

The Confession of Faith of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

(as enacted by the Executive Commission in 2007)

Prelude

In Christ God created the earth and everything in it good, and blessed human beings with life, meaning and purpose. But humankind has fallen into sin and so under divine judgement. In this predicament our only hope and comfort, in life and in death, is Jesus Christ; for in him God has acted to redeem and sanctify us. Through the Holy Spirit Christ reveals God's nature, grace, will and promise of final victory over sin and suffering.

The Need for Redemption

1. The Purpose and Predicament of Humankind

1.1 The good news in Jesus Christ tells us that we were created to enjoy communion with God in community with one another, to delight in creation and to glorify the Creator. This remains God's purpose for humankind, and is the reason why we exist.

1.2 Christ claims the whole of life for God and so makes clear how far short of grateful and loving obedience to God we have fallen. His death for our sins reveals the gravity of sin; his saving grace shows how empty every human claim to righteousness is.

1.3 The story of Adam and Eve portrays how, from the beginning, humankind has yielded to the temptation to turn away from God and in pride aspire to be self-sufficient and autonomous. That is what sin is. Instead of trusting and obeying God we have rebelled against God's holy will, setting ourselves up to be like God and to judge for ourselves between right and wrong according to our own self-interest.

1.4 Sin infects and corrupts our lives. It darkens our minds and perverts our very wills. All human virtue is itself defiled with self-interest. Our very knowledge of good and evil is a fallen knowledge, for we confuse what we ought to do with what we want to do. All human beings are in bondage to sin, unable to rescue themselves or of themselves turn to God to be rescued. The worst state is to believe in one's own righteousness and moral superiority.

1.5 Sin dominates the whole of human life. In our private and in our public lives we fall under the power of evil. We sin individually and corporately. We are proud, self-centred, resentful, lustful, greedy, corrupt; we hurt, exploit, discriminate against and oppress others; we neglect the needy. Sin misuses our greatest technological advances, ruining the environment and threatening us all with mutual destruction.

1.6 Sin empties life of meaning and issues in despair. It makes us enemies of God, of one another, of our natural environment and even of ourselves. It grievously offends God, brings us all under God's righteous wrath and just judgement, and leads to final alienation from God.

1.7 In this predicament we turn to false gods to find meaning and hope for our lives. A false god is anything of relative value to which we give absolute value or in which we put our final trust and so make an idol of it. Some false gods are: our race, nation, family, culture, social status, money, possessions, power, ideology, science, technology, sex, sport, alcohol, drugs, nature and even religion itself. Every false god enslaves its worshippers in further bondage.

The God who Redeems¹

2. God the Son, Revealer and Reconciler

2.1 The good news is that God does not abandon us to the judgement we deserve. In the history of Israel and above all in Jesus of Nazareth God, in sovereign and free grace, breaks through our alienation and our blindness.

2.2 God alone can make God known, and does so in and through Jesus Christ. For Christ is God's own eternal Wisdom and Word, by whom God made all things. As such he is himself God. As the Word he alone is the revelation or self-communication of God become flesh, the visible representation of the invisible God, the human face of God in history. Thus he alone reveals God as God truly is. God is always transcendent, infinite, mysterious, beyond human comprehension, yet no other than what Christ reveals. As the Word Christ is the Truth, and as the Truth he is the Way and the Life.

2.3 For the salvation of the world the eternal Word, the Son of God, humbled himself and by the Holy Spirit took on our humanity in the

¹ The section 'The God who Redeems' follows the epistemological order of the Trinity (the order in which we learn to know God as Triune; see II Cor.13:14.) The Article 'The Trinity' follows the ontological order (the order of being within the Trinity).

Virgin Mary's womb. He was born and lived in Palestine, as a carpenter and then an itinerant Jewish rabbi, or teacher. In him deity and humanity are united in one person, truly and fully God, yet truly and fully human; he was subject to all our human limitations and weaknesses and so also to temptation and suffering.

2.4 Jesus came to the Jews as their long-promised Messiah, identifying with them as an oppressed people. Anointed with the Holy Spirit, he proclaimed God's coming victorious rule on earth. Already in his own ministry God's rule invaded our time as a foretaste of God's new world. Tempted like us, he overcame temptation and broke the human pattern of failure and sin. He made God's grace known to sinners and healed the sick in body, mind and spirit. But some of his people rejected him, because his life and teaching judged their religious perceptions and practice, morality and national ambitions. Jews and Gentiles alike were guilty of his crucifixion. By crucifying Jesus the world passed judgement on itself.

2.5 Jesus crowned his work for God's coming rule by giving his life as a sin-offering for the world. The guilt of sin demanded the death of the guilty. But, in obedience to the Father's loving purpose, Christ died on the cross as a sinless human being for sinful human beings, the righteous for the unrighteous, the Judge in the place of the judged. He took our sin and bore God's judgement and wrath against sin in our place. Only in this way could he give us his righteousness. This unblemished sacrifice atoned once and for all for all sin; no other sacrifice is needed, sufficient or acceptable to God.

2.6 Jesus not only suffered death for us but by his glorious resurrection overcame death for us. God raised him bodily, in time and space, as the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Thus the victim of sin and death became for us the Victor over sin, death, Satan and all evil powers, inaugurated the new creation and brought us the free gift of eternal life.

2.7 This atonement reconciled the world to God. It honoured the holy justice of God that cannot condone or overlook sin and at the same time proved God's love for all sinners and glorified the grace of God that forgives. For through union with Christ we have forgiveness for all our sin, righteousness before God, reconciliation with God, and victory over sin, death and every evil power.

2.8 Thus Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and people, the only Saviour for all humankind. Exalted to God's 'right hand', he is our eternal Advocate and High Priest who intercedes for us; he is Lord over

all the universe and over every area of human life, private and public.

3. God the Father, Creator and Sustainer

3.1 God heard the cry of the Hebrews in Egypt, liberated them from oppression, provided them with food and water in the desert, and led them to the promised land. This and their continuing experience of providence and judgement revealed God to them as the creator and ruler of all things who brings justice to the oppressed and demands justice and righteousness from all people. They came to know God as Father of the chosen people and even of individuals in it.

3.2 The incarnation, teaching, miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the new creation in him confirmed the Old Testament revelation of God as the eternal Creator and sustainer of all things visible and invisible, who is universally present, undergirding all creation and all life, the sovereign Ruler over all things, the fountain of all truth, wisdom, love, goodness and beauty, the just Judge and merciful Saviour of humankind. God is revealed as the eternal Father above all in and through Jesus Christ as the eternal Son.

3.3 Jesus taught his disciples about God as not only his own Father but also their Father in heaven. For through Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Father adopts us as sons and daughters, and loves and cares for all people like a loving father.

3.4 Before the almighty Creator we ought to bow in awe; before the holy and righteous Judge of the universe we should stand in fear; but in God as our loving and merciful Father we may confidently trust.

3.5 Scripture uses female or motherly metaphors as well for God, because God relates to creation and to us with motherly care and tender compassion. But God is not a mother in the sense that the world or humankind is generated from a divine womb or is an extension of God's own being. God is Spirit and transcends all gender.

4. God the Holy Spirit, Life-giver and Sanctifier

4.1 The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and is one with God as a human spirit is one with a human being. The Spirit is the living, creative, personal and immediate presence and power of the transcendent God extended into the world, at work in it and in us. The Spirit is thus fully God and not at all to be ranked with any other existing or supposed spirit, whether ancestral or supernatural.

4.2 The Holy Spirit is likewise the Spirit of Christ, his living presence and power. Christ poured out the Spirit on the Church at Pentecost. He comes to us and works in us always by his Spirit, who resides in everyone who has faith in Christ. Scripture calls us to be constantly filled with the Spirit.

4.3 The Spirit, the Giver of life, was active in creation and is active in the new creation. The Spirit inspired the law, the prophets and the apostles and enables the Word to take root in our hearts. Through the Word and the sacraments the Spirit brings home to us the judgement and grace of God, enables us to recognize and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and moves us to commit ourselves to him. The Spirit unites us to Christ and to one another in his Body, gives us new birth, sets us free from bondage to sin, and assures us that we are now children of God.

4.4 The Spirit helps us to pray, moves us to worship and obey God, gives us faith and hope, pours the love of God into our hearts and brings forth the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit equips us with an abundance of gifts and talents to build up his Body, and empowers us to serve and witness to Jesus Christ in the world. In all these ways the Spirit brings life and revival to, and through, the Church.

