

Pulpit & People

**Essays in honour of William Still
on his 75th birthday**

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WORD, MINISTRY AND CONGREGATION IN THE REFORMATION CONFESSIONS

DAVID F. WRIGHT

The ministry of William Still has been distinguished by a grand simplification of the work of the ministry, in the conviction that the two main weapons the Lord has given to his Church are preaching and praying. Central to the growing evangelical movement in the Church of Scotland which honours him as its senior father-in-God is a similar persuasion that the minister's calling is above all to be an expositor of the Word and to lead the congregation in prayer, and to sit loose to many other activities that 'the ministry' has accumulated over the generations.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was likewise characterized by a drastic simplification of Christianity. The burdensome paraphernalia of medieval Catholicism were dumped by the cartload (sometimes quite literally), and the faith reformed assumed a leaner, stripped-down profile — in theology, in Church government, in Christian piety, in worship, in Church buildings, in ecclesiastical law, indeed in almost every area of the Church's life. It seems appropriate, therefore, in a volume that pays tribute to an outstandingly faithful minister of Christ and his Church, to examine how the Reformation confessions present the reformed ministry. The confessions alone cannot be expected to yield a comprehensive picture of Reformation approaches to the ministry; for this one would need to quarry much more widely. Nevertheless, it should be instructive to discover, from those texts which most deliberately set forth for public consumption the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith as the Reformation Churches recognized them, how the ministry was understood — in other words, what they felt they must *confess* about the ministry.

A further justification may be cited for questioning the confessions about the ministry. Some of them are a direct reflection of preaching and teaching ministries in reformed Churches, or apologiae for those ministries. The Augsburg Confession of 1530, the standard-bearer of all the Reformation confessions and still the basic confession of the Lutheran Churches, is presented by its signatories as 'a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith, setting forth how and in what manner, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, these things are preached, taught, communicated and embraced in our lands' (Preface). Its several articles are nearly all introduced by 'Our Churches teach' or 'It is also taught among us'. This stance is no less marked in the Tetrapolitan Confession which was drawn up for

presentation to the same imperial Diet of Augsburg on behalf of four cities, led by Strasbourg, which could not endorse the Augsburg Confession, especially on the Lord's Supper. Its first section is entitled 'Of the Subject-Matter of Sermons', declaring that 'our preachers' have been enjoined 'to teach from the pulpit nothing else than is either contained in the Holy Scriptures or has sure ground therein'. Thereafter reference is repeatedly made to the principled practice of 'our preachers' or 'our churchmen'.

Not all sixteenth-century confessions claim to be such direct transcripts of their Churches' preaching activity, but the apologetic, 'Here-we-stand' posture is often no less clearly expressed. The Preface to the Scots Confession (1560) laments that no earlier opportunity has availed to make 'known to the world the doctrine which we profess and for which we have suffered abuse and danger'. Its articles begin with 'we acknowledge, confess, believe' rather than with verbs of preaching and teaching. The Gallican (French) Confession of 1559 is prefaced by an appeal to King Francis II pleading for relief from the persecutions experienced by French Protestants for adhering to the doctrines set out in the Confession.

Confessions like these may claim a degree of continuity with the primitive Christian tradition which linked confession closely with martyrdom, and indeed with the One who bore a good confession before Pontius Pilate (1 Tim. 6:13). Perhaps confessions should always give clear evidence of the readiness to suffer, if not the actual experience of suffering, for the faith confessed. Their theology should certainly be kerygmatic — not only preachable but already proved in the crucible of preaching. Viewed in this light confessions are as much the work of preachers as of theologians.

Church and Ministry

If one were to feel justified, in such a study, in turning first to the Westminster Confession, one would find with surprise that it assigns no chapter to the ministry of the Church, despite having chapters not only on the Church and the sacraments, but also on Church Censures and Synods and Councils. The explanation may partly lie in the fact that the Westminster Assembly produced also the Form of Presbyterian Church Government and the Directory of Public Worship, both of which are almost wholly taken up with the ordering and duties of ministers. But this circumstance cannot of itself account for the Confession's lack of a separate statement on the ministry, since the Directory deals with other topics, such as Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the Sanctification of the Lord's Day, which the Confession also covers. It is, in fact, in the chapters on these and related subjects that the Confession's doctrine of ministry, such as it is, may be found.

