

**THE  
UNITED  
CHURCH OF INDIA  
BELIEFS**



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## **PREFACE**

Our Christian beliefs can never take the place of the glowing experience of God. But without them there could be no vital Christianity at all. For in order to walk with God we need to know something about him.

So the purpose of this book is to say in plain words what the people of the United Church of India believe. It attempts to lift up the spirit of the United Church of India and show how it interprets the ageless affirmations of the Bible.

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. THE BIBLE AS THE PRIMARY BASIS FOR BELIEF

We share in holding that the Bible comprising of 66 Books is the primary source and norm for Christian belief. “In all matters of faith and morals, the authority of Holy Scripture stands supreme. We share also in our way of approaching the Bible.

John Wesley of the Methodist Church gave his followers certain guidelines for interpreting Scripture in the *Forty-four Sermons* and in his *Notes on the New Testament*. These served at least as the negative limits of teaching and preaching. These *Sermons* and *Notes* were evangelical and Arminian. They emphasized religion as a conscious relationship with God through Jesus Christ involving personal decision or response and the call to share these realities with others. They were also pragmatic, persuading men toward right living and ethical responsibility.

The Bible, then, is regarded as the primary source and norm of Christian belief. And the Bible is to be understood, not with the mentality of a ferocious literalism, but with an eye to seeing it as God’s living Word. It is to be interpreted in the light of tradition and Christian experience with the aid of reason. When we affirm that Scripture is the primary basis for belief, we mean to emphasize also what is at the heart of the biblical revelation; namely, the purpose of God coming to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This is at the head of the hierarchy of biblical affirmations. And this mystery is illuminated, not by tradition as a dead past, but by tradition as a developing understanding of Jesus Christ as Lord. And the mystery of God’s love in Christ is illuminated and brought home to each of us personally in Christian experience which is made available through the

community of faith.

In view of some problems in the contemporary situation, it is important to add a word about reason as a basis for belief. We believers hold that in many areas of human knowledge the rightful basis for belief is reason, broadly understood. For example, common sense enables us to know the world around us. On this level of practical reason we come to some understanding of the world of nature, the weather, civilization, traffic regulations, farming, other people, family life, earning a living, etc. Similarly, through the physical and behavioral sciences we come to a more detailed and precise knowledge of things, events, and people. We believe also that the Christian, like anyone else who seeks truth, can and should think about his idea of God. He can improve his understanding of God. He can discover solid reasons for believing in God. That is, by reason he may develop a theistic world view and show the intellectual weaknesses in the competing alternatives. We share in affirming a basic confidence in man's reason in these intellectual dimensions.

The twentieth century has been too much infected by the diseases of subjectivism and irrationalism. The words "existentialism," "phenomenology," "logical positivism," "the analysis of language," "death of God," etc.—though cumbersome and not easy to define—suggest how far men have succumbed to these maladies. To be sure, each of these terms suggests important contributions to our thinking in the modern world. But they are also infected with an incurable subjectivism and irrationalism. They illustrate contemporary man's refusal to have confidence in the human mind's ability to attain some real understanding of God in relation to the universe and man. One practical consequence of this subjectivism and irrationalism is the resort to violence of deed and tongue so often manifested throughout the world. The tragedy here is that people act on the basis of emotion or ideology or private impressions rather than on the basis of reason and the will of God.

In this context, then, we the United Church of India offers a twofold approach. First, *within* the community of faith the Bible, reasonably interpreted in the light of tradition and Christian experience, is the primary basis and guide. Second, we affirm confidence in man's

reason as normative in the general quest for truth.

This confidence in reason is felt even in regard to the formation of an overall world view with God as the ultimate Mind. This world view, attainable by the reasoning mind, lends support from “outside,” as it were, to what is already affirmed in the Bible. And it enables us to communicate with those multitudes who are unavoidably involved in doubts and who are not yet receptive to the biblical revelation.

Reason never functions as a principle of salvation. Nor is it the final basis for belief within the community of faith. It is not a substitute for Scripture. Nor can it take the place of Scripture as the primal norm for Christian affirmation and conduct. But it has an immensely important role. Therefore the philosophical theologian and the thoughtful Christian are free to seek the truth about God, nature, and man that is open to rational discovery.

## **2. THE CONTINUING EMPHASIS ON CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

We share also in the continuing emphasis on personal salvation. Religion that is not experienced is not vital religion. The essence of Christianity is the experienced person-to-person relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the community of faith. From that profound inner reality flow the fruits of faith. Its vocabulary consists of the historic words: repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, new birth, conversion, new creation, sanctification, Christian perfection, growth in grace, and any contemporary words which reach for the same experiential meanings. Paul Tillich’s remark that up to now the efforts to substitute new words for old ones in the Christian vocabulary have largely ended up by losing something of the depth of the original meanings. But here we must be open. For we have our eyes not on the words but on *the experienced realities*.

## **3. CHRISTIAN HABITS AND DISCIPLINES**

Again, we share in the belief about practical Christianity that we cannot make much progress in it without Christian habits and disciplines. The unorganized life is ineffective. The undisciplined life is no more worth living than is the unexamined life. More will be said on this in Chapter IX.

## **4. FROM INNER DYNAMIC TO COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY**

We share further in the belief that the inner life necessarily produces

outer results in keeping with it. The good tree, said Jesus, by its very nature produces good fruit. The bad tree necessarily produces bad fruit. We cannot make a good world out of bad people. Nor can we make a superior society out of mediocre persons. Structures may be changed—and ought to be, whenever indicated—but unless *people* are changed, little is accomplished. For any social structures, however well designed, are easily corrupted by evil men or made cumbersome and inhuman by mediocre men.

So we the United Church of India continues church to urge upon the contemporary world the need for the kinds of inner transformation, growth, and insight which, with the power of the Holy Spirit, necessarily issue in the responsible management of life, both personally and socially. The formula is: from inner transformation of heart and mind to creative leadership and authentic social reform.

#### **5. ARMINIAN IN THE GOD-MAN RELATIONSHIPS**

We share in a theology which is pervaded throughout by an essentially Arminian approach. “Universal redemption” (Christ died for all men), “free grace,” the ability of a man to say “yes” or “no” to God and even to fall away from grace—these are the themes of Arminianism as against predestinarianism.

What we are dealing with here, of course, is the God-man relationship in the process of salvation. What does God do and what does man do in this process? That is the question. Some have said that God does it all; man does nothing. This is the idea of predestination. Some are chosen, others not. This is selective election. At the other extreme—in our time—are those who so minimize the divine action as to suggest that man must save himself. Everything is done by man, with man, and for man. So theology is reduced to anthropology, and instead of salvation by grace we are left to recover ourselves by our own decisions. That is, the aims and activity of God are translated wholly into man’s aims and deeds.

We the United Church of India turn away from both of these extremes and emphasize the one mighty theme that *God and man are interacting at every stage of life and grace*. And here is where the emphasis on the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit is God present and at work on all levels of a man’s life. Even before a man



is a Christian, the Holy Spirit is present along with the dynamics of human personality. Some spoke of this as prevenient grace—the grace that goes before grace. Then, in the processes involved in becoming a Christian—including the awareness of guilt and inadequacy in repentance and faith—the Holy Spirit and the human spirit are mysteriously interacting. Similarly, though on higher levels, in the movement toward sanctification and Christian growth the Holy Spirit and the dynamics of human personality interact in the interest of creative advances in Christian living.

A word of caution is needed here. We the United Church of India shares with Christians of all eras in affirming the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. That is, we do not believe that we are forgiven for our sin by our own deeds but by the forgiving grace of God in Christ which is ours by faith. Man's action and response, though indispensable in the process leading to justification or forgiveness, do not function as the principle of forgiveness, nor do they have merit in this process. Nothing we do can make God forgiving. It is his nature, as revealed in Christ, to forgive. But what we do is necessary to place us in a position to receive this divine benefit.

The basic point here is that God has chosen man to participate with him in creative advances through this present life. His aim is, to promote scriptural holiness throughout the world. In other words, God summons man to participate with him in the realization of moral and spiritual values in community under Jesus Christ. So we are involved in lifelong adventures in Christian growth and in creative Christian service.

Throughout this entire process, then, the Holy Spirit and the human spirit are in mysterious yet experienced interaction. No man lives apart from the energizing, at one level or another, of the Holy Spirit. And the Christian is one who lives in increasing awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit assisting him to move forward under Christ in the Church and in the world. So we United Church joins in affirming a total program of Christian living which gives continuing dignity to man and continuing glory to God.

Even at the highest levels of Christian growth the continuing

human responses are necessary. For men may fall from any and all levels of grace at any time. Further remarks on this will be found in the chapter dealing with Christian perfection (Chapter IX).

#### **6. THE CALL TO SHARE WHAT WE HAVE EXPERIENCED**

Once more, we United Church shares the desire to communicate to others what God has done for us. This apostolic commission has been a part of our heritage on all sides from the start. No one can read the life stories of great evangelists and missionaries without being moved by their *passion to evangelize*, to share with others. Sometimes these men and their followers shared in small groups, sometimes in the open air, sometimes in barns or in large camp meetings and other gatherings, and sometimes in person-to-person witness. But always there was the sense of being summoned by God to evangelize, to tell the story of God's love as experienced in their own lives.

Therefore on the contemporary scene, as we look toward the twenty-first century, we can hear again the call of God for United Church to be true to their heritage. For we, together with all Christian groups, have something of utmost importance to share with the world. We are called to communicate the message of salvation and responsible living.

That message, so urgently needed in this twentyfirst century, includes at least three emphases. First, it includes the sharing of a total world view (including the basic belief in God as the only ultimate Being) without which human existence can have no enduring meaning. Second, it includes sharing Jesus Christ, the only one to whom we can commit ourselves without reservation and the only one through whom we mysteriously find our way from sin and mediocrity toward the highest experiences of God's grace. Third, the message we are called to share includes the promise and presence of the Holy Spirit to assist us in creative living and in using the only strategy for dealing with our human problems, namely, love informed by wisdom.

This message, this good news, the world desperately needs in these times. Therefore we are called of the Father, who revealed it, to share it with courage, patience, resourcefulness, and passion. We are not

to be discouraged in this great mission. For God is with us.

### **III. Some Remarks About This Book**

These are the things in which we share. They form a kind of magnificent vision of the Christian religion which would seem to be urgently needed in these times of doubt, bewilderment, anxiety, disillusionment, and passivity.

The aim of the chapters that follow is to state in plain language what we believe and why we believe it. They are addressed to the general reader in The United Church—whether young, in middle life, or old—and to all other interested Christians with whom the thoughts here expressed will have much in common.

There is a note of urgency in what is said because both the gospel and the times require it. The book is presented with the conviction that Christianity, in dynamic balance, offers the most magnificent option to men and women, young people, and older people, who are looking with hope toward the twenty-first century. It is aimed to appeal, in a special way, to all who want to join that vast procession of people who are responding to the divine summons to rise above the paltry dimensions of mediocrity and to participate with God in doing a great work. For all men are called to share in a magnificent destiny, both here and in the world to come.

## THE STATEMENT OF FAITH

The United Church of India accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, 66 books containing all things necessary to salvation, as the supreme and foundational standard of faith. We believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture, that the Bible, Old and New Testaments in the original autographs, is the inspired, infallible Word of God, a complete and final written revelation of God.<sup>1</sup>

We believe in all the fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christianity. We believe in one personal, transcendent and holy God, the Creator of all who is eternal and who manifests Himself in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

We believe that Jesus Christ, though fully God, became a human, that He is the promised Messiah, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, provided for the atonement of our sins by His vicarious death on the cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to make intercession for us.<sup>3</sup>

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfill His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that all people are by nature separated from God and responsible for their own sin but that salvation, redemption and forgiveness are freely offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

We believe that when people repent of their sin and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, trusting Him to save, they

are immediately born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit, their sins are forgiven, and they become the children of God.<sup>6</sup>

We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who indwells, seals and empowers all believers, baptizing them into the Body of Christ. We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers who ask in faith, enabling them to preach the Gospel in power.<sup>7</sup>

We also believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are for today and should be exercised within the scriptural guidelines.<sup>8</sup> We believe that agape love is more important than all the gifts, and without this love, all exercise of spiritual gifts is worthless.<sup>9</sup> As a priority, Believers Church seeks to guide each believer into an intimate walk with Jesus and being conformed into His image.<sup>10</sup>

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Body, His Church, and that church government should be simple rather than bureaucratic. We desire to be led by the Holy Spirit in all the functions and directions for the ministry of the church.<sup>11</sup>

We believe in ,the rapture, of the Church before the Tribulation and in the Second Coming of Christ with His saints to rule on the earth. It will be personal and visible. This motivates us to holy living, heartfelt worship, committed service, diligent study of Gods Word, Christian fellowship, believers baptism, holy communion and mission involvement.<sup>12</sup>

We seek to teach the Word of God in such a way that its message can be applied to an individual's life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.<sup>13</sup>

We believe in the resurrection of the body unto eternal life for the saved and unto eternal punishment for the lost.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1-2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:6.

<sup>3</sup> John 1:1; Matthew 1:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 1:3, 10:12; John 16:7-11; Matthew 19:28, 25:31; 2 Timothy 2:8.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8,4:8,4:31.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3; Romans 3:23, 5:12; 1 John 1:8; Ephesians 2:3-10.

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1:7, 2:1-10; John 1:12.

- <sup>7</sup> John 16:7-15; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8.
- <sup>s</sup> 1 Corinthians 12, 14.
- <sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 13.
- <sup>10</sup> Romans 8:29; Philippians 2:1-7; 2 Corinthians 3:18.
- <sup>11</sup> Ephesians 1:22, 4:1-16; 1 Timothy 3:1; Acts 14:23.
- <sup>12</sup> Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Acts 2:38-47; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
- <sup>13</sup> Isaiah 28:13; Acts 20:27; Nehemiah 8:8; Matthew 7:24; James 1:22-24.
- <sup>14</sup> Revelation 20; Acts 24:25; John 5:28-29; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 1 John 3:2.

## CHAPTER I

### THE UNITED CHURCH'S ENDURING SIGNIFICANCE

Nothing is easier to miss than an appreciation of what is always near. The air we breathe is ever present. So we seldom stop to think about it. The benefits of freedom we enjoy are always with us. Hence, we rarely feel their true worth. And so it is with our United Church. We are so close to it that we frequently miss its glory and its abiding significance. "And sweets grown common lose their dear delight."

There are no exclusively United Church doctrines. For, though we have distinctive emphases, we have no affirmations that are not also believed by other Christian groups. So some people ask, What is the place of United Church if it has no message all its own?

The answer to this is clear. While United Church repudiates any narrow sectarianism, it brings to the community of believers its own special gifts. And what are these? Two key words tell the story: *vitality* and *balance*. United Church is Christianity with a vital balance. And this is its abiding contribution to the Christian world.

The leadership must combine the warm heart with the consecrated mind.

Christianity is always in danger of becoming either lifeless or one-sided. One of the most earnest efforts of the United Church is to preach and teach a Christianity that is vital and balanced.

#### **I. Vital Christianity**

United Church is vital because it calls us back to the one mighty fact of our religion: the grace of God in the hearts of people. It asks us to return to the glory of first-century Christianity so that we may sit at the feet of the apostles and learn from them the true meaning of our religion. And whenever United Church remains true to its genius, it persuades the world to enter into that same kind of vital religion.

This is the altar round which the Church is built. So all else must be seen as a means of promoting apostolic Christianity in the world today. Christian doctrines, the Bible, public gatherings, fellowships and the programs of the Church all exist to bring people into a living fellowship with God, to assist them to grow in grace, and to enable them to do a great work for God.

### **1. VITAL CHRISTIANITY: *More Than Sound Doctrine***

Some say that we should look for genuine Christianity wherever there is sound doctrine. According to them right belief is the most basic fact. So they tell us that with our talk about the vital experience of grace, have drifted away from the true position of the Church through the ages.

We believe in the importance of sound doctrine. But we know that the stream of life runs deeper than doctrines. The river of God flows far deeper than our beliefs. Vital religion is not in itself a matter of what we believe but of whom we trust. “Even the demons believe—and shudder” (Jas. 2:19). Christian experience presupposes basic beliefs and goes beyond them.

### **2. VITAL CHRISTIANITY: *More Than Belief in the Bible***

Others say that we find genuine Christianity in accepting the truths of the Bible literally. And they tell us that we put this vital experience of grace, with its outreach in Christian conduct, above the Bible.

We believe in and exalt the Bible as the Book of books. But we insist also that a person may know the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and believe every sentence in it, and still be very far from the kingdom. For we are not saved by the Bible but by the Savior of whom it speaks.

For example, why do we have the four Gospels? Because we cannot stand today in the presence of the historical Jesus in just the same way that the first Christians did. So we read about him in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. To be sure, the four Gospels contain other things besides materials about what Jesus said and did. They contain interpretation and the proclamation of God’s good news. But they do such a good job of picturing and recovering the historical Jesus that we too may remember him as the disciples did. So these four Gospels exist to help us feel what the apostles felt when they



walked along the roads with Jesus. (See John 20:31.) And in one way or another the whole Bible exists primarily to introduce us to the Savior.

### **3. VITAL CHRISTIANITY: *More Than the Means of Grace***

The apostolic Christianity does not consist in outer forms.

Not even ministers and priests—for all their nearness to the Bible and to the sacraments—can in any literal sense give or withhold God's boundless grace in Jesus Christ. For minister and layman, priest and confessor, are *equidistant from the grace of God. And they are equally near*. Our assurance and growth in grace come from the Spirit in and through the community of faith.

### **4. VITAL CHRISTIANITY: *More Than Good Works***

Still others would find vital Christianity in moral precepts and good works.

We believe in the Christian moral life. We have not been activist by chance. But our activism is the *fruit* of vital religion and is therefore not to be confused with it. Ours is vital Christianity because in it the strivings of the moral life and the wonderworking power of the Holy Spirit come together into a dynamic unity. Duty by itself is a small trickle. Morality by itself is a lazy brook. But the struggling stream of goodness within people can become a mighty river of God by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith.

## **II. Balanced Christianity**

When it comes to religion, people are always in danger of losing their balance. Our forebears knew this. So they preached and taught a kind of Christianity which, without losing its vitality, held its balance.

### **1. BALANCED VIEW OF THE BIBLE**

We see this balanced Christianity first of all in our approach to the Bible (66 Books). With all Christians we unite in affirming the great doctrines of Scripture. We recognize differences of interpretation on many points. But we commend four principles to aid us as we read.

First, the Bible is to be understood as the Church's book. It has its being and meaning in and for the community of faith. The Church has authorized it, preserved it, translated it, used it. And the Church, through centuries of prayerful study and reflection, has understood

its central meaning as the revelation of God's redemptive love coming to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In a balanced way, then, we place ourselves as interpreters of the Bible in the main lines of Christian tradition. Second, the Bible is to be understood not merely on the basis of a single verse or a few selected passages. Instead, we must rest our beliefs on the total insight of the biblical revelation. This total insight, as the Church has understood it, includes as a central feature the revelation of the *purpose* of God for mankind in creation, redemption, and consummation.

Third, the Bible is to be understood as revelation for response. We may study it as literature, or as history, or in reference to scientific accuracy. But from the standpoint of the deeper moral and spiritual meaning of the Bible, these miss the mark. For the point is that the Bible is God's *living* Word. A word is for communication. This living Word is communication from God *calling for our response*. So the Word becomes effective when we begin to ask as we read, "What is God trying to say to me today through this passage?" or "What is he summoning me to do?" For the Bible is revelation for response.

A fourth principle which gives balance to our belief is this: The Bible is to be understood as confirmed in Christian experience. The Bible itself is, in large measure, the witness of people over many centuries to what God has done. Its promises, its great passages, its insights, its practical teachings—all of these are at last comprehended in their deeper meaning in the ongoing lives of believers. This keeps the Bible from being just another book and makes it the dynamic Word. It addresses itself to men *now*.

There is a marvelous balance in the habit of exalting the *whole* Bible, with Christ at the center of it, as the authority for our preaching, teaching, and living. At the same time it is a sure mark of sound thinking to read this Book, with the illuminating tradition of historic Christianity. It is also a mark of practical intelligence to understand the Bible in relation to our human situation today and our growing Christian experience. For experience checks us in our errors. It shatters our illusions. It protects us against fanaticism. And it is the one teacher to whom all of us go every day.

So what Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles did and talked about becomes real in our contemporary experience. And this helps us to

share with them so as to gain a vitally balanced understanding of the Bible.

## **2. BALANCED VIEW OF CONVERSION AND EDUCATION**

Again, this balance is seen in our emphasis on both conversion and education. In life itself these two are mingled together. But there is always the peril of losing one or the other. Some people make the new birth everything. If one is not hurled suddenly into the kingdom, they imagine that he cannot get there at all. They stress enthusiasm, feeling, crucial decision. But they neglect the gradual processes of learning what Christianity is all about.

This is one-sided. But it holds a profound truth in which we steadfastly believe. *Conversion has a tremendous place in life.* When we see ourselves as we really are, we see the need of making an absolute commitment of our whole being to Christ. We need to be born of the Spirit.

On the other hand, our deep concern for education is seen in the tremendous amount of talent and money we put into the literature of our church school program. We deplore the present-day ignorance of the Bible. We are determined to give people throughout the world every chance to know that great Book. This is education.

We have determined not to allow our people to lose the vision of God in the midst of their studies in institutions of higher learning. So we seek increasingly effective ways of communicating God's living Word in the contemporary world. And we desire to influence the thinking of people at all stages and on all levels of education.

## **3. BALANCED VIEW OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY**

This balance is seen further in the United Church concern for both personal salvation and social responsibility.

Individuals alone can be redeemed. God knocks on the doors of solitary souls. But the saved soul must do his duty while he lives on this earth. As Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day" (John 9:4).

Whatever harms people strikes at Christ and stirs the Christian into action. So we are concerned about war, broken homes, race prejudice, political corruption, organized crime, sexual promiscuity, poverty, pollution, the problems posed by overpopulation, alcoholism, drug addiction, and all forms of inhumanity.

#### **4. BALANCED VIEW OF DENOMINATIONAL AND ECUMENICAL EFFORTS**

We believe in the ecumenical Church. We are proud of our Church. We are committed to do our best to bring all the denominations into a closer unity of fellowship and action—"so there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). Not an organic unity, but unity in fellowship, vision and mission.

We rejoice in all forces that work to bring Christians together. For we know that we need the helping hand of one another to fight the battles of this present age. On large affirmations we shall agree. On small ones we shall agree to differ. On all practical matters we shall work together with others. Only then can we begin to say, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15).

#### **5. BALANCED DOCTRINES**

This balance is nowhere more in evidence than in our view of the great Christian doctrines.

We share with others the basic affirmations of the biblical revelation. We believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Redeemer. We believe in the Holy Spirit as the power and presence of God ever working in men to lift them into higher dimensions of living. We believe that man is both created in the image of God and a sinner, and that, with God's help, he must choose whom he will serve and how he will live. We believe in justification by faith. We believe in sanctification or Christian perfection, not as a fixed state but as a dynamic movement by the power of the Spirit toward the realization of God's aims in men. We believe in the Church as the people of Christ, the community of faith, wherein the Christian life is called into being, nurtured, and shared. We believe in responsible living in the world to the end that society may be transformed for the glory of God and the benefit of men. We believe in the life everlasting as an adventure with God which begins here and now and which continues as a creative adventure with God and with those who participate with him in the kingdom of heaven beyond death.

In our own way we strive for a fully balanced understanding of these great Christian affirmations.

## CHAPTER II

### WE BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE

The tree of Protestantism roots in the Bible. In that soil alone does it flourish. Every time we try to plant it somewhere else it withers away and dies. The Bible is the mainstay of our pulpits, the content of our Church school lessons, and the foundation of our devotional life. When we neglect it, vital Christianity suffers. When we exalt it, vital Christianity thrives.

We the United Church joins all Christian groups in viewing the Bible as the primary source and norm for Christian belief and conduct! We do not turn to the Bible because it will improve our cultural background, though it will do that. We read it prayerfully because we want to know God's will and purpose for our lives. In the ongoing of life we soon discover that our human treasures, like our fashions, come and go. Many books tumble off our presses and flow downstream into the vast ocean of oblivion. We are fascinated for fleeting moments by the literature of the day. But in the midst of what comes and passes away *we find some things which are neither new nor old but everlasting because they come from God*. So the Bible abides.

The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand for ever. (Isa. 40:8)

#### **I. The Bible: Ageless for Its Stories and Events**

We the United Church knows, first of all, that the Bible is ageless because of the great stories and events through which God spoke and still speaks.

There is the story of Abraham, who, set out by faith to discover a new spiritual continent. There is the story of Jacob and his vision at Bethel; of Joseph and his brothers. There is the sad account of the

children of Israel in bondage in Egypt.

There is the unforgettable career of Moses. We see the babe saved from slaughter by an astute mother and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. We see the little prince with all the advantages of the palace. We behold the young man seeing the bondage of his people and striking down an Egyptian. We see the frightened Moses fleeing to Midian only to be confronted by God while tending Jethro's flocks. Then we see Moses, the man of God, the greatest figure in the Old Testament, leading his people out of Egypt and governing them in the wilderness. We see the lawgiver, under the pressure of community life and under the inspiration of Almighty God, coming down from Mount Sinai with the immortal Ten Commandments. And at last we read the sad story of Moses' wistful glimpse of Canaan and of his death somewhere perhaps on Nebo's lonely slopes where his worn-out body lay unbound and unmarked.

We along with others, return to the ageless stories of the kings. There is Saul, with his happy beginning and sad ending, who shows in his life and death the bitter fruits of disobedience.

There is David, the purehearted shepherd boy, triumphant with a round smooth stone over Goliath, the giant. There is David the mighty king, the miserable sinner, and the brokenhearted man, singing the songs of repentance for every human being.

And there are all the other kings who "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" and who thus stand as constant reminders of how power corrupts and of how the mighty have fallen.

We look eagerly to the stories of the prophets. From Amos, the roughhewn prophet of justice, to Jeremiah, the sensitive prophet of the deeper spiritual things, we see God's power of working through these human instruments. Life had its tragedies and its defeats. But there was always the glory of the remnant, of the hope that roots in God, and of the promised Messiah.

And, of course, we never get tired of reading the story of Jesus. There is the story of the angels singing, of the shepherds listening, of the wise men seeking. And there is the beautiful story of the baby Jesus born in a stable and laid in a manger, while shepherds, wise men, all, came in to pay him homage.

There is the story of the twelve-year-old boy who loved the temple so much and who lingered there to ask and answer questions.

And there are the records of Jesus the stern yet winsome teacher and the great physician. He taught the ignorant, healed the sick, blessed little children, befriended women, and preached good tidings to the poor. That was his mission. (See Luke 4:18-19.)

And then there is the story of how Jesus was finally, arrested, slapped in the face, spat upon, laughed at, given a mock trial, and crucified as a common criminal between two thieves. There is the heartrending scene of the bleeding, suffering Jesus praying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

At the last there is the unutterable beauty of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, who broke the bonds of sin and destroyed the power of death.

## **II. The Bible: *Ageless for Its Revelation of God's Purpose***

We the United Church knows that the Bible is ageless because, through its great characters and events, God has revealed the *purpose* for which he made man.

Man can discover many things for himself. He can get some insights into what his life is all about through experience and reflection. But there is no source like the Bible for disclosing God's purpose in creating man. Science and technology are immensely important. But they do not tell us why we are here. Explorations on the moon, and possibly on other planets, could be among man's finest achievements. But they reveal nothing about the meaning and purpose of our strange lives on this beautiful little planet. Psychology and societal studies are important, but they do not provide an understanding of ultimate meaning and purpose. Culture and civilization say something to us about life and its direction, but they lack clarity and depth.

We can ride all the highways of all the world, or travel its waterways, or fly its air routes, and never discover why we are here. But the Bible, rightly understood, reveals the meaning and purpose of human life. It teaches that God created man for a purpose. It is not enough merely to affirm that God created man. We must go on to the biblical teaching that he did so for the realization of a supremely

worthy end. In this way the dynamic movement of God in pursuit of his aims becomes visible. Purpose is the key idea in relation to God's creative action.

The Bible not only teaches that God made us for a sublime purpose. It reveals what that purpose is, namely, to realize moral and spiritual values in community. The words "in community" are important. God worked in and through the *people* of Israel. He spoke through Moses and the prophets in the context of community. The covenant was with the *people* of Israel. Jesus introduced the note of personal salvation into religion. He loved and served men one by one. But he also taught about the *kingdom* of God and he summoned people to enter the *kingdom* of heaven. All this means that God wants to realize moral and spiritual values in our lives in the midst of our involvement with our fellowmen. For this reason it is no accident that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church was born at that first Christian Pentecost. It was the *community* of faith, the *people* of Christ. This principle is illustrated further by the fact that when God made us, he placed us in a family setting with community relationships from the start. The whole of our existence in society, with its political, economic, educational, recreational, and cultural dimensions, illustrates God's concern for the realization of values in community.

The Bible teaches also that all these values come to their highest realization under the leadership of Jesus Christ. His love and goodness guide the way. All achievements, however great, lose their glory unless they are aimed toward the well-being of mankind with which Jesus was concerned. All ideal values, such as friendship, humor, goodness, beauty, truth, and worship, have a life-subserving purpose under God. And wherever Jesus Christ is Lord, this is the direction which all human efforts take; namely, to benefit mankind in the service of God.

Therefore, the Bible, in revealing the purpose for which God made us, gives us the sense of direction we need. This guides us through this present life and opens the door to the creative advances of the future in the life after death. For it is not God's policy to abandon the valuable creatures whom he formed in his own image.

### **III. The Bible: Ageless for Its Mighty Affirmations**

We know that the Bible is ageless for its mighty affirmations.



We live in an age of secularism. And by secularism we mean the idea that if God is, he doesn't matter; he makes no difference. Many things that are secular are good, many are bad. But *secularism* is a tragedy of the contemporary era as it looks in anxiety toward the twenty-first century. In contrast to secularism and unbelief stand the mighty affirmations of the Bible. But what are these great beliefs all about?

First, the Bible tells us what we need to know about God. In a wonderful way it affirms God. It speaks of him as the Creator of the universe. He alone is Lord of all. Beside these tremendous affirmations of the Bible secularism is reduced to triviality.

Secondly, the Bible tells us what we need to know about man. It insists that we never understand ourselves until we see ourselves in the light of God. Why? Because in the pure light of God three facts become clear. The first fact is that man is a creature. He is always dependent on God. The second fact is that man is a very special kind of creature. He was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). This means that God made him for high and noble things and, above all, for himself. The third fact is that man is also a sinner. The Bible teaches us that man has within him gravitational pulls away from God and from his own best ideals. Man has passions and strivings that are at war with God's plan for him. And the Bible tells us that in the midst of these inner conflicts and strivings man has the power of choosing which road he will take, whether to go where God is going or to go his own way. So man is a sinner because he takes the wrong road. He is made to conquer evil, with God's help, but evil conquers him. From beginning to end the Bible holds man to his responsibility for turning away from God.

Once more, the Bible tells us what we need to know about the *meeting* of God and man. For the vast redemptive powers of God are freely offered to every man in Jesus Christ.

So the Bible is a book about God. It is a book about man. And it is a book about the meeting of God and man. It will never let us forget that God has made us for himself.

We glory in the biblical affirmation that *God has taken the initiative in our behalf*. There is no greater thought than this: Long

before we thought of God, he thought of us. And we find this beautifully expressed in that simple little verse that even our children can recite, “We love, because he first loved us” (I John 4:19).

And, what is most beautiful of all, God’s redeeming love is free to all who repent and hold fast to the Savior. This is why we speak of the *grace* of God. His love is *freely* given to all who trust him. The Bible declares the glory of God and tells us of his wonder work in Jesus Christ. It offers deliverance to every man, not by the power of any man, but by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16.)

#### **IV. The Bible: Ageless for Its Ministry to Human Needs**

We the United Church know that the Bible is ageless because through it, God meets us where our needs go deepest.

For every moral and spiritual need of the human heart there is an answering passage in the Bible. Just as the world in its many-colored beauty can satisfy every human longing for beauty, so is it with the Bible and our hunger for spiritual truth. It meets us in our many moods. It goes with us wherever our temptations take us. It confronts us in our sin. In the lonely hours of the night the exalted beauty of its passages sings us to sleep.

When grief comes our way, we take up that Book and hear the voice of God. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, which is sometimes worse than death itself, we read and know that we are not alone.

When heavy responsibilities are placed upon us, we turn to the Bible and find the strength we need. When there is the call to do a great work for God and we totter on the brink of cowardice, we take up that Book and read and know what must be done. When the burdens of suffering human beings press in upon us, we read of the One who denied himself and then return to our tasks rejoicing that we can share in the work of God.

Those who longed for chastity have turned to the story of Joseph. Those who wanted patience have learned from Job. Political leaders who felt their love of power threaten their characters have looked at Moses and learned how to be kingly in authority and humble in spirit.

Those whose consciences were dead have read Hosea and Amos and felt their moral strength restored. Those who lost their courage have seen the face of Stephen and have become soldiers of the cross again. Those who became weak in well-doing have retraced the long hard journeys of Paul and have heard him sing, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). And those who hungered and thirsted for forgiveness and eternal life have knelt at the foot of the cross and looked into their Redeemer’s face.

### **V. Concluding Observation**

Against this background, we believe in the immense importance of the sacred Book. It has not only guided the Church but also given a special quality to our culture. The very idea of having this Book as the basis of our belief and practice means that we look beyond nature and beyond man to God for our ultimate hope and destiny.

## CHAPTER III

### WE BELIEVE IN GOD

The United Church joins all Christians and the people of all high religions in believing in God. We believe that the one true God is the Ground and Lord of this universe. Back of the starry heavens above, under the earth beneath, in and through the energies of the whole universe, and in our life within there is the living God.

#### I. Why We Believe in God

We believe in God because of our heritage in the Bible. But we also believe in God *because it makes sense to do so*.

We are not at all impressed with atheism. Why? Because it has never made a single positive contribution to the world. It is a doctrine of denial rather than affirmation. And besides that, it does not make sense. In contrast to it we say two things. First, we believe in God because the Bible and the Christian home have taught us to believe. Also we believe because our best thinking demands it and our experience confirms it.

Some say, “God is too great to be known by us.” But we declare that God is too great not to let himself be known by us. We know that there is mystery. And we are sure that there are many things about God that we shall never know. But we hold that God has made himself known to everyone who takes a good look at the world around him. (See Rom. 1:19-21.)

Others say, “You should not give arguments for God because that makes the arguments greater than God.” That sounds very pious. But we cannot accept it. Why not? Because nobody is making the arguments greater than God. The arguments have to do not with God but with our *belief* in God. And we United Church insist that to those who have doubts we need to show that our best thinking leads us

toward the belief in God.

If there is good reason for believing in God, we ought to talk about it. If we are called foolish for believing, we ought to indicate the reasons for our belief. For in addition to our scriptural heritage, we place confidence in man's reason as a basis for belief.

Why do we believe in God? Basically for three reasons which are intertwined in mutual support.

### **1. IT IS INTUITIVELY PLAUSIBLE**

It is intuitively plausible to believe in God. A man does not have to be a philosopher to see this, though that may help. Here the basic idea is that men perceive by a kind of immediate insight that the finite requires the Infinite. Just as a leaf requires the tree, a blade of grass the earth, and a whitecap the ocean, so the finite requires the Infinite, the passing demands the Enduring, the imperfect calls for the Perfect.

Anselm (1033-1109), who is famous for presenting the so-called ontological argument for the belief in God, rendered a very important service. He showed that there is an inherent difference between the idea of God and the idea of everything else. He brought to clarity what nearly all men perceive intuitively; namely, that God cannot be thought of as not existing. If he could be, he would not be God. Of everything else, we know that it might not have existed.

