

Preamble

In its beliefs the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) is bound ultimately to the Holy Scriptures, not to any human formulation of doctrine – including this document. The Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) has throughout its history emphasized biblical authority in all matters of faith and practice. This emphasis exalts the centrality of Scripture and counsels a proper use of statements of faith as expressions of our current understanding of Scripture. Such documents are to be regarded as descriptive more than normative. They are never to be given equal status with the Bible.

We regard this present draft statement of faith, therefore, as a reiteration of the past statements of faith within the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean). The Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) is historically and theologically rooted in evangelical Mennonite-Anabaptism of the sixteenth century Reformation which sought to recapture the faith and life of the New Testament church. In recent years there has been some conviction that it is imperative to draw up a new statement of faith, not to repudiate any earlier statement, but to restate the doctrinal position of the church in terms relevant to today's issues. The validity of this new draft statement of faith depends on its biblical character; its usefulness depends on its ability to communicate our understanding of the biblical message. In this expression of our faith we sincerely accept the lordship of Jesus Christ and the full authority of the written Word of God, the Bible. Our purpose in formulating this draft statement of faith is twofold: (1) to seek to promote unity of the brotherhood by establishing an Apostolic Christian "doctrinal identity" and (2) to safeguard sound doctrine and life by providing a powerful and biblically grounded symbol of our faith.

1. OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND CREATION

We believe in one almighty God, the eternal Spirit, who is complete in holiness, love, righteousness, truth, power, goodness and mercy (Deuteronomy 6:4-6; John 4:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17). God exists and reveals Himself in three persons, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). These are equal in their divine perfection, though distinct in manifestation, and execute distinct but harmonious offices in the great work of redemption.

The Father

We believe in God the Father, who created all things, a God of providence, and the author of our salvation through Jesus Christ. He has revealed Himself in word and deed as the source and sustainer of all life. He is a God of love who orders and continually upholds all things to serve His eternal purposes. In mercy and grace He has adopted as His children all who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

We believe that in the beginning God created all things by His Son, and that all existence is therefore finite and dependent upon God, the Source and End of all things visible and invisible (Colossians 1:16-17). He created all humankind in His own image, which set us apart from an animal creation. In free will, moral character, superior intellect, and spiritual nature, we bear the image of our Creator (Genesis 1; Isaiah 40).

We believe that in His providence God is concerned with the lives of His children, and in everything works for their eternal good (Psalms 139; Matthew 10:29). He hears and answers

their prayers. By Jesus Christ he continuously upholds the entire created order. He is sovereign over all things, but He is not the author of sin. He has endowed humankind with the power of self-determination, and He holds us responsible for our moral choices (Hebrews 11:6).

The Son

We believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, whom the Father sent to this world to reconcile us to Himself and to redeem us from sin and eternal death (2 Corinthians 5:19). God's divine Son, who was with the Father from all eternity, took upon Himself human form (Philippians 2:6-8; 1 Timothy 3:16). He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Thus He is truly and fully God and truly and fully man according to the Scriptures. He lived a perfect, holy and sinless life. In the redemptive purpose of God, He suffered crucifixion and death for our sin. He rose from the dead for our justification and ascended into heaven where He now, as Lord and Christ at the right hand of the Father, intercedes for the saints. He will come again to judge the living and the dead to establish His eternal Kingdom (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, one with the Father and the Son, sent by Them to effect redemption in man. We believe in His personality as set forth in the Scriptures: that He convicts, regenerates, guides, teaches, rebukes, indwells, empowers, comforts, intercedes, unites believers into one body, and glorifies Christ (John 15:26; Romans 8:1-17, 26-27).

2. WORK OF GOD AND REVELATION

We believe that God has revealed His power and deity in the created universe so that all mankind can know Him (Romans 1:18-23). Nevertheless, this knowledge of Him cannot save, for it cannot make Christ known. God, therefore, revealed Himself in saving word and deed in the Old Testament and established a covenant relationship with His people, Israel. He fulfilled this revelation of Himself in the word and deed of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament (John 20:31). The God of creation and redemption has revealed Himself and His will for humankind, then, in the Holy Scriptures and supremely and finally in His incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Psalm 19; John 1: 1-16; 1 John 1:1-5).

