

Conservative Mennonite Statement of Theology



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Adopted by the Conservative
Mennonite Conference, August 16, 1991

The Greek letter theta is the initial of theos (God) and theos logos (theology).

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Introduction

This statement of theology expresses understandings of God and His work. It regards theology not primarily as experience with God, but as what we say about God. (Note the root words, *theos* (God) and *logos* (word). In comparison, doctrine refers to the entire scope of teaching in the church, including, but not limited to, theology. In ethics, for example, a doctrine of abstinence from alcohol may draw on science, sociology, and theology. But a theology of abstinence would immediately narrow the topic to that part of it focused on God's being and revelation--a focus on what is.

The statement uses theological language, attempting to categorically express truth revealed in the Scriptures. This approach is based on the concept of the church having the task of faithfully interpreting and explaining the truth of the Scriptures. A sermon, for example, should not only be a reading of biblical text with use of purely biblical vocabulary, but should interpret and expound the Scriptures in contemporary language. Likewise, a theological statement should be faithful to the Scriptures with interpretive expression which includes, but is not limited to, biblical vocabulary.

GOD

JESUS CHRIST

HOLY SPIRIT

THE BIBLE

CREATION

MAN

SALVATION

THE CHURCH

THE
KINGDOM

SATAN

THE STATE

LAST THINGS



The statement was developed by the Conservative Mennonite Conference (CMC). The project was approved in its business meeting at Wooster, Ohio, in August, 1990. A committee was appointed by the Executive Committee of CMC, consisting of Ivan E. Yoder, chairman; David I. Miller, secretary; and Alvin L. Yoder. The committee prepared the document and presented the first draft to the business meeting of CMC at its meeting in Sarasota, Florida, in February, 1991, with various ideas noted for consideration by the committee. A second presentation was made at the business meeting of CMC in Kalona, Iowa, in August, 1991, at which meeting the document was approved and adopted as the statement of theology of Conservative Mennonite Conference.

CMC also subscribes to the Conservative Mennonite Statement of Practice (2007) which is available from the CMC office in Irwin, Ohio, or at cmcrosedale.org/about-us/statement-of-practice.

God

God is the one and only true God, eternal, perfect and infinite in His being, holiness, love, wisdom, mercy, righteousness and power; transcendent above the world as its Creator, yet immanent in the world as the Preserver of all things. God is self-existent and self-revealing in three divine Persons--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit--who are distinct in function, but equal in power and glory.¹

The Father is revealed in Scripture as a person of the triune Godhead. His existence and power are revealed in creation and in the function of the human conscience. He sent His Son into the world for the salvation of the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed and addressed Him as His Father. He is a Father in a personal relationship to all who confess and follow Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the triune Godhead, the eternal Word and divine Son of God.² Before His incarnation, He was eternally with God the Father and was God. In regard to His humanity, He was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit without a human father, was born of a virgin, took on true humanity, and thus was fully human and fully divine.³

¹The triune nature of God is both ontological and expressive. The more definite New Testament teaching on divine trinity, in comparison the less definite teaching in the Old Testament, is not a matter of development of human thought or of God rearranging himself in order to reveal himself, but of progression of revelation. The perfect God is triune.

²This clause refers to the intrinsic nature of Christ. The description, which follows, of the humanity of Christ refers to his assumed nature. This position differs from some Christologies which describe Jesus as having grown into divinity.

³Biblical Christology avoids the position of a deficient divinity and the position of a deficient humanity and avoids emphasizing either at the expense of the other.

Deut. 6:4
I Tim. 1:17
I Tim. 2:5
Heb. 11:3

Ex. 34:6, 7

Gen. 1:1-2:3

Matt. 3:13-17
II Cor. 13:14

John 3:16
John 14:9-12
I John 3:1, 2

John 1:1-4, 14, 18
John 14:5-10
Col. 1:15-17

Matt. 1:18-25
Luke 1:26-35
Phil. 2:5-11

Heb. 1:3, 4

II Cor. 5:19-21



Mark 10:45
Rom. 3:21-26
Rom. 5:9-11
Isa. 53:4-12
I Cor. 15:3, 4
I Pet. 2:24
Acts 1:9-11
Rom. 8:33, 34
Heb. 7:25
Heb. 9:24
Phil. 2:10, 11
Col. 1:19-21

In His incarnation, He lived a perfect life on earth and revealed the invisible God perfectly. He gave Himself in death upon the cross as a substitutionary and propitiatory⁴ sacrifice for the sins of the world, by which He paid the price of redemption, thus satisfying both the righteousness⁵ and the love of God. He was raised from the dead, glorified in the body in which He had suffered and died, ascended into heaven, is at the right hand of the Father, and makes intercession for us. He is the only⁶ Savior and Lord of the church and the universe.

