

# Affirmations and Denials Concerning World Mission

— The Southgate Fellowship —

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9–12 ESV)

## *1. Preface*

In the summer of 2016 a group of theologians, missiologists and reflective practitioners convened to discuss the state of missions within the evangelical world. Drawn from Europe, Canada and the United States, participants reflected a variety of backgrounds, church denominations, and diverse cross-cultural experience. Following the success of this initial symposium it was decided to establish a formal identity with a clear mission. We began to meet again under the title of *The Southgate Fellowship* (named after the location of our first meeting in North London; hereafter, *TSF*). *TSF* is a fellowship of theologians, missiologists, and reflective practitioners fully committed to the visible church and her Christ-appointed mission. In obedience to Christ and his Word, *TSF* exists to advance biblical thinking and practice in world mission, as captured in the *solas* of reformational theology.

The *summum bonum* of mission activity is the glory of God. This ultimate aim—under Jesus Christ, Head of the church and Lord of the nations—must retain uncompromising primacy for each and every missionary and mission endeavour. In order to bring glory to Christ in the fulfilling of his mandate (Matt 28:18–20), we must let God's authoritative and sufficient Word define the design and execution of mission strategy. In short, all mission activities must draw upon Scripture and its self-interpreting authority. To heed Scripture is to obey the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church and the Head of her mission.

As we affirm these core principles, *TSF* observes that due to a convergence of forces in contemporary theology and the global church, many in the study and practice of world mission have strayed methodologically from the sure foundation of Scripture; they functionally deny the categorical uniqueness of the Christian faith, and impose non-biblical and even anti-biblical interpretive grids upon people, religions, culture, and the work of mission.

*TSF* Council, the author of these 'Affirmations and Denials Concerning World Mission,' does not set out to determine the motives behind such trends. Rather, for the sake of Christ and his global church, we identify, challenge, and offer corrections to the errors we perceive in the world of missions. Thus, in

keeping with the *solas* of the Reformation, the following Affirmations and Denials seek to rearticulate biblical mission thought and practice, attempt to locate and expose weaknesses and errors in various contemporary paradigms, and seek to call missiologists, missionaries, mission agencies, and Christ's global church to biblical fidelity in belief, thought, methods, and goals—all in obedience to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the nations.

The writing of the 'Affirmations and Denials Concerning World Mission' has been a labour of love. We have strived to write these statements in a way which recognises complexity without sacrificing clarity. We have strived to write these statements with epistemic humility and confidence, recognizing both our own contextual locatedness and the kerygmatic unity and universality of biblical revelation. That this work has been done within the context of a fellowship of loving, listening, united and prayerful believers is of vital importance in terms of the context and spirit in which we believe such theological construction is to be undertaken and received. A consensus document, the following sets of affirmations and denials then are the fruit of lengthy reflection, debate, and collaboration. Each statement draws upon the study and experience of *TSF* Council and its external advisors, with a view to express precisely the biblical framework for missions and missiological questions, the lenses through which we must discern and determine every question of faithful contextualization.

We believe that the academic and ministerial background, missiological experience and ecclesial diversity of its authors, in combination with the valuable guidance of nationals and missionaries from all over the world, means that these affirmations and denials are a substantive and significant piece of work deserving of a wide circulation within the evangelical community and beyond. We offer them not as the end of a conversation but rather as a contribution to ongoing global missiological reflection and conversation. For the glory of Christ Jesus, Head of the Church, and Lord of gospel mission, we pray that they will produce the faithfulness and fruitfulness that we long to see in the advance of Christ's name to the nations.

*TSF* Council humbly and prayerfully offer these affirmations and denials to the global church with the aim that God's name will be glorified among the nations. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

—David B. Garner and Daniel Strange, *TSF* Co-Chairs on behalf of *TSF* Council

## ***2. Introduction: Why Affirmations and Denials concerning World Mission?***

In the following 100 sets of affirmations and denials, *TSF* has sought to provide a biblical response to a host of missions, missiological, and theology of religions questions. We have decided to use the method of affirmation and denial under the conviction that Scripture lays down fundamental guidelines for faithful missions thinking and practice, and that within those God-given guidelines lies God-given latitude for faithfully creative self-theologising and contextualisation. We recognise that methodologically, within our current late-modern cultural context, the decision to use 'affirmations' and 'denials' may need a little explanation and perhaps even justification.

In his ambitious and seminal study, *The Gagging of God*, D. A. Carson entitled one of his chapters 'On Drawing Lines, When Drawing Lines Is Rude'.<sup>1</sup> Twenty years on, and the drawing of lines can be perceived, both inside and outside the church and academy, to be even more offensive, oppressive, pedantic, simplistic, and stifling.

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 347.

However, the capacity and necessity to create boundaries and make distinctions is what God's image bearers have been endowed with since creation. We image a Creator God who creates by placing boundaries, making distinctions and separations, and distinguishing truth from error. Indeed, the capstone of the Christian worldview has rightly been called the 'Creator-creature *distinction*'.

Therefore, unpacking the specifics of a Christian worldview ontologically, epistemologically and ethically concerns the making of distinctions and setting of boundaries. Discrimination and boundary setting are not inherently confining or destructive, but when applied according to the divine order (that is, according to a biblically defined structure and interpretation of reality), ensure beautiful, God-exalting, clarifying, and life-giving peace. Conversely it is the blurring or erasing of God-given boundaries that generate sub- and non-Christian worldviews, which evidence and perpetuate rebellion, confusion, human misery and futility.<sup>2</sup>

It is from this perspective that we understand the worldview of the New Testament writers who are constantly making distinctions and creating boundaries for the building up and protection of Christ's church. In terms of justifying our own exercise in 'Affirmations and Denials', it is in this pastoral, and not pedantic, spirit that Paul exhorts Titus to hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, to encourage others by sound doctrine *and* to refute those who oppose it (1:9). To exhort, encourage and refute, one needs not only an *affirmation* of what the trustworthy message is, but a corollary *denial* of what it is not, or by implication, what it cannot be.

Therefore, the following affirmations and denials can act as a foundation upon which, and a fence within which, missional methods can and must operate. The goal of these statements then is not to stifle but to articulate, and ultimately stimulate, healthy and faithful missiology and faithful mission.

For the sake of transparency, a few explanatory points are worthy of disclosure:

- Though deeply aware of our fallibility, the authors self-consciously seek to submit to God's Word completely in each and every affirmation and denial. These words are reliable only insofar as they honour Holy Scripture.
- The affirmations and denials are saturated with biblical reflection, yet in order to avoid the perils of proof texting, we determined not to include any. When using exact biblical wording, we have put phrases in quotation marks and noted references in the glossary.
- Each affirmation and denial targets specific mission thinking and practice, presenting critiques of extant errors and constructive formulations to engender biblical thought and practice.
- This document should be read as a whole, as each section depends on the others before and after it.
- At several points, we employ phrases common to missiological publications. These quotation-marked phrases and italicised terms are defined in the glossary.
- Not every affirmation has a corresponding denial and vice versa. We have sought to frame each statement according to what we believe to be most useful—sometimes multiple affirmations and sometime multiple denials. The goal at each point therefore

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<sup>2</sup> As Os Guinness notes, 'The story of creation is a story of distinctions, a story of discrimination between heaven and earth, which the Tower of Babel tries to undo, between male and female, etc. In fact, the Jews called the Lord, "the Great Discriminator," because His creation discriminates between things, and if you remove the discriminations, you create idols'. Os Guinness, 'Christian Courage and the Struggle for Civilization', *C. S. Lewis Institute Broadcast Talks 2.4* (2017): 6, [http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm\\_send/6110](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/6110).

is not to impose an artificial affirmation/denial symmetry, but to deliver theological, methodological, and missiological clarity.

- Throughout this document, we use the term “visible” church to include individual local churches, groups of local churches, presbyteries, and synods.

