

THREE REASONS FOR THE COMMON USE OF CONFESSIONS IN THE CHURCH

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## ABBREVIATIONS

2LCF	2 <sup>ND</sup> London Baptist Confession
BF&M	2000 Baptist Faith and Message
NT	New Testament
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith

## INTRODUCTION

The resolute doctrine of inerrancy teaches that the Bible is truthful.<sup>1</sup> Millard Erickson puts it succinctly, stating, “The inerrancy of Scripture is the doctrine that the Bible is fully truthful in all its teachings.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, if God has given the Church the Holy Scriptures to be the rule of our lives, it follows that we must regard them as the supreme authority for the whole of the Christian life. The doctrine of sufficiency further articulates this thought in that, “All Scripture is,” as Paul writes to young Timothy, “...profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”<sup>3</sup> (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In our modern age of irrational thought, moral relativism and individualistic self-promotion, it behooves the church to stand upon the inerrant, infallible and all-sufficient Word as its authority, but to also carefully unpack its content with clarity to the masses—both within and outside its walls. This is the reason why the church has historically attempted to use clear statements that articulate where it stands in relation to God, to the world and to each other, and does not hide its loyalty to the written Word of God. As Carl Trueman points out, “a church which is open about its confessional position is, in theory at least, better able to do justice to the supreme authority of Scripture.”<sup>4</sup> We might also add that a public declaration of what we believe can play a vital role in fulfilling the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

### *Historical Consideration*

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<sup>1</sup> So, for instance, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy affirms “that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, *being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit*” (Art. XII, emphasis added). The Statement can be found in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 493-502. Geisler and Lanny Wilson write, “When one speaks of inerrancy, he is claiming that the Bible is factually and actually correct (true) in what it affirms. The Bible makes no mistakes and affirms no false statements. What the Bible says is true is true; and what the Bible says is false is false” (N.L. Geisler and L. Wilson, “Bible, Inerrancy of” in *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, ed. Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008], 103).

<sup>2</sup> M.J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), p.247.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture citations in this work are taken from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Trueman, *A Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), p.161.

In reality, a confession of faith is nothing more than a clearly articulated statement of what a group of Christians believe about God, the gospel, the church, and the Christian life. It is used primarily to list important truths, clarify doctrinal points and distinguish truth from error. Another term is the word creed,<sup>5</sup> which comes from the Latin word “credo,” meaning, “I believe.” There are numerous passages in Scripture that contain creed-like statements.<sup>6</sup> In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul passed down the truths to the church in Corinth which he himself received, “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” Notice that Paul says this creed was not his own, but it had been passed down to him. One generation passes down the tenets of the faith to another as a witness of what God has done, and in harmony with the Word of God. A creed, therefore, is not an opinion, but rather a testimony of the truth.

### Early Church Councils

The rapid spread of the early church brought with it the practical need for a statement of faith to help believers focus on the most important doctrines of their Christian faith. As the church grew, heresies also grew, and the early Christians needed to clarify the defining boundaries of the faith, starting with the finalization of the NT canon. In the early 300s, even before final canonization, controversy developed over the divinity of Christ by Arius, which led to the gathering of Christian bishops in the town of Nicea in 325 AD at the request of Emperor Constantine. As other heresies sprung up within the pockets of Christendom, the creeds of the church expanded to include solidifying of more doctrinal truths. In 381, another major council was held at Constantinople to clear up additional theological confusion. In the next century, church leaders met in the city of Chalcedon to discuss, among other things, various theories about the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ. They developed a creed to explain what they believe to be true to the gospel, true to the apostolic teaching, and true to the Scriptures.

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<sup>5</sup> This term tends to refer to shorter, easily memorized statements of faith that are generally brief. The three creeds most common among evangelical circles are the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene (or Niceno-Constantinopolitan) Creed and what is known as the Definition of Chalcedon.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Jews used the *Shema*, based on Deuteronomy 6:4-9, as a type of creedal statement. Paul also wrote creed-like statements in 1 Corinthians 8:6; 12:23 and 15:3-4.