Gen. 1:1, 2
Acts 5:3, 4
II Cor. 13:14
John 16:7-11
I Cor. 6:17-20
Eph 3:14-19
Acts 2:1-21
John 14:16, 26
Rom. 8:1-17
Acts 4:31
I Pet. 1:2
I Cor. 2:12-14
Gal. 5:16-25
Eph. 1:13, 14
I Cor. 12:7-11
Eph. 4:30
Rom. 15:18, 19

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and with the Son in the triune Godhead and possesses all of the distinctively divine attributes. He is God, present and active in the world, ministering conviction of sin to sinners and regeneration to penitents. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to believers, in whom He resides. He ministers comfort, assurance, guidance, and victory. He is the agent of sanctification in the believer's life, producing progressive growth in Spirit-fruit. He empowers believers and works through them in the distribution, manifestation, and ministry of spiritual gifts.

⁴An objective provision by which God could exercise His mercy.

⁵Gr. *dikaïos* is translated "righteousness" 41 times and "just" 33 times in the King James New Testament. The atoning work of Christ satisfied God in terms of both *dikaïos* and *agape*.

⁶Not only superior, but also unique; there is no salvation aside from Jesus Christ and His work.

The Bible

The Scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament,⁷ are the Word of God,⁸ a supernatural⁹ revelation from God to mankind, verbally¹⁰ inspired by the Holy Spirit through human instrumentality,¹¹ without error in the original writings¹² in all that they affirm.¹³ They are a God-given record of the incarnational revelation of God in Christ¹⁴ and a written¹⁵ disclosure of God's will and plan for mankind. The Scriptures are the final¹⁶ authority for faith and

I Pet. 1:10-12
Matt. 5:17, 18
John 5:45-47
II Tim. 3:16, 17
II Pet. 1:20, 21
Psa. 119:160
John 10:35
Heb. 1:1, 2
Luke 24:25-27
Luke 24:44-47
John 5:39
II Pet. 3:15, 16
Heb. 8:7-13

⁷Defining which scriptures; not referring to The Apocrypha, for example.

⁸Not just containing or expressing God's Word.

⁹Not primarily an expression of the writer's or the culture's understanding of God or His revelation.

¹⁰The words are inspired, not just the ideas.

¹¹In addition to the Bible having divine authorship, it also has human authorship, reflecting the personalities, vocabularies, education, and cultures of the writers.

¹²This point allows the possibility of error in transcription and translation and leaves the serious student of biblical exegesis with concern for the objective evidence of the original wording while also acknowledging that errors are relatively few and that readers do have access to the Word of God through translation.

¹³This includes geography, numbers, dates, and science, but does not preclude recognition of language style (Ex., prose, poetry, figures of speech, parables, phenomenal language, rounded numbers, catechistic abridgements) in the interpretive process.

¹⁴The supremacy of God's revelation in the incarnation is sometimes stressed in ways which detract from or undermine the importance of the written record of the life and teachings of Jesus. An emphasis on the Gospels over the epistles which does not recognize the entire New Testament to be the written revelation which informs us of the Incarnate revelation disregards the epistles as the product of Jesus' instructions to his disciples to teach "them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

¹⁵God's Word is written, in addition to being spoken and incarnated. Today, the spoken Word and the Incarnate Word are known to us by the written Word.

¹⁶"Final," though not only. God's people do recognize other authorities, such as tradition and the church, or at least are influenced by them. But the Bible is the final authority and all other authorities must bend to it.



Gen. 1, 2
Heb. 11:3
Isa. 40:26
Eph. 3:9
Col. 1:16
Rev. 4:11

Gen. 1:26-31
Gen. 2:7, 18-25
Gal. 3:28
I Cor. 11:3-16
Eph. 5:22-33
I Tim. 2:11-15
Gen. 3
Rom. 5:12-21
Eph. 4:18, 19

practice, with the entire New Testament being the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the perfected rule¹⁷ for the Christian church.

