

The Polish National Catholic Church and the Declaration and Union of Scranton

by Very Rev. Robert M. Nemkovich Jr.

The Polish National Catholic Church promulgated the Declaration of Scranton in 2008 to preserve true and genuine Old Catholicism and allow for a Union of Churches that would be a beacon for and home to people of all nations who aspire to union with the pristine faith of the undivided Church. The Declaration of Scranton “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.”¹ The Polish National Catholic Church to this day holds the Declaration of Utrecht as a normative document of faith.

To understand the origins of the Declaration of Utrecht we must look back not only to the origin of the Old Catholic Movement as a response to the First Vatican Council but to the very see of Utrecht itself. “The bishopric of Utrecht, which until the sixteenth century had been the only bishopric in what is now Dutch territory, was founded by St. Willibrord, an English missionary bishop from Yorkshire.”² Willibrord was consecrated in Rome by Pope Sergius I in 696, given the pallium of an archbishop and given see of Utrecht by Pepin, the Mayor of the Palace of the Merovingian dynasty. Utrecht became under Willibrord the ecclesiastical capital of the Northern Netherlands. One of the privileges the Chapter of Utrecht had was the right to elect its own archbishop.³ Another important factor for the see of Utrecht was the neutrality of the civil government which was not under the Court and thus control of Rome.

In the late Sixteenth century the Jesuits first entered into the Netherlands and soon tension and disagreement followed with the national clergy which ultimately lead to the schism. “The Roman Catholics of Holland had their own diocesan organization; the chapters had the right to elect bishops and present them to the Pope for confirmation. They regarded the Pope as their lawful superior but held that he was bound to respect their canonical rights.”⁴ From their arrival in Holland the Jesuits did their utmost to stop bishoprics from being filled. “They held that the bishop who was needed for ordination and confirmation should be only a vicar-apostolic appointed by the Pope and removable at his direction; not a diocesan bishop with canonical

¹ Official Commentary of The Declaration of Scranton, 2010, page 1

² The Old Catholic Movement, C.B. Moss, 1948 – reprinted 2005, page 90

³ Moss, page 90

⁴ Moss, page 96

rights of his own. The chapters, on the other hand, and the majority of the clergy and people, while perfectly loyal to the pope, did not want to be directly controlled from Rome. They valued their ancient rights, and were determined to maintain them.”⁵

Against this backdrop “the accusation of Jansenism was brought against the Chapter of Utrecht much later, on the principle of ‘Give a dog a bad name and hang him.’ But from the first to the last, the real issue was the rights of the chapters and, behind it, the claim of the Papacy to unlimited obedience.”⁶ Jansenism was a religious movement predominately in France in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries that arose out of reconciling divine grace and human freedom. The Jansenists focused on original sin, human corruption and the absolute necessity of divine grace. In France, it soon became connected with the struggle against the papacy by proponents of Gallicanism. These advocated the restriction of papal power and opposition to monarchical authoritarianism of Louis XIV. Pope Clement XI issued a papal bull ‘Unigenitus’ condemning Jansenism on September 8, 1713. This began a doctrinal controversy that lasted much of the eighteenth century and merged with the French Church’s fight for autonomy (Gallicanism).

Over time this tension grew until ultimately there was a break from Rome in 1723. “A Vicar Apostolic, Peter Codde, consecrated as Bishop at Brussels, Belgium in 1689 ... He was elected Archbishop by the Chapter of Utrecht. During this episcopate he refused to sign the formulary of Pope Alexander VII and died without recantation in 1710. The Church at Utrecht joined with the French “Appelants” in their resistance to the Bull, “Unigenitus” (*The Only Begotten*), issued in 1713 by Pope Clement XI.