For example, a tree in a front yard now exists, but at one time it did not exist. And in the future it will cease to exist. So is it with people. There is no inherent reason why we have to exist. If we live after death, this will be because God wills it and not because we must necessarily continue to be. In fact, of the entire universe we may say that it need not be. There is nothing about it that requires it to exist. God might have created numberless other universes. But he created this one. There may come a time when his work with this one is finished and it will cease to be. So this universe, though presently existing, does not necessarily have to be.

But this is not the case with God. He *has* to be, else he could not be God. And men perceive this intuitively. When anyone asks the question, Who made God? he shows that he does not understand the meaning of the word "God." For if God could be made by something

else, he could not be God.

## 2. IT IS INTRINSICALLY REASONABLE

Again, it is intrinsically reasonable to believe in God. That is, in the light of the total evidence and in the light of the major options, it makes sense to believe in God. Consider briefly some of the important kinds of evidence which point to theism (the belief in God).

First, there is the evidence from the physical universe and the creatures in it. This is a very complicated matter. In our common sense experiences with the things around us we come to realize that we are living in an ordered world. And we seldom stop to ask why it is orderly or how it came to be so. But, when we think about it, we realize that this calls for explanation. That is, the mind of man wants to understand how it is possible for there to be an ordered world. Scientists, as they explore the cosmos beyond the reaches of common sense, also presuppose and discover an orderly universe. They are not generally philosophers and theologians, so they do not ask why there should be an orderly universe.

Another way of putting it is this: What does the human mind require to explain an ordered universe *when there are infinite possibilities for chaos*? The best answer is that the creative activity of God alone is adequate to explain this. We may experiment with the only real option (unless we abandon the search altogether); namely, that the universe is a product of chance or of impersonal processes. But when we do, we realize that we have not discovered any adequate explanation. So we have to go with our best thinking and say that only God can explain this universe.

Out of many others, three further facts require explanation. The first is the fantastic fact that we can know the world around us. It is not in our minds, but we *know* it. The universe, from its tiniest particles to its largest galaxies, is intelligible. Einstein spoke of this when he said, "One may say the eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility." This is all so close to us that we are apt to miss it. Everyone simply accepts the fact that he knows the world around him. He sees trees, cars, other people, the stars, and lets it go at that. But how is it possible? By blind chance or impersonal process? Never. The best explanation is that God, the ultimate Mind, is at work in

and through the universe to make it a continuing medium of communication. That same God created our minds and made them capable of receiving the messages from nature. So there is mind at both ends of the line. God explains what otherwise goes unexplained. A second fact is that of creativity. A. N. Whitehead, whom some have called the greatest philosophical mind of the twentieth century, said that he could not accept atheism because it did not explain the amazing creativity in the universe. How can new things emerge? The universe is characterized by creative energy, energy producing novelty. Can this be explained by blind chance or impersonal process? Of course not. Here again the dynamic energy of God, marked by something like purpose and intelligence, is the most reasonable explanation we have. Indeed, it makes more sense than any competing alternative.

A third fact (in addition to the basic fact of an ordered universe) has to do with values. Beauty and goodness are among the truly ideal values. They should be experienced by all. But why should this be a universe in which men experience beauty when there are infinite possibilities for ugliness and disharmony? Yet the physical world is so made that it can satisfy every longing for beauty in the human spirit. And it also yields itself to man's desires to create beauty. The painter has his materials. The architect can shape wood, brick, stone, steel, and aluminum into magnificent buildings. The musician can create instruments which bear his ordered sounds. And the writer has pen or typewriter and paper. Why all this coordination, both in nature and man, toward the production of beauty? The ancient psalmist perceived the answer when he said,

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Day to day pours forth the story,  
and night to night declares knowledge. (Ps. 19:1; line 3  
was suggested by *The Interpreter's Bible*, IV, 102.)

There is also goodness. This comes to focus in man. Why should man be a moral creature? Would this be possible if blind chance or impersonal energy were ultimate? Of course not. Yet here is man, a moral being. This is not to say that he actually lives as he should.

Everyone knows that he does not. What we have in mind is that man recognizes the ideal of goodness, is capable of responding to it increasingly, and cannot be satisfied in his own being without coming to terms with it. This is not merely something which he has learned, an accident of his upbringing. Rather, like his intellect, it is a capacity with which he was born. It requires life situations to come to expression, but it is more than these.

Man asks moral questions. Is it right or wrong to lie, steal, cheat, kill, etc.? Did we do the right thing? Where did we go wrong? What we mean here is that, in a way not possible for monkeys, dogs, horses, whales, and birds, man has a capacity for the moral life. But why should this be the case? Because of blind chance or impersonal processes? Never. Our minds perceive that something more is needed to explain this presence of the moral nature in man. That something more is God. For when we realize that God is good, we perceive that as Creator he is the ultimate Source of all goodness and moral aspiration. So, again, it makes sense to believe in God.

### **3. IT IS EXPERIENTIALLY CONFIRMABLE**

Men have not only thought about God and talked about him; they have experienced his presence and power. The best evidences here are the lives of the saints. These are those who are worthy of the imitation of all men. They are selected as the best evidences because in any line the best men are authoritative. In science we do not look to dabblers but to the Pasteurs, the Einsteins, the best. So is it here. No witness to the reality of God would be complete without that of the saints and of all those who have followed in their line. For they tell us not only of the God of the universe. They speak also of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; of Moses, David, and the prophets; of the apostles; and, supremely, of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They remind us that the God of everything is also our Father.

From the start we are impressed with the number, quality, similarity, and contributions of those who have reported the continuing presence of God in their lives. They compose a vast multitude. Some are famous and some are not. But all adorn the world with the beauty, goodness, and triumph of their lives—often under the most difficult



circumstances.

The Bible itself is full of such examples. Job, the suffering saint, speaking out of the depths of his affliction, says, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25). The psalmist gives his simple witness, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). Many who have walked with God come and go. We call them prophets. Then Paul speaks. Everyone has been eager to hear him. His face is radiant. His speech is deliberate but forceful. He says, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him” (Rom. 8:28). He pauses for emphasis and continues, in effect, “I am sure, from long experience, that nothing—no matter how bad or tragic—? can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (See Rom. 8:38-39.) Millions have followed in his line.

## **II. Summary**

Because of these and similar considerations it is no accident that there has been a long succession of first-rate minds in Western thought who have beheld the vision of God. There was Plato, the most gifted man ever to take up philosophy. There was Aristotle. There were all those philosophical and theological minds of the West who have joined some from the East in affirming a theistic world view. These men, following in a magnificent line, cannot be lightly ignored by thoughtful people.

There were also the great minds of literature: Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and others. There were scientists like Kepler, Newton, Pascal, and Pasteur, and many of the best in our own day. Yes, and there were the great religious and saintly minds of the ages: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the psalmists, the apostles. There was Augustine, and the “angelic doctor,” Thomas Aquinas. Luther, Calvin, and John Wesley join in the vast company who affirmed the reality and power of God. So we confront a long succession of witnesses telling the story of the greatness and glory of God. (See Heb. 12:1.)

We are left to ponder these things in silence. And when the truth sinks in, the impact is tremendous. For we begin to see that no comprehensive belief comes to the human mind with better credentials than the belief in God. Atheism does not stand up under careful thought. To think about it is to refute it. Agnosticism, which says,

“We do not know,” is intellectual timidity. Leave out the Creator, and we have to resort to the *myth* that all this order and ingenuity in the universe come “somehow” from unconscious processes. And that is sheer credulity. Affirm the Creator, and the mind recognizes that it has the real explanation. While the fact of natural evil presents a problem for the man who believes in God, it is as nothing compared to the difficulties that stand in the way of the man who tries to account for human beings and the universe without God.

Besides this, the cumulative witness of millions of religious people through the centuries is unanswerable. We believe in the living God because he has spoken to men and even now works dynamically in them. As we have seen, the clearest witness here comes from the saints, because they have entered into the religious life—experimented, if you will—more persistently than the others. So they are in a better position to know than anybody else. And there is only one thing to do with the cumulative testimony of honorable people: accept it. We may sit in the armchair and doubt. But this much is sure: *We can neither establish nor destroy in the armchair what has been verified in the laboratory of the human soul.*

### **III. What God Is Like**

In what kind of God do we believe?

#### **1. God: *The Ultimate Spirit***

We believe that God is the ultimate Spirit. God is ultimate because he is the beginning and the end, “the Alpha and the Omega” (Rev. 1:8). He alone is self-existent.

God is Spirit. Many people are so dazzled by what they see that they miss the glory of the unseen. But what do we mean by the word “spirit”? Here we get the best clue by looking at ourselves. We have bodies; but we are spirits. For example, everyone has a *purpose* for doing something. But while we can see what he does, we can never see his purpose. Why? Because it is spiritual. So is it with our souls. They are unseen spirits.

We see the physical world. But we cannot see God. So we believe in the unseen God who sustains us. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24.)

## **2. GOD: *The Ultimate Person***

We believe that God is the ultimate person.

From beginning to end the Bible teaches that God is a living person. He is the creator, not merely the first principle of things. He is the sustainer of the universe, not merely a cosmic process. He is love, not merely the moral order. He is the ultimate person, not merely a system of ideals.

But what do we mean by this? Of course we do not mean that he is limited like ourselves. We mean rather that even on our human level a person gives us the best clue that we have to what God is like. A person *knows*.

So God, the ultimate person, *knows* his universe and identifies his children. If God did not know us, there could be no vital religion. But he is our Father who knows each member of his family.

God *loves* his children. The question is often asked, “Does God really care about our little lives on this earth? Isn’t he too great for that?” And the answer is that God is too great *not* to love us. The greater the gardener, the more he likes each particular flower in the garden. The greater the God, the more intimately he knows and loves every one of his children.

When we say that God is a person, we mean also that he *acts*. God is not some far-off static deity serenely contemplating the tragedies of nature and history. He is dynamically present in all events and in every life. It is not enough to speak of God as a process. But, whatever else we may say of him, he is inherently dynamic. The God of the Bible is the God who acts.

He does things. He creates. He sustains. He provides. Besides his huge projects throughout the universe God acts daily upon our lives. He rebukes, forgives, redeems, strengthens, promises, confirms, delivers, keeps, judges, challenges. He breaks the bonds of death and summons us to a creative adventure with him in paradise. So God is carrying forward his purposes. As Jesus said, “My Father is working still, and I am working” (John 5:17).

## **3. GOD: *The Ultimate Sovereign***

We believe that God is the ultimate sovereign.

Whatever else the Bible tells us about God, it will not let us forget

that he alone is the sovereign of the universe and the Lord of all the earth. He alone has the last word. He alone is God.

At the same time, we affirm the freedom and responsibility of people under God. Some tell us that if God is sovereign, he controls and determines in advance whatever we do. But we could never believe that God binds us hand and foot and allows no place for our responsible action. We are not puppets on the stage of life. So we hold that God himself, by his sovereign command, created us free beings with the power of saying “yes” and “no.” The truth is that it takes a greater God to make people free than to make them puppets. Our freedom, far from robbing God of his power, is one of the surest signs of God’s sovereignty.

So God is the ultimate sovereign. And in all matters he alone commands our complete devotion.

#### **4. God: *The Ultimate Love***

God is not only supreme in power, he is supreme in love. His power is an unfailing expression of his love. This is the meaning of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The prophets before him caught fleeting glimpses of this. For example, Zechariah saw it when he spoke for God, saying, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). God speaks through the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53). He requires of men, in contrast to power and might, that they do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Mic. 6:8). The full meaning of God as love was not available to men until Jesus Christ revealed it in his self-giving love which led him to suffer and die for men.

When we push forward toward the deeper meaning of all this, we come to see that the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ is the same love that is back of the universe. Love created it in the first place. Love sustains it. Love carries it forward into the future. The love of God made known in Jesus Christ is ever present with us to forgive, to sustain, to empower, and to conquer death. God has spoken through Jesus Christ in the accents of a moral universe. Not all is clear to us on this because of the fact of pain, suffering, and natural evil. But deeper than these mysteries is the biblical affirmation that God is self-giving love. This divine love is the only final basis for hope, for

openness to the future.

### **5. GOD: *The Holy Trinity***

We United Church believe in the Trinity. We believe also that there is a great difference between trinitarianism and unitarianism. But what does all this mean?

Let us begin with the historic doctrine of the Trinity. God is three in one. Is not this a contradiction? No, but it is a mystery. There is only one God. But Christians across many centuries have urged that we must say more than that. For the one true God has revealed himself in different ways in relation to our lives. So, in struggling to express this fact, Christians have recognized three interrelated but distinct kinds of activities in which God is engaged. What are they?

Before answering that question we need to note that Christians have insisted that these three kinds of divine activities come out of *differentiations within God himself*. A man may be one individual or person. Yet he is complex. He thinks, feels, decides. And these activities are rooted in three distinguishable features of his one being. This is an analogy only. It is merely suggestive. But in some such way God is three in one. He is one Being with at least *three structural differentiations* within himself. Of course, if we could know everything about God, we might see that his Being is so rich as to have many other differentiations. But God, in his infinite love and wisdom, has revealed the three great characteristics of his nature which bear most importantly on our human needs. What are those three?

They are: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God as Father is creator and sustainer of the universe. He is God in his concern for all creation, including man. Here God as Father has revealed himself in the universe and in his general concern for the value of his children. God the Son is the redeemer and re-creator of the souls of men. Here he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. So this revelation is different from the revelation in the universe of God's general providence. God the Holy Spirit is God in the hearts and minds of men. And here he is present most clearly within the community of faith where Jesus Christ is Lord. God as Holy Spirit is specially related to the Church. For there he works to bring home to

people the glory of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit forms and nurtures the community of faith.

We believe that it makes a great practical difference as to whether or not we are trinitarians or unitarians. Why? Because men need to know specifically what God expects of them and what he promises to do for them. In unitarianism God's aims and actions are not sufficiently clear for man's full response. In trinitarianism men know that God created them for a great purpose. They know that he has acted and still acts in their behalf through Jesus Christ to forgive them and to re-create their lives. They know that he is ever present to magnify Christ as Lord in the community of faith. They know that he promises his grace, or assistance, for creative service in the world. And they know the responses of faith and commitment which God expects them to make.

From this we can see that the doctrine of the Trinity, on one side of it, is pragmatic. It specifies the practical differences God makes when men open themselves to him and put their trust in him. All this is essential to vital or experienced Christianity. In unitarian religion revelation tends to be for contemplation. It seeks to satisfy the intellect. In trinitarian religion the revelation of God, without sacrificing the interest in the intellect, is aimed to awaken man's total response and commitment to the divine summons.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **WE BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST**

We The United Church believe that the greatest fact of history was the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. The most sublime events were those which began in a stable, continued on a cross, and ended with an empty tomb. The birth of a babe in a strange little village marks the great divide in time. All that went before was B.C; all that followed, A.D. (Anna Domini : In the year of the Lord)

We hold that in Jesus Christ eternity bared its secrets to men. In him all tyranny over the souls of men was given the sign of its defeat. And in him everyone can claim his right to receive the grace of God and become a new creature.

Some tell us that Jesus' earthly life was not very important. They say he wrote no books, composed no songs, drew no pictures, carved no statues, amassed no fortune, commanded no army, ruled no nation. And yet we know that Jesus spoke as never man had spoken, and lived and healed and died as never man had done.

He who never wrote a line has been made the hero of unnumbered volumes. He who never drew a sketch has been the inspiration of some of the finest paintings put on canvas. He who never carved in stone has lived to be the architect of the world's most beautiful cathedrals. He who never wrote a song has put music into the hearts of nameless multitudes. He who never established an institution is the foundation of the Church which bears his name. He who refused the kingdoms of this world has become the Lord of millions. He who never wove a napkin has been woven into our Western civilization. Yes, he whose shameful death scarcely produced a ripple on the pool of history in his day has become a mighty current in the vast ocean of the centuries since he died.

He was so winsome that children loved him, so gentle that women were comforted by him, so manly that rough people took notice of him, so compassionate that the multitudes pressed upon him, so courageous that the powers of entrenched evil trembled before him, so pure that sinners saw God in him, so faithful that he went up that lonely heartbreaking road to the cross, and so triumphant that twenty centuries after his earthly life was spent his cross still stands as “sovereign emblem over all.”

But what is the significance of this Jesus? Was he merely a Jewish peasant who lived long ago, who captured the multitudes by his amazing powers of healing, and who astounded the people by his teachings? Was he just a man who combined with the force of a prophet the gentility of a saint?

We join the ancient apostles and all other Christians in affirming that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (II Cor. 5:19). So with the earliest Christians we too stand before Jesus, the Son of man and the Son of God.

But how shall we say it in the language of our day? We know that no single formula can tell the full truth here. For all great truths require more than one approach to them. The Church has never been fully satisfied with what it has said about the meaning of Jesus Christ as Lord and Redeemer. Without presuming to give an exclusive formula, we believe that one of the best insights here can be plainly stated. We believe that the eternal God was uniquely and redemptively present in what Jesus said and thought and did. God was in the birth and in the *actual* life that Jesus lived.

### **I. God in the Compassion of Jesus**

With this in mind we notice first of all the compassion that Jesus had for the multitudes. And we see God there.

Who were these people that Jesus loved? They were not cultured folk. They were poor, sick, and enslaved by the tyranny of conventions. Jesus loved them. He suffered with them. He felt the pangs of their hunger, the privations of their poverty, the anguish of their diseases. He had compassion on the multitude. (See Matt. 15:32; Mark 8:2.)

How touchingly this is brought before us in a great scene just



outside the city of Jericho! Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the way on the outskirts of that ancient city. (See Mark 10:46-52.) During the quiet hours of many a day he had perhaps recounted in his thoughts the incidents told him about Jesus. How frequently had he longed to be near this Jesus! On that particular day, perhaps, he told himself to let his imagination linger no longer on the Galilean. For he would never come his way. Not long afterward he heard the sound of an approaching crowd. What did it mean? The multitudes who were following Jesus were moving toward the spot where Bartimaeus sat. Amid the hustle and bustle of the passing through this poor blind man asked anyone who could answer, "What's all the crowd about?"

The reply came back, "Oh, it's a man from Nazareth who is passing by. I think they call him Jesus."

Bartimaeus' voice caught in his throat and for a moment he could not utter a sound. Then the words burst forth upon the air like so much pent-up energy that was suddenly released: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Some, hearing him cry out to Jesus, shouted harshly at him, "Quiet, blind fool! Jesus has no time for the likes of you!"

The Gospel writer puts it wonderfully when he says, "But he cried out all the more, Son of David, have mercy on me!" And the ears of the Master, tuned long in advance to hear the cries of people, were pierced by the desperate sadness of the voice that uttered those words. He stopped and said, "Call this man." Bartimaeus cast away his garment, leaped to his feet, pushed through the throng, and, trembling, stood in the presence of Jesus. Everyone knows the rest of the story, how Jesus bade him go his way and how immediately there appeared before his wondering eyes a world of color, of forms and shapes and people.

When John's disciples came to him and asked, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus' reply revealed again the measure of his compassion: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:3,5).

Now was that compassion that Jesus had for the people merely the strange exaggerated mood of a Jewish peasant who lived two thousand years ago? No. That was the eternal God clothing himself in flesh and blood and showing us his everlasting compassion. *That was God in Christ!*

## **II. God in Jesus' Estimate of People**

Again, we The United Church notice how Jesus estimated all people as belonging essentially on the same level before God. He was no respecter of persons. It mattered not whether they were rich or poor, strong or weak, young or old, men or women, one race or another, Jesus viewed them all as on the same level before God. And so he struck mightily against that chronic plague of the human race which has led the proud people of all the ages to look down upon their fellowmen.

Jesus knew that some people were more gifted than others. The parable of the talents tells that story.

But according to him, the Pharisee had no vantage point before God which entitled him to despise his brother publican. The rich had no right to hold their special privileges over the poor. Not even Caesar was entitled to lordship over the souls of men. Men had no birthright which did not also belong to women. Adults walked no pathway into the kingdom of God which little children might not tread. The sons of Abraham had no claim upon the power of God which was not also available to the Canaanitish woman or the hated Samaritan. And the chief priests and elders had no seats in heaven which the harlots and the outcasts might not fill. So Jesus saw all people as on the same level before God.

Here Jesus fought against one of the worst attitudes of people toward their fellows. And the secular mind has never fully realized how much people owe to Jesus for what freedom they have.

Now was this estimate Jesus placed upon all people merely the peculiar judgment of a Jewish peasant who lived centuries ago? No. We The United Church believe that this was the eternal God showing in the Savior what he thinks of people. For "God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). *This was God in Christ!*

### III. God in Christ's Power to Save

There is an even deeper side of this. In Jesus Christ, God convinces people of sin, helps them to conquer sin, and draws them to himself.

We see this when we take a close look at the apostles. Jesus impressed them so much that after the Resurrection it seemed perfectly sensible to them to believe that the vast redemptive powers of Almighty God were now released to everybody through him.

Nothing seemed to make sense like the thought that the crucified and risen Lord was the promised Savior of the world. These disciples had heard Jesus speak. They had lived with him on the most intimate terms. And yet one of them could say to the multitudes: "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

In this we are impressed by the unrestrained confidence and boldness with which these apostles announced the gospel. They had known Jesus in the flesh. And yet it seemed to them perfectly proper to believe in him as the Savior of the world. *No recorded fact could pay a higher tribute to Jesus Christ than that.* And no other fact could tell us more about the impact of Jesus upon his disciples.

That was the eternal God redemptively at work in the Savior. No other language will tell the story. If we cannot fully understand it, that does not entitle us to the folly of denying it. We do not understand life, but we live it. And millions can witness to the forgiving, life-giving power of the Savior.

Is this mighty work of Christ merely the strange impact of a Jewish peasant out of the long ago? No. It is the eternal God at work redemptively in the living Savior. It is God in Christ, forgiving and conquering sin, and drawing us to himself. So Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32).

## CHAPTER V

### WE BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

We The United Church share with all Christians in believing in the Holy Spirit. We believe that God is not only “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1), but that he is also nearer than hands and feet and closer to us than breathing. At times we have neglected this doctrine of the Holy Spirit. And when we have not neglected it, we have often misunderstood it. It would not be going too far to say that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the most neglected and most misunderstood vital doctrine of the Christian religion. Frequently we have not known what to say about the Spirit. But always we have been true to New Testament Christianity whenever we stressed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. In order to see this clearly we must turn to the New Testament itself and retrace the steps of Jesus and his first disciples and Paul.

#### **I. The Holy Spirit in the New Testament**

The three primary sources of insight in the New Testament are these: what Jesus taught, what really happened at Pentecost, and what Paul said. (See John 13-17; Acts 2:1-42; I Cor. 12:1-3.)

We remember the times when Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples. He was facing the cross. He knew his earthly mission was to end soon. So he wanted to bind their hearts together in love and to strengthen them. We find the story in the Gospel of John. (See John 13-17.) Jesus promised them the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26.) They would never be left alone in the world. They would be supported and strengthened in all good things by the unseen Presence. As Jesus said, “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). Here, of course, the

word “Counselor” refers to the Holy Spirit. (The Greek word, *Parakletos*, is very difficult to render into English.) And Jesus also said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

Jesus did not mean that the Holy Spirit would be, like an encyclopedia, a vast source of information to men. Rather, he meant that the Holy Spirit would help them to know all they needed to understand for their souls’ salvation in Jesus Christ and for the basic direction of their lives on earth. So Jesus went on to say, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14; see also 14:26). Jesus made it impossible to separate the work of the Holy Spirit from his own person and mission. Jesus taught his followers that the Holy Spirit was sure to come, and when he did, he would bring their minds and hearts to focus on himself and on the community which was to bear his name.

This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Picture the scene. Jesus had been crucified. The eleven disciples and others had gathered in the upper room where they “devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). Jesus had commanded them to remain in the city until they were “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). And fresh upon their memory were the words of the risen Lord, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Not long after that it happened; “and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). Peter, who tremblingly denied his Lord before a little maiden just a few weeks before, was now so transformed and empowered that he stood before the people of Jerusalem and delivered a powerful sermon. It was that same Jerusalem which rejected Jesus. Its religious leaders had started and carried through the crucifixion of Jesus. In such a setting Peter, with the others standing with him, spoke.

What was it that really happened at that first Christian Pentecost? Some call attention to the sound from heaven “like the rush of a mighty wind.” Others think of the “tongues as of fire” which appeared to rest on each one present. Still others think of how they “began to speak in other tongues.” (Acts 2:2-4.) But clearly these were outer accompanying factors, not the inner reality. Whatever else the power

of the Holy Spirit may be, it is beyond question an inner transforming force. So what we want to know is how those followers of Jesus were changed within.

We find the clue in what Peter preached when he stood before the multitude in the temple area. He said, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). So the real meaning of that Pentecost comes to light not merely in the first four verses of Acts 2, but in what began to manifest itself in the minds and hearts of Peter and the others. The Holy Spirit illuminated their minds so that, for the first time in any settled way, they grasped the fact that God had chosen to do his mighty redemptive work for the whole world through Jesus Christ. They had walked with him, sat at his feet, broken bread with him. They had witnessed his resurrection and heard his promise of the Holy Spirit. But the full meaning of the coming of Jesus Christ was not grasped. Then suddenly, they were made aware of the tremendous fact that he was the One through whom the whole world was to be redeemed. The power of God in their risen Lord was felt in their own hearts. The experience was overwhelming.

The Holy Spirit’s unique mission of magnifying the Savior became an *experienced reality* in the hearts of those present. The followers of Jesus were formed into a community of faith based on this great good news. And three thousand souls were added that day to the fellowship (Acts 2:41). What happened, then, was that the Holy Spirit transformed their lives by illuminating them as to who Jesus really was and by enabling them to make a total commitment of themselves to the living Christ in community. In a true sense, that was the birthday of the Church.

This is significant for The United Church in a special way because of our emphasis on the *experienced presence* of the Holy Spirit. Outward signs and accompanying factors may be present, but the ageless glory of that occasion was the life-changing power of the new faith and total commitment to Jesus Christ wrought by the Holy Spirit. To be sure, those present played their parts too. They were there; they had a common memory of Jesus and talked together about

it; they were receptive, and they responded. But the substantive power—without which that scene would have been nothing more than a gathering of bewildered people sharing their fears and disappointments—was the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul, in his judicious and inspired way, perceived the inner meaning of that first Christian Pentecost when he said, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:3). The words “Jesus Christ is Lord” formed one of the earliest Christian confessions. And Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth of what he had taught them; namely, that the primary mission of the Holy Spirit is to bring home to men the real meaning of that confession.

We, then, believe that in Pentecost we confront a primal fact of Christian history. What men in their own strength alone could not do, men under the power of the Holy Spirit did. No wonder the earliest Christians talked so much about the Spirit. No wonder Paul asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). And no wonder centuries afterward another disciple could speak of that first Christian Pentecost as “an eternal moment in the destiny of mankind.” For those disciples had entered into a new dimension of existence by the power of the Spirit.

## **II. Who Is the Holy Spirit?**

But what is the meaning of all this for us today? What is the Holy Spirit? Rather, who is this Spirit?

He is God in his nearness, made known and available in Jesus Christ. He is God close beside us, at work within us. We believe that God meets everyone where he is and at every stage in the spiritual pilgrimage. The Holy Spirit is the unseen Presence rebuking us for every evil thought and deed, confirming us in every good thing, and summoning us to creative advances with God and man.

Another way of saying it is this: The Holy Spirit is the power of the risen Christ at work in the hearts of people. For we believe that this Spirit is far more than some vague force that stuns and shocks people. Paul set the pattern for our thinking here when he said that the Lord is the Spirit (II Cor. 3:18). He was insisting that we are to think of the Spirit as the living Christ at work within us. This saves Christianity from all of those strange doings in the name of the Spirit

which border on the magical and the hysterical. So the Holy Spirit is the mighty unseen power of the living God which makes for Christlikeness in our lives.

This basic biblical guideline is important because whenever Christians emphasize the inner spiritual life—as we believers do—there are dangers of identifying the work of the Spirit with our own deep feelings and hunches. Almost every conceivable error of judgment or breakdown of intelligence has claimed to be the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit guides us, but many times we do not really know how to distinguish between our own hunches or impressions and the authentic movement of the Spirit. The Spirit may heal our diseases, but we may deceive people into believing that we know the laws of his healing work. Speaking in tongues, or unintelligible sounds, may seem to be a manifestation of the Spirit when people are overwhelmed with the joy of his presence. But at best these activities are not at the heart of the New Testament teaching on the Holy Spirit. At worst they involve us in delusions which obscure the primary mission of the Holy Spirit, which, as we have seen, is to magnify Jesus Christ as Lord in the community of faith and in the world. All else is secondary, if not trivial.

### **III. The Language of the Holy Spirit**

But how does the Holy Spirit speak to us? What language does he use?

There are many languages in the world. And there are different languages that the Spirit of God uses in speaking to us. Yet many people never learn to hear them.

For example, there is the language of conscience. Some things are right. Some things are wrong. Some things that we stoop to are beneath contempt. Yet we try to justify ourselves in them. Anything to exalt our own beloved selves! Then the presence of the Holy Spirit is felt as he, in the light of Christ, confronts us with ourselves as we really are. He is present also in our boredom, disillusionment, and despair. He meets us in our anxieties as well as in our hopes and dreams. This power of the Spirit, then, is at work to a degree in every human being. Even before the gift of God's grace there is this



wonderful preparatory work of the Spirit. This is what we call prevenient grace—which means the grace that is already present before we are really Christians. This is “the true light that enlightens every man” (John 1:9). It is the law of conscience that is written upon the hearts of all. (See Rom. 2:15.)

Thus God has not left us to ourselves. By nature, by birth, God has a claim upon us and he speaks to us in the language of conscience. He speaks in the language of beauty, of companionship, of culture and refinement, of creative work in the busy affairs of daily life. Strange as it may seem, the Holy Spirit speaks to us even through sadness. He speaks in the plaintive language of loneliness calling us to the fellowship with himself. He whispers in the still, dark silence of our futility, “Children, the truth in Christ will make you free.” During the long fearful hours when we walk through the shadow of death, the Holy Spirit speaks the language of comfort and peace. In the midst of our doubts the Spirit speaks the language of trust. In despair he speaks hope; in fear, confidence; in resentment, love.

So the Holy Spirit works by the various tugs and pulls upon our souls in the course of daily living. And the Christian has no more important responsibility than that of understanding the divine language which is spoken throughout each day.

Every impulse and motion of the Spirit is to draw us to God. He convinces us of the hopelessness of life lived without God. Why? To show us the truth of the new life in Jesus Christ. He shows us the awfulness of our sin—something we do not like to see. Why? To lead us from the darkness into the light of Christ. He strengthens every noble impulse in us by his quiet secret workings within our souls. Why? Because he would make the living Christ not merely a fleeting object of affection but the master impulse of our entire being.

The Holy Spirit empowers us through the Church. He meets us when we are incorporated into the community of faith. He meets us in corporate worship. He inspires us through the words of the hymns. And he leads us through the prayers spoken and unspoken, through the special music, the special services, and the sermons.

Few things are more important than learning how to understand the divine language. And the Holy Spirit surely speaks to those who

tune their ears to hear him.

The Holy Spirit also speaks within our hearts the language of assurance. Paul put it this way: “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:15-16). Hence, we know by the witness of the Spirit that we are his.

We believe that we need not drift about upon a sea of uncertainties. For we can know within ourselves that we belong to God and are in his favor.

“Let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit, which is separate from the fruit of it.” So the Holy Spirit works in us to bear fruit.

#### **IV. The Fruit of the Spirit**

We believe that the Spirit of God daily works in our lives as what Augustine called “the good of all good.” And we rejoice daily in this fact. So the Spirit bears fruit through us. This is his nature.

But what kind of fruit does he bear? Here Paul, who gave us our profoundest insights on the works of the Holy Spirit, must guide us. He said, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23; see also Rom. 14:17). And we may add to these the great Christian virtue of wisdom. For love implies wisdom.

We believe that these fruits are not, like apples and pears, gifts of nature. Nor do they come in their fullness out of man’s wisdom and culture. They go deeper than our moral life. The Spirit is present both in the refinements and duties of life. But our good manners and politeness are not enough to do God’s work in the world. And the power of duty is merely a struggling stream compared to the tidal wave of God’s grace that is needed.

Around the turn of the century two men set out in the world to do a job for humanity. They were about the same age. One of them was Stefan Zweig of Austria. He drank from the cultural fountains of Europe. He knew the best that had been thought and said by men. After World War I he dedicated himself to the fight against the “lunacy of war.” He wrote books and became famous in many lands. But along came Hitler and his armies to puncture the dreams of a Europe

at peace. Those armies moved into Austria and Stefan Zweig moved out. He went to Brazil, where he hoped to build a new home. But on February 23, 1942, while contemplating Europe's spiritual plight, he committed suicide. He gave the world a kind of light. But his was a light that failed.

The other man was a missionary. Early in his life he felt the call to carry the ageless gospel to Korea. There he preached and taught and labored until after some thirty years he was instrumental in establishing nearly two hundred churches. But war struck the Far East too. And missionaries were brought home for reassignment. This man was called home and sent to a field in an entirely different part of the world. He had to learn a new language. Soon he was preaching in the native tongue there and carrying forward the work of God like a true soldier of the cross. He too gave light to the world. But his was a light that did not lose its glow.

What was the difference? Phillips Brooks has given us a beautiful figure that tells the answer. One man was like a candle lighted from the finest altars of this world to produce an earthly flame. The other was like a candle lifted high up to the altar of heaven and there lighted with the divine flame.

So the fruit of the Spirit comes not from ourselves alone but from the indwelling and unseen Presence. We join all Christians who affirm this to be one of the most basic differences between vital religion and the secular perspective. We are commanded to love. But in ourselves we cannot fully do it. We are required to forgive. Yet in ourselves we fail. We are called to serve. Alas, we fret over the miserable goals that end in self. Then comes the penetrating, pure work of the Holy Spirit to set us right and to give us the power of moving toward what we were made *to be*.

There is one more kind of fruit of the Spirit which, though implied, is not often openly stated. I have in mind the interaction between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit in the creative use of talents in every area of achievement. As we have seen, the primary and unique mission of the Holy Spirit is to magnify Jesus Christ as Lord and to enable us to open ourselves through the community of faith to what that lordship implies. We must not allow anything to obscure that.

But those who are brought into the newness of life through Christ have talents which are to be put to their best use. And, in view of the God-appointed human interest in art, literature, music, the performing arts, the sciences, politics, business, labor, recreation, etc., it follows that all human talents are to be used as creatively as possible for the glory of God and the benefit of man. The Holy Spirit assists men to make the best use of these talents and thus to claim them for the cause of humanity. It is no accident that among the highest flights of artistic, musical, literary, intellectual, and cultural achievements have been those made under the influence of Christ.

Here again man's built-in capacities are to be understood as quickened and guided by the divine assistance. This is the ultimate basis for an authentic Christian humanism.

The Holy Spirit, then, is the greatest force for righteousness and creativity in the world today. And men and nations desperately need this resource for creative achievement and service in these times when we are looking toward the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER VI

### WE BELIEVE IN MAN

Nothing is easier than to lose faith in people. But we The United Church join all Christians in holding fast to the God-given goodness that is in every man.

We know that people are not good enough to be what they ought to be without God's help. But we also know that the view of man as mean and sinful has its dangers. We are all sinners. But our sin becomes tragic only because we are much more than sinners. God has created us in his image. And in spite of our sin, that image is engraved upon our souls by the act of Almighty God. By birth God has set his mark and seal upon us and claimed us for himself. (See Gen. 1:27.)

#### **I. Is Man Really Important?**

But it is not always easy to have a high opinion of people. Why not? Because our human estimates blind us to the full truth.

First of all, there are perspectives from which our human life seems like the merest trifle. For example, when we see ourselves over against the vast stretches of things in space, we are reduced to nothing.

Look at the stars, and man shrinks to a particle of dust. His pride bursts like a pretty bubble. Before the heavens, where is the glory of man? Is he not rather a speck lost in space?

