

EXPLORING WAYS FORWARD FOR CHRISTIANITY INTO THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY

A Paper for Dialogue

Preface

This Paper has been prepared by members of the network "Christians Awakening to a New Awareness" (CANA). As a booklet it was made available in 1999 as a contribution to the millennium debate, and because of the need for a collective spiritual leadership that will serve humanity in the coming era and counterbalance the forces for materialism, consumerism, and the dominating influence of technological and economic imperatives. Following is the paper as it was originally published in 1999.

Preparation of the Paper

The Core Group of CANA prepared an initial Discussion Paper which was then circulated to its national membership for comment and for discussion at a working conference in November 1998. Copies were also given to other people inside and outside the Christian Church for comment. Responses were positive both to the purpose and the content of the Discussion Paper and people's suggestions have been incorporated in this Paper which CANA is now seeking to disseminate for dialogue on a wider basis within and without the Christian Church.

The Purpose of this Paper

This paper has been prepared with the following objectives

- To communicate a sample of some of the diverse ways in which Christians are expressing their spiritual journeys and contemporary understanding
- To initiate dialogue within and between the Christian traditions that will enable Christianity to evolve in a way that serves the community in a new era
- To encourage a focus on spirituality and spiritual living that will provide a framework for people's journey through life
- To facilitate the emergence of an open holistic vision for the new millennium which will help all people and all creation to flourish

Background

CANA grew out of The Bridge Trust. This latter is a small association formed in 1973 from within a Christian context by a group of people who were developing a new awareness of the Divine Oneness of all creation and a sense of the Holy Spirit moving humanity forward into a new relationship with God, with the self, with neighbours both locally and globally, and with the natural environment.

At first those experiencing this new awareness expressed it primarily in ecological and educational directions. Then, in the 1980's, it began to express itself in their spiritual lives and began to transform their understanding of the Christian Faith. When the many Bridge Trust members who were life-long church-going Christians, sought to share this new awareness with

their Church communities, the responses ranged from non-comprehension to hostility. So a network for Christians Awakening to a New Awareness (CANA) was established.

The purpose of the CANA network is to provide a supportive association of 'kindred spirits' from a Christian background who are seeking authentic ways to pursue their growing awareness and to build bridges of understanding between those within mainstream traditions and those who have moved away from the institutional churches.

CANA has held several retreats, conferences and seminars, and includes within its membership and affiliations clergy from different traditions, some of whom have sought ways of ministry outside a stipendiary position.

For many people today their Christianity has been vastly enriched by contact with other faiths, with ancient traditional beliefs, with contemporary psychological understanding and with the new scientific paradigm. Above all, an expanded awareness is leading us to take on responsibility for our own spiritual journeys and for healing our planet.

There are now many centres, groups, associations, and individuals working in inspiring new directions. The concern of the CANA network is to link with them and to share the new expressions of spirituality with others in mainstream Christian traditions. It is hoped that a new holistic vision of Christianity will emerge - an inspiring Christian vision for the whole earth in the new millennium.

We offer this Paper for consideration by all those, inside and outside the Church, who have a deep concern for the future of Christianity and the Church. We fully realise that there are many voices within the Church who have been debating this vigorously for some time. However, we believe that we bring a distinctive voice into the arena due to our bridging position and bridging role. We bridge not only between the old and the new Christian perspectives, but also at the present time between those people inside and outside the Church with unmet spiritual needs - Christian and otherwise - and those in leadership positions within the Church institution.

In summary we believe that we offer a channel of communication between the Church leadership and those whose voices have not yet been heard. We welcome the opportunity to contribute these voices to the Church's millennium debates about the future.

Definitions

When the words 'holistic', 'open', 'emergent', 'love', 'Christ-consciousness' appear in the text they are being used in accordance with the following definitions:

Holistic: That which manifests nature's tendency to form self-organising systems in which the wholes are greater than the sum of the constituent parts and in which the parts are themselves in dynamic interaction with each other and with the wholes of which they are a part.

Open: That which is 'permeable' and responsive to the environment and whose development results from dynamic interaction with it.

Emergent: That which is issuing forth new forms from old

Love: The word is used to mean spiritual love or *agape*. There are many definitions. The following (after M. Scott Peck) is found helpful by many today: extending oneself to further one's own spiritual growth or that of others (people and/or Planet).

Christ-consciousness:

The term used by Christians to describe the state of union with the Divine which they believe Jesus lived and manifested. It is the state to which spiritual seekers in all faith traditions, and none, aspire and which they each name in their own way.

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1. FRAMEWORKS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

In the following pages of this first section of the Paper we present two frameworks for the expression of Christian belief some traditional expressions of belief that have been popularly held down the years and, alongside, some contemporary alternatives to them. We realise that whilst expressions of belief have changed over time and are subtle and complex, we of necessity, can only show a snapshot of these expressed in simple terms: furthermore, what we show are illustrative, not definitive or comprehensive. For simplicity we use 'traditional' and 'contemporary' as blanket terms. We appreciate that each embraces a broad range of beliefs, many of which are complementary and dovetail into each other. They are offered as an invitation to each of us to think through each statement and formulate for ourselves one that more nearly resonates with our own understanding and experience, and which will help us on our spiritual journey.

In common with all human beings, as spiritual creatures we Christians carry within us a set of beliefs about that Reality we name God which underlies our existence and which guides us through life. This we call our 'Christian Faith'. The seeds of this were probably planted in early childhood, from 'our mother's knee', from school, Sunday School, Catechism Class and from our early experiences of the sacred in Church. As we matured they were thought about, questioned and became more personal to us. Whatever these beliefs mean to us now and however they influence our lives, we are invited by the Church to affirm universally held Christian truths in the formula of its creeds. These formulations have a long history. They were composed for a particular purpose in a particular culture at a particular time, and for many today the manner in which these truths are stated does not ring true with our own experience. In all aspects of life - scientific, sociological, political, cultural, ethical, psychological - we no longer express our understanding of the world as our parents did. Our scientific knowledge, our Biblical studies. our consciousness have all evolved. Hence, there is a gap between the way we understand divine truths today and the formulations of the creeds.

Divine Truth is absolute and unchanging: it is an attribute of that ultimate Reality underpinning the Cosmos - 'God'. It can never be grasped, let alone expressed, in its totality by our limited minds. So as we grapple with its ineffability we construct partial truths or beliefs. Since these are limited, their expression is not eternally etched in stone but must change as our personal and collective understanding evolves. Indeed doubt and faith are more closely related than is often realised. If God is indeed ultimate truth, then we need not be too frightened of asking questions.

As Christians we believe there is one thing God requires of us during our passage on Earth and that is that we grow in love. Our knowledge of and belief in matters divine are a means to an end: to enable us to be more loving. If our beliefs are to be nourishment for and enliven our way of living, they must relate to Reality as we personally understand and experience it today. Consequently it is a matter of integrity, not of disloyalty to our Church community, to endeavour to re-express Christian truths. To do so is not to imply that these latter were erroneous: they were apposite for their time and they are profoundly meaningful for some people today, but not for all.

In the left hand column of the pages which follow is a mixed selection of familiar traditional views. Some of these are basic doctrines of the Church while others are popular assumptions lacking doctrinal status. We recognise the depth of theological thought that has gone into the doctrinal statements and the spiritual nourishment they have provided for Christians down the years to meditate and gain insight into the Faith but feel that the contemporary Church is failing to present the Christian message in the light of contemporary knowledge. In the right hand column therefore we offer examples of contemporary thinking on the same issues.

In the subsequent section of the Paper are a number of credal statements that some CANA members have composed which are included as an encouragement to us to write our own.

SOME EXPRESSIONS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Familiar Traditional

Contemporary Alternatives

A. THE BIBLE AND REVELATION

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|---|--|
| 1. God has given us a full and final Revelation of Himself, to be guarded against corruption. | Humanity is still evolving so our understanding of God is always in the process of developing. |
| 2. The Bible is the sole source of God's Revelation. | The Universe and our inner experience constitute the primary sources of Revelation. |
| 3. The Bible is the once-and-for-all statement of Divine Truth. | Each age needs to re-interpret afresh the Biblical message if its underlying Truth is to be our inspiration. |
| 4. There are truths which we could not have known except for God's Revelation. | 'Revelation' is born out of human experience and can only be understood and expressed within the bounds of human experience. |
| 5. Revelation reaches its climax in Jesus. | 'Revelation' is ongoing; it cannot be totally possessed by any one Religion. |
| 6. Jesus's actions and words are accurately recorded in the Gospels. | Jesus is the person of whom the Gospels speak: a product of memory, reflection, revision and community experience. |
| 7. Faith is belief in doctrine. | Faith is the framework which gives our life direction and out of which we make our judgements |

B GOD

- | | |
|---|---|
| 8. The Holy Trinity is defined as "Three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in one God". | The relational nature of God can be understood in many different ways e.g. The Trinity symbolises the three elements in God's relationship with all things in Creation namely, God, Creation and the love which flows between them. |
| 9. The Holy Spirit distributes God's grace through the Church. | The Spirit of God inspires all people of good will in different ways and through different events throughout history. |
| 10. "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth". | We experience the Ground of Being as the creative, loving and wise Reality that underlies our ultimate concerns. This we name God. |

11. Creation was an act of God done once and for all at the beginning of time.
12. God is the all-powerful, all-knowing Lord of all creation; the loving Father who sent his Son to reveal the mysteries of Divine Grace.
13. Our understanding of God is in the context of looking back to the Fall-Redemption story.

Creation is the continuing action of God holding all things in existence.

God is the Divine presence in, and creative energy of, this world whom we discover through our relationships with people, things, events and concepts.

Our understanding of God is in the context of the unfolding creation story.

C. JESUS THE CHRIST

14. Starting from our knowledge of God we discover who Jesus is as the Christ. We know the qualities of Jesus because we know the attributes of God.
15. God 'sent' his Son 'down' to Earth and Jesus ascended 'up' into Heaven.
16. Jesus is God-made-man who came down from Heaven to save us.
17. The accounts of Jesus's birth given in the Bible, in particular that "he came down from Heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary", are literally true.
18. The emphasis is on the divinity of Jesus.
19. Jesus equals God, a Divine Being who took on human nature.
20. Jesus is worthy of unconditional worship as God.

