



The purpose of CityGate is to strengthen the witness of the Church by helping people to bridge the gap between the reality of Christ and everyday life

Consensus of Belief

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Assumptions important for understanding this Consensus

What do we mean by “bridging the gap”?

What do we mean when we say our purpose is to strengthen the witness of the Church by helping people to bridge the gap between the reality of Christ and daily life?

There is, in reality, no gap between Christ and everyday life. However there are many gaps in the perception of reality in the minds of both believers and non-believers. What are some of these gaps in understanding, where do they come from and how do they affect belief, behaviour and the development of a comprehensive Biblical worldview?

For various cultural and philosophical reasons, many western Christians have a mental model that divides the world into two spheres: a vague religious sphere where God and religion exist and a sphere often called daily “reality”. This second sphere is generally located in the material world. Tragically, the two spheres rarely overlap or there is confusion in how they intersect. This is a cause of weakness. The Gospel is not merely an attempt to try to be moral in daily life, but of living life in the presence of God in a supernatural universe, in the God in whom we live and move and have our being.¹

1. Regarding gaps of Matter and Spirit

Ancient philosophers without a doctrine of creation tried to make sense of what they believed was the problem of how mind and matter interact, and many (such as Plato) concluded that mind is the ultimate reality and matter only an appearance of reality, or, at best, an inferior form of reality. Others, such as the Manicheans and the Gnostics taught that matter itself is evil. Some of these ideas influenced the early Christians and convinced them that the body of Christ could not be real, or else He could not have been sinless. This in turn led to a confusion of understanding and undervalued the humanity of Christ, the nature of sin, and what it means to be human in a physical universe.

The Biblical doctrine of creation addresses these false dilemmas, teaching us that God created both mind and matter.²

2. Regarding gaps of being human and issues of identity

Our understanding of what it means to be human is inevitably related to what we think of spirit and matter. Some ancient philosophies with a sharp division between mind and body emphasised one of them and devalued the other.

One heresy that reappears over the centuries elevates spirit and denies that the human body can be good. The Docetic heresy, for example, denied that Jesus really had a human body; it must have been an illusion or else he could not have been sinless. The various Gnostic heresies regarded the human being as a spirit trapped in a body. This results in the denial of a legitimate appreciation of some aspects of human existence, and suspicion of some activities.

Enlightenment concepts divide the human being into the rational and emotional; either ignoring or over-emphasizing one part or the other.

In the modern paradigm “man” is a self-referential being whose identity is formed by self-observation rather than the recognition of the image of God in us and the discovery of the self through life in relationship and community.

Additionally, there are “post-human” teachings negating the Biblical division of human beings from other forms of life.

The biblical teaching is that God created humanity, body and spirit, mind and emotions, and saves and sanctifies all believers, expecting the whole person to glorify Him on the earth

3. Of gaps between the “spiritual and the secular” or the “Church and the world”

In relating to the general society Christians have often used two opposite and unhelpful models to consider the society in which they live: either a separation that emphasises individual piety without responsibility for the wider human society, or accommodation through a social gospel that emphasises ethics without recognising the need for regeneration and redemption.

4. Of gaps caused by incomplete reasoning or immaturity

Other gaps we seek to understand and address in the process of discipleship include: the gap between unarticulated belief and articulated belief; between belief and behaviour; between emotion and reason; between faith and reason; and between the ideal and the real.

The problem with words and the need for active listening

Many theological words no longer carry a clear consensus of meaning. “Christianity”, for example, now means many different things to many people: for some a set of religious laws, for others a description of national identity, for others a political position and for some a relationship with God. Our judgements are contained in our words and therefore we need to listen carefully in order to understand what is really being said.

Genuine disagreement is a rare achievement and takes hard work. Usually what we call disagreement is merely confusion. Often we think we are engaged in argument when we are only talking past one another. It can be an “achievement” to arrive at the point where we know the extent of our disagreement with somebody else.³

We want to respect other people by understanding what they mean just as we, too, want to be understood.

The gaps between reality, our experience and our description of it

Reality, our experience of reality and our description of our experience are three separate aspects of life. Confusion about truth commonly happens when we mistake one of these for the other. We might say that we fall into the gaps between these three. It is important in our discussion to learn to separate these. Our desire and aim is that what we say about life and our relationship to ultimate things should correspond with what really is.

The tension between the individual and the communal

It is essential to remember that each of us is unique and yet there are realities common to all people of all times and all cultures. One can imagine this as a line stretched from the one to the many. On one end is the unique person with his or her own family and national history, and context. On the other end there are those basic attributes and issues that are true for all people at all times. Everyone breathes and eats, everyone has fear and anger and so on. How we negotiate these common experiences will be culturally conditioned, but the fact that they universally exist as means that we can speak, as the Bible speaks, to the realities common to all people.

Articulated and unarticulated belief and the problem of unexamined assumptions⁴

Francis Schaeffer quoted a Dutch proverb:

“All men have two creeds: what they say they believe and what they act on. What they really believe is what they act on.” Schaeffer said, “This truth must be handled with care, but is true for all of us to some degree.”

We all have a working theory about the way things are which is often deeply internalised and motivational. There are the ideas that we consciously articulate about our beliefs and motivations. And then there are our unarticulated, “gut” assumptions that we may not even know we have but which dominate the way we actually live. These stem from unprocessed or unarticulated interpretations of life experiences. Further we give assent to some ideas because we think we are expected to or because we have not had the time or reason to think about, or question, them. There is therefore a difference in what we say we believe and what we really believe.

As the Holy Spirit works within us, through the teaching and preaching of the Word, humble discipleship and grace, we are restored and grow in true knowledge. There is then increasing integrity between articulated and internalised truth; and articulated belief becomes our true experience. This is in part what we mean by growing in grace or maturity in the faith.

Historic Biblical Christianity - Clarifications^v

This section covers issues we have found to be important for the clarification and proclamation of our beliefs. Its primary purpose is to describe our understanding of reality and how this defines the purpose, relationships and activities of CityGate.

These theological perspectives are not meant to be exhaustive; no attempt is being made to give a full summary of all Biblical teaching. They are, however, a reminder of who we are, what we believe, and what we think needs to be spoken at this time in history.

We will add and correct emphases as we grow as a body^{vi} and respond to the challenge of communicating ancient truth with clarity and integrity in Central and Eastern Europe. We believe it is crucial to emphasise these points in our time in that they are not active in the minds of many believers, and therefore do not shape a comprehensive and compelling worldview in the Church, compromising its effectiveness. Not all things in this affirmation of faith are of equal weight: some being more essential, some less.

One aspect of truth is often overemphasised at the expense of another. We must always be careful that our teaching and practice are not one-sided, but seek the balance of truth reflected in the Bible. A healthy church will try to hold the body of Biblical knowledge in balance and while not everyone will understand everything there will be enough people who understand enough of it to maintain a balance in the life and practice of the church. Many of these emphases are included here because we have found them to be important in bridging the gap between the worldview learned through society and the view of reality that comes from Biblical revelation.

We believe it is important to promote theological thinking. Our field studies show that many Christians believe that theology is for specialists and professionals, boring and irrelevant to ordinary lives. In the light of this we aim to present a theology that is a practical expression of the way things really are.

What do we mean when we say Christianity is Historic and Biblical?

Christianity is historical in two ways

First, Christianity is historical in that it stands on the actual events as described in the Old and New Testaments, leading up to and concerning Jesus. There is sufficient evidence for reasonable belief that the events described and interpreted to us in the Bible are true and a reliable witness to what happened in history.

Second, Christianity's historicity is evident in the integrity of its expressed reality lived and witnessed for 2000 years by believers, the Body of Christ, who have loved and followed the triune God. We do not claim to have anything new. What we have has been tried and tested. There is wisdom in the Church: through the centuries the form and expression may change, but the content remains the same. Each generation is faced with different questions and issues. We must face the questions and issues of our times and be faithful in our generation.

We bear the history of the Church as both a blessing and a burden: as a blessing in lessons learned and theology clarified; as a burden in mistakes and failures from which we must learn. This history, while not ultimately authoritative, is beneficial. We must not idealize any one period of church history as the "golden age". We may learn from all of them, but must not allow nostalgia to blind us to the universal standards and principles that transcend them all and relativise them, helping us to see that they are all beset with their own characteristic weaknesses and sins. These perennial imperfections must not

give occasion for the cynicism that is so prevalent in our own age. If we must not idealize a particular age, neither must we demonise another, although we recognize that there are periods of relative strength and weakness. As the Apostles' Creed says, we believe in the "catholic [one true] Church". We should act in that spirit, exposing the difference between true and false no matter under what cover it hides.

