

Focal Identity Statement Task Group

Terms of Reference

The 2004 Assembly resolved:

That the Focal Identity Statement Task Group, with additional members, formulate a subordinate standard in contemporary and inclusive language mindful of the Pacific context of our church, which is faithful to the Bible, our Supreme Standard, the historic creeds, and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith and which encompasses the church's central tenets of faith and after consultation with Te Aka Puaho, Synods, Presbyteries/UDCs, Sessions and Parish Councils, present it for consideration at a future General Assembly, and that before a final draft is distributed a skilled writer be commissioned to bring the document to its final form

Recommendation

That the Act of Modification appended to this report including the resolution "that the Confession of Faith attached to this Act as Appendix 1, together with the Explanatory Notes attached to this Act as Appendix 2, become the Subordinate Standards of this Church in the place of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.", be approved and referred to presbyteries under the Barrier Act.

Report

1 Background

1.1 The 1999 Special General Assembly established a Task Group to review the Church's subordinate standards with emphasis on their relevance as confessional documents for a Reformed Church in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 21st century. The 2002 Assembly received that Group's report and appointed a further Task Group to develop a focal identity statement for use in worship as a confession of faith.

1.1 Following consultation and engagement with a range of groups within the Church, the Task Group presented its report and proposed Focal Identity Statement to the 2004 General Assembly. The Assembly also received legal advice from Ian Millard QC that the Assembly had authority to modify its subordinate standards by replacing them, provided that the new standard was consistent with the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith as set out in the relevant appendix to the Book of Order. The Church itself, in Assembly, is the sole judge of that consistency.

2 Introduction

2.1 The need to create a new and yet orthodox statement of faith to replace the Westminster Confession of faith has been before us for some years now. At

the 2004 Assembly in Christchurch it was clear that the work of the committee was not convincing enough to unite the Church behind what was offered there. We have worked very hard in the interim to create something that we believe will provide the Church with a clear, orthodox and modern statement of faith.

3 Approach

- 3.1 The feedback process we initiated in 2005 resulted in about 50 responses from individuals and parishes and some presbyteries within the Church. We endeavoured to respond to each of these in person and to adjust, if required, the confession accordingly. We did not follow every suggestion but all received fair hearing and the statement now before us is the result of many hours of editing and re-editing. We suggest that it is both comprehensive and faithful to the Scriptures and will serve our Church well as a statement of faith and a confession of faith and a subordinate standard.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 Adopting this as our subordinate standard will achieve several things for our church.

- It will free us from the legalism of the theology of the Westminster Confession and it will give us permission as a church to enter into that activity which is at the heart of the faith of every church in the Reformed tradition, the continual re-examination of our life and practice against the Supreme Standard, the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Holding on to a 400 year old confession, no matter how good it is, has been in itself an act in violation of this Reformation principle.
- It will signal that we are ready as a Church to address new cultures within our own society with a missionary zeal and originality which the Spirit wants to initiate in every age and towards every part of society.
- It will allow us more easily to view and accept the way the Spirit has been working with and within other groups and cultures because we have been able to free ourselves from the cultural constraints of those who penned the Westminster Confession. That culture bequeathed to us is a tremendous gift – the Westminster Confession but as a human gift it carried with it certain assumptions and values which the Spirit in this day and age has not affirmed. The one thing we must do is to take advantage of their call to continually refine our knowledge of God in the light of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. By moving forward with this new confession of faith we honour the memory and gift of the Westminster Confession divines more than if we refuse to reform our thinking.

5 Task Group membership

Richard Dawson (Convener), Susan Jones, Bruce Hamill, Murray Rae

6 Proposal

- 6.1 The outcome of our review is that the proposed Focal Identity Statement (Appendix 1) and accompanying Explanatory Notes (Appendix 2), become the Subordinate Standards of this Church. It is proposed that they replace the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
- 6.2 The Act of Modification appended below has been drafted by Ian Millard QC in consultation with the Task Group. It is brought to the Assembly with the endorsement of the Book of Order and Judicial Reference Group.

