CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF FAITH, THEN AND NOW (CONFESSION OF FAITH AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CHRISTIANS)

Daniel Trihandarkha, S.Sos., M.Th.

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Jemaat Kristus Indonesia (STTJKI)

daniamdg@sttjki.ac.id

Diterima : 15 Desember 2021

Direvisi : 19 Desember 2021

Disetujui : 20 Desember 2021

ABSTRACT

Confession of faith is part of the tradition in the ecclesial life of believers. We now know The Apostle Creeds which are predominately used in Protestant Church in Indonesia has gone through long stories and journey until it reaches what we have now in Indonesian language. Confession of faith is slightly different because they were made in the different times and different challenges compared with Apostle Creed. This writing will explore the foundational understanding of why confession of faith is necessary in the time of reformation only-the reason will be explained later. How it was and how it is now in the life of believers? We will see the biblical basis, and how it influenced the formulation of the Confession of Faith. Finally we will see the ever present relevance for all of us now.

ABSTRAK

Pengakuan iman adalah bagian dari tradisi dalam kehidupan gerejawi orang percaya. Kita sekarang tahu Syahadat Rasul yang mayoritas digunakan di Gereja Protestan di Indonesia telah melalui cerita panjang dan perjalanan hingga mencapai apa yang kita miliki sekarang dalam bahasa Indonesia. Pengakuan iman sedikit berbeda karena dibuat dalam waktu yang berbeda dan tantangan yang berbeda dibandingkan dengan Pengakuan Iman Rasuli. Tulisan ini akan mengupas pemahaman mendasar mengapa pengakuan iman hanya diperlukan pada masa reformasi—alasan akan dijelaskan kemudian. Bagaimana keadaannya dan bagaimana keadaannya sekarang dalam kehidupan orang percaya? Kita akan melihat dasar alkitabiah, dan bagaimana hal itu mempengaruhi perumusan Pengakuan Iman. Akhirnya kita akan melihat relevansi yang selalu ada untuk kita semua sekarang.

INTRODUCTION

What is confession of faith? Confession of faith to the lordship of Jesus Christ maybe considered as originary practice in the Christian life (Thompson, 2020). It means that Christians, originally, did confession of faith as their daily important practice to do, without one Christians could not see themselves as follower of Jesus. Ziegler continued that 1 Cor 12:1-3 holds the Spirit as *sine qua non* to the confession of faith (Thompson, 2020) . If we see closely to those verses, Paul in other words, sternly affirm the presence of Holy Spirit as the sole prerequisites before one can utter the confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit, as Paul affirmed, plays it roles as third eternal person in Trinity, as a seal to receive promise now and to come (Eph 1:14; 4:30).

While the apostle creed was formulated in the year of 150-250 AD in Rome through Latin Church and was not until the formulation of the fusion between the Christological and Trinitarian in 430 AD that it went through different versions of revision. It had not been finished until the year of 700AD, where the final 7th form is included in *textus receptus* (Thompson, 2020). Creeds are needed as there were many heretics and cults causing problems in the first and second centuries in the Christian teaching in the empire. Confession of Faith (CF) in the contrary put itself in the opposition to the unified, monogamous, and principalities of the Roman Catholic. Reformation is tightly tied with the formulation of this Confession for the specific purpose. We will discuss about Luther's motivation behind it all.

METHOD

We will see how CF is adopted by contemporary churches for various reasons. The Mennonite, for example, who generally express themselves as the biblical people, considers confession of faith as aesthetic words from biblical phrase which properly voicing biblical truths yet within the harmonize and doctrinal and topical scheme (Zerbe, 2007). Confession of faith ties tightly with church doctrine, as for today with certain denomination. The biblical doctrines, supposedly, are systemized into a preferred statement to support the church dogmatic identity, or the in the other words, dogmatic position of certain church is seen as an endorsement from the bible. How we view Bible also determine the confession of faith of churches or organization.

This writing will initially explore the basis of constituting confession of faith, what challenges to it, what it was retrospectively in Reform Tradition and finally then offer contemporary suggestions toward it.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Authority of the Bible

Confession of faith or statement of faith closely related to bible and how such organization treats the bible. For the evangelicals, for example, the *inerrancy* of the bible is usually found in the churches, organization or higher education provider (Mohler Jr. et al., 2013). If you see through the confession of faith toward bible in Presbyterian Church in USA, the oldest one with more progressive stance, never mentioned the word inerrant, God-breathed or divinely inspired words of God, they call it “Sacred”(Mohler Jr. et al., 2013).

