



BARMEN & BELHAR: WESTMINSTER SEMINAR 2026

CONFESSION AS VERB & NOUN



BARMEN & BELHAR:

THE CHURCH AGAINST NAZISM & APARTHEID

(OCTOBER 4) CONFESSION AS VERB AND NOUN

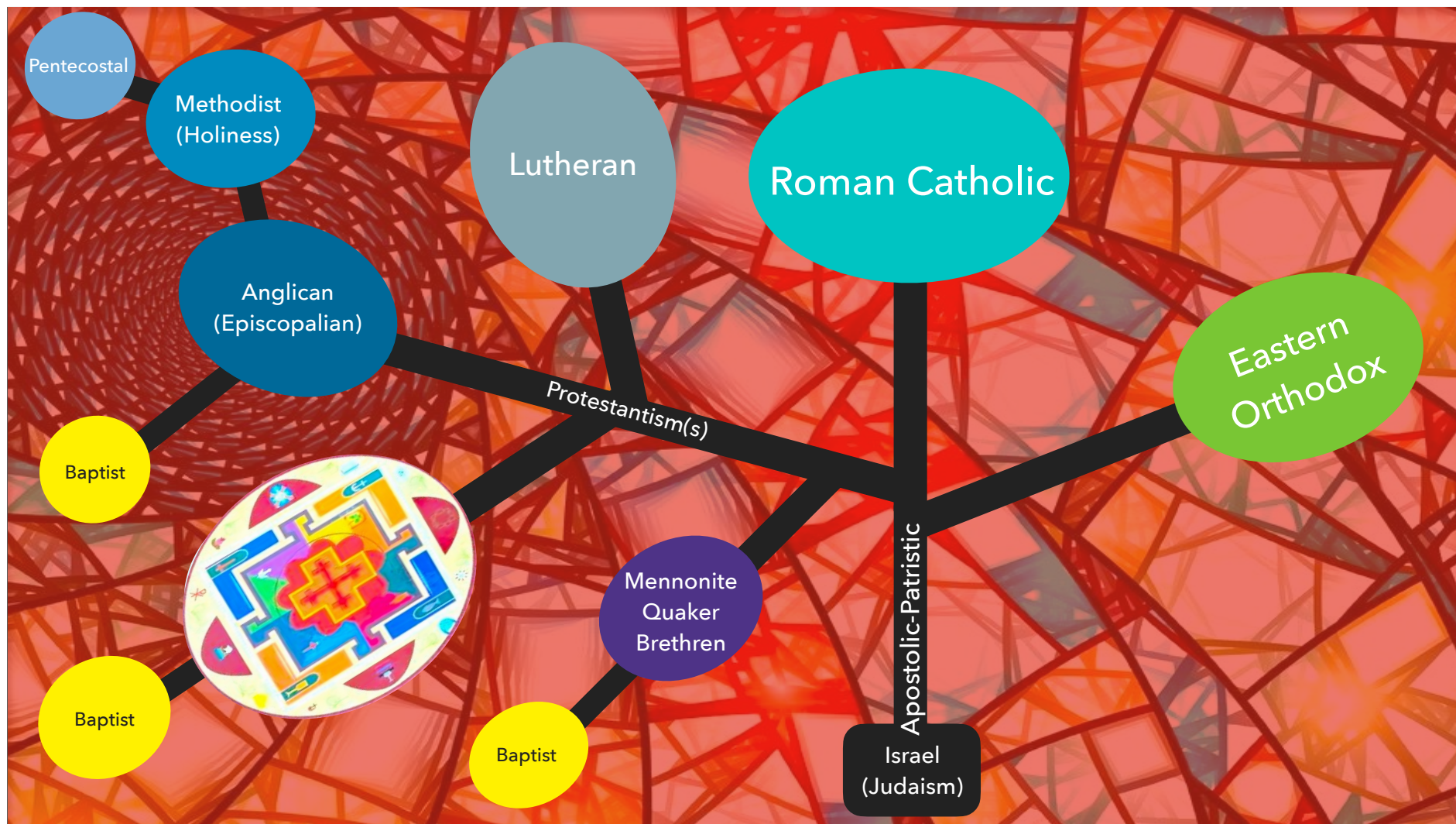
(OCTOBER 11) CHURCH AGAINST NAZISM (BARMEN DECLARATION)

(OCTOBER 18) CHURCH AGAINST APARTHEID (BELHAR CONFESSION)