Starting from what we know of the historical man, Jesus, we learn from him what we can of the mystery of God. We know some of the attributes of God because we see the sort of person Jesus was.

We do not think of the Incarnation or the Ascension as physically down or up. We understand them as metaphors.

Jesus is perceived as the icon of God who lived among us to show and empower us to live by higher values - which he called 'The Kingdom of God'. This perception was a radical step forward in humanity's understanding of its call to At-one-ment with the divine nature.

Jesus was conceived naturally and born as a human baby to a young woman (the proper translation of 'virgin'). The accounts of his birth were constructed later to explain his divine nature in mythological terms.

The emphasis is on the humanity of Jesus and his God-consciousness.

Jesus, in his humanity, does not equal God, but is a human being who is transparent to the Divine. God was as fully present and active in Jesus as is possible in human form.

We worship God as revealed in Jesus.

21. Jesus was omniscient and omnipotent from his conception.
22. Everything Jesus did and said is done and said by God. He had supernatural powers because he was God.
23. From Jesus' words: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6) we understand that Jesus alone is the key to our salvation: he is the only way to God.
24. Jesus brought us 'Salvation'; variously described as Ransom, a price paid, Justification, Satisfaction, Reparation.
25. Redemption is an act of rescue by an external, Divine agent.
26. The 'Resurrection' is the belief that God raised Jesus to bodily life on the third day after he died on the cross.

Jesus was limited by his humanity. His understanding of himself, of his mission, of God, and of other people developed in his lifetime.

Jesus acted and spoke as a human being. All his powers issued from his potential being fully realised; because he was fully aware of his unity with God.

The Way revealed by Jesus is also found in other faiths but for Christians its manifestation in Jesus is the most accessible, powerful and inspiring.

Jesus brought about the possibility of At-one-ment: a step forward in humanity's evolution towards our becoming one with the Divine.

Redemption is the transformation process by which the life-giving Spirit within us moves us from human-centredness to Divine-centeredness

The 'Resurrection' is the way in which the Gospel writers affirm that the spirit of Jesus is still among us, thus demonstrating the power of divine love over material limitations.

D HUMAN BEINGS

27. Humanity became enslaved to Satan by Adam and Eve's sin (the event known as 'The Fall') but has been set free by the blood of Christ.
28. Sin is an offence against God.
29. We obey the Commandments in order to receive our reward in the next life.

The world is part of an essentially good creation and God chooses to share his creative activity with us to make it even better. The Genesis story is an expression of humanity's 'rise' to consciousness of the Self, it describes a step in human evolution.

Sin is a failure to grow in, wholeness, within ourselves, with others and in relation to the whole of creation. It is to ignore the Divine within us.

We try to be loving people because we believe this leads to our own and all Creation's fulfilment

30. The human being is at the pinnacle of Creation, for whom all else was created.
31. Human beings were granted dominion over the Earth to use the natural world for human benefit.

The human being is the most evolved species to appear on this planet. Evolution is continuing.

We human beings are not above the natural world but embedded within it. As evolved creatures with intelligence we have a duty to care for it.

E. THE CHURCH

32. The Church is an organisation superior to civil society because matters spiritual are superior to matters temporal.
33. The Church is hierarchical in structure. Members relate according to their authority roles.
34. Christianity alone holds the true Revelation and key to Salvation. All other religions are false or inadequate.
35. Christians alone can bring about the Kingdom of God.

The Church is called to be the expression on Earth - the sign or witness - of what it means to live by the values of what Jesus called 'the Kingdom of God'.

The Church is a community. The fundamental relationship of all Christians is as sisters and brothers in a common humanity.

Christianity is the religion in which the role of Christ is most clearly understood. Other religions have different perspectives on the One Truth. Each is a path to ultimate union with God for their followers.

The Kingdom of God is promoted by all who act unselfishly for others, whether Christian or not.

F. THEOLOGY AND WORLD VIEWS

36. When we die our souls enter Heaven or Hell: eternal reward or eternal punishment. We know this by Revelation.
37. Theology is the 'queen of sciences'; it gives us knowledge of all else, because it comes through Revelation.

We cannot know what happens when we shed our earthly bodies but trust that we continue on a journey towards the fullest union with God.

All human knowledge is tentative and interrelated. Theology needs to co-operate with all other disciplines to develop an holistic world view.

G. IMPLICATIONS FOR LIVING

38. Each individual is an eternal soul (distinct from the physical body) relating to God. Earthly life is short lived and of secondary significance. Personal salvation through faith and worship is of primary importance and gives support for righteous living.

39. Belief in Jesus as personal saviour is the essence of being a Christian.

40. To live a Christian life it is sufficient to follow the Way of Jesus in personal daily life.

41. Matters of the spirit are more sacred, of greater significance and value than matters of the flesh and the material, and must be given greater reverence, respect and care.

Each individual is an eternal soul relating to God and comprises body, mind and spirit in dynamic interaction. It is by loving service in the world for the wellbeing of others and for the whole of creation that we grow towards wholeness and union with God.

Following the Way of love shown by Jesus is the essence of being a Christian.

Christians are mandated to follow the Way of Christ not only in the conduct of their own lives but in their expression of public truth and corporate action for furtherance of justice, freedom and peace for all.

Spirit and matter are equally sacred. Therefore we must revere, respect and care not only for the spirit but also for the temple of the spirit – the human body, the body corporate, the planet and its biosphere and the whole of material creation.

2. SOME PERSONAL CREEDS

Introduction

It was from people's urgent need to find a contemporary means of understanding and expressing the Christian faith that the CANA network itself emerged. CANA members were looking for an updated expression of the eternal verities of the faith - a new 'creed' - which was relevant to people's lives and understanding and which would engage and inspire them at the beginning of the twenty-first century. They realised that 'Creeds are a way to walk in' to committed action in the world and must be relevant to their living context.

The Need to Create a New 'Creed'

When the suggestion was first put to the Core Group that CANA might try to write a new Christian creed which was more in line with contemporary knowledge and understanding of the faith, it was met with a mixed reception. While many members do not accept at face value traditional credal beliefs and they know that the continuing requirement for church-going Christians to affirm these credal beliefs has turned people away from the Church, they were nevertheless uneasy about tackling such a seemingly awesome task.

There were several reasons for this unease. Some thought it would be too difficult an undertaking. After all, the early Church took three centuries to arrive at the Nicene Creed. Furthermore the original creeds were anything but personal: they were written for ecclesiastical and political reasons. As one CANA Core Group member said, "Who am I to write a creed?.. . The creeds adopted by the early Church were written by those who had the greatest wisdom, authority or power at the time. Moreover, a creed devised by a group will inevitably not represent the position of all the members and could also limit growth and change."

Another member asked "Do we really want a new general creed anyway?" Several members had their reservations about colluding at all with the notion of general 'creeds', with which all the faithful are expected to identify. In the history of the Church these have sometimes been perceived as oppressive, triumphalist and inappropriately definitive. When our faith is so provisional and open-ended, emergent, there is a tendency for creeds to try to define the indefinable.

Despite these reservations there was an acknowledgement that something needed to be done to bring the new Christian consciousness to a wider public, both within and outside the Church.

Some Examples of Personal Creeds

As a starting point therefore some CANA Core Group members and other CANA members subsequently, agreed to write down their own personal creeds. (Seven samples, chosen to represent a broad spectrum of approaches, follow in this section; the rest are in the Appendix). They are offered here to show something of the variety that exists even among a small group of people who share a similar overall vision for the Christian faith. However, we offer these personal creeds with humility and with several provisos:

First, it is appreciated that their meaning will be somewhat blunted by being presented out of their living context.

Secondly, each of the writers is keenly aware of the provisionality of their statements and the importance of not being held back by them, and prevented from moving on.

The third proviso is an acknowledgement of the difficulty of capturing inner beliefs in words. Words are at best only gross approximations but they are the only tools we have for handling and communicating ideas. We must therefore use them with care and be aware of their limitations.

2 Some Personal Creeds

Lastly, each writer approached the task quite differently, in form, content and purpose. Some have followed the pattern of the traditional creed; a few have departed considerably. Some have focused more inwardly while others have spoken explicitly of action in the world. Indeed, one of the latter says that for her, "a creed would become more of a manifesto i.e. a statement of how I believe that I should try to live my life in this world, based on my understanding of the nature of the Trinity *and* on the nature of the human being. It should therefore include a set of commitments or dedications, explicit rather than implicit." This writer also draws attention to the omission in the traditional creeds of the teachings of Jesus and mention of the word 'love'.

Some wish to move away from belief statements altogether. One of the writers says "I am aware that the more I know the more I don't know". Another CANA member wrote: "I appreciate that my true home is in the land of peaceful glorious uncertainty."

An Encouragement to Others

We hope that by sharing these personal creeds, other people might be encouraged to reflect on, and perhaps, write down their own. In doing so you might find it helpful to refer to the previous general **Frameworks** section and the **Helpful Books** section at the end of the Paper.

Personal Creed (1): Celia Storey

I believe in one God
Father/Mother of all
Maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;

And in Jesus,
Blessed by God for his earthly mission,
Born a human being for all to see
That humanity might emulate his example
And become One with the Creator
By whom all things were made.

Jesus, in his life on earth,
Embraced the Spirit of God
Through which he taught the meaning of true love.
He healed the sick, uplifted the poor, and gave hope to the lonely;
He showed tolerance to his oppressors,
Forgiveness to his aggressors
And, by his death, revealed the secret of resurrection
That all may hope for a future beyond the grave.

That we may follow his example he revealed the Holy Spirit,
The living Spirit of God working in us as it did in Jesus,
That we can live in constant communion, knowing the will of God,
That humanity may again live in harmony with one another and all life
And all may rejoice in the magnificence of Creation.

Personal Creed (2) : John Gant

I believe in the creative power which made all things known and yet to be known.

