

THE CANDLESTAND STATEMENT

Ecumenical Considerations regarding the Charismatic Movement

The Candlestand Statement was written in 2004 by a fellowship of dedicated men and a woman in Amersfoort, 2004. They came from various countries, all with their good and bad experiences with the Charismatic Movement.

The final result had the following content:

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PREAMBLE

To all believers of Reformed faith, and to all who desire to have sound biblical teaching:

We, church leaders of different churches and nationalities, being concerned about the growing influence of the Charismatic Movement around the world and the unprepared state of our churches to meet its impact, feel obliged to make the following statements about the use of the Holy Bible, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the gifts of grace.

One of the foremost characteristics of Reformed or Presbyterian churches is that they should always be reforming - *Ecclesia Reformata Semper Reformanda*. This rule calls the churches that are rooted in the Great Reformation to a progressive and dynamic attitude and a willingness always to adjust to the Word of God alone - *Sola Scriptura*. The church must apply its developing insights from God's Word to the needs of our ever changing times and circumstances. This important characteristic of being Reformed should guard the church against formalism, traditionalism, or laziness when it comes to meeting the concrete needs of the church in her context. Church history shows that Reformed and Presbyterian churches have striven to be faithful and zealous in living up to the Reformed standards and in meeting the criteria of being a true church of Jesus Christ.



On the other hand, we have to acknowledge that we and other so-called "traditional churches" are not always successful in avoiding unhealthy and formalistic views on tradition and doctrine. Sometimes we have to admit that churches become trapped in the pitfalls of rigid formalism, traditionalism, or dogmatism.

We also observe that many Christian churches tolerate the misleading influence of false teachings in their midst. We briefly mention liberalism, modernism, and wrong forms of ecumenism. This creates fertile soil for all kinds of teaching in the churches, prepares the way for secularism, or for the Charismatic Movement.

Even when we do not recognise the above-mentioned elements in our own churches, the Bible gives us enough reason to regularly examine ourselves by asking important questions about biblical standards of Christian spirituality and church-life. Do we really strive to live up to these standards? Or have we become lukewarm and clever in making up arguments, hiding behind our church-walls and so avoiding the consequences of our confession which call for holiness and being obedient children of God's covenant?

With regard to the work of the Holy Spirit: are we receptive or alert to the leading of the Spirit? Or are we suppressing private experiences of the Spirit through the Word of God by not allowing the expression of emotions and special experiences in our worship or in our Christian lives? Are we intentionally letting go of the ethical aspects of our Christian lives, leading to a life not transformed by the Word of God but conforming to the standards of the world?

We do not suggest easy answers to all these questions; however, we should be aware of our responsibility to lead the churches that Jesus Christ has entrusted to us away from pitfalls and cliffs. If not, we are preparing the ground for falsehood to grow abundantly within our ranks, overcoming and swallowing up our sound teachings. These teachings which, however sound they might be, have not succeeded in preserving the church from lifelessness, lukewarmness, and unholiness. Therefore, we humble ourselves before our Lord and we

confess our weaknesses and shortcomings in leading his beloved church and pledge to make ourselves more available in his service.

At the same time we pray for his wisdom and guidance to fight against any false teaching and prophecy, and to do this in a biblical, loving way. Our attitude should be open to other opinions, receptive to good points and suggestions, and avoid being too quick to judge or prejudice other teachings or understandings of God's Word. We should show a sincere willingness to seek points of contacts with others and together to find the truth of God's Word.

Our loving and respectful attitude should not excuse us from persevering in sound teaching, as well as openly and clearly refuting false teachings suited to the desires of men. In order that we may live according to the biblical standards of persevering in sound doctrine and true Christian life - through faith alone – Sola Fide, dependent on God's grace alone – Sola Gratia, let us be patient. Let the love of Christ reign in our hearts and determine our attitude.

May the Lord help us and may his Spirit guide us to understand the Word of God and so preserve the truth in his Church. To Him who is able to establish us by the gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, to the only wise God, be glory forever, through Jesus Christ!

Glory be to Him alone - Soli Deo Gloria! Amen.

Candlestand-Church, Amersfoort, Pentecost 2004

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PART 1

REVELATION AND THE BIBLE

1.1 About revelation

1.1 * 1 Revelation

We believe in the sovereign and almighty God, creator of heaven, earth, and all that is created. He made man according to his image and likeness, giving him special qualities, making him responsible and able to listen, answer, and understand. The eternal God took the initiative to make Himself known to man. He was in fellowship with man, revealing his will, love, and holiness to him. But man gave ear to the words of Satan. As a result, man subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, curse, and corruption.

Irrespective of that, God did not cease to reveal Himself to man, but He came to search for him and to call him. He punished man because of his rebellion, but also promised the coming of a Saviour. A divine plan for the reconciliation of all things was set up, to be fulfilled along the destined and designed lines of history. We confess the accomplishment of this plan in Jesus Christ, in order that, as recorded for us in Scripture, "We may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

1.1 * 2 The Bible

God's revelation received its climax and centre in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2). By his Holy Spirit, God carefully handed down all that we need to know about Him and his redemptive works. We receive this knowledge through the Holy Scriptures, which covers the whole history of redemption, or the teachings of the prophets and apostles. The works of creation and providence give us a sense of the existence of a divine being. The Bible is the only source containing sufficient information to really know the creator of all things. By the Bible we also know the whole will of God needed for our salvation and comfort, as well as for the edification and guidance of our personal and congregational lives.

1.1 * 3 The completeness of the Bible

We believe that God has completed this work of authoritative revelation, recorded for us in Scripture. By reading and explaining Scripture, the Holy Spirit will lead us to understand God's plan and will, as well as to believe his promises for today and for the days to come. The truth of the Bible, to which we subject ourselves, provides the only source for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, and adequately equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

1.2 Understanding the Bible

1.2 * 4 The Bible and the church

We receive the sixty-six books of the Bible, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, as the only and sufficient source by which the church knows God and his redemptive works. Although the Bible is composed of many different books, we acknowledge that it conveys the one, coherent story of God's redemptive revelation. It is through this coherent story of God's revelation that we are enabled to know the Triune God, his great deeds, and his deep love for his creation and mankind. The church of all ages is established through the witness of the prophets and apostles (Eph

2:20). The church, being grateful for this special love and fully trusting that God will accomplish his plan, is equipped and illuminated by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of total restoration in Christ Jesus to the world.

