

**KUPU WHAKAPONO (Confession of Faith)**

**From this land of Aotearoa New Zealand  
we confess that we believe in and belong  
to the one true and living God,  
who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Love before all love.**

**We believe in God the Father,  
sovereign and holy,  
Creator and nurturer of all,  
Father of Jesus Christ,  
sender of the Holy Spirit,  
and Judge of all the earth.**

**We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour,  
truly human and truly divine,  
who lived among us full of grace and truth.  
For our sin he was crucified  
and by the power of God was raised from death,  
forgiving us, setting us free and bringing to birth God's new creation.  
Now ascended, he calls us to repentance and faith  
and restores us to God and to one another.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
the giver of life at work in all creation,  
who inspired the Scriptures and makes Christ known,  
who transforms hearts and minds  
and gathers us into the community of Christ,  
empowering the Church in worship and in mission.**

**We belong to this triune God,  
women and men,  
young and old,  
from many nations,  
in Christ *he iwi kotahi tatou*,  
witnesses to God's love in word and action,  
servants of reconciliation,  
and stewards of creation.**

[we are one people]

**As God's people,  
we look forward in hope and joy  
to the return of Christ,  
to the new heaven and earth,  
where evil and death will be no more,  
justice and peace will flourish,  
and we shall forever delight in the glory of God.**

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## COMMENTARY ON THE KUPU WHAKAPONO

### Introduction

1. This Confession of Faith and the accompanying Commentary seeks to bear witness to the apostolic faith of the Christian Church, and to express our confidence that the same God who is made known to us in Jesus Christ is present through Word and Spirit in our own place and time. This confession expresses some distinctives of our context, as the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The confession will have value only as it binds us together in the one body of Christ, as it nourishes the Church in mission, and as it renews confidence in and commitment to the saving grace of God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
2. Confessing the faith is how the Church ‘binds itself to the Gospel... in astonished, fearful and grateful acknowledgement that the Gospel is the one word by which to live and die’.<sup>1</sup> Creeds and confessions are, at heart, servants of the Gospel. They do not replace the Gospel but assist the Church to confess it. In different times and places, the Church can find new words to declare the Gospel it has received. Furthermore, creeds and confessions are not, in and of themselves, the fullness of the Church’s act of confession. There is always an inadequacy about our human confession of the mystery of God. For this reason, the Church offers its witness to the Gospel and its confession of faith with deep humility. We acknowledge that the clarity and the truth of our confession depends not on our own wisdom but on the continuing guidance and testimony of God’s Spirit.
3. The Church’s relationship to any particular confession must therefore be conditional. Trusting in the grace of God to lead us forward into new understandings of the truth, the Church accepts that the confessions it produces from time to time will always be limited in scope and in clarity and that there is always a need to review such formulas and ask whether what was written by previous generations still remains adequate to confess the faith. Revisions of the Church’s confessional formulae need not imply rejection of previous confessions but are a recognition that the new times and places require new expressions of the faith handed down to us. The question might be put this way: ‘do these new words of *ours* enable us to *say the same thing?*’
4. Formulating the faith in our own words is important for the mission of the Church, because we are accepting responsibility for the declaration of the Gospel in our own context, using the speech of those around us – those to whom God has sent us. To express the Gospel in our own language is an act of mission. Acts 2 records how, on the day of Pentecost, the Church itself was born as the Gospel was declared by the power of the Holy Spirit in languages that all could understand.
5. Confessing the faith is a continuing responsibility of the Church, as it seeks faithfully to proclaim in changing times and contexts the unchanging Gospel once delivered to the saints. That Gospel sustains and nurtures the whole Church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. This Confession of Faith signals that we stand within and are nourished by that same tradition. The most important beliefs we confess are those that are shared with all Christians throughout history and across whatever differences there may be in culture and context. We gratefully acknowledge the confessional heritage in which we belong. That heritage begins with Scripture itself, the supreme standard of our faith and the pre-eminent witness to God’s grace, and is continued through a range of creeds and confessional documents that have nurtured and sustained the Church down through the ages. Among these, we acknowledge especially the

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<sup>1</sup> John Webster, ‘Confession and Confessions’, in Christopher R. Seitz (ed), *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press 2001): 119.

Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. These ecumenical Creeds continue to be authoritative for us in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and their place in our life helps bind us to the worldwide Church.

6. In addition to the early church creeds, important documents of our Reformed heritage have contributed to the renewal of the Church and to the clarity of its faith. These include the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession and, especially for the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is a diverse church in which people from many parts of the world now stand together in faith and belong. We acknowledge too, therefore, the enrichment of our church by traditions of faith, worship and mission that have been developed in Asia and the Pacific.
7. As indicated above, the whole truth of God is greater than can ever be encapsulated in any creed or confession. It has been a mark of God's grace, nevertheless, that the Word of God has been entrusted to such earthen vessels. Through them, and by the sustaining and life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, God has seen fit to preserve the Gospel among God's people. As promised in Scripture, the Spirit continues to give new light and purpose to the Church's proclamation of Christ and makes eloquent the stumbling witness of faith. It is in this confidence that the present Confession of Faith is made.

#### **8. From this land of Aotearoa New Zealand**

9. We make this Confession of Faith from within the land of Aotearoa, New Zealand. In doing so we acknowledge both the distinctives and the limitations of our context, and affirm that the Good News of Jesus Christ extends the reach of God's grace and truth to all places and times. No human beings can fully comprehend or express the truth of God, but we are grateful for the diverse witness of the Church through the ages, and acknowledge that all genuinely Christian confessions contribute to our understanding of God.

#### **10. we confess that we believe in and belong to the one true and living God,**

11. The Scriptures assert that there is only one God who exists (Isa. 44:6), who is alone worthy of worship and obedience (Exod. 20:3). The one true and living God is revealed in Christ and the Scriptures. We acknowledge with respect the sincerity of many who believe in other gods and ideologies, and should relate to everyone with justice and mercy, but may confess no other God than the triune God revealed in Christ.
12. Faith in the living God is more than simply belief that God exists. It means fellowship with God, and therefore community with all others who belong to God through Christ. Our belonging to God began when we were created in the image of God, but is restored and fulfilled through the salvation that comes to us in Christ, who gathers us as his Church.

#### **13. ...who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit,**

14. The revelation of God in the Christian Scriptures is inescapably trinitarian. The only true God is one God, who is Father, Son and Spirit, who exists in an eternal communion of divine love. The triune being of God is one of the great revelations of the New Testament, which builds upon and fulfils God's self-disclosure in the Old Testament. No true confession of the Christian faith can fail to confess the Trinity and remain faithful to the revelation of God in Christ and the Scriptures.

