

The Confession of Faith of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (2012/2013)

Prefatory note concerning the present status of amendments

The Confessions Committee presented four sets of amendments to the General Assembly in 2012:

1. a comprehensive set of amendments (mainly rearrangements of material and improvements in wording) that the 2010 Assembly adopted and remitted to the Presbyteries (*Papers for the 10th General Assembly 2012*, Appendix A, p.103-118);
2. a set of amendments that arose from some Presbyteries' proposals in their returns to the 2010 remit, which the 2011 Executive Commission then adopted and remitted to the Presbyteries (*Papers for the 10th General Assembly 2012*, Appendix B, p.119-123);
3. a set of amendments that the Committee proposed and the 2011 Executive Commission also adopted and remitted to the Presbyteries (*Papers for the 10th General Assembly 2012*, Appendix C, p.123-128); and
4. a short set of amendments that the Committee proposed in 2012 (*Papers for the 10th General Assembly 2012*, Appendix D, p.129).

By the Assembly in 2012 the Presbyteries had duly sent enough approving returns to the remits for the Assembly to enact (1), (2) and (3). However, a blunder in the numbering of the Appendices in the Proposals of the Committee's Report in 2012 went undetected at the Assembly. The effect of this was that the Assembly formally enacted (1) and (2) but, contrary to all intentions, did not enact (3) and did not adopt (4) and remit it to the Presbyteries. This can be rectified only at the Executive Commission in 2013. Nevertheless the text of the Confession below includes *all 4 sets of amendments*: Those adopted but not yet enacted (3) are underlined. Those not yet formally adopted nor enacted (4) are boxed.

Prelude

The good news in Jesus Christ declares that God created all things through him, in the overflow of divine love, and thus created them all very good. All the vast universe is the theatre of God's glory. The heavens declare this glory, and human beings were created to express it in word and deed. They were to glorify the Creator by delighting in communion with God and one another, by loving and serving God and one another and by rejoicing in creation and the blessings of life on earth. This remains God's purpose for humankind and is the reason why we exist. But humankind has fallen into sin, and sin brings us all under divine judgement.

The good news in Jesus Christ declares also that in him God has acted to redeem and sanctify us. Christ is thus our only hope and comfort, in life and in death. He reveals God's nature, grace, will and promise of final victory over sin and suffering

The Need for Redemption

1. The Human Predicament

1.1 Human beings were created in the image of God, creatures little lower than the angels. As the story of Adam and Eve portrays, however, the paradox and tragedy is that humankind has from the beginning yielded to temptation and turned away from God. Instead of trusting and obeying God we have rebelled against God's holy will. In pride we have aspired to be like God, self-sufficient and autonomous, choosing our own moral laws. Instead of living for, and with, God and so also for and with others, human beings have come to live primarily for themselves.

1.2 It is God's grace and holiness in Jesus Christ that reveal what sinners we are and how empty before God every human claim to be righteous is. Christ claims the whole of life for God and so reveals how far short of grateful and loving obedience to God we have fallen. That he needed to die for our sins shows how grave sin is.

1.3 Human society is capable of degrees of justice, and human beings of great altruism, heroism and self-sacrifice. Yet both societies and individuals are also capable also of appalling brutality and degradation. The most just society is radically flawed with injustice, and our noblest deeds and highest virtues with individual or group egoism, pride and self-interest. Group and individual interests distort even how we judge between right and wrong.

1.4 Sin is a corruption of our very nature; it infects and dominates the whole of human life. In our private and 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; we sin by commission and by omission. Sin misuses our greatest technological advances, so that we pollute and ruin the environment and deplete the earth's resources, overpopulation spreads hunger and starvation, and modern weapons threaten us all with destruction. Sin warps religion itself with individual and group egoism, self-righteousness and prejudice.

1.5 Sin darkens our minds and perverts our very wills. All human beings are in bondage to sin, unable to rescue themselves and unable of themselves to turn to God to be rescued. The worst state is to believe in our own righteousness or moral superiority, as though we were not in radical need of grace and forgiveness.

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 threatens final alienation from God.

1.7 In this predicament, because we reject grace and yet seek meaning and hope for our lives, we create or turn to a multitude of false gods. Even though it may well be of relative value, a false god is anything other than God to which we give absolute value or in which we put our final trust and so make into an idol. Some have made false gods of their race, nation, family or culture, or of social status, money, possessions, power, an ideology, nature, science, technology, sex, pop stars, political leaders, sport, alcohol or drugs. The idolization of every false god is itself 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, but, in sovereign and free grace, breaks through our alienation and our blindness.

