

A Statement of Faith

**THE STATEMENT OF FAITH**

In 1986 the Panel was instructed by the General Assembly "to prepare a draft Statement of Faith, and to report".

For this purpose the Panel established a Working Party under the Convenership of the Rev. Bruce Ritchie. Its members were the Rev. Dr Douglas Murray, the Rev. Dr Stewart Todd, the Rev. David Beckett, the Rev. Professor James Torrance, the Rev. Howard Taylor, the Rev. Samuel Harris, Dr Bruce McCormack, Dr Dan Martin, Dr Charles Waterston. The Rev. Dr David Fergusson found it necessary to resign last year as Secretary, and the Working Party was grateful to the Rev. Alastair Malcolm for taking over his responsibilities. The Rev. Professor Robert Davidson also served on the Working Party until recently.

The Statement of Faith is now presented to the General Assembly. Along with the Statement, and integral to it, is a Commentary in which the Panel has tried to explain more fully the meaning of the short phrases in the Statement itself. The Panel asks the General Assembly to commend the Statement and the Commentary to the Church for study and discussion, especially in Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions.

**The Purpose of the Statement**

The desire for a Statement of Faith arose out of many years of discussion on The Westminster Confession. In considering the last proposals regarding the status of the Confession several Presbyteries expressed the view that there is a need for a more contemporary statement of faith. In 1986 therefore, in response to this clearly perceived need, the General Assembly instructed the Panel to prepare such a statement, thereby leaving aside in the meantime questions about the place and status of the Westminster Confession.

The Panel agrees it is important to be able to say together, as a Church, what we believe; and to turn our confession of Jesus outward in evangelical witness to thc world, rather than inward toward Church disputes. In 1986 three possible goals of a Statement of Faith were suggested. Such a Statement would be:

1. a document affirming our faith, to the glory of God;
2. a document suitable for some teaching purposes;
3. a document which clarified the place of our own Church within the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and proclaimed the faith of the Church to the world today.

The Panel reaffirms these overall goals; but before they can be achieved the Church has to reach a common mind and make the Statement its own. Therefore, while keeping the long-term goals in mind, the Panel suggests two immediate aims for the present Statement. It is offered:

1. as a stimulus to the Church to think through her faith and come to a common mind over its expression;
2. as a document which, along with its commentary, may be published as an aicl to our understanding and declaration of the Christian faith.

The Panel believes it is only as the Statement and its Commentary are used that it will be possible to assess whether they provide a helpful way forward. It hopes that the Statement of Faith may help the Church to ascribe praise, to declare the faith and to strengthen the bonds of unity in the Holy Spirit.

**A STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH**

**We believe in one God:**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

three persons living in the unity of love.

**We praise God the Father:**

in love he created the universe through his eternal Word and Spirit;

by his power he sustains and directs it.

He has made us his sons and daughters,

 to share his joy and to live together in peace.

**We confess Jesus Christ, God the Son:**

in love, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became one of us;

to fulfil the promise to Israel and to reconcile the world with God.

In his life he was obedient to his Father's will;

 he forgave sinners, brought hope to the lost,

 healed the sick, and set free those who were oppressed.

In his death on the cross he bore the sin of the world;

 on the third day he was raised from death by the power of God.

 He triumphed over all the powers of evil;

 now he reigns in heaven, sharing his risen life with us.

**We trust God the Holy Spirit:**

in love he calls the Church into being.

He unites us to Christ, in whom we are justified.

He guides our understanding of the scriptures,

 as he also guided and inspired their writers.

He sanctifies us in sacraments

 and imparts to the faithful the fullness of Christ.

He assures us of forgiveness.

He empowers us to be disciples,

 embodying the love of Jesus in the Church and in the world.

**We rejoice in the gift of eternal life:**

We hope for the coming resurrection, through the resurrection of Christ.

We look for his coming again in power and glory,

 to judge the world and to make all things new.

Then all creation shall rejoice in communion with the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God blessed forever. Amen.

**COMMENTARY ON THE STATEMENT OF FAITH**

**We believe in one God**

The Statement of Faith is intended to be a declaration of the faith of the Church: it begins therefore with the plural form of the first person, we. It is a declaration which we make as members of the Church of Christ. Our individual confessions are made within the fellowship of the Church, where we join in declaring our faith with all who believe.

This statement has been produced for the Church of Scotland for use within that Church, but it is also devoutly perceived as being true to the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, of which the Kirk is a part. We declare our faith as part of a world Church, a Church guided and upbuilt by the Spirit down the ages: we are one with believers in every time and place. We declare the faith first proclaimed by the apostles, the gospel based on the biblical witness to Jesus Christ the Church's founder and foundation.

**We *believe***

The statement is in the form of a creed, a confession of faith; but such a statement as this is made within the life of the Christian community, not in a vacuum. Equally its source is not a classroom or a debating chamber but the Church at worship. It is in the context of worship pre-eminently that the gospel is declared and heard and commitment is made; it is there pre-eminently that Christ is present in word and sacrament and his people respond and identify with him in gratitude and faith. Therefore the statement is not only credal and confessional, it is also doxological—in the nature of a praise formula, to be used by the Church in its worship. Belief, confession, praise, trust and hope interpenetrate in the act of confessing our faith.