15. The relationships within the Trinity are summed up in the biblical confession that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). The way orthodox Christianity names the three ‘persons’ within the Trinity expresses the Trinity’s deeply relational nature. The names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ indicate the profound inter-relatedness within the Trinity. In everyday human language, ‘Father’ means a male parent. But in relation to the Trinity, the name ‘Father’ has nothing to do with human biology (God is spirit, John 4:24) and does not refer to the gendered characteristics of human fathers. Jesus taught that the Father’s care for us greatly exceeds that of human fathers (Luke 11:11-13) thus indicating that the Fatherhood of God lies beyond the realms of human parenthood and gender. There are occasions in Scripture in which feminine analogies highlight particular aspects of the character of God (Isa. 49:15-16; Matt. 23:37; Isa. 42:14; Hos. 11:3-4). Scripture also contains references to God that are non-gendered and non-personal (Ps. 28:1; Ps. 46:1). While the naming of God in Scripture and creeds as Father, Son and Spirit, identifies the God of Jesus Christ, the diversity of the Scriptural witness is such that no single name or formula fully describes the mystery which is God.

**16. ...Love before all love.**

17. The primary characteristic of God is love (1 John 4:7-10). God’s love precedes all other loves, is the source of love, and surpasses all other love. In the drama of creation and redemption, God graciously opened his life to embrace that which is other than God. God did so in love, not for his own sake but for ours. We were created for fellowship with God, to enjoy and benefit from creation, and to love and serve one another. God’s love makes human love possible, both for God and for others. Through God’s overflowing grace we can be forgiven and set free. In Christ we enter into the eternal communion of God’s love, called to worship and enjoy God forever.

**18. We believe in God the Father...**

19. Jesus addressed the God of Israel as ‘my Father’. The term ‘Father’, consistently used by Scripture, refers to the one from whom all things flow and in whom all things have their origin. The Father does not live in isolation, but lives in and through profound communion with the Spirit and the Son. From that communion of love, creation is brought into being and is given life through the Father’s Word and Spirit. Desiring that the creature should have fullness of life, the Father sends the Son and pours out the Spirit on all flesh, to enliven, redeem and reconcile the creature who has strayed far from the Father’s love. It is through the Son and Spirit that the creative and redemptive work of the Father is done. As all things have their origin from the Father, so will all things be returned to him in the final consummation of God’s purposes (1 Cor. 15:20-28).

**20. ...sovereign and holy,**

21. God is sovereign, the everlasting King of the universe. God’s rule is benevolent, merciful, and just (Ps. 145:8-19). God upholds and sustains the world, and there is nothing that can defeat God’s purposes. Before the world was created, God had in his love chosen us in Christ (Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 8:29-30), and called us to live for him. Nevertheless God allows his creatures to make choices. Ultimately, however, all God’s purposes will be achieved in and through Christ.

22. To confess God as holy is to confess the incomparable otherness, splendour and majesty of God. No mortal can look on God’s awesome presence and glory (1 Tim. 6:16; John 1:18). The holiness and glory of God is revealed supremely in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (John 1:14, 18; Rom. 1:4).

23. God is entirely without evil in his nature or actions. God is opposed to all that is evil, as light is to darkness. God finds evil offensive, and it places a barrier between us and God (Ps. 66:18; Isa. 59:1-2), a

barrier that is only overcome by God's grace (Ps. 103:8-10; Rom. 8:1).

**24.** God's holiness is expressed throughout the ages in the election of a people to live in communion with him, in their redemption from sin, and in the work of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies them into the likeness of Christ and equips them to be instruments of God's purposes. To this people, God utters the promise and the imperative: 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (Lev. 19:2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15).

**25. ...Creator and nurturer of all,**

26. The creation was brought forth from nothing; there is nothing that has its origin apart from God (Gen. 1:1; Isa. 42:5, 45:18; John 1:3; Col. 1:15-16), and nothing that can finally stand against the fulfilment of God's purposes. Just as we are formed by God in our mothers' wombs (Ps. 139:13) so was the whole creation brought forth in love. God's creation was deliberate, ordered, and it is very good (Gen.1). Humanity is the pinnacle of God's creation (Gen. 2; Ps. 8:5-6). All creation is subject to the Creator (Ps. 24:1), and brings glory not to itself but to God (Ps. 19:1-4). Creation is to be enjoyed and admired, with thanksgiving to God (James 1:17). Created things are not themselves divine and so to worship them is idolatry (Rom.1:19-22; Isa. 44:9-17).

27. In his great love and power, God cherishes, sustains and cares for his creation (Ps. 104; Ps. 145:14-16).

**28. ...Father of Jesus Christ,**

29. The New Testament reveals the intimate relationship of the divine Father and Son (John 10:30). After sending prophets and teachers to communicate his call and purpose to Israel, the Father sends his own beloved Son (Matt. 21:33-41). Ancient language of the Church testifies that the Son is 'begotten' of the Father, and 'of one being' with the Father, thereby indicating the church's faith that in Christ we are encountered by none other than the one, holy and eternal God, now made known to us as Father, Son and Spirit. The Father sent the Son to be the saviour and reconciler of the world (Gal. 4:4; John 3:16), and anointed him with the Holy Spirit for that purpose. The Son truly reveals the nature and being of the Father (John 1:18, 16:13-15; Col. 1:15).

**30. ...sender of the Holy Spirit,**

31. The Spirit of God was active in the creation of the world, and in God's dealings with his people, as recorded in the Old Testament. At the time of Jesus' baptism, the Father anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit, commissioning and empowering him for his work on earth. At Pentecost, the Father and the Son poured out the Holy Spirit upon the Church, to empower and sustain its life and mission until Christ returns.

**32. ...and Judge of all the earth.**

33. The judgement of God has its place within the dynamic of God's love. Strictly speaking judgement is to be distinguished from punishment. God's judgement is the means by which the truth of things is laid bare: the offence of our sinfulness, the vindication of God's purposes, and the truth of God's grace. Jesus confesses the Father as the true judge (John 8:50). While Christ came to save rather than to judge (John 12:47-48), it is nevertheless through Christ that God's judgement will be conveyed (John 5:30, 8:15-16; Acts 10:42; Rom. 2:16). For those who choose to neglect the justice and mercy of God, the Scriptures warn of the punishment of exclusion from God's presence. In the light of this, Scripture urges us to place our trust in God's mercy and grace which are found in Christ Jesus.

