

The Witness of a Good Confession

I Timothy 6: 11-13 says, *“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.”* The word “profession” and “confession” are translated from the same Greek word “homologia” meaning: “which we declare is our own” or “to say the same thing.”

It is believed that the apostles drew up the ancient Apostle’s Creed within fifty years after the close of the canon of Holy Scripture. In concise words they wanted to quickly declare the tenants of the true faith. This seemed to be a driving desire of the early church as voiced in inspiration by Jude, *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”* (Jude, verse 3). The oldest written documented Apostle’s Creed is the Old Roman Form and is given from the Greek of Marcellus, of Ancyra, 341 AD reads thusly: “I believe in God the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary; crucified under Pontius Pilate, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father, from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost; the holy Church; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; (the life everlasting).”

Last weekend I sat in ordination council for Stephen White, who was reared up at Christchurch. He has completed his bachelor’s degree and two master’s degrees. He has now sought, and as of last Sunday, received full ordination into the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t when I have been more honored to lay hands on a candidate.

In the midst of the ordination counsel, we had an epiphany (a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some occurrence or experience.) If a meaning of confession means “to say the same thing,” I, by the grace of God, witnessed the purest example. Stephen had written a sixteen-page compilation of the articles of the faith, which he embraces. His treatise covered Bibliology (The doctrine of the Bible), Christology (the doctrine of Christ), Pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit), Harmartiology (the doctrine of sin), Angelology (the doctrine of angels), Anthropology (the doctrine of mankind), Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), Ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church) and Eschatology (the doctrine of last things). I had not had time to look Stephen’s manuscript over before the questions had begun. When we got to anthropology, I asked Stephen something I have said often from the pulpit of Christchurch. I said, “Stephen, do you concur with the opening lines of the Westminster Confession, which says, “What is the chief purpose of man? The chief purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”? As I gave the ancient answer from the confession, he looked me directly in the eyes and repeated from memory those words. In follow up, Stephen said those words are found at the bottom of page 10. As I have since looked more carefully into the young minister’s treatise, I see him “saying the same thing” I believe and have taught for 39 years. The young preacher has witnessed a good confession! He says the same thing as his father, a great servant in our local church. He has confessed the same thing as his great grandfather, a (now deceased) Texas Baptist preacher. He confesses the same as his pastor who writes these words.

My wife and I had originally planned to go to Stephen’s ordination in Georgia and then come home, but as you well know, one of my greatest mentor’s in the faith, Dr. J. B. Buffington passed from this earth while we were packing for our trip, so we threw in some extra clothes and came on

down to Florida where I have the high honor to speak at his funeral. As I write these words, I am preparing my heart for the message. This thought has engulfed me in view of Stephen's ordination: I confess the same thing as J.B. Buffington, born in 1923. Today while my wife and I were out, we went by the old church where my dad pastored. He was born in 1913, yet we confess the same thing. As we travel back in time, we confess the same thing as the apostles and by God's goodness, we are convinced beyond any shadow of a doubt that we confess the same thing as our Lord, "...*who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession*" (I Timothy 6:13).

My heart's desire is that the youth I minister to today will witness a good confession, i.e. "say the same thing" as those who have gone before. The Christians of ancient days lived by their confession and many died as martyrs "saying the same thing." The Apostle John had won a young man to the Lord Jesus Christ by the name of Polycarp. Although he lived to be an older man, he was not destined to die a natural death. His teachings were those taught by Jesus to John and then to young Polycarp. He never varied, never gave in to heresy and to this day, his death is among the most precious testimonies to the true faith. Rome felt threatened by this man's confession that was the means to many a conversion. These conversions were looked upon as threats to the kingdom of Rome. Allow me to give you the record of his death: One of the judges tried to get him to deny his faith by saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty; reproach Christ!" It is at this point that Polycarp gives his famous response: "Eighty and six years have I now served Christ, and he has never done me the least wrong: How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" The judge loudly cried out three times, "Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian." Polycarp then prayed one of the most doctrinal and humble prayers ever prayed. Upon "Amen" the executioner lit the fire, but something strange happened. The flames arched around Polycarp like a sail of a ship filled with wind and he would not burn. After some time, the command was given to the executioner to stab him with a sword, so he did. The result was that so much blood flowed from the wound that it extinguished the fire. The fire was rekindled and Polycarp's body was burned to ashes. Polycarp was faithful to the Lord unto death. The kingdom of Rome is no longer, but the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ endures in the hearts of the true confessors. In the Apostle Peter's last epistle he wrote, "*Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*" (II Peter 1:1). What an honor to be holding this "like precious faith" handed to me! Stephen White's ordination was a great reminder that this faith will live on with him and all who witness a good confession.

- Pastor Pope -

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