

GEORGE W. TRUETT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SUMMA THEOLOGICA

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SUMMA THEOLOGICA

Perhaps the best statement of faith is the simple three-word proclamation of the early church and of the Apostle Paul: “Jesus is Lord” (Rm 10:9). Perhaps the best statement of our actions on faith (for “faith without works is dead”) is Christ’s own perception of his ministry in his first sermon: “to bring good news to the poor”, “to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” because the Spirit of God was upon Him (Jm 2:17; Lk 4:18-19). Therefore, all Christian faith is centered and proceeds from an abiding faith in the Lordship and salvific work of Jesus the Christ and is focused on a lived praxis of faith in the world. For the purposes of further explaining this faith, the model of the Church’s early statement in the Apostle’s Creed will be used as a guide for expanding theologically on the foundation of faith given to us by Scripture, the Church, and the Spirit. Holy Scripture will guide the basis of this confession, with several references undergirding every paragraph. The Apostle’s Creed will be presented in its large sections, then further divided into individual statements for additional exploration. Some Scriptures will be utilized multiple times, and some areas of theology will overlap in their exploration through various sections of the creed. This is not a sign of cluttered organization, but rather the inseparability of theological traits from one another. Not every nuance of this perception of the Christian faith can be explored in these pages. This statement will, however, explore the overarching themes of the faith in relation to Scripture and lived praxis in contemporary context.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I BELIEVE IN

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hb 11:1). Theology is a work of believers exploring the realities of God through revelation. Christians then interpret revelation in Tradition, reason, and experience. Therefore, Christians believe in God for a variety of reasons, but ultimately accept much of their faith as mystery and journey with the Divine. Not every belief of the Christian can or should be absolutely proven by science, but rather can be held in holy tension because of the convictions of Holy Scripture and the witness of the church. As Church history has proved, however, majority consensus is not always holy, so all beliefs must be aligned with Scripture acting as our test for what is good (1 Th 5:21). Beliefs shape practices and liturgies, which in turn re-shape beliefs, therefore belief is not separate from praxis, but in an inseparable cycle with it.

GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY

God exists eternally as One in three persons: revealed to us by the Scriptures as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:1, Mt 3:16-17). God was first revealed to humanity as God the Father, the almighty, the creator of heaven and earth (Gen 1:1). The testimony of Scripture and the Church reveal God as powerful, knowledgeable, creative, holy, and full of grace (1 Kings 18:38, Ps 139:17, Is 6:3, 2 Pt 3:9). God acts as a loving parent toward creation, especially humanity (Lk 11:13). This first member of the Trinity is most often revealed to creatures as God the Father, and should likewise be approached not only as the king, creator, and judge but as our own wise and loving Father. Though “Father”

stands as the predominant title for this member of the Trinity in Scripture, Jesus and the Bible also use Mothering imagery for God, allowing us to then remember that God is certainly not bound in human conceptions of male-ness, but exists as our heavenly parent (Jn 4:24).

CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

God is the creator of all nature and all creatures: the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Ps 24:1). The Scriptures record multiple differing creation accounts, demonstrating to believers not a scientific, strictly historical account of the beginning, but a true narrative of God's goodness and care in doing things humans cannot (Gen 1, 2). All things we have discovered through science, and all things we have yet to discover belong to God. Humanity is God's handiwork along with the other creatures. Humanity remains distinct from other creatures, however, in that we have the privilege of being created in God's image and have the responsibility of caring for the rest of creation (Gen 1:26). Creation, therefore, is not our possession to abuse, but our gift to for which to steward and care wisely. Because nature is a creative endeavor of the living God, it can act as a kind of general revelation, declaring the glory of the Divine (Rm 1:20). However, more specific revelation is needed to practice a uniquely Christian faith. The grand transcendence of a holy and sovereign God is displayed in power and beauty in the incomprehensible, seemingly infinite and detailed universe, while God's great imminence is shown in the detail of the smallest creation. God is present with us because of the care with which humanity was given an environmentally excellent earth to inhabit, and bodies "knit together in [our] mother's womb" (Ps 139:13). In response to God's creativity, the People of God are called together as co-creators in this world (1 Cor 3:9).