*TSF* invites every reader of the ‘Affirmations and Denials Concerning World Mission’ to express support for its contents by endorsement at [www.TheSouthgateFellowship.org](http://www.TheSouthgateFellowship.org), and to share this document with churches, church leaders, church mission committees, missionaries, and mission agencies.

Finally, *TSF* wish to express thanks for the detailed input, correction and feedback along the way from national church leaders and missionaries in many nations around the world. Indebted to their input, *TSF* still assumes full responsibility for the following affirmations and denials.

### ***3. Prolegomena and Theological Method<sup>3</sup>***

#### **3.1. Scripture and Mission**

1a) We affirm that the Christian faith is given by supernatural special revelation, and inscripturated in the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.

1b) We affirm that the Bible reveals the good news of salvation provided only through the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1c) We affirm that the whole of Scripture is to be believed and obeyed by people in all places, all times, and all cultures.

1d) We deny that what Scripture affirms lays obligations of belief and obedience only on its original recipients, only on some cultures, or only in some situations.

1e) We affirm that Scripture authoritatively and uniquely reveals and explains the meaning of the redemptive work of God in history, centering in and accomplished by Jesus Christ, and provides authoritative and sufficient instruction for faith and obedience, including authoritative and sufficient instruction for faithful dissemination of that unique message.

2a) We affirm that the primary interpretive lens for understanding Scripture (including the book of Acts) concerning various religions and practices of the Jews and Gentiles is the Bible’s inherent redemptive historical framework.

2b) We deny that the primary interpretive lens for understanding Scripture (including the book of Acts) concerning the religious practices of Jews and Gentiles is culture, ethnicity, race, or regional diversity and local autonomy.

2c) We deny that the context of the receptor bears ultimate epistemological and interpretive authority, and we further deny that a people in any given epoch of human history has the authority to impose its unique interpretive grid upon the Scriptures.

2d) We deny that this redemptive historical interpretive lens weakens the comprehensive authority of Scripture, but rather draws from Scripture’s own claims and thereby acknowledges and submits to the Bible’s own self-interpreting authority.

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<sup>3</sup> Select affirmations and denials in this section draw upon ‘Affirmations and Denials Concerning the Doctrine of Scripture’, Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), December 2008.

2e) We affirm that some commands and practices of Scripture are of such a nature that their application to our present circumstances must reckon with the changed redemptive-historical conditions in which God addresses us. For example, animal sacrifices that were prescribed in the Old Testament are no longer legitimate now, because Christ has offered the final sacrifice.

3a) We affirm that study of the practice of the church in the New Testament is essential to mission, yet all such interpretation must yield to the unique redemptive-historical factors at work in this description of the early mission of the church, and indeed at each stage of biblical revelation.

3b) We affirm that the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles reveal certain non-repeatable features unique to the apostolic age, and that functionally affirming these features is essential to drawing proper contemporary missiological principles.

### 3.2. Theology of Religions

4a) We affirm that Scripture uniquely presents the one true faith and the one true religion.

4b) We deny that any faith, spirituality, or religion that claims written, oral, or institutional authority above or on par with Scripture is a true, saving faith or divinely-given religion.

4c) We affirm that God has created all humans to be worshippers and that all humans are created to be in a covenant relationship with him. Thus, he is the origin of all true worship and all true covenant-keeping.

4d) We affirm that in absolute contrast to all other faiths and religions, which are idolatrous counterfeits by their very existence, the faith expressed in Scripture is divinely-given and as such is unqualifiedly distinct.

4e) We deny that the Christian faith and religion are purely human constructs.

4f) We affirm that trust in any god other than the triune God revealed in Scripture, any false understanding of the triune God revealed in Scripture, or any resistance to the triune God revealed in Scripture requires full repentance.

5a) We affirm that as a result of the perpetuity of the *imago Dei*, God's common grace, and the historical influence of special revelation, traditions and cultures *formally* share many religious practices.

5b) We deny that any belief or practice of non-Christian religions is spiritually profitable or pleasing to the one true God.

5c) We affirm that releasing anyone from their inescapable moral and epistemological opposition to the Creator requires the regenerating work of the Spirit.

5d) We deny that outward religious similarities reflect degrees of spiritual proximity to the true faith or that devotion to such practices evidences a greater readiness for spiritual conversion.

6a) We affirm that the practice of false religions and the moral posture of unbelievers make them blind to saving knowledge, unwilling to embrace the one true God by faith, and unable to reverse their eternal judgment.

6b) We deny that someone who holds a false monotheistic religion is spiritually closer to belief in the gospel than one who holds a polytheistic, pantheistic or atheistic worldview.

6c) We affirm that the offer of salvation in Christ is directed without exception to all people who are not yet bound to him in conscious faith.

6d) We deny that the adherents of any non-Christian religions and worldviews can receive salvation, except through faith in Christ alone.

6e) We affirm that Israel, too, finds salvation only in turning to Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of Old Testament religion.

6f) We deny that non-Christian religions and worldviews also offer ways of salvation.

6g) We affirm that a correct response to the foundational questions posed by any and all humans (e.g., 'How did we get here?'; 'What went wrong?' and 'How can this be fixed?') is impossible without revelation from the triune God.

### 3.3. Sufficiency of General and Special Revelation

7a) We affirm that universal general revelation is sufficient to render all people accountable before God and without excuse.

7b) We deny that general revelation is sufficient for salvation.

8a) We affirm that God's special revelation has always been needed, even before the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to properly interpret, supplement, and therefore, complement God's general revelation.

8b) We deny that these two modes were ever meant to be separated from one another or work independently from each other, as special revelation employs the tools of general revelation.

9a) We affirm that special revelation, as inscripturated in the canon of the Old and New Testaments, is necessary for salvation because it reveals the good news of Jesus Christ.

9b) We affirm that Scripture presents saving faith having its object in Jesus Christ, and that the efficacy rests not in faith itself, but in Christ who saves.

9c) We deny that faith can be saving if Jesus Christ (as revealed in Scripture) is not the object of faith.

10a) We affirm that the Bible teaches the need to learn the gospel (*fides ex auditu*) from reading Scripture or a human messenger proclaiming it.

10b) We deny that the Bible prescribes personal salvation by means of private revelation.

10c) We deny there is scriptural evidence to warrant belief in any form of post-mortem evangelism or post-mortem salvation.

11a) We affirm that Old Testament believers, both Israelites and those gentiles ingrafted into Israel, were saved by Christ as he was revealed to them at their stage of redemptive history.

11b) We deny the inclusivist contention that there is a valid analogy between the salvation of those who lived before Christ and those today who have never heard of Christ.

### 3.4. Biblical Revelation and Other Sacred Texts

12a) We affirm that the sacred texts of non-Christian religions are an extension of their entire worldviews, and thus they must be interpreted in light of this comprehensive grid.

12b) We affirm that the sacred texts and readers of non-Christian religions advance their own hermeneutical rules, which are not necessarily monolithic, yet uniformly entail attempted autonomy and epistemological rebellion.

12c) We deny it is valid to impose a Christian reading of non-biblical sacred texts as a means of reframing and thereby legitimising the texts as divinely inspired or authoritative.

12d) We deny that one can pick aspects of the non-biblical sacred texts and declare them in any way to be Holy Spirit-inspired.

12e) We affirm that biblical truths and historical events can be presented in other non-biblical documents, yet their proper description and meaning come ultimately from Scripture.

13a) We affirm that when Christians are called to analyse and interpret the data found in non-biblical sacred texts, they must do so under biblical authority and according to the clear teaching of Scripture.

13b) We deny that a hermeneutical importation of content from non-biblical sacred texts which conclusively influences an interpreter to adjust their understanding of a biblical text is ever helpful or warranted.

### 3.5. Extraordinary Means

14a) We affirm that while the Old Testament records many cases of extraordinary immediate revelation to the prophets, God's final extraordinary revelation is in his Son and the once-for-all apostolic witness he appointed and preserved in the New Testament.

14b) We affirm that God uses his prophetic and apostolic Word proclaimed as his appointed ordinary means of salvation.

14c) We deny the existence of any biblical accounts of faith and repentance without human agency.

