

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH II:1-2

(Reading: Revelation 4; Daniel 4:28-37)

Who God Is - In Himself & To Yourself!

Many of us like to read. And in our reading we have our favourite authors. He or she is the one whose latest books we look out for in the library. Our family or friends might even splash out with one of his or her books when they want to give us a gift.

Now, you read that author because you are drawn to the way they write and what they write about. In fact, you get to know quite a bit about that author, because the best authors usually write about something they know a lot about -- and there's nothing better for this than one's own life experience.

That's actually one of the things advised to prospective writers. Stay close to home. Don't get out of your depth. And do your homework. Add to your knowledge. That gives the book more depth. Therefore, if you turn to the greatest book of them all, the book written by no one less than God Himself, you can expect that you will get to know Him. And not only know Him because this is about an area He knows about - which He certainly does - but especially because the subject of the book itself is about how He has made Himself known to us!

The way the letter to the Hebrews begins tells this in the clearest way. It says there, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Heb.1:1-3a)."

So from beginning to end this book is about God. Genesis 1 verse 1 starts with, "In the beginning God..." and Revelation 22 ends by saying God is the 'omega' - the end. And so it's God who's the be-all and end-all of our faith, and of everything that lies in-between!

Having confessed, in Chapter 1, to why there is Holy Scripture, who that Scripture is from, what is in it, and how it got to us today, we have met God Himself. For when we look at these words by faith it is God Himself speaking to us, because here are the words about the Living Word - the history which is His Story!

Thus when the first Article of Chapter 2 begins with the words "There is but one only, living, and true God," we confess this is the God who wrote the Holy Scriptures. We say in this phrase that it's the pages in this book which tells us that He's the only God. There are no other gods. For while the Bible may speak about other gods, and even describes certain men as being in god-like roles, it's not because they are actually gods or anything like that. It's because of what people have made them out to be, or because of the authority they have from God. And it's only the LORD God Himself who can declare that to be so.

We are confessing that this God is. A confession which didn't come naturally. In fact, we have only come to it supernaturally. And how supernatural doesn't Article 1 get? Because this is Someone who is what we're so definitely not! And it's Someone we wouldn't otherwise meet. So, in the first part to Articles 1 and 2 of this chapter 2, entitled 'Of God, and of the Holy Trinity', we see WHAT GOD IS IN HIMSELF.

What God Is In Himself

You see, once we come to see that the LORD is God, it's like the door has been opened to a whole new vista which we didn't realise before. Who else could sing with Psalm 19 verse 1 that the heavens declare the glory of God? How else would we know that the skies proclaim the work of His hands?

With Thomas we have been humbled before the Lord. With him we cry out, in those immortal words of John 20 verse 28, "My Lord and my God!"

But this is only the start. Having the scales lifted from our eyes means we begin to see. There's still so much to take in.

And most of what God is we will come to see we cannot take in. That's what Article 1 continues with confessing. Because when God is described as being "infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions," we are really put in our place. Imagine - to think of God as a Spirit. He doesn't look anything like us! In fact, He doesn't look like anything at all!

Now, sometimes we read in the Bible that God hears by His ear, or He rules by His hand, or sees with His eye. But He doesn't actually have an ear or hand or eye. These descriptions are anthropomorphism's.

I thought you'd like that word! That means they picture God to us in a way that we can understand, using parts of our bodies.

What God as a Spirit tells us is that He's not limited in any way whatsoever. He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. That means He is all powerful, all knowing, and everywhere present.

A little boy was once asked, "How many Gods are there?" "One," he answered. So he was then asked, "How do you know that?" "Because," said the boy, "there's only room for one, for He fills heaven and earth."

Isn't this the truth of Psalm 139? In the verses 7 and 8 there David acknowledges, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."

But we may have been a bit confused by one of the words Article 1 used in this description. For it said that the Lord has no "passions". And we might have wondered about this because then we would be saying that God doesn't feel for something personally at all. This is not what it means, though. Rather, we say that He is not ruled by emotions. It doesn't mean that He doesn't feel in a personal way, but it tells us that He is not ruled by something outside of Himself.

You can see already how unique He is amongst all the gods that man has made on this earth. For as those other gods are our gods they can be manipulated by what we do or don't do. They can have our emotions, our weaknesses, our pain, because they are only the best that we think we can be.

And many of those misconceptions about God have been shown up throughout church history. Whether Gnosticism, Manichaeism, syncretism, or whatever other 'ism', it's all completely wiped out here. When you confess that God is "immutable (which means unchanging), immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, and most absolute," you know that He is completely above and beyond you.