'The ministry of the Word' is assumed by the chapter on Effectual Calling (10:3, 4) and more specifically by the one on Religious

Worship and the Sabbath-Day (21:5). The nearest thing to a formal articulation of a doctrine of ministry appears in the Confession's statement on the Church. To the visible, catholic Church 'Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life' (25:3). The purity of particular Churches (which are members of this universal Church) is commensurate with the purity with which 'the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered and public worship performed ... in them' (25:4). Further references to Christ's appointment of ministers are contained in the chapters on the Lord's Supper and on Church Censures.

Ministry, then, can hardly be judged one of the Westminster Confession's strong points. Nevertheless, the way it speaks of ministry illustrates an important theological principle, that the doctrine of ministry belongs under the doctrine of the Church and not vice-versa. This is borne out in many of the sixteenth-century confessions, which introduce the ministry in the context of identifying the true Church of Christ. The Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles (1563/1571) declare the Church to be 'a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance' (19). In the Augsburg Confession the Church is presented as 'the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel' (7), although we should note that it has already spoken of 'the office of the ministry' as the God-given means of obtaining the faith of justification (5).

Other confessions specify the service of the Word, the sacraments and often discipline as marks by which the Church is known or discerned. According to the Genevan Confession, one of the earliest fruits of John Calvin's activity in the city in 1536, 'the proper mark by which rightly to discern the Church of Jesus Christ is that his holy gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard and kept, and that his sacraments be properly administered' (18). The First Helvetic (Swiss) Confession of the same year, which was the first joint confession of the reformed cities of Switzerland (not yet including Geneva), puts the matter less personally: 'the fellowship and congregation of all saints which is Christ's bride and spouse' is 'not only known but also gathered and built up by visible signs, rites and ordinances, which Christ himself has instituted and appointed by the Word of God as a universal, public and orderly discipline' (14). A simpler statement is given in the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, which is perhaps the most mature and most widely accepted, as well as the longest, confession of Reformed Protestantism. 'The true Church is that in which the signs or marks of the true Church are to be found, especially the lawful and sincere preaching of the Word of God as it was delivered to us in the books of the prophets and the apostles' (17). This Confession's expansive exposition proceeds to itemise other

'notes or signs of the true Church', including spiritual unity and worship and participation in the sacraments instituted by Christ. No clearer declaration could be asked for than is given in the Scots Confession: 'The notes of the true Kirk we believe, confess and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the Word of God, in which God has revealed himself to us...; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Jesus Christ...; and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes' (18).

Functional Ministry

It is noteworthy that the confessions we have quoted identify the Church by the activities it engages in, the functions or services that are fulfilled in it, by it and for it, rather than by its possession of certain special individuals (ordained ministers) to carry them out. This is an essentially ecclesial approach to ministry; the preaching of the Word of God and the administration of sacraments and discipline are responsibilities and privileges of the Church, before they are entrusted to particular members of the Church. The Church cannot live without the Word and the sacraments, but it may be able to live without officers of a certain kind to dispense them. Such a perspective, which places the ordering of the Church's ministry at one remove from the indispensability of maintaining the Word and the sacraments in the Church, is of immense practical import, not least in the contemporary situation of the Church of Scotland faced by the problems addressed by 'Union and Readjustment' of congregations. The sole *sine qua non* is the provision of the service of Word and sacraments, not the availability of, say, presbyters with official minimum credentials to supply it.

Luther's *Large Catechism* of 1529, which enjoys confessional status in Lutheranism by virtue of its inclusion in the *Book of Concord* (1580), speaks of the Church itself as the ministering agent. In its explanation of the third article of the Apostles Creed ('I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church...'), Luther describes the Church as 'the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God... There is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ... I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word... Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word.' Such an emphasis is entirely proper, since the Creed makes no mention of ministers.