Properly speaking we cannot make this statement except in the context or in the spirit of worship: we will not understand it if we remain aloof, apart, examining its phrases clinically and from the outside. In other words faith is to be seen in terms of a life-relationship with God not merely intellectual assent to certain propositions. This is not to deny the statement a role in converting outsiders, pointing them to God, who loves those outside the Church as well as those inside it. The doxological nature of our statement also reminds us that our statements and propositions are pointers to the truth, to the One who is the Truth. They cannot be simply equated with the truth, they cannot therefore be objects of faith in themselves.

**We believe *in one God***

 We declare our faith in the one true God. Other gods abound: nature, space, money and material possessions, chance, sex, drugs all have devotees. There are also what the Bible calls "fools" (Psalm 14:1) who say in their hearts "there is no God". Such people, with a completely secular outlook, think that the world is autonomous and can be explained without reference to any higher reality. Others think it is pointless to try to explain it at all.

There are also other religious people in the world who believe in one God. With Judaism obviously we have a special affinity and no doubt we share insights with others. They convey truth which we would not wish to deny, but we believe Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, through whom alone men and women come to the Father (John 14:6). The one God in whom we believe is not a god whom we place alongside other gods, whether we think there are many or few. He is the God who takes the place of everything that others call "God"; he is the God who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all things; he is the God who made himself known primarily to a people Israel, and subsequently and definitively in Jesus Christ our Lord. This making known is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Although we certainly believe in one God, trinitarianism rather than monotheism is the more accurate description of our belief. In our statement the words "we believe in one God" are separated from the words "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" by only a comma. The phrase "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" fills out the Christian understanding of the phrase "one God" The one God in whom we believe is not only the ruler of the universe upon whom everything depends and whom we describe primarily in terms of power: he is ruler, saviour and sanctifier, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom we describe primarily in terms of love. With these words we already anticipate the next clause.

**We believe in one God: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons living in the unity of love***

The familiar shorthand of Christian belief speaks of God in three persons, but if the shorthand is useful it also presents difficulties. There is controversy surrounding the term "persons". On the one hand it helps us to assert that the distinctions within God are not mere appearances with no substantial basis: God does not merely appear to be thc Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit. It is of his very essence that he is three in one. On the other hand the use of the term "person" is unhelpful and wrong if it leads us to suppose that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate centres of consciousness and will. There are not three Gods (tritheism): there is one God in three persons. Early Christians were led to speak like this because of what they had experienced. They knew the Father of Jesus, the Father in heaven to whom Jesus prayed and taught his followers to pray: he is God. They knew Jesus; they knew he was the Christ and were compelled to say: he is God.

They knew the Holy Spirit as a creative force in their lives: they knew this was the Spirit whom Jesus had promised (John 14:16) would be given by the Father who is God, they also experienced this Spirit as Christ in them (Romans 8:9-11)and he is God: the Spirit is God.

Although from earliest times baptism was in the threefold name,5 and Father, Son and Holy Spirit had been worshipped, it was not until the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD that the relationships within the Godhead were given more precise formulation by the Church. There it was affirmed that the Son was of the same substance (being) as the Father. At the same time it became clear that if the Holy Spirit was also the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Son, he too must be of the same substance as the Father. 6 If Christ truly unites us with the Father, and if it is only through the Spirit that we are united with Christ, then both the Son and the Spirit must be of the same nature as the Father. Therefore there is one God, who can be distinguished as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons in thc one being.

The gospel emboldens us to claim that what pre-eminently characterises the unity of the three persons of the Trinity is love. Grateful acknowledgment of this love is expressed in the ensuing three articles of our doxological statement. Both in his works and in his nature God is love. The three persons of the Trinity find their life and fulfilment in communion and it is a union and communion of love. The Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father and the Son. Certainly we must observe distinction in the Godhead but there is also and equally relationship, and the relationship is a perfect relationship of love. The operations, gifts and purposes of God are acts of love, for his nature and his name is love.

This fountain of love overflows into the world. Creation of the world and of human beings within it is "part of the divine love affair".8

Salvation likewise!

**We praise *God the Father***

In explication of the foregoing brief Trinitarian formula the statement goes on to deal with Father, Son and Holy Spirit in three distinct articles.

In the Old Testament we learn to think of God as wholly other, holy, different from us, unknowable by us except insofar as he has chosen to reveal himself to us. But we are also told that he is the Father of his people Israel.9 Fatherhood is stressed not because of its male connotations, but because of the personal nature of God. True fatherhood is seen in the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loves his Son from all eternity and calls us all to share by adoption in that unique Father-Son relationship.10 This is the fatherly love already foreshadowed in the Old Testament. There is however another facet of God's fatherly nature: it contains within it qualities most often described as "feminine". God is spoken of as a mother" comforting her children.