4.5 The indwelling Spirit is the promise and foretaste of God's coming rule.

4.6 Through the Spirit God guides us in our daily lives. But every claimed experience or guidance of the Spirit must be tested by the Word of God.

5. The Trinity

5.1 God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and outpouring of the Holy Spirit reveal God as Father, Son and Spirit, at the same time transcendent over the world, acting in history, and present in the world. This revelation in history discloses what God truly and inherently is, for it is God's self-revelation. It is the revelation of the one true and living God, who alone is to be worshipped and adored.

5.2 The Father speaks, and Christ is the Word that is spoken. The Son is eternally generated by the Father, Light of Light, God of God. In him the fullness of deity dwells. Through him the Father made all things, reconciles us to the Godhead, and saves us from sin and death. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God eternally proceeding from the Father through the Son and operating in and through the Son, who sends the Spirit into the world to give life, renew, sanctify and guide.

5.3 God is one and the same being, yet threefold: one in three and three in one. The one indivisible God who said, 'I am who I am,' has always existed and will always exist in three distinct and different but inseparable ways of being, which we call Persons. Each is wholly and fully God, the same in majesty, glory and power, but distinguished by a different relation to the others. They exist eternally with, for, and in one another; yet all retain their identities in personal relationship with one another. They constitute a living communion of mutual self-giving, so that God's being is essentially relational and there is no solitude or self-centredness in the eternal Trinity; instead holy love is, and always has been, at the very heart of the Godhead.

5.4 All outward action of the Godhead begins with the Father and proceeds through the Son in the Spirit. Though God the Father particularly is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, God the Son the Revealer and Reconciler and God the Spirit the Giver of Life and Sanctifier, all three share together in the creation and preservation of all things, the revelation of God's truth, the reconciliation and redemption of humankind, and the renewal and perfection of creation. For all three are one in being, nature, will and work, the same in goodness, justice, love and mercy.

5.5 The Father is revealed by the Son through the Spirit, and no one comes to the Father except through the Son and in the Spirit. No one comes to the Son and confesses him as Lord unless drawn by the Father and moved by the Spirit.

5.6 In condescending to be known by us God yet remains transcendent, holy and mysterious. God's triune being is a mystery that we can now know only dimly and in part, but are to adore eternally.

The Revelation of Redemption

6. Revelation, Scripture, Preaching and Personal Witness

6.1 In themselves human beings are unable to find and know God. Not by our intellect nor by striving to be better people nor by spiritual or religious practices of any kind are we able to bridge the abyss between God and humankind. For God reigns in infinite and transcendent majesty, and we are but finite creatures; God reigns in impregnable holiness, and we are sinners. We do not even have ears that can hear God speak to us.

6.2 By grace alone, however, in the power of the Holy Spirit, God's Word breaks through our spiritual deafness, convicts us of sin and moves us to repent and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

6.3 The Word of God is always God's living Word that addresses us in real life, in the power of the Spirit, and points, or witnesses, to Jesus Christ. That Word is thus in the most exact sense the living and present Lord Jesus Christ himself addressing us. In his life, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension God has spoken unambiguously, so that the test of sound teaching is its accord with the gospel.

6.4 Christ reveals himself to us through the witness that Holy Scripture bears to him, and through the witness that the Church bears to him on the basis of Scripture. Thus Christ speaks through Scripture, preaching and personal witness, in the power of the Spirit, where and when he chooses.

6.5 The same Spirit who spoke through the prophets and Jesus and the apostles inspired the writing of the Scriptures. They record the revelation of God's grace, will and purpose for the world in the call of Abraham, in the liberation and history of Israel, in the birth, ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is thus the sufficient and uniquely authoritative witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. As such it is the Word of God written and the final rule of faith and life.²

6.6 The ultimate authority of Scripture itself rests on its witness to Jesus Christ, who lived, died and rose again for the world's salvation, and on the Spirit's inner witness that God in person is speaking to us in the words of Scripture. In all revelation God is sovereign and speaks in the present.

6.7 Scripture consists of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments commonly accepted as fully canonical. The Spirit guided the community of faith to recognize these writings as the unique and faithful record of the Word of God on which the people of God was

founded and thus the criterion by which to judge the broader tradition of which they are part.

6.8 Neither Testament is dispensable: each is to be read in the light of the other. The Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, bears witness to God's faithfulness, justice and grace in dealing with Israel and points forward to the coming Messiah. The New Testament witnesses to the coming of the Messiah in the past and his coming in glory in the future. Thus the New Testament presupposes and builds upon the Old in interpreting the gospel; it also fulfils and completes the Old. Only if we are schooled in the Old Testament will we properly interpret the New and its gospel of God's rule. But what the Old Testament proclaims Christ reveals fully: God's justice, love and grace and the promise of God's victory over all evil.

6.9 The Scriptures are inspired by the same God who accepted the constraints of the incarnation. Thus though inspired by the Spirit, the Scriptures are at the same time fully human documents. As the elements in Holy Communion remain bread and wine yet through the sacrament Christ imparts himself to us, so the Word of God is accommodated to our understanding in the human words of Scripture and addresses us through those words.

6.10 Indeed as human documents the books of the Bible are conditioned by the thought forms of their times and open to rational analysis. Such analysis helps us understand their literary and historical nature and their social, political, ideological and religious contexts. Yet it is not detached rational analysis, or for that matter religious intuition, but the Holy Spirit who uncovers the Word of God to us. It is not we who judge God's Word in the Bible, but the Word that examines and judges us. To hear the Word of God in the Bible and in preaching we need ears opened, and hearts enlightened, by the Spirit.

6.11 God's Word is sovereign, and Holy Scripture is the source and only criterion for all that the church teaches. God may speak to us also through the grandeur of nature, the rustling of a leaf, the storms and silences of life, a vision, a dream or the cry of a hungry child. We need to listen for God's call and command at all times, wherever we are. But every claimed revelation is to be tested by the normative criterion of the Word of God as Scripture bears witness to it.

6.12 Scripture needs to be interpreted from within the community of faith and its tradition, of which Scripture itself is a part. The Holy Spirit has also guided the great councils of the Church and the formulation of its great creeds, whose authority we recognize. Yet, important as church

² In adopting the Confession the UPCS recognizes that its members have different (for some, overlapping) views on the relation between the Word of God and Scripture:

1. Some fully identify the Word of God with Scripture, regarding it as verbally inspired and infallible.
2. Some distinguish between the Word of God and Scripture as its inspired and normative but fallible human record and witness.
3. Some emphasize that the Word of God is strictly Jesus Christ, the living Word, and see Scripture as the normative and authoritative witness to Christ that by the power of the Spirit becomes and is the Word of God in bearing such witness (Jn.5:39f., II Cor.3-4:6).

All, however, confess that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and that the Scriptures are inspired by God and have unique authority.

tradition is in guiding us how to interpret Scripture, Scripture itself is the uniquely normative part of all tradition. The Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture is the standard by which all tradition, councils, creeds, confessions and other pronouncements, all religious experience and human reasoning and all preaching and personal witness are to be tested. The Spirit does not reveal truth different from that in Scripture, but opens our minds to the gospel and impresses on them its truth.

6.13 Scripture is its own interpreter in the sense that its fundamental message must be understood not in terms of any interpretive key from outside it but on its own terms. Every biblical passage is to be interpreted in the light of the whole of Scripture and above all in the light of Christ. For it is to Christ that Scripture bears witness: he is its burden, its centre, its purpose, its unity and the fulfilment of all its divine promises. All of Scripture is to be read with the aim of finding Christ in it.

6.14 As a witness to God's Word Scripture is judged only by the Christ to whom it witnesses and who speaks through it. For he is the Lord of Scripture and its norm. As the herald and living embodiment of God's grace and coming rule, as the Galilean Jew who identified with the poor and oppressed, having nowhere to lay his own head, as the victim of the religious and political powers at whose hands he died for our sins and as the Lord who rose for our justification and was exalted as sovereign over all of life, he is the liberating Word that is the key to the interpretation of all Scripture. Our own egoism and group and class interests constantly tempt us to read Scripture through the spectacles of our pride, prejudices and vested interests; as God's Word, however, Christ always calls for repentance, faith, humility and gratitude, and for liberation and justice for the poor, the exploited and the victimized.