1.2 * 5 The need for Bible interpretation

We believe that the Bible can be read and understood by everyone who submits himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we believe too that a thorough and competent method of interpreting the Bible is desirable and should therefore be encouraged so that the church will be able to carry out its mandate and responsibilities in the right way. The need for such a method of interpretation is caused by the long historical distance between the ancient context of the Bible and the present situation of the church. This need is felt even more due to the rise of modern ideas which deny the divine authority of the Scriptures.

Such a method of interpretation is needed for the faithful proclamation of the gospel and for the edification and expansion of the church. It provides a sound basis for theological understanding, and is an important tool for fruitful Bible study.

We believe that the church should pray for opportunities to provide appropriate training to ensure that the members of the church are dedicated and spiritually motivated. Church leaders should be able to interpret the Bible in the right way and so further the proclamation of the gospel, good preaching, and sound theological development.

1.2 * 6 Hermeneutics and exegesis

We believe that biblical passages as a whole communicate in a more or less clear way (notwithstanding that some are also complicated) what the Divine Author intended to communicate.

We believe that the biblical text contains historical, literary, and doctrinal aspects. We believe in the trustworthiness of biblical events, the writer, and the text. We believe that as a basis for this comprehensive mandate and responsibility of the church, the goal of Bible interpretation is to discover the intention of the Divine Author. Therefore we have to make every effort to understand his original meaning and how this is communicated in the text to the hearers. We believe that in our efforts to understand the original meaning of the text it is important for us to acknowledge that these texts are based on specific phases in the coherent story of God's revelation.

For example, it is important to take into account that the books of the New Testament are related to the specific transitional phase in the realization of God's plan. The life and work of Jesus Christ broke down the temporary wall between Israel and the nations. The proclamation of the gospel initiated the gathering of the worldwide church.

1.2 * 7 Application

We apply Scripture to our present times by transferring the author's meaning to our context. It is to be expected that applications may vary in terms of time and place. For example, we do not consider our government to be of a theocratic nature as it was during the old covenant. Compared to biblical times our society is influenced by very different religions, philosophies, ideologies, and world views. The situation of our modern world is incomparable with the situation in which the first congregations lived.

Therefore, when applying the Bible to our modern times, we have to take into account that many factors are different. We should avoid superficial similarities and we are obligated to supply understanding on the basis of good studies.

This does not discourage the members of the church from reading their Bible every day. On the contrary, regular reading provides more understanding. There should be a willingness to read, an openness to accept guidance and correction by means of Bible study, and a regular listening to the preaching and teaching of the Word.

1.3 THE POWER OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

1.3 * 8 The Scriptures as a precious gift

We confess that the Holy Spirit breathed the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as his very precious gift or charisma. By giving these written documents the Spirit convinces us that God's revelation is reliable, unchangeable, and without deceit. As we read and hear Scripture we should express our gratefulness to the Spirit. For believers this reading and hearing is an act of obedience by which the Spirit opens their hearts and lives, governing and renewing them in Christ.

1.3 * 9 The power of the Scriptures

We confess that the Holy Spirit cares for the Scriptures and continues to empower the biblical text. We realize that as we study the Bible better, we come in a closer relationship with God. We hear the loving voice of our Saviour speaking to us in our daily lives, and in this way we experience intimate fellowship with the Spirit. God Himself promised that his Spirit would be present whenever a believer opens the Bible and reads it. "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and the one who hears it and takes to the heart what is written in it" (Rev 1:3). This close fellowship with the Word of God strengthens faith, comforts, and makes the believer trust in the Lord. The power of the Spirit will fill him more and more and enable him to rely fully on the Lord Jesus Christ during good and evil times (Eccl 7:14).

1.3 * 10 The messenger of the Scriptures

We confess that the Bible communicates divine revelation to us. In its divine mysteries it is far beyond our human capabilities of understanding (Rom 11:32). We believe that God chooses people to bring the message of redemption: "Blessed are the feet of those who bring good tidings" (Isa 52:7). Therefore the messenger should be trustworthy, a solid, convinced believer who honours Scripture as the gift of the Holy Spirit. As the result of faithful prayer the Holy Spirit will graciously bless the message that has been prepared by means of proper study and meditation. The Holy Spirit then exercises his power and enables the reader and listener to really hear and accept the content of the message. We pray for a humble attitude on the part of preachers and teachers by which they leave the power and the effect of the preaching in the hand of the living Lord and the Holy Spirit.

1.3 * 11 Illumination and personal experience

We believe that the preaching of the Word of God bears fruit in the lives of his children. By this holy work the Spirit is leading, guiding, illuminating, and governing our lives. He gives true understanding into the Scriptures (1 Cor 2:16). This work of the Spirit influences our whole being: mind, soul, emotions, and conscience. For this reason we sometimes explain special experiences or unexpected circumstances as God's guiding hand in our personal lives. For example, he may use them to lead us to godliness.

Dreams are part of a natural process associated with daily life. In general, a dream today, as a reflection on human perceptions, can not be a normative standard by which to know the truth. The guidance of dreams and other special experiences always has to be subjected to the authoritative message of the

Bible. It is our responsibility to let ourselves be led, guided, and transformed by the Spirit. He uses our human insights in such a way that we plan, act, receive advice from others, and correct our errors. However, we should not place too much stress on this for it will lead us to neglect God's fatherly guidance.

The link between the proclamation of the Word of God and its faithful reading will always exist and should remain in place to prevent us from drifting away on the waves of human invention and feeling.

1.3 * 12 Expectation of perfect revelation

We believe that on this earth and in our times we must live our Christian lives in the expectation of the coming of Christ. There is a longing for more perfect times. "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). This expectation of the coming of this full revelation fills us with comfort and leads us to pray. As was revealed to John, "The dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be his people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev 21:3, 4). Actually, we do not know what we ought to pray for, "But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom 8:26). The Lord taught us to persevere by praying, hoping, and patiently waiting for the fulfilment of all his promises. In doing this we are encouraged by the intercession of the Holy Spirit. He helps us in our weakness and He is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession (Eph 1:13-14).