In the New Testament "Father" is the distinctive way in which Jesus addresses God in prayer. He calls God "Abba" a unique usage which indicates the closest and most intimate relationship between father and son. The gospel of John similarly represents Jesus as saying: "he who has seen me has seen the Father" and on the cross he commits himself into his Father's hands.13 In this loving relationship we are invited to share. By the Spirit we are united to Christ and, being brothered by him, we are permitted to call God "Abba" Father i4 and to reckon ourselves beloved.

***In love he created the universe through his eternal Word and Spirit; by his power he sustains and directs it. He has made us his sons and daughters, to share his joy and to live together in peace.***

We come now to speak of God the Father as creator of the universe. The creeds call him the maker of heaven and earth and the choice of language is not casual. The world is not God himself, nor is it God's child, nor is it something which flows out of him, an expression of himself. All of these ideas have had currency in the past and have led to error. Equally the world is not something independent, based on itself, over against God and God's world. It is something God has made. To hammer home the fact that he has made it and given it reality and a nature and a freedom and a whole existence appropriate to it, traditional doctrine has called it a creation out of nothingness.15 As our statement says, the universe is likewise sustained in being and directed by God, prevented from returning to nothingness.

The God who has created and who sustains is God the Father. There need not be any conflict between Trinitarian faith and the insights of scientific enquiry; indeed we look to scientists to tell us all they are discovering about the universe and to enhance thereby our doxology. He who has created the universe is God the Father and what has been said above about God the Father is not now unsaid. If we are to understand the true significance of the universe we shall do so in the light of our knowledge of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father. And if we are to be of a mind to praise God who created the universe, then for that purpose also we need to count Christ in.

Although we may say God the Father created, this must not be taken to mean that in creation only the Father is involved. The classic creeds tend towards this in the way they are set out: as if creation were the work of the Father, redemption the work of the Son, and sanctification the work of the Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are not separated.

We shall not understand God in his works unless we also take account of God in his relationships. The doctrine of the Trinity is not an optional extra for Christian belief and worship, a difficult hurdle over which the intellectually athletic may be able to leap, or a dry-as-dust article of belief which is brought out once a year on Trinity Sunday and dusted down. If our Christian thinking is to be faithful and in particular if our statements are to do justice to the love of God they will be Trinitarian through and through.

Note therefore the two phrases in our statement which modify the verb "created". The first phrase is "in love" and the second is "through his eternal Word and Spirit". Creation was not fortuitous; it was an act of love; there is involved here a good purpose. God desired the world, and the world in God's good purpose is closely linked with the Father's love for the Son. 16 It is in love for the Son that he determines to be the creator.

Through the Son's answering love the world becomes God's joy and glory. The Word/Son is therefore with God at creation. 17 This creation is effected by the powers and energies of his own Spirit. 18

The love that infuses the relationships of the Trinity overflows to men and women. We are created in his image to share his love and fellowship. We are moreover stewards of the earth, priests who are to enable all creation to render glory to God and to praise him in its way. In love God has made us free, free to love but also free to sin. Sin is not merely occasional misbehaviour or derailing, but the rejection of our relationship with God. Our relationships with one another also suffer. In restored fellowship, in reunion and communion with God, we are made capable of living joyfully and peaceably on the earth and of fulfilling our priestly function for all creation. This the Son has come to restore.

***We confess Jesus Christ, God the Son***

There are pragmatic Christians who imagine it possible to confess Jesus Christ, a great teacher, and to concentrate on his teaching in order to identify appropriate Christian action. When we do this however we discover that the teaching of Christ recorded in the New Testament consists not merely of ethical precepts but of the most astonishing claims for his person: "I am the way, the truth and the life I am the light of the world"; "before Abraham was I am". The teaching of Jesus cannot be separated from his person. We do not abstract from the gospels a series of authoritative utterances and remarkable phenomena, rather we witness the incarnation of God himself: we contess that Jesus Christ, God the Son, who has been with the Father from all eternity, has taken human flesh.

***In love, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became one of us; to fulfil the promise to Israel and to reconcile the world with God.***

He became one of us, he God the Son: Scripture describes this Son as "only-begotten", it also describes him as "first-born of many brethren".19 Both of these descriptions are necessary if we are to begin to do justice to the nature of this sonship. Only-begotten speaks of his unique relationship to the Father and within this unique relationship he is God "for us". First-born of many brethren speaks of his relationship with us and with the world,20 "God with us", fully human yet fully divine, prototype of all those he has come to brother and to take with him to the Father.

The phrase "in love", by now almost a refrain, recurs in the context of this second article also. Indeed even if we had not proved ourselves flawed and fallen mortals God's love would still have been extended to us. 21 The love of God comes to us in Jesus22 and it does so not only as a divine rescue operation but also as a mission for the enhancement of the life of human beings and of their world, to grace them. This mission involves the whole life, death and exaltation of Jesus and his return in the Spirit. New life is offered, new righteousness, new creation through the resurrection. There is moreover a superabundance of grace: it is not in strict proportion to our sin, there is more.

