

# **Ancient Discipline and Pristine Doctrine: Appeals to Antiquity in the Developing Reformation**

by

**GREGORY SODERBERG**

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in the Faculty of Theology

University of Pretoria

Supervisor: Prof. J.W. Hofmeyr

September 2006

## SUMMARY

**Ancient Discipline and Pristine Doctrine:  
Appeals to Antiquity in the Developing Reformation**

by

Gregory D. Soderberg

Degree: Master of Arts

Subject: Church History

Supervisor: Prof. J.W. Hofmeyr

This thesis in Church History examines the changing attitudes of Protestants toward Church History. The primary evidence surveyed is statements within major Protestant confessions, as well as the views of selected Reformers. By focusing on how Protestant confessions either quote the church fathers, or affirm the ancient creeds of the Church, the thesis presents a general overview of how Protestants have related to Church History.

This thesis takes advantage of many recent studies on the use of church fathers by the reformers, and new critical study of creeds and confessions. A study of selected reformers and Protestant confessions demonstrates that an important part of the Reformation program was the claim to continuity with the early church, as opposed to the perceived innovations of Rome. A brief survey of reformation attitudes towards history also shows that appeals to church history were largely determined by the historical and polemical context of the times. Calvin and Bucer, for instance, make stronger or weaker appeals to church history depending in which polemical context they found themselves.

As a result of the hardening of confessional lines, a more critical attitude towards church history developed, especially in Anabaptism and English Puritanism. Whereas the reformers and most Protestant confessions claim continuity with the “ancient church,” the Puritans claimed continuity with the “apostolic” church. This is ironic because the Puritans wanted to reform the English church according to the model of the “best reformed churches,” whose confessions affirm the ancient creeds.

Thus, this thesis provides further evidence for the claims of other scholars who have argued that there are two main view of church history within Protestantism: one that stresses continuity with the church in history, and one which stresses interpretation of the Bible free from any historical considerations. As Stephen R. Holmes has suggested, one

## SUMMARY

party sought to “reform” the church while the other party sought to “re-found” the church.

If Protestants have developed an anti-historical attitude, it has been partly in response to polemical circumstances. A way out of current Protestant provincialism, particularly in American fundamentalism, may be found in studying the reformers' original, more positive, attitude towards church history.

## KEY WORDS

Anabaptist

Ancient Church

Apostolic Church

Catholicity

Catholic Substance

Confessions

Creeds

Humanist

Primitive Church

Puritan

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people for their encouragement, their support, their helpful criticism, and their enthusiasm.

Prof. J.W. Hofmeyr

Cynthia Soderberg

Dr. Chad Van Dixhoorn

Chris Schlect

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
1. PROTESTANTS AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY	1
a. Creedal Affirmation in Protestant Confessions	2
b. Polemics and Appeals to History	3
c. <i>Prima Facie</i> Evidence of Creedal Affirmation	5
d. Magisterial Reformation vs. Anabaptist Tradition	6
2. METHODOLOGY AND OUTCOMES	7
a. Methodology of the Thesis	7
b. Contributions to the Field of Knowledge	9
CHAPTER 1	12
APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN THE CONTINENTAL CONTEXT	12
1. HUMANISM AND APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY	12
a. Primitivist Historiography	12
b. Liturgical Primitivism and Uniformity	14
c. Reformers and Primitive Catholicity	15
2. REFORMERS AND APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY	16
a. Reformers' Sense of Catholicity	17
i. Reformers' Use of Church Fathers	18
ii. Tension in the Reformers' Approach to History	20
3. LUTHER AND CALVIN AND APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY	22
a. Luther: An "Obedient Rebel"	22
i. Luther Not a Humanist	23
ii. Luther Not Only Concerned for Individual Justification	23
iii. Luther Not a Pope-Hating Schismatic	24
iv. Luther's View of Councils	28
v. Luther's Catholic Liturgy and Ecclesiology	31
b. Calvin	34
i. General Use of Church History	34
ii. Tension with Church History	36
iii. Calvin as a Polemicist	38
iv. The <i>Reply to Sadolet</i>	39
1. Tradition in the <i>Reply</i>	40
2. Concept of the Church in the <i>Reply</i>	42

v. Conclusion	44
CHAPTER 2	46
APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN OTHER REFORMATIONAL CONTEXTS	46
1. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN THE ENGLISH REFORMATION	46
a. Foundations of the English Reformation	46
b. Puritan Conflict—Movement Towards a “Primitive Church”	48
c. Schaff on the Puritans	51
2. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN ANABAPTIST THOUGHT	54
CHAPTER 3	57
APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN PROTESTANT CONFESSIONS	57
1. INTRODUCTION	57
a. Preliminary Observations	58
b. Differences and Distinctions in Protestant Confessions	58
2. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS	60
a. Augsburg Confession (1530)	60
i. Authorial Evidence: Melancthon	60
ii. Documentary Evidence	65
b. Formula of Concord (1577)	72
3. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN REFORMED CONFESSIONS	76
a. Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)	76
b. First Helvetic Confession (1536)	78
c. French Confession of Faith (1559)	78
d. Heidelberg Catechism (1563)	81
i. Zacharias Ursinus	83
ii. Caspar Olevianus	84
e. Belgic Confession (1561)	85
f. Second Helvetic Confession (1566)	88
i. Authorial Evidence: Bullinger	88
ii. Documentary Evidence	90
g. Declaration of Thorn (1645)	94
h. Confession of the Waldenses (1655)	96
4. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN ANGLO-PURITAN CONFESSIONS	99
a. Scotch Confession (1560)	99
b. Thirty Nine Articles (1562)	102

c. Irish Articles of Religion (1615)	105
d. Westminster Confession (1647)	106
i. History of the Westminster Assembly	107
ii. Puritan View of History	107
iii. Liturgical Differences in Westminster	109
iv. Theological Differences in Westminster	112
v. Possible Reasons for Differences	113
vi. Anabaptists and Separatists	113
vii. Hermeneutical Method	115
viii. The Debate Over the Apostles' Creed	116
ix. Conclusions	120
CHAPTER 4	122
IN THE WAKE OF WESTMINSTER	122
1. INTRODUCTION	122
2. CONGREGATIONALISTS AND ANTI-CREEDALISM	123
3. BAPTIST AMBIVALENCE TO CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS	126
CONCLUSION	130
A Return to Catholicity	130
BIBLIOGRAPHY	135

## INTRODUCTION

Atque ad hunc modum retinemus inviolatam sive integram fidem Christianam, orthodoxam atque Catholicam: scientes, symbolis prædictis nihil contineri, quod non sit conforme verbo Dei, et prorsus faciat ad sinceram fidei explicationem.

- Heinrich Bullinger, *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* <sup>1</sup>

Then I was assailed by those who, when they ought to have kept others in their ranks, had led them astray, and when I determined not to desist, opposed me with violence. On this grievous tumults arose, and the contest blazed and issued in disruption. With whom the blame rests it is for thee, O Lord, to decide. Always, both by word and deed, have I protested how eager I was for unity. Mine, however, was a unity of the Church, which should begin with thee and end in thee.

- John Calvin, *Reply to Sadolet* <sup>2</sup>

### 1. PROTESTANTS AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

The great church historian Jaroslav Pelikan captures some of the humor and irony involved in the study of Protestant attitudes to tradition and history. He writes, “one of the most intriguing aspects of this kind of study is the uncovering of the processes by which the very *antitraditionalism of the Reformation has itself become a tradition*. After four centuries of saying, in the well-known formula of the English divine, William Chillingworth, that ‘the Bible only is the religion of Protestants,’ Protestants have, in this principle, nothing less than a full-blown tradition” (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> Tradition, then, is

---

<sup>1</sup> “And thus we retain the Christian, sound, and Catholic faith, whole and inviolable, knowing that nothing is contained in the aforesaid creeds which is not agreeable to the Word of God, and makes wholly for the sincere declaration of the faith,” Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches* (New York: Harper and Row, 1931; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 854.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises. With a short life of Calvin by Theodore Beza*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 11.



inescapable. It is not a question of *whether* the Church will have traditions, but *which* traditions the Church will have.

### **a. Creedal Affirmation in Protestant Confessions**

Since the beginnings of the Reformation, Protestants have struggled to come to grips with the history and traditions of the Church. The changing attitudes of Protestants towards the history of the Church can be usefully surveyed by examining Protestant confessions. A helpful index for how church history was understood is *explicit affirmations of the creeds and fathers in Protestant confessions*. Explicit affirmations of the creeds are a useful indicator of the *changing polemical situations* surrounding different Protestant confessions.