For the evangelical proponent like the late **Norman Geisler**, the inerrancy of the bible is foundational axiom-a necessary truth that follows upon God’s truthfulness (Mohler Jr. et al., 2013). The very notion of revealed God in the bible of his righteousness, almighty and perfectness will be compromised if the very words upon which he speaks, has, even a miniscule, mistake. God is not trustworthy if the words contain error, he is not omniscience if there are some contradictions in the bible, and he is not omnipotent if he cannot preserve the very truth about the bible itself.

Albert Mohler supports what Geisler’s said about inerrancy position. To which the inerrancy not only bears about the truthfulness of the scripture, but also the theological conviction, conviction about who God is, and how God communicates and relates in and through the text of the Scripture What is God, who is not able to communicate through untrustworthy text? (Mohler Jr. et al., 2013). The question is a direct and logical consequence of ascribing bible as an erroneous text. One’s characters and traits will be determined by the products or materials he chooses to disclose about themselves.

Politics and Culture

The progressives see the necessity of arguing the doctrine of inerrancy as it might take a church in a certain position in recent political issues. For example Samuel Perry sees the inerrancy as inaccurate view how to see and interpret the bible in the frame of contemporary social political situation i.e. same sex marriage, thus interpretation is muddled with its effect. Perry also said that inerrancy is a proxy of advocating the position of certain conservatives or evangelical churches or organization, rather than postulating a theological reflection itself.¹ We know the discussion about the equality of marriage is still prevalent in western country like US, UK and Australia, although the tensions are now seemingly dissipating due to pandemic. This is not the main religious issue in Asia, because mainly Islam has unified opposing stance toward LGBTQ movement, which quite contrary with Christian with much more diverse in nature (Perry, 2015).

People usually put these two opposite groups in large, traditional dichotomy, but there is also another group of churches who need to confront the interpretation, not the doctrine of inerrancy itself, for their own theological and ecclesial needs as well. The Assembly of God, for example, challenges the interpretation of the bible proposed by conservative of women is not supposed to speak before the congregation. Because their Pentecostal or charismatic dogmatic who allows women in the church to prophesy and become part in the clergy (Hoover, 2012). They even affirm and proud to recognize themselves as one of the inerrantists who allow women to be ordained fully as part of clergies (Hoover, 2012). This view is clearly opposed by Southern Baptist Convention, the largest evangelical and Protestant movement in United States where mainly, upon the high view of the bible, fully adhere to the submission of Eve to Adam, and Paul's specific instruction to women to remain quite in the church (Eerly, 1979) .

Inevitably, there are motives behind formulating the confession of faith to accommodate certain gesture of organization or church toward contemporary issues in politics or cultures. It is difficult to see confession of faith as a static entity, rather it will develop continually as the world

¹ (Perry, 2015)p.3

and its complexities also are ever-changing. Some organizations fundamentalist will remain unmoved in their core values as a response toward surrounding situations, without trying to criticize such gesture, there is unavoidable situations changes in the environment. People died and new people are born, technology will keep on developing and culture will slightly be altered or even changed by strong power of globalization and tidal wave of information. Conservatives and fundamentalist alike are strongly grounded in the biblical values and it serves them right on their own respective purpose, yet one cannot deny that expressions out of that conviction must be viable to change, or else the community they serve who lives with recent advancement in mobile technology, the rapid converge of communications medias and social problems they face every day, will not understand or comprehend the values they are trying to convey in their operation and service.

Existential Certainty

Alvin Toffler wrote that the illiterate are those who are not able to write or read but those who refuse or cannot learn, unlearn and relearn (Toffler: 1984). Toffler readily stated that the only way people or organization to survive is to keep the mindset of openness of steadily learning and observing and chip away the attitude of closeness toward the world.