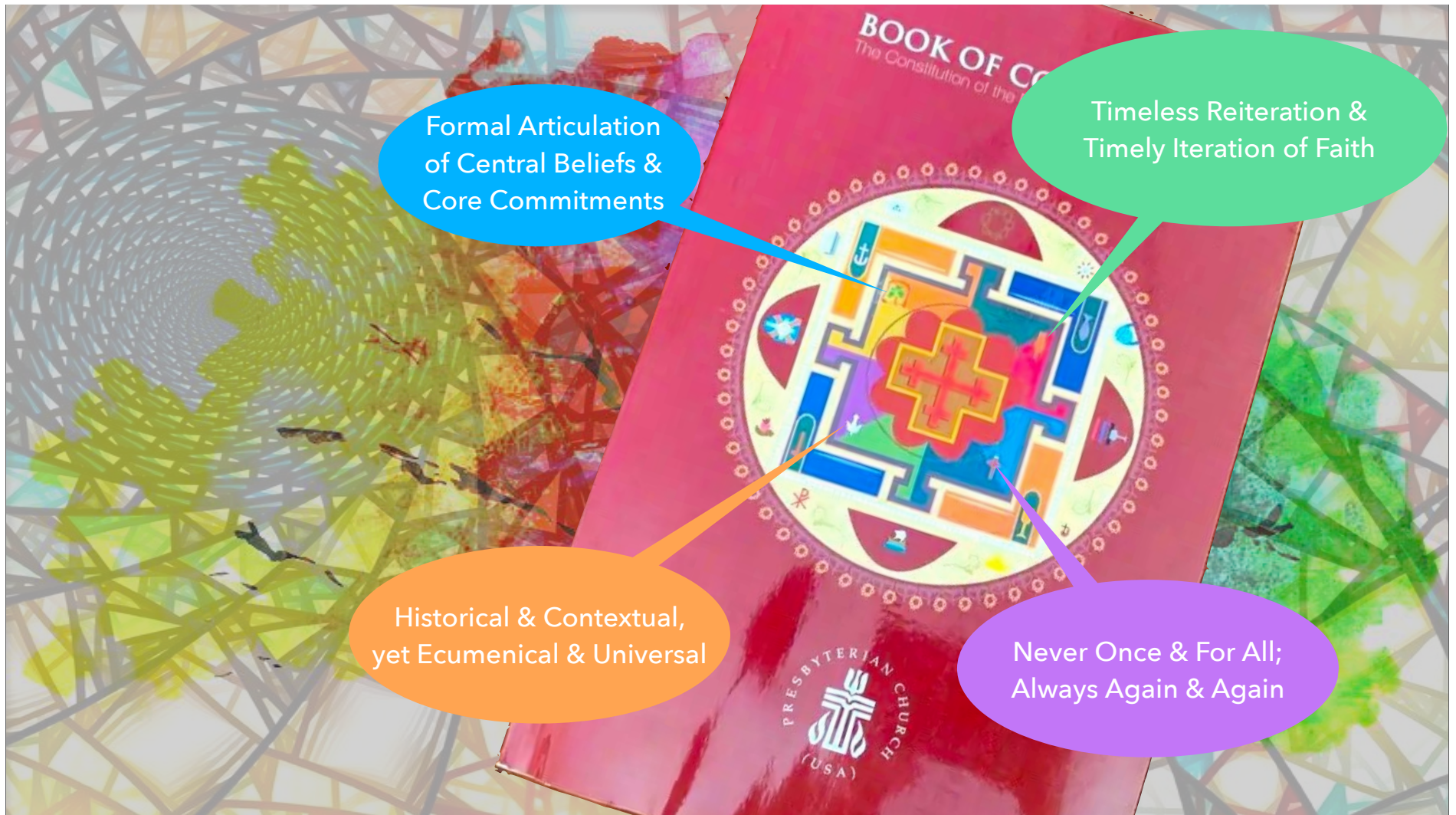
(OCTOBER 25) CONFESSION TODAY











Formal Articulation
of Central Beliefs &
Core Commitments

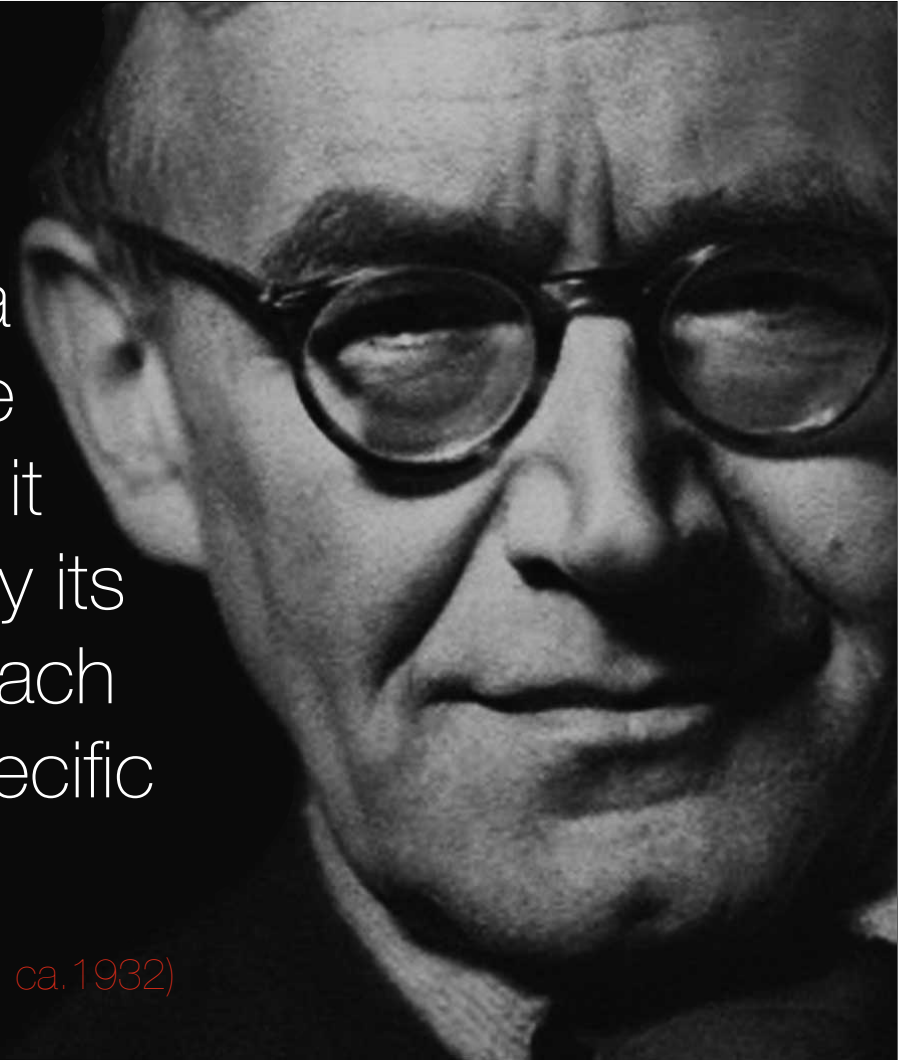