15a) We affirm that if God were to use extraordinary means today (e.g. miraculous events, dreams or visions), that these occurrences should be interpreted providentially either as pre-evangelistic *praeparatio*, uncommon tools in God's hand for sovereignly drawing people to himself, or as divinely purposed tools for hardening unbelievers in their unbelief.

15b) We deny that any extraordinary experience or extra-biblical insight is of equal or similar authority to Scripture, that these experiences in themselves warrant any epistemic reliance or that they provide adequate basis for faith in Christ.

15c) We affirm instead that all believers everywhere should trust solely in the Word of God inscripturated in the Old and New Testaments, rather than mystical, emotional, or otherwise extraordinary experiences.

16a) We affirm the authority, necessity and sufficiency of biblical revelation, coupled with the Spirit's illumination in the heart and mind of the hearer, for true faith and epistemic certainty.

16b) We deny that we can properly speculate concerning the precise nature of the causal chain of events between providential *praeparatio* and providential contact with a human messenger, who articulates the biblical faith.

### **3.6. Biblical Authority and the Social Sciences**

17a) We affirm that God has gifted the church with many tools, including the social sciences, which aid in understanding societies, norms, ethics, religions, and human relationships.

17b) We deny a dualistic view of reality in which nature and grace (or the sciences and faith) oppose each other.

18a) We affirm that Scripture is the ultimate authority to which all human disciplines, including missiology and social sciences, must be subject.

18b) We deny that any extra-biblical tool should ever or in any way supplant Scripture, explicitly, implicitly or functionally, as the determinative authority for defining human relationships or missional method.

18c) We deny that the Bible's norming role precludes the need for diligent study of human circumstances, such as the details of various religions, people groups, and perceived identities.

### **3.7. The Usefulness of Extra-Biblical Tools**

19a) We affirm that God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit actively sustains and governs all of creation.

19b) We deny that all of God's work in this world can be empirically researched, explained or measured. In other words: data that are related to faith convictions or practices cannot be reduced to mere empirical facts.

19c) We deny that empirical facts can be assessed apart from religious and interpretive precommitments.

19d) We deny a use of ethnography which reduces practical theology or biblical missiology to a purely descriptive tool.

20a) We affirm that Christian believers must take a self-conscious stance in the assessment of all things, including empirical facts, according to the self-interpreting authority of Scripture and its revealed worldview.

20b) We deny a positivist-empiricist claim of scientific neutrality or agnosticism, which denies or hides the presuppositions of the researcher.

20c) We affirm that the use and interpretation of empirical data must be governed by divine revelation, whereby biblical revelation exercises interpretive and methodological authority over all data research, including, but not restricted to the process of observation, the research methods used, and the ways in which the Christian ethnographer's interpretations are formed and practiced.

20d) We deny any claim of relativism, which rejects the possibility of discerning truth in or through created reality.

21a) We affirm that in order to be really useful for theology and mission, social sciences must be sanctified through their thorough submission to Scripture.

21b) We deny that ethnographic research offers no valuable assistance to theologians from different contexts and cultures for delivering faithful contextual articulations of the gospel.

#### ***4. Trinity/Doctrine of God***

##### **4.1. God as He Is and as He Is Revealed**

22a) We affirm the historic creeds and confessions of the church concerning the Trinity, including, but not limited to the Apostles', the Nicene-Constantinopolitan, and the Athanasian Creeds.

22b) We deny that God reveals himself in any way other than he is.

22c) We affirm that this revealed God is the very trinitarian God of Scripture.

23a) We affirm the biblical revelation of the Trinity as unique, sufficient, and solely reliable.

23b) We deny that the teaching of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity requires any source of light or wisdom outside of the Bible itself.

23c) We affirm the Trinity was revealed progressively in Scripture, culminating in the coming of the Son and the outpouring of the Spirit.

23d) We deny that the doctrine of the Trinity is a later philosophically-derived compromise with pagan culture.

##### **4.2. Trinity and Redemption**

24a) We affirm the uniqueness of Christianity and its sole source to be the triune God of Scripture.

24b) We deny that the gospel can be separated from the revelation of the Trinity without repudiating the biblical meaning of redemption.

24c) We deny that anyone who believes in any aspect of the gospel but still rejects the Trinity is a true Christian and possesses authentic hope of salvation.

25a) We affirm the confession of Christ as Saviour is only possible within a trinitarian redemptive framework.

25b) We deny Christ may be effectively or redemptively associated with any other faith system.

25c) We affirm there is no meaning to redemption without a sending Father, a sent and saving Son, and a perpetually proceeding and sanctifying Spirit.

#### ***5. Anthropology***

##### **5.1. Anthropology and Scripture: Mankind Created**

26a) We affirm that all human beings are *homo adorans*: created uniquely in the *imago Dei*, covenantally related to and dependent upon God, and commissioned to reveal and represent him as his royal vice-gerents on earth.

26b) We deny this created and covenantal relatedness can ever be essentially lost however radical the noetic, moral, and epistemological consequences of human rebellion and idolatry.

27a) We affirm that the perpetuity of the *imago Dei* means the perpetuity of human dignity and sanctity of human life which should inform all engagement with the non-Christian religions.

27b) We deny that human beings at any stage of history are ever in a state where they lack accountability to their Creator.

27c) We affirm that being created in the image of God entails a 'sense of the divine' and 'seed of religion' which accounts for a common structure in human religious response.

27d) We deny that that 'sense of the divine' and 'seed of religion' are unaffected by the fall or can ever on their own construct a valid and reliable natural theology.

28a) We affirm that the Bible provides a single, coherent, and complex theological anthropology which provides the normative hermeneutical framework through which we are to interpret and evaluate all human religious responses to divine revelation.

28b) We deny that this norming theological anthropology obviates the need for diligent study of the variegated and dynamic religious responses of human beings and the social scientific disciplines associated with such study (including anthropology, phenomenology, sociology, ethnography, etc.).

### **5.2. Anthropology and Scripture: Mankind Fallen**

29a) We affirm that in the fall of Adam under the covenant of works/life/creation, the *imago Dei* was distorted but not completely erased.

29b) We affirm that a biblical anthropology presents the effects of the fall as being so severe that all human beings deserve wrath, judgment, and condemnation.

29c) We affirm that the fall was an idolatrous act of de-creation which blurred the Creator -creature distinction—pulling God down to the level of the creature and tyrannically and rebelliously elevating Adam and Eve to the level of the Creator.

29d) We affirm that Adam and Eve not only disbelieved God and his Word but believed lies about him, and that such false faith is the characteristic of all idolatrous worship.

30a) We affirm that any deity—conceptual or physical—worshipped that is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the living God but an idol behind which lie the spiritual forces of darkness.

30b) We deny that such categories as idolatry and false faith are irrelevant and unsuitable categories by which to interpret human religion today.

30c) We affirm that in our sinful state human beings universally suppress the truth inescapably revealed in God's creation and substitute idols for the truth of God.

30d) We affirm that the comprehensiveness of human idolatry means there is no truth that has not been suppressed in some way.

30e) We deny that universal human suppression and substitution are either uniform or static but rather variegated and dynamic, yet restrained by God's work of common grace.

31a) We affirm the doctrine of common grace which describes the non-salvific operation of the Spirit whereby sin is restrained and civic good engendered in human beings.

31b) We deny that common grace regenerates a human heart or provides religiously neutral ground between believer and unbeliever.

32a) We affirm the doctrine of the antithesis which describes the radical difference and spiritual enmity between the people of God and those not belonging to God.

32b) We deny that as a theological reality (though not necessarily in human perception) there exists any liminal space between these two bounded, mutually exclusive spiritual states.

33a) We affirm that a biblical anthropology must be explicated within the boundaries of the doctrines of idolatry, false faith and antithesis on the one hand, and of the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and God's common grace, on the other hand.

33b) We deny that the universal human religious response to divine revelation can ever be satisfactorily explained without recognising its idolatrous character which evidences both elements of continuity and discontinuity when compared to true worship.