This is not a new thought. The ancient psalmist knew it when he said:

When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,  
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;  
what is man that thou art mindful of him,  
and the son of man that thou dost care for him? (Ps. 8:3-4.)

Again, we look backward into the past and forward into the future,

and what we call our present is only a flickering candle in the wind.

Who knows how long God has been at work! Who can count the millions of people who were born, grew up, and died, and who are no longer remembered by anyone—unless God remembers them! Families, clans, and tribes have come and gone only to get lost in “death’s dateless night.” Nations have risen to power and glory only to go down. And if we want to find the remains of most of the civilizations of history, we must dig them up from beneath the surface of the earth.

How short life is! How long time is! We are here today and gone tomorrow. And such a life as we have, like a speeding car, swiftly passes by. So we are easily lost in the vast procession of the ages, and our days “are like a passing shadow” (Ps. 144:4).

So why all this talk about the dignity of human life? This too is not a new thought. For the ancient psalmist said,

As for man, his days are like grass;  
 he flourishes like a flower of the field;  
 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,  
 and its place knows it no more. (Ps. 103:15-16.)

And when we enter the moral world and see the depths of evil to which people can go, we question their dignity. Even on the simple levels of daily life there is a touchy pride in people that makes it hard to admire them. As so many people have pointed out, self-love is always with us. Writing about this self-love, La Rochefoucauld called it “one long and mighty agitation.” And for many, life is little more than the restless motions of selfishness.

Another common weakness is ingratitude. No matter how much is done for us, we are apt to be ungrateful. For we like to turn everything toward ourselves.

William Hazlitt, whose observations on human nature are among the keenest ever written, calls our attention to another flaw when he says, “Envy is the most universal passion.” And Pascal sums it up like this: “We are incapable both of truth and of good.”

The tragedy of humanity is seen nowhere more glaringly than in the awful injustices of history. What is history? In no small degree it is a record of “man’s inhumanity to man.” From Cain and Abel to

the prophets and their assassins, from the crucifiers of Jesus to the twentieth-century tyrants, brutality and meanness have broken through the cages of this common humanity.

Lord Acton said that nearly all great men were bad men. And the great German thinker Hegel has spoken of history as “the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized.” The streams of history are red with the blood of people.

No wonder the bitterest words of all languages have been written against man himself. And history has been well called the “despair of philosophy.”

Where, then, is the glory of man? Is he not rather a miserable creature, worthless and vile?

Again there is nothing new in such a pessimistic thought. For the ancient psalmist was familiar with it when he said

They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt;  
there is none that does good,  
no, not one. (Ps. 14:3.)

## **II. Jesus' View of Man**

But since we take Jesus seriously, we must turn across the centuries two thousand years to see what he had to say about people. He knew their weaknesses. And he was not blind to their sins. But he saw in them creatures of unutterable worth.

Little children shone like precious jewels before him. He loved the poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind, the lepers, the sinners, as well as the rich, the healthy, the whole, the “righteous.” His earthly mission was “to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). He said, “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?” (Matt. 16:26). He who girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples' feet knew the worth of men (John 13:1-11). He who lamented over Jerusalem so many times (Matt. 23:37) still felt the importance of those who crucified him. He who was called a winebibber and a glutton saw the image of God in the heart of every sinner. And he who told the story of the lost sheep had a deep sense of the preciousness of every man.

But how are we to fit these two facts together? On the one hand, it seems that man is not worth much. On the other hand, Jesus, the Savior of the world, tells us that each person is very precious in the sight of God. Was Jesus a mere dreamer? Much depends upon the answer to this question. And we join Christians everywhere in looking to Jesus Christ as our Lord and teacher. So with him we declare the dignity of human life.

But how are we to think this through?

### **III. The Image of God**

We can think it through by answering the question: What does the Bible mean when it says God made us in his own image? Here we must look for a comprehensive answer based on the primal fact that God created man to bear some real marks of kinship with himself.

The Bible loses its glory if man has no special value. The mighty thought of God's redemptive love in Jesus Christ means nothing if man is worthless. Where is the victory of the empty tomb if man is a particle of dust?

But once lift up this doctrine that God made us after his own likeness and we can speak of every man as one "for whom Christ died" (I Cor. 8:11). But let us look at this great belief about man in the light of our modern setting.

First of all, here is where we need to stop thinking about man's body and start thinking about his soul. His body is physical. But his soul is spiritual. In spite of what some people may say, man is a living spirit.

The Bible teaches us that God is the infinite Spirit. And he created man after his likeness in that he made him a spiritual being. Nobody has ever seen the soul of a man. If the stark truth were told, a congregation or assembly of people is a group of invisible spirits. They have bodies. But their real selves, their souls, are spirits.

The soul is something which no eye can see, no hand can touch, no weight can lift, and no device can measure. How big is a soul? We can never answer that question in inches or feet or miles or light years. In contrast to the vast stretches of things in space, man is, like the Maker of this universe, an invisible being who will never be seen through a telescope nor expressed in a mathematical formula. So



man is a creature of dignity because God made him a living spirit.

But much more than that needs to be said. Look at the wonderful powers that people have. And think of the great things people have done. The wisest and best men and women have always said that there is a difference between what is *good* and what is bad. They have said that there is a difference between the *beautiful* and the ugly, the *true* and the false, the *holy* and the blasphemous. And they have insisted that man is a creature of dignity because he can grow and adventure in things that are good and beautiful and true and holy.

What is the difference between a child and a little monkey? When a monkey gets to be six years old, would we send him to school? Of course not. Why not? Because he cannot really grow in understanding. Can a monkey sing songs or grasp the Ten Commandments or pray to God? Of course not. So the monkey is not made in the image of God. But man is.

Man is by nature capable of responding to the *beautiful*. He can love the *truth* and repudiate errors. And he can seek that absolute *righteousness* which comes only from loyal service to the one true God. In his natural state these capacities are both undeveloped and even twisted by his pride and pettiness. But they are always there just the same. And because of these things man is a creature of dignity.

From this it is only a step to the thought that people are dear to the very heart of God. Even a newborn babe is unutterably precious because he belongs to God and is made for growth under God.

A child begins his deeds of goodness, perhaps, by sharing a stick of chewing gum and ends by sharing his life in the struggle for truth, love, and justice. He sets out by enjoying his colorful little toys and continues until he appreciates Shakespeare and composes symphonies. He commences with Walt Disney's Pluto only to grow until he rethinks the thoughts of Plato. He starts with a simple bedtime prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep," only to move on toward an ever-deepening understanding of our Lord's Prayer.

But we do not reach the summit of the matter until at last we express ourselves in the language of the saints. The Bible gives us the highest insight here. For in it we know God as the one in whom

goodness, beauty, truth, and holiness live and have their being. For what is goodness but an abstraction until it has its reality in God who is “the good of all good”? What is beauty but a dream until it is clothed in an ultimate mind? What is truth but a word until it speaks through the “God of truth”? And what is righteousness but an ideal until it comes to life in the goodness of God?

So when we say that man was created in the image of God, we mean that he was given the power of growing and adventuring, with God’s help, in those qualities which belong to God himself.

Now we begin to see something of the wonder of this doctrine of the “image of God.” God is the ultimate Spirit. Man is the finite spirit. God is infinite goodness. Man shares in that goodness. God is absolute beauty. Man longs for beauty. God is holiness. Man is made for holy living.

In the light of this, man’s reason for living becomes clear. He is made to be a child of God. The purpose of life on this earth is, with God’s help, to weave into the fabric of a passing existence those qualities which are neither new nor old but everlasting because they come from God.

So we The United Church believe that man is made to be a child of God. His *natural make-up*, which gives him dignity, starts him on the way to God. But that by itself is utterly inadequate. So here is where God’s *special help* comes in. We call this the grace of God. So by God’s grace man the child of God in promise becomes man the child of God in fact. And the Father loves him with a mighty love. That is the deeper meaning of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

#### **IV. Summary and Practical Implications**

Why do we believe in the incalculable preciousness of each human being? Because the Bible teaches that God created man to be his child, with the mysterious ties of a special kinship with himself. We believe this also because Jesus emphasized it and gave it new depth and meaning. We believe it because man shows in his own life and activity the marks of God’s creative work; for man is capable of growing in goodness, beauty, truth, and sanctity. We believe it also because God has wrought a great work in Jesus Christ precisely for

the redemption and creative advance of human beings. We believe it because the Holy Spirit does his work in all who respond. We believe it because of the destiny beyond death to which man has been summoned.

There are practical implications of all this which need to be noted. If what we believe about the dignity and incalculable preciousness of each human being is important, then no man is to be evaluated on any other basis than the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This means that neither race, nor culture, nor sex, nor age, nor status, nor any other historical or human factor is to obscure the sense of the ultimate worth of people. All men are made for God. Christ lived and died for all. And the Holy Spirit ever takes the initiative to bless and enrich the lives of all. In the realm of ideal values our paltry human distinctions have no standing before God. All may manifest goodness, beauty, truth, and holiness. For these are not cooped up in any nation, culture, race, sex, or age.

This is one of the primal sources of our opposition to everything that dehumanizes men. And it is an equally primal source of our passion to improve the lot of all men, including especially those in greatest need.

## CHAPTER VII

### WE BELIEVE IN THE CROSS

Man is a creature of dignity. But he cannot answer his own deepest questions. So the cross of Christ must always be seen against the background of man's preciousness and of his failure. Man was both important enough and needy enough for Christ to die for him.

#### **I. Man's Thirst for God**

Someone has said that man is a religious animal. He is. But why is he? Why have people of all ages turned to the supernatural for help?

The answer is not simple but it is clear. Whether we look at the crude gropings of primitive peoples or at the refined frustrations of our modern day, we observe that one universal human longing has driven people to worship God. And what is that? It is the longing for an enduring meaning in the face of sin and death.

But why did people of all ages long for this enduring meaning? Because they were made for God. And people are restless till they rest in him. But how do they come to see this tremendous fact about themselves? By seeing the failure of everything but God.

#### **1. THE FAILURE OF THE WORLD AROUND US**

Primitive people saw clearly that somehow nature was not their friend. It involved them in disease. It struck them down by droughts and floods and terrifying storms. It threatened them with wild beasts. And it always seemed to destroy them in the end.

Today, despite all our scientific conquests of nature—for which daily we thank God—we still look out upon a physical universe that threatens our life and all that we hold most dear. Oh, we do not live in the tiny little world of our primitive ancestors. We can look through telescopes into outer space and tumble from one galaxy to another.

But do we feel more at home in such a universe?

We are told that there are a hundred billion stars in our galaxy. They tell us also that there may be a hundred billion other galaxies the size of ours. Does that make us feel any safer as we face the facts of sin and death? Of course not. Why? Because neither the stars above us nor the earth beneath us can speak to us as person to person. So the spiritual quest, on its human side, is the longing for communion that breaks through the terrible silence of the universe around us. And on its divine side it is God speaking to us and calling us to himself.

### **2. THE FAILURE OF MAN**

Again, people have looked at human history and found it helpless to answer the ageless problems of sin and death. It is true that primitive peoples never had the advantages of reading books. But they saw people come and go. They knew human tragedy. They understood premature death and helpless old age. And in the passing of the years they were acquainted with the awful tragedy of man's inhumanity.

In modern times we can read books and look back across the long centuries. We can follow the slow painful steps that people took to get out of the jungle. But can we find there the meaning of life in the face of sin and death? We cannot. Why not? Because the story of man forgives no sins and does not conquer death. It merely pictures the long procession of sinners and the endless stream of death. Culture and civilization have failed us also.

### **3. THE FAILURE OF OURSELVES**

Where shall we turn, then? Shall we look into our own souls? What good will that do? It is our souls that demand the answer which they cannot give themselves. The plain fact is that we are driven beyond ourselves, beyond all else, to God.

So in the face of our utter inability to cope with our own situation, we long for God. Some people express this longing in the crude language of idol worship; some in the superstitious tongues of painful rites. But always there is the craving for a fellowship with God that can conquer the terror or inadequacy of all earthly attachments.

Lost in the world around us, lost in the dark corridors of history and culture, and lost in ourselves, we thirst for God.

## **II. God's Eternal Answer**

Then a strange thing happens. We finally begin to see that God wants to speak to us. Abraham saw this. And he heard something of the divine speech. Then there was Isaac; then Jacob. Moses stood before God and heard his voice. The prophets heard the word of God, the message of hope and promise. Finally God saw that the time was ripe for speaking in a way that every human being could understand. So, in Jesus Christ, he spoke in the language of our common humanity. And in him we know that sin and death are defeated. In the Savior, therefore, we learn to feel at home in this present world. Why? Because through him we know that back of this universe there is the heart of God that broke on Calvary.

We join all Christians in affirming that God did his redemptive work for everyone in the Savior. So we speak of the atoning work of God in Jesus Christ. At the heart of Christianity is the Atonement. But what does that mean? It means God's meeting us and drawing us to himself. It means that in the face of sin, which separates us from God, there is a complete forgiveness, which binds us to him. It means that in the face of death, which destroys us, there is God's mighty love, which gives us everlasting life. So nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

How do we know all this? We know it by standing at the foot of the cross and there beholding the divine method of dealing with sin and death. For the whole story of God's redeeming love centers in the crucified Savior of the world.

## **III. The Meaning of the Cross**

But what does the cross mean?

The Church has never reached a final statement about it because no creed can tell the full story. But Paul gave the finest single utterance about it when he said, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (II Cor. 5:19). What are the divine redemptive facts here?

We join all believers in finding the meaning of the cross of Christ in at least six divine redemptive facts.

### **1. THE DIVINE INITIATIVE**

The first and greatest fact is that God in Christ took the initiative in our behalf. Long in advance God saw our human need. He loved

us first. This fact is supremely seen in the cross. As Paul put it, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). If this will not draw us to the Father, nothing will.

## **2. GOD TAKES SIN SERIOUSLY**

The second redemptive fact about the cross is that God takes our sin seriously. If God had a trifling attitude toward sin, we would be left unmoved. But when we look up at the crucified Christ and see the heart of God broken because of our sin, we get a vision of the awfulness of our failure. Sin breaks the heart of God. And when we know this, we are moved to a repentance that binds us to his forgiving love.

## **3. ONLY GOD CAN SAVE**

The third mighty fact about the cross is this: God alone can answer the problems of sin and death. The cross means that God has entered into our common humanity to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. And this fact moves us to walk with confidence into the presence of God. For we know that he alone can answer our need; and we know also that he wants more than anything to do it.

## **4. NO LIMIT TO GOD’S LOVE**

The fourth divine fact about the cross is that there are no lengths to which God will not go in our behalf. Love can never reach higher than the cross. Nor can it probe deeper. The cross means that God withheld nothing of himself when he gave his Son to die. And since this fact was placed in history on Calvary’s hill by the sign of the cross, all men everywhere can know beyond the slightest doubt that, *as far as God is concerned, the way to him is always wide open.* The only obstacle, then, to our entrance into the joys of eternal life now is within our own selves. For the cross is the ageless sign of God’s unfaltering readiness to forgive and to bind us to himself.

## **5. GOD SUFFERS TO GIVE LIFE**

The fifth redemptive fact about the cross is this: Our salvation is always made available at the price of God’s suffering. This is what Christians have called *vicarious suffering*. It means that God took upon himself the sufferings of our common humanity for the purpose of lifting us up. Wherever men sin, God suffers. Wherever men are

bereaved or lonely or misunderstood, God shares in their sorrow. Jesus did not offer the world some clever remarks about looking to the beautiful. For he had to be about his Father's business. And he knew that life was not that simple. There are hurts to be healed, broken hearts to be comforted, sinners to be forgiven, and fears to be conquered. So God, far from serenely contemplating the good, clothed himself in flesh and blood and took upon himself our pain and suffering. And the cross was this perfect, self-giving, suffering love of God in our behalf. So when we come to Christ, the crucified Savior, we know that God has done his great redemptive work for us.

### **6. THE CROSS: *Yesterday, Today, Forever***

The last divine fact about the cross to be mentioned here is that God was, is, and ever shall be as revealed in the Christ of the cross (Heb. 13:8). Calvary was not new to God. It expressed the heart of God. As soon as there were men that sinned, hearts that broke, souls that despaired, God's great heart knew the cross that was from the beginning within himself. This has been beautifully expressed in the book of Revelation, where we read of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). So the cross is ever present in the heart of God. And the crucifixion is daily reenacted whenever sin and sadness flourish. And this too fills us with Godly sorrow and pulls us mightily into the marvelous fellowship with God.



## CHAPTER VIII

### WE BELIEVE IN THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The doctrine of the forgiveness of our sins is one of the most triumphant notes in the scale of the Christian religion. The Bible sings when it assures us of God's forgiving grace. The Old Testament proclaims it. (See Isa. 1:18; Ps. 103:12.) But the sweetest strains of this note are not heard until we reach the New Testament, where Paul sings. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

#### **I. The Fact of Sin**

In our day, however, this talk of sin and forgiveness has for many people a strange sound. It seems unrelated to life.

Do we have complexes? Yes. Are there frustrations? Of course. What about fears and resentments? To be sure. Negative thinking? Obviously. Neuroses? Clearly. A chronic sense of futility and ineffectiveness? Yes. But what about sin? Here we hesitate. But we need not. Call it by what name we will, sin is still with us.

We live in an age of easy excuses. The old and chronic habit of making excuses for ourselves has reached its peak in our time. Why? Because by misusing the honored name of science we can "explain" everything we do.

We easily explain what we do by our biological heritage or by our environment or by reference to subconscious processes. And when we get through making these excuses, we end up without facing the most real fact about ourselves—namely, that God made us responsible beings. Yes, ours is an age of clever alibis.

But life has a way of puncturing our vain imaginings. For everyone knows that ungovernable anger is a sure mark of failure. Everyone knows that resentment is not merely the strange product of the

environment; it is the evil fruit of a defective character.

Some time ago I saw a cartoon picturing a scene on a playground at a public school. A little boy had hit another over the head with a baseball bat. And two teachers were discussing it. One teacher said to the other in the presence of the culprit, "Now, we must be very careful not to make him feel guilty."

No worse insult can be leveled against a human being than that of excusing him from his responsibility for injuring another. And there is no surer sign of mental health than that of *feeling* guilty when we actually are.

Our nations and our world today are threatened by sin and moral decay. And the hopes of freedom are frustrated by sin. We live today in a society wherein billions of dollars are spent each year on illegal transactions of one sort or another. Drunkenness is a formidable problem. Sexual immorality is casually condoned. Divorce is a terrible blight upon our nation. Racial prejudice thrives in the minds of many. Tyrants still beat people down with their fists both at home and abroad. And the threat of nuclear destruction lurks in the background of international affairs. Petty bickerings at home do their deadly work. And our complacent refusals to support the decent causes of our churches and communities shut us out of the kingdom of God.

So while we believe that there is good in every man, we also believe that man is naturally "inclined to evil, and that continually." (See the Articles of Religion, VII.)

We neglect God for a "paradise of dainty devices." And we defy God by carrying out our own selfish ambitions.

Sin, then, is a fact. Look within and we find it. Look about and there it is. It may take the form of a deed done. And every time we look down the corridors of our memory, there it hangs like a hideous picture upon the wall. We tremble before it. And we long for forgiveness.

Sin may be the disposition or set of the soul away from God. We are sinners, whether we commit any specific acts of evil or not, whenever our hearts are not moving with God. Hence, it is no help to say, "What evil have I done?"

Or, sin may take the form of a vague sense of wrongness. We

want a better life. But we do not live it. And so we say with Paul, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” (Rom. 7:15).

## **II. The Answer: *God’s Forgiving Grace***

What is the answer?

The first part of the answer is found in the forgiving grace of God which is ours through faith. Two thousand years of Christian history carry us back to the cross, where God’s forgiving love is ours for the asking.

We are always trying to save ourselves by trusting in our own devices or by forgetting our sin in good works. But we soon find that we have not come to grips with the inner problem. Besides, even after we have done our very best, we have only done what we should have done anyway. Our sin remains.

Not all our deeds together can deliver us. For what we need is to be brought into a living fellowship with God. And this is not done by piling one deed upon another. It happens by being honest with God and by accepting in faith the *free gift* of God’s forgiving love in Jesus Christ. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” (Eph. 2:8.)

Our part is to recognize our sin before God—which is repentance—and to trust wholly in God’s forgiving love—which is faith. God wants to forgive us. That is why Jesus said, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

So we believe that our sin drives us beyond every human answer, to the salvation that comes from God. It is only as we go to a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem that we can stand and behold, in humble faith, the Savior of the world. Here is where we find the principle of forgiveness. Not by culture and politeness, not by information and skills, not by good works, but by God’s love are we forgiven. Those other things have their useful roles in the Christian life. But we are justified only by God’s boundless forgiving love in Christ.

## **III. Justification by Faith**

We know this from Christian experience. And every Christian can sing in his heart each day the sublime story of forgiveness when God has done his great redemptive work. No wonder Christians

compose hymns! They have something to sing about. No wonder they take the good news with them wherever they go! No wonder they want to live for the glory of God and the service of man!

Saul of Tarsus tried to find his way to God by climbing the endless stairway of religious rules. He went and did not arrive. He sought and did not find. At last he began to see the light on the road to Damascus and to know that he was forgiven and loved by the Savior.

That is why, on his first missionary journey at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul could preach the gospel of forgiveness as he did. We can almost see him standing before the crowd in the synagogue there and saying, “Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39).

And along this line he wrote to the Galatians, “A man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 2:16).

This new principle of deliverance from sin was like music in the ears of multitudes throughout the ancient world. It was heard in Jerusalem, in the cities of Asia Minor and Macedonia, in Athens, in Corinth, and even in Rome.

But after many generations of Christians had lived and died under the glow of this redemptive love, many people returned to a system of salvation by works and ceremonies. Then came Martin Luther (1483-1546) to revive the principle of forgiveness by faith and not by works. After the young Luther was stunned by a bolt of lightning, he promised God that he would become a monk. In the monastery he followed the most rigorous disciplines. He studied long hours. He observed in minute detail all the forms and ceremonies. He went to Rome and knelt his way up the sacred stairs there. When he wrote of those experiences, he likened himself to Paul. Just as the apostle had become a Pharisee of the Pharisees, so Luther became a monk of monks.

But his efforts did him no good. He became bitter toward God. He despised the word “penitence.” The righteousness of God was dreadful to think about. Then he finally saw God’s righteousness in

the light of the words, “He who through faith is righteous shall live” (Rom. 1:17; see Gal. 3:11). He grasped what Paul had been talking about centuries ago. And he was free from the tyranny of his sin. For now he trusted the Savior to do for him what he himself could never do. He accepted the free gift of God’s forgiveness.

So we join all Christians in believing in the forgiveness of our sins by faith.

#### **IV. The Continuing Need for Forgiveness**

This is an era of the easy conscience. And men today are not apt to realize how much they need God’s forgiving love. But we who are now looking toward the twenty-first century need forgiveness just as much as did our ancient forebears in Galatia, Corinth, and Rome. They read with joy what Paul said about being forgiven by grace through faith.

Whenever we probe beneath the surface of our superficiality, we too know that we have turned from God to our own ways. We have missed the purpose for which God created us and hence repudiated the reason for our being here. The ancient evils are still with us and at work in us. Hatred, war, prejudice, crime, the breakdown of character, greed, lust, dishonesty, meanness, pettiness, mediocrity—these and many other evils are with us because we are the kind of people we are. We need to be forgiven.

But modern man, with his limitless powers of self-deception, imagines that he can find his way through without repentance and without God’s forgiving grace. When he comes toward the threshold of religion, he wants to substitute the word “acceptance” for “forgiveness.” He wants to think that God accepts him as he is whether or not he is willing to repent. But this is neither true to the Bible nor to life. It is a cheap and unrealistic substitute for honest repentance and a living faith. God always loves us. He is ever eager to forgive us and accept us. But not even God can forgive us unless we put ourselves in a position to be forgiven. Repentance is basic honesty before God.

Modern man imagines that progress is inevitable, that history is automatically redemptive, that the secular world is essentially good, that education is the answer, and that everything roots in economics.

There are half-truths here mingled with demonic illusions. These illusions, like beautiful bubbles, have fascinated modern man and then burst into oblivion.

Two world wars, the disasters of Vietnam, the dangers in the Middle East, the possibility of nuclear destruction, the increase of crime, the breakdown of the responsible management of sex, the threats to marriage and family life, the disruptions in education, the depths of the dimensions of racial prejudice, the appeals to emotion and ideologies rather than to reason, the blind and nihilistic protests, the pollution and degradation of nature and men in country and city—these and a thousand other desperate problems tell us that far more is wrong with the world than men had supposed. There is, as of old, a radical wrongness within the minds and hearts of men. And the issue has to do with whether or not we can survive with any meaning and dignity.

In this era of mankind's desperate need, we are increasingly aware of our failures. At the same time, we are convinced that God, in his infinite love and wisdom, has shown the way in Jesus Christ. Repentance and forgiveness through faith are the starting points for all renewal in persons and in cultures. For here is the beginning of integrity before God and man. This beginning is desperately needed today. The issue is one of moral and spiritual survival as against either massive destruction or degeneration into societies of mediocre people.

Jesus confronted people in his day with what men need in ours. He was informed by eyewitnesses of those Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices. Then he said: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:1-3). We believe in the forgiveness of sins.

## CHAPTER IX

### WE BELIEVE IN VICTORY THROUGH DISCIPLINED LIVING

It is one thing to be forgiven; it is another thing to be empowered. The earliest Christians rejoiced not only in God's forgiving love but also in his empowering grace. And this was theirs through disciplined living within the fellowship of believers.

The name "United Church" brings together various communities of faith which have shared in this great heritage of disciplined living. We believe in victory through the fulfillment of conditions. Nothing that is basic in the moral and spiritual life happens by chance. We reap what we sow.

And we realize the importance of this the moment we see ourselves as we really are. There is a lot of good in every one of us. But we are not good enough. In fact we are a strange mixture of good and bad. And nothing is clearer than that we need some *method* of victorious living.

We need the courage to stand for what is right; and we need to know how to get it.

We need patience, self-control, and downright honesty. We need victory over temptation. And above all, we need love. Here our fine resolutions fail us. We resolve to have done with every useless passion and every fruitless word, but we get into the same old ruts. So we are driven to ask the great questions: *How can we live victoriously?* How can we be the kind of people we really want to be? How can we be what God wants us to be?

#### I. The Bible's Promise

The Bible teaches that we are made to be not only conquerors but "more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:37). Victory is promised everyone who seeks it in the right way. It is not

ours merely because we wish it. Nor does it come to us by hit-and-miss techniques. For there are laws of the spiritual life.

Again and again the Bible reminds us of these laws. We are to “wait,” to “watch and pray,” to “hold fast,” to “press forward.” In fact we are to become spiritual athletes. (I Cor. 9:24.)

And the Bible encourages us with its great promises.

Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;  
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:30-31.)

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled. (Matt. 5:6.) The pure in heart shall see God. (Matt. 5:8.) “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matt. 7:7.) When Jesus said “Ask,” he did not mean “Inquire a little.” When he said “Seek,” he did not mean “Look around a little.” And when he said “Knock,” he did not mean “Tap.” The Master was talking about a passionate, persistent, and sensible seeking.

But we cannot realize these promises unless we first come to grips with some of the enemies of Christ that work within us every day.

## II. A Major Obstacle to Victorious Living

What are the greatest enemies of victorious Christian living? People of equal wisdom might say different things. But, we believe that the worst enemies from within are these: *distraction* and *self-love*.

Put it like this. Who are we? We are our *thoughts* and our *desires*. We are more than these; but we find the key to ourselves in the quality of what we *think* and what we *want*. And distraction has to do with our thoughts, while self-love has to do with our desires.

So let us look first at our distracted thoughts and see how they interfere with a vital spiritual life. Here I am talking about something everyone experiences. But not everyone realizes what is going on within his own soul. By “thoughts” I mean whatever comes into our minds, whether it be a memory of yesterday’s pleasures, a fear of tomorrow’s problems, the ring of a telephone, the scream of a siren,



the attractiveness of a magazine, the pangs of an insult, the throbbing of a headache, or anything else that we are aware of. In the midst of so many things that claim our attention we forget God, and we forget every promise we ever made to him.

During each waking moment we are thinking of something or other. Like the coming and going of the waves on the ocean, thoughts come and go in our minds. Often without rhyme or reason we swing and sway from thought to thought. And regardless of the quality of these comings and goings within us, we are entertained by them as if by a constant flow of inner television programs. Why? Because, good, bad, or mediocre, they are *our very own*. Then another day has passed. And when we thought last of God we cannot remember.

But is there power in such a day? Of course not. Why not? Because there is not and cannot be power in the mere flow of unrelated thoughts and feelings. Thomas Edison was asked once whether or not he believed in luck. He replied, "No; and if I did, I'd regard myself as the most unlucky fellow that ever lived. For every one of my inventions came only after a lot of hard work." Then he added, "The only difference between me, who's supposed to be lucky, and other people is that while they think about many different things, I think of one thing until I get what I'm after."

This is the key principle in all phases of life. And it applies supremely to the spiritual life.

Christ demands unity. But our minds are swallowed up in multiplicity. This is one of the great battlefields of the soul today. Mediocre thoughts and feelings, however entertaining, add up to a mediocre person. For as a man "thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7 KJV). And as life goes on, few things take us nearer to the brink of hell than the realization that our one chance to live on earth was spent on a vast and meaningless assortment of trifles.

Ours is an age of mediocrity because, more than any other, it is the age of distraction. For example, our forefathers had the Bible and a few other books. They could fix their minds upon those few things. But we have so many books that we do not know what to read. With the coming of radio, television, and the press, and with the increase of leisure time made possible by machines, computers,

and automation, we have reached the point where *disciplined living is the only alternative to mediocrity*.

The great question is: How can we escape from this fruitless living, with its endless rounds of triviality and defeat?

### **III. The Answer**

We can almost hear someone say, “The answer is simple: just think about God and his kingdom all of the time!” But this misses the mark. Why? Because nobody can do it.

Living involves many interests. And in order to keep body and soul together we have to think about many different things. Where is the answer, then?

Nearly three thousand years of devotional history show us the way. Isaiah caught a glimpse of the heart-principle of victorious living when he said, “In returning . . . you shall be saved” (Isa. 30:15). We are not made to think of just one thing during the day. For many things crowd in upon us. But we are made to keep returning to God and the things of God. This is the basis of disciplined Christian living. Why set apart times each day and week for worship? Because in these sacred moments God brings a new and holy beauty to all the rest of life. And it is just here that we see the amazing relevance, for our distracted age, of United Church’s call to the disciplined life.

### **IV. Another Obstacle to Victorious Living**

But there is another serious threat, from within, to victorious living. And this is self-love. Our world revolves round ourselves instead of Christ. If it is true that we are what we think, it is also true that we are what we want. (See Matt. 6:21.)

Christ demands the love of God and others. But naturally and easily we love ourselves. And this shuts out God. To be sure, up to a point we are supposed to love ourselves. Jesus knew this when he said, “You shall love .... your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10: 27). But the tragedy of life is that we are so fascinated with our own beloved selves that we miss the glorious life of service in the kingdom of God.

Now and then everyone wants to go all out in this kind of unselfish service to God and man. And in rare moments we feel like Peter when he said to Jesus, “Though they all fall away because of you, I

will never fall away” (Matt. 26:33). Yet Jesus knew that on that very night this impetuous disciple would deny him. We too are like Peter. Why? Because we keep returning to our self-love until it overrules our noblest impulses. Our highest resolutions are often broken at last upon the hard rock of our selfishness.

Besides this, our self-love pulls us in a thousand directions. In one moment it lures us toward money, in another toward social position, in another toward revenge, and in yet another toward companionship. Self-love compels us to take advantage of our fellows and at the same time to seek their praise. It tries to justify every kind of folly. It passionately craves social status, and yet it uses the tongue to cut others down. Self-love seeks peace and promotes conflict. It drives people through the wild rounds of pleasure, and it plunges them into the deep and lonely pools of remorse. The fact is that self-love is a chaos of conflicting desires. And it leaves us where Peter the Great of Russia found himself when he said, “I wish to reform my empire, but I cannot reform myself.”

And the pity of it is that the work of this self-love goes on so close to us, and so pleasantly within us, that we do not realize what has been happening until we get a vision of Christ and behold what we might have been.

## **V. The Answer**

Here again, we find the answer in the heart-principle of nearly three thousand years of devotional experience: “In returning . . . you shall be saved.”

To what are we to return in order to overcome the gravitational pull of our self-love? We are to return to God and the things of God; to Christ and his love; to the great passages of the Bible; to the family altar; to private devotions and honest living; to public worship; to prayer and study; to good books and creative fellowship. We are to become dynamically incorporated into the community of faith. Life is not improved by accident. Nor is it sustained in goodness by chance. For God works mightily through the Christian habits to bless us and others through us.

Through the habits of Christian devotion God gives us the power of living daily under the inspiration of our highest and holiest

moments, and he gives the power that comes from a complete commitment. Through discipline he opens up the great passages of the Bible until the soul finds the element for which it was created—the *love* of God and men.

So we need to recover in this age the mighty disciplines of the spiritual life which are so vital a part of our heritage. When it is time to study our Sunday school lessons, we are to do it—television program or no television program. And at regular times we are to teach our children to study theirs. For we are to understand what the Bible is all about. When the doors of the church are open, we are to be there. When asked to serve, we are to see the high privilege of it and respond accordingly. When asked to give, we are to do it joyfully and liberally. We are to pray, just as Jesus prayed, at regular times.

How do we gain victory? By proven methods.

I love the mountains. I like to see them when the morning sun wakes them up with a kiss upon their brows. I like to see them in the evening when, like sleeping giants, they *lie* tucked away under the cover of darkness. But I look out of my study window and do not see the mountains. Why not? Because I have not put myself in a position to see them. So is it with us and God.

## CHAPTER X

### WE BELIEVE IN THE CENTRALITY OF LOVE

Christian love has been rightly called the greatest thing in the world. For it binds us to God and to our fellowmen. It is the law of life because it fulfills every law. (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14.) Without it we do not really *live*; we merely exist. And the supreme reason for exalting Jesus Christ as Lord is that he perfectly embodies the love of God.

#### I. Jesus' Emphasis on Love

Jesus showed us, once and for all, that love is the basic principle of human relations. He taught that God is love. And he introduced the world to love as a creative dynamic power. This was the new principle of living. To be sure, there was the ancient commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). But Jesus carried it far beyond anything that went before him by showing what it really means to be a neighbor. (See Luke 10:25-37.)

One could obey the law of loving his neighbor as himself and still hate the Samaritan. But Jesus took a despised Samaritan and made him the hero of one of the world's most beautiful stories. One could love his neighbor as himself and still have a low conception of women. But Jesus gave to women their rightful place. One could love his neighbor as himself and abhor sinners. But Jesus taught the love of sinners. One could love his neighbor as himself and hate his enemies. But Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:44-45).

And, more than teaching this love, Jesus lived it. He who taught that we should be concerned about the outcasts loved the hated Samaritans (John 4:7-42) and was even accused of being one of them

(John 8:48). He who asked his disciples to love sinners was condemned for being a friend of publicans and sinners (Luke 7: 34). And he who said, “Love your enemies,” prayed, while hanging on the cross, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus here unveiled the heart of God and revealed the only principle of life that has the Creator’s sanction. He showed us with absolute finality that without the love of God no life can stand, and with that love no life can fail. So in contrast to the proud man’s boast and the tyrant’s fist the love of Christ abides forever. And that love becomes the governing power of the new humanity in Christ.

For this reason Jesus gave his disciples the new commandment of love (John 13:34). Above all else he wanted his followers to be bound together in Christian love. And the whole world was to identify them by their love for each other (John 13:35).

## **II. Paul Speaks of Love**

It is also fascinating to see how this stress on love pervaded the thinking of the first Christians. They had their disagreements. (See for example Gal. 2:11.) They knew the difficulties of working together. But they labored under the inspiration of a common affection.

