

Associated Gospel Churches - Articles of Faith and Doctrine

Introduction

October 16, 2005

Case for Discussion

David is a young man from your church whom you led to Christ about a month before he went away for university. A few weeks after leaving, he e-mails you to let you know that he's settled in well and that he's been looking around at different churches in the area. There are two in particular that he seems drawn to, because the people are friendly and he likes the music. The teaching seems OK too. One of the churches is called Community Christian Fellowship. He's forgotten the exact name of the other one (it's been a couple weeks since he went), but it's something like 'Kingdom Hall'. He asks you what you think.

How would you reply?

Case for Discussion (continued)

You visit the websites for the 2 churches and review their statements of belief (see handout).

- What would you tell David based on these statements?**
- How do these compare to the beliefs of Chinese Gospel Church?**

Church #1

We believe in the inspired Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and conduct.

II Timothy 3:16-17

We believe in one True God, self-existent Maker of all things, who has revealed Himself in three Persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - co-equal, co-eternal, and one in substance.

II Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:18

We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, incarnate Son of God; True God, True Man. He lived a sinless life, was crucified, died, and was buried; He was raised from the dead and is alive forevermore.

Luke 1:26-31; John 1:1; Revelation 1:18; Romans 1:4

We believe that man was originally created in the image and likeness of God, but by voluntary transgression fell and is separated from God, thus making personal salvation through faith in Christ's death and resurrection a necessity for every man.

Genesis 1:26; Genesis 2:17; Genesis 3:24; Romans 5:17-19

We believe in Water Baptism by immersion. Obedience to this commandment is essential to enable the believer to walk in newness of life.

Mark 16:16; Colossians 2:11-12; Romans 6:3-8

We believe in the promise of the Father, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the endowment of power, for life and service, as distinct from and subsequent to the new birth. We believe that speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is a normative accompaniment to this baptism and is to be expected and desired by all believers as a God-given resource in prayer and worship for Spirit-filled living. We further believe that all the gifts of the Spirit should be and must be operative in the Church for the Church to manifest her full glory under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:8; Acts 2:4; I Corinthians 12

Church #1 (continued)

We believe that entire sanctification is the will of God for all believers and is to be earnestly pursued by walking in obedience to God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Hebrews 13:12; John 17:17; Leviticus 20:7; I Thessalonians 4:3-4

We believe that divine healing and health through faith is provided for all in the Atonement.
Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 8:17; I Peter 2:24; James 5:15

We believe that God wants us to prosper in every area of our lives, spirit, soul and body.
I Thessalonians 5:23; III John 2

We believe in a faith that works by love, so Christ can be formed in us and that we all come into the unity of the faith.
Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 4:13

We believe the Church, the Body of Christ, is the habitation of God through the Spirit comprised of every believer born of the Spirit. The Church universal is the world, and edification of believers is carried on.
I Corinthians 12:12; II Corinthians 6:16; I Corinthians 3:16; Acts 16:5; Mark 16:15

Church #2

The Bible

It is God's infallible, inspired Word, upon which we base all our beliefs. Some portions of the Bible are to be understood figuratively, or symbolically.—2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Revelation 1:1.

God

Jehovah is the name of the only true God, the Creator of all things. As such, he is worthy of our worship and devotion. His outstanding qualities are love, justice, wisdom, and power.—Psalm 83:18; 1 John 4:8; Revelation 4:11.

Jesus

He is the Son of God. He came to earth from heaven and gave his perfect human life as a ransom sacrifice. His death and resurrection made salvation to eternal life possible for those exercising faith in him. He is now ruling as King of God's heavenly Kingdom, which will soon bring peace to the entire earth. Jesus never claimed equality with God and thus is not part of a Trinity.—John 3:16;14:28; Revelation 11:15.

Sin and Death

Death is a result of sin inherited from the first man, Adam, who chose to disobey God. The original sin was not sex relations but was the deliberate disobedient act of eating of "the tree of the knowledge of good and bad." The dead are conscious of nothing. In the future, God through Jesus will resurrect the dead.—Genesis 2:17; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; John 11:25; Romans 5:12.