*The Church of Utrecht kept up a supply of priests by sending their candidates with dimissorials to French Appellant Catholic bishops for ordination to the Holy Priesthood.*⁷

The chapter of Utrecht having received permission of the government met on April 17, 1723 and after a Mass to the Holy Ghost, elected Cornelius Steenoven to be the Archbishop of Utrecht. Steenoven received his doctorate in Rome and was the Vicar General of Utrecht prior to his election. The chapter of Utrecht asked the pope to permit the consecration but no reply was received. After looking to France but with no bishops willing to consecrate, the Bishop of

⁵ Moss, page 97

⁶ Moss, page 97

⁷ Apostolic Succession in the Polish National Catholic Church, 2007

Babylon – Dominique Marie Varlet, agreed to consecrate Steenoven. This took place on October 15, 1724 in Amsterdam in the presence of the whole chapter. Cornelius Steenoven was now the seventh Archbishop of Utrecht and the first Archbishop in that territory since the reformation. “The deed was done: the Church of Utrecht, though as yet she did not know it, began her career as a church independent of the see of Rome.”⁸

The legitimacy and canonicity of this consecration was defended by Zeger van Espen, the famed canonist of Louvain University. Bishop Varlet consecrated four Archbishops of Utrecht. After Varlet’s death Bishop Meinhardt (the last consecrated by him) established the Bishopric of Haarlem in 1742 and the Bishopric of Deventer in 1752. Meinhardt’s successor was consecrated by the Bishop of Haarlem, who maintained the line of succession that continues to our day.”⁹

It was this church of Utrecht independent of Rome that 150 years later would lend support to Catholic faithful in Germany and Switzerland who desired to remain true to their Catholic roots and identity following the First Vatican Council and *Pastor Aeternus* (“*Eternal Shepherd*” - First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ which defines the Petrine primacy, supreme power of universal jurisdiction and infallibility of the Roman Pontiff). In Germany the response of theologians and professors was in great opposition to the new dogmas. They gathered like-minded individuals together in Munich for a congress in September of 1871. Their purpose was not schism but they wanted to find a way to address the spiritual needs of those who had been excommunicated for refusing to submit to the Vatican Council. Momentum grew and a second Old Catholic Congress was held in September of 1872 at Cologne and this time the Archbishop of Utrecht was present with four of his clergy and interested people from Switzerland and Austria. Also important to note is that Anglican Bishop Christopher Wordsworth of Lincoln was present along with 22 Anglican priests.¹⁰ “The Old Catholics, as we must now call them (that is, those who maintained the Roman Catholic religion as it was before the Vatican Council), were finding support in other countries also.”¹¹

On June 4, 1873 an election was held where Josef Hubert Reinkens was elected at St. Pantaleon’s Church in Cologne. There were 77 electors (21 priests and 56 laity). “Probably it was the first popular election of a bishop in Germany since the days of St. Boniface. The

⁸ Moss, Page 123

⁹ Apostolic Succession in the Polish National Catholic Church, 2007

¹⁰ Moss, page 238

¹¹ Moss, Page 233

assembly burst into tears of joy, and Schulte (*a professor/theologian*) calls the scene “a most inspiring moment, such as the Church has not seen since the apostolic times.”¹² The Archbishop of Utrecht agreed that Reinkens should be consecrated and this took place on August 11, 1873 by Bishop Herman Heykamp. There was now an Old Catholic Bishop in Germany.

Paralleling the movement in Germany there was also great concern over the new papal dogmas in Switzerland. This was headed again by theologians and professors who could not accept the new Vatican decrees. In 1872 a great meeting of protest was held against the Infallibility of the Pope and 7 points of a Church program were passed by those present. The seven points are:

- “1 *The establishment of local branches of the movement.*
- 2 *The local branches would protest against the Papacy.*
- 3 *The local branches would do all they could to make sure that priests who opposed Papal Infallibility were appointed to vacant parishes.*
- 4 *The central committee was to bring influence to have Old Catholic teachers appointed.*
- 5 *Necessary reforms in worship and discipline could only be introduced when a new constitution for the church was established.*
- 6 *The Central Committee would have the right to invite foreign bishops for ordinations and Confirmations.*
- 7 *The overall goal of the movement was reunion of all Christian Churches.*”¹³

As the movement grew in 1873 “the ‘committee of the Society of Independent Catholics’ started a paper called *Katholische Blatter* (Catholic Leaves). In 1878 it became *Der Katholik* and still continues under this name.”¹⁴

The first National Synod of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland met on June 14, 1875, it had 46 clergy and 115 lay members. This synod paved the way for the election of a bishop for their church. This became a reality in June of 1876 where a following Synod elected Eduard Herzog bishop. A similar process later played out in Austria as well.