2.2 God alone can make God known, and did so in the history of Israel and above all 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

¹ The first three articles in the section 'The God who Redeems' follow the order of *knowing* God as Triune (like II Cor.13:14). The Article on 'The Trinity' follows the order of *being* within the Trinity.

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 Virgin Mary's womb. He was born and lived in Palestine, as an artisan 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 weakness and so also to temptation and suffering. Thus in him God condescended fully to share our creaturely human reality.

2.4 Jesus came to the Jews as their long-promised Messiah, identifying with them as an oppressed people. Baptized by John the Baptist, he was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Tempted like us, he overcame temptation and broke the human pattern of failure and sin. Already in his words and works God's rule invaded history with a foretaste of the new creation. He proclaimed God's coming victorious rule especially to the poor, called for repentance in anticipation of that rule, healed the sick in body, mind and spirit, welcomed sinners and outcasts, made God's grace known to all, and taught what God demands.

2.5 Already during his ministry in Galilee he came into conflict with the religious and the political authorities. The ruler of Galilee sought his life, and religious leaders from his own people sought to destroy him, because his example and teaching judged their religious and moral perceptions and practice and their national ambitions. Finally, the religious establishment had him arrested and handed him over to Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judaea. Despite recognizing his innocence, the Roman prefect unjustly gave in to the demands of a hostile crowd and ordered him put to death. He was crucified, as a rival king to Caesar, along with two bandits, or insurrectionists. As a public event in which Jesus and Caesar's representative confronted each other Jesus' trial and death had an irrevocably political as well as religious dimension. The religious establishment, the State and the common people, Jews and Gentiles all alike, were guilty of his death. By crucifying Jesus the world passed judgement on itself.

2.6 Jesus crowned his work for God's coming rule by giving his life as a sin-offering for the world. Because God condones no sin or evil, the guilt of sin demanded the death of the guilty. But, as one with the Father and in obedience to the Father's own loving purpose, Christ suffered and died on the cross in our place as a sinless human being for sinful human beings, the righteous for the unrighteous, the Judge in place of the judged. As one with the human race, he took upon himself its sin and guilt and bore God's judgement and wrath against it for our sakes. In him all were judged. In this way he exchanged his righteousness for our unrighteousness. Thus Jesus Christ became our High Priest, offering himself to God as an unblemished sacrifice for our sins. His blood atoned, once and for all, for all sin; no other sacrifice is needed, sufficient or acceptable to God. In this way God's love triumphs over judgement.

2.7 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 died and will rise again. 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.

2.8 This atonement reconciled the world to God. It honoured the holy justice of God that cannot condone or overlook sin; at the same time it proved God's holy 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, peace and reconciliation with God, and victory over sin, death and every evil power.

2.9 As both divine and human, 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 always lives to intercede for us.

2.10 At God's right hand, Jesus Christ reigns as 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's love for all humankind took particular historical form in electing Abraham and his descendants. 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. All this and their continuing experience of providence and judgement revealed God to them as the holy, mysterious and eternal Creator of all things visible and invisible, who is universally present and undergirds all creation and all life, who is the fountain of all truth, wisdom, love, goodness and beauty, who rules in sovereign power. They came to know God, then, not as a nameless blind force but as Yahweh, the righteous, just and ever-faithful covenant God, the Father of the chosen people, who, abounding in mercy and compassion, is afflicted in all their affliction and who as the Lord of history and partisan of the oppressed brings justice to the world and demands justice and righteousness from all people.

3.2 The incarnation, teaching, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ and the new creation in him confirmed and profoundly deepened this revelation of God. Christ revealed God as the ineffable Creator of the world who reigns over it all in sovereign power and is everywhere present to it, the just Judge of all humankind who yet chooses to be a Saviour abounding in compassion and mercy, the Father who out of love for humankind sent the Son to live and die and be raised for us and our salvation.

3.3 It is above all in and through Jesus Christ as the eternal Son that God is truly revealed as the eternal Father. Jesus taught his disciples about God as his Father, and also their Father in heaven. For through Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Father adopts us as sons and daughters, and also 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 trust and rejoice.

3.5 Scripture also uses womanly metaphors 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 in fundamental contrast to every 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. Through Christ God poured out the Spirit at Pentecost. God comes to us and works in us always by the 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 writings of the Old and New Testaments 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 the Body of Christ and empowers us to serve and witness to Christ in the world. In all these ways the Spirit brings life and revival to, and through, the Church.

