"We believe that unity must not be spiritualized, but manifested in concrete behavior, by doing justice and loving service to one another"

universal message of the Christian faith. Blackness, in the religions of the African Diaspora, is a profound and complex symbol of diversified yet united experience: servitude and oppression, faithfulness through suffering, identification with the exclusion, martyrdom and exaltation of Jesus as the Oppressed One of God who triumphs over enemies, a passion for justice and liberation, the exuberance of Black faith and life, rejoicing in the Risen Lord in Pentecostal fervor and in service to the "least" of Christ's brothers and sisters.

White Christians have too often treated unity as if it were only a spiritual reality. We believe that unity must not be spiritualized, but manifested in concrete behavior, by doing justice and loving service to one another. The cost of unity in the Church is repentance and affirmative discipleship (i.e., action). We have, therefore, a profound hermeneutical suspicion about any movement for unity that is dominated by North Atlantic attitudes and assumptions. We have observed that when our White brothers and sisters speak of unity they often mean being together on terms that carefully maintain their political, economic and cultural hegemony. Unity is frequently confused with "Anglo-conformity"—strict adherence to premises and perspectives based upon the worldview and ethos of the North Atlantic community with its history of racial oppression. Christian unity is, however, based upon the worship of a common Creator who is no respecter of persons, obedience to a common lawgiver and Judge whose commandment to break every yoke is not abrogated by the gracious justification of sinners, and upon participation in the earthly mission of a common Redeemer, the sharing of whose suffering and ordeal makes us truly one, though of many races and cultures.

Blackness is one of God's gifts for the realization of the unity of the Church and humankind at this critical stage of history. It has been preserved by God as a cultural and religious inheritance of the Black churches of Africa, the Caribbean, and North and South America since the mission of the Ethiopian eunuch to the upper Nile Valley after his baptism by the Evangelist. It is rooted in the divine revelation to our African ancestors who lived before the Christian era. It has traditionally celebrated the goodness of the Almighty Sovereign God and the goodness of creation. It has emphasized the humanity of the historical Jesus, i.e., his earthly life, example, teaching, suffering, death and resurrection. It confesses belief in the humanity of Jesus together with the oneness with God, the Creator, and the Holy Spirit, but understands that humanity in non-sexist terms rather than being exclusively of the male gender. It identifies with the shadow of death that falls upon the Cross as a symbol of suffering and shame, yet crowned with light inexpressible in the victory of the resurrection.

Thus, the meaning of unity is related to the meaning of Blackness for the Afro-American Church and points to its vocation as a church of the poor and oppressed who claim liberation in the Black Messiah of God and want to share the humanizing experience of suffering and joy in struggle with others who want to work for a world of justice and equality for all. Unity is possible only when there is acceptance of suffering under Christ's work of liberation and when there is commitment to his mission.

II. HOLINESS

The Black churches of North America made a unique contribution to the Holiness and Pentecostal movements of world Christianity at the beginning of this century. The Black Pentecostal obsession with the text of Hebrews 12:14 "strive... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (RSV), and Black leadership of the interracial Azusa Street Revival of 1906-1908 in Los Angeles created the groundwork for modern Pentecostalism—the most remarkable religious movement among the oppressed communities of the world since the Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries. Although most African American churches did not originate from Pentecostalism or the Azusa Street Revival most of them have been influenced by the Pentecostal emphasis upon the *ruach/pneuma* of God in their conception of the Person and Work of the Holy Ghost. Their understanding of holiness as a process of moral perfection is rooted in the necessity of a personal encounter with God that is manifested in both the ecstasy of congregational worship and the praxis of social justice.

Afro-American spirituality has to do with self-transcendence and is unembarrassed by displays of sincere emotion, but it is also related to faith and action in the world. The Holy Spirit moves, therefore, in the real world of everyday life, in the sanctuary and the realm of secular affairs. The Holy Spirit is not an abstraction of Trinitarian theology but participates dynamically in what it means to be human being and to suffer and struggle with the assurance of victory in this world as in the world to come. The distinctiveness of the Black religious experience is that theology is experienced before it is thought. Moreover, holiness in the paradoxical sense of transcendence and existential involvement in the world, must accompany the act of "doing theology." Holiness is a criterion of the Church's theological authenticity. It creates a theology that is "hummed, sung and shouted" in Black churches, and contrary to White fundamentalism, has more to do with how Christians treat one another than how strictly they hold to Biblical literalism or ascetic life styles.

