

LIKE A MUSTARD SEED
Commentaries on the Statement of Faith
of the
United Church of Christ in the Philippines

Feliciano V. Cariño
Editor

United Church of Christ in the Philippines
Quezon City
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THE STATEMENT OF FAITH OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES

WE BELIEVE

In One God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer in whom creation finds order, purpose, meaning and fulfillment.

In Jesus Christ He became man and rules as Sovereign Lord of life and history.

In the Holy Spirit, he is present in the world, empowering and guiding believers to understand and live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

WE BELIEVE

Man is created in the image of God, sinful but destined to live in community with God and fellowmen.

Entrusted with God's creation and called to participate in the establishment of a meaningful and just social order.

WE BELIEVE

In the Church, the one Body of Christ, the community of those reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with Jesus' own ministry.

WE BELIEVE

In the Holy Bible as a faithful witness of God's self-revelation in the history of His people, God's inspired instrument to illumine, guide, correct, and edify His people for their faith and witness.

WE BELIEVE

God is working to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world His Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed, where love, justice and peace prevail.

WE BELIEVE

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ has overcome the power of death gives assurance of life even after death, and we look forward to His coming again in all His fullness and gather His children in His Kingdom, and to make all creation new.

FOREWORD

The approval of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines by the 1986 General Assembly is a very significant milestone in our pilgrimage from the various Christian traditions, interpretations and practices towards greater unity. It calls for rejoicing, thanksgiving and praise to God. For at last, after thirty-eight years as a united and uniting church and twenty years of writing and re-writing, we have produced a statement of faith.

This Statement, however, is by no means complete. In the coming years, we may again re-write and re-interpret it according to the needs of the time. For Christians of every generation have to meaningfully express their faith in their own historical context.

After the approval of the Statement, the Faith and Order Committee thought that the next step is to have a study program for the whole church on the Statement itself. Hence, they planned to write this book of commentaries primarily to stimulate discussions, reflections and deeper study.

We, therefore, welcome the publication of this book as an initial step in our endeavor "to deepen and broaden the understanding of the entire UCCP constituency on the Biblico-theological-historical foundations of the Christian faith that they, collectively and individually, become fully committed as living witnesses to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Cf. Program Thrusts of the UCCP, 1986-87).

The commentaries in this book should not be taken, however, as official dogmatic statements of the church. Rather, as the title implies, they are "like a mustard seed" of faith, small as it were but full of possibilities for growth and greater witness.

I, therefore, commend this book to all members of the UCCP for study. I do hope that these commentaries will invite writing of more articles, and perhaps new books for the enrichment of our understanding of the Christian faith as we continue in our mission and ministry "for the life of the world".

ERME R. CAMBA
General Secretary
August 5, 1987

INTRODUCTION

Within the family of Reformed Churches, the past several years have been a "season" of issuing contemporary confessions of faith. Over a period of about two decades, something like thirty new confessions of faith have been drafted by various Churches around the world.¹ The need for "new" confessions have been understood in various ways. For some, it is a matter of updating, modernizing and redefining earlier statements. Some, in short, have issued new statements in order to make the old statements more understandable and accessible to modern, contemporary people. Others look at the need as a matter of indigenizing the faith in terms of native cultural forms. Still others have made new articulations of faith from the experience of battle and in order to express commitment for action and aspiration within new and emerging configurations of economic, social and political realities. Others, finally, have had to redefine and restate their faith as a result of their participation in movements toward the formation of united Churches.²

The drafting of the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines in many ways emerged from a combination of all of these factors. The need for a "new" Statement of Faith was necessitated by the manner in which the United Church came into being. Having come together to form one United Church solely on the basis of faith in "Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God -- our living Lord and Savior," who is "the Head of the Church, present and active in the world through the Holy Spirit,"³ the Churches that originally made up the United Church rightly affirmed that issues of doctrinal and theological divergence must be dealt with not as a prerequisite for reunion but as the possible consequence and fruit of a new life together in Christ. As that new life together has become more firmly established over the years after 1948 and faithfully lived together in new manifestations of common witness and service, it has become increasingly imperative to come out with a statement of the faith that has undergirded that unity and which impels the Church to move forward into new areas of work. Thus, when the decision was made to form a Committee to draft the Statement of Faith, a number of considerations were borne in mind in regard to the manner in which the work was to be done:

- A. It was first understood that the writing of a Statement, of Faith is to be a part of a larger effort to convert the "oral" story of the Church into written form so that the story may be preserved for future generations, and can become a basis from which the Church in the present and in the future may continue to make its witness creatively and faithfully.
- B. The Statement of Faith is to serve as basic material for the orientation, direction and guidance of the Church's members, and for the nurture of the whole community of faith.
- C. The Statement of Faith is to be a primary document by which the Church may protect itself from insipient "heresies" that have begun to infect various aspects of its life.
- D. The Statement of Faith is to arise out of and to indicate, the Church's mission within the given historical context of the present time.

The guidelines laid out by the Committee for its work adumbrated these concerns well. The Committee, for example, assumed from the beginning that the Statement of Faith it was going to produce must be Biblically rooted and must embody the main ingredients of the historical tradition of the Church. At the same time, however, the Committee also underscored the fact that the Statement of Faith must be liturgically useful and instructive for the nurture and guidance of the members of the Church at the present time. It also stressed the need for drafting a Statement of Faith that would speak to the historical context within which it is made and to which it is going to be spoken and affirmed. Historical fidelity to the faith of the Church, in other words, was to be combined with new departures and new emphasis.

¹*Confessions and Confessing in the Reformed Tradition Today* (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1982), pp. 23-24.

²*Ibid*, p. 3.

³*Constitution and By-Laws, United Church of Christ in the Philippines* (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1980). p. 3.

The "season of confessing" into which we, together with other Reformed Churches around the world, have entered has, on the one hand, demythologized previous conceptions about the place of confessions in the life of the Church, and, on the other hand, underscored the proper importance that must be given to the common and public declarations of faith by the Church. A Statement of Faith is not a prerequisite to or the object of the act of faith. The object of faith is not a creedal formulation but Jesus Christ himself. A Statement of Faith, too, is not born out of eternity for the confessing of the Church in eternity. It is not for all seasons to come. It is, to use the words of Karl Barth, an expression of the Church's present understanding and is crafted out of the Church's present state of knowledge, taking into account the content of its faith critically, bracketed on the one hand, by its adherence to the standard of Holy Scriptures, and on the other, by the demands that are put upon it by the pressure-points of its contemporary mission and witness in the world. The importance of a Statement of Faith therefore lies not in the presumption to eternity or to having exhausted once and for all the richness of the faith of the Church and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but in the fact that at a certain time and place it embodies the mind and will of the whole Church relative to where the Church has been, where the Church is presently located, and where the Church might go in its struggle to be faithful to its Lord. As the emergence of "new" confessions has clearly indicated, Statements of Faith can, should and have been restated again and again. It is only the whole Church, however, that can undertake that work, and until that has happened, the Statement of Faith stands as the basic foundation on which the life of the Church is rooted, and from which its mission to the world must flow. A Statement of Faith is important, in other words, because it links the Church to the living, historical faith of the Church as it has been expressed through the ages, at the same time that it opens the way by which the Church in the present can fulfill its mission relevantly, and by which also the future is opened to ever new and more abundant expressions of witness to the God who is the only authentic Foundation, Lord and Head of the Church.

Contrary to what some people have presumed, work on the Statement of Faith began in earnest shortly after the General Assembly at Cagayan de Oro in 1978, under the leadership of Bishop Pedro Raterta. By the time of the General Assembly that was held in Malolos in 1982, a Draft Statement was already presented, along with a shorter, liturgical version. That Draft Statement was accepted in principle by the Malolos Assembly with the suggestion that it be circulated further to the various constituencies of the Church for more study and comment. The version that was finally adopted and on the basis of which these Commentaries have been made contain only minor modifications in form and content of that Draft Statement that was first presented at the Malolos Assembly.

The Commentaries that are included in this volume are *personal* though by no means entirely *private*. Written individually, the Commentaries were prepared by people who have been involved in the drafting of the Statement of Faith, but went through the refinement of discussion and exchange with other members of the Faith and Order Committee. They do not constitute the authoritative interpretation of the Statement of Faith. The writers are, in the end, solely responsible for what they have produced. Indeed, all members of the United Church are encouraged to write their own commentaries and reflections on the Statement of Faith, all of which too may be studied with others, so that the study of the Statement of Faith, as it were, becomes a corporate experience of all. These Commentaries are being shared to spur that study and to give assistance, background and suggestive insight for what could be a major common effort on the part of the United Church to understand for its time and place the meaning and the demands of its faith, and the witness and service it is called to provide at the particular conjecture of history in which it has been placed.

The words of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches are worth noting in this regard:

*The ultimate source of all confessions is Jesus Christ who made the good confession before Pontius Pilate. He is at the same time the author and perfecter and the object of the confession of the Church. As the Church confesses she shares in his confession. But Jesus Christ is never exhaustively expressed in the confession of the Church. His richness surpasses everything the Church has ever grasped and expressed. Therefore, there has always been and always will be the need for new departures. The present time may well offer the opportunity for a new departure.*⁴

⁴Confessions and Confessing p. 22.

Whether that new departure will occur in the life of the United Church or not will depend in large measure upon the seriousness with which we give attention and understanding to what we have stated to be our faith, and the courage and daring with which we put that faith into practice.

Feliciano V. Cariño
Chairman, Faith and Order Committee

THE TRINITARIAN FOUNDATION

Melanio L. Aoanan*

WE BELIEVE

In One God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer in whom creation finds order, purpose, meaning and fulfillment.

In Jesus Christ He became man and rules as Sovereign Lord of life and history.

In the Holy Spirit, he is present in the world, empowering and guiding believers to understand and live out their faith in Jesus Christ.

I. INTRODUCTION

The UCCP Statement of Faith appropriately begins and repeats the phrase "we believe". This is to emphasize the nature of our ecclesiological understanding. Despite our diversities in historical origins, theological orientations, and practical operations, we are by God's grace a UNITED Church! Hence, the phrase "we believe" is our testimony to the divine imperative expressed in the Lord's "other" prayer: "That they may all be one, . . . so that the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21).

The three sentences in the opening paragraph of the Statement of Faith indicates in no uncertain terms the Trinitarian foundation of our Church's affirmation. And the phrase "we believe" is a clear expression of our "collegial" or corporate life as a community of faith.

II. WE BELIEVE IN ONE GOD: CREATOR, REDEEMER AND SUSTAINER

The God in whom we believe is one God. This is the one God who revealed himself in the Bible. He is the God of our fathers: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- A. For the Old Testament, God is the one, sole God who re-revealed himself in the Exodus event. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:1-2). While others may believe in lesser gods, for those who belong to the Exodus community, those who were delivered from Egyptian bondage, there is only one God to be obeyed and worshipped. Likewise, for all who belong to the church community, particularly those who declare "we believe in one God . . .", there is only one God who is to be obeyed unconditionally. This affirmation is significant not only in the life of the church but also in the life of our society.

When we declare our absolute obedience to the one God and affirm the monotheistic faith, we fall into the same stream of faith as that of our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters, and provides basis for mutual understanding and cooperation with them. For us in the United Church, the checkered and bloody struggle against the Muslims in particular which characterized our history has to give way to an imperative of cooperation and trust.

- B. To affirm that God is Creator means that he is the ultimate source of all energy and all order in the universe. It also means that the meaning of all life derives from Him. This is fundamental to Biblical faith. God started the process of creation and sustains it with his power. Any one who subscribes to this fundamental faith could have "the confidence that God is the absolute starting point of all beings and it is with God that we must begin all our plans and undertakings if we are to find our rightful destiny" (Dewolf, *Enduring Message of the Bible*, p. 16).

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The affirmation that God is Creator and Sustainer of the universe gives us assurance that there is meaning in human existence. Life, in all its manifestations, does not just happen by accident. Life, despite the miseries and pain, has meaning and purpose. It is a result of God's purposive and liberating activity. We are not trapped in a hostile, chaotic universe. The eternal God who, in the beginning created the universe, has a purpose for his creation and for our life. Therefore, the fundamental fact of human life is our immediate and total dependence on God.

C. Our affirmation that the one God who requires our complete allegiance is our Redeemer and Liberator. Again, our basis for this claim is the testimony of the Scriptures. To the Biblical writers, the God whom they trusted and to whom they gave their allegiance, to whom they cried during their distress, was at their side. He manifested his compassion and care as he heard their afflictions and oppression (Ex. 3:7-10). He was not a slave-owner but a God who freed slaves from their bondage. Thus, he is a God of liberation.

This God of liberation called and appointed Moses as his great and charismatic leader. Through Moses, God delivered his people from Egyptian oppression and sustained their struggle as they crossed the "Red Sea" and wandered in the wilderness. This series of God's liberating acts has been continually proclaimed from generation to generation.

This God of liberation (Redeemer) made his name known to his people unlike the unknown and unnamed god of the pagans (Acts 17:23). He revealed his name to Moses: Yahweh is his name, a name which was written in Hebrew only in consonants -- YHWH. Later, the vowels of the name "adonai" (Lord) were added to the four consonants which medieval theologians read as "Jehovah".