The sinful and piteous state of humanity and of the world is the most urgent and most obvious call upon divine love however and the Scriptures employ many motifs and metaphors in their endeavour to give expression to the wonder that lies at the heart of the gospel of salvation. Among these motifs and metaphors are those of sacrifice, atonement by a priest, a shepherd's surrender of life for his sheep, ransom of a slave, payment of debt, vicarious satisfaction of a legal penalty, victory over the powers of evil. Some of these are of Old Testament origin, as is to be expected since Israel plays a unique part in the divine plan of salvation. That Jesus, in becoming one of us, became a Jew was not accidental. The love of God which issues in salvation is experienced in Israel as covenant love and Jesus fulfils that covenant.

None of the metaphors, none of the motifs, does full justice to the love that is here operating: this love derives from the intra-Trinitarian relationships of which this commentary has already spoken. 24 The Father loves the Son but his desire is not only to enjoy the bliss of that relationship in eternity, he also wishes to enjoy the bliss of a relationship with human beings in time. The Son is at the centre for the new humanity, our leader to and in the kingdom of God. But the response from us must be a free response. God has to limit himself in that regard and wait. And because this freedom involves freedom not to love, God has to go the length of self sacrifice. In love he cannot stop short of that and so in the end there is the cross. God reveals himself in utter humiliation on that cross; he reveals also the greatness of his glory. For this is truly glory, this hiding of glory in its opposite, in the misery of human beings, for love of them. God makes the misery his own in order to take it away. Then complementing this action on the cross there is the resurrection: here again the glory of God is revealed in a different aspect. Here again, his love for humankind is revealed, for humanity is raised and permitted to triumph over sin and death. This is reconciliation, this stupendous exchange. God puts himself in humanity's place and humanity in God's place, and all because God loves humankind to the uttermost.

Jesus became one of us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of God overshadowed her. 25 The Holy Spirit was there at Jesus' baptism, throughout his life, in his ministry. 26 After crucifixion, death and burial, it was through the Spirit that Jesus was raised.

When we say the eternal Son of God became one of us we speak of the mystery of the Incarnation. Traditionally the most eloquent expression of this is found in the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Becoming one of us means exactly what it says: he was a human being. He was tempted, he knew physical exhaustion, sorrow, fear, thirst, he knew joy and exhilaration and delight in the world. He shared our total human experience. In baptism he even identified with our sin though he was himself without sin.

***In his life he was obedient to his Father's will; he forgave sinners, brought hope to the lost, healed the sick, and set free those who were oppressed.***

The life of Christ is as significant as his death and resurrection. It is important for the Church because the Church's ministry today is in fact the continuing ministry of Christ in our midst. The life of Christ therefore, more reliably than the value of the world, dictates the Church's agenda.

The life of Jesus was a life of faith and obedience. His obedience to his Father's will was the source of his authority. He taught his followers to trust and obey God and to pray that God's will should be done on earth. He accepted a servant-role. It must be assumed that between the nature of Our Lord's obedience and our own there will be analogy. There will, however, be no more than analogy because the perfection of Our Lord's obedience is unique and stands in place of our disobedience. He lived a life of obedience in our place, as he died on the cross in our place.

If the will of God is determined by his love then obedience to that will of God will be characterised by acts, words and attitudes of love. This love of God will appear as judgement upon all that resists it and therefore the words of Our Lord were often rebuke and his actions also displayed indignation. But the overriding motive in the ministry of Jesus is love and that love is given substance in "the kingdom of God". Forgiveness, hope, healing, freedom and new life are a few of the characteristic features of that kingdom and manifestations of its laws of love. That kingdom has broken in upon the world with the coming of Christ and his words and actions are signs of that irruption.

Acts of forgiveness on Jesus' part abound in the gospels: he forgives sinners, he invites the guilty to share his company, and he calls men and women to follow him. And if the poor and the despised seem to have some sort of priority in this matter it is only because they are the sick who need a physician,27 perhaps also because they can more truly appreciate the profundity of God's goodness. They are aware of the great debt. 28

This apparent predisposition towards the poor and the despised must not be understood as any kind of selectivity on Jesus' part or in his portrayal of the lovc of God. All are sinners, including those who have an appearance of righteousness and God loves all.

