



## Recent Reformed confessions of faith

### Lukas Vischer (1986)

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Within the last thirty years or so, many Reformed churches have taken the step of defining and recording their faith in new confessions of faith or credal statements. This is a development which would scarcely have been conceivable half a century ago when the 400th anniversary of the Reformation was celebrated in Geneva. The basic freedom to reformulate the faith has always been recognized in Reformed churches, of course. Some Reformed confessions, especially in the early period, expressly emphasize that the church must always be prepared to discuss the content and formulation of the gospel in the light of Scripture. The preamble to the Synod of Bern (1532), for example, states: "We will gladly accept anything that brings us closer to Christ and is conducive to friendship among the churches." But in actual fact, the production of new confessions of faith had slowed to a standstill by the end of the 17th century. In the succeeding centuries, the Reformed churches made repeated efforts to come to terms with the question of how to handle this more or less closed confessional tradition.

Various ways were tried. Some Reformed churches are still persuaded that the confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries epitomized the gospel in a way that is valid for the church today as it was for the church three or four centuries ago. They therefore consider these confessions (or rather, a certain selection of them) to be still binding even today. Other Reformed churches, especially those in the tradition influenced by the Westminster Confession of Faith and its accompanying catechisms, sought to take account of the changed needs of the time by correcting and revising their doctrinal standards. Some went even further and in the course of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries gradually cut loose from their traditional commitment to the classical confessions of faith altogether. In these churches the memory of the confessional tradition has faded almost completely.

Attempts to come to terms with the confessional tradition were not without their difficulties. They produced serious crises in the Reformed churches and in many places culminated in divisions which have still not been healed even today.

In recent times, however, the situation has changed completely. A new possibility presented itself. Instead of revolving endlessly around the old conundrum of the possible significance of the traditional confessions of faith for the church today, many Reformed churches boldly tackled the problem of formulating their witness to Christ today, in the light of scripture and of the Reformed tradition (and of other traditions as well), in the form of new credal statements.

The period in which we live has been marked by a creativity previously found only in the early decades following the Reformation. The result is a whole series of modern confessions of faith.

### **How did this upsurge come about?**

The deepest reason must undoubtedly be sought in the radical change in the presuppositions of preaching. Hitherto unsuspected vistas have opened up before us. New questions have arisen which urgently call for a united response. The confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries were inadequate for this purpose. However important and comprehensive they may be, they nevertheless belong to a past age. If the Reformed churches were to give a clear account of the hope that is in them, a fresh start was indispensable. Just as our forebears in the faith had tried in their day to summarize the main lines of their message, so the Reformed churches today had to try to demonstrate the relevance of the gospel in their age and circumstances here and now.

Another reason for this upsurge of confessions of faith is the ecumenical movement. The churches have drawn closer together. Today they are not only engaged in an intensive dialogue but have also become accustomed to bearing common witness. In some countries Reformed churches have formed united churches of other confessional traditions. Discussions within the ecumenical movement have naturally led to a reinterpretation of the individual traditions. Statements once considered axiomatic have had to be re-examined and revised. Questions posed by other churches have had to be answered.

But the real pressure for new confessions of faith came from another quarter altogether, of course. In recent times; many Reformed churches have found themselves in increasingly critical situations, confronted with governments and powers which radically challenged the gospel message. If they were not to go under, they simply had to confess their faith clearly.

The key even here was the Barmen Theological Declaration of 1934. This was not an attempt to present a comprehensive summary of the Christian faith on the basis of painstaking study. It sprang rather from the critical necessity of intervening illuminatingly in a confused situation. The boundary between truth and falsehood was in danger of being obliterated. The text had its antecedent history, of course. But its full significance as a confession of the church's faith emerged clearly only in the conflicts which ensued. What was said later was true, therefore: the Barmen declaration had not been the result of "hard work" but rather something "given" to the church. As Karl Barth once said: a confession is not something "planned" but the sequel to an inescapable challenge, like the thunder which follows the lightning flash.

