

STATEMENT OF BELIEF OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH MOVEMENT, NZ

1. *The one true and living God who eternally exists in three persons in unity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

The glorious doctrine of the nature and character of God! Every word in this brief statement counts. God is both Almighty and Immanuel, both over, above and beyond and yet intimately involved with his creation. He is utterly majestic in his holiness and yet unfathomably loving in his care and concern for us. Let us worship him!

- God is One - this is a foundational statement of God's nature of being. He is one God (Deut 6:4). He is not made up of a number of parts. But more than that, there is no other God; he has no rival (Psa 86:8; Isa 44:6-8). The God revealed in the Bible claims to be the only God over all of creation. Indeed, he inhabits eternity.
- God is True - this speaks of God's constancy. In relationships he is utterly faithful, in himself he is unchanging (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8). This means that what God speaks is right and we, as creatures, need to obey his commands and agree with his values.
- God is Living - God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex 3:14). God exists without being dependent on anyone or anything else outside of himself. Not only that, he is the source of all life; every plant and animal in creation depends on him for their life (Col 1:17). This makes the relationship people have with God the most important one of all.
- God eternally exists - this means God has neither beginning nor end (Psa 90:2; Isa 40:28). All created things have their origin in God and depend on him to exist, but God himself is uncreated. He did not come from somewhere once upon a time; he has always been, or better yet, always is. Another aspect of this is that God exists totally outside all limits of space and time. To say that God inhabits eternity means that God exists in a different sphere to his creation. After all, God is Spirit (Jn 4:24).
- In three persons in unity - God is a three-personal being. This is hard for us to grasp because there is nothing in creation that adequately pictures this for us. Yet although God is three persons he is in complete unity within himself. In God there is unity of thought, unity of purpose, unity of action (see 1 Cor 2:4-6; Gal 4:6).
- Father, Son and Holy Spirit - these are the names of the three persons of the Godhead. When the New Testament speaks of God, it usually (but not always) means the Father. Jesus, the Son, revealed the Father and claimed both in word and in action the prerogatives of deity. The Gospel of John opens with one of the most profound statements of Jesus' divinity in Scripture. **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** (Jn 1:1)

The New Testament also makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is not in any way less than God (Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor 3:17-18). True, he is sent by the Father and the Son (Jn 15:26; 16:7), and brings glory to the Son (Jn 16:14), but in the same way the Son is sent by the Father (Jn 3:16) and the Son brings glory to the Father just as the Father glorifies the Son (Jn 17:1). So then, in the Trinity there is not only an equality of nature and being, but the perfect community of love - the pattern for the church.

Further Scriptures:

On God - Gen 1:1-3; Isa 45:20-25; 1 Cor 8:5-6. On Trinity - Matt 3:16-17; 28:19; Jn 14:16; Rom 8:11; 15:30.

2. *The Divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures.*

God is a person and the Scriptures are his revelation of himself to humanity. He wants us to know him as he truly is. Although God has not revealed everything about himself, what is revealed is utterly true and dependable. When we study and meditate on the Scriptures we need to keep in mind that we are coming *to him* in relationship - it is one of the key ways we get to know God (not 'get to know *about* God').

- Divine inspiration - means that God is responsible for the Bible - it has its origin in him (2 Pet 1:20-21). We affirm that the Bible is God's message to humanity. It tells us everything we need to know about God and about ourselves. What is written is God's revelation about the world we live in - not just the physical world but the spiritual realm as well.

The idea of inspiration comes from 2 Tim 3:16 "All scripture is inspired..." The word in Greek is literally 'God-breathed.' God has breathed not only his message but also his very life into the words of scripture.¹ Because of this, the books of the Bible have a quality about them not shared by other writings.

- Divine authority - Because God himself has breathed his message and life into the Scriptures, they carry his authority. That is why Paul can say to Timothy that Scripture is "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Scripture is a standard by which we measure our lives; it is authoritative. We sometimes talk of the 'canon' of Scripture, being the 66 books of the Bible. The word 'canon' comes from the Greek word used for a carpenter's measuring rule. The 66 books of the canon 'measure up' to God's standard of inspiration and are the authority of God for the life and faith of believers.

Further Scriptures:

Psa 19:7-14; Psa 119; Matt 7:24-29; Jn 17:17; Eph 5:26; Col 3:16.

¹ Compare Gen 2:7.