33c) We affirm that the gospel of Jesus Christ always both confronts and connects with our human idolatrous religious response, rebuking and correcting all unbelief and every idolatrous practice, and simultaneously fulfilling God-given desires and purposes more richly and supernaturally than any man-made religion or custom could envision.

### 5.3. Biblical Identity, Religious Studies, and Social Science

34a) We affirm that the Bible teaches personal identity to be fundamentally divinely revealed rather than humanly conceived; all people are either identified with—*and sinful in*—Adam, or identified with—*and redeemed in*—Christ.

34b) We affirm that this theological identity, as taught by Scripture, defines and frames every other dimension and perception of identity.

34c) We deny that perceived cultural or religious diversity is more essential to human identity than divinely revealed identity.

35a) We affirm the development and promotion of explicitly biblically-governed religious studies and missiology.

35b) We deny that anthropology, ethnography, phenomenology or any other social science can be studied with epistemological neutrality or a-theologically.

35c) We affirm that describing human religious responses to divine personal revelation is complex, properly mysterious and defies simplistic or superficial analyses.

35d) We deny that biblical anthropological complexity is incoherent, contradictory or dialectical.

35e) We deny that the human sciences can arrive at a full understanding of human nature, psychology, sociality, and history without presupposing and submitting to divine revelation, supremely held out in the Christ of Scripture.

## *6. Christology*

### **6.1. The Two Natures of Christ**

36a) We affirm, with the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds, that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, and that Christ's human and divine natures are united in his one person without confusion, conversion, division or separation.

36b) We deny any theology from below, in which the being of God is solely determined in and through the historical work of the incarnate Son.

37a) We affirm that all depictions of the person, work and natures of Christ not controlled by Scripture are idolatrous.

37b) We deny models of the incarnation which find connections with non-Christian depictions of the person of Christ by asserting or assuming an emptying of the divine nature, rendering him only human.

38a) We affirm that in the incarnation the Son of God took on a full human nature, entering into our weaknesses and experiencing temptation, yet without sin.

38b) We affirm that he grew physically, cognitively, culturally and in covenantal obedience to his Heavenly Father.

38c) We deny the validity of any theologies or methodologies that depreciate the divine nature of Christ as the eternal Son of God or seek to recast the divine sonship of Christ in exclusively human categories of royalty.

39a) We affirm that in his resurrection and appointment as exalted Son of God, Christ secures the adoption of believers.

39b) We further affirm that any minimisation of filial categories for the identity of Christ, and the status of the believers in him, represents a distortion of the gospel.

39c) We deny that the modification, minimisation or removal of Father and Son language from gospel presentations or Bible translations preserves and faithfully proclaims the triune God or his gospel.

### **6.2. The Incarnation and Christ's Determinative Presence in Mission**

40a) We affirm that the incarnation was an unrepeatable movement of God toward mankind in which the second person of the Trinity became incarnate as the last Adam, lived a life of obedience to the Law, died under the curse of the Law, was raised to life and ascended bodily to the right hand of the Father.

40b) We affirm that the incarnate life of the Son of God—including his death and resurrection—grounds and patterns the believer's love for God and love and mercy toward our neighbour.

40c) We further affirm that a sincere, God-honouring life of love toward God and neighbour is only possible through union with Christ, whereby Christ is present to his people—and through them to the world—through the regenerating and indwelling work of the Holy Spirit.

41a) We affirm the perpetual humanity of the Son—now raised and exalted.

41b) We deny that the body metaphors for the church in the New Testament frame the church as Christ's earthly embodiment, whereby the church becomes *Christus prolongatus* or some other inimical ontological confusion.

42a) We affirm that the mission of the church is conducted in the magisterial presence of the exalted Christ who is freely and sovereignly present in the world, through the Spirit, as the one who rules, bears witness to himself through the Scriptures, and intercedes for his elect.

42b) We affirm that the Lordship of Christ, expressed in his rule over all creation; his self-attesting witness through the Scriptures and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit; and his intercession for his elect in all contexts, nations, cultures, and times constitutes the grounds on which the church calls all peoples to turn to Christ and confess him as Lord.

42c) We deny that the *sui generis* incarnation of the eternal Son of God offers a proper analogy for construing contextualisation as 'incarnational'.

## 7. Soteriology

### 7.1. Necessity of Salvation

43a) We affirm that the human race, fallen in the first Adam, required the last Adam to fulfil the requirements of the Law, both passively and actively for the elect.

43b) We affirm the abiding importance of soteriology within an evangelical theology of religions.

43c) We deny that soteriology should dominate an evangelical theology of religions to the exclusion of other systematic theological *loci* that require study, understanding, and obedient faith.

44a) We affirm that Christ alone is the propitiation for sin, and that salvation is accomplished exclusively by his substitutionary atonement.

44b) We affirm that only those who are united to Christ by a Holy Spirit-wrought faith are declared righteous (justification) and made righteous (sanctification) in him.

44c) We deny the possibility of salvation outside of Christ, since all peoples are in the first Adam and ruled by the spiritual forces of darkness until, by God's grace, the elect are effectually called, through the proclamation of the gospel and regenerating work of the Spirit, to repentance and faith in Christ—the last Adam.

### 7.2. The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation

45a) We affirm that the Bible teaches a fundamental separation of humanity which at the final judgment is irrevocable and which leads to two eternal and unchangeable destinies—on the one hand, 'the new heavens and new earth', and on the other, hell.

45b) We affirm that hell is an actual place of everlasting, retributive judgment and torment and that one's entrance into it secures permanent alienation from the grace of God.

45c) We deny that final judgment is restorative covenant parental love, making hell disciplinary with the possibility of repentance.

46a) We affirm the sovereignty of God in salvation and the freedom of his Holy Spirit to work savingly when, where and with whom he wills.

46b) We deny that it is ever legitimate to speculate on matters which depart from the soteriological patterns and promises described and prescribed in Scripture.

46c) We deny that the family of positions identified by or associated with 'inclusivism' 'pluralism,' or universalism are consistent with biblical and reformational teaching.

46d) We deny the validity of categories such as the 'invincibly *ignorant*' or 'those who have never heard *through no fault of their own*'.

47a) We affirm the cosmic implications of God's work of redemption which brings renewal and restoration to the world.

47b) We deny that this renewal and restoration implies a universalism which holds that all individuals will finally be saved.

48a) We affirm the universal scope of the gospel that saves from among any nation and every type of background.

48b) We deny that for God to be loving and just, his salvific will must be universal and/or that salvation has to be universally accessible.

49a) We affirm that there is only one Saviour, Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, the only mediator between God and his people.

49b) We deny any form of the *logos spermatikos* theory which implies a salvific universal anthropological enlightenment and enabling by the pre-incarnate Christ.

50a) We affirm that Christ as the last Adam and true Israel fulfils the role of the image bearer under the Law, and has come to restore his elect to image bearing in him, under the new covenant made in his blood.

50b) We affirm that the risen Christ, as to his human nature, is the image of God to which the elect, his church, will be finally and fully conformed at the resurrection of the dead.

## ***8. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit***

### **8.1. The Holy Spirit as the Third Member of the Trinity**

51a) We affirm the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son.

51b) We deny that the Holy Spirit ever works independently of the Father or of the Son.

### **8.2. The Holy Spirit and the Word of God**

52a) We affirm that the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit is only revealed in the Bible, the one Word of God.

52b) We deny that the saving work of the Spirit is present in non-biblical texts, that the Spirit inspires other sacred texts, or that the Spirit authorises or legitimates use of non-biblical texts as a bridge to Christ.

52c) We deny that the Holy Spirit can or will ever contradict the revealed Word.

### **8.3. The Holy Spirit and the Church**

53a) We affirm the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity in the church, just as the Spirit is the Spirit of unity in the Godhead.

53b) We deny that the Holy Spirit would ever lead and empower any movement outside of the church of Jesus Christ or any movement in the name of Christ that pits one part of the evangelical faith against another.