In this thesis, “creeds” refers to the decrees of the ecumenical Church (which begs the question of which creeds are really ecumenical). For the purposes of this study, I will accept the view of the Protestants and the major confessions, which singled out the “three creeds” (Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed) as ecumenical, authoritative, summaries of Christian doctrine. “Confessions,” on the other hand, denote detailed summaries of faith produced by national and political Protestant groups. Only two of the confessions surveyed were produced by one author (Second Helvetic Confession and Irish Articles), but even then, these documents were intimately bound up with national Protestant considerations. While the “creeds” claimed to represent the

teaching of the catholic (universal) Church, Protestant confessions made no such claims. They did, however, seek to prove continuity with the catholic creeds.<sup>1</sup>

### **b. Polemics and Appeals to History**

The relation of Protestant confessions to the creeds is part of a larger issue, that of Protestant attitudes to church history. Protestants wanted to both *affirm* certain aspects of ancient and medieval church history, while also *critiquing* perceived corruptions in the Roman Catholic church. All this took place in a highly volatile and inflammatory polemical context, which must not be forgotten as we examine Protestant confessions. Backus, in arguing against Polman's ground-breaking study, proposes that polemics and historical argumentation are closely linked:

In the following pages I shall argue that the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries were characterised by an interest in history first and foremost and that the very omnipresence of history made it the obvious means whereby theologians of all religious parties could affirm their confessional identity. This hypothesis does *not* deny that there was religious controversy in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century. It does, however, aim to do away with the notion that theologians of the period were polemicists first and foremost. Their quest and struggle for religious identity, had history as its main court of appeal. I shall also be showing that appeal to history need not contradict the 'sola Scriptura' principle if the Bible is taken as determining the course of history.<sup>2</sup>

In Reformation polemics, appeals to Scripture and appeals to history went hand in hand.

Thus, in order to fully understand the Protestant movement, we need to understand how they appealed to history, and not simply focus on the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1-5, for various definitions of "creed" and "confession". See also "Creeds and Confessions" in *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3-4.

For some, there is an impossible conflict between Protestant principles and the history of the Church. John Henry Newman accused Protestants of being inherently anti-historical:

History is not a creed or a catechism, it gives lessons rather than rules ... And this one thing at least is certain; whatever history teaches, whatever it omits, whatever it exaggerates or extenuates, whatever it says and unsays, at least the Christianity is not Protestantism. If ever there were a safe truth, it is this. And Protestantism has ever felt it so. I do not mean that every writer on the Protestant side has felt it; for it was fashion at first, at least as a rhetorical argument against Rome, to appeal to past ages, or to some of them; but Protestantism, as a whole, feels it, and has felt it. This is shown in the determination already referred to of *dispensing with historical Christianity* altogether, and forming a Christianity from the *Bible alone*: men would never have put it aside, unless they had despaired of it ... To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Newman's own historical study led him into the bosom of the Roman catholic church, and his words highlight the tension in Protestant views of history. As Newman points out, it was indeed "fashionable" for the reformers to appeal to church history in defense of the Reformation. This was part of their effort to authenticate and validate their reform efforts. By examining *how they appealed to church history*, we can understand the Reformation better.

Protestant historians like John T. McNeill have argued for a more balanced view of Protestantism:

The tendency of the social historians has been to regard Protestantism as a concomitant of the nationalism and individualism which marked the social life of the age, and as wholly sympathetic with these movements. In the present study both these viewpoints are challenged as inadequate, and the view is advanced that Protestantism, while not unaffected by the nationalistic and individualistic movements that preceded and accompanied it, possessed an inward unitive principle by virtue of which it resisted, with a measure of success, the forces of disintegration. The

---

<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman, *Development of Doctrine* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989), 7-8.

assertion of this principle by the Reformers is indicated with reference to their teaching on the communion of believers, *their claim of catholicity against the sectarianism of Rome*, and their conciliar ideal of church government (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

It is the second of the three aspects of the Protestant “unitive principle” that I wish to pursue at greater length. Part of the Reformation program was the assertion that Rome had actually fallen into sectarianism and it was the Reformers who were restoring true catholicity. Thus, *virtually all the major Protestant confessions appeal explicitly to the catholic substance<sup>2</sup> of the church, especially as contained in the early creeds*. A brief sampling of Protestant confessional statements will establish the point sufficiently.

### **c. *Prima Facie* Evidence of Creedal Affirmation**

The Formula of Concord states:

And inasmuch as immediately after the times of the Apostles, nay, even while they were yet alive, false teachers and heretics arose, against whom in the primitive church symbols were composed, that is to say, brief and explicit confessions, which contained the unanimous consent of the Catholic Christian faith, and the confession of the orthodox and true Church (such as are the APOSTLES’, the NICENE, and the ATHANASIAN CREEDS): we publicly profess that we embrace them, and reject all heresies and all dogmas which have ever been brought into the Church of God contrary to their decision.<sup>3</sup>

We find a similar affirmation in the French Confession:

---

<sup>1</sup> John T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: A Study in Our Religious Resources* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), 17. One of the great pleasures of writing this thesis has been having an excuse to buy old books. Consequently, I own the great Reformation scholar Roland Bainton’s copy of McNeill’s book, which brings a sense of living history to this project. I can only imagine the exhilaration of the reformers when reading the church fathers for the first time, much less Erasmus’s Greek New Testament.

<sup>2</sup> I use this term in the same sense as Pelikan in *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther’s Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). In that study, the phrase describes the body of doctrine, dogma, teaching, preaching, and liturgical practice of the church throughout the centuries. It is what Christians everywhere, universally, have believed and practiced. The phrase comes originally from Paul Tillich.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 94-95.

We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all, that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them. And therefore we confess the three creeds, to wit: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, because they are in accordance with the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

The Thirty-Nine Articles are also clear in affirming continuity with the creeds:

The three Credes, Nicene Crede, Athanasian Crede, and that whiche is commonly called the Apostles' Crede, ought throughlye to be receaved and bleaued: for they may be proued by moste certayne warrauntes of holye scripture.<sup>2</sup>

Arthur Cochrane, discussing what should be included in a collection of *Reformed* confessions, provides a summary statement of the evidence:

The Lutheran Book of Concord [affirms the creeds] by explicitly including the texts of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the so-called Creed of Athanasius. The Chalcedonian Creed is not included. The *Corpus et syntagma* appears to be the only collection of Reformed Confessions in which the creeds were incorporated. The Irish Articles of Religion of 1615 (Art. 7) and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (Art. VIII) specifically adopt, but do not include, the text of the three ecumenical creeds. Among the Reformed Confessions the Second Helvetic Confession (Chapter XI), the Gallic Confession (Art. V), and the Belgic Confession (Art. IX) expressly approve the three creeds 'as agreeing with the written Word of God.' The Apostles' Creed, together with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, is expounded in the Lutheran, Genevan, Heidelberg, and other standard catechisms.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 362.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 492.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 23-24. I, somewhat regrettably, discovered Cochrane's summary in the final stages of revising my thesis, after I had already combed through Schaff's *Creeds of Christendom* for myself, noting all references to the creeds and fathers. Cochrane does not mention references to the fathers in Protestant Confessions. Thus, my thesis can be seen as fleshing out and extending Cochrane's summary.

#### d. Magisterial Reformation vs. Anabaptist Tradition

These excerpts from major Protestant confessions clearly show that *the reformers knew and revered the fathers, the creeds, and the catholic substance of the church.*

However, not all Protestant confessions explicitly affirm the creeds. From the beginning, the Anabaptist tradition was inherently anti-creedal. As William Lumpkin notes in his collection of Baptist confessions: “The Baptist Movement has traditionally been non-creedal in the sense that it has not erected authoritative confessions of faith as official bases of organization and tests of orthodoxy.”<sup>1</sup> Anabaptism defined itself in opposition to both Roman Catholicism *and* the magisterial Reformation.

The magisterial reformers defined themselves in opposition to the Anabaptist movement, just as the Anabaptists defined themselves in opposition to the magisterial reformers.

Pelikan argues that Luther’s view of church history can only be understood if we remember the two fronts he fought on. He extends this point to include the Reformation confessions, as well: “And as they felt compelled to take issue with the Roman Catholic institutionalization of the church, so they had to defend the reality of the church, and therefore the value of its history, against the radical individualism of the left wing Reformers.”<sup>2</sup>

Both of these traditions came to focused conflict in the English Reformation. While the English reformers and Puritans sought to follow the example of Geneva and the “best reformed churches” (in the words of the Solemn League and Covenant), they were also influenced by the Anabaptist tradition. Thus, comparing and contrasting the major

---

<sup>1</sup> William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959), 16.

<sup>2</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 33.

English confessions with the major continental confessions sheds further light on the development of Protestant attitudes to church history.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND OUTCOMES

### a. Methodology of the Thesis

The *evidence* surveyed in this thesis will be two-fold: *appeals to antiquity* in *selected reformers* and in the *Protestant confessions themselves*. References to the *creeds* and *church fathers* in these confessions will be singled out as “appeals to antiquity,” and thus as useful indicators of changing views of church history.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, confessions were most often politically charged documents, and one could fill up books on the political circumstances surrounding each major confession.<sup>2</sup> But, for the purposes of this study, I will only seek to give a general impression of the circumstances of each confession, and will only occasionally delve deeper into politics as it concerns *polemical contexts of*

---

<sup>1</sup> I do not presume to add anything new to the field of knowledge in regard to Protestant usage of the church fathers. This is a growing area of research which has been well covered. However, I have found no one yet who relates these attitudes to history to the explicit references to church history in Protestant confessions. There are many paths of influence and causation here, and I only want to highlight a broad pattern by which Protestant attitudes toward church history (manifested in actual appeals to, or negations of, antiquity) changed from Luther to the Westminster Assembly and beyond. The scope of history thus surveyed is indeed broad. Many details will slip through the cracks. Many trees will be ignored as I endeavor to map this certain forest.