Paul, the apostle of faith, could even more fittingly be called the apostle of love. His great words on love in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians are unrivaled in all literature on that subject both for their beauty and practical sanity. And as every Christian knows, love heads the list of the Christian virtues.

It is not often realized that Paul placed his magnificent words on love in the context of his remarks on the essential unity of Christians. There are things that divide people. Some have special gifts. But there is one Baptism and one Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). There is one body with many members. The central reality of the Christian community is not prophecy, miracles, healing, speaking in tongues, etc. So Paul challenges us to desire the higher gifts and then shows us “a still more excellent way” (I Cor. 12:31).

He tells us that we may speak with the tongues of angels, which would be a wonderful thing, but without love we would be “a noisy

gong or a clanging cymbal.” We may have prophetic powers, of which many today are boasting. We may understand every mystery and have all knowledge, which would be an unbelievably great advantage. We may have all faith so as to remove mountains, which means that we could say to any mountain in our way, “Move over, bud!” Yet, says Paul, if we have all these powers and do not have love, we are *nothing*. Then he tells us what love is and how it acts. And after speaking of the things that are sure to fail, he tells of the things that abide: faith, hope, and love; “but the greatest of these is love” (I Cor. 13:13).

### III. What Is Love?

We believe in the life of love. But what is Christian love? Some people think of it as a weak, sentimental, gushy feeling that has nothing to do with love. They view it as a kind of sweet agreeableness that prides itself on going along with people no matter what they do. But this is not Christian love. For sometimes love is firm. Jesus was not only “meek and mild.” He was also stern. When he cleansed the temple, driving out the merchants and overturning the tables of the money-changers, he was not trying to be a “good fellow” (John 2:14-16). He was not meek and mild when he called Herod a fox (Luke 13:32); nor was he gentle when he identified Peter with Satan (Matt. 16:23). He was not a weak and “pale Galilean” when he confronted the Pharisees with his blistering “Woe to you . . . hypocrites!” (Matt. 23:13-36).

So a balance is needed here. What, then, is Christian love? *Within* the fellowship of the redeemed, it means the eager concern to do God’s work together in the Church. It means the desire to bear our part of the load and at the same time to bear the burdens of others. *Outside* the fellowship, love is the burning passion for God’s best for everyone in the world. It knows no barriers and withholds itself from no one. Christian love does not seek its own way, for it is God’s way. It wants to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger, to visit and heal the sick, to lift up the fallen, and, above all, to draw every human being into the orbit of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Its nature is to share. Its opposite is to withhold. Its genius is to show no partiality.

To have Christian love does not mean to like all people equally. That is impossible. It means rather to want God's best for all people regardless of our likes and dislikes. It means doing what we can where and when we can.

#### **IV. Love in Today's World**

The world is hungry, naked, sick, lonely; it is war-torn, drug-saturated, and weary; it is bitter, petty, and mean. And it has drifted far from the great Creator's love. How can the world's needs be met? Only by the mighty power of a self-denying love. So Christian love means the cross. It means the fellowship and privilege of suffering in behalf of others.

The suffering peoples of the world, and the downtrodden, find in Christ their champion. For he lived and died for them. And every Christian is called, with Timothy, to take his "share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 2:3). Out of the love of Christ the ignorant are to be taught, the weak encouraged, the bewildered guided, and the lost brought back into the fold. For this love of Christ is a mighty thing. It works through consecrated individuals. But it works even more through the cooperative adventures of those who are in the fellowship of believers. It makes for peace, it seeks justice, it encourages creativity.

And the stark truth is that after two thousand years we are beginning to see, as a world, that we are engaged in a race between the love of Christ and world disaster. God's love, as it is in Christ, fits the world's need today. Let all Christians who are entering the threshold of the twenty-first century awake together to the ministry of compassion! For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.

#### **V. Love in Solitary Souls**

When we turn from the world to our own individual souls, we see also how perfectly this love of Christ fits our need. In personal living, only love will work.

There never was an age when **so** many people had the time and money for the luxury of analyzing their own frustrations. Everywhere we meet those who know what is wrong with themselves but who are powerless to do anything about it. Ever thinking about living, they never quite get around to it. They look into each nook and cranny of



their minds and dissect every impulse. And they long for and need a sympathetic listener. But the pity of their lives is that they do everything except the one thing that is needful. They do not give themselves in a magnificent abandon to the service of God and man. They withhold themselves from their share of unselfish suffering.

Modern man is engaged in a colossal search for his identity. He wants to know who he is. And this is important. But the question is: Can we find our identity by seeking it? Rather, is it not like true happiness? When we seek it for its own sake, we miss it.

Then, under the leadership of Jesus Christ, we open ourselves to the same great cause which is incalculably more important than ourselves, and behold, both identity and happiness come our way. "For," said Jesus, "whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35).

God did not create the mind of man to look deeply into itself. He made it to turn outward upon the world in work and helpful service. And while it is the rightful job of some to probe deeply into the human spirit, this is not the business of most people. We are to love and work and be thankful for what we are and what we can do.

Any attitude other than love fails. Resentment, whether taken in large doses or small, is poison. Pet peeves get us nowhere. Looking down on people becomes comical in the light of Almighty God. Envy is as useless as it is universal. Suspicion is a thief that robs us of friends. Indifference slowly but surely leads us downhill into the bogs of cynicism. And only love abides. For God is love (I John 4:16).

## **VI. Love Implies Both Law and Wisdom**

It is often supposed that love can express itself properly with a minimal interest in moral laws. We are told that love alone is absolute. We are told also that we should not hesitate to break any law, moral or otherwise, if the situation seems to call for it. This is basically misguided. To be sure, there is a truth here. Circumstances do alter cases. But the deeper truth is that we cannot persistently express love without policies, rules, or moral laws. What is love without a policy of loyalty? What is love without a policy of courtesy? What is love without basic guidelines concerning telling the truth, honesty, mutual

respect, the willingness to listen, the eagerness to respond if we can when asked? What is love in a world at war without peace-making policies? And what is love without the desire to improve upon ourselves and our competence?

Love also implies wisdom. Love must not be at the mercy of stupidity. It demands resourcefulness. Love has a job to do. How can we know whether or not the work of love is being done unless we use the minds that God has given us? Authentic love is not blind. Rather, it is guided and informed by the wisdom which God wants us to reflect in all our efforts to express his love. Love is the engine, intelligence is the steering wheel. It is not easy to know who does the most harm, the vicious or the mistaken. Here I am not talking about highly sophisticated levels of intellectual understanding. I am talking about what every normal human being has—namely, practical intelligence. The point is that it must be used. For love requires it.

### **VII. The Call to All Christians**

We The United Church join all Christians in believing in the new life of love. There is no alternative to it. We are not free to take it or leave it. Jesus Christ commanded it. Life demands it. And the grace of God supplies it.

Our salvation depends upon it. We are saved by faith. But we continue to be saved by “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6).

Both nations and individuals today plead for the united efforts of all Christians in a worldwide program of compassion and wisdom based on the love of God. For God will conquer war by the love that works for peace. He will banish ignorance and prejudice by the love that strives for truth. And he will build his kingdom on the love that rejoices in the privilege of service.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **WE BELIEVE IN CONVERSION, ASSURANCE, AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION**

We believe in the new life in Christ. But no statement of it can be adequate for believers who do that does not affirm the truths of conversion, assurance, and Christian perfection. While we The United Church do not say that these affirmations about the Christian life are ours exclusively, we do say that we have a passion to make them burn like divine flames in the hearts of people.

#### **I. What Conversion Is and Why We Believe in It**

We believe in conversion. But what is it? It is the most basic transformation in life. It is a revolution at the heart of one's being. It is the new birth. It is not a natural growth but a supernatural rebirth.

For the selfish person conversion means a basic change in the center of his commitment. Self is dethroned; Christ is enthroned. For those who measure success and failure in dollars and cents, the new birth means the reign of Christ and of his standards. For those who put their highest trust in political organizations and in the might of arms, conversion means seeing in Christ the only hope of the world. To those who are crippled by failure and despair, conversion means absolute trust in the healing ministry of the conquering Savior. In short, we are born of the Spirit when Christ becomes the master impulse of our life. And we enter into this new life at the moment when we take all that we know about ourselves and lay it trustfully before all that we know about Christ.

Conversion or the new birth, then, is a basic change of mind and heart. The skeptic may say, "Let's be realistic. No man really changes his identity. He remains himself. So all this talk about a new being or a new mind doesn't make sense."

Here we need a clear understanding of what we are talking about.

For in moral and spiritual matters it is of utmost importance to deal in reality and not fantasy. Paul said, “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (II Cor. 5:17). How can there be a new creation when men remain themselves? *They can change their direction, their values, and their feelings.* There is no inherent psychological process that prevents this. In fact, both psychology and our general insight into human nature show that this is possible. No normal person changes his identity as a conscious self. But anyone may alter his aims, accept new standards and values for his life, and change his attitudes and feelings. Moreover, anyone may move from the overwhelming sense of meaninglessness and despair to the awareness of meaning and joy.

So conversion, or “the new creation” Paul speaks of, means *a basic change of purpose, of values, of affections, and of life-meaning wrought by the power of God.* If God can help a man change his fundamental purpose, God can convert him. If God can help a man change his standards and values, his attitudes, and his feelings about the meaning of life, then God can convert him. If God can forgive a man and help him to know that he is rightly related to God in heart and purpose, he can convert him. Such a man is indeed a new creation. And old things have in fact passed away and all that counts has become new. According to the New Testament, men may experience precisely these things—whether gradually or suddenly—through faith in Jesus Christ.

Why do we believe in conversion?

### **1. THE BIBLE AFFIRMS IT**

We believe in conversion because the Bible affirms it. If there is one thing on which the Bible is clear, it is this: *Anyone can begin a new life now with God’s help.* This runs like a theme through the Scriptures. From the vision of Jacob at Bethel to the transforming experience of Moses in Arabia; from the repentance and faith of David the king to the conversion of Isaiah the prophet; from Matthew the tax collector to Saul the tentmaker—in short, from beginning to end—the Bible is a book about conversion. “Turn,” “return,” “forsake,” “choose”—these words and many others like them are among the

most striking in the Bible. And they call us to the new life in God.

## **2. JESUS TAUGHT IT**

We believe in conversion because Jesus taught it. The story of the prodigal son sums it up for the man who is down and out. He need not stay the way he is. (Luke 15:11-32.) But Jesus did not confine this principle of conversion to those who wandered far from home. Nicodemus was a good man. Yet when he came to Jesus by night to inquire about spiritual things, Jesus said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). He too needed the new birth. For there are many ways of missing God. So all men need to be born again. This is what Jesus taught.

## **3. CHRISTIAN HISTORY CONFIRMS IT**

We believe in conversion because Christian history confirms it. No fact of recorded history is more securely grounded in the evidence than this. Take away the fact of conversion, and we cannot account for Christianity. The only reasonable thing here, then, is to accept the witness of people like Paul, Augustine, Wesley, and millions of others who have witnessed to the new birth in Christ.

## **4. THE FACTS OF LIFE REQUIRE IT**

We believe in conversion also because the facts of life require it. How do people get changed? The obvious answer is: by a gradual process. And there is a great truth here. We learn many things little by little. Like the flowers of the field we grow gradually.

But there is within each of us another power which does not operate on the principle of gradualness. Some of our finest thoughts come suddenly. Some of our most crucial decisions occur in high and holy moments. And the profoundest transformations may take place in a flash.

The point is this. Because there is within us not only the power of gradual change but also the power of sudden transformation, God can do his mighty work within us in the twinkling of an eye. The Holy Spirit moves swifter than a weaver’s shuttle. On our part, preparation for conversion may be slow, uncertain, gradual. But conversion itself is as sudden and sure as decision.

Many people, in the interest of gradualness, postpone what ought

to be done *now*. Knowledge comes slowly. Wisdom takes time. And art is long. But an unforgiving spirit can be changed in an instant. A new goal in life may be accepted *now*. New values and attitudes may be chosen *now*. A new relationship toward God and men, through forgiveness, may be experienced *now*. And a new sense of meaning and destiny—with the summons to start sharing in a great work for God and man—may be awakened *now*.

For many people life is a feverish effort to deal with their evil habits one at a time. But they forget something. They forget that it is easier to change a whole person than it is to reshape his degrading habits. They forget that a transformed person means transformed habits. For when the Savior gives new life to a human being, new habits are set in motion.

There comes a time when we have to make up our minds about the kind of people we are going to be. And if such a time needs to be repeated, let it be repeated. For our commitment must be sealed. We cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6:24.)

## II. Assurance

We believe in assurance. Why?

First of all, because the New Testament affirms it. The sheep within the fold *know* their shepherd. (John 10:5,14.) The Holy Spirit guides the faithful (John 16:13.) And he assures them that they belong to God. This is the witness of the Spirit. (Rom. 8:16.)

We believe in assurance also because Christian experience confirms it. Whatever keeps returning to us in the ongoing of life is the sure test here. And as life goes on, we know, with an ever-deepening sense of assurance, that God is with us. Just as a child increasingly knows that he belongs to his earthly parents, so every Christian knows that he belongs to God. Now and then he may have doubts. But the continuing state of his soul is that of an unflinching assurance.

He knows that God forgives him. He knows that God is with him in his daily work. He knows that when he is tempted God helps him to gain the victory. He knows that God confirms him as he enters into the community struggles for truth and fairness. He knows that he never walks alone through the valley of the shadow of death. When

he looks back across the winding road of life, he knows that God has seen him through. And he knows that the promise of heaven is sure. “Blessed Assurance” is not merely the title of a hymn; it is a state of the soul. It may come and go, but it is real and important.

And we United Church believe that everyone can enter into the joy of this experience.

### **III. Christian Perfection**

We believe in Christian perfection. As we have seen, *conversion* is the doorway through which we enter the Christian life. And, once in the house of God, we rejoice in the *assurance* that we belong to the Father. But in the nature of the spiritual life we are to move from room to room and story to story. The new birth starts us off in the crib where, as newborn babes, we partake of the milk of God’s Word and grow thereby. (1 Pet. 2:2.) We are confined to the nursery for a time. Gradually, however, we become stronger and learn to walk into the larger rooms of God’s house. And it is the Father’s good pleasure to see his children grow in grace.

Some tell us that just as the new birth comes as the *first* work of grace, Christian perfection, or sanctification, comes as the *second* definite work of grace. There is a first story in the house of God; and there is a second story. But others say that we should not limit the house of God to these two stories. Controversies on this topic have gone far into many a night. And much remains to be said.

The difference of opinion has become one of the most controversial topics in evangelical Christianity, and in many circles it continues to be just that. But we need, above all, to see that there are at least *six basic points on which we can all agree*.

#### **1. OUR HERITAGE**

The interest in scriptural holiness was a part of the evangelical movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We emphasize it because it is a characteristic feature of New Testament teaching. This led Wesley to instruct his preachers to call every Christian to move on toward perfection. He himself never said he had attained it. But he preached and taught it as God’s power to fill the soul with love and purity of intention.

Sanctification “may be received in this life both gradually and

instantaneously, and should be sought earnestly by every child of God.” Then we are reminded, very appropriately, that this experience does not deliver us from infirmities, ignorance, and the possibility of sin.

We believe that this emphasis on sanctity or Christian perfection has a continuing role of major importance in Christianity. We are aware that it needs to be comprehended in the light of the whole sweep of the biblical revelation. That is, it must be seen as the *direction* toward which we are summoned in the light of God’s revealed purpose to realize moral and spiritual values under Christ in community. No atomistic or sectarian interpretation will do. And no obscuring of that sublime divine goal can measure up to what God requires of us. For it is as easy as it is sinful to seek righteousness for its own sake. There is no surer sign of imperfection than the feeling that we have arrived. The true meaning of sanctification or Christian perfection is not in a state but in a *direction* of life with God. It is a moving where God is moving with his help. His grace is sufficient for the greatness of his commission.

## **2. THE ONLY DIRECTION**

Christian perfection is the only direction in which to move. So it is congenial to the call of Jesus to be perfect. (See Matt. 5:48.) It is our deep-seated conviction that God’s grace is sufficient to make us perfect in love. Just as our commitment can be sure, our sincerity in love can be perfect. We agree, then, that the grace of God is fully able to work within our hearts to make them pure and loving and wise. (See I Thess. 5:23.) It is our earnest prayer that we may be made perfect in love day by day. And if The United Church loses this passion for Christian perfection, it will not only betray its heritage; it will neglect its mission in the world today. No one is perfect. But everyone is called to move toward perfection.

## **3. ROOM FOR ALL**

We are agreed that everyone who thinks of Christian perfection as a second definite work of grace can surely feel at home in the atmosphere of The United Church. It has been true since the earliest days of church history that some of the finest Christians professed this second definite work of grace. And there is something bracing



about the stress upon the *suddenness and definiteness* of the workings of the Holy Spirit. For he who expects nothing in particular is not apt to receive anything.

#### 4. MORE AND MORE GRACE

It is also in keeping with the spirit of United Church to feel that God leads us from story to story, from experience to experience, in his great house. And we are always to live in the expectation of being led by God to ever higher dimensions of Christian living. No matter who we are or in what stage of Christian development, there is profound truth for us all in the words “he gives more grace” (Jas. 4:6). There is no room for boasting here because we are not affirming man’s achievement but God’s grace. The plain fact is that we need all the help we can get to rise above mediocrity. And it does not require the grace of God to be a mediocre person.

#### 5. UNITED IN LOVE

Again, we are all agreed that no church should allow its differences over the *interpretation* of Christian perfection to be in the least a source of bitterness and strife. For the great principle to remember here is that we are all “one body in Christ” (Rom. 12:5; see also I Cor. 12:12-27). And neither minister nor people can be wise in creating strife that actually nullifies the whole ideal of Christian perfection. We must in love agree to differ. For we know that *people* are far more important than their particular interpretations of Christian truth. In this way the profound and beautiful longing within us for perfect love can be nurtured. And the grace of God can have the fullest chance to do its wonderwork.

#### 6. SANCTITY IN THE ECUMENICAL HERITAGE

Finally, this stress on Christian perfection has placed us in a main current of Christian history since the days of the apostles. These ancient forebears were concerned about righteous living with God’s help. Their stress on the power of the Holy Spirit to lift men up and enable them to reflect the love of Christ shows this. Moreover, in all the centuries of Christian history there have been those who, following in the line of the apostles, shared in seeking ever greater resources for doing God’s work in the world. This can be called the quest for Christian perfection or for scriptural holiness. Some have called it

saintliness; others, sanctity or sanctification. The devotional literature of all eras of Christian history discloses this concern.

In the world today—which moved swiftly toward the twenty-first century—there is an awakening of interest in the power of the Spirit to transform and elevate human existence. From the evangelicals who stress sanctification to the Roman Catholics who talk of sanctity, there is this shared quest. And we believe that God is present in all this.

We are aware of the dangers here of lapsing into a sect-type mentality. For men can be carried away with a kind of spiritism that disconnects itself from tradition, from the historic community, from doctrine, and from ethical responsibility in the world. But as our experience has demonstrated, along with other Christian communities, that this need not be the case.

So we continue to believe in Christian perfection.

## CHAPTER XII

### WE BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH

The Church of Jesus Christ is the most important institution in the world. Why? Because it proclaims the eternal gospel from generation to generation.

Yet the Church has many critics. Like every good force in the world it undergoes its test of fire again and again. Some say the Church is too superstitious. Others say it disturbs the consciences of people too much. Many say that it does not make its members any different from other people. Some say the Church has too much social vision. Others say it has not enough. Still others tell us that it is divided into too many parts. Then there are always those who lie in bed on Sunday morning and say that the Church is full of hypocrites.

All sincere Christians are painfully aware of the imperfections of this earthen vessel that we call the Church. It is imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people. So Christians prayerfully strive to make the Church a more effective instrument for doing God's work on earth.

But at the same time they see the glory of the Church that many of its critics miss. To Christians the Church becomes the greatest of all institutions because of the glory of the gospel it proclaims. Those who are blind to the beauty of the gospel cannot see the glory of the Church that communicates it.

#### **I. The Necessity of the Church**

But is the Church really necessary? If the gospel comes first, why not exalt it and let the Church go?

##### 1. NEEDED TO KEEP ALIVE THE GOSPEL

Because the Church alone keeps the gospel alive.

Once there was a man who wrote his friend, "I believe in

Christianity. But I don't believe in the Church.”

His friend replied, “You cannot really believe in Christianity without believing in the Church.”

He was right. Why? Because without the Church there would not be any Christianity in which to believe. The gospel has not come down to us by chance. It has been passed on through Christian groups of every generation who preached, taught, heard, and lived that gospel. They are the true apostolic succession. Without them, in their organized effort, the gospel would have died in the first century. The Bible too has been kept alive by the Church.

We say that we believe in democracy. And we do. But can anyone believe in democracy unless he also supports the institutions that keep democracy alive? Of course not. If a man says he believes in education but does not believe in public and private schools or in colleges and universities, he does not really believe in education. If a man says he believes in medicine but does not believe in medical schools, hospitals, and prescriptions, he does not believe in medicine. So is it with the gospel and the Church.

We find in Christianity, then, two things: (1) the ageless gospel (good news) which has come to us through Jesus Christ and (2) the Church which is its earthly instrument. Without the combination of these two things there would be no Christianity today. The gospel of God in Jesus Christ is unutterably beautiful. It wonderfully answers our deepest needs because it came from God just for that purpose. But this gospel must be proclaimed and taught by a community of faith from one generation to another. When one Christian dies, another must take his place. And the community continues.

Every newborn babe starts in spiritual nakedness. He needs a guardian who can wrap him in the garments of Christianity. So the gospel demands an organization that outlives the generations of men. Christians come and go. But the fellowship of the redeemed continues through the centuries.

*So if the gospel is God's message, the Church, despite its imperfections, is God's means of keeping that gospel alive.*

## **2. CHRISTIAN HISTORY CONFIRMS THIS**

We believe the Church is necessary because of the facts of Christian

history. The gospel has always been made effective by the Church.

Paul was a great man. Why? Because of the letters he wrote which make up a large portion of the New Testament.

But *why* did he write those letters? He wrote most of them to strengthen the churches he had founded. Wherever Paul went, he disclosed a passion for founding churches. He took the ageless gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ and gave it a body in the form of the Christian churches in Galatia, at Philippi, at Thessalonica, at Corinth, and at Ephesus. So he wrote to those Christian *groups* in order to encourage and counsel them. In this way Paul brought Christianity westward and was chiefly responsible for making it finally available in the Western world.

The study of history shows that there is no sustained force without an institution. It reveals also that there can be no continuing Christian gospel without the Church.

### 3. OUR HUMAN SITUATION REQUIRES THE CHURCH

We believe the Church is necessary because of the demands of life today. This becomes as clear as noonday when we face the facts of our human situation as they really are.

We live in a world where *evils are not limited to wicked individuals*. The forces of evil are organized. They would destroy the Church if they could. And we confront not merely this evil person or that. We confront syndicated powers and principalities of evil. Crime is a *social* force.

How can the dangerous forces of our modern day be overcome? Not by pious individuals who separate themselves from one another. We can be sure that the days of many contemporary ideologies are numbered. And we know that long after people are sick of the sound and fury of these movements they will be marching under the banner of Christ. But this is because Christianity is composed of a *community of believers* who do not fight the forces of evil as isolated individuals.

We see the significance of the Church as soon as we know that we confront *organized evils*. As Paul said, "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

Unorganized goodness is as weak as any other kind of unorganized power.

Turning from these larger issues of our world today to our inner problems, we find that people easily forget God. So they need the Church to keep reminding them of the reality of the spiritual.

It may be theoretically possible for an individual to continue in a vital Christian experience without the Church if he has had a fine Christian background. But, practically speaking, it does not work out that way. Take a live coal out of the fire and it quickly loses its glow. Take a man out of the fellowship of the redeemed and he soon loses his faith.

## **II. The Glory of the Church**

The glory of the Church is the ageless gospel it proclaims. But what are the ingredients of that gospel which make it so welcome to us? They are the mighty affirmations of our religion. These, as they are embodied in Jesus Christ, give us hope. They are therefore the good news.

In the light of all this let us stand off and behold the glory of the Church. And by the Church we do not mean just our own fellowship. We mean all those churches that rightly bear the name of Jesus Christ. For we know that we repudiate our Lord whenever we imagine that we have a corner on the redemptive grace of God. We are all one in Christ.

### **1. THE MESSAGE ABOUT GOD**

Behold the glory of the Church which from age to age persists in reminding us that God is in charge of this universe! And we are not, like so many corks, bobbing up and down upon an alien sea. For God is with us. God is the first and final fact. And we are not alone.

### **2. THE MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST**

Behold the glory of the Church which from generation to generation persists in reminding us that the best that ever walked the earth was Jesus Christ! In a world whose standards are often cheap, where success is measured in the coins of this life, where tyrants stalk about, where men are trampled under foot, what is it worth to hear one voice exalting Jesus Christ as teacher and Lord?

### **3. THE MESSAGE ABOUT THE SAVIOR**

Behold the glory of the Church which proclaims the great redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ so that everyone can enter into the kingdom! People seek their messiahs in many places. But they go and do not arrive; they seek and do not find. Then they meet the Savior through the Church. What is it worth to have one voice that persists in reminding us from century to century of the forgiveness of sins? We sin and do not know where to turn. We hear the gospel and know that where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more. Then we take the broken fragments of what we call our life to the foot of the cross and there receive the Savior's healing word.

#### 4. THE MESSAGE ABOUT THE DIGNITY OF MAN

Behold the glory of the Church which reminds us from age to age of the dignity and value of each person under God! Others speak of the rights of man and of the dignity of man. We travel with them as far as they are able to go. But only the Church can put the full dimension of depth into this view of man. Why? Because only the Church sees people in the light of the God who cares enough to suffer and to give himself for their redemption.

#### 5. THE MESSAGE ABOUT VOCATIONS

Behold the glory of the Church in its call to see every useful task as a divine vocation! No job is merely a pay check. It is a task to be done for the glory of God and the service of man. No work is a sacrifice. It is a privilege. For God calls us to it. What is it worth to have one voice teaching us never to be triflingly employed but to do our work with all diligence because that is pleasing to God?

#### 6. THE MESSAGE ABOUT MISSIONS

Behold the glory of the Church which, in the midst of our provincial perspectives, calls us to the world mission of Christianity. Because *we* need the Savior, *all* people need him. The Church challenges us with the ideal of world brotherhood in the family of God. And it makes this challenge concrete by sending its sons and daughters to the far-flung corners of the earth with the message of the love of God. These missionaries carry no guns, earn no wealth, gain no high position. But, armed with the love of Christ, they heal the sick, teach the ignorant, train the unskilled, and proclaim the good news. As a body they compose the finest group of men and

women who have ever walked this earth.

#### 7. THE MESSAGE ABOUT RESPONSIBLE LIVING IN COMMUNITY

Behold the glory of the Church which, amid a world of indifference, dehumanization, and desperate need, calls upon the people of God to do a great work for mankind toward the improvement of society. The Church, as the bearer of the good news in Christ, is called of God “to proclaim release to the captives” and “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18), and to promote peace. For all its failures and weaknesses, the community of faith is still summoned to join hands in realizing the prayer:

Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth as it is in heaven.

#### 8. THE MESSAGE ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE

Behold the glory of the Church that keeps reminding us that we are made for two worlds and not just one! We are made for the life everlasting. It begins here. But it does not stop at the grave. And the greatest single miscalculation that can be made by the mind of man is to suppose that death is the end. What is it worth to have one voice telling us that Easter is not just a day on the calendar? It is a fact about human destiny. Easter is God’s perfect way of promising us victory over death through Jesus Christ.

### **III. Summary Statement**

So the Church is the body of Christ. It is his instrument. It is his servant. It is the bearer of the eternal treasure, the gospel. And because Christ is the foundation of the Church, “the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).



## CHAPTER XIII

### WE BELIEVE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Bible is a book about the kingdom of God. From beginning to end it speaks of the God who is vitally concerned with the affairs of men in this life. Some would confine the work of God to the personal needs of individuals. But this is not the total insight of the Bible.

As we have already seen, we believe in personal salvation. God loves each individual. He redeems his children one by one. And we know that our Lord's earthly ministry was frequently to needy individuals. So we hold fast to the perfect relevance of the gospel to our profoundest personal needs. But Christianity can never stop there. Why? Because God does not stop there.

How do we know this? We know it from the Bible. We know it from Christian history. We know it from Christian experience and insight. And we know it from the Christian vision of human needs.

#### **I. The Bible and the Kingdom**

One of the most basic ideas running through the Bible is that of the kingdom of God. We cannot get away from it.

##### **1. THE OLD TESTAMENT SPEAKS**

The Old Testament has to do not only with individuals but also with the people of Israel. God's promise to Abraham concerned his seed. And it had very much to do with the larger affairs of this earthly life. (See Gen. 12:2-3, 7; 13:14-17.) So was it with Jacob. (Gen. 28:13-15.) The entire story of the great Moses reveals God's tremendous concern for the well-being of the enslaved *people* of Israel. The Ten Commandments had to do with the ordering of an earthly society under God. And the writings of the psalmists and the prophets show God's constant concern over the entire social order.

### THE NEW TESTAMENT SPEAKS

So is it with the New Testament. When we first see the Master as he enters upon his divine mission, we hear him say, “The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). And this kingdom was confined neither to the hearts of individuals nor to the world to come.

Jesus was concerned to save the souls of individuals. But he also wanted to change the life of the Jewish community. He came to give abundant life to multitudes. And in the light of what Jesus taught and how he lived *it is infinitely pathetic to tear his message loose from the total fabric of our human situation*. He said he was sent to “preach the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 4: 43). And the whole story of his teachings can best be summarized in terms of this kingdom of the Father.

Jesus made every effort to change the religious and social situation of the Jewish community. So far as Jesus was concerned, God’s work was not being done as it should through the religious leaders at Jerusalem. Even the temple was polluted. And when he cleansed it, he challenged the existing order at a point where it needed it.

In contrast to the traditions and standards of men Jesus came to announce the *divine order*. When he defied the regulations about the sabbath, he tore into the social fabric of the Jewish community. No regulations were more pervasively social than those having to do with sabbath observance. And none were more jealously guarded. Yet Jesus called for an entirely different conception of the sabbath. He insisted upon the life-subserving purpose of all regulations when he said, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). No saying could have placed him more decisively in the center of the social setting of his day than that. And one of the basic reasons why the religious leaders stirred up the unthinking mob to shout, “Crucify him!” was that Jesus proclaimed the neglected social principle that the law of Moses existed *for* man. Jesus did not come into the world to call people merely to a life of personal and private serenity. He wanted them to have all the peace of soul that was possible. But, above all, he wanted men to know their place and mission in the divine community.

## II. The Divine Orders and the Kingdom

So the God of the Bible is concerned with communities in the here and now as well as with individuals. God stood in judgment over Israel and over the nations. And if the Bible is true, it is not too much to say today that at many points God is at war with our society. For God's will is being flouted by the traditions of men. And we scoff at God by waving our little standards in his face. We say, "What difference do our racial prejudices make to God? What difference does it make if we blunder into war? What difference does divorce make to God? Why worry about dishonesty in business and corruption in politics? Does God care?"

Let all Christians understand this: God is at many points at war with our earthly communities. He loves his children. But he stands in judgment upon them and upon their paltry standards.

God himself has put us together in a community life. And God has established certain *orders* on this earth. He wants his purpose for these *divine orders* to be carried out. But what are the divine orders? They are the *conditions* that God has made for all civilized existence. Let us look at them.

### 1. THE ECONOMIC ORDER

First, there is the economic order. God has put man upon this earth to be a trustee of everything in it. (Gen. 1:26.) He is to get his food and shelter from it. He is to have comforts and conveniences because of his control over nature. But all of this requires the economic order. So God has established the conditions of farming and business and labor.

But men waste the materials of the earth and pollute this beautiful little planet. They thus attempt to mock God. Men ruthlessly exploit their fellowmen and thus trample upon God's ordinances within which they are supposed to carry out their trusteeship. So in the economic life we need always to let "reason and the will of God prevail." And what does this mean? Basically it means *stewardship in the use of the earth and of all property*. It means absolute honesty and justice in all transactions. It means fairness to all people involved. It means serving God with wealth. It means putting in an honest day's work.

At this point we join all Christians in affirming the sacredness of

all useful work. It is a joy to work. And every needed task has its glory in the kingdom of God. Every craftsman and artist, every doctor and lawyer and nurse, every teacher and home builder and preacher, every scholar, scientist, and writer, every businessman and laborer, every political leader and newspaperman, everyone having to do with television and radio, every social worker, every servant of the handicapped—every young person and adult is called to do his or her work for the kingdom-building purpose of God.

## **2. THE POLITICAL ORDER**

Then there is the political order. No community life is possible without government. So the order of government was established by God. And God is concerned about the *quality* of the governments of this earth. There is a vast difference in the eyes of God between democracy and tyranny. God's kingdom is defied by tyrants at one extreme and by indifferent citizens at the other. His kingdom in the political order is repudiated by corrupt politicians and by men whose souls can be bought for a price. Government exists for the glory of God and the service of man.

So a Christian cannot be an isolationist. He cannot separate himself from what happens in the governments of the earth. Why? Because God has established the order of government, and men have often corrupted that order. Not infrequently the very fate of humanity hangs upon these political organizations.

We believe in active participation in government. Many believers participate in the affairs of national and local governments. And our prayer is that they will be true to their heritage. We believe that all Christians have a God-appointed kingdom-building job to do in the interest of good government.

## **3. MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY ORDER**

Again, there is the order of marriage and family life. This too has been established by God. But there are all kinds of families. Here also God is often defied by people. And our task as Christians is to become kingdom-builders by entering into the joys of creating Christian homes.

But what kind of home is a Christian home? First of all, it is one in which *God reigns*. We belong to God and so do our family

relationships. Secondly, a Christian home is one in which the *husband-wife relationship* is more important than any others. This is not to minimize in the least the wonderful attachments of parents and children to each other. But in a Christian home the husband-wife relationship comes first. This is not a man-made injunction; it is a divinely established order. Jesus said: “From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one.’ So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:6-9; see also Eph. 5:31).

Husband and wife are bound to each other by the intimacies of a common memory. As life goes on, they rejoice together. They suffer together. They face life’s struggles together. And each one so contributes to the other that one is in a true sense lost without the other. God has made it that way. And every attempt to break this relationship—with rare and justifiable exceptions—is an attempt to defy the very order that God himself has established for our earthly communities.

A wedding is an event, but a marriage is an achievement.

In the third place, a Christian home is one in which *the children are loved and guided and taught every day*. We are to love our children. And we are to teach them the precepts of God. We are to show them by word and deed the light of the gospel. Every child must learn about God and Christ and love and fairness. Clearly the major responsibility here belongs to the parents. So a Christian home is one in which this kingdom-building responsibility is joyfully accepted. In this way the divine order of the family fulfills its true purpose.

#### **4. THE EDUCATIONAL ORDER**

In addition to these divinely established orders there are certain institutions without which no highly civilized life would be possible. These too are instruments of God for advancing his kingdom.

To mention one in particular, there is the educational order. This includes our elementary and high schools, our colleges and universities. It is true that life could, in a manner, continue without

these institutions. But since no advanced community life would be possible without them, we are justified in speaking of this educational order as having its ultimate origin and sanction also in God. Every Christian is called upon to advance the kingdom by devotedly serving and helping to finance our schools and colleges and universities. We have demonstrated our belief in education by laboring to build educational institutions of high quality.

The work of the teacher is exalted because it follows in the line of the great Teacher and renders an indispensable service to mankind. The work of the student too is important. And every student, from the first grade to graduate school, is called of God to do his or her best.

### III. The Key Principle

Within all these orders, foremost in our thinking must be the passion to know and do God's will. We find the key to that will in the love of Jesus Christ. In the light of that love we clearly recognize the *diseases* that plague the societies of this earth.