The Church Hearing the Word

The confessions give central place to the Church's proclamation of the Word, but they also speak frequently of the Church's obedient hearing of the Word. In this connexion the teaching of Jesus about following the voice of the shepherd (John 10:2-5) is often cited or alluded to. The Ten Theses (Conclusions) of Berne, which were

affirmed after a disputation there in 1528 involving a wide range of Reformers from Switzerland and South Germany, begin by affirming that 'The holy Christian Church, whose only head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger'. The Genevan Confession insists that the first identifying mark of the Church of Jesus Christ is that 'his holy gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard and kept... Where the gospel is not declared, heard and received, there we do not acknowledge the form of the Church' (18). According to the Gallican Confession the true Church is 'the company of the faithful who agree to follow God's Word and the pure religion which it teaches... Properly speaking, there can be no Church where the Word of God is not received, nor profession made of subjection to it, nor use of the sacraments' (27, 28). In the Second Helvetic Confession, the stipulation of the lawful and sincere preaching of the Word of God as the primary mark of the Church is followed by a quotation of John 10: 27, 28, 5. Those who 'do not proclaim the voice of the Shepherd undoubtedly cannot represent the Church, the bride of Christ. Therefore they are not to be heard in his name, since Christ's sheep follow not the voice of a stranger' (Tetrapolitan Confession 15). The Westminster Confession correlates the purity of the Church to the gospel being 'taught and embraced' (25:4).

The Church is accordingly to be discerned not merely where the Word is faithfully expounded but where it is received, believed, heeded. This emphasis joins up with the primary definition of the Church in the confessions — 'the assembly of all believers' (Augsburg Confession 7), 'the assembly of true Christian believers' (Belgic Confession 27), 'one company and multitude of men chosen by God who rightly worship and embrace him by true faith in Christ Jesus' (Scots Confession 16). That is to say, the ministry of the Word and sacraments enables the Church to be and become the Church, not by virtue of its due performance alone but by its fruitfulness through the Spirit. It is not preaching and sacraments that *ex opere operato* turn a body of people into the Church, but rather their power in the hands of God to evoke repentance, faith and worship. The Word believed is as essential to the Church as the Word proclaimed.

This is an emphasis that has tended to be obscured in expositions of Reformation doctrines of ministry, which have too often given the impression that the Church is constituted by the ministry of the Word almost regardless of congregational response or even presence. This may have been more of a danger on the Lutheran side, with its more one-sided stress on the objective givenness of the Word of Christ, independent of the response of faith. This is seen in the Reformation debates about the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, which Luther refused to make conditional on believing reception, whereas the Zwinglian and Reformed, in different ways, argued that Christ is eaten only by faith. So Lutheran confessional statements typically

highlight the Spirit's gift of faith through the ministry of the Word rather than the congregation's heeding the voice of the Shepherd. Luther's *Large Catechism*, in explaining the sabbath Commandment, says that 'At whatever time God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read or pondered, there the person, the day and the work are sanctified by it'.

The introduction of the Reformation, particularly in the cities of Switzerland and South Germany, was often effected through a declaration of assent to the gospel by the people at large, whether in the citizen assembly, as at Geneva, or in the broadest representative body, as at Strasbourg, or in disputations. These were somewhat like large public Bible studies in which the citizens adjudicated whether the old clergy or the new preachers had more faithfully interpreted the Scriptures. Such exercises presupposed two fundamental Protestant convictions, the priesthood of all Christians and the perspicuity of Scripture. We may discern some echo of this common feature of the Reformation in these cities in the place the confessions give to the recognition and following of the voice of the Shepherd as an indispensable mark of the true Church of Christ.

To make this point may provoke some hard questions. What about the ministry of the Word in a congregation which extends no welcoming embrace of faith for years on end? Is there not a proper comfort to be gained in such a situation from appealing to the Reformers' primary emphasis on the proclamation of the Word? Is not the faithfulness of such a ministry rather than its success the decisive criterion? Perhaps too easy a resort to such considerations should be viewed as a temptation, as also should taking refuge in the inscrutable working of divine providence. Is it an unthinkable conclusion that, where the service of Word and sacraments evokes no response from a community, such a ministry cannot be viewed as giving that body of people the dignity of 'the Church'? This must be seen as a reasonable interpretation of some of the confessional declarations cited above. At the same time, such a dreadful possibility must assume that it is indeed the Word of God that is held forth for the hearing of faith. God forbid that we shake off the dust of our feet because a house or a town has refused to hear not God's Word but a merely human message. On the other hand, if the confessions are correct in suggesting that believing response to the gospel is integral to the proclamation of the Word as a mark of the Church, those charged with this ministry should be appropriately confident and expectant. Church growth, in this sense, is a normal accompaniment of a ministry of gospel Word and sacraments.