“The result of the protest against the Vatican Council was that in three countries – Germany, Switzerland and Austria – new separate organizations had been formed, composed of

¹² Moss, page 241

¹³ Moss, page 246

¹⁴ Moss, page 249

individuals whom the Pope had excommunicated. Their hopes, first that a large section of the Roman Communion would join them, and then that they would be able to bring about immediate reunion with the Orthodox or Anglican churches were not fulfilled. The organization which had at first been expected to be temporary became permanent.”¹⁵

A further declaration from Rome again brought the Old Catholics together. In 1880 Pope Leo XIII declared that civil marriage was no marriage at all for Roman Catholics in an encyclical. The Archbishop of Utrecht at the time was Bishop Heykamp. He responded by proving from Scripture, the decrees of Council and from even teaching of past Popes that marriage is a natural right and may exist without the Christian sacrament which is namely the benediction of the Church. Archbishop Heykamp called a conference of Old Catholic bishops in September of 1889 which in turn led to the Declaration of Utrecht. The conference was composed of five Old Catholic Bishops: The Archbishop of Utrecht (Heykamp); the Bishop of Haarlem (Rinkel); the Bishop of Deventer (Diependaal) and Bishops Reinkens (Germany) and Herzog (Switzerland). They with theologians from the Dutch, Germany and Swiss Churches reached an agreement to unite their churches:

“1 The five Bishops’ agreed to establish a Bishop’ conference for mutual consultation. No Church was to have priority or jurisdiction over any other; all the bishops agreed that they would not consecrate any bishop without the consent of all the Old Catholic bishops, and without the acceptance of the Convention of Utrecht by the candidate.

2 An International Old Catholic Congress was to be held every two years.

*3 The five bishops issued a declaration of doctrinal principles by which all Old Catholic bishops and priests were bound. This document, known was the Declaration of Utrecht, is the doctrinal basis of Old Catholicism.”*¹⁶

In the Declaration of Utrecht “the Old Catholic churches now possessed a firm basis of principle and of unity: to be an Old Catholic is to accept the Declaration of Utrecht. It was the turning point in the history of the Old Catholic movement; it may yet prove to have been a turning point in the history of the reunion of Christendom.”¹⁷

The opening Statement of the Declaration of Utrecht is: We faithfully adhere to the Rule

¹⁵ Moss, page 271

¹⁶ Moss, Page 280

¹⁷ Moss, page 281

of Faith laid down by St. Vincent of Lerins in these terms: *“Id teneamus, ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est; hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum.”*¹ (We hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and of all people: for that is truly and properly Catholic.) For this reason we persevere 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.¹⁸

The Declaration of Utrecht was written to respond to the situation in which Old Catholic Bishops found themselves following the First Vatican Council and due to the history of the see and chapter of Utrecht an opportunity was given to create a model of unity of churches through their bishops in faith and praxis based on the pristine Church of the First Millennium.

Across the pond in America at this time various ethnic groups immigrated to America. Some sought political and/or religious freedoms and some sought a better life for themselves and their families. Those immigrants who were devout Roman Catholics sought representation of their ethnicity in the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in their new land. By 1900 there were approximately two million Polish immigrants in the United States. About one out of every ten Roman Catholics was of Polish birth or parentage and this number was significantly higher in major industrial cities in the Northeast. These Polish immigrants sought representation in the Roman Catholic hierarchy by asking for Polish bishops and more Polish priests. Their petitions were ignored by the hierarchy. The discontent among the Poles over this lack of representation and other issues led to the eventual rise of several independent religious movements in various parts of the country.

“Isolated by their language and culture, the Poles inhabited the poorest section of Scranton called Slocum Hollow or later, South Side. Feeling oppressed by both their working and living conditions, the Poles found solace in their local Polish parish, Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Their parish not only served as a place for worship and a center for religious life, but also as a place for social, cultural, economic and recreational activities. When their pastor, Father Richard Aust, began to demand additional offerings for enlarging the parish cemetery, the people became upset and began to rebel. They demanded that all such collections be handled not by the pastor, but by a committee chosen by a parish assembly. As discontent and tensions continued to build at the parish, Father Aust brought this situation to the attention of Bishop

¹⁸ Declaration of Utrecht & Declaration of Scranton.