#### **34. We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord...**

35. Christian confession takes as its central theme the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the centre of our relationship with God, and the one without whom there would be neither confession nor faith (John 14:6; Eph. 2:1-10; 1 Cor. 1:18, 2:16; Phil. 2:5-11). In Christ we discover both our need for forgiveness and reconciliation, and God's grace. We uphold, therefore, the ancient creedal affirmations concerning Christ which express the very heart of the Christian gospel.
36. When we call Jesus Christ 'Lord', we align ourselves with one of the earliest Christian affirmations, that 'Jesus is Lord.' In our more egalitarian society, the concepts of 'lordship' and 'lord' can be uncomfortable for some. But as the divine Son of God, as confirmed by his resurrection (John 20:28; Rom. 1:4), Christ is fully worthy of being 'Lord'. Also, the way in which Christ exercised his lordship, was not through being domineering or self-serving, but through humility, servanthood, and self-sacrifice (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:5-11). In his life, Christ humbly associated with those despised as thieves and prostitutes. In his death, Christ endured what he least deserved: rejection, suffering, and the agony of the Cross. In calling us to accept his Lordship, Christ calls us to acknowledge only that which is his right, and he challenges us to live with the same humility, compassion and self-giving which he has himself shown to us (Matt.16:24-25). In the light of all that Christ is, and all he has done, we willingly bow at the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **37. ...and Saviour,**

38. The confession of Jesus as Lord and Saviour is a fundamental affirmation of Christian faith. The biblical conception of salvation is very broad in scope but involves, especially, the overcoming of the alienation that exists between God and the world (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:20), the healing of creation's disorder and decay (Rom. 8:19-21), and the reconciliation of those who were once estranged (Col. 1:21). The confession that Christ is the one who accomplishes this salvation entails that he is both one with God, the one through whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (Col. 1:19), and one with humanity; he is like us in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest and atone for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17). The identification of Christ with God establishes him as the one who, acting in union with the Father and with the Spirit, can forgive the wrong that humanity has done and restore the creation to its divinely ordained purpose. His identification with humankind, on the other hand, establishes him as the one who, acting in our place and on our behalf, makes atonement for sin and offers to the Father a life of perfect obedience and love. Christ becomes our Saviour as we receive the gift of forgiveness and are gathered in faith into his life of communion with God. The saving *work* of Christ is intimately bound up, therefore, with the *person* of Christ who is both:

#### **39. ...truly human and truly divine,**

40. Following Scripture and the Christian creeds, we affirm that Jesus Christ is both human (John 1:14, 4:6, 11:26; Mark 11:12) and divine (John 1:1, 20:28; Col. 1:19, 2:9; Heb. 1: 4-13). This affirmation lies at the heart of Christian faith. Christ's revelatory and saving impact on us depends on the fact that his life has its source in the Father and in eternity (Col 1:19), but is played out within the constraints of the human condition and in a particular historical situation. Uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity are shown in their true form. That dual identity is expressed in the creedal phrase 'He was born of the virgin Mary', which attests both his divine origin (and conception) and his human creatureliness. The Son of God became human for the sake of our salvation and to bring to completion the promised reconciliation between God and humankind.

**41. ...who lived among us full of grace and truth,**

42. The Son of God through whom all things were created truly 'lived among us', becoming one with our own material, social and historical existence. The one true Word is not an idea or a symbol but the same historic Jesus of flesh and blood whom we encounter through the four-fold witness of the Gospels. From the perspective of the resurrection, we look back at the life Jesus lived for over thirty years in first century Palestine, as a Jew living under Roman occupation, teaching, healing and challenging his people, and gathering a group of followers in anticipation of the final establishment of the Kingdom of God. The historical narrative is, for us, not merely a history lesson. Nor is it simply the story of an inspirational man. It is, rather, the story of the God-man who lived in human frailty a life without sin (Heb. 4:15), of complete faithfulness to God and obedience to the will of the Father. That life is described most fully as 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Grace and truth are inextricably linked in the person of Jesus. His is a life 'full of grace': full of the love and compassion of God, and also the means by which we also may receive the grace of God. His life is full of truth: he is himself the truth about God, and the way by which we too may receive God's truth (John 14:6). Christ brings truth about God, ourselves, and the world. He reveals that truth graciously – in that sense Christ's Truth is also Grace.

**43. For our sin he was crucified**

44. All people on earth are bound by the all-pervasive human condition called 'original sin'. This condition, which links us to all other human beings 'in Adam' (Rom. 5:12), paradoxically unites us to others while at the same time setting us against them. The essence and root cause of our sinfulness is human rivalry with God (Gen. 3). That pride produces a vain attempt to live in independence of God, an anxious striving against God and a pervasive tendency to doubt and mistrust God. Our sinfulness is also expressed in such wayward behaviour as idolatry, covetousness, lying, stealing, adultery, and murder (Exod. 20). The consequence of our sinfulness is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). Our human sinfulness has also plunged the whole created order into travail and groaning (Gen. 3:17-18; Rom. 8:22). The fact that our lives are governed by our alienation from God and by sin is not self-evident, nor obvious to us. The truth of our alienation from God and our sinfulness needs to be told to us (John 3:19, 9:35-41). The truth about our condition is revealed through the Scriptures, and especially through Jesus.

45. At the heart of the Gospel lies the proclamation that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are set free from sin.

46. Although Christ's self-giving life originated in the will of the triune God, the immediate cause of his death lies with humanity and the violence initiated by human sinfulness (Acts 2:22-23, 3:14-15, 5:30, 10:39). Through our sin Christ died, and all humanity is implicated (not in the particular act, but in the sinfulness that lay behind it). Jesus was the victim of human unbelief and injustice, and he died in a manner designed to make death as slow and painful as possible.

47. Christ died not of natural causes but gave himself up to the deadly consequence of human sinfulness and ignorance (1 Pet. 2:24; Phil. 2:8; Rom. 4:25). For our sin Christ was crucified (Rom. 5:6, 8, 15, 6:10; 1 Cor. 15:3). In Jesus, God shoulders the burden of the world's sin, graciously taking the place of the guilty in order that sin may be forgiven and we might be reconciled to God (Rom. 3:24; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:8; 1 Pet. 3:18). No single biblical metaphor (e.g. ransom, exchange, substitution, atoning sacrifice) is sufficient to explain the wonder of what was achieved by the Cross, but all bear witness to the saving purposes and great grace of God.

