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A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

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1. To encourage *reformation* in the local Christian churches worldwide.
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

INFORMATION

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in America, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

T. M. Moore

This issue of *Reformation and Revival Journal* is devoted to a consideration of the confessional heritage of the Reformation tradition. To some, this may seem an unusual subject for a journal devoted to fostering renewal in the church. Are not such studies more appropriate for more purely theological publications?

However, critical to the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the churches is sound instruction in doctrinal orthodoxy. God will not revive his people on any basis other than the clear and uncompromised foundation of his holy Word. Therefore, preparation for the reviving winds of the Spirit must involve sound and consistent instruction in the doctrines of the faith. Historically, it has been among churches where faithful ministers have diligently and consistently laid such a foundation that the Spirit of God has most powerfully and effectually moved among his people. The creeds and confessions of the Reformation tradition provide a most helpful framework for laying such a foundation.

Recent trends in preaching have seen a move away from exegetical and doctrinal homiletics toward a more need-centered approach. While an emphasis on congregational needs must always be included in the preaching of the Word, making this the basis of preaching runs the risk of neglecting or compromising a comprehensive doctrinal foundation for the sake of what can appear to be more immediate concerns. Recovering a broad-based and consistent orthodoxy in preaching certainly allows us to speak to the needs of the congregation. More importantly, it helps to ensure that our preaching will be the sort that God is most pleased to honor with that outpouring of his Spirit that brings revival to his people in his time.

The creeds and confessions of the Reformation tradition are like scaffolds upon which the builders of the church stand as they carry out the work assigned to them. Set on the solid rock of God's Word, they provide a framework within which the building of the church can proceed according to the design of the Divine Architect, and they provide a place to take our stand as we lay stone upon stone in that glorious temple of praise that God is raising for himself. Understanding these doctrinal formularies in their historical provenance, doctrinal clarity, and contemporary relevance can re-ignite our sense of continuity with previous generations whose labors God was pleased to bless in reviving and reforming his church. These majestic formularies of faith were developed amid doctrinal confusion, political uncertainty, and ecclesiastical disunity in an effort to recover and restate the ancient apostolic teaching in a manner most conducive to the needs of the age. As such, they would seem to be particularly relevant to our own day, when heterodoxy and fragmentation beset the churches, and when the political, cultural, and social environment seems increasingly at cross purposes with the faith of Christ. The creeds and confessions we will consider have proven their worth over the centuries in providing untold numbers of believers the comfort, confidence, and conviction of faith essential to vital Christian living. We believe they can have that same effect on the followers of Christ today.

Our focus in particular is on confessions of faith deriving from the Reformation on the European continent. In the articles that follow, Robert Kolb and Joel Beeke will show us something of the historical background of the continental creeds of the Reformation. Peter Toon, James McGoldrick, and Johan D. Tangelder will help us to understand why these confessions remain important to the church today. Chad Van Dixhoorn will deal with the *West-*

minster Larger Catechism and its place in history and practice. Our prayer is that these articles will challenge you to a renewed appreciation of our Reformation heritage, and will lead you to discover new ways of making use of them in your ministry.

Samuel Miller wrote:

Confessions of Faith, judiciously drawn, and solemnly adopted by particular churches, are not only invaluable as bonds of union, and fences against error; but . . . they also serve an important purpose, as accredited manuals of Christian doctrine, well fitted for the instruction of those private members of churches, who have neither leisure nor habits of thinking sufficiently close, to draw from the sacred writings themselves a consistent system of truth.¹

Several suggestions for using these classic confessions will come to mind as you read the articles that follow. Preachers might consider using sections of the confessions as part of their own pulpit work. In my own experience I found preaching through one chapter a year of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* an excellent way of focusing on contemporary needs in the church and laying a solid doctrinal foundation at the same time. I would select a chapter to preach; then, in my study of that chapter, isolate key phrases in each paragraph that could serve as focal points for preaching. Using the Scripture proofs accompanying that paragraph, I would then develop a series of exegetical sermons to flesh out the teaching of each paragraph, working my way through all the sections until I completed an entire chapter. I made sure that the chapter I was preaching was printed on a handout and included in the bulletin each week during the series. This allowed for effective review throughout the series and a ready reference for the congregation in seeing where each sermon fit into the over-

all flow of the argument of the chapter. Each week I showed how the teaching of the particular paragraph in view related to the needs of the church in our day, and our congregation in particular, and challenged the people to meditate on the teaching of the *Confession* during their devotions for the coming week.

I also found using the chapter I was preaching during other parts of the service of worship a useful way of driving home the message of each paragraph. We did this by responsive readings—breaking a whole paragraph down into a responsive reading format and printing it in the bulletin—or by a rewriting of the paragraph in the form of a prayer for unison congregational prayer following the sermon.