William O'Hara, the Diocesan Bishop of the Roman Diocese of Scranton. Father Aust, in a sermon delivered on August 23, 1896, "threatened to excommunicate anyone who would resist or criticize his actions."¹⁹ In response to these threats a group of parishioners formed a temporary committee to approach Bishop O'Hara. They insisted that he compel Father Aust to organize a parish committee that would be elected by a general parish assembly. The bishop refused their demands."²⁰

The people later turned to a former assistant pastor of theirs Fr. Francis Hodur. Hodur was born in Poland in a poor family and as an exceptional student traveled to Krakow to study and later entered the seminary. He was very much moved by the plight of the Polish people and was involved with political activism which eventually led to his expulsion from the seminary. In 1893 he arrived in the United States. Priests from the Scranton area sent him to a seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania and later that year was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop O'Hara (Roman Catholic Bishop of Scranton).

In March of 1897 the people of a new organized St. Stanislaus parish after refusing to surrender the deed to the control of this bishop, turned to Fr. Hodur to lead them. Hodur agreed and had the first Mass for them on March 21, 1897. Father Hodur proposed a "Church Constitution" that was unanimously accepted and the first parish committee was elected in accordance to it. Soon after, Hodur established and published a weekly newspaper, the *Straż* or "The Guard." The first issue was published on Saturday, April 17, 1897. The purpose of the *Straż* was to be a true "Guard of our divine rights and the herald of a better future to come."²¹ Through the *Straż* Father Hodur challenged several Roman Catholic teachings, including papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction.

Like the Old Catholics in Europe, Hodur did not intend to break away from the Roman Catholic Church. He was hopeful that the demands of these immigrants would be granted within the framework of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, in January 1898 he traveled to Rome to present the National Church (*Kościół Narodowy*) Program, created by the St. Stanislaus parish committee and co-signed by the neighboring churches of Nanticoke, Wilkes-Barre, Plymouth, Duryea and Priceburg (*now Dickson City*). The program called for:

¹⁹ Wlodarski, page 23

²⁰ Abridged PNCC History, 2010, page 7

²¹ Wlodarski, p. 52

- (1) legal ownership of church property by the local parish;
- (2) parish governance by parish committees elected by parishioners;
- (3) appointment of pastorates of priests approved by the Parishioners;
- (4) appointment of Polish bishops by priests and parishioners, subject to confirmation by the Pope.

While in Rome, Father Hodur met first with Cardinal Ledochowski and then with Father Cormier. He was told that his efforts were fruitless and that he must submit to the authorities of the church or face exclusion. He returned to Scranton, met with his congregation and reported on his trip to Rome. Upon hearing the report of Father Hodur, the congregation unanimously voted to sever their ties with the Roman Church and to work diligently in building the “National Catholic Church.” Father Hodur received an official letter of excommunication, prepared by Bishop Hoban and dated September 29, 1898.

As the Polish National Catholic movement continued to grow and new parishes were organized, Father Hodur called the first synod of the Polish National Catholic Church on September 6, 1904 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The clergy and lay delegates, as well as representatives of various Polish organizations and societies that were supportive of this independent movement, were present and voted on all matters. Father Hodur organized this first synod to solidify and give direction to the Polish National Catholic movement. This synod, lasting only three days, gave an organizational framework (synodal structure) through which the Polish National Catholic Church would function and grow. The major decisions made at the First Synod were: breaking ties with the Vatican, electing Hodur as bishop, established funding for a future seminary, adopted a Church Constitution, named *Straż (The Guard)* the official organ (newspaper) of the Church and established the Great Council, composed of six clergy and six lay people plus Father Hodur, to govern the Church between synods (*This became the Supreme Council*).

