

## The Confession of Faith of the UPCSA in Précis (revised)

### The Need for Redemption

#### 1. Purpose and Predicament of Humankind

- 1.1 God created all things through Christ and created them good.
- 1.2 From the beginning, however, human beings have rebelled against God's holy will, **failing to love** and worship God and **love** and **serve** one another. People are capable of good as individuals and of justice as communities, but are all corrupted by pride and self-interest. They are in bondage to sin, unable to rescue themselves from it; **therefore**, they turn to false gods that further entrap them in sin.
- 1.3 Christ's death to atone for sin shows how grave sin is. It offends God, bringing wrath and judgement and threatening final alienation from God.

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### The God who Redeems

#### 2. God the Son, Revealer and Reconciler

- 2.1 Yet God does not abandon us to what we deserve.
- 2.2 God **revealed God-self** in the history of Israel and above all in Jesus Christ, who is both truly God and truly human. Jesus came to the Jews **in their oppression<sup>i</sup>** as their Messiah, proclaiming the coming of God's victorious rule. In his own person, works and words he revealed God's grace and will for humankind. Opposed by the religious authorities, he was crucified by the Roman political authorities. He died on the cross to atone once for all for all sin.
- 2.4 But God raised Christ from death, and so made possible the free gift of eternal life. Now at God's right hand, he intercedes for us as our eternal High Priest and rules over all the universe and every area of human life.

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#### 3. God the Father, Creator and Sustainer

- 3.1 God heard the cry of the Hebrews, liberated them and led them to the Promised Land. This revealed to them the Creator, sustainer and sovereign ruler of all, who liberates the oppressed and demands justice and righteousness from all people.
- 3.2 The incarnation, teaching and miracles of Jesus deepened this revelation. Jesus revealed God as the eternal Father of the eternal Son, and **as** our Father, who indeed loves and cares for all people.
- 3.3 **However**, scripture also uses motherly metaphors to express God's care and compassion; **Therefore, people must remember that** God is Spirit and transcends all gender.

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#### 4. God the Holy Spirit, Life-Giver and Sanctifier

- 4.1 The Holy Spirit is fully God, the very presence and power of God at work in the world and in us.
- 4.2 The Spirit was active in creation and inspired the law, the prophets and the apostles. The Spirit reveals God's Word and roots it in our hearts, convicts us of sin and judgement, moves us to faith in Christ, assures us of God's grace and salvation, unites us to Christ and one another, sanctifies us, moves us to worship and obey God and to forgive and love one another, equips and strengthens us to serve and witness to Christ, and guides us. The **presence and work of the Spirit in the world and the life of believers<sup>ii</sup>** is also the foretaste of God's coming rule.
- 4.3 Every claimed experience or guidance of the Spirit must be tested by God's Word in Holy Scripture.

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#### 5. The Trinity

- 5.1 God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ and outpouring of the Holy Spirit reveal God as Father, Son and Spirit. Yet all three are one and the same indivisible God; all exist eternally with, for and in one another. So from eternity God is not solitary but in communion, and love is at the heart of the Godhead. All are active in creation, reconciliation and regeneration, and sanctification.
- 5.2 God's triune being is a mystery we only dimly understand but are ever to adore.

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### The Revelation of Redemption

#### 6. Revelation, Scripture, Preaching and Personal Witness

- 6.1 Human beings are unable to find and know God or hear God's Word in their own power. But by grace alone, in the power of the Spirit, God's Word breaks through our deafness, calling us to repent and accept Christ as Lord and Saviour.
- 6.2 In the most exact sense Jesus Christ, addressing us through Scripture in the power of the Spirit, is God's Word to us.
- 6.3 The Spirit inspired the writings of the Old and New Testaments and their choice as the faithful record of the Word.
- 6.4 As human documents the Scriptures are conditioned by their times and open to academic analysis. But the Spirit alone uncovers the Word in Scripture to us. That Word judges every claimed revelation.
- 6.5 Every part of Scripture is to be read in the light of the whole and, above all, of Christ, who came as the Messiah,<sup>iii</sup> Lord and Saviour for all.
- 6.6 The Spirit empowers preaching and personal witness that are true to Scripture to become the Word of God. Through them Christ encounters us in the present.

