Unity in Truth

DONALD MACLEOD

The whole concept of unity in truth is very much under assault at the present time. Indeed ecumenical discussion often seems concerned to drive a firm wedge between the two ideas of unity and truth.

There are two reasons for this in contemporary thought and church life.

First, a philosophical reason. Kant distinguished sharply between pure reason and practical reason and argued that pure reason has as such no access to God. Only in and through conscience, practical reason, can we have some knowledge of the deity. Kant went on to launch an attack on the whole idea that we can know the *noumenon*, the unseen, propositionally. Propositions as such cannot describe God. In many ways that is the basic assumption of modern theology. It is often expressed in church circles in terms of an antithesis between person and proposition. We are told that truth is a person, not a proposition. At a recent Scottish conference involving virtually all the churches, it was planned to hold a common eucharist, but the idea foundered on the objections of the Roman Catholic clergy who could not involve themselves in a common sacrament. This caused enormous consternation. The central conference sermon took as its text the question 'What is truth?', and it was a full-blooded attack (and I mean that!) upon the whole idea that truth meant propositions because such an approach to truth meant that the Roman Catholics could not sit at a Scottish Communion Service and we could not sit with them at a Mass. Propositions, we were told, divide. It is the person grasped in some non-propositional way who unites.

The second reason for the disjunction between unity and truth is that, over large sections of the church, preaching and proclamation are no longer central. Instead, the sacrament, the eucharist, is the central concern. That is, of course, classic Roman Catholicism: in the sacraments we receive spiritual life and have that life restored if we lose it or if we damage it. But over the last hundred or so years that same mentality has infiltrated the Protestant churches, too. It has come significantly into Anglican thinking and it is coming more and more into our Scottish thinking and preaching is being set aside. If we go down that road, in no time at all truth is at a discount. If the central emphasis falls upon proclamation, the intellect and truth and the message are at a premium. But ecumenism has a vested interest in shifting attention away from truth and intellect to something much more nebulous: we can all sit together at the Lord's table if we forget all those nasty things called propositions.

It is because we have this two-fold approach, the de-emphasizing of reason and the emphasizing of the sacraments, that in recent ecumenical activity there has been such a sharp tension between unity on the one hand and truth on the other. In many ways the Church of England has the worst of both of those worlds. Through Charles Gore, you had this fusion of Kantianism and sacramentalism in what is called Liberal Anglo-Catholicism. You find its acme and culmination in the position of such a man as Don Cupitt who would deny the resurrection of Christ and yet believe in 'the real presence'! That is a quite astonishing fusion: that we can have in the Eucharist the presence of *the thing itself*—(the body of Christ)—and yet no resurrection! We have escaped through the work of men of gigantic intellectual power into a world of mysticism, a world of unreason, that is very close to magic.

We as evangelicals have to stand firm against both of those emphases. We have to insist on the primacy of truth: and truth conceived as expressible in propositional form. It is often said, of course, that we should emphasize love rather than intellect. But even two people in love have a certain knowledge of one another propositionally and exchange propositions about one another. At the most momentous, existential level, the words 'I love you' are propositional. 'He or she loves' is also propositional. We cannot in the name of relationships escape into the world of the non-propositional. Propositions lie at the very heart of the Christian faith. 'Christ died for our sins and rose again the third day and was seen': these are all propositions.

Equally, we cannot allow that the church should move from a preaching-centred ministry to a sacrament-centred ministry. The sacraments have their own due place. In Reformed thought, they are divine ordinances and it is therefore mandatory that we avail ourselves of them. But Paul said: 'God sent me not to baptize but to preach the Gospel.' One of the greatest needs today is to call the mainline church back to the primacy of proclamation. It is by the foolishness of the *kerygma*, of the proclamation, that it has pleased God to save and it is calamitous that there has been such a steady erosion of this particular ministry in the churches in recent years.