Act of Modification

WHEREAS (By Way of Background):

- A. The existing Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in Section A, declares:

1. Standards

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is founded on the following basis:

- (a) *That the Word of God, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the supreme rule of faith and duty, and is the supreme standard of this Church.*
- (b) *That the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms are the subordinate standards of this Church.*
- (c) *The Declaratory Act of the General Assembly of the said Church sets forth, in regard to certain doctrines, what is required from those entering upon office.*
- (d) *That the Directory for Worship (1995) and The Westminster Form of Church Government set forth generally the order of worship, discipline and government in this Church.*
- (e) *That the Church has the right, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate, interpret or modify its subordinate standards; always in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in the said Confession and other subordinate standards, of which agreement the Church itself shall be the sole judge.*

- B. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand recognises that:

- As a part of the Reformed Church tradition, it is its duty thereby to continually examine and, when necessary, modify its life and confession in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in its midst, always faithful, nevertheless, to the one Word of God made flesh in Jesus Christ and set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

- Having made provision for this in its own standards it should from time to time undertake a significant review of its confession of faith in order that it should speak clearly to each generation;
 - Creeds and confessions are, at heart, servants of the Gospel, they do not replace the Gospel but assist the Church to confess it; and
 - The act of confession of faith is an ongoing responsibility of the Church if it is to faithfully proclaim in the changing times the unchanging Gospel once deliver to the saints.
- C. In light of that ongoing responsibility of the Church to proclaim in the changing times the unchanging Gospel, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has, in dependence on the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, undertaken a review of its subordinate standards, including its confession of faith.
- D. The outcome of such review is the proposal that Confession of Faith attached to this Act as Appendix 1, together with the Explanatory Notes attached to this Act as Appendix 2, become the Subordinate Standards of this Church. This is in the place of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
- E. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand considers such proposed new Subordinate Standards of this Church to be in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed Faith contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (as is evidenced by this Church's agreement to them signified by the passing of this resolution and the eventual formal adoption of the proposed new Subordinate Standards).
- F. The Barrier Act 1697 (which, under 374, is incorporated into the Constitution of this Church) provides that:
- ... before any General Assembly of this Church shall pass any Acts which are to be binding Rules and Constitutions to the Church, the same Acts be first proposed as overtures to the Assembly, and, being by them passed as such, be remitted to the consideration of the several Presbyteries of this Church, and their opinions and consent reported by their commissioners to the next General Assembly following, who may then pass the same in Acts, if the more general opinion of the Church thus had agreed thereunto.

NOW THIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLVES:

To approve the proposal that the Confession of Faith attached to this Act as Appendix 1, together with the Explanatory Notes attached to this Act as Appendix 2, become the Subordinate Standards of this Church in the place of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

Appendix 1 – Confession of Faith

We Believe, We Belong, We Become

From this land of Aotearoa New Zealand
we confess that we believe in and belong to God
who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in God
the Father of Jesus Christ,
sender of the Holy Spirit;
Creator and Nurturer of all,
Love above all loves,
and Judge of all the earth.

We believe in Jesus Christ,
truly human and truly God.
He lived among us and suffered death by human hand,
and was raised to new life,
setting us free from sin
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
who makes Christ known,
inspires the Scriptures,
transforms hearts and minds,
gathers us into the community of Christ's Body
and sustains the Church in worship and in mission.

We belong to this triune God
who calls us to become what we are in Christ:
God's own people,
witnesses to his love in word and in action,
servants of his mission of reconciliation,
and stewards of creation.

Brought together in Christ,
women and men,
young and old,
tangata whenua and tauwi,
we look forward in hope
to that fullness of life
in which justice and peace will flourish,
the reign of Christ will be complete,
and we shall sing praise to the glory of God.

Introduction

This confession and the accompanying commentary seeks to bear witness to the apostolic faith of the Christian Church, and to express the Church's confidence that the same God who is made known to us in Jesus Christ is present through Word and Spirit in our place and time. It gives expression to some of the particularities of our

present context, and to matters that are of special importance for 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 nurtures the Church in mission, and as it renews confidence in and commitment to the saving grace of God effective in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Confession is that act in which 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'.¹ It is the act in and through which the Church finds new words to declare in its own time and place the Gospel it has received. Creeds and confessions are, at heart, servants of the Gospel. They do not replace that Gospel but assist the church to confess it. 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, essentially, not on our own wisdom but on the continuing guidance and testimony of God's Spirit.

The Church's relationship to any particular confession must therefore be conditional. Trusting in the grace of God to lead us forward into new understanding 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 revisit such formulas and to review whether or not the Confession continues to convey the good news entrusted to the Church. Because the revelation of God is a living thing coming fresh to every generation in a form appropriate for that generation, each generation must decide for itself whether the Confession handed down to it by earlier generations are adequate. Revisions of the Church's Confessional formulae need not imply any disparagement of previous Confessions but are merely a recognition that the cultural mores of new times and places require new expressions of the faith that has been handed down to us. The question might be put this way: 'do these new words of *ours* enable us to say *the same thing*?'