Refutations

1. We refute all teaching which denies that God has completed the work of authoritative revelation in the Bible. It is not to be expected that God still inspires special men to add specific or private authoritative revelation to bypass his already completed revelation.
2. We do not believe that the Bible is equal to God, nor do we expect any magical power from its written or spoken words. God is not to be reduced to the biblical text, nor may that text be easily manipulated and applied according to one's needs or desires.
3. We refute the misuse of the Bible, Bible passages, specific verses, or even words, in order to derive extra power to heal or to prosper. There is no biblical basis for the teaching that God will perform miracles by repeating his words, or by forceful reading or whispering.
4. The Bible is not to be seen as *logos* (Greek word meaning "word") which becomes powerful *rhema* (another Greek word meaning "word") by speaking it. We refute the distinction made up between these words for the sake of defending a certain use of the Bible to work spiritual powers.
5. We refute all desires (and prayers) to receive instant messages for our daily life directly from God, bypassing Scripture.
6. We refute the preference given to direct personal experiences (for example, direct guidance from the Holy Spirit by inner voices and visions). This preference goes beyond the promises of the covenant we live in, neglects the creational way of exercising our responsibilities, and forsakes the sound use of the Scriptures.
7. We refute every teaching claiming that dreams are directives in things concerning the church and the Christian affairs and do not need to be subject to the authority of the Scriptures. This is without biblical support and must not be taught or pursued. There is no room for anyone to make his or her dreams a norm if they conflict with the Scriptures.

PART 2

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

2.1 About the Trinity

2.1 * 13 The triune God

We believe that God has revealed Himself as the one, true, and living God, from eternity to eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three persons are one, each having his specific identity and function, working together in communion and interaction, accomplishing one will and plan in creation and recreation.

This God, by his Word and Spirit, accomplished the good work of creation, which was corrupted by the rebellion of mankind. God however loved the world, so He determined to reconcile Himself with creation and mankind. He revealed Himself by establishing his faithfulness as the God of the covenant. This plan follows the God-given lines and periods of redemptive history, in which each of the three divine persons carry out their allocated tasks, acting according to their own identity and function.

2.1 * 14 God the Father

We believe that God put enmity between Satan and mankind, thus submitting his creation to the powers of death. At the same time He established his covenant of grace by promising a mediating Saviour and Redeemer to restore the broken bond between God and man, and to renew his beautiful creation. He fulfilled this promise in history, becoming the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the people of Israel. God promised to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham's seed, fulfilling his promise by sending his Son into this corrupt world to become the promised mediator, firstly to Israel, then to the whole world. This is Christ, the only and eternal Son, the Word through whom all things were created. In this God revealed Himself to be the Father of all, the creator and sustainer, full of love for his creation and especially to mankind.

2.1 * 15 God the Son

The Son fulfilled this task by not considering his equality as something to be grasped, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Phil 2:6-8). He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, thus taking up our infirmities and carrying our sorrows. By doing so He became the true cornerstone of the church, the gathering of those who believe in Christ. Thus the Son, whom we know by his name Jesus Christ, overcame death and "God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). He sits at the right hand of God the Father to plead for us. He has promised to return at the end of time, being history's Beginning and End, to judge the living and the dead and to finally and fully accomplish God's plan of restoring creation.

2.1 * 16 God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is together with the Father and the Son the one and eternal God. He moved over the waters at creation (Gen 1:2), guided the people of God throughout the Old Testament, and overshadowed the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35). The Father and the Son poured out the Spirit on the day of Pentecost to bring the beautiful message of reconciliation to people of every language and nation, even

to the ends of the earth. He is the Comforter of the church, the one who fills the disciples of Christ with courage and understanding, with faith and trust. He has promised to be with us in the new covenant, putting God's promises and demands in the minds and writing it on the hearts of the believers, bestowing God's precious gifts to proclaim the gospel, gathering and protecting God's people, and preparing them for eternal life on the new earth.

2.1 * 17 Oneness and interaction

Faith in this triune God is always focussed on communion with the one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, never on communion with one of the three persons alone. God the Father sent his Son and the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to accomplish one and the same goal. The Spirit brings us to the Son, the Mediator, and by the Son we have access to the Father becoming his children, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Pet 2:9a).

2.1 * 18 People of the triune God

As God's people we know that it is our responsibility and calling to obey our Lord. By our words and deeds we praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things (1 Cor 8:6). We encourage one another to eagerly long for the return of Christ, and to pray in communion with the Spirit "Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus, come soon!"

We confess that the doctrine of the Trinity is far beyond our human understanding, and we thank our God and worship the Trinity according to his revelation.

Refutations

8. We refute any teaching that distinguishes between three (or more) different dispensations, for instance the dispensation of the Father (which is in the Old Testament), the dispensation of the Son (which is the time of Jesus' life on earth), and the dispensation of the Spirit (which is the time after Pentecost until the second coming of Jesus). According to this teaching every new dispensation rendered the former as invalid and inferior. This teaching does not acknowledge the unity of God in redemptive history. It causes a separation where there should be communion inside the Trinity.

9. We refute the teaching that concentrates worship on only one person of the Trinity, worshipping only the Holy Spirit, or only the Son, where we should worship the Trinity. This results in a distortion of God's coherent redemptive plan. The work of the Spirit is ineffective without the Son, the work of the Son is ineffective without the Spirit, and the Father will not gather his people without the work of both the Son and the Spirit.

10. We also refute the view that the Christ has already returned in other human forms, or in invisible forms. We also can not determine or prophesy when and where He will return to earth. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Matt 24:36).

2.2 The experience of the Spirit

2.2 * 19 Experience

As the people of the triune God we live in faith; this faith is the knowledge and confidence that our sins are forgiven and everlasting life is guaranteed to us. This knowledge and confidence has much to do with our minds, but at the same time it also deals with our whole human being, addressing and changing all our human faculties. It touches our reality and becomes a true and vivid experience to our mind, will, and emotions; it comes into our daily lives, filling us and leavening us as yeast leavens the whole bread. It goes with us, moving with us wherever we go and in whatever we do. It covers our whole being.

In this life we are led by the Holy Spirit, who protects us from drifting away on the waves of our human desires and emotions. The ultimate goal of his work is not only to produce in us an intellectual understanding, but to reach our hearts and feelings through the Word, giving us true assurance of our personal bond with the triune God. In this process the Holy Spirit, through the Word, transforms our lives in all areas.

