

**THE DECLARATION OF CLERGY
ON RITUAL: CONFERENCE OF
CLERGY AT KEBLE COLLEGE
OXFORD, JANUARY 12 AND 13,
1904**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649257362

The Declaration of clergy on ritual: conference of clergy at Keble College Oxford, January 12 and 13, 1904 by Various

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VARIOUS

**THE DECLARATION OF CLERGY
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The Declaration of Clergy on Ritual.

CONFERENCE OF CLERGY AT
KEBLE COLLEGE, OXFORD

January 12 and 13, 1904.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE TRACT COMMITTEE.

LONDON,

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
NORTHUMBERLAND AVENUE, W.C. ; 43, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, E.C.
BRIGHTON : 129, NORTH STREET
NEW YORK : E. S. GORHAM

1904

PREFACE

IN the course of the preparation of the Declaration of Clergy presented to the Archbishops in July, 1903, the question was asked whether it was intended to form the basis of any permanent association. The answer was an immediate and emphatic negative. But the suggestion was made that it might be advisable to organize a Conference for discussion in connexion with the Declaration. If the number of signatures had been small the purpose of such Conference might have been to give greater definiteness to any expressions in the Declaration which seemed wanting in clearness, or to supplement any that seemed inadequate. But for such purpose representation of the whole body would have been necessary, and no resolution of such section of the supporters of the Declaration as happened to be able or willing to attend a Conference could have been taken as necessarily representing the views of the whole body. Still less authority would attach to

resolutions passed by a comparatively small and specially invited group.

The purpose, therefore, of the Conference was this. Vague as in some quarters the Declaration was stated to be, it was at least clear enough to prevent some clergy from signing it. Now, the Declaration was not intended merely to gather professions of obedience from those whose loyalty no reasonable person could suspect, but to invite co-operation also from those whose attitude had rightly or wrongly been regarded with suspicion. And there were some of them who hesitated to accept it. It seemed, therefore, desirable to discuss the grounds on which they held aloof. Two questions were suggested for discussion: (1) Obedience to the Bishops; (2) The rights of Particular or National Churches. Now presumably the enormous majority of those who signed the Declaration would have been prepared to express their readiness to obey their Bishops without the reservation attached to the profession of obedience in the Declaration. But there are some of the clergy who would not. The main point, therefore, of the one subject was to endeavour to realize what kind of reservation such men would feel it necessary

to make, and the reasons and justification which could be alleged for such reservation. On this point it is noteworthy that though there was a general desire for the restoration of the synodical action of the Church, more than one speaker in express terms repudiated the idea that the Bishops' injunctions depended for their authority upon it. It was rather claimed that they should have behind them clear determination of law by an authority which the Church had actually accepted. On the other point the signatories of the Declaration for the most part would affirm with Dr. Collins and the Dean of Christ Church unhesitatingly that matters of practice do not, by the mere fact that they have at some time been observed ecumenically through the whole Church, acquire such authority that a National Church has no right to dispense with them for its own members. There are many of the clergy who hesitate to affirm this. The intention of the discussion was to discover the grounds of such hesitation and the nature and extent of the limitation which would thus be placed on the freedom of action of particular churches. On this point, at all events, a clear issue was raised. It was maintained on the one hand

that the undivided Church was so informed and guided by the Holy Spirit that whatever custom was universally observed therein must be taken as ordained not by man's authority. It was pointed out on the other hand that the phrase "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us" was used by the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem in a decision on ceremonial matters, which, as a whole, was quite possibly never observed through the whole Church, and certainly is not followed now. It is hoped that the discussion may have real value in throwing light on the attitude of many whose earnestness of purpose even those most opposed to them will acknowledge, and also in clearing the issue for further discussion, and if it please God of fuller agreement on principles which vitally affect the life and work of the Church at the present time.

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