This is particularly important for the mission of the Church. When we attempt to 'say the same thing in our words' we become a mission oriented people because we are accepting responsibility for the declaration of the Gospel in our own time and place. Our speech is, in general, like the speech of those around us – those to whom God has sent us. To express the Gospel in our own language is therefore an act of mission, perhaps *the* act of mission, because, as is clear in the report of Pentecost in Acts 2, the Church itself was born as the Gospel was declared in languages that all could understand. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, it was the disciples' ability to proclaim the good news of God in a manner that could be understood that led to three thousand people coming to faith in Christ. If we are to be a mission people, we need a confession that is expressed in our words.

The act of confession is, therefore, an ongoing 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. The particular Confession of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand signals that we stand within and are nourished by that same tradition. It is for this reason that we gratefully acknowledge the

¹ Confession and Confessions' by John Webster in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, Ed. Christopher R Seitz. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press 2001) p.119.

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 Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. These ecumenical Creeds continue to be authoritative for us in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand and we are glad to acknowledge that their place in our life together binds us to the worldwide Church. 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.

In addition to these ecumenical Creeds, important documents of our Reformed heritage have contributed, we believe, to the renewal of the Church and to the nurturing of our faith. These include in particular 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 stand together in faith. We acknowledge too, therefore, the enrichment of our church by traditions of faith, worship and mission that have been developed in Asia and throughout the Pacific.

As has been indicated above, the whole truth of God is greater than can 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 these 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.

Appendix 2 - Explanatory Notes regarding Confession of Faith (2006)

1 From this land of Aotearoa New Zealand,

We make this confession of faith from within the land of Aotearoa, New Zealand. The acknowledgement of our context is both an admission of the particularities and limitations of our cultural and contextual perspectives, and a recognition of the fact that the incarnation of Christ overcomes those limitations and extends the reach of God's saving and reconciling love to all places and times. All human words about God, shaped as they are by time and place, are necessarily contingent and provisional. We are limited in outlook not just by the particularities of our location, but also by our fallible humanity, and so we speak only in part the truth about the God we worship. While our particular confession of faith may take a different form from those employed elsewhere in our world and at different times in history, we are grateful for the polyphonic witness of the Church through the ages, and gladly affirm that all genuinely Christian confessions contribute to our understanding of the God whom we confess but do not fully comprehend.

We confess that we believe in and belong to God,

God is identified as the One who calls us to faith and who establishes us as the particular community of the Church. It is from God that all community and all unity in the Church is derived. Our belonging and our belief has its beginning and end in the life and identity of God. God is the origin and substance also of all faith and hope and love and therefore, indeed, of all life. It is to God, therefore, as Creator and Sustainer of our own identity as God's people, that this confession bears witness first and foremost.

... who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The revelation of who God is in the Bible is emphatically Trinitarian. We confess no other God than the one revealed in Christ to be Father, Son and Spirit, bound together as one in an eternal communion of love, and made known to us through the biblical narrative. Unless the triune being of God is confessed explicitly, we run the risk of identifying with a god who is simply not the God of the Bible. No true confession of the Christian faith can fail at this point. That God is God in God's threeness is the great revelation of the New Testament, built upon and fulfilling the self-disclosure of God through Word and Spirit in the Old Testament.

The Trinitarian relationality is summed up in the biblical confession that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). This love is the mark of God's presence in human relationships and in our relationship with Creation. The orthodox naming of the three persons of the Trinity expresses the Trinity's personal nature. 'Father' and 'Son' classically indicate the personal inter-relatedness (*perichoresis*) of the persons of God. In everyday language, 'Father' denotes a male parent. Theologically, however, 'Father' is used of God as a relational term not bound to biology and does not denote the gendered characteristics of a male parent. Jesus taught on more than one occasion about the ways in which the care and attention paid to us by God far exceed the usual behaviour 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, of course, in which feminine analogies highlight particular aspects of the character of God (Isaiah 49:15-16; Matthew 23:37; Isaiah 42:14; Hosea 11:3-4). Scripture also contains references to God that are non-gendered and non-personal (Psalm 28:1; Psalm 46:1). While the biblical and creedal naming of God 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.