If God is in Christ, war has no place in the kingdom of God and must be conquered in the name of the Prince of Peace.

If God is in Christ, political corruption, indulgence in alcoholic drink, drug addiction, vulgarity, and the filthy tongue are enemies of the King and must be overcome by Christian integrity and purity.

If God is in Christ, poverty and ignorance have no part in the kingdom of God and must be banished from the realm.

If God is in Christ, racial prejudice does not belong in human societies and must be cast out by the mighty power of the *love* and *wisdom* of Christ.

If God is in Christ, disloyalty and strife in the home have no place in the kingdom and must be replaced by loyalty and understanding.

If God is in Christ, lawlessness and irresponsible protest are not the ways to do a great work for God and man.

If God is in Christ, wrong laws and cumbersome legal processes need to be transformed for the service of all men.

It has often been remarked by sociologists and other astute observers of men in society that no community will be able to maintain the highest moral standards and values unless it sees them as rooted

in God. And many would join Pitirim A. Sorokin, the well-known sociologist, in saying that the best way out of the crises in the world was expressed by Jesus when he said, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well” (Matt. 6:33).

## CHAPTER XIV

### WE BELIEVE IN THE LIFE EVERLASTING

Ours is the religion of the empty tomb and the risen Christ. We join all Christians in affirming the resurrection of Jesus and the life everlasting.

#### **I. The New Testament Witness**

None of the writers of the New Testament for a moment doubts the resurrection of Jesus. And none of them fails to grasp its towering significance in the Christian religion.

The Gospel writers all tell the story of the empty tomb. All of them speak of the risen Lord. Three of the Gospels (Matthew, Luke, and John) present detailed accounts of the appearances of this risen Lord. And it is beyond all question that without this absolute affirmation of the Resurrection the Christian movement would have been reduced to a band of trembling moralists whose enthusiasm would have run out before their death.

The disciples were crushed by the crucifixion. With what interest and excitement and doubts they listened to the first reports of the empty tomb! With what eagerness two of them ran to the tomb to see for themselves! And with what overpowering sublimity they beheld their risen Lord!

Here was one of those turning points in history. Everything was changed. The past was gone. The cross was a triumph. The grave was defeated. The way was now open for the Holy Spirit to do his wonderwork on Pentecost.

Upon receiving power from on high, Peter stood before a multitude already sympathetic with Jesus and proclaimed the crucified and risen Lord. (Acts 2:23-24.) And afterward some three thousand souls were added to the fellowship of believers. (Acts 2:41.)



Nobody grasped the significance of the Resurrection more firmly than Paul. He said, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain (I Cor. 15:14; see Rom. 8:34). To the first-century Christians, then, the resurrection of Jesus was significant, not only because it established beyond all question that men could not destroy the Savior and his work, but also because *in the Resurrection there was the promise of everlasting life to everyone who lives by faith in the Son of God.*

In the light of the New Testament itself, then, the efforts in recent decades to reduce the resurrection of Jesus to the faith of the earliest Christians are misguided. They are often supported by great learning and profound scholarly sincerity. But they fail to explain the impact of the risen Lord upon the creation and sustenance of the Christian communities. The New Testament makes it clear that without the Resurrection, there would have been no continuing Christian movement. So the reality of the Church is explained, in part, by the fact of the Resurrection and the promise of life after death which it communicated.

## **II. Man's Profoundest Question and God's Answer**

When we turn from the New Testament to our own souls, once again we see how perfectly this teaching answers our most urgent questions. In the innermost recesses of every man is the passion to live. And this passion to live beyond the grave is nothing but an extension of the desire to live tomorrow.

In our modern setting we may ask this profoundest of all questions like this: What is the meaning of our earthly careers in the face of death? No question can probe deeper than that. And he who has no answer to death has no answer for life.

But why do men persist in asking about life and death and destiny? The answer is that they cannot help it. For no passion goes deeper than the passion to live. And no answer is more desperately sought by people than the answer to the question: After death, what? This is the cry of the soul for an enduring meaning.

So God heard this age-old cry and called upon Jesus Christ to reveal his concern for us all. And in the Savior, whom he raised from

the dead, he revealed his administrative policy of overcoming death. What we could never conquer, God conquered in Jesus Christ. It is precisely this marvelous adjustment of the gospel to our deepest needs that assures us that it is of God. Man cries out like an infant in the night, and the Father comes with his magnificent response.

### III. What Eternal Life Is

But what is this eternal life that is ours through Christ?

First of all, *it is a life that begins here*. Whenever the risen Savior reigns in our hearts, we become new creatures and start on the journey into everlasting life.

Secondly, eternal life means that *each one of us, as an individual, will live beyond death*. In other words, we believe in individual or personal immortality. It is not merely a matter of the “immortality of influence,” about which so many speak. And it is far more than the thought that in some way we shall contribute to the ongoing of the universe despite the death of our souls.

In the third place, eternal life is not merely endless existence. Mere existence has no special value. So eternal life means *the opportunity for endless creative adventure with God*. We cannot now imagine the vast projects that God has in mind. But we know that with God we shall not be content merely to sit around and rock our way through the centuries. God does not call us to laziness here. So he will not call us to unemployment in the world to come.

Finally, eternal life, which begins here and contains even now the promise of unbelievably greater things, *is a life of peace and joy*. Why? Because it is lived in intimate association with our heavenly Father.

Eternal life is one of peace and joy also because it is free from the sufferings, obstacles, and bewilderments of this earthly life. In it there is both a great work to do and the God-given power to complete it. Creative work is always a joy. It is a privilege even on earth to be asked to do any worthy job. This privilege will become transfigured in heaven.

Besides this, eternal life is one of peace and joy because it brings together the redeemed souls into a perfect fellowship. Many people

ask, Will we recognize our friends in heaven? The answer is that we shall not only recognize them; we shall see how truly wonderful they are. And we shall more perfectly love them.

Others ask, Will we be married in heaven? Jesus answered this clearly when he said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). And this leads those who have known the joys of married love on earth to feel that heaven will lack something. But we need to think more deeply here. Instead of the usual attachments of marriage, such as those we know on this earth, there will be spiritual attachments of the most perfect sort. And those who were bound to each other by a genuine love in this life will also be bound intimately to each other in heaven. But their relationship will be unspeakably more wonderful than the very happiest marriages on earth could ever be. They will know each other. They will have a special relationship to each other. They will adore and serve each other. And they will glorify God together in perfect worship and praise.

Moreover, all those to whom they were deeply attached here will be among their dear ones in heaven if they do not deny their Lord. Beyond this the whole society of the redeemed will be a community of love and joy. The only exception to this will be when the redeemed in heaven are called upon to suffer vicariously with the brokenhearted Father of us all over the pathetic plight of those who have defied the aims of God for men. For we must never forget that our Father suffers even while he reigns in heaven.

#### **IV. Some Questions Answered**

But many people have difficulty believing these things.

Some say, "Why isn't the immortality of influence enough?"

The answer *is* that influence is not the most important thing. Not all the influences of all history are to be compared to the value of the souls of people.

Why is any influence important? Because it helps people. If the people are so unimportant as to come to absolutely nothing at death, what difference does the influence really make in the end? Even a small child should not be deceived by the effort to put the immortality

of influence—which is not immortality at all—in the place of a genuine life after death.

Others say, “All this is merely wishful thinking. People believe it because they *want* to believe it. How do we know it is true?”

The desire to live beyond death is no different, in quality, from the desire to live tomorrow. Yet these people question the former and praise the latter. *Of course* we wish to live beyond death. But we do not believe that our wish can bring it to pass. We believe in the resurrection and the life everlasting *because God has promised it in Jesus Christ*. And what he has promised he has the absolute power to perform. It is not and cannot be our doing.

Still others say, “But death is so final. It seems to be the end of everything. Our souls are so bound up with our bodies that it is hard to see how they can live on after the bodies pass away. And after death we never seem to communicate with people. How can these things be explained?”

The soul of man is one thing and his body is another. In this life the two are so intimately bound up with each other that our physicians are right in treating body and soul as one and the same thing. But in fact the two are distinct. Thoughts, purposes, memories, have their entire existence in and for living souls. Just as the light is not the same thing as the light bulb, so a soul is not the same thing as the body that conveys it through this life. So we Christians believe that at death we lose these corruptible bodies and at the resurrection are given incorruptible bodies which are suitable to the new dimension of existence beyond death. (I Cor. 15:42-44, 53-54.)

But if souls live on, why do we not communicate with them after they have departed? Many people claim that they do. And there are not a few reports on the subject. But we must remember that the dead are now in a different realm of existence. In the nature of the case communication with the dead is not so reliably evident as it is among those of us who still live together in the same earthly dimension. A great gulf separates us from each other.

But the question may still be asked, “How can these things be?”

Truth is stranger than fiction. There is no greater mystery than the birth of a baby. At every birth an entirely new creature has entered

into existence. How? We know the successive stages. But we have no insight whatever into how a human being that did not exist can now come into the world. This is a mystery of God's creative power. Yet it is a fact.

Many a man who accepts the miracle of birth without batting an eye stands completely baffled before the miracle of the Resurrection. We are *familiar* with the daily miracle of birth; we are *not familiar* with the miracle of resurrection. But our familiarity or unfamiliarity with these things has nothing to do with the realities. *For ultimately everything depends on the power and purpose of God.* And in the resurrection of Jesus, God demonstrated his conquest of death and his policy of conquering death.

One question remains. Some say, "But does not this belief in the life everlasting incapacitate us for living effectively in the here and now?"

It has often been supposed that this belief shuts the door to a sensible interest in the practical affairs of this earthly life. And in some cases this has happened. But, as a general thing, persons who shirk their duties here are not the ones who have a lively hope for the everlasting life. Why? Because in the Christian affirmation this life and the next are vitally linked to each other. How we live here has a great deal to do with what happens to us in the world to come. So the fact is that, far from making us lose our sense of duty here, the assurance of eternal life becomes one of our finest springs of action in this life.

Our commission is sure. Our duties stretch out before us. *During the only life we now possess*, we are to work and serve humanity and advance the kingdom.

## **V. The Divine Judgment**

Christians have always recognized the terrible contrast between heaven and hell. And it is our belief that we cannot express ourselves more clearly about our duties before God than by saying this: *How we live here makes all the difference between heaven and hell in the world to come.* We are not redeemed by our good works. But we shall never be redeemed without them. *A saved soul must do his duty before God and man.*

No man can continue to be saved without doing God's will on this earth. As Jesus said, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7: 21).

So we have our God-given responsibilities in this world. We are called to carry forward God's work, *in everything we do*, as long as we live here. Then, and only then, can we hope to hear those words which are perhaps the most beautiful that anyone can hear, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

We believe in the life everlasting.

## CHAPTER XV

### SOME UNITED CHURCH ATTITUDES

#### I. The Second Coming of Christ

We know that the New Testament speaks in many places of the second coming of Christ. And we hold that these references have a true meaning. And we affirm it when we recite the Apostles' Creed.

But as a general thing we have so fixed their attention upon the things of Christ which pertain to life here and now that they have not in practice gone deeply into the full import of the second coming.

In regard to times and seasons we keep returning to two statements by Jesus. He said, "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). And by implication this means that no man knows the century or the millennium. Again, the risen Lord instructed his disciples in these matters when he said. "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). These words of our blessed Lord are, with us, final.

There is, however, a meaning in the second coming that we do not want people to miss. This is the profound truth that God will bring this present order to an end in a way that is in keeping with his mighty act of creation. We cannot be true to the Creator and suppose that he would inaugurate a marvelous universe, make man for the realization of a great purpose, reveal himself in Christ, move into men's lives by the power of the Holy **Spirit, only to let everything fizzle out** in the end. Clearly the Christian understanding of the last things must be commensurate with our understanding of the vast processes of creation and redemption.

So the second coming means that, while no man knows the times or seasons, God will, in his own time and way, inaugurate his new

era under Christ in glory, power, and love.

As for our personal response to this, we have in our hearts the assurance of salvation. So we *know* that our life is in God's hands. At death, which may come at any time, we *know* we are prepared to take the Savior's hand and walk in heavenly places. For we believe that the Lord will meet us at the end of the line. (See John 14:3.) So we live in hope, regarding both our life after death and the new era which God will inaugurate.

The great point in Christianity, however, is not to wait eagerly for some event that lies hidden in God. The great point is to let the living Christ do his wonderwork in us now. So, as long as we are here on earth, we must be about our Lord's business.

## **II. The Unpardonable Sin**

Some people make a great deal of the unpardonable sin. But it has never been viewed as a major doctrine during the long history of Christianity.

Then why all the talk about it? This doctrine goes back to a remark that Jesus made. When some Pharisees said that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan (Matt. 12:24), our Lord gave a strong answer. And among other things he said, "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matt. 12:31-32.)

We believe that the only unpardonable sin is that for which people do not or cannot repent. And when people, such as certain of the Pharisees, were so stubborn that they defiantly called God's work the devil's, they became hopeless. Jesus was talking about people whose pride was so great, whose blindness was so complete, that there was no basis for hope in them.

But we believe that this thought can be overworked. And we deplore the activities of those who frighten people into supposing that they might have committed the unpardonable sin. Here is where we need to look at the total insight of the Bible. And we must never make light of God's mighty redemptive power in Jesus Christ by



putting people beyond its reach.

For practical purposes we would give everyone this word of assurance: *If you fear that you may have committed the unpardonable sin, you can be sure that you have not done it.* Those who are involved in such sin never care enough to worry about it.

### **III. “What Is to Be Will Be”**

Some people say, “What is to be will be.” And so they leave everything to God.

We do not accept this doctrine. We believe that everything happens under the rule of God. But we believe that God created people with the power to say “yes” and the power to say “no.” From beginning to end the Bible calls men and women to “choose,” to “come,” to “repent,” to “seek.”

It was God who created us with freedom. And the facts of history prove beyond reasonable doubt that God does not interfere with that freedom. For this reason God allows people to go so far as to kill each other in war and destroy themselves on the highways.

So we repudiate the doctrine of “what is to be will be.” For it is a form of fatalism. And it makes man helpless to do anything under his own God-given power. For this reason we put no confidence in astrology, or predictions that imply fatalism, or any other beliefs and practices which reduce human beings to puppets.

### **IV. “Once in Grace Always in Grace”**

Other people say, “Once in grace always in grace.”

What does this mean? It means that after we have become real Christians we cannot fall away from the life of grace. In other words, it means that *after* we are Christians we have *no freedom* to turn away from Christ.

But we believe that we are still free to turn away from Christ even while we are Christians. Here again we take our human freedom seriously. Why do we think this way? Because both the Bible and common sense require it.

The Bible is filled with examples of people who started out well and ended up tragically. There was King Saul in the Old Testament. (See I Sam. 10:9-10, 16-24.) And there was Demas in the New Testament. (See II Tim. 4:10.) Besides these, many others might

be mentioned. Men can experience no state of grace which is beyond the possibility of falling. For human freedom functions at all levels of grace.

Backsliding is something which we preach and all denominations practice.

Yet it is true that once a person has tasted of the Christian life, he is not likely to turn away from it permanently.

## **V. Predestination**

What is predestination? It is the doctrine that God alone decides who will be saved and who will be lost. It means that some people are picked out by God for salvation.

We repudiate this doctrine. We affirm the sovereignty of God. And we hold that only God can save us. But we believe that people may or may not put themselves in a position where God will do his saving work. God freely gives. But man must receive. We are saved by the grace of God only. But to receive that grace we must exercise faith.

More than this, we regard it as both contrary to the total insight of the Bible and to common sense to suppose that God would assign anyone to hell. Taken in its literal form, this is a pernicious doctrine.

So we believe in a Christianity that is open to *every man*. And we call every man to choose God and live.

Baptism means incorporation into the new life of the spirit. Christian baptism is Holy Spirit baptism as the New Testament directs. John the Baptist prophesied it and that is fulfilled on the Pentecostay. So those who do not want water baptism have the freedom to be a member of the church even without water baptism. But those who are not taking water baptism have to witness and confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour before the believers assembly or congregation.

## **VI. Prayer and Intercessory Prayer**

We believe in prayer.

Prayer is not merely asking God for things. Nor is it merely “saying prayers.” It is more than meditation. It goes deeper than contemplation. Prayer has been called “the soul’s sincere desire.” It is that and much more. Some identify prayer with action. This too misses the mark.

What is prayer? Prayer is communication with God, where as petitions are placing our needs before God. It is person-to-person communion with God. It involves some real awareness of the greatness, glory, mystery, and love of God. So, in important respects, prayer differs from our person-to-person fellowship with other people. It is communion with *God*, the Creator, Sustainer, the Redeemer and Empowerer of our lives. He shares himself and his benefits with us. To be sure, the Father delights in the responses of his children and is himself enriched by them. But we are the ones who receive his blessings and benefits in prayer.

Jesus was the only founder of a world religion to teach his followers to pray to God as Father. This is of first importance in the kind of prayer we have been talking about. If prayer is person-to-person communion with God, it helps us to pray when we think of God as Father. This means that while God has priority as Creator and Sustainer, he is infinitely approachable. He is to be thought of as the ultimate Person. This does not mean that he has a body as we do, or that he is limited as we are.

Rather, it means that the basic characteristics of a person—as distinguished from a stone, a tree, or a galaxy—apply to God. He *knows* us. Without this there could be no person-to-person communion. He *loves* us. Without this we would avoid him. He *communicates* with us. Without this prayer would be reduced to man talking to himself. He acts purposively. Without this prayer would lead to aimlessness. God *summons* us. Without this we would not be empowered to serve the present age.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of prayer—*prophetic* and *mystical*. In the former the person-to-person communion with God, involving the call to serve, is primal. In mystical prayer—which is represented not only in the religions of the East but also by some Christians—there is the ascent leading toward the vision of God or the sense of complete oneness with God. Both of these have their places. But the biblical revelation guides us basically into the kind of prophetic prayer discussed in the foregoing paragraphs. As Heiler points out in his great book entitled *Prayer*; the highest point in the history of prayer was reached when Jesus prayed in Gethsemane:

“Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

The greatest answer to prayer is a life dedicated to the service of God and man.

We believe also in intercessory prayer.

This means that we believe in praying for others. Some people imagine that the only kind of prayer that does any good is the kind that works upon our own minds. But we go much further than that.

Jesus prayed for others. (Luke 22:31-32; John 17:9-17.) And, by example, Jesus taught his disciples to pray for each other. Paul and others followed this practice with great persistence. (See II Cor. 13:7-9; Eph. 1:15-17; Phil. 1:3-5; I Thess. 1:2-3; Philem. 4.)

But what happens in intercessory prayer? Many things. Put it like this. Suppose that every time we prayed for someone else, God put a thought, a reminder, a suggestion, into the soul of the other person. Then God would be answering our prayer. This would not mean that the other person *had* to do what we wanted him to. But it would mean that when we prayed in the right spirit, God would always answer our prayer. And such prayers often perform wonders.

Nor do we rule out divine healing. We deplore some of the practices along this line. We support and foster the medical profession with its scientific understanding and proven skills. And also we know that many people have been healed as a result of prayer. So we see no conflict between these two approaches. Here we are frank to say, however, that we do not understand the laws of divine healing. So we refuse to let people deceive themselves with vain hopes. In any case, intercessory prayer, as well as the prayer of the patients, is an aid and support to the work of the doctors. For it is a mighty healing force.

Besides this, intercessory prayer is one of God’s ways of binding the hearts of people together and so of doing his great work in the world.

We believe also in praying for the Church, and for world peace, and for the kingdom of God.

## **VII. Why Do People Suffer?**

Many people believe that all human suffering is caused by sin. We The United Church repudiate that doctrine. We know that much

suffering comes from sin. Generation after generation suffers from the sins of the parents. Greed and stupidity bring war. Disloyalty brings broken homes. Drunkenness brings disaster. Corruption in high places brings disgrace. People sow what they reap. (Gal. 6:7.) The way of transgressors is hard. (Prov. 13:15.)

But the way of innocent people is sometimes hard too. Why? We do not know. Turn it around any way you like, and you are baffled in just the same way that the innocent Job was.

I once heard a well-known preacher say, "If a child gets polio, it is because God sent it on him." We repudiate that doctrine as not only inhuman but as utterly contrary to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come into the world to show us the God of terror. He came to show us the Father who heals our hurt. So he was the Great Physician. We cannot use God to *explain* innocent suffering and at the same time look to him for *help* in rising above it.

We know that innocent people suffer. And we know also that they are not alone in their suffering. It is a lonely business. But frequently God comes nearest to his children in the time of their suffering. There is no night so dark but that God's light shines through. And with his help, which is ever present, we can be not merely conquerors but more than conquerors. (Rom. 8:37.)

God seems to permit such natural evils as hurricanes, tornadoes, cancer, deformity, insanity, etc., for some reason that we do not now understand. But we know he loves us still and would never deliberately harm innocent people.

### **VIII. The World Mission of Christianity**

We believe in world Christianity.

Why? Because *we* need the gospel, *everyone* needs it. And we must catch the true spirit of that earliest missionary commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

We must adventure or decay. Life is like riding a bicycle: either we go forward or get off. And a Christianity that loses its evangelical dynamic is itself lost. So through churches, schools, hospitals, farms, industries, and all serviceable agencies, we believe in preaching and teaching the unsearchable riches of God in Jesus Christ around the

world.

Only Christ can answer the deepest questions of life. Sin? Forgiveness. Fear? Faith. Despair? Hope. Resentment? Love. Provincialism? World vision. Death? Everlasting life.

We believe in the unity of all men in Christ. And we believe that through well-qualified missionaries and through well-trained leaders from their native lands we must labor together to communicate the love of Christ. This means a sharing in the prayers for the world. It means giving time and money to do a work for God so great that it reaches around the whole world.

### **IX. The Ecumenical Spirit**

We believe that the best contribution we can make to the ecumenical movement is to bring to it a profound appreciation and growing understanding of our own identity. At the same time, we earnestly desire to work cooperatively and creatively toward greater unity in spirit, organization, and leadership among all Christians. We insist on the “catholic spirit.” The ecumenical spirit may begin with tolerance—in the full meaning of that word—but it goes beyond it to seek agreement and unity wherever possible.

To that end it has been often suggested that United Church is *catholic, protestant, and evangelical*. It is catholic (universal) because it shares in the biblical revelation and in the vast, rich, cumulative tradition of Christianity. It is catholic in its call to all United Churches to share in the efforts toward Christian unity.

United Church of India is protestant in that it takes the Bible seriously. It is protestant in calling its people to share in the responsibility for soul-searching and critical re-evaluation. It is protestant in that it respects the conscience of every man and calls upon everyone to seek, to perceive, to understand for himself. It is protestant in protesting against everything that is phony and demonic in the Church and in the lives of “religious” people.

United Church is evangelical in its emphasis on a living relationship with God through Christ. It is evangelical in that it seeks to win the world for the kingdom. It is evangelical in striving toward this end by the conversion and rededication of individuals and by the transformation of society. It is evangelical in calling upon all Churches

in their own ways to grow in their effectiveness as living witnesses of what God has done in them and of what he can do through them.

The ecumenical movement began with the Edinburgh Conference in 1910. During the brief period since then many advances have been made toward Christian unity. There is a long way to go, and we may never make the journey all the way. But conversations are taking place. We are getting better acquainted with each other. Proposals—sometimes wise, sometimes impractical—are being made.

This much is sure: Wherever Christians are concerned to meet and share, to work together in the struggles against inhumanity and mediocrity, to worship together, to pray together, and, where practicable, to organize into a common fellowship—there we believers are present and at work.

### **The Extend of Unity**

When we think of the unity of the Universal Church of Christ we hear the words of Jesus quoted in John 15: 'That they all may be one'. Based on this verse and the hope to be a fold under one shepherded is also the desire of our Lord. Unity here expressed is in fellowship. Not an Organic unity. Organic unity of the churches is one body under one leader and one administrative structure with a uniform creed, doctrine and worship order. This was the concern of the protestant church through the world Council of Churches in the 1930's till 1970's. Lot of discussions and studies were held and published on the topic: At last the practical conclusion reached is 'let us have unity in diversity', living together as a fellowship under one umbrella. All other debates and discussions to reach organic unity has practical difficulties.

The history of the church in the last 20 centuries tells us the divisions occurred based on doctrinal matters. These doctrinal matters are not of much help, because God is so big a person to be interpreted and the incarnation of Christ is a mystery beyond human comprehension. The discussions on words such as 'homo ousios' 'homoiousios', talks reached no where, leading to divisions and enmity in the church. So let us not spend or waste our time on such issues. Let us be satisfied with Apostles Creed and Nicean Creed as our basis

with regard to doctrinal matters.

Based on the practical level the unity we envisage is a wider fellowship of the churches through mutual understanding, sharing, concern, and cooperation in mission. The kingdom of God is our goal and let us join hands in the areas where we can work together.

There are more than 700 crores of people on the face of the earth and each individual is different. There are thousands of people group, communities, christian practices from different cultures. God is so big and great that he understands and accepts, and respects these differences. So let us think and look at things from God's perspective above all diversities. Unity in diversity is our slogan.

### **X. The Ministry and the Laity**

We believe that all Christians, by virtue of their faith and their Christian experience, are called of God to serve him in the world where they are. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. Every person has a direct access to God as any other. The overwhelming majority of Christians are laymen—men and women, children and young people. In a true sense they are all ministers or servants of God. So was it in the earliest days of Christianity. The multitudes who followed Jesus, the individuals who sought him and to whom he ministered, the women who stood by him to the end—these were laymen. The stories Jesus told were, for the most part, about laymen. The good Samaritan, the widow, the shepherd seeking a lost sheep, the father and the prodigal son, the sower, the faithful steward, the searcher for the pearl of great price, the builder, the householder and the workers in the vineyard, the rich, fool, the woman and her lost coin, the rich man and Lazarus, the judge, the publican—these were all laymen. One reason why laymen have been so responsive to the Master is precisely because he rubbed shoulders with them and talked their language. The story of the laity has never been adequately told. But we try to give due recognition to the judgment and leadership of the laity by requiring that there be a layman for every minister at the major deliberations of the Church. And in the local churches the leadership of the laity, of dedicated men and women, children and young people, as always, is of utmost importance.



As every layman knows, the ordained ministry is essential also for the leadership and direction of the Church. It was no accident that Jesus selected twelve to devote themselves wholly to understanding, preaching, and witnessing to the good news. (See Mark 10:28; Acts 1:23-26.) The ordained ministry goes back to the apostles. While all are called to serve God, some are called *to devote their whole mind, heart, and soul* to understanding and interpreting Christian truth, to guiding the spiritual life of the community of faith, and to leading in all moral and spiritual affairs. Therefore, this is a special call of God.

We believe the *call* to the ministry is important. It may come gradually or suddenly. It may be experienced in any one of many ways. It may even be intermingled with doubts that come and go. It consists essentially of two things. First is the inner sense that God wants a person to devote his full time / part time to proclaiming the gospel and to leading in the spiritual life. This part of the call is usually nurtured in the home, in the local church, and in Christian camps.

Second, the call requires authorization by the Church. This authorization begins in the local church where a person has his membership and continues through the District Committee and thence, through the Board of the Ministry. It is not enough for an individual merely to feel called. This, together with his response to God, is a part of it. But he must demonstrate his determination and aptitudes for the demanding work of the minister in the contemporary world. He must prove himself by being willing to serve, by disciplining his life, by pursuing a theological education, and by working under the direction of his bishop or church leadership.

### **XI. Place of Sacraments or Rituals**

The foundation of Christian faith is not on any doctrine, sacrament, ritual or verse or teaching. The basis of christian faith is on the living Lord God Jesus Christ and the enriching presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The United Church of India does not promote or oppose sacraments and rites because.

1. In due course it will become a stumbling block for the growth of the believers in Christ. Usually people are satisfied with the outward

rituals and performances.

That makes them religious and does not help to lead a normal fruitful life. Fear and anxiety are the driving forces behind religious people. This is practically against the abundant life promised in Jesus Christ.

2. The recorded events, Bible versus in the New Testament are only shadow or symbolically explained. The water baptism is the continuation from Jewish religion and via John the Baptist. Christian baptism is Holy Spirit Baptism:- About the Lord's Supper, the statements such as I am Bread, Wine and braches are only symbolical. These are to be spiritually explained (Jn. 6:33).

3. The rituals, ceremonies have their place for that particular period, moment, situation or background. Rites need re-evaluation and re-interpretation if necessary to convey the truth.

4. Rituals, rites and ceremonies are practiced by various religions. Faith is not just to be performed, but a lifestyle to be practiced, in day to day life. By practising religious ceremonies, we do not want to mixup, Christian way of life like other religions.

5. The finished work of Christ with regard to the salvation of humanity is final and full to its least iota and no human philosophy, effort, rituals or ceremony is needed to support the work of Christ. No supplementary argument or defense is needed for the finished work of Christ through His incarnation, life, death on the cross, burial, resurrection and ascension to heaven.

6. Sinful man / humanity is justified and redeemed by their faith in the living Son of God Jesus Christ. Redemption is based not on any sacraments, acts, rites, rituals or ceremonies.

7. By God's Word (Rhema) everything is created and held together, sustained right from the beginning of the scriptures O.T. Genesis to Revelation. The revealed Word of God is the foundation for living by faith in the living Lord.

8. History of the Christian Church for the last 20 centuries tells us and teaches that most divisions, enmity, discord and confusions in the Christian church is due to the attempts to protect or protest the teachings on sacraments and rituals.

The basic teaching of the church on Apostles creed or Nicean

creed makes no division or quarell between churches from Roman Catholic to the twentyfirst century Charismatic Movements. Division and tension comes when it touches sacraments such as Water Baptism, Holy Communion, Lord's Supper etc.

7. Nowhere in the New Testament we find the coinages such as Sacraments or Gospel sacraments or Dominical sacraments or Jesus instituted sacraments. These are all coinages by the theologians and Bible Scholars. Their intention to establish and suggest such wordings is to support the practices in their own churches. To establish these as church practices they have deducted some wordings from the related contexts in the New Testament. Deductions and assumptions are only philosophical or intellectual exercises that bombard between the thoughts of the people. Such bombardments brought strife and confusion between the churches. This strife and arrogance is the present enemy among the Christians. The United Church's mission is to neutralise or breakdown such separation, distance and bring together believers in the wisdom and knowledge of Christ.

Even though there are certain shadows and shades with regard to the teachings of the sacraments in the New Testament, there is no specific, straight forward instruction like a command to be observed. The New Testament teaches that our whole life and the opportunity to live in this world, need a sacramental approach. We should approach life and the material world as a gift from God to be enjoyed in this world. We should not confine any doctrinal matters to be based on a particular verse or verses or a practice of the Church in the past. Any doctrine or practice we advocate or insist should be based on concrete logical and practical point of view.

We need to take the teachings of the twenty seven books in the New Testament as the basis of our doctrines or practices. The conclusions, analysis and convictions of the forefathers need re-evaluation and rethinking and have to be corrected wherever it is incorrect. For example, in the John's gospel several allegorical or symbolic figures are used to express the divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is referred to as the Door, Light, True Vine, Word, Shepherd, Bread etc. We are not supposed to interpret any of these as a sacrament or doctrine to be observed, because Christ has already warned us that

the things which he spoke are all spiritual matters.

1 The approach of the UCI towards any sacraments is optional and inclusive if it is according to protestant theology.

1 In this circumstance any church, fellowship, denomination, organisation, institution that joins UCI have the freedom to practice their rituals and ceremonies which are in agreement with the protestant theology. Such groups should not insist UCI or any member churches of UCI to follow their beliefs or practices.

1 In the UCI meetings, forum, platforms, discussions on such topics shall be avoided.

## **XII. The UCI Strategy**

The United Church of India stands for the unification of the various congregations, fellowships, assemblies, gatherings, groups collected in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord and the Saviour of the world.

Lord Jesus Christ is the creator, sustainer and owner of this world. The ownership of the people is given to God's children. Whoever confesses in their life that Jesus is Lord & Saviour of their life will become the children of God. As children of God, it is the spiritual inheritance to all believers in Christ to have spiritual authority and possession over the land in that particular vicinity.

Because God's children are the spiritual owners of the land, the devil and his followers should not take over or possess the rule of the land or authority over the souls of the people.

God's children, believers in Christ are appointed in various places to take the position and authority of the places morally, spiritually and to rule in its sociological context through influence, and teaching.

It is the duty of the people of God to bring in and gather all the human souls to the company of God's family acknowledging the Lordship of Christ in their lives too.

The spiritual authorities or the Heads of the United Church are called and appointed by God Almighty to fulfill His plan and purposes as revealed through the only begotten Son Lord Jesus Christ and through His great Soul's through out the centuries.

The United Church is taking a new turn in this millenium organising the people of God everywhere through the positioning of

the land through the authority bestowed to us through Lord Jesus Christ.

All the god men and self declared gods and powers rejecting the Lordship of Jesus Christ will be thrown away from their grabbed positions. The rule of the land is given to God's children in Jesus Christ.

### **Positioning**

The Government function in a hierachical system to administer the churches at States, Districts, Taluks, Panchayat, Ward levels.

The United Church will have its officers starting from centre, state, district levels. Apostle Archbishops will be the persons in the centre. Every state will have an office. Every district in each state will have a bishop to be the guardian or spiritual father to that place. Every bishop will have Assistant bishops (Corepiscopas) to support in Taluk levels and Vicars to operate in the panchayat/ Municipal levels, the Municipal / Panchayat wards will be represented by deacons or servants.

The Age limit for appointment is from 24 years and shall continue in service till attaining the age 75.

The selection or appointment of the officers will be finalised or approved by the Apostle Archbishops Office.

The offices are honorary and can not claim any remuneration, salaries, allowances etc.

### **Confessions of the officers of the church**

1. I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour of my life.
2. I dedicate my life as a living sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God (Romans 12:1 -2) not conforming to the standards of this world.
3. I confess that I love the Lord with all my strength, all my might and all my heart and confession that I love my neighbour. (Mt: 22:37-39).
4. I confess that I am crucified with Christ and it is no more I that lives in me but Christ lives in me. (Gal.
5. I confess that I died with Christ and I am living for the one who is risen (2 Cor. 5:13).

6. I confess that I am a gift of God and everything that belongs to me is a gift of God and hence belongs to the kingdom of God.
7. I confess that I seek first, God's Kingdom and His righteousness.
8. I confess that my God will supply all that I needed... According to His riches in glory.
9. I confess that preaching, proclaiming, and witnessing will be my life style.
10. I confess that life after death and heaven is my right and privilege as a child of God.

### **The UCI Definition**

Definition: By United Church we mean the coming together of different denominations/ mission agencies that accepts, believes and practices the Nicene Creed and faith based on the 66 books of the Bible and do not mean the merging of other churches in its organisational structural set up. The design is to be a new united movement for missionary advance and fellowship in the world at large involving in Jesus's Kingdom Ministry as followers of Jesus Christ.

The United Church of India is a united movement for the unity of the existing and emerging churches in India which was being visualized and desired by the majority of the churches in India for the last several years after the independence of our motherland. It is a common platform for all the indigenous churches which are organized, independent, denominational, congregational, local, house churches and so on. It stands for the unification of the various congregations, fellowships, assemblies, gatherings, groups collected in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord and the Saviour of the world.

### **UCI Mission Statement**

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God Almighty, The United Church of India stands for the spiritual enlightenment of the people of God irrespective of Caste, Creed or Colour; bringing them to the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus as New Creations, preparing them for the Kingdom Ministry of the Lord as a transformed community in this world and the world to come for the blessing of people everywhere.

#### **XIV. Worship**

Worship in Christian spirituality is fellowship with the Heavenly Father and God's people, the believers. Worship must be in truth and spirit (Jn. 4:24). No place is set apart as holy for worship, fellowship or gathering. No images or idols or symbols are used for worship. However, the accepted symbol of the Universal church can be placed wherever apt or needed. Man is created in the image of God and he is the crown of creation. God never expects his crown of creation, man to worship any images or spirits.