What do we mean by Biblical Christianity?

As Christ entered this world through the submissive obedience and co-operation of a willing human being, without violating her will or person, so we believe that God graciously co-operated with human authors to bring His written revelation into the world. It is through the written Word that we gain information about Jesus Christ, and through the written Word that we come to know Him as the Living Word. There are no contradictions between the two, and no legitimacy in pitting one against the other.

The Christian Scriptures, consisting of the sixty-six canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, are the infallible Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts and the gracious revelation^{vii} of the infinite God to us about Himself, His intentions towards us, and our relationship with Him. He continues that work today through the illumination of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit. This revelation is communication in human language to us, His creatures. We are not surprised at this, as we would expect the Author of Life to take the initiative to communicate with those He created. As the author, God is able to preserve His text and the message He wants to communicate to us.

Our final authority is God Himself, "Who has spoken in these last days to us by His Son",^{viii} Who stands behind the Christian Scriptures and speaks through them. The Church, led by the Holy Spirit, recognised those texts that were divinely inspired, in the same way one might recognise the inherent authority of a banknote. God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

The Bible claims divine inspiration for all that it affirms, and therefore also claims to be infallible in its teaching. This is true whether it is addressing matters of faith and practice, or matters of history and the created order. The human authors did not introduce distortion or falsehood into God's communication through their sinful nature or finiteness. We consider this written revelation to be true for all history and cultures. We acknowledge and expect there to be some things we do not fully understand, for we are inherently limited beings, and further limited by our times and circumstances.

Understanding the Scriptures

We make a clear distinction between the Christian Scriptures and our understanding of them. We actively seek to understand what God says to us through the study of the text, never forgetting His warning to the Pharisees^{ix} that there is always a danger of idolatry, even of the Bible: of thinking that we have life merely because we know the texts of the Bible. Thus we emphasise the humility and care with which we must approach the text itself. We understand and seek to resist the dangers of traditional bias, cultural assumptions, individualism, subjectivism, and moral failure in understanding the text. We understand the dangers of a false literalism that gives no space for understanding thought forms and literary style, especially with respect of genre. We are also cautious of the danger of manipulation and aware of the pain caused through misuse of the Bible by proof texts.

We believe it is important to re-emphasise the active work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating the Scriptures to us. The process of interpretation is possible because God is still speaking in and through the written Word given to the Apostles and the Prophets. As we open ourselves up to the Word of God, we can expect Him to speak to us in and through it and to experience the presence of the One to Whom we are listening.^x

While God is ultimately the author of all Scripture, we must take care not to minimise the human authorship. When Scripture affirms itself to be God-breathed, it says it is more than human literature, however it is not less than literature. The Bible should be read as real literature as with any other book. God, in His work of inspiration, did not override the distinctive personalities of the writers whom He chose and prepared, but utilised them and their literary styles.

There is great value in studying ancient cultures and literary texts outside the Scripture as they better help us understand the uniqueness of the Bible both in its own original context and in our own. However, such study should not be considered as a necessary pre-requisite for understanding the Word of God.

The task of the reader, in conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit, with mental engagement and faithfulness, and the best tools available, is to seek to find the originally intended meaning. Thus the meaning of Biblical texts is a fixed historical reality, rooted in the unchangeable intentions of its divine and human authors, realizing that the human authors were not always aware of the full extent of the meaning of their writings, as, for example, in the case of some Old Testament prophecies. However, while meaning does not change, the application of that meaning may change in various situations. Nevertheless it is not legitimate to infer a meaning from a Biblical text that is not demonstrably carried by the words that God inspired.

The Bible is made up of diverse literary forms. An identification of the genre or type of literature is relevant to its interpretation. God's revelation is a unified and coherent whole. The Old Testament is necessary fully to understand the New Testament and the New even more, fully to understand the Old. We must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. At the same time, it is essential not to minimise the fact that each text has an historical, literary, and theological context and should to be interpreted in it. There is progression in revelation, but what comes later does not contradict what preceded it. While God revealed Himself in stages to the people of Israel, we are privileged to have a more complete picture. While there are definite and clear doctrines taught in Scripture (e.g. God as the Creator, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgement, etc.), not all Scripture is equally clear. That which is unclear should be interpreted in terms of those parts that are clearer.

As we are called to be salt and light in our present moment of history, it is important to examine contemporary issues in the light of Scripture. However, these contemporary ethical, social, sexual or philosophical issues should not control our reading and interpretation of the Biblical text.

We attest that the Bible is "propositionally true", meaning that what it affirms can be stated in true propositions,^{xi} in contrast to the view that its statements merely evoke a human response, irrespective of their correspondence to what is true, or that the Bible is merely the confession of the faith of various peoples' experience of God. In a time in which relativism is the dominant philosophy, we consider the Scriptures, properly read with the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to be the primary source of understanding and interpretation of how things truly are^{xii} and how we are meant to live well.

While we claim that the Bible is true in all it affirms, we do not claim that it addresses all issues of life. In this we have the general revelation and those insights that God has

given to all human beings as part of His common grace. What we learn about God through nature we interpret through the Christian Scriptures.

Practical implications of the truth that God has spoken through His word

God has spoken and we have a record of His Word in the Bible. This means we are committed to studying the Bible as the revelation of God to humans and submitting to what we find there. We will take time in our lives to listen to God as we study the Word of God. We will not follow or practise means of study that put us in judgment over the Word. We will actively seek to deepen our understanding of God and make time to do this. If this is the Word of God, and He has promised to meet us through it, then we have something unique and awesome within our grasp and it would be a terrible wrong to ignore it. Therefore, we want to resist any diminishing of the Bible's authority or any loss of confidence in its truthfulness.

Regarding God and Language

Linguistic communication deeply reflects God's own nature. Through speech God created the universe.^{xiii} Before the creation, God the Son is identified as "the Word".^{xiv} In the diversity of creation, God created human beings in His image, endowing them with the gift of symbolic language and enabling them to communicate with Him and with each other with meaning and power about God and His creation.

Our communication has become corrupted through the Fall. Languages, and the meaning-systems beneath their vocabularies, may obscure or obstruct the clear communication of God's truth. The gift of language may also be used to mislead, through ignorance or malice.

One of God's purposes in redemption is to redeem our use of language,^{xv} that we might reflect God in this aspect of our lives. We are told by the apostle Paul to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly.^{xvi} Therefore we affirm that our language is able to communicate truth, bring healing, build up the Church of Christ and give honour to God.

Despite contemporary critical theory, and while recognising the enormous power of language in shaping human understanding and culture, we deny that it forms reality. Language has to function within the boundaries of the creation. We also deny that language is inherently indeterminate or incapable of conveying meaning and truth.

The linguistic conventions in a culture ensure that words have a substantially common meaning, which adequately corresponds to reality, whether of God or of the created order, therefore effective communication can take place with language. Yet we also believe that there is no automatic or fixed correspondence between the words that we use and the things to which they refer. Because of our finiteness, sinfulness, and our creativity our verbal communication is never exhaustive and not always exact.

Even in the context of obstacles to communication (e.g., animosity, experience, or vast differences in time and culture) real and meaningful communication can take place, but this requires us to be humble, creative, patient, attentive and loving towards each other.

Scriptural language teaches us that God is a personal being who told us to address Him as "Abba, Father". God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are not at liberty to change these names or the Trinitarian formulation to suit the linguistic sensibilities of our time. Scripture is rich in figurative language about God, including both masculine and feminine metaphors, similes and images, to help us know God truly and worship Him rightly. Scripture is also clear that male language about God is not intended to communicate that God is a sexual being. He created and transcends human sexuality. Moses warned against making images of God "either male or female"

^{xvii}and as male and female are created equally in His image, neither men nor women image or reflect God more accurately than the other.

Truth, Knowledge and our context at the beginning of the 21st Century

For the last 300 years the Western World has been throwing off dependence upon the personal and infinite God. People have become “alone in the Universe”. This has consequences in every aspect of individual and social life. It is not a mere intellectual loneliness, but is felt existentially; people are fragmented socially and internally.