Timeless Reiteration &
Timely Iteration of Faith

Historical & Contextual,
yet Ecumenical & Universal

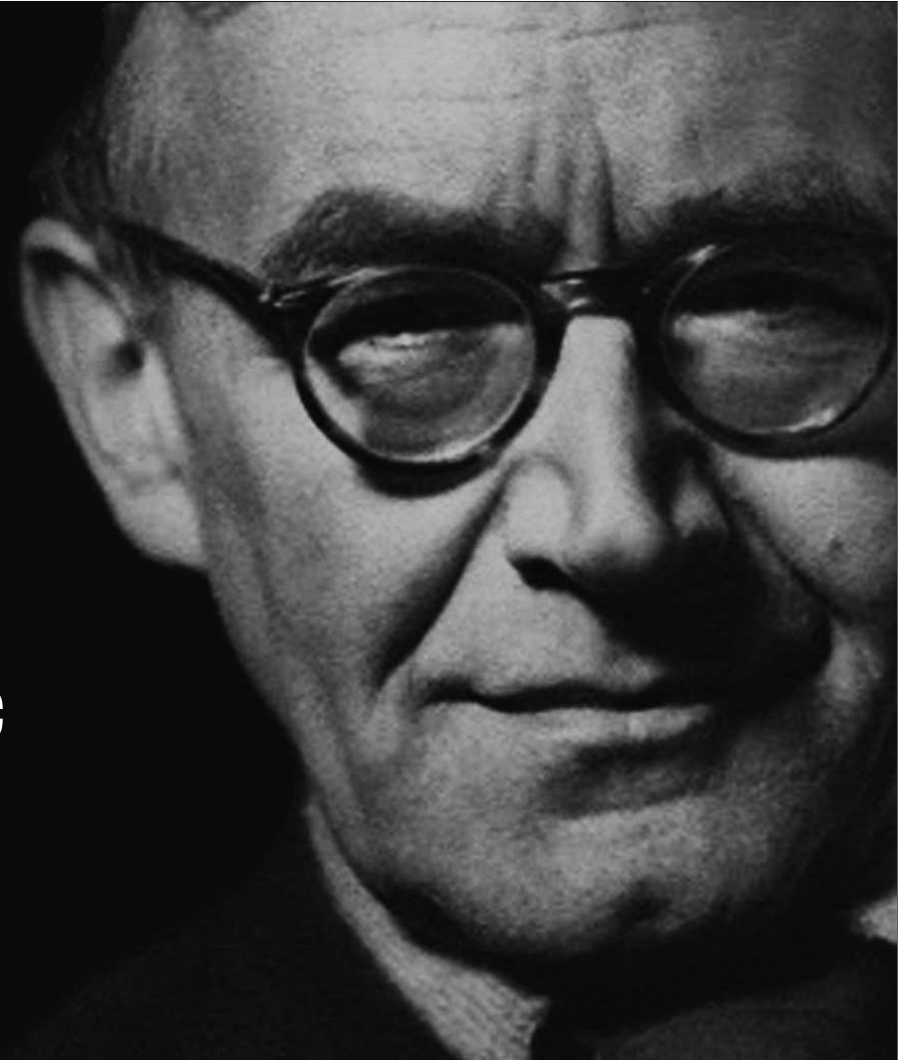
Never Once & For All;
Always Again & Again