In some churches a paragraph from a confession is used as a reading, to allow the congregation to make a corporate testimony of faith at some point in the service of worship. Other churches use one question and answer of a catechism, read responsively, in the same way.

In addition to worship and preaching, the confessions of the Reformation tradition lend themselves to stimulating teaching. I always found the *Westminster Confession* to be a source of interesting discussion and pointed instruction in Sunday school classes, men's studies, and seminary courses. Such a context provides ample opportunity to help lay people wade through the sometimes archaic language of the *Confession*, to lead them to rephrase each paragraph in more contemporary ways, and to help them learn how to appropriate the teaching of the *Confession* for themselves. The language of the various Reformation confessions is directed at the whole person—mind, heart, and life. Thus, teachers should have no difficulty helping lay people understand and apply the teaching of the confessions to their own needs and situations. Often I would end a class with a time of prayer, when individuals would be

invited to offer praise and thanks to God, and to make supplications, following the content of the particular section of the *Westminster Confession* under discussion that day. The same can be done with any of the historic confessions of the Reformation tradition.

I also found the *Westminster Confession* to be a useful tool during counseling sessions. The problems pastors meet in counseling are of a wide variety; yet they often stem from a very few roots—lack of assurance of salvation, an inadequate view of God, lingering sin and doubt, a failure of love, to cite only a few. The *Westminster Confession* often provided me a helpful way to address some of these root causes and to lay a foundation for believers to begin mending their lives according to the solid food of God's Word. After listening carefully to the problem and praying with the counselee, I would have him read a section of the *Confession*—say, concerning his lack of assurance or some problem with his spouse—and then discuss it with me in detail. Could the counselee see in his own life any of the classic reasons for a lack of assurance that the *Confession* points out? Or any ways that he had failed to exercise good works of love toward his wife? Could he think of any ways to begin repairing this area of his life? This would often lead to fruitful discussion, the ready identification of obstacles to growth or impediments to relationships, and reasonable and workable courses of action for beginning to get back on track in the life of faith.

One task I was frequently called upon to perform during my time in the pastorate was to prepare brief position papers on subjects in order to help the elders determine a proper response to a question, situation, or need. In such papers I was always careful to cite the scriptural arguments one way or another, and to show how those arguments found expression in our confession. This enabled the elders to determine how they should rule, and to have the

confidence they were doing so according to the Word of God and the standards of our Reformation tradition.

Too often in churches in the Reformation traditions our historic creeds and confessions come into play in only a few places: when ministers are being examined for a call; as part of a course of officer training; when someone has challenged the orthodoxy of some aspect of our preaching or teaching. Certainly they should be employed, and with great care and deliberation, at such times. However, by working our confessions more consistently and diligently into other aspects of their ministries, pastors will find that they are strengthening the foundations of their work overall, building the church in a way that God will honor, and precluding a raft of problems—relating to orthodoxy and orthopraxy—that might otherwise arise.

This issue of *Reformation and Revival Journal* will provide you an excellent opportunity to rediscover the riches of the Reformation tradition. Read the articles carefully. Let them encourage you to become familiar all over again with the various confessions of faith of our Reformation tradition. Study those confessions, let them guide your prayers and preparation for ministry, look for ways to allow them to enrich your own walk with the Lord. We think you will find the confessions of the Reformation tradition as vibrant and vital to renewal—in your life as well as your church—as previous generations who lived and died by them.

T. M. MOORE
Associate Editor

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Question: *What is the special work of the Holy Spirit?*

Answer: The Holy Spirit sanctifies me (makes me holy) by bringing me to faith in Christ, so that I might have the blessings of redemption and lead a godly life (sanctification in the wide sense).

Question: *Why do you need the Holy Spirit to begin and sustain this faith in you?*

Answer: By nature I am spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God, as the Scriptures teach; therefore, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him."

Question: *What has the Holy Spirit done to bring you to faith?*

Answer: The Holy Spirit "has called me by the Gospel," that is, He has invited and drawn me by the Gospel to partake of the spiritual blessings that are mine in Christ.

Question: *How do the Scriptures describe this gracious work of the Spirit in you?*

Answer: The Scriptures teach that by the Gospel the Holy Spirit "enlightened me with His gifts," that is, He gave me the saving knowledge of Jesus, my Savior, so that I trust, rejoice, and find comfort in Him.

Question: *What is the work of the Holy Spirit called?*

Answer: It is called conversion (being turned) or regeneration (new birth).

LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM
(QUESTIONS 156-160)