6.15 True preaching expounds the Scriptures and applies them to the contemporary context. It focuses on Christ and calls people to accept him as Saviour and serve him as Lord in daily life. To the extent that it is true to Scripture in bearing witness to Jesus Christ and is empowered by the Spirit, preaching is itself God's own Word to us.

6.16 Likewise the Spirit empowers the halting words of all who bear personal witness to Christ, so that, despite their human weaknesses, they speak the very Word of God, which encounters their hearers and calls them to faith and obedience. Through such preaching and personal witness, then, Christ encounters people in the present as the living Word.

7. The Sacraments

7.1 Christ ordained two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. They respectively succeed circumcision and the Passover in the old covenant.

7.2 The same Word of God that addresses us verbally through Scripture, preaching and personal witness comes to us visibly and tangibly through the sacraments. The sacraments are not just symbols of the Word or visual aids to it but visible, material forms of the Word itself that apply, confirm and seal the promises of the gospel to the individual. Through them Christ comes to us with saving grace in the power of his Spirit.

7.3 As the Holy Spirit awakens faith by means of preaching and personal witness to Christ, so by means of the sacraments the same Spirit confirms our faith, binds us to Christ and establishes our salvation. Thus the sacraments convey and effect God's promises to sinners; only in the second place do they express our response to God's grace.

7.4 Jesus Christ alone saves. Just as no printed or spoken human words themselves can save, so no water, bread, wine or outward ritual itself can. Yet Christ comes to us not face to face but clothed in human words and in the earthly elements of the sacraments. As the very Word of God he is the essential content of the sacraments, just as of Scripture, preaching and personal witness. He is personally present in the sacraments; his Spirit is the source of all their power.

7.5 The spoken Word, in preaching and in the liturgy, constitutes these rites as sacraments. It does so by explaining what they signify and so making clear their offer of grace. Only by trusting in God's promise signified by the sacrament and articulated in its accompanying words do we receive its essential content. Apart from the word of promise and having, or coming to have, faith in that promise, the sacraments have no saving effect.

7.6 The sacraments remind us of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, which accomplished our salvation in the past. Through them Christ offers, effects and affirms that salvation in the present. They also anticipate God's final sanctification and renewal of all things in the future.

7.7 Through the sacraments the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ and incorporates us in his one body. Christ applies his atonement to the individual, forgives our sins, seals his covenant of salvation with us, confirms our faith and empowers us to follow him. The sacraments

identify the Church, and by participating in them we profess our identity in Christ and our faith before the world.

7.8 We recognize the confession of sins and assurance of grace, ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament, and marriage all as ordinances of God, though not as sacraments.

7.9 Members of the Church who fail to pay their church dues are not for that reason to be denied the sacraments and ordinances of the Church.

8. Baptism

8.1 The risen Lord Jesus is our baptizer. In baptism he calls us by name and initiates us into the covenant of grace and the community of the redeemed—and so admits us to his holy Table. Baptism therefore normally takes place in the face of the worshipping community. Preceded by repentance and confession of faith in Christ as the crucified and risen Lord, it is with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because the water signifies spiritual cleansing and life, baptism may be by either immersion in, or pouring on, water.

8.2 Baptism into God's name claims us as God's people, no longer belonging to the world. God uses baptism in water along with preaching or personal witness to Christ to baptize us with the Spirit and give us new birth through faith in him. By baptism in water, Christ washes away all our guilt and clothes us with his righteousness; we die and are buried with Christ, to die to sin and live as new people in him. Baptism incorporates us into his Body as a community that transcends all divisions of race, class and gender, and consecrates us to be members of the royal priesthood. It commissions us to take up our cross, follow him and witness to him. As the sacrament of renewal, it points forward to the cosmic renewal to come and seals us for the day of redemption.

8.3 Christ calls us to be born of water and the Spirit. But as the wind blows where it wills, so the Spirit regenerates some through the audible Word and faith without baptism, and not all who are baptized are born anew.

8.4 God's covenant is with a community and so with the individuals within that community. The covenant thus includes not only adult believers but also their children. As the circumcision of infants signified this in the old dispensation, so infant baptism signifies it in the new. For by baptism we are circumcised with the circumcision of Christ. As circumcision was a sign of repentance and a seal of righteousness by

faith yet administered to infants in anticipation of these things, so is baptism. Therefore the children of baptized parents who have repented and confessed their faith may be baptized too, with the parents' promising to nurture them in the faith. To such belongs God's coming rule. The community of faith is responsible with the parents for the nurture of such children. Thus it is not on the basis of their understanding or ability that human beings receive God's gift, but only through the grace of God. Infant baptism is not to be practised as a social custom or a cultural rite of passage after birth: it is not to be administered indiscriminately.

8.5 Children who die unbaptized and people whose mental incapacity does not enable them to respond to the call of grace are not to be seen as outside the hope of redemption.

8.6 Baptism initiates the children into the covenant, incorporates them into the body of Christ and engages them to be the Lord's. But baptism never replaces the need for faith: it anticipates that, as members of the community, such children will come to respond with a free, glad 'yes' to God's 'Yes' to them by accepting Christ as Lord and Saviour—and publicly professing that faith. Their baptism thus calls them to trust in Christ and worship and obey God as they grow up, for its promise of grace to be realized in them. The regeneration that infant baptism signifies may be fulfilled in childhood, adolescence or even old age, whenever a person is brought to faith.

8.7 As Christ died and rose for us once and for all, baptism happens only once. Whenever received, it remains effective for the whole of a believer's life; its promise is permanent. Whenever we sin or are troubled or in doubt, Christ calls us to look back to our baptism as the sacrament through which he initiated us into his covenant, claimed us, and cleansed us for his service. In that light we are to repent and to know that we have died with Christ to self and sin and been raised with him to forgiveness and new life.

9. The Lord's Supper

9.1 The risen Lord Jesus is the host at the Lord's Supper. It is the sacrament of communion with him. He instituted it as a fourfold act of taking, giving thanks, breaking, and sharing bread and wine that signify his body and blood. Just as baptism is normally in the face of the congregation, so the Lord's Supper is normally a communal meal. Only those who know they are unworthy of the Supper, grieve for their sins and humbly trust in God's promise of grace are ready for it. Those who

eat and drink in unbelief dishonour the death of Christ to their own condemnation.

9.2 The Supper commemorates and proclaims Christ's death and resurrection in the past as the ground of our salvation. But at it the exalted and living Lord himself is truly present, presiding at his Table in the power of his crucifixion and resurrection. In the act of Holy Communion, through the Spirit, he feeds us with his very body and blood, so that he lives in us and we in him. In this way he confirms and renews his covenant with us and assures us that he died for our sins and will raise us from death to live with him for ever. For with Christ we receive the benefits of his death and resurrection: the forgiveness of our sins, the joy of mystical communion with him, and reconciliation and union with one another in the one body of Christ. All should therefore come to the Table at peace with one another. Through this sacrament Christ empowers us to overcome the temptations we face in this age, renews us to share his mission in the world and gives us a foretaste of the messianic banquet in the age to come.

9.3 By their material elements the sacraments remind us of the bodily nature of the incarnation, assure us tangibly of our salvation and bring home that the good news is not just a matter of words but a reality to be known and lived out in this world. The sharing of the bread reminds us both of our unity in Christ and of Christ's command to share our bread with the hungry as we would with him.

9.4 The Supper is the centre and crown of the Church's worship. In faithfulness to Christ's example and to apostolic practice, it should be celebrated regularly and frequently.

10. Natural Revelation

10.1 The universe with its vastness, order, beauty, mystery and power has struck people in every age with awe. It points beyond itself to the majesty and power of its Creator. Conscience also makes people dimly aware of God's righteousness and judgement. So, even without what Jesus Christ reveals of God, human beings have some sense of the reality of the Supreme Being. This leaves us without excuse for failing to honour, love and serve the living God as we should. But sin so corrupts the mind and spirit that, left to ourselves, we deny or distort this revelation. Instead of acknowledging the true and living God we fashion our own false ideas of God or worship idols.

10.2 God, who is holy and transcendent, is hidden from sinners: they can only grope after the divine reality. Human reason cannot pierce

the mystery of God; indeed sin warps reason's view of both divine reality and the human condition. Nor can we discover God in nature, in history or in the depths of our own being. Only God's Word or self-revelation in Jesus Christ can bridge the chasm between God and sinful human beings. Only the grace and mercy of God in Christ breaks through our sin and spiritual blindness.