53c) We affirm the discernibility of the work of the Holy Spirit according to his own given biblical parameters, and simultaneously affirm the Scripture's insistence upon the mysterious and secret work of the Holy Spirit, making it impossible to grasp his work and his ways exhaustively.

### **8.4. The Holy Spirit and Redemption**

54a) We affirm that the Holy Spirit works through the proclaimed Word of Christ to bring eternal life to the lost.

54b) We deny that the Holy Spirit operates independently of the saving and interceding work of the Son.

54c) We deny that human beings may have eternal life through any means other than God's sovereign regeneration through the Holy Spirit.

### **8.5. The Holy Spirit and Non-Biblical Religion**

55a) We affirm that the only way of faith, hope, and life is to be a member of the Body of Christ.

55b) We deny that claims about the work of the Holy Spirit or any other claim can be rightly used to justify a person's remaining within a Bible-denying or Bible-subjugating faith system.

55c) We deny that the Holy Spirit works to affirm, adapt or improve non-Christian religions.

55d) We affirm that when Christ saves those of other faith systems, he leads them by the power of the Holy Spirit from their false religion into the visible Body of Christ.

56a) We affirm the Holy Spirit working through the Word is the ultimate authority for a godly and ethical life.

56b) We deny that anyone may live in a manner pleasing to God by embedding a professed faith in Christ within an alien faith system that denies the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## **9. Eschatology**

### **9.1. The Nature of Eschatology**

57a) We affirm that eschatology refers to the ultimate and final state of the world and its historical processes which lead to the *eschaton*, the consummation of all things.

57b) We affirm that eschatology is rooted in the eternal purpose of God and is therefore in place at the very creation of the world.

57c) We affirm that the redemptive work of Christ restores and perfects fallen creation.

57d) We affirm that the original created endpoint of the world is the selfsame reality secured by Christ's work of redemption.

57e) We deny that God's purpose changes even in the fall of mankind into sin.

### **9.2. Eschatology and the Work of Christ**

58a) We affirm that Christ's resurrection inaugurated the last days and that, from that point forward, all people everywhere live in these last days and await the Last Day at the return of the Son of God.

58b) We deny that in terms of redemptive history or for the sake of mission method, these last days offer direct parallel to or unqualified analogy to those prior to the coming of Christ.

### **9.3. Eschatology and the Church**

59a) We affirm that God's eschatological purpose in bringing all things together under Christ is the formation of a holy people, the church.

59b) We affirm that the church exists as the Body of Christ, according to the will of God the Father, by the work of Christ, and through the regenerating ministry of the Spirit.

59c) We deny that the church exists only because of her activity or by her participation in mission.

59d) We affirm that the church already exists and works in the last days, and that her redemptive-historical situation is characterised by the *already and not yet*, situated between the two comings of Christ.

60a) We affirm that in Christ and through the Spirit the church possesses all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places and, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, experiences the power of the age to come.

60b) We deny that God's activity is ever absolutely unpredictable and mysterious, the result of a capricious or arbitrary will, or contingent on random or autonomous turns of events.

### **9.4. Life of Believers in the *Already and Not Yet***

61a) We affirm that Christians live and work within the *already and not yet* of an inaugurated eschatology, awaiting the full realisation of our inheritance at the bodily return of Christ Jesus.

61b) We deny that it is illegitimate for Christians to exercise godly influence on this age, culturally, politically, economically, socially or in other structural or institutional ways.

62a) We affirm that, for believers, this age is characterised by fellowship with Christ in his sufferings and his glories, a mixed time of groaning and of joy, labouring for the Lord with tears but not in vain.

62b) We deny any proclamation that includes a 'prosperity gospel'—that Christians should normally enjoy peace, health, success, comfort, as the world conceives them.

63a) We affirm that the growth and influence of the gospel often remains hidden and unmeasurable until the Last Day.

63b) We deny that the church should operate in such a way that ensures her lack of community influence, that she seek to remain invisible or that she lazily or fearfully, or for any ungodly reason, pursue or relish isolation.

### **9.5. Eschatology and Mission**

64a) We affirm Christ's heavenly and Spiritual rule, whereby under his authority, by his power, and in obedience to his command for his glory alone, disciples of Christ seek the expansion of his kingdom by making disciples from all nations, calling all to repentance and faith, and urging them to subject themselves to their rightful King and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

64b) We affirm that this age features the postponement of God's final wrath, judgment and punishment of his sinful creatures.

64c) We affirm that as we await the bodily return of Christ Jesus when he will come as Judge, grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation are extended by gospel proclamation for the redemption and gathering of God's elect.

64d) We affirm the church's God-given and urgent mandate to extend the way of salvation universally, to proclaim the gospel of grace to all human beings, whatever their ethnic, sexual, religious, national, cultural, social, professional, political, economic, and assumed identity.

65a) We affirm that our critical efforts to reach people of all tribes, nations and languages must be motivated by the love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the love of the Bride of Christ, and the love of neighbour.

65b) We deny the idea that the church's effort to complete the reaching of the nations *causes* the Parousia or should be motivated by self-reliance or perceived quantitative successes.

## **10. Ecclesiology<sup>4</sup>**

### **10.1. The Church's Role in Mission**

66a) We affirm that the mission of the visible church can only be carried out with the verbal proclamation of the gospel, by which the Spirit of Christ calls people to turn in repentance and to exercise faith, for the glory of God.

66b) We deny that biblical mission prescribes mercy ministries or seeks to address social concerns apart from verbal proclamation of the gospel.

67a) We affirm that people have needs of all kinds, but that every person's greatest need is for faith in Christ and repentance from sin to the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

67b) We deny that addressing this greatest need precludes or diminishes the critical importance of acts of service for addressing other individual and social needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Select affirmations and denials in this section draw upon David Garner, et al. 'Affirmations and Denials Concerning Missions and Ecclesiology' and 'The Holy Spirit, Scripture, and the Church', in *A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements* (The Presbyterian Church in America, 19 March 2014), <http://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/2101-SCIM-2014-ALL-with-MRs-4-30-14.pdf>.

68a) We affirm that the Christ-ordained calling of the visible church is to be distinguished from, yet is inseparably tied to, every believer's unique vocation in the world.

68b) We deny that the visible church exists to redeem culture.

68c) We affirm that visible churches must carry the redemptive message of the gospel which impacts all of life.

69a) We affirm that membership in a visible church and regular participation in the means of grace are essential for all believers to equip them for gospel proclamation and acts of service.

69b) We deny that believers should seek independence or religious autonomy, refuse or avoid membership in a visible church, or seek to carry out Christ's mission independently of the visible church's direct oversight and care.

69c) We affirm that because mission belongs to Christ and Christ is head of his church, the visible church is his chosen agent responsible for sending out gifted and godly men and women to call people to repentance and faith.

70a) We affirm that the goal of mission is inextricably tied to the visible church—the means and end of Christ's work, through which God's Spirit by his Word gathers and perfects his people.

70b) We deny that new believers should ever be discouraged from joining with other believers in membership of a visible church.

70c) We affirm that missionaries should seek vital connection with a visible church in their mission context.

70d) We deny that missionaries should deem it unnecessary to join with other believers in membership of a visible church.

71a) We affirm that local expressions of the gospel should always function in the context of the catholic Christian church, so that local theologians are accountable to the formulations of the Christian faith in the historic creeds and confessions of the church.

71b) We deny that faithful contextual formulations of the gospel are merely 'local theologies,' which have their validity apart from the catholicity of the church.

71c) We affirm that all local theologising should be an obedient receiving and restating of the Word of God, which is true everywhere and at all times.

### **10.2. Church: Word and Deed<sup>5</sup>**

72a) We affirm the primacy of the proclaimed Word for the mission of the church.

72b) We deny that ministry of the Word obviates the need for acts of mercy, since verbal expressions of the love of Christ entail tangible manifestations of that love.

72c) We affirm that biblical deed ministry is sincere service to meet the needs of people.

72d) We deny that biblical deed ministry is ever rightly employed as a diversion or tactic merely to secure an audience for gospel proclamation.

