

Contents

Nature, Faith & Order

4 THIS IS A LIVE SESSION COURSE FOR SMALL GROUPS OF YOUNG ADULTS IN LOCAL CHURCHES

FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP THROUGH THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH FOR WHATEVER REASON WANTING UNDERSTANDING OF OUR TRADITION

THE STATEMENT CONCERNING ORDER IS THE ONE WE SAY OF OUR BIG PUBLIC OCCASIONS VIVID SNAPSHOT OF WHAT WE DO WITH WELL TUNED HISTORICAL LANGUAGE ABLE TO PICK UP ALL SORTS OF SOMETIMES TURBULENT PASTS THAT ARE STILL DIVISIVE AMONG US. SAY THESE WORDS SOME COULD BE HELPFUL ALONG WITH AN INVOLVED DEBATES. THEN THE DEEPER MEANINGS OF THESE PHRASES ARE APPRECIATED. NOT EMPTY WORDS TO BE PAID ATTENTION TO AT AN INDUCTIVE AND TINGLING TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH WE ARE OR HOPE TO BE

THE SESSIONS ARE BASED ON THE RESPONSIVE FORM OF THE STATEMENT SINCE THIS IS THE VERSION WITH WHICH MOST PEOPLE WILL BE FAMILIAR

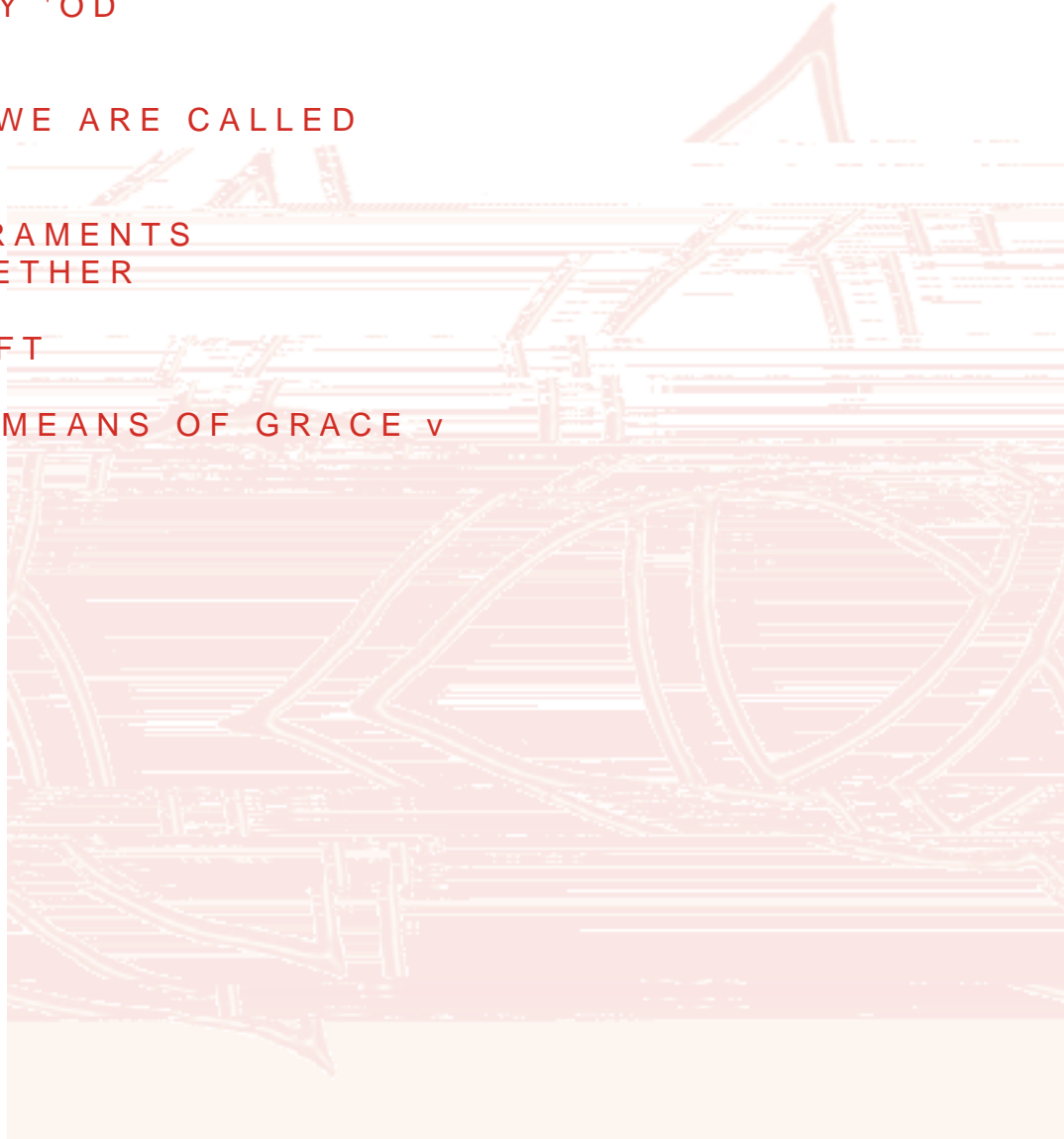


WITH THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH BELIEVES IN
ONE GOD
& THE SON AND HOLY SPIRIT

THE LIVING GOD THE ONLY GOD