The name Yahweh occurs more than 680 times in the Bible. What does this name mean? Through the "burning bush experience," Moses received a cryptic and enigmatic answer: "Ehyeh asher Ehyeh". This phrase had been translated as "I Am Who I Am" because the Hebrew word "hayah" means "to be". God's enigmatic name could therefore mean "to be present, to take -place, to happen, to come to be." God is known by what he does. His being is known by his liberating acts in history. We come to know the being of God by what he causes to happen in historical events. Yahweh, the name revealed to Moses, signifies a declaration of God's intention -- his continuing presence and dynamic existence in history. God is present in our midst, guiding, helping, strengthening, liberating. Or, as Hans Kung says:

He is the God of historical dynamism. The Exodus God and the Creator God are not opposed to one another in the Old Testament. It is the question of one and the same living God in one and the same history of Israel (Does God Exist. p, 622).

Because of this understanding, there developed in Israel a distinct "spatio-historical way of thinking" wherein the past remained present and helped people to cope with the actual situation and to catch sight of the future. Israel's credo is not a philosophical, speculative, but a historical credo. It is centered on the God of liberation, a God who brought Israel out of Egypt.

III. WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

This portion of the Statement of Faith affirms the centrality of Jesus Christ in our Christian faith: And yet it is this fundamental affirmation wherein great and lengthy controversies have occurred in the history of the Church. From the beginnings of Christianity when the followers of Jesus were severely persecuted, when they were forced to meet in clandestine underground catacombs, declaring that "Christ is Lord" involved grave risk. At times, the early Christians had to resort to the use of secret codes and symbolisms which non-Christians could not decipher. One of these symbols is the fish. The figure of the fish could mean life or death to a follower of Christ. Why? It is because the Greek word for fish is ICHTHUS. The ingenuity of the early Christians was shown in the acronym: Iesou Christou Theo Uous Soter", which means "Jesus Christ God's Son Savior". The mere symbol of the figure of the fish is therefore a powerful declaration of faith: "I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior."

Another simple declaration of faith in Christ is the phrase "Kurios" "Christous" or "Christ is Lord". The term Lord (kurios) is reserved for God alone. Says Robert McAfee Brown: "To acknowledge someone as 'Lord' is to acknowledge that he is supreme and that he occupies a place no one else can occupy. To acknowledge Jesus Christ

as Lord is to acknowledge that he is supreme and that he occupies a place no one else can occupy. To him and to him alone is full allegiance given. There can be no other Lord if he is truly Lord" (*The Spirit of Protestantism*, p. 41).

From the early period of Christianity up to our time, the many formulations of our fundamental faith in Jesus Christ are attempts at responding to the question Christ himself asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mat. 16:15). All the formulations, including the one in the UCCP Statement of Faith, are indeed to bridge the chasm between God and human beings. Jesus Christ is both God and a human person, or according to the queer-sounding Nicene Creed, Christ is "very God of very God and very man of very man". Through Christ, "the eternal, infinite, immortal, good nature of God" had entered and invaded into "depraved human nature." And this is the great saving act of God. Because without Christ, we are lost beyond redemption. But with and in Christ, we become a new creation. Through him, we see God's will for human life fulfilled and glorified.

There are three points which I would underscore in connection with our affirmation "We believe in Jesus Christ". First of all, we affirm that Jesus Christ was a historical figure. Jesus is not only a fact of history; he is the greatest factor in history. The historicity of Jesus' life is borne out by the Gospel writers. Also, the Apostles' Creed, which was formulated much later than the apostolic period, affirms the historicity of Jesus. "I believe in Jesus Christ . . . born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and was buried." The historical life of Jesus could be summed up as follows:

He lived in Palestine from 4 B.C. to A.D. 29. Most of his life was spent as an artisan in Nazareth. His public ministry was very brief, a year and a half to three years . . . In the early stages of his ministry he received a large hearing, but in the later stages, only the most devout disciples were with him. When he died, he left a legacy to his disciples the commission to take his gospel to the ends of the earth. The third day after his death the disciples were convinced that he had risen from the dead. Inspired by this conviction, which they shared without any reservation recorded in our Scripture, they went on their mission to preach - his gospel to the ends of the earth. That is the common historical heritage of the Christian faith today (A Firm Faith Today, p. 63-64).

The second point which we have to stress when we affirm that "we believe in Jesus Christ" is: he is one of the great, if not the greatest, teachers of ethical religion the world has even known. As a teacher, he attracted all kinds of people, multitudes of people particularly those who are in the periphery of society. After he delivered his teaching, the multitudes were amazed because he taught them with authority unlike the other religious leaders (Matt. 7:28-29). His sense of authority is derived from the fact that he knew the Scriptures by heart. But more than this is the fact that Jesus had an intimate knowledge of and relationship with God. In addition to his intimate knowledge of and relationship with God, Jesus had a penetrating insight into human nature.

The Sermon on the Mount remains a monumental compilation of Jesus' teachings which have attracted the moral geniuses of human kind. In it, Jesus shows his essential insight into morality and his deeper perception of reality.

The third point that we need to emphasize when we affirm that "we believe in Jesus Christ" is: we can believe that he is the clearest revelation of the will of God for the life of human beings. The testimony of the Fourth Gospel tells us not only that in Jesus Christ God became a particular historical man. "In him was life, and the light was the light of men" (Jn. 1:4). Again, the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus saying: "I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus Christ reveals who God is and what man can become through him. This is the finality of Jesus Christ for our life.

Christ's call for discipleship provides us with "open doors" into a -more challenging, purposeful and abundant life. One such door is the proper way of relating with our fellow human beings. We are all bound into one bundle of life by the creative will of God, by his dealing with us in history, by his love which desires that all shall find fulfillment in him.

Another "open door" which is manifested by the teaching of 'Jesus is the centrality of forgiving love. This is the only way to deal with enmity, ill-will and hatred. Insults, injuries, and indignation abound in our day to day existence. A person's natural reaction is "to make even" if not "to put one on top of the other". The worsening conflicts in our world today, in our .nation arid in our church, prove that we have followed the above formula

faithfully. To Jesus, the only resolution to the problem of enmity, injustice and indignity is to master the art of forgiving love. This is the reason why when he suffered on the cross in the hands of his torturers and accusers, Jesus was able to say: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing" (Lk. 23:34).

IV. WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

In order to know and understand the Christian idea of God more completely, we need to clarify what is meant by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The great majority of our Church members are not conversant about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine has been neglected by the mainline Churches for quite sometime.

We must emphasize that a sound doctrine of the Holy Spirit is of utmost importance to the individual believer and to the Church as a whole. It is through the Holy Spirit of God that a personal-existential contact is realized between the believer and God. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost was a fulfillment of what God the Father promised (Joel 2:28), a promise which was reiterated by Jesus Christ to his disciples after he was risen (Luke 24:49). The risen Christ to whom all power in heaven and earth had been given promised that he would always be present with his disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the Synoptic Gospels, practically all the crucial stages in the life and ministry of Jesus are related with the person and work of the Holy Spirit. However, it is in the Acts of the Apostles where there are at least seventy references to the Holy Spirit. As Yeow Choo Lak puts it:

The prominence of the Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles is the more remarkable when it is remembered that it records the first thirty years of the Church's life and work. We see the Holy Spirit as the Supreme authority and source power in every activity of the early church. He works in and through the church, and the whole of life of the Christian community is dominated and controlled by the Spirit's presence and power (Church and Theology, p. 76).

It was the day of Pentecost when the power of the Holy Spirit was manifested. This marks the "turning point in the history of the Christian movement". The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost endowed the disciples with courage, power and confidence to take their faith to the streets, to the market places, and even to the sacred precincts, of the Temple itself. Due to this indwelling of the Holy Spirit, every man and woman who had fled in fear when Jesus was arrested and who had remained in seclusion while he was being executed were empowered to face the forces that had put them to death.

For the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit constitutes the very life of the Church as a whole. Christians share a common life, a life of the Spirit, and are therefore a unity, an organic body (Acts 2:44-47). Thus, the communion of the Holy Spirit means a common participation or sharing in the Holy Spirit by the whole body of Christ.

Because of heretical teachings during the early centuries, the church was compelled to define its doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It was during the Council of Constantinople in 381 A. D. when the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was finally established. The doctrine was formulated to fight those who taught against the Person of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.

From the New Testament and the experience of the early Church, the descent of the Holy Spirit means a special manifestation of God's presence and power in people who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord. From this experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit, three important meanings have been related to the formation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

First, God is always at work in the life of his people, seeking to redeem them from sin and wickedness and lifting them into new levels of life and meaning. Secondly, God is always at work in the world. He is the Supreme Fact in the world: an active, concerned and compassionate Father in all that is to be. Evidences of his work as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer are found everywhere. Thirdly, God is at work in the life of the Christian community. It is a simple statement that the Christian community, from its beginnings to the present, has felt the Holy Spirit in its life.

These three meanings on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit enable us to establish an affirmation of the Holy Spirit in our concept of God. As Harold Bosley says:

To believe in the Holy Spirit is to believe that the hand of God is always on your shoulder seeking to lead you in the-direction of his full will for you and your life. To believe in the Holy Spirit is to believe that God is seeking to bring about order, His order, out of the confusion and chaos of our history. To believe in the Holy Spirit is to believe that the God of the past and present is the God of the future as well (A Firm Faith For Today, pp.- 95-96).

V. CONCLUSION

Our Statement of Faith clearly shows solid biblical, theological and historical bases. Because of this, I am fully convinced, that the unity of our Church has been bolstered and reinforced. This is our unique contribution to the understanding of the nature of the Universal Church. Our constituents in the United Church of Christ must be undergirded by the Trinitarian bases of our faith as we seek to demonstrate our unity in the midst of our diversity. We must encourage all our church members to take the injunction of the Apostle Paul when he said:

And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith. . . We shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful men, who lead others into errors by the trick they invent. Instead, by speaking the truth in the spirit of love, we must grow up in the way of Christ, who is the head (Eph. 4:13-15, TEV).

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Luna Dingayan

WE BELIEVE

Man is created in the image of God, sinful but destined to live in community with God and fellowmen. Entrusted with God's creation and called to participate in the establishment of a meaningful and just social order.

I. WE BELIEVE MAN IS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD . . .

The word "man" should be understood in this context to mean the human person or better still the whole of humanity, which would include both man and woman.

The belief that human beings are created in God's image is very central in our faith as Christians. As a matter of fact, we do understand what is truly human in relation to this belief.

Image of God is a religio-political concept that prevailed in the Ancient kingdoms and empires. It refers particularly to a political ruler, who is supposed to be the only "image" of God on earth whom people should recognize and to whom they are to put their ultimate allegiance (cf. Daniel 3). It is similar to "the divine rights of kings" in the Middle Ages and the authoritarian rule of modern-day dictators. The ruler is defied and some kind of a religious cult is built around him/her.

The writers of Genesis I questioned such belief and practice. Genesis I, by the way, was written when the Israelites were exiled in Babylon (587-538 B.C.). As slaves, the Israelites experienced what it means to live under a deified ruler. In the midst of their sufferings and hopelessness, they affirmed that each human being, not only the powerful ruler, is created in the image of God (vs. 26-31).

The writers' proclamation is like a two-edged sword. While declaring their faith, they were at the same time protesting against the prevailing religio-political belief and practice. They were, in fact, saying that the Ruler is not the only "image" of God on earth. Rather, each person born into this world is God's image.

Such faith of the Israelites in Exile pictures to us concretely What it means to be truly human. In the first place, it would mean to reflect or to image the Creator. To show what the Creator is like. To do and proclaim the Creator's will and way.

To image the Creator does not mean, however, that we become the Creator ourselves. Rather, we should accept the fact that we are indeed creatures. To deny our creaturehood and usurp God's position would make us less human.

The experiences of the Israelites in Exile bear witness to this fact. The Emperor was supposed to be the only "image of God" on earth. But instead of imaging God, he lorded it over the people. A religious cult was built around him, and people were compelled to worship him like a god. Those who refused suffered the brutal punishment of being burned at stake or being thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 3,6).

Indeed playing like a god would bring untold sufferings to many. The Early Christians suffered so much as a result of such demonic display of power (Rev. 13). Jesus himself was a victim of the powerful who thought and acted like gods (cf. John 19; Luke 23).

This reality is also concretely seen in present-day dictatorial and fascist regimes where people opposed to the abuses and excesses of the ruling powers are harassed, jailed, tortured or summarily executed. Playing like a god would indeed reduce a human person into a cruel "beast" (cf. Daniel 7; Rev. 13).

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II. . . . SINFUL . . .

We believe that the human person, though created to image the Creator, is sinful. The Yahwist writers expressed this belief in their writings preserved in Genesis 3. This piece of biblical narrative was written during the Solomonic Era (950 B.C.), when building constructions and other infrastructure programs were uppermost in the mind of the Monarch while the masses bore the burden of forced labor and heavy taxes (I Kings 11, II Chronicles 10:1-9). It was a time when riches adorned the palace and the Temple while the people lived in penury.

Through a story the Yahwists affirmed that the human person's downfall and misery is ultimately rooted in his/her refusal to trust and obey God. He/she wants instead to be like God. In the language of the biblical text, he/she desires to know what is "good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-6).

"Good and evil" is a Hebrew idiom attributed only to God. It means "everything". To know "good and evil", therefore, would mean to know everything. And only God can know everything. Who else can know everything other than God? Hence, desiring to know "good and evil" would mean desiring to be like God.