## Modern Confessional Statements

In more modern times, Presbyterians are well-known for their development and use of their WCF and Catechisms to great effect. Of course, Presbyterians are not alone in their confessional heritage. Congregationalists, Lutherans, and Anglicans all have a long history of “writing up” and using confessional standards in their churches. The Baptists also have an incredibly intricate history of confessional documents that trace their lineage from the 2LBC even to the current BF&M. But today confessionalism is largely absent in evangelical churches. This may be due in part to the rise of independent, non-denominational churches that insist on avoiding any ties to denominations or similar bodies of churches working together. In some instances, it may simply be the result of a lack of theological conviction.

Even with the resurgence of interest in Calvinism, too often the growing interest in doctrine has not led to a robust understanding of reformed theology as a whole or an embrace of Reformed confessions. Common sentiments are, “We need no creed but the Bible” or “No creed but Christ!” While it might be possible to appreciate the attempt to demonstrate a fidelity to Scriptural authority, such an emotional response overlooks the true purpose and usefulness of confessions. Additionally, such a statement is itself a confession, albeit it with much left unaddressed. Carl Trueman makes a great point that no church or Christian simply *believes* the Bible. He goes on to say that if a statement such as this “is intended in the sense that I have no understanding of the Bible other than the Bible itself, then that is highly misleading...what he really should have said was: I have a creed but I am not going to write it down, so you cannot critique it; and I am going to identify my creed so closely with the Bible that I am not going to be able to critique it either.”<sup>7</sup> This is certainly not a modern phenomena, as Horatius Bonar makes clear in an his evaluation of his day,

Every new utterance of skepticism, especially on religious subjects, and by so-called “religious” men, is cheered as another howl of that storm that is to send all creeds to the bottom of the sea; the flowing or receding tide is watched, not for the appearance of truth above the water, but for the submergence of dogma. To any book or doctrine or creed that leaves men at liberty to worship

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<sup>7</sup> Carl Trueman, *A Creedal Imperative*, p.160.

what god they please, there is no objection; but to anything that would fix their relationship to God, that would infer their responsibility for their faith, that would imply that God has made an authoritative announcement as to what they are to believe, they object, with protestations in the name of injured liberty.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Three Reasons for the Use of Confessions*

So, do we really need creeds and confessions? To echo the sentiments of many in the modern Church, “Isn’t Scripture enough?” The aim here is to contend that confessions have a very important role in the life of the Church, and yet they are also not to be a replacement for the Bible and should never be given equal authority to the Bible. Rather, they are to be considered faithful expressions of what Scripture teaches, and can be cherished without harmfully blind devotion.

### Confessions Seek to Establish Biblical Clarity

Confessions identify core Christians beliefs in the context of a world that does not believe the truth and promotes popular teaching that does not conform to doctrine that accords with godliness. There are countless influences within modern culture that erode the idea that there might be useful sources of wisdom that we can depend on to shed light on truth; namely, the Word of God. Trueman paints a compelling picture of these harmful forces that penetrate the minds and hearts of God-seeking Christians; modern science, technology, consumerism, the disappearance of “human nature,” mysticism, pragmatism and others.<sup>9</sup> If we are to know the truth, we must be able to explain it beyond simply quoting the Bible, and accompany it with expository precision. This is, in part, why God gave the church teachers—to unpack the truths of Scripture.

Paul, when he was giving his farewell address to the elders in Ephesus, declared, “I am innocent of the blood of you all, because I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27). The phrase “whole counsel of God” points to

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<sup>8</sup> From Bonar’s preface to *Catechisms of the Scottish Reformation*, reprinted as ‘Religion without Theology’, *Banner of Truth*, June 1971, p.37, quoting Samuel Waldron, *Modern Exposition of 1689 Confession of Faith* (England: EP Books, 2013), p.8.

