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## Statement of Faith

### Introduction

On March 31, 2011, the Board of Directors of the World Reformed Fellowship completed work on a Statement of Faith that was five years in the making. Why a new Statement of Faith? There were three guiding motives behind our work: 1) We wished to express accurately the common elements of the historic Reformed Confessions which we have used to define ourselves theologically - The Gallican Confession, The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Thirty-Nine Articles, The Second Helvetic Confession, The Canons of Dort, The Westminster Confession of Faith, the London Confession of 1689, and the Savoy Declaration; 2) We wished to bring that historic Reformed orthodoxy to bear on some of the critical issues facing the church of the 21st century - abortion, genetic manipulation, the nature of marriage, poverty, suffering, and oppression; and 3) We wish to include the voices of evangelical Reformed Christians from the entire world, in light of the fact that all of the historic Reformed confessions were written in Western Europe or Great Britain. It has never been and is not now our intention that our Statement of Faith *replace* any of the historic confessions. However, at the Fourth General Assembly of the WRF in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on March 26, 2015, the members of the WRF determined that the WRF Statement of Faith may stand alongside the historic confessions as one of those to which prospective members may subscribe.

Immediately below is the Statement of Faith in English. Versions of the Statement in the following languages are available as attachments to this article: Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Afrikaans, and French.

### The WRF Statement of Faith in English

#### [I. The Doctrine of God](#)

#### [II. Evil and Sin](#)

[III. The Person and Work of Christ](#)

[IV. The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit](#)

[V. God's Work of Salvation](#)

[VI. The Christian Life](#)

[VII. Holy Scripture](#)

[VIII. The Church](#)

[IX. Tradition](#)

[X. Mission and Evangelism](#)

[XI. Law and Ethics](#)

[XII. Eschatology](#)

## **I. The doctrine of God**

### 1. The identity of the Creator

We believe in one God, who is the creator, sustainer and ruler of everything that exists. By his eternal decrees he has established the universe and governs it according to his sovereign will. No being greater than he exists, and no being has the power to affect, modify or diminish his sovereignty over his creation.

### 2. The Creator and his Creatures

God communicates his presence and his power to all his creatures, but in particular to the human race, which he has made in his own image, both male and female. There is a basic equality of being between men and women but with differences, so that the callings of men and women are not interchangeable but complementary. Although there is no distinction of gender in God, he reveals himself to us essentially in masculine terms and his Son became incarnate as a male.

### 3. The self-revelation of the Creator to all human beings

God is a personal being and reveals himself in personal terms. In ancient times, he spoke to many different people in many different ways. His words were accompanied and his promises were fulfilled by actions that were signs of his power. In speaking to human beings, he revealed both himself and his purposes to them in the expectation that they would respond by obeying whatever he commanded them to do.

The natural order bears witness to the existence, power and majesty of its divine creator, so that no-one has any excuse not to believe in him. General revelation is the term used to describe those ways in which God reveals himself to all human beings without exception, in nature, in history and in conscience. General revelation is sufficient to make us aware of the existence and power of God and even of our responsibilities before him, but not sufficient to bring us to salvation. Special revelation is required because as fallen creatures we are spiritually blind and spiritually dead. True knowledge of God comes about when we are enabled by God to see and understand the truth of his self-revelation.

Because human beings are created in the image of the personal God, both God and human beings are personal. They think and communicate with one another in ways that can be expressed in human language. Because of this connection, human beings can come to a knowledge of both visible and invisible reality and can use concepts derived from the latter to develop and transform the former. As part of the visible creation, human beings live in interdependence with all other material creatures but because they are created in the image of God, they are conscious of their status and are able to look for meaning in, and exercise dominion over, the rest of the created order.

Human knowledge is personal and extends from an ability to acquire and catalogue factual details, to the capacity for analysing them in order to come to an understanding of their deeper meaning and purpose. By virtue of this, human beings have a responsibility towards the creation which has been entrusted to them and must answer to God for the way in which they relate to it. Human knowledge is objectively limited by creaturely finitude and subjectively by a rejection of God which has led to a state of radical sinfulness. The objective ability to acquire knowledge and understanding remains in human beings despite their fall into sin, but the effect of that is so great that it is impossible for any human being or society to fulfil the creation mandate in the way originally intended by God.

#### 4. The self-revelation of the Creator to his covenant people

God makes himself known more fully and completely to his covenant people, with whom he has established a special relationship. God reveals himself to them by his Spirit through his Word, which is living (in Jesus Christ), written (in Holy Scripture) and spoken (in preaching).

