
Saved by Grace

A Statement of World Methodist Belief and Practice

I

Compelled to Account

1. Since Methodists from a Christian community, scattered in mission throughout the world, they are compelled to give an account of who they are by declaring what they believe and hope. The good they do appears to some as more obvious than the faith they profess, and yet they proclaim that the good they do proceeds out of the faith they profess. Many are confused. Methodism appears to them as a collection of various opinions where a person is free to believe almost anything that person chooses. What is needed is a clear, fresh and vital vision of the saving truth, which is Jesus Christ, who transforms human life and gives meaning and hope to human existence.

Seeing the Vision

2. How can we describe the vision we see so that we enable others to see it with us? How do we express what we believe so that we pass it on to others as the truth we have also received? It will not be enough to reproduce the words of others. Somehow, our answer must point clearly to the vision of Jesus Christ for human life and all creation in the Kingdom of God. It must be deeply grounded in the Scriptures that attest to that vision. Our vision must not contradict what Christians of all ages have experienced and known. To carry conviction our answer must arise from a genuine experience of that vision. That vision can happen anywhere, anytime and is capable of making sense of the full range of human experience. We should give our answer in a way that helps not only the 'wise men' but also the 'lowly shepherds' to see that vision and commit themselves unreservedly to it. And yet our answer must not be so complete as to prevent our growth in understanding the Christian Faith.

Our Sufficient Authority

3. The authority upon which all Christians base their understanding and their doctrinal formulations is, first and foremost, the Holy Bible: taken as a whole, it is sufficient for our knowledge of God and of his self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

Essentials of Faith

4. We therefore invite Methodists throughout the world to seek to discover and reaffirm the essentials of the Christian Faith. This would include an appreciation of our Methodist tradition as well as a deeper understanding and love for the catholic heritage that lies behind it. They will then be able and ready to "give an account of the hope that is in them." Coming to understand the Faith will make sense of at least three things: our experience; how we think, and the responsibilities that we have in life. This understanding will give wholeness, strength and courage to our lives. It will enable us to claim our identity as part of the Christian family. It will give us things to say and do in our mission in the world. It will provide us critical norms for evaluating and transforming the values and ways of life that shape people. It will sensitize us to the evil structures of our world, such as racism, injustice, oppression, violence and terrorism, and inspire us with courage to overcome them and work for peace. It will give us freedom to participate with all those who work for making a better home for humankind. It will motivate us to be more faithful servants of the Lord who, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through people, continues to make the Kingdom come. This is no light option. For it to succeed, commitment, effort and resources must be given to this task.

II

Beginning at Pentecost

5. What we are inviting Methodists to discover and do began in Jerusalem. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came with power upon the apostles, and the other disciples, and made them realize that God had been at work in Jesus to bring salvation to the world. Suddenly, as a result, they found words to tell others of what they had seen and heard! This that happened in Jerusalem began to happen in "Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth." God brought peoples in all ages and from various cultures and civilizations into the same experience and formed them into a fellowship across the world. They came to belong to the same family. This process has been happening ever since and we are a part of it.

The Wesleyan Movement

6. Similarly something very special and remarkable happened to John Wesley. His life was transformed by the grace of God, who used him to light a flame that spread throughout the world. He offered to all who would listen the Good News that they could receive salvation through Jesus Christ. Doing so he gave them a vision of the 'new creatures' they could become. The churches that have arisen from this movement throughout the world are not identical, but there is a strong family likeness among them. The Methodists are still one people.

Methodist Distinctives

7. Central to Wesley's work was the proclamation of salvation and out of this emerged what is distinctive in Methodism:

- God's Grace

Grace is behind the whole of God's works. God's grace is active in creation and providence. By grace we possess conscience which enables us to discern good and evil. Human beings reject the will of God, are estranged from the divine life and themselves, and are entangled in the evil which corrupts the world around them. Thus human beings are in need of salvation, and God's grace gives them the capacity to respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ.

