

# **The Declaratory Statement of the Presbyterian Church of Australia**

(Section II below, an extract from *Constitution, Procedure and Practice of the General Assembly of Australia*)

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **THE SCHEME OF UNION**

The Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, the Presbyterian Church of Victoria, the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, the Presbyterian Church of South Australia, the Presbyterian Church of Tasmania and the Presbyterian Church of Western Australia, holding the same doctrine, government, discipline, and form of worship, believing that it would be for the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom that they should form one Presbyterian Church, as hereinafter provided, to be called the Presbyterian Church of Australia, and under authority of Christ alone, the Head of the Church and Head over all things to His Church, agree to unite on the following basis and subject to the following articles to be subscribed by the Moderators of the respective churches in their names and on their behalf.

### **BASIS OF UNION**

**I** The Supreme Standard of the united church shall be the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

**II** The Subordinate Standard of the united church shall be the Westminster Confession of Faith, read in the light of the following declaratory statement:-

1. That in regard to the doctrine of redemption as taught in the subordinate standard, and in consistency therewith, the love of God to all mankind, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the free offer of salvation to men without distinction on the grounds of Christ's all sufficient sacrifice, are regarded by this Church as vital to the Christian faith. And inasmuch as the Christian faith rests upon, and the Christian consciousness takes hold of, certain objective supernatural historic facts, especially the incarnation, the atoning life and death, and the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, and His bestowment of His Holy Spirit, this Church regards those whom it admits to the office of the Holy Ministry as pledged to give a chief place in their teaching to these cardinal facts, and to the message of redemption and reconciliation implied and manifested in them.
2. That the doctrine of God's eternal decree, including the doctrine of election to eternal life, is held as defined in the Confession of Faith, Chapter III, Section 1, where it is expressly stated that according to this doctrine, "neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established"; and further, that the said doctrine is held in connection and harmony with the truth - that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, that He has provided a salvation sufficient for all, and adapted to all, and offered to all in the Gospel, and that every hearer of the Gospel is responsible for his dealing with the free and unrestricted offer of eternal life.
3. That while none are saved except through the mediation of Christ and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who worketh when and where and how it pleaseth Him; while the duty of sending the Gospel to the heathen who are sunk in ignorance, sin and misery is imperative; and while the outward and ordinary means of salvation for those capable of being called by the Word are the ordinances of the Gospel, in accepting the subordinate standard it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost,

or that God may not extend His Grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in His sight.

4. That in holding and teaching, according to the Confession of Faith, the corruption of man's nature as fallen, this Church also maintains that there remain tokens of man's greatness as created in the image of God, that he possesses a knowledge of God and of duty - that he is responsible for compliance with the moral law and the call of the Gospel, and that, although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God unto salvation, he is yet capable of affections and actions which of themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy.
5. That liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the subordinate standard not essential to the doctrine therein taught, the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace.
6. That with regard to the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion, as taught in the subordinate standard the church holds that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, "and Head over all things to the Church, which is His body." It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles and does not consider its office-bearers, in subscribing the Confession, as committed to any principles inconsistent with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgement, declaring in the words of the Confession that "God alone is Lord of the conscience".

**III** Any proposed revision or abridgement of the subordinate standard of the Church, or restatement of its doctrine, or change of the formula, shall, before being adopted, be remitted to the local assemblies, and through them to the presbyteries, and no change shall be made without the consent of a majority of the local assemblies, three-fifths of the presbyteries of the whole Church, and a majority of three-fifths of the members present when the final vote of the General Assembly is taken.

**IV** On any change being made in the Basis of Union in accordance with Section III, if any congregation thereupon refuses to acquiesce in the change and determines to adhere to the original basis of union, the General Assembly is empowered - (1) to allow such congregation to retain all its congregational property; or (2) to deal in such other way with the said property as to the Assembly may seem just and equitable.

**V** Any proposed change in either of the two preceding Sections III and IV shall be made only under the provisions contained in section III.

**VI** Formula to be signed by ministers and elders at their ordination or induction, and by probationers on receiving licence:-

I own and accept the Subordinate Standard of this Church, with the explanations given in the articles contained in the declaratory statement, as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the Holy Scriptures, and as a confession of my faith. I further own the purity of worship practised in this Church, and the Presbyterian government thereof to be founded on the Word of God, and agreeable thereto; and I promise that through the Grace of God I shall firmly and constantly adhere to the same, and to the utmost of my power shall in my station assert, maintain, and defend the doctrine, worship and government of this Church.