<sup>9</sup> In a section he calls “Devaluing the Past,” Trueman tries to identify the enemy so that we might better appreciate how, in defending Scriptures unique authority, being shaped by the forces of the world around us is detrimental to the role of the church in helping to foster biblical understanding and stature in the context of the historic life and practice of the church. Trueman, *A Creedal Imperative*, pp. 24-46.

some kind of unified summary of essential biblical truth. Similarly, Paul instructed Timothy, “Guard the deposit entrusted to you,” (1 Tim. 6:20) in a sort of apostolic handing over of truth to be protected. Likewise in Romans 6:17, Paul says, “You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.”

And yet sadly, the use of deceptively twisting biblical language itself can be a devastating tactic for those who have departed from biblical truth. It is entirely possible that a “Bible only” person might simply mean they are a heretic. In other words, biblical texts can be used to justify false things. This type of person could frankly believe anything. Confessions and affirmations of faith help to see clearly how people are actually reading and understanding the Scripture. Are they reading error *into* the Bible? Or are they drawing truth out *from* the Bible?

In the debates between Athanasius and the heretic Arius, both sides heartily affirmed the authority of Scripture and both sides appealed to the Bible to argue for their side. A “No creed but Christ” position could simply be used to gloss over the fact that the denial of Christ’s deity does not matter, when in reality it is paramount to the entirety of the Christian faith and can determine the eternal state of souls! Consider Samuel Miller’s alarming observations from the Council of Nicea,

When the Council entered on the examination of the subject [of Arius’s view of the divinity of Christ], it was found extremely difficult to obtain from Arius any satisfactory explanation of his views. He was not only as ready as the most orthodox divine present, to profess that he believed the Bible; but he also declared himself willing to adopt, as his own, all the language of the Scriptures, in detail, concerning the person and character of the blessed Redeemer. But when the members of the Council wished to ascertain in what sense he understood the language, he discovered a disposition to evade and equivocate, and actually, for a considerable time, baffled the attempts of the most ingenious of the orthodox to specify his errors, and to bring them to light. He declared that he was perfectly willing to employ the popular various titles of Christ plainly expressive of Divinity, such as ‘God’—‘the true God’—the ‘express image of God,’ etc.—to every one of which Arius and his followers most readily subscribed;—claiming a right, however, to put their own construction on the scriptural titles in question. After employing much time and ingenuity in vain, in endeavouring to drag this artful thief from his lurking places, and to obtain from him an explanation of his views, *the Council found it would be impossible to accomplish*

*their object as long as they permitted him to entrench himself behind a mere general profession of belief in the Bible. They therefore, did, what common sense, as well as the Word of God had taught the church to do in all preceding times, and what alone can enable her to detect the artful advocate of error. They expressed, in their own language, what they supposed to be the doctrine of Scripture concerning the Divinity of the Saviour; in other words, they drew up a confession of faith on this subject, which they called upon Arius and his disciples to subscribe. This the heretics refused: and were thus virtually brought to the acknowledgment that they did not understand the Scriptures as the rest of the Council understood them, and, of course, that the charge against them was correct.”<sup>10</sup>*

A common fallacy among the opponents of holding to confessional documents is to call into question the rallying cry of the Reformation against the perversion of the Roman Catholic’s infidelity to scriptural authority, which was famously “Sola Scripture”, or Scripture Alone; that somehow, a confessional document strips away even the truest of affections for this tenet of reformed theology. But many of these same men were instrumental as the early building blocks for further clarification of the truths of Scripture to a public that had been held in bondage to the abuses of popery and the disguising of the biblical texts for over a thousand years. Precursors to the WCF and 2LCF include the Augsburg Confession (1530), Belgic Confession (1561), Heidelberg Catechism (1576), the Canons of Dort (1619) and the brief Waldensian Confession (1655) from the reformed churches of Northern Italy. Even the 95 Theses that Martin Luther (1517) legendarily nailed to the church door in Worms has been assimilated in many ways to such documents.

