

Editorial: "Theology Is For Confession" **By Theodore J. Hopkins**

Nearly thirty years ago Gerhard Forde wrote his well-known treatise *Theology Is for Proclamation*.¹ For me, this book was a game-changer. I began to see theology not primarily as an academic enterprise that finds the truth at all costs, but as a discipline that is fundamentally oriented to the church and directed toward a specific end: God's eschatological announcement of the Gospel message in Jesus Christ, "Your sins are forgiven." This understanding of theology has continued to propel my own teaching at the university level, and Forde's distinction between explanation and proclamation remains a necessary distinction so that the gospel is not elided by a system. In Forde's own metaphor, the distinction helps to ensure the bridegroom is heard saying, "I love you," to his bride and not merely a lecture on the nature of love.

With some trepidation and a recognition of the continuing significance of Forde's work, I wish to put forward an alternative to broaden and enrich his proposal that theology is for proclamation. I believe it is more helpful to say that theology is for confession.² Before I describe what that means, let me explain why I think the adjustment is necessary: the church. Forde's notion of proclamation easily separates Christians from each other so that every Christian stands before God, yes, but all seem to stand in their own separate space

For these reasons, I suggest instead that theology is for confession. What does this mean? Theology as a discipline of the church is to “foster, advocate, and drive to” confession.⁵ First, this means that theology drives to confession of sins and the good news of the absolution. That is, theology is not designed to simply provide eternal answers to theological questions but to open space for repentance and the proclamation of God’s promises in Jesus. In this aspect of my suggestion, I am not intending to say anything other than what Forde has elucidated so well already. Second, this means that theology is to advocate and foster a robust confession of faith. Just as the divine service moves from proclamation in confession and absolution to the confession of the Creed, so too theology must cultivate a true, robust, and meaningful confession of the Christian faith. To use Forde’s imagery of love with the bridegroom and the bride, theology’s role is not only to make space for the bridegroom to proclaim his love but also to describe Christ the groom and narrate his story in such a way that the bride knows the groom, delights in speaking about the groom, and sees him as her whole world. In other words, the church learns to understand who Jesus is, confesses her faith in him boldly, confesses him in praise joyfully, and knows all reality in relation to him.

I believe that this notion that theology is to foster confession is more helpful than Forde’s understanding of theology for proclamation for five reasons. First,

and empty the trash bin). Such is neither my desire nor intention. Pastors and all Christians must divide Law and Gospel in such a way that the good news of Jesus the Savior is spoken, I to you, the bridegroom to his bride. Only when the promise is given will sinners believe and respond in confession. Thus, if my suggestion has any merit, it will not be to curtail proclamation but to widen the eyes of the church so that Christians who are addressed by the bridegroom come and see their lives with others who also have been addressed by the same Lord. Christians would come to see themselves as the children of God who learn to confess the same crucified Christ in their words and praise the Triune God with their lips together with the whole church past and present, and to the world in which they dwell. Such a goal, however, will take more than a change in slogan.

Theodore J. Hopkins
Co-Managing Editor of CTJ