Just as there was great excitement in Germany of the election of their bishop, it was the same in Scranton. Father Hodur’s election as bishop was a time of great excitement and joy. *The Scranton Times* newspaper article reported it this way: “I have never seen such enthusiasm. They were hugging and kissing one another, shouting and ringing the church bells, and with

shining faces – including crowds of people gathered in the streets outside – caught by a genuine feeling of joy, they all cheered with an indescribable enthusiasm reaching the utmost.”²²

Bishop Hodur sought out consecration from valid Catholic or Orthodox bishops that had unquestionable Apostolic Succession. Father Hodur approached the Old Catholic Churches in Europe for consecration. However, at that time the Old Catholic Church already had a bishop in the United States in the person of Bishop Kozlowski of Chicago. It was a standing practice of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht that there would be just one Old Catholic bishop for a country.

In 1907 Bishop Kozlowski died and thus a new Old Catholic bishop was needed for the United States and for this Polish Independent Movement. Father Hodur traveled to meet the Old Catholic Bishops in Europe and brought with him several letters and petitions for his consecration from several parishes under his jurisdiction. Father John Tichy from the Kozlowski movement in Chicago also approached the Old Catholics seeking consecration. “The matter of consecrations was discussed for a long time, each of the elects spoke of his work and his intentions for the future. When my [Hodur] turn came I presented the cause of the Polish people in America, its struggle for existence and the danger threatening it from all sides, and the one salvation, the creation of the Polish National [Catholic] Church free from all Roman dogmas.”²³

The Old Catholics decided that Father Hodur would be consecrated as the Old Catholic bishop for the United States. It is important to note that the election and consecration of a bishop is a two-step process, where first a valid election must take place illustrating the approval of the faithful and the clergy. The candidate for the consecration as a bishop must then be accepted by the current bishops. Their decision to consecrate him is a visible sign of their approval of him as a successor of the Apostles.

On September 29, 1907 Father Hodur was consecrated a bishop at St. Gertrude’s Cathedral in Utrecht, Holland by the Archbishop of Utrecht, Gerard Gul; Bishop of Haarlem, William Van Thiel; and the Bishop of Deventer, Michael Spit. The consecration of Bishop Francis Hodur was a moment of great joy and enthusiasm for the entire Polish National Catholic Movement. On October 17, 1907 Bishop Hodur was welcomed back to the United States by 28 priests and 46 lay

²² Wlodarski, 85

²³ Wiczerzak, Biographical Essays, page 273

people in New York City. Upon his return to the City of Scranton as Bishop, a great multitude of PNC faithful met Bishop Hodur at the train station and together they marched up Pittston Avenue to St. Stanislaus Cathedral. Bishop Hodur emphasized that “the consecration he received will never change his spirit of love toward the people which inspired him to work for his fellowman. He assured his congregation that he would continue along the same lines in the work which he chose ten years ago.”²⁴

The Polish National Catholic Church had now become the Old Catholic Church in the United States and a member of the Union of Utrecht. This was important for the PNCC to be a part of a union of Churches based the faith of the Undivided Church.

In 1911 a group of Polish independent parishes from the Buffalo NY area under the leadership of Bishop Kaminski, who died, joined with the Polish National Catholic Church under Hodur.

In 1931, in Europe, important developments that involved the PNCC and its membership in the International Bishops Conference of the Union of Utrecht took place. A historic intercommunion agreement, called “The Bonn Agreement,” was reached between the European Old Catholic Churches and the Anglican Church. This agreement allowed members of the Old Catholic Churches and the Anglican Church to receive the Holy Eucharist in each other’s churches. The Bonn Agreement is a significant ecumenical document that continues to serve as a model for discussions about sacramental sharing among different churches.

The Bonn Agreement includes the following main points:

1. Each Church recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other, and maintains its own.
2. Each Church agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the sacraments.
3. Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.

²⁴ Wlodarski, page 96

This agreement continues to be a basis for the unity of churches in the Polish National Catholic Church as evidence in the “Requirements for Communion with the Polish National Catholic Church.”²⁵

Bishop Hodur and the PNCC always had an ecumenical outlook to realize the prayer of Jesus “that they may be one” for the unity of His Church. After World War II ended, the PNCC continued to actively work to make connections with other churches. At that time our Church found it had much in common with the Episcopal Church in America. Both churches had similar governing structures and conducted their synods much the same way. Both churches held similar beliefs related to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This led to a formal agreement of intercommunion between the PNCC and the Episcopal Church in 1946. We are painfully aware that this agreement was suspended in 1976 by Prime Bishop Thaddeus Zielinski and terminated in 1978 by the PNCC General Synod when the Episcopal Church attempted to ordain women to Holy Orders.