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, GOD'S ONLY SON, OUR LORD

Coming as the promised Messiah when the fullness of time had come, God incarnated in the flesh on earth as Jesus of Nazareth (Gal 4:4). God in Jesus is not separated from God the Father but is uniquely and intimately in communion with the Godhead at all times (John 10:30). Christ is eternally co-existent with God the Father (Jn 1:1). Jesus came both as our moral teacher/example, and as our unique salvific Lord and savior. This is perhaps best illustrated in the Son's title: Jesus Christ. He is both intimately knowable (Jesus), but high above and divine (Christ). Because Jesus is Lord, we hope in, pray toward, trust in, and worship Jesus as God. Our goal should be to both imitate and worship the Christ.

WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY,

Like the Trinity, Jesus' very nature is a mystery. Jesus is the only being in all history to have a dual nature: fully divine and fully human. As a child conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is not only human but God as well (Lk 1:35). Because Jesus is God, He is able to redeem the creation and creatures He made (Phl 2:6). As God, Jesus amazingly chooses mercy over judgment, teaching us rather than condemning us, dying for us rather than banishing us (Mt 9:13). Tradition emphasizes that Jesus is not just Spirit, but lived a physical life on earth as God in the flesh. Because Jesus was physically present as a growing, living, and dying human being born of Mary (Not an Old Testament theophany), He was also fully human. Jesus faced temptations of all kinds and was well acquainted with the sorrows of our human condition (Christ is often understood as the "Man of Sorrows" in Is 53). One potential weakness of the

Apostle's Creed is a lack of emphasis on the life of Christ. In Christ's life, He performed countless miracles as an act of care for creation and a display of the power of God. Christ also taught like no one before, showing us how to live and revealing God to humanity in a new way (Mt 5-7). Christ's ministry consisted of teaching parables, miracles, sermons, and discipleship, often focused on one subject: the Kingdom of God. In Christ's human life, readers will see evidence of his divine life: not just through miracles but the presence of the voice of God the Father and the Spirit in baptism and in Christ's glorious transfiguration (Lk 3:21-22; Mt 17:2).

SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE,

In life and in the process of death, Christ suffered greatly. From satanic temptation to abandonment and betrayal by his friends, Jesus' life was characterized by suffering (Mt 4:1; Mk 14:39; Mt 26:14-16). Such suffering illustrates to us our personal sin before a Holy God. This world is not right, but broken, and Christ bore the weight of this suffering. While Christ suffered at the whims of the devil and at the individual sins of humans, the creed's insistence that suffering also occurred "under Pontius Pilate" emphasizes an important theological point. Individual sin will be addressed in a proceeding section, but the creed's mention of Pilate reminds Christians that human institutions are inherently broken, leading to systemic sin. Human trust cannot be placed in human-made institutions or governments, for it was the fairest and equitable empire to date that caused God in the flesh to suffer (Mt 27:24). The broken systems of a governmental justice system were not solely to blame in Christ's suffering, however, as the Gospels seem to equally implicate the religious leaders and the angry crowd of onlookers in the ordeal as well (Mt 26:66-67; Mt 27:25). Our ultimate trust, therefore, lays not in religious hierarchies, governments, or even the intentions of passionate groups of people, but in Christ alone. We are called therefore to work against systemic sin and injustice. It is clear from the

teachings of Jesus however, that He does not call humans to disengage from broken systems completely: as He participated in hierarchical religious life, instructed Christians to pay taxes and participate in government, and had great compassion for crowds (Lk 2:46; Mk 12:17; Mt 9:36). Our goal then should be to see Christ's redemption in all systems, not glorifying humanity, but extending God's reign on earth (Col 1:20).