3. *The original perfection of creation; the inherent corruptness of humanity through the Fall; the necessity of repentance and regeneration by grace and through faith in Christ alone, and the eternal separation from God of the finally unrepentant.*

This statement gives the outline of the very great and wonderful story of which God is the author. It begins with the beauty of creation and tells of how things have gone awfully wrong because of human disobedience. It wonderfully declares that the solution to our dilemma is in Christ Jesus, that through his death God has acted sovereignly to restore humanity to himself. But people are free to choose whether they receive God's gracious gift of salvation or whether they reject it - to their peril.

- The original perfection of creation - When God finished each stage of creation he announced it was good, and when he completed the final stage he looked at it all and pronounced that it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). Both Judaism and Christianity set a great value of the world around us because it is God's creation and because it reflects his glory (Ps 19:1-6).
- The inherent corruptness of humanity - is the result of sin in our lives. Every person has a bias toward sin (Jer 17:9). Just like a bowling ball has a bias so that it cannot run in a straight line, so we too cannot run true - we will always deviate to one side or the other, or as the Bible says, we fall short of the mark (Rom 3:23). But with a bowling ball that bias can be used to advantage in a game. Not so with us - the bias of sin has corrupted the beauty of God's image in which we were made (Gen 1:26-27).
- Through the Fall - The Fall is told in Genesis 3. Through the disobedience of the first human, Adam, sin entered our race and places every person under God's judgment of death (Rom 5:15). Even the good things of creation are now etched with pain and toil (Gen 3:16, 17-19).
- The necessity of repentance and regeneration - If we are to recapture the perfection of what we lost in the Fall, the only way to do that is to repent: ie. to turn away from selfishly following our own ways and to humbly return to God, committing ourselves to following his commands for our lives (Mk 1:14-15). When we do that God regenerates us, he gives us abundant, eternal life - life in and of the Spirit (Jn 10:10). Being 'born again' (John 3:3) is not something we achieve any more than we achieved our own natural birth; this new life is something God does in us and for us.
- By grace and through faith in Christ alone - Neither is this new life something we have somehow deserved, it is purely a gift of God's immense grace (Eph 2:8). "The substance of Christianity is," as J.I. Packer says, "faith in the forgiveness of sins through the redeeming work of Christ on the cross."² We receive the gracious provision of God's redemption through faith. Yet even faith is God's gracious gift to us. A great Christian leader once said: "The only thing I contributed to my salvation was the sins for which Christ died."
- The eternal separation from God of the finally unrepentant - Those who choose not to believe in Christ's atoning death will, when they die, be separated from God for ever. There will be no possibility of returning to God (Lk 16:26). Their separation from all God's benefits will be final. They will be lost to even those blessings God has provided in creation - blessings of friendships, of social order and natural comforts.

Further Scriptures:

On human nature - Gen 8:21; Matt 15:10-20; Jn 2:23-25. On repentance - Acts 2:37-40; 2 Cor 7:8-11. On eternal punishment - Mk 9:43-48; Heb 6:2; Rev 20:11-15.

² J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), 178.

4. *The virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, triumphant resurrection, ascension and continuing intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, His second coming and eternal Kingdom reign.*

Our lives commence at conception. Jesus' life did not begin then but, as John 1:1 makes quite clear, he is God and has always been. However, God entered the human race (without ceasing to be God) when Jesus came to the earth. Though tempted he did not sin, though without guilt he was executed as a criminal; his death was not for himself but for us whose sin caused his death. Vindicated by God, he was raised triumphant over death and afterwards ascended to his rightful place of power and glory where he continues to intercede on our behalf. He has promised to come again to this earth when every enemy will be finally removed and his eternal kingdom will be fully established.