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<sup>5</sup> Select affirmations and denials in this section draw upon Phil D., 'Mercy Ministry in Mission Strategy,' *Southeast Asia Network for the Gospel*, 12 May 2018, <https://seagospel.net/mercy-ministry-in-mission-strategy>.

73a) We affirm the necessity of compassion and mercy to characterize the lives of those who proclaim the Word of the gospel.

73b) We deny that Word ministry occurs faithfully without evident compassion for those suffering or in need.

74a) We affirm that to separate mercy ministry and ministry of the Word is to be out of accord with Christ's commission.

74b) We deny that either form of ministry is an isolated or exclusive priority.

74c) We affirm that in the church's mission to the world, it is biblically informed wisdom which will recommend the order and leading priority of Word or deed for each occasion.

### **10.3. Relationship of Church, Denominational Agencies, and Parachurch Organisations**

75a) We affirm that visible churches bear the primary responsibility for the theological, moral, and ministry-method oversight of missionaries.

75b) We affirm that the visible church has the primary responsibility to recruit, mobilise, and send individual church members into mission.

75c) We deny that denominational agencies and parachurch organisations should have the primary theological, moral, and ministry-method oversight of missionaries.

76a) We affirm the genuine value of denominational agencies and parachurch organisations, when they properly assist visible churches to engage in mission.

76b) We affirm that denominational agencies and parachurch organisations can carry out delegated oversight for such things as the logistical, financial, and health concerns of missionaries.

77a) We affirm the value of working across denominational boundaries (within or without mission agencies), according to biblical principles of ecumenism.

77b) We deny that denominational collaboration means ignoring doctrinal differences.

### **10.4. Mutuality and Accountability of Visible Churches**

78a) We affirm that a visible church which sends a missionary, and the visible church which a missionary plants or ministers in, share a vital and mutually important relationship.

78b) We deny that such a relationship entails or permits only a unidirectional flow of resources.

78c) We affirm that the receiving church holds primary jurisdiction over its own ministry.

78d) We deny that such a vital and important relationship involves permanent control by the older, sending church(es).

78e) We affirm that such a vital and important relationship rightly facilitates humble teaching, correcting and rebuking of one another.

79a) We affirm that any church planted through a missionary ideally should grow toward local governance, local sustenance and local replication, while sustaining manifest connection to the historical and global church.

79b) We deny that a sending church has no theological, financial or moral responsibility to any church planted or otherwise served by missionaries it has sent.

79c) We deny that a younger church has no theological, financial or moral obligation to the sending church.

79d) We deny that any church planted through missionaries should be financially, or in any other way, controlled by the visible church which sent these missionaries.

## ***11. Contextualisation***

### **11.1. The Redemptive-Historical Context**

80a) We affirm that the triune God and his comprehensive, redemptive-historical plan revealed in Scripture provide the only macro-context for properly understanding anything or anyone at any point in history.

80b) We affirm that the triune God has delivered his salvation plan in the context of specific individuals or groups set in specific local cultural contexts, such as the call of Abraham in a specific place and time.

81a) We affirm the epistemological and interpretive authority of Scripture for assessing every human context at every age.

81b) We deny the interpretive primacy of the receptor(s) of the gospel, the missionary or missionaries, or any other person or group of people.

82a) We affirm that the Bible's description of unregenerate people and their collective gatherings under the umbrella of their religions is not subject to interpretation, or re-interpretation according to the demands of cultural exigencies.

82b) We deny that the *Zeitgeist* of relativism, tolerance and subjectivism should influence the normativity of the Bible and its interpretation.

82c) We deny that contextualisation efforts which attempt to separate form and meaning are proper or useful (e.g., while in some contexts 'Isa' does mean the biblical Jesus, some renditions of dynamic equivalence linguistic theories *wrongly make* the Islamic 'Isa' dynamically the same as the biblical Jesus, or the Son of God dynamically equivalent to a legal representative).

### **11.2. The Ecclesiastical Context**

83a) We affirm that as the pillar and ground of the truth, the visible church through the ages has been entrusted with the task of faithfully making disciples, according to God's prescribed methods, and by applying his prescribed means of spreading the message of salvation.

83b) We deny that adaptations of gospel presentation without considering Scripture and the visible church historically and globally are proper or helpful.

83c) We deny that the exigencies of any given local context should dictate how Scripture is to be read, interpreted, and applied.

83d) We deny that a Jesus redesigned to fit a particular context will ever bring ultimate glory to the triune God or aid the spiritual growth of the church.

84a) We affirm that theological teaching can legitimately adjust its teaching style, phraseology, selection of content, use of illustrations, and many other ways that prove significant in facilitating the communication and grasp of truth in the audience's target language and culture.

84b) We deny that such adaptation may rightly interpret any culture, religion, faith, and practice apart from the comprehensive authority of Scripture concerning the radical distinction between the Christian and non-Christian religions, between believers and unbelievers, and between the moral and religious antithesis that exists between those in Adam and those in Christ Jesus.

### **11.3. The Anthropological and Missiological Context**

85a) We affirm that God-given, God-ordained methods are effective both for bringing an 'aroma of life' and an 'aroma of death'.

85b) We deny that humanly prescribed methods have any ultimate effectiveness of their own.

85c) We deny that the Bible contains any kind of elusive, mysterious or secret interpretive formula, such as a 'skeleton key' or 'golden key' exemplified by the 'person of peace', or 'fourth (4th) soil persons'.

85d) We deny that any culture contains an elusive but inherently redemptive and 'salvific key', exemplified by 'redemptive analogy thinking'.

86a) We affirm that theology must drive mission methodology, because a failure to deal adequately with the effects of truth suppression will generate an overly positive view of human nature and will manifest itself in distorted methodologies.

86b) We deny that any mission methodology is neutral or atheological.

86c) We deny that the historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural contexts of mission provide the epistemological and ontological preconditions for the rule, revelation, and presence of Christ.

86d) We deny that missiological methods are legitimised by the claim that 'God will surely recognise his own' at the second coming of Christ.

## ***12. Culture***

### **12.1. Culture Defined and Explained**

87a) We affirm that the word 'culture' is used generally to describe the shared set of artefacts, characteristics, meanings and values that give shape to the total corporate life of a group of people.

87b) We affirm that culture is complex and multi-faceted and operates at many different levels—the external and observable artefacts of culture always expressing more deeply held beliefs and value systems.

88a) We affirm that each culture is dynamic and has providentially arisen over time in a concrete location; each is influenced by factors such as geography, climate, history, and interactions with other groups.

88b) We affirm that culture is inherent and unavoidable, a necessary part of human existence.

88c) We deny that culture is the final determiner in interpretation of either ancient or contemporary texts and settings.

### **12.2. Creator, Creation, and Culture**

89a) We affirm that in order to define, understand, and make missiological applications concerning culture, it is necessary to submit ourselves entirely to what God the Creator has revealed about mankind and human culture in his written Word.

89b) We deny that it is possible for us, God's creatures operating from within human cultures, accurately, objectively, and adequately to define, understand, and make missiological applications concerning culture, independently from God's Word.

90a) We affirm that culture and religion are interrelated, interdependent and inseparable, the latter informing the former.

90b) We deny that any facet of human culture may truly be a-moral, a-theological, or a-religious.

90c) We affirm that all acts of mankind are inescapably religious at their core, because humanity is made in the *imago Dei*.

90d) We deny the existence of any human culture that functions disconnected from or uninfluenced by human religious thought and expression or by the spiritual forces of darkness.

90e) We deny that human activities can properly be evaluated by separating them into religious and non-religious components.

### **12.3. Origins of Culture**

91a) We affirm that the Scriptures make clear that human culture was always part of God's divine plan, noting that the so-called 'Cultural Mandate' is given in the context of mankind's creation in the image of God.

91b) We affirm that cultural diversity reflects the intention of God's covenantal purposes and that such diversity manifests his glory.

91c) We affirm that culture and cultural development exist because God is the Creator and sovereign governor of all things.

