



# FUNDAMENTAL AND ESSENTIAL

by Andrew Gabriel

*The PAOC's Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths: Looking to the Past and the Future*

## GOING FORWARD

To encourage theological vitality, the PAOC's "General Executive has asked the Theology Study Group to lead us in a process to review and refresh our doctrinal statements ..." <sup>1</sup> This process will include regional and national conversations where all members will be invited to contribute. Through this process we will continue our history of re-examining our doctrinal expressions.

## EARLY YEARS

Before the PAOC began, Pentecostals tended to view doctrinal statements as signs of spiritually dead traditions and as signs of denominational disunity. Early Canadian Pentecostals emphasized "the Word of God as the only creed." <sup>2</sup>

This emphasis on the authority of the Bible continued as North American Pentecostalism began to institutionalize. When the "General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands" formed (1914), the constitutional preamble affirmed "the Holy Inspired Scriptures . . . as the all-sufficient rule for faith and practice" and maintained that this new organization was not "a human organization that legislates or forms laws and articles of faith." <sup>3</sup> The same Pentecostals who made these affirmations soon found value in having a statement of faith.

In 1916 the Assemblies of God (AG) approved their first *Statement of Fundamental Truths* (SOFT), largely as a response to the increasing influence of Oneness Pentecostalism. <sup>4</sup> Some left the AG because they felt that forming a SOFT was contrary to the preamble of the 1914 constitution. <sup>5</sup> As a response to these concerns, the preamble of the SOFT clarified that "this Statement of Fundamental Truths is *not intended as a creed* for the Church," that "the human phraseology employed in such *statement is not inspired*," and that it only contained what they considered "*essential to a full Gospel ministry*" (emphasis added). <sup>6</sup> The SOFT that followed included 16 articles.

## PAOC BEGINNINGS

In 1919 the PAOC formed in Eastern Canada. The following year, the PAOC and Pentecostals in Western Canada united and became districts of the AG. Robert McAlister reported that "by so doing the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada accepted the statement of fundamental truths approved by the General Council." <sup>7</sup>

Even after the PAOC became independent from the AG in 1925, McAlister still felt the AG's SOFT reflected PAOC views. Hence, he published the AG's SOFT in the February 1926 issue of the Canadian Pentecostal Testimony. Nevertheless, members of the PAOC soon felt the need to have their own expression of the SOFT and they approved one in 1928.

## 1928-1979

The PAOC's 1928 SOFT included the same preamble as the AG's SOFT, noting that the SOFT was not intended as a creed and was not inspired. Although some sections of the PAOC's SOFT copied the AG's SOFT verbatim, it was expanded from 16 to 25 sections, including numerous sections that were partially or completely rewritten.

Changes soon came to the PAOC's SOFT. The first change came in the middle of the Second World War (1938-45). Somewhere between 1941 and 1942, two (of three) paragraphs were deleted from a section called "Civil Government." This section had been explicitly pacifist in nature, stating "neither shall we take up any weapon of destruction to slay another, whether in our own defense, or in defense of others." <sup>8</sup> There is no record of the change being approved in the General Conference minutes. A similar change happened somewhere between 1947 and 1955 when the section "Regarding Secret Societies" was deleted from the SOFT. <sup>9</sup>

## THE 1980 SOFET

The 1980 General Conference approved a new *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths* (SOFET). It repeated some wording from the 1928 SOFT, but was largely reorganized and rewritten. The Doctrinal Statement Study Committee felt that the 1928 SOFT was defensive, so as they prepared a new SOFET (over a period of two years), they aimed to remove the defensive nature and simply state the theological views of the PAOC. <sup>10</sup> For example, in response to Oneness Pentecostalism, the section on the "One True God" had been one full page, whereas in 1980 the new section on "The Godhead" was half a page. At the same time, the new section added affirmations such as the sinlessness and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

The section on Spirit baptism was also rewritten. The 1928 SOFT maintained that Spirit baptism is "indicated by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues," with an additional sentence stating, "the baptism of the Holy Spirit is regularly accompanied by the initial physical sign of speaking in other tongues." <sup>11</sup> To be more concise, the 1980 SOFET simply described tongues as "the initial evidence" of Spirit baptism. Furthermore, previously the SOFT did not address the outcome of Spirit baptism, whereas the 1980 version added that through Spirit baptism a person "comes to know Christ in a more intimate way, and receives power to witness and grow spiritually." <sup>12</sup>

The 1980 SOFET did reflect some change in belief within the PAOC. For example, when members discussed the proposed new SOFET at the 1980 General Conference, a member made a motion to amend the proposed SOFET with the addition of the phrase, "entire sanctification is the will of God for all believers." Even though this phrase was a quotation from the 1928 SOFT, the motion was defeated. <sup>13</sup>



## FROM 1980 TO TODAY

The PAOC has since revised the 1980 *SOFET*. In 1984 the General Conference voted to change the description of the rapture, allowing for a “pre-tribulation” or “mid-tribulation” view of the rapture.<sup>14</sup> In 1988 a statement regarding “Marriage and Family” was added, affirming marriage as a permanent relationship of one man and one woman.<sup>15</sup> This new statement was later amended in 1994 and 2008. In 1994, and after many discussions at previous General Conferences, the section on “Divorce and Remarriage” was revised to state that remarriage (for divorced persons) was “acceptable if there has been sexual immorality on the part of the former partner or if the former partner has remarried.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, in 2014, the *SOFET* was revised to use gender-inclusive language when referring to both women and men.<sup>17</sup>

## LEARNING FROM OUR PAST

The PAOC’s *SOFET* has seen many changes. Some of these changes reflect reaffirmations of previous beliefs, while some reflect changing beliefs in the PAOC. Only the section on tithing has remained the same, word for word, since it was first added to the *SOFT* in 1928 (we had that figured out!).