10.3 Thus it is not by seeing or recognizing the majesty and power of God in nature or the universe that one comes to real knowledge of God. Instead it is only by first coming to know God in Jesus Christ, in the humiliation, weakness, shame and suffering of the Cross and in the victory of the resurrection, that we come to know the true and living God. Indeed even though creation bears God's handprints, it is only through the spectacles of Scripture that we can see it clearly for what it is: the handiwork of this God, the theatre of the Creator's glory.

10.4 Reason and nature by themselves are inadequate also to answer the question how we should behave. God's Word alone does that clearly and fully.

10.5 Conscience itself must be transformed by being made captive to that Word; for Christ, not conscience, is the ultimate judge of what is right or wrong.

11. Revelation and Religion

11.1 Some religions include impressive elements of spirituality and morality that challenge the Church to be faithful to its own message and ethics. But all religion stands under God's judgement and is radically called in question by the good news that grace alone puts us right with God. That good news shatters every human claim to have achieved knowledge of, or peace with, God. It means the end of all religious, including all Christian, conceit and pride.

11.2 Thus the Christian mission to people of every religion properly begins with the confession that before the one true God everyone is spiritually poor. Christians in themselves are no more righteous than unbelievers. Nor have we found God or achieved any saving knowledge of God; only God's search for us and self-disclosure in Jesus Christ achieves that.

11.3 We are constantly tempted to turn all religion, including our Christian religion, into a basis for self-righteousness, self-complacency and looking down on those whose religion differs from our own, especially if their social class, race or nationality differs as well. We also tend to use religion to sanction our social or political way of life.

Christians need to repent for prejudice against others and for when they have persecuted and oppressed others in the name of their religion.

11.4 God wants all people to be saved, and Christ died to atone for the sins not only of Christians but of the whole world. As the one Mediator between God and humankind Christ opens up the way to God for the religious and the irreligious alike.

11.5 We have no right to try to impose the lordship of Jesus Christ on unbelievers against their will. Instead, in all humility, and wherever necessary in penitence, Christians should seek dialogue with people of other religions and work with them for religious freedom for everyone and for justice, peace and the environment. For peace in a world torn apart by religious, sectarian and other kinds of conflict needs tolerance, tolerance needs understanding, and mutual understanding needs dialogue.

11.6 At the same time Christ calls us to be always loyal to the one true and living God he reveals. The good news calls us to witness to all people of every religion and of no religion that Christ is the one Lord and Saviour, the Way, the Truth and the Life. To know the true and living God means the end of all other gods.

12. Revelation and Culture

12.1 In Scripture revelation comes to us clothed in the culture of the ancient Middle East. To communicate the good news to others we need to express it in their language and cultural concepts. As the good news takes root, it becomes embodied in a particular culture.

12.2 Human culture, however, tends to enmesh the Church in its values and to reduce the Church's preaching and teaching to an echo of those values. Even in Scripture a cultural patriarchalism and male-centredness in many places obscures the full biblical insight that in God's eyes all people are equal, no matter their gender, race, nation or class. God's revelation itself is not to be identified with any human culture or its religious aspect. It remains sovereign over every culture and addresses every culture and all people equally. It judges every culture together with its religious beliefs, practices and pretensions.

12.3 The good news opposes the materialism, consumerism, racism, militarism and sexual licence that are rampant in many cultures, including our own. It opposes any resort to mediums, fortune-tellers, astrology, horoscopes, charms or fetishes.

12.4 Likewise the good news opposes any religious or cultural

honouring or veneration of the ancestors that in any way compromises the role of Jesus Christ as Scripture reveals it. We should remember the blessed departed. Indeed our forebears in the faith surround us as a great cloud of witnesses: their example encourages us to persevere in the race set before us. But Christ alone blazes the trail for our faith and enables it to reach its goal. He, once for all, provided the only, sufficient sacrifice on our behalf; he alone is Mediator between God and humankind; he alone gives us saving knowledge of the true and living God; his Word and Spirit alone are our true guide; he alone is our comfort in life and in death. In him there is no place for fear of any supernatural powers, stars, ancestral spirits or evil spells. For he is exalted as Lord in glory and might far above every heavenly body, every power, every spirit; he is the Saviour who delivers us from every threat they may pose.

The Way of Redemption

13. Election and Covenant

13.1 Already before creating the world God elected a particular people in Christ, predestining them to be adopted as children of God. God elected Abraham, Sarah and their descendants with the promise, 'I will bless you, so that in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' Thus of all the people on earth God covenanted with Israel to be their God and called them to be a holy and faithful people and obey the commandments. But Israel was elected to be a blessing to others: to be a light to all the nations. The election of this particular people was for the sake of God's mission to the whole world, to make God's grace and salvation known to all people in the face of sin and judgement.

13.2 This election and covenant anticipated the coming of the Messiah and the uniting together of all things in heaven and on earth under one head, Jesus Christ.

13.3 God's covenant is an everlasting covenant. Although the people of Israel were disobedient, God did not cast them away for ever, but instead made a new covenant of grace with them. For God remains faithful even when we are faithless.

13.4 The new covenant is sealed with the blood of the Messiah, entered through faith by baptism and written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Gentiles accounted righteous through faith, as Abraham was, are

thereby made children of Abraham and Sarah within the covenant and so equal to the Jews and heirs of salvation.

13.5 Thus God, although hidden from human eyes, by grace comes to be known by some. For God elects in Christ, purely out of grace, not because the elect merit it in any way or are better than other people.

13.6 Election assures the weakest of believers of their security in the grace of God. For God is faithful. Even though we may grow spiritually cold or wander away and fall into grave sin, God does not abandon us. God's Spirit draws us to repent, be restored and persevere to the end. Nothing can snatch us out of the Father's hand. God who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion.

13.7 The elect are called to make God known to the whole world and seek its salvation. We are called to bear witness that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour and that all who truly seek shall find God.

13.8 Thus the goal of election is to liberate humankind from all hostile powers that threaten it, even death itself, so that human beings may be reconciled with God, with one another, with nature and with themselves, in true community under God's loving rule.

13.9 Scripture's witness to Christ excludes the notion that God, by an eternal decree, predestined any particular individuals or people to final rejection.

14. The Victorious Rule of God

14.1 Jesus Christ revealed that, despite all the sin and suffering in it, God has not abandoned this world. For the world is God's, and God loves it. God wants to save sinners—and stands on the side of the poor, the oppressed and the exploited against all social, economic and political structures that oppress them. Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's triumph over all the powers of evil, the renewal of the world and God's victorious rule in it. This was the good news of a radically new order of justice, mercy and peace: one that would save sinners, bless the poor, fill the hungry, liberate the oppressed, end the rule of Satan and bring eternal life.

14.2 God's victorious rule broke into history already in Jesus' life and ministry. By his healings, miracles and forgiveness of sin and above all by his resurrection, exaltation and outpouring of the Spirit, Christ inaugurated God's rule in anticipation of its final victory. Thus those who by faith are heirs of that rule already experience something of what it means to be brought under it, and so be rescued from the power of darkness.

14.3 Christ reigns from 'God's right hand' as Lord and King over every area of life. Though his kingship is hidden from unbelievers now, at the end of the age he will manifest and implement it in its fullness, bringing judgement and salvation to all the world.

14.4 God's victorious rule is no human enterprise that we bring about, build or extend in any way. It is no evolving historical process. Nor can any human revolution ever be reckoned as bringing it about. Instead it comes by God's grace and sovereign power alone.

14.5 Thus the gospel makes clear that this world is not as it is meant to be; instead it is in the grip of evil. Christ calls us to live in eager anticipation of God's victory that will triumph over evil. We do that by our own obedience and by working for the liberation of the oppressed and striving to conform society to God's will. The Church is the community in which God's rule breaks through when it is a Church for others, with its members caring for others and struggling for a just and free society.

14.6 Every partial triumph of good over evil, of personal holiness over sin and of justice over injustice, is a sign of the coming rule of God. For that rule already impacts on the world, and in the end must triumph.