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

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

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. Thus God is 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 alone is ingenerate, the fountainhead of all the divine being. 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 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 some 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, in mutual self-giving; yet all retain their identities in personal relationship with one another. Thus God's being is essentially relational, a being-in-communion, without any solitude or self-centredness. In this way holy love is, and always has been, at the very heart of the eternal 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 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 their own power human beings are unable to find and know God. No human intellectual or moral endeavours or spiritual or religious practices of any kind are 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 in the most exact sense is thus the living and present Lord Jesus Christ himself addressing us. In his life, teaching, death, resurrection and exaltation God has spoken conclusively, so that the test of sound teaching is its accord with the gospel.

6.4 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, the liberation and history of Israel, the birth, ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ and 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

6.5 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.

6.6 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. The Bible is a dead letter if the Spirit does not make it the living Word of God for us.

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

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

² In adopting the Confession the UPCSA 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.3:14-4:6).

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

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 victorious 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 accommodates itself 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, psychological, 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 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.

6.13 The Spirit does not reveal truth that differs from that in Scripture, but opens our minds to the gospel and impresses on them its truth.

6.14 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 goal; in him is 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.

6.15 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.

6.16 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. Thus preaching, to the extent that it is true to Scripture in bearing witness to Jesus Christ and is empowered by the Spirit, by God's grace becomes what mere human preachers of themselves cannot utter: God's own Word to us.

6.17 Likewise the Spirit empowers the halting words of all who bear faithful personal witness to Christ, so that by God's grace it becomes what they of themselves cannot utter: the very Word of God. Through such preaching and personal witness, then, Christ encounters people in the present as the living Word, calling them to faith and obedience.

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. For God in Christ comes to us not face to face but clothed in human words and in the earthly elements of 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 gospel's promises to the individual. They are the Word in palpable form, God's palpable Word to us.

7.3 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 promise and offer of grace. Only by trusting in God's promise signified by the sacraments and articulated in the accompanying words do we receive their power. Otherwise the sacraments have no saving effect.

7.4 Jesus Christ alone saves. Just as no printed or spoken human words in themselves can save, so no water, bread, wine or outward ritual itself can. Yet as the very Word of God Christ 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 sacraments remind us of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, which accomplished our salvation in the past. Through the Word and sacraments together Christ offers, effects and affirms that salvation in the present. The sacraments also anticipate God's final sanctification and renewal of all things in the future.

7.6 Through the Word and the sacraments Christ comes to us with saving grace in the power of his Spirit. 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 incorporates us in his one body; Christ applies his atonement to the individual, forgives our sins, seals his covenant of salvation with us and empowers us to follow him.

7.7 Thus through the sacraments Christ acts to convey and effect God's promises to sinners, confirm our salvation and strengthen our faith; only in the second place do the sacraments express our response to God's grace and attest our faith.

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

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

7.10 God's grace in the sacraments and ordinances of the Church is not to be denied to any church member on account of failing to pay church dues.

8. Baptism

8.1 Baptism is preceded by repentance and confession of faith in Christ as the crucified and risen Lord (in the case of small children by confession by their parents or those actually raising them).

8.2 Baptism is with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It may be either by pouring on water (signifying spiritual cleansing) or by immersion (signifying dying to the old life of sin in order to receive new life). Baptism into God's name signifies that we are called to be God's people, in the world but no longer of it.

8.3 The risen Lord Jesus is our baptizer. Along with preaching or personal witness he uses baptism in water to call us by name, baptize us with the Spirit, unite us to himself, initiate us into the covenant of grace, wash away all our guilt, clothe us with his righteousness and give us new birth. Thus by baptism through faith we die and are buried with Christ, to die to sin and live as new people in him. By it Christ commissions us to take up our cross, follow him and witness to him. As the sacrament of renewal, baptism points forward to the cosmic renewal to come and seals us for the day of redemption.

8.4 By baptism Christ grafts us into his Body, the community of the redeemed that transcends all divisions of race, class and gender, consecrates us to be members of the royal priesthood and admits us to his holy Table. Baptism therefore normally takes place in the face of the worshipping community.

8.5 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 without baptism, and not all who are baptized are born anew.

8.6 God's covenant is with a community and by way of that with the individuals in the community. God does not exclude children from the community. Instead the covenant is with all in the community, both adult believers and their children. The circumcision of infants signified this in the old dispensation; infant baptism signifies it in the new. Circumcision was a sign of repentance and a seal of righteousness by faith, yet was administered to infants in anticipation of these things; just so with baptism. Indeed by baptism we are circumcised with the circumcision of Christ. And Jesus promised that God's victorious rule belonged to the children of those who brought them to him to bless. Therefore baptized parents who have repented, confess their faith and are part of the community may bring their children for baptism, promising to nurture them in the faith. The community of faith is responsible with the parents for the nurture of the children.

