

Forming Faithful Structures

8. THE CONSTITUTION: "Preamble"

(1960)

The Basis of Union stipulated a process by which the United Church of Christ would prepare both a Statement of Faith and a Constitution. During the pre-union period a Joint Committee to Study Basic Doctrine suggested a paragraph related to doctrine to inform the preparation of both documents. The paragraph was basically a revision of the Basis of Union, Article II "Faith" (see vol. 7:1):

The faith we confess is that faith in God which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments set forth, which our spiritual fathers expressed in the ancient creeds (such as the Apostles', Nicene, and Chalcedonian creeds), to which they gave utterance in the confessions and covenants of the Reformation and later times (such as Luther's Small Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession, the Covenants, and Statements of Faith). In the freedom inherent in the Gospel, we acknowledge our dependence upon the Holy Scriptures, our kinship with those in the history of the Church who have given various accounts of the nature of the faith, and our continual obligation to give fresh and valid expression to the faith which informs us.

This paragraph was seriously considered by the Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith, but it decided that its work was not to refine a statement of doctrine. Its minutes noted that the mode and expression of the Statement of Faith it planned to present to the General Synod was

SOURCE: "Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ," *GS Minutes 1960*, Appendix 31.

to "point to God's work," and not to "define against heresy." The UCC Statement of Faith was an "act of union."

For this reason the Commission to Prepare a Statement of Faith recommended the above "revision of the 'Faith Article' from the Basis of Union" to the Commission on the Constitution. The Constitutional Commission reviewed the revision carefully. When it completed its work, the "Preamble to the Constitution" that it presented to the General Synod in 1959, and which was formally adopted at the special "adjourned session" of the second General Synod in 1960, built upon the "faith article." The Preamble to the Constitution offers a way of anchoring and interpreting the set of beliefs that is stated narratively in the UCC Statement of Faith.

Constitution of the United Church of Christ

Preamble

1. The United Church of Christ, formed June 25, 1957, by the union of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and The General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States in order to express more fully the oneness in Christ of the churches composing it, to make more effective their common witness in Him, and to serve His kingdom in the world, hereby adopts this Constitution.

2. The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Saviour of men. It acknowledges as brethren in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God. In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians, it recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

3. The provisions herein define and regulate the General Synod and those instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ which are recognized, established by or responsible to the General Synod, and describe the free and voluntary relationships which the local churches, Associations, Conferences and ministers sustain with the General Synod and with each other. The pattern of relationships and procedures so described is recommended to local churches, Associations, Conferences and ministers, to enable them more effectively to accomplish their tasks and the work of the United Church of Christ.