Creation

Creation is a good and supernatural¹⁸ work of God, who is the creator of all things, visible and invisible. Creation is the explanation of the origin and existence of all things, including the material universe, the spiritual cosmos, and those beings which by free will rebelled against God and chose an attitude and condition of evil.¹⁹

Man

Man was created in the image of God, sinless, in perfect holiness and fellowship with God; as male and female, equal before God as persons and distinct in manhood and womanhood, with male responsibility for headship in the home and in the church;²⁰ as a being of choice who willfully disobeyed God, bringing alienation, depravity, death, and eternal lostness to the human race through Adam's sin.²¹

¹⁷This view of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament is very influential, and sometimes decisive, in hermeneutics and in application of some passages.

¹⁸The origin of the material universe was not a process of natural or theistic evolution.

¹⁹Evil is seen, not as a creation of God, but as an attitude or condition of beings of free and moral choice. All things created by God, both spiritual and material, were good as created. This statement denies the notion held by some philosophies that an element of evil was present in creation.

²⁰This statement is in harmony with the New Testament teaching that male and female as believers have equal access to God through Christ and are of equal standing in God's creative and redemptive plan, with difference of function between men and women in leadership ministries in the church and in the home.

²¹The problem of sin is both original (sin and guilt inherited from Adam) and personal (attitudes and actions of the individual which are offensive to God). But no one goes to hell because of Adam's sin or Adamic guilt, as noted further in note 23.

Salvation

Salvation is a free gift of God's grace based on the work of Jesus Christ (the shedding of His blood on the cross, His resurrection and present intercessory ministry) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Those who receive God's gift of salvation by faith become children of God, justified in their relationship to God, sanctified in their walk and work, and secure in an ongoing faith expressed and fostered by obedience to Christ.²² Justification is extended to all people in regard to Adamic guilt²³ and by personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and His provision in regard to personal guilt.

Rom. 6:23
Rom. 10:9, 10
Phil. 1:6
Acts 2:38
Eph. 2:8-10
John 1:12
Gal. 4:4-7
Eph. 4:23, 24
I Peter 1:5
I John 2:4-6
Col. 1:22, 23
Rom. 5:1, 12-21
James 2:14-26

The Church

The church of Jesus Christ is the universal body of redeemed believers committed to Jesus Christ as Lord, and finds expression in the local church in worship, fellowship, holiness, discipline, teaching and preaching the Word, prayer, spiritual gifts, and the New Testament ordinances. The church is called out from and is separate from the world, but reaches out to the world with the Gospel and the "cup of cold water".²⁴ The church, as the body of Christ, is the visible representation of God on earth and is ready to suffer and serve as required by Christ and His Word.

I Peter 2:9, 10
Acts 2:42-47
I Cor. 1:2
I Cor. 14:26
Rom. 12:4-8
I Cor. 12
Eph. 4:7-16
Matt. 28:19, 20
John 13:14-16
I Cor. 11
James 5:13-16
Matt 5:13-16
II Cor. 5:18-20
Rom. 8:17
II Thess. 1:5

²²The believer's security is conditional, rather than unconditional. The condition for ongoing salvation is an ongoing, trusting, living faith in Christ. John 3:36 can be translated: "He that is believing on the Son is having everlasting life." Works do not earn or deserve salvation. Rather, they demonstrate and nourish a living faith.

²³The nature of Adam's relationship to the human race caused the sin tendency (depravity) which he possessed after the fall to be passed on to his descendants. Depravity remains with the believer even after salvation and is in conflict with the Holy Spirit within the believer. Adam's relationship to posterity also caused Adam's guilt to be passed on to his descendants (original sin). God's love and justice stepped in and, based on the work of Christ, justified all people in terms of the Adamic guilt. Thus, babies are not under condemnation and should not be baptized as a symbol or sacrament related to their personal salvation. For salvation from personal sin, repentance and faith are necessary conditions.