<sup>2</sup> I will ignore much of the historical context, well knowing how important it is: “To do justice to Reformation theology, however, one must know something of Reformation history. The phenomenon called Christianity is inextricably interwoven with world history, political, economic, ethnic, cultural, and religious, all the way from Caesar Augustus and Quirinius and Caesar Tiberius and Pontius Pilate through Nicea and Chalcedon, and Rome and Constantinople, Wittenberg and Geneva and Canterbury, and Trent and Vatican II, down to the present day. And, of course, the responsible and authoritative formulation of the church’s teaching is equally enmeshed in history. In my unscientific view the close interaction of history and theology is nowhere more crucial than in the sixteenth century,” Herbert J.A. Bouman, “Retrospect and Prospect: Some Unscientific Reflections on the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Formula of Concord,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, no. 4 (1977): 85.

*appeals to antiquity*.<sup>1</sup> I am following Muller's suggestion that looking at the broad pattern of confessional theology is more productive than simply examining one particular reformer. As quoted by Mathison, "rather ... than seek the unity of the Reformed faith in the thought of a single theologian or a single major confessional document ... we must seek out instead a sense of broad consensus arising out of diversity in expression, of a unified tradition defined not by any single confession or by any attempt at harmonization but by the limits to expression established by a series of confessional boundary-markers."<sup>2</sup>

This study will take the confessional appeals to antiquity at face value and not delve into whether the reformers and confessions quoted creeds/fathers accurately; their claims to recover the teachings and practices of the early church will be accepted simply to demonstrate their attitudes to church history. Whether or not they successfully recovered the teachings of the early church is far outside the scope of this project. Additionally, the question is unfair, since *we* know far more about the patristic period than scholars in the sixteenth century did.

## **b. Contributions to the Field of Knowledge**

Other scholars, (see Arthur Cochrane's summary on page 5) have noted a pattern of affirming the ecumenical creeds in Protestant Confessions. I do not pretend any original insight here. Rather, I have laid out the evidence in a summary fashion, and hopefully

---

<sup>1</sup> One example is the opening of the Augsburg Confession. The laws of the Holy Roman Empire demanded subscription to the ancient, Trinitarian faith, and so the confession appropriately begins by professing Nicene orthodoxy. See, pg. 56, below.

<sup>2</sup> Keith A. Mathison, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002), 49-50.



have provided something of a rationale for why different Protestant confessions either *explicitly affirm* the creeds and fathers, or why they *omit such affirmations*. I have also drawn attention to the thought and theology of some of those who wrote (or influenced) the major Protestant confessions, collecting evidence of how Protestants appealed to ancient church history in order to define themselves and legitimize their reform efforts.

This thesis is important because it provides additional support for the historical and theological framework developed by two distinguished church historians. Alister McGrath, following Oberman,<sup>1</sup> distinguishes different views of the relationship of Scripture and tradition. He distinguishes three main attitudes towards Scripture and tradition:

- Tradition 0: The radical Reformation
- Tradition 1: The Magisterial Reformation
- Tradition 2: The Council of Trent<sup>2</sup>

Tradition 0 posits the Bible alone, without any creedal or traditional encumbrances. As McGrath explains the other two, “‘Tradition 1’ is a *single-source* theory of doctrine: doctrine is based upon Scripture, and ‘tradition’ refers to a ‘traditional way of interpreting Scripture.’ ‘Tradition 2’ is a *dual-source* theory of doctrine: doctrine is based upon two quite distinct sources, Scripture and unwritten tradition.”<sup>3</sup> This thesis will *add evidence to support this framework at the confessional level*. The majority of both continental and English confessions clearly display Tradition 1, while some confessions move in the direction of Tradition 0.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Heiko Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1986) and *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 182.

<sup>3</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 182.

Alister McGrath believes this aspect of the Reformation has not been fully explored.<sup>1</sup> However, a growing field of research has shown that the Reformers were not ignorant of history and did not seek to reject the historic catholic church *in tota*.<sup>2</sup> The Reformation debate, of course, concerned the *definition* of the historical and catholic church. To continue in the spirit of the Reformation, we must be honest with history. No unity or revival will ever come of distorting historical facts and misinterpreting them to fit some denominational agenda. It is a welcome sign to see Protestants and Roman Catholics calling for a return to the central, historical, truths of Christianity. I hope that this thesis may contribute, in some small way, to understand the reformers better, and in bringing truly catholic unity to the Church.

---

<sup>1</sup> “This point is of particular importance, and has not received the attention it merits,” *Historical Theology*, 183. Happily, the point is getting more attention. See Irena Backus, ed., *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001) and Leif Grane, A. Schindler, and M. Wriedt, eds., *Auctoritas Patrum: Zur Rezeption Der Kirchenväter Im 15. Und 16. Jahrhundert*, (Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1993), as well as Grane, Schindler, and Wriedt, eds., *Auctoritas Patrum II: New Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> “The Reformers vigorously protested what they viewed as deviations from biblical teaching, but they never used Scripture to undermine the trinitarian and christological consensus of the early church embodied in the historic creeds that had come down from patristic times. The Reformers stoutly resisted the charge of innovation: they did not seek to found new churches but sought simply to reform the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church on the basis of the word of God,” Charles Colson and John Richard Neuhaus, eds., *Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 4.

## CHAPTER 1

### APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN THE CONTINENTAL CONTEXT

#### 1. HUMANISM AND APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY

Attention to history, both sacred and secular, spawned the Renaissance *and* the Reformation. Part of the humanistic project, in Italian humanism and Northern humanism, was a return to the sources (*ad fontes*) of classical antiquity. This included texts of the church fathers and early church history. It became a standard rhetorical device to critique the present by an appeal to the past. The world of antiquity thus became a “golden age,” or at least a more pure age, by which to judge the decadence of the present. Many reformers were raised and trained in this cultural milieu, and used this rhetorical device to great advantage.

##### **a. Primitivist Historiography**

A primitivist view of history was shared by all sides in the Reformation debates. One of the most helpful summaries of this mindset comes from Franklin Little in his study of Anabaptism. Little argues that Anabaptists shared the “primitivist” view of history which predominated at this time:

The man of the Reformation epoch was thus profoundly uneasy about the manner of his social life and the pattern of his own formal thinking and worship. He thought that his own age was ‘decadent;’ a threefold Fall (*triplex discessio*) had occurred—in national affairs, in the church, in the age. The historians of the Renaissance and Reformation frequently rejected the historiography of Orosius, which had been dominant and which projected a pattern of progressive Christian development. The thinking man of the period was conscious of a renewal to come, a new birth of spiritual vigor following a long decline. A new periodization was

introduced, with a Fall both political and religious in imperial Rome, with a *Restitution of old virtue in the present* (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Steven Ozment describes the kinship between humanism and Protestantism, and also shows that appealing to antiquity was not simply a Protestant strategy:

There was a fundamental and lasting kinship between humanism and Protestantism. Neither had been able to find in the dominant late medieval scholastic traditions either attractive personal models or an educational program appropriate to the changed society of the sixteenth century. Finding the chivalric and clerical traditions of the Middle Ages inadequate to both their literary interests and political aspirations Italian and northern humanists had turned instead to either classical or Christian antiquity. Protestants, finding medieval religion incapable of resolving their religious problems, turned back to the Bible and the Church Fathers. Ignatius of Loyola called attention to this close connection between humanism and Protestantism and their common undercutting of church tradition. He warned in his *Spiritual Exercises* against reading the Bible and the Church Fathers directly and apart from the guidance of ‘scholastic doctors such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Master of the Sentences (Peter Lombard)’; the latter, Ignatius argued, possess a ‘clearer understanding’ of both Scripture and the Church Fathers inasmuch as they are ‘of more recent date’.<sup>2</sup>

We see, then, that there was a common assumption that the way out of the corruptions of the late medieval world lay in a return to the sources, *ad fontes*. For the reformers, the most important original source that needed to be recovered was the original text of Scripture, free from the mistranslations of the Vulgate and the labyrinth of Scholastic glosses. But, Scripture was not the only original source deemed important. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Franklin Hamlin Little, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Ozment, “The Intellectual Origins of the Reformation” in F. Forrester Church and Timothy George, eds., *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 134-35. It is tantalizing to see the debate over the fathers as simply arguing from “chronological snobbery,” the logical fallacy which maintains something is good or bad simply because of its novelty or antiquity. Ignatius of Loyola argued for the new, while others argued for the old. Unfortunately, history is more complicated than neat and tidy logical fallacies.

reformers were also very interested in recovering the church fathers.<sup>1</sup> As a precursor to the Reformation, Erasmus led the way in both these areas. His publication of the Greek New Testament sparked Luther's realization that "repentance" had been mistranslated as "do penance," and Erasmus' editions of the church fathers were a standard reference from which Calvin and other reformers would draw their arguments against Rome.<sup>2</sup>

### **b. Liturgical Primitivism and Uniformity**

Besides a return to classical sources, Humanism involved a return to liturgical uniformity. In discussing the development of Reformation baptismal rites, Old remarks on the different attitudes toward the multiplicity of local variations in the baptismal rite of the late middle ages: "As we shall see, the earliest Protestant Reformers were careful to maintain many of these local customs. On the other hand, there were certainly those who would have preferred a greater consistency, believing such variety to be a sign of decadence from a supposed original uniformity. Particularly the Christian Humanists tended to look on these variations as unfortunate."<sup>3</sup> Note here the mention of a "supposed original uniformity". This theme appears throughout Reformation and post-Reformation polemics. All sides wanted to claim continuity with some original

---

<sup>1</sup> The return *ad fontes* also led to a recovery of the texts of the church councils: "Through the general renewal of historical interest during the fifteenth century, the study of the early ecumenical councils received new attention," Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4, *Reformation of Church & Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 102.