2.2 * 20 Experience and emotions in the Bible

Experience and emotions form an integral part of our covenantal life. Paul shows us that love is the most excellent way (1 Cor 13). This is in line with the words of Jesus, when He said that the core of God's law is love. This has to do with our actions, feelings, and experiences. In the covenant of grace we experience all kinds of emotions. For example, peace (Ps 131), joy (Phil 4:4), grief and sorrow (Ps 42; Ps 51; 2 Cor 7), anger (Gal 1:8, 9; Luke 19:45-46), contentment and satisfaction in all situations (Phil 4:11-12).

Our mind and thoughts are to be seen as essential levels of Christian experience; the Spirit guides us into the full understanding of the apostolic faith by providing insight and wisdom. The Apostle Paul was overwhelmed with joy and praise when he experienced the work of the Spirit in his life. Although he was aware of the limitations of human understanding, he could not help but express himself thus: "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 counselor? 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).

2.2 * 21 Experience of the Spirit

The church experiences the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in diverse forms:

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in Acts

We believe that Jesus Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon his church in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In accordance with the promise, the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into the full truth of Christ (John 16:13). In this way they became the legitimate, authoritative, and final witnesses of Christ at a time of transition in the church during the New Testament age. In order to overcome the problems associated with this transition, the Spirit gave extra demonstrations as signs to make the Jewish believers accept the spreading of the Gospel beyond Jewish boundaries, thereby promoting the international and intercultural unity of the church. Firstly, in Samaria the Spirit publicly and

immediately underlined the entrance of the first non-Jews to the New Testament church at the request of the apostles (Acts 8:14-17). Secondly, the same happened when the first Roman believers in Caesarea confessed Christ to be their Lord (Acts 10:44-48), and so convinced Peter and the apostles too (Acts 11). Thirdly, in Ephesus the Spirit demonstrated his presence because John's disciples had an incomplete awareness of Christ, as well he emphasized Paul's authority (Acts 19:1-7).

The filling of the Holy Spirit

We believe that Scripture teaches Jesus' ongoing immersion of people with the Spirit and fire. This immersion represents blessing and judgment (Matt 3:11-12).

In the context of being holy (not filled with wine), Scripture tells unholy people to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). We also read the phrase "filled with the Spirit" when Scripture describes the state of the Son, being sent by the Father (John 3:34). The apostles were filled with the Spirit in order to confront opposition to the gospel (Acts 2:12; 4:8). Being filled with the Spirit is especially dispensed to believers in order to enable them to boldly bring the gospel of Christ at various times and to different locations, to encourage one another, to worship in truth, and to enjoy the Christian life.

The purpose of the filling

To be filled by the Spirit means that our heart, soul, mind, and will is led and governed by the Spirit to enable us to boldly confess Christ and to be fully committed to Him. The Spirit will then perform in us his ongoing comprehensive transformation of spirit, mind, emotion, desire, and will. The believer thus becomes like a spring of water to eternal life (John 7:38-39). This experience serves our sanctification and impacts on the preaching of the gospel. Believers are therefore urged to be eager in praying to receive spiritual wisdom and love, to live as children of light (Eph 5:8-21), producing the fruit of the Spirit and longing for the return of Christ.

The glory of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit grants us the joy of intimately knowing Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and unites us to the body of Christ's world-wide church. We praise and glorify Him for his wondrous work of regeneration, faith, and transformation of our lives. We thank Him for interceding in prayer for us and for steadily renewing our hope (Rom 8:26, 27).

Glory, knowledge, wisdom, and power be to the Holy Spirit, in unity with the Father and the Son, for ever and ever. Amen.

Refutations

11. We refute the misuse of the term "baptism with the Spirit" as a separate experience to be expected or required in the lives of all believers as "a second blessing." It disqualifies the work that the Holy Spirit has already done and over-emphasizes the experience that is expected, especially the emotional and the extra-ordinary manifestation of it. The term "baptism with the Spirit" refers to the totality of the Holy Spirit's manifestation.

12. The event of Pentecost happened once and for all in redemptive history, and we refute those teachings that present it as a model for believers, suggesting that we all should have our own personal Pentecost.

2.3 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, whom we glorify, graciously equips the church with various gifts, also called charismata.

2.3 * 22 Definition of gifts

Charismata are, by their literal meaning, to be understood as gifts of grace that are given freely by God and cannot be earned or claimed by men. God will give these gifts, employing them according to his will, with the purpose of meeting the actual needs of his people and accomplishing his plan of reconciliation following the pattern of redemptive history.

This means that these gifts are always given to meet a special need or development, to guide the people of God, to found, unite, and expand the church. He gave gifts during the Old Testament, the New Testament, and he also gives them today.

2.3 * 23 Purpose of gifts

We add that the Holy Spirit dedicates his gifts for the good of the church, as it is written, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). >From this imagery of the body we learn that the unity of the church has priority over the diversity of gifts. The diversity is given to the church to strengthen the unity and each gift that exalts itself above another disqualifies itself: "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). It is therefore our desire and joy to see all the members loving and serving one another with the various gifts of the Holy Spirit.

2.3 * 24 Gifts in history

We learn from the Bible that the Holy Spirit bestows his gifts upon the church in various ways, and in accordance with needs, times, and circumstances:

Charismata in the Old Testament

God used a range of gifts among his people in preserving the covenant, protecting them, establishing worship, and preparing for the coming of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. For example: the judges, the prophets, the kings, gifts of speech and wisdom, gifts of interpreting dreams, gifts to build the tabernacle and temple. Thus God preserved the progress of his work throughout history.

Charismata in the New Testament

The Lord Jesus Christ sent out his disciples to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. This mission required enabling gifts, all serving God's purpose of reconciling Himself with creation and mankind. He gave his Holy Spirit, who is the most precious gift of all. To the first church He gave gifts fitting to the needs of young congregations. This tells us that the Spirit gives according to special needs and times. For example:

- Gifts to found the church: apostles, prophets, eyewitnesses, words of wisdom, signs of tongues, miracles;
- Gifts to unite and to guard the church: apostles, elders, shepherds, love;
- Gifts to prepare for the return of Christ: teachers, preachers;
- Gifts to worship God: ministers of the Word, presbyters, involvement of gifted members;
- Gifts to edify the congregation and shepherd its members: presbytery, wisdom, administrators, etc;

- Gifts to proclaim the gospel and preach the Kingdom of Christ: evangelists.