2 We believe in God the Father of Jesus Christ, and sender of the Holy Spirit...

We confess together our belief in God, the Father of Jesus Christ and sender of the Holy Spirit. This act of confession is grounded in God's own act of self-identification. God is known as the one who lives in triune communion as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and from whom the love that creates and sustains the world overflows, redeeming it from sinfulness, and bringing it to fulfilment in Christ (Eph 1:3-10). The Father, who is the sender of the Son and the Spirit, does not live in splendid isolation, but is identified as the one who lives in and through communion with the Spirit and the Son. We confess, therefore, that the presence with us of the Son, and the empowering presence and of the Spirit, truly disclose the nature and being of God (John 1:18, 16:13-15; 1 Cor 12:4-6).

Again, the difficulty of using language that commonly denotes gender is apparent here. The meaning of 'Father' when used theologically, is not to be determined by projecting human categories onto God, as if God were like a human father; such a conception of theological language results in idolatry and leads to the erroneous and sinful idea that males participate more fully in the image of God. That manner of theological signification must be rejected (Matt 23:9). The meaning of the term 'Father' when used of God is to be discerned, rather, by understanding the nature of the relationship between Jesus and the one he called "Abba". The term signals the intrinsic relationality of the being of God – a relationality that is sometimes developed in Scripture through the use of feminine imagery alongside the masculine. God is compared, for example, to a nursing mother (Isa 49:15), and as a woman in childbirth (Isa 42:14). Here too, the parental metaphors are rendered apposite, not by anthropomorphic projection but by attending to the nature of God's dealings with Israel and with the world. God is the one who gives life, who loves, nurtures, chastises and forgives, and who in all things seeks to bring the children of God into the fullness of human life as it is made known in Christ (John 10:10).

The term 'Father' refers us to the one from whom all things flow and in whom all things have their origin. The Father is the one who sends the Son to be the saviour and reconciler of the world, and who anoints him with the Spirit, thereby equipping him for that purpose. 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).

... Creator and Nurturer of all.

Just as the Father is the sender of the Son and the Spirit so also is the Father the one who through Word and Spirit brings the world into being. The creation is brought forth from nothing; there is nothing that has its origin apart from God and nothing that can finally stand against the fulfilment of God's purposes. Just as we are formed by God in our mothers' wombs (Psalm 139:13) so is the whole creation brought forth in love to be nurtured and sustained by God.

... Love above all loves,

Precisely through the working out of God's purpose in creation and redemption, God is identified as eternal love (1 John 4:7-10). Not for God's own sake, but as an act of love and for our sakes, the world is brought forth to live in communion with Him. The

drama of creation and redemption is the gracious opening of God's life to embrace that which is other than God. Precisely through the divine gift of love, we human beings are enabled also to love, both God and one another.

... and Judge of all the earth.

The judgement of God has its place within this dynamic of love. Judgement is to be distinguished from punishment. The judgement of God is the means by which the truth of things is laid bare, the truth of our fallenness, to be sure, but also the truth of God's unconditional grace through which we are embraced by, and included within, the eternal communion of Father, Son and Spirit, there to worship and enjoy God forever. Jesus confesses the Father as the true judge (John 8: 50) and declares that He did not come into the world to judge it (John 12:47-48). It is however through Christ himself that the judgement of God is conveyed (John 5:30; John 8:15-16). In consequence of Christ's faithfulness in this regard the Church confesses that Christ himself is judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; Rom 2:16).

3 We believe in Jesus Christ

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; see especially one of the earliest extant witness to apostolic Christology in Phil 2:5-11). In him 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.

... truly human and truly God.

Following the precedents of Scripture and our creedal heritage, we affirm both the humanity (Col 1:19; Col 2:9; John 1:1) and the divinity (John 1:14; 20:28; Heb. 1:4-13) of Jesus Christ. This affirmation lies at the heart of Christian faith. His 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), and yet is played out within the constraints and conditions of our existence, and within his own particular historical situation. Uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ, divinity and humanity are given together. The Son of God becomes human for the sake of our salvation and to bring to completion the promised reconciliation between God and humankind.

He lived among us,

The Son of God through whom all things were created became a subject within our material, social and historical life. The one true Word and Christ is not an idea or a symbol but the same historic Jesus of flesh and blood who we encounter through the four-fold witness of the Gospels. From the perspective of the resurrection we look back at the life he lived for thirty-plus 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 recounting of 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 of complete faithfulness to God and obedience to the will of the Father, a life that Israel failed to embrace at that time, and a life we cannot live on our own but only 'under his sway', participating, by the Spirit, in the very life of Christ.