<sup>2</sup> See Hilmer M. Pabel, "Retelling the History of the Early Church: Erasmus's Paraphrase on Acts" *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 63-85.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Shape of the Reformed Baptismal Rite* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 5. Thus, the same humanist move toward uniformity produced Castellani's Roman rite in 1523, the year in which Luther and Jud produced their rites. Castellani's work was the foundation of Paul V's final version of the Roman baptismal rite in 1614, according to Old, 6.

uniformity. As this study will show, perceptions about the nature of this original uniformity changed quite drastically.

In the realm of pure humanism, if such a thing ever existed, the return to the original uniformity meant returning to the superior literature, philosophy, rhetoric, and architecture of Greece and Rome. Many of the first generation reformers were noted humanists. Zwingli, Bucer, Melancthon, Calvin, Capito, and Oecampadius ranked among the top scholars of the day. Thus, many of the first generation reformers' polemics involve appeals to antiquity and the classical sources of Christian doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

### **c. Reformers and Primitive Catholicity**

This appeal to antiquity involved two things, (a) a strong sense of continuity with the church fathers, (b) affirmation of the ecumenical creeds. Alister McGrath believes this aspect of the Reformation has not been fully explored<sup>2</sup>, and David Steinmetz even claims, “The Reformation is an argument not just about the Bible but about the early Christian fathers, whom the Protestants wanted to claim. This is one of those things that is so obvious nobody has paid much attention to it—then you look and you see it everywhere.”<sup>3</sup> Nor did the Reformers deny the teaching of the church in history.

Perhaps Bullinger said it best: “And thus we retain the Christian, sound, and Catholic

---

<sup>1</sup> The arguments of the early reformation were so similar to humanist claims that Melancthon could characterize the Reformation as a battle between the humanists and the scholastics. See Leif Grane, “Some Remarks on the Church Fathers in the First Years of the Reformation (1516-1520)” in Grane, *Auctoritas Patrum*. See Charles G. Nauert, Jr., “The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics: an Approach to Pre-Reformation Controversies” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 4, no. 1 (1973): 1-18, for more on the pre-reformation humanist background.

<sup>2</sup> “This point is of particular importance, and has not received the attention it merits,” McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 183.

<sup>3</sup> Steinmetz, quoted in Chris Armstrong, “‘The Bible Alone’? Not for John Calvin!” *Christianity Today*, January 16, 2004. [www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2004/jan16.html](http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2004/jan16.html).

faith, whole and inviolable, knowing that nothing is contained in the aforesaid creeds which is not agreeable to the Word of God, and makes wholly for the sincere declaration of the faith.”<sup>1</sup> Timothy George summarizes the Reformers’ attitude to church history well when he writes: “Overwhelmingly, however, the Reformers saw themselves as part of the ongoing Catholic tradition, indeed as the legitimate bearers of it.”<sup>2</sup> He lists three evidences of this: “(1) their sense of continuity with the church of the preceding centuries; (2) their embrace of the ecumenical orthodoxy of the early church; (3) their desire to read the Bible in dialogue with the exegetical tradition of the past.”<sup>3</sup>

These three concerns can also be summarized as a concern for “catholic substance,” as stated above. We must now examine these three concerns in the Reformation, broadly considered, and then in the thought of particular reformers. After surveying the broader historical context, as well as the writings of major reformers, we will better understand the confessional documents produced in this time and by these men.

### 3. REFORMERS AND APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY

The reformers’ appeal to theological continuity with antiquity was part of their apologetic against Rome, and a key validation of their reform efforts. According to S.J. Barnett, “During and after the Reformation, one of the most pressing issues for Protestants was to locate an appropriate answer to a disarmingly simple Catholic question: where was your church before Luther? Catholic propagandists hoped to undermine the legitimacy of Protestantism by contrasting its evident novelty against the relative antiquity of Roman

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 854.

<sup>2</sup> Colson, *Your Word*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Colson, *Your Word*, 16.

Catholicism. Implicit in the charge of novelty was the accusation that Protestantism represented only a counterfeit religion.”<sup>1</sup>

### **a. Reformers’ Sense of Catholicity**

In reply, the reformers claimed continuity with the catholic substance of the church.

They did not want to be followers of only one man (like Luther).<sup>2</sup> They saw themselves as continuing in the stream of orthodoxy that flowed from the early church’s creeds and fathers. The Roman church had polluted the stream, to be sure, but had not totally diverted it, much less dammed it up, as some radicals would say.

Although the reformers felt a great deal of theological freedom and liberation, it is important to note that they were not seeking autonomy or free-floating interpretation. They sought to remain faithful to a more ancient standard than that of Rome. Alister McGrath argues that the reformers were seeking to recover a more ancient understanding of this relationship, rather than the relatively recent Roman view. So, most reformers divided history into the Apostolic (primitive) church, the Ancient church, and the corrupt medieval church. While they staunchly criticized the Roman corruptions, *they did not hesitate to appeal to the Ancient church.*

---

<sup>1</sup> S.J. Barnett, “Where Was Your Church before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined,” *Church History*, March (1999): 14-41.

<sup>2</sup> Neither Luther nor Calvin set out to establish new denominations in their names. “Lutheran” seems to have come from a papal bull, and Luther opposed the term. See B.A. Gerrish, *The Faith of Christendom: A Source Book of Creeds and Confessions* (Cleveland & New York: Meridian Books, 1963), 22. Gerrish also states, significantly, that: “The Reformed theologians did not think of their communion as founded by a man of the sixteenth century, but as the ancient Church reformed after the primitive pattern,” 24.



### *i. Reformers' Use of Church Fathers*

Scott Hendrix asks whether the reformers were opportunistic in their use of the church fathers and answers, “Not at all, especially if ‘opportunistic’ means taking advantage of a situation without regard to principle. I would say instead that most Protestant reformers adopted an intentionally balanced stance toward the fathers of the church. This attitude, *while it did serve their self-interest, was not self-serving*. In fact, I want to argue that the selective use of the fathers by certain reformers resulted mainly from their theological freedom. This freedom enabled them to adopt a balanced stance toward the fathers which acknowledged both their limitations and their contributions without granting to the fathers undeserved authority” (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

McGrath explains this attitude further: “One of the reasons why the reformers valued the writings of the fathers, especially Augustine, was that they regarded them as exponents of a biblical theology. In other words, the reformers believed that the fathers were attempting to develop a theology based upon Scripture alone—which was, of course, precisely what they were also trying to do in the sixteenth century.”<sup>2</sup> Apparently, according to McGrath, the Protestants were so effective in quoting Augustine that the Roman Catholics initially thought Augustine was a “proto-Protestant”!<sup>3</sup> But, as became

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott Hendrix, *Tradition and Authority in the Reformation* (Aldershot, Great Britain: Variorum, 1996), 57. Pelikan summarizes Luther’s unique role in the emergence of modern historiography: “The Protestant principle in Luther’s Reformation enabled it to be critical in dealing with the historical assumptions in the inherited Catholic substance, and thus to make room for the exercise of objective, critical historical methodology in the study of church history,” *Obedient Rebels*, 32.

<sup>2</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 183.

<sup>3</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 173.

apparent later, the Roman Catholics were not content to let the Protestants have the church fathers.<sup>1</sup>

The reformers tried to navigate between the extremes of Roman Catholic supremacy and radical individualism. The magisterial reformers thought that both Romanists and radicals misinterpreted the Scriptures *and* misconstrued church history. In contrast to the radicals, who by and large rejected the history of the church,<sup>2</sup> the magisterial reformers frequently appealed to church history to substantiate their claims. On the other hand, the reformers could not accept everything that had been said in church history, and so they tended to reject most of the medieval doctrinal development. They claimed continuity with the “primitive” or Apostolic church, and also claimed much agreement with the “ancient” church, which they typically defined as the church up until the time of Augustine (or Gregory the Great at the latest).