God's revelation of himself in the Old and New Testaments is accurate and sufficient for human beings to know, love and serve him. However, such knowledge of God cannot be complete because there is much about God which cannot be known by us and there are some things that can be known by experience but cannot be fully expressed in human language. In himself, God is often so unlike any of his creatures that we can only speak of him by saying what he is not – he is not visible, not mortal, not comprehensible either physically or mentally. However, he has characteristics that human beings can recognize and express, and he has them to an absolute degree, in that he is all-knowing, all-wise and all-powerful. These characteristics are identifiable but they cannot be fully defined within the boundaries of human reason and logic. They can only be truly known and understood through personal relationship with God established by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God spoke in a special way to Abraham, to whom he gave the promise that he would become the father of a great nation. He would be given a land and he would bring blessing to the whole world. These promises were renewed to his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, to whom the name of Israel was given. Through Jacob's descendants, Israel, the nation, became a special people whose historical destiny was to receive and transmit God's Word to the world, and to prepare for the coming of a divine Saviour. This Word was given through chosen servants and eventually it was preserved in the written texts that we now call the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament. What was promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament Scriptures was eventually fulfilled in Christ. While many of the prescriptions in the Old Testament, including temple worship and animal sacrifices, are no longer necessary, their spiritual principles have not been abolished. These remain valid for Christians, who have been united to the people of Israel on the basis of the faith that we share with Abraham. Christian believers form a family, the kingdom of God, which extends to the utmost limits of the world, and the preaching of the Christian gospel brings blessings to all who hear it and believe. Those who are ethnically Jewish, but who have not accepted Christ, have not received the blessings promised to their ancestors, but nevertheless retain a special place in the plan and purposes of God that will be fully revealed at the end of time. The church, therefore, is under obligation to share the message of Jesus as Messiah, Saviour and Lord with the Jewish people. Their incorporation into the Christian church is on the same basis as non-Jews.

#### 5. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit form a Trinity of equal persons

In Jesus Christ, God reveals himself as a Trinity of persons, making Christianity unique among the monotheistic religions of the world. God is not a solitary monad, but a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who dwell in personal communion for ever. It is because of this that human beings, who are created in the image and likeness of God, have a sense of their own personal identity and relationship with both God and other people. The individual distinctiveness inherent in personal identity, whether human or divine, is grounded in the distinctions of the three divine persons, who subsist eternally in the one God.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all equally and fully God in their own right, and not by derivation, transfer or inheritance from the Father or anyone else. They share a common divine nature and because there is only one God, it is inadequate to claim to know one of the persons without knowing all three. The divine persons relate to each other in ways which are distinctive to each of them but which are all characterized by the common denominator of love. It is because the Father loves the Son that he has given him all authority in heaven and earth. It is because the Son loves the Father that he voluntarily sacrificed himself for us, so that we might live with him in heaven as the Father wants us to. It is because the Holy Spirit loves both the Father and the Son that he comes into the world, not to speak primarily about himself, but to bear witness to them and to bring their common life to us. Finally, it is because we too are persons, created in the image of God, that we can receive his love, relate to him in that love and manifest that love in all our personal relationships.

#### 6. In the Old Testament God speaks in the person of the Father

In the Old Testament God speaks as one person, whom the New Testament equates with the Father of Jesus Christ, although the term 'Father' was not normally used to speak about God in Israel. However, it is clear that the God of the Old Testament is both sovereign and invisible in a way which is fully in agreement with the person of the Father as revealed to us by Jesus. The Father is the one whose will Jesus (as the Son) has come to obey and fulfil and he is the one person of the Godhead who remains both permanently invisible and transcendent at all times. The Son and the Holy Spirit are not very extensively described in the Old Testament but they are eternally present in God and participate fully in all his acts, especially the great work of creation, and there are many references to the person and work of the promised Messiah, as well to the work of God's Spirit among the people of God and in the broader world.

#### 7. God has revealed himself fully and finally in Jesus Christ

God has spoken fully and finally in Jesus Christ, who has fulfilled the ancient covenant made with Israel and with all his elect. He is both prophet and Word, priest and sacrifice, king and kingdom. No further revelation of God is necessary because he is himself God in human flesh. In Jesus Christ God revealed himself as the Son who identified the first person as his Father and promised that after his departure he would send a third person, the 'other Comforter' whom the Scriptures call the Holy Spirit. It is therefore intrinsic to the teaching of Christ that there are three persons in the one God.

#### 8. God reveals himself to us in language we can understand

Because God has condescended to use human language and because the person of the Son became a man, it is possible to speak about him in human terms. The first disciples could have described the physical appearance of Jesus, but did not do so. The New Testament does not give any specific encouragement to make pictures or statues of him, either as aids to worship or as reminders of his presence on earth. No picture or dramatic portrayal of Jesus has any authority in itself, and such things must never become objects of veneration or worship, but may be useful in other ways.

## **II. Evil and sin**

### 1. The origin of evil

God made the entire universe very good. God is not the author of evil, and his holiness is not compromised by its existence. Evil originated in the rebellion of Satan and some of the angels. It appears that pride was at the root of their fall. The fallen angels are called demons and are led by Satan. They oppose the work of God and seek to frustrate his purposes. Nevertheless God remains sovereign over the powers of evil and uses their actions to forward his plan of salvation. Demons are not to be worshipped or served in any way. Their activity lies behind false religions and Satan blinds human minds to the truth.

## 2. Evil and humanity

Evil intruded into human life through the sin of the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. Adam is the ancestor of the entire human race and so every human being must suffer the consequences of his sin, which included a disordered world and physical death. Adam and Eve set themselves in the place of God, and gave their allegiance to Satan. Succumbing to the temptation of being like God has far reaching consequences. Robbing God of the glory due to him leads to the elimination of the distinctions established by him and involves transgression into the domain of the divine, the abrogation of the male-female distinctions ordained by God and the confusion between human beings and animals. By using that which is good for the wrong reasons, chaos, tension and suffering have appeared in the midst of human society.