I believe in the Web of Life to which all Creation is connected.

I believe that reverence for all Creation will bind it together.

I believe that injury to any one part injures the whole.

I believe that spiritual awareness binds all humankind together.

I believe that my spiritual growth depends on helping the spiritual growth of others.

I am committed to working for the Unity, in peace and love, of all Creation and for the conservation of Mother Earth.

I believe that Truth is emergent and that recognising the beliefs of other faiths are crucial to the pursuit of Truth.

I believe that in following the Tao of Jesus I shall be helped to give life and light to my Creed.

Personal Creed/Manifesto(3): Rose Moore

I BELIEVE that:

GOD's nature cannot be fully defined or comprehended by us, but that my conscious search will both yield some knowledge and also accept the mystery of "unknowing". God is objective reality, i.e. the truth, the "is-ness" of being. God is also the fount of all creation, manifesting in life processes and energies, i.e. the action of doing. I do not believe that God expresses subjectivity through judging, redeeming, suffering or sending, but that God's objectivity IS LOVE, and that to do God's "will" means aligning with the truth of love.

HUMAN NATURE is an aspect of God's creation, manifest as separated from the divine source but imbued with spirit which yearns for re-connection with it. The essential duality of human nature is expressed in the "is-ness" of being, and in the doing in the world. The doing is influenced by free will, whose elements of subjectivity may not align with the will of God. The journey through life hopefully brings a greater degree of consciousness, and with it, increasing responsibility to face the shadow. My concept of sin is a conscious "No"-saying to the potential of life and love.

I believe that while on earth, we are here to embrace and respect matter rather than deny it - that this planet is a living organism, and that the human body is a temple of the spirit, created for love and joy, but also, through suffering, to present chances for transformation.

JESUS the CHRIST • I am enthralled by the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and I do not expect to understand them in rational terms. They speak to the heart, of the essential partnership of Universal Mind and Universal Matter.

I believe that Jesus was a human being fully permeated by the conscious will for love, who showed how human potential may be fulfilled. Therefore his commandments form the core of my creed:

--- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind"

--- "Love your neighbour as yourself"

I understand his life as a journey of liberation through love and forgiveness which inevitably challenges us to radical acts in the name of peace, justice and equality for all people, as envisioned in the Beatitudes. The paradox of our fallibility and vulnerability are integral to this vision. We are empowered in as far as we perceive the indwelling Christ in ourselves and in others. In as far as we fall short of this; we may receive the grace of forgiveness.

THE HOLY SPIRIT • I experience the spirit as the presence of God within me which energises my understanding, sustains my faith, gives courage when challenged, and is the capacity to love and be loved. Though unique to me and surviving the death of my physical body, it is of the universal essence of being, and so connects me intimately to all others and the whole web of creation.

Personal Creed (4): Jill Gant

I BELIEVE:

There is a Creator Spirit - I call God - at the heart of Reality; whose boundless outpouring of wise and compassionate love is the Source, Sustainer and Soul of all Being, manifest and unmanifest; whose creative intelligence motivates the evolution of the cosmos and of humankind, and who seeks through full communion (Oneness) with evolving human consciousness to bring about the rule of love on earth and throughout eternity.

God's Spirit enfolds all things, is within all things, connects all things, and is over all things in Creation. I matter because I am a child of God, deeply embedded within God's Creation and intimately involved with its destiny; I have a unique vocation to fulfil in the process of Creation: and my lifelong purpose is to pursue a spiritual journey in search and fulfilment of that vocation.

Jesus Christ, through the wisdom and compassion of his teaching and the sacrificial love of his life and death, manifested the Spirit of God on earth, showed us the way God wishes us to live and empowered us to follow it.

I experience God's Spirit as the inner voice of love and wisdom which urges me to greater becoming: strengthening me, comforting me, moving and guiding me towards wholeness and to fulfilment of my potential and empowering me to spend myself for the good of Creation.

Openness of heart and mind is crucial to spiritual growth and I expect my beliefs to evolve with deepening knowledge of inner and outer Reality and of the congruence between them.

If I acknowledge in humility my inadequacies in faith, understanding and service, God will be merciful and will continue to sustain me on my journey

AS A RESULT OF MY BELIEFS I COMMIT MYSELF:

- * To discern with wisdom and act with compassion upon the promptings of God's inner voice; to seek to follow the Way of Christ and other spiritual leaders to guide me; and to turn to God's living Spirit within for inner strength.
- * To growth in spiritual awareness (through prayer, meditation, reading the Bible and other sacred works, worship, training, counselling, dialogue and such like) so that I may better discern God's inner voice and derive greater strength and clearer guidance in the conduct of my life.
- * To love and serve God; and to love and serve my neighbour and my environment as myself; not just in my heart and with my lips, **but by sacrificial loving action** in whatever I am called to do.
- * To respect and value others people's spiritual journeys, in whatever faith tradition or none, since I believe that there are many paths to God and that our collective spiritual progress will benefit from sharing our insights openly with each other.

Personal Creed (5) : Janice Dolley

Any statement of belief now seems limiting and provisional as I know that concepts can create a pseudo type of reality and awareness of reality itself will continue to expand. However, within this limitation:

- God now seems the One 'about whom naught may be said'. He/She/It is beyond definition by our finite minds. God alone is.
- Evolution is God's Life and Thought unfolding. Oneness manifests in duality - in multiplicity and diversity. We are each unique expressions of the oneness and cannot, therefore, be separate from each other or from God, except in our conscious awareness of this oneness.
- Quantum Theory is now explaining the scientific basis, and mystical insight affirms, the nature of God's energy vibrating at different frequencies and as both particle and wave, seen and unseen.
- This leads to an increased awareness of an interconnectedness with all creation in many dimensions of being.
- The Christ is the aspect of the Godhead which issues forth spirit into material form, creating life. This life, because it is born of the Father/Mother, carries like qualities.
- Two primary qualities underlying the essence of life are light and love. Light is God. Love is God. A third is wisdom and power in combination. These qualities substand all life unconsciously. It is within humanity, that they become, or can become, consciously realised.
- Being a Christed One therefore means to be consciously bearing these three qualities of life.
- Jesus of Nazareth fully embodied the Christ consciousness and could therefore say. 'I and the Father are One', 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life'. At the time he was accused of blasphemy by those whose understanding was limited.
- The journey of each soul through successive lives is to respond to the same Christ consciousness within and through a process of continuous learning and transformation grow to become a Christed One also.
- Through a willing heart, an open mind and a listening ear each person can receive an inner connection with the Christ, listen to 'the still small voice' and discover the truth that the 'Kingdom of Heaven is within you'
- The voice of the beloved is experienced by people of all faiths and none and is interpreted and named according to their faith tradition and cultural tradition.
- As an understanding of the universality of the 'God experience' grows and our awareness of the oneness of life expands, so the distinctions between the religions will fall away.
- The common experience of all who enter this awareness is that our role as humans is to attune innerly to the light and live and express this outerly through wisdom and power in whichever field of service to which we feel called; so become co-creators in the divine plan for "thy Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven."

Personal Creed (6) : Lee Casey

I BELIEVE in the Nothingness, the Void, the Silence, the unknowable, unmanifest, origin, source which is above, below and beyond Time. I believe in Oneness - Oneness of the Father Creator that creates not by making but by becoming.....

.... the son, the incarnate Body of the Christ, the Anointed One, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father. The stars, the galaxies, the seas, the Cosmic Christ, the web of life, and dolphins, ducks and Us.

I and the Father are One

We are all the sons of God, we are all part of the body of Christ, our spirits are part of the Great Spirit, our minds are part of the Great Mind - we are co-creators of the Kingdom.

I BELIEVE in Perfect Love that is synonymous with Light and Wisdom, Spirit, Power and Grace. Love that comes to us primarily through our relationships with other people. If we reject love we reject God Himself

Beloved, let us love one another, for Love is of God

I BELIEVE that we can, by aligning our hearts, souls and spirits in the right way, through a real experience of (not an intellectual assent to) The Silence, to unconditional Love, tap into that Power/Spirit which wishes nothing but our good (even though it involves change, transformation and destruction). I believe we are given `a white light at the back of our minds to guide us' and that we can TRUST THE PROCESS.

And I call myself a Christian because I think I believe what Jesus believed. Which is all the above things. I recognise in him a fully enlightened human being, living at the cutting edge of his belief system, whose life was an enactment of the myths of eternal truths about love and forgiveness and rebirth, and resurrection and the ultimate triumph of good over evil, no matter how we try to mess it up! We must look through his life to the truth that it reveals, not at it, or we miss the point (like seeing the image in a magic eye picture).

Lord, to whom shall we go, for you have the words of eternal life?

I BELIEVE we can all have the same experiences (salvation, healing, forgiveness, resurrection, rebirth etc) whenever and wherever we spend our lives. But we describe our experiences perforce in accordance with our cultures, visions, and vocabulary - and thereby misunderstand each other.

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious and devout souls are everywhere of one religion: and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the diverse liveries they wear here make them strangers.

Personal Creed (7) : Philip Sheppard

There is a call to Be One, or Return to Me reverberating throughout the whole universe like an echo from the voice of the big bang. It can be felt continuously in the heart of each person in the form of our deepest desire. It is the call of the Creator to create.

The Creator exists as transcendent, the ultimate other, and as immanent, the ultimate intimacy. The creator immanent is the Christ, filling all creation continuously. The Christ is met at the centre of each human being, more intimate with us than we are with ourselves. when we seek to follow the call, the Christ works in us to draw the universe towards completion.. When we ignore or resist the call, we hinder the process of the completion of creation, and prolong pain and suffering in the world.

Jesus was the Christ manifest in human form and came to communicate the good news of the call to the human race. He chose a painful early death rather than betray this mission.

The power working in this universal process is the Spirit of Divine Love. The Spirit of Divine Love is the generative power of the whole universe, the source of all things, the uncaused cause of all that is. No thing can create this love, only the love itself.