15. Grace, Justification, Regeneration and Faith

15.1 We are justified, that is, declared righteous and so set right with God, purely out of grace. Grace is not power given to us in order that we may achieve our own righteousness and so merit salvation; it is God's free love and mercy that we utterly fail to deserve. For before God no one can boast of any goodness or merit. All our own righteousness fails; all our efforts leave us worthy only of death. But when we despair of ourselves, we find comfort in God. In our failure and need God's sovereign, free grace comes to us.

15.2 The Spirit strips us of all our self-deception and supposed righteousness and convicts us of the enormity of our own sin. The Spirit brings home to us how God has met that sin in Christ and unites us to Christ by moving us to surrender to him as Lord and trust in him as Saviour.

15.3 Through our union with Christ God freely pardons us and accounts us righteous on the sole ground of Christ's perfect obedience and atonement. Thus God imputes to us a righteousness that is not our own but Christ's. This frees us from all condemnation, and the Spirit assures us of the forgiveness of all our sins. For no sin or guilt is so great that Christ's atonement does not cover it. At the same time as God imputes Christ's

righteousness to us, the Spirit, by uniting us with Christ, always sanctifies us, in the sense of cleansing away all our sins with the blood of Christ.

15.4 In this way the Spirit gives us new birth as God's children in Christ, inseparable from God. Regeneration then manifests itself in genuine conversion (whether experienced as sudden conversion or not).

15.5 We receive grace through faith alone. Faith comes through hearing the good news and is confirmed by the sacraments. Much more than belief in right doctrine, it is accepting the living Christ as Lord and trusting in him alone as the Saviour who fulfils all God's promises of mercy and grace. It is our acceptance, in humility and gratitude, of God's surprising acceptance of us.

15.6 Thus faith hungers and thirsts for Christ and lays hold of him who has first laid hold of us, even if at times we struggle to cling to him. Faith does not mean the absence of all doubt but remains standing in the face of doubt. For though faith cannot sustain itself, the Word and the Spirit continually uphold it.

15.7 As our response to the good news of Jesus Christ, faith involves a human decision. Indeed how we respond to that news, with faith and commitment or with unbelief or indifference, is the most critical decision we make in life. Yet we are able to make that decision only because in the power of the Spirit God's Word unblocks our deaf ears, enlightens our minds, changes our hearts and moves us to accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. Thus faith is not a human achievement but the effect of grace, the work of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts, God's gift to us. No one may boast of having chosen to accept salvation in contrast to those who reject it, for we all resist God. We do not choose Christ; he chooses us, and no one can come to him unless the Father draws that person with the Spirit.

15.8 Nor does faith itself merit, effect or appropriate salvation. Faith is but the means that the Spirit uses to unite us to Christ; it is an empty hand that receives redemption as a gift and then clings to Christ and God's promises in him. For Christ, not faith, is our righteousness and our sanctification. All the glory for salvation belongs to God alone.

The Response to Redemption

16. Grace, Gratitude and Ongoing Sanctification

16.1 Grace is free, because we in no way earn it. But for God it is utterly costly, because it cost the life of God's Son; so we dare not treat

it as cheap. For us too it is costly in that it demands repentance and, in the face of opposition and persecution, faithfulness. To repent means so to be moved by the Spirit that we grieve for our sins, turn away from them to God, and bear fruit worthy of grace. Christ accepts us as we are, but does not let us remain as we are. He claims our whole life for God and calls us, in the midst of an unholy world, to grow in grace and active holiness. We are saved to live for God and live out the love of Christ in the world.

16.2 Ongoing sanctification in our manner of living thus follows our justification, initial sanctification and regeneration. The Spirit moves us to respond to God's grace not only with faith but with love and glad obedience that seeks to serve God. True faith thus always issues in action, or works. Such works are done not in order to win eternal life, for that is God's free, unmerited gift, but in gratitude and to the glory of God.

16.3 To glorify God means to worship God and to live out God's will in the world. It means to commit our lives to Christ, and witness to him, no matter the cost. It means to love all our neighbours and to forgive and love all our enemies. For we cannot claim to love God, whom we do not see, if we hate people whom we do see. True faith is active in love, a love that cares for others. Such love does all it can to stand for justice, defend the oppressed, feed the hungry, comfort the distressed, visit those in prison, rescue the outcast and join the struggle against evil in the world in anticipation of God's coming just rule.

16.4 In ourselves we are always ungodly sinners, unprofitable servants who fail to achieve any righteousness of our own and need forgiveness every day. Even our best deeds in this life remain imperfect and contaminated with sin. Yet God graciously accepts and is pleased by deeds of obedience and even promises to reward them. This is not because they merit reward, but because it is the Spirit that moves us to do them and Christ's atonement covers all the shortcomings in our obedience with his righteousness.

16.5 Thus to be a Christian means to repent every day for sin and give unending praise and thanks for God's goodness and grace.

17. Gospel and Law

17.1 The Word of God comes to us as the gospel, or good news, of God's grace and as God's law, or commandments. Both aspects of the Word encounter us in the Old Testament and in the New but most profoundly in the person, life, example and teaching of Jesus himself.

17.2 The sacrifices and ritual laws of the old covenant foreshadowed the promised reality that Christ was to bring, and so fell away with his coming. But the spiritual and moral commandments of Scripture remain valid and imperative.

17.3 The law and the gospel must be distinguished. It is God's grace in Jesus Christ that redeems us, not God's law. The law demands that we keep all the commandments and live holy lives. Yet it does not enable us to do this, and so cannot redeem us.

17.4 We understand the gospel and the law properly only in the light of each other. The Spirit uses both together as a mirror to reveal to us what we are: sinners who fall far short of the commandments and indeed rebel against God in will, thought, word and deed. In this way the Spirit convicts us of our sin and condemnation under the law, drives home our desperate need for Christ and brings us to godly grief. Christ is thus the goal of the law.

17.5 The good news is that in bearing our sins on the cross Christ freed us from the law's condemnation. It thus calls us to put our faith in Jesus Christ instead of striving for a righteousness of our own under the law. For all whom the Spirit unites to Christ through faith thereby receive the righteousness and life of Christ. This frees them from the demand that they achieve a righteousness of their own and from all the law's threats.

17.6 Yet the gospel and the law are not separate. The same God who liberated the Hebrews from Egypt gave them the commandments. The same Saviour who died for our sins and was raised for our justification is the Lord who claims all authority in heaven and on earth and calls us to observe all that he has commanded.

17.7 Christ himself fulfilled the law on our behalf. He thus does not abolish the law but upholds it. Indeed in freeing us from condemnation by the law he freed us to obey and serve God's will. For true freedom is not freedom to do as we like within the prison of sin but being set free from that prison and so being free for God, free for others.

17.8 Thus God's covenant involves both grace and the commandments. God does not offer us the grace of the good news without confronting us with the commandments. Indeed the grace of God itself commands us, for it claims our whole being. To know God's grace is to know God, and to know God is to know and serve God's will.

17.9 The one Word of God is thus both gospel and law: it reveals both God's good will towards us and what God's will demands from us. In calling us to faith the gospel does so in order that we may live

according to God's will, and the commandments show us how to live in accord with the gospel.

17.10 In accordance with God's promised new covenant the Spirit writes the law on believers' hearts. That means that the Spirit moves us to live to God's glory in accordance with the good news and the commandments, in gratitude for God's grace and mercy. It means that the Spirit empowers us to live out the law's demands gladly, joyfully and courageously.

17.11 The Spirit interprets the commandments, so that we obey them not legalistically but as the Spirit of life applies them in the light of Christ. This also means in accordance with the two primary commandments in which Christ summed up the will of God: to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbours as ourselves.

17.12 Civil law too must be judged in the light of God's law. Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word we have to hear, trust and obey, in life and in death. No other law or command of any kind can have greater authority than that Word. For Christ is Lord over every area of life.

18. Worship and Prayer

18.1 The Holy Spirit gathers the family of God to glorify God together. For the Church gathers not so much to seek God as to celebrate and proclaim that God has first sought and found us. We respond to God's grace by faithful worship and daily prayer. Corporate worship, meditating on Scripture and private prayer are all integral to Christian life. Through them God arouses and preserves our faith, transforms our lives, stirs up the gifts of the Spirit in us and sustains our Christian discipleship. Godliness that is not expressed in prayer and worship dissipates.