48. The divine love poured out at Calvary, in which the Son offers himself in the Spirit in perfect obedience

to the Father, was the saving act of the triune God. God the Father was deeply involved in the suffering of the Cross: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor. 5:19). Although in his humanity Jesus greatly struggled in anticipation of his ordeal, he also fully embraced it (Matt. 26:36-44), and willingly laid down his life so we might live (1 John 3:16; John 15:13). 'Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God' (Eph. 5:2).

49. As a result of Christ's death for us, we are delivered from the control of sin. Our sinful defiance of God is overcome by the greater power of forgiveness and love. In the light of the Cross, therefore, we are no longer to live for ourselves, but to live for God (2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Cor. 6:11, 20; Rom.12:1; Gal. 2:20).

**50. and by the power of God was raised from death,**

51. The resurrection accounts in the Gospels leave us in no doubt that Jesus was dead (e.g. John 19:30-40), and that it was by God's awe-inspiring power that Jesus was raised from death (Matt. 28:2; Acts 2:32; Rom.1:4; Eph. 1:19). Neither by human power, nor as an illusion of human imagination or hopefulness, is Jesus encountered as the Risen One. The risen Jesus leaves the tomb empty (John 20:5-7), encounters the apostles in the flesh (John 20:19), eats and drinks with them (Luke 24:42-3), and, by revealing to them the wounds in his hands and side, invites them to verify that he truly is the one who had been crucified and who is now alive before them (John 20:27).

52. For the first disciples, and for all who subsequently encounter the risen Lord, the resurrection appearances are an encounter with God (John 20:28). Rather than taking revenge on those who cast him out of their world, or those who deserted him or denied him, God comes back to them in the person of the Risen Son, offering forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration (John 20:21-22, 21:15-17; Acts 2:22-41, 5:29-32).

53. Paul's teaching about a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:35-49) remains crucial to our faith. It captures something of the mystery of the resurrection, and highlights the fact that God's vindication of Jesus and forgiveness of humankind was not accomplished merely by resuscitating Jesus, i.e., by just bringing him *back* to life. Rather, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was entry into a new type of existence, in a body that was the same body but radically transformed. Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17), a new order of life beyond the current order - which is subject to decay (Rom. 8:21). The appearances to the apostles of the risen Christ are an intersection of God's new order with the old order which is passing away. Jesus' resurrection body is the prototype of the body of those who will be raised in union with Christ to eternal life (1 Cor. 15:20-21, 42-56).

54. The resurrection event, made real to us through our own encounter with the risen Christ, is a transforming address from beyond death in which the Spirit gives us the courage and freedom to repent, to look past death as Jesus did (1 Cor. 15:54-57; Rom 8:38-9; Heb. 12:1-2) and, indeed, to participate in his life.

55. While in the post-apostolic age Jesus is no longer physically present in the way experienced in the early church, as risen Lord he remains present through the Spirit, revealing truth, bringing forgiveness and new life, and empowering our service and witness.

56. In the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, God vindicates the man we had violently rejected. In raising Jesus, God declares his judgement on the sinfulness that demanded Jesus' death, and lays bare our foolishness in choosing death rather than God. But God graciously overcomes such death with new life (Col. 2:15; 1 John 4:9).



### **57. ...forgiving us, setting us free**

58. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurate our salvation and set us out upon a life made new. They do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. In these saving events we are confronted with the truth that we are sinners, but we are not destroyed. In an astonishing revelation of God's grace, our undeserved human verdict of death against the Son of God is answered by God's undeserved verdict towards us of forgiveness and new life. It is the universal witness of the Christian faith that this act of self-giving on God's part reconciles us to God and undoes the grip of original sin. Through faith in Christ we receive the grace of God, and are justified and declared righteous by God. This means not only that our sin has been forgiven but also that we share with Christ his righteous standing before God (Rom. 3:21-24; 2 Cor. 5:21). The New Testament offers a number of ways of talking about how our salvation is achieved— through victory, through sacrifice, through ransom — but that diverse witness testifies that a new humanity is created by these events and a new community is brought into being, constituted no longer by its solidarity with the first Adam but by a new identity in Christ.

59. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, of which baptism is the sign and the seal, we are born again to a new life in communion with God and with one another (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Rom. 6:4).

60. This new humanity is brought about through participation in Christ alone and in his life and death (Gal. 2:20, 4:19; Col. 3:3-4; John 15:4-6). We share in this life through faith. Whatever words we use to testify to the atonement accomplished for us in Christ they must spell out the necessity of our reconciliation to God, the overcoming of our alienation, and the new life made possible through Christ's life, death and resurrection. Christ sets us free by clearing the relational space between God and us of its sinful debris and by incorporating us through the Spirit in his life of loving obedience to the Father. These events in Christ's life initiate a forgiveness whose goal is not a mere amnesty but the bountiful restoration of fellowship and communion.

### **61. ...and bringing to birth God's new creation.**

62. The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings into being God's new creation. It foreshadows that day when all things will be made new in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 21:1-5; Eph. 1:10). This is an event of transformative power, not only for humanity but for the whole cosmos (Col. 1:20; Rom. 8:18-25). The resurrection is understood by Christians to be the first fruits of the longed for completion of God's work in which the dead shall live (Isa. 26:19) and the whole earth will at last live in peace (Isa. 11:1-9).

### **63. Now ascended,**

64. The biblical witness testifies that the risen Christ is now present at the right hand of God (Heb. 8:1) from where he continues his kingly rule and priestly intercession on behalf of creation (Heb. 4:14, 7:26). The ascended Lord is, in heaven, the mediator of our worship who enables us to draw near to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16, 10:19-22).

### **65. ...he calls us to repentance and faith**

66. The good news of Christ calls forth a response of repentance and faith. Repentance means turning away from the life of sin and alienation from God and a grateful turning toward the righteousness that is granted to us in Christ. It is the transformation of one's mind and heart under the impact of God's grace, and flows into a new form of life dedicated to the service of God (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 2:10).

67. It is in and through Christ that we are called to faith (Rom. 1:16-17; Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:15-21). Faith

is not merely assent to doctrines, nor is it a general attitude of credulity. It is a life of trust in our saving God, a life lived by the Spirit's empowering that is conformed to the faithfulness and life of Christ. It is not a life that we can live in our own strength merely by choosing to do so. Our sinful identity, which has been shaped by disobedience 'in Adam' (Rom. 5:12-19), must be undone by the Spirit, who continues to present the living, forgiving Christ to us (Rom. 8:1-4). It must be remade by the Spirit in conformity with Christ. The faith we are called to is a new life 'in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:17), depends entirely on Christ (Heb. 12:2), and is thus sustained by grace alone (Eph. 2:4-10).