The Barmen Theological Declaration was a turning point in the history of the Reformed churches. Whereas the basic freedom to confess the faith anew had previously been a subject of discussion, here it was actually

exercised and the threshold crossed. The theoretical possibility had become an accomplished fact. On the basis of a clear confessional declaration, the church was summoned to a new act of confession. From now on each church had to face up to the question whether it was fulfilling its mission with sufficient clarity. Above all, the example set by the Barmen Theological Declaration sensitized the churches to the danger of losing sight of the very heart of the gospel in crises and conflicts. Without reference to the Barmen Theological Declaration it is hardly possible to explain the upsurge of new confessions of faith in recent times. Barmen was the event.

### **Three types of confession**

If we keep these three reasons for the spate of new confessions clearly in mind, it will hardly surprise us to find that these confessions fall into three categories:

a) Firstly, there are texts which offer a comprehensive summary of the faith. This is the type of statement preferred, above all, by churches in North America. The best-known example is the Confession of 1967 of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA. But it is also the type chosen by the (southern) Presbyterian Church in the United States, the Reformed Church of America, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church of Canada. This comprehensive type of presentation is also found outside North America; for example, in Great Britain, Indonesia, Korea and Japan. The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba deserves special attention, representing as it does the attempt to provide a new sense of direction within a radically changed social context.

b) The second type of text consists of confessions of faith which have emerged in the context of union negotiations. The question of the common confession of faith inevitably arises whenever the decision to move towards a united church is taken.

The participating churches have to reach agreement on how they are to proclaim the gospel together. In the measure that Reformed churches have been involved in such an agreement, the resultant confessions of faith are to be regarded as "Reformed". For a Reformed church does not cease to be Reformed the moment it unites with churches of other traditions. On the contrary, the advance into unity is also an advance in one's own tradition. Reformed confessions of this kind have emerged in South India (1941), Ghana (1965), Zambia (1965), North India (1965), New Zealand (1971), Belgium (1978), Australia (1979) and Great Britain (1981).

c) The third type of text consists of confessions of faith which, like the Barmen Theological Declaration, seek to throw light on a confused situation and to recall in that situation the essential content of the gospel. It is characteristic of these confessions that they sometimes deal with specific questions in a deliberately one-sided way. They are fully intelligible to the reader only if the context in which the church in question has to bear its witness is taken into account. Korean Christians, for example, produced a confession in which the church's responsibility in a context of oppression receives special emphasis (1976). The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan has finally adopted (1985) a confession in which it expresses its twofold solidarity: on the one hand, with the universal church and, on the other hand, with the people in whose midst it champions the gospel and whose rights it is committed to defend. Another example is a proposed confession of faith of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in which it is stated that

"separation, hostility and hatred between peoples and groups is a sin which Christ has already overcome" (1982). To the extent that they claim the status of a credal statement, these texts are more than simple declarations of a church's position on specific questions. Like the creeds of the ancient church, they open with the solemn words: "We believe". Their guiding purpose is to interpret the faith of the church within a specific context or situation.

### **What is the significance of this new development?**

It is important that the Reformed churches should take cognizance of this new development. Even more important, they should begin to think together about it. For what else does this new upsurge signify if not that a confessional tradition which seemed to have become a closed tradition has once more started to move. If we wish to know the Reformed specificity today, it is to these texts that we must turn.

The question of the identity of the Reformed tradition is posed afresh. By formulating new confessions to express their faith, the Reformed churches make it quite clear that their identity can, in the last analysis, result only from the actual performance of proclamation. This identity has not already been finally defined and established by ancient texts, however important, but is constantly being born anew from a living confrontation with the gospel.

It is very tempting today to derive the identity of the Reformed tradition exclusively from the past. When the bond with the classic confessions has been modified or even completely severed, the temptation is to claim that general characteristics which have emerged in the course of history constitute the quintessence of the Reformed position. Certain themes, certain religious attitudes and even certain sociological features are declared to be typical. Attention is shifted from the content of the mission to the way the Reformed churches have actually developed. Important as the analysis of the present condition of the Reformed churches in the light of the past tradition may undoubtedly be, this preoccupation with the Reformed tradition has its dangers. It is only a very short step from "This is how we developed" to "This is what we must be". Studies of French Protestantism, in particular, repeatedly fall for this argument.

