

– A Reforming Catholic Confession –

A “Mere Protestant” Statement of Faith to mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation

THE REFORMING CATHOLIC CONFESSION WHAT WE, PROTESTANTS OF DIVERSE CHURCHES AND THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS, SAY TOGETHER

“We believe...”

TRIUNE GOD

That there is one God, infinitely great and good, the creator and sustainer of all things visible and invisible, the one true source of light and life, who has life in himself and lives eternally in glorious light and sovereign love in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14) – co-equal in nature, majesty, and glory. Everything God does in creating, sustaining, judging, and redeeming the world reflects who God is, the one whose perfections, including love, holiness, knowledge, wisdom, power, and righteousness, have been revealed in the history of salvation. God has freely purposed from before the foundation of the world to elect and form a people for himself to be his treasured possession (Deut. 7:6), to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:3-14).

HOLY SCRIPTURE

That God has spoken and continues to speak in and through Scripture, the only infallible and sufficiently clear rule and authority for Christian faith, thought, and life (*sola scriptura*). Scripture is God’s inspired and illuminating Word in the words of his servants (Psa. 119:105), the prophets and apostles, a gracious self-communication of God’s own light and life, a means of grace for growing in knowledge and holiness. The Bible is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it commands, trusted in all that it promises, and revered in all that it reveals (2 Tim 3:16).

HUMAN BEINGS

That God communicates his goodness to all creatures, but in particular to human beings, whom he has made in his own image, both male and female (Gen. 1:26-27), and accordingly that all men, women, and children have been graciously bestowed with inherent dignity (rights) and creaturely vocation (responsibilities).

FALLENNESS

That the original goodness of creation and the human creature has been corrupted by sin, namely, the self-defeating choice of the first human beings to deny the Creator and the created order by going their own way, breaking God's law for life (Rom. 3:23). Through disobedience to the law-giver, Adam and Eve incurred disorder instead of order (Rom. 8:20-21), divine condemnation instead of approval, and death instead of life for themselves and their descendants (Psa. 51:5; Rom. 5:12-20).

JESUS CHRIST

That Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God become human for us and our salvation (John 3:17), the only Mediator (solus Christus) between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5), born of the virgin Mary, the Son of David and servant of the house of Israel (Rom. 1:3; 15:8), one person with two natures, truly God and truly man. He lived a fully human life, having entered into the disorder and brokenness of fallen existence, yet without sin, and in his words, deeds, attitude, and suffering embodied the free and loving communication of God's own light (truth) and life (salvation).

THE ATONING WORK OF CHRIST

That God who is rich in mercy towards the undeserving has made gracious provision for human wrongdoing, corruption, and guilt, provisionally and typologically through Israel's Temple and sin offerings, then definitively and gloriously in the gift of Jesus' once-for-all sufficient and perfect sacrificial death on the cross (Rom. 6:10; 1 Pet. 3:18) in the temple of his human flesh (Heb. 10:11-12). By his death in our stead, he revealed God's love and upheld God's justice, removing our guilt, vanquishing the powers that held us captive, and reconciling us to God (Isa. 53:4-6; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:14-15). It is wholly by grace (sola gratia), not our own works or merits, that we have been forgiven; it is wholly by Jesus' shed blood, not by our own sweat and tears, that we have been cleansed.

THE GOSPEL

That the gospel is the good news that the triune God has poured out his grace in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that through his work we might have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Jesus lived in perfect obedience yet suffered everything sinners deserved so that sinners would not have to pursue a righteousness of their own, relying on their own works, but rather through trust in him as the fulfillment of

God's promises could be justified by faith alone (sola fide) in order to become fellow heirs with him. Christ died in the place of sinners, absorbing the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23), so that those who entrust themselves to him also die with him to the power, penalty, and (eventually) practice of sin. Christ was raised the firstborn of a renewed and restored creation, so that those whom the Spirit unites to him in faith are raised up and created a new humanity in him (Eph. 2:15). Renewed in God's image, they are thereby enabled to live out his life in them. One with Christ and made alive in him who is the only ground of salvation, sinners are reconciled with God – justified, adopted, sanctified, and eventually glorified children of the promise.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

That the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, the unseen yet active personal presence of God in the world, who unites believers to Christ, regenerating and making them new creatures (Tit. 3:5) with hearts oriented to the light and life of the kingdom of God and to peace and justice on earth. The Spirit indwells those whom he makes alive with Christ, through faith incorporates them into the body of Christ, and conforms them to the image of Christ so that they may glorify him as they grow in knowledge, wisdom, and love into mature sainthood, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). The Spirit is the light of truth and fire of love who continues to sanctify the people of God, prompting them to repentance and faith, diversifying their gifts, directing their witness, and empowering their discipleship.

THE CHURCH

That the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church is God's new society, the first fruit of the new creation, the whole company of the redeemed through the ages, of which Christ is Lord and head. The truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, is the church's firm foundation (Matt. 16:16-18; 1 Cor. 3:11). The local church is both embassy and parable of the kingdom of heaven, an earthly place where his will is done and he is now present, existing visibly everywhere two or three gather in his name to proclaim and spread the gospel in word and works of love, and by obeying the Lord's command to baptize disciples (Matt. 28:19) and celebrate the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19).

BAPTISM AND LORD'S SUPPER

That these two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which some among us call "sacraments," are bound to the Word by the Spirit as visible words proclaiming the promise

of the gospel, and thus become places where recipients encounter the Word again. Baptism and the Lord's Supper communicate life in Christ to the faithful, confirming them in their assurance that Christ, the gift of God for the people of God, is indeed "for us and our salvation" and nurturing them in their faith. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are physical focal points for key Reformation insights: the gifts of God (*sola gratia*) and the faith that grasps their promise (*sola fide*). They are tangible expressions of the gospel insofar as they vividly depict our dying, rising, and incorporation into Jesus' body ("one bread ... one body" – 1 Cor. 10:16-17), truly presenting Christ and the reconciliation he achieved on the cross. Baptism and the Lord's Supper strengthen the faithful by visibly recalling, proclaiming, and sealing the gracious promise of forgiveness of sins and communion with God and one another through the peace-making blood of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26; Col. 1:20).

HOLY LIVING

That through participating in baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as prayer, the ministry of the Word, and other forms of corporate worship, we grow into our new reality as God's people, a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9, 10), called to put on Christ through his indwelling Spirit. It is through the Spirit's enlivening power that we live in imitation of Christ as his disciples, individually and corporately, a royal priesthood that proclaims his excellent deeds and offers our bodies as spiritual sacrifices in right worship of God and sacrificial service to the world through works of love, compassion for the poor, and justice for the oppressed, always, everywhere and to everyone bearing wise witness to the way, truth, and life of Jesus Christ.

LAST THINGS

That in God's own time and way, the bodily risen and ascended Christ will visibly return to consummate God's purpose for the whole cosmos through his victory over death and the devil (1 Cor. 15:26). He will judge the world, consigning any who persist in unbelief to an everlasting fate apart from him, where his life and light are no more. Yet he will prepare his people as a bride for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9), giving rest to restless hearts and life to glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:42-44; Phil. 3:21) as they exult in joyful fellowship with their Lord and delight in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). There they shall reign with him (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 22:5) and see him face to face (1 Cor. 13:12; Rev. 22:4), forever rapt in wonder, love, and praise.

Soli Deo Gloria!