McGrath summarizes the reformers’ stance well: “The magisterial Reformation was painfully aware of the threat of individualism, and attempted to avoid this threat by placing emphasis upon the church’s traditional interpretation of Scripture, where this traditional interpretation was regarded as correct. Doctrinal criticism was directed against those areas in which Catholic theology or practice appeared to have gone far beyond, or to have contradicted, Scripture. As most of these developments took place in

---

<sup>1</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 173.

<sup>2</sup> See Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 32-38, for a description of the Lutheran response to the radical left wing of the Reformation. The most extreme version of the radical’s anti-historical mentality is found in Sebastian Franck: “Franck put the fall of the Church at the end of the apostolic age rather than, with the Anabaptists, at the conversion of Constantine: ‘I firmly believe that the outward Church of Christ was wasted and destroyed right after the apostles,’ since when it was not to be found on earth,” in Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott: 1981; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002).

53. The Anabaptist view of church history will be explained more fully below.

the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that the reformers spoke of the period 1200-1500 as an ‘era of decay’ or a ‘period of corruption’ which they had a mission to reform.

Equally, it is hardly surprising that we find the reformers appealing to the early fathers as generally reliable interpreters of Scripture.”<sup>1</sup>

### *ii. Tension in the Reformers’ Approach to History*

This dual appeal to the Scriptures as the ultimate authority and to the fathers and creeds as valuable, but secondary sources of authority, necessarily involved a certain degree of tension. Jaroslav Pelikan’s apt summary of this tension is worth quoting at length:

The fathers of the church had defeated heresy by citing the authority of Scripture, so that loyalty to them required a subjection to the same authority, with which they did not want their own writings to be equated. The epigram of Cyprian, ‘A custom without truth is nothing more than an ancient error,’ became an appropriate way of making the point that the truth of God in Scripture took precedence over the customs of the church, however ancient they might be. Those who were ‘abandoned by the word of God’ would ‘flee for aid to antiquity,’ but *genuine antiquity was, more often than not, on the side of the Reformed*, while their opponents labeled as ‘ancient’ those traditions that ‘the recent greed of some has invented.’ When ecclesiastical antiquity did not support the Reformed, as in the question of celibacy, the *most venerable antiquity of all was the apostolic authority of Scripture*. When, on the other hand, antiquity was on their side, as they believed it to be in the question of the real presence over against the Lutheran as well as the Roman Catholic position, Reformed teachers defended themselves by declaring ‘that what we today do not teach anything else than what was accepted then without any controversy.’ The Radicals of the Reformation claimed to be carrying out more consistently the sole authority of Scripture, which theoretically they had in common with Lutheran and Reformed teachers. Against them (and, at the same time if possible, against other opponents) *the Reformed defended orthodox antiquity*, including the ‘homoousios’ of the Nicene Creed. But the idea of a nonscriptural tradition was without foundation, and the genuine ‘apostolic tradition’ was that embodied in the Apostle’s Creed. Not everything Christ had said or done was contained in Scripture, but everything necessary was (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 183.

<sup>2</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 211-212.

Even though the reformers had to face some difficult problems in reconciling the authority of Scripture and the subordinate authorities of the church, due weight must be given their intentions. Although it quickly became apparent in the controversies over the meaning of the Lord's Supper that *sola Scriptura* and *ad fontes* did not automatically unite those who held these principles, we should not automatically blame the principles as the source of disunity. Avis writes: "Full weight should be given to the 'catholic intention' of the Reformers. Paradoxical as it may seem when we consider the sad divisions of the Church that stem from the Reformation, the fact is that the Reformers believed that their work was to save the catholic Church. But in order to save the Church they had first to save the gospel."<sup>1</sup> Part of this work, the reformers believed, was recovering the purity of the ancient church.

Hendrix also argues that the reformers sought the support of the fathers, not out of an individualistic, autonomous spirit, but because they were solidly grounded in the principle of *sola Scriptura*. Because they built their theology on the bedrock of Scripture, they did not have to stretch the words of the fathers to fit into a supposed "consensus":

While it may not surprise us that Protestant reformers were willing to accept a limited authority of the fathers beneath Scripture, no historical necessity compelled them to adopt that stance. They could have rebelled against the fathers and rejected them completely or they could have submissively sought their support. In either case they would not have used the fathers freely as a resource, but would have felt bound to reject them or obligated to agree with them. What can look like a self-serving or ambivalent attitude toward the fathers can therefore also be read in a more positive way. The reformers selected support from the fathers not only because it served their apologetic interest to do so, but also because they were secure enough in the biblical grounding of their own theology to choose patristic support if they wished. They were free to acknowledge

---

<sup>1</sup> Avis, *The Church*, 216.

both the contributions and the limitations of the fathers and to use them as resources accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Evans argues that for the reformers to appeal to antiquity both established a positive line of continuity with the primitive fathers, and distanced themselves, negatively, from medieval scholarship and exegesis:

When the Protestant reformers called for *sola Scriptura*, a return to primitive truth, Gospel simplicity and the early vision of the apostolic community, they were in large part expressing disenchantment with the Christian scholarship of recent mediaeval centuries. They shared a conviction that the official pronouncements of the Church had gone too far, in adding to Scripture, in imposing unnecessary rituals upon the faithful, and above all in claiming that these were necessary for salvation. But the call for ‘Scripture alone’ did not seem to all the reformers to necessitate refusing help from earlier Christian scholars. Many of them found a place for patristic researches, especially the reading of Greek Fathers who, with the exceptions of Origen and Chrysostom, had been comparatively unfamiliar or inaccessible during the later Middle Ages in the Latin West.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the reformers sought to be schooled by Apostles and the fathers, rather than being schooled by the Schoolmen.

#### 4. LUTHER AND CALVIN AND APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY

##### **a. Luther: An “Obedient Rebel”**

One of the foremost liturgical scholars has written, “Luther is a strange combination of both faithful continuity and radical discontinuity with the past, a tension that has

---

<sup>1</sup> Hendrix, *Tradition*, 58.

<sup>2</sup> G.R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 74.

characterized much of Protestant worship ever since.”<sup>1</sup> By briefly highlighting this tension in Luther, we can understand the basic context of the reformers’ appeals to antiquity as manifested in confessional documents. Unfortunately, because of widespread misconceptions about Luther I must start with a series of negations.

***i. Luther Not a Humanist***

Luther differed from most of the other first generation reformers in that he was not trained as a humanist. His reformation was driven by theological and pastoral concerns. He took up the study of church history rather late in his career. In studying the development of reformational appeals to antiquity, Luther is valuable mainly as a foil. The basic similarities in the approaches of other reformers will become apparent by comparing and contrasting them to Luther’s approach to church history.

***ii. Luther Not Only Concerned for Individual Justification***

As an “obedient rebel” Luther had a *deep sense of continuity with the past*. Luther did not set out to start Lutheranism. Luther did not wake up one morning and decide to overthrow the Pope. Although Luther is often blamed for the rise of subjectivism in Western Culture and in the church, this charge is one-sided. Hendrix argues for a more balanced view: “It can be pointed out, however, that the theology of Luther, for example, was anything but subjectively oriented and did not overshift to the side of individual faith. Ecclesiological concerns were at the center of his theological development and a correlative concept of the church grew up together with his new soteriology. Luther was

---

<sup>1</sup> James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 37.

not interested in how the individual Christian could survive apart from the church, but in how the church properly conceived could feed the Christian faithful with the word of life in the midst of crisis and uncertainty.”<sup>1</sup> We should focus then, more on what Luther said about the collective church, and perhaps not so much on individual justification by faith. Luther’s program of reformation was for the *church*, not just for individuals.

This concern for the church included concern for the *church in history*. In the first years of reform, in his interview with Cardinal Cajetan (1518), Luther displayed his sense of continuity with the historical church: “Above all I, brother Martin Luther, Augustinian, declare publicly that I cherish and follow the holy Roman Church in all my words and actions—present, past and future ... Today I declare publicly that I am not conscious of having said anything contrary to the *Holy Scripture, the church fathers, or papal decretals or their correct meaning*. All that I have said today seems to me to have been *sensible, true, and catholic*. Nevertheless, since I am a man who can err, I have submitted and now again submit to the judgment and the lawful conclusion of the holy Church and of all who are better informed than I” (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup>

### ***iii. Luther Not a Pope-Hating Schismatic***

One of the things Luther had said that day was that the pope was not superior to the council of Basel, or superior to Scripture. But, it must be understood that Luther’s reformation grew out of his zeal for the catholic church, and not simply out of a hatred of the papacy. Even when we grant that Luther’s views were anything but static, and that

---

<sup>1</sup> Hendrix, *Tradition*, 376.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Hillerbrand, *The Reformation* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), 64.

his antipathy to the pope grew over time, this early statement still captures the essence of his efforts. Luther wanted to reform the church, not dismember the church:

Luther's vision of 'reformation' was that of reform and renewal *from within* the church. It cannot be stated too often that he did not choose to separate from the medieval church; he was kicked out of it and *forced* to undertake a program of reform from outside that church. Even as late as 1519, well after his epoch-making discovery of the "righteousness of God," Luther wrote: "If, unfortunately, there are things in Rome which cannot be improved, there is not—nor can there be!—any reason for tearing oneself away from the church in schism. Rather, the worse things become, the more one should help her and stand by her, for by schism and contempt nothing can be mended." Schism was *forced on*, not *chosen by*, Luther.<sup>1</sup>