The incarnation of our Lord, reveals us that God is Emmanuel, one who is with us always. God is no more separated from us dwelling in holy places, altars and high places. God is with the people. Now He is with us always as the Holy Spirit, paraclete, comforter.

Religion always search for gods and goddesses, going to their abode to worship them. This is not so in Christian spirituality. We are commanded to love the Lord with all our mind, soul and heart, that is with our total personality, and to love others (Mt.22:37-39). The commandment here is to love your Lord, not to worship Him. Hebrews 10:25 exhorts us not to forsake our assembling and not the worship service.

Our gathering is to enjoy and nurture in the word, in the presence of God and in the company of His people. Where two or three are gathered in Lord's name, there His presence is promised. So in His presence, with the fellowship of believers we encourage, exhort, grow in the word, strengthening ourselves for the kingdom ministry of our Lord in this world. In the assemblies we are preparing for a spiritual war, to involve as coworkers with the Lord, in the saving ministry of our Lord.

Jesus taught to address God as Heavenly Father in the prayer He taught His disciples. If the earthly parents do not ask their children to worship them, our heavenly Father also do not ask us to do so. But, He commands us to love Him (Mt.22:37-39). Our earthly parents also ask us to love them, not to worship them. So, our Christian worship is primarily fellowship. Singing, praising, praying, are all our expressions of rejoicing, thanksgiving and our privilege as children of God. The resources of the Father belongs to the children.

So believers ask heavenly Fathers resources to spend in their needs. Through prayer we seek God's communication or fellowship. Through petitions we appropriate resources of our Father; Through faith affirmation, we claim, appropriate the privileges as children of God.

### **XV. The UCI — A Need of The Hour**

The world history affirms that 'United We Stand Divided we fall' is the basic motto for any political, social, religious, spiritual movements. 'One shepherd and one flock' is the ultimate goal of Christ through the ministry of the disciples of Christ. This oneness and unity in Christ is the model for a Christ community. Unfortunately because world's wisdom and thoughts influenced the hierarchy and running of the church, the universal vision and approach of Christ is distorted by religious, cultural and political reasons. The unhealthy attitudes of the religious leaders always led to division and enmity among Christian churches. Discussions under various labels are done in the past centuries to bring together all the churches in Christ. For petty irrelevant reasons the dream of coming together of churches is still a mirage or Utopia. As long as human fallacies and narrow-minded unconverted people are in the leadership and controlling bodies of the churches, the unity of the churches is again becoming an unpractical seminary topic on discussion level only. The desire and hidden agenda to enjoy the power, material wealth of the churches and various opportunities in the church institutions, keep the controlling bodies to avoid any exterior entrance into the church. As a result new membership to the established churches is again an unpractical proposition. Faith and practices of the traditional churches is another blockage for its growth and ecumenical fellowship.

In spite of all the drawbacks or impracticalities of the established churches, Jesus Christ ordains His Church to witness and function as a body. Fusion of all people everywhere is the master strategy of our Lord. When the established traditional churches side track from their vision and mission, Lord in his eternal master plan selects and call believers or people from outside the church. This is proved by the Lord all throughout history.

The teachings of Jesus Christ is simple, straight forward and trans-



parent enough for the coming together of all people everywhere. The only basic qualification is surrendering one's life and accepting Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The Holy Spirit who guides us in all truth, gives the teachings that can bring together and unite people. It is the human interpretations and immature evaluations and judgments about the teachings of Christ that cause disagreements and divisions.

The Lord who became flesh came to witness truth, knows very well that the unity of humankind is possible through Him, because He is the author and finisher of our faith. And in him, for Him everything is created.

The tragedy of this present age is that even people who claim that they are believers and are born again are not coming together for fellowship.

Every group is attached to their own group exclusively. Exclusivity is the trump card used by leaders to hold their people intact. Whenever someone speak about unity of churches, majority with one accord just evade it as a hopeless attempt.

Coming together of churches does not mean a monolithic structure with a single person at the top controlling everybody and everything. It is not the organic unity envisaged by the WCC, we UCI is attempting to fulfill. It is the networking of all the churches having their own way of fellowship, worship and administrative structures. Each church will be independent in their own areas.

Jesus Christ referred to his disciples not as servants but as friends and brothers. Believers in Christ are called to be co-workers with Christ. This is the message we read in the gospels and the Epistles in the New Testament.

Believers in Christ are exalted to the position of royal priesthood. In that case one shepherd and one flock means the leader is Christ alone.

The different denominations of the Christian church have different leaders. Even among the church leaders the contention is as to who is the greatest. Who is greatest or who is least is not a question based on N.T. Every leader is under the great leader Jesus Christ. Nobody is greater than anybody. All are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Positions and power is at the organizational level only.

All religious performances in the church led the church and people to false spirituality and negative attitudes that are not constructive or productive. Rituals and ceremonies led people to false understanding of Christian spirituality. Jesus Christ expressed and frankly explained that worship of God is not through rituals and ceremonies. Worship must be in truth and spirit. There is no localised or place centred spirituality for Christ.

There is no manmade images in spirit worship. Truth is purely the secular word definition. St. Paul referred Justice, truth etc. to be manifested in life by wearing the full armor of God to involve in spiritual warfare. For the 4th century to the 20th century Christians are totally confused about the true spirituality of Christ, because of the poor understanding of the gospels and scriptures, Leaders gave their ear to the voice of worldly wisdom and misled by wrong interpretations.

Jesus emphatically taught that the spirit of God dwells not in temples or so called holy places, but in the lives of people. This truth is not fully communicated to the masses even in this mass media era. When the Holy Spirit lives in the life of a person, he is a new person. Such a person is one who has received Jesus Christ as his Lord and saviour and is known as a Bornagain personality. He/She becomes a child of God. Such a privilege is open to all human.

Unfortunately various religious teachings in this world misguided the people, leading them to invent their own, making themselves religious, religious rites and rituals. As a result even the Christian faith is reduced to religious philosophy which never incarnated to the practical level.

In this generation, a fresh dynamic presentation of the claims of church upon humanity is the inevitable need of the hour. In order to take up that task to reach the millions around the world the new arrangement of the United Church of India came into being.

The UCI seeks to revive the lifeless churches and at the same time motivate the churches to get involve more in the mission and evangelism on an emergency basis.

Outdated religious teachings, rules and regulations misguiding

ignorant people from the poor to the rich, from the uneducated to the educated. Religion is taking advantage of the people and exploiting their religious ignorance. Even the majority of the church goers are not sure whether they are saved by the grace of God. Neither they do not experience a personal relationship with the living Christ nor they do enjoy the privilege as a child of God. They do not know that if they sincerely accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, they can experience a 'born again' life. The responsibility upon the church to conscientise and nurture the people in Christian truth and the Word of God is not taken seriously. They are not sure about their life after death or eternal life. The present structure of the Christian churches is not ready to restructure or take a new turn. The inflexibility of the churches in its approach to change is a very pitiable thing

The only alternative is to take a new turn through a new movement. The last commissioning of our Lord to the disciples was to go to the uttermost parts of the world to make them also disciples. To pull down the works of the devil, Jesus became human, crucified, died, resurrected and liveth forever. The salvation to all humanity made available by God through Jesus Christ must reach each and every individual. The United Church of India is asking people to join in hands to fulfill this great commission of our Lord. Only new Wineskins can hold new wine.

*UCI is The Need of the Hour because:*

1. God loves the people of India.
2. To know the Saviour of the mankind is the right of anyone in the world.
3. Lord, called entrusted and committed his mission of reaching the people, to his Apostles and through them to the disciples of Christ, called by Him in all these centuries till now.
4. When the chosen people do not do the will of God, He choses others to fulfill His purposes. When the established churches ignored the mission of Christ, Jesus called people like William Carey, Moravian Missionaries, CMS missionaries etc. When the established churches in India are neutral to Evangelism & Mission God raised more than 200 protestant missionary agencies from India, itself in the last 40 years.

5. The fellowships, groups thus formed as a result of missionary work need nurture, guidance and unity with other fellowships.

6. The limitations, inflexibility, and lack of committed human persons in the ministry, compels the established churches to take a neutral position in accepting new gatherings.

7. Teaching ministry of the churches/missions in the last fifty years is not satisfactory. So we need a united effort in this direction.

8. The possibility & potential of this age is to be involved in the social, educational, developmental, health fields as service areas to help in the progress and prosperity of all the people.

9. The United Church of India is planning to establish:

a) Christ Jesus Vidyapith Schools all over India, under Open School (NOIS), CBSE, ICSE, and State Boards.

b) Health & Gospel centres called JC Wellness & Spices outlets to promote health products, spices and Bible Books all over India in all the towns in cooperation with the churches in those areas.

c) Acquiring land, and constructing believers Housing Colonies which will have schools, community Halls, Prayer Centres etc.

d) Help to establish Bible book libraries along with churches all over India.

10. By Ordaining ministers, consecrating Bishops to take position in town, district, state levels, the UCI plans to establish the church of Christ everywhere.

## **XV. Redeeming the land**

Redemption of the land is one area of Christian ministry which is a little obscure but which when understood becomes a very important responsibility because of its implications and benefits.

A person can redeem his pledge by paying what was promised or pledged. A bond can be redeemed when the necessary conditions are met. A piece of property previously pledged can be redeemed on paying what was stated by the pledger at the time of making the transaction. So also can a piece of land be redeemed legally by paying what was outstanding on the land. The right to redeem resides in the person legally in the position to exercise it and in no other.

However, in spiritual matters it is more complicated. The Bible

states quite clearly that God made the heaven and the earth (Genesis 1:1). The Psalmist reinforced this when he said:

(Psalm 24:1-2), (Genesis 1:26-28)

This dominion was lost when Adam sinned in the garden of Eden. Man came short of the glory of God. Satan became the god of this world and usurped the powers that man was to have exercised.

Satan expanded his hold over the earth by deploying his principalities and powers to cause and spread spiritual wickedness in this world. People were deceived into worshipping idols, gods and Satan by building altars, offering sacrifices, creating groves and high places. Thus Satan strengthened his hold over families, communities, cities and nations, This went on to the point where the Bible laments that “the whole world lies in wickedness” (1 John 5:19).

But Jesus Christ came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1 Jn 3:8), not only to save man but to redeem everything. This can be seen in the scripture which states it so plainly. (Colossians 1:19-22)

Jesus Christ came to redeem man and creation for himself. That explains why in addition to being made sin for man, he allowed the soldiers to jam the crown of thorns upon his head to pay for God’s curse on the earth in Genesis 3:17-18)

On the cross Jesus also destroyed principalities and powers and made a public show of them, triumphing over them in it.

After Jesus rose from the dead he delegated authority to born-again Christians, his followers, exercise over all the power of the enemy – not just in people’s lives but in spiritual warfare to redeem the land.

Being joint heirs with him means that what he has belongs to his followers (born-again Christians) and, since he commanded such people to wield this authority till he returns, it is important for the Church to look into that area of its responsibility.

Implicit here is the necessity to deal with the kings (satanic powers), the people and the land.

Now since we want people saved, we must therefore deal spiritually with the “kings” (satanic powers) in order to redeem the land so that the people can live even more abundant lives.

In this regard it is now possible to understand how the gospel fared when preached in parts of the Third World where idolatry was strong. Without practical knowledge of spiritual warfare missionaries made converts who would go to church on Sundays but still visit sorcerers, witchdoctors and prognosticators when the issues of life confronted them. Sadly, some people still make the same mistakes today.

It is important that the thoughts come through the mind of one who has lived and ministered in areas where preaching the gospel demands more than simply explaining verses from the Bible. Indeed, the freedom Jesus Christ proclaims (Luke 4:18, 19; John 8:32) should affect all of life. And, as his ambassadors to the world today, every Christian must know and understand that faith should influence every aspect of human existence. Each person must actively work towards that goal.

The principles for redeeming our countries, the land that God has given us, generally apply to any community or society. They are Biblical and, as the various examples cited show, tried and proved true and effective.

In God's army, there are no hangers on. All are called to put on the whole armour (Ephesians 6:10) and having done all, to stand victorious.

### **XVI. Our Approach to Religions**

All religions are man made or culturally evolved. Some are philosophical and some are agnostic. Religions may have a god, gods or goddess which can be mythical or a character from a folk lore or a novel or even a historical figure. By whatever the names gods and goddesses are called, the final conclusion is that all characters are imaginative or man made.

Hence religions are man's creation. Created movements has its own limitations. No religion or god can go beyond the intelligence of its creator.

Man is created in the image of God and man is the crown of creations. Because man is the crown of creations, he is not supposed to bow down or worship an image or picture of any kind created by man. So we cannot accept any religion as spiritual. Man is a spiri-

tual being. But devil carried away the thinking of man and devil acts through the controlling of the soul of man. Religion always helps the devil to have influence and dominion over the human soul. Thus devil conquers the personality of man ie., his soul and spirit.

Through the redemptive act of Christ on the Cross, Jesus Christ helped humanity to have a personal relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. Satan or devil take advantage of the soul of man and through religions, man gets a kind of satisfaction, peace and rest. Thus man is immuned to any true teaching or influence, other than what they believed or accepted. Religions, thus give a pseudo spiritual godly feeling, that they are okay. Through religion man is being deceived and always motivates him to do something to please God – such as giving money, going for pilgrimages, self-torturing etc.. Religion thus makes man a slave to certain ideologies and fear. He is thus kept under mental torture and a distorted conscience.

In the history of the world and spirituality, religion has always played a major role as a disrupter for the freedom of human mind and soul. UCI cannot support or agree with any kind of wrong teachings that is harmful to humanity. Christianity is also in effect reached the state of a religion. The spirituality taught, advocated, practiced by Jesus Christ is not religious. Christian life is spiritual and is a way of life and it will not come under the religious track.

UCI members are called to love the world and live for the blessings of the people in the world. Love people, pray for them, irrespective of any religion or beliefs or practices or philosophies one believe.

All religions are searching for God, truth or salvation or a peaceful life. Thus religious search can be philosophical, life style, ethical, sociological, communal, conceptual or a discipline in life. It can also be related to certain powers of gods or goddesses.

On the otherhand the spiritual life envisage by Jesus Christ is not a religious thing or just a conceptual idea. Spiritual experience has to be transferred through the living Lord Jesus Christ living in a person. So every person can individually experience a new life, in their life as a whole. The newness in life should be brought through Lord Jesus Christ. We believe there is only one living God and that

God is revealed to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Religious Conversion**

UCI do not believe, advocate, promote any kind of religious conversions. Ritualistic religious conversion or change of religion is sinful and discourageable in the sight of God and man. Religious conversions with force, threat, coercion and inducement are all contrary to the spirit of Christ and UCI. Conversion of the total personality of the people involving mind, intellect, emotion and will with divine intervention and personal relationship with the Loving Lord Jesus Christ is the only acceptable method of conversion by the UCI. Such conversion should be witnessed in public by the converted. Such conversions should be testified or supported by two witnesses who are in relation or known by the converted.

### **Not Religious**

According to Webster, religion is devotion, fidelity, conscientiousness, an awareness or conviction of the existence of a supreme being, which arouses reverence, love, gratitude, the will to obey and serve...

Christianity is certainly that... and more.

Christianity is more than a religion, because every religion has one basic characteristic. Its followers are trying to reach God, find God, please God through their own efforts. Religions reach up toward God. Christianity is God reaching down to man. Christianity claims that men have not found God, but *that God has found them*. To some this is a crushing blow. They prefer religious effort-dealing with God on their own terms. This puts them in control. They feel good about "being religious."

Christianity, however, is not religious striving.

To practice Christianity is to *respond* to what God has done for you. The Christian life is a relationship with God, not a religious treadmill. Many Christians, however, behave like they really don't believe this. With form, formalism, ritual, legalism, rules, systems and formulas they attempt to reduce Christianity to a religion—a system of some kind where works are really substituted for faith and trust, where law takes precedence over grace. We will not necessarily admit this. Instead of responding to God's love, we reach out for



it—and neatly keep God at arm's length while we do so.

But God will not stay at arm's length. When He comes into your life He demands all of it. Away with religious pretense and pontificating. Away with your religious game called “church” that you play so well every Sunday. God wants all of you – your heart, your soul, your body – as a living sacrifice to Him.

Is there a way to be a Christian without being religious? Is there some kind of surgical tool that will help us cut through the facade that leaves many of us feeling deep within that “Christianity is really \*being good’ and if I’m not good, I haven’t made the grade, and if I haven’t made the grade I’m left feeling frustrated, guilty, and really not very happy with myself or my faith.”

Yes, there is such a tool. It is a single book of the New Testament – Paul’s letter to the Romans. In 16 brief chapters the great apostle shows you that Christianity is far more than a religion. He tells you who you really are, why you are living, how to get the most out of life.



## **Appendix A**

### **The Church in the New Testament**

The church has a choice: to die as a result of its resistance to change or to die in order to live . — *Mike Regele*.

The church of the New Testament is essentially the same as the church in the Old, with some changes, of course. It is the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). It bears the same exalted titles given to Israel in the Old Testament (1 Peter 2:9f; cf. Exod. 19:6). The people of God are all one olive tree, a tree from which some branches (unbelieving Jews) have been broken off so that others (believing Gentiles) might be grafted in (Rom. 11:17-32). Promises given to Old Testament Israel are regularly applied to the church in the New Testament. Joel prophesied that God’s Spirit would one day be poured out on all people (2:28-32), a prophecy fulfilled by the new presence of the Spirit on the Christians on Pentecost (Acts 2:17-21). Amos prophesied that God would rebuild the tabernacle of David (9:1 If), and the Lord fulfills that prophecy by bringing Gentiles into the New Testament church (Acts 15:16-18).

Of course, there are also changes, because major events have taken place: the incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son. The Aaronic priesthood, the “one priesthood” of the Old Testament, gives way to the new priesthood of Jesus himself, a priesthood disconnected from the Old Covenant in the way that the story of Melchizedek in Genesis 14 is disconnected from its historical context (Heb. 4:14-5:9; and chapters 7-10). The earthly tabernacle and temple, the “central altar,” give way to the reality of which they are but shadowy images, the heavenly temple to which Christ brought his once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-28). Similarly do the feasts, the sacrifices, the distinctive garb, and

the dietary laws give way.

But what of unity? Did Jesus come to establish one church, as in the Old Testament, or many denominations? Does the Old Testament emphasis on church unity fall away with the coming of Christ? If that is the case, it is certainly very difficult to imagine why it should be so. Jesus' one sacrifice obviously eliminates the need for animal sacrifices, a central altar, a continuing human priesthood.<sup>7</sup> But why should it eliminate the need for unity among God's people, that beautiful unity about which the psalmist spoke so eloquently (Ps. 133)?

The need for unity is still there. The New Testament is as concerned about it as is the Old. Please consider the following:

1. *As in the Old Testament, the New Testament believer worships at a central altar.* Christ himself fulfills the central altar of the Old Testament, and there is only *one* Christ (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 1:13; 8:6; Eph. 4:4-6). Same for the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices. The church has a single location in one sense, though it is scattered throughout the earth—for it is seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3,20;2:6;6:12).<sup>8</sup>
2. *Jesus does come to build one church.* The word *church* is regularly used in the singular to refer to the whole New Testament people of God (Matt. 16:18; cf. Acts 2:47; 5:11; 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:32; 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Eph. 1:22; etc.).
3. *The New Testament church is a unity of a higher order than that of Old Testament Israel.* In the new order, the great schism between Jew and Gentile is broken down. Jesus died not only for the Jewish nation but (as God had spoken—ironically through the wicked priest-prophet Caiaphas) “also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one” (John 11:51f). At Pentecost, Jews from many nations are united in Christ's body; they participate with *one* “heart and mind” (Acts 4:32). Later, Samaritans (Acts 8) and Gentiles (Acts 10) are added, and the great wall comes down (Eph. 2:11-22; cf. Gal. 2:11-5:26).
4. *There are other ways in which scripture teaches church unity:*
  - (a) The New Testament images of the church: a temple, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the flock of the Good Shepherd,

the branches of the vine, the people (or family) of God—all stress unity in the above senses, but doubtless in many other ways as well.

- (b) There is one Spirit in which we have been baptized, who gives gifts to the church (1 Cor. 12).
  - (c) It is God's love in Christ that binds us together (John 13:34f; 1 Cor. 13; 1 John 4:7ff).
  - (d) There is one gospel (Acts 4:12).
  - (e) There is one revelation (1 Cor. 2:6-10).
5. *The New Testament uses the word church to designate not only the universal body of Christ* (as above). The word also refers to the Christians in a region (Acts 15:3), those in a city (e.g., Acts 11:22; 14:23; 18:22; Rom. 16:1), those worshiping together in a household fellowship (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philemon 2)—indicating unity among the Christians at various geographical levels.
  6. *The Lord gives his church a church government.* There are first the apostles and prophets (Matt. 16:18; John 20:21, 23; Eph. 2:19-22; 4:11), but also evangelists, pastors, and teachers (ibid.). Elsewhere there are references in other terms to church leaders: elders (bishops) and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; cf. Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2ff, 22f, 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim. 5:17). Obedience to such leaders is not an optional matter; it is God's command (1 Cor. 16:16; 1 Thess. 5:12f; Heb. 13:7, 17). We do not, therefore, have the option of choosing when we will or will not submit to the government of the church. This is Christ's church, Christ's church government. If we do not like it, we dare not set up our own government to rival his. Thus, Christ's intention was to unite all his people under his officers. One Lord, one church, one church government.
  7. *Denominations play no role in New Testament church government.* Look up *denomination* in a concordance—you won't find it there! More seriously, whether by *denomination* or by some other name, the New Testament says nothing at all about what we would today call denominations. Denominations, in the sense of groups of Christians who differ from other Christians by some

distinctives of doctrine, practice, ethnicity, or historical background, play *no* role in New Testament church government.<sup>9</sup> That is especially remarkable when we consider that there were many diversities in the early church that might have led its leaders to consider a “friendly” denominational division: great differences of ethnicity, languages, and so on. But the New Testament seems to make a particular point of stressing that such differences are *not* to be the basis of divisions in the church (Acts 10; 11; Gal. 2; 3:28; Col. 3:11).

8. *The New Testament rebukes the mentalities and practices that were later to produce denominational division in the church.* These mentalities and practices are:
  - (a) *autonomy*—picking and choosing which leaders in the church will have one’s respect (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1-23)
  - (b) *factionalism*—forming partisan groups in the church to advance the program (or supposed program) of one’s favorite leaders [same passages as (a)]
  - (c) *lust for power*—seeking to be boss (Matt. 20:20-28; Acts 8:9-24; 20:30; Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Peter 5:1-3, 3 John 9)
  - (d) *unwillingness to seek reconciliation*—(Matt. 5:23-26<sup>10</sup>; 18:15-20; Rom. 12:18; Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:1-4; 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:13; Heb. 12:14; James 3:17)
  - (e) *failure to maintain church discipline*—(Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5)
  - (f) *inattention to doctrinal and practical purity*—(1 Tim. 4; 6:11-21; 2 Tim. 1:13f; 2:14-4:5; Titus; etc.)
  - (g) *failure to help fellow believers in need*—(Matt. 25:31-46; 3 John<sup>11</sup>)
9. *When Scripture speaks of the church as the body of Christ, it contrasts the harmonious working together of the parts of the body with “schism” or “division.”* (See 1 Cor. 12:25, in the context of 1 Cor. 12 and Rom. 12.) The figure of the church as a temple points in the same direction (Eph. 2:21), as does that of the family (Eph. 4:6).
10. *Jesus prayed that the church would be one, as he and his Father are one* (John 17:20f). This is referring to “spiritual” unity

rather than “organizational” unity. Organizational matters are not the emphasis of this prayer. The emphasis is on the vital union of the believers, disciples with Christ in the Spirit. However, that union is not wholly invisible; it is visible in the conduct of Christians in their relationships to one another as well as to God himself. Therefore:

- (a) It is doubtful whether ancient readers would have naturally made, in such a context, the spiritual/organizational distinction that we today make so easily.<sup>12</sup>
- (b) The unity of which Jesus speaks clearly has a visible dimension, for it is something that even unbelievers can see, and which indeed drives them to faith (v. 21).
- (c) The spiritual and the organizational cannot in fact be sharply separated. Our lack of organizational unity is caused by, and in turn causes, the lack of fellowship, harmony, and cooperation that are certainly aspects of, or manifestations of, spiritual unity.
- (d) Since it is plain from other texts (above, #3-#6) that Jesus gave a particular government to the church, it is hard to imagine that this (and only this) form of oneness would be excluded from his prayer. Surely he was praying that the church be one in every way that he has established.
- (e) Some experts have argued that since Jesus’ prayers are always answered, this prayer must be a prayer for spiritual unity (which has, in some sense, always existed in the church) rather than organizational unity (which has not always existed). Do we really want to say that the Father did not answer Jesus’ prayer? I have no doubt that the prayer of Jesus will one day be fully answered, that God will unite the church in his own time and will unite it organizationally as well as in all other respects. That seems plain from many other passages. But we also know that God does not always immediately accomplish his will (and that of his Son). For some reason, God often accomplishes his purpose through a historical process that sometimes tries our patience. There is always at least the *beginning* of a fulfillment. Biblical theo-

logians speak of “the already and the not yet.” God has *begun* to unify his church (even organizationally!), but there is more unity to come in the future.

11. *Unity is given by divine sovereignty but requires the efforts of human beings.* God’s sovereignty in Scripture does not negate, but rather underlies, the efficacy of human efforts. The passages cited earlier make it plain that the establishment of unity is God’s work. Yet God himself in Scripture exhorts us solemnly to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) and to avoid attitudes (above) and actions detrimental to that unity. We are always to seek reconciliation with those whom we have offended or who have offended us (Matt. 5:21-26; 18:15-17). God’s sovereignty does not entail human passivity. Scripture’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty in restoring unity does not undermine human efforts in that direction; rather, it encourages them.

### **New Testament Church Government**

God gave to the church a government, that Christians were obligated to honor that government, and that denominations played no role in the government of the church. But perhaps we should go into some more detail about the form of government God gave to the church.

The form of church government is, of course, itself one of the debated matters that has led to denominational division. I shall not try here to resolve the long-running disputes within the church concerning government. I shall, however, summarize the major views on the subject and seek to ascertain the bearing of each on the question of denominationalism.

Congregationalists emphasize the autonomy of the local church body. They do not deny the value of gathering representatives of various churches to help each other in making hard decisions, but they deny the existence of any continuing institution that has perpetual sovereignty over the local church. In their view, all associations of churches are purely voluntary. In one sense, congregationalists are extreme denominationalists, for they regard each congrega-



tion as, in effect, a denomination unto itself. On the other hand, if Congregationalism is to function well, it is important that each congregation be in fellowship with all the others. When fellowship is broken, one congregation will be unable to associate with another congregation, even voluntarily, to do the Lord's work. Thus, Congregationalism is, at another level, anti-denominational. A Congregationalism that measures up to the standards implicit in the congregational reading of Scripture would put all the world's churches together in one "congregational association" or "baptist convention."

Episcopal government is even more anti-denominational in its basic thrust. Episcopalianism holds that the churches in each geographical region ought to be ruled (with some checks and balances) by a single bishop. But if this sort of government existed in the early church, the bishop ruled over all the churches in his area, not just those of a particular denomination; and that must still be the ideal for an episcopalian. This anti-denominational thrust will be even stronger for those episcopalians (mostly Roman Catholics and Anglo-Catholics) who believe that the bishops are the successors of the apostles and thus have an additional mandate to rule the churches in their region.

Most likely, the church was originally organized in a way analogous to the organization of Israel (Exod. 18:17-26), with leaders over tens, hundreds, thousands, and so on. The pattern applied also to Israel's religious life, organized according to families and synagogues, with the Sanhedrin as the highest court. The early Christians naturally adopted this model with little change. The "tens" would be the house churches: essentially single families with, perhaps, others worshipping with them. The "thousands" would be the city churches, the church of Jerusalem, the church of Philippi, and so on—whose leaders Paul addresses as a body in Philippians 1:1.

The highest level would be the whole church; and indeed at one point in Acts a body is convened that has power over the whole church to deal with a matter that could not be resolved at the local level (Acts 15). As such the government of the church is composed of various levels of courts, the broader ones dealing with issues that cannot be resolved by the narrower ones.

This presbyterian structure, like the congregationalist and epis-

copal alternatives, requires organizational church unity. For if the church is divided into denominations, then (a) there is no highest court by which controversies can be ultimately decided; there are, instead, rival courts; and (b) leaders will be available to help resolve problems only within their own denominations. Denomination I, will lack the gifts of the leaders in denomination II, and vice versa. That will be a great disadvantage for both denominations. The resources of each will be less than what God has promised to his people.

Biblical presbyterianism, then, requires the abolition of denominationalism. In a biblically presbyterian church, *all* the area Christians in good standing would vote to elect the elders and deacons. Those officers would rule *all* those Christians, not merely those of one denominational faction. And *all* the gifts God has given his people in the area would be available for the ministry. We can see that biblical presbyterianism is rather different from presbyterianism as it now exists—so different that the latter’s biblical warrant is questionable.

All three of the major views held by Christians regarding church government require for their best implementation the organizational unity of the church and the elimination of denominations.

## Appendix B

### Healing & Spiritual Warfare

#### Healing

The ‘prosperity gospel’ is often associated with the ministry of healing. Perhaps unfairly many refer to this as the “health and wealth” gospel. The premise is that God wants you to be rich and He wants you to be healed, if you are unwell.

We cannot think Paul would have gone into Corinth with fear and trembling as he did had the authority to promise that all sick people would be healed and all poor people in financial difficulty made rich if they would accept Jesus. No need to fear with a message like that! People would flock to receive such a Jesus. No stigma, no offense. They would line up to get their healing and assurance of prosperity.

But knowing the offense of the cross as he did, Paul none the less determined “to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). By this Paul meant that faith in Jesus means wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption are put to our credit (1 Cor. 1:30). We were declared righteous before God and saved from the wrath to come—that was Paul’s gospel, with not a word about healing. To find a people that would be interested in such a gospel required the anointing of the Spirit on His preaching.

Paul believed in healing. He was an instrument of the Holy Spirit and he was used to heal many times. But he did not claim the blood shed on the cross *guaranteed* that those who trust Jesus would be saved and also healed.

God has become very nice in recent times, according to some. Nice indeed. We are now told by some—often the same preachers who promise prosperity—that when Jesus died on the cross it was so

we might be healed of all diseases. If we are not healed, it is because of our lack of faith.

Jesus came to save us from our sins and to ensure that we will go to heaven, not hell, when we die. By His sacrifice we are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus and freed from the demands of the Mosaic Law. He died and rose again to bring us into intimacy with God the Father and to enable us to have communion with the Holy Spirit. This is Paul's gospel.

But it is hard to get people motivated to send in their money for this. Better results come when people are told "God wants you healed"—much more than a message like "God wants to save you from your sins." So Paul went into Corinth with fear and trembling because he knew this was not what people were interested in hearing. But he stuck to his guns and stayed with the preaching of the cross—"foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

Some of these preachers who offer health and prosperity over television. They quote verses in the Bible, yes. But they often astonishingly miss the main point of the gospel and never, ever, seem to get around to preaching the real reason Jesus died on the cross. You get the impression that the reason He died was so we could enjoy living on this planet in the here and now. Existentialist teaching—what's in it for me—has found its way into the Church, largely through television, and the gospel itself has passed behind a cloud. Whatever happened to the gospel?

When Isaiah prophesied that the death of Messiah meant we would be healed by His wounds (Isa. 53:5), he promised that the Son of God would heal people. And he did. Yes, Jesus of Nazareth did just that. The miracles were so vast "even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Not only that, we have the promise of Isaiah that foretold this. For when the demon-possessed or physically ill were brought to Jesus and they were delivered and healed, Matthew quotes Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Matt. 8:17; Isa. 53:4).

But this aspect of Jesus' ministry is about the only thing some church leaders wish to focus on. They choose the part of Jesus' life

and teachings that appeals to a generation interested in comfort in the here and now. It is a nice God who gives people who otherwise have little time for the true gospel what plays into their comfort zones.

J. I. Packer has referred to the Bible belt in America as being a thousand miles wide and one inch thick. That Bible belt would not be there at all had there not been at least two Great Awakenings: The first in New England in the eighteenth century and the second in the South in the early nineteenth century. Those revivals, which led to countless others all over the United States, were characterized by the preaching of the cross, the need to be ready to meet God because there is a heaven and a hell, and the changing of people's lives from promiscuous to godliness. The Bible belt today may be a shadow of what it once was, but that is partly because the preaching of today is almost a different gospel or, at the very least, a lopsided interest in the things of God for the wrong reasons.

Never forget that the apostle Paul had a "thorn in the flesh." We do not know what it was or whether it was physical or had to do with illness at all. But the fact remains that even he, God's sovereign and highly esteemed vessel, prayed three times (2 Cor. 12:8) for it to be removed! God merely replied, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul knew God was sovereign and could give or withhold mercy, and that He would be just in acting either way. And yet believe it or not, one prominent "health and wealth" television preacher actually said, "If the apostle Paul had had my faith he wouldn't have had his thorn in the flesh." Think about that.

We do not believe that the miraculous ended after the early Church gave us the Bible. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

God is sovereign in healing just as He is in salvation. It is not right to put sick people under a cloud of guilt because they have not been healed, which is what so many faith healers do today. The people who were healed were not the ones required to have sufficient faith—that was for the ones who did the praying. But this is not the emphasis with most healing ministries today. They put sick people under pressure to have more faith, and such weak people blame themselves for their sickness, which is both unfair and wrong.

The main reason Jesus died on the cross was to prepare us for heaven. All who trust His blood for salvation will be saved and guaranteed a home in heaven, but not all who trust Christ's blood are healed. Salvation was the primary purpose of Jesus' death, healing was subsidiary. But the kind of preachers describing here make the secondary reason for the cross the main reason. Why? Because it is not the real gospel, it is counterfeit. A nice God watches all this happen and such preachers never seem to feel a thing. There is no sense of shame and no apologies for making innocent, ill people feel guilty.

We need a restoration of the sovereignty of God in the Church today. Let God be God. He is able to heal, but He may not choose to heal. He is sovereign. Jesus himself walked right past the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful many times over the years and did not heal this man. It would seem Jesus saved him for Peter and John, who came along later and saw this man gloriously healed (Acts 3). The point is, Jesus Himself—who had all authority and power—walked past the man and left him unhealed. He mirrored the sovereignty of God in His ministry as does the Holy Spirit to this day. The preaching and teaching of the sovereignty of God, were it to emerge all over the Church, would encourage us to believe that:

- God is alive and real
- God has a will of His own which is to be respected
- We do not need to feel guilty when things do not happen as we would wish

The discovery of the sovereignty of God is a wonderful recipe for overcoming guilt. Perhaps God will revive the anointing of healing in great power once again. If He does, let us never forget that He who gives can also take away, and He is perfectly just either way.

## **Spiritual Warfare**

In recent years there has been considerable interest in the subject of spiritual warfare, the demonic, and deliverance. Some people who have devoted the whole of their ministries to this.

Spiritual warfare is serious, serious business. God never promotes us to the level of our incompetence. Accepting our limits is humbling but always crucial and yet perhaps never so important as in the

area of the demonic.

The devil is real, the demonic is real, demon possession is real, and the attack of evil forces is ever present. Said Peter, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). He is always prowling around waiting for an entry point in our lives by which he can turn things upside down, bring us to despair, and make us think there is no way out.

The devil will be most happy if you will take either of these two options: first, do not believe in him at all—deny his existence entirely (he would love that); or second, become preoccupied with the demonic and the occult and go to extremes on spiritual warfare—taking the devil on, so to speak. He loves that too.

By yourself, you are no match for the devil. Don’t ever take him on, don’t ever pick a fight with him, and don’t ever imagine yourself so strong that you can punch him in the nose and make him leave you alone. He will not only love it, but he will also divert you from the things that ought to preoccupy you and you will become virtually useless in the kingdom of God. That is the way it is.