In the individual level, when the human person desires to be like God, he/she would like to be always at the top. And he/she would do everything he/she can in order to be there and remain there. Greed and selfishness would rule his/her life. Hence, he/she would logically dominate and exploit others for his/her own sake. Consequently, others would truly suffer. For he/she is not essentially God. He/she is just pretending to be one.

The "desire to be like God" is also seen very clearly in the contradictions between the rich and the poor, between the ruling powers and the suffering masses, between the superpowers and the powerless nations. In other words, the sinfulness of the human person is concretely seen not only in the level of the individual, but also in the relationships of peoples and nations, in the systems and structures of societies. Jesus and the prophets talk about the bankruptcies and hypocrisies of religious institutions (Amos 5; Matt. 23). Paul discusses how sin came to life through the Law (Romans 7), and the whole of creation groaning in travail in need for salvation (Romans 8).

Sin, therefore, concerns relationships - the relationship of the human person to himself/herself, to God, to his/her fellow human beings, and the rest of God's creation. In other words, it has an individual as well as a social dimension to it. Sin should be understood in this manner.

III. . . . BUT DESTINED TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY WITH GOD AND FELLOWMEN . . .

The human person is not born alone. He/she is born to a family or to a community. Although we have individual identities, still, we live in a community. This is ultimately shown in our being created as man and woman (Gen. 1:27). As a matter of fact, it is in our relationship with one another and to our God that our humanity finds meaning and fulfillment.

Being created in the "image of God" would also mean that the human person is created with dignity. And it is in the context of a human community that such dignity should be enhanced and preserved. A human person should not be treated like a property nor valued for a peso or a dollar. It is inhuman indeed to exploit people for the sake of monetary gains.

This is a sharp criticism of the Genesis writers against the kind of slavery experienced by the Israelites in the hands of the Babylonians and other foreign powers throughout the course of their history as a people. It could also be the same criticism against any form of slavery we are experiencing today. For slavery in any form is truly dehumanizing.

Out of the experiences of slavery, and persecutions, the people of God developed a vision of a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, a new human community which we may also affirm and share (Isa. 65; Rev. 21). It is a human community where weeping is no more; babies no longer die as -infants; workers live in houses they build; peasants enjoy the fruits of their labor; and God's justice and peace reign supreme throughout the land (Isa. 65:17-21).

Such truly dignified human community was seen in the life and works of the Early Church, wherein the resources of the community were shared and the need of everyone was met (Acts 4:32-35).

IV. . . . ENTRUSTED WITH GOD'S CREATION . . .

The human person is God's steward. Being created in God's image would also mean being God's responsible manager. We have a divinely bestowed social responsibility to see to it that God's creation is developed, not to be destroyed but to serve the human community. In short, stewardship should be understood in the light of our relationship with our fellow human beings.

All of us, every human person is God's steward; not just a few! As a matter of fact, we find fulfillment as human beings as we exercise our responsibility as God's stewards. We become less human if we are deprived of such divine responsibility. Stewardship, therefore should be shared by all.

In the Exilic Period, the Emperor, being God's only "image" on earth, considered himself as God's sole steward. In fact, he had dominion over all that belonged to the Empire, *including people* (cf. Lamentations 5, Daniel 3). However, the writers of Genesis 1 (also cf. Psalm 8) affirmed that all of God's creation, *except people*, are put under the dominion of the human person (vs. 26-31). The concern for people as human beings is truly of vital importance. This would mean that the human person is not someone to be dominated nor to be exploited, but someone to be cared for and to be respected as a fellow steward of God.

V. . . . AND CALLED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MEANINGFUL AND JUST SOCIAL ORDER.

As a creature in God's image, the human person is bestowed by God with the capacity as well as the right to think, analyze, reflect, decide and act for himself/herself. This divinely bestowed self-transcendence also reveals the humanness of the human person. In fact, it is something we cannot find in the rest of God's creation.

For instance, we may condition a dog to behave in the way we want, like giving food to help elicit a particular response. But this we cannot nor should not do with human beings. Human beings have the capacity and the right to think and decide for themselves. We should not treat human beings like dogs. There are some people though who are treated like dogs, and who seem to enjoy themselves being "dogs" of the rich and the powerful.

Human beings are dynamic and should remain as such. We are active participants in the making of history, in the shaping of the destiny of humankind. We decide what kind of society or church we want; what kind of social order and structure we should establish and follow. So that if and when this right is denied of us, then, we are also denied of our true humanity.

The Genesis writers' faith in the human was a product of their painful experiences in Exile, where their destiny as a people was decided not by themselves, but by their captors. Being slaves of the Babylonians, they had lost their self-respect and their sense of being human (cf. Lamentations 5; Nehemiah 5:1-13; Jeremiah 29). The Genesis writers' affirmation was a challenge as well as a call for the restoration of their self-respect as a people.

The centrality of the human person was also shown in the ministry of Jesus. He said, "Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Jesus placed the concern for the human above any religious or social order and structure. The human, in other words, should be the measure by which any social order, structure or any human project is to be judged.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CHURCH

Patrocinio Apura* and Salvador D. Eduarte**

WE BELIEVE

In the Church, the one Body of Christ, the community of those reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with Jesus' own ministry.

I. Introduction

The inclusion of the Church as part of the Article of faith has received contrasting, if not conflicting, views from various sectors of the Christian community. Various factors, of course, come into play to affect the often colored lenses by which believers look at and describe the Church. Socio-economic and political factors, for example, often play a significant part in conditioning a person's view of the Church. Much, too, depends upon a believer's faith and involvement in the actual life and work of the Church and the conditions of the world's life under which he or she lives.

Thus, historically the Church has been viewed in numerous ways. In general, however, two historical views of the Church have been dominant. There is, first of all, the view that looks at the Church as "the body of the hierarchy, ruled by Pope, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and lesser clergy." This may be called the imperial view of the Church. There is, secondly, the view that the Church is nothing more than a voluntary association entered into by individuals for the purpose of enhancing their religious interests. This may be called the contractual view of the Church.

These two views clearly represent ecclesiological extremes. The first, which emerged out of the age of feudalism, puts tremendous importance on the authority of the central organs of the Church, and allows little freedom for the individual believer. It has both a totalitarian form of polity and a totalitarian form of religious expression. The life and work of the Church are viewed to be so centrally regulated. The second view has come out of the age of *laissez faire* individualism, and views the Church as nothing more than a voluntary association of individuals who have banded together by contract to form a Church for the sake of convenience, for voluntary common worship, and for effecting the salvation of their souls. The Church, in this sense, has no significance and is dependent solely upon the voluntary wills of those who have come together to form it. Presumably it is dissolvable also upon the contrary will of those who have brought it into being.

The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, in a sense, takes an ecclesiological posture that avoids either of these two extremes, puts them somewhat in tension with each other, and locates the significance of the Church somewhere between them. The Statement of Faith unequivocally affirms the reality and significance of the Church, and asserts this to be an integral part of its article of faith in terms of four basic principles, namely, the Church as the Body of Christ, the Church as Community, the Church as the Community of the Reconciled, and the Church as the "Trustee" of Jesus' own ministry.

II. THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Statement of Faith starts with the ascription that the Church is the "Body of Christ ... " This, of course, is figurative. The

Church Fathers, notably Ambrose, Augustine, and Irenaeus, added an adjective to the noun and referred to the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. By this they meant that the Church is part of and integral to the Person of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, Paul uses this phrase in a number of occasions (see for example, Rom. 12:4-5; I Cor. 12:12-13; Ephesians 5:23-26). In all of these, what is pointed to is the special relationship between Christ and the Church in such a way that; without the Church, Christ is the head without a body. Scripture moreover makes it quite clear that Christ nourishes His Body, the Church, with His own life, and not only nourishes and feeds it but even gave His own life for its sake (Acts 20:28).

The affirmation that the church is the Body of Christ, in short proclaims both the divine origin and meaning of the Church. The Church is not the result of, nor did it come into being only because of the contriving of human purpose or human need. It is part of the work of God and is rooted in the purpose of God itself. Seen from the "eye of faith", the Church is a "continuation of the life of God that came into the world in Jesus of Nazareth - his body, an extension of his life in the world through the continued activity of the Holy Spirit."¹ This, of course, does not deny the human element that is present in it. The Church, after all, is still made up of human beings, does take the form of human institutions, and does its work through human groupings. Very often, too, the Church behaves in a very human manner and does preoccupy itself, with mundane interests. Bearing these in mind, however, must not vitiate the fact that as an article of faith, the significance and place of the Church in Christian life must be located in its divine origin and in its character as the historical extension of Christ's own work.

The Church as the Body of Christ is not so much an organization as it is an organism. An organism has life: it grows; it pulsates and makes its presence felt in its environment. As an organism, the Church is God's instrument of social transformation, Being God's own people, the Church radiates the life of its Founder, apart from which the fullness of God's glory becomes blurred.

The Church does not and cannot be applied, to only one denomination because no one denomination can lay claim to a monopoly of God's truth. Thus, the Church refers, in its generic sense, to all believers in Jesus Christ and who acknowledge His Lordship and Sovereignty in all aspects of life. The Church, in this sense, is one Body but has many parts. In affirming that the Church is the Body of Christ, one also affirms that each individual believer is a member of that one Body. The Church, in other words is one at the same time that it is a community of many persons.

III. THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

The Church as community underscores the fact that whatever else the Church is, it is in fact a community of persons. Moreover, to affirm that the Church is a community of persons is to affirm also the importance of the human response of faith. Above all, however, to affirm that the Church as the Body of Christ as community is to affirm that no one can claim authentic Christian identity apart from the Church. In these times when there are many so-called Bible teachers and "evangelists" who invite people to accept Christ as personal saviour, as though that was the end of it, without taking into consideration the Church in the life of the believer, this assertion could not be over-emphasized. A Christian is a Christian in relation to other persons. The Bible knows no isolated Christian because no man is an island. The communal life of the Spirit is found within the community of faith, and the gifts which are attached to that life (see Galatians 5:22-24) are never found outside but always within the fold of the community of God's people. Thus, ecclesial life is nourished by the gift of the Spirit, strengthening both fellowship and growth, and promoting peace and accord in such a manner that Church membership enables a person to move from elementary belief to a mature faith in Christ.

But, it is often asked, is it not possible to be a believer without any Church connection? Can one not be a child of God without joining a Church? The answer is no. For the Church is a community and a community can not exist unless a group comprises it. Whatever weaknesses the Church may have – and there are doubtless many – it is still true that it is only in the Church that God's salvific act is mediated through the power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY OF THE RECONCILED

Note that the Statement of Faith affirms that this community, this Body of Christ, is "the community of those reconciled to God through Jesus Christ." The Church, in other words, is not just a collection of undifferentiated individuals but is composed of those who are repentant of their sins and have been forgiven and accepted by God into His household through the Lord Jesus Christ. In this sense, the gift of reconciliation becomes fully realizable and experienced only in and through the Church. Paul affirms that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:19ff.). This reconciling act is both God giving himself as well as man responding in faith to the offer of God's saving act. Reconciliation, of course, presupposes that we are alienated from God through sin, and thus we need to be re-united, as it were, with the very source of our Being.

¹Howard Grimes, *The Church Redemptive* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958). p. 22

This also means that as members of the Community we are to be reconciled with one another. Division in the Body of Christ is a sin not only against the Lord of the Church but also against the very *raison d'être* of the Church. No Christian, least of all those who claim to be its leaders, can, without contradicting the nature of the Church, split the Body of Christ and create schism within the Community of Faith purely on personal grounds, whether it be pride, wounded feelings, desire for power and similar self-regarding reasons. The world will never believe that we are children of God unless the breach created by puny divisions in the Church will eventually be healed by the forgiving love of God in Jesus Christ.

The etymological roots of the word "Church" further clarifies this point. It should have been noted at the outset that the Hebrew word for the Church and its Greek derivative have been rendered in the Latin form *ecclesiam*. John Calvin has made a good comparison and analogy which might help us understand better the significance of the Church. He calls the Church a "company". This military figure of speech calls to mind citizens called by the trumpet and rushing from everywhere. They are present; they form a company - company of the faithful people, of those who, called by God's faithfulness, respond in faithfulness.² It is God who convokes them. The Church is not formed by human gatherings, nor is it a gathering of people who have the same opinions, but a gathering of people who until then have been scattered by their own opinions! Individualism, the by-product of Western capitalism, has no place in the Church, for the idea of community militates strongly against that privatization of Christianity which tends to confine religion to one's private affair. Religion is never a "private" affair; indeed, it is realized only when it is expressed in community. It is this sense of a community called by God and living in community with Him that the term *ecclesiam* conveys.