While a key motivation for establishing these historic documents of faith was certainly rooted in distinguishing reformed churches from the heretical teachings of the Catholic Church, an emphasis was clearly placed on expressing the doctrinal truths and teachings of Scripture in understandable language for all to understand. In truth, “A creed or confession is simply a statement of faith (credo means I believe’); and as such no more

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel Miller, *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1987), pp.33-35, quoting Waldron, *Modern Exposition of 1689 Confession of Faith*, p.10-11, emphasis added.

diminishes the Bible's authority than saying, 'I believe in God,' or 'I believe in Christ,' or 'I believe in the Bible.'"<sup>11</sup>

What do we believe? What matters to us as the people of God? A confession helps us to answer these questions, and lays this out for all to see. Faith not only latches onto, but indeed thrives, on deep, proper doctrine that flows out of the word of God that is accurately summarized and sheds light on proper application for our lives, our souls, our families, our churches and even our society. "The Bible presents life and existence (now and eternally) as it really is, not as we want it to be."<sup>12</sup> Confessions are intended to be healthy for life and for obedience to Christ. To suggest that we rid ourselves of such statements of faith presents a loose view about what the Bible says and does not require that we come to terms with what it truly means. We need confessions that illuminate exactly what we see in the Scriptures. And keep in mind, confessions do not function as an authority on their own, but should direct us toward truth and reaffirm the Bible as God's perfect and final authoritative word for the church.

#### Confessions Pursue Unity within the Church

In identifying core beliefs, confessions provide a basis for doctrinal unity within a church and between like-minded churches. Before there can be a community of faith, there must be a faith to confess. The very basis of our communion is the truth of God and his gospel. Without a written summary of biblical truth, we can easily slide into vague expressions about what we believe. There are many who think that avoiding confessions of faith in fact provides greater Christian unity among the brethren, seemingly because "writing things down" requires precision and clarity and explicitness and all of those precipitate disagreements and arguments. But the alternative is to obscure those disagreements under a cloud of vagueness, and the effect of that so-called unity is that it constantly depends on keeping clarity of truth at a distance. You simply cannot see it with

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Waldron, *Modern Exposition of 1689 Confession of Faith* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2013), p.12.

<sup>12</sup> Morris Brooks, *Truth and Right Thinking*, Pressing On, <http://morris-pressingon.blogspot.com/2015/07/truth-and-right-thinking.html>, July 18 2015.

precision up close and it lets you down in the end when crucial applications and decisions have to be made on the basis of truth.<sup>13</sup>

In the light of Christian history, we simply have no justification or grounds for a sort of unbridled individualism in our churches. The Nicene Creed declares that we are “*unam ecclesiam*,” or “one church,” and according to the WCF, this oneness has implications for our church identity: “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (25:1). Biblically speaking, when God draws us out of the world unto salvation and a life of obedience, we become members of the body of Christ. And there can only be one body.

In uniting with other believers, a proper ecclesiology recognizes that we constitute something far greater than our individual selves, for in Christ we represent living stones that God joins to form a spiritual house (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10), members who are organically connected to one another (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:12-31). In the words of NT scholar Robert Banks, “Paul’s understanding of community is nothing less than the gospel in corporate form!”<sup>14</sup> In the vein of churches proclaiming the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection, he is absolutely right. The church is organically related to Christ more intensely than any other organic relationship in our human experience, rooted in Christ and built up in Christ (Col. 2:7). Richard Hooker once wrote, “The church is in Christ as Eve was in Adam.”

This does not mean we should not be leery to such calls for unity that lay waste to doctrinal substance in the name of social harmony. In John 8:32, Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.” There is specific content and particular redemptive truths which define us and the relationships in which we engage. Dialogue with other Christian traditions is valuable only so long as we do not forget that genuine unity is rooted in the gospel, the heart of what it is to speak of *evangel*: the good news of

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<sup>13</sup> John Piper, *No Creed but the Bible?*, DesiringGod audio transcript, [www.desiringgod.org/interviews/no-creed-but-the-bible](http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/no-creed-but-the-bible), October 30 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 190.

Jesus death and resurrection, which results in new life for those who believe, being informed and supplied by the whole counsel of God.