Certain people have a low view of the sovereignty of God and a high view of their knowledge of the devil. Some seem to concentrate on the devil more than they believe in the pre-eminent power of God. Others sadly don’t seem to have much responsible fear of the devil. They deal with him as if he were a toy to play with.

There are a number of Scriptures that have governed me in this area. I pray the Holy Spirit will apply these to your life and ministry:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your *stand* against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to *stand* your ground, and after you have done everything, to *stand*. *Stand* firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place. (Eph. 6:10-14)

What is often forgotten in these verses that follow is the word “stand.” Four times in Ephesians 6:11-14 comes this word. Why? This discussion leads us to the first principle of spiritual warfare.

1. *Spiritual warfare is defensive.* You stand. You don’t jump. You don’t run. You don’t even walk. You certainly don’t want to slip and fall. And you don’t want to go backward after you have done everything to stand. Don’t try to make progress. Just stand. Because when the “day of evil” comes—and it will surely come—you make progress when you simply stand. Standing is progress when you are resisting the devil. Having told us that the devil is like a roaring lion, Peter said, “Resist him” (1 Pet. 5:9). James also said it, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7). You can resist him only when he attacks. Resisting someone means they have attacked you first. You don’t run around resisting what isn’t already attacking you. The very point of resistance is that it is defensive. That means being defensive as opposed to going on the offense.

2. *Don’t ever attack the devil.* You wait for him to attack. If he never attacks, wonderful! Be glad. Don’t lament. Consider that God is answering your prayer (if you pray it as you should), “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:13). The reason spiritual warfare is defensive is because you are not promised grace if you are on the attack but only if you follow the Word of God and resist the devil when he does attack. If you do the attacking, believe me, you will have a fight on your hands too big for you. You are no match for the devil.

To quote Jesus’ words, “When someone stronger [than the devil] attacks and overpowers him, he [Jesus] takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils” (Luke 11:22). This assumes you have been attacked first; then you have the promise of God’s presence and protection.

You must wait for the devil to attack before you attack. Some people are clever but not wise. Paul showed wisdom when he did not immediately turn to the slave girl who was tantalizing the disciples. She kept saying, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved” (Acts 16:17). This sounds good, doesn’t it? Yet the Puritan William Perkins used to say, “Don’t



believe the devil even when he tells the truth.”

She [this girl] kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!” At that moment the spirit left her. (Acts 16:18)

He waited many days. Too many don’t wait; they go on the attack at once and get in over their heads.

3. *Be sure you know the Lord Jesus.* As we saw in the Introduction, some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed and would say, “In the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” On one occasion,

The evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. (Acts 19:15-16)

This is what we mean by promoting yourself to the level of your incompetence. “As thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deut. 33:25 KJV). Be sure you are called by the Spirit to get involved in this kind of ministry.

4. *Don’t rebuke the devil directly.* You may say, “But Jesus did.” I say: you aren’t Jesus. I have watched sincere, good, and well-meaning people say to the devil, “I rebuke you” and keep on saying it. The devil isn’t too threatened by your words. And if you aren’t careful he will suddenly overwhelm you and leave you in shreds before you know what has happened. The most overlooked and neglected verse in the New Testament when it comes to spiritual warfare is in Jude 9: “Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, *did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation* against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” Think about that verse. Michael was presumably the highest ranking and most qualified angel in the heavenly realms to take on the devil and rebuke him and give him a piece of his mind. But no. He calmly said, “The Lord rebuke you.” I would plead for those involved in spiritual warfare to ponder this verse. God is bigger than the devil. This ought to go without saying, but I would encourage all who read

these lines to know that God is superior to the devil; He is sovereign and can with a little finger wipe him out before you can count to ten. And will do this one day. In the meantime remember that the devil goes only where God gives him permission. We learn this from Job. God took the initiative and let the devil have a go at Job, but God only let him go so far (Job 1:6-12). Whenever there is a presence of evil, whether it be an attack on you or your being near a demon-possessed person, do not panic. God let it happen. He did. The devil doesn't make a move without our Heavenly Father's permission. This is perhaps the main reason the teaching of the sovereignty of God is essential to balanced and effective spiritual warfare. Don't panic when you see evil. Lean on a sovereign God who can give you victory in an instant—if you follow the rules. The teaching of the sovereignty of God is to me most edifying and comforting. If harm has come from the abuse of this teaching, it has also come from incompetent people who take on more than they should when it comes to spiritual warfare.

## Appendix - C

### REDEEMING THE LAND

#### I. PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES

When man sinned as recorded in Genesis 3, serious trouble ensued. Many of us do not understand that man is lost. We lost our position in the creation order, our clothing of glory and honour, and ability to do things. In fact, the wisdom to name all things as and have them obey man is gone. The Bible teaches us in the book of Romans (Chapter 8) that everything has rebelled as a result of the fall. Things are no longer the same as God intended. Satan began to exercise some amount of authority over these things.

What preliminary principles must we bear in mind?

#### 1. Encompass all of creation by prayer.

Psalm 24 provides us with this principle: *“the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof the world and they that dwell therein”*.

There are four things mentioned here:-

● the earth, ● the fullness of the earth, ● the world, ● they that dwell therein

The earth is the planet itself; the fullness is everything in it. The world is what man has put inside the earth, for example business. They that dwell therein signifies people. These belong to the Lord. We must understand these four aspects. And in dealing with redeeming the land we must be able to influence and in some cases control them.

Why do we make such an assertion? The second verse of Psalm 24 states that God founded the earth upon the seas and established it upon the floods. Our activities, intercessions, and prayers must influence or change each of these four areas. Many times we only pray about the Church, our ministries, or about ourselves.

## **2. Value your own inheritance and do not envy other lands.**

In seeking to redeem our land, we must understand that we should not envy the lands of other people. When they came to Mt. Seri, they kept going around the place many days and God said I am not going to give you one foot of this land. God wants us not to envy the nations of other people. As intercessors we must be purged from the envy of America, Britain, Saudi Arabia and all those places we think have so much money (Deut: 2:9-13).

## **3. Study the land and obtain facts for prayer.**

We find this principle in chapters 13 and 14 of the book of Numbers. In chapter 13: 17-23 one of the important principles in redeeming the land is to study the land carefully. What are the resources in the land? What about the people? What are its features? What are the riches? What are the products of the land? All these are important. When you do not research the land, you probably do not know what God has put there and your prayers and activities are severely limited. Moses sent the people out to check. Let us move on to consider verses 26 to 29 of chapter 13.

These qualities should characterize each intercessor. We must have the spirit that agrees with God: the spirit of boldness and confidence, the spirit that pushes away the principles of the world. We must be consistent, consecrated, and diligent. As Caleb, we must follow the Lord fully. In other words, we must agree with the Holy Spirit all the time. Let God be true, let what God wants be done.

## **4. Avoid murmuring against or slandering the land.**

We find other principles in Numbers 14:36-37. There are certain people who make others murmur. They spread dissatisfaction. Such people seem to have a job to speak to incite others to murmur. In these verses the people began to slander the land. God does not want people to slander the land. God does not want us to slander our countries. We should also not join others to murmur against our countries. We must ensure that we do not commit this sin of despising the land. This is an important point we must note and obey.

We need to pray and to ask God to deliver us from slander against our land. We need to ask God to deliver us from fearing the people and from all kinds of murmurers. We should ask God to help

us see the goodness of the land he has given to us and to forgive us for the times when we have murmured against or despised the present land. We need to pray that we would follow God fully with the confidence Caleb and Joshua had in leading the Israelites to say “let us go and possess the land”.

## II. DEALING WITH THE GATES

In real life, gates provide protection. So we must understand that every city in the spiritual realm has gates. The enemy, in order to keep certain lands, cities, towns, villages, provinces under his control, has gates. And these gates are there to protect what is inside.

Another point we must understand about gates in spiritual matters is that a gate is the place where important decisions are made. In the book of Ruth (4:1), the gate of that particular city speaks of that place where the elders meet to do business. It is there that the powers of darkness make their decisions. It is there that covenants are made, it is there that sacrifices are made. Again in the scripture, the gates are where thrones of kings are placed during important occasions (1 Kings 22:10). It is there that they make preparations for war. When you are dealing with any particular city, town or province, you have to locate the spiritual gates in order to deal with them. Gates are built to keep certain people in and to keep others out. We must understand this in the spiritual and apply it.

In the New Testament also God dealt with gates. In the Book of Acts (12:10 ff; 16:25-26) we see that God has many ways of dealing with gates: to cut the bars, break the gates, break everything in sunder, or send an angel to open the gates. In this particular case, the praises of God helped open the gates of the prison, so God’s people could come out.

Gates may apply to a city, town, province, business, factory, and even a church. There are certain gates that must be dealt with. To get into a particular place, to see somebody, to get a job, to do an interview or to get a contract; in all these you have to get through the gates. You can go on and get to the place, but Satan’s spiritual forces watching over that gate seek to make sure you do not enter. They work to keep you out and to keep business from growing or getting

to you. So you have to deal with these gates. You have got to penetrate, to “blow up” that gate and walk through in victory.

Let us consider Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18: *“And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”*.

Here he made a violent statement. Many of us think that the Church ought to be harmless, soft and gentle, accommodating. Here Jesus said that the Church is an institution to do spiritual violence against, to assail and assault the gates of darkness so that we can loose the prisoners behind there. This is not just the literal hell. It talks about the whole power of darkness because the gates of hell refer to the fortifications that keep unbelievers from repentance. They also cause the resources of this world from being used to further the work of God.

The Church can do charitable work. It is good, part of the Church’s ministry of showing mercy, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners in prisons. But in addition, the primary aim of the Church, the first thing that Jesus ever said about the Church was that the Church is to be an instrument of spiritual violence to prevail against the gates of darkness. This is the foundation, the first reason for building the Church: “I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”.

### **Keys of the kingdom**

The keys that the Lord Jesus Christ obtained for us by his victory over the powers of darkness, death and the grave are the keys of the kingdom. Keys are necessary in everyday use to open doors, locks, gates, safes and prisons.

Keys also symbolize authority. In cities that have mayors, it is usual for such officials as part of their ceremonial attire to have a key suspended from a gold chain around the necks as a symbol of their authority. Also when a man is honored as a freeman or citizen of a city, he is presented with a key to the city.

In the Book of Revelation (1:18) the Lord Jesus Christ said: “*I am that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death*”.

The keys of hell and of death symbolize the power and authority over the gates of hell and the gate of death. This confirms what is written in two scriptures: (*Colossians 2:15*), (*Hebrews 2:14-15*), (*Revelation 3:7*).

### III. ENTERING INTO THE HOLY PLACE

In redeeming the land as intercessors we should be able to enter into the holiest, into the very presence of God during preparation. There are certain secrets that the Bible has revealed to help us. Hebrews 10:19-22 deals with the provisions that God himself has made for intercessors, in fact for every believer.

#### 1. Boldness

God has already provided us with boldness. The Bible teaches that we should have it and that we should manifest it. Every believer ought to be bold. We see from Hebrews 4:14-16 that we must come to God with humility and also with boldness. Whenever we intercede we ought to be bold. Remember also that in warfare, even in normal military warfare, you cannot progress with fear. You boldly attack the enemy, hoping to win, hoping to knock him out. We must have boldness because we have Jesus as our high priest. If we are ever going to face the giants, if we are going to deal with the gates, if we are going to deal with battles, we must come with boldness; this is of utmost importance.

#### 2. The Blood of Jesus

This is the second provision, “having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the *blood of Jesus*”. There is so much in the New Testament about the blood of Jesus. It is by the blood of Jesus that we are washed from our sins. It is by the blood of Jesus that we have justification (Romans 5:1). It is by the blood of Jesus that we have forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7). It is by the blood of Jesus that we are sanctified. It is this blood that gives us victory. The blood of Jesus has atoned for us. In fact, it is the blood of Jesus that purges our consciences from dead works so that we can

serve the living God. It is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sins. We read in Hebrews Chapter 9, that God has given us eternal redemption by his blood. The foregoing means that whenever we intercede or pray, we must ask for the ministry of the blood of Jesus to operate on our behalf.

### **3. A new living way**

This is the third provision we see in Hebrews 10:20, *“By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh”*. This is a little mysterious but can be explained very quickly. In the Old Testament, to get into the presence of God the High Priest had to come from the outside into the outer court. Then he would go through that door into the holy place. There was yet another door into the holiest of all. So to go into the presence of God you had to go through the way God had established in the tabernacle and in the temple.

### **4. A high priest**

The fourth provision is found in Hebrews 10:21. *“And having an high priest over the House of God”*. It is important that we should understand that God had provided a high priest. Let us look at some of the qualifications of the high priest that God has for us. We start with Hebrews Chapter 4. Verse 14 says *“Seeing then we have a great high priest.... “He is great.*

His ability is such that He can save to the uttermost, to the last degree, to remove every spot, blemish, wrinkle, or weakness. Jesus is able to deal with all of these to save us to the last degree. Notice verse 25 says *“seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them”*. He is an interceding high priest. Verse 26 states other qualifications:

u Holy u Harmless u undefiled u Separate from sinners u Made higher than the heavens

God knows our problems so he gave us a high priest with the ability to meet our needs.

### **5. Intercession**

Intercession is joining the prayer meeting that is already going on in heaven, because Jesus is already interceding. So when we intercede we just let him take us with him. We are able to come into the presence of God because of the provision of this high priest. He has



prayed and interceded for us and is still interceding for us. What is more, he helps us to intercede. He is our Saviour. So we can, because of God's provision go to him and say, "Lord Jesus, you are our high priest. You know about holiness, you know everything, may I please join your prayer meeting"?

When we want to pray, we need to spend time first, taking hold of the things God has provided for us. Let us ask the Lord for boldness. Let us say: "Lord, I want to come by the new and living way. Let us receive and appropriate the ministry of the blood of Jesus. Let us make sure that we avail ourselves of the power, authority and ministry of our high priest, the Lord Jesus. Then we can really begin to pray.

There are five requirements we have to bring when we enter into intercession. Hebrews 10:22,23 states these clearly.

- a. ***"Let us draw near with a true heart"*** (Jere: 17; Pro: 4:23)
- b. ***Full assurance of faith.*** (Habak 2:4, Rom 1:17, Gala 3:11, Heb 10:38). 24 of 2 Cori (Heb 1 1:6).
- c. ***Good conscience.*** (Heb 10:22; Tim 1:18-19; Heb 9:13-14)
- d. ***Clean body*** (Heb 10:22)
- e. ***Keeping faith alive*** (Heb 10:23.)

#### IV. PROPHETIC PRAYING

Prophetic praying is prayer that originates in the mind of God. It is prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit and which always proves decisive in spiritual warfare. This prayer more often finds expression through quickening of certain scriptures to our spirit. We are then led to apply those scriptures in an appropriate way relative to the subject of the prayer.

##### Principles

1. *Prophetic praying is most available for people whose prayer lives are healthy.* You see, if you have not prayed for one week or maybe you pray once in three days, it will be difficult for you to really flow in the area of Prophetic praying. It really manifests in the lives of those whose prayer lives are healthy, people who are constantly in prayer.

2. *Prophetic praying is not possible unless you are filled with*

*the word of God.* It is out of the fullness of the knowledge of the word of God that Prophetic praying actually flows without hindrance.

3. *Prophetic praying is controlled by the Holy Spirit.* The mind of a man is not very helpful in Prophetic praying. You can keep praying but the Holy Spirit usually is responsible when it comes to Prophetic praying. Therefore Prophetic prayer only really works in the lives of the people who are baptized in the Holy Spirit. If a person is not baptized in the Holy Spirit Prophetic praying may be difficult. I am not saying it is impossible, because all things are possible with God and when a person is born again, he is born again by the Holy Spirit. But Prophetic praying is easier for people who are baptized in the Holy Spirit.

4. *Prophetic prayer is necessary and very useful in the economy of God.* God has a plan, and in working out plan, there are methods, strategies and timings in working it out, whether in a person's life or in a family, in a fellowship, in a church, or in the nation. All of these form part of the economy of God, and Prophetic praying is usually manifested to demonstrate the power of God.

5. *Prophetic praying is necessary in the kingdom of God.* The Church is the instrument God uses to achieve his purposes. The Kingdom of God is bigger than the Church. Prophetic praying is necessary for carrying out the purposes of the Kingdom of God.

Prophetic praying is the combination of the Word of the Lord and the voice of the Lord. It does not come from the mind or the head. It comes from the Holy Spirit. It comes from the Word of God. It comes from Communion with the Lord and it flows to achieve the purposes of God. Prophetic praying is given to us by the Holy Spirit to do certain things in the economy of God.

That's the power of the voice of the Lord [Calm the storms, fig tree, Lazarus (Jn. 11)] and this is what happens in Prophetic praying. You speak a word and it travels, deals with men, goes distances, takes hold of the situation and achieves the purposes God directs. Prophetic praying can bring a dead situation back to life. It can reverse hopeless situations, things that people have written off. It can re-create a backslidden Christian. It can bring a dead marriage to life.

## **Fear no one**

This is what Jeremiah the prophet learned when God called him: *“Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 1: 1-10).*

It is important for us to know what the Scripture means. Jeremiah was called to speak as a prophet to the nation of Israel and what God taught him applies also to Prophetic praying.

## **Speak God’s word**

In verse 9 of Jeremiah chapter 1, he says,

*“Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth”.*

It is the mouth that is used in Prophetic praying and it is very important, because it is from the mouth that you release the most important and most volatile level of God’s power. Laying on of hands can impart spiritual gifts and healing. But when it comes to the ultimate in God’s power, it is the mouth.

Prophetic praying can be used to take hold of things that eyes perhaps cannot see, and bring them back. Nobody believed that the Jews would ever return to Israel. Today the nation of Israel is there. There is nothing anybody can do about it.

Prophetic praying is very powerful. It can change laws. It can cancel what politicians have said. It can change decisions, and this is what we need to understand. It has the ability to build, to plant, to destroy, to throw down, to pull down, to root out. It does not matter how strong the obstacle is.

*Prophetic praying transfers blessings that are already stored to the future.*

*Prophetic praying commits people to doing the will of God and opens the doors of God’s purposes so that people can enter.*

When you look at the position of things in your nation, remember that the Bible says that God speaks of those things which are not as though they were very strong distinction here between Prophetic praying and positive confession. The latter is in its own class and the people who know about it can handle it. But here I am dealing with

Prophetic praying. It is important, it is very vital, for people whose economies need to be built up, people who want to marry and make good wives, good husbands, people who want to be useful in the will of God, people who want to achieve purposes of God for their lives and for their families, such people must be praying prophetically all the time.

## V. SINS THAT TOUCH THE LAND

It is very important that we understand the nature of these sins, how God looks at them and how to deal with them in intercession so that when we pray to redeem the land, we would see more of the power of God at work.

Now when you look at that kind of scripture, it immediately let you know that the sins we have just been reading about touched on the land. Not only did they affect the people, the sins also affected the land. Again certain people may have lived in a particular place a hundred or even two hundred years ago but if they committed these kinds of sins, such sins would still affect the land, although the people responsible died long ago. And since people are sustained by the land and people prosper in the land, if these sins are left untreated or untouched, the effect on the land continues. When it comes to redeeming the land, we must pay attention to these sins that we see from the Scriptures which touch on the land.

Now let's look at them briefly again. The Bible says here:

u They served their idols; u They sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils; u They shed innocent blood.

All these sins polluted the land. Now we all know what it is to serve idols. But I want to point out a few things. In serving idols, people use the blessings that God has given, the things which God has provided and give them to idols: livestock or chicken or certain things are given to idols. Their belongings are dedicated to idols; agricultural produce is dedicated to idols. God allows things to grow and food to multiply, yet at the end of each farming season some of the produce is given to idols. That is what the Bible calls "serving their idols".

When it comes to sacrificing sons and daughters unto devils,

you would notice that in some parts of the world you will find that in order to start certain enterprises, people are sacrificed. In some parts of Africa and Asia, if people want to start a market or a commercial venture, they usually sacrifice people on the spot. They may sacrifice or bury somebody alive in order to appease the god of the land so that whatever they do would prosper.

In redeeming the land we need to pay attention to these things because the Bible says that these sins defile the people and touch upon the land. The land is polluted with innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters. Abortion falls under this particular category. People, because of their carelessness or lust, conceive and call such babies “unwanted babies”. If you do not want a baby, then do not start the process of getting a baby at all. It is like putting corn in the ground and saying, “I did not want it to grow”. You cannot do that.

When intercessors come into the priestly ministry, that is to say, we speak to God concerning these matters, they need to understand that such things have to be confessed. Let us not make the mistake others make, that when we confess these things people would think that we are the worst people in the world. If pride keeps us from confessing our national sins, the effect will continue to stay with us. The Bible says, If we confess and forsake our sins we shall have mercy. But the Bible also says that he that covered his sins shall not prosper. If the intercessors for a country cover their sins, many blessings would elude that nation. This is why we need to pay attention to the sins that touch upon the land.

It is clear that the blood of Jesus Christ does not only minister to people. Jesus also shed that blood to reconcile to God all things seen and unseen, including the land and the people. This should give us confidence and the authority to apply the blood of Jesus when we are praying to redeem the land. What this means is that we need to understand that there is a deeper and stronger application of the blood of Jesus Christ, because he is the creator of all things. All things were made by him, and all things exist by him. He is before all things and he is pre-eminent. When we pray let us remember that the blood of Jesus was not only shed for the redemption of man but also to recon-

cile all things unto himself.

In Revelation 5:5-8 Jesus, the Lamb receiving a book sealed with seven seals from '*him that sat on the throne*'. That book was the title deed of ownership of the whole earth. He purchased and redeemed it by his blood and with his life. And on that basis we can use the principle of our being joint-heirs with him to redeem the land out of the hold of evil powers.

## **VI. PRAYER TO SUBDUE THE LAND**

In order to gain proper understanding of this topic, it would be helpful to study Psalm 144. We must first understand that the land is in a state of rebellion against God. We should also acknowledge the fact that it is only in the Millennium, when the Lord Jesus Christ himself will be ruling on earth, that we will see the full and total subjection of the land. What we can do or hope to achieve at this time before the Lord Jesus comes is to manifest the power and authority of God as well as the authority that we have received from him as saints and as intercessors. It is with this understanding that we approach the study of Psalm 144.

When we call God into the ministry to be our high tower, not only does he protect us, but the Spirit of God gives us clear understanding to enable us target the enemy accurately in prayer. We then begin to ask the Lord to subdue the people under us. Only he can do this.

In intercession to subdue the land we need to have a proper understanding of how God views man. As believers we occasionally make the mistake of considering man as very high. We consider rich men as powerful and military people invincible. When we have such a mentality we find that when we pray, we have a bit of fear and wonder whether the power of God can touch such people. But when we look at these scriptures we can get the proper mentality necessary to deal with man. The Bible says that man is just like a shadow. The Bible also says that man is like a vapor. Let us not look at any person as so high, too tough, too difficult, too important, too powerful, or too rich to be subdued by the power of God. Let us understand that as intercessors, as people who have been set over nations and over

kingdoms, we have, spiritually speaking, the power to subdue any man.

### **Dealing with strange children**

In Psalm 144:7, we enter into prayer proper;

*“Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children”.*

God’s hand has different functions. It can be a hand of love, or a hand of power. Here it is the hand of war. Let us take note of two other expressions here. The first one is “great waters”, the second is “strange children”. In dealing with subjugation of the land, we need to take note of the fact that we are to deal with “great waters” and “strange children”. It is not possible to give all the meanings of “great waters”. But we could classify all natural flooding as great waters. When God deal with people as in the days of Noah or maybe some marine or mermaid spirits are causing wickedness, then you get this kind of flooding.

How does the Bible describe these “strange children”. They are those “whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood” (verse 8). These are usually dissidents, liars, anarchists, trouble makers, people who disturb the peace of society. In verse 11, we read again “Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood”.

We need to understand that these strange children are enemies of society. They are enemies of the Kingdom of God and their activities in the land need to be stopped. We can witness to them, which is good. We can invite them to church and preach to them but in intercession, we need to deal with the things they do which create problems in the society.

Again strange children could be insurgents, or ideological demagogues. There are people whose speeches, can cause rebellion. They can sweep people off their feet. There was such a person in the Book of Acts. Demetrius, a silversmith. After the Apostle Paul had finished ministering in Ephesus (Act 19:21-27), Demetrius gathered all the silversmiths and he said “Great is Diana of Ephesus”, by the time he had finished his speech the whole city, the Bible says, was in

an uproar. People began to throw sand up in the air. Those in front did not know what those behind were saying but everybody was causing trouble and they wanted to strangle Paul. Such people the Bible calls “strange children”.

Strange children also include pimps, music and movie stars whose lyrics and lifestyles loosen and damage public morals and move people away from righteousness. They may be innovators of lustful fashion design. They may include newspapers, magazines, radio and TV personalities whose columns, comments, and contributions very skillfully indoctrinate and disorder. They are the various kinds of *mafia*: drug, crime, prostitution, smuggling and assassination gangs. (Pro: 4:16-17)

Let us consider one more scripture. Psalm 47:4 says, “He shall choose our inheritance for us, the Excellency of Jacob whom he loved”. We will briefly analyze the expression: *He shall choose our inheritance for us*.

This is an extended process, not something we do once and forget. We need to ask God to choose his inheritance for us in each area of national life. What is the mind of God, for instance, when it comes to the standards for marriage, agricultural production, law for workers, law for industries, for manufactures, leading rates, interest rates, the practice of the ethics of the press and that of the legal profession? The Bible does not discuss some of these issues in detail, but we can ask the Lord to choose our inheritance for us as they affect each situation.

After we have subdued the land we must not leave a vacuum. We need to ask the Lord to choose our inheritance for us. What standards must be maintained in the press, in television production, industry and fashion? Here we must not trust our own minds because we may bring ourselves and other people into bondage. The thing to do is to ask the Lord. This is when we need the ministry of the prophet. Intercessors need to pray for the Lord to begin to help us to know exactly what to do. And we should be prepared to obey God’s direction.

## VII. PRAYER IN TIMES OF NATIONAL CRISIS

The past few years have seen country after country in one form



of crisis or other. In order to remedy the situation, intercessors have a role to play because God is the God of order, the only one who has everything under his control. When the Lord Jesus was in the boat during the storm (Mark 4:35-41), a crisis situation arose and the disciples plunged into despair. In fact they accused Jesus of doing nothing and not caring whether they were going to die or not. But the Lord Jesus stood up and rebuked that storm, and there was calm. The Bible says God made the heavens when the earth was without form and void. The Spirit of God “moved upon the waters”, and began to change the situation (Genesis 1). We need to understand that only God can adequately deal with any crisis. When our nations face crisis there are Biblical principles to deal with such situations.

### **VIII. DEALING WITH ALTARS AND COVENANTS OF THE LAND**

Land is very important in human existence. The *terra firma* is where we live and work and from it we extract resources.

Spiritually land is of the utmost importance. Jesus Christ came to reconcile all things (including the land) to himself (Colossians 1:16-20). When man sinned the whole of creation suffered. (Psalm 106:34-40).

#### **Satan’s strategy**

Satan has a habit of copying what he knows to be a divine principles, perverting and trying to use it for his own advantage. A careful look at various nations of the world will show that the old dragon has deceived the people to convey the land to him by using evil spirits to make people build altars, offer sacrifices, pour libations on the land thereby giving him authority over the land.

In many countries in Asia and Africa we find that the tribal heads and elders have groves and mountains which have been dedicated to certain spirits. Shrines are built in family compounds, homesteads, or villages, communities, markets and even for whole clans. Certain forests are even designated for specific spirits. When people break the ground to lay foundations for buildings they put in tokens as offering and sacrifices to the gods. They bury tortoises, coins and pour animal blood into the ground. All of these draw down spirits and install terri-

torial spirits over the land or geographical area.

In many communities where certain animals are venerated because they are thought to represent the gods these animals have free access into people's houses and in the case of fish they are not caught or killed. In many cases before bridges are built over rivers or roads constructed over certain pieces of land blood sacrifices are offered.

The whole of the land area or river is therefore held under the control of these spirits. When we realize the full implications of these acts it would then become clear that there is a need to redeem the land from under the control of these spirits or powers.

Furthermore we can also discern that some of the characteristics of people in certain communities can be due to these territorial spirits. People may generally be immoral, prone to drunkenness, or given to other vices because of these powers. Certain nations tend to export prostitutes more than others and certain kinds of perversions tend to be rampant in certain areas due to these spirits. Accidents have been known to happen regularly in some areas because of the activities of spirits. A clear understanding of these things can come through discerning of spirits and intercession.

### **Overcoming Satan's strategy**

To break the power of these spirits and redeem the land it is necessary to investigate the spiritual history of the land by prayer, fasting and by asking questions in a discreet manner.

Another step is to confess the sin of idolatry, blood guiltiness and devotion to idols by intercessors and to repent before God for these things which had been done on the land.

The next step is to break the covenants made between the people and the powers of darkness and to renounce them. The basis of these covenants and devotion must be discredited before God in line with Psalm 24:1 and Colossians 1:16-20.

The final step is to pray prophetically on the spot or in the area to reclaim it and to break the power and hold of spirits of darkness over the land.

It is necessary to exercise superior legal and spiritual authority over the rights conferred on the powers of darkness. We have solid grounds in Revelation 5. Verses six and seven read:

*“And I behold, and, lo, in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right chief of him that sat upon the throne”.*

This little book sealed with seven seals is the title-deed for the whole earth. That is why there was so much praise by the whole company of heaven after the weeping in verse five.

After waiting on the Lord for the strategy to reclaim any piece of land or territory from the defilement and influence of territorial spirits the proclamation of that scripture, the whole of Revelation 5 in faith, over the land can have a redemptive effect. It must be stressed that the warfare involved here requires careful preparation, unity amongst participating believers and a conscious and clear following of the Holy Spirit’s directions.

As this is done it is essential to deprogramme anything Satan has planned concerning the land in his archives and in the heavenliest by strong biblical prayer. Whatever curses, pollutions and defilements that may have come upon the land need to be cleansed by the pleading of the blood of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:20). The land needs to be blessed and the presence of God invited upon the land.

This is the responsibility of the intercessor.

*(Redeeming the Land — Emeka Nwankpa).*

## **Appendix D**

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF DENOMINATIONALISM**

#### **Where Did Denominations Come From?**

In the New Testament period there was one, true church. Sharply contrasting with that is our situation today, in which the church is divided into many denominations. What has happened—and why?

The New Testament rebukes attitudes and actions leading to division: unwillingness to submit to authority, autonomy, factionalism, lust for power, rejection of reconciliation, failures of church discipline and of doctrinal and practical purity. The New Testament writers emphasize that there should be no “schism” in the body. Since they issued such rebukes, there were evidently those in the church who deserved and needed them. That is to say, even in the first century, the essential sources of denominationalism were present.

Beyond this, there were also people who left the one, true church. Some left involuntarily, as the result of proper discipline (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:5-11). Others (whom John calls “antichrists”) left at their own initiative (1 John 2:18f; 4:3-6). Still others fell away from their initial profession of faith, the texts being inexplicit as to whether these left the church voluntarily or under discipline (Heb. 6:4-6, 10:26-31). Did any of these, perhaps, form sects of their own, claiming to be the true disciples of Christ? We simply don’t know; there is no evidence either way.

#### **A Brief History of Denominationalism**

In the early centuries following the New Testament period, heresy and schism were more or less synonymous.<sup>1</sup> Heretics, teachers of false doctrine, were church-dividers, schismatics. They sought to attract followers to themselves, either by forming factions in the existing church or by drawing people to leave the church and follow them.

The heretic Marcion (approx. A.D. 80-160), who rejected the Old Testament and much of the New, set up many churches dedicated to his philosophy. In the late second century, Montanus, who claimed (but failed to convince the church as a whole) that he brought new revelation from God, attracted many churches to his teaching.

In the mid-third century, however, an event occurred that led to a distinction between heresy and schism. During the Decian persecution, many believers renounced the faith. Afterward, Novatian, a learned priest and theologian, opposed any readmission of these people into the church. The church, however, held that reconciliation could be granted upon repentance. A Roman synod excommunicated Novatian, who then set up his own church, which lasted to the eighth century.<sup>2</sup> The status of the Novatianist church was a matter of some discussion in those days. Those in the Catholic church agreed that schism—departure from the one, true church and establishing a rival church—was a serious sin. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, went so far as to deny the validity of Novatianist baptisms, but his principle was not upheld by the church in later years.

Novatian was not considered a heretic, though he did hold a view with which the church did not concur. In general, he was recognized as orthodox in theology, indeed a very competent exponent of Christian truth. He was therefore an “orthodox schismatic.” “Heresy” and “schism” were no longer virtually synonymous. Heresy was considered a sin against truth, schism a sin against unity and love.

Persecution, in A.D. 303, gave rise to another schism. As in the earlier case, certain people believed that those who denied the faith under persecution were being treated too leniently by the church. Led by Donatus, these people formed a schismatic denomination that claimed to be, in fact, the one, true church. They rebaptized those who came from the Roman Catholic church. The Donatist church existed until around 700. In the original church, this group, like the Novatianist group, was considered generally orthodox though schismatic.

Another schism developed in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon (451), which declared Christ to be one person in two natures, fully God and fully man. The council’s statement was unacceptable to the

Egyptian and Syrian churches, and eventually fellowship was broken. That division continues to exist today.

The Eastern Orthodox Churches, under the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Roman Catholic Church, under the Pope of Rome, broke fellowship in 1054 over the claims of papal authority and the Western insertion into the Nicene Creed the statement maintaining that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father *and the Son* (Latin, *filioque*.) Patriarch and Pope excommunicated one another. That division also continues to the present.

The excommunication of Martin Luther (1521) began a proliferation of divisions: Protestant from Roman Catholic, Protestant from Protestant, sectarian from sectarian. Bucer, Melancthon Oecolampadius, and Calvin sought unity among the Reformation churches, but without success.

Additional denominations came into existence when the denominations from which they came were thought in some measure to be compromising the true doctrine. Hence the many Reformed denominations of the Netherlands, the many Presbyterian churches of Scotland, the many Baptist denominations of the United States. Still others appeared when people carried their distinctive traditions from one country to another. Often these immigrants wanted to worship with others of the same language and nationality. Thus, in the United States there is an Evangelical Covenant Church (Swedish), an Evangelical Free Church (Norwegian, Danish), a Christian Reformed Church (Dutch), a Russian Orthodox Church, a Korean-American Presbyterian Church, a Church of God in Christ (African-American), a German Reformed Church (the Reformed Church in the United States).

### **Evaluating the Divisions**

How shall we evaluate this complex chain of events? It is not an easy matter. Some evaluations, to be sure, are fairly simple. We do not hesitate to join the ancient church in condemning the schisms of Marcion and Montanus. These men certainly were heretics, and they had no justification whatever for forming their own “churches.” On both counts they violated scriptural principles. Same for Novatian

and Donatus, though these were relatively much more orthodox than Marcion and Montanus. The church was right to reject the “rigorist” position of these men. Novatian and Donatus should have remained in the church, conforming their views to Scripture and/or accepting the church’s discipline for their errors.

The post-Chalcedonian schism, however, is a more difficult issue. We do believe that the Council of Chalcedon was expressing an important biblical truth. At the same time, its operative language was philosophical rather than scriptural. Although philosophical language is not necessarily a wrong means of expressing theological truth, it tends to raise as many questions as it answers. The council said that Jesus is “one person in two natures”—but what, precisely, is a “person”? What is a “nature”? How should we interpret the “one person” so as not to compromise the “two natures,” and vice versa? The answers are not obvious. Lutherans and Calvinists later accused one another of different sorts of failure to do justice to Chalcedon, and that debate continues to the present, with intelligent, learned and godly thinkers on both sides. Is this issue really designed by God to be a test of orthodoxy?