## 3. The effects of sin in human life

Human beings join forces with supernatural agents who have brought about such horrific evils as genocide, the abuse of power, world wars, various types of terrorism, psychopathic killing, human trafficking, drug abuse and violence of all kinds. Without underestimating and undermining the significance of human beings, such outrageous forms of evil are propagated and orchestrated by demonic forces with the result that human beings can be divided, destroyed and brought below the level of animals in their thoughts and behaviour. Evil is not only directed towards the destruction of creation and the image of God in the descendants of Adam and Eve, but also towards suppression of the church and the truth of God. Though demons do not multiply, nor can they be destroyed by humans, we are still called to resist the evil, injustice, oppression and violence that the demons use for their purposes, while awaiting and praying for the return of Jesus Christ, who will bring an end to all these things.

## 4. The universality of sin and its consequences

In Adam all die and death has spread to everyone because all have sinned. The whole human race is implicated in the fall and its consequences: sin, alienation, violence, war, illness, suffering and death. Spiritually speaking, all human beings are dead because they are in rebellion against God and cut off from his blessings. Although fallen human beings can discover many truths, they lack the framework needed to understand them as aspects of God's truth. As sinners they refuse to accept the consequences of the truth that they do have, and instead suppress it by their wickedness. Bodily death is also at work in them until they return to the dust from which they were taken. Unless God graciously intervenes, spiritual death will become eternal death.

# **III. The person and work of Christ**

## 1. The Glory of Christ

At the centre of Christianity lies the person of Jesus Christ. His glory and greatness are such that to worship and exalt him is both the duty and the desire of every believer.

## 2. The incarnate Son of God has one divine person and two natures

The divine person of the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, took on a complete human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary and was born as the man Jesus of Nazareth. He now has two natures, one divine and one human, which remain whole and distinct in themselves but are at the same time united in and by his divine person. Because his divine nature, which he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit, cannot suffer or die, the Son acquired a human nature in order to be able to pay the price of human sin and reconcile us to God. On the cross, it was the person of the Son, in his two natures, who suffered and died.

### 3. The incarnate Son of God is a true human being

As the incarnate Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God became a true human being. He possessed a human mind and a human will, and he had a normal psychological make-up, while retaining his divine nature. He was tempted in the same way as any other human being, but did not fall into sin.

### 4. The incarnate Son of God was perfectly able to reconcile us to his Father

The man Jesus Christ was able to take our place on the cross and pay the price of our sin, not because of any natural or objective superiority to us but because he was perfectly obedient to his Father and therefore entirely without sin. In becoming sin for us, he could cancel our debt towards God without incurring any guilt that would have separated him from his Father. The redemptive work of Christ secured the salvation of all who were chosen in him before the foundation of the world.

### 5. The nature of Christ's resurrection body

After two days in the tomb, Jesus of Nazareth rose again from the dead with a transformed but still recognizable human nature. His resurrection body was capable of transcending natural physical laws but still retained its own physical properties. In his ascension, that body was further transformed into the heavenly state which it still possesses and has been taken up into God. Human beings will be resurrected, not as Jesus was on the first Easter morning, but as he is now, in his ascended state.

## **IV. The person and work of the Holy Spirit**

### 1. The Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity

The Holy Spirit is involved in the work of creation and redemption along with the Father and the Son. In particular, the incarnate Son was conceived by the Holy Spirit, anointed with the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform his public ministry on earth.

### 2. The work of the Holy Spirit in redemption

The Holy Spirit applies the Son's work of redemption to individual believers and unites them both to Christ their head and to one another. He is the agent of the adoption of believers into

God's family and gives them the inner assurance that they have been chosen by the sovereign power of God. He helps, teaches, guides and leads believers in accordance with God's revealed will and character. He sanctifies believers by producing his fruit in them and he constantly intercedes for them in prayer to the Father.

### 3. The sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was the beginning of a new work of God in the life of believers, which led to the foundation of the Christian church. The extraordinary revelatory gifts given at that time were unique signs of the beginning of the messianic age and they may not be claimed automatically or required as decisive proof of God's power at work today. The continuing and diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit must be sought for in humility, according to his will and in order to glorify God in service for the common good of the church.

### 4. The Holy Spirit and spiritual revival

The power of the Holy Spirit continues to be manifested in special ways during times of spiritual revival which occur periodically in the life of the church. These times of awakening and spiritual refreshing further the expansion of God's kingdom by making people more conscious of their sinfulness and turning them to Christ in a new and deeper way. At such times, believers are reminded of the presence of the Holy Spirit as they become more aware of his working in their lives and of his gifts to them. Spiritual revival is especially effective in bringing God's people back to him by reforming the church, which is constantly in danger of going astray. Nevertheless, the work of the Holy Spirit which is evident at times of spiritual revival is always present in the church and believers must eagerly pray for his fruits and his gifts at all times.

### 5. The Holy Spirit and spiritual warfare

The Holy Spirit actively combats Satan and his demons and protects believers from them. The Holy Spirit delivers men and women from demon oppression and possession and equips them with the spiritual weapons they need to resist the power of the devil. The Bible forbids believers from dabbling with the forces of darkness and their works.