EVER TO BE PRAISED

THE LIFE OF FAITH TO WHICH WE ARE CALLED
IS THE SPIRIT'S GIFT
CONTINUALLY RECEIVED
THROUGH THE WORD THE SACRAMENTS
AND OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE TOGETHER

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE GIFT
AND ANSWER THE CALL
GIVING THANKS FOR THE MEANS OF GRACE



WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE NOT TO HAVE YOUR OWN
COPY OF THE BIBLE BUT TO DEPEND ON MEMORY
YOUR OWN AND OTHERS WORK TOGETHER AS
A GROUP AT REMEMBERING A BIBLE STORY SEE
IF YOU CAN PUT TOGETHER THE PARABLE OF THE
PRODIGAL SON FROM YOUR CORPORATE MEMORY
REMEMBER THE SHAPE OF THE STORY AS MANY
PARTICULAR PHRASES AS POSSIBLE AND WHAT

YOU STUB ABOUT
ANY GROUP'S OWN
COPY OF THE
PARABLE

A GROUP AS POSSIBLE AS POSITIVE AT SHAPE OF YOUR OWN
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THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY FOR WHAT IS 'OD S WORD IN THE BIBLE ALIVE FOR HIS PEOPLE TODAY THROUGH THE HELP OF THE (OLY

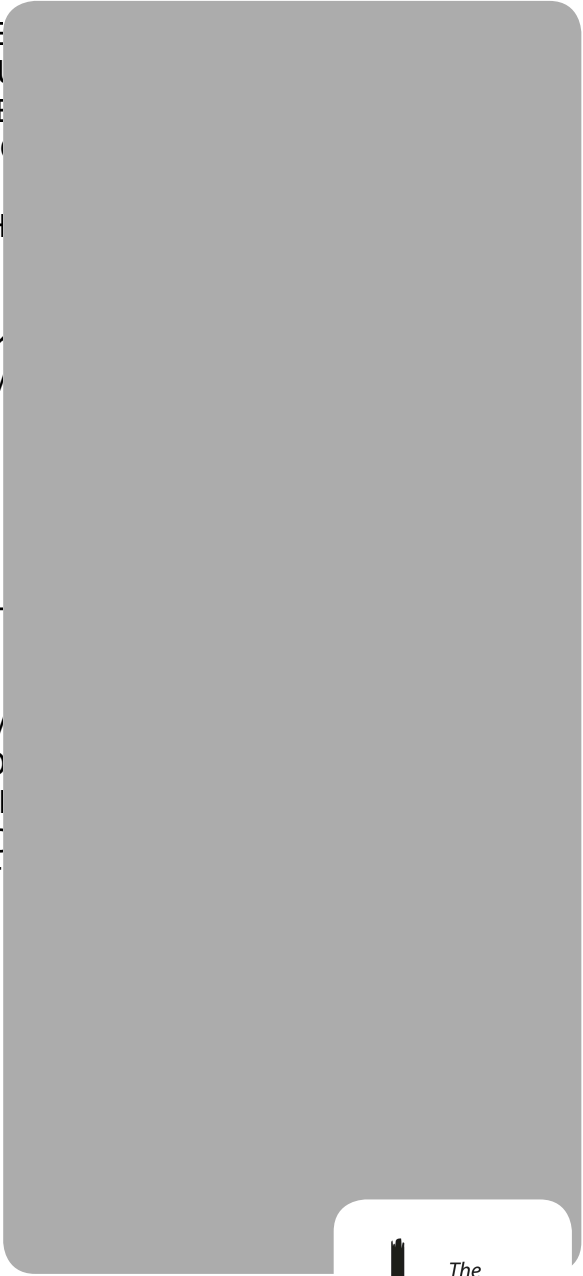
WE RESPOND TO THIS WORD WHOSE SERVANTS WE ARE WITH ALL 'OD S PEOPLE THROUGH THE YEARS