... suffered death by human hand,

The confession that Christ died at the hands of human executioners summarises the consistent proclamation of the early Church (Acts 2:22-23, 3:14-15, 5:30, 10:39). Although his 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. At this crisis of history, Jesus of Nazareth, a man whose origin lies in the life of God, and who was the living out of God's life in a fully human situation, died, not of natural causes but gave himself up to the deadly consequence of human sinfulness and ignorance (Mark 15:24) (John 1:10, Rom 4:25). In Jesus' death, God's self-giving met our human propensity to take (or take over) the life of the other for fear of losing our own lives – a propensity to be governed (often unbeknown to ourselves) by death (Matt 16:25; John 8:34-38, 42-47; Matt 23:33-37). Thus, in Jesus, God shoulders the burden of the world's sin, graciously taking the place of victim in order that sin may be overcome. As a result, we are delivered from the control of sin. Our sinful defiance of God is overcome by the greater power of forgiveness and love.

...and was raised to new life,

The fact that our lives are governed by our enmity towards God and by death is not self-evident, and is therefore something we cannot tell ourselves. The truth of our alienation from God is something that needs to be told to us (John 3:19; John 9:35-41). The truth is revealed through the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. In this resurrection we discover that God vindicates the man we violently cast out. The resurrection casts divine light on the *adamic* rivalry with God (pride) (Gen 3), which sets each person against his or her neighbour (in covetousness, lying, stealing, adultery, murder) (Exodus 20), in a vain and anxious attempt to secure our life in independence of God. In raising Jesus, God vindicates the one who was crucified and declares his judgement on the sinfulness that demanded Jesus' death. Jesus' resurrection reveals our sin by simultaneously laying bare the contradiction involved in our choosing death, and by overcoming death with new life (Col 2:15; 1 John 4:9).

For the first disciples, and for all who subsequently encounter the risen Lord, the resurrection appearances are an encounter with the God who, rather than taking revenge on those who cast him out of their world, comes back to them and gives God's self (the risen Son) to them again in what St Paul calls a 'spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:35-49). Jesus' life and death touches theirs, and ours, in the reconciling and restorative manner we call forgiveness (John 20:21-22; Acts 5:29-32).

Paul's notion of a spiritual body remains crucial to our faith. It captures something of the complexity of the resurrection stories and highlights the fact that God's vindication of Jesus and God's forgiveness of humankind was not accomplished merely by resuscitating him, by bringing him *back* to life. Rather, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the beginning of a 'new creation' (2 Cor. 5.17), a new order of life beyond the current order, subject as that is to decay (Rom. 8.21). The appearances to the apostles of the risen Christ are an intersection of God's new ordering of things with the older order that is passing away. In the post-apostolic life of the Church the Spirit continues to make present to us this same revelation of Christ and the same forgiveness, but in the absence now of his 'spiritual body' as it was first experienced in the Church.

The resurrection event, made real to us through encounter with the risen Christ, is not simply a declaration of non-retaliation on God's part (although it certainly is a revelation of God's non-retaliatory mercy and grace). It is also 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.

... setting us free from sin,

At the heart of the good news of the Gospel lies the proclamation that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we are set free from sin. These events inaugurate our salvation and set us out upon a life made new. They do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, namely, liberate ourselves from the all-pervasive (but tragically unnecessary) human condition called 'original sin'. This condition, which links us to all other human beings 'in Adam' (Rom 5:12) is a social ordering which paradoxically unites us to others while at the same time setting us against our neighbours in a rivalry whose spiritual consequence is death (Rom 6:23). In the liberating events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection we are confronted as sinners but not destroyed. Our human verdict of death to the Son of God is answered by God's verdict of forgiveness and new life. The universal witness of Christian faith is that this act of self-giving on God's part, reconciles us to God and undoes the grip of original sin. The New Testament offers a number of ways of talking about how this is effected — through victory, through sacrifice, through ransom — but this 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 its new identity in Christ.

This new humanity is brought about through participation in Christ and in his life and death (Gal 2:20, 4:19, Col 3:3-4, John 15:4-6 etc). 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 so much divine amnesty as the restoration of fellowship and communion.

... and bringing to birth God's new creation.

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 (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).

Now ascended,

The biblical witness testifies that the risen Christ is now present at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19; 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).

... he calls us to repentance and faith,

The good news of the gospel 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).

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 the life of Christ. It is not a life that we can live in our own strength merely by choosing to do so. Our 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), and 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).

... and restores us to God and to one another.

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. (Romans 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).