This stands in stark contrast to a typical stereotype of Luther. One contemporary Roman Catholic apologist writes: "Luther replaced the infallible teaching authority of the Church by his self-bestowed personal infallibility in interpreting the Bible."<sup>2</sup> The writer goes on to claim: "His interpretation of the Bible was the saving truth; all else was lies and delusions. It is hardly surprising that some Reformers who disagreed with him remarked sardonically that it was small gain to have got rid of the Pope of Rome if they were to have in place the Pope of Wittenberg."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 36-37. McGrath then quotes the great Luther scholar Heinrich Bornkamm: "Luther was excluded from his church because of his criticism of the theology and the ecclesiastical conditions of his time. It was *his* church from which he was excluded, for it was for no other church that he uttered his fervent pleadings and prayers and his painful laments and angry indictments. Everything he did and said and wrote was not against it, but for it, for its sake, not in order to establish a new church. It was because *his* church, the Roman Church of that time, excluded him that an inner reform, which had often taken place before, became something new, outside of the hitherto existing church," 137.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Davies, *Cranmer's Godly Order: The Destruction of Catholicism Through Liturgical Change* (Ft. Collins: Roman Catholic Books, 1976), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, *Cranmer's Godly Order*, 30. Heiko Oberman's *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Image Books, 1989) is a balanced corrective to both Roman Catholic and Protestant misinterpretations of Luther. Chapter nine is especially helpful in outlining Luther's attitude toward the church in history.



Now, there is no doubt that Luther made strong claims at times. For instance, he could say: "In matters of faith each Christian is for himself Pope and Church, and nothing may be decreed or kept that could issue ... in a threat to faith."<sup>1</sup> What Davies fails to point out *that it is because of Luther's high view of Scripture* that he can make such strong statements. Scripture is plain enough for every man to understand. The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture is a direct implication of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers). Thus, when Luther claims "infallibility" it is because he believes his interpretation to be what the infallible Scriptures teach: "He who does not accept my doctrine cannot be saved. For it is God's and not mine."<sup>2</sup> Scripture provided the framework to sift through all the pronouncements of other mere men (like Luther) throughout church history.

As a well-trained Augustinian monk, Luther was concerned to sift through the good and the bad in church history, and did not simply reject it like the radical reformers.<sup>3</sup> So, Luther was able to say:

We on our part confess that there is much that is Christian and good under the papacy; indeed, everything that is Christian and is good is to be found there and has come to us from this source. For instance, we confess that in the papal church there are the true Holy Scriptures, true baptism, the true sacrament of the altar, the true keys to the forgiveness of sins, the true office of the ministry, the true catechism in the form of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the articles of the Creed.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Davies, *Cranmer's Godly Order*, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Davies, *Cranmer's Godly Order*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Radical reformers like Sebastian Franck assumed an anti-historical stance: "I believe that the outward Church of Christ, including all its gifts and sacraments, because of the breaking in and laying waste by antichrist right after the death of the apostles, went up into heaven and lies concealed in the Spirit and in truth. I am thus quite certain that for fourteen hundred years now there has existed not gathered Church nor any sacrament," Avis, *Theology of the Church*, 53. Many modern Protestants lean closer to this view than the views of the magisterial reformers themselves.

<sup>4</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 204.

Luther, then, did not reject the past *in tota*. Concerning the Lord's Supper he said, "For over 1,200 years the church remained orthodox."<sup>1</sup> Luther believed his reform efforts were restoring the pure face of the church besmeared by papal corruptions.

Luther and the reformers were not trying to establish their own denominations, or their own personality cults. As McGrath points out, the very word "reformation" presupposes something to be reformed: "For the magisterial reformers ... the task of the Reformation was to reform a church which had become corrupted or disfigured as a result of developments in the Middle Ages ... to reform a church is to presuppose that a church already exists. Luther and Calvin were both clear that the medieval church was indeed a Christian church. The difficulty was that it had lost its way and required to be reformed."<sup>2</sup>

It must be emphasized that the reformers strongly maintained that they were not rejecting the orthodox consensus of past centuries. McGrath points out: "The catholics argued that the reformers elevated private judgment above the corporate judgement of the church. The reformers replied that they were doing nothing of the sort: they were simply restoring that corporate judgement to what it once was, by *combating the doctrinal degeneration of the Middle Ages by an appeal to the corporate judgement of the patristic era*" (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup>

But this "consensus" must still be subjected to the scrutiny of the Scriptures: "Now if any of the saintly fathers can show that his interpretation is based on Scripture, and if

---

<sup>1</sup> *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, John Dillenberger, ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 267.

<sup>2</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 204.

<sup>3</sup> McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 156.

Scripture proves that this is the way it should be interpreted, then the interpretation is right. If this is not the case, I must not believe him."<sup>1</sup> Luther felt the church fathers actually *invited* him to be critical. He quotes Augustine (the preeminent church father) to prove that church fathers are only witnesses to the ultimate authority of Scripture:

“Luther also quotes Augustine’s appeal from *De Trinitate*: ‘My dear man, do not follow my writings as you do Holy Scripture. Instead, whatever you find in Holy Scripture that you would not have believed before, believe without doubt. But in my writings you should regard nothing as certain that you were uncertain about before, unless I have proved its truth.’”<sup>2</sup> Even so, Luther claimed allegiance to the catholic tradition.<sup>3</sup> In his “Disputation Against Scholastic Theology,” he writes: “In all I wanted to say, we believe we have said nothing that is not in agreement with the Catholic church and the teachers of the church.”<sup>4</sup>

#### *iv. Luther’s View of Councils*

Specifically, Luther acknowledged the authority of the first four ecumenical councils. At times, Luther defended his reform efforts as simply keeping his priestly and academic vows, which included affirming the historic creeds: “The doctoral oath at Wittenburg in 1533, included this promise of loyalty to the creeds: ‘I promise the eternal God ... that with God’s help I shall faithfully serve the church in teaching the Gospel without any corruptions and shall constantly *defend the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds ...*’”

<sup>1</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 82.

<sup>2</sup> *De Trin.* 3.2, quoted in Jeffrey J. Meyers, “Der Grund der Seligkeit: Luther’s Evangelical and Christological Method of Distinguishing Doctrine Within the Early Church Councils and Fathers” (unpublished paper), 17.

<sup>3</sup> See David S. Yeago, “The Catholic Luther” in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), for a provocative reading of the early Luther in this regard.

<sup>4</sup> Colson, *Your Word*, 14.

(emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup> Oberman summarizes Luther's view of councils: "These councils, which continued to speak for the whole of Christendom east and west, had still been free to make decisions—free of the pope. But since the Church of Rome had acquired power over Christendom, it was no longer possible or permissible to build on a council."<sup>2</sup> From Luther's point of view, the medieval councils were contradictory and thus not authoritative. Moreover, they were not truly ecumenical. As Oberman quotes Luther, in 1519: "Quid est ecclesia hodie nisi quaedam schismatum confusio? ... Caecitas, caecitas, caecitas."<sup>3</sup>

Luther was also stridently critical of church history, especially later in life as his knowledge of church history deepened, and the refusal of the Roman church to reform itself became obvious. In 1536, he writes: "At the beginning ... I was totally innocent of historical knowledge. I attacked the papacy a priori, as one says, meaning on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. Others now confirm my results a posteriori, on the basis of historical documents."<sup>4</sup> Luther seriously studied the history of church councils when Pope Paul III made overtures of finally calling an ecumenical council. It was this study which generated his work *On Councils*.

Having said all this, in many ways Luther was *not* as concerned with continuity with church history compared with other reformers such as Bucer, Melancthon, and Calvin. He did not feel any compulsion to sort out every last detail of church history. Although he manifested an overwhelming ego at times, he also had a healthy sense of his own

---

<sup>1</sup> Meyers, "Der Grund," 45.

<sup>2</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 247.

<sup>3</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 249.

<sup>4</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 259.

finiteness and limitations. Part of the problem lay in the limited amount of information available to him about certain aspects of the early church. Even so, he was able to say (in commenting on the Council of Chalcedon): “I shall give you my ideas; if I hit the mark, good—if not, the Christian faith will not fall herewith.”<sup>1</sup>

His view of Scripture was so paramount that questions of church history inevitably took a subsidiary form: “Even if I do not have this council or any proper understanding of it, I still have Scripture and a proper understanding of it. The council is bound to hold to it; and for me Scripture is far more certain than all councils.”<sup>2</sup> And while other reformers tried to bring the contemporary church into explicit conformity with the early church, Luther had broader vision. Headley writes: “Much as Luther admired the ministry of the early Church, it was not to this fact nor to any specific practice that he sought to restore the contemporary Church. What he discovered in the primitive Church for the most part, and what he sought to restore, was not its entire outward appearance but its relative freedom from human traditions in order that the gospel could effectively operate.”<sup>3</sup> Luther was more concerned about the Gospel than the details of church history.