Dogmatics is a theological discipline. But theology is a function of the Church. The Church confesses God as it speaks about God. First, by its existence in the action of each believer. Second, by its specific action as a community.

– Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* I/1 §1 ca.1932)



**Theology is the lived
existence of the Church
as it confesses God
in the action of each
believer and its specific
action as a community**











The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians

CHAPTER I

an apostle, (not of men, but by man, but by Jesus and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) to the brethren which are in the churches of Galatia.

Greeting to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank God always for you in Christ Jesus our Lord, because of the grace which is given you in Christ Jesus, according to the Father's will.

For ever and ever.

And now I return to you, and I have written you these things, lest being present I should have to write to you.

11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

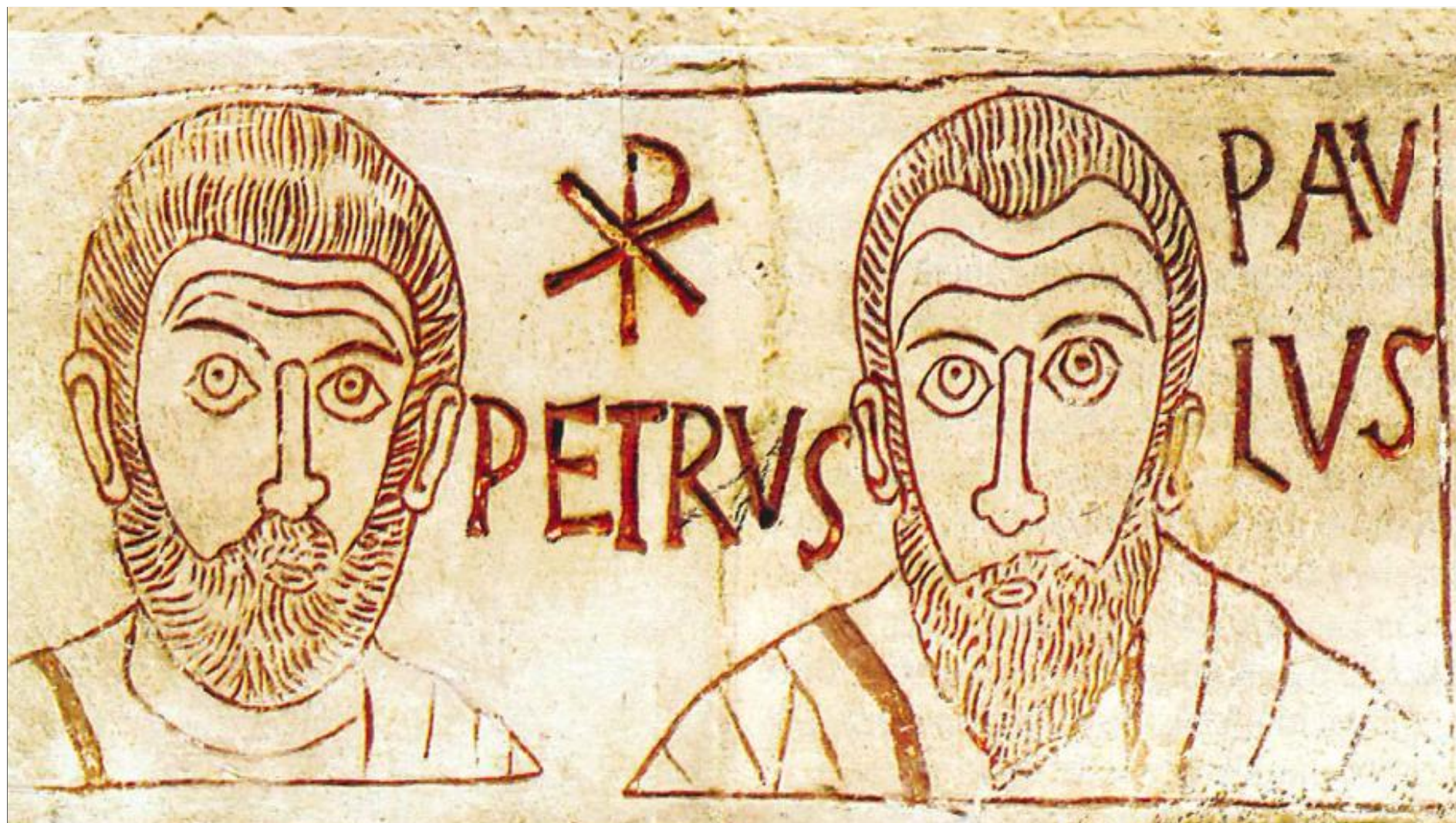
12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jewish religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and destroyed it:

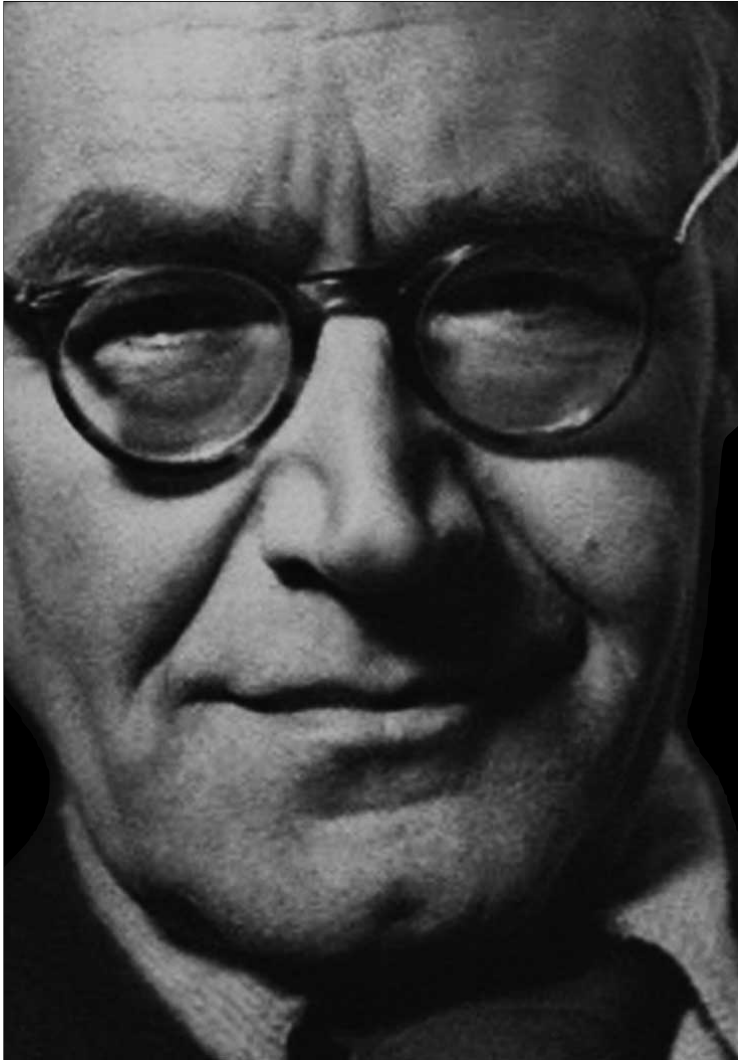
14 And profited in the Jewish religion above many my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother and brethren, and called me by his grace:

16 To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles: immediately I conferred with my brethren, and went away into Arabia; and returned again into Syria and Cilicia.