This love of God which extends to forgiveness of sin brought hope, hope for here and now as well as hope for the time beyond death. The gospel persuaded men and women of a dignity and worth they possessed in the eyes of God. They found their true selves. This love of God also issued in healing. Such acts of healing were both straight acts of compassion and signs of the presence of the kingdom in the person of Jesus. It also brought freedom, 29 freedom from oppression by conventional attitudes of society, freedom from burdens of guilt, freedom from despair, freedom from the demonic. 30 Jesus also is revealed as lord over all creation: 31 it too will be redeemed to be part of the kingdom. 32

***In his death on the cross he bore the sin of the world; on the third day he was raisedfrom death by the power of God. He triumphed over all the powers of evil; now he reigns in heaven, sharing his risen life with us.***

These brief clauses of our confession of Christ do not and cannot say everything. The words "in his death on the cross" have to be read in the light of what is unsaid, in the context of what is fulfilled by the cross, in the context therefore of the suffering that leads to the cross. In the Apostles' Creed the whole life of Jesus after birth is subsumed under the words "suffered under Pontious Pilate". Death on the cross includes suffering unto death: denial by his disciples, false accusations, wrong judgement, indifference, ridicule, blows, wounds, thirst, even abandonment by God. The terrible cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? "33 has to be confronted in all its agony of despair. For this says that Christ suffered God's judgement. He who had devoted his entire life to the service of God's will, who had been ready to confront the pain and ridicule the cross involved, suddenly found himself plunged into new unfamiliar territory where God was not to be found. He was identified that day with all who feel cut off from God. On that cross for one awful afternoon he was alone, rejected and cursed. 34 For God "hath made him to be sin for us .35

This sin Jesus bore; and the verb "bore" has two connotations. It means both he took it upon himself and he removed it, took it away. Here we use one of the metaphors mentioned above. 36 To take sin away was the purpose of ritual sacrifice. The blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the doorposts would deliver the household from destruction. 37 By Jesus' time the Passover lamb had acquired a sacrificial significance and he associated his death with it. The lambs slain year by year were held to take away the sins of the house of Israel. Jesus is the lamb who takes away the sin of the whole world. All the evil of human hearts and hands, of human tongues and attitudes, all the curse that should put the human race on a cross, all in us that is impossible before God is put to death and buried. God has done this for us in Jesus. This he suffers in our place. God enters into that which separates us from God. On the cross the relationship between the Father and the Son is broken in love for us; at the same time the relationship remains intact in mutual love and in love for us. Our sin and the effects of it are taken away in this transaction, this mystery of love. We cannot say everything that has to be said about this mystery. Nor can we avoid the limitations of our understanding and our thinking. One of our limitations is that we have to historicise and to speak of cross, resurrection, exaltation and return in the Spirit as a sequence of events. It would be preferable to speak of them as different aspects of the one event.

The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ revealed the victory which is adumbrated on the cross. He is conqueror over sin and death. By his resurrection it is made plain to us that the power of evil is broken, rendered essentially ineffectual. Sin continues to exist as does death, but they are vanquished things. The game is up.

The resurrection is the beginning of a new creation. Men and women are not only freed from the slavery of their sin, they are also given new life. Human judgement of Jesus was that he was worthy of death by crucifixion: God's judgement was that he was worthy of resurrection. And because Jesus in resurrection and exaltation was still both divine and human, therefore both God was glorified in this miracle and mystery and humanity was vindicated. 38 In Jesus, risen and exalted, men and women are translated into the kingdom of God, in Jesus they are permitted to move forward to better things, to grow in grace, and to believe that death and the grave no longer have dominion over them. Just as in the beginning God created the universe out of nothing so he brought life out of the grave. The complete realisation of this rebirth has still to be fulfilled. The resurrection of Jesus is the seed from which it grows.

The tomb is empty on Easter Day. 39 The disciples experience fellowship with the risen Jesus in the days that follow.

There is involved here both continuity and discontinuity. Jesus is the same Jesus that was crucified and yet he is also different. The Jesus who is raised from the dead is clearly the same as the Jesus who died on the cross. The tomb is empty. The wounds in his hands and side are there to be seen. He is not a ghost: he can be seen and touched. There is a clear continuity between the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord. And yet there is something different, even other-worldly about him. He is not always recognised. He appears and disappears before the disciples' eyes. Those to whom he appears are given a hint of the future, of the coming glory of God . 41 Jesus was raised into the corning glory of the Father.

"Jesus reigns in heaven" is our way of expressing the fact that Jesus is raised into the coming glory of the Father and that there he is Lord. He is enthroned, he in whom glory has been revealed at Easter. He has entered into the divine space, the holy of holies, which is concealed from men and women, where God is. He has not forsaken our space. He is at once above it and present to it. And he is there, this bearer of humanity, because that was the goal of his life and death and resurrection. The atonement is completed and in him humanity is exalted. This was the point of it all, that we be with him beside God. This is now the possibility for men and women. The mission of the Church, as part of Christ's continuing ministry, is that the possibility for redeemed humanity and for redeemed creation shall be developed in the world and for the world.

And now as Lord he sends the Spirit so that we may share with him his risen life.

***We trust God the Holy Spirit: in love he calls the Church into being. He unites us to Christ, in whom we are justified.***

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for spirit42 can also be translated wind or breath. Applied to God it denotes his life-giving and creative power. The spirit of God broods over the waters at the dawn of creation43 and forms the heavenly hosts,44 gives life to human beings and sustains them in existence,45 inspires artists, kings and prophets. The prophet Joel moreover looks forward to the time when God's Spirit will inspire not only selected individuals but the whole people. 47 The Church later saw the fulfilment of this prophecy in the events of Pentecost.