WAS CRUCIFIED, DIED, AND WAS BURIED

Even more audacious than the thought of God in the flesh being born in a barn, is the image of the Creator of the universe nailed to the tree He formed, stripped and dying in front of a mocking crowd. In Christian teaching, this crucifixion is more than a wrongful government execution (though it is certainly that). Christ voluntarily died for all, that we might live (Jn 10:18; 2 Cor 5:15). In Christ's death, the veil between God and humanity is torn, and the dead are resurrected (Mt 27:51-52). The crucifixion of our Lord is not divine child abuse, as some have purported, but the sacrificial act of God in the flesh suffering and dying out of free choice and love for the world, so that none may perish, but all may have everlasting life (1 Jn 2:2; 2 Pt 3:9). The Church and the Holy Scriptures have given us several images of atonement to hold in tension as we consider Christ's sacrifice on the cross: moral example, Christ the Victor, and substitutionary atonement (Mt 16:24; Mk 10:45; 1 Pt 2:24). A full narrative of Christ will consider all these models: for Christ's holiness, sacrifice, and example must all be taught in order to approximate the witness of Scripture. All of these images do not have to be pursued at the same time while teaching, for that would be enough to comprise a sermon series unto itself, but the Church should balance their atonement imagery so that Christians are familiar with multiple realities present in the cross. Christ was laid to rest in a borrowed tomb, left until the end of Sabbath for more full burial preparations (Lk 23:50-54).

HE DESCENDED TO THE DEAD

To say that Jesus dies is a difficult theological statement: if the human body was deceased, what then was Jesus doing between death and resurrection? One answer of the early church was a descent into hell for the purpose of saving those who had died before Christ's coming. Protestants traditionally have found no scriptural evidence for a descent of Christ to hell during this period, but the Scriptures do attest to a God who is effective throughout history and locations, both geographic and spiritual. It is in declaring that Christ descended to the dead that we proclaim Jesus as omnipresent: even in the depths, God is there (Ps 139:8; Eph. 4:9-10). Belief in an event in which Christ descended to hell is not essential for Christian faith: this point does underscore, however, the power of Christ over death, and His presence in even our most hellish situations. When Christ declares from the cross "it is finished," many Christians understand the Savior to be effectively dying for all saints across time and space (Jn 19:30).

ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN;

If death was perhaps Christ's most vulnerable and sacrificial moment, Easter morning is perhaps His most glorious and triumphant. Christ sacrificed Himself for humanity; but all the evil of every human being and the brokenness of every earthly system cannot contain God to a grave (Jn 10:10)! Had Christ remained dead, sin and death would have reigned supreme, but thanks be to God, in the fullness of Christ death has been defeated, and darkness does not have the final word (1 Cor 15:55-57). Christ proved His resurrection in appearances to over 500 people, giving hope that the savior was not defeated (1 Cor 15:6). Because Christ is risen, we too shall rise (1 Cor 15:22). Resurrection is the promise and hope of the Christian faith: demonstrating a God humble enough to die for humanity yet powerful enough to kill death.

HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER,

Though Jesus walked the earth for a short while after the resurrection, he ascended to heaven, promising that as He did so, He would send the Holy Spirit to intercede for and with us (Jn 16:7). He now is physically present with God the Father (Eph 1:20). Christ now reigns and rules the Kingdom about which he preached on earth, as a good and gracious King of a united and uniting communion of saints (1 Pt 3:22). In heaven Christ intercedes for us, ruling in great mercy and grace. Such an action by Christ allows for the creation of a Church and gives believers the responsibility of now being His physical body on earth (1 Cor 12:27). Christ's ascension is God's trust and empowerment of the Church to build the Kingdom on earth.

AND WILL COME AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Though Christians have already been given a present salvation and present task of being Christ's body and building the Kingdom, the future hope of Christians is found in God's judgment (Jn 14:3). This is the fulfillment of the creeds progressive construction of Christ: He came to the world, He currently sits at God's right hand, and He will be coming again. Such a judgment gives Christians not an amorphous end goal, but an end that our sacrificing and gracious God is bringing to us (Lk 23:43). Before discussing various aspects of judgment and eschatology, it is important to stress Christ's insistence that judgment is not to be understood as a mystic timeline for the future, but rather a catalyst in how we live now (Mt 24:36). Therefore an exact, intricate description of every aspect of the end times should not be attempted from Scriptures (Christ made clear we don't know all there is to know here). The Scriptures, however, do beg Christians to hold several images together in their discussion of the hope of the last days. First, the Scriptures do speak of a coming judgment. At a later point in the creed, the forgiveness of sin will be discussed, but at this point, Christ's insistence that what we do matters should be

