

Adam

God's Beloved

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INTRODUCTION

How This Book Came to Be Written

BEGINNING IN SEPTEMBER 1995, the people of LArche Daybreak offered me a sabbatical to celebrate my ten years as their pastor. Because my deepest desire was to write, I chose to spend the year working on several themes that have inspired and supported me in my ministry. Many of these thoughts were shaped by my life in the community of Daybreak, which has become a true home for me.

I had been pondering, “What do I believe?” “What does it mean when I say that I believe in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?” “What do I say when I recite the articles of faith?” These questions had been with me for quite a while so I decided to write a small book about the Apostles’ Creed.

I spoke about it with several people and proposed to my friend and publisher, Robert Ellsberg, that I start working on a contemporary confession of faith. Although I was primarily concerned to find a new way to express the faith that I have tried to live all of my

life, I also believed that this would help the many men and women in our world who are struggling with the same questions and for whom the traditional formulas have lost their meaning and relevance.

Robert Ellsberg was quite excited about the idea and took the time and energy to collect a series of articles about the Creed. As I started to read them I soon found myself immersed in very complicated theological discussions about the origins and various forms of the central formulation of the faith of the Christian. I began to wonder if my seemingly simple plan wasn't going to be in fact an ambitious and pretentious undertaking. I simply desired to express in understandable language how we can live our lives in the name of our loving God. The more I read the less easy it seemed. I had to ask myself how I dared to write a responsible book about the Creed of all Christians, having left the academic life more than a decade ago and having no intention of doing deep theological research. Wasn't I now primarily a pastor of a small community with people who have mental disabilities? Surely that is not the most obvious context in which to discuss the twelve articles of our faith. Most of the people I live with in the community of Daybreak never articulate their beliefs systematically, and for many of them reflective thinking on theological articles is difficult if not impossible.

Just as I started to wonder if I wasn't trying to reach

far beyond my limits, Adam Arnett died. Adam was my friend, my teacher, and my guide: an unusual friend, because he couldn't express affection and love in the way most people do; an unusual teacher, because he couldn't think reflectively or articulate ideas or concepts; an unusual guide, because he couldn't give me any concrete direction or advice. Adam was one of my housemates when I first came to LArche Daybreak. He was the first person I was asked to care for when I joined the LArche Daybreak community in Toronto where he lived.

From the moment I saw Adam's body lying in his casket, I was struck by the mystery of this man's life and death. In a flash I knew in my heart that this very disabled human being was loved by God from all eternity and sent into the world with a unique mission of healing, which was now fulfilled. I recognized many parallels between the story of Jesus and the story of Adam. And I knew something else. I knew, in a very profound place, that Adam, in some mysterious way, had become an image of the living Christ for me just as Jesus, when he lived on the earth, was friend, teacher, and guide for his disciples. In and through Adam I came to a truly new understanding of those relationships of Jesus, not just as they were lived long ago, but as Jesus desires to live them now, with me and with us, through the weakest and most vulnerable people. Indeed, not only did I come to know more about God by

caring for Adam, but also Adam helped me, by his life, to discover and rediscover the Spirit of Jesus alive in my own “poorness of spirit.” Jesus lived long ago, but Adam lived in my time. Jesus was physically present to his disciples. Adam was physically present to me. Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us. Adam became for me a sacred person, a holy man, an image of the living God.

Was Adam very unusual? Was he some special angel? Not at all. Adam was one person among many others. But I had a relationship with Adam, and he became special for me. I loved him, and our relationship was one of the most significant of my life. Adam’s death touched me deeply because for me he was the one who more than any book or professor led me to the person of Jesus. His death was a wake-up call. It seemed as if he said to me, “Now that I have left you, you can write about me and tell your friends and readers what I have taught you about the mystery of our wonderful God who came to dwell among us and who sent us the Holy Spirit.”



When, after Adam’s burial, I returned to my writing, I was facing once again my question: “What do I believe?” Then I became aware that this was a question that Adam could help me to answer. I stopped reading my theological and historical articles and began to ponder the life and vocation of this remarkable man who

died at about the same age as Jesus, thirty-four. As I let his short life pass through my mind and heart I realized that Adam's life story would give me words to speak about my faith and about the Christian Creed in a way that people could easily understand. Adam, who never spoke a word, gradually became a true source of words for me to express my deepest conviction as a Christian, living at the turn of the second millennium. He who was so vulnerable became a powerful support to help me announce the richness of Christ. And he who could not expressly recognize me, would, through me, help others recognize God in their lives.

Adam's unexpected death and my own grief led me to the interior place I had been searching for where I was able to speak about God and God's entering into human history. I realized that his story would help me to tell Jesus' story, because Jesus' story had helped me to understand Adam's story.

He could have been called John or Peter. The fact that he who revealed Jesus to me in a very special way was called Adam was purely coincidental, but a coincidence that was also providential. Like the first Adam, our Adam represents every human person and thus more easily raises the question: "Who is your Adam who speaks to you about God?"

I started to write, and the story that follows is probably as close as I will ever come to writing about the Apostles' Creed. Adam is the door to the expression

of this Creed, so I write with love and gratitude for him and for our special relationship. I also write with the deep hope that many others, through Adam's story, will be enabled to recognize God's story among us and so be empowered to say in a new way, "I do believe."