18.2 The central act of worship includes Word and sacrament. For worship is a dialogue in which God comes to us in the Word and the sacraments, and we respond with praise and adoration, confessing our sins, declaring our faith, giving thanks and offering our gifts and ourselves as a living sacrifice. Through the Spirit we become the one Body of Christ, in fellowship with one another. All true worship is to the glory of God the Father, Son and Spirit alone. Worship is acceptable only through Jesus Christ, the Mediator.

18.3 The Lord's day in particular is ordained for corporate worship and the celebration of Holy Communion, as a time to delight in God. For on

this day the Lord rose from the dead, made himself known to his followers and ate with them.

18.4 Prayer is offered to the Holy Trinity. It is addressed usually to the Father through the Son as our Advocate and Intercessor and in the Holy Spirit, though also to the Son and sometimes to the Spirit. Although prayer is a human activity, at a deeper level it is an activity of the Spirit within us. All true prayer is presented on the basis not of our righteousness but of God's great mercy. In it we reach out beyond ourselves to glorify and thank God, confess our sins, pray for others and for ourselves, wait upon God and dedicate ourselves to God's service. Jesus promised that God hears prayer offered in his name and therefore in accordance with his will. To such prayers he joins his own intercessions for us.

18.5 True worship and prayer are not an escape from the world or responsibility in it; instead they renew us to serve God and our neighbour in the world and to witness to the gospel.

19. Vocation, Money and Rest

19.1 We should each seek our true vocation according to the abilities given to us. Work may be for wages or profit but should also serve God and people, no matter how humbly. We should promote mutual respect in the workplace and oppose exploitation and unfair working conditions.

19.2 In a world of appalling poverty alongside excessive wealth we need to heed the call to strive for a just and more equal society. Our money is not our own. God calls us to a life in which everyone's poverty is our own and our wealth is everyone's. We are to be faithful stewards of our abilities, time and money and other material resources and use them to be a community of mutual sharing, to support the Church in its mission, and to do all we can for the poor as well as our own families. God's economy provides enough for all.

19.3 God does not promise worldly prosperity to the faithful.

19.4 God ordained regular rest from work for time to worship together, to build family relations and for recreation.

20. The Image of God

20.1 God created man and woman together out of earthly matter but in the image of God. Thus both men and women share in the image, and it includes being made for community, with God and with one

another. A person is a person through being related to God and to other people.

20.2 Sin has radically corrupted our whole human nature and so marred that image, but it is never entirely effaced from anyone. Christ who is the perfect image of God, came in human form in order to restore that image in humankind. He has taken our likeness that we might be transformed into his likeness and become imitators of him and so of God.

20.3 Because God created all people equally in that image and Christ gave his life to restore it, every person's life is sacrosanct. Everyone has a God-given dignity and a right to be treated with respect and protected from violence and abuse, no matter their gender, age, race, social status, sexual orientation, religion or any mental or physical handicap. God judges those who in any way abuse or oppress others and calls us to oppose all such abuse.

20.4 We are not to measure others according to our own image but to receive one another as human beings created in God's image. Christ calls us to minister in particular to the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick and those in prison as to himself, and to widows and orphans.

21. Marriage, Sex and Children

21.1 God made man and woman for each other, so that they could help each other, delight in each other in intimate physical and spiritual union and receive the gift of children together. God ordained marriage as a faithful life-long partnership. Marriage is thus constituted by a solemn public covenant to be faithful to each other, in a rite recognized by society. Christians should marry in the Lord and by Christian rites.

21.2 Marriage is the foundation of the family, for the nurture and training of children. As such it is the basis of a sound society. Married couples should love, respect, forgive, support and comfort each other, provide for each other and for their families as they are able, and live together all their days.

21.3 In the midst of a hedonistic and licentious world, made worse by abuse of modern communications media, God calls us to be holy and so to be chaste before marriage and faithful in marriage. Human sexual intercourse is to be enjoyed only within marriage, as binding people together in love. We are to master our own bodies, honour one another's, and desist from sexual intimacy outside marriage. We are also to shun pornography.

21.4 As God remains faithful to one people, so a person should be married to only one spouse. Any convert who is already a polygamist should take no additional spouse.

21.5 Jesus strongly upheld lifelong monogamy against divorce. Every effort should be made to mend a marriage in trouble; yet one shattered beyond repair or in which one partner seriously abuses another may be better dissolved.

21.6 As the Church interprets the mind of Christ, in this fallen world its ministers may, under grace, consider remarrying a divorced person, but only where that person truly repents for any guilt in the breakup of the previous marriage and humbly determines to maintain a new covenant of marriage with God's help.

21.7 God calls some people to be celibate for the sake of their vocation.

21.8 Parents should set an example to their children of modesty and faithfulness. They should instruct them in the faith and its values. This includes frank instruction in the virtues of chastity and faithfulness and the consequences of sexual licence.

21.9 Children are to respect their parents. Parents have the right to discipline their children in love, but not to abuse or oppress them.

The Community of the Redeemed

22. The Church

22.1 The Church is a divine institution, founded upon Jesus Christ. It is not constituted by the decision of religious individuals to come together for devout purposes; instead it is born of the Word and the sacraments through the action of the Spirit. It exists wherever the gospel is preached in accord with Scripture and heard with faith and the sacraments are celebrated according to Christ's institution. These two marks, not the religious or moral purity of its members, define the true Church. Nevertheless in its communion with God the Church is called to reflect in its own life the holiness, unity, love and mutual self-giving of the Trinity into whose name its members are baptized. It is a community of people called to exist and act for others rather than themselves.

22.2 The Church is God's missionary community in the world, commissioned to reconcile people to God and to one another. It is the company of disciples sent forth to the ends of the earth with the good news, to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world and win

people for Christ. Thus it exists not for its own sake but for the sake of the world, which God loves. It is the task of every congregation to equip its members for their mission to the world; for every congregation, every Christian, is called to witness to Christ in word and action.

22.3 The Church, when it is faithful, will always be a minority in the world. Some of its members even suffer martyrdom for their witness. But in the face of the world's hostility Christ has promised to stand by his disciples to the end of the age, when he will bring all nations and all creation under God's rule.

22.4 The Church is the pilgrim People of God, the Israel of God, journeying toward the fulfilment of God's promise that in Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed. As such it is heir to the faith of Abraham. Yet it does not replace Israel after the flesh, whose calling is irrevocable. Instead its Gentile members are grafted into Israel, and the unbelieving branches of Israel, now broken-off, will be grafted back into it when the Jews one day accept their Messiah. It thus includes Jews and people of every other nation. Not race, nationality or class but baptism and the Holy Spirit determine who belongs to the Church. God calls the Church to be the vanguard of a new humanity.

22.5 The Church is the Family of God. All people born of the Spirit are children of the one Father and so brothers and sisters of Christ and of one another.

22.6 The Church is the Body of Christ in that through the Word and sacraments, by the power of the Spirit, the risen and exalted Lord is present in his Church. For where Christ is proclaimed, and received in faith, there he takes bodily form on earth in, and as, this community and lives on earth in the members of his Body. Through it he speaks and carries on his mission to the world. He is its only Head, and it does not listen to the voice of a stranger. Only as members of the Body do we have fellowship with the Head.

22.7 The one Body unites all its different members together. Unlike Israel it is not a nation constituted by ties of descent and culture. In it the barrier of alienation between Jews and Gentiles and every barrier of race, nation, tribe, caste, class, language, culture and social status is broken down to form a single new humanity that excludes no outsiders. No member of the Body can reject any other; for God has accepted us all in the beloved Son and bound us together in one Spirit, as members who need one another for the Body to function properly in its work and witness to the world. In covenant with God, we are all in covenant with one another, called to walk together in God's ways and ordinances, in

mutual love and care, in anticipation, and as a sign, of when God will unite all things with Christ as their one Head. As the community of the faithful the Church stretches beyond this world to include all believers who have departed this life.

22.8 The Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit at Pentecost gave birth to the Church, and the Spirit continues to dwell within it, working through the Word it proclaims and the sacraments it celebrates, and building it and its members up with the gifts it gives them. The Spirit empowers the Church in its weakness and sustains, guides and increases it.

22.9 The Church is one, because it worships only one God, serves one Lord and is united by one Spirit in one faith, one hope and one baptism, to be one People, one Family, one Body, one Temple. It is holy in that though it and its members sin, God is holy, Christ covers the sins of all believers with his righteousness and the Holy Spirit sanctifies it through the Word and the sacraments. It is catholic because it is sent to reach out with the gospel to all the world, to embrace people of every race, culture and class, and be a church also for the poor and those on the margins of society. It is apostolic because it is founded upon the Word of God taught by the apostles, hands on their teaching, celebrates the sacraments and worships and prays as they did, and carries on their mission of evangelism, prayer for healing and ministry to those in need. Indeed Christ made the Church the custodian of the Word and the sacraments.