8.7 Thus it is not on the basis of their understanding or ability that human beings receive God's gift, but through the grace of God alone. But infant baptism is not a social custom or a cultural rite of passage after birth; it is not to be administered indiscriminately.

8.8 Children who die unbaptized and people whose mental incapacity prevents them from responding to the call of grace are not to be seen as outside the hope of redemption.

8.9 Baptism initiates the children into the covenant, grafts 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, they 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 mature age, whenever a person is brought to faith.

8.10 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 doubt troubles us, Christ calls us to look back to our baptism as the sacrament through which he initiated us into his covenant and cleansed and claimed us for his service. Our baptism is thus an ongoing summons to repent and to remember 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 Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, 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.

9.2 The exalted and living Lord Jesus Christ himself presides as the host at the Lord's Supper. In that it succeeds the Passover Meal, the Supper commemorates the Exodus as a liberation from oppression. It also reminds us of Jesus' fellowship at table with sinners and outcasts. But above all other past events it commemorates and proclaims his death and resurrection as the ground of our salvation. Through the Spirit Christ himself is truly present in the power of his crucifixion and resurrection and feeds us with his very body and blood in the act of Holy Communion. Thus the bread and wine are not empty but sacramental signs that exhibit the real presence of Christ, who by the Spirit conveys to the believer what they promise.

9.3 In this way Christ confirms and renews his covenant with us, lives in us and we in him, 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. 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. It is therefore to be celebrated with hope and joy.

9.4 The unity and fellowship of the Body of Christ is manifested above all at the holy Table: no believer may be barred from it or separated at it on grounds of race, nationality, culture or class.

9.5 Only those who know they are unworthy of the Supper, grieve for their sins, humbly trust in God's promise of grace and are at peace with one another are ready to come to the Table. Those who eat and drink in unbelief dishonour the death of Christ to their own condemnation.

9.6 By their material elements the sacraments exhibit 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 know and live out in this world. The sharing of the bread also reminds us of Christ's command to share our bread with the hungry as we would share with him.

9.7 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 always had some sense of the reality of the Supreme Being and the divine demand for righteousness in their lives and equity in society. This leaves us without excuse for failing to honour, love and serve the living God as we should. But sin so corrupts the human mind and spirit that, left to themselves, human beings deny or distort this revelation. Instead of acknowledging the true and living God they fashion their own false ideas of God or worship false gods.

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, in the depths of our own being or in our own religious presentiments and feelings. 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 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, including Judaism and Islam as the other Abrahamic religions, display impressive elements of spirituality and morality that challenge Christians to be faithful to the gospel and its 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 achieve that.

11.3 We are constantly tempted to turn religion, including our Christian religion, into a basis for self-righteousness, self-complacency and looking down on people 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 or 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 everywhere, 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 cultures of the ancient Middle East. To communicate the good news to other people we need to express it in their own languages and cultural concepts. As the good news takes root, it takes on the clothing of each particular culture.

12.2 Human culture, however, tends to enmesh the Church in its values, so that its preaching and teaching echo those values. Even Scripture in many places shows a cultural patriarchalism, or male-centredness, and a cultural acceptance of slavery, for instance. This obscures the full biblical insight that in God's eyes all people are equal, no matter their gender, race, nation or class, and that all discrimination based on such distinctions has been abolished in Christ, who has set us free spiritually and so in principle socially. At the same time God calls us to be servants of all. God's revelation itself is not to be identified with any human culture or compromised by allowing culture to become a moral or religious norm. Revelation remains sovereign over every culture and judges every culture together with its religious beliefs and practices and its moral standards and conduct.

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 ancestors that in any way compromises the unique role of Jesus Christ as Scripture reveals it. We should remember the blessed departed. 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; his intercession alone makes our prayers effective; he alone is our comfort in life and in death. In him there is no place for fear of any supernatural powers, stars or ancestral spirits, and so no place for their propitiation or appeasement or for fear of evil spells.

For through him and for him all things were created, and 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, every bondage they may claim to impose.

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 final uniting together of all beings 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 by baptism through faith and written on people's hearts by the Holy Spirit. Gentiles who are 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 human beings. 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 and be restored and enables us to 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 and to his atonement for the sins of the whole world excludes the notion that, by an eternal decree, God predestined any particular individuals or people to final rejection.