- The virgin birth - Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born (Mt 1:18, 25; Lk 1:34-35). His human beginning was a miracle. Different writers have tried to express the mystery of the incarnation - of someone who is fully God and fully man. It is often said that God "took on human flesh." Someone put it like this: "He became what he was not (ie. human); he did not cease to be what he was (ie. God)." We say that Jesus has two natures - human and divine - in his one person.
- Sinless life - In all his life, as a child, a carpenter, and a rabbi, Jesus never sinned (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 7:26). Only he, since Adam, was born without that bias of fallen human nature toward sin. He was tempted as every person is tempted (Heb 4:15), but temptation is not sin (James 1:14-15).
- Atoning death - Jesus laid down his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45) so as to reconcile humanity (and all of creation) to God. To atone means to make "at one." God made Jesus who knew no sin to become sin (2 Cor 5:21) and so he died for us, for the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). "It is finished" (John 19:30) is Jesus' victory cry. At the cross Jesus dealt with sin, defeated Satan and removed our guilt. The cross stands at the centre of our Christian life.
- Triumphant resurrection - Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4). The resurrection cleared Jesus from the charge of blasphemy, showed his message of salvation to be true, and established for us, once and for all, the fact of his unique status as Son of God. Not only that, Jesus was raised as the "first born from the dead" (Col 1:18) and so guarantees our own resurrection: it is God's unshakeable promise of the fullness of our redemption in Christ.
- Ascension and continuing intercession - Having accomplished all he came for, Jesus returned bodily to heaven and assumed again the glory he laid aside when he came to earth (Phil 2:7; Heb 2:9). Jesus did not leave his humanity behind when he ascended, but bears it now in a glorified state (which gives us a promise of the destiny and glory that shall be ours also). In heaven, as our great high priest, Jesus is continually praying for us, representing us to God. In him, God draws near to us, and in him we may draw near to God with the assurance of constant and immediate access (Heb 7:25; see also Rom 8:33; Isa 52:12; John 17).
- His second coming and eternal Kingdom reign - The Bible promises Jesus' return (Acts 1:11) and that his kingdom shall keep on increasing and never end (Isaiah 9:7). The Bible speaks of a period of 1000 years when Christ will reign and there will be peace on the earth (Rev 20:3-7). These Scriptures and how they relate to Jesus' return have been interpreted in various ways so that there are several different schools of thought on the subject. However it happens, two things are certain: first, Jesus will come again; and second, when that happens, the kingdom that he has established on earth by his death will be seen by everyone in all its fullness.

Further Scriptures:

Isa 52:13-53:12; John 1:1-18; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:1-4; Rev 5:6-14; 21:1-4.

5. *The justification and sanctification of believers through the finished work of Christ, their security as they remain in Him, and their future resurrection in an incorruptible body.*

This statement looks at the benefits of salvation for the believer. Salvation has a past, an ongoing, and a future aspect so that the Bible can say at different places that we were saved, we are being saved, and that we shall be saved (2 Tim 1:9; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:2; Rom 5:9-10).

- Justification - is God's act of declaring the sinner righteous. Our sin is no longer held to our account, it has been dealt with by Christ. No longer are we strangers to God but we have been brought back into covenant relationship with him (Col 1:21-23). Justification is God's work (Rom 8:33).
- Sanctification - has two aspects, past and ongoing. To sanctify is to set apart for sacred use. That is what happened when we were born again (regenerated) - God set us apart for his holy use (1 Pet 2:9-10). But sanctification is a journey of growing in holiness of life. In this we cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work within us making us more like Christ (1 Pet 2:11-12; 1 Jn 3:2-3). This aspect of sanctification carries on all our life.
- Through the finished work of Christ - This emphasises that sanctification, like justification, rests on what Christ accomplished on the cross (1 Cor 1:30). Sanctification therefore is a gradual process of appropriating the benefits of the finished work of Christ. A person can never in this life say that the process of sanctification has been completed.
- Their security as they remain in Him - Historically, the security of the believer has been intensely debated and now there are two major schools of thought over whether the 'elect' can 'fall away from grace.' The Apostolic Church's position takes a middle line recognising that God keeps the believer secure in their salvation, but that the believer is responsible to keep pressing into God in the fear of the Lord. W.A.C. Rowe says that we should talk about "the possibility, not probability of falling from grace."³ He goes on to explain that the *fear of the Lord* will cause us to live close to God in full assurance (Col 2:2) and holy confidence (Heb 10:22-23, 35). The result will be a Christian life full of joy and hope (Rom 15:13).⁴

Further Scriptures:

On justification - Gal 2:15-21. On sanctification - Gal 5:16-25. On the cross 1 Cor 1:17-24; Gal 6:14.

³ W.A.C. Rowe, *One Lord, One Faith* (Penygroes: Apostolic Publications, 2nd. ed., 1988), 332.

⁴ *ibid.*

6. *The sacraments of baptism by immersion and of the Lord's Supper.*

Most Protestant churches observe two sacraments, sometimes called ordinances. Sacraments are rites of the church that were instituted by Christ and are sometimes described as 'means of grace.' The sacraments are occasions where God's grace is specially conveyed to the believer.

