

A Separate Doctrinal Statement on the Father?

From time to time, Free Methodists are asked why our Articles of Religion have no separate statement about God the Father. The Articles begin with a statement about the Triune God and then move to statements about God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This document seeks to serve as a brief answer.

Movements that are Wesleyan in doctrinal orientation, including Free Methodists, find their doctrinal roots in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England of the 18th century. In that formative doctrinal statement, there is no separate statement about the Father.

More broadly, *“Free Methodists consider the story of the church in the book of Acts and the other New Testament writings as their primary heritage. Generation after generation derives from this record their main source of direction and renewal. Followers of God have wrestled with issues both old and new throughout the centuries just as they do now. The entire history of the church is instructive for us.”* [see the Introduction to the Manual] Two millennia of church history tell us that the Church has never found a way to create an adequate Article on the Father (like those on the Son). Even the great creeds of the Church say much less about the Father (and the Spirit) than they do about the Son. The results of an informal survey contained in the chart in appendix “A” reveals a widespread trend of doctrinal statements that contain no separate statement on the Father.

We suspect that the main reason for this history is that attempts to say too much about God the Father (in distinction from the Son) usually end in heresy (specifically, Arianism). The Church has found it difficult to say much about God the Father apart from his self-revelation in the Son. The writers of the New Testament make this clear.

Colossians 1:15-19:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers--all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Hebrews 1:1-3a:

“Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through

whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word."

John 14:6, 9:

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. . . . Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.'"

Jesus Christ, then, is the lens through which humans can see God. It doesn't make sense to expect to come to any adequate sense of God apart from Jesus. This does not mean that we cannot see something of God in other ways, but without Jesus Christ we are all short-sighted and never get the right focus. It's all blurred and distorted. Perhaps this is the reason that in most denominational doctrine statements, the movement is from The Holy Trinity, to The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

While we see problems with expressions of worship and teaching that focus on one person of the Trinity (e.g. the Son or the Spirit) to the exclusion of the others, we do not believe this can be resolved by including a separate statement on the Father in the Articles. What is needed are pastors and worship leaders whose language and example are fully Trinitarian.

And while we share the concerns of those who lament the lack of examples of good father models in our world, we likewise do not believe a separate statement on the Father would be the remedy. People who need help being more like God the Father need to look at Jesus and experience the life of the Spirit.

We believe that our Articles, taken together, say all that is essential about God, including the Father, and that adding a separate statement on the Father would likely serve only to cloud, not add clarity.

Church of the Nazarene http://nazarene.org/ministries/administration/visitorcenter/articles/display.html	NO
The Wesleyan Church http://www.wesleyan.org/979/articles-of-religion	YES ¹
Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America - incorporating the Historic Anglican 39 Articles http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html	NO
The Methodist Church - 25 Articles http://www.crivoice.org/creed25.html	NO
Augsburg Confession http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Augsburg_Confession#Article_I:_Of_God .	NO
Christian and Missionary Alliance http://www.cmalliance.org/whoweare/doctrine.jsp	NO
Presbyterian Church in Canada (Westminster Confession) http://presbyterian.ca/resources-od/	NO
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada https://paoc.org/docs/default-source/paoc-family-docs/what-we-believe/statement-of-fundamental-and-essential-truths.pdf?sfvrsn=4	YES ²
Southern Baptist Convention http://www.creeds.net/Index2.htm	YES ³
Salvation Army http://salvationist.ca/about-us/doctrines/	NO
Brethren in Christ Churches http://www.bic-church.org/about/beliefs/god_creation.asp	NO
Grace Theological Seminary http://gts.grace.edu/files/uploads/webfm/pdfs/covenant.pdf	NO
Asbury Theological Seminary http://asburyseminary.edu/about/our-theological-orientation/our-statement-of-faith/	NO
Tyndale University College and Seminary http://www.tyndale.ca/about/mission-statement-of-faith	NO
Regent College (Vancouver) http://www.regent-college.edu/about-us/theological-position	NO
Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary http://www.gordonconwell.edu/about/Statement-of-Faith.cfm	NO
Fuller Theological Seminary http://www.fuller.edu/About/Mission-and-Values/Statement-of-Faith/	NO
Evangelical Fellowship of Canada http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/statementoffaith	NO

¹ We believe the Father is the Source of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, He made man, male and female, in His image. By intention He relates to people as Father, thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives penitent sinners.

[NOTE: This grew out of merger negotiations (failed ones) with the Free Methodist Church (when we had the same new Article on the Father – which had been created in the 1960's].

² The Father exists eternally as the Creator of heaven and earth, the Giver of the Law, to whom all things will be subjected, so that He may be all in all.

³ God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.