The Egyptians who rejected Chalcedon (speaking with their Bishop Cyril of the “one nature of the incarnate word”) were called mono-physites (the root of the word means “one nature”). But the Egyptians also rejected the extreme monophysite position of Eutyches, which the council had particularly sought to exclude; so their position actually agreed with the council in what may be the most significant respect. Yet they could not accept the formula required by the council. It is not inconceivable that the Egyptians and Syrians were seeking to preserve by the “one nature” formula concerns that the majority expressed by the “one person” formula. If so, the differences between the two would be merely differences over choice of words.

In retrospect, too, it is evident that there was a lot of sheer power politics going on in the developments leading to Chalcedon. Personal loyalties played a considerable role in the theological/terminological decisions that were made.

The schism was certainly an evil. But who was to blame? Those

on both sides who mixed up theology with partisan loyalty? The Egyptians, for their unwillingness to accept the verdict of the whole church, even though their own convictions were perhaps not substantially different? The Council of Chalcedon, for imposing on the people's consciences a difficult philosophical and highly debatable formulation capable of various interpretations and uses? Perhaps there is plenty of blame to go around.

### Dealing with Our Attitudes

At the root of the whole problem of church division lies our own cussedness, our sinful attitudes. We saw earlier that denominationalism encourages such frames of mind, but of course it is a chicken-and-egg situation. Wrong attitudes cause division, and they are also fed by it.

Embracing all other sinful attitudes is *lack of love*, love for God and for one another (Matt. 22:37-40). Our lack of love for God keeps us from hearing his Word and from being willing to make radical changes in our values and practices. We would rather keep the fleeting benefits of denominationalism than claim by faith the far greater blessings that come from doing things God's way.

### The Symptoms

Our lack of love for one another, which derives from lovelessness toward God, manifests itself in a number of ways:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Pride, boastfulness, arrogance* (Ps. 10:2; 59:12; 73:6; Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10; 14:3; 16:18; 29:23; Isa. 23:9; 25:11; Jer. 48:29; 49:16; Mark 7:22; 1 Tim. 3:6; 6:4; 1 John 2:6). We tend to look on what God has done in our denominational fellowships as if it were our own achievement and the unique property of our own group. Somehow these accomplishments seem to reflect better on ourselves when there are fewer people to share them with. Conversely, just as it is difficult to admit our own errors and faults, it is very difficult for us to admit such errors and faults in our denominations.

2. *Contentiousness, discord, strife* (Prov. 13:10a; 18:6; 19:13; 21:19; 22:10; 27:15; Hab. 1:3; Rom. 2:8; 1 Cor. 1:11; 11:16; Phil. 1:15-17; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:9f). "Pride only breeds quarrels," says



the first passage in Proverbs from our group of references. Because we want glory for ourselves, we seek to find fault in others. Contentious people are constantly looking for something to argue about, some way to start controversy and disrupt the peace.

Contentiousness can be difficult to identify, for one man's contentiousness is another man's "zeal for the truth." Zeal for the truth is certainly a virtue. But one's energetic efforts deserve that title only when they are grounded in a realistic biblical understanding of what the truth really is, including Scripture's teachings about unity and about priorities. A constant insistence that we achieve perfection in some one area of church life before doing anything else is not a proper zeal for the truth; rather, it is contentiousness. Dwelling on the faults of other denominations out of proportion to their importance is contentiousness.

Contentious people believe the worst about others, frequently taking the statements of others in the worst possible sense, rather than giving others the benefit of the doubt ("innocent until proven guilty"). Surely that has had much to do with the animosities underlying the church's divisions.

Contentiousness is related to oversensitivity; when someone says an even slightly critical word about a contentious person, the latter will rush to defend himself. He cannot abide the idea of being wrong or of being thought wrong by others. Yet there is little consideration for the feelings of those whom he wishes to criticize. Although he considers himself free to interpret their words and deeds in the worst possible sense, others are supposed to make all sorts of allowances and excuses for his excesses. Of such people it is often said, "He can dish it out, but he can't take it." Such a person will often have a double standard when evaluating denominations: one standard for his own, another for the others. He will tend to defend his denomination as he defends himself—while, without justification, finding all sorts of fault with those outside.

It can be difficult to identify contentiousness in others, at least to identify it well enough to make them accountable to formal discipline. Christians can usually recognize it in themselves if they call on the indwelling Spirit to open their eyes. The trouble is that our

pride often keeps us from even considering that we might be guilty of such a seriously sinful attitude. Let us hear what the above Scriptures have to say to us, as well as the following, which urge positively a gentle and peaceful attitude: 2 Samuel 20:19; Zechariah 8:19; Matthew 5:9; Galatians 6:1; James 3:17; 5:19; 1 Peter 3:11.

3. *Envy, jealousy* (Exod. 20:17; Prov. 23:17; 27:4; Matt. 27:18; Acts 13:45; 17:5; Rom. 1:29; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4). Envy is not just a desire to take unjustly what belongs to others, but it is also what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*, or hatred of others for their accomplishments and success. It is the reverse side of pride. We wish to glorify ourselves, so we hate those achievements that allow others to glorify themselves, perhaps at our expense. Thus, churches that are strong in teaching but weak in evangelism will often feel constrained to find some fault in those to whom God has given some evangelistic success. The reverse is also true, though in my experience to a lesser degree.

4. *Harshness*, the opposite of gentleness (Isa. 40:11; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess. 2:7; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 3:2; James 3:17; 1 Peter 2:18). Harshness exaggerates the faults and errors of others, both as to the degree of evil and as to the measures we should take against it.

5. *Xenophobia, snobbery*, rather than welcoming hospitality to other Christians (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; 1 Peter 4:9). Frankly, we all have a great desire to stay with what is familiar, with our own people, our own ways of doing things. We don't want to have to deal with other ethnic or socioeconomic groups in the fellowship of our churches. We don't want to have to deal with the priority concerns of those in other theological traditions. We don't want to have to endure challenges from them or to be answerable to them.

6. *Party spirit* (1 Cor. 1-3). The partisan mentality ignores our responsibility to love all in the body. It prefers to give allegiance only to its own particular faction, which may be united by respect for a particular leader or leadership style or by preference for some doctrinal or practical emphasis.

7. *Superficiality, immaturity* (1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:13f; Phil. 3:12; Col. 1:28; 3:16; 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb.

12:23; 13:21; 1 Peter 5:10). We need to grow in our understanding of what God's Word says about these issues, willing to be taught and not taking for granted what we have heard in the past.

8. *Anger, wrath, bitterness, vengeance* (Deut. 32:35; Ps. 94:1; Matt. 5:22; Rom. 12:19; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:26, 31; Col. 3:8, 21; Titus 1:7; James 1:19f). There is godly anger, like the zeal of Christ for the holiness of God's temple. But Scripture usually presents human anger as a sinful or even murderous lack of love. Anger seeks to replace God's vengeance with our own. It holds grudges, refusing to forgive (Matt. 18:21). There is much of this, I believe, in the movement to perpetuate division in the church. God says in his Word that anger should be dealt with *quickly*. "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Eph. 4:26; cf. Matt. 5:23-26; 18:15-20). Reconciliation is a high priority in God's kingdom. Instead, the nature of unrighteous anger is to indulge itself, to put off reconciliation, to harbor a grudge.

9. *Ambition, avarice* (Titus 1:7; 2 Peter 2:10). Those who are interested in personal power or advancement often reinforce denominational divisions. It is easier to achieve prominence (by worldly means) in a small group than in a large one, easier in a human denomination than in God's trans-denominational church. Rather than risk the end of their prominence in the uncertainty inherent in church merger, influential denominational bureaucrat types often stand in the way of biblical reunion. This is a large part of the problem; for these are the types of people most often appointed to ecumenism committees, the ones who most often must be satisfied with any negotiation.

10. *Lack of openness, honesty* (John 15:15). Too often when representatives of different denominations hold discussions, there is a reticence, an unwillingness to share what it is that *really* stands in the way of union. We need to remember again that in such cases we are dealing with other Christian brothers and sisters, with whom we can share family secrets without embarrassment.

(Evangelical Reunion — John M. Frame, Baker Book House, USA, 1991, p. 25-31.)

## Appendix E

### Guiding Principles for Leaders of Gospel Team

The complete unity of the team must be preserved at all times throughout each campaign. The underlying principle of this is the experience of Pentecost where the secret of power consisted in that they were “all together, of one accord, in one place.” (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 4, 42, 44-46; 4:32; 5:12, 32). The greatest factor in unifying the team is “sharing.”

#### *Findings:—*

1. The team should be carefully and prayerfully chosen. The large majority should be of those upon whose co-operation the leaders can surely depend. Must not have too many “passengers.” \*
2. Most Gospel Team failures are due to the leaders; even if a missionary goes, there should always be one or more competent indigenous leaders who can do within the team itself and outside what no missionary can ever do. Such leaders must be of the sort who will bear a heavy burden of prayer for the spiritual success of the campaign, and who will feel that any failure is not so much the failure of the missionary as it is *their* failure.
3. Before going upon the campaign through social means, Bible study, and much prayer (individually and collectively) the members must be transformed into a *unified*, Spirit-guided team. A common realization of their desperate need for God’s cleansing and power is the fundamental basis of this real spiritual unity. Apply 1 John 1:7-9 and James 5:16.
4. The good team leader will always seek to “lead from behind.” He will be very careful to keep the group dominated by the Holy Spirit rather than himself.
5. Each member must be willing to do anything “according to

- the sense of the meeting.” Those who join the team submit for that campaign to the *necessary spiritual discipline* just as soldiers in order to win battles submit to military discipline. This is what Paul did: “ Though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more.” 1 Cor. 9:19.
6. Strict *promptness* at all meals and meetings is absolutely necessary for a unified team spirit and efficient work.
  7. The team members should all stay together in the *same place* for eating, playing, and living. No team members should visit their own homes or those of their friends for eating or sleeping during the campaign. Violation of this rule again and again has brought humiliating failure.
  8. Always be ready to meet extraordinary and unexpected difficult situations or keen disappointments with a calm and trusting spirit. “ Underneath are the everlasting arms.” “ He careth for you.” “ Lo, I am with you always.”
  9. The morning and evening devotions of the team during the campaign are primarily “ spiritual setting-up exercises,” for the purpose of keeping the team upon an increasingly high spiritual level. Success here *prevents* most of the *troubles* of the leader. (See page 101 for sample.)
  10. At the team devotions (usually immediately following chota hazri) the plans for the day, after prayer and discussion in which all are urged to participate, are decided upon. Then let every man speak and for the rest of the day “ forever after hold his peace.” These plans are loyally carried out all day long, unless exceptional guidance of the Holy Spirit dictates otherwise. (Spiritual democracy. “ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” Acts 15:28; 16:6, 7.)
  11. The more difficult the campaign the greater need for extra prayer, individually and as a group. Mid-night prayer meetings of a few who felt a special need or burden of responsibility have been our greatest weapon.
  12. When special difficulties arise during the day or evening, form an inner circle of leaders to pray together. Also divide the whole

- team into prayer groups of three or four members for “praying through “ the difficulty.
13. *Long* prayers at home in private and *short* prayers in *public* on the Gospel Team! (Dr. Wilfred Grenfel was converted because of the good common sense of D. L. Moody when his meeting was being spoiled by the unreasonably long prayer of an unthinking elderly man. Moody in order to stop him said: “ We will now sing a hymn while the good brother is finishing his prayer.”)
  14. Testimonies of absolute honesty and reality are the only kind to have. *You can't give what you haven't got*. Testify only to that with Christ which *you* have actually experienced. For most students (usually three at a meeting) from 7 to 10 minutes at most is enough. Never speak unless you have something to say!
  15. In gaining reality for preparation of testimonies three questions are helpful: (1) What was my life before I actually followed Christ's way of life? (2) How, when, where, why, did I yield to the will of God for my life? (3) What does Jesus mean to me *now*?
  16. The *entire team* should continually be *praying* for whomever is giving his testimony, preaching, or leading in any other way but, especially for the one who is giving the invitation to accept Christ, every member of the team must pray his hardest. This is the way we get *miracles*!
  17. The leaders should be quick to encourage team members who dread their task and those who do their best for Christ's sake. The leaders must at all times be very sympathetic with the weaker members of the team, being much in prayer for them.
  18. The greatest joy and profit to the team members result from the “ Round Table” meetings of the homeward journey on the 3rd class railway car or steamer deck. To many of us this has been a real “ Road To Emmaus “ where our hearts burned within us while He opened to us the Way of Life. It is here that each, who desires, shares with the others as to what of Reality, what new secret of life, what of Christ, he has experienced in that campaign. Many confessions of past sin and failure and realization

- of new life enrich the lives of all of us.
19. \* Mixed teams must be well chaperoned. Conduct must be above suspicion and criticism. Non-Christians watch very closely. “Ye are our epistle known and read of all men.” (2 Cor. 3:2). “What you are speaks so loud, I can not hear what you say.”
  20. Every campaign must be an outstanding spiritual event for the campaigners themselves.
  21. *The leader must forget himself and his own happiness and think only of the happiness of every member of his team. Even the violent anti-Christian Nietzsche defined heroic leadership better than most Christians, saying: “Who is a hero? Whoever serves a great cause in such a way that all consideration for himself is forgotten.”*
  22. The leaders must see that every member has a definite task for which he is responsible. The more the *team* does and, the less the leaders do, the better!
  23. *Every single member of the team is very important to the success of the campaign. One member may spoil the whole campaign. Remember Achaan! (Joshua 7th; 22:20.)*

*\*In Dr. E. Stanley Jones' paper, "The Fellowship," for December 1930, it says of our North India mixed team:—This transcending of race was very remarkable, but the transcending of sex was more remarkable. These boys and girls travelled together in the most frank and friendly way and yet there was no disposition on the part of anyone to feel that there was anything wrong about this relationship. Everyone felt that it was healthy and beautifully pure. The Indian youth saw the possibility of a relationship with the other sex that was based not on the physical, but upon the moral and spiritual and the intellectual. When they stood on the platforms and sang their songs and held hands in a joyous circle the students roared approval, not because these young people had been allowed this freedom but because they saw that in this freedom there was a beautiful purity and spirituality.*

24. The larger the team, the greater the task and the more difficult it is to transform your crowd into an effective, unified, Spirit-controlled Gospel Team! Inexperienced leaders should begin with small teams of 5 or 6 members.
25. *Safety-Valve Meetings*: At the evening devotions of the team all who are offended or who have offended have the chance to seek reconciliation. This was the secret of maintaining the morale of the Siam and North India teams. We take seriously the Scripture: “Let not the sun go down upon your anger.”
26. The happy Christian fellowship of the team is one of its greatest appeals. Much depends on the joyous, radiant, spontaneous spirit of the group and the apparent freedom from fatigue or worry. “They looked unto Him and were radiant.” Psa. 34:5.

### GOSPEL TEAM SLOGANS.

1. “You can’t give what you haven’t got!” Prof. Henry B. Wright.
2. No rest for the wicked! Plenty of rest in heaven. (When some members are too sleepy to get up early in the morning, or when extra work comes.)
3. Take “the underground road to glory”! (When self-sacrifice is necessary and slights must be endured.)
4. Get your man!
5. Don’t be a Jonah!
6. You can have all the power you really want, all you are willing to pay the price for.
7. He has never failed us yet, not once; but we have all too often failed Him.
8. “Prayer changes things! It changes things on this end; it changes things on the other end!” S. D. Gordon.
9. “If you would find your Lord, go, work for Him in His vineyard; you will find Him laboring there!” Donald Hankey.
10. Am I willing to be “a fool for Christ’s sake”?
11. Be original! Don’t be a poor imitation of some one else! The only truly original lives are those which are lived according to God’s original plan. Our plans are always copies from the lives of others. Dare to do God’s will! Have *you* found His plan for



*you?*

12. "God give me this country....., or I die! "
13. "Your servants for Jesus' sake." 2 Cor. 4:5.
14. " That by *all* means I might save some." 1 Cor. 9:22.
15. Have you given God "your Isaac " ? Have you taken "your Isaac" back again? Have you "another Isaac " ? (Another way of saying 100% surrender to the will of God.)
16. In soul-transformation when man *persists* in co-operating with the Cross-bearing God by means of suffering love, *there is no impossible case!*
17. Suffering Love Will Win In The End! (No matter how great the trouble, injury, insult, obstacle, opposition—use it! Let Christ change it from a liability to an asset!)
18. Have we the " invincible good-will " ? The bitter hatred of the Jews and all the cruel might of the Roman Empire could not spoil His good-will!
19. For the sake of our Koinonia! (Sharing all things with each other and with Christ).
20. "Evangelize the inevitable," Dr. Stanley Jones said in Bible class when he sailed with us to India and when we returned to Burma, he said: "India invites these *troubadours of God* to come again."
21. The personal devotional life of the team leader is supremely important. "You can't give what you haven't got." Human wisdom alone, even of the most brilliant sort, is insufficient. The successful leader must have Divine guidance both for himself and his team. In order to get His orders for the day, the following questions may be used in the Quiet Hour:—
  1. Is there anything in my life to separate me from God?
  2. Is there anything to separate me from my fellowmen? (If so, then it will separate me from God! See 1 John 4:19-21.)
  3. Have I done my utmost to make reconciliation with all others? (If not, then I am *not* right with God! Mat. 5 :23, 24, 38-48.)
  4. Am I really praying for my enemies?
  5. Is His love dominant in me?
  6. Am I guilty of self-pity, thinking excessively of my own

- troubles and my injuries?
7. Am I thinking more, far more, of what I can *give* others, rather than of what I can *get*?
  8. Am I 100% surrendered today?
  9. “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do” *today*?
  22. Play the game! Remember that no amount of external forces can ever conquer us; only the evil forces within ourselves can bring defeat !
  23. The expert leader of an “Expert Friendship” Gospel Team will always lead from behind!
  24. Neither our program nor any other program will ever truly succeed in transforming others into Christlike character without a right spirit and, therefore, not without the Holy Spirit!

## Appendix F

### Peacemakers

*Matthew 5:9*

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” Christ calls you to a complicated, painful, and blessed task: *making peace*.

#### 1. A Complicated Task

To be a *biblical* peacemaker, you need to develop a bias toward compromise on unimportant points, rather than insisting on confrontation at every point of disagreement. Be willing to place a priority on the common ground which Christians share, rather than focusing exclusively on our differences. Be willing to place the best interpretation on the motives and actions of others, rather than approaching them suspiciously, assuming the worst about their hidden agendas. You need a lot of patient trust in God, that he will show them where they are wrong—and you where you are wrong!

But here is what makes this job so complicated: Which *are* the unimportant points of difference on which you can compromise for the present? What if the pragmatic methods that your brother uses in evangelism really *are* rooted in a man-centered gospel, or motivated by a thirst for power and fame rather than compassion for sinful people and a passion for the glory of God? God’s peace does not peacefully coexist with falsehood, sham, or injustice; so God’s peacemakers cannot simply ignore peace-destroying sin and error, any more than a surgeon can simply close up an infected wound: an abscess is bound to develop.

And yet, on the other hand, “love *does* cover over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). What sins or differences of conviction can be covered? Which ones must be confronted in humble love for your

brother or sister? It's a complicated task, and because of that it is also. .

## 2. A Painful Task

Making peace is not easy. To be a peacemaker you have to become the person that all the other Beatitudes describe. Peacemaking demands that you be *poor in spirit*, humble enough to admit that you have been wrong and to ask for forgiveness (as Jesus commands later in this sermon, Matt. 5:23-24). It demands *meekness*, which shows itself in the self-control to hold your tongue, to refuse to use the truth sometimes, even though it would vindicate your cause and blow your opponent out of the water (Matt. 5:22). It demands that the stains and the schisms in the church, the body of Christ, bother you—a lot!—so that you *mourn* as you survey the ravages of sin in yourself and your brothers and sisters.

And sometimes peacemaking is painful because the Christians among whom you are trying to make peace will disagree with you on whether compromise or confrontation is the way to peace in a particular situation. They may just think you have poor judgment—naively optimistic, theologically undiscerning, etc.: “If you *really* understood the underlying theological issues, the actual motivations of our opponents, you would know that peace will never come through negotiation or compromise, but only through those opponents’ unconditional surrender.” Or they may suspect *your* motives, too: “Why aren’t you willing to pay the price to contend for the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints?” Peacemakers can look like cowardly “pleasers of men” when they are compared with bold champions who courageously disregard the opinions and feelings of human beings.

Barnabas was more characteristically a peacemaker than was Paul: Could this be the source of their friction over taking John Mark along on a second trip (Acts 15:36<sup>1</sup>)? Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance. But from Paul’s perspective, perhaps, Barnabas looked naive when he hoped that Mark had learned his lesson from his first desertion. So they disagreed — sharply! They argued. And biblical peace was fractured. Now, I’ve heard this pas-

sage appealed to justify denominationalism, but I think you have to say that the Holy Spirit was *not* smiling in approval as he caused Luke to report this scene. *Somebody* was in the wrong. Maybe Paul was right and Barnabas was wrong: Mark wasn't ready yet. Maybe Barnabas was right: later Paul did appreciate Mark's ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). In any case, Barnabas the peacemaker *looked* wrong to Paul, and neither man would budge.

If you set out to be a peacemaker in Christ's church, you will not always make the right choice about how to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And even when you do make the right choice, it's going to look wrong to lots of people: to some, too tolerant; to others, too rigid. You can't win.. Oh, yes, you can:

### 3. A Blessed Task

The task is blessed because Jesus says so, and he announces the amazing honor which will be bestowed on peacemakers at the last judgment: "they will be called sons of God." Or, to make plain the real subject who stands behind this divine passive: "God will call them his sons."

In one way or another, all of the promises of the Beatitudes are promises of eternal life and joy in the kingdom of God; but each promise focuses on a particular aspect of that complete salvation. What is the special focus of being called by God as his sons?

a. As sons peacemakers are *in tune with the Father's purpose*. God's goal is peace, not conflict. Unity, not division and hostility. "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness" (3:18). He observed that righteousness does not grow in an environment of strife, competition, and hostility. Farming may not be as exciting as the battlefield, but the patient planting and watering of reconciliation, patience, and forgiveness produces the fruit of righteous lives and attitudes which delight our Father. Make it your goal to *win over* those who differ from you rather than simply to *win* over them, and you will show that you are pursuing the purpose of the Father.

b. As sons, peacemakers *reflect the image of God's Son*. If you think that peacemaking is painful for you, look at Jesus. If you are

hurting from the criticism which you have had to absorb in your efforts to promote peace in Christ's church, consider the price he paid for our peace. Christ's purpose "was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus *making peace*, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God *through the cross*, by which he put to death their hostility" (Eph. 2:15-16). Peacemakers are blessed, despite the pain and the criticism, because in them is reflected the peace-making grace of the Son of God, who gave himself to reconcile us to God and to each other.

## **Appendix G**

### **Evangelism and Church Planting**

#### **Passion for Souls**

“Come, follow me.... and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, NIV).

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19, NIV).

Evangelism and church planting are two major priorities of the United Church, just as they were at the heart of the New Testament Church.

One of the most clear and visible marks of a godly, Bible-based church is a people deeply committed to evangelism and seeing souls won to Christ.

From the very start, it appears that the life of the early Church revolved around the nations that had yet to know of salvation through Jesus, holding tight to the command Jesus gave them: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15, Niv). “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This is exactly what the believers of the early Church did. Left and right, wherever they went, they lived as witnesses to the salvation, life and power of Jesus Christ.

In both difficult times and easy times, the early Church was marked by a sincere passion and boldness to proclaim salvation through Christ. We see this truth in Acts 4, when Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin to give an account of how a crippled man got healed.

They confidently answered, “It is by the name of Jesus Christ that this man stands before you completely healed. Salvation is found in no one else. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (paraphrase, see Acts 4:7-13).

And when, in the midst of opposition and attack they were threatened” to not speak the name of Jesus Christ anymore, the believers prayed and cried out to God to show them what to do. As a result of their prayers, God gave them even greater boldness, and they continued to preach the Gospel (Acts 4:29-31).

The boldness given by the Holy Spirit was not for entertainment. It was given to preach the Gospel in power and conviction. We see that is exactly what they did, risking their very lives to see Jesus proclaimed in every nation and among every people.

The believers of the early Church made their one goal and aim to know Jesus and make Him known. From the first chapter to the last, the whole book of Acts is the incredible story of the early Church evangelizing their entire known world! We see this in Acts 2, when Peter preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and over 3,000 people turned to Christ. As these believers lived and grew in the Word of God together, “the Lord added to the church *daily* those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47, emphasis mine). When we are faithful to share the Gospel, the Lord is faithful to do a great work through us.

Acts 5 shows the Church continuing in the power and boldness of the Holy Spirit. And because of that, we are told, “believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women. . . . Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:14,42).

In Acts 7, Stephen, a deacon, was called to wait on tables so that the apostles could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Stephen used his service as an opportunity for evangelism, even laying down his life for the Gospel. Out of Stephen’s death, a great persecution arose against the Church, and all the believers were scattered. But even so, “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4, NIV”).

In Acts 8 we see the Gospel spreading into Samaria, Ethiopia and Damascus, with even Saul, the greatest opponent of the Gospel,



turning to salvation through Christ. “And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).

From infancy, the early Church was totally committed to missions work and proclaiming Jesus Christ. In just a short time, it became responsible for reproducing itself around the whole known world.

Remember Jesus’ prayer when He saw the multitudes of lost, helpless and discouraged people? He was moved with compassion, for the people were without a shepherd to lead them to green pasture. In response to this need, Jesus told His disciples to pray to “the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38).

If the Church today truly embraced the truth that every believer is called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, imagine the millions of people who would come into the kingdom! When traveling on a bus, working in the office, standing in line or shopping at the marketplace—preaching and sharing the Gospel as a daily activity and way of life—imagine what the results would be! All it requires is a willing heart. But the saddest thing today is that most believers do not have this burning passion to share the Gospel. Many believers often think that evangelism is the job of the pastor, missionary or evangelist. But that is not true. The Holy Spirit is given to each of us, to help us witness each day to those we come in contact with.

Every believer can share the Gospel simply by handing out a Gospel tract or giving someone a New Testament. If a believer truly desires to witness, the Lord will certainly provide the opportunity.

If we lack this passion, we have no real reason to exist. We are not on this earth to enjoy the pleasures of this temporary life. We are here to share God’s message of hope for those who don’t know Him. This world is not our home; we are only passing-through (see 1 Peter 2:11). If our only purpose for being saved is to go to heaven and be with the Lord forever, then why didn’t God just take us up to heaven the moment we received salvation? God left us here for a purpose—to know Him, and in knowing Him, make Him known to the whole world around us.

What an exciting opportunity to be involved in the rescuing of mankind from the grip of sin and death. We live in this world as

soldiers in enemy territory. Our King has given us the assignment to rescue those who are captured by the enemy and bring them into the life and safety of the kingdom of God; This assignment should be the major focus of our lives;

### **Practical Ways to Share the Gospel**

Now we come to a very important question: How do we practically implement the call of our Lord to share the Gospel? *Some* very practical suggestions of how each and every one of us can be involved in some form of evangelism.

**One.** *Be involved in personal evangelism.* This is one-on-one witnessing. In this type of situation, you open the New Testament and have the person you are witnessing to read certain verses that explain the need for and the way to salvation, verses such as Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, John 3:16, John 1:12 and Revelation 3:20. After taking someone through these Scriptures, ask him if he would like to give his life to Jesus and receive Christ's free gift of salvation. If he says "yes," pray with him right there, leading him in the sinners prayer (see-example on page 190).

There are also many good materials available to teach you how to be effective in personal evangelism. We encourage members of The United Church of India to continually learn and grow in how to share their faith through personal evangelism.

**Two.** *Pass out tracts.* This is probably the most significant way to share the Gospel. It has been said that the reason communism spread so rapidly throughout the world was because of the massive amounts of literature distributed on its cause.

Literature evangelism is very powerful, simply because we are handing out God's Word. In Isaiah 55:9-11 (NIV), the Lord said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

All believers should carry Gospel tracts and distribute them to people wherever they go. While waiting for the train or bus and while walking, in the marketplace are only a few examples of hundreds of opportunities the Lord may provide.

**Three. Hold Evangelistic Meetings.** Every Church should have mini-evangelistic meetings throughout the year to reach out and preach the Gospel to the people in the community. Imagine the excitement and unity a local fellowship will experience when the whole church comes together to pray for and plan three or four outreaches in one year, specifically for the sake of leading people to Christ!

In all of this planning, however, we must stay sober-minded, remembering the purpose for all of it. It is not so we can boast about how many meetings we have held or how many people showed up. It is not for the believers to have a good time planning an event. The church, the pastor and the elders must pray and wait upon the Lord to know His way of doing things. The content of the preaching during an evangelistic meeting must be the salvation message. It must be clear but not offensive. There should be no screaming, shouting or mocking others, but simply sharing God's love. The songs sung, the prayer offered and everything taught must be done in a way that any listener can clearly understand the wonderful Gospel message.

All of the planning for a meeting like this must be handled carefully and thoughtfully. If we do this, bringing our plans under the Lord's direction, we will communicate the Gospel effectively and touch the lives of the people in our communities.

**Four. Witness door-to-door.** Every member of the United Church to make the time to be involved in door-to-door witnessing. Invite a friend and go from house to house two by two, sharing the Gospel and praying for people. Carry Gospel literature with you when you go, such as tracts, booklets, New Testaments and Bibles, so that the people to whom you witness will have something to keep.

**Five. Have consistent focused prayer.** Each family should have a list of 10 to 15 names of unbelievers for whom they pray daily. These can be people or families they know well or just casual acquaintances. When we pray for the Lord to draw people to Himself

and open their eyes to the truth of the Gospel, we see hearts softened and people turning to Christ. All Church members should believe God for the salvation of someone in their lives.

**Six.** *Invite friends to church meetings.* This is perhaps the easiest way to introduce others to Christ. Bringing a friend to meet others in the body of believers, to hear the pastor preach, to take part in a worship service—all these things can help draw a person to the Lord. Let us be active and bold in inviting unsaved friends and relatives to church with us.

**Seven.** *Live out the conspiracy of love.* This is extremely significant. The conspiracy of love is simply the act of the local church involving itself in the needs of the community. We cannot just stand outside the need and scream at people to get saved. We must open up our lives and step into the needs of the people around us. This is done by reaching out and befriending the leper or the Dalit or by giving our time and resources to minister to the poor or orphaned.

Let us remember the lesson from the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:40 in which Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Niv).

The Church is the extension of Jesus Christ and His love and compassion toward suffering humanity. Therefore, we must involve our lives in being part of a positive change. Each Believers Church should have a goal to start some form of help ministry to show the mercy and love of Christ. Through this very real manifestation of love, our communities and our nation will be impacted with the Gospel.

**Eight.** *Organize a vacation Bible school (VBS).* When I was a small boy, I attended vacation Bible school, and it had a tremendous impact on my life. It was there that I first memorized Bible verses, which I still remember to this day.

In Matthew 19, little children were brought to Jesus for Him to bless them. When the disciples rebuked those who had brought the children to Him, Jesus turned to the disciples and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (v. 14, Niv). Jesus welcomed the

little children and cared for them, and so must we. Studies show that 92 percent of all the Christian workers in the world came to Christ before the age of 11!

Every Believers Church must hold a VBS each year—a strong one that is not only fun and understandable for the children, but that also teaches them the Word of God and shows them the love of Jesus.

**Nine. Set goals.** Every Believers Church should, by faith, set a goal for the number of people they want to see come to Christ and be baptized each month or each year. The Bible tells us, “According to your faith will it be done to you” (Matthew 9:29, NIV). If the church says, “Lord, we believe we are going to have 50 people added to our fellowship this next month,” and the members work and pray toward that goal, their faith, prayer and hard work will make it a reality.

**Ten. Send radio missionaries.** This is a wonderful form ministry in which a couple of believers get together and travel from house to house encouraging people to listen to our radio broadcasts, showing them where to tune the dial to get the programs and informing them of the times to listen. Oftentimes, teashops and small vegetable shops play the radio during the business day. An excellent way for people to hear the Gospel message is to ask the owners of these shops to play our radio program.

This is a simple form of ministry that does not take much time yet can make a significant impact on entire families as the Word of God comes into their homes through a radio broadcast.

**Eleven. Send students to Bible school.** Each church should pray for the Lord to call young people from its fellowship to serve Him full time as missionaries and pastors. When that prayer is answered, the church needs to rally around those who have been called by the Lord and help support them financially and through prayer. A photograph can be taken and then hung at the back of the church to remind the church to pray for those it has sent out for training. Prayer can be organized for the students, and cards or gifts can be sent to encourage them while they’re in training.

What a blessing it is for that church, when the students have finished their training and are sent to the mission field, to be able to say, “This brother is from our fellowship. We sent him to Bible school,

and now he is serving the Lord on the mission field of Tripura, or Bhutan, or somewhere else.” What a blessing it is to think about a fellowship that has sent out 10 to 15 pastors to the mission field to plant churches.

See how practical it can be? It’s amazing! Just one church, actively supporting its own people, can make a significant difference in the long run.

**Twelve.** *Organize missions prayer meetings.* Each Church should organize a core group of people who commit to regularly gather together in prayer exclusively for missions. These must be people whom God has burdened to pray for missions and the nations of the world. A world map can be used to pray for the different countries of the world.

**Thirteen.** *Have a monthly missions awareness.* Once a month, each church should learn about a people group or a nation in order to create an awareness of missions and the need in the world today. Printed information can be handed out that gives an overview of the country or people group, population, beliefs, percentage of Christians and ways to pray. A great resource for this information is the book *Operation World*.<sup>7</sup>

We must be aware of the spiritual state of the nations so that we can intelligently pray for their evangelization.

That is why each fellowship should have teaching on missions once a month, either in an evening meeting or by holding a special meeting in which believers come together to worship God and to learn about the nations through maps, pictures and whatever means are available. After learning about the spiritual state of these countries, prayer should be offered up for the people of those nations. We should all be informed about the nations so that everyone—the youngest child to the little old grandmothers—can start praying.

Imagine the power there is when a local church is informed and praying about the things happening in the world today!

**Fourteen,** *organize missions trips.* Churches should organize a yearly missions trip for the church members who are able to go (this can be in conjunction with other Churches that cooperate with us in the same district or area). The reason we do this is because Jesus saw

the multitudes, and in seeing them, He was moved with compassion for them. In the same way, unless we have a way to feel, to touch and to see the need, we will not be able to understand and be moved with compassion to pray, give and send missionaries to reach the lost in these places.

The pastor / vicar can tell his people, “This, year we are going to have a missions trip. We have 10 months to pray and raise the money.” The whole church can gather together and pray about where to go—Nepal, Orissa, Assam or some other state or country—and who should go. It doesn’t matter how old or young the believers are, as long as they can travel for three or four days by train and are able to minister for a few weeks or a month.

Together the church members can plan out the places to minister, where to stay and what kind of ministry will be done. They don’t necessarily need to go somewhere where they can speak the language. They could simply hand out tracts in the language of the people they meet.

The impact this will have on the body of believers will be amazing as they experience the Lord using their lives to reach the lost in distant lands. The testimonies and reports they come back with will charge the whole atmosphere of the fellowship and cultivate a greater desire to be involved in missions and reaching the lost.

***Fifteen.*** *Hold a missions Sunday.* Every church, about once every four months, should have a special Sunday called Missions Sunday, during which a missionary is invited to speak and share from the Word of God and about what God is doing on the mission field where he works.

***Sixteen.*** *Have an offering box for missions.* Every church member should consider it a privilege to financially support missions. Having an offering box placed in one’s home is a very practical way for a family to be involved in giving.

***Seventeen.*** *Participate in the sponsorship program.* Every member can contribute toward supporting a missionary or a student through our sponsorship program as they are able.

We pray that we will be known as a people who are sold out and committed to sharing the love of Christ with the people around us,

just like the early Church was known for loving God and reaching the lost at all costs: May God use every one of us to make a significant impact in this generation.