We believe that all Scripture, regardless who the human author was, is inspired by God as men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit. We accept the Old and New Testaments as the infallible Word of God and the authoritative guide for the faith and life of Christian discipleship (Psalm 119:105). We believe that the Old Covenant was preparatory in nature, finding its fulfillment in the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:5-13). Christian doctrine and practice are therefore based upon the whole Word of God, the word of promise of the Old Covenant as fulfilled in the New (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Hebrews 1:1-2). We believe that the message of the Bible points to the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:27, 44). It is to Him that the Scriptures of the Old Testament bear witness, and He is the One whom the Scriptures of the New Testament proclaim. Christ is the central focus to the proper understanding of the Bible.

3. HUMAN NATURE AND SALVATION

We believe that God created humankind in the image of God, sinless and holy, in fellowship with God, with a free will to make moral choices (Genesis 1:27, 31). Man yielded, however, to the

temptation of Satan and by willful disobedience to God failed to maintain the holy condition in which he had been created. By willfully disobeying God and breaking fellowship with Him, man brought physical and spiritual death and eternal condemnation on the whole human race (Genesis 3:1-19). Consequently all are sinful by nature, guilty before God and in need of forgiveness through Christ. Although all are sinners by nature because of Adam's fall, they are not guilty of his sin. Those who perish eternally do so because of their own sin, the most grievous of which is their stubborn refusal to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Romans 5:12-21). We believe, therefore, that children are born with a nature, which will manifest itself as sinful as they mature (Matthew 18:1-14; Ephesians 2:1-3). When they come to know themselves to be responsible to God, they must repent and believe in Christ in order to be saved. For as a fallen creature man is self-centered, self-willed, rebellious towards God, unwilling to yield to Christ, unable to break with sin and under divine judgment (Romans 3:10-18).

4. JESUS CHRIST AND REDEMPTION

We believe that there is one Mediator between God and humankind, the Man Jesus Christ (Acts 2:33; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15, 7:11). The purpose of His coming was to redeem us from the judgement and power of sin, to destroy the power and works of the devil, and to reconcile us to God (Luke 19:10; Romans 5:11). Through the shedding of His blood, Christ provided the one sufficient sacrifice for sin and established God's New Covenant (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:14-15).

We believe that not only did the Lord Jesus Christ proclaim God's Word as a prophet, but that He was in His very person the Word of God (John 1:1). As a priest, He Himself was the sacrifice for sin, and now makes intercession with the Father for the saints. As our risen Lord and King, He is vested with all authority in heaven and on earth.

In His life the Lord Jesus demonstrated perfectly the will of God. Although tempted in all points as we are, yet He never sinned. Through the shedding of His blood he inaugurated the New Covenant, broke the power of sin for those who exercise faith in Him, and triumphed over Satan (Colossians 2:15). By His resurrection from the dead, Christ accomplished the full justification of those who believe in Him. By faith each is united with the risen and glorified Christ, the Lord of glory.

5. SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

We are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ, not by character, law, good works, or ceremonies (Romans 4; 5:10; Ephesians 2:8-10). The merits of the death and resurrection of Christ are adequate for the salvation of all mankind, are offered to all, and are intended for all (John 3:16). The Holy Spirit, through the Word of God, convicts us of our sin and need for salvation. Those who repent and believe in Christ as Savior and Lord receive forgiveness and the gift of righteousness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit are born again, receiving the assurance of salvation (John 10:27-29; 1 John 5:13). Repentance involves a godly sorrow for and confession of sins committed against God and man, together with a full surrender of the will, a confident trust in Him, a joyful obedience to His Word as a faithful disciple producing fruits of a changed life, and a love for all. The God who saves is also able to keep each believer faithfully

unto victorious end in Christ (Jude 24). Nevertheless, as long as the believer lives, he stands in need of the forgiveness, cleansing, mediation, and grace of Christ (Romans 8:34).

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND TRANSFORMATION

We believe that Christ as Lord and Savior does His work through the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in every Christian and transforms him or her into the image of Christ (John 15:4-5). He empowers the believer to follow Christ and to be an effective witness for Him.³⁵

We believe that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin. Through the Holy Spirit those who believe and repent are born again. The supreme ministry of the Spirit then, is to lead men to Christ and His salvation. As Christians yield to Christ and obey His Word, the Holy Spirit transforms them into the spiritual image of Jesus Christ, and enables perseverance in faith and holiness (John 16:7-13; Hebrews 12:14).

We believe that the Christian, through the Holy Spirit, lives in fellowship with God. The believer also lives with other believers by joining the body of Christ and the local church through water baptism. Following water baptism the convert receives the sealing of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands by the elders and prayer by the congregation (Ephesians 1:13-14). He contributes to the building of the body of Christ with spiritual and material gifts, for the Holy Spirit bestows upon each believer such gifts as He wills for the edification of the church, the body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12:11-13; Galatians 5:22-24). Nurtured through the Word, fellowship, prayer and praise, the believer grows more Christlike, glorifies God, and is a witness for Him in everyday life (Acts 1:8).