14. The Victorious Rule ('Kingdom') of God

14.1 The gospel makes clear that this world is not as it is meant to be; instead it lies in the grasp of the evil one. But Jesus Christ showed that, despite all the sin and suffering in it, God has not abandoned this world. For it is God's world; God loves the world and has always ultimately ruled over it and its history, even if in a hidden way. God wants to save sinners—and also stands on the side of the poor, the oppressed and the exploited against all social, economic and political structures that oppress them. Jesus proclaimed this in heralding God's imminent coming as King to triumph over all the powers of evil and rule victoriously in a transformed world. This was the good news he proclaimed: the news of a radically new order of righteousness, justice, mercy and peace in which God would end Satan's power, save the lost, welcome the outcasts, liberate the oppressed, bless the poor, comfort the weeping, fill the hungry, and bring eternal life in a world freed of all want, sickness, suffering and death.

14.2 The God who is to come was already present in Jesus Christ. God's victorious rule broke into history in advance in the person and ministry of Jesus himself. By his exorcisms, healings, miracles, teaching, preaching, eating with sinners and outcasts, forgiveness of sins, and above all by his death, resurrection, exaltation and outpouring of the Spirit, Christ inaugurated God's rule in anticipation of its final victory. God's rule is thus identified not with the reign of Caesar but with the person whom Caesar's agents scourged, mocked and crucified.

14.3 Those who by faith in Christ receive the Spirit and are born from above are heirs of God's rule. Indeed in believing the gospel and experiencing the Spirit we already experience something of the coming rule of God, taste the powers of the age to come, and are transferred from the domain of darkness to be under the rule of God's beloved Son.

14.4 The exalted Jesus 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. But those who believe in him are already delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to his rule. Thus through the gospel the Holy Spirit makes the coming rule of God a present reality in the world.

14.5 God's final victorious rule is no human enterprise that we build or extend: no evangelistic or social activism, political revolution or ethical effort can bring it about or hasten its coming. Nor is it any evolving historical process. Instead it comes as God's free gift, by God's grace and sovereign power alone.

14.6 Christ calls us to live in the world already now in eager anticipation of God's final victory and its triumph over evil. We do that by repentance and faith in Christ, by praying for that rule to come, by calling others to repentance, faith and hope and by obeying Christ's commands.

14.7 Christ mandated his disciples to do the same works of God's rule as he did and saw the works they then did as anticipating Satan's downfall. Christ calls his disciples today likewise to witness and work in the power of the Spirit and so signify that God's victorious rule is coming. They are to proclaim the good news, declare the forgiveness of sins, heal the sick in mind and body, care for the needy, embrace the outcasts, and strive for the liberation of the oppressed and a just and free society.

14.8 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 God justifies us as ungodly sinners, that is, declares us righteous and so sets us right with God, purely out of grace. Grace is not a 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, then 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 dealt with that sin in Christ and unites us to Christ by moving us to repent, surrender to him as Lord and trust in him as Saviour.

15.3 Through our union with Christ God freely acquits us of all our guilt and accounts us righteous on the sole ground of Christ's perfect human 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, sanctifies us, cleansing away all our sins with the blood of Christ.

15.4 With our justification the Spirit gives us new birth as God's children in Christ, inseparable from God, because of our union with Christ. Regeneration then manifests itself in genuine conversion (whether conversion is experienced as sudden 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 continuing to stand in the face of doubt. For though faith cannot sustain itself, the Word and the Spirit continually uphold faith in the face of doubt.

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 as sinners we are unable to decide for Christ of ourselves. 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 of ourselves 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 to be moved by the Spirit so that the gravity of sin cuts us to the heart and we turn away from all sin and self-justification to God, and seek to bear fruit worthy of grace.

16.2 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.

16.3 Ongoing sanctification in the way we live thus follows 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 in both our private lives and our public life. For faith is real only in obedient discipleship. 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.

16.4 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 to 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.

16.5 True faith is thus 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.

16.6 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.

16.7 Thus being a Christian means to repent every day for sin, to give unending praise and thanks for God's goodness and grace and to seek to live to God's glory.

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 All true worship begins with God. Through the Word and the Spirit God gathers the people of God, God's family, together. Though our disobedience shuts us off from God, Jesus Christ, our incarnate, risen and exalted Lord, has by his own obedience and sacrifice of himself opened the way and won access to God for all. He is not only God's Word to humankind but the obedient human response to that Word and as such the true minister and agent of worship. As our High Priest he, through the Spirit,

sanctifies us as a royal priesthood and bears our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving on high, making it acceptable to God. As our Advocate he intercedes for us before the Father. True worship and prayer is thus through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator, on the basis of not our own but his righteousness, in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

18.2 Our union with Christ in the Spirit unites us in fellowship with one another in the one Body of Christ and brings us into the very presence of the Father. Indeed through the Spirit Christ draws us and our worship into his own communion with the Father and so into the very life of the triune God.