## **V. God's work of salvation**

### 1. Common Grace

God exercises a common grace to all humanity as well as the special grace by which people enter into salvation. By this common grace, sin is restrained, sinful human beings receive blessings from God and they are enabled to do good things. This common grace provides a foundation for human society and enables work in the arts and sciences. It is the Holy Spirit who enables this work in the arts and sciences, thus cultural progress and human civilisation are good gifts of God, made possible despite the fall of humanity into sin.



## 2. The call and election of God

God's call to human beings is to repent and believe. No one can respond to this call without the work of the Holy Spirit. Though many may aurally receive the message, or read it directly from the Bible, or indirectly in Christian literature, not all are chosen. Rather than abandon the human race in its fallen condition, God sovereignly and graciously elected some to eternal life. Only those whose hearts and minds are illumined by the Holy Spirit are empowered to accept the promised gifts of forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God.

## 3. The nature of regeneration

By the work of the Holy Spirit, a dead sinner receives life from God, and the implanting of that life results in a new orientation towards God and his righteousness. Only the Holy Spirit can bring about the change which produces holiness, without which none shall see God. While this regenerating work produces character changes, Christians are unique persons, for while they all possess the Holy Spirit, they are all different. What they share in common is the implanting of new life, which means that they are now in an indissoluble spiritual union with Christ. The New Testament expresses this by saying that Christians are 'in Christ,' that is, they become 'heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.' Because they are so united to Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, they are complete in him. All Christian believers have the Spirit of Christ, and being in union with Christ also means that they are in a vital relationship with one another. They share a common salvation and have common goals and aspirations.

## 4. The effects of regeneration

God's work in regeneration needs no repetition. Having been justified by God, Christians display that change in status by a change in their spiritual condition. Conversion marks the conscious beginning of a new life so that believers seek to live in accordance with their new nature, with affections set on spiritual and eternal issues. At the heart of the new life are repentance and faith, which are bonded together as the expression of conversion.

## 5. Faith

The grace to believe is the gift of God. Faith, then, is an act of receiving the blessings of salvation by personal belief in, and commitment to, Christ the Saviour. This faith is the instrument by which divine revelation and all the promised blessings are grasped, received and enjoyed. It is a conviction that the Bible's message is true and that personal appropriation of Christ's merits and work is essential. True faith rests on its object, Christ Jesus, and he is embraced as Saviour, and by an act of committal the soul rests on him alone for salvation.

## 6. Justification

Justification is the act of God which follows effectual calling by the Holy Spirit and the sinner's consequent response of repentance and faith: 'whom he called, these he also justified.' In justification God declares sinners to be righteous in his sight, regarding their sins as forgiven and counting the righteousness of Christ as belonging to them. Justification is not a pretence on

God's part that sinners are righteous when in fact they are guilty. For justification to be real and consistent with the holiness of God, it must have a meritorious ground. A real righteousness must exist for God to be righteous in his declaration of justification. Sinners are justified on the basis of a righteousness supplied by another, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which is counted as belonging to them. This imputation of the righteousness of Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith.

#### 7. The righteousness of Christ is the basis of our justification

The righteousness of Christ comprises his life of perfect obedience to every commandment of the law of God and his death on the cross by which he bore the penalty of God's holy wrath due to the sins of all his people, a work sealed by his triumphant resurrection. Believers now share the same righteous status as Christ who has satisfied all the demands of God's law in their place and on their behalf. The ground of the sinner's justification is solely the perfect righteousness of Christ.

#### 8. The harmony between Paul and James in their teaching about justification

There is no conflict between the teaching of Paul and that of James regarding justification. Paul writes of justification as pardon and acceptance before God; James insists that if this justification is real, it will show itself in a life of obedience.

#### 9. The adoption of believers in Christ

The position of the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal uncreated Son of God by nature is unique. Nevertheless he is not ashamed to call those he has saved his brothers and sisters. These adopted children of God are heirs of the inheritance which Christ has secured for them, the full measure of the blessings of redemption, and so they are described as 'heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.'

As children of God, believers share in all the blessings provided by God for his family and by the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, they recognise and address God as Father. They are the objects of the love of God, of his compassion, and of his care for their needs. The children of God also have the privilege of sharing in the sufferings of Christ and his subsequent glorification. A further privilege of God's children, which confirms their adoption, is their experience of the fatherly chastening of God. They are assured that: 'God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?' The unity of the children of God in one body is also a privilege to be enjoyed and a responsibility that requires mutual love and ministry.

The full blessings of adoption will not be enjoyed until the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Adoption has a present dimension but also an eschatological dimension, which is an element of Christian hope. Thus 'we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.' Adoption will not be complete until Christ gives his people new bodies at the resurrection, when believers will enjoy 'the freedom of the glory of the children of God' along with the renewed creation.

## 10. The Holy Spirit's work of sanctification

The Holy Spirit works in the lives of those who have been justified and adopted to make them holy and to transform them into the likeness of Christ. God's work in believers includes both willing and doing what he requires. Active obedience to the commandments of the Lord is essential. Sanctification requires the putting to death of all that is sinful in human life and the development of new godly habits and patterns of thinking and living.

## 11. The attainment of Christian perfection

During this present life no believer is entirely free of sin, and sanctification progresses at varying rates. God's disciplining his beloved children also serves their sanctification. The work of sanctification will be completed by the power and grace of God. The spirit is fully sanctified at death, joining 'the spirits of the righteous made perfect.' At the resurrection the body of a believer will share in that perfection, being made like the glorious body of Christ. Ultimately every believer will fully 'bear the image of the man of heaven.'