This present generation of young Europeans lives in a vertigo of relativity. The rule of rationalism, which started with the Enlightenment, is losing its grip. Many of our contemporaries, reacting to the idolatry of Rationalism, have given up the search for truth – and have redefined the idea of truth as mere social opinion. What once appeared to be valid scientific knowledge is now sometimes viewed as a sophisticated power game. They claim either that we cannot know anything, or that, at best, we know only incoherent pieces of truth from which we are not able to anticipate the whole picture. This belief, itself, assumes total and absolute knowledge, and is a claim to total insight, which belongs only to God. At the same time many people either react strongly negatively to dogmatic statements of modernistic certainty or demand absolute proofs of truth.

Having listened seriously to the cautious scepticism of our days, we nonetheless seek Truth in the gracious revelation from God, Who spoke and still speaks. His revealed Word frees us from epistemological circles and legalistic, moralistic manipulation. Knowledge of Truth comes to us from outside our system, outside our universe of meanings. It enters in such a way that we are able to understand, limited and perverted as we are. We do not know everything and even our knowledge is only partial and sometimes mixed with misunderstanding. Nevertheless we have ground for confidence that we may know sufficient truth to make sense of our existence, for the God Who is behind all existence has spoken.

The Bible teaches that our knowledge of God is limited and conditional; however, although we do not have exhaustive knowledge of God in any area, because God has revealed Himself to us in words, we can have knowledge about Him that is true of Him as well as for us. Although we are not able to know the Truth in its entirety, we are able to know enough to make responsible decisions on all levels of our life.

In our suspicion of Rationalism we are not against the proper use of reason. God created a reasonable universe, reflecting His own person. The opposite of reason is not faith, but madness. Christian faith is reasonable faith, but we admit that there is no final certainty without trust in the person of Christ. God has given us reasonable ground for trusting Him. This is an important distinction that demands our submission and humility. We are not asked to enter a dark room and take a leap of faith, but rather to walk in obedience in the light we have been given. As we walk, we are to expect to be given more light as the Holy Spirit gives wisdom, knowledge and insight into truth about the way things really are. To enter into knowledge of Truth is to enter into a relationship, as God, the sum of all Truth, is personal and not merely an idea. God lets Himself be known by the persons He created. He is not the object of a scientific, rationalistic exploration. This does not lead to the abandonment of intellectual pursuits but recognizes the limits of human reason.

True knowledge is possible for believer and unbeliever alike. The truth we know is truth in opposition to falsehood; truth that accords with the way things are, as opposed to the

way things are not. This makes both the natural and the human sciences possible. This truth also makes history possible, history which can be examined and from which adequate proof can be ascertained. This understanding is related also to the way we have been created to live, secure in the conviction that God enables us to know enough to live in the ways He has designed for us.

Modernism taught that our moral state does not matter in the area of knowledge, that something can be known regardless of our moral condition. However knowledge of God is not morally neutral, rebellion and idolatry hinder knowledge of God. Obedience leads us to experience something of the reality of God Himself. In obedience, the commitment to act on what we know, we come to know the truth.^{xviii}

Truth may be known when we bow ontologically, epistemologically, morally.^{xix}

Firstly, we must bow as creatures and acknowledge our dependence on God the Creator for life itself and that there is a distinction between the Creator and His creation. We acknowledge the priority of God ontologically: God has priority as the centre and source of all reality – Creator, Sustainer, Saviour and Judge.

Secondly, we must bow in our minds epistemologically, acknowledging that we cannot find truth by reason alone, and are dependent on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This 'Word' is both of general and of special revelation. We confess that God knows all things and we do not. He has priority in revelatory self-disclosure – within the creation, within the Scriptures and supremely in Jesus Christ. Anything we discern through our study of the world or of ourselves must be subjected to God's revealed Word in the Scriptures.

Thirdly, we must bow as sinners knowing that personal pride and cultural prejudice distort all we think. Our perception and understanding of truth is finite, relative to our dispositions and – above all – perverted by our sinful tendency to hide the truth and our fatal attraction to lie. We confess that God is perfect and we are not.

The starting point for the proclamation and defence of Christianity is the fact that Christianity is true to what is and to all. Therefore, we affirm:

- the unity and exclusivity of truth which rests upon the existence of the One and only God
- the distinctiveness of God, His character and His creation, and the correspondence of His revealed Word with the given order of His creation. Together these provide a principle of antithesis, which excludes the possibility of propositions that are true also being false. Hence we do not accept systems of thought such as Neo-Orthodoxy, the New Age and certain kinds of "complementarity" teaching, which involve a divided view of truth.
- that Christianity can be shown to be true and reasonable, just as the Apostle Paul could assert that his teaching was "true and reasonable".^{xx} By this we mean that there are good and sufficient reasons to believe that Christianity is true and that one can come to know that truth with confidence.
- that Christian truth can be understood through rational means and propositional communication.
- that the propositional content of the Christian faith cannot be replaced by internal testimony, mystical experience, or emotional encounter.
- that individual Christian faith and knowledge should properly be based upon rational understanding and intellectual certainty, not merely upon subjective assurance, important as that is.

- that knowledge of God is not only possible but unavoidable for the whole human race, since human beings are made in the image of God; nevertheless, knowledge of salvation is possible only on the basis of the Scriptures and their revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- A limited understanding of God can be gained from observing the natural order, although this will always be speculative and tentative unless confirmed by God's special revelation. A complete understanding of God without reference to His special revelation is not possible. It does not denigrate science to say that neither science nor naturalistic philosophy can provide substantial answers to the larger questions of our existence in their being partial and contingent and clouded by the same sin that hinders all other spheres of human activity.

The Centrality of the Reality of God

We worship one living, triune, sovereign, infinite, personal and all-glorious God, the centre, source and sustainer of all reality, in three excellent and admirable Persons: God the Father, fountain of all being; God the Son, eternally begotten, not made, without beginning, being of one essence with the Father; and God the Holy Spirit, proceeding in the full divine essence as a Person, eternally from the Father and the Son. Thus each Person in the Godhead is fully and completely God. We do not consider God in His parts only but also in His wholeness. His glory is the sum of all His attributes. God loves His Glory with infinite intensity;^{xxi} this is the source of His righteousness, as He loves what is best. His ultimate loyalty is to His own Glory^{xxii}.

God is Spirit, eternally existing, and unchangeable. In Him alone is absolute truth, wisdom, power, beauty, holiness, justice, love, grace, mercy, goodness, and without need.

God is supremely joyful and fulfilled in the fellowship of the Trinity, each Person beholding and expressing His eternal and unsurpassed delight in the all-satisfying perfections of the triune God. Within the Trinity there has been love and personal communication throughout all eternity. Our trinitarianism is Christocentric, for it is supremely through Christ that God has chosen to reveal Himself to us.^{xxiii}

From the Trinity we take our emphasis on relationship, community and acceptance of difference in the context of unity. We learn the legitimacy and importance of difference. Neither the Father nor the Son nor the Spirit are each other. There is difference and the difference is good. We may therefore accept and rejoice in proper difference between people. We can be truly unique and at the same time one with others in relationships of profound trust and honesty. We have been created in the likeness of this personal God, though our humanness is flawed in every aspect by sin and its effects.

God created both the visible and invisible universe. While He is separate from His creation He is active as sovereign over it, doing all things according to the counsel of His will.^{xxiv} He is, at the same time, both Transcendent and Immanent through the incarnation of Jesus the Christ and the active work of the Holy Spirit in His creation; drawing people to Christ, to convict of sin and to comfort, encourage and empower those who serve Him. God, in His wisdom, is working out His will by calling out for Himself a people for salvation. We are therefore theists and not deists.

God is infinite as well as personal. We must not reduce our concept of His infinity in our attempts to understand Him as personal.

God alone is omniscient and supremely free. We accept no teaching that weakens in any way His foreknowledge or sovereign freedom. Through this omniscience we trust in the final justice of God.

Christ, God's Son, came into this world, lived as a perfect human being, died and rose again. Through His atoning work on the cross we, who look to Him in faith, are restored to fellowship with God and look forward to overcoming all the consequences of the Fall in our lives.^{xxv}

Christ suffered voluntarily in fulfilment of God's redemptive plan, He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, He died, was buried and on the third day rose from the dead to vindicate the saving work of His life and death and to take His place as the invincible, everlasting Lord of glory. During forty days after His resurrection, He gave many compelling evidences of His bodily resurrection and then ascended bodily into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His people on the basis of His all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, and reigning until He puts all His enemies under His feet.