So then, if we want to explore the theme of unity in truth, we must emphasize the importance of propositional truth and the importance of proclamation as the church's central ministry to the world of our own time and our own place. This is the foundation of our ecumenism. The question is not, Can we sit together? The question is, 'Can we preach together?' Biblical ecumenism is not something which exhausts itself in sacramental, mystical, apophatic participation in the Lord's Supper. It is something which expresses itself in a community of proclamation. That is certainly how it was seen at the Reformation. The Reformers gave us those great creeds

and confessions, because, for them, unity was unity in preaching. It was not unity in clapping hands or unity in sitting at the sacrament. It was this great fact: they shared a common message. They had a common understanding of the plight of man and a common proclamation of God's answer to that plight and so their communion and community were credal and confessional and proclamatory. They were one in the message which they proclaimed. That is why they spoke of their creeds as *symbols*, a word which comes from the two Greek words that mean 'to throw together': *syn ballein*. It was the truth that threw them together and it was the truth that held them together. You have these great Articles because it was of importance that within the Church of England one pulpit should not speak against another on matters of fundamental doctrine. There should be one gospel. There was liberty on much else but there had to be agreement on the great central emphases of the Christian proclamation. Those creeds, those symbols, are themselves expressions of the primacy of proclamation and of the centrality of preaching in the life and work of the Christian church.

Which brings me to this: what is to be the content of such creeds and confessions? Do we put into our creeds all that we may happen to believe? Do we cram into our confessions every detail of our own personal theology? There are those, for example, who believe that the Received Text is the only valid text of Holy Scripture. Does that go into our articles? Do we put in Augustine's view of evil as deprivation, as purely negative, the absence of something, not something positive? Do we put into our confessions our current insights, for example, into the impassibility of God? Or the doctrine of the Rapture, does that go into our confessions?

No, manifestly not. We face here the whole problem of the hierarchy of truths. That concept was given great prominence by the Second Vatican Council and in many ways that has put it in bad standing among evangelicals. But this is by no means a Roman Catholic idea. It was a concept held very firmly by John Calvin and held equally firmly by the Reformers who followed him and by the nineteenth-century men of impeccable orthodoxy who have moulded so much of current evangelical thinking. In fact, the very existence of creeds, confessions and articles is itself a testimony to the fact that the Church, historically, has regarded some doctrines as of crucial and indispensable importance. The church never put all that its theologians believed into its creeds. It put in certain selected doctrines on which there manifestly had to be agreement and unanimity.

But this is not a matter simply of Vatican II or Calvin or our existing creeds. It is a fact that the New Testament itself tells us very plainly that there are some things which are of first importance. You will find that in I Cor. 15 when the Apostle Paul tells us that he, in his traditioning, his proclamation, emphasized certain points. He puts it

in verse 3 this way: 'What I received, I passed on to you as of first importance.' He gave primary emphasis. He gave immediate attention. He laid constant stress on those things which he calls 'the first things'. These *first things* are a distinct category from much else that the apostle went on to lay down and to expound for the church of God. Here there is clear Biblical warrant for the whole concept of primary doctrines: for this idea that there are some things of foremost importance.

The question then becomes: How do we identify those things which are of first importance? There are, I think, three or four principles that may guide us.

First, there are certain doctrines which the Scriptures themselves unambiguously declare to be indispensable and to involve the integrity of the very gospel itself. You find the Apostle Paul, in the same chapter of I Corinthians, telling us that if we deny that Christ rose from dead then our faith is empty and our preaching is empty. He is saying categorically, 'Here is a doctrine without which there can be no Christianity—without it we are of all men most miserable'. I am not saying that Paul is asserting this of the resurrection, defined and described *anyhow*. It is, I think, true that the very problem at Corinth was a doctrine identical with that of Bishop Jenkins: that the resurrection happened in the mind of the disciples. Paul is not saying, 'Well if you grant that, I consider you fit to remain as a teacher of the church of God'. Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the flesh, (*carnis*) of the body of Christ, and saying that without it our faith and our preaching are absolutely empty.

When he turned to the Galatians Paul raised the question of justification by faith alone. If anyone comes to you and denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone, then that is another gospel and so much other that it is anathema. He said in the most unambiguous way, 'Here is something which belongs to the very essence'.

I need not go on to explain what the other essentials laid down by the New Testament are. My point is that the New Testament itself says explicitly: here are certain doctrines and they belong to the essence, and without them the Gospel itself and the church itself collapses and becomes a vanity; indeed becomes a false witness to God.

