

Two Recent Samples of Easter Confession, Thomas-style

Colleagues,

The Second Sunday of Easter brought us the great account of Jesus drawing Thomas into lucid, explicit confession: “My Lord and my God.” No one else in St. John’s Gospel comes close to this clarity and confidence about Jesus’ identity. To this day Thomas’s words are the essential standard by which any faith that merits the adjective “Christian” has got to be measured.

More’s the pity, of course, that Thomas has gotten such lousy treatment from his co-confessors in subsequent centuries. “Doubting Thomas.” That’s a false label, the consequence of careless reading. When day dawns on the Sunday after Easter Thomas is the very thing that doubters are not. He’s of firm mind, as certain as certain can be that his fellow disciples are babbling nonsense when they say they’ve seen Jesus. “Unless I see and inspect him myself, there’s no way I’m buying that.” The Greek word for his stance at this point—thus Jesus, when he calls him on it—is *apistos*, “not-faithing,” which suggests much more than the semi-faithing that “doubt” encompasses; and the turn he makes when Jesus appears is a full 180 degrees, not 70 or 110 or even 150. In the end he shows us all what it looks and sounds like to be *pistos*, i.e. faith-full, no ifs, ands or buts when it comes to who Jesus is. “My Lord. My God.” Note the second statement in particular. As John tells the story, Thomas is the first person ever to take Jesus’ most outrageous assertions as serious and accurate statements of a hitherto unimagined reality. “The Father and I are one” (10:30). “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9), which, were Jesus using blunt, colloquial English when he says this to Philip, might

come out like this: “Guess what, pal: you’re *looking* at God!” What precipitates that comment? Jesus’ prior response to–yes–Thomas: “I AM (*ego eimi*) the Way, the Truth, the Life” (14:6).

“Amen,” says Thomas at last, on the second Sunday of Easter. This is more than his fellows have managed to come out with so far. He says it, as Jesus points out, in testimony to us, so that we will say it too (20:29). Why anyone has ever thought to look down their noses at him is altogether beyond me. We ought to honor him instead. Better still, we’ll keep thanking God for him.

One way of thanking God and grinding the pro-Thomas axe a little more is by bringing you a couple of recent examples of Thomas-like confessing. Each rests, of course, on the great history of Easter confession that Thomas inaugurated. Each also builds on that history by couching the confession in language that serves the missional purpose that Easter both presupposes and authorizes (“As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” Jn. 20:21). The aim, in other words, is to draw a fresh set of people into the joy of echoing Thomas’s use of that first person possessive pronoun: “My Lord, my God.” Do the examples here achieve that? I join others in thinking they do; but read on, and see what you think. You’ll find them below, with commentary by the undersigned,

Peace and Joy,
Jerry Burce, for the editorial team

I. **An English-language creedal hymn, unknown to Americans**–1

We trust in God our only king,
Whose mighty hand makes everything,
The Father who has called the light

From chaos deep, more dark than night.

2a

We trust in Jesus Christ his Son,
Light born of Light and yet true man,
Who took our darkness, all our pain,
And shared our guilty death and shame.

2b

He conquered hell and rose to reign
With God in glory once again,
Until he sets the whole world right
By bringing guilt and grace to light.

3a

We trust the Spirit, holy dove,
Who gives us faith and teaches love;
He leads us where he'd have us go,
And lifts us up, when we are low.

3b

By joining us with Jesus he
Creates a growing unity,
Until at last, from sin set free,
We see God's face eternally.

Comment:

I ran across this last year when I spent some time with fellow Lutherans of South Africa's Cape Church—the Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa (Cape), to be precise. They use hymnals from the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) for their English services. That's where this comes from. The LCA's [John W. Kleinig](#) translated it from a German original, said original intended, apparently, as a paraphrase of the Nicene Creed after the fashion of Luther's *Wir Glauben All' An Einen Gott*. Be

that as it may, Kleinig gets the credit for the limpid, fetching, and thoroughly down-to-earth English that you've just read. If you breezed through too quickly the first time, go back and read again, this time with an eye for the abundance of strong, one-syllable words. It's even better sung, of course, which we did at the services I attended in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. I liked it so well that I ordered books when I got home, and we used it this past Lent in the congregation I serve.

What jumps out especially here is Kleinig's superb and quintessentially Lutheran rendering of the Latin "credemus," or the German "wir glauben," I suppose. Not "we believe," but rather, "we trust." Isn't that precisely what Jesus is after when he urges Thomas to be *pistos* instead of *apistos*? "Trust me," he says. "Trust God in and through me, and in the power of the Spirit I'm breathing into you." And so we do. For American Christians this language will carry a special punch, speaking directly, as it does, to the question prompted by the ubiquitous phrase on our U.S. one-dollar bills. In which God do we trust? Answer: in *thisone*, on whom we count for *these* things. *Our* Lord. *Our* God. "Yours too if you'll let him," as we well might add in a conversation with our neighbors. Talk about a missional resource!

- II. **The Masai Creed** We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created Man and wanted Man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the Earth. We have known this High God in darkness, and now we know Him in the light. God promised in the book of His word, the Bible, that He would save the world and all the nations and tribes.

We believe that God made good His promise by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who left His home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing the meaning of religion is love. He was rejected by his people, tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day, He rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.

We believe that all our sins are forgiven through Him. All who have faith in Him must be sorry for their sins, be baptised in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love and share the bread together in love, to announce the Good News to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for Him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen

Comment:

I learned about this some days ago in a note from Ed Schroeder, who sent it with a link to a brief [Wikipedia article](#) about it. The article cites the late, great Jaroslav Pelikan as someone who admired this as an example of what creeds are meant to accomplish. Digging through attendant links, I ran across a lecture in which Pelikan does exactly this. Delivered in 2003, the lecture is entitled "[The Will to Believe and the Need for Creed.](#)" Take the time (and it will take time) to click, read and learn, bearing in mind that this link alone makes the present post worth sending, and then some.

As for the creed, pay attention again to the clarity of language and the pulsating confidence that it conveys, especially through the brief, punchy sentences at the end. Why such confidence? Because "God has made good his

promise" in Jesus Christ whom "the hyenas did not touch"—what a phrase! So it is that good news gets driven home to another particular set of human beings for whom Christ died, and whom he now invites to stand shoulder to shoulder with Thomas in joyful, determined trust. One more time: *My Lord. My God.*

Amen and Amen. —JB