18.3 True worship is thus to the glory of the one true and living God, Father, Son and Spirit.

18.4 Worship is an essential part of our response to God's grace in which we gather not so much to seek God as to celebrate and proclaim that God has first sought and found us. It is a dialogue in which God comes to us in the Word and the sacraments, and we respond in song and prayer, declaring our faith, offering our gifts, and offering ourselves as a living sacrifice. Word and sacrament are thus both central to worship.

18.5 Despite our unworthiness, then, God accepts worship and hears prayer that is offered in Christ's name, and so is in accordance with God's will. Hence we should worship and pray with freedom and complete confidence. What matters is not the splendour of our worship or the power of our prayers but that through Christ God accepts our worship and hears us.

18.6 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. It is a time to rest from our work and let God's Word and Spirit work in us.

18.7 Corporate worship, meditating on Scripture and daily private prayer are all integral to Christian life. Through them God arouses and preserves faith, transforms lives, stirs up the gifts of the Spirit and sustains us as Christian disciples. Without worship and prayer godliness dissipates.

18.8 True prayer, like all true worship, begins with God. Through the Word and the Spirit God calls, moves and enables the people of God to pray. As the true minister of worship, Christ, our High Priest, Advocate and Intercessor, is the true minister of prayer: he has won access to God for our prayers and by his intercession bears our prayers to the throne of grace. In the Spirit we pray as those who have access to the Father as the brothers and sisters of Jesus. Thus though prayer is a human activity, at a deeper level it is the Spirit's activity within us. When we do not know how to pray as we ought, the Spirit intercedes through us and for us.

18.9 In prayer we reach out beyond ourselves and speak to God, who has already spoken to us in the gospel and the law. Prayer is offered to God alone. It is addressed primarily to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, though also to the Son and sometimes to the Spirit.

18.10 Prayer comprises glorifying and adoring God, confessing our sins, waiting upon God, giving thanks, praying for others and for ourselves and dedicating ourselves to Christ's service.

18.11 God answers the prayers of those who abide in Christ and pray in his name. But as in Gethsemane the Father did not grant Jesus what he first prayed for, so God's answer to prayer may differ from what we request.

18.12 God commands us to pray, for prayer is a weapon without which we cannot walk in God's way and prevail against the power of evil. Indeed God calls us to pray without ceasing, that is, to be constantly prayerful in mind, heart and conscience.

18.12 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 live as though everyone's poverty were our own and our wealth were everyone's. We are to live simply and be faithful stewards of our abilities, time and money and other material resources, using 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. As God's own being is essentially relational, a being-in-communion, so human beings are created to be not solitary or self-centred but to live in fellowship with God and one another and in mutual concern for 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 and despite 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, those in prison and widows and orphans as to himself.

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 life-long union and 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 be faithful to each other all their days.

21.3 In a hedonistic and licentious world, made more blatantly so 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 a marriage in which one partner seriously abuses another or which is shattered beyond repair 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 Every child has a right to a secure and loving home. Couples should conceive only children whom they will together cherish and care for. Couples with means should also consider fostering or adopting orphans.

21.9 It is the duty of parents to set an example of modesty and faithfulness to their children. 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.

21.10 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 divinely instituted community, founded upon Jesus Christ. It is not initiated by religious individuals deciding to come together for devout purposes. Instead it is the consequence of God's election and calling, and is born of, and sustained by, the Word and the sacraments, through the action of the Spirit. It is thus the Lord's Church, not ours. It exists for the sake of God's coming rule and is therefore called to live in hope and obedience to that rule.

22.2 The Church is a company of disciples that 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 its communion with God calls the Church to reflect in its own life the holiness, unity, love and mutual self-giving of the Trinity into whose name its members are baptized.

22.3 The Church is by its very nature a missionary community: through it the Son and the Holy Spirit continue their mission from the Father to bring the good news to the world and reconcile people to God and to one another. It is sent forth to the ends of the earth to win people for Christ, stand with the oppressed and minister to the needy and

the suffering. 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 life, action and word.

22.4 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.

22.5 The Church is the pilgrim People 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. Moreover the unbelieving branches of Israel, now broken off, will be grafted back into it when one day, despite all that Christians have done to discredit him in their eyes, the Jews recognize their Messiah. The Church thus embraces both Jews and Gentiles in the one new humanity Christ creates.