The new confessions of recent times point in a different direction. They recall the mission of the church. They are tantamount to an invitation to advance together into the future God is preparing for us. This does not mean that the classic confessions lose their significance. They are stations along a way to which Reformed Christians look back in gratitude, though with a critical eye. They remain a source of inspiration and may take on fresh relevance when the church today seeks to proclaim the gospel for the present time, just as the Reformation pioneers did for their time.

The new confessions of recent times are a gift as well as a challenge. The Reformed churches have to come to terms with this new development.

They must try to give an account of the direction in which they have been led and ask themselves how far this has - rightly or wrongly - changed their identity. This common reflection is one of the urgent tasks waiting to be tackled by the Reformed family.

But how is this to be done? There are considerable differences between these confessions. On the whole, they have come into existence independently of one another and, not surprisingly, present no uniform

pattern. The positions and emphases which bind the Reformed churches together today are not immediately apparent, therefore. To clarify the picture, a process of mutual questioning and correction would be needed. It would also be an illusion to suppose that everything which interests the Reformed churches today is reflected in these new confessions. A good deal is in flux. A good deal is at present only in embryo and a good deal becomes mercurial only in the intimacy of small groups. The life of the Reformed churches is far richer than the available texts permit us to suppose.

Nevertheless, let me try to indicate today some of the features which seem to me to be common to these new confessions of faith.

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### ● **God in Christ: the lord and consummator of history**

One feature common to these new confessions of faith is a strong emphasis on the historical dimension. Almost without exception, their authors seem to be moved by the same fundamental question: How are we to speak of God's salvation in face of human history, its heights and depth, its advances and its failures? And to this question, the answer they give in endless variations is this: By becoming human in Jesus Christ, God has entered into human history; just as he was with Jesus in his life, death and resurrection, so today he accompanies us through history right to the end, till the day when his kingdom finally comes.

Many of the confessions stress that God as revealed in Christ is the Lord of history and is at work in it guiding it to the fulfilment. To a far greater extent that was the case in the earlier confessions, it is affirmed that God has become identified with and involved in the history of the human race. Fuller treatment is given to the life of Jesus. Salvation is manifest in the way Jesus deals with the human beings he encounters. Just as God in Christ acted in history, so today, too, he acts in history. Within history he pursues the goal of his kingdom. The church, therefore, must keep its eyes open for what God is doing today and, at the same time, live in hope of the kingdom which God will bring in his appointed time. The events of history are not unimportant. Correctly interpreted in the light of God's Word, they are signposts pointing to the way God is taking towards his kingdom. It is in history that the church must be effective.

To be sure, most of the new confessions repeat the traditional statements about the reconciliation and redemption in Christ. But they emphasize that God's reconciling and redeeming work took place, and takes place still, in history. It is when they come to describe God's accompaniment of us in history that the new confessions of faith take on a particularly vivid tone. Let me quote here one very characteristic passage:

The church's story with God did not end with the latest events recorded in Scripture.  
Across the centuries the company of believers has continued its pilgrimage with the Lord of history.  
We confess we are heirs of this whole story.  
We are charged to remember our past,  
to be warned and encouraged by it,  
but not to live it again.  
Now is the time of our testing  
as God's story with the church moves forward through us.  
We are called to live now as God's servants  
in the service of people everywhere.

### ● **Form and style of the confession**

Recent confessions also differ from earlier texts in their form and style. The form, of course, is largely determined by the purpose underlying a particular confession. The form varies according to the type of credal statement we are dealing with: comprehensive summary, consensus formula, positional statement.

Compared with previous texts, however, all the recent confessions are far more doxological in character. As far as possible the didactic style is avoided, even where the intention is to present a summary of the Christian faith. None of the recent confessions adopts the catechetical form, even though this has played an important part in the Reformed tradition. In the recent confessions the faith is confessed rather than spelt out in detail. The language adopted is one which appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect. In some cases, the statements are arranged in rhythmic sentences (Reformed Church of America, Presbyterian Church of the United States, Presbyterian Church of Canada).