prominent in the minds of believers (Mt 25:45). Therefore, the Christian life is one that matters: building the Kingdom on earth and working for the justice of oppressed peoples. Second, Christ speaks of his return to earth and our resurrection (Mt 24:29-31). The sudden nature of Christ's appearing is paired with signs of earth fallenness that could be seen in almost every age (Lk 21:10). Therefore, Christian activity should not only be tempered in judgment (for sins will be forgiven) but in order to be found faithful at any moment (Mt 25:1-13). The greatest hope in eschatology is in resurrection and life eternal. In such moments, Christians can join in the scriptural taunt, "where, O death, is your victory" (1 Cor 15:55)? Heaven is promised to followers of Christ, even as hell is described often by Jesus (Lk 13:28). Therefore, eschatology is not a magic ball into the future, but a hope for Christians and a great encouragement to spread the Gospel of Christ and work for the justice of God's world.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The third and perhaps least understood member of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:38-39). The Spirit of God works throughout the Old Testament but is also sent to the earth as an advocate for believers in the New Testament (Jn 15:26-27). The Spirit comes in Pentecost power to testify to the grace of God across every cultural and human boundary (Acts 2:8). The Spirit unifies believers and calls us to widen the Kingdom of God, inviting those who were once strangers to become friends (Acts 8:26-40). The Spirit empowers Christians not with worldly structural power, but the power to witness to the grace of God across the earth (Acts 1:8).

The Spirit of God reveals God's Truth to humanity: specific revelation unavailable to people through nature and general revelation. This revelation comes to humanity by God's work,

inspiring human authors to create holy Scripture. Scripture is not verbally dictated by God, but rather the result of human interactions with the divine. The Christian canon of Scripture is composed of a wide variety of books from a large breadth of authors, over an almost incomprehensible span of time. Nevertheless, both testaments of Scripture attest to the same God, clearly incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ (Lk 1:4; Jn 1:1). Though all Scripture is God-breathed, useful for teaching and rebuke, Christ is the hermeneutic through which Scripture is to be read (2 Tim 3:16; Mt 5:21-22). Seeing as the canon of Scripture acts uniquely as the written revelation of God, the Church did not so much assemble the revelation, as they did recognize what God had already done. Hermeneutics of Scripture will be discussed in a later section.

THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH

God calls the Church into being, building upon a foundation of disciples and empowers them with the Holy Spirit to become the body of Christ on earth (Mt 16:18; 1 Cor 12:27). The creed refers to the Church as “holy” and “Catholic.” As Protestants, these terms may be hard to understand or believe. As a point of clarification, the Church may be believed as holy not in the sense that it has never made a mistake (for it most certainly has). Rather, the Church remains holy in the sense that it is the agent by which the Holy Spirit brings God’s sanctification to the earth: for even the gates of hell cannot prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18). The Church is Catholic, also, not in the sense that all Christians must belong to the Roman Catholic Church, but rather that all Christians throughout all time are united in the grip of the Spirit of God, and the common confession of St. Paul: “Jesus is Lord” (Rm 8:38-39; Rm 10:9). As all churches are united as part of the universal Church, many will practice various forms of polity. To the best of this author’s understanding, individual priesthood for the good of the community

should be stressed, with autonomy granted to local congregations choosing to work together for the sake of mission (2 Peter 2:9).

The Church is called into being for no less than three purposes: the completion of the Great Commission, the proclamation and discipleship of the Word of God, and the administration of the sacraments (Mt 28:18-20; 2 Tim 4:2; 1 Cor 11:24). Great Commission witness and the sacraments are featured in other portions of this statement, but this is an appropriate place to discuss that the Church has found teaching, proclamation, and discipleship to be one of its main goals throughout Church history. The object of the Church's teaching and proclamation is Jesus Christ, the Word of God (Jn 1:1, 7). The Incarnate Word is primarily revealed to the Church through the canon of Scripture, inspired by the Spirit and recognized by most of the Church through most of history (Col 1:28). Therefore, with the Old Testament affirmed by our Mothers and Fathers in the faith, with the New Testament recognized by the Church, and with Christ at the center of Scripture, Christian and Church teaching is a product of study in the Scriptures (Heb 1:1-2). The best historical, critical, literary, and scientific methods should be brought to the Text with the goal of exposing the God of the Bible to hungry people. Proclamation of the Bible should then call hearers to maturity in Christ, conviction of sin, and into prophetic action for a more just world (Rom 10:14). A major aspect of Church life, therefore, understanding Scriptures in our community.

THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The concept of the communion of the saints has no less than two powerful meanings to discuss. First, Christ's reconciling actions and incarnate presence on earth, along with the sending of the Holy Spirit unifies all believers across all time in a common salvation, a common love of God, and a common confession of Jesus as Lord (Eph 4:5-6). Even though we have been

called in unique giftings to various areas of ministry, and various functions, all Christians through all time form one body, or one communion with one another (1 Cor 12:1-11).

Secondly, Christ has instituted two specific sacraments for the church in baptism and the Eucharist (Mt 28:19; 1 Cor 11:24). A sacrament is a means of grace practiced by the Church, which involves an outer symbol of an inner grace. Though much of Protestantism recognizes only these two sacraments or ordinances, there are members of the Church who recognize more, such as marriage or ordination. While Christ has only given baptism and communion as specific ordinances, Christians should not belabor the exclusivity of specific sacraments to great lengths, for indeed God is always present among God's people, and grace abounds (Mt 18:20; Rom 5:20).

Baptism is the practice by which the Church follows the Lord's command to illustrate the Gospel of resurrection with one another in public proclamation of new life. In the Scriptures we find Christ's instruction to carry out baptism, the obedience of new believers to follow the Lord in this sacrament, and even Christ's own baptism (Mt 28:19; Acts 8:38; Mk 1:9). Baptism can refer to an event involving water, or sometimes is a term used to describe the moment the Spirit manifests itself in a new way among a new believer (Acts 1:5). The Church should understand that there is one spiritual baptism as described by Paul, present when a new Christian gains righteousness by faith through Christ (Rom 10:9). Water baptism, then in Baptist settings is an outer illustration of that inner grace: with a believer conscious of their decision being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). This physical baptism represents an ideal scenario: response to an inner grace, completed in the biblical model of immersion. Infant baptism does have the scriptural model of entire households coming to faith and follows the pattern of most of the Church through most of history. Therefore infant baptisms

are not to be condemned but celebrated, if present, as a sign and seal of God's promise of grace to a child who will have the opportunity to respond to God as he or she grows (Jsh 24:15; Jn 4:53).

Communion follows the command to remember Christ as a Church through a frequent common meal (1 Cor 11:24). The meal is celebrated as a "remembrance" of Christ, where we are fed and experience grace along with the real presence of Christ. That is not to say, however, that the elements transubstantiate into the body and blood of Christ: neither in essence nor in accident. Communion lives at the intersection of several tensions in Christian life. The Eucharist is a celebration of the fulfillment of Passover, pointing backward, while it is also pointing forward as a hint of the future eschatological feast to come (Lk 22:7; Rev 19:7-10). At the same time, communion must live in the tension between contrition for our sins and celebration of our forgiveness (1 Cor 11:27; Jn 6:56). Christian teaching on communion should reside at the intersection of these tensions, allowing the past and future to shape our present remembrance, even as the dual realities of our contrition and forgiveness mark our justification. Communion should be celebrated often in order to emphasize all of these realities, remember Christ's sacrifice, receive grace, and follow the Lord's command to do these things "as often" as we remember Him.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