It is this God who does what He wills. Well, if anyone can He can! Because He really does know it all! In fact, He always knew it all -- and He can do it all! So when we confess that God is "working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory," we are saying that it couldn't be in better hands!

Recognising this is reaching the conclusion Job came to. Because in the last chapter - chapter 42 - of the book of Job it all becomes clear to him. There he replies to the Lord in the verses 2 till 4, "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know."

When you see this you cannot say God is unfair. Oh, sometimes we wonder what it's all about. We can even be driven to despair. Like Job would have when he lost everything. But, then, like him, you know who's controlling it all. With Paul you know that He's working it all out. For when in Ephesians 1 verse 11 the apostle says that He "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" we know it's for the best.

Perhaps we don't see that so clearly when we go through that difficult time. But then only God has 20/20 vision all the time! That's why Article 1 can go on and say that God is the "most loving, gracious, merciful, and long suffering." He is the One who is "abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." He is "the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

God is absolutely just. And that's why there's the other side of the coin as well. That's why Article 1 ends as it does. You cannot confess that God is just and then say there's no justice. In the highest court of all everything comes to light. As John wrote in his first letter chapter 1 verse 5, "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."

Believer, you know that. You know that whatever contributes to God's glory or the display of it, is ultimately from God Himself. And that's what Article 2 brings out.

Yet we may wonder why Article 2 is here. Looking at it initially I thought it was a lot like Article 1. I puzzled over it. You have a look. What is essentially new or different there?

But then I realised it's coming from a different angle. For moving on from seeing WHAT GOD IS IN HIMSELF we come now to WHAT GOD IS TO YOURSELF.

What God Is To Yourself

In a way it's kind of like the difference between the first and second chapters of Genesis. For there you have two accounts of the creation. Two accounts because they're from different angles. One is looking down. And the other is looking up.

So now look at Article 2. Leaving aside the old English, put it in your words, then isn't this looking at the same picture but from our angle?

And looking at Article 2, do you notice a word we didn't have in Article 1? A word which shows how much this is from our perspective. Have you seen it?

That word is "life". "God hath all **life**." And further on we read, "He is the alone fountain of all being." Thus, while we are far from having the qualities which God possesses, yet we have some things - things that we do need. Like "life". And it's in these things that now, by faith, we get a glimpse of what God is like.

G.I. Williamson uses the illustration of a mirror here. He says, "Hold a mirror before you. You will see an image of yourself. Now observe: the many qualities belonging to yourself which you and your image have in common are not really the same at all. For you are real and your image is not. You exist on an entirely different level than does your image. The qualities belonging to your image in the mirror are but a reflection of your qualities. There is a dimension belonging to your attributes which does not belong to those of your image. So it is with God. All of God's attributes possess that higher level of glorious and perfect existence which the creature's attributes do not."

Therefore everything comes from God. He's the great originator. Despite however many copyrights and patents are put on things that men make it was never simply their own work. They got it from someone else or from God. And if it came from someone else it originally came from God anyway! As Paul declares in Romans 11 verse 36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!"

You know, when I started out my looking at this text, I thought I would have lots to say. I mean, when it comes to God isn't there so much to say? And look at these two Articles! They certainly use some big words and expressive phrases! And there are so many proof texts! To quote the Scripture relevant to this would itself take so long!

But I've come to feel a little of what King Nebuchadnezzar went through. He who was so self-sufficient; he who was so proud. And God took it all away. He was driven away from his power and fortune. He became mad. Only when he looked up was his sanity restored. And so, in Daniel 4 verse 37 we read, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." What more could he say?

You see, you will meet in this world many who claim they don't believe. They'll argue that you have to prove it. As one man said, "If a man tells me he has a horse who can trot a mile in three minutes, I'll tell him to bring out the horse and prove it. If you tell me that there's a God, I ask you to produce God and prove his existence."

But no Christian claims to know God, or would want to know Him that way. We don't get to know God, and the might and marvel of who He is, by searching that way. The believer doesn't say, "I know God," or "I see God," or "I think there's a God." He says, "I believe in God."

That's looking up! Then you realise the sovereignty of God. He's completely in control. In the words of Article 2, it's God "of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things."

That's why every believer humbled in prayer is a Calvinist, because it's there most of all he knows what he doesn't have - and what God does have! Then you know, with Article 2, that "He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands." In the words of Hebrews 11:6 you "believe that God exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

And this is how Article 2 ends. We confess that God "is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require from them." Do you see? It's all His! Especially you!