While thus concern is seemingly adopted nicely by the progressive, there is also a problem with adopting too much and changing rapidly to the extent of serving the needs in community. The values of certainty and consistencies are what people needed. Without one people will lose hope and has identity crisis, no matter how convenient the adoptive stance one might have, he or she will face the reality of pain, suffering and death. Those are absolute things to come existentially.

Let's take the one of most scientific tenet of medical science, cancer treatment. People and doctors alike are often grappling with uncertainty of cancer, whether is curable, it is unprecedented cases or it is out of hopes. The patient, through the study, have shown different responses toward doctors observed statement, when listen to the uncertainty of their sickness patients are struggling, and uncertainty just proves of inability to control thus create low degree

of confidence in expectancy and hopes (Karlsson et al., 2014). Surprisingly, when the patients were informed about the stage of their cancer were incurable, there were eventually sense of relieve among the patients. They were slowly embracing the inconvenient new reality (Karlsson et al., 2014). Certainty surely has its own merit. That absolute phase of life of birth, sickness and pain is reality any churches and organization need to face and develop values for the member and leadership to follow, and subsequently, share that value as culture- adopted and habitually exercised in the mind of the people. Certainty does give hope in the state of predicaments and adversities no matter semantically, positively or negatively it is formulated. We will see how the in the era of church fathers believers used this confession of faith as a certainty to hope for toward persecutions and celebration.

Biblical Confession of Faith

As mentioned in the early paragraphs Apostle Paul gave strong conditions before somebody confessing the Lordship of Jesus Christ, which is the presence of Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 10:9-10). But in the OT there is forgotten gentile woman whose confession of faith determined the born of Messiah and salvation for the whole world, yes! Her name is Ruth.

Paul House described Ruth's confession at Ruth 1:16 as covenantal confession of faith which was impacting her fate and the fate of the nation of Israel. House equates Ruth's confession to Rahab (which was Boaz great grandmother), Naaman and The Ninevites in the early part of the book of Jonah. The Israel as monotheistic religion open their house to others who wanted to embrace the covenantal beliefs. Moreover when Ruth mentioned the name of Yahweh at 1:17, it is an indication of a promise of permanent, binding and dangerous to break (House, 1998. p.457).

Confession of Faith and Reformation

It would be helpful before we study the confession of faith and reformation, to see briefly how Luther's thought and theology developed at the first place. Luther was 21 years old when he was promoted as Master of Art, at University of Erfurt and by month of May he already in doctorate study in theology and taught practical law both at Erfurt and Wittenberg. He was influenced heavily by Augustine as his mentor, Johann Von Staupidz, was also influenced heavily

by the African bishop. Glen L. Thompson, "The Daughter of the Word: What Luther Learned from the Early Church and the Fathers," *Perichoresis* 17, no. 4 (2020): 42.

Entered the monastery life, Luther as a young monk was in the verge of renaissance era in Europe where the study of Greek and early churches fathers had greater exposure to the life of the scholars at the time. He was struggling with the writing of Augustine that the only way a man can obtain good theology is by the spiritual insight and adventure from the scripture and is to be obtained prayerful and careful exegesis. The young monk was restless and he was tormented in his soul as he was looking at the way theologically of how can a sinful wretched man be made righteous before the holy God? Luther's quest for answer was not satisfied straight away, and obviously not by the Roman Catholic's theology that was so powerful at the time. The restless young monk was actually well versed in Anasthasius' conversation with Arius, which would be music for his ears for such apologetic discourse for a restless and inquisitive heart like Luther. He was in the right path when he finally found Augustine writing entitled *The Spirit and The Letter* which also in agreement with Luther's finding that 'it is the righteousness of Christ that clothes us when God justifies us (Luther 1518b:54; as cited in Thompson, 2020). Subsequently he wrote in huge amount of letters to many of his colleagues about his finding which was basically saying, that 'only in the Bible and the writing of Augustine he could find truth (Luther 1518b:54; as cited in Thompson, 2020). Luther quickly realized that the Catholic theology on tract of *False and True Penance* did not agree with the theology of Augustine. One of his senior professor at the University Wittenberg debated him after received Luther's letter including the tract, and turned out that he, Andreas Bondensein von Karstad, in turned became a follower of Augustine even deeper than Luther himself (Thompson, 2020). Luther then emphasized that if we want take the Fathers teaching seriously we must see the truth not from the authority of person, but he from the scripture alone, it was Augustine writing to Jerome saying: '*I have learned to hold the Scriptures alone inerrant. Therefore, I read all the others, as holy and learned as they may be, with the reservation that I regard their teaching true only if they can prove their statements through Scripture or reason.*' And. '*Dear brother, I hope that you do not expect your*

books to be regarded as equal to those of the Apostles and Prophets' (Augustine, *Eps.* 82.3; Luther, 1539: 25; Thompson, 2019: 46).