#### **68. ...and restores us to God and to one another.**

69. Our reconciliation with God is at the same time the undoing of our former existence, the violence and the ungodliness of which we were previously unaware. The result of this is that the right relationship with God which was enjoyed prior to the fall is restored (Rom. 5:18-19). We are reconciled, put right with God and with one another (Eph. 4:14-16). The life to which we are called in Christ is a life in which divisions are overcome and enmity is brought to an end. Because of what God has done for us in Christ, we are called to reach out in love to others (2 Cor. 5:16-21).

#### **70. We believe in God the Holy Spirit...**

71. In the Old Testament, belief in the Spirit does not take Christian trinitarian form but the divine Spirit is recognised to be at work in creation (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30), in certain acts disclosing God's will (Ezek. 11:1, 37:1), and in the actions of particular men and women (Exod. 31:3; Num. 24:2; Judges 6:34; 1 Sam. 11:6). In all these instances, the Spirit is the agent of God's sovereign will.

72. In the New Testament, God's Spirit is recognised again, but particularly in relation to the person of Jesus Christ, and it becomes clear that the Holy Spirit is to be identified with the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; Acts 16:6-7; Phil. 1:19). Furthermore, it is through the action of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is both conceived (Luke 1:35) and later raised from the dead (1 Peter 3:18). At his baptism, the Spirit of God descends on Christ (John 1:32, 3:34; Matt. 3:16), after which the ministry of Christ continually depends upon the guidance and sustaining power of the Spirit (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:18). The Spirit is also at work in Jesus' miracles (Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:14; Acts 8:39; Rom. 15:19) and is closely related to the words of Jesus and to God's wisdom (John 6:63, 14:16-17, 15:26, 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:12-16; Eph. 1:17).

#### **73. ...the giver of life**

74. The Old Testament Scriptures associate the 'breath' of God's spirit with the power that gives life to the world and to God's creatures. Genesis 1:2 speaks of a breath or a wind from God sweeping over the face of the deep. The Hebrew word translated 'breath' or 'wind' here is the same word translated elsewhere as 'Spirit', thus suggesting that the Spirit is at work at the dawn of creation, bringing forth life and light through the utterance of God's word. As the biblical story progresses, it is confirmed that all of life depends upon God. The Psalmist, for example, says of all living things, 'when you take away your breath, they die and return to their dust... When you send forth your spirit, they are created' (Ps. 104:29-30; cf. Gen 6:3). Likewise Job 34:14-15 reads, 'If he should take back his spirit to himself and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust' (cf. Ezek. 37: 6, 9-10). Recognising that the life-giving spirit of God is a gift which depends continually on God, the Psalmist prays, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your holy spirit from me' (Ps. 51:10-11).

75. The New Testament takes up this same theme and attributes to the pouring out of God's Spirit the new life of the church, and the enlivening of the disciples at Pentecost to preach the good news (Acts 2).

76. It is by the work of the Spirit that we are made open to the counsel of Christ and come to recognise and confess God (e.g. John 16:8-14). It is by the Spirit that we are born anew, receiving new life from God (John 3:5-8). Not only is life itself enabled and sustained by the Spirit of God, but the fullness of life in Christ that is promised by the Gospel is also the gift of the Spirit.

**77. ...at work in all creation,**

78. The Spirit who is present at the dawn of creation and who sustains all created life is also the one who perfects creation and guides it towards fulfillment. Sometimes the work of perfecting the creation involves judgment as in Isaiah 24:21-23 when the spirit of the Lord gathers the creatures for judgment, or when the wind or spirit of the Lord dries up the land (Hos. 13:15). The same Spirit can turn the desert into a paradise replenishing the earth and enabling it to become fruitful again (Isa. 32:15).

79. The church, in turn, looks forward in hope to the time when the whole creation 'will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom 8:21). This fulfillment is attributed by Paul to the work of the Spirit, known in the meantime by its 'first fruits'. The Spirit is thus understood as the power of God active in history, carrying creation forward to the destiny disclosed and inaugurated in Jesus Christ.

**80. ...who inspired the Scriptures**

81. Because we confess that it is the Holy Spirit who engages and transforms human minds with the truth of Jesus Christ, we acknowledge also that it is the Holy Spirit who has inspired the witness of the Old and New Testaments (2 Tim. 3:16). At all points in the historical process of communicating the truth of God, the Holy Spirit is active, from the inspiration of the prophetic and apostolic witness through to the transformation and enlightenment of the minds of readers and hearers down the ages. The primary agency by which the Spirit does this work is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as such these are the 'Word of God'. Through the humanly formed but divinely inspired words of the Scriptures, God addresses the Church and so renews its faith and its life. Since we are dependent for our existence as Church on God speaking through these Scriptures, they are authoritative for our faith and life and are our supreme standard of belief and practice.

**82. ...and makes Christ known,**

83. The Scriptures indicate that a key role of the Holy Spirit is to witness to the teachings, truth and divine authority of Jesus (John 14:26, 15:26, 16:12-15).

84. The Spirit's role in Jesus' birth, self-understanding, calling, words and work is clearly attested in the Gospels. Where sin blinds us to the true nature of God, particularly the truth about God revealed in the person of Jesus (John 1:10-11, 9:35; Rom. 1:28), the Spirit communicates the truth about Christ to the Church in every age. It is the work of the Spirit which enables the Church to confess that truth of Christ in the midst of an unbelieving world (John 14:26, 15:26-27, 16:13-15; 1 Cor. 12:3). The Spirit also works to bring the world into conviction regarding its own sinfulness (John 16:8). Furthermore, the Spirit is the enabling power of the whole life and faithfulness of the believer (Rom. 8:13-17; 1 Cor. 2:13-14; Gal. 5:16-26).

**85. ...who transforms hearts and minds**

86. It is by the Holy Spirit that every person who becomes a believer is brought to faith and is given

assurance of God's love for them (Rom 8:9, 11; Gal 4:6-7, 5:16-25). It is the work of the Spirit to convert and to transform human hearts (Rom. 2:29) and in doing so to sanctify or to 'make holy' the life of every believer. By the power of the Spirit, believers in Christ are born anew, receiving a new life of the Spirit within that reflects the mind and nature of Christ (John 3:3-8; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22-24).