THE CONCEPT “REFORMED CONFESSION”

- ▶ PRAXIS OF DISPUTATION, DELIBERATION, & DECISION
- ▶ INTERPRETATION OF TEXT OF SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT
- ▶ MUTUAL AUTHORITY & RECIPROCAL FREEDOM
- ▶ CONSENSUS VIA SPEECH & COUNTER-SPEECH
- ▶ INHERENTLY POLITICAL & INTRINSICALLY DEMOCRATIC





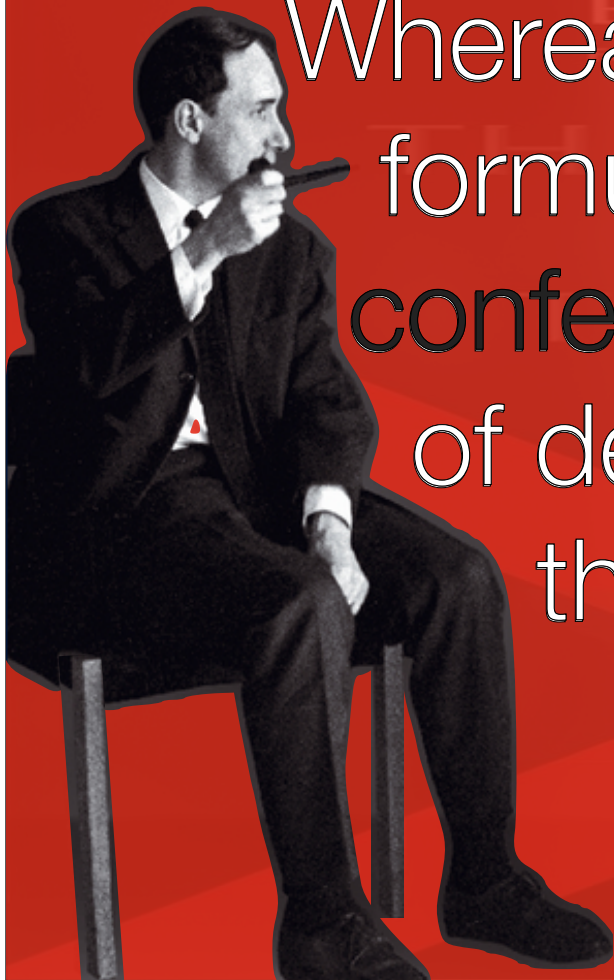


Eberhard Busch

Foreword by Daniel L. Migliore

THE BARMEN
THESES
THEN AND
NOW





Whereas such **Confessions** are formulated relatively seldom, **confessing** itself is a basic way of defining the daily task in the life of all Christians.

— Eberhard Busch (*Barmen Theses Then & Now*, 8-9)

Eberhard Busch

Foreword by Daniel L. Migliore

Confessions (NOUN) Confessing (VERB)



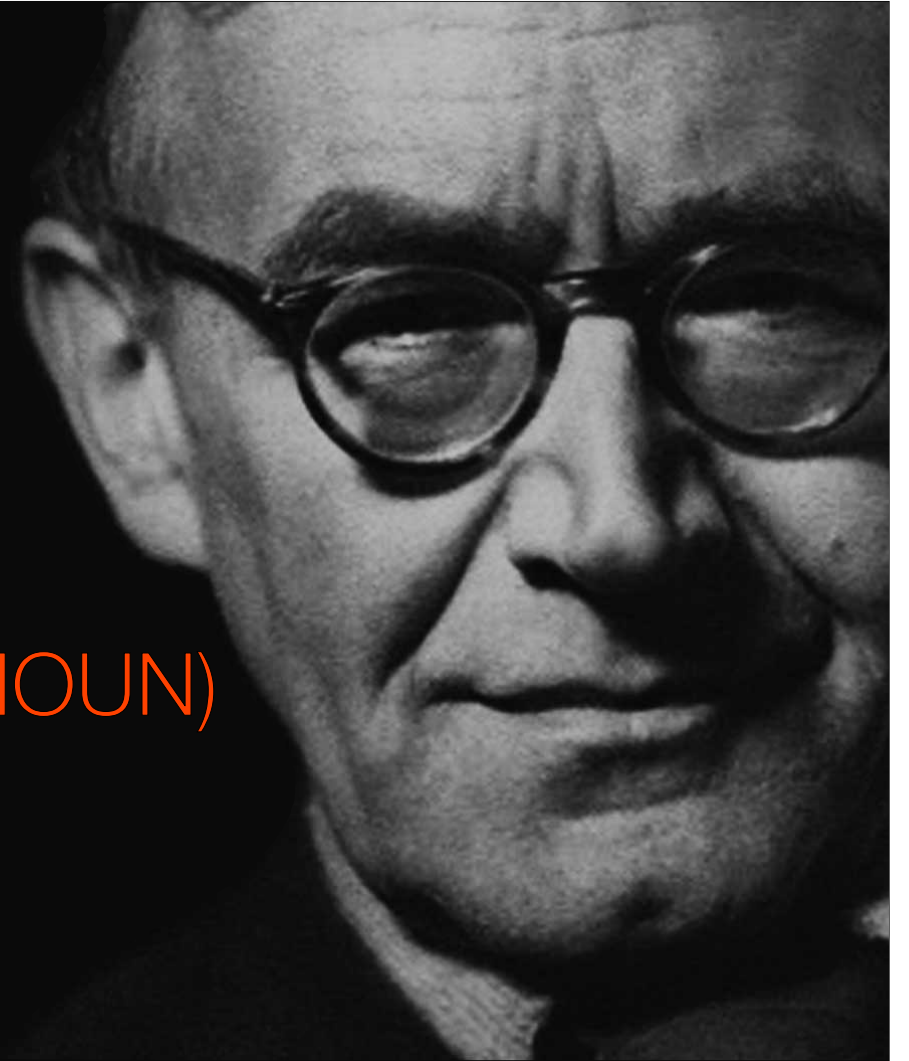
MISCONCEPTIONS OF “CONFESSION(S)”