For Luther, the Church was subordinate to the Gospel: “The face of the Church was important, but it was the face of the gospel within the Church that Luther sought to restore.”<sup>4</sup> Luther believed that the gospel was the center around which the church was defined. As Paul Avis summarizes: “For Luther, the Church was created by the living

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Meyers, “Der Grund,” 33.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Meyers, “Der Grund,” 33. Later in his essay, Meyers proves that Luther was not exalting his own “private” interpretation above the body of true doctrines that had been handed down through the ages. When doctrines were supported by Scripture, Luther submitted most willingly.

<sup>3</sup> John M. Headley, *Luther’s View of Church History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 180.

<sup>4</sup> Headley, *Luther’s View*, 180.

presence of Christ through his word the gospel. Where the gospel is found Christ is present, and where he is present the Church must truly exist. This conviction lay at the root of the whole Reformation struggle and was shared by all the Reformers—Lutheran and Reformed, Anglican and Anabaptist. They were prepared to sacrifice the visible unity of the Western Church if only by so doing they could save the gospel.”<sup>1</sup>

What many extremists (on both Protestant and Roman Catholic sides of the debate) do not realize is that Luther’s firm stand on the Word of God did not negate an acceptance of the church’s history. Rather, Luther thought he was continuing in the stream of the historic church. Luther was an unwilling reformer. He did not seek to reject the authority of the church.

#### ***v. Luther’s Catholic Liturgy and Ecclesiology***

Luther’s high view of the church is also apparent in his liturgical reforms. In liturgical reformation, “It was not his purpose, Luther explained at the beginning of his *Formula of the Mass*, to do away with the liturgy altogether, but to purge the existing liturgy of the abominations that had been added to it. But immediately thereafter he hastened to point out that the ‘additions of the early fathers’ did not belong to this category, but were commendable and should be retained; such was, for example, the Kyrie.”<sup>2</sup> Luther also added more liturgical usage of the Old Testament, and especially the Psalter, thus expressing his deep sense of continuity with the Old Covenant people of God.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Avis, *The Church*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 86.

Luther's ecclesiology is graphically epitomized in a bit of typological exegesis in one of his early sermons. In a Christmas sermon on the text of Luke 2:15-20, Luther compares Mary, who kept and pondered the miraculous events of her child's birth, to the Church. He also compares Joseph, the faithful servant of his son, to the servants of the church. He infers that, since Luke mentions Mary before Joseph in Luke 2:16, the Church is preferred before her servants, the prelates. In writing about Mary as the Church, he describes what the church should be like: "The Christian church retains now all the words of God in her heart and ponders them, compares them with one another and with the Scriptures. Therefore he who would find Christ must first find the Church. How should we know where Christ and his faith were, if we did not know where his believers are? And he who would know anything of Christ must not trust himself nor build a bridge to heaven by his own reason; but he must go to the Church, attend and ask her."<sup>1</sup>

For Luther, the Church is *highly visible*. The Church can be seen in the actions of the believing community: "Now the Church is not wood and stone, but the company of believing people; one must hold to them, and see how they believe, live and teach; they surely have Christ in their midst."<sup>2</sup> Far from being a religious club, or a voluntary association, the Church is indispensable: "For outside of the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation."<sup>3</sup>

Continuing in Luther's analogy, the medieval prelates usurped too many privileges and forsook their station as faithful Josephs, as faithful servants of the Church. Luther almost

---

<sup>1</sup> Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. John Nicholas Lenker, trans. Lanker and Others, vol. 1.1-2, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 169-170.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 170.

<sup>3</sup> Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 170.

sounds like a congregationalist as he criticizes prelatical posturing: "But their teaching should be subject to the congregation of believers. The congregation should decide and judge what they teach; their judgment should stand, in order that Mary may be found before Joseph, the church be preferred to the preachers. For it was not Joseph but Mary who retains the words in her heart, ponders them, gathers them together and compares."<sup>1</sup>

The body of believers, Mary, has authority over a single prelate who unduly elevates himself. But this is no mere democracy. Mary, the Church, must treasure the words of God, and compare them with each other. Mary, in a word, must judge prelates by the analogy of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Like the Bereans, the Church is faithful as it faithfully examines the words of Scripture, to see if what is being preached is indeed true (Acts 17:11).

We see, then, that Luther had a very high view of the church. He believed Rome had left him (and the gospel), not that he had left Rome.<sup>3</sup> And when Rome left him (because he was proclaiming the Scriptural gospel) Rome, in effect, left the true church. But, Protestants have not always remained faithful to Luther's original insights: "Whereas the real Luther never lost sight of the Church, the Protestant Luther had."<sup>4</sup> In this sense, Protestants need to recover Luther's stress on the church.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luther, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 170.

<sup>2</sup> George relates that this is precisely why the reformers, in general, retained a measure of devotion to Mary, as opposed to their successors. Even Zwingli thought the "Ave Maria" could be sung! See, Colson, *Your Word*, 15.

<sup>3</sup> "Yet by his teaching of justification by faith, Luther stood in the continuity of the faithful in all generations. He was proclaiming the gospel by which and for which the church lives. The pope excommunicated him and condemned justification by faith alone. As far as Luther was concerned, the pope had thereby also condemned the gospel. And so, in Luther's eyes, it was Rome that had left Luther, and not Luther that had left Rome," Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 248.



In his concern to pursue both Protestant principle and catholic substance, Luther thus set the tone for the magisterial reformation. Although other reformers would lay greater stress on continuity with the past, and while the radical reformers would stress *discontinuity* with the past, the tension we find in Luther is characteristic of the Reformation period, and perhaps of all efforts to reform religion and society.

## **b. Calvin**

Calvin was not afraid of church history. He never hesitated to appeal to history in arguing for reformation. Like all reformers and counter-reformers, he debated fiercely and violently at times. However, we must remember that he saw himself as defending the holiness and majesty of God. He argued that the purity of God's word had been obscured in past history, but he also sought to understand history truly as he interpreted historical facts through a biblical framework. Though Calvin and the other reformers held to *notae ecclesiae*, derived from Scripture, this did not prevent them from delving into the realm of historical critique. Rather, the Biblical marks of a true church demanded a historical investigation of these marks. Scripture provided the framework with which to judge the history of the church.

### ***i. General Use of Church History***

Calvin's knowledge of church history revealed itself early in his career. At the Lausanne Disputation (1536), Calvin proved himself to be well-versed in the fathers and a new force to be reckoned with. Lane relates that after passively listening to the proceedings for a day, Calvin could no longer restrain himself. When he addressed the assembly, he

quoted extensively (from memory!) numerous passages from the church fathers to defend the Protestant cause. Apparently, Calvin was so persuasive that a Franciscan monk renounced his vows after the Disputation and joined the Protestants.<sup>1</sup> This outstanding display of memory and rhetorical skill would continue to manifest itself as Calvin argued against Cardinals, Popes, the theologians of the Sorbonne, appealed to Imperial Diets, and defended the Reformation on all sides.

These abilities are manifest in the fourth book of Calvin's *Institutes*. Even while apologizing somewhat for Calvin's style, modern editors of the *Institutes* remark on Calvin's historical understanding: "Calvin's very considerable knowledge of church history is used in an animated polemic against Roman assertions of Peter's authority in Rome and the rising claim and exercise of papal power in the Middle Ages. If the too abundant invective were removed from these chapters, there would remain a rather impressive body of historical data germane to the issue; but he views historical changes with too little sense of the complexity of the forces involved."<sup>2</sup>

In the opinion of E. Harris Harbison, Calvin was a superior thinker in his use of the past: "... Calvin preserved closer touch with all the major thought-forms of the past than either Erasmus or Luther, each of whom was more genuinely revolutionary in his own way. He did so because he was more objective in his approach to scholastic, juristic, and humanistic learning, because he could absorb their methods without subscribing to their spirit and swallowing their content, and because he was more catholic in his intellectual

---

<sup>1</sup> This narrative is dependent on Anthony Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 25-28.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles, eds., Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), lxii.

tastes.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there is interesting evidence that historical thinking was an important factor in his conversion from Roman Catholicism.<sup>2</sup>

## *ii. Tension with Church History*

It is obvious that Calvin, like other reformers, knew the fathers well and was anxious to preserve continuity with the past. Also like other reformers, Calvin judged church history by Scripture: “Although Calvin claimed that he could appeal to the fathers, he resisted the temptation to invest excessive authority in them by basing the truth of his arguments on their opinions. Instead, using biblical phrases, he recalled that believers in Christ were not beholden to the fathers but that the reverse was true, namely, that the fathers were to serve believers by promoting obedience to Christ”.<sup>3</sup> As with Luther, Calvin ascribes a pastoral role to the fathers, not a dictatorial role. The fathers have been given to us to help lead us to Christ, just like all other pastors and teachers, not to supplant Christ. The fathers point to Christ, and because all human teachers are at variance with Christ at some point, they do not deserve our ultimate allegiance.<sup>4</sup>

This is evident in his treatment of creedal subscription in his debate with Caroli. In this highly-charged polemical situation, Calvin refused to subscribe to the Athanasian Creed, suggested by Caroli for defining the parameters of the debate. Reynolds makes clear that

---

<sup>1</sup> E. Harris Harbison, *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956), 146.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard L. Buerher, *John Calvin’s Humanistic Approach to Church History* (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> Hendrix, “Deparentifying the Fathers,” 62.

