

CONFESSION OF FAITH

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I

The first word of God we confess is that He is Creator and we are his creatures. Our own existence is thus a gift from God. Every other creature human and non-human, is also gift. Thus our existence is derivative; we are not self-made people. Our existence continues in the posture of dependency. This basic premise underlies the admission: “for all of which it is my duty (N.B., “schuldig bin”) to thank and praise, serve and obey him.” Thus the Christian confession about God the creator centers on the personal lived relationship that constitutes creaturely existence. Questions of **how** it all began, **how far back** the beginning was, **whether** “the man” (Adam) of Gen. 2-3 is a literary figure or a person who lived on the earth, are irrelevant to the givens of our being God’s creatures.

Thus creation is unquestionably a good gift of the creator, even though we sinners cannot hear this first word of God as an unmitigated good word. The gifts of our creaturely existence are the vehicles we use to live out our sinfulness. It is we, not Adam of ancient history, who are the cause of our own sinfulness. Consequently “this article would humble and terrify us all if we (really) believed it.” Since the creation is now populated with sinners, the gifts of creation are also the agents for Gods criticism of sinners. Therefore we do not call God “Father,” a term that confesses personal good relationship and positive loving care, merely on the basis of the ambiguous “first word” that God is our creator and we his creatures. We need the data of the second article, concerning the “only-begotten son,” before we can faith-fully confess the creator to be **our** Father.

II

The second word of God we confess is Jesus Christ our Lord. He is God talking to us in person, keeping faith with ancient Israel in the promise he pledged to them, and also addressing us in our day with a surprisingly promising word: “Take heart, my child, your sin is forgiven.” This is what makes him our Lord. He is our Savior, our rescuer, our sin-forgiver. He extricates us from the all-pervasive dilemma called sin, and does so by confronting and conquering the power (dynamis) of sin, which, as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 15.56b) is the law. Jesus’ death and resurrection silences the “bad news” which the “law of sin and death” constitutes for every sinner. Thus He in person is God’s good word to sinners countermanding the law’s “bad news” for them.

This word holds high promise for the future as well. In fact, “promise” is the very term frequently used in the Holy Scriptures for the surprising good news of God’s forgiving sinners. Promise is this historical gift of forgiveness which is uniquely

incarnate in Jesus, and which lies at the center of our confessing him to be Son of God, Christ, Lord, and Savior. The future for sinners is bleak apart from Christ, precisely because of the continuing operation of God's "incarnate" criticism and killing of sinners (Deut. 32:39, John 3.36). The graveyards of the world are evidence of how "down to earth" this action of God is. But just because of that overwhelming evidence of the "law of sin and death," the work and word of Christ is such a happy surprise. It bodes well for our lives now, and even better for the future.

Our confidence that He is our Lord and Savior is grounded in the concrete historical events wherein he achieved this Lordship over us sinners by lording it over the law of sin and death. These biographical data include the entire path from the Virgin's womb to Calvary and empty tomb, and even beyond that to His ascension and coming again. We cling to this promissory word in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary in our own lived experience. Our faith in Christ's promise does not go unchallenged—by our own old Adam, by the manifold voices of the tempter, by God's own law as it continues to carry out its verdict in our daily lives. Thus our redemption, Christ's lordship in our individual biographies, is "not yet" complete. In trusting his promise we trust that he will prove himself to be our Lord yet in the future by resurrecting us from our own sinner's death (1 Cor. 15).

III

We also confess the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian church, etc. The chief work of the Spirit is to get sinners connected to the Lord Jesus and keep them connected. The church herself, the preaching and sacraments of her ministry, and the Scriptures are vehicles whereby the Spirit carries on this work. The church in her concrete life on the earth is herself an object of faith—we believe that sinners calling Christ Lord are indeed His holy people even though the evidence to the contrary may seem overpowering. Thus the "forgiveness of sins" is expressly confessed in this article to keep the eye focused on the one thing needful for the church to exist at all. The church becomes apostate only when she moves away from this one base which is the source of her existence.

The chief difference between church, understood here as the locus for the Spirit's promoting the forgiveness of sins, and the world is the difference between forgiven and unforgiven sinners. The presence of the Spirit is not necessarily accompanied by "signs and wonders" of supernatural power and explosiveness. For the natural powers themselves are just as much God's as any supernatural ones might be. Instead the unique mark of the Spirit's active presence is the concrete re-presenting of Christ and his word of forgiveness. Where that is made present, there the Spirit is at work. This also applies, of course, to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. The picture here is not one of a supernatural power commandeering men to write and speak whatever the power makes them say. It is rather people already connected to God's forgiveness ("holy men of God") promoting that same Word via the "normal" channels that are available to them. According to the Gospel of St. John that is what is meant by "being moved by the Holy Ghost." The goal of the Spirit's work is the goal of Christ's: "He takes what is Christ's and declares it to us."

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