Worship

True worship emphasizes, not ritual and outward show, but spirit and truth. It is characterized by genuine love for God, obedience to his commandments, and love for one's fellowman. We do not use religious symbols, such as the cross, in their worship.—Matthew 22:37-39; John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 10:14.

God's Kingdom

It is the heavenly Kingdom for which Jesus taught all his followers to pray. Soon it will become the one government over all the earth and will solve mankind's pressing problems. The Bible does not give a date for these events, but it provides evidence to show that we are living in "the last days" of this troubled world.—2 Timothy 3:1-5; Daniel 2:44; Matthew 6:9, 10; 24:3-8, 36.

Earth

The earth will never be destroyed or depopulated but will become a peaceful paradise.—Psalm 37:29; Isaiah 45:18; Luke 23:43.

Church #2 (continued)

Judgment

Jesus is God's appointed Judge who determines what each one's future will be. Those judged righteous will be given everlasting life on a paradise earth. Those judged unrighteous will not be tormented but will die and cease to exist. Humans are not responsible for this judgment, nor will they be involved when God takes action to remove all wickedness from the earth.—Proverbs 2:21, 22; John 5:22; Acts 17:30, 31; Revelation 21:3, 4.

Marriage

We view marriage as a serious, lifelong commitment. We look to the Bible for guidance in resolving marital problems in a loving and respectful way. Scripturally, divorce may be obtained on the grounds of marital unfaithfulness. Separation is acceptable in extreme situations, such as those involving willful nonsupport or physical abuse. Whether to separate or not is the personal decision of the wronged mate.—Matthew 19:6, 9; Ephesians 5:33.

Children

Parents are to love their children. They also have the primary responsibility of providing for the physical, emotional, recreational, and spiritual needs of their children. Parents should teach their children Scriptural values and provide loving discipline. The Bible does not condone harsh physical punishment.—Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Ephesians 6:4.

Respect for Authority

We believe that it is their Christian responsibility to be model citizens. For this reason, we honor and respect governmental authority. Only on those rare occasions when a government demands what is in direct conflict with what God commands do we decline to comply. Their publications and public ministry encourage everyone to be law-abiding.—Matthew 22:17-21; Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7.

Relationship to Society

We are found at all levels of society, and we do not physically separate ourselves from those who do not share our beliefs. We live, work, and go to school with people of different religious beliefs, and we enjoy cordial relationships with them. We follow Jesus' example of being "no part of the world" by avoiding the unchristian prejudices and controversies that divide mankind today. Although not ascetics, we avoid being excessive in the pursuit of wealth, pleasure, or prominence.—John 17:15, 16; 1 John 2:15, 16.

Baptism

This act symbolizes one's dedication to God and is taken by those of responsible age who have made an informed decision. Baptism is by complete water immersion.

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

A. What are ‘Articles of Faith & Doctrine’?

- summary statement of key beliefs/doctrines
 - **aka statement of beliefs; creed; confession of faith**
 - **formulated by an ecclesiastical assembly as representing the beliefs of the church (or group of churches, i.e. denomination or association)**
 - **typically derived from Scripture**
 - **arise out of Church’s reflection on Scripture**
 - **summary statements about what the whole Bible says about particular topics**
 - **high degree of stability, but not infallible**
 - **may change as understanding of Scripture changes**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

B. Why have Articles of Faith & Doctrine?

1. to define boundaries of truth and error for

- **doctrines that have been significant in church history and have been essential for all Christians in all times (e.g. deity of Christ, justification by faith, the bodily resurrection of Christ, etc.)**
- **doctrines that have become important for Christians in the present situation in the history of the Church (e.g. inerrancy of Scripture, roles of men and women in the church, homosexuality, etc.)**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

B. Why have Articles of Faith & Doctrine?

1. to define boundaries of truth and error

- **helps overcome wrong ideas or beliefs by summarizing Scripture's teachings on core issues**
- **helps provide guidance to member churches and individuals on what is sound doctrine**
- **provides fixed points of reference to help deal with doctrinal issues that may arise in the future**
 - **jigsaw puzzle analogy - the more pieces of the puzzle you have filled in, the easier it becomes to fill in pieces that might be missing**
 - **does a certain position contradict any of the Articles?**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

