

# Revised SCEA Statement of Faith (Draft 1: March 2021)

## Guiding principles:

In suggesting a new form for the SCEA Statement of Faith, some guiding principles have followed:

- 1) As a Christian community on mission, members of SCEA and those employed by SCEA have an agreed statement of their joint faith to which they can refer back and which can help inform their missional endeavours. It reflects the broad contours of historic Christianity, and especially the understanding held within the evangelical sector of the Christian faith with which SCEA is most naturally aligned.
- 2) As all members and employees of SCEA are required to sign their assent to the SCEA Statement of Faith (SOF), it is inclusive of all those who can realistically be considered part of the evangelical sector of the Christian faith. Consequently, unnecessarily divisive statements have been excluded, and the statement is minimalist rather than expansive (as each statement potentially excludes people unnecessarily).
- 3) As a basis for our common mission in the 21st century, the language of the SOF is positive and in conformity with current conventions.
- 4) As far as possible, the affirmations of the current SOF have been kept, albeit that they are now expressed in positive terms and in accordance with 21st century conventions. Stated differently, while there is a difference in style, there is not a significant difference in content. Where a change is suggested, an explanation is given in the notes.

What follows are 3 versions of the SCEA SOF:

- 1) The current version
- 2) The current version with the proposed new statement placed in italics alongside
- 3) The proposed new version (Draft 1)

Footnotes explaining changes are provided at the end. Note that clause (e) has been split into (e) and (f) in the proposed SOF, meaning that there is one extra clause, with a flow on effect for numbering.

## 1. The current version

Faith

3.1 All Members are to believe and confess:

(a) One God eternally existent in three persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

(b) The sovereignty of God in creation, providence, redemption, revelation and final judgment.

- (c) The Divine inspiration of the original documents of the Bible consisting of 66 books, its entire trustworthiness, sufficiency and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- (d) The Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ - His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His atoning death on the Cross as our representative and substitute, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His mediatorial work.
- (e) The personality and malignancy of the devil, the fallen, sinful and lost estate of all mankind.
- (f) Justification of the sinner by the grace of God through personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone.
- (g) The Deity of the Holy Spirit and His work in the regeneration of men, and in their sanctification.
- (h) The receiving and indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion, and His continuing work in the heart and life of the believer.
- (i) The one holy universal church, the body of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, to which all true believers belong.
- (j) The visible bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection and judgment of all mankind, the eternal punishment of the unrepentant and the eternal blessedness of the redeemed.

## **2. The current version with the proposed version in italics alongside**

### Faith

#### 3.1 All Members are to believe and confess:

All Members are to believe and confess: *Together with Christians through the centuries and around the globe, SCEA and its members affirm:*

- (a) One God eternally existent in three persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *One God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer*
- (b) The sovereignty of God in creation, providence, redemption, revelation and final judgment. *God is the ultimate creator and ruler of all things*

- (c) The Divine inspiration of the original documents of the Bible consisting of 66 books, its entire trustworthiness, sufficiency and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. *The nature and plan of God is revealed in the Bible. Its 66 books are divinely inspired, entirely trustworthy, authoritative and sufficient to guide us in all matters of faith and conduct*
- (d) The Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ - His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles, His atoning death on the Cross as our representative and substitute, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His mediatorial work. *The full humanity and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, performed many miracles, died in our place on the Cross of Calvary, as an atonement for our sins. He rose from the dead, ascended to the Father and continues to intercede for us.*
- (e) The personality and malignancy of the devil, the fallen, sinful and lost estate of all mankind. *The dreadful reality of evil, and the existence of the devil.*
- (f) Though humans are wonderfully made in the image of God, humanity has fallen into sin which expresses itself both systemically and in each individual life, thereby alienating each person from God*
- (f) Justification of the sinner by the grace of God through personal faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone. *A restored relationship with God is possible only through the grace of God which leads to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*
- (g) The Deity of the Holy Spirit and His work in the regeneration of men, and in their sanctification. *The divinity of the Holy Spirit, who works to convict people of their need for God, and aids us in our spiritual growth*
- (h) The receiving and indwelling of the Holy Spirit at conversion, and His continuing work in the heart and life of the believer. *The Holy Spirit fills us at our conversion and continues to work in our hearts and lives helping us to be more faithful disciples of Jesus*
- (i) The one holy universal church, the body of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, to which all true believers belong. *One holy, universal church, the body of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, to which all are invited and where those who recognise Jesus as their Lord and Saviour find their home.*
- (j) The visible bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection and judgment of all mankind, the eternal punishment of the unrepentant and the eternal blessedness of the redeemed. *The visible return of Jesus Christ, after which the dead will be raised and all humanity will be judged. Those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus will enter into the life prepared for those who follow Jesus.*

### 3. Proposed new Statement of Faith

*Together with Christians through the centuries and around the globe, SCEA and its members affirm:*