Confessions can help us to pursue our unity with other traditions, denominations and churches that affirm the core truths of Scripture, and can aid us in avoiding the sort of parochialism and disintegration that comes from exaggerating what might be considered “nonessential” doctrines or even our own personal preferences. These can so easily undermine the unifying nature of the Holy Spirit, which God intends us to preserve. To avoid this error, the apostle Paul admonished his readers to be of one mind in the Spirit, joined and knit together (1 Cor. 3:1-17; Phil. 1:17; Eph. 4:1-16), which implies that we abscond the not-so-modern spectacle of attaching oneself to “celebrity pastors” who cut loose the mooring of Scripture to receive the praise of man.

It is true that confessions inherently draw important lines of distinction between various churches or denominations, but even then they will reveal that our differences are either of secondary or essential importance. For example, the 2LCF is the common confession of nearly all Reformed Baptist churches. It was written in its original form in 1677 during a time of persecution by the Church of England against dissenters, and would not be publicly affirmed and signed until 1689 when the Act of Toleration passed giving freedom to Protestants who differed from the state church. Baptists built this confession directly upon the labors of our Presbyterian and Congregational brothers’ work; namely, the WCF and the Savoy Declaration. They used these earlier confessions as the beginning foundations to their own documents because they believed them to be biblical and well-written expressions of the faith. Baptists edited these confessions to point out their own theological distinctives as Baptists. And yet, even in doing so, Baptists demonstrated much agreement with these and other groups of believers while remaining faithful to their theological convictions about credobaptism and aspects of ecclesiology.

It is not enough to want to be together, or even to simply affirm that “Jesus is Lord.” We must be bound together by the faith once delivered to the saints clearly presented in the language of the people. Such unity is not only desirable with modern churches, but the churches that have gone before us. A confessional church does not view

itself as an island to itself, but a part of the great continent of the universal church. Christians should indeed work for unity in the church, and confessions do not have to be a hindrance to that work, but in fact can be of great advantage. John Murray wrote, “If we are once convinced of the evil of schism in the body of Christ...we shall then be constrained to preach the evil, to bring conviction to the hearts of others also, to implore God’s grace and wisdom in remedying the evil, and to devise ways and means of healing these ruptures.”<sup>15</sup> And in following the enduring advice of Matthew Henry: “In the great things of religion be of one mind; and where there is not a unity of sentiment, still let there be union of affection.”<sup>16</sup>

### Confessions Offer Security to the Believer

Confessions are not only a public affirmation of doctrine, but are also a means of instruction and a help in shielding the church from error. Creeds and confessions have historically developed in the context of theological disagreement or heresy, where the church was forced to clearly demonstrate what the word of God says in matters of great importance. A church without a confession is a church that is under-protected against the assaults of the enemy, who desires to create confusion over, and cast doubt upon, the word of God.

John MacArthur was correct in stating, “Creeds were never formulated to invent fundamental doctrines, but rather to defend them. They are repudiations of false doctrines—condemning new error by affirming established truth. As time passed, new errors required new affirmations; thus church creeds and Christian confessions have become longer and more complex.”<sup>17</sup> The internal pleas found in Scripture itself are unyielding. Paul tells his young companion to “hold fast the form of sound words” (2

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<sup>15</sup> John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:335. Cf. Kuiper, *Glorious Body of Christ* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 46-55.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Henry, “1 Corinthians,” *Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), p. 1217, [http://www.whitehorsemedia.com/docs/MATTHEW\\_HENRYS\\_BIBLE\\_COMMENTARY.pdf](http://www.whitehorsemedia.com/docs/MATTHEW_HENRYS_BIBLE_COMMENTARY.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> John MacArthur, *Is the Apostles’ Creed Enough?*, adapted from *Reckless Faith*, <https://www.gty.org/blog/B151109/is-the-apostles-creed-all-i-need-to-believe>, November 9 2015.