We believe that the Holy Spirit empowers each believer, fills their heart with love for all, and moves them to practice Christian discipleship (Acts 2:1-21). Believers therefore attain maturity as they yield to Christ and obey His Word. In Christ the believer puts off the former way of life with its sinful affections and lusts. He is no longer enslaved to sin and Satan. His body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should not be defiled or abused in any way (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). The fruit of the Spirit is to be increasingly evident in his life, especially in his relationship to others (John 12:26; 1 John 3:17-18). The Holy Spirit empowers him to gain victory over sin and temptation, to live a pure life, and to do good (Romans 6; 8:9-16; Titus 2:11-14). The Holy Spirit is God's guarantee that He will also redeem the bodies of faithful believers in the day of Christ (Ephesians 5:30).

7. CHURCH OF CHRIST AND MISSION

1. INNER NATURE OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

1.1 Nature of the Church

We believe that the church is one body, the bride of Christ, established through God's redemptive work in history (Ephesians 5:25-27). Believers from all nations, races and social classes, regenerated by faith in Christ and cleansed by His blood, are baptized into one body and separated to God and are members of this body, whose head is Christ (John 17:20-21; Ephesians 2:11-22). The church is therefore the fellowship of those who are in the kingdom of Christ, the assembly of those who believe in Him, the brotherhood of the saints (1 Peter 2:9). The church is corporately the dwelling place of God in the Spirit, His holy temple. It is the visible body of

those who are Christian disciples. This distinguishes us from other protestant thinking. That is why the church must be a visible manifestation of the purity resulting from the redemptive shed blood of Christ (Matthew 5:13-14). Through His Spirit the Lord gives gifts to the church to be exercised for the up-building of believers and the propagation of the Gospel (Ephesians 4:11-13).

1.2 Organization of the Church

We believe that the initial unit of the church is the local assembly of believers. The local church is an association of believers, baptized and organized for worship, fellowship, nurture, service and witness (Acts 2:38-44). It is in the congregation that the work of teaching, witnessing, and disciplining is carried on. Congregations are committed to the Word of God and to each other. Consequently, the work of the brotherhood is conducted in a spirit of interdependence, love and submission to one another under the Lordship of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:5-6). In order to maintain the unity of the whole church it is profitable for congregational representatives to periodically meet together in regular conferences. The concern for the welfare of the whole church calls for these Spirit-led meetings to assist local congregations in maintaining biblical standards of faith, conduct, stewardship and missions. The decisions of such elder conferences should be observed by the individual congregations and members (Acts 15:1-28).

1.3 Mission of the Church

We believe that the command of Jesus Christ is to preach the gospel and to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). This is the primary task of the church. It is the mission of the church, therefore, to demonstrate to the world the will of God and to witness to all people the saving power of God in Christ. Every member has the responsibility to be a witness of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit and to call men to be reconciled to God (Romans 1:16; Acts 1:8). The church seeks to lead all people to the obedience of faith. Believers unite in the church for instruction and nurture, for worship, for witnessing in the evangelizing body of Christ, for the observance of the ordinances, for Christian fellowship, and for the discipline of the Word and the Spirit of God (Acts 2:38-44). The Spirit leads the church to discover the gifts which He has bestowed upon the members for the building up of the body (Romans 12:3-8). The church has the obligation to listen to the Word of God and obey it in the moral and spiritual conflicts of each era of history.

We believe that the church is called to be a brotherhood under the lordship of Jesus Christ, a loving fellowship of brothers and sisters who are concerned for the total welfare, both spiritual and material, of one another (Ephesians 4:11-16). This concern results in the attempt to help the erring brother or sister find the right path; it includes sharing generously financial aid, encouragement, and a willingness to give and receive counsel (1 Corinthians 4:11-16).

1.4 Discipline of the Church

We believe that every church member is to engage in humble service, mutual exhortation and disciplined living. In the church every member is therefore to be concerned for the welfare of fellow-members and to intercede for them in prayer (Ephesians 4:13; 5:21). Through public teaching of Scripture, sympathetic encouragement, private counseling and earnest rebuke, the church promotes constructive Christian discipline. Believers are thereby encouraged to live a life

of Christian discipleship, and to progress toward spiritual maturity so that the church will glorify God in the world.