While it is not the whole of the Christian life, the great catalyst of relationship with Christ comes through the glorious promise of the forgiveness of sins. Following the example of Adam, all people have fallen short of the glory of God in their words, thoughts, and deeds (Rom 3:23). The Law given to Moses reveals that there is no good human being: all who are conscious have willingly disobeyed God, hurting themselves and others (1 John 1:8). Indeed, sin is so prevalent

and has so corrupted the world, that its effects are everywhere, even in our own hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). God knew that people would be unable to maintain covenant faithfulness, as illustrated in God's sealing of the Abrahamic covenant while the patriarch slept (Gen 15:17). In God's goodness, God always provides a way of reconciliation in response to sin: ultimately through Christ. In Christ we are reconciled to God by the forgiveness of our sins, allowing us the promise of a relationship with God in this life and the hope of heaven in the next (1 Jn 1:9). Our forgiveness is not a license to ignore sin, but a call to holiness in our personal and public life (Rom 6:1; Jm 2:20). Our forgiveness calls us toward forgiveness of others when we are wronged (Mt 18:21-35). Sin is not only a personal issue but a problem of systemic injustice as well. Therefore, it is the job of individual Christians to call cultures to repentance and toward greater justice, crossing barriers for the sake of the Gospel (Jn 3:4-5). Judging and convicting others of their sin is not our work, but the work of the Spirit of God (Mt 7:1). We need only act as faithful Gospel witnesses to the goodness of grace, telling others where we have found living water (Jn 4:28-29).

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

While a Christian is called to justice and service in God's world, there is the persistent, joyful hope of resurrection. Resurrection for the Christian exists as a present and future reality. Christians have been raised in this life with Christ from the deadness of sin unto a life on earth making this planet like heaven (Col 3:1). Christians are also promised that their physical death is not the end, but that they too shall be raised with Christ in a resurrection (Jn 11:25-26). Resurrection does not necessarily entail the reanimation of human corpses, for many Christians have decomposed in the grave or been cremated, but still will be risen with Christ. Our risen life with Christ is a mystery in physical science, but a promised hope nevertheless that we shall be

resurrected with Christ (2 Cor 4:14). This life is not the end, as God is carrying out a reconciliatory work through all creation, creating the Kingdom of Peace envisioned by the Prophets and in Revelation (Is 11:9; Rev 22:3-7).

AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING.

As attested to throughout this statement of faith, the hope of this earthly Christian walk is life eternal with God. While we are tasked with a mission here, there will be an eternal home prepared for all who believe (Jn 14:3). Heaven is described in several metaphors biblically, including the house of the Father, a great feast, and a marriage (Jn 14:2; Lk 13:29; Rev 19:9). Nevertheless, heaven is a place of joy and worship of God, no matter how we best perceive it now (Rev 22:3). Though a present reality toward which we work on earth, the Kingdom of God is also envisioned as this future heaven. This heavenly Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of an eschatological vision of ultimate peace: there is no famine, war, poverty, sickness, or oppression in the peaceable Kingdom of heaven (Rev 22:3-7). God wipes all tears from our eyes and initiates a new era free from sin (Rev 21:4-5). Admittance to heaven is gained by righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9). While the Apostle Paul makes clear that salvation is by faith through grace alone, our actions of obedience to Christ are real and important. These actions are the fruit of the seed of faith planted by the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). In speaking about heaven, dualistic thinking will bring up questions about hell. This author stands in the line of hopeful universalists, seeking the full redemption of all things promised in Colossians 1:20. This is, however, not the only witness of Scripture as Jesus solemnly warns that the path of life is narrow and few will find it (Mt 7:13-14). Therefore while Christians do not have vivid details of the nature of future punishment, they must continue to spread the Gospel of reconciliation with Christ in concern for the physical and spiritual liberation of the whole world.

AMEN.

Not all aspects and nuances of the faith can be expressed in these few pages, and there are certainly some important theologically distinctive elements not explored herein. This statement, however, has attempted to stand in the line of our parents in the faith, confessing the same faith of the Church for generations found in the Apostle's Creed, with distinctive elements of modern Baptist/Congregationalist life. Statements of faith are not binding tests of orthodoxy or exclusion, but rather a starting point for theological conversation based on the revelation of Jesus Christ. Christian faith is centered on Jesus Christ, with Scripture, Tradition, reason, and experience working in conversation to propose the best theological claims we can articulate this side of eternity. To the worship of God revealed as Father, Christ, and Spirit, and for the encouragement of the Body gathered on earth, Amen.