By His perfect obedience to God and by His suffering and death as the immaculate Lamb of God, Jesus Christ obtained forgiveness of sins and the gift of perfect righteousness for all who trusted in God prior to the cross and all who would trust in Christ thereafter. Through living a perfect life and dying in our place, the just for the unjust, Christ absorbed our punishment, appeased the wrath of God against us, vindicated the righteousness of God in our justification, and removed the condemnation of the law against us.

Christ is at work restoring us to true humanness as we become conformed to His likeness by the power of the Spirit. This will mean that wherever there is true faith in Christ there will be a life which begins to imitate the love of Christ. The Apostle Paul calls us to have the mind of Christ as we think more highly of one another than of ourselves and as we give ourselves to a life of service, loving one another as Christ has loved us. We should expect to see substantial healing of our person as we grow in relation to Christ in the context of the Church.

Practical implications of the love, goodness & justice of God

The love God has for us is not a sentimental feeling but a commitment to do what is right. It is an active goodness and not merely the absence of evil. Therefore if we claim the love of God, we should actively seek the good of other people, loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Practical implications of the transcendence & immanence of God

There is a distinction between the Creator and His creation. But God is not so distant that He does not enter into His creation to meet with us. We expect the Christian life to be a life of communion with God and of activity within His creation. Our personal and corporate life must allow time for this fellowship. If we find we are too busy to have time in the presence of God, then we must adjust our priorities.

The Incarnation

While remaining God, Christ has fully and eternally^{xxvi} identified with us as a human being, the only mediator between humans and the infinite and personal God. This supreme act of selflessness and humility is a model to guide our service.^{xxvii} In His identification with the sinful and broken human condition He remained without sin.

What does the incarnation mean for our evaluation of material existence? God created the material world and, at the right time Christ entered into the reality of daily life on this planet. The incarnation demonstrates, against a Platonic view, that rebellion against

God, not physical matter, is our problem. This is the reality into which God has placed us and in which the drama of salvation takes place. This demonstration that His creation is good is central to our understanding of what it means to be spiritual.

The purpose of God in Creation

A people to know and enjoy Him

God created the universe, and everything in it, out of nothing, by the Word of His power. Having no deficiency in Himself, nor moved by any incompleteness in His joyful self-sufficiency, God was pleased in creation to display His glory out of His desire to share Himself with the redeemed for everlasting joy, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

God directly created Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from Adam's side. Adam and Eve were the historical parents of the entire human race; they were created male and female equally in the image of God, without sin; they were created to glorify their Maker, Ruler, Provider, and Friend by trusting His all-sufficient goodness, admiring His infinite beauty, enjoying His personal fellowship, and obeying His all-wise counsel. In God's love and wisdom, they were appointed differing and complementary roles in marriage as a type of Christ and the Church. Relationship to God is our great privilege. Life is a privilege to be enjoyed with thankfulness.

We rest, knowing in part, but assured we are fully known.

The Creation mandate^{xxviii}

The Bible's description of our God-given responsibility for His creation is sometimes called the "creation mandate". It reveals God's purposes for humanity. Some of these are:

Worship. God's creation of the world culminated in a day of rest and worship, a pattern which God tells people to follow.^{xxix}

Work. People have been given responsibility (or "dominion"^{xxx}) over the earth to "subdue" it by cultivating, developing, and managing it in a way that meets human needs, taking care of the earth as a resource and an expression of His love, might, wisdom and creativity in His creating, and so brings glory to God.

In the act of naming things we see the seeds of scientific activity, in understanding, exploring and subduing the creation.

Family. People have been created male and female and commanded to procreate. The family is the basic building-block of society.

These purposes were established before sin entered the world and they were re-instituted even after the Fall. Thus they still apply today, and take on a fuller and deeper significance in the light of the gospel.

Made in the image of God: Truly human

In contrast to modern uncertainty about human identity, the Christian Scriptures provide a simple definition of humanity within its opening sentences, which gives both meaning and dignity. "So God created man in His image – male and female He created them".^{xxxi}

This means, using the alternative description within the same verse, that all human beings are made "like God", reflecting God, both in what they are and in what they do. They are images of God ontologically (by their very nature as human beings) and they are images of God functionally (given special status within the created order as His

representatives on earth – made to "rule over all the creatures that move along the ground".... and "over all the earth").^{xxxii}

We are thus differentiated both upward and downward: upwardly we are not confused with God, downwardly we are not confused with non-human creation. In our creatureliness we belong with the latter; in our imageness with the former. Since we are like God, the characteristics of God's personhood are found in us, though finitely and distorted since the Fall. God creates, we create; God loves, we love; He is moral, rational, aesthetic, social, and so are we; He communicates in language, so do we. Hence, the image^{xxxiii} includes, though is not limited to, such characteristics as self-awareness, moral awareness, significant choice and rationality. In fact it comprises all aspects of human experience – mental, emotional, volitional and physical - every aspect being part of an essential whole. So precious, indeed, is the image of God to God Himself, that His purpose is revealed in Christ in terms of its complete restoration, culminating eventually in the resurrection of the body.

Practical implications of the truth that each person has integral value as made in the image of God

All people are created in the image of God, though this image is broken and the reflection is incomplete: as His sons and daughters we are expected to treat all people as significant and valuable. To be sure this is easier with some than with others. The damage of the Fall takes different forms in different people, and each of us has a unique national, local and family history, culture and social background, all of which must be taken in to account and allowed for as we love our neighbour as commanded.

Sin and the problem of evil: Thinking right about wrong

Most people will agree that there is something wrong with life as we experience it. Few would doubt that life could be better or that there is a problem with the way things are. A persistent danger of our age is to think too superficially about sin and the impact of our rebellion against the reign of God over us.

Right thinking about what is wrong with life is essential to following Christ appropriately, and to free us from the dual dangers of cynicism and romanticism.^{xxxiv} There is a tendency to reduce sin to a series of named activities (which may be loosely based on the Scriptures but which vary from culture to culture). This leads to inadequate and unsatisfying responses to the problem of our radical separation from God and its impact on us. In reducing the gap between the holiness of God and the rebellious heart of human beings we limit our understanding of the gracious character of God in His redemptive work in history. This reduces our sense of wonder, humility, gratitude and worship.

Separation from God touches every area of human life. When the Reformers talked about total or radical depravity they meant that all parts of what makes us human, our emotions, conscience, will, creativity and reason are damaged or corrupted and in rebellion against God. The good we do is not completely pure, even as our evil acts, thoughts and intention are not always as bad as they could be. Faith is a gift from God and our coming to faith requires an act of regeneration from Him. Thus we are not born again through an act of our own will.

In the process of sanctification, Christians are too often left unarmed and unmotivated by weak concepts of the active power of sin, emotive responses to authority and law, a lukewarm commitment to the perfection of God and an impotent sense of hope. The fruit of a life confronted by and freed from the power and guilt of sin should be gratitude and profound humility, replacing legalism, quick fix "how tos" and behaviour management

that leave people feeling purposeless, powerless, guilty, hopeless and cheapened. Weak views of sin result in disappointment in relationships when the expectations and demands we place on others are not met. We are surprised at their (and our) failing. Sin, in the 21st Century, has been marginalized by psychology, genetics and philosophy. Personal responsibility for actions taken has been diminished and blame shifted to government, educational deficiency or parental failure. The problem of evil is the greatest problem facing human beings on many levels. The roots of sin are deep. In the area of apologetics the problem of evil raises large emotional and intellectual barriers to faith and faithfulness.

Sin is radical, all pervasive, an active force. Its corrupting power affects our personal lives, our close relationships and the operations of society. It is simply not the way things are supposed to be.

“And the woman saw the fruit” – The consequences of sin on knowledge.

Rebellion against God's command, given for our good, had an impact in the area of knowing. The attempt to enter into the experiential knowledge of evil in spite of the decree of God removed the possibility of certainty in knowledge. Adam and Eve knew the good, because it was all around them. Though they talked to evil embodied in the form of the snake they did not appear to have recognised it as such. In tasting the fruit they internalised the essence of evil, which is independence from God. They then “knew” evil from the inside. In doing this they lost their innocence, the protective covering that enabled them to be in the presence of the glory of God. It is telling that the last observation on the human condition before the Fall is that they were naked and not ashamed. Their nakedness speaks of vulnerability without fear or shame, or the fear of violation. The openness and innocence in this text sets the scene for the sadness that follows. This is in contrast to the covering skins required later.

We have by our wilful separation lost the immediate knowledge of God's glory, as if innocence was the shield that enabled us to live in the presence of the God whose perfections make Him a consuming fire to all that is evil.