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## 7. The Sacraments

7.1 Christ ordained two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. Both are visible and tangible forms of God's Word to us that apply and seal its promises of forgiveness and salvation.

7.2 Christ constitutes the two rites as sacraments through the spoken word that accompanies them, **words which he himself articulated**. We receive what they offer when we trust in the promise that **Christ, as the Living Word**,<sup>iv</sup> articulates.

7.2 Christ comes to us through Word and sacrament, in the power of his Spirit. The sacraments remind us of his incarnation, death and resurrection in the past, <sup>v</sup>affirm our salvation in the present and anticipate God's final renewal of all things in the future.

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## 8. Baptism<sup>vi</sup>

8.1 Baptism is preceded by repentance and confession of faith in Christ as the crucified and risen Lord. **However, God's covenant community includes both believing adults and their children. The children of baptized and believing parents may thus also be baptized, with the parents confessing faith and promising to nurture them in the faith. Child baptism should not be administered indiscriminately. It never replaces the need to come to personal faith and confess it.**

8.2 It is by pouring on, or immersion in, water (signifying spiritual cleansing and dying to our old life) in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

8.3 The risen Lord is our Baptizer. By baptism along with the spoken word, through faith, he baptizes us with the Spirit, grafts us into his Body and initiates us into the covenant; he washes away our guilt, clothes us with righteousness, gives us new birth and admits us to his holy Table.

8.4 Nevertheless the Spirit regenerates some by the audible Word without baptism, and not all who are baptized are born anew.

8.5 The death of unbaptized children does not remove them from the hope of redemption.

8.6 Baptism happens only once; its promise remains effective for a believer's whole life.

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## 9. Holy Communion

9.1 The Lord Jesus instituted Holy Communion as taking, giving thanks, breaking and sharing bread and wine that signify his body and blood.

9.2 Christ is the risen and living Host at the Table. Through the Spirit, he feeds us with his very body and blood, applying to us the benefits of his death and resurrection; he renews God's covenant of forgiveness and reconciliation and our union with him and with one another in his Body, empowering us to overcome temptation and to share his mission in the world.

9.3 Only those who grieve for their sins but trust in God's grace and have made peace with all whom they have offended are ready for the sacrament.

9.4 Communion is the crown of worship and should be celebrated regularly.

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## 10. Natural Revelation

10.1 The universe in all its grandeur points beyond itself to its Creator, and conscience makes people dimly aware of God's righteousness and judgement. But left to themselves, corrupted by sin, human beings fashion false ideas of God and of the human condition.

10.2 We cannot discover God for ourselves, whether in nature, history or the depths of our own being, or by reason or religious feeling. Only through Jesus Christ do we truly come to know God. Then, through the spectacles of Scripture, we see that God has created all things.

10.3 Conscience itself must be transformed and made captive to Christ.

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## 11. Revelation and Religion

11.1 Some religions display impressive elements of spirituality and morality. But all religion stands under God's judgement. Before the one true God we are all spiritually poor.<sup>vii</sup> Only God's grace in Christ puts us right with God.

11.2 Christ died for all people. But we have no right to impose his Lordship on others. Instead in humility and penitence we should work for religious freedom for all—and work with adherents of other religions for justice, peace and the environment. **Indeed Christians need to repent for past persecutions of, and discrimination against, others.**

11.3 At the same time Christ calls us to witness to all people of every, and of no, religion that he is the one Lord and Saviour, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

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## 12. Revelation and Culture

12.1 God's Word comes to us in Scripture, clothed in ancient middle eastern cultures. To communicate the gospel to others we need to express it in their own language and cultural concepts. But culture tends to enmesh the gospel's values with its own. Scripture itself corrects the cultural patriarchalism and male-centredness that much of it expresses.