# **VI. The Christian life**

## 1. Authentic spirituality

Christian spirituality is a life-long process of deep reverence and love for God, which translates into a right relationship with fellow human beings. Christian spirituality is practical godliness, leading to transformation into the likeness of Christ. It is not directed at the self, nor at seeking after an impersonal force, nor at attaining to a nebulous state of existence or altered states of consciousness. It is growing in covenantal union with the Triune God, and in ever-increasing fellowship with God's people in the world. It is the result of spiritual regeneration maintained and governed by the Holy Spirit.

## 2. The means of godliness

The Holy Spirit produces godliness in us by applying the Word of God to our hearts and minds, teaching us obedience, uniting us in the corporate fellowship of all believers, in the true worship of God, in our witness to the world, in trials and suffering, and in confrontation with evil.

## 3. The results of godliness

The results of godliness include transformed minds and hearts, words and actions, prayerfulness, and a life that continually grows into the image of Christ. Godliness produces a lifelong growth in self-denial, a daily 'taking up of our cross' and following Christ by practising love, patience, forgiveness, gentleness, compassion and kindness to all, especially to those of the Christian family. It involves the continuous yielding of ourselves in total devotion to God, experiencing inexpressible joy, filial fear, selfless reverence, glowing love, compassion, and self-controlled boldness, balanced with humility, respect, awe, contentment, childlike trust, obedience, undying hope, and God's peace in the face of trials, grief and pain.

#### 4. Spiritual experiences

A God-centred spiritual life receives these spiritual experiences as a gift from the Holy Spirit. As we seek to draw near to the Triune God, we are reminded that we are always living in his presence wherever we are. We are therefore motivated to fulfil our calling to be instruments of his transforming grace wherever his providence has placed us. Experience of our covenantal union with God in this life is but a foretaste of the glory of communion with God in the age to come.

### **VII. Holy Scripture**

#### 1. The Scriptures were brought into existence by God the Holy Spirit

The Scriptures are God-breathed, having been written when men spoke from God, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are God's Word and are completely reliable. As originally given, they are without error in all that they affirm, a doctrine that has been termed 'biblical inerrancy' by many Reformed theologians. God superintended the work of writing them so that they are precisely what he intended them to be. Having chosen to use human beings, God did not override their humanity or dictate the Scriptures to them. They therefore display the personal history and literary style of each author and the characteristics of the period in which they were written, while remaining in every respect the Word of God himself.

#### 2. The Scriptures are recognised through the work of God the Holy Spirit

The Scriptures display many fine qualities which commend them to us but ultimately our full persuasion and assurance of their infallible truth and divine authority is from the Holy Spirit as he bears witness to our hearts, by and through the Word. It is to the believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that the Scriptures display their authenticity as the Word of God. The Christian church received the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament in this way and was enabled to recognise it as its authoritative canon. The Scriptures do not draw their authority from the church, or from any source other than God himself.

#### 3. The Scriptures are understood through the work of God the Holy Spirit

The Scriptures have a fundamental clarity but only the Christian believer can receive and understand their spiritual meaning and significance, having access to the mind of Christ. Humanity's fall into sin affected the mind as well as the will and the emotions. The spiritual blindness thus incurred left human beings unable to understand the things of God without the work of the Holy Spirit. When human beings are effectually called and regenerated, the Holy Spirit begins to open up the Scriptures to their understanding. In his wisdom, the Holy Spirit reveals to us the true meaning of God's revelation.

#### 4. The Scriptures are applied by God the Holy Spirit

God brings men and women to himself through the preaching of his Word. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching, teaching and study of the Scriptures to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and to give us his mind. Whether preached or read, the Scriptures are profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that we may be equipped for every good work and show forth a God-honouring lifestyle. They thus provide for the foundation, confirmation and regulation of our faith.

#### 5. The presuppositions governing the interpretation of Scripture

Holy Scripture is the Word of God and therefore it cannot contradict itself. Our reading, interpreting, understanding and applying of it is influenced in various degrees and levels by our previous convictions or presuppositions about God and about the Bible. In order to understand it correctly, it is necessary to be aware of our presuppositions and examine them in the light of the biblical text so that we may reform them and bring them more closely into agreement with the meaning of the text itself. Since the Scriptures claim divine origin and inspiration, only those interpretative methods that take such claims seriously can arrive at their true meaning.

#### 6. The clarity of Scripture

The need for scholarly study of the Bible in its original languages does not undermine the clarity or the divine authority and trustworthiness of Scripture. The truths necessary for salvation are so clearly expressed in Scripture that both learned and unlearned readers may and should understand them. The message of Scripture must be expounded in the light of the philosophies and opinions which challenge and oppose its presuppositions. In defending the biblical worldview against such opponents, the clarity of Scripture's meaning is attained, not only by a careful comparing of one biblical text with another, but also by examining the meaning of its opposite.

#### 7. The appropriate methods of interpretation

The Bible is God's Word and so must be read in humble submission and prayer for the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Since it was written in human languages within specific cultural, social and temporal contexts, its meaning must be sought through the use of general rules of interpretation and the help of related fields, such as archaeology, history, textual criticism, and the study of the original languages. All these methods must take into account its divine origin, infallibility and human character.

