

# Preface

IN THIS BOOK ARE gathered some of the papers I have written during the past seven years. The overall theme is the confession of the Christian faith: its inspiration, content, and context. I take soundings from the past both by way of exposing some of the roots of a confession which I deem to be Reformed, Dissenting, and Catholic, and with a view to illuminating the present. The essays are arranged in two parts: Confessing the Faith in Context, and Confessing the Faith Ecclesially and Hopefully. In a few places I have updated notes and removed purely local references. Since my objectives are sufficiently explained in the Introductions to each Part, I shall here confine myself to thanking those who have granted permission to reprint papers that have already been published in widely-scattered places, and those connected with the publication of this book.

Three of the papers (chapters 7, 9, and 11) are published here in English for the first time.

Chapters 1, 5, and 6 were written at the invitation of the editor, Professor Eduardus Van der Borgh for occasions and publications connected with the International Reformed Theological Institute. Chapter 1, “Confessing the Faith and Confessions of Faith,” and chapter 6, “Confessing the Faith in the Intellectual Context,” were first delivered at the Institute’s Conference held in Seoul, South Korea, in July 2005. The former subsequently appeared among the conference papers published in *Christian Identity* (2008), the latter, in which I responded to a request to outline the position taken in my trilogy on Christian apologetic method, in *The Journal of Reformed Theology* 1.2 (2007). In November 2005, at the kind invitation of Dr. Lee Barrett, I read a version of chapter 2 at Lancaster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania, and in the following year I lectured on the topic at a conference of Polish Reformed ministers held in Warsaw, where Pastor Roman Lipinski was his usual hospitable self. Chapter 6, on “The Use, Abuse, and Relevance of Religion” is found in

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*Religion Without Ulterior Motive* (2006), the volume published to mark the first decade of the International Reformed Theological Institute's life, and the contribution to its nurture of Professor Abraham van de Beek. The three papers were published by Brill Academic Press, to whom I am grateful for permission to reprint them here.

Chapter 2, on "Varieties of English Separatist and Dissenting Writings," was written at the invitation of my brother, Roger D. Sell, the H. W. Donner Professor of Literary Communication at Åbo Akademi University, Finland. The memorable conference of 2006, held in that delightful city, marked the first occasion on which he and I had shared in a project. The paper was published by Ashgate in *Writing and Religion in England 1558–1689: Studies in Community-Making and Cultural Memory* (2009), edited by my brother and his colleague Anthony W. Johnson, and it appears here by kind permission of the publisher. A version of the paper was delivered at the University of Łódź in October 2009, at the invitation of Professor Jarosław Płuciennik who, with his family, entertained me most kindly.

Chapter 3, "Separatists and Dissenters Amidst the Arguments for and Against Toleration," was delivered in May 2011 at a colloquium held at Dr. Williams's Library, London, under the auspices of the Centre for Dissenting Studies, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the journal *Enlightenment and Dissent*. The editor of the journal, Dr. Martin Fitzpatrick, has published the paper in number 28 (2012), and I thank him for his willingness to allow it a fresh lease of life here.

Chapter 4, "Christianity, Secularism, and Toleration," was originally written for a colloquium convened by Professor Nigel Biggar at Trinity College, Dublin in June 2006. The paper was presented again in May 2007, at a conference at the University of Łódź organized by Professor Płuciennik, the proceedings of which appeared first in Grzegorz Gazdam, Irena Hübner, and Jarosław Płuciennik, editors, *Literatura Kultura Tolerancja*, Karków: Universitas, 2008, and then in Andrew R. Murphy, Charles Russell, Jarosław Płuciennik, and Irena Hübner, editors, *Literature, Culture, and Tolerance*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009. I am grateful for the permission of the publishers to reprint it here.

Chapter 7 represents my addition to the torrent of publications prompted by the 500th anniversary, in 2009, of Calvin's birth. I had the pleasure of delivering my paper at a conference at the University of Exeter convened by Dr. David Cornick and others; at the ecumenical Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw; and at the Reformed theological

faculties in Budapest, Sárospatak and Debrecen, with which institutions I have had most cordial relations for some thirty years. The paper was published in Polish in *Rocznik Teologiczny* 51 (2009), and in Hungarian and English in *Sárospataki Füzetek* (2010).

Chapter 8, on Calvin's ecclesiology, was written at the invitation of Dr. Gerard Mannion, and it appeared in a collection he edited with Eduardus Van der Borgh, entitled, *John Calvin's Ecclesiology: Ecumenical Perspectives* (2011). The paper is reprinted by kind permission of the publisher, T. & T. Clark.

Chapter 9 was written at the request of Professor Paul Murray of the University of Durham, and an abbreviated version of it was delivered at a stimulating and well-attended conference on "Receptive Ecumenism" which was held at Ushaw College in January 2009. I am most grateful for Professor Murray's gracious invitation and generous hospitality.

I come finally to chapter 10. I was pleased to be invited by Professor Van der Borgh to contribute to a *Festschrift* for Professor Abraham van de Beek. The suggestion was that I might write on eschatology, and this I did. However, so great was the clamour of scholars to be included in this volume that we were all required to limit our papers to 5,000 words. An abbreviated version of my paper thus appeared in E. Van der Borgh and P. van Geest, *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek*, Leiden: Brill, 2012. The full version is published here for the first time, with the blessing of Brill.

In attempting to ensure a degree of thematic coherence in a collection of papers written on different occasions one runs the risk of repetition—especially the repetition of quotations. I confess that the same words of two or three writers appear more than once in this book. Among them is a quotation from Thomas Helwys's book, *The Mystery of Iniquity*, which appears in longer or shorter form in chapters 2, 3, and 4. I hope that readers will agree that his words are of sufficient importance to bear repetition—especially in a collection of papers prepared during 2012, the year in which the quatercentenary of the publication of Helwys's book is being commemorated.

In the footnotes ODNB stands for *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by Colin Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford: OUP, 2004.

Once again it has been a great pleasure to work with Dr. K. C. Hanson, Dr. Robin Parry, and their obliging and efficient colleagues at the

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enterprising and ever-expanding publishing company, Wipf and Stock. My thanks to them all.

Two living Dissenters remain to be mentioned. The first is Karen, my wife, whose love and support continue unabated, and this means more to me than I can say. The second is Dr. Martin Fitzpatrick, with whom I first had contact through the *Price-Priestley Newsletter*, which he and the late D. O. Thomas founded in 1977, and which blossomed into *Enlightenment and Dissent* in 1982. Dr. Fitzpatrick is a careful and stimulating scholar of the Enlightenment, and through his university teaching and the journal he has encouraged many other scholars. Above all, he is a good friend, and I have much pleasure in dedicating this book to him.

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