2.3 * 25 Foundational gifts

We receive “the apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church, with Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). The office of apostle came to an end after the death of the last apostle. However, the fruit of their ministry, witness, and teaching lives on in the life and ministry of the church today. The Bible remains the basis of this apostolic faith. The office bearers of the church, namely the elders and deacons, are called to preserve the church on this foundation and to prepare God’s people for various works of service (Eph 4:12). We accept these leaders as gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that faith, hope, and love are permanent and important gifts for the well being of the church. And even more, they are a witness to the world so that the world may believe that the Father has sent the Son for our salvation (John 17:21).

2.3 * 26 Additional gifts

We believe that the Lord adds many kinds of blessings to build the church on this foundation. The continuity between the first church and the church of today is given and guaranteed in the living God and his foundational gifts. We gratefully admire his administration of additional gifts, as he determines in time and space. The authority of the Lord and the apostolic teaching governs the application and use of the gifts by believers. As a result, believers cannot claim specific gifts today or claim any permanent gift-related office or authority. We also state that believers cannot limit the Holy Spirit in giving what He wants. We cannot list all the gifts of the Holy Spirit or comment on them, because they are multiple.

On the most debated gifts we want to make these comments:

About tongues

Tongues refer to speaking in strange utterances or real languages, which are not understandable unless interpreted. We see it as a dispensable gift and we want to treat it according to the instructions of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

About healing

The Lord can heal the sick in answer to our prayers, but we do not believe that the authority of the healer exceeds the authority of Scripture, nor do we recognize the gift of healing as a permanent office (see Earthly blessings).

About prophecy

The application of the apostolic word can be considered as prophetic speech, but we don’t expect any additional revelation and do not believe the restoration of this office (See Revelation).

2.3 * 27 God’s sovereignty and our responsibility

It is our conviction that the Holy Spirit, in correlation with the triune Godhead, decides on what, when, and how He wants to bless us with his gifts. The church has the responsibility to observe both the creational and the spiritual gifts, and to acknowledge them with discernment. The Apostle John admonishes us: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1).

With full dedication the church has to use the provided talents and received gifts. She should be open to reform habits, structures, and other practices that can hinder the building of the church as a royal priesthood. This responsibility compels the church to pray and to strive for the greater gifts, not in a way of claiming, pushing, and manipulating God, but always in dependence and accordance with his divine will and wisdom, saying, "Not our will, but Your will be done" (Matt 26:40).

Refutations

13. We refute the teaching that churches which do not practice speaking in tongues during worship service are guilty of having quenched the Holy Spirit, or of expecting too little from God.

14. We refute the teaching that the gift of speaking in tongues was ever meant to serve the enlargement or enrichment of Christian experience.

15. We warn against pride, because in church history additional gifts have prevailed often over love and distorted unity.

16. We also refute the view that we can push or even force the Lord to give special gifts by our prayers and fasting.

17. We reject all claims of divine authority that are not based on the Word. We also remember the warning of the Apostle Paul: "Savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:29-30)

PART 3

CHRISTIAN LIFE

3.1 Spiritual blessings

3.1 * 28 Spiritual blessings and our deliverance

We confess that God made man in his own image, good, righteous, and holy. However, man disobeyed God's commands and subjected himself to sin and consequently to God's curse and also death. This original sin has been inherited by all generations of the human race (Rom 3:23). They can not deliver themselves from the slavery of sin.

We believe that God, who is merciful and just, took the redemptive initiative by sending his Son to reconcile us with Him and provide eternal salvation for us. We believe that we are saved and justified by grace alone, through faith, which is also a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9). In this faith we, as adopted children of God (Gal 4:5-7), have our assurance of salvation, as stated in Romans 8:38-39: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

3.1 * 29 Spiritual blessings and our responsibility

We confess that we are saved by grace alone and have a firm assurance of salvation. However, we have the responsibility to live our Christian lives according to God's will (Eph 2:10). The freedom we have in Christ is not a freedom to sin but that of our submission to the will of the Spirit (Gal 5:1). We read in the Bible time and again the call for holiness. We are commanded to be holy because of the holiness of our God and Saviour (1 Pet 1:15), because of the power of the Spirit who works in us (2 Tim 1:7), and because of the return of Jesus (Heb12:14). The Bible urges us to "continue to work out our salvation," that is to live out our Christian lives in holiness in accordance to the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ (Phil 2:12). We confess that our "good deeds" are the proof of our true Christian lives.

We are called to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18; Col 2:6). By doing this we will enjoy the reality of the Holy Spirit working in our lives allowing us to grow in all aspects and enabling us to respond to the gifts and talents that God has given us.

We confess that our Christian lives must bear fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit affirms that our Christian lives are true. Since we live by the Spirit we are to keep in step with the Spirit, and we begin to produce the fruit of the Spirit, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23).

We confess that our Christian life is an ever-progressing life. It is a lifelong process of sanctification towards a perfection or glorification which will be attained in future when Christ returns. In this process we struggle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Therefore we continually need to repent and to pray for forgiveness, as well as a willingness to submit ourselves to and be transformed by the Spirit.

We believe that in the process of sanctification, we are not struggling by ourselves but are totally dependent on the help of the Holy Spirit. The sanctification process is inner-transforming, wrought by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. It testifies in us that we belong to Christ and therefore we have crucified our sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Refutations

18. We refute the teaching that justification by faith alone is not sufficient and should be complemented by "full justification," that is by the way of strict discipline, ascetic lifestyle, lengthy prayers, etc. This teaching depends largely on our human abilities and works. It makes salvation man-centred instead of Christ-centred.

19. We refute all teachings that we are capable of achieving perfection, freed from the flaw of our sinful nature. Such teachings will lead us into distress and uncertainty, causing desolate and fruitless struggle in our lives or hypocrisy.

20. We refute the teaching that a believer can obtain a higher level of holiness by following special prescribed steps, such as baptism in the Spirit or speaking in tongues.