- ▶ SELDOM, RANDOM, PERIPHERAL, NEGLIGIBLE
- ▶ AUTHORITARIAN RATHER THAN AUTHORITATIVE
- ▶ WORK OF SINGULAR HEROIC GENIUS
OR SOLITARY PROPHETIC WITNESS
- ▶ CONFESSION APPEARS TO BE A PRODUCT,
RATHER THAN A PROCESS & A PRAXIS



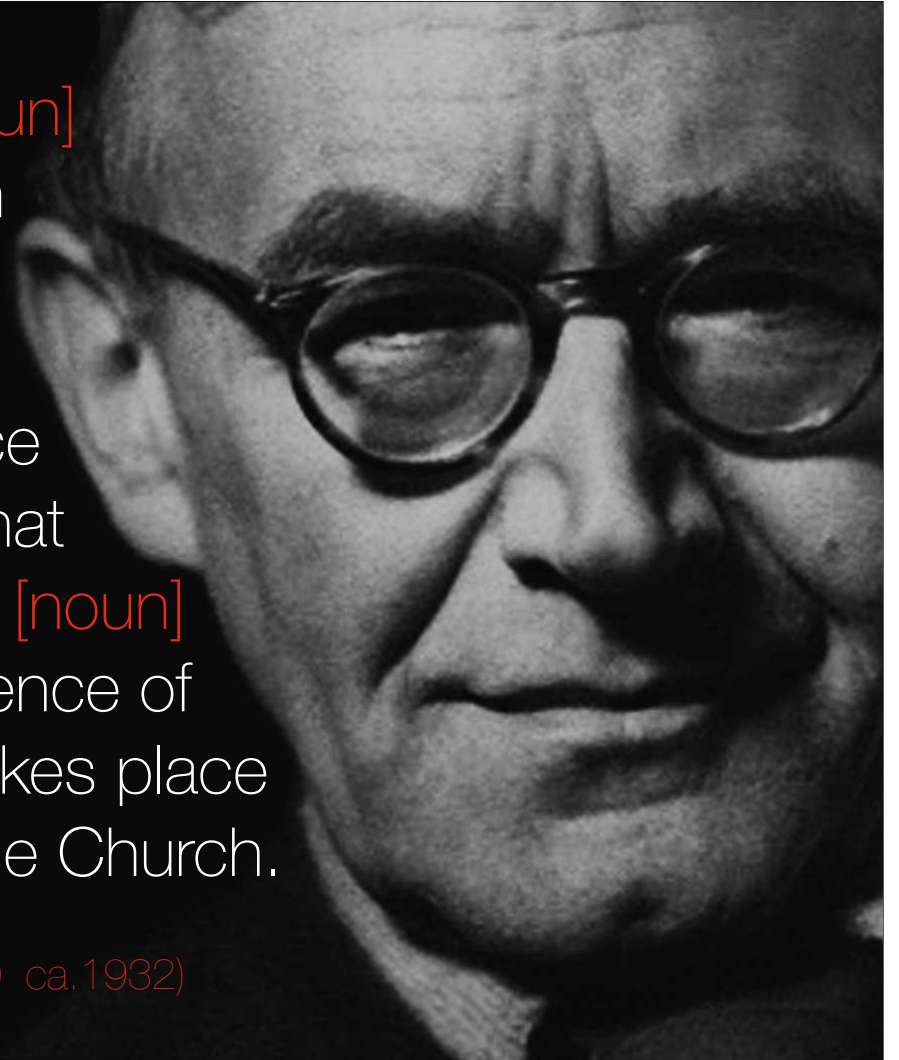
Wider(est) Sense (VERB)