Again in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is often spoken of as a power that comes from God in ways that are unpredictable and uncontrollable. We may speak of the strangeness of the Spirit. The Spirit comes upon human beings in ways that surprise and shock, and in this respect the strangeness of the Spirit is a sign of its lordship. 48 From the New Testament, however, we have learned always to relate the Spirit to the Father and the Son and to think of him as operating invariably with that love which characterises God in all his relationships.

The New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as resting upon and empowering Jesus throughout his incarnate life. As we have seen above 49 it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that he is conceived . 50 At his baptism the Holy Spirit is seen to rest upon him and to witness to him. 51 It is in the power of the Spirit that Jesus exercises his ministry; 52 it is in the Spirit that he prays, it is through the Spirit that his resurrection is accomplished. 54 Then through the resurrection and exaltation of Christ the transmitting of spiritual gifts (charismata) to the Church is made possible. The Holy Spirit is thus portrayed uniquely as the Spirit of Jesus Christ. 55 Everything we say about the Holy Spirit must therefore be grounded in our knowledge of Christ. This integral connection with Jesus Christ is the litmus test for our claims to be inspired by the Spirit. 56 It is the test by which we must judge whether our life as persons, as church , or as nation is filled by God's Spirit. Where Christ is present, there also is the Holy Spirit.

In Reformed theology the central role of the Holy Spirit is as the witness to Jesus Christ. If we confess Jesus as Lord we do so by the Holy Spirit. 57 It is through the inner voice of the Spirit that we come in faith to Christ. Calvin speaks of the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. 58 The role of the Spirit in the creation of faith cautions us against construing faith as something that we can manufacture or as something that can be invoked in an impersonal or mechanical way. It is the Spirit who moves our hearts and minds, who directs us to Christ. It is the Spirit who unites us with Christ and sets us free to respond in obedience and faith. It is the Spirit who also identifies us with his continuing ministry, and who equips us for our share in that ministry with gifts (charismata) that are of Christ's very self. This being so, faith and particularly the faith which justifies, is not an area of the Christian life that can be delimited as being our own. There is no such thing as a sphere where men and women, even acknowledging the help of God 's grace, could in a real sense claim to deserve well of God. We are justified solely in Jesus. The Scots Confession puts it very clearly: “…whosoever boasts themselves of the merits of their own works, or put their trust in the works of supererogation, boast themselves in that which is nought, and put their trust in damnable idolatry". 59 Jesus Christ in men and women, and that alone, constitutes the true Christian's life. The word "justification" is a favourite image of Paul's. 60 Justification means two things. Expressed negatively, it means that the guilt for our sins is not counted against us. Positively, the righteousness of Christ is imputed (or reckoned) to us. Our personal reaction may be estimable but in itself it is outdistanced by our unrighteousness before God. It is also vastly outdistanced by the grace of God in justification. If our Christian life is to mean anything it can only be as we consider ourselves in Jesus and in him alone.

***He guides our understanding of the scriptures, as he also guided and inspired their writers.***

It was through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the scriptures came to be written. How the Holy Spirit brought it about that the scriptures were written is a mystery. What we can say is that the apostles and prophets were arrested by the Spirit's witness to Christ, and knew themselves to be under command to speak and write. What they wrote, however, was a free response of faith to the divine address. As a result, the Bible quite naturally bears the marks of the humanity of its authors including their personalities, situations in life, educational and cultural backgrounds. The Bible is therefore both a divinely and a completely human witness to Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate.

In the strictest sense, Christ alone is the Word of God but, as the Church's authoritative witness to Christ, the Bible shares in Christ's authority. It is thus necessary and right to speak of the Bible as the written Word of God. Where the proclamation of the Church is rooted in the witness of scripture it too may participate in Christ's authority. The proclamation may rightly be called the Word of God preached.

Not only did the Holy Spirit guide and inspire the writing of the scriptures, he also continues to speak through them in the Church today. The Spirit must guide us in interpreting the scriptures but such guidance does not preclude the need for human interpretation. The Church must therefore employ in the service of scripture the critical tools supplied by modern scholarship. When properly employed, historical-critical study will enrich our understanding of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of the inspiration and the illumination of the scriptures are not ends in themselves. Both serve a single purpose: that the Holy Spirit may thereby witness to Christ and unite us with him.

***He sanctifies us in sacraments, and imparts to the faithful the fullness of Christ. ***

The Holy Spirit is the one who "sanctifies " and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. A loving God, having provided for our justification provides also for our sanctification, and this is how he does it. The question of the quality of Christian lives is answered once we believe that the answer is in Jesus Christ. He is the man "par excellence", the natural Son of God and the Holy Spirit is his Spirit, working secretly in human hearts and communicating to them Christ and all his benefits.

This is represented most clearly and dramatically in the sacraments. The promise made by Peter on the day of Pentecost is that in baptism we shall "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"

By the action of the Holy Spirit a person is "grafted into Christ as a member of his body the Church " and is thereby enlisted among "the saints" and engaged to confess Christ and serve him.

