

9.1.3 The Faith We Affirm Together (1994)

(This statement is a contemporary and inclusive language version of the original prepared for the "Plan for Union" 1971. It was prepared at the invitation of the Negotiating Churches Unity Council by the Auckland Ecumenical Group "Women in Church and Society" in 1994. The Forum of Cooperative Ventures sees it as a helpful current interpretation of the earlier statement.)

The standards of the church

In creation and in history God is revealed and has spoken in Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. The Bible is unique as the inspired record and interpretation of what God has revealed for our creation, preservation and redemption, above all in the act of self-giving and self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, anticipated in the Hebrew Scriptures and fulfilled in the New Testament.

The authority of the Bible is from God and the Holy Spirit as the word of God verifies its witness within the church to each generation. It is the responsibility of the believing community, the church, to interpret the biblical witness.

The books called the Apocrypha witness to the faith and thought of the people of Israel in the centuries immediately preceding the coming of Jesus Christ. Important as a bridge between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, they nevertheless are subordinate to the canonical writings of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

From Biblical times the church has confessed its faith in its hymns, liturgies, theological systems, confessions and creed. The Apostles' and Nicene creeds are recognised as witnessing to and safeguarding that faith which is continuously confirmed by the Holy Spirit in the experience of the church. Uniting the church today with the faith of Christians of all ages, and in every place, they are accepted as having an authority above that of later formulations.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Savoy Declaration, the Thirty Nine Articles, the standard sermons and notes on the New Testament of John Wesley, the declaration and address of Thomas Campbell are held in honour as embodying traditions now merged in the united churches understanding of its faith and mission. It is the right and duty of the united church to use this historic witness to the Christian faith, of which this present declaration "*The Faith we affirm together*" is a contemporary expression, for the instruction of its people and the guiding and the ordering of its life.

God

There is one living and true God. God is love and is known as the Creator, Son and Holy Spirit - One God - the Trinity. God, Creator and Sustainer of the Universe has made all things for God's glory, and has sent Jesus Christ into the world to reconcile the world to God, having prepared the way through the people of Israel. Jesus Christ, the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, born in the fullness of time of the Virgin Mary, is the mystery of the incarnation, truly God yet truly human.

Christ's life and teaching reveals God's nature, will, creative love and saving purpose. Though sinless he died on the cross for our sins. Raised from death to triumph over sin, Christ is exalted as our advocate and intercessor. He will come again in glory as Saviour and Renewer of all, bringing to completion all that has been planned.

God the Holy Spirit is at work in the world and in the lives of people leading them to repentance and to faith in Christ as Saviour bringing to all assurance of unity in the family of God, producing a Christ like character, guiding, empowering and uniting the church in love and in the continued service of God and humankind.

God Creator, Son and Holy Spirit has made all things, has redeemed humanity and sanctifies the church.

Humanity

God has created humankind in God's own image, endowed them with freedom and responsibility, with reason and moral judgement, with power to love, and the need to be loved. Humankind is made for unity with God as children of God and unity with each other as members of God's family.

Humanity, however, turns away in pride and disobedience from this divine intention in their lives. Thus, by sin they are alienated from God. The result is disorder, frustration, conflict and spiritual death. All people are responsible before God and are open to God's divine judgement.

New Life in Christ

God, who has first made known redemptive power for a sinful people through the election of Israel, declares through the gospel of Jesus Christ continued love for the world and shows a desire that all people should be saved. In Jesus Christ has been revealed humanity's true life and being. People are unable by their own actions to reconcile themselves to God, or in their own strength to fulfil the divine purpose for which they were created, but God's grace calls, justifies, reconciles and sanctifies those who respond to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. This new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit, who initiates and sustains the new life in the communion of the church by enabling all people to believe and share in the victory of Christ.

The Church

The church is the people of God, the body of Christ, the community of the Holy Spirit through which God Continues reconciling work in the world. The church is called to be one because it is one family under one God whose purpose is to unite all people in Jesus Christ. The church is enabled by the Holy Spirit to be God's holy people in the world. The church is called catholic because it is for all people, and for all times, holding the Christian faith in its fullness. The church is called to be apostolic because it is sent to preach the Gospel in the entire world, and to proclaim Jesus Christ through the Apostles.

The church is the community in which believers are nourished in the Christian life, live in unity, and have the promise of hope by means of the proclamation of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, participation together in Communion, common prayer and other ordinances of the church. In the Holy Spirit, members of the church share in the communion of saints.

Sacraments of the Gospel

The sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, appointed by Jesus Christ, are, in the power of the Holy Spirit, visible signs and effective means of grace. The sacrament of Holy Communion is a sign and seal of the covenant of redemption. It is the thanksgiving or Eucharist in which the church remembers with joy the Incarnation, Christ's life on earth, suffering, death and resurrection and presence. In this liturgy the church remembering Christ's word and action show forth His death until He comes, acknowledging his sacrifice and proclaiming his victory over evil, and with him shares life in God.

In response to grace we renew our covenant and communion with God and also with all those who have gathered in faith at the table, and with all God's company in heaven and earth. Christ meets those who are alienated, restores and assures them of God's steadfast and continuing love, drawing them closer to God and the church.

The Ministry

The church's ministry derives from Jesus Christ, risen head of the church. Christ's ministry is prophetic and priestly and by the Holy Spirit is continued through the church which is sent among people to serve creation. By virtue of membership in the church, God's people are called and commissioned to share in Christ's ministry, in to, and of the world. The church is called to a life of service in which every member shares.

God calls and sets aside people to minister in various and special ways. Some are ordained and sent, as were the Apostles, for a particular ministry within the general ministry of the church, to build up the church and to equip all members for their task. This particular ministry exercises the functions of proclamation, service and oversight and is expressed in a form including elements that are episcopal, presbyterial and diaconal.

The World and the Church

The world, which was created for the glory of God and is the object of the Creator's love, is the sphere of the church's mission. God calls all people to use their gifts in accordance with God's creative purpose. The church therefore welcomes all light that science can throw on the universe and its' working. Human society, however, gives clear evidence of its alienation from God in its divisions and abuse of God's good gifts. Nevertheless Jesus Christ is concerned with all of life, individual, social, national and international, and the church is Christ's serving people called in a divided and estranged world to declare the Gospel and to share in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Its vocation in the world is to witness to Jesus Christ so that all may come to fullness of life.

The Christian Hope

Humanity is created to glorify God and to share in the divine life. The fulfilment of this purpose is assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

For those in Christ eternal life begins on earth and continues forever in the presence of God and in the company of God's people. At the time appointed, God will bring to fulfilment all that has begun. Christ will be revealed, and God in Christ will renew all people in the light of God's knowledge, holiness and love.