87. Despite receiving the grace and love of God, we nevertheless continue to fall short of the life that has been gifted to us. We are at once justified and yet still prone to sin. Therefore we must continually come to God in humility and repentance, trusting that through the continuing mercy of God, and by the power of the Spirit, God will continue to shape us according to his purpose and conform us more and more to Christ. Although the decisive event of our salvation has been accomplished once and for all, the journey of faith, undertaken by grace, is a journey toward that day when God's creative and redemptive work will be complete, in the world as also in us.

88. Where hearts and minds are conformed to the truth that is in Christ, there follows, by the power of the Spirit, a reshaping of our lives to conform more nearly to the pattern of Christ's life of faithful obedience to God and compassionate service for others (Eph. 4:22-24). The Holy Spirit brings to every believer the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:13-16; Rom. 8:6). As the mind of Christ grows within the believer, he or she is transformed to live as a child of God (Rom. 8:6-16, 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25).

**89. ...and gathers us into the community of Christ,**

90. One of the first fruits of the Holy Spirit's work at Pentecost is *koinonia* or communion (Acts 2:42-44). The Spirit creates and sustains the unique community that is the Church. The Scriptures describe the Church as the Body of Christ, which is gathered by the Spirit into communion with Christ and has Christ as its head (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:17-20).

91. The basis of the Church's unity is believers' union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, and its community reflects the loving interdependence within the triune being of God. The Church's unity in Christ transcends all boundaries of time, place, customs, race and culture. Although most visible as local worshipping fellowships, and often organised in wider 'denominations' (families of churches), the Church is nevertheless a timeless and universal spiritual fellowship, celebrating one Lord, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:4-5).

92. The Church gathers for teaching and nurture, for fellowship and encouragement, for prayer, for worship and praise (1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 2:42-47, 4:23-31, 13:2-3).

93. The Church is the instrument of Christ's continuing work in the world (John 14:12, 20:21-23; Eph. 4:11, 12). It is called to continue Christ's work of preaching and healing, of delivering good news to the poor and release to the captives; it is to work towards the liberation of those who are oppressed, and it is to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 3:6-8; Col. 1:13-14). It is commissioned to preach the Gospel, and to make disciples of Christ in every nation (Matt. 28:19-20). In all these things the Church shares in God's creative and redemptive purpose for the world.

**94. ...empowering the Church in worship and in mission.**

95. The Spirit is the generative power behind the birth and life of the Church as well as the birth and life of every believer. The Church is born out of the Spirit's action through the followers of Jesus who gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Through the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, a group of people gathered together to worship God, were marked out by this experience, and charged with engaging in the continuing mission of Jesus Christ. The Church is equipped for this service by the

receiving of spiritual gifts for strengthening and edification (1 Cor. 12:7-11), and by the Spirit's work of making known God's Word through preaching and prophetic utterance (Acts 11:28; 1 Cor. 14:1).

96. Worship lies at the heart of the Church's life. Christian worship is the gift of participation in the loving communion of the triune God. The leader of our worship is Christ himself who, as our great High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16), gathers us into the communion he shares with the Father and with the Spirit. Through the twofold intercession of Christ (Heb. 7:28) and the Spirit (Rom. 8:26), and through the exercise of the Spirit's gifts, our stumbling words of worship are received by God as a worthy sacrifice of praise.
97. The preaching of the Word of God and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper are central acts of Christian worship. The Word and Sacraments are sacred gifts of God through which the Gospel is proclaimed and enacted. Because of God's promise to be present wherever the Word is preached and the sacraments shared, the sacraments are known as converting ordinances, that is as central means by which hearts are renewed and minds transformed by the life-giving presence of God. Faithful preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments are signs, therefore, of the vitality of the Church in our time and place, and of Christ's continuing ministry among us. Such preaching and celebration are to be treasured and maintained as expressions of our unity with the Church of all ages, and of our adherence to the faith once delivered to the saints.
98. Effective preaching of the Word is endowed with the power of the Spirit, and is focused on the Gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 2:1-5). The Reformed tradition rightly places emphasis on the reverent and careful exposition of Scripture, all of which is inspired by the Spirit and useful for building up the Church (2 Tim. 3:16).
99. Baptism and the Lord's Supper reinforce the truth of God's love and design for the world, call believers to faithfulness, and commission believers back into the world to present the Gospel to those who are 'far away'.
100. Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Baptism is a grateful acknowledgement of the fact that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. It proclaims to us the forgiveness of God and accomplishes on our behalf what we cannot do for ourselves. In the New Testament, believers are baptised not only in water for the remission of sins but also 'in the Spirit' (John 3:7-8; Acts 8:14-17; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 3:1-3), so that the Spirit is active in both the birth of new believers and in their growth in faith and love (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Baptism signifies that those called to faith in Christ die and are raised to new life with him, are made members of his Body, the Church, and are commissioned for a life of faithful service with him. In the New Testament, and often in other missional contexts, baptism is administered to new believers, as a powerful sign of new life in Christ and incorporation into the Church. In the post-apostolic age, the Church has also commonly baptised the children of believers. In Reformed understanding, such baptism of children reflects the analogy of the Old Testament practice of circumcision during infancy followed by nurture in the faith as the child grew up (Col. 2: 11-14; Deut. 6: 6-7). The Church also gave the opportunity to individuals baptised as infants later to profess their faith publicly and thus 'confirm' their baptism. (The church may also allow opportunities for believers to confirm or renew their baptism). The common practice of infant 'dedication' likewise has Old Testament roots, in the law's requirement to dedicate to God the first-born (Exod. 13:2; Luke 2:22-23). The New Testament makes no requirements as to whether the sign of baptism is best administered by sprinkling, pouring or immersion.
101. The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the covenant of redemption. Through the elements of bread and wine, which are symbols of the body and blood of Christ, we are spiritually nourished and strengthened in our life with him. The Lord's Supper is at once a remembrance of Christ's sacrificial

death through which the work of redemption is accomplished (1 Cor. 11:24-25), a celebration of his presence with us now (Matt 18:20), and a joyful anticipation of that day when Christ will drink again with his people in the kingdom of God (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25).

102. The Church is called to mission, God's mission, in all the world. The Church is called to proclaim Christ to all people - so that all may hear the saving Gospel of Christ (Rom. 10:13-15), to make disciples from every nation (Matt. 28:19-20), to bring the salt (flavour) and light (truth) of Christ into every corner of society, to do good, to act in compassion and mercy, to work for justice and peace.

103. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers the whole Church in mission, and in all the tasks of ministry (Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:7-13; 1 Pet. 2:9-10, 4:8-11; 1 Cor. 12).