Luther was clearly a pious monk looking for the answer of truth himself and an enthusiast scholar of history, theologian who was using the proper examination of the documents from church Fathers and careful exegesis of the Scripture to then postulate a series of doctrine (scriptural) then compared it and juxtaposed it, bravely, with his contemporary authoritarian dogmatic regime. He was fully aware that this finding was not for the sake of scholarly advancement only, but more than that, it was a healthy and lifesaving doctrine produced by careful, prayerful, and purposeful examination of the Scripture and the Father's document to understand the revealed words of God that mankind intended to hear and have faith upon- as he was initially struggle of the paradox of the salvation concept of a dirty sinner before a Holy God. The raise of nostalgic endeavor to see the ancient text and history beyond just submissively accepting the pre-formulated doctrine in Latin from the authority also added Luther's passion and restlessness to find the truth.

Luther with ever-growing followers realized that they need to defend their scriptural faith against the Roman Catholic oppositions. He with his colleagues made articles of faith, which was an elaborated theological statement of faith, using *article* as known as a joining connecting of different various part of the body but makes one, figuratively, larger body. Luther found it necessary to do creedal statement of faith as it was important for preserving, defining and confessing the Scriptural faith of the Church as he learnt that the Fathers also did so in defense against Arianism and other heretics (Thompson, 2020). The reformation as much as known to be signified *Ninety-Five Thesis* against the indulgences of Roman Catholic, but Lutheran around the world equivocally agree that the reading of *Augsburg Confession* at 1530, as the foundational statement of what constituted a Lutheran church, and 25th of June 1530 as Church in Saxony (Electorate of Holy Roman Empire) became the Lutheran as a whole which was signified by the implementation of evangelism, disappearing of monasteries and the replacement of priest with pastors (Thompson, 2020). The reading was important as upon the context of Ottoman Empire's

plan to attack Austria- as they have seized Hungary-and the Emperor Charles V invited the Lutheran church and having listened to the Confession of Augsburg, two major cities, eight princess and representatives signed agreement to this confession as it is according to the Scriptural teaching. This was a major blow to the Roman Catholic (Thompson, 2005). Confession of faith really shook the Europe on that time, it affected, not only religious aspect, but also politics, power and war, a sum of the fate of the empire. As reflected in the section above, in the contemporary world, confession of faith does affect the life of the people, whether you abide to it, or in strong opposition to it- ignoring it as a non-existence is a part of an inevitably.

Contemporary Usage of the Confession of Faith

The historical Augsburg Confession was the pioneer of how formulizing systematic adhered teaching and from that on the others confessions came afterward by other Churches which were born straight after the Reformation era. Thompson summarized it as follows:

The Augsburg Confession's form would in turn serve as a model for Archbishop Cranmer when he drew up his Thirteen Articles (1538) for use in doctrinal discussions with the Lutherans. Later he expanded these into the Forty-Two Articles (1553). After his death, these were re-worked into the Thirty-Nine Articles (1571), the confession that has remained the central doctrinal statement of the Anglican church. Similar confessions were produced by the Presbyterians (Westminster Confession, 1647), the Baptists (London Baptist Confession, 1644/1646), the Methodists (Articles of Religion, 1784), and other groups that were descendants of the Reformation (Thompson, 2020. p.53).

In Indonesia we know now that major Protestant churches like HKPB (Lutheran), GKI/GKJ/GPIB (Presbyterian), GMI (Methodist), GITJ and GKMI (Mennonite) adopted Apostle Creed in their institution. But the Charismatic, Evangelicals and Pentecostal, like GBI, GPdI, Baptist, GJKI, JKI (charismatic Mennonite), GKKD and GRII, have their own institutional credos which specifically adopted the doctrine of *inerrancy* in their confession of faith. How does it flare

in the Indonesian society? The latter article of confessing the inerrancy and infallible of the bible determines the churches gesture toward social issues in the community.