Call and Election

It would be misleading to give the impression that the Reformation confessions are not interested in the ordering of the ministry. The Tetrapolitan Confession's chapter on the Office, Dignity and Power of

Ministers in the Church precedes that on the Church itself. (Too much, however, should not be made of the sequence of material. Even earlier come chapters on Fasts, Meats and Monkeny! Theology is not done by ordinal numbers.) Normally a section is devoted to the Church before any attempt to specify how, or by whom, the ministry of Word, sacraments and discipline is to be exercised. Moreover, the confessions are in the main much more concerned about what ministers should do than about the offices they should occupy or the titles they should bear. There is little warrant in the confessions for making a particular polity mandatory. Several of them, however, do insist that all ministers must enjoy parity of authority. If order is a term which in this area of discussion normally implies hierarchy, then these confessions (with the exception of the Thirty-Nine Articles) know only one order of ministry.

Furthermore, the confessions are far more interested in the congregational call and choice of ministers than in their ordination. The Scots Confession nowhere alludes to the need for ordination; it merely states that the sacraments must be 'ministered by lawful ministers,...men appointed to preach the Word, unto whom God has given the power to preach the gospel, and who are lawfully called by some Kirk.' (The First Book of Discipline confirms that this lack of reference to ordination is no accidental oversight.) Even the Thirty-Nine Articles say only that no-one is to take up the office of 'Ministering in the Congregation' (itself a significant heading) 'before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same...by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard' (23). A later article refers to the Ordinal of Edward VI for the arrangements for the ordering of ministers. The Confession of Faith used by the English congregation at Geneva and incorporated into Knox's *Form of Prayers* (1556) merely states that the sacraments are to be administered as Christ has ordained and 'by such as by ordinary vocation are thereunto called' (4).

The Augsburg Confession's one-sentence article on Order in the Church asserts no more than that 'nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the Church without a regular call' (14). The Catholic *Confutation* of this article demanded the employment of canonical ordination. Melancthon's *Apology* for the Confession, which was placed alongside it in the *Book of Concord*, partly defers to this demand, professing a commitment to maintain 'the Church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority', but also affirming that the preservation of canonical order is secondary to advancing the teaching of the Word. A similar note is sounded in two other documents of confessional standing in the *Book of Concord*, Luther's Schmalkald Articles, drawn up for the papal council originally called for Mantua in 1537 which eventually met later at Trent, and

Melanchthon's *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (1537), which was adopted as a supplement to the Augsburg Confession. Both give priority to maintaining the gospel in the Church over the observance of canonical proprieties. As Melanchthon put it, 'Wherever the Church exists, the right to administer the gospel also exists. Wherefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the right of calling, electing and ordaining ministers.'

The Tetrapolitan Confession, which is a counterpart to Augsburg, mediating between Lutherans and Zwinglians, omits all reference to human appointment in its chapter on the Office, Dignity and Power of Ministers in the Church, deeming it sufficient to affirm that 'what constitutes fit and properly consecrated ministers of the Church, bishops, teachers and pastors, is that they have been divinely sent..., i.e., that they have received the power and mind to preach the gospel and feed the flock of Christ' (13). More typical is the Gallican Confession, which holds that the authority of pastors 'should be derived from election, as far as it is possible'. It must at least be a binding rule 'that all pastors, overseers and deacons should have evidence of being called to their office' (31). The Belgic Confession, which largely parallels the Gallican, similarly, if more allusively, stipulates 'a lawful election of the Church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teaches' (31). More explicit is the First Helvetic Confession, although the emphasis remains the same. The 'administrative power...to preach God's Word and to tend the flock of the Lord' is to be conferred only on those qualified by divine calling and election and by the Church's approval (16). They must be 'recognized and accepted by the judgment of the Church and the laying on of hands by the elders' (17). What is required according to the Second Helvetic Confession are careful calling and election 'by the Church or by those delegated from the Church for that purpose', followed by ordination with public prayer and laying on of hands (18).