I am committed to follow the **Call to Be One** continuously, in my inner being through the call to uniqueness, integrity and wholeness, and in my external relationships through the call to form community. As we form relationships with one another, we recognise in the other the same Christ that we have already encountered in ourselves. This is how we grow in awareness of the Christ. Holding both the inner and outer dimensions of the call simultaneously draws us into loving encounters where we experience companionship and at the same time our integrity is challenged to grow. If we can hold the tension, we grow together into community.

3. THE WAY AHEAD FOR CHRISTIANITY: A CONTEMPORARY STATEMENT

Stages on the Spiritual Journey

The examples of personal creeds given in the previous section and in the Appendix illustrate our increasing understanding of the stages - the patterns of transformation - through which people usually pass on the spiritual journey, in whatever religious tradition (or none) they express their spirituality. Many writers on spiritual matters have shown that each person's transformation path will be unique to their nature and experience. The essential point is that at any given time every individual Christian will be at a different point in their spiritual awareness. Some will find credal beliefs helpful - whether expressed in traditional or contemporary terms. Others will find them unnecessary on their journey into deeper mystical awareness. The Church needs to value and acknowledge this broad spectrum of belief positions explicitly. It should be a matter of both/and, not either/or, with opportunities created for mutual dialogue and learning across the spectrum.

The Need for a Contemporary Statement of Faith

As our examples have shown, each individual's personal creed is a unique affirmation of the One God. It is a statement of that person's position on the Christian spiritual path at a particular point in time. The diversity of these creeds is a cause for celebration and a vivid reminder of God's boundless creativity. Together they help us to build a fuller picture of humanity's understanding of the divine.

It will only be through the ever-expanding networking of sincerely seeking, mutually respecting individuals, honestly sharing with each other their deepening awareness, with open hearts and minds, in touch with inner and outer Reality, that the spiritual awareness of humanity as a whole can organically grow.

Such radical openness to God and His/Her Creation by increasing numbers of people will allow an open, holistic ever-unfolding Christianity to emerge. In this, all parts of the human personality (body, mind and spirit), all aspects of human nature (good and bad), all people and all faiths, indeed the whole cosmos, are seen as interconnected and interdependent and are embraced with acceptance and love. Such total interconnectedness is perfectly encapsulated in the much quoted phrase "none of us can be fully human until all are human."

We propose that a Contemporary Statement encompassing this vision is needed to express honest Christian commitment at the threshold of the third millennium; one which incorporates contemporary scientific understanding of the cosmos and humankind's place within it, and which accommodates the full spectrum of belief positions of those who are seeking to follow a Christian path.

The Right Reverend Dr John Saxbee, The Bishop and Archdeacon of Ludlow has made the following observation on the need for a contemporary expression of the faith: "Whilst I would not necessarily see the need to abandon the historic creeds as 'markers' in the development of the Christian tradition, I certainly see the value of guiding principles that will enable individuals and local communities to articulate for themselves a credo which is topical, provisional and contextual. I also recognise the importance of such principles supporting the value base which must undergird our personal relationships and corporate behaviour."

Some Shared Beliefs and Principles from the November 1998 CANA Conference

At the CANA Conference, groups sought to express shared beliefs and principles which could form the basis of a Contemporary Christian 'Creed' or Statement. Not surprisingly this proved to be most challenging, not just through restraints of time and circumstance but also due to the intrinsic difficulty of the task itself. Nevertheless significant material and ideas emerged about purpose and content and this has been incorporated in the suggested content for a Contemporary Statement of Christian Faith which follows.

Suggested Content for a Contemporary Statement of Christian Faith

The following suggested content is offered as a starting point for dialogue. It draws upon the CANA members' personal creeds, the responses received to the Discussion Paper and the Conference discussions. It also reflects the repeatedly expressed conviction that faith is more than the mind's assent to a set of philosophical beliefs. A living faith will also arouse an inner awareness of Spirit and a dedication to loving service.

The suggested Contemporary Statement therefore sets the framework of intellectual beliefs within a broader context. It starts with a pre-ambule which sets the scene. After the beliefs section there is a brief section about the nature of a living faith in which spiritual practice develops the inner awareness which compels to loving service. The Statement ends with a section on faith in service - principles for living, both for Christians and for the Church as a body.

1. PRE-AMBLE

- a A brief summary of the key changes in human knowledge and awareness that make it necessary to reframe the Creeds as a Contemporary Statement of Christian Faith.
- b An acknowledgement that this Statement is provisional since the expression of the Christian faith must evolve with humanity's developing understanding of the cosmos and humanity's place and responsibilities within it, if it is to continue to provide a valid spiritual framework to guide people's lives.
- c A commitment to regular review of this Statement, involving full consultation with all Christians, whether inside or outside the organised Church, and others interested.
- d An acknowledgement that human beings are spiritual creatures who need a meaningful framework to make sense of their existence and to guide them in their day to day lives; and that such a framework must be seen as the servant of a person's living faith, not its master.
- e A brief introduction to the Christian spiritual framework - its origin and validation in the experience and lives of people past and present, as recorded in the Bible and other Christian writings.

2 PURPOSE

This Contemporary Statement is:

- a For Christians in general and is therefore inclusive of the broad spectrum of faith positions, from those who find acceptance of belief statements essential to their faith, through those who are questioning and in transition, to those who have moved into a wordless state of awareness and trust,
- b For small groups who can use it as a basis from which to articulate their beliefs in a way which meets their local needs.
- c For the rest of the world - for them to know what to expect of Christians

3. BELIEFS

A summary of the core beliefs of the Christian Faith, expressed concisely in contemporary language without jargon is outlined below. It provides a frame of reference to guide and serve Christians on their spiritual journey and it is acknowledged that its usefulness in promoting the spiritual life will vary from person to person, depending upon their individual circumstances and spiritual experience,

- a God is the mysterious depth and Ground of all Being, Source of love and wisdom, who creates and sustains creation, manifest and unmanifest.
- b God is the living core, the life spirit, the creative energy of our inner being, our world, the cosmos; is in all, through all, over all; moving Creation unceasingly towards wholeness and fulfilment.
- c Jesus was fully aware of and responsive to God's Spirit within and empowers us to embody the Divine in our own lives.
- d By allowing ourselves to be radically influenced by Jesus's life and teaching we too can become aware of God's Spirit within, experience forgiveness, and be guided and empowered to fulfil ourselves in loving service for the creation of a better world.
- e A life of faith **necessarily** entails service in or for the world. It is not complete if it is **solely** concerned with the individual's relationship with God and his/her personal journey or salvation. True love compels people to act for the well-being of the Other - people and the Planet.
- f The unconditional inclusiveness of God's love which embraces everyone and encourages those who consciously endeavour to follow a path of beauty, goodness and truth.
- g We have a deep respect for the "temple of the spirit", the human body, the Earth and all material creation, which we hold sacred, and are committed to its care.
- h Notwithstanding these beliefs we have an awe-ful acceptance of the mystery at the heart of our existence.

4 SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

A living Christian faith is more than intellectual assent to a set of philosophical beliefs. It entails a commitment of the heart to living by the two great commandments, taught and exemplified by Jesus, and whose message is also central to the other great Faiths:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength"

"Love your neighbour as yourself"

Learning to live by these commandments is a lifelong spiritual journey. It requires commitment to the personal inner work entailed in spiritual growth, as, for example, in meditation, prayer, spiritual direction and counselling, study of the Bible and other wisdom literature and worship, and drawing where helpful upon the insights of the other great spiritual traditions.

Spiritual practice leads to an ever-increasing awareness of a level of reality that is both within and beyond the material level and a mindfulness in each moment. The way this increasing awareness is expressed will depend on the individual's temperament, experiences and circumstances. For some - particularly those of a contemplative disposition - it leads to an increasing commitment to the inner life - to "being"- and their service is to empower others by their wise and loving presence. For others, such increasing awareness compels ever increasing service through social action in the world.

5 PRINCIPLES FOR LIVING

While it is beyond the remit of this Paper to detail these, a Contemporary Christian Statement will include guiding principles for living. These will be derived from the great love commandments and therefore involve the application of wisdom and compassion to the complexities of everyday life.

The new awareness affects ethical principles for individuals, groups and society. Basically the move is away from following absolute rules of conduct and towards developing a mature discernment that acknowledges the totality and uniqueness of every situation. This does not imply an absence of ethical principles but recognises that these need to be interpreted with love and in context. It places the emphasis on our responsibility to become fully aware and to learn how to love in practice - a life-long process.

6 PRINCIPLES FOR THE CHURCH

It is the role of the Church to help people to progress on their spiritual journey towards greater love and the fulfilment of their unique vocation in God's creation. In seeking to fulfil this role the Church will be guided by the following principles:

- a The Church explicitly acknowledges and values the diverse and enriching pluralism of personal belief positions within the Church - from traditional believers to radical open-minded explorers, and those moving into mystical awareness. It welcomes the expression of all positions within its organisational structures and encourages dialogue between them. It provides a range of activities, literature and worship as well as open, quiet spaces which will enable the spiritual growth of people from across the spectrum of belief positions.

- b The Church acknowledges that other religious traditions are also paths towards the divine. Furthermore, the teachings and life examples of their spiritual leaders can offer great spiritual riches to open-minded Christians. The Church is committed to a pro-active approach to positive interfaith dialogue and collaboration to resolve world conflicts and bring about peace.
- c The Church accepts the Christian imperative for itself and its members to work for good not only at the personal level but also in the public sphere - in organisations, at local, national and global levels. This entails becoming appropriately involved in promoting human rights and peace in political, economic and financial spheres.
- d The Church affirms that love of neighbour now means not just other people but the Earth and its web of life and affirms its commitment to environmental justice and a sustainable economics which will ensure that the world is preserved for future generations.

4. THE WAY AHEAD FOR THE CHURCH: SOME CONTEMPORARY VISIONS

Having shared their ideas for a contemporary expression of Christian belief, CANA members also discussed how these might influence their visions for the future of the Church.

Four have put their personal visions in writing. They follow immediately in this section. Visions were also shared at the CANA Conference and the ideas which emerged are summarised later in the section. The section concludes with a diagram which draws together the main visionary ideas.