Sin and Culture^{xxxv}

We recognize that to some extent the conscience is conditioned by cultural priorities. Thus while one sin has a higher priority in one culture it may be of lower concern in another. Ultimately all cultures are part of the Fall and must be evaluated through the lens of the Bible. This requires careful evaluation of Biblical texts to critique cultural emphasis and also a willingness to critique our own belief and practice.

The impact of sin expressed in separation

The decision to sin resulted in death but what kind of death? What does it mean that we are dead in our trespasses and sins?^{xxxvi} This act brought the whole race and their descendants into a state of sin and judgement. The reality of this Fall can be expressed in these seven separations:

- God in His perfect righteousness will have nothing to do with evil and is, therefore, justly angry with us, His creatures. This wrath of God is daily experienced by us and our fellows for we were created for loving fellowship with our Maker. We have rebelled against our creator and sense His just indignation against us, an indignation which will last eternally for those not reconciled to Him through Christ.

- Our hearts are filled with self-worship and pride rather than humble devotion to the Lord. In our alienation from Him we have within us a deep reluctance to love and serve our Creator.
- We are also alienated from ourselves, that is, within each one of us we find the disintegrating power of sin. We do not faithfully express God's holiness and so we experience guilt and shame. We are not what we should be, we are unable to do what we wish, nor do we even accurately know what is deep in our own hearts. This inner brokenness demonstrates itself in the extremes of inordinate self-love and self-hatred, and in psychological disorder.
- This separation within our own persons is also expressed in our bodies. Pain, sickness and debility that come with advancing age demonstrate this physical corruption. Death, our final enemy, manifests this reality most fully as it tears apart body and spirit and brings our bodies down to the grave.
- We are alienated from each other. Even in our most cherished relationships, marriage, family and friendship, we discover ugly passions in our hearts: pride, envy, resentment, bitterness and hatred. These passions are at work in every facet of human society: in hostility between individuals, social groups, classes, races and nations. This inner enmity may break out in discrimination, violence, warfare and even genocide.
- There is separation between us and the creation around us. Instead of our dominion being made known in faithful stewardship of the earth, we pollute and damage our environment and recklessly destroy our fellow creatures.
- Even creation itself suffers separation as it has been subjected to the curse. The earth resists our attempts at dominion so that our daily work can be burdensome and even unproductive, and the natural order experiences disintegration and violence.

Practical implications from the radical nature of the Fall

Human rebellion against God has resulted in separations that cover every aspect of our human existence, and the radical corruption of human nature. Human beings were not designed to function properly outside the context of a relationship with God. As Christians, we should not expect others to be perfect nor demand that they should be; but we do expect ourselves to be humble and quick to recognize our own failings, being quick to repent. We are also to be quick to overlook failings in others, if appropriate, and quick to forgive. When we make judgments about the behaviour of others we recognize in ourselves the same weakness. We also expect that, as a result of the Fall, things will not always go as we have planned, that we will meet resistance in ourselves and others. We recognize that we will fail in thought, word and deed. We do not set our faith or hope on other human beings.

The work of God in overcoming the separation

Christ, in His death and through His substitutionary atonement on the cross, and in His triumphant resurrection, has overcome, is overcoming, and will fully overcome all these aspects of separation.

Apart from the effectual work of the Spirit, no one would come to faith, because all are dead in trespasses and sins; we are hostile to God, and morally unable to submit to God or please Him because the pleasures of sin appear greater than the pleasures of God. For God's elect, the Spirit triumphs over all resistance, wakens the dead, removes

blindness, and manifests Christ in such a compellingly beautiful way through the gospel that He becomes irresistibly attractive to the regenerate heart.

The divine saving work of the Trinity is the ground of our hope that our proclamation is not in vain in the Lord. The Spirit binds His saving work to the gospel of Christ, because His aim is to glorify the Christ of the gospel. Therefore we do not believe that there is salvation through any other means than through receiving the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Father in election, the work of the Son in atonement, and the work of the Spirit in regeneration is the empowerment of the proclamation of the gospel to peoples everywhere. The Holy Spirit does this saving work in connection with the presentation of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Practical implications of the atoning death and power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

We recognize and gratefully accept the necessity of the death of Christ to be our substitute atoning for our sins, resulting in our thankfulness and humility, which is expressed both towards God and towards those with whom we live. We recognize the legitimacy of that condemnation and the mercy of the death of Christ. We will boast in nothing because we have done nothing, receiving everything. We will live as those who were under the sentence of death and who have been spared. We will commit ourselves to putting to death in us that for which Christ died and living in the power of the resurrection. This means that we will live in the expectant hope that God will empower us to overcome our fears, suspicions, jealousies, angers and hatreds. We will not expect this to be immediate or without pain and possible suffering, but we will expect and trust in God's active help.

Christ is the peace between God and ourselves and among us; therefore the divisions, which so often exist between people, whether personal, cultural, racial or economic, ought to be overcome by those who have come to know Christ. Though it will not be perfect in this age, yet, in our homes and families, in our friendships and our churches, in our workplaces and neighbourhoods this supernatural restoration of relationships ought to be realised, in part, wherever there is true Christianity.

God's work in Regeneration, Justification and Sanctification

In a free act of righteous grace God justifies the ungodly by faith alone apart from works, pardoning their sins, and reckoning us as righteous and acceptable in His presence. Faith is thus the sole instrument by which we, as sinners, are united to Christ, whose perfect righteousness and satisfaction for sins is alone the ground of our acceptance with God. This acceptance happens fully and permanently at the first instant of justification.^{xxxvii} Thus the righteousness by which we come into right standing with God is not anything imparted to us at baptism nor over time, but rather is accomplished for us, outside ourselves, and is imputed to us.

We believe, nevertheless, that the faith which alone receives the gift of justification, does not remain isolated in the person so justified, but produces, by the Holy Spirit, the fruit of love and leads necessarily to sanctification. This necessary relation between justifying faith and the fruit of good works gives rise to some Biblical expressions which seem to make works the ground or means of justification, but in fact simply express the crucial truth that faith not producing good works is dead, being no true faith.

Justification and sanctification are both brought about by God through faith, but not in the same way. Justification is an act of God's imputing and reckoning; sanctification is an act of God's imparting and transforming. Thus the function of faith in regard to each is different. In regard to justification, faith is not the channel through which power or

transformation flows to the soul of the believer, but rather faith is the occasion of God's forgiving, acquitting and reckoning as righteous. But in regard to sanctification, faith the channel through which divine power and transformation flow to us; and the sanctifying work of God through faith does indeed touch the soul and change it into the likeness of Christ.

Justifying faith trusts in Christ not only for the gift of imputed righteousness and the forgiveness of sins, but also for the fulfilment of all His promises to us based on that reconciliation. It magnifies the finished work of Christ's atonement, by resting securely in all the promises of God obtained and guaranteed by that all-sufficient work. It embraces Christ in all His roles: Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Teacher, Guide, Comforter, Helper, Friend, Advocate and Protector.

This faith is not a mere intellectual assent, or a mere decision of the will, but is also a heartfelt, Spirit-given (yet imperfect) satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus. Therefore, the change of mind and heart that turns from the moral ugliness and danger of sin, and is sometimes called "repentance," is included in the very nature of saving faith.

This persevering faith is life-transforming, and therefore renders intelligible the teaching of the Scripture that final salvation in the age to come depends on the transformation of life, and yet does not contradict justification by faith alone. The faith which alone justifies, cannot remain alone, but works through love.

This simple, powerful reality of justifying faith is God's gift, which He gives unconditionally in accord with God's electing love, so that no one can boast in himself, but only give all glory to God for every part of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the decisive agent in this life-transformation. He is supplied to us and works holiness in us though our daily faith in the Son of God whose trustworthiness He loves to glorify.

The sanctification, which comes by the Spirit through faith, is imperfect and incomplete in this life. Although slavery to sin is broken, and sinful desires are progressively weakened by the power of a superior satisfaction in the glory of Christ, yet there remain remnants of corruption in every heart that give rise to irreconcilable war, and call for vigilance in the lifelong fight of faith.

All who are justified will win this fight. They will persevere in faith and never surrender to the enemy of their souls. This perseverance is the promise of the New Covenant, obtained by the blood of Christ, and worked in us by God Himself, yet not so as to diminish, but only to empower and encourage, our vigilance; so that we may say in the end, "I have fought the good fight, but it was not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

Practical implications of salvation through faith in the finished work of Christ

We live therefore as those who are confident that Christ's work on the cross has satisfied the wrath of God: This is reason for humility but also for a quiet confidence. We believe that one can be confident in the final outcome of Christ's work and that we do not have to wait until death for that assurance of our acceptance to God.