- Baptism by immersion - Baptism marks a significant moment in the believer's journey of becoming more like Jesus. The Apostolic Church stands in the anabaptist tradition of baptising believers (as opposed to infants). The mode of baptism (ie. full immersion) is inferred from the Scriptures and from the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*. Baptism has many nuances of meaning but two that are very significant are these: first, it symbolises our participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3-4). The very way that immersion is done signifies this. Second, baptism declares our allegiance to Christ as Lord (Mt 28:19).
- The Lord's Supper - Communion is a time of remembering Jesus' sacrificial death through which the new covenant, promised in the prophets (Jer 31:31-34), was established. Jesus used the Passover meal with his disciples to institute this sacrament with the words "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). The Lord's Supper reminds us constantly of the cross - the centre of our faith - and of its power to transform our lives as we partake. Paul said that in communion we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). In sharing the symbols of communion, we preach Christ crucified. It focuses our attention on the past historical fact of our salvation but also points us forward to the time when Jesus shall return again and make his reign a universal reality.

Further Scriptures:

On baptism - Acts 8:35-39; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 16:25-34. On the Lord's Supper - Ex 12:1-20; Acts 2:46; 1 Cor 10:14-22; 11:17-34.

7. *The baptism of the Holy Spirit for believers with supernatural signs, empowering the Church for its mission in the world.*

Pentecostal churches were established on the dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit's presence in believers' lives and on the belief that that experience was to enable them to go into all the world in the fullness of the Spirit's power to fulfil the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20; Lk 24:48-49; Acts 1:8).

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit for believers - For most people the 'baptism of (or 'in') the Spirit' (Acts 1:5) is something experienced after conversion, usually evidenced by speaking in other tongues (glossalalia). We read of this in the lives of believers in the early church (Acts 2:1-4, 38-39; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7). To be baptised in the Spirit is to experience God's presence personally and powerfully in this life.
- With supernatural signs - Jesus said signs and wonders would follow believers and the preaching of the Gospel (Mk 16:17, 20). The lame would walk, the blind would see and those who are in bondage would be set free (cf Lk 4:18-19). We are reminded that we are in a power encounter and that we wrestle not with flesh and blood but principalities and powers (Eph 6:12).

It is also important to remember that a sign is not the same as a signpost. A signpost only points to the real thing. A sign, however, does not just *point to* the kingdom of God but is *charged with* the power of God's kingdom. For example, when a person is healed, it is truly the power of the kingdom at work right here and now; but that healing also signifies (points to) the total healing that will accompany the kingdom when it is here in its fullness.

- Empowering the church for its mission in the world - This ties together the command of Jesus to make disciples of all nations with the power of the Spirit enabling that command to be obeyed and accomplished (Mt 28:19-20; Lk 24:48-49; Acts 1:8). The mission of the church is to live out the kingdom of God amid the life of this world (salt and light) and to call people to be born anew into that kingdom. But it needs the Spirit's power to be able to do that.

Further Scriptures:

Isa 35:5-6; 61:1-2; Matt 11:2-6; Jn 14:12; 20:19-23; Eph 3:20-21.

8. *The gifts of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church and ministry to the world.*

The church comprises individuals who are placed together according to the will of God. Everyone in the church is uniquely gifted. In fact, every person in the world is uniquely gifted because they are made in God's image. So we all bring to the body of believers our own unique contribution so that although corporately we are one body there is a diversity of gifts. These gifts function together to make the church effective both in its own growth and in its outreach. They are to be used in the church as well as in the market place.

- Gifts of the Holy Spirit - Spiritual gifts are sovereignly and graciously given by God and are not necessarily a mark of Christian maturity or character. The Holy Spirit responds to us as we reach out to him in faith for spiritual gifts and as we allow him to place us in situations where we will need them. When we use them properly, they will draw attention to the Giver and not to ourselves. There are many spiritual gifts. As well as the nine listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10, we find others in verses 28-30 of the same chapter and still others in Rom 12:6-8. Along with the supernatural gifts, there are also natural gifts and abilities which are also vital for the church to function properly.
- For the building up of the church - Just as with a natural body, so the church grows and is built up as each part is working properly, doing its bit (Eph 4:16). The church is like an organism rather than an organisation. We are not kept together by a set of rules or even beliefs, but by a common devotion to Christ and the life of the Spirit within (Acts 10:44-48).
- Ministry to the world - Nothing outlives its ultimate purpose. The church cannot endlessly edify itself without ultimately self-destructing. It must give out. It is the difference between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee - one has an outlet, the other does not; one supports life, the other does not. The church exists not for itself but for Christ who is its head and for the world for which he died (1 Pet 2:9).