The second principle is this: there are doctrines which are revealed in the Scriptures with unambiguous clarity and the fact of their being so revealed is itself testimony to their central importance. Now, not everything in God's Word is equally clear or equally clear to all and there is room among Christians for debate and discussion on, for example, the details of church order and some of the details of eschatology. On these things we find almost teasing references but we do not find sufficient clarity to secure the consent of the whole people of God. But there are other doctrines that have commanded the

virtually unanimous assent of the saints in all ages. They unite Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine and John of Damascus and Calvin and Luther and John Owen and John Knox and Whitefield and Wesley and Edwards and Simeon and Wescott and Lightfoot. All these men saw these truths in the same light, because the revelation is unambiguously clear. It is full, it is frequent, I have in mind such things as the deity of Christ. It is woven into the very fabric of the New Testament. It is never discussed or debated—no sign of the least controversy on that great issue. You open the *Epistle of James* or *Paul* to the *Galatians* and there you find the church already in the early forties in full possession of this doctrine of the deity of Christ. It is in every stratum, every layer. It is in all the Gospels, in all the epistles. It is in *John*. It is in every source behind our Gospel. It is everywhere. And if you preach in Biblical proportion and balance then you will preach the deity of Christ more often than anything else because it is a central doctrine, revealed with such unambiguous and such remorseless clarity: with what I suppose I might call 'revelatory overkill'.

The third principle is this: those doctrines are fundamental which have emerged as gains from the great controversies in which the church has been engaged. The church has debated them. It has analysed them. It has refined them. It has seen them from every possible angle and it has come to certain conclusions and those conclusions form the content of what we call the dogmas, the official statements of the church and its creeds on those great controversial issues. I have in mind, for example, the Arian controversy in which the church faced challenges to the deity of Christ. I have in mind the controversies on Christ's person on which again the church came to a clear insight. I have in mind the Pelagian controversy in which the church discussed the nature of man and the nature of grace. I have in mind the Reformation in which the church looked at the great question 'What must a man or woman or boy or girl do to be saved?', and for a hundred years, with tremendous efficiency, with incomparable earnestness and ability, thrashed out that question and came again to certain conclusions.

One of the great tragedies of current ecumenism is its contempt for our ecumenical past: the assumption that we can disregard Tertullian and Athanasius and Luther and that we can go back and that we indeed must go back, as if those men had never been, as if their work had never been, as if those great councils had never been, to the elemental affirmation 'Jesus is Lord'. If we do that we will have to reopen all the great controversies. Modern ecumenism is kicking away the past and in doing so rejecting the whole concept of historical ecumenicity. I find that totally unacceptable. Surely one of our great comforts and great longings is that one day, in the glory beyond, we shall see those heroes of the faith, those men whom God raised up to

thrash out the answers to certain questions! By and large, sadly, Evangelicalism has left patristics to the Catholics and to the Liberals and that is a great pity because our inheritance is not simply that of the Puritans or of the Reformers. It is that equally of patristics and I think it would give much needed breadth of vision, not to say much needed tolerance, to evangelicalism if it could go back more frequently to the insights and the preoccupations of Athanasius and Augustine and the great Cappadocians. The Puritans indeed are magnificent in so many areas. But our historical ecumenicity must be much, much deeper than that.

I am saying, then, that the truths of first importance are those asserted by God's Word to be so, those revealed with unambiguous clarity and those thrashed out in the great, historic controversies of the church of God. What would that mean in detail? What would it give us in terms of specific and precise doctrine?

It would give us first of all the doctrine of the canonicity of Holy Scripture. The great debate in the earliest years of the church was about the rule of faith. I am not sure but that that debate is being in effect, although not in theory, reopened at the present time. The reports of the life of Christ, (incidents, episodes and sayings of our Lord's life and ministry which are unambiguously described and related in the New Testament documents) are dismissed by so many of our leading Christian teachers. I am not thinking simply of those on the extremes of theological radicalism but of men like James Dunn who would regard the *Gospel of John* as virtually of no value whatever for Christology, at least of no historical value. The status of God's Word as canon, our being bound by the teaching of Scripture, that whole question has been reopened in recent years. I am not speaking simply of the Bible's value as archaeology or of its cosmogeny, but of its most specific theological statements. For example, it is argued by many that we cannot deduce from the *Gospel of John* the doctrine of the Lord's pre-existence. We are told, 'Yes, John teaches it but he does not reflect the Lord's own teaching'. Something is Biblical and yet not canonical. Surely our starting point if we want unity in truth must be acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God.

