I

The confession of the one God unites Old and New Testament. Wherever the New Testament speaks of God, it means the God who has created the world, who has elected the people of Israel and instituted a covenant with them, who has entrusted his promises to the old covenant community, and who is proclaimed and praised as ruler of the entire world and its history. In view of this shared foundation, Old and New Testament are understood as indissoluble unity.

A comprehensive confession of faith did not yet exist in the time of primitive Christianity. It emerges for the first time at the end of the second century A.D. in the Old Roman Creed. There is, however, in Old and New Testament and in intertestamental Judaism a variety of formal statements which exhibit confessional character and were used in homily and liturgy. This essay is concerned exclusively with statements of this type, not with reflexions of a theological nature.

The confession of the one God has its biblical foundation in Deut 6:4, the Shema, which was recited several times each day by every God-fearing Jew at the time of Jesus and the primitive church. Yet this confession is not located at the beginning of the Old Testament, and it is worthwhile to consider briefly the early history of the formation of confessions in the Old Testament.

Israel's basic confession is this: "Yahweh is our God" (יְהֹוָה הַלֹּהֵן). Very informative is the report in Josh 24 on the establishment of a covenant at Shechem. On the occasion of the institution of the league of twelve tribes after the
immigration in Canaan, Joshua directs the people's attention to Yahweh's great works: the election of the patriarchs, the rescue from Egypt, the preservation in the wilderness, and the leading into the promised land. Subsequently he confronts the people with the decision for or against their God (vss 14f). The people answer with the confession "Yahweh is our God" which is then briefly explained by reference to God's action in the history of the Israelite tribes (vss 17f). If nothing else, the structure of this confession is extremely telling. The confession entails an obligation to a personal God who even bears a name, and the act of confessing occurs on the basis of quite definite historical events in which Israel has recognized the action of her God. Significant are, consequently, the acknowledgment of God and the grateful reference to his saving acts, together with a definitely personal choosing of sides. Speech in the first person, singular or plural, therefore, belongs to the confession. Very similar is the ancient confession in Deut 26:3, 5-9:

I declare this day to Yahweh, my God, that I have come into the land which Yahweh swore to our fathers to give us... A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard labor. Then we cried to Yahweh, the God of our fathers, and Yahweh heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

The Israelite confessions are henotheistic in nature, that is to say they do not, at first, deny the existence of other gods and the obligation of other people and nations to foreign gods. Rather, the exclusiveness for Israel of this one God Yahweh is attested; in this sense it is stated "Yahweh is our God."

However, Israel did not remain on this level. The recognition of God deepened, the radical claim of the God Yahweh, which challenged Israel again and again, was not the claim of one god among others. Particularly in the prophetic message, the foreign gods were considered no longer as gods beside Yahweh, but at most as gods under Yahweh. This is the case,