#### 8. The meaning of a biblical text

A biblical text can have many different practical applications and significances, but its primary meaning is usually determined by the careful use of the historical, grammatical, and redemptive-historical principles already outlined in the previous paragraph. Allegorical, spiritual and figurative interpretations have no authority unless they are specifically approved by the text itself.

#### 9. The universality of truth and its application

God's truth revealed in Scripture is universal, eternal and relevant for all cultures, ages and peoples. Nevertheless, there can be several and distinct applications of that truth. In contextualizing God's Word, the church should distinguish between biblical principles which are the eternal and universal manifestations of God's truth, and the practical implications of those principles, which can vary in different contexts. It must always make sure that its applications are legitimate and proper extensions of the fundamental and unchanging principles.

#### 10. The normative pattern of God's self-revelation in post-biblical times

Since the completion of the New Testament canon, the normative pattern has been for God to speak to us in and through the Holy Scriptures with the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in our hearts and reveals both the Father and the Son to us. Those who hear the Spirit's voice receive the inheritance promised to us in the Son, and with his help they do the will of the Father in their lives. It is to teach us what this means and to guide us as we seek to put God's will into practice that the Holy Spirit has given us written texts to inform, challenge and encourage us along the way. In addition to the Old Testament, these texts are the revelation given to the followers of Christ, by or with the approval of the twelve disciples who saw him after he rose from the dead and whom he appointed to lead and instruct the church. The texts were collected by the first Christians, who acknowledged them as bearing the full authority of God himself, and were grouped together as the New Testament. No Christian teacher or church has the right to insist on beliefs which are not contained in Scripture or to interpret any one of them in a way which contradicts what God has revealed of himself elsewhere in Scripture.

## **VIII. The Church**

### 1. Its Nature

The church is both the invisible company of all Christians (known only to God) and the visible church on earth, in its many communities. The church is the spiritual and supernatural Body of Christ, who is the Head of the church. Every Christian is united to Christ and joined to every other Christian by God, thus constituting the church. In the life of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, the worship of God, fellowship, the Holy Scriptures, the sacraments and mission, are central.

### 2. The Ministries of the Church

Scripture indicates a number of ministries which God has given to the church at different times: apostles, prophets, elders, deacons and evangelists. Today, in each local church there are to be elders and deacons. The elders are to be pastors, overseers and examples and some of them are to devote themselves to preaching and teaching. Deacons are to care for the poor and needy, and to see to the practical, financial and fabric needs of the church. Like the eldership, this is a spiritual office requiring spiritual qualities.

### 3. Worship of God

The primary responsibility of the church is the worship of God. The nature and content of this worship is determined by God himself, as revealed to us in Scripture. This should include the singing of praise to God, the reading and preaching of Scripture and prayer.

#### 4. The Autonomy of the Local Congregation

Each congregation of believers has a degree of autonomy under the rule of the elders but there is also a wider unity with all other congregations. This connectionalism has been expressed in different ways at different times, in different parts of the church.

#### 5. The Sacraments

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. It is instituted by Christ and is representative of the work of Christ. Protestant churches recognise only two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (or Eucharist or Holy Communion). These are often identified with the two sacraments of the Old Testament church: circumcision and the Passover. Baptism is a rite of initiation into the Christian church. It is to be administered by using water. The Lord's Supper points to the death of Christ on the Cross, using bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Christ. It also provides for believers an opportunity for the strengthening of faith, fellowship in Christ and spiritual nourishment, while proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes.

### **IX. Tradition**

#### 1. The existence and validity of apostolic traditions

Every Christian church lives according to the rule of faith inherited from the apostolic age. The Holy Scriptures are the uniquely authentic and normative form of this rule, by which all other beliefs and practice must be measured. The apostolic churches undoubtedly had customs which are not recorded in Scripture or enjoined by it, but such traditions are not binding on later generations of Christians. Similarly, although it is possible that lost apostolic writings may one day be rediscovered, they will not be regarded as Holy Scripture because they have not been handed down from apostolic times as part of the normative rule.

#### 2. The authority of creeds and confessions

During the course of its history the church has adopted creeds and confessions of faith in order to clarify the teaching of Scripture. These documents and other similar decisions of various ecclesiastical bodies enjoy the authority possessed by those who adopted them and must be so regarded and respected by later generations. However, they are not infallible and where it can be shown that they are not in agreement with the teaching of Scripture or that their teaching can be more clearly expressed in a different way, the church is free to alter them accordingly.

#### 3. The Reformers' response to inherited traditions

The sixteenth-century reformers undertook a thorough revision of the church's traditions and abandoned those beliefs and practices which were clearly contrary to scriptural teaching. Some went further and discarded traditions which were not supported by Scripture even though they were not necessarily contrary to it either. An example of this was the celebration of Christmas on 25<sup>th</sup> December, which has no biblical warrant but clearly testifies to the New Testament doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. Traditions of this kind may be retained, modified or discarded at the discretion of the local church, provided that no biblical doctrine is thereby compromised.