We believe that the purposes of discipline are to lead each member to full stature in Christ, to reach out to those members who fall into sin, to clarify for all members the meaning of Christian discipleship, to promote the purity of the church, to counsel and support the weak and immature, and to maintain the good name and witness of the church before the world (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ himself has given authority to His church to exercise discipline (Matthew 18:15-20). God's Word is therefore the standard for church discipline. In this work the church employs public teaching of Scripture, private counseling, intercessory prayer, sympathetic encouragement, earnest warning and rebuke (1 Timothy 5:20). Most of the church programs are designed to build personal discipline in the lives of Christians.

If Christians commit sin, they are admonished in brotherly love and sincerity. Where private counseling fails, the church exercises redemptive discipline. If warnings are disregarded and the attitude of rebellion and estrangement persists, the church must withhold certain rights and privileges. Positive actions and spiritual exercises shall also be prescribed. If the offender continues to violate God's instructions and goes on to full apostasy and spiritual ruin, the church must, with a deep sense of loss, recognize that he has severed his relationship with Christ and His body. That individual is then formally excluded from the membership of the church (1 Corinthians 5:11-13; 6:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15). Believers, however, should continue to practice love and compassion toward the erring one. The church forgives, and is willing to receive him in worship and other spiritually constructive activities as appropriate (2 Corinthians 2:6-11; Galatians :1). Special attention should be given to his personal needs, particularly for counseling and building up personal defenses against temptation (See Appendix A).

1.5 Offices of the Church

We believe that God, through the Holy Spirit, has endowed His children with gifts for Christian ministry. Each member lovingly ministers to the other so that all may be built up to the maturity of Christ (2 Timothy 4:2). Some members of the church, however, receive special gifts for leadership, pastoral, preaching, teaching, evangelistic, and deacon-al ministries (Ephesians 4:11-12). The church prayerfully recognizes these gifts and calls these persons to active, visible service within the local congregation (1 Timothy 4:14). They must live above reproach, faithfully teach the Word of God and express loving concern for the well being of others. The elders, with the support of the congregation and under the Holy Spirit's guidance, may commission or ordain such servants (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:2-3). The church, in turn, shall love, respect and support them as well as be on guard to detect, correct or dismiss false teachers (1 Timothy 1;19-20).

We believe that it is the intention of Christ that there should be shepherds of His flock in each local congregation and that they should be ordained by a laying on of hands and prayer, symbolic of the church assigning responsibility and of God imparting the necessary gifts for the assignment (Acts 20:28). In the New Testament church there were such figures as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (bishops/elders), teachers, and deacons (Philippians 1:1). In each

era of the life of the church, Christ through His Spirit seeks to lead the church to adapt its organization to the needs of the time and place (Acts 15:6). The church is first and foremost a brotherhood, and its organizational structure should insure the full participation of the members with their spiritual gifts in its life and discipline (Matthew 23:8). It is therefore the duty of the church to give moral, spiritual and (where necessary) financial support to those whom it asks to serve as ordained leaders (1 Corinthians 9:14; Hebrews 13:17).

1.6 Ordinances of the Church

We believe that the Lord Jesus and His apostles instituted ordinances for the church to observe until Christ's return. These are baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:18-20).

We believe that Christians should obey their Lord's command to be baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To qualify for baptism, one must repent of sin, turn to Christ in sincere faith, give public testimony, and obey Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Acts 2:38; Colossians 2:12-13). We practice baptism as a twofold experience: water baptism and the sealing of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands and prayer by the elders. We regard water baptism as an ordinance of Christ which symbolizes the burial of the old nature, identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and the commitment to follow Him in a life of faithful obedience and discipleship (Acts 22:16; Romans 6:2-6; 1 Peter 3:2). Baptism is therefore a public commitment to a Christian life and at baptism the believer enters into the full fellowship and work of the church (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

We believe in observing the communion of the Lord's Supper as an ordinance instituted by Jesus Christ to symbolize the New Covenant (Matthew 26:26-30; Luke 22:19-20). We recognize the elements, the bread and the cup, as symbols commemorating Christ's broken body and shed blood, of our spiritual life in Him, and of the spiritual unity and fellowship of the body of Christ (Revelations 3:20). They remind us of His suffering and death for our salvation (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