But the *ekklesia*, the community of those who are called, the people chosen out of many, is not an end in itself. It is called by God to service. The calling of God, as in ancient Israel, is never into a privilege, but for a purpose, and that purpose in history is realized in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.²

The oneness of the Body, of the Community of Faith, needs in this light a brief but special comment. This is specially so because of the historical commitment of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines to the unity of the Church and the re-union of the Churches. Clearly, the existence of many Churches can not be denied, neither can one gloss over the many divisions that have wracked the Church's life throughout its history. In declaring that the Body of Christ is One, the Statement of Faith recognizes that while the plurality of Churches is part of the historical manifestation of the Church, oneness is essential to its nature and being. Thus, while there are many Churches, there is only One Church, there is only One Body just as there is only Head who is Jesus Christ. Christians, in this sense, are united not under one *visible* head, but under One Invisible Head, who is Christ himself. Our unity is thus in Christ, not in anything or anywhere else. While the reality of many Churches may thus be recognized for whatever historical reasons that has brought this into being, division within the Body of Christ must be viewed as a "scandal" that is neither integral to the nature of the Church nor healthy for the fulfillment of the Church's mission. Christ's prayer puts this in perspective, "Holy Father, protect by the power of thy name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one... But it is not for these alone that I pray, but those who through their word put their faith in me; that they may all be one, as thou Father art in me and I in Thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me (John 17:11,20). Here, clearly, the unity of the Church is rooted in the unity of Jesus Christ with the Father so that it is integral to the being of the Church. More importantly, however, the unity of the Church is so "that the world may believe." Unity, in short, is not only essential to the Church's life, it is also essential to the Church's mission.

V. TRUSTEE OF CHRIST'S OWN MINISTRY

This leads to the final point which the Statement of Faith makes with regard to the significance of the Church. The Statement of Faith affirms that the Church is "entrusted with Jesus' own ministry."

²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), Vol. II, Book 2, p. 56. See also Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church* (New York: Fontana Books, 1958), pp. 115-117.

Two things must be said immediately in this regard. First, the ministry is Christ's own ministry. The ministry does not belong to the Church neither is it determined by the Church. It belongs to Christ. The Church as such has no ministry in and of itself. Its ministry is a derivative ministry: it is derived from and issues exclusively out of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Church as a result occupies that exclusive place in history as the body through which Christ's ministry is extended into the world and into history until the end of time. No other historical body can lay claim to this vocation and to this role. The high place which this high calling places upon the Church, however, must be viewed in terms of the fact that the Church is the one historical body that is subjected to the judgment and expectation that is placed upon it by the ministry of Jesus Christ. No other historical body as well is placed under such a stringent judgment and such a high calling. Second, the body through which Christ's ministry is entrusted is the whole Church. The ministry is not entrusted to individuals in and by themselves, certainly not to certain sectors of the Church only, even more certainly not to the clergy only – for example, the bishops, pastors and other religious workers. The ministry of Jesus is entrusted to the whole Church, to the whole people of God. That ministry, in other words, cannot be usurped as the exclusive domain of any one group, or one sector of the Body of Jesus Christ. Indeed, within that one Body each part functions and works with its own gifts for the fulfillment of the one calling that is given to it by Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11ff.).

What is this ministry of Jesus that is entrusted to the Church? A few passages from the New Testament describes and proclaims some of its main features:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

I appeal to you therefore brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies as 'a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship (Romans 11:36-12:1).

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

From these Biblical passages, a number of elements become constitutive of the ministry that is entrusted to the Church.

First, the Church's ministry is and must always be a response to God's action. The Church's ministry is the Church's response to God's "wonderful deeds" of which the most wonderful is his gracious self-emptying in Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world.

Second, the ministry of the Church, therefore, involves the task of proclamation and declaration of these "wonderful deeds" of God for the redemption of the world. This is what is involved in the preaching of the Gospel as God's Good News and Word in Jesus Christ for the salvation of one and for the salvation of all.

Third, the ministry of the Church is the embodiment, the incarnation, in its life and work of the service of the "suffering servant" which was the primary hallmark of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus himself ascribes this primary character to his ministry by his choice of the Isaiah passage about the "suffering servant" when He started His ministry (Luke 4:14ff.). No less than this primary character of Jesus' ministry must be at the center of the Church's ministry. As the passage from Luke clearly indicates, this service of the suffering servant to be devoted for "the preaching of the Gospel to the poor," "the healing of the brokenhearted," "the deliverance to ... captives;" the recovery of "sight to the blind," and the setting "at liberty them that are bruised." The task of proclamation, in this sense, is accompanied and made active in a life of service that is mediated through the form and commitment to others of the "suffering servant." He or she who proclaims is he or she who is the suffering servant of all. Apart from this form, the Church becomes an unworthy trustee of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Within the needs and aspirations of our people at this moment in our history, and within the fellowship which we share with the Church around the world and through the ages, it is this ministry of faithful proclamation of God's wonderful deeds and of loving and suffering service to those who are neediest, that is entrusted to us by our Lord. It is thus also this ministry that must manifest itself in the elemental forms of life that are characteristic of the Church's existence, namely, its worship, its vocation and its order.

Aptly, the Church's worship is called a "service." In its life of prayer, adoration, confession and listening to the Word of God, and in its liturgical and sacramental acts, the Church re-lives and reminds itself of that ministry that is entrusted to it by its Lord. In the various vocations by which it calls its members to serve, it calls them and calls itself to the one vocation to which Christ calls His Church to fulfill. By its "orders" it sets itself up for the equipment and sustenance of the service that it is called to give to the world. Through its "ordered" ministry, the Church sets aside those to whom it grants special services to the Church and to the world. Through them and through their ministry, the Church serves and ministers to the world and fulfills its stewardship of Christ's ministry. Through its work of education and nurture, the Church seeks the strengthening of the whole Body, not for its self-perpetuation and maintenance, but for the equipment of the whole Body so that it can fulfill better the service which Christ has entrusted to it. By the institution of the sacraments and the means of grace, it recognizes its dependence upon God's empowerment and makes sacramental the work of healing the brokenhearted, giving deliverance to captives, giving food to the hungry, setting at liberty the captives, and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. In all of this, it fulfills not so much its task but its *being* as the "one Body of Christ, the community of those who are reconciled to God through *Jesus* Christ, and entrusted with Jesus' own ministry."

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THE PLACE OF THE BIBLE

Noriel C. Capulong*

WE BELIEVE

In the Holy Bible as a faithful witness of God's self-revelation in the history of His people, God's inspired instrument to illumine, guide, correct, and edify His people for their faith and witness.

The fourth article in the Statement of Faith recognizes the very significant and normative place the Scriptures assume in the life and work of the Church. By itself, the Holy Bible may be initially described as a collection of ancient documents with varied literary forms which contain the record of the history of God's people in their relationship with God. In short, the Bible is the record of a relationship between God and His chosen people, a relationship that is set squarely on the stage of human political, social, and religious history. As it is, the story of such relationship is reflected upon and recorded in various forms of literature that are rooted in the culture and the particular historical situation of the people of God.

I. A THREE-WAY UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE

With such initial description, we may approach the Bible and study it in three but necessarily interconnected ways. First, the Bible may be understood on the theological level as the word of God, and as a witness to and an affirmation of faith in the God who is revealed in its pages. In this way, the Bible is understood in primarily theological concepts. That is, the Bible is a document that records the deep theological reflections of the people of God, their confession of faith in this God whom they recognize, from Genesis as the sole Lord and creator of the heavens and the earth, to Revelation, as the great judge and re-creator of all that is. Through the pages of these documents, God's people are also making the confession of their faith in a God who acts in history in order to save and liberate the oppressed, and who came to identify Himself with His own people. Indeed, the Bible easily becomes the source of the most profound theological expressions of God's people.

Second, the Bible may also be understood on the textual level, as literature, that is, as word of God that is expressed and recorded by His people in typical literary forms of expression, such as a historical narrative, poetry or song, prophetic oracle or sayings, or proverbs, parables, epistles, and many others. Each literary form reflects a particular cultural background and historical situation to which the word of God is initially addressed. Thus, a proverb may reflect a typical teaching situation between a sage and his student. A legal material in the Old Testament such as the ones in Exodus (21-23), or in Deuteronomy (12-26) may reflect the context of a periodic religious festival in the sanctuary wherein the priests are expected to read and proclaim anew to the people the covenant regulations for their guidance. The apocalyptic materials in Daniel and the book of Revelation may reflect a situation of extreme political and religious persecution of the Jews and early Christians in the hands of colonial masters. The form of the literature of Biblical material also provides a very important key in understanding the original cultural and historical background of the material and in eventually arriving at the message of the text.

Third, the Bible, on the historical level, being the word of God that is encased in a particular culturally bound literary form, may also be understood as a record of history. It records the history of Israel as a nation and as a people of God. As such, Biblical literature, even as it contains the word of God, also contains records of events portraying the origins, the rise, fall, and the reconstitution of Israel as a nation, and the birth of Christianity as a religion. All these events are then set against the broader background of the history of the Ancient Near East, the history of the rise and fall of empires and super powers in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome. Indeed, the Bible presents itself as a history of a people; even as it may also be seen as a history of ideas and of faith, as well as a collection of varied forms of literature.

By its nature and topic, the literature of the Bible, is "highly historical and communal in the sense that it is concerned with human life in community under concrete conditions subject to change" (Gottwald, 1985: 597).

II. A WITNESS TO GOD'S SELF REVELATION AND TO THE DIVINE-HUMAN ENCOUNTER

It is in such historical processes recorded in various forms in the text of the Bible that one perceives the presence and movement, character and purpose of God. In this sense, the Bible becomes a literary-historical record of God's self-revelation to His people. It is a record that is encased in culture-bound literary forms and shaped to a large extent by the historical context out of which the record was written. But it is nevertheless a faithful record and witness to what God has disclosed to His people. It is essentially a witness to an encounter - the divine-human encounter - taking place on the stage of history. It is in that encounter between God and His people, either as a liberating or a judging encounter, that a relationship is born.

III. A FAITHFUL HISTORICAL WITNESS

The faithfulness of the Biblical witness to God's revelation and to the divine-human encounter does not necessarily imply, however, a faithful reproduction of the facts of the events witnessed to. The Bible does not and never claims to be concerned with the details and facts of a historical event. But the Bible is concerned mainly with an event as it becomes an indicator of God's presence and purpose and as that event becomes a bearer of God's message for His people. This, an event, like the Exodus event, is narrated in the book of Exodus, mainly because of its revelatory significance for God's people, because God's liberating presence was perceived as having acted decisively in favor of an oppressed people.

An event is recounted, not in order to reconstruct how it happened, but in order to derive meaning which has profound implications in the life of God's people. It is narrated in order to teach the people about God's ways and demands, and to challenge them towards a faithful and responsible life of relationship with their God.

The reconstruction of a historical event, thus, is not given so much emphasis as the conveying of certain truth and affirmations designed to guide, upbuild and give hope to the community of believers. "The events recorded are therefore never the 'bare facts', but are always accessible to us only in the clothing of their interpretation by the biblical authors..." (Van-Leer, 1980: 48).

This does not mean however, that the accounts of events and stories in the Bible become historically unreliable. Actually, even in the face of accounts of events that are strongly confessional in character, such as the Exodus-rooted credo in Deuteronomy 26:5-9, it cannot be denied that the memory of the event, as celebrated and recalled by the people in their festivals, is something that must have a basis in the historical experience of the people. No matter how thickly entrusted with theological interpretation the recollection of an event was, it cannot be denied that such theological interpretation has always been based on a "core event", the profound experience of which provided for its continuous reliving in memory.

We must remember, however, that it is the interpretation that makes an event an event. We may wonder why the Exodus, which is the foundational salvation event in the Old Testament, is actually not mentioned at all in the court annals of the Egyptian Pharaohs. It would be understandable to assume that as far as the Egyptian Pharaohs and historians are concerned, the escape of a motley band of slaves from their work camp is something that is so insignificant. It does not merit being recorded in their official annals. For them, it is a non-event. But what appeared to be a non-event for the Egyptians proved to be the "core event" in Israel's salvation history as far as the Biblical writers are concerned.

The same may be said of the variety of versions in the New Testament concerning the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In this case, the variety of versions coming from the four gospels, some of them even conflicting in certain aspects (e.g., the differences in the chronology of Jesus' ministry between the Synoptics and the Gospel of John), reinforces rather than weakens the historicity of Jesus as the Christ. They only point to a multiplicity of perspective in the interpretation of the same event. One may just wonder, why does Matthew trace Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham in the very beginning of his gospel (Matt. 1:1-16), while Luke traces Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:25-38)? Why is there no birth story in Mark, and why do the birth stories in Matthew and Luke differ from each other in details (Matt. 1:18-2:12; Luke 2:1-20)? And why does John interpret every mighty act of Jesus as a sign (John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14; 9:16; etc.)? Far from discouraging the believer, these problems even add to the richness and color of the Scriptures. They testify to the human dynamism involved in their writing and confirm the Bible as a record of several human witnessing to and interpretation of historical events, which, for the different writers concerned, are filled with religious meaning too profound to be captured by just any one of them.

IV. THE BIBLE AS AN INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

Since the Bible is considered as a theological interpretation of events in which the active presence of God is perceived by His people, the Scriptures may be seen also as representing a particular interpretation and view of history. History, as far as the Bible is concerned, is not just a plain and arbitrary succession of events into which people are caught. Rather, history is a purposeful unfolding of God's power over events and people. It is also a meaningful recording of the consequences of the people's decisions and actions in response to contemporary challenges and crises and to their responsibilities as a people of God. It is a view of history that upholds the lordship of God. It is A view of history that Upholds the lordship of God over the lives of men and nations and the primacy of His righteous and just demands on His people, and the constancy of His mercy and compassion on the weak and the oppressed. At the same time, the Scripture present an evaluation of the responses of God's people to His demands throughout their history. It shows how the Israelites had responded to God's offer of a covenant relationship in the wake of their liberation from Egypt. It shows the people's early attempts to establish a community in the Promised Land wherein legal, egalitarian, tribal-based safeguards as those social-ethical laws found in Exodus 21-23, were made in order to prevent the recurrence of an Egyptian-type of an oppressive system through their Tribal Confederacy. It shows how, upon the establishment of the Monarchy, the nation began to drift back to a corrupt and highly exploitative system. Such internal decaying eventually led to her becoming victim to external enemies, the foreign colonial masters who were then seen as the historical agents of God's judgment on His own people.