Concerning the 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.”²⁶

As unfortunate as the termination of intercommunion was with the Episcopal Church and with the IBC, the PNCC was committed to continue her ecumenical efforts. Dialogues were established with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in the 1970s and 1980s. A dialogue is the meeting of representatives of two different Churches to discuss their various Church teachings and practices, so that they can determine what they have in common and where differences exist.

As these dialogues met, many areas of common faith and practice were found to exist. Common statements of faith and practice were produced by both dialogues: “The Road to Unity” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Agreed Statements) was published in 1987, this is an important document

²⁵ Requirements for Communion with the PNCC, 2010, page 1

²⁶ Constitution and Laws of the Polish National Catholic Church, 2006, page 64

of faith shared between the Orthodox, Polish National Catholic and Old Catholic Churches (*This dialogue concluded and the statements were presented prior to some Old Catholic Churches in Europe attempting to ordain women to the priesthood*). This Old Catholic/Polish National Catholic/Orthodox collaborative work continues to be an important doctrinal document for the Polish National Catholic Church. In the section “The Importance of the Union of Utrecht from the Orthodox Point of View” we see the following: *“The formation of the Union of Utrecht was and is a very important ecclesial event for whole of the Christian world. It was not only important for the identity and development of the Old Catholic church itself, but also initiated processes of ferment in the whole Christian world: a) in its opposition to the dogmatic decisions of Vatican I, b) in suggesting theological and ecclesiological criteria to find a solution to the post-Tridentine dialectic between the position of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, in its search for the authentic spirit of the tradition of the ancient, undivided Church., c) in applying the dogmatic and canonical principles of the ecclesial tradition of the era of the ecumenical councils to the formation and administration of the communion of Old Catholic churches.”*²⁷

The section later continues *“these basic characteristics of the Agreement are mostly concerned with organizational questions, but are of special importance since they show a clear and developed ecclesiology, which reflects the spirit of the canonical tradition of the ancient Church. Such characteristic points are: a) the proper self-determination of the sacramental and spiritual way of life of each local church, b) Synodical transcendence of local self-determination when important issues are at stake, c) Relativization of the unlimited autonomy of each local church by the responsibility of the whole communion of Old Catholic bishops, in order to guarantee the authenticity of the orders of new bishops.”*²⁸

The Dialogue with Rome also produced substantial agreement on many matters of faith, these were published in two books: “Journeying Together in Christ” (Report of the Polish National Catholic-Roman Catholic Dialogue) in 1990; and “Journeying Together in Christ-The Journey Continues” (Report of the Polish National Catholic-Roman Catholic Dialogue) in 2004. However the major issue inhibiting unity continues to be the exercise of authority of the Bishop of Rome.

²⁷ The Road to Unity, 1990, page 1.

²⁸ The Road to Unity, page 2

As a result of the PNC-RC Dialogue the Roman Catholic Church in 1996 permitted Polish National Catholics to receive the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing under Canon 844.3 of Roman Catholic Canon Law. By extending this canon to the PNCC the Roman Catholic Church officially recognized the validity of the orders and sacraments of the PNCC. Roman Catholics have always been able to receive these sacraments in the PNCC.

As the PNCC celebrated her 100th anniversary in 1997 another new period in her history began. It was not long into the second century of existence when the PNCC was removed from the Union of Utrecht and the International Bishops Conference (2003). This occurred because the PNCC remained firm in the true Catholic and Apostolic Faith and would not accept the ordination of women to the priesthood and the blessing of same sex unions. Unfortunately during the 1990's first the German Old Catholic Church and then the Swiss Church moved in a direction contrary to Scripture, Tradition and the Declaration of Utrecht. They began to allow women into the ordained priesthood. During the November 2003 IBC Meeting in Prague, Bishop Mueller of Switzerland made the following motion: "In our IBC meeting of 2003 we state that full communion as defined in the statutes was not possible to restore and as a consequence separation of our churches follows."²⁹ The motion passed and the Polish National Catholic Church was de facto removed from the Union of Utrecht and her bishops were no longer members of the International Bishops Conference.