22.6 The Church is the Family of God, which meets around Christ's Table. All people born of the Spirit are children of the one Father and so brothers and sisters of Christ and of one another.

22.7 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 it. Indeed where Christ is proclaimed, and received in faith, there he is bodily present on earth in the form of this community and its members. Through it he speaks and carries on his mission to the world. He is its only Head, and its duty is to listen to his voice alone. Only as members of the Body do we have fellowship with the Head.

22.8 The one Body unites together all its different members. Unlike Israel after the flesh it is not a nation constituted by ties of descent and culture. For Christ has broken down the barrier of alienation between Jews and Gentiles and every barrier of race, nation, tribe, caste, class, language, culture, social status and gender to form a single new humanity. The claim of Christ and his Body on believers far outstrips the claim to loyalty of any group defined by any of these terms. Not race, nationality, culture or class but baptism and the Holy Spirit determine who belongs to the Church. 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 a community of mutual love and care. The one Body anticipates, and is a sign of, when God will unite all things with Christ as their one Head. Thus God calls the Church to be the vanguard of a new humanity. As the community of the faithful the Church stretches beyond this world to include all believers who have departed this life.

22.9 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 spiritual gifts. The Spirit empowers and sustains the Church in its weakness and guides and increases it.

22.10 The Church is one, in that it worships only one God, serves one Lord and is united by one Spirit in one faith, one hope and one baptism; it is one People, one Family, one Body, one Temple. It is holy in that, though it and its members sin, it belongs to God, who is holy, Christ covers the sins of all believers with his righteousness and through the Word and the sacraments the Holy Spirit sanctifies it

and summons it to be holy. It is catholic in that the Lord of the universe sends it to reach out with the gospel to all the world, to embrace people of every race, nation, culture and class, and to be a church also for the poor and those on the margins of society. It is apostolic in that it is founded upon the Word of God taught by the apostles, hands on their teaching, celebrates the sacraments and worships as they did, and carries on their mission of evangelism, prayer for healing and ministry to the needy.

22.11 Christ died to gather the children of God into unity, and he prays for the Church to be fully united as a community, so that the world may believe. As Head and Lord of the Church he calls it to manifest its unity not just spiritually but visibly before the world and as a witness to it. Yet visibly the Church is a body with severed members, lying bleeding in a broken world.³ 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 uniformity but for unity in doctrine, fellowship and structure, on the basis of the truth of the one gospel. For unity and diversity are both God's gifts to the Church.

22.12 Every branch of the Church has greater or lesser defects and merely nominal members within it, the weeds among the wheat. Yet 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.

22.13 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

³ This wording more exactly quotes John Calvin's letter written in April 1552 to Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury and Primate of all England, seeking a General Synod to reunite the Churches: 'the members being severed, the body lies bleeding.'

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. The Keys and Church Discipline

24.1 The Lord of the Church gives to the Church the keys of God's rule to extend God's forgiveness to repentant sinners, but also to name, judge and discipline particular sins and withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant.

24.2 The keys, along with the Word and the sacraments, are thus given for the relief of burdened consciences. They mean the authority to declare to all sinners who repent and humbly confess their sins that they are forgiven through the shedding of Christ's blood, provided that they make any appropriate restitution. Such declaration is made on the authority of God's Word and in God's stead; God's Word in the disciple's mouth absolves the penitent from guilt. It may be made after private confession or after a general confession of sins in public worship.

24.3 We can confess our sins to God alone. But we are called also to confess our sins to one another, declare the word of grace to one another in Christ's name and pray for one another.

24.4 The keys are given as well because we need mutual discipline for our own walk with God and to safeguard the doctrinal and moral purity of the Church and its witness in the world.

24.5 All members of the Body of Christ are both responsible for and accountable to one another. Caring responsibly for one another includes confronting and admonishing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, when any of us fall into sin.

24.6 The Lord of the Church charges it to rebuke members who spread serious 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.

24.7 The aims of church discipline are thus

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

24.8 The disunity of the Church and the extreme individualism, relativism, moral indifference and permissiveness of modern culture together with its skewed notions of freedom, love and tolerance make the exercise of church discipline difficult. But such discipline remains a necessary means of grace. Preaching needs it, lest it be left abstract and ineffectual, and it is an integral part of pastoral care. Without it, church members are more liable to fall into sin and doctrinal confusion and so to damage the life and witness of the Church.

24.9 Proper Church discipline is always a discipline of love and grace practised in humility and gentleness by sinners for sinners, and therefore 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.