This tendency finds its clearest reflection in the case of the United Church of Christ (USA). Instead of producing a lengthy and detailed document, it has summarized the faith in a short creed, one of the most impressive and beautiful texts to have been produced in recent times:

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

Who has created and is creating,

Who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh to reconcile and make new,

Who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the church:

to celebrate God's presence, to love and serve others,

to seek justice and resist evil,

to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

Behind this tendency to give the confession of faith the form and style of a hymn of praise to God, there are different motives. But the chief motive is the recognition that God's action in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit remains a mystery which we can never fully grasp. This has to be made clear in the church's confession of faith. We must not seek to explain everything so fully that no room remains for astonishment. The confession of faith is not to be patterned and formulated in a way that suggests faith is a doctrinal system to which every church member is required to assent. The confession should confine itself to the essentials and leave the details in suspense. Only in this way can we avoid turning the confession into a burdensome law and unduly limiting freedom of interpretation.

This still leaves an important question unanswered. It is not clear where the confession of faith fits into the life of the church. Apart from the creed

just quoted, the new confessions are too long for use in worship. Only to a limited degree are they suitable even for use in catechetics. The question arises, therefore, as to how far they can be received by the church at all. They can be published, of course, as official accounts of the church's faith, and recommended for reading and study. But is this really the way reception takes place? It is probably texts of the third type (response to specific questions) which have been most effectively received in the Reformed churches today.

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### ● **Emphasis on the "now"**

Most of these recent confessions are intended as statements which, while binding in character, nevertheless belong to a definite point in history. Their purpose is to attest the faith "now" and in the concrete situation in which the church finds itself. We have already seen that the Reformed confessions were always characterized by a readiness for restatements of the faith. But the recent confessions go further than that. They stress that the confession of the church is an act within history, is always "dated". The strong emphasis on the historical dimension also makes itself felt in the understanding of the confession itself as such. The content of the church's confession is always determined in part by the "kairos" of the act of confession.

In the text of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, for example, the date is included in the title: Confession of 1967. The purpose here was to make it quite clear that the church is *in via*, travelling a road which can lead to further utterances in the future. And, in actual fact, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA has been led beyond the Confession of 1967. It has since been united with the southern Presbyterian Church in the United States and is at present engaged in producing with it a new confession of faith. The same can also be said of the confessions produced in union negotiations. These reflect the consensus existing at the time of the union but at the same time expressly leave room for possible further developments resulting from the common experience of the uniting churches.

This emphasis on the "now" becomes even stronger still in the confessions born of wrestling with a concrete situation and which try to speak "to the situation". These confessions highlight aspects of the gospel which are of special importance in this situation and therefore merit credal status. They claim to be true at this particular point in time and only remain valid in the future too because they were true at this particular point in time.

This strong emphasis on the historical dimension raises, of course, the question as to how far the church's faith really remains the same throughout the ages. In the changing times, how does it become clear that the church remains the same apostolic church in its acts of confession in all ages?

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### ● **Discontinuity in the themes of the confessions of faith**

Studying the recent confessions of faith, we soon discover that certain themes which once played an important part in earlier times are almost completely absent today. The clearest example of this discontinuity is the doctrine of predestination. In none of the recent confessions is this theme dealt with in detail and, from the few places where it is mentioned at all, it is clear that the doctrine is still proclaimed today only in a truncated form

or else radically reinterpreted.

In some confessions, reference is made to the election of Jesus Christ. He is the elect one, chosen for our salvation (Presbyterian Church of Canada). "The clearest example of predestination and grace is Jesus Christ himself" (Presbyterian Church of Korea). It can be said that we have been elected in Christ: "Before the world was created, we were elected in Christ to be part of God's family" (Presbyterian Church of Canada and in similar terms, the Reformed Church of America). In these texts, predestination is used to denote that God is the sole author of our salvation. Nowhere is there any reference to a double predestination to salvation and to condemnation.

In some recent confessions of faith, the term "predestination" is used but in quite a new connection. It can be said, for example, that the individual is pre-conditioned by all sorts of factors but is able to transcend these factors by his or her own will (Presbyterian Church of Korea). Or again, it can be said that the human being is "predestined to be free" (Presbyterian Church of Cuba). Predestination here means the historical destiny and vocation of the human being, who must comply with it on his or her own responsibility if this calling is not to be in vain.