21. We refute an exaggerated stress on covenantal assurance, causing an abuse of grace in our churches, a neglect of the necessity of regeneration, a laziness in living a new sanctified life, a failure to produce the nine-fold fruits of the Spirit, and a giving up in our struggle against our sins and shortcomings.

3.2 Earthly blessings

3.2 * 30 Our almighty, sovereign God and his covenantal faithfulness

We confess that our God is the almighty and sovereign God. He is independent in his ruling and governing of the world. He is the almighty creator and we are his creatures. "By Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him" (Col1:16). He sustains and governs the whole creation and by his almighty power He holds in check our enemies, the devil, demons, and spirits. What is impossible for man is possible for God (Mark 9:23). He speaks and it will be done.

We confess that this almighty and sovereign God is our faithful Father in Jesus Christ. He loves us as his children and by this we know for sure that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

3.2 * 31 Sin and suffering

We confess that by the rebellion of man sin came into God's beautiful world, causing the world to be cursed and man to be deprived of his ability to do good. Due to this fall into sin, all living creatures are subject to suffering and finally to death.

To show his mercy God established the covenant of grace, promising the Saviour. He does not abandon his world, nor does He give up on sustaining all things. His ultimate goal is complete deliverance and the recreation of all things. He comforts his people with his promise that "He will wipe every tear from our eyes; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4).

This "old order of things" is the order to which we, although being in Christ, are still subjected during our earthly lives. All men, regardless of their belief or unbelief, face suffering of all kinds. Death comes to us by means of illness, accidents, wars, and famines. Moreover, many times believers are killed as martyrs, as stated in Hebrews 11 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 and verified in church history. It is impossible for man to escape the conditions of this "old order of things," but in all this we, as God's children, trust the almighty God as our Father, who by his providence will surely fulfill all his promises.

3.2 * 32 Our caring God and our responsibility

We confess our God to be a caring God. He promised his chosen people, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (see Genesis 17:3-8 and Exodus 3:14). By this He established his covenant, and He related Himself directly to the history of a sinful but also a suffering people. He sustains us and helps us during our times of suffering. So we confess that He is a comforting God, giving hope and light in the valley of death (Ps 23:4; Luke 1:79). We experience his providence toward us, sometimes in extraordinary ways,

for example in healings or in unexpected relief in the midst of hardship. These miracles are the proof of God's care and loving presence, intended to carry us to the core of the gospel. They are the signs of the coming kingdom, signs of a glorious time and place to come.

We confess that when relief is not given we do not need to despair, because God's covenantal promises will endure. Many believers have experienced that sufferings have a positive meaning and impact as we learn to submit ourselves to God's sovereignty and plan. In times of suffering we become more active and we pray to our God as the Almighty who also can and does perform miracles.

3.2 * 33 Prayer

When we pray we commit ourselves to our gracious God, both confessing his sovereignty and pleading with him to realize his redemptive plan. Living in God's covenant makes us eager and bold to pray with persistence, but always in line with the teaching of Jesus which He gave us in the Lord's Prayer. This prayer shows the priority within our prayer, reflecting the "needs" of the two partners of the covenant: firstly, the fulfilment of God's plan and his glory, and secondly, our human needs regarding food, forgiveness of sins, and his guidance in temptations. Prayer should always follow this scheme, and it should prevent us from praying beyond the range of the promises of the covenant.

3.2 * 34 Prosperity

God provides his children with all they need, and often more than that, but not always according to our human understanding or expectation. During the old covenant God promised his people many earthly blessings. God's people often rejoiced in the bounty of the Lord, who turned their mourning into gladness (Jer 31:11-13; Ps 126:4-6). During the new covenant He continued to show his care, especially his concern for the poor and needy people of his covenant. While Jesus is fully oriented towards the coming kingdom and the forgiveness of sin, we also see Him emotionally touched by the sick and the poor. He acts to heal, to feed, to comfort, and to help the sick, the poor, and the needy. He teaches us to do the same.

3.2 * 35 Offering

We ought to share our richness with the needy inside and outside the church. We also acknowledge that all our possessions and earnings are given to us by the Lord who owns the whole creation. We express our dependence on God and show our gratefulness to Him in giving our offerings. In the Old Testament the Lord commanded his people to give tithes, meaning one tenth of the harvest, cattle, and any other earnings (Num 18:21-29; Deut 14:22). In doing this the Old Testament believers confessed that all their possessions belonged to the Lord, and they symbolically returned it to the Lord for his covenant service and worship.

During the New Testament times God expects us to freely give our offerings (2 Cor 8:8-9; 9:5-8). We have to give ourselves as living sacrifices, including our belongings, worship, and thankfulness to God (Rom 12:1-2). We are to use our riches for the edification of the church and the proclamation of the gospel in the world.

3.2 * 36 Dangers of wealth

We are to avoid focusing on earthly richness. We may enjoy the good things God's creation; however, the expectation of a glorious state on the new earth fills us even more, and this is what we pray for. In the Christian life, especially in healthy and wealthy circumstances, temptation is near. Material bounty often leads God's children to forget God and worship earth-oriented idols, suited to

fleshly desires. God often receives ungratefulness, unfaithfulness, and discontentedness as a response to his care.

Especially the appointed and anointed leaders tend to become corrupt, misusing their office to enrich themselves. Money and power easily corrupt our minds and make us forget that we have a treasure in heaven "that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (Luke 12:33). The prophets, the apostles, and Christ Himself teach us to acknowledge the danger of wealth (Matt 6:21; 7:13-14; 13:22; Luke 12:15; 16:25; 18:25; 2 Cor 5:11-15; 1 Tim 6:9-10; Rev 3:17).

3.2 * 37 Dealing with illness and healing

We confess that Jesus healed many people in Israel, although He did not heal them all. By this He did not only show his divinity, but also his compassion for the sick. Jesus promised his disciples that those who believed in Him as the resurrected Lord would be accompanied by signs during their journeys of proclaiming the gospel (Mark 16:16-18). These promised signs marked the apostles (2 Cor 12:12), witnesses, and evangelists of the first period of Christianity, underlining their authority, confirming their founding of the New Testament church (Eph2:20), and demonstrating the message of the kingdom to come.