B. Why have Articles of Faith & Doctrine?

2. to define positions and boundaries on important issues on which Christians may disagree,

for example,

- **the Millenium**
- **the nature and purpose of the ‘sign gifts’**
- **the meaning of ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’**
- **mode of baptism**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

B. Why have Articles of Faith & Doctrine?

3. convenient summary of major doctrines

- **for reference**
 - “What does the Bible say about ____?”
 - allows others to see at a glance what you believe
- **as an aid for teaching & instruction**
 - to help pass sound doctrine from generation to generation
 - to help believers grow
 - right doctrine --> right living (transformed by the renewing of our minds)

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

C. How do Articles of Faith come about?

- arise from reflection of the Church on Scripture
- often arise out of controversy
 - forces the Church to consider certain issues
 - e.g. Nicene Creed (AD325, modified AD381) stated the orthodox understanding of the Trinity in response to the challenge of Arius and his followers
- typically formulated from Scripture by an ecclesiastical assembly

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

D. The AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine - How did they come about?

- AGC arose out of concern in the late 1800s-early 1900s over the growth of *theological liberalism*
 - a movement that gained ascendancy in continental Europe in 18th-19th century & was imported into North America churches in the 19th-20th century
 - Tended to:
 - deny that Scripture is God's inspired Word
 - deny the reliability & truthfulness of Scripture
 - dismiss supernatural events (e.g. Virgin birth, Resurrection, miracles) as legends or fables
 - emphasize experience over doctrine

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

D. The AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine -

How did they come about?

- those opposing liberals were known as ‘fundamentalists’ because they took a stand for the ‘fundamentals’ of faith
 - forefathers of modern evangelicals
- AGC Articles of Faith 1st drafted in early 1920s
 - reflect a fundamentalist standpoint
 - e.g. 1st article: “The Divine Authority and the plenary inspiration of the whole canonical Scriptures”
 - emphasis on premillennial view of eschatology
 - 16 Articles in the first edition, all of which are still in the current edition

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

D. The AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine - How did they come about?

- **articles on Baptism and Communion subsequently added**
- **3 Articles clarifying AGC position on Baptism with the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and Divine Healing of the Body added subsequently (?1980s?) in response to the rise of the charismatic movement and its teachings**
- **revised recently (c.2001) to modernize language**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

E. CGC's contribution

III. The Deity and the Virgin Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ

We believe in the essential deity of our Lord Jesus Christ *and His total humanity* through the virgin birth, and that all the Scriptures from first to last centre about Him, His person and work, His sacrificial death upon the cross and His coming again.

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

F. Comparison with statements of faith in case study

1. Church #1

- **similar in many respects to AGC Articles**
- **completely opposite to AGC position on Baptism with the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and Divine Healing of the body**
- **statement derived from a charismatic evangelical church**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

F. Comparison with statements of faith in case study

2. Church #2

- **similar in some respects to AGC Articles, but many differences**
- **e.g. “Jesus never claimed equality with God and thus is not part of a Trinity.” - completely opposed to AGC Articles (and historical Christianity)**
- **statement derived from Jehovah’s Witnesses**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

G. Relevance for today

- attacks by theological liberalism continue in different dress
- “Emerging Church” movement - striking similarities to liberalism of 1800-1900s
 - popularized by books such as *A New Kind of Christian*, and *A Generous Orthodoxy*, by Brian McLaren
- “Open Theism” - denies that God knows the future exhaustively
 - open theistic thought permeates popular books such as *Wild at Heart*, by John Eldredge

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

G. Relevance for today

- each generation needs to learn and apply the ‘fundamentals’ to defend the faith against improper teachings and heresies**

AGC Articles of Faith & Doctrine

“It is today as it was in the Reformers’ days. Decision is needed. Here is the day for the man, where is the man for the day? We who have had the gospel passed to us by martyr hands dare not trifle with it, nor sit by and hear it denied by traitors, who pretend to love it, but inwardly abhor every line of it... Look you, sirs, there are ages yet to come. If the Lord does not speedily appear, there will come another generation, and another, and all these generations will be tainted and injured if we are not faithful to God and to His truth today. We have come to a turning-point in the road. If we turn to the right, mayhap our children and our children’s children will go that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to His Word.”

-Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 1888

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