- God's Saving Love

The grace of God is, in its essence, God's saving love, rooted in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. God forgives our sin, removes estrangement and fear and conquers evil in and around us, as an anticipation of the full victory to be realized in the eternal world to come.

- Christ's Atonement – For All

The benefits of Christ's atonement must be appropriated by each and every person. Though God's saving grace is intended for everyone, it is not irresistible. God created human beings with freedom of choice. He will not violate their nature, even to save them.

- A Gift to be Received

Salvation is neither inevitable or self-achieved. People cannot save themselves, but neither can they be saved without themselves. God alone is the giver of salvation, but a person may refuse to accept the gift when it is offered.

- Transformed Lives

God not only works for us in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for our redemption, but also works in us by transforming our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Divine Life Within

Sanctification. As we live with God, the divine life is shaped within us. The goal is perfect love which is attainable in this life. The Christian life is one of growing maturity in grace.

- A Society of Saints

Holiness is social as well as personal. It involves the transformation not only of the individual, but transformation of the world of which he or she is a part. It envisages a society of saints. All people are called to be saints. The expression of holiness in its social context entails the physical and material well-being of all people.

- The Witness of God's Spirit

The feature of Methodist thought which brings joy, comfort and strength to people is the assurance of the work that God has done and is doing in them. "His Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." (Romans 8:16) The believer knows that the abode of the Holy Spirit is human hearts and communities.

Offering Christ

8. Since proclamation of the Gospel of salvation is central to Methodism, its theology is best expressed through preaching that contains the offer of salvation and calls for a response to it. Its theology is enshrined in hymns that are both a vehicle for teaching and an expression of the joy and praise of salvation. It is not insignificant that Methodists have often been dubbed 'a singing people.' The beauty of this theology is that it finds concrete expression in the holiness of the lives of the people shaped by it; and in the renewing of the world in righteousness, justice and peace according to the vision of the Kingdom. Theology in the Methodist tradition joins 'knowledge and vital piety;' it is inclusive in its scope and seeks to speak plain truth for plain people.' These distinctive features of Methodism are meaningless unless they are set within the whole Christian tradition.

III

What Methodists Share in Common With Other Christians

9. Methodists along with all other major Christian bodies accept the Apostles' Creed and the first four ecumenical councils of the Church, the teachings of which are set out in the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian formula. These embody the doctrine of the Trinity; the Person of Christ, the divine Word made flesh, fully God and fully human; and the doctrine of redemption.

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We share with all Christians belief that:

- Salvation is the work of the Triune God.

- Scriptures reveal God's plan of salvation.

- All people need salvation since all are sinners and cannot save themselves.

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Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is the Saviour of the world.

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The Holy Spirit is God present and active in the world for its salvation.

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The Church is the body of Christ; the community that bears the message of salvation and incorporates those who are in the way of salvation into its own body.

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The Church is the community of those who are being saved by grace through faith in Christ, living under God's rule, and are sent out as instruments of God's eternal purpose

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The Church is a fellowship of worship and praise in which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are celebrated.

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The Victory of God's love. Christ came preaching the kingly rule of God for all life. Salvation, under God's rule, is available now but looks forward to its consummation when every form of evil will be destroyed and the last enemy, which is death, will be no more. The victory of God's love will gloriously triumph in the 'resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.'

The One Church

10. Methodists gladly affirm their commitment to the ecumenical movement, and are invited to commit themselves afresh to work and pray for the visible unity of the one Church.

The Summons

This invitation summons the family of Methodists around the globe to prayer, that what happened in Jerusalem and Aldersgate through the moving power of the Holy Spirit will happen again in us.

Methodists are asked to reflect on what they already believe, but perhaps do not find easy to express, and to open themselves to the Bible and the insights of other Christians across the centuries. Thus, they may enter into a deeper and more meaningful experience of faith itself and receive a greater motivation to share the good News with others.

Then, our vision, our hopes, and our dreams of a new awakening may be fulfilled.

This statement was drafted in Jerusalem and adopted by the World Methodist Council in Nairobi, Kenya.