Tim. 1:13) and the Philippian church to “stand fast with one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). Likewise, Jude pleads with the reader to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We are to cut off those who seek to disrupt the godly peace of the church through false doctrine: “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him” (Titus 3:10). James Bannerman affirms the sense of familial security a confession can provide: “It is the duty of the church... by some formal and public declaration of its own faith, to give assurance to its members of the soundness of its profession, and to receive assurance of theirs.”<sup>18</sup>

Confessions also offer to church leadership the ability to maintain biblical integrity to doctrine, giving them the tools to lead a congregation effectively and lovingly. Trueman writes, “A church that is open about its confessional commitments and that strives to maintain a structure of governance which reflects biblical concepts of eldership is inevitably better placed to negotiate the relationship between Scripture and confession than the church which lacks these things.”<sup>19</sup> Points of disagreement and strife among congregants, requiring church leadership to provide specific counsel and even rebuke, may be diffused more quickly and effectively with the backing of concise biblical exposition in a readily summarized format. There is far less confusion when the document that governs the church’s ecclesiology based on Scriptural authority—going beyond just the constitution or bylaws of that local church—is readily accessible to the public.

The same protections afforded to elders may also be applied in defusing abuses of power that are harmful to the body. In a compelling closing argument to his book, Trueman states that confessions actually delimit the power of the church, a point that is often missed. He writes that, “Doctrinal competence without authority renders the office impotent and prevents the elders from leading a congregation toward spiritual maturity.

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<sup>18</sup> James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), vol. 1, p.296, quoting Waldron, *Modern Exposition of 1689 Confession of Faith*, p.19.

<sup>19</sup> Trueman, *A Creedal Imperative*, p.162.

Authority without doctrinal competence, however, is a recipe for willful despotism, where the church is whatever the elders decide, no more and no less.”<sup>20</sup>

### *A Personal Validation*

Up until the past few years, I had never considered myself to be a “confessional Christian.” There seemed to be no reason for me to subscribe to what looked like nothing more than a rigid system of faith. Furthermore, in my very narrow context of biblical training, it had been drilled into me that statements of faith that extended beyond a few paragraphs—which now can only produce agonizingly ambiguous declarations—were nothing more than “legalism” and “divisive distractions” to the body of Christ. And yet, the fact of the matter is this: every Christian (and for that matter, every church) believes that the Bible means *something*, and what he or she thinks it means is inherently confessional, regardless of whether he or she chooses to take pen to paper and write it down.

In hindsight, I can clearly see that each of the spiritual crossroads in my own life have given witness to a sort of confessionalism in a very testimonial sense. In salvation, I made an intimately personal and radical decision to place my trust in Christ as my Lord and Savior, believing that I was utterly lost and helpless apart from the finished work of Jesus to claim me as His own. In baptism, I publicly declared that I was a disciple of Christ, and that I had renounced the world in favor of living a life of obedience and love for God. In ordination, men laid hands on me with the understanding that I loved God and loved the doctrines of our faith. My word choice employed here is not offhanded. Belief. Trust. Obedience. Understanding. These all necessitate a position of intellectual certainty in a collection of truths; namely, that I believe explicit truths about the nature of God and His marvelous purposes, and it has fundamentally transformed and directed the course of my life.

### *Conclusion*

Every church needs a confession. It does not have to be the 2LCF or the WCF.<sup>21</sup> Confessions have often been accused as being too formal, too complex, too intellectual,

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<sup>20</sup> Trueman, *A Creedal Imperative*, p.164.

and in some circles seem to be given equal with inspired Scripture. But when properly used, they facilitate a sound footing for instruction, safeguard correct biblical doctrine, and create a focus for church fellowship. As A.A. Hodge observed, “The real question is not, as often pretended, between the Word of God and the creed of man, but between the tried and proved faith of the collective body of God’s people, and the private judgment and the unassisted wisdom of the repudiator of creeds.”<sup>22</sup>

The confessional church is a church that believes the truth is worth knowing and making known. It is a church that ties us in bonds of spiritual continuity with the churches that have gone before. It is a church that desires clarity in its exposition of Scripture. It is a church that pursues unity wherever possible among like-minded churches. It is a church that conveys charity when churches disagree on doctrines of secondary importance. It is a church that offers secure footing to aid our defenses against the infiltrations of heresy. And it is a church that recognizes that all final authority ultimately finds its source on the pages of the inspired Word of God.

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<sup>21</sup> My church holds to the BF&M, an excellent confession in its own right. You can read the confession in its entirety at [www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp](http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp).

<sup>22</sup> A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), p.2.

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