Clearly the doctrine of predestination as traditionally formulated is no longer received in the Reformed churches today. Why this discontinuity? There are different reasons which explain it. The main reason is the difficulty of the doctrine itself. Does it not speak too freely about God's unfathomable purposes with humanity? Surely greater caution is called for, in the church's confession of faith particularly. To be sure, the confession must make it quite clear that God alone is the author of salvation; but it must avoid claiming to know too much about election and rejection.

But the discontinuity is also connected with a changed approach to the question. The recent confessions of faith are interested primarily in the question as to how God's salvation in Christ works out in human history and what the role of the church is in this process. They are less interested therefore in what God has predetermined from all eternity. What they emphasize, on the contrary, is that God as the sovereign Lord guides this history towards its goal. The theme of God's sovereignty and self-glorification is still a vital concern but is now dealt with in connection with the historical process. This is the theatre of God's action and by his gracious initiative towards us human beings in Christ he empowers us to participate freely in this action.

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### ● **The theme of "sola scriptura": new approaches**

The new confessions of faith, like the earlier ones, are unanimous in their insistence that Holy Scripture is the basis and criterion of the church's doctrine and life. The underlying passion of the formula *sola scriptura* is still there in the Reformed churches today.

God's Word incarnate in Jesus Christ takes prior place to the church and has authority over the church and in the church. Because this Word is authoritatively attested only in Holy Scripture, the church must constantly return to this Scripture witness and start afresh from it. Every confession of faith, every experience and every act, must be measured against this scriptural standard.

It is however interesting to observe with what fresh emphases the recent confessions of faith speak of the authority of Holy Scripture. There seems

to be growing agreement on three points especially:

a) The historical character of Holy Scripture is strongly emphasized. It is a collection of testimonies which have emerged from within the community of faith. These testimonies are in a certain sense the Word of God. But a distinction must be made between Jesus Christ, the living Word who became flesh, and the written Word which bears witness to him in an authoritative and reliable way. "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are necessary, sufficient and reliable as witness to Jesus Christ the living Word" (Presbyterian Church in the United States).

We must see and understand the witness of Scripture in its historical context. The Scripture is not to be regarded as an inspired norm in any abstract sense. God's voice speaks to the church through the testimonies which emerged at different time in the history of God with his people. *De facto*, therefore, the way in which the authority of Scripture is defined in the Westminster Confession, for example, has become out of date in more than one respect.

b) Closely connected with that first emphasis is the increased attention paid to the process of interpreting the Bible. The Scripture witness requires interpretation. What has been said by God in a particular historical situation has to be translated into the present historical situation. In the final analysis, only the Holy Spirit can effect this translation. But what is also stressed in the new confessions of faith is the role which the church has to play in this connection. The Bible is the book of the church. It can be really understood only in the community of faith. The Spirit who inspired the testimony of Scripture is the same Spirit who called the church into being and who guides it today. The interpretation of Scripture is only possible when this indissoluble connection between Spirit, Scripture and church is recognized and respected.

It is characteristic of the new confessions that the affirmations concerning Holy Scripture are no longer located at the beginning (as they are, for example, in the Westminster Confession) but most often in the context of the third article of the Creed.

c) The question is sometimes raised as to how God's Word as attested in Holy Scripture is related to his action in history. None of the recent confessions goes into this question in detail but some individual formulations show that the issue is important to the churches. What do we mean when we say that God is at work in history? What does it imply when we say that Scripture itself "testified to the historical presence of God in the world" (Presbyterian Church of Korea)? The new confessions stress, on the one hand, that every new historical experience must be tested against Holy Scripture; on the other hand, they are concerned to avoid giving the impression that everything God wants to say has already been said. They set great store by the need to interpret historical events in the light of Holy Scripture.

In illustration of this we may quote from the text of the Presbyterian Church of Korea:

"The church sees the works of God, the Lord of history, in all events and takes a stand beyond pessimism and optimism. Even in the midst of social injustice and political crisis, God is establishing a new social order. God lets science and technology, politics and economy, learning and art, serve his kingdom; and he speaks anew through events taking place in history. The church should not cease to hear his words, to call all people to repentance, and to show forth God's future."

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## ● Church

Almost all the new confessions of faith deal in some detail with the theme of the church. The emphasis is on the church's missionary task.