4 We believe in God the Holy Spirit who makes Christ known,

The work of the Holy Spirit opens us to the counsel of Christ so that we come to recognise and confess God. The Spirit's role in His birth, self-understanding, calling, words and work is clearly attested in the Gospels. Where sin blinds us to the true nature of God, particularly as it is revealed in the person of Jesus (John 1:10-11; John 9:35; Rom 1:28) the Spirit communicates the truth about Christ to the Church in every age and, again, it is this work which enables the Church to confess that truth in the midst of an unbelieving world (John 14:16-17; 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 15:7-11). 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).

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; Psalm 104:30), in certain acts disclosing God's will (1 Chron 18:18; Ezek 11:1, 37:1), and in the actions of certain men and women (Ex 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.

In the New Testament, God's Spirit is recognised again, but specifically in relation to the person of Jesus Christ, so 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 actions 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).

... inspires the Scriptures,

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 Testament 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.

... transforms hearts and minds,

It is the work of the Spirit to convert and to transform the heart of humankind (Rom 2:29) and in doing so to sanctify or to 'make holy' the life of every believer. 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. The Holy Spirit brings to every believer the mind of Christ (1Cor. 2:13-16; Rom 8:6) As this mind 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) Confession of Christ is a further sign of God's Spirit working through us (2 Cor. 12:3) as is our worship (Phil. 3:3)

... gathers us into the community of Christ's Body,

One of the first fruits of the Spirit's work at Pentecost is 'koinonia' or communion (Acts 2:42-44). The Spirit creates community, and is responsible for establishing and sustaining the very particular community of Christ's body. This community, the Church, is gathered by the Spirit into communion with Christ, and with Christ at its head (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:17-20), becomes the agent of Christ's continuing work in the world (John 14:12, 20:21-23; Eph 4:11,12) The Church is called to continue his work of preaching and healing, of delivering good news to the poor and release to the captives; it is to work towards liberation of those who are oppressed and it is to proclaim the coming kingdom of God (Lk 4:18-19; Acts 3:6-8; Col 1:13,14). In all these things the Church is called to share in God's creative and redemptive purpose for the world and, in thankfulness for God's good ordering of things, it gathers to offer worship and praise. (Acts 2: 46-7; 4: 23-31;13:2,3)

... and sustains the Church in worship and in mission.

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 baptism, and were 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). It is by the same 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).

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.

The preaching of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments are the central acts of Christian worship. Those ordained to undertake these tasks for the building up and encouragement of the whole people of God (1 Cor 12:7-11), do so with the blessing of the whole Church, as signified at ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands. The Word and the Sacraments are sacred gifts of God through which the Gospel narrative 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, as central means, that is, by which hearts are renewed and minds transformed by the life-giving presence of God. The sacraments are, then, mission in themselves and signs of the Church in mission since in calling believers to faithfulness they reiterate God's love and design for the world and so direct the Church beyond its inner circle again back into the world to present the Gospel to those who are 'far away.' Faithful preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments are signs, therefore, of the preservation and 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.

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, 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.

The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the covenant of redemption. Through the elements of bread and wine we receive the body and blood of Christ and are thus renewed 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; Mk 14:25).

5 We belong to this triune God...

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. Our understanding of the human condition, however, is that human beings 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.

... who calls us to become what we are in Christ,

The Reformed faith holds that through faith in Christ we have been 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). Through baptism, we have been born again to a new life in communion with God and with one another (Rom 6:4). Yet it is true that we 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 journey toward that day when God's creative and redemptive work will be complete, in the world as also in us.

God's own people,

Although the creative and redemptive love of God is directed to the whole of the cosmos, God calls and appoints 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), blessed and guided them through anointed leaders and prophets, and announced through them the promise of the coming Messiah (Isa 40:1-11).

Christians confess that the Messianic promise is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth (Mark 8:29), and that through him a new covenant is established that now includes Gentiles among the people of God. So now, we are named as God's people and are appointed to proclaim the news of God's blessing and love (1 Pet 2:10). In confessing ourselves to be God's own people, we acknowledge that we are so by being grafted through Christ into God's people, Israel (Rom 11:17-19).