I give you a supplementary point (and it is only a supplementary point and I am not going to answer it). It is the question whether your fundamental doctrines must also include a theory of inspiration. In other words, is the doctrine of plenary inspiration or verbal inspiration or the doctrine of inerrancy a fundamental doctrine? Is it one you want to put in your creed? I am raising the question not because I have any doubts personally about this theory of inspiration but because we have to realize that there are certain prominent evangelical Christians in Britain today, as in the past (men like James Orr and James Denney for example), who do not believe in plenary

inspiration and certainly not in inerrancy. When the time comes to write a new creed for an evangelical denomination we shall have to give very serious thought to this matter. Do we encapsulate in our confession or creed a statement which requires belief in the inerrancy of Scripture? (and thus exclude, for example, a man like Howard Marshall)?

The second fundamental doctrine is the deity of Christ. I need not again go into the question why this would be fundamental. As I said earlier, it is asserted so fully, so repeatedly in the Word of God. That is one great reason. But I take you back to the whole motivation of Athanasius as he fought his battle against heresy. He was not fighting it simply on Biblical, theological grounds. He was fighting it for this reason: the whole status of our Christian faith as a religion depended upon the deity of Christ. What is Christianity? It is the worship of Jesus. That is what Pliny said long ago: 'These Christians meet in the mornings and they sing hymns to Christ as to a god.' Now, Athanasius said: 'Here we are, for three hundred years we have been worshipping this Jesus and here comes a brilliant logician to tell us that this Jesus is only a creature who once was not. He was created. He was made, not begotten. He is a median being between God and man, between God and creation. Now look, [he said] if that man is right and he is telling the truth, this whole religion must stop because we have no right to worship him unless he is God. We are idolators.'

It was a practical and a religious question. Have we the right to bow the knee to Jesus? Have we the right to fall on our faces as dead and to command the allegiance of every man and woman, boy and girl, to this incarnate Son of the living God? Only if the Word was God. Only if in Him there is all the fullness and all the reality of God. I do not think that despite all the centuries of debate and despite some of the apparent and obvious difficulties of the concept, we have yet improved on the Nicene formula that Christ is consubstantial with God. Indeed I take the view that not only is the deity of Christ a fundamental doctrine but that the word 'homoousios', however it be put in English, is the best way we have yet found to express and to protect the great concept. It is absurd to go back beyond the *homoousion* to the primitive confession 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.

Obviously in seeking to give this definitive, positive statement of the deity of Christ, one is also taking a particular negative position. We stand against Arius. But we stand, too, against the various forms of adoptionism. Adoptionism is the teaching that Christ in some way *became* God. As many of you know this is becoming very much the in-heresy of Anglican Christology, reflected, for example, in John Robinson's book *The Humanity of God* and reflected substantially too in Lampe's *God as Spirit*. It is of course part of our Presbyterian problem as well. But the interesting thing is that it is an old, old heresy going back into the second century, when this doctrine arose

that in some way Christ *became* God at his Baptism or *became* God at his Resurrection. Is it not fascinating that in the name of trying to demythologize the Gospel, to make it more palatable to modern man, we are going back to those ancient heresies? If, however, we say that Christ is God, we are saying that he is eternal God. He never *became* God. 'In the beginning', says John, '*was* the Word'. Here is a beautiful use of Greek grammar to express the ongoing, open-ended being of the Word of God: *was* the Word and the Word *was* with God and the Word *was* God. The Word *became* flesh but the Word never *became* God.

We start, then, with this great primary fact: We are worshipping him. Have we the right to worship him? Yes, if we bear in mind the great words of the hymn:

> Who is he in yonder stall
> At whose feet the shepherds fall?
> 'Tis the Lord, O wondrous story!
> 'Tis the Lord, the king of glory!
> At his feet we humbly fall;
> Crown him, crown him Lord of all!

If he is not the Lord of all and the Lord of glory then we have no right to worship him.

And then there is this: the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ. I shall not go far into this. But the church had to debate this whole problem of Godhead and Manhood in Christ. How were they related? To us today, I suppose, the debate seems remote and the technical detail seems very wearisome. Let me remind you, however, of this: Who is anti-Christ? the one who denies that Jesus came *in the flesh*! It would be a perilous assumption to believe this morning that the humanity of Jesus will never again be under threat or under attack. It is the hallmark of the church today that it is obsessed with the human. It thinks of Christ, as it says, 'from below'. But we cannot afford to ignore the humanity or to allow any erosion of it. I am concerned sometimes that evangelicals, in their reaction to the liberal Jesus and the Arian Jesus, are soft-pedalling on the incarnation. The assumption seems to be that if you concede too much humanness you imperil the deity, and so let us be quiet about the humanness. We must not do that. That is the anti-Christ. Let us remember the great theological issues at stake. It is as man that Christ obeys. It is what he *takes* that he saves. More fundamentally still, it is only because he took our humanness and entered into our human experiences that God can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. God through Christ has gathered up into himself what it means to be a human being. He has lived a human life. Any tampering with the

humanness, therefore, is perilous. We certainly must not feel that we are bound to minimize the humanity in order to safeguard the deity. It is one of the glories of Reformed theology, in fact, that above every other tradition, it has given such firm and such marked prominence to the humanity of Jesus, to his sufferings in Gethsemane and on the Cross and to his full participation in the sufferings of the present time.