The Bible also shows how the people of God, upon receiving the punishment as exiles, attempted again to restore their broken relationship with God through a regimented and strictly legalistic application of the covenant requirements (cf. Ezra-Nehemiah). In the process, the goal of obtaining God's favor and restoring the covenant-relationship is now thought to be hinged on certain legal requirements that only need to be fulfilled by the people. The divine-human relationship is now reduced into a simplistic formula based on human initiative and achievement.

The Bible also shows how the prophets had consistently criticized the regimented but insincere approach to God, without much success. Thus, the story of Jesus' life and ministry may also be seen as part of a continuum in the history of the divine-human encounter. Here, however, that history is considered as reaching a decisive nodal point. Jesus is presented as the fulfiller of the people's messianic hopes but in a way so radically different from normal Jewish expectations. Jesus is the Messiah who inaugurates the Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom which is not identifiable with any known human institution. At the same time, it is a kingdom that is supposed to be experienced by people here on earth.

The Scriptures then, specifically, the Gospels, present a new initiative of God in history through Jesus, in His unceasing effort to restore the wholeness of the divine-human relationship. They present God's ultimate self-revelation and, along with it, the depth of His character of love, compassion, justice and righteousness.

The Scriptures, at this point, restate the claim of God on His people. This time, the people are confronted with the ethical demands of the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus' coming. Such demands are nevertheless a re-statement of the original covenant responsibilities demanded of Israel by God, which is encapsulated in the so-called summary of the Law: love of God with the totality of one's whole being, and love of neighbor "as yourself" (cf. Luke 10:26-28).

This demand, however, remains addressed to the collectivity of peoples and nations. For in the final analysis, every individual will face the throne of judgment not as himself or herself alone, but as a member of a collectivity of peoples and nations acting and responding in various historical situations (cf. Matt. 25:32ff.).

In this light, the Scriptures may be considered as God's instrument in effecting His sovereign rule and lordship over peoples and nations. Through the Bible, Christians here in the Philippines are made accountable for the lives of their fellow countrymen just as the ancient Israelites were. Through the Bible, Filipino Christians are tasked to be participants and God's representatives in the making of history in the nation, that is, to be involved in issues and questions that concern the welfare of our people at this stage of our history. Filipino Christians are asked to be at the forefront in the struggle for justice, peace and democracy in this country if they are to remain faithful to the character and mission of God and of Jesus revealed in the Scriptures.

Indeed, the Bible can really be seen in its totality as a faithful witness to God's self revelation, the revelation of His acts and will for man as they are made relevant to contemporary Philippine situation. It is also a faithful witness to the dynamics of the divine-human encounter in history taking place in the events being told as well as in the reading of its pages by believers searching for light and guidance in living in contemporary Philippine reality.

V. THE BIBLE AS AN INSPIRED INSTRUMENT

It is in the light of the above discussion that the Bible may indeed be considered as an inspired instrument of God. It is inspired not 'in the sense that it is a letter-perfect, and flawless book, that it is literally infallible. To assume that it is so would be tantamount to ascribing to the Bible a quality of perfection that is attributable only to God and to nobody and nothing else including the Bible. It would be tantamount to Bibliolatry, or making an idol of the Bible.

A patient and systematic study of the Bible will reveal the many seeming contradictions in views and theology between books and even within a book of the Bible. It is for this reason that the Book of Isaiah is believed to actually consist of two or three books written at great intervals of time and space. It is also for this reason that the gospel of John is classified differently from the other three gospels. We just have to understand all these problems in the light of the fact that the books of the Bible were written over a time gap of more than one thousand years, over periods of Israel's having six different colonial masters (Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Graeco-Syrians, Romans), with their corresponding cultural-religious influences, and over a geographical expanse that covers the whole length of Palestine, Syria, Babylon and Asia Minor. This is in addition to the fact that what we are usually reading are but translations from the original Biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. And no translation can be said as having flawlessly translated the words and the original meanings of the words of the Bible into our native language or even in English. The Bible comes to us in a highly filtered form.

But if the inspiration of the Bible is not derived then from the letter and form of the book, where then does it come from? The inspiration is of God Himself. It comes from God Himself as He reveals Himself in the contents of each book of the Bible, and as He elicits in the reader a sense of being confronted by His presence, as He initiates in the reader a process of transformation of being, a conversion, leading him to commit his life in accordance with God's will as reflected in what he has read in the Bible and as he translates it in his own contemporary living and historical situation.

In this view, the Bible remains an instrument of God in bringing people to Him. It is, therefore, never an end in itself. It is never to be equated with nor substituted for God Himself. The Bible is a tool and a gift to us by God in order to enable us to know more about Him and be able to do His will here on earth. In effect, it is a guide for a life of obedience, a life of discipleship, a life of committed service to Him and to the people. It is never intended to function as an opiate in the life of a believer. It is never intended to make him withdraw from reality and from social responsibility. Rather, it is intended to open up the eyes of every believer in the community to the various opportunities of service and active involvement in the life of his or her own society, where his or her God reigns as lord and savior. It intends to develop in him or her a sensitivity to the dynamics of history taking place in society and to the presence of God and to the direction of His action in that society. It calls him or her to participate in the work of God in his or her own society, in the struggle to realize God's kingdom here on earth. It is challenging him or her to adopt the very program of ministry of Jesus as his or her own (Luke 4:18-21), even if it may lead to the cross.

As the Bible is to be considered as God's basic instrument to guide us to Him, it is also to be seen as a witness to the edification of God's people. Such edification though, as shown by Jesus, is achieved most meaningfully, in suffering for the sake of God's people.

How then do we allow the Holy Bible to become God's instrument for illuminating, guiding, correcting and edifying us as His people? The basic answer is for us to seriously study it. For only in seriously approaching the Bible can its profound truths and lessons emerge from the pages that imprison them to become our guide in adopting a lifestyle that is in accordance with God's will, in choosing a vocation that is in answer to His calling, and in pursuing a vision for society in obedience to His demand.

But since the Bible is a gift of God to His people for their mutual upbuilding, edification and deepening of faith, it is preferable that it be studied also collectively, its truth and lessons be drawn out through collective effort and

sharing. For the Bible was originally handed down to a community of believers. It is the community that is supposed to learn together, grow together in faith and social awareness from the study of the Bible.

We, however, cannot get illumination from the study of the Bible if we only study it to find a confirmation of our traditionally-held beliefs, ideas, practices, and even political options. Rather, we should approach the Bible with total openness of mind and spirit, like a molten clay that is willing to be molded in any shape by its owner, allowing the Holy Spirit to really work in us as we honestly search for the truth.

It may also be important for us to realize that much of the stories in the Old Testament, and much of the New Testament, came out of situations that considered these documents as rather subversive, containing ideas that are rather unsettling for the status quo and those who control it. In fact, most of the Biblical heroes, including Jesus himself, suffered because of the radical implications of their teachings.

As we read and study the Bible therefore, we should always consider the fact-that what we are reading are documents the possession of which caused the severest forms of persecution of the early Christians. At the same time, they are also documents that provided the seed-bed for the greatest revolution in the world. They are documents that practically turned the world upside down, the world of values and the world of politics (cf. Luke 1:46-55; Acts 17:6).

VI. THE SCIENTIFIC-CRITICAL METHOD OF STUDYING THE BIBLE

We, however, would not be able to appreciate the significance of this historical relevance and the textual uniqueness of the Bible and the profound implications of its message for us unless we study it with the help of basic scientific-critical tools now becoming more and more available. For the study of the word of God, and how it becomes God's inspired, instrument, is something that should not be taken lightly. It is a task that should involve the total commitment of the believer and his willingness to learn and grow. And because of the seriousness of the task involved, we need to avail of one of the best gifts of God to man in furthering the frontiers of human knowledge – the gift of science. That is, we use the scientific-critical tools of analysis to enable us to have a firmer grasp of what the text must have meant originally in order for us to be able to determine what the text means for us now.

This method of study means that we would need to know a little about history, particularly the history of Israel, to help us with the necessary background knowledge in clarifying the context of a passage. Also, we need to be acquainted with the form and dynamics of basic literary types present in the Bible. We should be able to distinguish, at the very least, between prose and poetry in the Bible, and how one form is interpreted differently from another form. Surely, we should not interpret any part of Psalms as if it is a prose narrative, as was disastrously done in a popular Bible translation (cf. Taylor's *The Living Bible*). Each literary form, like the parables of Jesus, or the epistles of Paul, or even the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, reflects particular socio-cultural setting in life which will determine to a large extent the way a passage of the book is to be interpreted. In the process, however, as the context of the passage is gradually disclosed and its original meaning and lesson established, we are also led to a process of examining our own contemporary contexts and our own selves. We begin to see some points of application in our lives and in the problems of our society. We begin to see that there are always parallel situations and parallel human responses, and perhaps, parallel demands of God. From there, we can derive further implications that can lead to a renewed hope and commitment, as well as repentance and renewal of lives along with a conviction to act accordingly in response to the word of God heard from that particular passage.

VII. THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

As one goes through this process, one affirms once more the authority of the Bible in the lives of God's people and in the greater community. In effect, the authority of the Bible becomes more and more established every time a study of the Bible takes place among a group of believers each time it is seriously and critically grappled with, each time it has resulted in reformed lives and renewed commitment to serve God and His people, each time it has created a new awareness and sensitivity among the believers, seeing their mission-task as being linked to the total effort to uplift human life and dignity, especially among the marginalized and dehumanized sectors of our society. For in the ultimate sense, the authority of the Bible is not to be sought in the letter of the text itself nor in the pronouncements of church magistrates. Rather, it is to be seen in the Bible's capacity as an instrument of God to

effect changes in the lives of people, and in its power to imbue men and women with a vision and a sense of high calling.

Finally, it remains important for every member of the church to know about the theological traditions out of which the Protestant faith developed. And we are indeed indebted to the fathers of the Reformation led by Martin Luther for that principle of *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) and *sola fide* (faith alone) in deciding questions of faith and conduct. Without intending to diminish the significance of their contribution, however, we should never forget the fact that in the ultimate analysis, after knowing the appropriate place of the Bible in the hierarchy of our faith, it is God alone, through Christ alone, who remains the sole authority in our lives as a people and as a nation, today and in the future.

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TOWARDS A NEW BEING AND A NEW WORLD

by Feliciano V. Carino*

WE BELIEVE

God is working to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world His Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is present where faith in Jesus Christ is shared, where healing is given to the sick, where food is given to the hungry, where light is given to the blind, where liberty is given to the captive and oppressed, where love, justice and peace prevail.

I. THE "PLACE" OF THE FIFTH ARTICLE

The significance of this article may be noted by the place it occupies in the overall framework of the Statement of Faith. Chronologically, it is the fifth article. That should not be construed, however, as an indication that it has that much less significance than the previous ones. The Statement of Faith is *one, whole statement of faith* in which the various parts are equal tangents of one affirmation. Each part, as it were, must be seen in the manner in which it flows from or is related to the others. At any time that one part is given less attention than the others, the wholeness of the one affirmation becomes distorted and the "faith" becomes reduced both in terms of its content and of its purpose.

The Statement of Faith starts with the affirmation about the nature of God and his manifestation as creator, redeemer and sustainer. Within this three-fold manifestation, the coming of Jesus Christ as redeemer and Lord and the presence of the Holy Spirit as empowerment and guide to believers are seen as the work of one and the same God. This is followed by the affirmation about the nature of the human as created in the image of God, sinful but at the same time given a "high" destiny and a "high" calling in relation to God and to the rest of the created order. The third article speaks of that community — the Church -- where the Christian life is nurtured and through which the ministry of Jesus is extended in history. The fourth refers to the source of our knowledge about God and the primary vehicle through which we hear the voice of God calling us to the roots of our faith and to the demands which God imposes on us in our time. In referring to the Bible as the faithful witness of God's self-revelation in the history of His people, the Statement of Faith strongly reaffirms the conviction that the living Word of God is heard most definitely and forcefully through the witness of the Old and New Testaments — a conviction that is central to the Reformed tradition of which the United Church is a part.

The fifth article flows from and is integral to these previous affirmations. It is important to point this out at the outset because in the classical creedal formulations of the Church the affirmation about the continuing work of God in the present and about the task of the Church as witness to God's Kingdom in the world is not commonly made. In including and underscoring this article in its Statement of Faith, the United Church is recognizing that the missiological dimension of the life of the Church is integral to its act of confessional affirmation.