Wijaya (2020) said that the mainline Protestant churches in Indonesia which are under the Consultation of Indonesian Churches (PGI), along with their theological institution wing like STT Jakarta-the oldest seminary in Indonesia- are, generally, progressive in nature and have declared support to the LGBTQ community. While the evangelicals churches, which strongly adhered to the inerrancy of the bible, condemn and reject the same-sex marriage and LGBTQ as a form of mental illness and opposing the God's standard as written in the bible (Wijaya, 2020) .

Similarly, in the United States, whether you verbally or systematically announce it or not, Scriptural confession of faith does affect Christians and in their choice of politics. Stephanie Renate Kreder, the director of Ohio Right to Life campaign said, as CT recorded:

I was quite happy with what President Trump stand for abortion, but my skepticism grows more and more and I can't take it anymore. His speech seemed to me were not polite against colored and brown people, and I cannot take my weight in my heart out when I see him treats women. I just cannot see a man sealed with Holy Spirit and with the fruit of the Sprit that not apparent, more ever man with lack of self-control (Silliman, 2020).

As much as the lady might deny it but it is the embedded Scriptural confession of faith that she based her opinion about President Trump upon. She said about Trump as a pro-life person, clearly it ascribed toward Psalm 139:13-14, she also has objection toward Trump's attitude toward women, it suggested the strong prohibition toward fornications and adultery as recorded at Exodus 20:7, while talking about Holy Spirit and self-control, the lady, possibly adopted from the gospel of John 3:3-5 about being born again, and the fruit from Paul's letter to the Galatians especially 5:22. While nowadays the utterance of the confession of faith might be limited in the liturgical setting, but the vocals conservatives usually embed it in their life choices, political choices and statements they make.

CONCLUSION

Confession of faith does have long history from the inspiration it got from the Apostle Creed in the time of the Reformation until it was adopted by many churches movement in the history and spread out around the world. Luther emphasized the Scriptural truth obtained by prayerful and careful exegesis as Augustine remarked in his writing. While Apostle Creed was created to unify the teaching in the midst of heresies and apostasies, confession of faith, historically, was created to make a statement from systemize teaching from the Scripture in opposition to the Roman Catholic theology. Contemporary attitude toward it, especially in the gesture from Scriptural basis, determine one's attitude in the realms of politic, social, justice and family.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Eerly, J. J. (1979). The Place of Southern Baptist Women in the. *Baptist History and Heritage*, Vol.53, 18.
- Hoover, J. A. (2012). 'Thy Daughters Shall Prophecy': The Assemblies of God, Inerrancy, and the Question of Clergywomen. *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 21(2), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-02102004>
- House, P. R. (1998). *Old Testament Theology* (1st ed.). InterVarsity Press. <https://www.ivpress.com/old-testament-theology>
- Karlsson, M., Friberg, F., Wallengren, C., & Öhlén, J. (2014). Meanings of existential uncertainty and certainty for people diagnosed with cancer and receiving palliative treatment: A life-world phenomenological study. *BMC Palliative Care*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-684X-13-28>
- Mohler Jr., R. A., Enns, P., & Vanhoozer, K. J. (2013). *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy Counterpoints: Bible and Theology* (J. Merrick (Ed.)). Zondervan Academics.
- Perry, S. L. (2015). Bible Beliefs, Conservative Religious Identity, and Same-Sex Marriage Support: Examining Main and Moderating Effects. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54(4), 792–813. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12212>
- Silliman, D. (2020). When Is It a Sin to Vote for a Political Candidate? *Christianity Today*.
- Thompson, G. L. (2005). *The Unaltered Augsburg Confession* by. Northwestern Publication House.
- Thompson, G. L. (2020). The Daughter of the Word: What Luther Learned from the Early Church and the Fathers. *Perichoresis*, 17(4), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.2478/perc-2019-0027>
- Wijaya, A. (2020). Intersecting Religion and Sexuality. *Intersecting Religion and Sexuality*, 27, 45–65. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004390713>
- Zerbe, G. (2007). Christ, Canon and Confession: The Bible and the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective. *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 15.