The overall biblical view gives evidence that we ought to pray for the sick (2 Kgs 1; Ps 35:13; Matt 25:36-44), hoping that they will be healed by the Lord. James 5:13-16 also teaches us to pray for healing, confessing our sins to one another, comforting those who are suffering from a deathly disease, and proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. However, the focus of the Bible is not on healing, nor on promising the healing of every believer. Instead, the Bible shows that every human being, one day or another, will face death.

The biblical message gives hope for a future earth free from suffering. On this earth we ought to pray whenever illness is troubling us. We pray for healing and for miracles to happen in times of suffering. We also pray that God may bless the creational ways of caring for the sick by means of medical care.

We confess that we should do our best to give pastoral care and comfort to the sick and the dying people. Indeed, the church has a pastoral heart to comfort those who may not recover and continuously suffer from all kind of disease and distress. As God's children we know with certainty and reassure one another that God our Father will help us. He will raise us up, if not in this earthly life then in the resurrection of everlasting life on God's new earth. With fear and awe we submit ourselves to his sovereignty and wisdom. The Christian faith makes us, who are limited in the understanding of all things, patient and humble. It generates in us full confidence to pray that not our will but God's will be done. In his immense suffering Christ Himself prayed this way, providing the supreme biblical example of faith in God, his heavenly Father (Luke 22:42).

3.2 * 38 Our spiritual warfare

We acknowledge that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Satan, with all his demons, is trying to win our souls by every means. He performs signs and wonders and he attracts people by all kinds of supernatural phenomena; he has been given much power with which he tempts God's chosen people. "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect" (Matt 24:24). The beast out of the sea will perform great and miraculous signs to deceive the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 13:13). Evil spirits of demons will perform miraculous signs to deceive the kings of the whole world (Rev 16:14).

Jesus Christ Himself foresaw the appearance of many false prophets performing signs and miracles in his name: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:22, 23) These are the devil's schemes, deluding and blinding the world with the suggestive power of earthly happiness, encouraging it to focus on the human self, and

again suggesting that man can become like God. This is our struggle “against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph 6:12).

PART 4

CHURCH LIFE

3.3 The organization of the church

3.3 * 39 The value of dogma

From the beginning the church of God has always been under the attack of the Evil One, who seeks to destroy her. He does this through false teachers who secretly introduce destructive heresies into the church. The warning to believers to watch out for false prophets and apostate teachings is echoed in the teachings of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, who are united in their call for the preservation of the faith “that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3).

The Apostle Paul warns Timothy and Titus to teach the sound doctrine; this presupposes that leaders are instructed to know the truth and its arguments in order to oppose this falsehood. The value of dogma, therefore, is to honour God by obeying his commands, to build and strengthen the church through right worship and holy living, and to safeguard the church against the evil schemes of Satan.

3.3 * 40 The value of church institutions

We believe that the institutionalization of the church is rooted in the Bible. We see from the Old Testament that God provided the nation of Israel with priests, prophets, and kings to be responsible for his people, the church (Ezek 34). We therefore believe that God provides the New Testament church with the gifts to be responsible for the church, that is to shepherd the flock (Eph 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), to build the body of Christ, to protect, to watch over it against false teachings, and to oversee order in the congregation. For this reason the Apostle Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders, thereby institutionalizing the churches (Titus 1:5). These gifts of elders and deacons are to be respected as they will have to give an account of their work to God (Heb 13:17).

3.3 * 41 Renewal of the church

We believe that the precious blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord, redeems our lives. The Holy Spirit renews us and we believe that this is an ongoing process, progressing day by day. We are taught that we will be made new in the attitude of our minds (Eph 4:23). Therefore, we acknowledge the need for a continuous transformation in church life. In the Old Testament we read about the renewal of the covenant (Josh 24), and we know the command of our Lord to the church of Ephesus: “Remember the heights from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (Rev 2:5).

Because of sin and corruption, a renewal or a revival of the church is necessary. We pray for this continuously and hope the Lord will bless us with obedience and courage. Then we can renew ourselves on the basis of the Word.

3.3 * 42 The Unity of the Church

We believe in the existence of one universal church. The Lord Jesus Christ gathers this church from every nation, tribe, and tongue in all time and places, and it is spread throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same spirit, by the power of faith. The unity of the church is founded in the sound teachings that conform to the glorious gospel of the blessed God (1 Tim 1:10-11).

We regret all the divisions within the church, made by selfish ambition or because of minor issues. We thank the Lord, however, for preserving the church, for blessing those who objected to false teachings or non-biblical traditions and who were expelled out of the church because of this. Being obedient to God, they served the true unity of the church and we commit ourselves to that same unity today. May the Lord unite all true believers in one faith to the glory of his holy name. Amen.

Refutations

32. On the basis of our convictions, expressed in this document, we reject the idea that dogmas or doctrines as such are a hindrance to the development of church life, causing lifelessness or rigid traditionalism. The Bible is very clear about the need to safeguard the church by dispensing sound doctrine. That presupposes the possibility of formulating what doctrine is all about. Therefore we consider doctrine and dogma in the church (e.g. in the form of confessions) as indispensable tools to sustain obedience.

33. Organization and institutionalizing as such are not a threat to the church. We see the lines of good governance coming up in the Bible, especially when it comes to safeguarding doctrine, to missionary outreach, and to the fostering of church relationships.

34. We refute the exaggerated view that all mainline churches are guilty of dead orthodoxy. History shows tremendous church growth before revivalism, Pentecostalism, and the charismatic movement. In traditional churches we can see the wondrous work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the congregation, in missionary outreach, in the up-building of the church, and in social commitment. These churches long to meet the high standard of the Word and to be renewed in the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

35. We refute the claim of unity on the basis of spiritual experience or the presence of manifestations of the Spirit. This is too small a basis and will not prevent church divisions. Unity should never be sought at the expense of doctrine.

36. We refute the "shepherding" style of governing and pastoral guidance found in some charismatic circles. Shepherding (a teaching that the believer can only grow in grace under the authoritative "covering" or spiritual "protection" of an older believer which often leads to pronounced hierarchical patterns in churches) opens the door for spiritual abuse.

37. The restoration of the office of apostle undermines the full authority of the Bible being the sufficient foundation for the church.