FROM LOOKING BACK OVER AMAZINGLY QUICKLY "BIBLES ARE NOT ALWAYS BOOKS AND COMMENTARIES AND WEIGHT WE SEE WITH HIGHLY VALUED AMONGS REFORMED CHRISTIANS IN 3 COMMUNITIES FROM WHICH HAVE BEEN TAUGHT TO COME ALTHOUGH THEY REMAINED THEIR WAS 'OD S CONTROVERSIAL IN SOME SCENARIOS WE CAN READ WITHOUT HAVING TO WORK AND PRAY AS WE DO SO

WITH THIS EMPHASIS ON "BUT WE TRUST THAT IT AND SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

4 THE BIBLE IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR EVERY KIND OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH AUTHORITY FOR OUR BELIEVING PARTICULAR CHURCH TRADITIONS WERE SHAPED OUT OF A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GREAT INTEREST IN THE BIBLE THROUGH REFORMATION WHICH STRETCHED FROM THE END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY TO THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY. SOME ARE READING AND INTERPRETING AGAIN TO STUDY THE BIBLE TEXTS IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGES (GREEK AND HEBREW) AND TO MAKE NEW DISCOVERIES ABOUT THEM. SOME ALSO ARGUED AT A TIME WHEN LITERACY WAS EXPANDING THAT EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO READ THE BIBLE IN HIS OR HER OWN LANGUAGE AND SO TRANSLATIONS BEGAN TO BE MADE. SOME FEARED THAT IGNORANT PEOPLE READING THE BIBLE WOULD LEAD TO NO GOOD AND WANTED TO PROTECT THE BIBLE FROM BEING MISINTERPRETED. BUT OUR PARTICULAR FOREBARS WERE FIRMLY ON THE SIDE OF OPENING IT UP TO EVERYONE. AT THE SAME TIME THEY WANTED MINISTERS TO BENEFIT FROM THE THINGS OF 'OD SO THAT THEY COULD INTERPRET AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRINTING PRESS OFFERS OUR SUREST HOPE OF BIBLES IN LOCAL LANGUAGES BECOMING AVAILABLE. WHAT IS 'OD S WILL FOR US WE KNOW

TIMES & FAITH IS NOT TO BE LIVED
 BUT IS FOR LIFE TODAY. SOME
 FOR THIS OR AT LEAST WARN US
 WE COULD BECOME SO IDENTIFIED
 PRESENT CULTURE THAT WE DON'T
 HOW CHRIST SPEAKS TO IT TO
 RENEW IT. IF WE SIT TOO LIGHT
 OF THE CHURCH WE MIGHT MISS
 GREAT WEALTH OF WISDOM AND
 PERHAPS WE MAKE THE MISTAKE
 HAVE TO START AGAIN. IN EVERY
 WE FORGET THAT WE ARE NOT
 BEING CHRISTIAN
 THAT COUNTLESS
 GENERATIONS HAVE
 GONE BEFORE US
 CAN OFFER US THE
 WITNESS OF THEIR
 FAITH. (HOWEVER
 THERE ARE ALSO PLENTY OF VOICES
 CRY THAT THE CHURCH IS TOO
 THE PAST AND THAT THE WORLD
 CHRISTIANS WHO HAVE THE CROSS
 (ONLY THE SPIRIT RENEW THEM IN THEIR
 OWN TIMES