... witnesses to his love in word and in action,

To bear witness is to give an account of what we know. 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 is to be through both word and action. In all that we say and do, therefore, our words and our actions must conform to the way of Christ among us, and so testify to the saving love of God. To witness is to communicate the salvation of God in Jesus, and is itself a fruit of that salvation. This 'communication' is more

than word alone. The whole life of the believer is to bear witness to the love of God (James 2:17). Just as our word alone is not enough (James 2:18-26), nor is our act alone a sufficient witness of itself. The true character of the act is known through the word that interprets and explains. Thus Peter rose to preach at Pentecost in order to make clear what had been witnessed in the dramatic outpouring of God's Spirit (Acts 2: 14). So also in the temple, Jesus revealed the true generosity of a poor widow who gave only a mite in her devotion to God (Luke 21:1-4). It is in the light of Christ's Word that these acts truly understood. So also, it is with the naming of Jesus Christ that Christian action becomes transparent as a witness to the Gospel.

... servants of his mission of reconciliation,

In as much as Christ is sent (missio) by the Father to a people lost to Him, His work is mission. 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 for all who are lost. 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. (2 Cor 5:19)

... and stewards of creation.

Christ's mission of reconciliation is effective at several levels. First we are reconciled with God and with others. However it is also clear that the Gospel applies to the whole of creation which is to be restored to its original purpose, freedom and glory (Romans 8:19-22). 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. Here and now, the world needs protection and conservation by its human inhabitants, so that it is passed on, still as blessing, to future generations. Without waiting for the end of time, Christians are stewards of the earth and of all other creatures which were given into our care at the dawn of creation itself (Gen 1:26). The first human being was given dominion over the animals, but the true nature of dominion (Lordship) is to be discerned in the compassionate service exercised by our Lord himself.

**6 Brought together in Christ
Women and men,
young and old,
Tangata Whenua and Tauwi,**

That we are brought together in the Christ is the central affirmation of the first four lines of this stanza. It is through and in Christ that disparate groups of people are brought together in a community of faith and love. It is only the power of the risen Christ that brings effective reconciliation between peoples who may otherwise continue as strangers to one another. Tangata Whenua and Tauwi, men and women, young and old are representative of three such groupings that are pertinent in our own time and place, and which, in Christ, are reconciled to one another and made equal members in the community of his Body.

Even though some of these distinctions strike tender places in our dealings with one another, through Christ even that which would seem irreconcilable can be reconciled. The power of the cross is a power greater than all human division and enmity and is available to all without distinction, imparting new life in reconciled communion with God and with one another. All three groupings are thus placed where they are in this

stanza to bring them under the headship of Christ and echo the scriptural statement: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female, there is no longer slave or free, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3: 28).

The three distinctions named have often been the cause of misunderstanding in the church and so are named explicitly here to affirm our commitment to the full and equal participation of all such peoples within the life of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. The Church has sometimes used natural theology to subordinate women in a way not supported by the actions of Jesus or by the writings of Paul (Gal 3: 28). There has often been tension between male and female, not only domestically but also within national and church life. Traditionally, Greek thought has influenced the way the male-female pairing has been thought of dualistically with a greater value put on the male side of the opposition than on the female side. As Paul declares in Gal 3: 28, however, in Christ male and female are made one and become equal partners in the ministry of Christ.

Age has also been a troubling issue both in everyday life and in the life of the church. The contrasting cultures of youth and age can create tensions in worship and in mission. 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 4:11). In the same way, young people in the church today can be talked about as the Church of tomorrow while their contribution to the Church of today is sometimes unwillingly received. On the other hand, when Church growth is a goal and new methods, music and activities begin, older people can find themselves marginalised in the Church they have served faithfully all their lives. Both young and old, however, bring their own wisdom to the Church. Under Christ, both young and old are important, each having their gifts to share for the building up of the Body.

Within the context of our land, the distinction between Maori (tangata whenua — people of the land) and those who have arrived later (tauwi — settled tribes²) has given rise to tension and misunderstanding. Again, therefore, these two groups are named and linked together to indicate that in this case too the good news of Jesus Christ brings disparate peoples together. The term 'tauwi' embraces those who have been long settled and who can count seven generations or more in New Zealand, and others have arrived in recent years. All who are tauwi are welcomed by and are free to establish their own bicultural relationship with Maori, the original people of this land.