Further Scriptures:

Gen 12:1-3; Isa 60:1-3; Acts 11:19-26.

9. *Christ's leadership of the Church through the ascension ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, for the unity, maturity and growth of the Church.*

This statement has been historically the distinguishing feature of the Apostolic Church. From its earliest days it saw in the so-called *ascension gifts* of Ephesians 4:11 a 'divine pattern' for leadership within the church, operating together to express fully the perfect earthly ministry of Jesus. The thrust of Ephesians 4 is captured in the last phrase of this Statement - the ultimate focus is not on the various leadership giftings but on their purpose, particularly the unity of the church.

- Christ's leadership of the church through the ascension ministries - Jesus is the Head of the church, no one else. It is his church, he gave himself for it, he is building it, and he is coming back for it. The ascended Jesus has given certain equipping gifts to the church - leaders who are able to impart to the saints what they need in order to do the work of ministry.
- Apostles - gifted leaders who see God's purposes and act on them, often taking churches into new areas of effective ministry. Apostles are listed first in 1 Cor 12:28 and in Eph 4:11 indicating that theirs is a foundational ministry in the church. Often trans-local, they often oversee numbers of local churches, especially those they may have planted or where there is a special relationship between church and apostle (1 Cor 9:2).
- Prophets - gifted visionaries who speak with spiritual incisiveness into the lives of people and movements and nations. Clearly, this is more than is meant by the spiritual gift of prophecy which is given for strengthening, encouragement and comfort (1 Cor 14:3). Prophets often work with apostles as Silas did with Paul (see also Eph 2:20; Lk 11:49).
- Evangelists - gifted communicators of the gospel who have a burden for the lost and an ability to bring them to Christ. Another sign of a true evangelist is their desire and ability to motivate and equip Christians for evangelism and witness.
- Pastors - skillful shepherds who are given to the Body of Christ to nurture and equip believers in their spiritual walk and ministry. Pastors are patient and diligent in the care of those for whom they are responsible - guarding, feeding, serving and leading by example. Teaching also forms an integral part of the pastoral ministry.
- Teachers - highly motivated students and lovers of sound doctrine. Their desire for understanding and truth leads them to search for biblical insight into questions and issues they encounter. Teachers are gifted in explaining and applying Scripture in a life-giving way; their ministry is vital in building strong biblical foundations in the lives of God's people, and in training future leaders (see 2 Tim 2:2).
- For the unity, maturity and growth of the Church - this is Paul's burden in Ephesians 4: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (vv 4-6). The church is to grow into Christ who is the Head, sure of the truth, properly functioning and growing in interdependence on each other's contributions (vv11-16). The role and purpose of the *ascension gifts* are to assist the church to the 'unity of the faith' (v13).

Further Scriptures:

1 Cor 3:9-17; Gal 3:26-28; Eph 1:18-23; 1 Pet 2:4-10; Rev 7:9-10.

10. *The privilege and responsibility of wise stewardship of all that God has given, including the practice of tithing to the local church.*

When God set the first humans in the Garden of Eden he charged them with the privilege and responsibility of caring for his creation. They were the image of the Creator within creation representing the true owner and ruler. So our dominion over creation is one of stewardship not of exploitative and absolute possession. Stewardship of money impacts us directly since it strikes at the very heart of our lives and livelihood.

- The privilege and responsibility of wise stewardship of all that God has given - Wisely caring for God's good gifts both in creation and of his kingdom is an attribute of maturity. God has entrusted us with incredible resources so that with them we can express his nature and character in the earth. Over and above our own endeavours and creativity God remains the true owner and provider of earth's blessings (Psalm 24:1).
- Including the practice of tithing to the local church - Tithing is a matter of faith and discipline. It declares that in our lives we put God first, that we trust him for our daily provision. The practice of tithing and bringing offerings to God is very ancient (Cain and Abel - Gen 4; Abram - Gen 14:20) and was later enshrined in Israel's law. In the New Testament, Jesus takes it a step further and reminds us that God wants all of our lives and resources not just one tenth. Giving to God therefore is ultimately an act of worship because it is our response to God's prior love and generosity to us.

Further Scriptures:

Matt 23:23-24; Luke 21:1-4; Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35; 2 Cor 8 - 9.