22.10 The Lord of the Church calls it to manifest its unity not just spiritually but visibly before the world. Yet visibly the Church lies a broken and bleeding body in a broken world. Its own divisions deeply undermine the credibility of its witness. Christ prays for the Church to be completely united as a community, so that the world may believe. It needs to pray and strive not for outward uniformity but for unity on the basis of the truth of the one gospel. For unity and diversity are both God's gifts to the Church.

22.11 Every branch of the Church has greater or lesser defects and merely nominal members within it, the weeds among the wheat. But it remains part of the Body so long as it retains the two marks of the true Church. Believers should not separate themselves from the visible Church, so long as the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments are not perverted. Instead they should strive always to reform and renew it.

22.12 The Church needs always to be reformed, in order to witness more faithfully to Jesus as Lord and Saviour. For it exists to glorify and serve its King and Head and so be a sign of the coming rule of God.

23. Church Order

23.1 Jesus Christ alone is the High Priest who offers the sacrifice that reconciles us to God. By baptism he consecrates all Christians to be members of the royal priesthood. Thereby they have immediate access to God through him, and are called to offer themselves as a living sacrifice to God, to make known the glorious acts of the One who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, to bring God to people and people to God, to intercede for and minister to others, and to forgive sins in Christ's name.

23.2 Christ entrusts his mission and ministry to his whole Body. Thus the Church's ministry is exercised corporately and through its individual members. The Spirit distributes abundant and complementary gifts to believers for building up the Body of Christ and witnessing to, and working for, him in the world.

23.4 When, guided by the Spirit, the Church calls to a ministry, it acts as Christ's Body, on his behalf. By free election from among its members with their different gifts and ministries Christ, as the Head of the Church, calls some to be ordained or appointed to particular offices for oversight, for evangelism or missionary work, for shepherding and teaching, and for caring for the poor and the sick. All the offices are for the sake of the Church's good order and its ministry, witness and outreach.

23.5 Through the Church, by the laying on of hands and invocation of the Spirit, Christ ordains to the office of shepherding and teaching, which includes preaching and celebrating the sacraments. Thus ordination does not set a person apart from the people of God but in their midst, to serve them. In particular it charges the ordinand to equip the people of God for ministry and mission, so that they may build up the Body of Christ and may reach out to, and minister to, the world with the ministry of Christ.

23.6 Christ, the Lord of the Church, came among people as a servant. Likewise all offices in the Church are to serve, not lord over, the people of God. The gifts of the Spirit too are to serve the congregation. No office imparts any higher status or dignity than baptism does, or any right to lord it over others. The office of oversight is thus a shared authority.

23.7 God calls both men and women to every office in the Church.

24. Church Discipline and the Keys

24.1 Two things together safeguard the doctrinal and moral purity of the Church and its witness in the world: the Word and discipline.

24.2 All members of the Body of Christ are responsible for, and accountable to, one another. Caring responsibly for one another includes supporting and guiding one another but also confronting and admonishing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to confess our sins to, pray for, and declare the word of grace to, one another.

24.3 The Lord of the Church gives to the Church the keys of God's rule to name, judge and discipline particular sins, extend God's forgiveness to repentant sinners, and withhold it from the unrepentant. He charges it to rebuke members who propagate grievous heresy or fall into scandalous behaviour. If they repent, it is to forgive their sins in Christ's name; if they stubbornly persist, it is to exclude them in his name from the benefits of church membership, including even fellowship at the Holy Table, so that they may be shamed and repent. Only if they refuse to repent, is it to declare them unforgiven.

24.4 The aims of church discipline are thus to

- uphold God's honour against any whose grave error or sin would deny and disgrace Christ,
- serve the costly grace of the gospel by calling such sinners to repent,
- restore them eventually to truth, sanctity and fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ, so that they do not lose their salvation,
- deter others from being led astray by false doctrine or the temptation to conform to the world's behaviour,
- save the Church from the infection of false doctrine and its witness from public scandal,
- maintain the unity of the Body of Christ, and
- save the Church from God's judgement.

24.5 The disunity of the Church and the extreme individualism, relativism, moral indifference and permissiveness of modern culture together with a false notion of love and tolerance and other factors make the exercise of church discipline difficult. But such discipline remains a necessary means of grace and an integral part of pastoral care. Without it, preaching is in some ways left abstract and ineffectual, and church members are more liable to fall into sin and doctrinal confusion and so also to damage the life and witness of the Church.

24.6 Proper Church discipline is always a discipline of love and grace practised in humility and gentleness by sinners for sinners, without excessive severity. It always seeks repentance and reconciliation and is accompanied by the assurance that God forgives those who repent and trust in the divine mercy.

24.7 Quite apart from church discipline, the keys are given for the relief of burdened consciences. No one is bound to confess sins other than to God alone. But the Lord has given his disciples the authority to declare to all repentant and believing sinners who humbly confess their sins that they are forgiven through the shedding of Christ's blood, provided any appropriate restitution is made. Such declaration may be made after a general confession of sins in public worship and after private confession. It is made on the authority of God's Word and in God's stead, for God's Word in the disciple's mouth absolves the penitent from guilt.

The World in which Redemption Takes Place

25. Church and State

25.1 God is no household idol but Lord of the whole world. Jesus Christ is not only Head of the Church but King of kings and Judge of all the nations. He is sovereign over every area of life, private, economic and political; he lays claim to the whole human being. God's will for justice and peace set forth in the Scriptures and above all in Christ is the standard by which all civil laws too are to be judged.

25.2 Christ commissions the Church to preach the good news and proclaim God's will for every sphere of life. Thus though Church and State are distinct from each other and the Church's task is never primarily political, it is always also political. Because sin and self-seeking are liable to corrupt any human Government, Christ calls the Church to be a sentinel and, whenever necessary, confront it prophetically: to stand for justice, to oppose all discrimination in civil law and policy, to speak out for the voiceless, to censure all corruption and to unmask all harmful ideologies and false propaganda. Whenever any person, group or class suffers injustice, the Church is to protest not only in words but if possible in action. It is also to aid the victims. Christians are to co-operate with one another and with others in seeking what is best for the civil community. The Church itself should set an example for a better social order; only then can its witness be taken seriously.

25.3 God has instituted civil Government for the sake of its subjects. Its tasks and duties are, firstly, to uphold justice, human rights, liberty, order and peace for everyone in society and to do what it can for the welfare of society. This includes preventing the powerful from exploiting the weak, aiding the destitute and the disabled, safeguarding the alien and the refugee and protecting the natural environment. Secondly, in line with all this, it is to shape public life by the best possible laws. Thirdly, in upholding human rights and liberty, it is also to protect all public worship of God. For it is the Government's duty, not to promote any one religion, but to protect the Church by protecting freedom of belief and worship for all. To all these ends, in this sinful world, the Government has the right to threaten and to use force, but only to the extent that this is necessary.

25.4 From its King and Head the Church derives a government distinct from civil Government, and civil rulers have no jurisdiction over the Church's spiritual affairs. The Government transgresses its calling if it seeks to appropriate the propagation of the Word or the administration of the sacraments or church discipline or to control or manipulate the Church or interfere in its affairs, silence its prophetic voice or take over any of its tasks. The Church must resist all such interference.

25.5 As the servant of Jesus Christ the Church betrays its calling if it either seeks any political power or becomes a servant of the Government or of the rich and powerful. Any ideology that tempts the Church to betray Jesus Christ and his commission in any way is a more serious threat to it than persecution.

25.6 We are to recognize the authority of the Government within its sphere and honour those who rule over us. We are to pray for justice and for all in authority, pay taxes and obey all laws that are compatible with God's law. Christians may serve in civil or political office, provided they work for justice and people's welfare.

25.7 On the other hand, because the Church knows God as the ultimate ruler over all, it must bear witness to the limits of the Government's rights and authority and confront oppression and injustice with the radical vision of God's coming rule. And whenever any human law, policy or command clashes with God's law, we must obey God rather than human beings. The Church must always be ready to be the Church under the Cross in resisting an unjust or oppressive State. Such resistance recalls a regime to its true vocation under God.