Some of the ideas presented are more radical than others but all see a crucial role for a revitalised, relevant Church in providing the spiritual healing and direction so desperately needed at local and global level for the salvation of humankind and the living Planet.

Many of the ideas expressed have always been present with greater or lesser emphasis in different church communities, but are offered here for their particular relevance at this time. What is characteristic of the new awareness is the move away from religious divisions towards an understanding of a shared underlying spirituality; and away from hierarchical structures towards networks of local communities.

A revitalised role can only be played by the Church if it is radically open and responsive on an ongoing basis to contemporary knowledge and understanding; if it is prepared to update its interpretation of the Christian message; and if it is willing to adopt an open, inclusive approach to all sincere seekers of the Way.

A former deputy Secretary General of the UN, Dr Robert Muller, has said, "Either the next century will be a spiritual century or there will be no twenty-first century at all."

MY VISION FOR THE CHURCH (1)

My vision is for every community to have ready access to a local church which practises an inclusive 'open' Christianity. Such a church - the community and its building - would welcome unconditionally all genuine seekers of God (however they understand that term). It would offer the Christian message in a variety of forms; and would respect the individual's freedom - in the light of their own nature, education and experience - to find their own path to communion with the loving Spirit of God, offering support, inspiration and guidance largely from the life and message of Christ and the Christian tradition, but not exclusively so. I suggest below how local churches might operate this way in practice.

Local Churches As Open Pastoral Centres

Where People are Loved and Learn to Love Unconditionally

I use the term 'pastoral' in its widest sense to embrace the spiritual, social and material needs of the community.

Purpose of Open Pastoral Centres: To Promote the Spiritual, Social and Personal Development of Local Communities, i.e. to Develop their Capacity to Love

This development would ideally be an ecumenical venture (indeed in the longer term a multi-faith venture) in which all local churches would participate, pooling all resources - both material and personnel - to create a network of Open Pastoral Centres, centred on existing churches and strategically located to serve local communities.

Each Centre would gravitate around the worship activity of the Church but its role would extend to that of retreat - cum - community centre for the whole local community, offering unconditional love through guidance and support of all kinds to all comers, regardless of belief and seeking to *offer* individuals help at their level of need.

Primary Values of Open Pastoral Centres

Open Pastoral Centres will only fulfil their purpose if all those working in them - paid and voluntary - share understanding of commitment to and capacity for, giving and receiving unconditional love (agape) and if they are prepared to work to common values. Suggested core values might be:

1. All people are respected and valued equally, whatever their belief system
2. It is accepted that all people are on a spiritual journey and will be at different stages in their journey
3. It is accepted that people need help at their level of need be that material, social and/or spiritual. Guidance and support is most effective when relevant to the person's understanding and experience and when offered non-directively
4. It is accepted that people who experience *agape* - unconditional (spiritual) love - grow in their capacity to love others

Possible Activities at Open Pastoral Centres

A range of activities could be provided on site and on an outreach basis. The scale, nature, combination and scheduling of such activities would obviously depend on the needs of each local community and should be decided in the light of a survey (or audit) of those community needs. The list below provides some suggestions but the list is not exhaustive! These activities

are in addition to the usual worship, teaching and outreach activities of the church which would continue, but which would hopefully become more attuned to the actual needs of the community.

1. Spiritual guidance and counselling for individuals - this should start from where the person is on their spiritual journey and should not sermonise from a position of superiority.
2. Personal befriending in response to bereavement, unemployment, and other personal, family or social problems; to include possible advocacy and support with other agencies.
3. Possible provision of material assistance, e.g. low-cost lunch clubs, nearly new and goods exchange schemes and / or financial assistance, e.g. from a Centre Welfare fund - derived from local donations - administered on a discretionary confidential basis by Centre Trustees, in accordance with clear criteria - mainly for occasional 'opportunities', exceptionally for emergency subsistence.
4. Range of activities and opportunities for spiritual, social and personal development to enable people to experience unconditional love, to regain their hope and trust in God, to enhance their loving and living skills and to find their own way to God, for example:
 - a Contemplative prayer and meditation
 - b Relaxation and stress management
 - c Community Building
 - d Expressive arts with a spiritual purpose, e.g. dance, drama, art, music, poetry
 - e Various groups to raise spiritual, social and personal awareness and to develop relationship and life skills
 - f Social activities to involve the community, including support groups for people who are isolated and/or have special needs e.g. lunch club for unemployed people
 - g Action groups to campaign and tackle local, national and international social and environmental problems to further God's Kingdom, e.g. ecology support group to motivate members' greener life-style
 - h Organisation of home care and house and garden maintenance services for the needy

Finance and Staffing:

It is not the purpose of this vision paper to suggest the details of implementing such developments. However, from experience of similar developments elsewhere I know that the money and human resources could be found - largely from redirecting the churches' own substantial resources - once the commitment to such initiatives has been made.

Furthermore I have evidence to support my belief that such Pastoral Centres would re-engage local communities whose spiritual hunger is not at present being met. Provided they were consulted throughout, voluntary workers, financial support and material resources would be forthcoming in plenty to supplement the churches' own resources.

Jill Gant

MY VISION FOR THE CHURCH (2)

Downshifting the Church

The world-wide Church already has the majority of its members living in the Southern Hemisphere. Therefore the Church of the new century will be a Third World Church, which means a Church of the poor and non-powerful, non-clericalist, de-centralised, expressing itself in less legislation and organisation.

This will dictate a new pattern for the Church as we know it in the West. Our European Church will become more of a witness to Gospel values by downshifting in five particular areas:

- 3 Our large anonymous urban parishes will become the nodes of a network of neighbourhood communities. For the most part the life of Christians will be nourished by their participation in small local communities of about ten-family size.
- 4 Within the Catholic Church there will be a shift of jurisdiction away from Papal/Vatican authority to local dioceses through which the Gospel and Church life will be inculturated in each country. The supreme authority of the Church will reside in collegiality not monarchy.
- 5 The present structures displaying ecclesial power (in the Catholic Church, the Vatican State and its Diplomatic Corps of Nuncios, etc) will give way to structures which are suited to and will promote the growth of Christians at the grass/cassava roots.
- 6 Today's pyramidal structure will downshift to a way of functioning in a networking, communitarian form.
- 7 There will be a downshift of the importance given to what Church members believe, in favour of how they live: from orthodox to orthopraxis. What will matter as each of us passes through death will not be how much we know or believe but how much we love. The former are only means to that end. A traditional Creed can be an instrument of exclusion - if you do not sign up to it you don't belong to us - rather than spiritual nourishment. Creeds will need to be composed in the idiom of each community's culture.

Adrian Smith

MY VISION FOR THE CHURCH (3)

The early Church was a gathering of those who were attuning to God's Spirit which enabled them to spend time together apart from the material, busy world. It provided fellowship and support to each person on their journey of awakening.

In later years, shared experience became codified into belief and then dogmas; ways of connecting with God became ritualised and established and the Church took over a position of power, standing in a mediating position between people and God.

What is now happening is that more people are having a direct experience of God and are seeking ways of expressing this that are authentic for them. They, like myself, find that church attendance limits rather than progresses their process of awakening to this experience. They prefer to gather outside the institution in small groups in which their experience will be honoured and in which - through a process of resonance - their spiritual energies will be raised. This can, and does, happen in a church setting but generally the materially-orientated interpretation of the gospel and the lack of space for quiet and inner stillness get in the way.

The Church can now proceed in one of two main directions:

1. It can continue to focus on the events of 2000 years ago, on the unique contribution that this has made to the world, and on a continuing worship of the person of Jesus.

This serves a useful purpose in the awakening of an individual from a complete pre-occupation with the material world to a discovery of the 'birth of the Christ in the heart' and an awareness of the spiritual dimension of life. But as more people progress to make their own connection with the Christ consciousness (to use Christian terminology) or the 'Presence' that others find through music or time with nature, and want to move as this inner light leads them, then the Church will remain as a kind of club for dwindling members who feel safer worshipping the historical expression through Jesus rather than grow into the fullness of expressing this Light in their own lives.

2. The Church could develop to serve the spiritual dimension of life in new ways:
 - a Acting as open centres in the community - much as St James's Piccadilly or the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York have done - to provide for a wide variety of spiritual needs through different ways of soul nourishment :
 - i Personal growth workshops
 - ii Artistic and musical endeavour
 - iii Lectures and courses
 - iv Open learning programmes for spiritual development and environmental care
 - v Ecological and community care

- b Supporting families - the home being the primary place of Love and Life
- c Providing spiritual resource centres where people can come to meditate and pray, study, meet others, receive counselling and spiritual direction
- d Offering holy rituals on significant occasions - traditional religious festivals; seasonal celebrations such as the equinox and solstices and lunar cycles; rites of passage at times of transition - birth, baptism, maturation in adulthood, marriage, death
- e Providing spiritual resources and a set of values for schools
- f Establishing resources, systems and services for adult learning that incorporate the Spirit
- g Providing leadership in national and international life on values, and on ethical, moral and environmental issues as a counterbalance to the materially based leadership provided by politicians, economists and business leaders
- h Facilitating the emergence of a new era that reflects the era foretold by Jesus and inspired by all the great world teachers

Janice Dolley

MY VISION FOR THE CHURCH (4)

My 'Church' would be people who:

1. Live out of the New Universe Story
2. See the interrelationship of EVERYTHING
3. See 'God' as the Ultimate Reality manifested in the whole of the evolving Universe
4. Follow the WAY of living personified in Jesus of Nazareth
5. Meditate silently daily
6. Meet in small groups regularly to share their spiritual experience
7. Celebrate family, seasonal, planetary etc events in rituals
8. Network with local and regional groups
9. Work for justice, peace, moral, ethical and environmental issues
10. Work towards changing the educational system to a more holistic form.

Sister Mercy Buckley

Visions for the Church Shared at the CANA Conference

During the 1998 CANA Conference we were guided as individuals to visualise the future of the Church. Some of the images that emerged are offered below.