As we prepare to refresh our *SOFET*, we can learn from those who went before us. At times they were responding to their context. At times the PAOC aimed to give greater breadth to the *SOFET*. As we consider our current context, are there issues we have not yet covered that we should? Or, perhaps as we enter into conversations within our Fellowship, we will wish to return to the good old days when we had no statement of faith. But I would not recommend that.

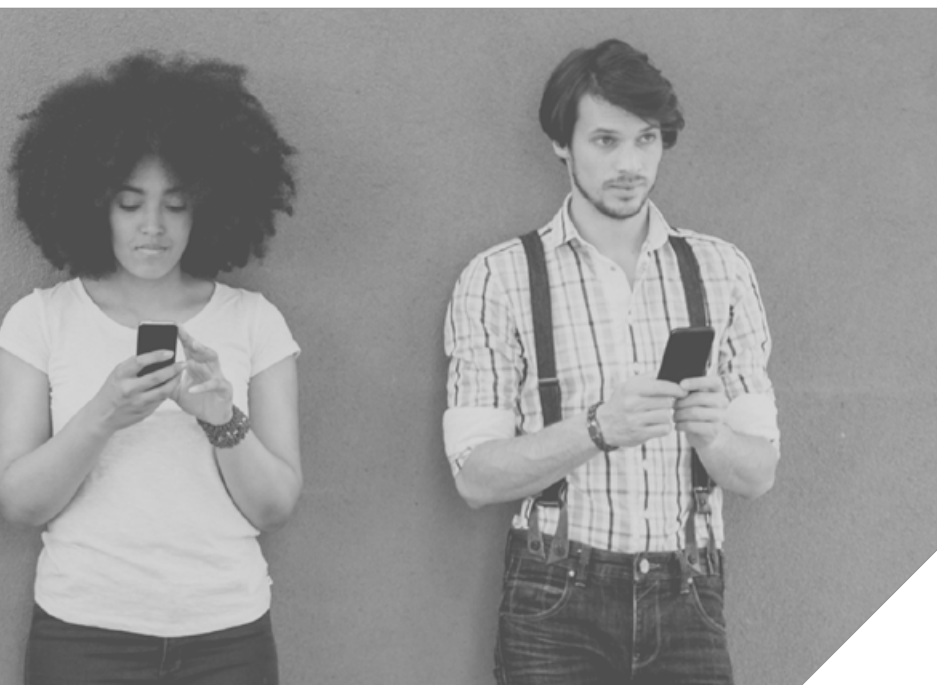
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## BIO

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## ENDNOTES

1. David Wells, “The PAOC’s 2020 Initiative: An Update,” *testimony*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (March/April 2016), 34.
2. Anonymous, “Pentecostal Work in Toronto,” *The Promise*, No. 12 (February 1909), 2, <http://mpseminary.com/resources-2>. *The Promise* newsletter was the official publication of the Church of God East End Mission (often called the Hebden Mission).
3. Assemblies of God, *Minutes of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada and Foreign Lands* (Findlay, OH: The Gospel Publishing House, 1914), 4.
4. Thomas A. Robinson, “Oneness Pentecostalism,” in *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*, ed. Michael Wilkinson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 43-4.
5. Glenn W. Gohr, “The Historical Development of the Statement of Fundamental Truths,” *Assemblies of God Heritage*, Vol. 32 (2012): 63.
6. Assemblies of God, *Minutes of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the General Council of the Assemblies of God in the United States of America, Canada, and Foreign Lands* (Springfield, MO: The Gospel Publishing House, 1918), 10.
7. R. E. McAlister, “Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada,” *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (February 1926), 2.



8. Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, *Constitution and By-Laws of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada: Including Essential Resolutions and Other Information* (London, ON: Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 1928), 21.
9. The section was present when the SFET was published in the *Canadian Pentecostal Testimony* (Vol. 28, No. 7, May 15, 1947, 19), but not present in the publication of the *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths* (Toronto, ON: The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 1955). There is no record of this change being approved in the General Conference minutes from 1948 to 1954.
10. Gordon Upton (former member of the Doctrinal Statement Study Committee), email to Andrew Gabriel, April 5, 2014.
11. *Essential Resolutions and Other Information*, 16.
12. The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, *Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths* (Toronto, ON: The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 1980).
13. Minutes of the 32nd Biennial General Conference of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, August 21-26, 1980, 23, PAOC Archives, Mississauga, ON.
14. Thomas William Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Mississauga, ON: Full Gospel Publishing House, 1994), 361.
15. Minutes of the 38th Biennial General Conference of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, August 25-30, 1988, 32-3 and 36-7, PAOC Archives, Mississauga, ON.
16. Minutes of the 41st Biennial General Conference of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, August 23-28, 1994, 34-40, PAOC Archives, Mississauga, ON.
17. Minutes of the 51st General Conference of The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, April 28 - May 1, 2014, 5-6. Available online at <https://paoc.org/events/general-conference/minutes>.



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