Practical application of the reality of Christ bearing our sins

We recognize the reality that Christ is our scapegoat. He has carried away both our sin and the sins of all believers, even those who sin against us. This requires of us that we have hearts of forgiveness towards each other and humility and gratitude towards Him. It requires us to recognize our own sin when we are confronted with the sins of others. Thus, resisting and avoiding judgementalism and a critical spirit, it

requires of us that we do not hold up in public the sins of others for which Christ died, that we treat each other with respect and dignity, while at the same time we hold one other accountable for behaviour and attitudes.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of Believers, Church and Mission

Each Christian from the time he or she first believes (whether that can be identified or not) is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This indwelling, according to Romans 8:9, is that which identifies a believer. At the same time, however, the need to grow, to be "changed from one degree of glory to another",^{xxxviii} remains the believer's abiding goal. Such change becomes possible only through the Holy Spirit Who makes His power available through our conscious appropriation of Christ's gift of salvation. We are called to "abide in Christ",^{xxxix} to "hold fast to the Head". The Spirit's work, in other words, can be described as self-effacing: He points^{xi} us to Christ. We are called to "know the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ" and so to "be filled with all the fullness of God."^{xii}

Our tradition is neither pro- nor anti-Charismatic. We have freedom of understanding about which gifts, both ordinary and supernatural, might be used by the Holy Spirit for the up-building of the Church. These gifts are many and various. Some are evidently miraculous and extra-ordinary; others are equally supernatural even in their ordinariness. As part of the restored relationship, supernatural gifts (charisma) are available to the Church continuously until Christ's return in glory. We accept that some of us will understand that some of these gifts have ceased and others will not want to be specific about what a gift of the Spirit is. We are to live within the tensions of this framework consciously and existentially.

In all things we must remember that the Holy Spirit is personal, completely Sovereign and Holy. Our relationship with Him is personal and not mechanical. It is not always clear what and how the Holy Spirit chooses to manifest these gifts and how they function. There is much that is fraudulent and a concentration on some "gifts" can be self-serving and therefore miss that larger and more glorious role of the Holy Spirit in empowering the Church to glorify Christ and to mission. Wise discernment is needed in their exercise, especially in a time when people find epistemological justification for belief primarily through existential experience and may be ignorant of the same phenomena appearing in the experience of many non-Christian religions. Any objection we have to an overemphasis on extraordinary experience and phenomena arises not from anti-supernaturalism, but rather from a concern that such a preoccupation tends to displace the priority both of a personal and corporate relationship with Christ, a well-reasoned grasp of Truth^{xliii} and a belief that God is active in the ordinariness of life.

What is important is that Christ is honoured in our unity and that we remain dependent on the Holy Spirit for our strength; that we do not grieve Him in our behaviour and that we trust Him to fulfil the work He wants to do through us.

Practical implications of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit aids believers, leading us into truth, convicting us of sin and encouraging and comforting us. We have the responsibility to learn how to listen to Him. We have the responsibility not to grieve Him or limit Him. We are firmly convinced that we live in a supernatural universe and we live in the expectation of His work among us and in trust and dependence.

Substantial healing

Christ is at work restoring us to true humanness as we become conformed to His likeness by the power of the Spirit. This will mean that wherever there is true faith in Christ there will be a life which begins to imitate the love of Christ. The Apostle Paul calls us to have the mind of Christ as we think more highly of one another than of ourselves and as we give ourselves to a life of service, loving one another as Christ has loved us. We should expect to see substantial healing of each person and community as we grow in relation to Christ in the context of the Church and a commitment to genuine humanness expressed in servant-hood and love, and displayed in supernaturally restored-relationships: at the same time, we acknowledge that only at the final resurrection do we fully experience the healing, for which we presently hunger.

Living in the fear of God^{xliii}

Our God is a “consuming Fire”.^{xliii} The Bible relates many accounts of people who have encountered God or His messengers: in every case they were struck with fear. This is the awe of meeting One who is so much more than we are used to in our normal life. This is one reason for the importance of true God-centred worship; that we, who behold His glory, are drawn into an attitude of awe-filled praise. This activity involves our thoughts and engages our feelings. We are to live in awe at His majestic holiness, in gratitude for His mercy and in fear of His wrath. When God becomes the centre of our worship, we come into right relationship with other things. We have a need for profound humility. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble;^{xliii} therefore we seek true and proper humility. This is not a weakness but controlled strength, a proper relationship to God, and the cessation of comparing ourselves with others.

In coming to a love of God, we learn to love the standards that He loves and also to hate what He hates. This is not out of craven fear but out of a hunger for the righteousness that he has awakened in us.

Law and Freedom

The Old Testament law correctly understood is a treasure of benefit, leading us to an understanding of the character and perfection of God. This leads to two things. 1) A profound sense of personal and corporate sin and sadness because of it. We do not fear this as we have come to see that an awareness of our sin and at the same time of the grace and mercy of God leads to freedom from it. We recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting of sin and the danger of our limited judgements. 2) We see in the law a description of foundations for the Kingdom of God, a time when the divine decrees are willingly followed, when a hunger for right living and knowledge of God is common and deeply satisfying, when personal autonomy is replaced by real freedom. While we are against all forms of legalism as man-made attempts to modify behaviour, we are fully committed to the reign of Christ and the rule of His law over us. The holiness of God is our hope: the coming Kingdom is a kingdom of perfection and completion.

Form and Freedom

Form and Freedom are two complementary aspects of the creation God has made to reflect Himself, e.g. we can have the freedom of flying because of the form of the laws of aerodynamics. We can know the freedom of love only within the formal parameters of God's law. There is a continual tension to find the right form to maximize our freedom in worship, teaching and life together and every other aspect of our work. This requires continual evaluation and prayer.

The visible and invisible Church

There is one universal Church, composed of all those, in every time and place, who are chosen in Christ and united to Him through faith by the Spirit in one Body, with Christ Himself as the all-supplying, all-sustaining, all-supreme and all-authoritative Head. We believe that the ultimate purpose of the Church is to glorify God in the everlasting and ever-increasing gladness of worship.

The universal Church finds expression in local churches in which believers covenant together to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to engage in corporate worship, to practise the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, to build each other's faith through the ministries of love, to hold each other accountable in the obedience of faith through Biblical discipline and to engage in local and world evangelisation. The Church is a body in which each member should find a suitable ministry for His gifts; it is the household of God in which the Spirit dwells; it is the pillar and bulwark of God's truth in a truth-denying world; and it is a city set on a hill so that men may see the light of its good deeds and give glory to the Father in heaven.

There is a crisis of identity and purpose in many local churches in Europe. This encompasses, among other things, forms of worship, styles of leadership, loyalty to institutions and differing expectations and assumptions about commitment and need. We recognize that the visible church will always struggle and not be perfect. Any expectation of perfectionism must be resisted. We must also resist a critical and cynical spirit.

The ideal, which we should aim for but will not reach, must be a Church where Christ is the centre of our corporate affection and worship. For the Church is a taste of the coming Kingdom in its humility and gratitude and faithfulness to God. There needs to be a return of the place of awe in our worship; a respect for difference and a commitment to unity; a safe space for questions and doubts and where people are encouraged to think about and discover the richness of the Christian faith; preaching and personal discipleship where the goal of teaching is to prepare people to be pleasing to God in their respective callings; where all partners of the community are committed to loving God with mind, strength and soul, and their neighbour as their self; where there is no recognition of difference between sacred and secular calling; where mission both local and distant is supported; where creativity is encouraged; where engagement with society and not withdrawal is understood and promoted; where strong theological foundations are laid and forms of community and worship promoted with all the freedom the Bible gives. We are not called to leave the world, but to be faithful in it. Our life together should be both a prophetic witness and a testimony to the goodness of God. Our witness should address the real issues of daily life. The organisation and expectation of church life should encourage and prayerfully support members to be fully engaged in commitments in the wider world.

Right and Wrong Tolerance

We believe all have the right to believe what they consider to be true. We must respect those with whom we disagree. It may be said, "if one can laugh at someone else's beliefs then it is probable that we have not understood them".^{xlvi} Pluralism^{xlvii} is a fact of modern life. Proper tolerance will respect difference and will want to understand that difference in order to have real communication. Wrong tolerance resists differences and either pretends differences do not exist, do not matter, or that contradictory truth claims are possible. This is disrespectful of honest relationship, which is not possible where there is not real communication. It is disrespectful of the image of God in Man. Respect and the desire to understand does not indicate agreement. A common mistake made by

Christians is that we withdraw friendship from those with whom we disagree. It is helpful to make the distinction between fellowship, which can happen between those who are in Christ, and relationships, which we can have with anyone.

The cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries. In this way, the importance of truth is served by the existence of doctrinal borders, and unity is served by the way we love others across those borders. As conversation and debate take place, it may be that we will learn from each other, and the boundaries will be adjusted, even possibly folding into closer fellowship formerly disagreeing groups.

Sexuality and Sexual Ethics

Male and female were created equally in the image of God. They are the same in value, dignity and responsibility before God, and are equally accountable to exercise caring rule over creation^{xlviii}

Within the basic unity of the human race, God has established the sex difference of male and female, which is good. We must neither deny the sex difference (the tendency of liberal feminists) nor make more of it than the Bible does (the tendency of both radical feminists and some traditionalists).

Men and women need and complement each other and are called to live in unity and peace in all areas of life and work. Whether single or married, Scripture teaches that it is not good for man or woman to be alone. Neither the division of labour nor leadership responsibilities (e.g. those normally associated with the 'traditional view' of marriage) should be exploitive when established by mutual consent and practised in a wise and godly manner.

Marriage is a creational norm for the whole human race. It is a gift of God in which a man and a woman can experience a profound unity in diversity as a reflection of the glory of Christ's union with the Church. For this reason, although divorce is sometimes permissible, it is always a tragic falling short of God's intention.

Marriage is a lifelong, covenantal relationship of mutual submission where the two become one, sharing a joint life before God. Within this, the wife is to submit to the husband and the husband is to follow Christ's example of loving, self-sacrificing headship towards the goal of the wife's growth towards glory or "radiance"^{xlix}.

Sex is a good and pleasurable gift from God. It gives physical expression to the union of a husband and wife, and brings forth the gift of children. Faithful, monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the only legitimate context for sexual intercourse.

Human fulfilment whether in marriage or in singleness is not chiefly related to sexual fulfilment, rather, to a proper relationship with God and conformity to His word. While men and women do need and complement one another, sexual experience should never be considered central to human experience. Therefore singleness should not be viewed negatively, whether by choice (as with celibacy) or by default (when those who desire marriage remain unmarried). Those unmarried have particular struggles and deserve the sensitive support of the Church; as do those who are married, who also have their own particular struggles. In both cases human fulfilment arises from 'true spirituality', not from the presence or absence of sexual experience.

Single men and women have a unique vocational freedom to serve Christ unhindered by responsibilities to husband, wife or children – and Scripture makes it clear that for some, celibacy is a calling and gift of the Holy Spirit. ¹

We resist any ideology that would undermine the relationship between male and female that God established at creation and redeemed by the work of Christ which results in:

Pitting the sexes against each other in class antagonism or separatist social structures.

Maintaining that the sexes are identical or that one sex has superiority or dominion over the other.

Undermining heterosexual marriage and family as if repressive institutions.

Advocating sexual activity outside marriage whether homosexual or heterosexual.

Devaluing sexual experience as if it were not spiritual.

The Commitment to applying God's truth to the whole of life

The visible and invisible creation in which we live, is the objective environment, not merely of religious experience, but of all human existence. It is the meeting place between God and human beings. This world, and not some abstract religious world, is the only place we have to enjoy our relationship with God.

Through God's common grace to all His creatures the sun shines on both the Christian and the non-Christian. This means that both Christian and non-Christian may do much good, however imperfect, and may all seek to know and understand many true insights into the working of the creation.

Before the Fall the first couple were both fully spiritual and fully human. There was no contradiction or tension in this. They were physical, feeling, reasoning, intuiting, creative beings, both before and after the Fall. Spirituality is not something "other worldly", but living in right relationship to God and therefore also in right relationship with other objects of His creation. To be "un-spiritual" means to live in a way that demonstrates separation from God.

God, the creator, is the maker and giver of every good gift. The universe displays His delight in creating what is good, beautiful and true. We need to train our minds to see the glory of the Creator behind His creation, while being aware of our own tendency towards idolatry. We are thankful for our humanness, which is not something secondary. It is no shame to rejoice in this creation in an attitude of thanksgiving for what God has given us. Gratitude, not guilt, for the material world is the appropriate response to God's generosity. Real gratitude for what has been given should lead to generous hearts and should be a driving motivation of our lives.

Because of our sins this world is cursed and waits for the righting of all wrongs and its redemption. The Christian's call is to seek God's Kingdom in all of life and to work at limiting the effects of the Fall. This is true in our own individual and community human relationships and also in our relationship with the environment. We receive this earth and all its creatures as good gifts from God and as a responsibility of stewardship. Christians above all others ought to care for the creation. Our calling is both to exercise dominion over the earth for the benefit of humanity, and also to pass our world on to the next generation in as good or better order than we received it.

Often Christians, seeking protection for themselves and their children, or from a misunderstanding of what it means to be holy, retreat from the wider culture by developing a sub-culture and so society is abandoned to go its wicked way. Yet, God has not abandoned the human race, humans all still bear the divine image, and therefore His Glory can still be perceived in all human cultures despite the terrible corruptions of

sin. As Christians we are called by the Lord not to withdraw from the world but to be in it, living as salt and light, rejoicing in all that is good in human society and committing ourselves to make a difference in our own way in whatever calling we are placed by the Lord.

There should be neither passive withdrawal from this world nor un-reflected activism within it, but continual communion with God in the context of an engaged life. We actively encourage Christians to demonstrate the Kingdom of God in their field of calling and interest. This allows for a deep sense of rest and trust as we know that our work is not done to earn favour but in partnership with God. We may also rest (without being lazy) in the final outcome of history, knowing that our lives make a difference within it.

Christianity is comprehensive, covering all aspects of life. Scripture makes no distinction between the sacred and the secular, that is, it does not encourage us to think that some activities, such as prayer or evangelism, are more spiritual than other activities, such as caring for children or manual labour. We are each called to live wisely and faithfully in that sphere of life to which God has called us.

As those made in His image, we are called to enjoy God's creation and to delight in using body, mind, and imagination to express our own creativity and to enrich the lives of others as we do. For example, whether it is the appreciation of great art in all the varied disciplines, or whether it is the "hidden art" of serving a well-prepared meal, or digging a ditch, we should honour, and be thankful for the depth and richness which art brings to our lives. We may say that Christianity is "ordinary" because it deals with the stuff of everyday life.

We are committed to encouraging Christians to be active in every sphere that is morally permissible. Evangelicals have sometimes concentrated on the problem of individual sin to the exclusion of the wider purposes of redemption: in that this is incomplete, it is, over the long term, counter productive. A one-sided theology of salvation does not afford the hope we need to keep going or to witness to the potential of Kingdom living to those around us. Rather we are taught that Christ is the Lord of all of life and that our calling is to honour Him in all that we do. We are to take captive every thought, to make it obedient to Christ and to seek to serve Him in every human activity.

With our priority on reason and words, Evangelicals have sometimes neglected the creative and imaginative aspects of life. While we would never want to reduce our emphasis on reason, we do believe it is important to balance this with the proper use of the imagination and creativity. We respect the gift of the artist and the imaginative person who help people to see life from a new perspective. As followers of the Creator we may take pleasure in the gift and joy of art, music and creativity. Likewise, through the sciences we can understand and appreciate the beauty and wonder of God's order in creation, and through our productive and creative work we can take delight in shaping our environment and expressing our uniqueness and humanity. We realise that there are tensions and temptations and that our hearts are easily deceived. Therefore we are to encourage and strengthen those who stand in difficult places.

Christ became incarnate in a particular culture at a particular time in history. He knew His contemporaries, for He was one among them, raised and educated as they were, shaped by the same ideas and customs, and yet He lived in obedience to His Father's will in all that He did and said. On every page of the gospels we see His deep knowledge and understanding of the times in which He lived and of the people to whom He sought to make known the good news of the Kingdom.

While Paul was not directly involved in economics or politics, when he set foot on the European mainland for the first time, he brought with him a message that would radically

change the way people understood the world. Over against the then contemporary view of the random caprice of the pagan “gods”, the Christian message of the love and justice of the One true, personal and infinite God and an understanding of the value of people made in the image of God, and a view of justice and holiness brought a new perspective on the purpose, meaning and direction of life. Paul’s gospel was not only a matter of personal sin management but also a radical discontinuity from the Greek and Roman worldviews.