On the other hand, holiness in the Black Church is not coterminous, as in some expressions of White liberalism, with frenetic social activism. Personal encounter with God as a prerequisite of sanctification and commitment to social transformation are both necessary, but the obligation to "give glory to God," to "glorify the holiness of God," is an essential corollary of the obligation to be engaged in "building the Kingdom" that continues to be frustrated by racism and oppression. The Black Church is sustained by prayer and praise. It exists in and for the glory of God and not the glorification of human institutions. We know that to struggle in the midst of the world is to experience the glory of God that is thwarted by racism and oppression, but we also know that we need to praise God in the sanctuary in order to struggle! One of our Spirituals has the refrain: "Have you got good religion?" The response is, "Certainly, certainly, certainly Lord!" *Good* religion is, therefore, understood to make worldly things that were formerly dubious better, and bad religion ruins the best of all possible worlds where there is no acknowledgement of God's presence. Without holiness no one shall see the Lord.

Ultimately, the holiness of the Church is a work of the Holy Spirit. We affirm that the One, Holy Church cannot exist apart from ministries of justice and liberation. We also affirm that true liberation is inseparable from deep spirituality. The intimate involvement of Christians with the Holy Spirit is expressed first in worship that celebrates the manifest presence, goodness and glory of God and moves from the sanctuary to the streets where it empowers the world to goodness, transfigures its wretchedness and need, and creates the quality of life that is symbolized by the nimbus that encircles the throne of God.

III. CATHOLICITY

Although Afro-American Christians have customarily been denied equal partnership in the *koinonia* of Christ, we nevertheless affirm the universality of the Christian faith. Universality in the Black religious experience has to do with the particular reality of people in concrete situations that are dissimilar but inseparable. Afro-American churches share with all who confess Jesus Christ the conviction of the universality of God's love "from each to all in every place...". We recognize solidarity in creation, sin and redemption with all human beings and seek with them to make catholicity visible by overcoming humanly erected barriers between people.

We deplore the fact that the profession of universality has actually meant that the norms of what is considered acceptable to the Church had to originate in the West. For years anything that White Christians in Europe and North America did not interpret as catholic lay outside the realm of true faith and proper order. Such assumptions distorted the truth about Jesus Christ and permitted the gospel to be used to divide people rather than free them to express the fullness of the faith in their own cultural styles and traditions. It also robbed the White churches of the opportunity to correct their own deficiencies.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Black preachers were refused ordination and their congregations were not considered in good order. Not until rebellious White Methodist and separatist Baptist clergy defied custom and accepted them as duly constituted ministers and churches did Black Christianity become legitimate in the eyes of Whites. To this day Black churches have protested any semblance of alienation or exclusion on account of race, class or discriminatory educational qualifications. Unfortunately the struggle for sexual equality has lagged behind in many Black churches and Black women need greater support in their resistance to subordination.

From the perspective of the Richmond consultation, catholicity has to do with faith in Jesus Christ, baptism, and continuing in "the apostles' teaching and fellowship" and in "the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). No person, group or institution that meets these requirements should be excluded from the visible Church or relegated to an inferior status by human authority, ecclesiastical or secular. The sin of racism, sexism and classism that refuses or discourages the fellowship of African Independent church or Black Holiness and Pentecostal denominations, among others in various parts of the world, must be repudiated as denying the catholicity of the Body of Christ.

Catholicity, in our view, also demands a persistent critique of and challenge to the economic and political status quo; for those churches that benefit from the existing international order too easily assume its normative character and become self-appointed guardians of what is supposedly good for all. Thus, many North American conservatives and fundamentalists speak of American democracy as "Christian" and oppose Christian socialists as irregular at best and heretical at worst.

Similarly, the "Moral Majority" in the U.S. supports "constructive engagement" with apartheid in South Africa as consistent with universal reason and the welfare of "all people of good will." In this view anti-communism becomes the test of universal Christian ethics and those who do not fall into line are considered sectarian, ignorant and contrary to the mainstream White American tradition which is regarded as the universal faith of the Church.

Jesus Christ challenged the assumption that faith in God or salvation was limited to the scribes and the Pharisees, or the rich and powerful. Instead he empowered sinners, the poor, strangers and women. His demonstration of catholicity was to open his arms to all who would be saved. His Church today can do no more or less.

IV. APOSTOLICITY

We affirm the Apostolic tradition that recognizes the transmission of authentic faith down the centuries by all those who have faithfully lived it, whether or not they have been officially designated apostles. We believe that, "What does not teach Christ is not Apostolic, even if it was taught by Peter or Paul; again what preaches Christ, this is Apostolic, even when