The fourth fundamental is the Augustinian doctrine of man. Here we think immediately of Augustine's involvement in the Pelagian controversies and his assertion of original sin. That is a very important aspect both of Augustinian and of Biblical thought. But it is not where I want to begin because he was fighting on another front, too. He was fighting on the Manichean front and by that I mean this. There was a school of philosophy which regarded evil as part of the nature of things and which therefore regarded man as essentially evil. He was made evil. It went right back into his origins. Now it may seem to you to be inconsequential. But you bear in mind the gravity of that. It means that God is saddled with the responsibility of our human sin because God made this creature. If evil is part of the nature of things, part of the very essence of creation, then the responsibility goes right back to God. In a curious way, modern evolutionary thought is leading in the very same direction: sinfulness, fallenness, is part of the very essence and the very nature of man. It is part of the legacy of his pre-human past. There is a very curious link between Manicheism at that level and evolutionism in our own modern situation. Many modern theologians have to espouse the same idea that evil belongs to the creation. Now you see what Augustine did against the Manichees. He interposed between God and evil a doctrine of creation and a doctrine of the fall. God made man upright. He did not take his first step as a primitive, selfish savage. In the Biblical doctrine he took his first step as a perfectly holy being in the Garden of Eden. And where did the sin come from? It came from a human decision and a human choice. That does not solve all the questions but it certainly goes a long way to establishing the necessary distance between God and sin. God did not create a brute. God made man in his own image and man fell in the exercise of his God-given freedom with no compulsion from his environment and no compulsion from within his own nature. He fell by his own free decision and choice.

And then Augustine goes on to discuss the questions raised by Pelagius and to elaborate the doctrine of the Fall, the doctrine of man's depravity and the doctrine of the enslavement of man's will. All this is expressed in the notorious Calvinistic tenet of total depravity. But bear in mind that total depravity means not that any human being is depraved absolutely or that all are depraved equally or that any of us is as depraved as he might be but that there is no

area of our human functioning that sin has not affected. Our emotions, our affections, our relationships, our decisions, ambitions, aspirations and not least our intellects and our consciences have been affected by the Fall.

In passing, let me say this. It is a very plausible, indeed, a demonstrable, historical thesis that this doctrine is absolutely essential to authentic evangelicalism. The moment we begin to weaken on it we shall cease to be evangelicals. If you do not have a Biblical doctrine of sin you will very soon find that you begin to minimize the kind of Saviour you need and the kind of atonement you need and the kind of grace you need and that is why you find that, with all the variations between them, men like Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Wesley and Edwards, Arminians as well as Calvinists, were all agreed that man is such that he must be born-again. There has been a great erosion of that emphasis in so much current Christian thought and that is alarming because unless you start off with the plight of man defined in Biblical terms then you are not going to need the Biblical Evangel or the Biblical Jesus or the Biblical Cross or the Biblical Pentecost. The Gospel is God's provision for a specific malady. Long ago Anselm said to his antagonists: 'You do not like my doctrine of the atonement with its emphasis on objective sacrifice and satisfaction offered to God. But the real problem is that you have never realized the gravity of sin.' That is always why people do not see the relevance or the glory of the Cross. They have no sense of need: those who are whole have no need of a physician. Today you can only hope to make your gospel relevant if you can convince people that they need salvation and that is why you need your Augustinian doctrine of man.