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THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND THROUGHOUT CREEDS IN
MANY CENTURIES AND BECAME FORMED AS PART OF
THEY WERE FRAMED AT CRIBACTILETSMEIS WOULD NOT
WHEN THE #HRISTIAN FASTAM E/ASAYS (OWEVER THEY
BEING SHAPED 9OU CANGRNODUNISMFOR OUR OWN AT
BOTH IN 2EJOICE AND 3INGIANDFOR TODAY
THERE ARE FASCINATING STORIES TO TELL
ABOUT THEM 7E OFTEN4THEIBKOTFE MENT ALSO ACKN
ATTENTION TO THE 6IRGON -ARITHASMADE BY OUR PAR
A RATHER LATE DEVELOPM E/ETHANKS FOR THEM 7E
#HURCH S LIFE SO IT S WASCERTAINING TOO DO IN THE
NOTICE THAT SHE IS NAMED E/SCRIBING THE FAITH A
COMPARATIVELY BRIEF n! FAND WESHONOUR THEM "U
#REED !ND IT S WORTH THDANOW E/UTONOUR THEM ONL
THE LONG STORY BEHIND WDRS BREAKACTS BUT RATH

3 SOMETIMES PEOPLE HAVE DESCRIBED US AS A
OWN CREDAL CHURCH BELIEVING THAT WE RARELY
EVER SAY CREEDS IN OUR WORSHIP AND THAT
WE WANT TO GIVE INDIVIDUALS FREEDOM TO STATE THE
FAITH IN THEIR OWN WORDS (OWEVER IT S NOT QUITE
AS SIMPLE AS THAT)IT IS TRUE THAT THE SAYING OF
CREEDS HAS NOT GENERALLY PLAYED A REGULAR PART IN
WORSHIP AT MOST OF OUR CHURCHES AND IT IS TRUE
THAT WE HAVE PLACED A HIGH VALUE ON FREEDOM OF
CONSCIENCE BUT IT IS NOT TRUE THAT WE HAVE NO
SENSE OF THE FAITH WE CAN HOLD TOGETHER OR THAT
@YOU CAN BELIEVE WHAT YOU LIKE IN THE 52#
THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS BEARS BUT WE ALSO
FRAMING THESE CREEDS BECAUSE THAT FAITH HAS TO
TO THE FAITH GIVEN BY THE !POSTLES AND SEEMS A CAUSE OFBE RENEWED FOR EVERY
#REEDS .OTE THAT @CATHOLIC FAITH SOMEHOW REFERS TO
THE FAITH OF THE WHOLE #HURCH AND DOES NOT
MEAN THE SAME AS 2OMAN #ATHOLIC FAITH
TODAY THESE WE WRITE HYMNSTOR ONIFIED PEARFORMS #HUR
TWO CREEDS BOTH FROM THE EARLY CENTURIES OF THE
#HURCH S LIFE ARE IMPORTANT TO US BECAUSE OF HOW FAR WBTM WE SAY • IS @ IN
GREAT AGE BECAUSE THEY ARE HONOURED BY CHURCHES

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OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION WE WERE EXCLUDED FROM THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE PROFESSIONS AND NOT ABLE TO WORSHIP IN THE WAYS OF OUR CHOOSING IN THE PARISH CHURCHES WE LEARNED OVER CENTURIES THE HARSH LESSONS OF COMING OUT ON THE LOSING SIDE OF HISTORY THIS EXPERIENCE HAS TAUGHT US THE IMPORTANCE OF CERTAIN FREEDOMS AND THE DESIRABILITY OF A SOCIETY THAT ALLOWS MORE THAN ONE FORM OF FAITH EXPRESSION THEN WE ACQUIRED THE NAME @NONCONFORMIST IN ENGLAND AND WALES WE TURNED THIS OFTEN TO POSITIVE VALUE AS A LABEL THAT SUGGESTS THE KIND OF COURAGE REQUIRED SOMETIMES TO RESIST OR TO QUESTION THE STATUS QUO WE ALSO HAD CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL IMPACT AS THOSE WHO SPOKE FROM SOMEWHERE ELSE THAN THE @RULING CLASS IS MANY OF THE FREEDOMS FOR WHICH WE HAVE STOOD ARE NOW COMMONLY ACCEPTED AND SINCE MANY IN THE #CHURCH OF ENGLAND NOW QUESTION THE RIGHTNESS OF AN @ESTABLISHED