In preparation for the fellowship of the Lord's Supper, every believer is to examine himself or herself and partake of the elements in a worthy manner. Those who have peace with God, live in peace with their fellowmen, and have been baptized into the body of Christ, are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper, thereby testifying to His death until He comes. The church shall invite to the Lord's table, therefore, only those who live in peace with God and their fellow believers and who share in the faith of the church, since the Lord's Supper expresses the fellowship and unity of believers with Christ (1 Corinthians 14:26). It is a supper of remembrance, celebration and praise which strengthens believers for true discipleship and service (1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

1.7 Marriage and the Christian Home

We believe that God instituted marriage for the intimate companionship of husband and wife, and for the procreation and nurture of children, and thereby serves as the foundational basis of the people of God (Genesis 1:27-28). Nevertheless, it is both acceptable and commendable to God to serve Christ unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 25-35). We believe that it is God's will that marriage be a holy state, monogamous, and for life (Hebrews 13:4). We believe that divorce

constitutes a basic violation of God's intention for marriage (Malachi 2:13-14; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12). God ordained that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and that the two shall become one and live in mutual submission (Genesis 2:18-24). In the marriage relationship, then, two mature partners find fulfillment in sharing mutual love, concerns, joys, ideals, ambitions and responsibilities (Proverbs 5:18-19). Those who marry should share a common Christian commitment; a believer should not marry an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). Christians shall marry only in the Lord, be of like precious faith, and for the sake of spiritual unity in the home they should be members of the same congregation (1 Corinthians 7:39).

We believe that Christian parents should nurture their children through exemplary godly living, by praying for them, by leading them in family worship, by teaching them the Scriptures, and by training and disciplining them in a manner pleasing to the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:7). In all of this the Christian home ought to loyally support the church in its mission (Ephesians 6:1-4).

1.8 Symbols of Christian Brotherhood and Order

We believe that in the New Testament the holy kiss and the right hand of fellowship are symbols of Christian love in the church of Christ (Romans 16:16; Galatians 2:9). Likewise, in the New Testament the symbols of man's submission to Christ are to be his short hair and uncovered head while praying or prophesying in worship, and the symbols of a woman's submission are to be her long hair and covered head (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). Historically the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) has highly valued these symbolizations of biblical truths. We believe that these symbols are of continuing value and importance to the church and its members insofar and inasmuch as they remind us of our mutual duty to serve and encourage one another, of our need for continuous cleansing in our daily walk, of our equal relation as male and female to the Lord, and of our various functions and roles as male and female both within the church and within the home (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28).

2. OUTER FUNCTIONS OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

2.1 Christian Integrity

We believe that it is a major Christian obligation to be strictly truthful and transparent in life and doctrine, with no secrecy or hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-12; John 18:19-23). Although the swearing of oaths was in Old Testament times, it is forbidden by Christ (James 5:12). Christians are obligated to speak the truth because they are always in the presence of God (Matthew 5:33-37). Therefore we simply affirm the truth in legal transactions. Our membership is not to be in lodges and secret societies which require the use of oaths and foster the formation of intimate alliances with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Ephesians 5:6-13). Instead, we seek to promote fellowship and brotherhood in the church (Hebrews 10:25).

2.2 Discipleship and Nonconformity

We believe that there are two opposing kingdoms to which men give their spiritual alliance, that of Christ and that of Satan (Matthew 7:13-14; Colossians 1:13). Those who belong to Satan's kingdom live for sin and self, and refuse the obedience of faith. The kingdom of God is composed of those who have been born again and have entered into a faith union with the Lord

Jesus Christ. In them the fruit of the Spirit is in evidence. God's people recognize the lordship of Christ, and perform all manner of good works in accordance with the Gospel. We seek, with God's help, for holiness of heart, life, and speech, and refuse any unequal yoke with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). We manifest only love toward those of other races, cultures, and economic levels. We regard our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts (Galatians 5:22-24). Thus anything which is harmful to or will defile the body we must avoid (Luke 9:23-26; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:12).

We believe that our adornment should be a beauty of the spirit, a sound, virtuous, and Christlike character. This is expressed in attire that is modest, economical, simple, and becoming of those professing Christian faith. "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" [1 Tim. 2:9-10]. "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" [1 Peter 3:3-4]. We also believe that we should be Christlike in our stewardship of money, time, and possessions; that is, we should be generous in giving and recognize that all we have is God's. We believe that our recreational and leisure life should be consistent with the Christian walk. In all of this, we believe that we, through the power of the Spirit, are putting off the old man and putting on the new (Ephesians 4:20-32).