#### 4. Patterns of worship and church government

Every church has developed patterns of worship and government which over time have become traditions of their own. As long as these practices are not contrary to the teaching of Scripture and continue to fulfil the task for which they were first devised there is no reason why they should not be retained. Nevertheless, each local church is free to modify such traditions as it sees fit. In particular, churches which have emerged from foreign missionary activity may have inherited practices from those missionaries that are not easily indigenized. Churches of that kind have a special responsibility to examine the biblical warrant for such transplanted customs and should be encouraged to modify them if by doing so they can make the witness of the gospel more effective in their circumstances. Nevertheless, no church should abolish, modify or adopt any tradition or practice without considering the effect such a move might have on the witness of the Christian community as a whole.

#### 5. The expedient retention of certain traditions

Some traditions have become so deeply rooted and universal in the Christian world that to alter them would achieve nothing and lead to unnecessary division within the church. An example of this is the custom of worshipping God on Sunday which, though clearly practised in the early church, is not specifically enjoined in the New Testament. There are circumstances where particular Christian bodies, for example in certain Muslim countries, may find it more convenient to worship on another day of the week, but no church should take it upon itself to abandon Sunday worship merely because it is not specifically required by Scripture. In cases of this kind the visible unity of the Christian world should be maintained if no theological principle is compromised thereby.

## **X. Mission and evangelism**

### 1. Our calling to be God's witnesses through word and deed

Our mission in the world flows from our passion for the glory of God and our assurance of the coming of his kingdom. The church as the community of Christ, is God's instrument of evangelism, which is the preaching and sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, through both words and deeds, that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures and that he, as the reigning Lord, now offers forgiveness of sin, eternal life and gifts of the Spirit



to all who repent and believe. In obedience to the commission of our God, we have to present two hands to all people: (1) the hand calling them to repentance, faith and eternal reconciliation with God through Christ, and (2) the hand manifesting deeds of mercy and compassion, extending the goodness of God's kingdom on earth in the name of Christ. This is the example given to us by Christ himself and proclaims that we are conformed to the image of Christ and have received the Holy Spirit as the first fruits and guarantee of God's new creation.

## 2. The extent of the call to mission

Our proclamation of the gospel has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. Likewise, our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the great commission by which God sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore this commission we have nothing to bring to the world. Our obedience to God stirs up our zeal for missions by making us trust him totally. This makes our witness both bold and gentle, and attracts the attention of unbelievers.

## 3. The compassion of Christians for the world

We affirm the great need for Christians to be clothed with compassion in the name of Christ, in the midst of poverty, disease, injustice and all forms of human misery. We are concerned that there are millions of people in this world living in desperate poverty. In calling us to clothe ourselves with compassion we are called to walk with the poor and convey the transforming grace of God with a quality of spiritual life that allows us to enter a suffering community not as saviours, but as servants of Christ the Saviour.

## 4. The transformation of human community

We understand the transformation of community to be the comprehensive reversal of the effects of sin over all of life and all the earth that alienated men and women from God, from self, from others and from the environment and the restoration of God's order in creation. It is God's intention that all human beings should be full bearers of his image. This task begins in this life but will only be completed when Christ returns in glory at the end of time. It aims to transform the sinful culture and society in which we live and to construct a new culture and new society in conformity with the nature of the Kingdom of God which has been inaugurated by Christ.

# **XI. Law and ethics**

## 1. The natural law

The law of God is the expression of his love and reveals his righteous requirements for the human race. It was written on the hearts of human beings at creation and, despite their fall into sin, they still have an awareness of its requirements through their consciences. In Eden, God also revealed his will for human beings in verbal form, in the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

## 2. The law of Moses

The Mosaic Law contained ceremonial elements which foreshadowed the person and work of Christ and the life of his church, and which have now been fulfilled. The law also contained judicial elements which shaped the civic life of Israel and which provide principles of justice that are to be reflected in the life and laws of all nations. The moral elements of the law continue to provide the pattern for godly living. God's law shows sinners their sin and points them to Christ as the only Saviour. The law in addition provides a measure of restraint on the expression of sin in society. It is also the guide for life for Christians as they are renewed in the image of Christ, revealing both the sin to be hated and the righteousness to be pursued.

## 3. Christ as the fulfilment of the law

Christ has fulfilled the requirements of the law, becoming a curse for his chosen people. Those who have been brought to faith in Christ express their love for the Lord by obeying his commandments through the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

## 4. Matrimony and sexual ethics

Marriage as heterosexual monogamy was instituted by God, with husband and wife leaving their own families and cleaving to one another in a lifelong relationship. Sexual desires are to be fulfilled within that union, and children born within it are to be cared for and nurtured in Christian knowledge and practice. Owing to human sinfulness, deviations from this pattern occur. The Bible disallows sexual relationships outside the bond of marriage, as it does same sex unions. Dissolution of a marriage by divorce is permissible if adultery has occurred, or if unbelievers irretrievably desert their Christian spouses. Man is described in Scripture as the 'head' of woman, as Christ is the 'head' of man and God is the 'head' of Christ. That headship in family and in church is demonstrated by loving as Christ loved the church.