Thus the confessions are more concerned with the bond between minister and congregation than between minister and any ministerial *ordo*, class or court. The significant lines of connexion are with the congregation, not with a body of ministers extended in time (by succession) or space (in presbyteries or similar institutions). In so far as the confessions are interested in historical continuity, it is the continuity of the Church, not the 'lineal succession' (Scots Confession 18) of ministers. The Reformation rejected 'absolute' ordination, i.e., ordination without reference to a specific charge. The ministry made sense only in relation to a local congregation, and so ordination was much less important than the congregational call. Ordination was little more than confirmation within the congregation of its calling and election of a person, not initiation into a supra-congregational order of ministers.

Outward and Inward Teaching

Lutheran confessional statements elevated the external ministry of Word and sacraments in opposition to the prominence given to the inner enlightenment and experience of the Spirit by Radical Protestants. 'Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts and works without the external Word of the gospel' (Augsburg Confession 5). The sharpest Lutheran statement to this effect comes in the Schmalkald Articles. 'God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before... God will not deal with us except through his external Word or sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil' (8). Only occasionally is the point made so bluntly in the Reformed confessions, although their uniform stress on the indispensability of the proclamation by Word and sacrament undoubtedly owes something to the desire to dissociate themselves from the Radicals' spiritualism. This is especially clear in confessions that are apologetically motivated. Thus the Gallican Confession maintains that 'the Church cannot exist without pastors for instruction'. Although God is not bound to such means, nevertheless the Confession rejects all visionaries who would destroy the ministry of Word and sacraments (25).

More space in the Reformed confessions is devoted to the relationship between human agency and the working of God. It goes without saying that all of them regard the ministry of the gospel as the means by which not only is the true Church distinguishable from the false, but the Church is itself created and built up by God. Several evince a concern that the distinctive roles of God and man should not be confused. The Tetrapolitan Confession quotes 1 Corinthians 3:6 ('I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth') to show that no persons should be thought of as more than ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. They have the keys of the kingdom, but 'in such a manner that they are nothing else than ministers of Christ, whose right and prerogative alone this is' (13). 'The Church's ministers are God's co-workers..., through whom he imparts and offers to those who believe in him the knowledge of himself and the forgiveness of sins,... but in all things we ascribe all efficacy and power to God the Lord alone, and only the imparting to the minister' (First Helvetic Confession 15). The sacraments are 'signs of divine grace by which the ministers of the Church work with the Lord... Bread and wine are... signs by which the true communion of his body and blood is administered and offered to believers by the Lord himself by means of the ministry of the Church' (20, 22).

As on many issues, the Second Helvetic Confession gives an extended and balanced account. Outward preaching is not rendered pointless by the need for inward illumination. The Lord inwardly opened Lydia's heart as Paul preached to her. Although God can

illumine whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, it is not his usual way (1). In the New Testament the apostolic preaching is called 'the Spirit' and 'the ministry of the Spirit' because 'by faith it becomes effectual and living in the ears, nay more, in the hearts of believers through the illumination of the Holy Spirit' (13). We must neither 'attribute what has to do with our conversion and instruction to the secret power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that we make void the ecclesiastical ministry', nor 'ascribe too much to ministers and the ministry'. God teaches both outwardly and inwardly at the same time (18). Christ reserves his authority to himself and does not transfer it to any other, 'so that he might stand idly by as a spectator while his ministers work'. Yet when they do what their Lord commands, *they* may be said to open the kingdom to the obedient and shut it to the disobedient. Their ministry is such that 'they reconcile men to God...., remit sins.... and rightly and effectually absolve when they preach the gospel of Christ' (14).

Such a conjunction between the work of the Spirit and human ministry suggests how congregations should honour the latter. 'As we receive the true ministers of the Word of God as messengers and ambassadors of God, it is necessary to listen to them as to God himself' (Genevan Confession 20). The first chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession deals with Scripture as the true Word of God. In testimony thereto it cites 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Matthew 10:20, Luke 10:16 and John 13:20. 'When this Word of God is now preached in the Church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful.' As the sub-heading puts it, in a memorable phrase, 'The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God'.

Limitations

The weaknesses of the confessions lie close to their strengths. They display little awareness that others in the congregation beside preachers, pastors, elders and deacons may have ministries to fulfil. Statements such as 'the Church acknowledges no ministry except that which preaches the Word of God and administers the sacrament' (Lausanne Articles 5, 1536) must not be interpreted outside their polemical context. Nevertheless, very rare is the note sounded by the Tetrapolitan Confession: 'Since it is the Church and kingdom of God, and for this reason all things must be done in the best order, it has various offices of ministers. For it is a body compacted of various members, whereof each has his own work' (15). In his *Large Catechism* Luther explains that the community of Christians is 'called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet it is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and a member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses.' Yet there is little

development towards an organic concept of the Church and the mutual responsibilities of all its members.