2.3 Love and Nonresistance

We believe that it is the will of God for His children to follow Christian love in all human relationships, that Christians should practice the forgiveness of enemies as exemplified by the Lord Jesus. Such a life of love excludes retaliation and revenge (Romans 12:18-21). Rather God pours His love into the hearts of Christians so that they desire the welfare of all people (Romans 5:5). The church, as the body of Christ, is a fellowship of redeemed, separated people, controlled by redemptive love. Its evangelistic responsibility is to present Christ, the Prince of Peace, as the answer to human need, enmity and violence. The evil, brutal and inhuman nature of war stands in contradiction to the new nature of the Christian. The Christian seeks to practice Christ's law of love in all relationships, and in all situations, including those involving personal injustice, social upheaval, industrial strife, and international tensions (1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 4:1). We believe that it is not God's will that we participate in military service by taking up military arms but that, where possible, perform alternate service to reduce strife, alleviate suffering, and bear witness to the love of Christ. Nor do we believe that it is appropriate that a Christian carry personal weapons (John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Rather, we believe that we must aggressively, at the risk of life itself, do whatever we can for the alleviation of human distress and suffering (Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:17-28, 38-48; Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8).

2.4 The Christian and the State

We believe that God instituted the state to maintain law and order in civil life and to promote public welfare. The functions and responsibilities of the state are distinct from those of the church (Acts 4:19). The chief and primary allegiance of all Christians should be to Christ's

kingdom and we should witness to the civil authorities God's redeeming love in Christ and His sovereignty over people (Acts 5:29; Ephesians 1:20-22). In law enforcement the state does not and cannot operate on the nonresistant principles of Christ's kingdom. Therefore, nonresistant Christians cannot undertake any service in the state or in society which would violate the principles of love and holiness as taught by Christ. Nevertheless, it is our duty to pray for those in government and to proclaim truth, love, righteousness and redemption (1 Timothy 2:1-6). We should respect those in authority, exercise social responsibility, witness against corruption, discrimination and injustice, pay taxes and obey all laws that do not conflict with the Word of God (Matthew 22:17-21; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14).

1. ETERNAL HOPE AND THE RESURRECTION

We believe that God who acts in history will bring His purposes to a final consummation. At death the righteous enter a state of rest in the presence of God, in fellowship with Christ (Philippians 1:21-24). The unrighteous suffer the torment of separation from God (Mark 9:43-48; Luke 16:22-23). Until then the church lives and witnesses in this present evil world, a world in which apostasy from God is to become even more pronounced (1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). The church looks forward with hope, therefore, to the day of the Lord, to the personal return of Christ, and the glorious future of the kingdom of God (Isaiah 61:1-11; Matthew 25:13; Acts 1:11; Titus 2:11-14).

We believe that when the Lord returns, living believers will be raptured and the dead in Christ will be resurrected to be with Him forever (1 Corinthians 15:21-58; 2 Corinthians 5:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Finally all mankind will be judged (Isaiah 2:4). The righteous will inherit the kingdom of God and the unrighteous shall suffer the anguish of eternal hell (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:25-29). In the end, death will be destroyed (2 Timothy 1:10; Revelations 20:14; 21:4). Anti-Christ will be defeated and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelations 20:10). Christ will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness reigns, and God shall be all in all. This is the blessed hope of the church (2 Peter 3:3-13).

May God enable us all to attain His eternal kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, that with His blessed Son we may enjoy fullness of life for ever and ever (Ephesians 1:4-12). "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour"[Mt.25:13]. He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."[Rev. 22:20]

Appendix A

Definitive Statement on Social Acceptance

Adopted: September 1988

(Excerpted from Elders Handbook)

No reinstatement is possible for members who have been excommunicated by the church for reasons of immorality or murder because reinstatement implies a return to a complete, full membership status. Every elder supports the idea of some restrictions on complete restoration. In a democratic society, however, persons in that situation must be permitted to attend worship services and other activities, which are not limited to members of the church alone. This we do not grudgingly, but lovingly, and have done so our entire history.

Persons who have been excommunicated but have satisfactorily professed to have found forgiveness must recognize the following restrictions to their status while continuing to participate in the church: they may not hold an office in the church, they may not be greeted with the holy kiss, they may not lead in public prayer.

In the matter of taking the Lord's Supper, this must be handled in the following manner: persons who have been excommunicated but have satisfactorily professed to have found forgiveness may not take part in the Lord's Supper.

May the Apostolic Christians Churches glorify the Living God by living together with love one for another, and observe this resolution in unity for the strengthening of our congregations. May we fulfill 1 Corinthians 14:20, where it writes, "... in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men."