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, social, 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 corrupt every human Government, Christ calls the Church to be a sentinel and, whenever necessary, prophetically confront it: to take a lead in standing 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 others in seeking what is best for the civil community. The Church should itself set an example, as a model community, 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 ensuring 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 of 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 or mouthpiece of the Government or of the rich and powerful. It must never uncritically ally itself with any ruler or be co-opted by the Government. It should never give religious legitimation to any head of State as specifically elected by God. It must also reject the idea of a "Christian State". Any ideology that tempts the Church to betray Jesus Christ and his commission in any way is a graver 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 the people's welfare.

25.7 On the other hand, 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.

25.8 Because the Church knows that the ultimate sovereignty and glory belong to God alone as ruler over all, it must bear witness to the limits of the Government's rights and authority. It must confront all elitism, oppression and injustice with the radical demands that the vision and hope of God's coming victory over all evil make on us now. It must contradict and oppose all that is wrong in society. It must speak to the State in the name of justice and the dignity, rights and responsibilities of all human beings. It speaks on behalf of the weak, the vulnerable, the poor, the threatened, the oppressed, the outcasts. Truth must speak boldly to power for justice to prevail.

25.9 The Church must also oppose as demonic any lust the State has for overweening power and glory. It must insist that the State pursue right, not might, and must oppose all nationalism.

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,⁴ it must be patently a war to prevent an even greater evil. It must be a last

⁴ 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.

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 all 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.

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 and for Christ, 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, and 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 in Christ of all the children of God. 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."

27.5 Part of the declared judgement on sinful humankind is that the whole created world is in bondage to decay. In the final renewal of all things, however, God will liberate all creation from decay to share the glorious freedom of the children of God, in a new heaven and a new earth.

28. The Natural Environment

28.1 That God created all the cosmos through, and for, Christ, means that all of creation belongs to God and that God delights in it and loves and cares for it. God created the earth as a splendid place for all plants, animals and human beings to live in as all creatures of the earth. It is a treasure on loan from its Creator to all that inhabits it. Every sabbath was thus set apart to glorify the Creator and to celebrate creation and its goodness. Christ specially honoured the earth by his incarnation and life on it. He died to reconcile not just individuals but the whole cosmos to God, who will not abandon but recreate it. Love for the Creator, love for Christ, thus means love for creation.

28.2 In being made in the image of God, human beings were made representatives of God, with dominion over the earth and all its other creatures. This means that they were made responsible for it as its custodians and stewards. We are to exercise that dominion in the image of the Creator, who loves, sustains and cares for the earth. Thus God calls us to revere, not ravage, the earth. We have the right to till the soil but the duty to love, protect and care for the earth, its creatures and its resources.

28.3 Sin, however, erodes our sense of the wonder of nature and our respect for it and damages our relation with the created order. Our dominion over the earth has enabled modern science and technology to develop, with the great benefits they bring but also the great threats they pose. Instead of being responsible and caring in that dominion, we dominate, plunder and abuse the earth to an extent that has led to environmental crisis. We destroy the delicate balance between the soil, water, atmosphere, plants and animals of the earth, which together make up an interdependent whole. Our greed for profit, our drive for ever greater industrialisation aided by technology, and the impact of the massive increase of population in many parts of the world are all increasingly ravaging the earth, diminishing its biodiversity, destroying its natural resources, polluting its land and air with waste and fumes and its seas with more and more non-biodegradable debris. Gradually we are making the earth an uninhabitable wasteland.

28.4 God promises us a new heaven and a new earth in the sense of a purged, redeemed and renewed creation, freed from its shackles of decay. 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 yet more 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 ultimate 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 to an extent and for the time being holds back the divine omnipotence. God 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 Thus God does not enable us to escape all suffering. 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, made known to us in Christ, is a just, loving and glorious one, and everything will in the end perfectly conform to it. Thus in all things God works for the good of those who love God and are called according to that purpose.

29.5 Meanwhile God grieves over the tragedies and anguish in the world more than we do. Indeed in Jesus Christ God stands by us, sharing our weakness, our sorrows and our suffering and caring for us. In the midst of tragedy we are comforted by this and by knowing 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 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 that divine providence has raised them up. Despite persecution, however, the faithful stand firm.

30.2 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.

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

30.4 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 transformed, restored and brought to its unity and destiny in Christ, to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God.

30.5 Everyone who has died will be raised and appear before Christ, who 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 like the body of their risen Lord 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 justice and peace. The sovereignty God manifested in creating the world will then 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!'