92a) We affirm that, in and of itself, human culture manifests divine goodness and is the gift of the Creator to his creatures.

92b) We deny that human culture was a divine afterthought or a consequence of the fall of Adam.

92c) We deny that human culture is an evil thing *per se* or that it is purely an assertion of humanity's prideful rebellion against the Creator.

### **12.4. Effects of the Fall on Culture**

93a) We affirm therefore that human sinfulness necessarily distorts both individuals and communities.

93b) We affirm therefore that every culture has been corrupted by sin.

93c) We affirm that all cultures advance strategies for the perpetuation of human suppression of truth.

93d) This notwithstanding, we affirm that because of God's common grace there is often much that is praiseworthy, helpful and delightful in every culture.

93e) We deny that any culture exists this side of the new heavens and the new earth that is either perfectly righteous, on the one hand, or perfectly evil on the other.

94a) We affirm that the Bible confronts and critiques human cultures and cultural practices at the points at which they diverge from what the Bible teaches.

94b) We deny that human cultures may be evaluated only in terms of cultural relativism or idolised in such a way that they escape biblical critique.

### **12.5. The Gospel and Culture**

95a) We affirm that only the Christian gospel, as revealed in Scripture, is able to redeem people of all cultures and furthermore is the sole means of salvation for all peoples.

95b) We deny that there is any human culture where the gospel is irrelevant, incomprehensible, or powerless.

95c) We affirm that the Scriptures teach and illustrate that gospel communication from one human culture to another is possible, desirable and indeed commanded.

96a) We affirm that the proclamation of God in Christ, at one and the same time, stands over and above all human cultures, yet can and should be articulated meaningfully in the languages of particular local cultures.

96b) We deny that the gospel of Christ can be captured or restrained by any one human culture or that any one human culture may claim a monopoly on the gospel.

97a) We affirm that when the gospel of Jesus Christ redeems and transforms individuals from existing societies, their cultures are necessarily impacted and influenced in all spheres of life.

97b) We deny the existence of any so-called Christian culture that is cut off from, completely different from and disconnected from existing human cultures.

### **12.6. Churches and Culture**

98a) We affirm that before the return of Christ, all Christian communities exist among other human cultures and are necessarily influenced by those cultures.

98b) We affirm that Christian individuals, whilst not abandoning their human cultural heritage, find their core identity as members together of the church, Christ's Body and the special locus of Jesus' kingdom.

98c) We affirm that the church is a 'new humanity': strangers and aliens, freed in Christ to resist pressures to conform to the patterns and methods of this world.

98d) We deny that Christian believers, including those influenced by individualistic western cultures, should find the main sense of their identity in their unbelieving culture.

99a) We affirm that all visible churches are necessarily contextualised expressions of the universal Body of Christ.

99b) We affirm that visible churches must take root in specific cultural settings: they should and indeed must use particular human languages, linguistic styles, biblically appropriate analogies, and thought forms to proclaim, apply, and live out the gospel in those local contexts.

99c) We deny that any visible church should seek to be uncontextualised—that it should ever seek to function aside of, apart from, or wholly disconnected from the local contemporary context where it worships and ministers.

### 12.7. Culture in the Eschaton

100a) We affirm that, insofar as contact and exchange is possible, Christian churches already enjoy mutual cross-cultural enrichment, as a foretaste of the new heavens and earth.

100b) We affirm that the new heavens and the new earth will be enriched by the unity and diversity of the universal people of God, the cultural and linguistic riches of people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

## 13. Glossary

‘Already and not yet’—The biblical conviction that expresses the overlap of two ages, this present age and the age to come. The age to come has been inaugurated by the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. However, we are still faithfully waiting for the fulness of the new age that will be brought about by the final and glorious return of Christ. Understanding our lives between these two ages is crucial to a healthy Christian life that recognizes the calling to live in this world while not conforming to its practices and beliefs. It is also necessary to the life and mission of the Church.

‘Aroma of life’ and an ‘aroma of death’—2 Corinthians 2:16.

‘Catholicity of the church’—The oneness of the universal church across time, space, and culture.

‘Creator/creature distinction’—The distinction between God the Creator and everything else (the creation, including humanity, the heavens and earth, the spiritual world, etc.) is fundamental to sound and biblical Christian belief. It is essential to acknowledge this distinction if we are to worship God, read Scripture, serve the Church, or participate in her mission.

*Christus prolongatus*—A concept, developed early by some church fathers, that conflates the Person of Christ with his church, wherein the church is the *incarnate* extension of Christ into the world.

‘Cultural Mandate’—The term first applied by Klaas Schilder to the commands in Genesis 1:26–28.

‘Culture’—‘Culture is religion externalized’ neatly paraphrases the position articulated by Henry R. Van Til in *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1959), 42: ‘The radical, totalitarian character of religion is such, then, that it determines both man’s cultus and his culture. That is to say, the conscious or unconscious relationship to God in a man’s heart determines all of his activities, whether theoretical or practical. This is true of philosophy, which is based upon non-theoretical, religious presuppositions. Thus, man’s morality and economics, his jurisprudence and his aesthetics, are all religiously oriented and determined.’

‘False faith’—The term used by Reformed scholastic Francis Turretin to describe what Adam and Eve wrongly believed about God following their deception by Satan.

'Fourth (4th) soil persons'—This is a phrase used by Kevin Greeson, author of the CAMEL method to describe strategies drawn from the Parable of the Sower to ensure rapid multiplication of churches.

*Homo adorans*— The worshipping man.

'Incarnational'—The adjective form of 'incarnation' frequently used to describe the work of missions. Notwithstanding the logical impossibility of humans 'incarnating' (becoming flesh—that is, becoming what we already are), use of 'incarnational' to describe Jesus as a model effectively undermines the *sui generis* character of God *becoming flesh* in Christ.

'Invincibly ignorant'—A term that arose within Catholic theology in the 16th century which describes a lack of knowledge which is not the fault of the person.

'Isa'—The Arabic name for Jesus, often, but not always, with a view of him from the Quran and other Muslim resources. For some 'Isa' is the biblical Jesus. For others, he is the Muslim one.

'God will surely recognise his own'—From the Latin, *Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius*, drawing upon 2 Timothy 2:19a, 'But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his"' (ESV). This was used historically even to justify wholesale genocide. Presently the phrase is sometimes employed as a justification for employing poor or unscriptural missiological methods, asserting, at the end of the day, God will have to sort things out.

'Golden key'—Not unlike a skeleton key which fits all locks and ensures success in opening them, a golden key promises to do the same.

'Great Commission'—The command of Jesus given to the church prior to his ascension in Matthew 28:18–20.

'Local theologies'—The process of doing theology and interpreting Scripture in a given local context has often been labeled 'local theology'. For some theologians, such local theologies are context-determined, thus breaking the necessary link between theology and Scripture—the only absolute determining criteria of theology.

'Logos spermatikos'— This concept of a 'generative rational principle' inherent in the universe and the human mind was taken from Stoicism and adapted for apologetic purposes by Justin Martyr (in light of John 1:1–14, especially v. 9). It is often used today to claim that God's *saving* truth is present and accessible in all cultures and religions.

'New humanity'—Ephesians 2:15 (NIV).

'Person of peace'—Drawn from Luke 10, contemporary outreach methodologies search for an elusive person who will catalyze a movement of people to Christ.

*Praeparatio* (or *preparatio*)—Providential circumstances, prior to the hearing of gospel proclamation, used by God to draw sinners to himself.

'Prosperity gospel'—A false gospel that teaches that God always rewards faith and obedience, including tithing—with additional and larger financial, health, and other personal blessings. The promise to attain your full potential in Christ is another subtle form of prosperity gospel. This false gospel transforms faith and loving obedience to God into a partial God made in our image.

'Redemptive analogy thinking'—Derived from Don Richardson's *Peace Child* and *Eternity in Their Hearts* this approach suggests that God has providentially placed salvific signposts in every culture. Critics point out that it has a tendency to conflate general and special revelation.