26. Peace and Conflict

26.1 Ours are not weapons of violence but prayer and God's Word, which is sharper than any two-edged sword. The true Church neither persecutes nor encourages persecution; instead it follows its Lord in taking up the cross, and being ready to be persecuted for righteousness' sake.

26.2 All conflict stems from sin. Peace within a nation is endangered where there is injustice or extreme inequality and little is done to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Peace between nations is endangered when one nation threatens or inflicts domination or injustice on another. Justice is at the heart of peace.

26.3 In every political conflict we should support justice and a non-violent solution, even at the risk of our own lives. Only in the most extreme circumstances, where the government is clearly a tyranny, injustice causes massive suffering and non-violent resistance alone cannot succeed, may Christians even consider supporting an attempt to remove a Government by force.

26.4 We should oppose all unnecessary build-up of armaments and unmask all propaganda that distorts the truth or dehumanises the enemy. If it is ever right to fight in a war,³ it must be patently a war to prevent an even greater evil. It must be a last resort: every way to settle the conflict by negotiation must have been tried. There must be a reasonable prospect of success and unnecessary violence must be avoided. No one may serve in a war for political or economic gain or in an army used to maintain an unjust and oppressive political status quo. Unless convinced that a war is justifiable and necessary, everyone is bound to refuse to fight in it and refuse conscription. No soldier may obey any command that is contrary to conscience, no matter the cost.

26.5 We should work for the end of war. Reconciliation and peace between nations is all the more urgent and war all the less possible to justify, when nuclear, chemical or biological weapons of mass destruction may be used. Such weapons gravely threaten the whole earth and all its peoples with destruction.

³ The UPCS recognizes that its members have different views on the right to use force. Some are strict pacifists who hold that all resistance against an internal oppressor or even an invading aggressor must be non-violent; others accept that in strictly circumscribed circumstances Christians may also participate in the military defence of the land and/or in the use of force to overthrow an oppressive government that causes great and widespread suffering.

27. Creation

27.1 Scripture witnesses that in the beginning God created all things visible and invisible, including the whole of space and time, from nothing. God created by word of command, that is, in a sovereign act of power and love. What the biblical account of creation provides is not a scientific but a sacred cosmology, a spiritual interpretation of the origin and nature of the universe. Though it reflects an ancient picture of the universe, that account bears witness to the grandeur and power of the Creator. So for that matter does the vast and complex picture of the universe that science has discovered.

27.2 God created all the world through the pre-existent divine Word. Through that Word God clothed the universe with order and beauty, and made it very good. This world, then, is God's world. The heights of the heavens, the depths of outer space, the whole earth are all in God's hands.

27.3 God is distinct from, and sovereign over, all creation, yet is everywhere present in it and continually upholds it. All things exist from and through and for God. Indeed God created all the world through Christ in order through him to display grace in it. Thus creation and redemption are fully congruent with each other.

27.4 God created all human beings through Christ as one species from common ancestors. That different climates and geographical environments have given rise to different races in no way conditions or limits the unity of all the children of God in Christ. The notion that any race or culture must preserve a separate, created identity is a crass denial of the good news and of the unity of the Body of Christ. 'The alien who resides among you shall be to you like one of your native-born, and you shall love him as yourself.'

28. The Natural Environment

28.1 The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. God created the earth as a splendid place to live in, and Christ honoured it by his incarnation and life on earth. Human beings are themselves creatures of the earth.

28.2 In making humankind in the image of God God gave us dominion over the earth and all its other creatures. The earth is thus a treasure on loan to us from its Creator, who loves and cares for it. God calls us to be its responsible custodians, with the right to till the soil but the duty to love, protect and care for the earth, its creatures and its resources. Being in the image of God includes exercising dominion over the earth with love and care, as the Creator does.

28.3 Our dominion over the earth has enabled modern science and technology to develop, with their great benefits but also their great dangers. Sin erodes our sense of the wonder of nature and damages our relation with the created order. Instead of responsible dominion we exercise ruthless domination and subjugation. In arrogant greed we treat the earth as if we owned it and had a right to plunder and abuse it. We destroy the delicate balance between the soil, water, atmosphere, plants and animals of the earth, which together make up an interdependent whole. Our technology and industrialisation increasingly ravage and devastate the earth and pollute its atmosphere, and are gradually making it uninhabitable.

28.4 God promises us a new earth. But in anticipation of this God calls us to maintain the earth and hand it on to future generations as a habitat fit for humanity and its other creatures. This means using all natural resources wisely, protecting the land, the sea and the air from damage and pollution and restoring them wherever they are damaged or polluted. This becomes all the more urgent as science places new powers in human hands.

29. Providence

29.1 The God who created the whole universe through Christ remains sovereign over it, constantly upholding and governing all things, caring and providing for all creatures and guiding all things towards the purpose for which they were made: their ultimate fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Neither the stars nor any other power but God alone controls the course of all events and holds the future in hand. History and time itself move through ambiguity and mystery, but remain in holy keeping, moving always toward their divine destination.

29.2 This does not mean that God is the author of sin or directly and exactly wills everything that happens. God graciously and sovereignly allows human beings the freedom of action and responsibility that their humanity entails and to that end refrains from the kind of absolute control of everything that would exclude all freedom.

29.3 God may chasten us with hard circumstances and break human pride on the rock of trials, tribulations, suffering and sorrow. Calamities sometimes also testify to God's judgement. But tragedy and suffering are by no means all a simple, direct consequence of individual or corporate sin or all directly willed by God. God's rule is not yet implemented on earth as in heaven. Hence we live in a world where

suffering is often a mystery, where evil flourishes and wars against us, where the wicked may prosper and the righteous suffer.

29.4 On the other hand God does not abandon us to fate or random chance. Nothing can take place except to the extent that God allows it, and God makes no mistakes. God works in mysterious ways to bend the evil deeds of sinful people, tragic events and even the power of evil itself to serve the eternal divine purpose. That purpose is a just, loving and glorious one, and everything will in the end perfectly conform to it. Thus with those who love God and are called according to that purpose all things work together for good.

29.5 Meanwhile God grieves over the tragedies and anguish in the world more than we do. In the midst of tragedy we are comforted by knowing that in Jesus Christ God stands by us, sharing our weakness, sorrow and suffering and caring for us, that all things are in God's hands and that in the end Christ will triumph over all evil. In the meantime we are called to pray and work with God for the good of the world and the relief of the suffering.

The Final Redemption

30. God's Final Victory

30.1 Christian faith looks beyond the present to the future. To live by faith in the crucified and risen Christ means to hope in his coming and universal rule.

30.2 Human history does not of itself or inevitably progress towards a better state of things. Antichrists appear, misleading many. Some cause great suffering. Some even claim to be raised up by divine providence. Despite persecution, however, the faithful stand firm.

30.3 On a day that God has appointed and alone knows, the Lord Jesus Christ will come in power and great glory. He will triumph over all evil and tragedy and all powers opposed to God's rightful sovereignty and establish God's complete rule in the world. The universe itself will be freed from the shackles of decay and be transformed, restored and brought to its unity and destiny in Christ, to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

30.4 Already now we may by faith partake of the blessings of that coming rule of God and share in the gift of eternal life. Because Christ's atonement covers all our sins and frees us from all condemnation, there

is no purgatory to be endured. When the faithful die, they go to be with the Lord and are at peace in sure hope of a blessed resurrection.

30.5 Everyone who has died will be raised and appear before Christ. He will judge every person's works and the secrets of every heart. Though we can place no limits on the mercy of God toward all humankind, sin condemns us all to be cut off from God's grace in hell for ever. But those who put their trust in God's mercy and grace in Christ will be raised in transformed, glorified bodies and face the judgement without fear, for their Judge is their Saviour.

30.6 God will bless them with eternal life in a liberated and transformed world, a new heaven and earth, a new age of peace and justice. The sovereignty God manifested in creating the world will finally triumph. God will be all in all and will wipe away every tear from our eyes. The power of evil will be destroyed; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain anymore. All God's people will rejoice together in the presence of God, whom they will glorify forever. All things will find their unity in Christ, their Head, and the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.

30.7 This is the glorious hope that sustains the Church.

Let the heavens be glad, let the earth rejoice;
let it be proclaimed among the nations, 'The Lord reigns!'