Narrower(est) Sense (NOUN)



Before and behind Confession [noun]
stands the actual life of the Church
[verb]....It is therefore of one piece
with the already taking-place, and
again-taking-place, ecclesial service
of God and community life [verb] that
announces itself in the Confession [noun]
...[which is] the documented presence of
a specific agreement [noun] that takes place
[verb] in concrete historical life in the Church.

– Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* I/2 §20 ca.1932)









“RECALIBRATING”

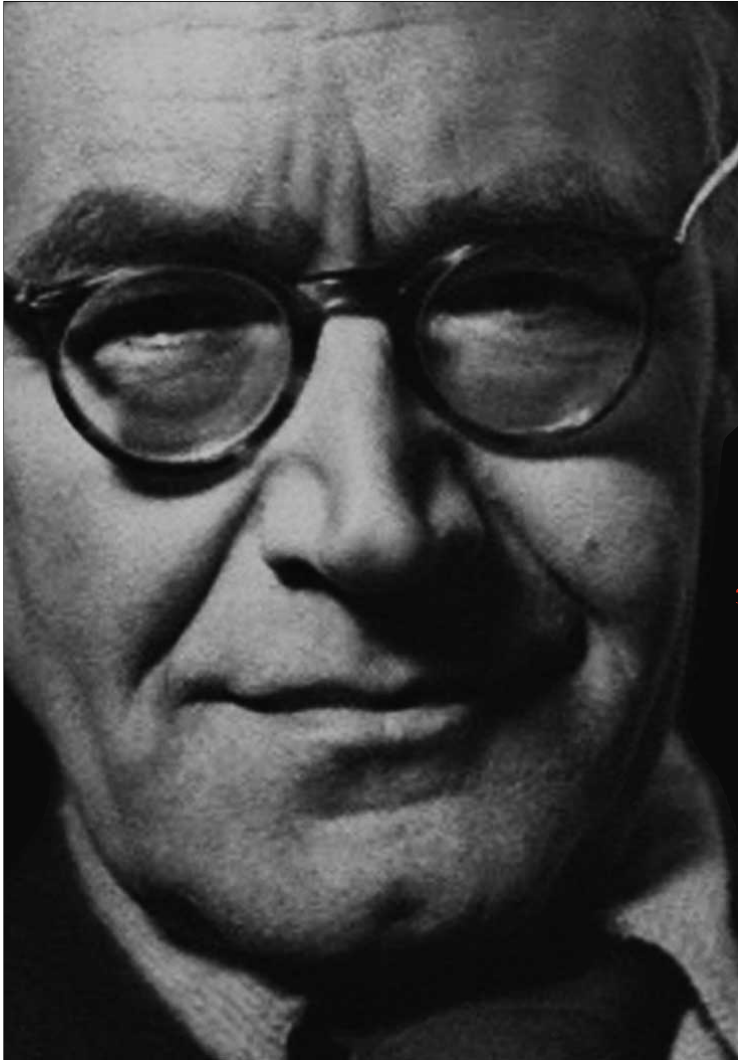
REFORMED CONFESSION(S):

- ▶ NO CONFESSIONS (NOUN) WITHOUT CONFESSING (VERB)
- ▶ CONFESSING (CONFESSIO CONTINUA) CREATES CONFESSIONS (STATUS CONFESSIONIS)
- ▶ CONFESSIONAL AUTHORITY IS A FUNCTION OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION
- ▶ CONFESSION IS A COMMUNAL PRAXIS IN WHICH ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY DETERMINE TOGETHER THEIR NORMATIVE BELIEF AND PRACTICE EVEN AS EACH MEMBER DETERMINES FOR THEMSELVES IF, AND TO WHAT EXTENT, THEY ASSENT TO THAT BELIEF AND CONSENT TO THAT PRACTICE



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CONFESSION AS VERB & NOUN



Reformed folk do not
allow themselves to be
condescended to from
above. They confess for
themselves, or they
don't confess at all.

– Karl Barth (*"Desirability & Possibility of a Universal Reformed Confession,"* 1925)