IMAGES OF THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH:

1. I was in a group of people holding hands in a circle, with a light shining in the centre.
We were facing both ways: IN towards the light and OUT towards the world.
We were in communion with each other, joined by our shared commitment.
We were treasuring, honouring the source of the light, the source of love, and also sharing that light, that love, with all around us.
2. I closed my eyes and turned away from a picture of the present social/cultural, religious situation.
I was in the desert with the sun rising.
I saw several groups of people: an Anglican group, a Roman Catholic group, a Baptist, a Methodist...; each group a different Christian denomination.
Then I saw a hand from each group link with a hand in each other group, so that each group was separate but linked.
Then I saw four other groups: one Jewish, one Moslem, one Hindu, one Buddhist.
As I watched, a hand from each group joined with a hand from each of the others and with the whole Christian group.
Still each group was separate but linked.
Next I saw many other groups of people who were spiritual beings but outside any organised religion.
Again each group linked hands with every other group so that all were individual but at the same time joined.
Lastly I had a picture of our planet looking like a globe with all the peoples. spiritually united.
3. I saw a building standing in darkness All its doors were wide open and a warm bright light was streaming out into the darkness. People were running towards it from all directions.
4. I saw a building constructed round a central space which was the sanctuary. I saw individuals sitting in there quietly, praying and meditating. Rooms radiated out from the central sanctuary. In some I saw worship - different in each. In other rooms I saw small groups doing a range of different things - some painting, drinking coffee, receiving counselling or guidance.
5. I saw a garment knitted in grey chain mail. It was unravelling. I then saw it being knitted into smaller garments.

COLLATING IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

Following the visualisation, 1998 CANA Conference members were invited to discuss ideas for the future of the Church. Discussions covered three aspects: purpose; process; organisation. Most ideas were about purpose and process which is not surprising at this early stage. The following suggestions were expressed.

Purpose

- * To be a beacon of light and provide a place of welcome and hope to all
- * To be the living, loving heart and servant of the community
- * To be a progressive, Pilgrim Church which offers non-directive spiritual guidance and support to all sincere explorers, respecting the uniqueness of each individual's spiritual journey
- * To be a centre for holistic therapies
- * To offer a range of worship activities and facilities to meet the varied needs of the different faith positions
- * To provide a bridge between the Spirit and principled passionate action and between the rich soil of the old traditions and the new shoots of the contemporary communities in all their diversity
- * To provide services to meet the material, personal and social needs of the community

Process:

The following themes emerged about how the churches would serve their communities.

The Church as the Living, Loving Heart of the Community

The Church is a place ...

- Where people experience being loved. This will provide the basis upon which they can learn to love better
- Which seeks to meet the real needs of all
- Which gives a sense of belonging, especially to minorities
- In which we each matter and all our contributions are valued
- For companionship
- Where we are each responsible for being 'church' to others

The Church as Progressive and Pilgrim-orientated

The Church

- Encourages questioning
- Is flexible, ready to be surprised and open to change
- Is driven by that desire for God which is in the heart of each person
- Moves confidently into the future from its rootedness in the past
- Supports us in our struggles and in our search for God

The Church as Open and Inclusive

The Church

- * Listens with awareness to God and others
- * Accepts and reaches out to all
- * Is ready to walk with others, encouraging them on their different paths
- * Is part of many interdependent networks
- * Has open doors and is a service and resource for all
- * Touches people but does not bind them
- * Recognises and is grateful for all it has been given but is ready to see what is lacking and to learn from others
- * Knows it has the truth but not the whole truth

It was recognised that we need to bless the past and draw on its riches. Moreover, as we struggle with the grief of change and seek to cope with the fear and challenge of the new, we will need to offer each other companionship and great compassion.

Organisation

Suggestions for the organisation of the future Church were very wide-ranging, echoing many of those made in the personal visions. Overall we look towards a Church which practises Christ-like servant leadership rather than hierarchical control. We wish to see the Church as a communion of local communities structured on the principle of subsidiarity where as far as possible, decisions are taken at the level closest to those directly affected.

LAST WORD

Someone ended the 1998 CANA Conference discussions thus: "We in the Christian Church should be grateful for what we've got but not so arrogant as to think we've got it all."

A Contemporary Vision for the Church: Our contribution to the Debate

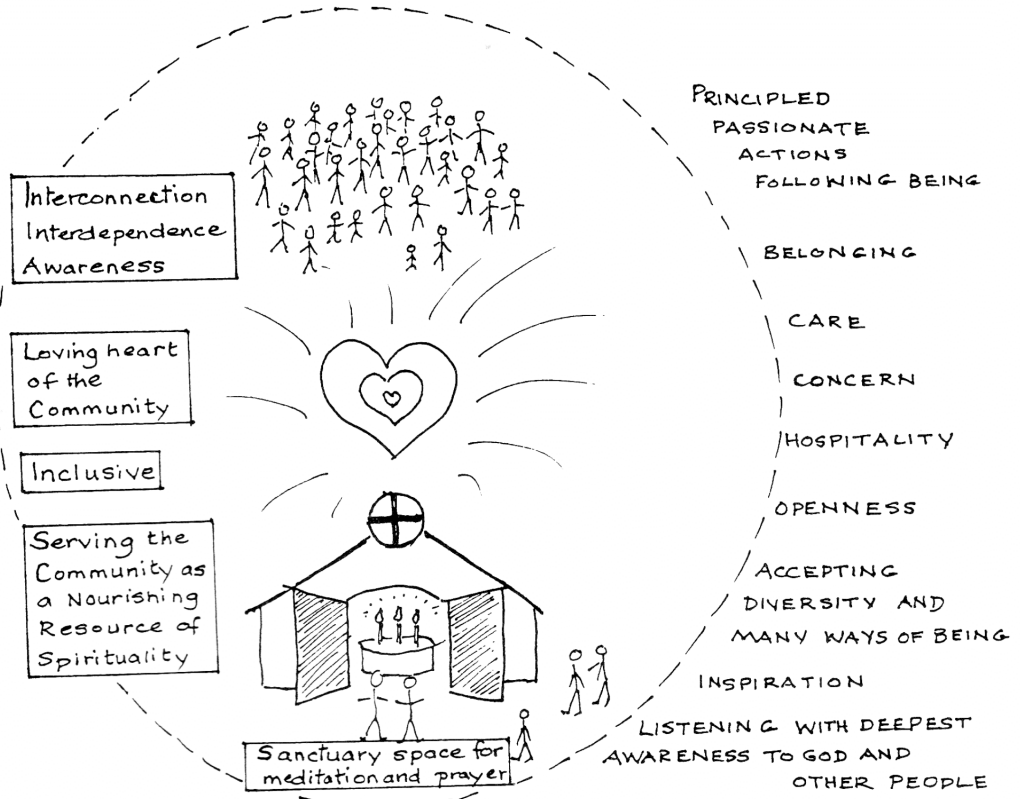
While this Paper has offered suggested content for a Contemporary Statement of Christian Faith, it is premature at this stage to endeavour to draw together firm suggestions for a contemporary vision for the future of the Church. However, we believe that the material that we have offered in the personal visions and from the Conference discussions provides a contribution to the debate. Some of the ideas expressed are summarised in pictorial form on the next page.

OUR VISION FOR THE CHURCH

Spirit as Transcendent and Immanent

Attracting Principle of Love

FUTURE



PRESENT



PAST



5. CONCLUSION

The New Awareness

In this Paper we have endeavoured to share our experiences of an inspiring new Christian awareness and how we think it could help the Church to flourish in the new millennium.

This open and holistic Christian awareness has been emerging over the last half century, informed by contemporary understanding of the cosmos and the interdependence of all things within it, the nature of humankind, and the significance of humanity's contribution to and responsibility for the course of cosmic evolution.

It is rooted in the belief that all people possess the divine spark within and have the potential to experience closer union with God. In following their spiritual journey they are enabled to make their unique contribution to the evolution of creation. Linked closely to this is the understanding that spiritual awareness evolves with our growing understanding of the cosmos and humankind, and that the creative emergence of the spiritually new is following essentially the same process of emergent evolution which has generated all new life forms on Earth.

With the new awareness comes a deep commitment to openness of mind and heart, to unconditional loving inclusiveness of all people and of all created things, to pluralism - valuing the mutual enrichment of diverse spiritual understandings, and to dedicated work for the Kingdom.

A Contemporary Statement of Christian Faith

Our suggested Contemporary Statement reflects this new awareness which encourages each of us to develop an awareness of being - practising the presence of God - and its translation into service, in personal and public spheres. Moreover it sees such a Statement as the servant of being and service, not the master.

The Statement offers an holistic approach to the Christian Faith, extending beyond intellectual beliefs to include all the essential components of a living faith namely, the development of inner awareness through spiritual practice and its translation into loving service, providing also for the inclusion of ethical principles for guidance in our actions.

The Statement is designed to be of contemporary relevance and accessible to all sincere seekers of the Christian Way but also makes clear its provisional status and commitment to regular review. Crucially, by outlining principles for Church practice it also gives explicit assurance that the individual's faith position is respected, valued and provided for.

New Visions for the Church

Our visions for the Church are founded on the belief that the Church needs an overall downshifting, becoming less hierarchical, more open, inclusive and participative, with the emphasis being on networks of local community churches, with less centralised control. We would like to see community churches as loving hearts of their communities where all people are welcome unconditionally; which offer spiritual, social, emotional and, as appropriate, material help at people's level of need; and which respect each individual's unique spiritual journey, offering non-dogmatic, flexible spiritual support and guidance.

Desire for Dialogue

It is our hope that the Church will be open to the new awareness and institute new forums for dialogue between this and the Church's mainstream traditions, in order that the new may become integrated and contribute to the creation of ways forward for Christianity and the Church in the new millennium. Forums for such open dialogue between the formal structures of an organisation and its informal growing points are an essential feature of all healthy institutions.

Indeed such ongoing radical openness by the Church to the contemporary world in which it is embedded is essential for its survival as an effective, positive force in society and in the destiny of the Planet.

