishops and interchangeability of ministries.

While not a member of the Union of Utrecht, the ECC commits itself to the Declaration of Utrecht and to seeking pastoral oversight from the Archbishop of Utrecht. The ECC sees itself in continuity with these two strands of Old Catholicism. Like the Dutch Catholic Church, the ECC considers itself to be an expression of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church that is a representation of the American people, just as the Dutch Catholic Church considers itself to be an expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of the Dutch people. Like the Union of Utrecht, the ECC also rejects making essentials out of what we consider innovations to what it means to be Catholic.

We particularly endorse the following elements of the Declaration of Utrecht and the Old Catholic movement:

1. We in the ECC likewise consider ourselves to be an expression of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in continuity with the Scriptures and the ancient ecumenical councils of the undivided church.

2. While not denying a special pastoral ministry of the Bishop of Rome, we do not consider communion with the Bishop of Rome to define what it means to be Catholic.

3. While affirming the centrality of the Virgin Mary in the Incarnation, as a special mediatory between humanity and Christ, and worthily the object of special veneration, we nonetheless do not require belief in the doctrines of the Assumption and Immaculate Conception as binding on all the faithful. Belief in the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been common in the Catholic Church since ancient times. However, this pious belief was never elevated to the level of dogma by any recognized ecumenical council. In 1952, Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary to be a dogma of the Church. Old Catholics do not recognize the pope's authority to declare dogma apart from a truly ecumenical council of the entire Catholic Church. In 1854, Pope Pius IX declared the belief of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, the belief that when the Virgin Mary was conceived in her mother's womb she was miraculously spared the taint of Original Sin, to be a dogma of the Church. Old Catholics also reject this action of Pius IX on the same grounds as the rejection of Pius XII's declaration concerning the Assumption.

We pledge to commit ourselves to the Declaration of Utrecht by:

1. Formal action of our governing synod;
2. Seeking ecumenical cooperation where possible with Anglicans;
3. Teaching the history and theology of the Old Catholic movement to our seminarians;
4. And by formally seeking pastoral oversight from the Archbishop of Utrecht.

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1. We adhere faithfully to the Rule of Faith laid down by St. Vincent of Lerins in these terms: *"Id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est; hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum."* [Let us hold to what has been believed everywhere, always, by all; for this is truly and properly catholic.] For this reason we preserve in professing the faith of the primitive Church, as formulated in the ecumenical symbols and specified precisely by the unanimously accepted decisions of the Ecumenical Councils held in the undivided Church of the first thousand years.

2. We therefore reject the decrees of the so-called Council of the Vatican, which were promulgated July 18th, 1870, concerning the infallibility and the universal Episcopate of the Bishop of Rome, decrees which are in contradiction with the faith of the ancient Church, and which destroy its ancient canonical constitution by attributing to the Pope the plentitude of ecclesiastical powers over all Dioceses and

over all the faithful. By denial of this primatial jurisdiction we do not wish to deny the historical primacy which several Ecumenical Councils and Fathers of the ancient 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 Pius IX in 1854 in defiance of the Holy Scriptures and in contradiction to the tradition of the centuries.

4. As for other Encyclicals published by the Bishops of Rome in recent times for example, the Bulls *Unigenitus* and *Auctorem fidei*, and the Syllabus of 1864, we reject them on all such points as are in contradiction with the doctrine of the primitive Church, and we do not recognize them as binding on the consciences of the faithful. We also renew the ancient protests of the Catholic Church of Holland against the errors of the Roman Curia, and against its attacks upon the rights of national Churches.

5. We refuse to accept the decrees of the Council of Trent in matters of discipline, and as for the dogmatic decisions of that Council we accept them only so far as they are in harmony with the teaching of the primitive Church.

6. Considering that the Holy Eucharist has always been the true central point of Catholic worship, we consider it our right to declare that we maintain with perfect fidelity the ancient Catholic doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, by believing that we receive the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ 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 Jesus offered once for all upon the Cross: but it is a sacrifice because it is the perpetual commemoration of the sacrifice offered upon the Cross, and it is the act by which we represent upon earth and appropriate to ourselves the one offering which Jesus Christ makes in Heaven, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews 9:11-12, for the salvation of redeemed humanity, by appearing for us in the presence of God (Heb. 9:24). The character of the Holy Eucharist being thus understood, it is, at the same time, a sacrificial feast, by means of which the faithful in receiving the Body and Blood of our Savior, enter into communion with one another (I Cor. 10:17).

7. We hope that Catholic theologians, in maintaining the faith of the undivided Church, will succeed in establishing an agreement upon questions which have been controverted ever since the divisions which arose between the Churches. We exhort the priests under our jurisdiction to teach, both by preaching and by the instruction of the young, especially the essential Christian truths professed by all the Christian confessions, to avoid, in discussing controverted doctrines, any violation of truth or charity, and in word and deed to set an example to the members.

8. By maintaining and professing faithfully the doctrine of Jesus Christ, by refusing to admit those errors which by the fault of men have crept into the Catholic Church,

by laying aside the abuses in ecclesiastical matters, together with the worldly tendencies of the hierarchy, we believe that we shall be able to combat efficaciously the great evils of our day, which are unbelief and indifference in matters of religion.