3.4 The life of the congregation

3.4 * 43 Church life in the apostolic age

We confess that the description of the first church after Pentecost stimulates us to continue in teaching, fellowship, prayer, sharing, and the breaking of the bread. It is a good example; however, it is not the only example of church life in the Bible. We should not idealize it or take it as a compulsory model for all ages. The church of Acts 4 was gifted in particular to lay the foundation for the church which was still in her infancy. Soon after this first report we see the emergence of other reports about the struggle against sin within the congregation. To persevere and to preserve the truth, church organization is needed in the form of office bearers as elders and deacons to dispense discipline, to admonish and strengthen, and to warn against falsehood.

Churches are developing in patterns different from that of the first New Testament church because churches have to adjust to their own reality and face their own challenges. For instance, we see the struggle against divisions in Corinth, or the differences in church life pictured in Revelation 1 – 3. The apostles and the first church leaders had to deal with the reality of all kinds of shortcomings. In leading the churches entrusted to us, we should take into account this whole picture of leading the church as it is coming to us in the Scripture, and not focus only on Acts 4. These developments teach us to take into account the differences in context in various times and places.

3.4 * 44 The life in the congregation

We confess that God in his wisdom created all people equal before Him. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one (Gal 3:28). Man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God, having equal rights and access to Him, needing no other intermediaries except Christ, the only way to the Father.

We confess that the church of Christ is built up of many different members. In this difference both the weak and the strong are found (Rom 14). Based on this reality the Bible admonishes us not to look down upon one another; instead we must accept one another as Christ accepted us. Driven by love both for God and for our fellow brothers and sisters, we ought to do our best to seek those things that lead to peace and mutual edification in the unity of Christ. We acknowledge that in doing this the church of Christ will be built up, resulting in God being honoured and glorified.

3.4 * 45 Unity in diversity

We confess that we are the one body of Christ. We have diversity of gifts but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. There are diversities of activities but it is the same God who works all in all. As the body of Christ the members should have the same care for one another. Differences should complement each other. In the acknowledgment of different talents and gifts, God empowers his church and gives it lots of energy. There should not be schism in the body and, if one is honoured, all the members should rejoice with him (1 Cor 12). God's holiness and grace unite us in one body in which no one can be proud and nobody should boast about his results or honour himself (Eph 2:9).

3.4 * 46 Leadership in the church

Those who have been entrusted to serve and take responsibility for leadership should seek humility. No one should think of himself more highly than he ought to, "but with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given him or her" (Rom 12:3). Jesus taught that those who want to be leaders must be willing to be servants. When He washed his disciples' feet, He set an example for all to follow (John 13:15). Paul, who had been commissioned by Christ as an Apostle, saw himself as the least of them all. He advises us to have the attitude that Christ had, "Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very

nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Phil 2:5-7). We should accept our ministries humbly as gifts from God for the edification and the building of the church.

3.4 * 47 Living in the world

We confess that we, as the holy church, have been brought out of the darkness into Christ's wonderful light (1 Pet 2:9-10). By this we have been chosen out of the world and been set apart from the world to commit our lives to the true God (1 Thess 1:9-10; 1 Pet 4:1-6). Thus we became a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a precious people belonging to God. This is our identity, making us distinctive in the world. This identity implies that there will be misunderstanding, rejection, and sometimes even persecution from the world, as Christ was once rejected by the world of his days (John 15:19, 16:1-4). Since we live in this world we are tempted and sometimes led astray, hence we constantly need to be revived and transformed to really be a true and living church of Christ, his holy bride.

We confess that as the church of Christ we are sent into the world as God's apostolic instrument to proclaim the gospel of salvation (1 Pet 2:9), to be a light and salt in the world. This implies that the church accepts the calling of her Lord to demonstrate the light by our personal Christian life, behaviour, testimony, and verbal witness (Col 4:5-6), and by the structure of our church life by which we are active in the realization of this calling. This also involves our being in the world as citizens of a country, a society. Christians should show social commitment, being the ambassadors of the Kingdom of Christ, reflecting the image of God, and fulfilling the cultural mandate.

3.4 * 48 Worship

We confess that the nature of our worship is covenantal. In worship God is meeting his covenant people. We enjoy the presence of the Lord; we come together to glorify his name, listen carefully to his voice, and to receive forgiveness. We praise Him because of his great works, receiving cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ (symbolized and experienced in the Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper) and a reassurance of our trust in God's faithfulness. In worship we see his power, glory, majesty, and faithfulness. We meet the triune God and we experience God's power in the renewing work of the Spirit.

We feel the certainty of being the children of the covenant and are at home in the church of Christ, our mediator. During worship we express our faith and feelings by confessing our faith and surrender our wilful attitudes by listening and submitting to the Word of God. We respond to his Word and we communicate with the Lord in our hymns and prayers. We enjoy this fellowship and the love of Christ, gathering with brothers and sisters in the unity of the body of Christ. We are encouraged and empowered by the Spirit to go out into the world, to bear witness to the salvation of Jesus Christ. Worship ignites mission; it is God's divine call-and-response strategy. Worship causes people to encounter Christ and makes them respond to his call to witness.

Refutations

38. Teaching that claims the model of Acts 4 to be the biblical image of the church for all places and ages does not take into account the differences of circumstances and the reality of sin in the church. The Bible also shows the images of other churches, for instance Corinth.

39. We refute the emergence of two levels in church life, or the presence of a kind of "spiritual elite" in the congregation, a practice caused by overemphasizing holiness and the need for "second blessing."

40. We refute the teaching that Christians should retreat from the world for the sake of their holiness and to live in so called holy cities.

41. We admit that ongoing discussions on the topic of liturgy are contradictory to the Spirit-given freedom to worship. We refute styles of worship that are focused on creating an emotional atmosphere in order to open the way for all kinds of ecstatic expressions of faith. The proclamation and teaching of the Word of God should attract our heart and mind, not long singing, praising, dancing, praying, shouting, music, laughter, speaking in tongues, and the like.

DOXOLOGY

We pray that this Statement may be blessed by the Lord, giving light to the churches. With the Apostle we praise our Lord with the words:

*Now to Him who is able to establish you
by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ,
according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past,
but now revealed and made known
through the prophetic writings
by the command of the eternal God,
so that all nations might believe
and obey Him -
to the only wise God be glory
forever
through Jesus Christ!*

Amen.