## 5. Family planning

Family planning is acceptable, though contraception by such means as taking a pill after conception or by abortion of a foetus is really the destruction of a new life. For married couples experiencing difficulty in conceiving, in vitro fertilisation (IVF) is one possible option, though use of donor sperm or surrogate mothers is not because these practices, though medically feasible, intrude into the marriage relationship. Experimentation with human embryos is destructive of human life, as is experimentation with adult humans that may result in illness, disability, or even death. Though cloning of humans ('somatic cell nuclear transfer') may be technologically possible, neither 'reproductive cloning' nor 'therapeutic cloning' fits the biblical model in which sex and procreation are part of the covenantal relationship of marriage. Human scientific discoveries, though intrinsically good in themselves, can be used in defiance of God's moral order for his world. Life, and the ability to bear children, have to be viewed as God's gifts, and they are sovereignly bestowed.

## 6. The prolongation of life

Human bodies are subject to various illnesses, and modern medicine is able to assist with appropriate treatments, operations, and medicinal drugs. Organ transplants are a legitimate extension of such medical intervention to cure illnesses or to prolong life.

#### 7. The termination of life

Just as the creation of a new person is God's action, so it is he who determines the end of a person's life. Both origination and termination of life are in his sovereign control. While drugs may be used to relieve pain, they are not to be used to terminate human life, nor are they intended for use in giving an individual pleasure or to induce extrasensory states. Though modern technology may enable a person to be kept artificially alive, yet when no evidence exists of brain activity, then turning off such equipment is not wrong.

## **XII. Eschatology**

### 1. The eternal plan of God

At the very beginning of time there was a promise of fulfilment in the end of Adam's probation, God's Sabbath rest, and the promise of eternal life from the tree of life. All these anticipated God's intention to perfect what he had made very good. Paul saw the resurrection (or recreation) of the last Adam as the fulfilment of the creation of the first Adam before the Fall. The history of redemption is the outworking of God's saving purposes, culminating in the life and death of the Saviour, the taking of salvation to the nations, and the eschatological recreation of heaven and earth. In the present time, those who are united to Christ already experience the power of the world to come by the Spirit who lives in them. Even though they will experience death, they already have a taste of the future resurrection.

### 2. The state of the dead

Immediately after death, the souls of human beings return to God, while their bodies are destroyed. They do not fall into a state of sleep. The souls of the saved enter into a state of perfect holiness and joy, in the presence of God, and reign with Christ, while they await the resurrection. This happiness is not impeded by the memory of their lives in earth, since now they consider everything from the light of God's perfect will and plan. Their happiness and salvation is solely by God's grace. They have no power to intercede for the living or to become mediators between them and God. The souls of the lost are not destroyed after death, but enter into a state of suffering and darkness, cast away from God's presence, while they await the judgment day. There are no other states besides these two after death. Neither the souls of the saved nor those of the lost can return to the land of the living after death. All experiences attributed to the action of disembodied souls must be attributed either to human imagination or to the action of demons.

### 3. The second coming of Christ

The resurrection of Christ, followed by the sending of the Holy Spirit, inaugurated the new era, called the last days in Scripture. The Christian in this present time lives in the 'semi-eschatological' reality of the 'already' of Christ's finished work, and the 'not yet' of the future consummation. One day Christ will return to this world in a visible manner, with the glorious body of his resurrection, so that the whole world will see him. He will come in power, with the saints and his angels, to judge all human beings and bring God's kingdom to completion. The Scriptures strongly exhort us to be ready for Christ's coming; nevertheless, they do not give us a timetable or signs of when that might be. Christ's return remains the highest Christian hope. The church is encouraged to pray for it and to speed it up by preaching the gospel to the whole world.

#### 4. The resurrection of the dead

The dead who belong to Christ will be resurrected by his power, with a body similar to his, and made fit for the eternal state of fellowship with God and everlasting joy. As for the lost, they will also be resurrected, but for judgment and eternal punishment. This fate should make us tremble and fear and drive us to preach the gospel of God's saving grace to all nations. The personal identity of both the saved and the lost will be the same as they were on earth, but their bodies will be transformed in their substance and properties.

#### 5. The last judgment

Christ will return to this world as its judge, because he is the Son of Man and the king who reigns over it eternally. He will judge the living and the dead in righteousness and will show no favouritism or partiality. The elect will be declared justified on account of Christ's death and resurrection for them, and invited to enter his everlasting kingdom. The wicked and reprobate will be justly convicted of their sins and iniquities and cast out from his presence, along with Satan and the demons. In the meantime, Christians should support all lawful efforts to bring justice to this world, knowing that full and perfect judgment will be made at the end of time. As to the rewards Christ has promised to his people, Scripture says very little, but enough to give us an additional motivation for obedience and faithfulness.

#### 6. The millennium

The interim between Christ's exaltation and his second coming, that is, the present time when the good news of the gospel and its blessings are made known to the nations, has been recognized by most of the church as the millennium referred to in the Scriptures. Some, however, hold to a literal period of a thousand years of Christ's rule over the earth after Christ has returned. The present time still suffers the effects of human sin and rebellion and the power of Satan. Manifestations of evil will occur in the world, alongside expressions of Christ's kingdom, until he returns in glory.

#### 7. The new creation

After Christ returns, God will recreate the physical universe, and his resurrected people, vested with immortality and perfection, will live under Christ's rule in this new heaven and earth for ever.

#### 8. Different interpretations of eschatological matters

Christians agree about the main events that constitute the last things, but not always about their sequence and nature. The last things should be discussed with humility, remembering that it was often only after prophecies were fulfilled that God's people fully understood them.