²⁴Matthew 10:42



The Kingdom

The kingdom of God is the realm where God reigns. It is a present reality and is visible on earth, especially in the church, giving believers release from the power and penalty of sin. The kingdom is extended on earth by evangelization and is expressed in Gospel preaching, compassionate ministries, peace-making based on reconciliation to God through faith in Christ,²⁵ and in supernatural demonstrations of God's power. As participants in the Kingdom, God's people follow Christ in the way of love, peace, and non-resistance in relating to all people, including personal and national enemies. The final fulfillment of the kingdom is awaited,²⁶ when God's people will be free from the presence of sin and the kingdom of Satan will be judged and doomed to everlasting destruction.

I Pet. 2:9
Matt. 4:17, 23
Matt. 5:3, 10
John 3:3-5
Matt. 12:28
Matt. 16:18, 19
Matt. 24:14
Luke 17:21
Luke 19:11-27
John 18:36
Matt. 5:38-48
Rom. 12:14-21
Act. 14:22
Matt. 25:34
I Tim. 6:14-16
Rev. 12:10
Rev. 21:1-4
Rev. 20:11-15

Satan

Satan is a fallen angel who had rebelled against God. He is known as "the prince of the power of the air," "the prince of this world," and "the god of this age."²⁷ He is a liar, a deceiver, a cunning tempter, and a destroyer. Satan and his demons are a powerful and vast kingdom and are active in the present age and world, opposing God's kingdom, seeking to destroy God's people, holding many people in bondage, and claiming many worshippers. Satan was defeated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is restricted in his activity by God's power and permission, and is destined for eternal punishment in the lake of fire.

Isa. 14:12-15
Ezek. 28:12-15
John 8:44
I John 3:8
I Pet. 5:8
Matt. 25:41
Eph. 6:11
Acts 10:38
II Thess. 2:9
Rev. 12:9-12
Luke 10:18
Rev. 13:3-8
Gen. 3:1-7
John 12:31
Rev. 12:3, 4
Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10

²⁵Peacemaking outside commitment to Christ serves good humanitarian purpose, but should not be confused with the peace of the kingdom, which is peace in Christ, whether personal or social.

²⁶The kingdom of God may be viewed eschatologically as already-but-not-yet. It has been inaugurated and is a present reality, but there is much to come in the final consummation. This statement rejects the idea of the kingdom postponed to a later age as well as the idea of a fully realized kingdom now.

²⁷Eph. 2:2; John 12:31; II Cor. 4:4

The State

The state is a provision of God for the administration of order and justice for the welfare of all people. The state is distinct from the church in purpose and cannot be expected to function by the ethics of Christ and the New Testament. Under God's provision, the state uses the sword, which "is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ"²⁸ and is a function contrary to the New Testament teachings for the church and the disciple of Christ. Christians are to pray for and respect the state and its officials and obey in matters not violating obedience to Christ and His Word. The church is a witness²⁹ to the state of God's righteousness and may cooperate with the state in matters of community and law where principles of love and righteousness are not violated, but may not be integrated with the state or succumb to a nationalism which essentially accords the state the status of a tribal god.

Last Things

The end of this age and the coming of the glorious future of the kingdom will be marked by the personal return of Jesus Christ. The living saints will be transformed; the dead will be resurrected, the just to eternal glory and bliss in heaven and the unjust to everlasting punishment and torment in hell. Satan, death, and hell will be cast into the lake of fire and the glorious reign of the Kingdom of God will be eternally fulfilled.³⁰

²⁸Quoted from *The Schleithem Confession of Faith* (1527)

²⁹The witness of the church to the state is an influence toward a greater consciousness of and conscience toward the sovereignty of God, but is not an attempt to bring the state under New Testament kingdom ethics aside from a response to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This witness of the church consists of testimony and appeal from a people ready to suffer, rather than pressure and demand from a people of political power.

³⁰This section expresses a conservative biblical eschatology and includes basic tenets held by both amillennialists and premillennialists.

Rom. 13:1-7
Matt. 22:15-22
I Peter 2:13-15
Matt. 5:38-42
Matt. 26:52
John 18:36
Rom. 12:17-21
I Tim. 2:1-2
I Pet. 2:17
Titus 3:1
Acts 4:19
Acts 5:29
Act 5:13
Acts 24-26

Rom. 8:22, 23
Acts 1:10, 11
Matt. 24:30
II Cor. 5:6-10
John 5:29
I Cor. 15:20-28
Thess. 4: 13-17
Rev. 20:10
Rev. 21