Religious and non-religious components—Whilst individuals, groups and societies may see themselves as a-religious and describe themselves as such (whether atheistic, disinterested, secular or

other). However, though a superficial appearance of being a-religious is possible, all human beings are necessarily religious at a more fundamental level, on account of their being divine image bearers. Romans 1 reveals authoritatively that human ultimate commitments are always religious.

‘Salvific key’—A teaching that cultural artifacts such as the altar to the unknown god (Acts 17:23) can be apologetic keys that open the door to salvation.

‘Seed of religion’ (*semen religionis*)—God the Creator has implanted a ‘seed of religion’ in all people. However, the effects of the fall extend to the whole human nature, including the ‘seed of religion’. This explains the apparent similarities between the Christian faith and other religions. This also explains that in all times and places, people worship spiritual or material ‘gods,’ but cannot attain the true knowledge of God apart from saving and transforming grace.

‘Sense of the divine’ (*sensus divinitatis*)—The conviction that there exists within the human mind an awareness of divinity. This, however, is not a general awareness of any divinity but of the true God. The *sensus divinitatis* also explains why, since this awareness subsists in all people, all are held inexcusable before God for failing to believe and worship him.

‘Skeleton key’—See ‘golden key’.

‘The new heavens and new earth’—Revelation 21:1, 26.

‘Those who have never heard *through no fault of their own*’—A common way of describing the category of the unevangelised and enshrined in Vatican II’s dogmatic statement *Lumen Gentium* 16. It is used to refer to people who have never had access to the proclamation of the gospel and therefore, as is argued, cannot carry any guilt from their failure to respond in faith to Jesus. It distinguishes them from those who had an opportunity to hear the gospel but for one reason or another within their control, they failed to do so.

#### *14. TSF Council*

##### **David B. Garner**

The Rev Dr David B. Garner (co-chair, The Southgate Fellowship) is a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and a member of Philadelphia Metro West Presbytery. He is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Academic Dean, and Vice President of Global Ministries at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia, PA), where he has served since 2007. A former missionary to Eastern Europe, Dr Garner continues to teach around the world, most frequently in Asia. Dr Garner serves as the Systematic Theology Book Review Editor for *Themelios*. While teaching at Westminster, he simultaneously served as Pastor of Teaching at Proclamation Presbyterian Church (Bryn Mawr, PA) from 2012–2015. His most recent book is *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2016).

##### **Daniel Strange**

Dr Daniel Strange (co-chair, The Southgate Fellowship) is College Director and Tutor in Culture, Religion, and Public theology at Oak Hill College, London. A faculty and board member of Crosslands, an in-context theological training initiative created by Oak Hill and Acts 29, he also serves as a Trustee of Tyndale House, Cambridge. Dr Strange is a Contributing Editor for *Themelios*, and serves as an

elder at East Finchley Baptist Church, which is part of the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches (FIEC). His book, *Their Rock is Not Like Our Rock: A Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), received an Award of Merit for Theology/Ethics in the *Christianity Today* 2016 Book Awards. His most recent book is *Plugged In: Connecting Your Faith with What You Watch, Read, and Play* (London: Good Book, 2019).

#### **Yannick Imbert**

Dr Yannick Imbert is professor of apologetics at the Faculty Jean Calvin (Aix-en-Provence). An expert on the work of J. R. R. Tolkien, on which he wrote his PhD dissertation (Westminster Theological Seminary), he works on themes of imagination and fantasy. He studies and writes on the relationship between faith and society, endeavors which began during his studies at the Institute of Political Science. He serves as president of Éditions Kérygma, as well as a member of the Theological Commission of the National Council (France). He is author of *Rechercher L'Immortalité: Folie ou Réalité?* (Lognes: Farel Press, 2016), a reformed analysis and critique of transhumanism, and a volume on apologetics, entitled, *Croire, Expliquer, Vivre: Introduction à l'Apologétique* (Charols and Aix-en-Provence: Excelsis, 2014).

#### **Bill Nikides**

The Rev Bill Nikides is a minister in the PCA and member of Rocky Mountain Presbytery. A retired United States Air Force officer and veteran of the Gulf War and Invasion of Panama, Rev Nikides serves with Reformed Evangelistic Fellowship (formerly Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship) training church planters around the world, particularly in the Muslim world. He also serves as assistant pastor at Great Plains Gathering (PCA), a Native American church plant in Montana. In addition to more than 20 published articles concerning missions and theology, Rev Nikides is co-author of *Muslim Conversions to Christ: A Critique of Insider Movements in Islamic Contexts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), and co-author and editor of *Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel* (i2 Ministries, 2011). As part of his global mission concern, he directed a feature-length documentary, 'Half Devil Half Child,' which profiles the effects of the Insider Movement in Bangladesh. Based on more than 200 ethnographic interviews with Bengalis, the film became a semi-finalist at the San Antonio film festival. Rev Nikides served as an adjunct/assistant professor at Sanford University for over five years and has taught in history, theology, and missiology at seminaries in the USA, the UK, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

#### **Flavien Pardigon**

The Rev Dr Flavien Pardigon was born and raised in France. He received an LTh and MTh from Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée (Aix-en-Provence, France), and a PhD from Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). He is an ordained minister in the PCA and a member of Western North Carolina Presbytery. His ministry supports indigenous Reformed churches in the Majority World, by offering theological training and developing connections for global partnerships. He is the author of *Paul Against the Idols: A Contextual Reading of the Areopagus Speech* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019).

#### **Robert Scott**

Mr Robert Scott has a BA in Anthropology, an MSc in Developments Studies, and an MA in History. He worked for an NGO in Bangladesh and then with the World Health Organisation. Since 2001, Mr Scott has served as Director of Missions at St Helen's Bishopsgate, a conservative Anglican

congregation, which adheres to the Church of England's 39 Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal, and is a founding member of Renew—an organisation which fights for biblical orthodoxy within the Anglicanism especially on issues of marriage, sexuality, and gender (<https://www.renewconference.org.uk/about/statement-of-faith>). As Director of Missions, Mr Scott has led the international student ministry and does church planting among immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim people in East London. He has completed the Cornhill Training Course (a yearlong certificate in exegesis and preaching) and has studied doctrine, ethics, church history, and church planting modules at Oak Hill Theological College. He teaches part-time at Cornhill and Oak Hill on Islamic Studies, and is author of *Dear Abdullah: Eight Questions Muslim People Ask About Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

### **John Span**

The Rev Dr John Span is ordained as a commissioned pastor in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and is part of the Returning Church, a group of pastors working towards a return to orthodoxy within the denomination. From 2000–2011, Dr Span worked with a CRC missions team among the Fulbe who Islamized Guinea. In 2012, Dr Span moved to Egypt, where he served for three years as the Vice-Principal of the Alexandria School of Theology. At present, he resides in Canada, where he is employed by Interserve, Canada. In April 2019 he completed his PhD thesis at the John Calvin Faculty in Aix-en-Provence, France. His dissertation analyzes attempted Christianization of the Qur'an in evangelistic strategies and examines their presuppositions from a Reformed perspective.

### **Jonny Woodrow**

The Rev Dr Jonny Woodrow is pastor of Christ Church Loughborough, a Reformed Baptist Church in the UK, which he planted 15 years ago. Christ Church seeks to reach the large Muslim community on its doorstep. Formerly a Lecturer in Psychology at Loughborough University, Dr Woodrow has spent the last decade teaching on and writing for theological distance education programs for ministry training. Jonny is studying for a PhD in Systematic Theology through Union Theological College in Belfast on the topic of John Webster's Doctrine of God and Creation. He lectures on Reformed theology and Islam for Cornhill Scotland and is co-author of *Ascension: Humanity in the Presence of God* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013).

### **Additional Contributors**

*TSF* Secretary Rev Andrew H. Bruno serves as assistant pastor of Alverstoke Evangelical Church.

Former *TSF* Council member David Baldwin is a missionary with SIM and Director of Theology for Crossing Cultures at Oak Hill College, London.