But you need, too, your Protestant doctrine of justification. As you know, this has been the main theme of A.R.C.I.C. II, a fascinating document which must, I think, make many hearts tremble in the Vatican. At the same time it is ambiguous at key points. But that is not my business at the moment. The question is this: what is the nature of justification? A.R.C.I.C. II concedes, so far as I can see, that *to justify* is the opposite of *to condemn*. That is a fundamental Reformation insight. It is also an essential part of the New Testament presentation that man needs a change in his status. He needs the pardoning of his sin. He needs the obliteration of his guilt. But the more fundamental question is this: on what grounds and for what reason does God justify us? Or to put it in another way: what kind of man, what kind of woman, does God justify? The mediaeval doctrine which caused Luther such distress was that God justifies a *good* man, however such a man was going to be defined. Luther tried all he knew to become a good man and so do many still and yet he found at last that he could get peace only at this point: *simul iustus ac peccator*. He was saying to God in his human pride: 'Lord I'll take peace only if

you give it to me on the basis of my being a good man. I want to be a good man first.' And God said to him: 'Look Martin, you have to take my peace as a sinner.' That was Luther's great discovery, that he could have God's peace as an ungodly man. Now of course it is wide open to the charge of antinomianism and in a different context I would have to define it with some care. All I am saying here is that it is a fundamental, Biblical, Reformation insight, the very core of God's good news for man. You do not need to be sinless, to be perfect, to be good, to be godly before you can have peace. We have that marvellous paradox in Romans where the Apostle Paul can say at one point, 'Oh! wretched man that I am!' and can say a little later, 'Nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus!'. Both are true: and true simultaneously.

I shall leave these particular details there and close with some practical points.

I want to say, first of all, that whatever credal confession you have, the terms of subscription to it are as important as the creed itself. There is a sense in which you need no further articles, no other articles than those you have. The defect has not lain in the articles. It has lain in the terms of subscription to them and that has happened in our Presbyterian churches too. Even where the standards of Westminster have not been abandoned the form of subscription to them has been significantly altered and modified and this has completely changed their status and authority.

My second point is that whatever creed you have it is useless if you do not implement it. It is no use saying, 'That man is breaking his ordination vows', whispering that in various tea-parties, unless we are prepared to do something about it. Emotionally, it is a very difficult thing to do. But has David Jenkins convinced the Church of England that after all he is orthodox? Or are we as evangelicals saying with the majority of mainstream clergy that a heresy trial is inconceivable? Now if discipline is inconceivable, it is quite pointless to have standards or a creed. Even the politicians know that a law which cannot be enforced discredits law as such—it makes the law an ass. It is far better to have a creed which is very limited in the number of its articles but is properly subscribed to and practically enforceable than to have a large and comprehensive creed, loosely subscribed to and in practice unenforceable.

Again let me say this: we ought to extend the hand of fellowship across every kind of barrier to those who hold the same truth, the same Gospel message, as ourselves. Now I do not subscribe to Dr. Lloyd-Jones's call for secession and I deprecate a separatist mentality but I think it is important to bear in mind that he was saying something else too. He was saying: What is the point of remaining in those tense and lonely situations in mixed denominations when you could be closely affiliated with each other? Now, for good or ill (for

ill, in my view) that Conference address was the beginning of a great divide in English Evangelicalism. You have gone your separate ways since. I have been pondering in the last twenty-four hours how we could fuse this Conference with the Carey Conference or the Leicester Conference. Is it inconceivable? Is the gulf too wide? But it is a challenge I put to you: Are we at some level choosing the fellowship and association of those with whom we can live only in tension, in preference to that of those who share our beliefs and share our vision, and with whom we are substantially one? There is no doubt that a great deal of energy is expended in conflict *within* the denominations which would be far better utilised in united missionary outreach alongside those of like precious faith. I am not here prescribing policies. I am only sowing thoughts.

And my last point is this: why do we hold the truth? and what does it mean to hold the truth? Do we hold the truth only on the pages of a creed? Do we use that truth only for the purposes of canon law? No, we hold that truth in order to preach. The Reformers did not say that the mark of a true church was the possession of sound theological standards. They said, The mark of a true church is the preaching of the Word! There is a great need to re-ally theology and the Church, theology and proclamation, to fuse them into that glorious synthesis of logic on fire which John Stott and Martyn Lloyd-Jones so brilliantly exemplify.

Let me go back to Hebrews: 'Hold fast your confession.' The Writer did not mean, Make sure the Privy Council applies it correctly! He meant, Let it loose! You have convictions. Let men know what you believe and make sure the sound of the good news of God's grace enfleshed and embodied in Christ goes forth to every family in this land. The truth is not simply to be held. The truth is to be fearlessly and unambiguously proclaimed.

DONALD MACLEOD is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Free Church of Scotland College.