... we look forward in hope

Because we are brought together in Christ, we can look forward in hope to the completion of God's work of reconciliation. In 1 Peter 3:15, Christians are encouraged to be always ready to 'give an account of the hope that is within them'. The basis of the Christian hope is set out in those previous clauses of the confession that declare the saving work of God. In the plan of God's saving action in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is included also the pattern of God's future (2 Cor. 3:9-12, Acts 26:6, Romans 8:24,25). Christian hope is hope in God. More particularly, it is the hope that God will bring to completion his creative and redemptive purpose for the world. That purpose is shown forth by God in the election of Israel to be the covenant people and is further revealed in the incarnation and

² The translation of tauwi as 'settled tribes' was confirmed with the Moderator of Te Aka Puaho, the Maori Synod, in 2006.

presence among us of God's own Son, in his self-giving life and death, and in his resurrection from the dead. The hope within us is nurtured by the sending of the Spirit who renews and sustains the life and witness of God's people. The content of Christian hope is described in the Bible in a variety of ways. We look forward in hope to the coming kingdom of God (Ps 22:28; Mark 1:14; Luke 11:2), to the new creation (Rom 8:21; 2 Cor 5:17), to the coming again of Jesus Christ (1 Thess 4:18); to that day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:10-11), and God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28). However, we may describe it, the content of that hope is the completion of God's purpose in creation and redemption and the final realisation of God's promise to dwell with humankind and be their God (Rev. 21:3).

... to that fullness of life,

The fullness of life to which we look forward in hope is eternal life characterised by communion with Christ and with the one who sent him (John 17:3). Fullness of life is also the goal of sanctification, of the process by which believers are conformed more and more to the fullness of Christ's life lived in compassionate service of others. While the Christian hope of the resurrection of the dead may be expressed individualistically, the hope encouraged in us by the Bible is also a hope for the world – it is, therefore, a corporate hope. Paul expresses the full scope of this in Romans 16:26 and a more focused version of it when speaking of his own people the Jews in Romans 11:14,15) But it is also cosmic in its scope, and is concerned with the renewal of the whole creation (Rev. 21:5). This hope for a new heaven and Earth (Rev 21:1) summarises the common expectation of the Biblical witness that the creation itself will be renewed (Rom 8:22). God's purpose is to redeem the world as a whole (Eph 2:9-10) and to establish within it that fullness of life which for which it is destined and which can be realised only in communion with him.

... in which justice and peace will flourish,

Two of the distinctive marks of the fullness of life that is promised under the reign of God are justice and peace (Isaiah 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, then there will be peace (Psalm 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). As an expression of this hope, the Church is called to share in the mission of God, and to strive for justice and for peace.

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 is brought forth as God lays bare and overcomes the fruitlessness of all human attempts to establish and sustain life on our own terms, thereby refusing the fullness of life in communion with God. That sinful propensity of human beings is destined to end in death and can have no share in the life of the kingdom of God. The participation of human beings in the coming kingdom is not, therefore, by our own design. Nor is it based on our own merit. It takes place, rather, solely in virtue of the mercy and the love of God.

... the reign of Christ will be complete.

A further biblical expression of the hope towards which the Church lives is the coming reign of Christ. The Christian hope is that the earth will be brought to its proper goal under the headship of Christ (Rev 11:5). The 'completion' of the reign of Christ signifies both the fullness of his reign and the completion of Christ's work in establishing his Lordship over and final defeat of all that stands against God (1 Cor: 15:25; cf. Heb 2:8). The content and character of Christ's reign is evident in his earthly life among us. Rejecting the conventional expectations and trappings of kingship, Christ takes the road of lowliness and suffering love. The fruits of that kingship become evident as the kingdom of God takes shape in and through Jesus himself: the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, lepers are healed of their diseases, the dead are brought back to life, and the poor have good news preached to them (Matt 11: 4-5). These transformations to new life show forth the pattern of God's kingdom towards which the Church strives in faithfulness to Christ. 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.

... and we shall sing praise to the glory of God.

The glory of God is the end towards which all creation moves. God's glory is declared in the heavens (Psalm 19:1) and in the midst of creation human beings are called to give glory to God and to enjoy him for ever. 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).

The glory of God shines in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). It is a glory that is revealed not only in majesty but also in lowliness. Jesus says, 'the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit' (Jn 12: 23-24). It is in his faithfulness and obedience even unto death that the Son glorifies the Father. Jesus then goes on to say, 'Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour' (Jn 12: 26). Those who would be disciples of Jesus, therefore, must also take the way of service and love, giving glory to God by their faithfulness to Christ.

Singing praise to the glory of God is not a matter of obeisance. God has no need of human praise but seeks, rather, the full expression of mutual love. In John's Gospel especially, the glorification of God is worked out in Trinitarian terms. This is seen especially in Jesus' prayer to the Father in chapter 17. 'Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you... I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed (John 17: 1, 4f.). Jesus says of the Spirit, 'He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (16:14). The Son's glorification 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' (Jn 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.