MANY OF FN

CHURCH THESE STANCES ARE NOT OVERALONE (HOWEVER IN A CULTURE WHICH IS INCREASINGLY MULTI CULTURAL AND MULTI FAITH THEY HAVE NEW FORCE AND

IMPORTANCE WE HAVE EXPERIENCE OF WEIGHING IN THE BALANCE QUESTIONS OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH WITH THE NEED TO BE CAREFUL OF CAUSING OFFENCE WE HAVE EXPERIENCE OF LIVING IN A SOCIETY WHERE WE ARE NOT THE DOMINANT VOICE WE HAVE EXPERIENCE OF THINKING ABOUT THE PROPER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE IS WE THINK TODAY ABOUT SUCH THINGS AS BLASPHEMY LAWS FAITH SCHOOLS AND @DEFENDER OF FAITH VERSUS @DEFENDER OF FAITHS WE HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER INTO THE DISCUSSION



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S 7HERE HAVE YOU EXPERIEN
DISUNITY BETWEEN #HRISTI
WHERE HAVE YOU SEEN EXA
UNITY BECOMING REAL AND

24 # ; + 0)

S 3OME PEOPLE SAY THAT WE
TOO MUCH TIME ON ECUMEN
WHILE FORGETTING MISSION
DO YOU THINK IS THE RELAT
BETWEEN THE TWO

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S)F WE ARE IN AN @E CUMEN
DO YOU THINK 3PRING WILL
IF SO WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK

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S)F ALL THE CHURCHES CAM
OVERNIGHT WHAT C NTRIB
WOULD THE 5NITED 2EFORM
#HURCH BRING TO IT IND W
THINGS WOULD WE GAIN FR
#HRISTIAN TRADITIO S

S)S THERE A DIFFERENCE BE
WOKRTO BUILD UNITY BETWE
#HRISTIANS AND WOKR TO
PEACE BETWEEN FAITH S



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FURTHER SEPARATIONS AMONG THE
CHURCHES AND THERE HAVE BEEN
MORE SINCE AND THESE DIVISIONS
HAVE BEEN A GREAT SADNESS TO
MANY OVER THE CENTURIES 4HE
5NITED 2EFORMED #HURCH
BELIEVES THAT THE #HURCH IS ONE
AND THAT THE UNITY WHICH 'OD
GIV

AN .Bä.DER `

ASE HE UNI OF THE #HURCH ST OMESC\ THO@ OF
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ATCIVCÄHTPATB GRÐ •PAHOMJMU@T.D

4HE #HURCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN A VERY
DIVERSE COMMUNITY AND THERE HAVE BEEN
DEBATES ARGUMENTS AND DIVISIONS SINCE
THE BEGINNING 9OU ONLY HAVE TO READ THE .EW
4ESTAMENT TO SEE THAT THERE NEVER WAS A GOLDEN
AGE WHEN PERFECT PEACE REIGNED AMONG AND
BETWEEN #HRISTIANS (OWEVER THERE HAVE BEEN
SOME MAJOR DIVISIONS IN THE #HURCH WHICH HAVE
CAUSED GREAT PAIN AND DAMAGE @
NOT ONLY TO THE WITNESS
OF THE #HURCH BUT
TO IETSYVLIFE .EAR
THE END OF THE IRST
MILLENNIUM THE #HURCH
SEPARATED INTO %AST
AND 7EST NOT QUITE
BUT ALMOST EQUIVALENT TO THE CHURCHES WE
WOULD NOW DESCRIBE AS /RTHODOX AND 2OMAN
#ATHOLIC 4HE 2EFORMATION PERIOD LED TO