Issues for Debate

1 The Contemporary Statement

CANA's first priority for dialogue would be the creation of an open holistic Contemporary Statement of Christian Belief which would be meaningful and accessible to Christians of all faith positions at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

2. Ethical Principles

In our suggested Contemporary Statement we found that a holistic love-centred approach to ethical principles emerged naturally from the content of the beliefs outlined. We would like to explore with the Church the implications of this ethical approach, since we believe that it provides a sound basis for ethical guidance which is relevant to people's personal and public lives today. In our view there is a pressing need for the Church to provide contemporary ethical principles informed by such an approach. This should cover all aspects of personal life and also of public life including politics, scientific research, economics, environment, health, employment. the arts.

These principles should explicitly emphasise, where relevant, the inclusion of the Planet and its web of life as 'neighbour' and should therefore include the promotion of a caring approach to the whole of creation, responsibility for the preservation of the Earth and all living things, and sustainable economic development

3. Awareness into Service

Lastly, but crucially, CANA would like to discuss the Church's position regarding the emphasis given to service in a living faith. The Church's position on this is sometimes equivocal in principle and is varied in practice. The new awareness has implications for this. It sees inner awareness and the service of being and action as inseparable and in balanced and dynamic interaction. It is not a matter of either/or, but both/and. The deeper the awareness, the greater is the impulse to express this awareness in loving service and the more discerning the service given. In other words a mature living faith is awareness in service. We should therefore like to see the Church explicitly affirming in words and deeds, the unequivocal and salient place of service in personal and public spheres, in the expression of a mature faith. This is essential if the Church as a body and individual Christians are to make a significant impact on the destiny of humankind and the Planet.

6 HELPFUL BOOKS

Each member of the CANA Core Group was asked to select the dozen or so books which has helped them the most on their spiritual journey in the Christian faith. These are listed below in alphabetical order by author's surname under four main headings: Christian Theology; Science, Spirituality and the New World View; The Spiritual Journey and Faith in Service; and Christianity and Ecology. Those which were selected by more than one person are asterisked.

Christian Theology

- | | | |
|------------------|--|------------------------------|
| AMIS Robin | <i>A Different Christianity</i> | 1995 SUNY |
| BARNES Michael | <i>God East and West</i> | 1991 SPCK |
| CAREY Ken | <i>Terra Christa</i> | 1985 Unwin |
| EDWARDS Denis | <i>Creation, Humanity, Community: Building a New Theology</i> | Gill & Macmillan |
| FIDELER David | <i>Jesus Christ Sun of God: Ancient Cosmology and Early Christian Symbolism</i> | 1993 Quest |
| FOX Matthew | * <i>Original Blessing</i> | 1983 Bear & Co |
| | <i>The Coming of the Cosmic Christ</i> | 1988 Harper & Row |
| GRIFFITHS Bede | <i>The Universal Christ</i> [Edited by Peter Spink] | Darton Longman & Todd |
| | * <i>A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith</i> | 1989 Collins (now paperback) |
| | <i>The Marriage of East and West</i> | 1982 Collins |
| HICK John | <i>The Metaphor of God Incarnate</i> | 1993 SCM Press |
| JOHNSTON William | <i>Mystical Theology: the Science of Love</i> | 1995 Fount |
| NEEDLEMAN Jacob | <i>Lost Christianity</i> | 1990 Element |
| PRICKETT John | <i>The New Reformation</i> | 1996 Temple House Books |
| SANDERS EP | <i>The Historical Figure of Jesus</i> | 1993 Penguin |
| SCOTT Chris | <i>Between the Poles</i> | 1996 New Millennium |
| SMITH Adrian | * <i>The God Shift: Our Changing Perception of the Ultimate Mystery</i> | 1996 New Millennium |
| | <i>God and the Aquarian Age: the New Era of the Kingdom</i> | 1990 McCrimmons |
| SPONG John S. | <i>Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism</i> | 1992 Harper Collins |
| | <i>Resurrection - Myth or Reality?</i> | 1999 Harper Collins |
| | <i>Why Christianity Must Change or Die</i> | 1998 Harper Collins |
| STRACHAN Gordon | <i>Christ and the Cosmos</i> | 1985 Labarum |
| TEMPLE Richard | <i>Icons and the Mystical Origins of Christianity</i> | 1995 Element |
| TOMLINSON Dave | <i>The Post-Evangelical</i> | 1995 SPCK |
| WARD Keith | * <i>A Vision to Pursue</i> | 1991 SCM Press |
| | <i>God, Chance and Necessity</i> | 1997 One World Oxford |
| | <i>God, Faith and the New Millennium</i> | 1998 One World Oxford |
| WATTS Alan | <i>Myth and Ritual in Christianity</i> | 1954 Thames and Hudson |

Science: Spirituality and the New World View

- BURTON Ursula &, DOLLEY Janice
Christian Evolution: Moving towards a Global Spirituality 1984 Turnstone Press
- CAPRA Fritjof
**The Tao of Physics* 1979 Fontana
**The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* 1983 Flamingo
**The Web of Life* 1997 Flamingo
- CAPRA Fritjof & STEINDL-RAST Fr. David
Belonging to the Universe: Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality 1991 Harper
- GEERING Lloyd
Relativity: The Key to Human Understanding Published in New Zealand but obtainable from Sea of Faith Network, 15 Burton Street, Loughborough, LE11 2DT
- KUNG Hans
Global Responsibility: in Search of A New World Ethic 1990 SCM
- O'MURCHU Diarmuid
**Our World in Transition* 1992 Temple House Books
Coping with Change in the Modern World 1987 Mercier Press
Quantum Theology 1997 Crossroad Pub Co
Reclaiming Spirituality 1997 Gill & Macmillan
- RUSSELL Peter
**The White Hole in Time: Our Future Evolution and the Meaning of Now* 1992 Aquarian / Thorsons
The Awakening Earth 1982 Routledge & Kegan Paul
- SPANGLER David
Reflections on the Christ 1977 Findhorn Press
Towards a Planetary Vision 1997 Findhorn Press
The Rebirth of the Sacred 1984 Gateway Books
- SWIMME Brian & BERRY Thomas
The Universe Story 1994 Harper
The Universe is a Green Dragon 1985 Bear & Co
- STARCKE Walter
The Gospel of Relativity 1973 Turnstone
- WEBER Renee
Dialogues with Scientists and Sages: the Search for Unity 1986 Routledge & Kegan Paul
- ZOHAR Danah
**The Quantum Self* 1991 Flamingo
- ZOHAR Danah & MARSHALL Ian
The Quantum Society 199-1 Flamingo

The Spiritual Journey and Faith in Service

- CADDY Eileen *Opening Doors Within* 1991 Findhorn Press
- CARMICHAEL Alexander
 The Sun Dance: Prayers and Blessings from the Gaelic 1988 Floris
 books
- CHARITON Igumen of Valamo
 The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology 1966 Faber
- DASS Ram *Grist for the Mill* 1976 Celestial Arts
- DE MELLO Anthony
 Awareness 1990/1997 Fount Paperbacks
- EASWAREN Eknath (Translator)
 The Geeta; The Dhammapada; The Upanishads Arkana
- EDWARDS Gill *Living Magically* 1991 Piatkus
- EISLER Riane *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* 1998 Harper
 Collins
- FERUCCI Piero **What We May Be - The Vision & Techniques of Psychosynthesis* 1982
 Aquarian/Thorsons Harper Collins
- FEILD Reshad *The Last Barrier* 1976 Element
- FRENCH RM (Trs) *The Way of a Pilgrim* 1954 SPCK
 The Pilgrim Continues his Way 1973 SPCK
- GELAS Thaddeus *A Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment* 1971 Pao Alto, The Seed Centre
- GREAVES Helen *Testimony of Light* 1969 Neville Spearman
- HARVEY Andrew *Hidden Journey* 1991 Bloomsbury
 [and Translations of Rumi]
- HEBBLETHWAITE Margaret
 Basic is Beautiful: Basic Ecclesial Communities from 3rd World to 1st
 World 1993 Fount
- JACOBS Michael *Living Illusion: a Psychology of Belief* 1993 SPCK
- KORNFELD Jack *A Path with a Heart* 1993 Bantam
- LEECH Kenneth *The Eye of the Storm: Spiritual Resources for the Pursuit of Justice*
 1992 DLT
- MAHARSHI Ramana *Be as You Are the Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* 1985 Arkana
- McGREGOR ROSS Hugh *The Gospel of Thomas* 1991 Element Books
- MOON & HOWES *The Choicemaker* 1987 Quest
- MYSS Caroline *Anatomy of the Spirit* 1996 Bantam Books
- NOLON Albert OP *Jesus before Christianity* Darton, Longman & Todd
- PARFITT Will *The Elements of Psychosynthesis: psychology with a soul* Element

APPENDIX

Additional Personal Creeds

Many more personal creeds were submitted by CANA members than could be included within the main text. However, each additional one brings a richness of new insight to the Faith and they are appended here for those who wish to explore further.

A : Gillian Paschkes-Bell

God is the Source of all Being.

The underlying pattern of Being is Love.

Jesus of Nazareth was recognised as the Christ;
God-with-us (Emmanuel),
so that we can be one-with-God (atonement).

When we are one with God, we are also one with ourselves,
with one another, and with the whole of creation.

This is the meaning of wholeness, holiness, and the holistic consciousness
to which we aspire.

B: David Storey

My heart says:

The world is created by unconditional love, in the hope that this may be discovered and used as a model for living by humanity: women and men; and all those differing, but of the same genus.

My head says:

So that you may know where I stood at the time that I wrote this.

I believe in God, Creator of all that is, so that we may live and in living be a co-creator with God for good or evil. We are free to choose.

God is beyond our understanding, yet we may know God as a friend. God allows most things to happen according to the laws of nature. Despite those laws appearing harsh they have been not only allowed, but created in order that this planet may be the living whole that it is. Humans need to respect nature and use it for needs and not greed.

In order for us to understand God's laws and nature, God sent and guided wise people, prophets and priests. Some of these were so special that they were recognised not only in their own day, but still are now.

The person that I feel God sent to guide me was Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of the Christians.

