

A Theological Vision

These affirmations are offered as a positive contribution to the Church's ongoing theological discernment in the *Living in Love and Faith* project, and as an invitation to ongoing conversation. They seek to present a concise but broad vision of Christian life and discipleship, to bring greater clarity to our points of convergence and divergence, and to encourage and equip those who remain committed to the Church's inherited teaching.

These affirmations are sponsored by a number of members of the House of Bishops, whose names appear below, and are supported by a wider grouping within the House and College. They should be read in conjunction with the earlier paper on the Church of England's Doctrine of Marriage.

CREDAL ORTHODOXY

For in Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority (Colossians 2.9-10)

We profess, in common with the universal Church, a wholehearted commitment to the Nicene Creed. Its Trinitarian foundation and exclusive Christology, its assertion of the goodness and promised fulfilment of embodied humanity within the created order, its teaching on the coming judgement, and its emphasis on the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church provide vital markers for our time as a summary of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation and reveal God's will for human life and behaviour. As the Articles say, what is not found in Scripture cannot be imposed on the Church, and the Church lacks authority to ordain anything contrary to God's word written. We seek to interpret the Scriptures guided by the Church Catholic across time and space.

UNIVERSAL CHURCH

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9)

We celebrate the universal Church's calling to serve the people and societies in which it is placed, while recognising that it will never be fully at home in any culture, since its primary loyalty is to the present and coming kingdom of God. In its various cultural contexts, the Church is called to witness boldly to the gospel of Jesus Christ, identifying and rejecting the idols and harmful ideologies of any age. We are called to be aliens and strangers within the world, cleaving to Christ and turning from sin.

The Anglican Communion is part of this universal Church, called to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his gospel, and must play its part in answering the prayer of Jesus that his people should be united. The Church across the world is interdependent, and the proper autonomy of the provinces within the Anglican Communion cannot alter the reality that what one does affects the others. We stand alongside all faithful Christians, including fellow Anglicans globally who are committed to holding to the Church's historic faith and moral teaching.

SUPERNATURAL FAITH

Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Thessalonians 1.5)

We declare a confident faith in the life-giving and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. We hold to the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and the efficacy of prayer. We recognise the unseen dimensions of spiritual life, the reality of the miraculous, and the joy of eschatological hope, living out the vocation of the Church as a family of believers in all our diversity.

Marriage and celibacy, in their different ways, point forward to this eschatological hope, and have offered paths of holiness from the earliest days of the church until now. Marriage is more than a contingent social arrangement. As the joyful, lifelong union of male and female, the two forms of created humanity, marriage is a dynamic sign of the saving union between Christ and the Church through the Spirit, from which our salvation springs. It thus represents the coming together of difference and is the proper place for sexual intimacy, out of which union the miracle of new life may be born. Singleness is more than sexual self-denial. It is a positive declaration of the ultimate sufficiency of our eternal union with God in Christ, focussed, like Jesus, on leaving spiritual descendants.

SACRIFICIAL DISCIPLESHIP

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me (Galatians 2.19-20)

We rejoice in the baptismal Christian life as life in all its fullness through death-to-self in repentance and faith. Joy and peace paradoxically come through sacrifice and self-denial, not through seeking self-fulfilment or self-expression. The Church invites all people to a life of worship and holiness, serving others with compassion, and learning to be turned outwards in love for God and neighbour.

In a society where questions of inclusion and identity are pressing, we rejoice that Christ calls all to follow him without exception. We discover who we are created to be, as men and women made in God's image through our relationships with God in Christ and with each other, whatever our sexuality or gender. All are invited to find true forgiveness, belonging, identity, peace, joy, hope and an eternal destiny in Christ, our crucified, risen and ascended Lord.

Sponsored by:

Jill Duff, Bishop of Lancaster
Jonathan Gibbs, Bishop of Rochester
Ric Thorpe, Bishop of Islington
Martin Warner, Bishop of Chichester
Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford
Pete Wilcox, Bishop of Sheffield
Paul Williams, Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham

On behalf of a wider grouping within the House and College.