104. Some are recognised by the Church as called to serve as ministers (pastors), preaching the Word and teaching the faith, building up and encouraging the people of God, overseeing the Church's worship and sacraments, extending pastoral care, and leading the Church in mission (Eph. 4:11-12). In the act of ordination they are set apart in prayer for the Spirit's empowering, and are called by the people to serve in particular settings. In addition to such 'teaching elders', the church also elects and ordains in prayer 'ruling elders', who, working in partnership with ministers, are called to exercise prayerful oversight of the Church, to care for the people and to contribute to the ministry and mission of the Church.

105. **We belong to this triune God..**

106. We belong to God through creation and through redemption. Along with all creatures we are God's creation and, in common with the whole created order, we are sustained by God's life-giving love. Human beings, however, are set apart for a special relationship with God. They are called to live in loving communion with God according to the pattern of Jesus Christ. Humans do violence to the integrity of this relationship, however, when they disobey God's law and fall away from God. The redemptive work of Christ at Calvary and subsequent prompting of the Spirit gathers us again into right relationship with God and thus continues and completes God's creative work. Fallen creatures are reconciled with God (John 3:16; Eph. 2:4-10) and become, again, God's children who are heirs with Christ of God's blessing and promise (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:6). We creatures, therefore, have been made by God and are redeemed by God (Gal. 1:4). Creation and redemption are not discontinuous but the one coherent expression of God's creative love which is directed towards the gathering of all things together in Christ (Eph. 1:10). We who confess our faith together thereby participate in the new life established for us in Christ and so acknowledge that we belong to God.

107. **...women and men,  
young and old,  
from many nations,  
in Christ *he iwi kotahi tatou,***

**[we are one people]**

108. Our unity in Christ does not imply a homogenous church. Belonging to the triune God means we reflect the diversity inherent in God's own being and in the profusion of God's creation. The new creation that is God's new humanity in Christ is richly diverse: it is both Jew and Gentile, female and male, young and old, poor and rich. It represents a vast array of races, languages and cultures (Acts 2:5-11; Rev. 5:9). It includes people of a great variety of natural capacities and spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:26; Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12-14).

109. In Christ, the dividing walls of hostility are broken down (Eph. 2:14), and, in Christ, believers are made one (Gal. 3:28). In Christ, diverse groups of people are brought together in a community of

faith and love. The body of Christ thus reflects God's purpose to bring all things together in Christ (Eph. 1:10), and is built up as a sign and anticipation of God's kingdom. It is only the power of the risen Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit which bring such reconciliation.

110. Some distinctions are named explicitly here to affirm our commitment to the full and equal participation of all peoples within the life of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.
111. Throughout history, there has often been tension between male and female, not only domestically but also within society and church. Such tensions between men and women are in part a result of humanity's fall into sin (Gen. 3). Paul declares in Galatians 3:28, however, that, in Christ, male and female are made one and become equal partners in the ministry of Christ. The subordination of women is not supported by the actions of Jesus or by the teachings of Paul.
112. The contrasting cultures of youth and age also contribute to the richness of the Church's life, each having crucial gifts to share for the building up of the Body. The young Timothy was encouraged not to let himself be looked down upon by older Christians but to have faith in his calling (1 Tim. 4:12). Young people must not be seen as 'the church of tomorrow', but as an indispensable part of the Church of today. Older people too must be valued for their own experience, wisdom and dedication.
113. The words 'from many nations' acknowledges that the body of Christ is truly universal, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, comprised of people of 'every tribe and tongue', from every corner of the globe. In Christ, the confusion and divisions of Babel (Gen.11:7-9) are reversed and redeemed, and the oneness that is Christ brings great richness of fellowship and mutual learning. Here, in this land, the Presbyterian Church is increasingly enriched by people who have come from many other places and cultures, including those of the Pacific and Asia.
114. The words '*he iwi kotahi tatou*' (meaning 'we are one people') are those used by Governor Hobson after the first signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, on 6 February 1840. The Treaty with the British Crown was intended to protect the original people of this land, the Maori, from exploitation and injustice, and to honour both Maori and settlers as of equal status and rights. The Treaty was promoted by Christian missionaries, and was seen by some Maori as a sacred agreement similar to various biblical covenants. The subsequent history of this land has not always reflected that, and there have been tensions, misunderstandings and conflicts between the *tangata whenua* (the 'people of the land', the Maori) and those who have arrived later (the *tauiwi* — the 'settled tribes', people from Europe and elsewhere). The Treaty implies that all who are *tauiwi* are welcomed by and are free to establish their own bicultural relationship with Maori. As believers in Christ, we acknowledge that the unity among races announced by Hobson will only fully be realised in the oneness that is established in Christ.

**115. Pronunciation Guide: He iwi kotahi tatou**

'He': as in 'hen'.

'Iwi': 'i' as in the double 'ee' in 'deep' (i.e., 'eewee' but said quickly).

'Kotahi': 'ko' as in 'core'; 'ta' as in 'far'; 'hi' - 'hee' as in 'deep'.

'Tātou': 'ta', again as in 'far' but lengthen the sound; 'tou' as in 'tow'.

**116. ...witnesses to God's love in word and in action,**

117. We are called to give an account of Christ to the world in all that we say and do. Just as Jesus gave his life as a testimony to the love of God so our life is to be a living witness to him through whom that same love of God is poured out for us. This act of witness becomes possible only through the further work of God's Spirit who unites us to Christ (John 17:23), gives us words to speak, and bestows gifts enabling us to participate in the mission of God. Our witness to Christ is to all nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20).

**118. ...servants of reconciliation,**

119. Christ's mission of reconciliation is effective at several levels. First, we are reconciled with God and with others. The mission of Christ is directed to a lost and alienated people and seeks them out rather than waiting for them to come to him (John 20:21; Acts 26:17-18; Luke 15:4-7). Those gathered into community with Christ and made his disciples are called to participate in his mission of reconciliation towards those not yet reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19-20). The Spirit equips those who are disciples of Christ with gifts suitable for the mission to which they are called, and creates and sustains the Church as an instrument through which the work of Christ is continued in the world.

**120. ...and stewards of creation.**

121. Where faith in Christ brings reconciliation with God and peace between people, it will also bring a new relationship with the world in which we live. Humanity is appointed to tend and care for the earth (Gen. 2:15), so that it is passed on, still as a blessing, to future generations. The 'dominion' over nature given by God to humanity does not mean domination or exploitation, but is rather to reflect God's own delight in the goodness of creation (Gen. 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The true nature of dominion is to be discerned in the compassionate service exercised by our Lord himself. God's love for the natural order is also revealed in his intention to restore the whole creation to its original purpose, freedom and glory (Rom. 8:19-22).