The call to be transformed in our mindsⁱⁱ means, among many other things, to evaluate the belief, perspectives and practices of our daily life against that of the Bible, as we seek to structure our lives in the framework and worldview of reality as described to us in the Bible, developing an integrated worldview where the Sovereignty of God is respected over all of His creation.

While Christians should be conversant with and contributing to all parts of their societies, economically, culturally, scientifically and scholarly, the content of their Christianity must not conform itself to the fashions and prejudices of any age. As the doctrines and behaviours of our own age set no universal standard for the Church, so also do all previous ages become relativized before the eternal teachings of God as set before us in the Scriptures.

To resist those cultural ideas and practices which are against God, we must understand them and bring them before the bar of Scripture. Reflection on the Word and on the world is necessary, both for holy living and also for wise communication of the gospel to those around us. Paul spoke the same truth, but he presented it in different ways depending on whether he was in a synagogue with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, or whether he was on Mars Hill with pagans.

We live out our Christian faith in the midst of many competing worldviews: it is important to know what these are and how they affect our message and methods. If we ignore them they will mostly likely influence us unawares. To communicate and live faithfully we have to work at understanding the intellectual environment of the times in which we live, and we need to give ourselves to people in love if we want to know what idols captivate the hearts of our contemporaries.

Hope and the Gospel of the Reign of God

Our Christian hope is based on the purpose and character of God and the demonstrated faithfulness of Christ in His death and resurrection. Our ultimate hope is an eternal life of restored relationship with Him in His Kingdom that we will experience as reality finally in the restoration and redemption of all things. We understand this will be a physical reality in the new creation.ⁱⁱⁱ Until then we live in the tension of the “now” and the “not yet”.

At CityGate we use the image of the City Gate to symbolize many aspects of the Christian faith. Christ came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. This is a kingdom one enters through the gateway of salvation. Regeneration, repentance, faith and forgiveness of sin are essential for inclusion in the Kingdom of God. However, we understand there is much more to living out our faith than standing at the gate. Restored relationships are the purpose of God.

Reconciliation to God also means that we will grow in our desire to be reconciled to His way of ordering reality; we are to be servants of a new kingdom. Our lives should now be a growing reflection of this. As the Church together and as individuals our lives should be a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus had a clear understanding of what He was on earth to accomplish and of the cost. We grieve over our sins and the hardness of our hearts and resist evil because we do

not wish to offend God whom we have come to love through His gracious work in us. We hunger for His righteousness, as this is what saves us at two levels: firstly the righteousness of Christ applied to us and secondly the righteous life which pleases Him. The Gospel of the Kingdom offers real hope for the way people are to live together and organise life. It addresses and answers the problems of our life together. As we grow in our understanding of the reign of Christ among us and submit to the conviction of the Holy Spirit and understand His law we see that it is comprehensive and encompasses all the interaction of human beings. Thus, after times of large-scale conversion, or when the influence of Christianity is spread deeply in society, one sees widespread benefit at many levels in society.

Our hope is not a romantic idealism or a woolly vagueness about the future. We hope for what is real and should to some measure be real among us. We are called to live here and now for God, continuing to fulfil the creation mandateⁱⁱⁱ and as a prophetic witness of Christ for those separated from Him. We are called to pray and to work for God's will to be done on earth. To the measure that it is not real or understood among us it is a cause for weakness, discouragement, disobedience and idolatry. It is important to hope, but to hope in something unrealistic and unobtainable is a cruel illusion, breeding cynicism.

We do not believe in an immediate utopia, or that by our work we will gradually bring it into existence. There is a future time for the restoration of all things known only to God. We live in the tension of the now and the then. As Jacob discovered in his dream "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven".^{iv}

We need to demonstrate that we are people of a greater hope. Amid our own frustrations and fears we should demonstrate the life of faith lived in the context of the coming Kingdom.

¹ Acts 17:24 – 28.

² Another reason, suggested by Nigel Cameron, is that in the defence of the Deity of Christ against Liberal Modernism of the late 19 and early 20 centuries, evangelicals neglected to preach on the humanity of Christ; thus an imbalance occurred in our understanding of both the Humanity of Christ and what it means to be Christian and human; (*Complete in Christ*, Paternoster Press).

³ John Courtney Murray, SJ.

⁴ L'Abri tape x236.

^v Sources: Material for this section has been taken from a number of sources including:

The L'Abri Statements, April 1997, Affirmation of Faith of The Bethlehem Institute, John Piper, August 28, 2000

^{vi} See note on provision for change at end of this document.

^{vii} Gal. 1:11 – 16; Eph. 1:17, 3:3; 1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:15 - 21; Luke 1:70; 2 Samuel 23:1-3.

^{viii} Heb. 1.

^{ix} John 5:39: "You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me". And Mt. 22:29: "Jesus answered and said to them. 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God'.

^x Eph. 1:17, 18:3:10,18; John 10:35; Isaiah 55.

^{xi} A proposition is a statement that can be either true or false; it must be one or the other, and it cannot be both.

^{xii} It is "the index to reality", J. I. Packer "Knowing God".

^{xiii} Gen. 1.

^{xiv} John 1:1.

^{xv} Eph. 4:29-32.

^{xvi} Col. 3:16.

^{xvii} Deut.4:16.

^{xviii} *An example of this is found in John 8 where we read of a man of whom obedience was required to come to a true knowledge of Christ.*

^{xix} F. Schaeffer.

^{xx} Acts 26:25-26.

^{xxi} Isaiah 48:9-11.

^{xxii} Ezek. 36: 20-38.

^{xxiii} John 17, Heb. 1.

^{xxiv} Eph. 1:11.

^{xxv} *This work of reconciliation is a model for restored relationships, 2 Cor. 5: 11.*

^{xxvi} Col. 1:15.

^{xxvii} Phil.2:1 – 11.

^{xxviii} Gen. 1:28 – 2:19; Psalm 8:6.

^{xxix} Gen. 2:1–3; Ex. 20:8–11.

^{xxx} Gen. 1:28.

^{xxxi} Gen. 1:27.

^{xxxii} Gen. 1:26.

^{xxxiii} *The number of Biblical texts dealing explicitly with the concept of the image is small, e.g. Gen. 9:6, James 3:9, Col. 3:9,11; 2 Cor. 3:18. Nevertheless, implicit references appear throughout both Old and New Testaments in that all texts relevant to our humanness presuppose and clarify it. Furthermore, Gen. 9:6 and James 3:9 confirm explicitly that the image of God has not been lost at the Fall (Gen. 3). It has been distorted but not destroyed. Even fallen human beings continue to bear God's image simply by who they are. Their lives have infinite value. They are sacrosanct in their very being from conception on. Hence it is wrong to take any human life in a way contrary to God's law: it is wrong not merely to kill a good person, a creative person, or one who is helpful or useful; it is wrong even to demean any human being by thought, word or deed.*

Our Lord's teaching on this theme in Mt. 5:21-22 illustrates further how broadly the original definition of humanity as the image of God is expressed and elucidated throughout Scripture.

In conclusion, since it is a fundamental teaching throughout Scripture, and therefore has been a prominent feature of our teaching, we affirm the interdependence of both aspects of the image of God (ontological and functional) and resist any attempt to eliminate either aspect, or to reduce one to the other.

^{xxxiv} Cornelius Plantinga, Jr, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A breviary of Sin.*, (Apollos, IVP, 1995).

^{xxxv} EMQ Jan 2002, "Clashing Cultural views of Sin", Aaron Dean.

^{xxxvi} Eph. 2:1.

^{xxxvii} Rom. 5:1.

^{xxxviii} 2 Cor. 3.

^{xxxix} Jn. 15.

^{xl} Col. 2.

^{xli} Eph. 3.

^{xlvi} Rom. 12:2.

^{xlvi} Ps. 139.

^{xlii} Heb. 12.

^{xlv} James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5.

^{xlvi} Ravi Zacharias (in a talk given at Legionnaires Conference, 1995, Florida).

^{xlvii} *By this we mean the reality that we live in a society where many people have different beliefs and must live side by side. We do not mean that all these beliefs have the same value in respect of Truth.*

^{xlviii} Gen. 1:27-8; 2:15.

^{xlix} Eph. 5 :27.

I I Cor. 7:17-40.)

li Rom. 12:2.

lii Christ the firstborn of a new creation.

liii Gen. 2.

liv Gen. 28:17.