In Holy Communion God is asked to send his Holy Spirit to sanctify both worshippers and elements of bread and wine that the elements may be the body and blood of Christ and the worshippers may receive Christ with all his benefits to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

***He assures us of forgiveness.***

Both through the Word and through the event of baptism we are assured by the Holy Spirit that, sinners though we be, transgressors, deviating from the way we should go and separating ourselves time and again from God, nevertheless God is for us and we belong to the realm of his illimitable love and mercy.

***He empowers us to be disciples, embodying the love of Jesus in the Church and in the world.***

The Holy Spirit not only sanctifies us as individuals, he also inspires and empowers the Church's response to the gospel in the wide range of service to God and to people, for which service again Christ himself is the model. In uniting the Church to Christ he unites us to Christ's ministry and to his mission, which is to all. 65 An essential preliminary to the achievement of that mission is the reconciliation of separated Christians. In recent decades the evidence of the Spirit's operation in this field has been widely observed. And if there are periods when the ecumenical movement falters it must not be forgotten that they will pass.

Returning to the wide range of services however, we can say that the Spirit empowers us through our union with Christ to be good stewards of creation, to love our neighbours and to live joyfully and faithfully. The object of God's reconciling love is the world. 66 Issues of national and international justice and peace should concern every Christian and this means we have to act responsibly in politics, economics and in society. We must also take seriously our God-given responsibility for our environment and the well-being of planet Earth. This is to associate the activity of the Holy Spirit with what are perhaps more usually presented to Christians as laws or commandments or challenges. We are challenged by the ecological problems that beset us; we are commanded to love our neighbour; 67 rejoicing in faith is a law of the God of Jacob. 68

These great commands, and others which follow, have been preceded by great truths. The commands follow logically from the recognition that the Lord has done great things for his people in creation and salvation, as recalled in our first two articles, but the whole gospel has not been heard until it is understood that the commands themselves are shot through with promise. It is an essential part of the gospel that Jesus Christ shares his risen lifc with us as the statement says above. In other words, with Christ in our lives, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we shall be able to begin to meet the challenges and obey the laws and fulfil the commandments. This understanding is in tune with the doxological character of the statement and indeed of Christian life; it may even be claimed to be one of the merits of doxology that it summons forth these happy and most authentic notes of the faith.

The Holy Spirit, who was involved in creation, is also involved in the redemption and fulfilment of creation. The creation will not be abandoned by God but will be transfigured by the power of the Spirit. We are therefore to enjoy the physical universe as our home. It is not a prison from which we seek to escape, but rather it is the theatre of God's glory, filled by the Spirit's light. It is destined to be redeemed rather than annihilated. In the current ecological crisis the Spirit calls and empowers us; we must trust that ecological problems are not insoluble, however difficult and alarming they may be. The Spirit will enable us to be priests of creation, good stewards of its resources and beauties, according to God's will.

Likewise those who are in Christ, in the Spirit, participating in Christ's obedience and service, are enabled to love their neighbour with something of the quality of love that was seen in Christ. Love divine can really come down and fix in us his humble dwelling. We can learn how to enhance our relationships, we can learn new ways of loving our neighbour whether at near hand or, through good laws justly administered, at far hand. And always by the activity of the Spirit in our lives there is buoyancy of faith and joy.

Jesus Christ is the model for all service, for all ministry in the Church, he who came not to be ministered unto but to minister. Jesus Christ is also the model for all worship. He is the true worshipper, he pre-eminently glorifies God, and by the gifts of the Spirit we can be caught up into this worship, this glorification. It is through the gifts of the Spirit that we are equipped to lift up our hearts in worship week by week and to give thanks to our God.

There has sometimes been a tendency to think of the Spirit solely in terms of his communicating knowledge of Christ. For many this exclusive emphasis has led to a failure in both theology and Church life to be captivated by the ongoing, dynamic and energetic life of God's Holy Spirit. As we have seen, the Spirit not only assures us that Christ has died for us and that our sins are forgiven, he also unites us with Christ in his resurrection and enables us to live in him and for him. 70 This work of the Spirit has traditionally been described as sanctification or regeneration but it is important not to divorce it from the work of Christ. It is not so much a separate work that takes place after the work of Christ, it is rather the impacting of that work upon our lives. Easter and Pentecost must be seen together. Life in the Spirit is life with Jesus Christ. 71 It is life in which we can participate in his grateful obedience before God and joyful service of others. Life in the power of the Holy Spirit is a continuous and exciting transformation. While the transformation is often impeded by our failures it is nonetheless real. It is a life marked by prayer and praise, by confidence in Christ crucified and risen, by the virtues of faith and love and by hope of the resurrection.

***We rejoice in the gift of eternal life: We hope for the coming resurrection, through the resurrection of Christ. We look for his coming again in power and glory, to judge the world and to make all things new. Then all creation shall rejoice in communion with the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God blessed forever. Amen.***

We come finally to the doctrine of the Last Things (eschatology), an area of Christian belief which is shot through with hope and joy. The Old Testament frequently uses the phrase "Day of the Lord" to speak of the time when the Lord will come in person to establish his kingdom of peace, truth and justice. In that day sins would be forgiven, the sick healed, the oppressed set free, the dead raised, and nature itself would be renewed.