Not one of the confessions even inculcates the responsibility of the faithful to pray for ministers. Luther's *Small Catechism*, likewise part of the *Book of Concord*, includes a Table of Duties spelt out in lists of biblical verses. The Duties Christians Owe Their Teachers and Pastors are to be found in Luke 10:7, 1 Corinthians 9:14, Galatians 6:6-7, 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (which all deal with 'the maintenance of the ministry'), 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (respect and esteem), and Hebrews 13:17 (submission). The limitations of such a list are only too obvious.

The paramount duty of Christian people is that of diligent attendance at worship for the hearing of the Word. This is regularly emphasised as the import of the sabbath Commandment, which teaches that 'we should not despise God's Word and the preaching of it, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it' (Luther's *Small Catechism*). The Gallican Confession allows no absence, even in persecution: 'We believe that no-one ought to seclude himself and be contented to be alone; but that all jointly should keep and maintain the union of the Church, and submit to the public teaching, and to the yoke of Jesus Christ, wherever God shall have established a true order of the Church, even if the magistrates and their edicts are contrary to it' (26).

The ultimate justification for such insistence was that the gifts of life, righteousness and the Holy Spirit 'cannot be obtained except through the office of preaching and of administering the holy sacraments', as the Augsburg Confession expressed it (28). Almost half a century later, the Formula of Concord (1577) settled decades of doctrinal dispute among Lutherans. The issues in contention included the role of free will in conversion and regeneration. The Formula's Solid Declaration on this question contained the following section on 'how and by what means (namely, the oral Word and the holy sacraments) the Holy Spirit wills to be efficacious in us by giving and working true repentance, faith and new spiritual power and ability for good in our hearts, and how we are to relate ourselves to and use these means:

In his boundless kindness and mercy, God provides for the public proclamation of his divine, eternal law and the wonderful counsel concerning our redemption, namely, the holy and only saving gospel of his eternal Son, our only Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Thereby he gathers an eternal church for himself out of the human race and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of their sins and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, convert them, beget them anew, and sanctify them through this means and in no other way — namely, through his holy Word (when one hears it preached or reads it) and the sacraments (when they are used according to his Word) (1 Cor. 1:21; Acts 11:14; Rom. 10:17; John 17:17, 20; Matt. 17:5). All who would be saved must hear this preaching, for the preaching and the hearing of God's Word are the Holy Spirit's instrument in, with, and through which he wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to achieve.

The person who is not yet converted to God and regenerated can hear and read this Word externally because, as stated above, even after the Fall man still has something of a free will in these external matters, so that he can go to church, listen to the sermon, or not listen to it.

Through this means (namely, the preaching and the hearing of his Word) God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and comforts itself with the promise of the gospel. And in this way the Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced into the heart.

On the one hand, it is true that both the preacher's planting and watering and the hearer's running and willing would be in vain, and no conversion would follow, if there were not added the power and operation of the Holy Spirit, who through the Word preached and heard illuminates and converts hearts so that men believe this Word and give their assent to it. On the other hand, neither the preacher nor the hearer should question this grace and operation of the Holy Spirit, but should be certain that, when the Word of God is preached, pure and unalloyed according to God's command and will, and when the people diligently and earnestly listen to and meditate on it, God is certainly present with his grace and gives what man is unable by his own powers to take or to give. We should not and cannot pass judgment on the Holy Spirit's presence, operations, and gifts merely on the basis of our feeling, how and when we perceive it in our hearts. On the contrary, because the Holy Spirit's activity often is hidden, and happens under cover of great weakness, we should be certain, because of and on the basis of his promise, that the Word which is heard and preached is an office and work of the Holy Spirit, whereby he assuredly is potent and active in our hearts (2 Cor. 2:14ff.).

For living proof of the truth of this fine statement, one could do no better than observe what God has wrought through the preaching of William Still, *minister Verbi Dei*, whom we salute on this notable anniversary.