The first four articles, in a way, are *foundational*. They summarize and describe the foundations on which the structure and content of the Christian faith are built. The first four articles, too, are, in a way, "internal." They refer to things that are affirmed within and happen inside the life of the Christian community and within the life of the believer. The fifth article, on the other hand is, as already indicated above, *missiological* and *directional*. It points the life of the Christian community and of the believer to things that are happening *outside* of the Christian community and to what the Church and the Christian might do in relation to the world in which they live. The fifth article, in other words, seeks to provide *orientation and purpose* for those actions and forms of behavior that the Church and the Christian might undertake as an expression of their life and work in the world. In the process, it also provides some clues for those aspirations that the Church might seek to embody in its interaction with the social order in which it is set, and in its life and work within the larger human community in which it is to do its witness. Understandably, the fifth article could be considered the "social plank" of the Statement of Faith. Even this, however, needs to be qualified. First, the distinction between the "individual" and the "social" dimensions of faith is really never tenable. God's act is at once an "individual" and a "social" act, so that one cannot in the end separate the individual and the social dimensions of faith. There is a social character even in the nature of God's

being as it is laid out in the Trinitarian formula. There, too, is- a social character to the work of God as creator, redeemer and sustainer by virtue of the fact that these are done in relation to the whole of creation rather than simply to the individual. In this sense, all of the various parts of the Statement of Faith are "social" in character and have a social importance. Second, the Statement of Faith embodies a primary characteristic of reformed faith in affirming that there is and should be no split between the "theological" and the "ethical," between the "religious" affirmation and the "social" action and aspiration. What God *is* is known only and grasped only through what God *does*. In the same manner, what the Christian *is* is rooted in and mediated through what the Christian *does*. There is, in this sense, no theological affirmation that does not involve a form of social action, at the same time that any form of action is rooted in or integral with some kind of affirmation. "Act" and "being" cannot be separated from each other. Thus, as the great Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, has so well put it, ethics cannot be separated from dogmatics, neither can ethics be considered simply as the offspring of dogmatics. Ethics is part of dogmatics, and all dogmatics have an ethical dimension. Precisely because what God *is* is what God *does*, our action as Christians must be attuned to what God is doing in the world. Ethics becomes in this context a matter of tracing the shape of God's action in history and provide that action a human equivalent.

II. GOD IS WORKING STILL

This article re-states and re-affirms the primary theological axis on which the whole Statement of Faith hangs and which runs through all of the other articles: God is a God who is *at work*. To put it differently, the God in whom we believe, who is revealed and who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, and who is present in the world through the Holy Spirit, is a God who *acts*. The sovereignty of God as creator, redeemer and sustainer is a sovereignty that is active rather than passive. It is a sovereignty moreover that is *involved in* rather than *aloof from* the ongoing history of His people and of the whole created order. His work, therefore, is not to be understood in the past tense but in the *present tense*. God is working still. His work of creation, redemption and sustaining has not stopped. Our lives as individuals and the life of nations and societies and of the whole cosmos are the arenas where that work is being done. Creation, redemption and sustenance are not, in this sense, finished products that are merely to be given out as if in a packaged form. They are ongoing activities of God, ongoing gifts of His gracious will. They are events that happen still in our time and place. They are happenings that we need to grasp in our own lives and in the lives of our communities. As such, our lives as human beings and as believers and members of His Church are to be attuned to this ongoing activity of an ever-active Lord, so that our work is to be seen in the light of His work. This is the reason why faith is never a matter of giving assent to a body of prescribed doctrines but the active attunement of our lives and of everything that we do to the active and present will of God as this continues to operate in our world.

This conviction about an active, involved and contemporaneous God who is working still in our lives and in our world is central to the Reformed tradition and to the whole gamut of Biblical faith. The Bible, as we know, is history. It is the history of a people; of a people who were once no people and how they became a people. It is the history of the concrete problems this people faced, their agonies, their sufferings, their temptations, the individual and collective choices they had to make, their political entanglements and oppressions, their hopes and aspirations. It is the history of that people's struggle to be free and to find a homeland. Amidst that history of a people, God emerges as an actor, in fact, as the primary actor that creates, recreates, redeems and sustains, and pushes that people to their promised land to their promised destiny.

It is that same God about which we are talking when we say in the Statement of Faith, "we believe *God is working* to make each person a new being in Christ and the whole world His Kingdom." Note that the tense in which the phrasing of the article is put is in *the present*. God is working still in our lives, in the life of each person, and also in the life of our present world. The fact that He is *working still* is what impels us to *work also*. The fact that He is working still in the present impels us also to look critically and creatively in our present life and in our present world so that we might locate where He is at work, with whom He is working and what, in the light of this, we might do as well. What we do with our lives, with our environment, with our social existence, with our political aspirations and with the whole created world becomes caught in the ongoing activity of a God who is active still and who has not ceased in His work of creation, redemption and sustenance. The work that we do to build a home, or to found a church, or to make and re-make society, or to renew our lives are not separated from but are located within the ongoing active work of God for the remaking of each person and for the transformation of the whole

world into God's own aspiration and hope for what we and our world are supposed to be. Our work is to be God's own work and our world is to be God's own world.

III. A NEW BEING AND A NEW WORLD

The direction, the goal, towards which God's work moves is, according to the Statement of Faith, the making of "each person (into) a new being in Christ and the whole world His Kingdom." Several things need to be clarified in order to draw the full meaning of these lines.

- A. The making of each person into "a new being in Christ and the whole world (into) His Kingdom" are, properly understood, to be seen as *eschatological* events. They are the final fruit, the fullest fulfillment and the last events in the work of God. It is therefore no accident that this article is situated between the affirmation about the human as both made in the image of God. It is, therefore, no accident that this article is situated between the affirmation about the human as both made in the image of God and at the same time sinful, who is called to participate in the making of a just social order (Article II), and the final article which looks forward to that time when Christ will come again and "gather His children in His Kingdom and make all creation new" (Article VI). Both the new being and the new world are, in this sense, God's gift and God's own making the fulfillment of which are to come in God's own time. Both the "new being" and the "new world" are, to put it differently, to be seen as in process of being made between "present reality" and "future fulfillment."
- B. There can be, as a result, no triumphalism on the part of the Church or of the Christian about both the "new being in Christ" and about the "coming of God's Kingdom." No one can claim either of these affirmations for himself or herself, or for the world in which we live or seek to build. What we can claim and what we may see are only approximations, only "signs," of the presence and the power of these realities in our lives and in the midst of our histories. Such approximations and "signs" are struggling manifestations on the way towards the full consummation of that newness of personal and social life which are promised to us by God and which are the work of His own gracious will towards us.
- C. It is important to note that the Statement of Faith underscores the fact that the work of God has both a personal and a social dimension. Its personal dimension is the making of "each person (into) a new being in Christ." Its social dimension is the making of "the whole world (into) His Kingdom." What is involved in the work of God, in other words, is not only the conversion and transformation of each person in the very depth of his or her being, but also the remaking of society and of the whole world in all of their structures and patterns of relationships, for example, in their structures and patterns of relationships among persons and peoples, in their structures and patterns of relationships of power, in their structures and patterns of relationship with nature, and in their "economy" of time, abilities, knowledge, and of goods, resources and benefits.
- D. The making of "each person (into) a new being in Christ" is clearly much more than the conversion of persons from unbelievers to believers, or from a life of unfaith to a life of faith in Jesus Christ. It is more than the passage from indifference and disbelief into an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and entry into membership in the Church. It is the transformation of the whole being in such a way that it begins to manifest and show a new orientation, a new purpose, a new allegiance, a new web of relationships, and a new power for constant renewal, repentance and forgiveness. That it is "in Christ" means not only that it is thoroughly and constantly an existence that is rooted in faith, but also, that it is an existence that is nurtured in that quality of living that is exemplified by Jesus as the summation and incarnation of the "new being" that entered the world. That it is "in Christ" means, moreover, that it is not sustaining and self-fulfilling but is possible only by its attachment to and being related with Christ as its source, center and aspiration. This "new being" manifests itself in "signs" that become operative as the expression of a new quality and power for life in this world. In the Biblical narrative and in the Christian tradition, the "signs" of this new being that are manifested in life are those of love, justice and righteousness, freedom and peace, full development and fulfillment. Where the "new being" begins to emerge, that new being manifests itself in a life of love, justice, righteousness, freedom, peace and fulfillment. Where the life of love, justice, righteousness, freedom, peace and fulfillment begins to occur, there the new being in Christ is beginning to be nurtured.

- E. The symbol of the Kingdom of God as the final end of God's work in the world is central to the Biblical narrative. The symbol is indelibly and unmistakably political in character and demolishes any presumptions that there is no political quality to the work of God. On the contrary, the symbol of the Kingdom of God underscores the political shape of God's aspiration for humanity and the inevitable political character of the mission of the Church in the world.

The importance of the symbol of the Kingdom of God is best illustrated by the fact that the coming of Jesus into the world was announced as the coming of the Kingdom and as the inaugural act of its inception as a reality in history. "The Kingdom of God is at hand," proclaimed John the Baptist in announcing the coming of Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:2). The preaching and teaching of Jesus were all centered on the Kingdom of God as God's hope for the world. Jesus' parables were almost entirely parables of the Kingdom, prefiguring in human life and in the life of society the shape of human relations, the demands, the perspectives, the orientations and the hopes that life in the Kingdom exemplify.

The Kingdom of God, in short, is the symbol used by Jesus to express God's own unique intention and God's own unique hope for the world. As such, it set the tone for Christ's ministry as it should also for the life and mission of the Church. The "Kingdom" is the utopia of God's own dream for his people, the final good of the whole creation in God. It is the hope of a world in which all imperfection is removed and in which God's rule permeates all aspects of life. The "Kingdom," in this sense, carries salvation to its completion and to the fullness of its implications in personal and social life, and in the life of the whole universe. It is the "new being" expressing itself and being embodied in the corporate and collective life of the world.

The images and descriptions of this future Kingdom in the Bible are numerous. In the prophecy of Micah, it is described as a world where "they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks..." where "Nations will never again go to war and never prepare for battle again. Everyone will live in peace... and no one will make them afraid" (Micah 4:3-5). In Isaiah, the Kingdom is described as the reign of justice and righteousness that will lead to peace. It is a "new heaven and a new earth," writes Isaiah, where they who build houses shall inhabit them, "and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them" (Isaiah 65:17-25). In the final pages of the New Testament, after all the signs of the Kingdom are given in the parables of Jesus, in the life and ministry of the early Church, the future Kingdom is presented as "a new heaven and a new earth... a new Jerusalem..." the coming of which means that God's home is now with humankind. "He will live with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all their tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared" (Revelations 21:1-4).

This is the Kingdom that the Church bears and proclaims as the final summation and fulfillment of its hope and the salvation that it presents to the world. The images of the Kingdom expressed in the Bible are no blueprints of the future society neither are they programmatic enough so that they can be viewed as a platform for the Church's political work. They present clear and perceptible orientations and parameters, however, on the basis of which the Church can never be satisfied with the programmatic projects of the present social and political order, at the same time, that they give hints relative to which movements and political prescriptions in the present come closer to the personal and social values of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, in this sense, becomes a hope as well as a criteria by which political movements and ideologies may be viewed in terms either of their distance or proximity to the aspirations which God himself projects for his world.

The Statement of Faith, in pointing to the Kingdom of God as the final summation of the work of God and therefore also of the ministry of the Church, calls the Church to believe in this hope and in this future, and to live and work by its demands in the present. The parameters of the Church's ministry are those that are set by the parameters of the Kingdom of God. They are not bound by the expectations and limits of the present social order. The expectations of the Church about how life in the world is to be lived and how society is to be built, transcends the expectations of the present because the Church's work is to be empowered and generated by the pull that comes from the belief in the possibility and the promise of this Kingdom.

While affirming unequivocally the utopia of God's own dream for His world, the Statement of Faith nevertheless places the work of God in making the world His Kingdom squarely within the realities of the life of the present world. The world as it is, the world in all of its decadence, malaise, sickness and death – the world under the present powers and principalities — is the arena where the Kingdom is proclaimed and where the work to bear

testimony to it is done. The mission of the Church as witness to the Kingdom, in short, is placed squarely between the reality of a decadent and struggling world on the one hand, and the demands and the promise of the Kingdom on the other. In proclaiming the Kingdom of God as the expression of its hope and the generating power of its life and mission, the Church sets itself up against the present world, against the present social and political order, and poses for itself the task of the total overhaul of the world's life. It must be in the light of the demands and aspirations of the Kingdom that the Church determines its work and the solidarities that it makes in the struggles of the present. Its social task, in this sense, becomes an integral part of its confession of faith and its witness to the Kingdom of God.

IV. SIGNS OF THE PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM

The rest of the Article is important to consider in this context. Note that the phrasing of the Article uses the words "The Kingdom of God is *present*. . ." and not "The Kingdom of God *is fulfilled*. . ." The *fulfillment* of the Kingdom of God is not within the possibility of the present world or of the present time; neither is it within the range of the ministry of the Church. Its fulfillment is within the possibility only of God's own work and in God's own time. *The presence* of the Kingdom as a reality and as a power in the present world however is what the Church is called to believe in and to give testimony to in its life and work.

In locating the proclamation of the Kingdom of God within the arena of the life of the present world and the life of present society, the Statement of Faith calls us to recognize the presence of the Kingdom rather than to presume its fulfillment. We can as a result give only approximations of it and provide *signs* that indeed such approximations bear testimony to its presence in our midst.

The "signs" that are mentioned in the Statement of Faith are active signs. They underscore the conviction that the signs of the presence of the Kingdom are more properly given by the Church through its action rather than through its intention or assertion. The "signs of the presence of the Kingdom" are, it should also be noted, recognized wherever certain "events" happen whether in the life of the Church or *outside of it* where the purpose of God for the world is given active shape and expression by people in various areas of life. The "signs of the Kingdom," in other words, are not the exclusive property of the Church; they may be recognized as well in the action of people who are outside of the Church but who exude in what they do the qualities of the purpose of God for the world.