Jesus began his ministry by preaching that this time was now fulfilled and the kingdom of God had drawn near. During his life he forgave the sinner, healed the sick, set free the oppressed, raised the dead and calmed the forces of nature. The kingdom of God was breaking into the midst of Israel to destroy the kingdom of Satan. This on a local scale was a sign of God's final purpose for the whole world. After his resurrection he commanded that this good news be made known in all the world as a prelude to his return to the world to judge and save all peoples. The kingdom of God then really did break into Israel and its message is now proclaimed in all the world. In that sense the kingdom of God is now in our midst72 and eternal life is a present reafity. 73

While eternal life refers to a new quality of life already experienced here and now, this is only a foretaste of what is to come. The Bible looks forward in hope to the fulfilment of God's purpose and in doing so it speaks both of a destruction of this world and of a glorious renewal of nature reunited with heaven.

We have seen how creation is related to the loving purpose of God for humanity and to the love that is at the heart of the Trinity. 74 We have seen how evil and human sin have broken apart the relationship 75 that should exist between God and his people, between people and people and between people and nature. Count Christ out and everything seems to be moving towards chaos, death and non-being.

The Bible teaches that God has not forsaken his world but in history he works out his purpose to renew the broken relations and bring new creation from the old. It is a painful process for both God and humanity for it involves the bearing away of human sin before the final glory is revealed and earth is set free from its bondage to evil and decay. This painful, though glorious process is focused in the history of Israel and the Promised Land which until the end of time represents in peculiar intensity all people and all lands before God. Its complete focus is the life, sufferings, death and resurrection of Jesus who as Son of God and Son of Man is Israel's Messiah and the saviour of the world. Only through him who is "the lamb of God slain from before the foundation of the world" 76 are we able to understand the mysterious history of Israel as well as the destiny of all people as it moves towards its terrible yet glorious climax when justice, love and peace will finally triumph. Concerning our perception of this climax we have to say we see through a glass darkly. For example there are powerful passages in both the Old and the New Testaments which imply that the kingdom of God which will come in its fullness at the end of time will be continuous with this world. 77 In other passages in both Testaments a new kingdom is spoken of as coming from beyond this world. 8 Some will find this ambivalence disconcerting but this need not be. In Jesus Christ we see brought together just such a continuity and discontinuity. His birth is continuous with the rest of humanity, especially with the history and destiny of Israel; yet also he is "born . . . of God". 79 As we said above there is a clear continuity between the crucified Jesus and the risen Lord, and yet there is something different, even other-worldly about him.

There will be continuity and discontinuity at the end of time between the world and the kingdom of God, between time and eternity, between our life here and our life hereafter. When, in the buoyancy of faith in Jesus' resurrection, we say we believe in the resurrection of the body we mean that we ourselves and all of what we are will rise. Our belief in resurrection is not grounded on a philosophical idea of the immortality of the soul, but on the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore we believe in a personal resurrection in which the individuality and uniqueness of self are not lost but fulfilled in a new communion. That includes the acknowledgement that this life of ours with its actions and experiences will be completed: there will be a continuity. On the other hand "we shall all be changed". 81

We cannot know when these things will be: we do not know the day nor the hour. 82 We rejoice that they will be. It has to be noted however that words attributed both to our Lord and to the apostle Paul imply that the final consummation awaits the time when the gospel has been preached to all nations.

Will all be saved at the last? We are assured that "in Christ shall all be made alive", but in the context of the mystery of evil it must be said that it is possible for a man or a woman to resist God's purposes of mercy and cut themselves off from God's eternal kingdom. This would be the final misuse of human freedom. It must also be said and proclaimed and heard gratefully that God has embraced all people in Christ.

We rejoice in hope. The progress of history will be no easy process. On the contrary there will be many who "deny the Father and the Son". No doubt evil will gather momentum against God's final purpose. Even nature, which cannot be separated from creation and redemption, groans in travail as it awaits the revealing of the children of God. Earthquakes, famines, wars and rumours of wars are to be expected, but the final word about the destiny of the world will not be spoken by human self-destruction or natural disaster. The final word belongs to the eternal Word made flesh to whom is given all authority in heaven and earth.

The New Testament is clear about the dominant emphasis of that final word: it is fulfilment, completion. It speaks of the marriage feast of the Lamb. 85 It speaks of glory, glory to God and glory of God. 6 And since glory in God is not a static thing but like his love overflows, comes down and comes in, eschatology is not an indulgence but a very practical matter. The glory of God's future passes judgement on things as they are in the present and challenges us to do better. Nevertheless the best is yet to come, when we and all creation with us will at last rejoice in our communion with the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God, blessed for ever. And there shall be "a new heaven and a new earth".87 "And God shall wipe away all tears . . . and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”