CHAPTER 6

Renewal of Religious Leadership According to an Ancient Model: Bishop Joseph Hubert Reinkens and Bishop Martin of Tours

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Introduction

In the past few decades, many new sources on Joseph Hubert Reinkens have been made accessible: letters and other documents from his youth and letters to his elder brother Wilhelm from the years 1840–1873.1 These sources have given rise to several publications about this professor of ancient church history, his relation to the Prince-Bishop of Breslau and his rejection of the First Vatican Council (1869–1870).2 Although this means that Reinkens can be regarded as one of the important champions of the Old Catholic movement in Germany, oddly enough no modern biography considers his life and work in the period from 1873,3 when Reinkens was elected bishop for the Old Catholics in Germany and consecrated in Rotterdam by a bishop of the Old Catholic


3 The only full biography dates from ten years after Reinkens’s death and was written by his nephew: Joseph Martin Reinkens, Joseph Hubert Reinkens. Ein Lebensbild (Gotha, 1906). More recent articles which concentrate on the period between 1873 and 1896 focus on certain aspects of his life. For an overview of the literature, see Angela Berlis, ‘Brüder im Bischofsamt – Freunde
Church in the Netherlands. Little in-depth work has been published on Reinkens as a bishop, let alone on his views on episcopacy.

This latter question is the subject of this article. How did Reinkens regard religious leadership, especially episcopacy? In what way was his view influenced by his historical research and his experiences with contemporary bishops? This article draws on Reinkens’s works on Martin of Tours (1866) and Hilary of Poitiers (1864) and his first pastoral letter (1873) and also touches on his correspondence.

Biographical Sketch of Joseph Hubert Reinkens

Joseph Hubert Reinkens was born on 1 March 1821 in Burtscheid near Aachen. Whereas his elder brother, Wilhelm (1811–1889), received a fancy education, the family became impoverished in the 1830s and Joseph and his brothers had to work in order to help their father support the family after their mother’s death in 1836. Consequently, Joseph Reinkens was 23 by the time he passed his final school examination. He went on to study philosophy, theology, and classical philology at the University of Bonn. During this period, he lived in the house of his elder brother Wilhelm, who was the parish priest at St Remigius in Bonn. Wilhelm Reinkens was the spiritual centre of a group of men and women inspired by the philosophy of Anton Günther (1783–1863), which was engaged in a careful study of the Church Fathers. Anton Günther, who lived in Vienna as a private scholar, aimed to overcome the rift between Christianity and science, faith and knowledge through a philosophical justification of positive Christianity. He inspired an influential philosophical school of the nineteenth century. A number of the men in the “Bonn circle of Güntherians” subsequently left the Archbishopric of Cologne because the archbishop was ill-