*(a) One God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.*

*(b) God is the ultimate creator and ruler of all things.*

*(c) The nature and plan of God is revealed in the Bible. Its 66 books are divinely inspired, entirely trustworthy, authoritative and sufficient to guide us in all matters of faith and conduct.*

*(d) The full humanity and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, performed many miracles, died in our place on the Cross of Calvary, as an atonement for our sins. He rose from the dead, ascended to the Father and continues to intercede for us.*

*(e) The dreadful reality of evil, and the existence of the devil.*

*(f) Though humans are wonderfully made in the image of God, humanity has fallen into sin which expresses itself both systemically and in each individual life, thereby alienating each person from God.*

*(g) A restored relationship with God is possible only through the grace of God which leads to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*(h) The divinity of the Holy Spirit, who works to convict people of their need for God, and aids us in our spiritual growth.*

*(i) The Holy Spirit fills us at our conversion and continues to work in our hearts and lives helping us to be more faithful disciples of Jesus.*

*(j) One holy, universal church, the body of which our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, to which all are invited and where those who recognise Jesus as their Lord and Saviour find their home.*

*(k) The visible return of Jesus Christ, after which the dead will be raised and all humanity will be judged. Those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus will enter into the glorious and eternal life prepared for those who follow Jesus.*

#### **Notes:**

3.1 Prelude: Rather than the current rather blunt statement that all SCEA members will believe what follows, this succinctly and positively places the SOF in a broader context.

- a. This expansion from simply stating who the members of the Godhead are, follows the current convention of adding a broad descriptor of the work of each member of the Godhead - widely summarised as Creator (Father); Redeemer (Jesus) and Sustainer (Spirit)
- b. Summarises God's sovereignty to creatorship and rulership over all things - as demarcating areas can leave the impression that God's sovereignty is limited to those zones - which it clearly is not.
- c. Is essentially a refresh of the language.
- d. Importantly affirms both the full humanity and divinity of Jesus. As it currently stands, the statement excludes any reference to Jesus' humanity and therefore falls short of historic orthodox Christological statements (the need to affirm both was a focus of the Council of Chalcedon in 451). Other changes are essentially a refresh of the language.

- e. The statement is intentionally split into two (e and f) as currently the statement links the devil to humanity which is a strange and unfortunate association - as though the two are supposed to be spoken of together. Each should have their own statement, though a statement about the devil should also have a statement about evil, as while there is a valid association between the devil and evil, the two should be stated separately lest we blame all evil on the devil and fail to accept the role of humanity in evil.
- f. (f) now becomes a statement on humanity, and rectifies the flaw in the current SOF which only speaks of the fall of humanity, forgetting that the first word the Bible speaks about humans is that we are made in God's image. The failure to speak of our original creation in God's image is a genuine flaw in the current SOF as without reference to the original creation we have no basis on which to understand the fall or to understand the call of humans to be image bearers of God. Sin is now also seen as both individual and systemic - another important corrective if we are to be true to the biblical narrative.
- g. (previously f) This is essentially a refresh of the language, trying to put into current usage some theological terms which are not widely understood.
- h. (previously g) This is again essentially a refresh of the language.
- i. (previously h) Both refreshes the language and adds a missiological reminder (to which all are invited).
- j. (previously i) A refresh of the language and an intentional shift from the language of eternal punishment to an undefined judgment - whilst positively affirming the future of those who believe in Jesus. This shift recognises the increasingly contested conviction amongst evangelicals of what happens to those who do not believe at the final judgement. Note that in its current form the SOF potentially excludes many notable evangelical groups (for example, Seventh Day Adventists, who believe in annihilation, not eternal punishment; and notable individual evangelicals - for example, it would have excluded no less an evangelical than John Stott who also believed in annihilation). While some are likely to be unhappy with this shift, I would suggest that the significant division amongst evangelicals on this matter leaves us with few options if we require people to sign the SOF and to do so in good faith. This SOF does not exclude those who believe in eternal punishment as it simply does not go into detail - which is consistent with the document as a whole where many would want to add more substance, but would exclude others if they did so. Note that the meaning of eternal punishment is strongly contested - some argue that it means that the final judgement leads to the punishment of death which will be for eternity (essentially annihilationism) - though this begs the question of why the punishment is not named as being death, which is the reason many annihilationists would not be willing to sign this. Others argue that it means eternal conscious torment in Hell - and there are many other sub- categories of belief on this. In short, the shift means that those who are less confident as to what the final judgment will look like for those who have not put their trust in Jesus, are able to sign the SOF in clear conscience and remain part of the SCEA movement.

Thank you for engaging me on this project. Suggestions are given in good faith, but I fully understand that they may be accepted in full, adapted in part, or totally abandoned.

**Dr Brian Harris**  
**Director: AVENIR Leadership Institute**  
**brian@avenirleadership.org**