Despite scriptural suggestions otherwise, (which scripture I believe was a theological not historical statement, although it may have been historical), I believe Jesus was born as is all mankind of earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. But I believe his soul was a special soul, who was called to provide in a special people, who called themselves the children of God, a special witness to the persona and nature of God.

As a result of that calling he witnessed to the sacramental value of Baptism, as an outward and visible sign of the invisible forgiveness of sins.

He taught the supremacy of Love as the greatest Law of God. We are called to love God and our neighbour, as a start to loving all mankind and all creation.

His teaching was misunderstood and seen as threat to the established order. So the religious establishment with the help of a manipulated mob organised his death by crucifixion while Pontius Pilate was the Roman Governor at Jerusalem.

Through the death of Jesus people everywhere have been able to gain some understanding of the Love of God, the Forgiveness of God and the Grace of God to be converted, turned round from living for self to living for others.

Towards that end we are called to live the virtues and renounce the vices of life. To help us God sent the Holy Spirit (The Spirit of God) to enliven our spirits so that we may live for God. Some of us are called to special tasks in God's name to make the world a better place for those who suffer.

Those who agree these things and try to live them are called into that fellowship which is called the Church. The Church through its members seeks to be a beacon of light among those who are lost in what may be their egocentricity and a giving-in to the passions and depravity of the body, as we ourselves may have been.

In these days, I believe we are called to listen to the wisdom of those of other faiths, to learn from them and where possible to work with them, for the ongoing work of redemption from sin, healing of sickness and hurt, and the promotion of the Love and Law of God in all aspects of life.

So may I live by the Grace of God.

C: Susan Hannis

I believe God created the whole universe, visible and invisible; including each one of us and that one day creation will be drawn back into Him. (The Godhead is beyond gender, but we have to use one or the other)

Because God is present everywhere and in everything, nothing can exist outside Him. His laws run through every part of creation and they have stability and consistency; we can observe them in ourselves and in the world we live in. However, humanity has tried to live by its own understanding and ignore God, looking for satisfaction in his own powers. Turning away from God can never bring satisfaction because we have the divine within us and each has the potential to become a divine being.

I believe that God is at once Love, Wisdom and Consciousness/Being (sat -chit -ananda); that in our usual condition we cannot know God, but we can work against the pull of our earthly nature and towards spiritual growth and understanding, so achieving some insight into God's Love, Wisdom and Consciousness, and eventually unity with Him. God's great love sends grace and help to each, whatever their state, to make this return to Him.

I believe there have been and are still people of great wisdom who have understood the things of God (not only in the Christian Church) and I am willing to trust what they say and pray for their help. Because many of the prayers and hymns used by the Church came from such people, they contain a wisdom that we have largely lost, and I believe we should honour and preserve them. But I also believe that it is urgent now in many cases to reinterpret them in plainer language.

I believe that Jesus Christ was God born as a human being; that he was both man and God. He came as a revelation of God's nature, showing the full possibility for humankind. He was incarnated at that particular time because mankind was going seriously astray. We have no higher authority than His word.

I believe that what happens in a church when Christians come together is a mystery. The Orthodox Church says that the liturgy takes place outside time, so we are in the presence of the infinite, the eternal Now. Everything that distracts us is left outside and we turn wholly toward God. This experience is an important function of sacred buildings and needs the presence of worshipping people and probably priests (who should be able to guide us towards the divine). So although we can and do have deep experiences of the divine when we are on our own, I believe we also need liturgical worship.

But I also believe that there are many millions of people who have been fully Christian, although not baptised into any Church. Beyond a certain level of spiritual development I believe there are no divisions, divine wisdom being the same whatever path you take to it. In this sense being a 'Christian' is a high level of spiritual development, far beyond what we now call it. Christ and the saints are beyond all man-made divisions.

I believe the church will only survive if it restates its message in terms of the present age, taking into account the findings of science, but being faithful to the original teaching of the Gospel. It must take back the role of spiritual guide, which people are seeking, and must act towards the world's problems with honesty, clarity, openness and compassion. Christ is greater than the Christian Church. He is for all people of the world. And the symbol of the cross is far more ancient than the Christian cross. It was in ancient wisdom the meeting of the four directions, the four elements, held in place by the centre which is everywhere. The intersection is the moment Now, the only time in which we can change anything - the only time when we can let go of the old and move into the new. This is traditional wisdom and it is time Christians admitted as much.

D: Sheila Ward

I believe that humanity is starting the process of an evolutionary leap into a higher consciousness which will eventually become Christ consciousness - that each of us has a divine potential which can only be activated by love. The transformation comes about through a meeting of hearts and minds.

By its very nature such a state of consciousness is as much beyond my present consciousness as poetry, mathematics, music and morality are beyond the comprehension of a dog. However, I increasingly have glimpses of some aspects of what may be involved.

Love provides the creative energy for this transformation. Yet we have hardly begun to understand the dynamics and variety of what we call 'Love'

The early symptoms of such a change were people like Buddha, Christ, St Francis, St Clare, the mystics.

Symptoms in our own day are the increasing occurrence of Peak Experiences or Self-Realisation (which I would rather call 'Realisation'). These experiences were known by mystics but not identified as special phenomena until recently (cf Maslow). These I associate with 'a state of Grace', 'The Holy Spirit', 'Enlightenment'.

Such experiences are characterised by a feeling of wonder, timelessness, wholeness, oneness with the whole of creation, a deep 'knowing', a heightened sense of beauty, boundless love (which may be of the intensity of 'in love' yet probably without physical attraction). In this state the faculties of intuition, telepathy, healing and prophesy are in evidence. There is more energy and vision to alleviate suffering and create peace. Synchronicity occurs more frequently

These experiences may only last a few moments. On the other hand they may be prolonged for considerable periods although probably eventually at a level of less intensity. In such experiences a new paradigm of life emerges.

Practices such as yoga and meditation help to sustain this awareness and paradigm. Any sense of guilt or disharmony diminishes this state.

I envisage this new level of love and being will gradually manifest more widely.... overlaying the traditional relationships of marriage, family and friendship. To begin with it will often be misunderstood and rejected, but increasingly it will become the norm. Thus the vision of Christ Omega (or the Second Coming) will emerge. It is the intuitive awareness of this which I would call God.

I find great spiritual energy within the Christian Church (which I see as one of the great evolutionary drives) yet find it is locked in thought patterns of the past. I find that most Christian Festivals are translatable and spiritually creative.

I keep my mind open, constantly vigilant for larger realities.

I do not state this as a creed which I would preach or try and persuade others to accept. Nor is it in any way final or static for me. It is simply the paradigm within which I live now.

E: David Charles-Edwards

Guiding Principles succeeding Creeds

We believe that God is love, and that the universe, constantly evolving and changing, is the expression of that same God's awe-inspiring power, creativity and intelligence. It is full of contrasts, enormous and tiny, terrifying and nurturing.

On our own earth, life has evolved with great power, intricacy, beauty and diversity into millions of different forms, existing in a balance of competition and co-operation with each other. As a species, humans are part of that and have a very special responsibility to care for the earth and other forms of life as well as each other. To enable us to do that we have evolved with a consciousness and growing awareness; but we also have a terrible capacity for destruction and evil. Our individual and collective life is an opportunity and a challenge to grow spiritually, in compassion and wisdom, so that the good that we do outweighs the evil, and the world benefits from our time here. Crucial to this journey are the acceptance of our own fallibility and the making of mistakes, through which comes the opportunity to learn and grow spiritually. We need to help others and be helped through forgiveness, encouragement and support.

To do this, our own spirit has access to God's Holy Spirit, which constantly finds expression through goodness, truth and beauty enabling us to draw strength and inspiration from many different sources including other people, nature, science, music, art, words, work and religion.

Our collective learning and identity finds expression through a rich variety of culture and language. Love requires a spirit of discerning, mutual respect towards the diversity of paths being taken by people, while challenging each other towards some unifying ethical standards of behaviour, as expressed for example in the Ten Commandments given to Moses and the two Great Commandments of Jesus. For Christians, following Jesus means that some of our deepest learning comes through the inspiration of his life, teaching and death, through prayer, study, discussion, worship, the sacraments and a sense that his spirit is even now available to us and that the same Spirit works through other religious and non-religious channels, wherever there is deep commitment to justice and compassion.

As the beginning of the Third Millennium after Christ approaches, human beings have reached two turning points in their history. The first is that living together in peace, now especially, requires a mutual respect and tolerance that transcends religions (or the rejection of religion), tribe, family and personal characteristics (such as gender, age and race). The second is that humans are required to curb their personal greed, ambitions and ability to destroy each other and life on earth, in the seas and in the air, so that resources, wealth and work may be shared equitably, and other species enabled to thrive in the magnificent diversity and natural environments provided by creation.

The Churches and other religions are being called upon to work urgently together to take a lead in challenging, encouraging and guiding humanity to a renewed vision, a new politics, a new economics and a new way of allowing this to happen through the power, creativity and love of the Holy Spirit.

F: Sister Mercy Bucley

I believe in "God" (Ultimate Reality, Source, energy) which is being manifested in the Universe in all its diversity.

I believe that Personhood is one aspect of this Ultimate Reality, "God", and that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was a person who, through enlightenment came to understand the ONENESS, interrelationships, interdependence and interconnectedness of all the different manifestations of this Ultimate Reality - "God".

I believe that the relationship between all the diverse manifestations is the Spirit or Communion which unites the Universe and enables the process of Creation to continue WITHIN the Ultimate Reality - "God".

This ONENESS and manifested DIVERSITY is seen as Trinitarian and is expressed metaphorically as FATHER - SON - SPIRIT.

I believe that humans can reflect on this UNITY/TRINITY of the Ultimate Reality, "God". and by following the WAY of living seen in the life of Jesus of Nazareth they can also reach Enlightenment and live a life of LOVE, COMPASSION and RESPECT for the dignity of EVERYONE and EVERYTHING in the Universe, especially our Planet Earth. .

I believe that Everyone and Everything returns to the Source - Ultimate Reality - "God"