Not that nothing is said about the sacraments or the internal order of the church. Indeed, we can even discern a greater emphasis today on the importance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is particularly true of the texts produced in union negotiations. Where the object was to produce an agreed statement on the church, a good deal of attention had necessarily to be given to questions of internal ecclesial order.

But the main emphasis lies, all the same, on the missionary task. The church is called to bear witness to the gospel in this world. It has been sent into the world by God. It has no mandate, therefore, to remain inward-looking, but has to be concerned for human beings. God's Word does not come to them only in the church but also in the world. God is indeed at work in the world. As the church accepts its mission into the world, it follows its Lord in a definite direction. As it holds itself in readiness always for the encounter with other human beings, it becomes clear to it what plans God has for it.

The missionary task is first of all fulfilled by the proclamation of the gospel. But it also embraces the commitment for peace and justice. Several of the new confessions deal explicitly with this aspect of the missionary task. Confessions of the third type call for mention here in particular. They make it quite clear that the struggle for human rights (Korea), the campaign for self-determination (Taiwan), the repudiation of apartheid (South Africa), and the firm rejection of weapons of mass destruction (Federal Republic of Germany), are all an integral part of the confession of Jesus Christ and, therefore, of the missionary task as well.

Consistently with this emphasis on the missionary task, several of the new confessions of faith lay special stress on the quality of fellowship which must be characteristic of the church. The church is to be a sign of God's gracious concern for human beings: not only by its preaching but also by its living fellowship in the midst of them. Its work in society becomes credible only when it first claims from itself what it demands of society.

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## ● The horizon of the ecumenical movement

Most of the Reformed churches today are in favour of participation in the ecumenical movement. But this participation is still challenged in some quarters and it would be an illusion to imagine that confessionalistic thinking is completely a thing of the past. In most cases, the new confessions of faith, strangely enough, do not deal explicitly with the question of the relationship with other churches. The only exceptions, of course, are the texts produced in union negotiations. These make it quite clear, not only by their verbal statements but even more by their concrete steps towards union, that in the Reformed view the church is not coextensive with the confessional boundaries. God gathers his people from all the churches and it is therefore in principle possible, indeed obligatory, that we should unite together as this one people across the confessional frontiers.

The new confessions of faith take at least a step in this direction by

refraining from explicit demarcations stressing differences from other traditions. There is no explicit repetition today of any of the anathemas found in the classic confessions of the Reformed tradition, whether against the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutherans or the Mennonites. Indeed, the Reformed churches have made efforts to show that these condemnations no longer apply to their respective partner churches today.

This greater openness towards other confessional traditions does not mean, of course, that no demarcation lines at all are drawn in the new confessions of faith. There are implicit anathemas in most of them. The texts which declare a *status confessionis* to exist point explicitly to certain options which made it possible to determine where the church of Jesus Christ is to be found.

This twofold observation is of great importance. It shows how the Reformed churches understand their relationship to other churches. The dividing line between true and pseudo church does not coincide with the line dividing the confessional traditions but follows the decisions made in the confessing of the faith today. Unity comes as the churches "assemble under Christ's banner", as Calvin said in his letter to Cardinal Sadolet. The new confessions of faith are a summons, first of all, to the Reformed churches but then also to the churches of other traditions, to respond together obediently to the summons of Christ.

These seven points seek to identify common characteristics of the new confessions of faith. Much more would obviously need to be said to provide even a moderately full picture of the diversity of these texts. Not only the convergent points but also the points of divergence would then become clear. and a closer study of the texts would inevitably raise the question whether and to what extent these confessions adequately express the liberating truth of the gospel. The only way to achieve a clear picture is by a vigorous exchange between the Reformed churches. We must examine together the confessions of faith produced in the individual churches. When one church confesses its faith it is in principle putting a question to all the other churches. It is seeking a hearing but also open to correction. What the Reformed churches are called to confess together today can only be discovered as we engage in an exchange of this kind.

Communication between the Reformed churches is still not sufficiently advanced to make this process of exchange possible. Could not the jubilee of the Geneva Reformation perhaps provide the spur to a more intensive, vigorous and committed discussion among them?

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