12.2 God's revelation judges the values and practices of every culture. It judges materialism, consumerism, militarism and sexual licence, for instance.

12.3 It also judges any cultural veneration of ancestors that compromises the unique role of Jesus Christ. For he alone mediates between us and God; his sacrifice alone suffices, once and for all. His intercession alone makes our prayers effective.

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Now 1547 in all as compared with 1218 in Trevor Gaunt's summary.

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<sup>i</sup> It is most appropriate to point out that the Messiah came, first of all, to deliver the Jews. However, it is misleading to imply that all Jews of the time were oppressed. Of course, from a sound theological perspective, they were indeed oppressed under sin and under the law (and certainly most of them were politically, socially and religiously oppressed too) – yet the phrase “*in their oppression*” is too loaded in our modern context where the assumption can be made that Jesus came to deliver only those who are oppressed on a politico-socio-economic level. Hence I would support a wording that is shorter and less vulnerable to political interpretation such as: “Jesus came to the Jews as their Messiah”.

<sup>ii</sup> The Holy Spirit, in it’s *personhood*, is not the foretaste of God’s coming rule, in fact the Holy Spirit is God who rules; however the Spirit’s work and presence – in all its varied manifestations – is the foretaste of God’s coming rule. This statement needs to be less ambiguous, thus I suggest that the qualifying words - “The **presence and work of the Spirit in the world and the life of believers**” - be inserted.

<sup>iii</sup> Note again, as in the first instance, the loaded wording. Jesus is the Messiah of all, not only the poor and oppressed. As stated above, I do appreciate that all people are in one way or another oppressed and impoverished; However, in our contemporary situation such wording lends itself to a possible exclusive identification with those who are oppressed politically, culturally, socially, etc and impoverished economically, etc – this is a possible interpretation we must avoid in a document intended for our entire denomination, which includes individuals who would not consider themselves ‘oppressed’ according to modern usage of this term; yet rightly believe that Christ is nevertheless still their saviour.

I propose that this sentence reads simply, “...who came as the Messiah, Lord and Saviour for all.”

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<sup>iv</sup> It is essential that we point clearly to the fact that the words and phrases used during the sacraments do not carry any magical power in and of themselves – rather they are uttered in faithfulness to the command of Christ, who presides over both sacraments. Albeit that these utterances are spoken through us, it is only insofar as the Living Word makes these promises and is trusted to fulfil such that we receive what the Living Word articulates.

I propose the following wording: “*Christ constitutes the two rites as sacraments through the spoken word that accompanies them, **words which he himself articulated**. We receive what they offer when we trust in the promise that **Christ, as the Living Word,**<sup>iv</sup> articulates.”*

<sup>v</sup> The sacraments certainly affirm our salvation, they reflect the nature of it and the means by which it was effected, but they in no way effect (i.e. make effective or bring into effect the reality of) our salvation. I suggest that the word “effect” be removed from the sentence entirely since it may be misleading to some.

<sup>vi</sup> I understand that to restructure the entire paragraph on baptism might be problematic from a logistical point of view. Nevertheless, it is vitally important to insert the original section 8.4 as the qualifying statement for an otherwise potentially misleading opening sentence.

To begin by declaring that repentance and confession of faith precedes (presumably chronologically) the rite of baptism and then to withhold the qualifying statement for the defense of Infant Baptism (in light of this opening statement) until point 8.4 is irresponsible and undermines the foundational truth and importance of Infant Baptism.

<sup>vii</sup> This is quite clearly a contradiction of terms – the true nature of being Christian presupposes not being in self, but rather being *in Christ*. We are new in Christ and *he is our righteousness*.

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Moreover, his is a perfect and spotless righteousness. To deny this truth is to deny the very foundation upon which we have been reconciled to God. Based on this truth I would point out that the sentence referred to is moot; and I propose that the sentence be left out altogether.

Instead of being confused into thinking that they are sometimes in Christ and at other times not, Christians should celebrate this as a mysterious reality and be motivated by it to live humbly – since it is the free gift of grace completely un-deserved by us.