Finally, the "signs" that are mentioned in the Statement of Faith are by no means exhaustive. They are clearly selective. They are examples that have been chosen by their familiarity in the Biblical narrative and in the Christian tradition, and by the fact that they point to certain dominant themes and issues in contemporary life.

- A. The sharing of faith in Jesus Christ, understood as full trust and confidence in the promise and faithfulness of Jesus Christ, is certainly a dominant theme in the Christian tradition. Faith here is also understood as allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord and as recognition of the total sovereignty of God over our lives and over the life of the world. Where such faith is shared, and received, there a sign of the Kingdom of God occurs.
- B. The healing of the sick is another sign of the Kingdom which is a familiar and dominant mode by which Jesus Christ gave substance and meaning to the work of God. Healing implies immediately the treatment of physical handicap and infirmity. It means, more importantly, the recovery of wholeness to life. Healing, therefore, means more than the treatment of sickness. It is the more encompassing task of providing the conditions by which the recovery of wholeness to life in all of its physical, social, psychological, economic, cultural and political dimensions can take place and can be maintained. Healing implies the building of a social order in which the health of people is considered a priority, and in which sickness is not a chronic possibility that constantly infects the lives of its constituents. It is as much a social as it is a physical and medical task.
- C. The giving of food to the hungry is a sign of God's providence and care, and therefore of His rule over the world, that is so constant in the Biblical tradition from the moment that "manna" was provided by God for his people in the wilderness to the numerous instances where Jesus undertakes the act of feeding the multitudes. The provision of the physical needs and sustenance of people is an event that is viewed in the Biblical narrative as a bearer of the presence of the Kingdom. It is no wonder that the eating of bread and the drinking of wine have become, in the life of the Church, a sacrament of God's presence and grace in the world. Eating and feeding are acts of profound religious significance. There is truth in what a materialist philosopher once said that "we are what we eat." When we eat nothing, we become nothing, and are nothing. Implicit in this

Article of the Statement of Faith is the conviction that the building of structures and patterns of social and economic life that insure the physical well-being of all and provide assurance that none will be hungry is an act of "feeding" that is a sure "sign" of that quality of life in the Kingdom.

- D. The giving of light to the blind is an equally dominant theme in the ministry of Jesus as a ministry that is rooted in and bears testimony to the Kingdom of God. Indeed, in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the "light of the world." Light is to be seen as the contrast of darkness. It signifies clarity, direction and proper perspective. It is the counter to confusion, disorientation and deception. The giving of light to the blind implies, therefore, more than the actual opening of sight to the physical handicap of blindness. It is the assertion of truth over falsehood. It is the combatting of those social, cultural, and political structures and habits of mis-information and deception that often pervades the flow of social and political relations.
- E. The final lines of the Article are, in a sense, a summation of all the other "signs" that have been referred to before. Liberty, love, justice and peace are the towering qualities and values of God's reign. They are the sure "signs" of God's design amidst the disorder of human life. They define not only the proper relations of human beings in their life together, in community. They are the primary attributes of God's dealing with His world. They are qualities of life and being that are rooted in God's being. Where these qualities are present, where these dimensions of life are affirmed, where these attributes of common well-being are worked for and strived after, there the Kingdom of God is present, there the rule of God is recognized, there God's work is being done to bring to full fruition the hope that God has given to the world.

V. SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

What this Article in the Statement of Faith in the end poses for the Church is the same as that which the other Articles pose. Do we really believe and can we really affirm, that this promise of God for the "making of each person (into) a new being in Christ and of the world (into) His Kingdom, is a reality by which we would live our lives and by which we would put at stake the life and ministry of the Church? What, in the end, this Article poses is a question of faith, and where we so affirm it, we also put ourselves under its challenge and under the pressure of its demands.

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THE LIFE HEREAFTER

Salvador D. Eduarte*

WE BELIEVE

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ has overcome the power of death gives assurance of life even after death, and we look forward to His coming again in all His fullness and gather His children in His Kingdom, and to make all creation new.

A final affirmation of our faith focuses on the resurrection and the life hereafter. This article of faith is so central to our fundamental Christianity that it is impossible to conceive of the Christian religion without at the same time affirming the overpowering truth of the resurrection of Christ and the promise of hope that it brings to us.

I. THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

That Christ died and rose again is central to our biblical faith. All the Synoptic Gospels affirm in so many words that Jesus Christ did not remain in the grave, but that He rose again and lived on forever in the hearts and minds of His followers.

It is evident from Scripture that Christ did rise again from the dead. The problem, however, is the manner of how that resurrection took place, and its historicity as part of human experience. The Gospels, notably Matthew (28:1-8), Mark (16:1-8) and Luke (24:1-10), and later, John (20:1-18) all have something to say on the resurrection of Christ. While they differ on minor points, it is safe to assume that all Four Gospels point to a Christ who is alive, One who overcame death and its powers, and Who lives forever, never to die again.

As to the historicity of the resurrection, believers differ on certain details, e.g., whether it was a *physical* resurrection, or whether or not it was a *symbolic* resurrection. This article does not wish to enter into some controversial aspects which even theologians and Bible scholars are not in agreement, because we feel that such debates are a waste of time and effort. Our historic Christian faith simply asserts that the resurrection of Jesus Christ "has overcome the power of death, gives assurance of life even after death..." thus focusing on the *meaning* of the resurrection for our life today.

It is important to note, in the first place, that death has been overcome by the resurrection of Christ. This is not to say that as believers, we will not taste physical death. Nor does it mean that we are glossing over the fact of death, for our experience and the experiences of others around us point to death as a painful reality.

A healthy view of death should make us realize that the Christian faith does not, on the one hand, deny the reality of death, but on the other hand, it does not see death as the final word on human existence. While realizing that death is a fact of life -- even as a testimony to that mortality that is the fruit of sin -- we at the same time see in its harsh reality the fact of God's love and His Divine Plan for mankind.

We affirm as Christians that Christ rose again from death. There are two elements in the term "to rise again."* First, it means to awake after having slept; and to rise up after having lain down. In sleep, we are, so to speak, outside of ourselves, we do not control our persons. We find ourselves in the unconscious, in dreams, as if in the hand of another power. On awaking, on "rising", we re-enter life. This is the formal sense of the word resurrection. For each of us who rises up will lie down again, and at the end of our lives everyone of us will lie down again. Our uprisings are but little images of that great and only uprising of Christ in His resurrection. We begin in our mother's bosom, and we end up in the bosom of the earth. But there is always this little image: men rising up, men trying to live. But it is a try only. Christ resurrection, on the contrary, is the resurrection in its quintessential meaning. Christ rose up out of death, he lives, he stands up, he watches, as God Himself rises up, without setback, without relapse. There, in the Christ risen, lies true human reality.

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*I am indebted here to Karl Barth's little book, *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles Creed* (New York and London: Meridian Books, 1967), pp. 90-92.

The New Testament describes Easter by two assertions: the women found the tomb empty, then they met the Risen Christ acting in their midst in a -- humanly speaking -- very strange and new yet very real manner. The mention of the empty tomb in the Gospels irrefutably marks the bodily resurrection. By this we are instructed concerning man and his life: he is body and spirit. When he is living, he is living as body and soul. Hence also, man's resurrection necessarily is corporal.

It may be said: This is impossible! A dead man does not re-enter life. It never happened. It is even a contradiction in terms. Death means, life has ended, and it cannot be started again. One would then be facing a dilemma -- either the Christ died and did not rise again, or He rose again and was not dead. A German theologian of a generation ago, Friedrich Schleiermacher, was always posing this dilemma and stopping at the second possibility.* For him, the death of Jesus was just an appearance. Jesus had been in stupor. Then He was buried without being dead. The New Testament story is something quite unlike that beautiful yet rather dangerous theory.

The New Testament is in fact much simpler than that. It raises the issues of belief and unbelief. And it quite plainly shows that we may believe in Him only when we believe in His corporal resurrection squarely, either we believe in it, or our life is all in vain (I Cor. 15: 14ff). The fact of the resurrection, therefore, may well be the rigid touchstone whether the Christian faith stands or falls. As far as the early Church was concerned, it was difficult to be neutral on this issue. And we, are to make a decision whether we believe in it or not. But as children of the resurrection, we can do no less.

II. LIFE AFTER DEATH

The Statement of Faith further asserts that this conviction that Christ rose from the dead gives assurance of life even after death. This has nothing to do with immortality. In fact, as Oscar Cullmann suggests, the immortality of the soul is unbiblical, almost pagan in origin.* Life after death is not to be interpreted as eternal existence, something like a life that goes on and on, without end. This is hell, namely, existence without end. Rather, Christian faith tells us that eternal life is a quality of life lived in and for God, whether here or hereafter. Life enriched by the love of God, enlivened by the purposes of God, and moving towards final consummation in the Plan of God — this is life eternal.

How does this conviction — that Christ is alive -- give assurance of life even after death? Victor Hugo, the French writer and poet, while not a professional theologian, seems on the right track when he said: "Man lies down in the evening; he rises up at day's dawning; we sleep on the side of time; we wake up in eternity."**

The consciousness of God's presence at the time of death more often than not, strengthens the Christian as he passes "through the valley of the shadow." This is not simply poetry; it is a fact of experience. People who have lived a selfless life find death as a friend, rather than an enemy. But a guilty conscience, the awareness that one has not lived as God intends him to, is often a tortuous experience.

III. CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN

We also look forward to His coming again. This is what some Christians call the second coming of Christ, although the phrase is not found in the New Testament. Paul describes this as the "blessed hope" when he wrote to Titus: "We must be self-restrained and live good and religious lives here in this present world, while we are waiting in hope for the blessing which will come with the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13, Jerusalem).

There is no sense in debating whether Christ's coming will be visible, physical, or in another form. Traditional Christian view is expressed in Scripture passages as Acts 1:9-11, where the implication seems to be that the return of Christ will be in the same manner in which He ascended into heaven. Sincere Christians through the ages have held to the conviction that at some time in the future, Christ will return bodily to earth, in some cataclysmic manner, put an end to all injustices and sins, and take the saints home to be with Him in heaven forever.

*See his *Mythology and History*, Trans. Olive Wyon. (New York and Chicago: Garden City Books, 1949), pp. 188ff. His liberal interpretation of the resurrection, while has some merits, appears to be hypothetical rather than scriptural.

**See his book, *Resurrection or Immortality?* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1966), chapter 4, pp. 121-125.

***"Death is not putting out the light, but the lighting of the lamp, because the dawn has come" (Salvador de Madariaga, *Faith and Unfaith*, p. 181).

While this view seems to be the orthodox form, and therefore easy to understand and explain., it also has some built-in difficulties. Greater than the literal meaning of His return is the hope that it brings to the heart of the believer. For man has a sense of justice, and the desire for an end to evil and injustice is latent in the human heart. The Christian hope therefore, focuses its emphasis not on the peripheral, literal view of the event of His return, but on the eschatological dimension which sees the end of history in its final consummation in the Kingdom of God.

History, as viewed from the Christian perspective, does not simply refer to events of the past, but of God's ongoing purpose moving irresistibly towards the final denouement, in which God's will shall finally prevail over man's sin and rebellion. The Book of Revelation is probably the best source of information on how this drama of redemption will be accomplished in God's own good time. The first part of this apocalyptic literature deals with the conflict between good and evil -- the cosmic forces symbolized by such imageries as the beast, the dragon, and the plagues -- and the last part deals with the final showdown in the Battle of Armageddon where the Lamb of God, the Christ, will emerge triumphant over the forces of evil and the New Jerusalem comes down from God to be with men forever.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

This is why the Statement of Faith speaks of God gathering His children in His Kingdom, and thus makes all creation new. God, by His redemptive act in Christ, through the resurrection and consummated by His return at the end of history, will finally be with His people in a community where human frailties and limitations will be a thing of the past. In the moving and poignant words of Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and the first earth had disappeared now, and there is no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride dressed for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne: 'You see this city? Here God lives among men. He will make His home among them, they shall be His people, and he will be their God. His name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death; and no more mourning and sadness. The world of the past has gone" (Rev. 21:1-4, Jerusalem Bible).

That beatific vision will surely defy language. For the complete harmony of creation, now renewed in the plan and purpose and image of God, will be a transnational reality. But the fact of God's presence among His people, now reunited in Divine Union never to be marred by human sin or the pain of separation in time and space, will surely complete God's Plan for the New Age. Such a new community, with God living in and among it, marks the final gathering of all His children, in a world where the past is gone.

But our Statement of Faith goes a bit further. It says that God will make all creation new. This fact is also recognized in that beautiful passage in the Apocalypse where, after describing the New Jerusalem, the writer also focuses attention in the character of God as Alpha and Omega: "The One sitting on the throne spoke: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new,' he said. 'Write this: that what I am saying is sure and will come true.' And then he said. 'It is already done, I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.'" (Rev. 21:5-6). God as the Beginning and the End, the source of all that is, and the end of all that will be, is a concept which the historic Christian faith calls "the Christian hope."

This eschatological hope is not, however, without some attendant dangers. Millenarians and other extremists often predict that the Second Coming of Christ will be on a definite date, only to be disenchanting later because Christ did not come as expected. The imminent return of Christ, long recognized by the early Church and hinted by Christ Himself during His lifetime, did not in the least diminish the doctrine that in the plan and purpose of God, the least diminish the doctrine that in the plan and purpose of God, the end of history will usher in the Kingdom of God in all its fullness and grandeur. This is not a utopia imagined by some millenarian poets and dreamers, but it does point to a fulfillment of all human hopes when the Ultimate Reality of who God is dawns on all people.