Following the removal of the PNCC from the Union of Utrecht after 96 years, the PNCC found herself standing alone. The PNCC was giving episcopal oversight to a group of former Lutherans in Norway and began to formulate a structure to move forward with this and other relationships. In 2006 Prime Bishop Robert Nemkovich and the 22nd General Synod formed the PNCC – Nordic Catholic Church Commission. In 2007 the Nordic Catholic Church held a synod during which they elected Roald Nikolai Flemestad as bishop. The Declaration of Scranton was promulgated by the PNCC Bishops in April of 2008 and accepted by the PNCC National Clergy Conference in October. The delegates of the 2010 General Synod concurred with the Official Commentary for the Declaration of Scranton, the Requirements for communion with the Polish National Catholic Church and the Statutes for governing the Union of Scranton.

²⁹ Motion recorded from the notes of Rev. Robert M. Nemkovich Jr. (*Proxy for PNCC Bishop Dawidziuk*) The motion passed with 6 votes in favor, 4 votes against and 1 abstention. The IBC never shared with the PNCC the official minutes of this meeting.

The Declaration of Scranton

“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. 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.

Subsequent to the 2003 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/Old 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. 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.”³⁰

July 25, 2011 saw a historic day in St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr Cathedral in Scranton, PA. Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky and the bishops of the Polish National Catholic Church

³⁰ Official Commentary on the Declaration of Scranton

consecrated Very Rev. Roald Nikolai Flemestad to the Holy Office of Bishop for the Nordic Catholic Church. With this consecration the Union of Scranton now became a reality.

The relationship among the Bishops of the Union of Scranton and their Churches is governed by the Statutes of the Union of Scranton.

1. *The Union of Scranton is a union of Churches and their bishops governing them that is determined to maintain and pass on the Catholic faith, worship, and essential structure of the Undivided Church of the first millennium. The Union of Scranton finds its origins in the development of the Union of Utrecht on September 24, 1889, at Utrecht, Holland. There a determination was made and recorded in three documents that formed the Convention of Utrecht: the “Declaration,” the “Agreement,” and the “Regulations” (Statutes). The full communion of the Churches found its expression and was evident in the bishops uniting to form a Bishops’ Conference, which other bishops later joined. Since the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC) continues to hold the Declaration of Utrecht as a normative document of faith, the development of the Union of Scranton follows a similar design.*
2. *The Union of Scranton emerged because certain member Churches of the Union of Utrecht unilaterally began to ordain women to the Priesthood and to bless same-sex unions in opposition to Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition of the Undivided Church. Since November 20, 2003 the PNCC is neither in communion, nor affiliated with the Churches of the Union of Utrecht.*
3. *The Union of Scranton confesses the Catholic faith as articulated by the first seven Ecumenical Councils and expressed throughout the Undivided Church. The Declaration of Scranton affirms the principles of the Declaration of Utrecht, which was formulated in response to the decrees of Vatican Council I. Each declaration acknowledges the historic precedence of the Bishop of Rome as primus inter pares, but rejects the papal dogmas of the said council and a number of other papal pronouncements that are at variance with the doctrine of the Ancient Church. Both declarations affirm faith in the essence and mystery of the Eucharist. Furthermore, the obligation of the Union of Scranton is to strive to overcome the divisions in the Church*

*and, based on the faith of the Undivided Church, to restore unity and communion with other Churches.*³¹

As has been recognized and expressed ever more clearly in the course of time, the original Union of Utrecht and the Convention of Utrecht imply a specific ecclesiology which continues to be the ecclesiology of the Union of Scranton.