122. The responsibility God gives us to care for the earth (Gen. 2:15) has implications for all our lives, including matters of ecological and economic sustainability.

**123. As God's people,**

124. Christians are the people of the new covenant. Although the creative and redemptive love of God is directed to the whole of the cosmos, God called and appointed a particular people to be his covenant partner, to be an instrument of and witness to the blessing promised to all nations (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 43:10). Beginning with Abraham and Sarah and continuing through successive generations of their descendants, God established Israel as a covenant people (Gen. 17:1-22; Exod. 6:5-6), blessed and guided them through anointed leaders and prophets, and announced through them the promise of the coming Messiah (Isa. 40:1-11). That messianic promise is fulfilled in Jesus (Mark 8:29), and through him a new covenant was established that now includes Gentiles among the people of God: through Christ, Gentile believers are grafted into God's people, 'Israel' (Rom. 11:17-19). All believers in Christ are thus named as God's people, and are appointed to proclaim the news of God's blessing and love (1 Pet. 2:10).

**125. ...we look forward in hope and joy**

126. Brought together in Christ, we look forward in hope and joy to the completion of God's purposes for the world, which were revealed in Christ and have been inaugurated with the coming of the Spirit and the birth and growth of the Church (Eph. 1:9-10, 3:3-10; Col. 1:19). Christian hope for the future is



not wishful thinking, but a confident expectation grounded in trust in God. It is given shape by the promises of God attested for us in Scripture, is strengthened by the saving acts of God thus far (supremely in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus), and is nurtured by the Spirit. The content of Christian hope is described in the Scriptures in a variety of ways, and includes anticipation of the coming Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14; Luke 11:2), the renewal of creation (Rom. 8:21; Rev. 21:1-5), the coming again of Jesus Christ (Heb. 9:28), and that day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). The Christian hope is centred on the full completion of God's purposes in creation and redemption and the final realisation of God's promise to dwell with humankind and be their God (Rev. 21:3). At the completion of Christ's work, when death will be no more and the earth's travail is at an end, then will the kingdom be handed over to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24), and God will be all in all.

**127. ...to the return of Christ,**

128. Exactly how these matters will unfold is beyond our human understanding, but it is the witness of the New Testament, as expressed (Rev. 22:20) in almost its final words, that at the end of this age Christ will return. He will come to gather God's people (1 Thess. 4:16-17), to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5), and to establish fully the Kingdom of God. He will come in power and glory (Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Dan. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). All humanity will see him, and acknowledge his divine authority (Rev. 1:7; Phil. 2:10-11). While believers may look for signs of the end of this age, it is futile to try to predict the timing of Christ's return, as his return will come unexpectedly (Matt. 24:36-39, 44; 1 Thess. 5:1-2; Luke 12:40).

**129. ...to the new heaven and earth,**

130. The scope of God's saving purposes of God embrace not only individuals, nor only the church, but the whole of God's creation. This is portrayed in Scripture as the coming of a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1-5), in which God and humanity will again live in close harmony, and suffering and death will be no more. The promise of a new heaven and earth can be understood to involve the destruction (2 Pet. 3:7-13) and replacement of the universe as it currently exists, or the divine transformation of the existing universe, its release from all futility, decay and pain, and the restoration to earth of the unrestrained blessing and glory of God (Rom. 8:18-25). Our finite human understanding of such future events is always elusive and inadequate (1 Cor. 13:12). But it is clear that the purpose of God is to redeem and unite all things in Christ, and to establish fully his Kingdom (Eph. 1:9-10; Luke 11:2-3).

**131. ...where evil and death will be no more,**

132. The Bible makes clear that the establishment of God's justice and peace is not brought about without divine judgement upon all that is set against God. The new creation will be brought forth as God lays bare and overcomes the fruitlessness of all human attempts to establish and sustain life on our own terms, in independence from God. The sinful propensity of human beings is destined to end in death, and can have no share in the life of the kingdom of God. There will be no place for evil when the reign of God has been fully established. God's purpose for the end involves the final defeat of all that stands against God, including the crushing of Satan (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10) and all principalities and powers (1 Cor. 15:25).

133. Likewise, there will be no place for death: this last enemy will itself be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26), and those in Christ shall live for ever in the presence of God (Rev. 21:4-5; John 3:16). All that has cursed humanity down through the ages will be at an end, and God's reign will be complete.

**134. ...justice and peace will flourish,**

135. Two of the distinctive marks of the fullness of life that is promised under the reign of God are justice and peace (Isa. 9:7). Justice also means righteousness in the biblical languages. Justice and righteousness both refer to the right ordering of things according to God's purpose. When that right ordering of things occurs, there will be peace (Ps. 85). In Isaiah's vision of the peaceful kingdom, for example, it is proclaimed that 'the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together and a little child shall lead them' (Isa. 11:6). Isaiah further explains that it is on account of the coming Messiah that the earth will be renewed and peace will be established (Isa. 11:1-2; 42:3-4). In anticipation of the reign of God, the Church is called to share in the mission of God and to strive for justice and for peace in every context.

**136. ...and we shall forever delight in the glory of God.**

137. The glory of God is the end towards which all creation moves. God's glory is declared in the heavens (Ps. 19:1) and, in the midst of creation, human beings are called to give glory to God and to enjoy him forever. To enjoy God means to rejoice in all that God has done, and to glorify God means to be with God in joy and to express that joy in thanksgiving and praise. The offering of praise to the glory of God is our first and enduring response to the great things of the gospel (Eph. 1:12).

138. The glorification of the Son rests in his accomplishing what the Father sent him to do, namely the reconciliation of the world to God. Through the work of the Son and the Spirit we are adopted into God's own family of love. The fellowship between Father, Son and Spirit is so wide open that the whole community of Christ's people can find a place within it. Thus Jesus goes on to pray, 'As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (John 17:21). The glory of God thereby expresses itself, not in self-glorifying majesty, but in the abundant communication of God's own fullness of life. It is as grateful recipients of this love that we are caught up in creation's offering of praise to God's glory, thus to fulfil the calling to glorify God and enjoy God forever.

139. The glory of God, supremely revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6; John 1:18), will be fully apparent to all who are gathered in the everlasting presence of God. The Triune God will be with his people (Rev. 7:9-17, 21:3). They shall forever delight in God's presence (Ps. 16:11), serve God, and together sing praise to God's eternal glory.

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!  
'Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counsellor?'  
'Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?'  
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

(Rom. 11: 33-36)