The gathering of all His children in His Kingdom was the burden of the great preaching of the early Church. No less than such Church Fathers as Augustine and Tertullian anchored their eschatological hopes in the imminent appearance of the Kingdom. More than others, Saint Augustine spoke of the City of Man and the City of God. In his view, the Church is the prototype of the City of God coming into fruition in the context of the imminent collapse of the Roman Empire.

Saint Paul, for his part, believes in the return of Christ as taking place within his lifetime. When, however, this created some problem in the early Corinthian church, he sternly told them that the imminent return of Christ should not be a cloak for being lazy and indifferent to the challenge of living in this world.

Which brings us to the more practical application of this doctrine: the fact that we look forward to His coming again should not lull us to indifference and complacency in facing the problems of man and society. In fact, it should spur us to be more alert and participative in the continuing struggle for human dignity, for human rights, and for making justice more alive and workable within this social order. Actively involving ourselves in the struggle for justice and human dignity is actualizing in concrete and human terms the meaning of what it means to believe in the return of the Lord. Some Christians are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.

V. CONCLUSION

The last article of our Statement of Faith is a definitive affirmation of our belief in the triumph of justice in the end. Retribution of God will be swift and sure, and this the Bible affirms time and time again. Vindictiveness is not a part of God's attributes; justice is. For Christian faith asserts that divine retribution will come in His own good time, because, while it is true on the human plane that

*The wheel of justice grinds slowly
But it grinds exceedingly small;*

yet God will certainly not wink at evil, but will settle all the scores according to His own way and according to His own plan. This is why the Scripture often says in emphatic terms: "Never repay evil with evil but let everyone see that you are interested only in the highest ideals. Do all you can to live in peace with everyone. Never try to get revenge; leave that, my friends, to God's anger. Vengeance is mine --I will pay them back, says the Lord" (Romans 12:18-19, Jerusalem Bible).

When all human hopes have, failed and everything looks hopeless, the Christian hope sees that future breaking into our time when God in all His fullness will reign in justice and truth. This may mean a forward look, but such a hope activates us to make that kingdom real in terms of our participating in the human struggles and problems that our time demands. While, therefore, awaiting that full realization of the Kingdom, we, as part of that Resurrection faith, will keep on our witness against the face of forces and of cosmic evil arrayed in high places of authority. The Church militant cannot rest on the laurels of the Church triumphant, but will, with faith in the Risen and Coming Lord, maintain active witness and testimony that the Reign of God shall finally be done on earth as it is in heaven.

APPENDICES

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

"Jesus said to him, I am the way, the truth, and the life no one comes to the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

STATEMENT ON EVANGELISM (1971)

I. BIBLICAL BASIS

"He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor
To bind up the hearts that are broken,
to proclaim liberty to the captives
freedom to those in prison . . .
to comfort those who mourn . . ." (Isaias 61:1-2)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor,
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind;
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

"For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger and you made me welcome
naked and you clothed me,
in prison and you came to see me." (Matthew 25:39)

II. A STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The faith and trust given by Jesus Christ and His Gospel is our foundation and energy
Evangelism is the bearing of our witness, to the unbounded love of God in Jesus Christ for the world.

A witness in word and deed.

A movement from word to deed the oneness of Word and deed.

Not a privilege but a compelling and humbling task of the
mighty acts of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Discovering, discerning, and celebrating and sharing
His reconciling acts of love in the midst of Humanity.

Evangelism is God's work in us;

A concern for human life for its potentiality and abundancy

A concern for liberation, liberating men from all sinful dehumanizing pressures and systems.

A concern for participation, participating in the task of love and justice for all.

Evangelism is not image building,

But genuine self-giving springing from Jesus Christ alone

and a commitment to Him rooted in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

To this task Jesus Christ was obedient,

To this task we commit ourselves,

To this task,
The United Church of Christ in the Philippines commits herself.

Ever conscious that men of courage, dedication and steadfast purpose in love, obedient to His Spirit are channels of God's power and Grace.

III. BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR EVANGELISM

To witness is to Proclaim,
To Proclaim is to Preach,
To Preach is to live
The Living Word, Jesus Christ.
His Good News of Life,
And to Celebrate His Mighty
Act of Redemption in the Cross and His Resurrection.

A. The Local Congregation

The local congregation is the concrete reality of the Church Universal. It is the concrete reality of the gathered people of God. It is her liturgical life "Liturgice" (work of the people) offered in worship that witness is proclaimed in the Preaching and the Acting of the Holy Word of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are to strengthen, enrich, and equip the saints in the worship life of the local congregation. For in the gathered community in worship, we as God's people, "it was there from the beginning; we have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell, Our theme is the word of life. This life was made visible; we have seen it and bear our testimony; we have declared to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ." (I John 1:1-3) NEB.

B. A Style of Life

The Christian presence is a presence of LOVE. It is the Christian's style of life to be SALT, A LEAVEN, A LIGHT, expressed in individual relationships with one another in the family, and in our daily life of responsibility.

"I give you a new commandment: Love one another; as I have loved you, then all will know that you are my disciples." (John 13: 34-35) NEB

C. A Life of a Citizen

To witness to the concerned love of Jesus Christ is to live a life in the given world of God. Participating in human development and nation-building is the Christian's witnessing life. As Christians, our earthly citizenship should be a manifestation of our citizenship of the Kingdom of God. This is made clear and known in our being good citizens of our country. We are to be deeply involved in the ongoing social process of needed changes in our society and nation, that man may become fully human and that our nation share in the humanization of all mankind.

"Stand firm against the device of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the super forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand."

D. Ecumenical Life

The whole body of Christ, local, national and universal is the witness, the Mission of God's loving concern here on earth. To live in Division is Sin. Where there is no unity, the vision is blurred, and the evangelistic task of liberating men from sin is dammed.

In the pursuance of our evangelistic task we affirm Unity without Uniformity, and Unity in the midst of Diversity. We shall join to witness an ecumenical life together, any local congregation, denomination, religious or non-religious bodies where God is active in love, hope, and faith for the glory of God and the salvation of Mankind.

POLICY STATEMENT ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS (1986)

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines is an ecumenical endeavour by the union of five Churches - - Presbyterian, United Brethren, Methodist, Disciples, Congregational, and some indigenous churches - and has been in the forefront of ecumenical dialogue and movements. By the very nature of its historical background the UCCP is a member of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia, the World Methodist Council, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Being a united and uniting Church, her character is evangelical, and evangelistic, her ministry is wholistic, her concerns are universal and inclusive, her spirit is progressive and her attitude is open-minded.

The UCCP is open to the spirit of new ecumenism which goes beyond the traditional denominational lines. This new ecumenism has come out of the Church's ministry in identity and solidarity with the people's struggle for justice, peace, and freedom. Its main objective is the restoration of the individual to full humanhood and the transformation of society to usher in the Kingdom of God.

With the above understanding and spirit, the UCCP adopts the following policy statements:

1. For a more united and effective Christian witness and service of the Christian churches, the UCCP relates herself with churches, denominations and world confessional bodies through the National Council of Churches (NCCP), World Council of Churches (WCC), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and World Methodist Council (WMC). These relationships are defined in the constitution and by-laws, memoranda of agreements and concordate adopted by these churches. The NCCP member churches with which the UCCP relates are the following: Philippine Independent Church (PIC), United Methodist Church (UMC), Lutheran Church of the Philippines (LCP), Salvation Army Church (SAC), Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches (CPBC), Philippine Episcopal Church (PEC), Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF), Iglesia Unida de Cristo (UNIDA), and the Christ-Centered Church (CCC).
2. With regards to the non-NCCP Churches and other groups, the UCCP relates to them in the following manner:

- a) On development projects/programs.

The UCCP in the local, conferences and jurisdictional levels may engage in development projects/programs with any religious or non-sectarian groups on the following guidelines:

- 1) that these projects/programs are mutually agreed upon, after consultations by the parties concerned.
- 2) that these are endorsed by the following entities, where any of these are concerned:
 - a) local church council or the pastor;
 - b) conferences executive committee or the moderators;
 - c) jurisdictional executive committee or the bishop;
 - d) General Assembly Executive Committee or the General Secretary;
- 3) that if these projects/programs use primarily the facilities, equipments, and involve the UCCP pastors and church members, said projects/programs should be under the management and control of the UCCP;
- 4) that in the periodical evaluation of the project/program, the office of moderator, the bishop, or the general secretary, or their duly authorized representative shall participate.

- b) On ecumenical activities for evangelism, Bible studies, prayer rallies, worship, and the like

The UCCP in the local, conference, and jurisdictional levels may participate as a church in any ecumenical activities and gatherings provided that said activities are truly ecumenical in nature, content, planned and participated in by the churches concerned. Otherwise, participation should be left to individual conscience.

c) On the use of the pulpit and other church facilities

Any local church pastor or church council may invite a non-UCCP preacher to use the pulpit; and may offer the use of church facilities to any person or group which is non-UCCP, provided that there is an approval by the church council and/or by the moderator of the conference whenever possible. Without such approval no one should be allowed to preach in the pulpit and use church facilities of the UCCP.

d) On church workers participating in any ecumenical movement

- 1) Any church worker or church leader may participate in any ecumenical group or movement or program on his own individual capacity, provided that such action is not inimical to the unity and growth of the church and provided further that he/she informs his/her immediate group to which he/she is responsible;
- 2) Provided further that in case he/she wants to act in an official way, he/she should get the authority of the body concerned;
- 3) Any church worker may be allowed to work full-time in any ecumenical program or project not considered as conference project;
 - a) provided that he/she secures recognition from the conference.
 - b) provided that during his/her employment with this other group that he/she does not get benefits from the UCCP insurance and hospitalization plans
 - c) provided further that these benefits are to be shouldered by his/her employer.

For the General Assembly
United Church of Christ in the Philippines
May 20-24,1986

BY THE UCCP COUNCIL OF BISHOPS

PEACEMAKING: OUR MINISTRY (1986)

"Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
And the effect of righteousness will be peace . . ."
Isaiah 32:16-17

ALL-ENCOMPASSING MEANING

The Prince of Peace compels us to be peacemakers. We thus affirm and renew our commitment to peace through continued prayer and action. This commitment flows from our conviction that genuine peace can be attained only when founded on justice.

The Scriptures expand the meaning of peace to cover wholeness, well-being, growth, harmony, security, equality — not just the absence of violence and war. Real peace happens when the roots of conflicts and violence are removed, when a just social structure is built and when human rights and dignity are held sacred.

When justice and righteousness prevail, peace (Shalom) reigns supreme. As Isaiah puts it: "May people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places (32:18)."

THREATS TO PEACE

The ascendancy of the Aquino government brought hopes for peace and prosperity to this violence-torn land. But, while we have begun enjoying the democratic space so long denied us, the forces of evil around us continue to threaten peace.

Riding on the wave of our people's popular and legitimate quest for genuine peace, some elements in our society — who claim to be bearers of peace — are in fact agents of conflicts and violence. They have not stopped

destabilizing the present government in the guise of "national reconciliation." In the face of this ill-disguised attempt to subvert peace, we should remain vigilant!

Militarization in the Countrysides. While the Aquino government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) expressed a desire for a ceasefire, some elements are opting for a military solution to insurgency. Intensified military operations designed to eliminate insurgents have wrought havoc on the lives of our brothers and sisters in the countrysides, eliciting defensive responses from the insurgents. This unfortunate situation tends to derail the ceasefire negotiations, and can frustrate efforts to attain genuine peace.

Real Threat to Peace: Structures of Injustice. The real threat to peace is not the intransigence of hard-core rebels but unjust socioeconomic political structures that breed insurgents. President Aquino herself, in her UP Commencement address, recognized that the "roots of insurgency are in the economic condition of the people and the social structures that oppress them." What is considered "insurgency" is in many ways, a defensive action of people to protect their lives and rights.

GENUINE AND LASTING PEACE COMES WHEN PEOPLE'S NEEDS ARE SERVED

Genuine peace comes when justice is served.

For as long as peasants remain landless

For as long as laborers do not receive just wages,

For as long as we are politically and economically dominated by foreign nations,

For as long as we channel more money to the military than to basic social services.

For as long as the causes of social unrest remain untouched,

There will be no peace.

OUR MINISTRY OF PEACEMAKING

The ministry of peacemaking is an imperative of the faith we profess. The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines calls us "to participate in the establishment of a meaningful and just social order." Hence, the peace we seek should result from our active participation in building structures that promote human development and uphold human dignity.

Our affirmation of faith demands the end of our indifference and silence. It calls for an unwavering commitment to the all-transcending task of building peace founded on justice.

As People of God, we should identify threats to peace and human dignity in our national life. We should critically evaluate national and international policies and challenge them when they do not contribute to peacemaking.

As a Church, we should actively work for understanding, reconciliation and unity. We should join hands with peoples of the world in the common quest for peace based on justice.

Above all, we should follow Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Shalom!

THEME FOR THE QUADRENNIUM 1986-1990
THE CHURCH FOR THE LIFE OF THE WORLD

Another parable he put before them, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." – Matthew 13:31-32, RSV

He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you." – Matthew 17:20, RSV

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