This ecclesiology presupposes that:

- 1.1 each local Church is a communion of people, reconciled in Jesus Christ, and by the outpouring and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit is constituted as a unity in a given place. Each local Church is gathered around a bishop with the Eucharist as its center. Each local Church is a complete Church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place. Each local Church is a representation of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church as confessed by the ecumenical Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (A.D. 381). Each local Church lives the common faith and has an indispensable synodal structure uniting the clergy and the laity, thereby expressing its communion and unity.*
- 1.2 each local Church is “Catholic,” because it participates and finds its unity in the whole reality of salvation and truth that comprises God and human beings, heaven and earth. The catholicity of each local Church is manifested in the unity and communion it shares with other local Churches perceived as being identical in their essential beliefs in the redemptive work of the Triune God. The unity and communion of local Churches is an expression of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, whether they are organized as national Churches, ecclesiastical provinces or patriarchates. This does not imply a kind of super-diocese of either supra-regional or universal dimension, but rather a communion of bishops and synodically organized local Churches. It is in this perspective that the relationship between the autonomy of the local Church and its obligation to its national Church, ecclesiastical province or patriarchate is understood.*
- 1.3 each local Church is the Body of Christ and its members are the people of God. In salvation history God began the renewal of creation through His promise to Abraham and his descendants and fulfilled that promise through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Christ and through His Church God opened to all peoples the blessing promised to Abraham. Through*

³¹ Preamble of the Statutes of the Union of Scranton, 2010

baptism they become “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart” (see 1 Peter 2:9). Its members are baptized and confirmed in the name of the Holy Trinity and thereby are united in Christ and through the Eucharist. They are called and commissioned by Christ and sanctified by the gifts of the Holy Spirit to live a common life in witness, worship and service. On the road to salvation all its members have to walk in repentance and hope.

1.4 in continuity with its apostolic origins, Apostolic Succession is fundamental to the catholicity of the Church. Apostolic Succession is imparted when a synodically-elected candidate for bishop is validly consecrated through prayer, anointing and by the laying-on of hands of bishops who themselves possess Apostolic Succession. Whether in Word and Sacrament, doctrine and ministry, or in Sacred Tradition whatever the Church has done and continues to do has had as its origin the mission of Jesus Christ that was given to His Apostles, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and passed on by them and their successor bishops.³²

There is an equality among the bishops of Churches that are in full communion, since by Christ’s design each Church is overseen by its bishop. Full communion is understood to exist only among bishops in whom the Apostolic Succession of the Church resides. For “bishops in full communion” to share the sacramental nature of the Church, a certain relationship or collegiality must exist. The Polish National Catholic Church understands the following to embrace this collegiality of bishops: “Where the bishop is, there let the multitude of believers be; even as where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church.”³³ The term “collegiality” is used to express the relationship that bishops share among themselves as successors to the Apostles. In the role of shepherd each bishop teaches, sanctifies and governs through the grace of the Holy Spirit.³⁴

The bishops of the Union of Scranton meet in the International Catholic Bishops Conference (ICBC) and the Union is now expanding in Europe. In addition to the Nordic Catholic Church with several parishes in Norway, there are now parishes in Sweden, Germany, France and Italy.

Due to circumstances the Polish National Catholic Church found herself and cognizant of her history she brought to reality the Declaration and Union of Scranton to continue her ecumenical

³² Statutes of the Union of Scranton, 2010, pages 1-2

³³ St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, 1st Century

³⁴ Requirements for Communion with the PNCC, 2010, Page 1-2

endeavors as she strives toward that unity for which Jesus prayed. The standard is the unity of the Ancient, Undivided Church. Through this Declaration and Union the PNCC continues to preserve and maintain true and genuine Old Catholicism.

The Feast of the Epiphany
6 January 2015

Appendix:

The apostolic line of the Archbishops of Utrecht in communion with the Roman Catholic Church is as follows:

Frederick Schenck, 1560-1580

Sasbold Vosmeer, 1602-1614

Philip Rovenius, 1620-1651

Jam del la Torre, 1651-1661

J. van Neerchasel, 1661-1686

Peter Codde, 1688-1710

After the break from Roman jurisdiction:

C. van Steenhoven, 1724-1725

Cor. J. Barchman Wuytiers, 1725-1733

T. van der Croon, 1734-1739

P. J. Meinhardt, 1739-1767

Walter van Neuwenhuisen, 1768-1797

J. J. van Rhyn, 1797-1808

W. van Os, 1814-1825

J. van Santen, 1825-1858

Henry Loos, 1858-1873

John Heykamp, 1875-1892

Gerard Gul, 1892-1920

Gerard Gul was the Consecrator of Francis Hodur on 29 September 29 1907

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