<sup>4</sup> It is only fair to point out that Christians from the Roman Catholic or Orthodox point of view would probably not object to this statement. What is at issue is the degree to which the fathers do or do not point to Christ.

Calvin, in this instance, wanted to focus on Biblical teaching, rather than a man-made summary.<sup>1</sup>

Calvin, like most theological writers of his time, was not interested in a dispassionate or neutral account of church history. Church history must be interpreted theologically and judged by the ultimate standard of Scripture. In good Renaissance fashion, Calvin also used church history to his rhetorical advantage, and sometimes ignored important pieces of information.

Although Calvin knew much of church history, ancient practice and belief were never binding for him simply because they were ancient. For example, in his very brief refutation of paedocommunion, he writes: “This permission [to give the Lord’s Supper to small children] was indeed commonly given in the ancient church, as is clear from Cyprian and Augustine, but the custom has deservedly fallen into disuse.”<sup>2</sup> In this instance, Calvin merely dismisses the practice of the ancient church (and Augustine!), with a wave of the hand. This is certainly not one of the best examples of careful, historical, refutation of what he considered to be error. Perhaps this cursory treatment is due to the fact that there was no opponent arguing for paedocommunion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Calvin’s treatment of historical errors was limited by the polemical contexts of his day.

Another example of Calvin’s selective use of church history (rather than a purely historical approach) appears when Calvin treats the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council. Calvin was

---

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds, Stephen M. “Calvin’s View of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 23 (1960): 33-37.

<sup>2</sup> *Institutes*, IV.xvi.30.

not above distorting the historical evidence as he made his apologetic case. Payton shows, conclusively I believe, that Calvin did not deal carefully with the proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council.<sup>1</sup> In this case, Calvin's concern as a polemical apologist outweighed his integrity as a humanist scholar.

### *iii. Calvin as a Polemicist*

For Calvin, apologetics and history cannot be separated. The development of doctrine through polemics is a time-honored tradition in the Christian church. Indeed, one could say there has been no development without polemics.<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff summarizes Calvin's talents as a polemicist: "He displayed a decided superiority over all his opponents, as a scholar and a reasoner. He was never at a loss for an argument. He had also the dangerous gift of wit, irony, and sarcasm, but not the more desirable gift of harmless humor ... He treated his opponents ... with sovereign contempt, and called them *nebulones, nugatores, canes, porci, bestiae*. Such epithets are like weeds in the garden of his chaste and elegant style. But they were freely used by the ancient fathers, with the exception of Chrysostom and Augustin, in dealing with heretics, and occur even in the Scriptures, but impersonally."<sup>3</sup> Apparently, even the catholic-minded Schaff could not follow the fathers as far as Calvin! Calvin certainly fits into Backus' description of

<sup>1</sup> James R. Payton, Jr., "Calvin and the Legitimation of Icons: His Treatment of the Seventh Ecumenical Council," *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte* Jahr. 84 (1993): 222-241.

<sup>2</sup> "Although references to the doctrine of baptism are scattered throughout the Christian literature of the second and third centuries, only one extant treatise from that period is devoted exclusively to the subject, that of Tertullian. And the most succinct statement by Tertullian on the doctrine of baptism actually came, not in his treatise on baptism, but in his polemic against Marcion. (It was a similar polemical need that called forth Irenaeus's summary of the catholic doctrine of the Eucharist.)," Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 163.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation* (Charles Scribner's Sons: 1910; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 594-595. Unfortunately, this passage tells us more about Schaff than about Calvin. Calvin followed the example of the fathers quite well in using biting language.

sixteenth-century polemics.<sup>1</sup> He saw no contradiction between affirming and appealing to the history of the church and the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*.

One of Calvin's earliest tracts came directly out of a polemical situation and wonderfully captures the early Protestant attitude to church history. I feel it is important to appreciate the *optimism* and *confidence* which accompanied early efforts at reform since this optimism is reflected at the *confessional* level. By the time of the Puritans, Protestants are not quite as comfortable with the types of claims Calvin makes in his *Reply to Sadolet*.

#### *iv. The Reply to Sadolet*

As a prime example of the young Calvin's theological and rhetorical prowess, the *Reply* illustrates *Calvin's polemical use of church history*. It demonstrates two things: (1) At this early stage of his career, perhaps under the influence of the irenic Bucer, Calvin had a very high and optimistic view of ancient church history,<sup>2</sup> (2) Calvin appeals to the similarities between the Reformers and the ancient church in order to legitimize the Protestant movement.

Throughout this brief survey, we should remember that Calvin is speaking as a polemical apologist for a movement under attack. He is not a modern church historian. Rather than criticize lapses of historical accuracy, we should note the difference between Calvin's high view of church history at this time, as opposed to the more ambivalent, and even negative, view of church history exemplified by those who would later claim to be

---

<sup>1</sup> See pgs 2-3 above.

<sup>2</sup> Beuhrer argues that this optimistic note is less prominent in the later Calvin. See his *John Calvin's Humanistic Approach to Church History*, chapter five.

Calvin's followers. In many ways, later Calvinists seem to have abandoned Calvin's actual view of church history.

### 1. Tradition in the *Reply*

In responding to Sadolet, Calvin presses the superiority of the Word of God over tradition, but recognizes that the Word has been received *through tradition*. As James Payton describes Calvin's stance: "he used the language of tradition to describe the responsibility of pastors to be guided by the Word of God in all that they do and teach. He said that their office, *non quae a se ipsis placita temere excuderint, confidenter ingerere, sed quae ex ore Domini oracula acceperint, religiose ac bona fide proferre*, 'is not boldly to set forth teachings devised on their own, but religiously and in good faith to deliver the oracles which they have received at the mouth of the Lord' (emphasis added)."<sup>1</sup>

Payton goes on to say: "Calvin was quite unwilling to relinquish the cherished conception of tradition: it simply had to be the proper tradition, that of faithfulness to the Word of God. This was for him no ahistorical and unattainable ideal; rather it had demarked the Church, in the main, during the course of her history and found its contemporary embodiment among the Protestants."<sup>2</sup> In arguing against Sadolet, Calvin sincerely believes he has gone beyond Sadolet, or rather behind him, to the ancient and primitive church. Calvin is not proposing some new-fangled heresy: he is simply calling for a return to *true* tradition, as well as *truly ancient* tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup> Payton, "Sola Scriptura and Church History: The Views of Bucer and Melancthon on Religious Authority in 1539" (Ph.D. diss., University of Waterloo, 1982), 111. Italics have been substituted for Payton's underlining.

<sup>2</sup> Payton, "Sola Scriptura," 111.

Payton remarks that Calvin's proffered definition of the church (*societatem ... per omnes aetates dispersa, una tamen Christi doctrina et in uno spiritu colligata*) allows Calvin to advocate an understanding of tradition, "in a manner allowing both for historical and theological criticism of the Church in any particular era, on the one hand, and for an historical and theological continuity of the Church, on the other."<sup>1</sup> As we shall see, this summarizes Calvin's two-pronged attack against the Roman Church: *he critiques the Roman Catholics by appealing to what he believes is true catholicity*. This rhetorical strategy was part of Calvin's basic humanist worldview.

A similar attitude towards history and the church fathers pervaded the first generation of Reformers, most of whom had received a thorough humanist education: "For all their criticism of the medieval period and their preference for Christian antiquity, the Christian humanists nonetheless believed as Christians that the Church had never ceased to exist, even in the darkest medieval night. In some fashion still undefined in relationship to their sense of historical distance, there had to be an essential continuity, a true tradition.

According to Calvin—and the same could be said of Philip Melancthon and Martin Bucer—, that tradition had been preserved and then existed among the Protestants, and not in the Roman obedience."<sup>2</sup>

The most basic point to understand before we analyze Calvin's *Reply* further is that Calvin's, "Protestant stance upon the Word of God was not of such a nature as to require him to posit a huge disjunction between the ancient Word of God and other written

---

<sup>1</sup> Payton, "Sola Scriptura," 111-112.

<sup>2</sup> Payton, "Sola Scriptura," 112.



monuments of Christian antiquity.”<sup>1</sup> For Calvin, appealing to the Word of God did not negate the task of historical research. Although tradition was definitely subordinate to Scripture, Calvin freely appealed to tradition and the “ancient church”.

## 2. Concept of the Church in the *Reply*

Calvin denies that the reformers are inventing something new: “You are mistaken in supposing that we desire to head away the people from that method of worshipping God which the Catholic Church has always observed.”<sup>2</sup> But, in order to claim unity with the church that has always existed, Calvin must define it in such a way as to exclude the corrupt Roman church: “Now, if you can bear to receive a truer definition of the Church than our own, say, in future, that it is the society of all the saints, a society which, spread over the whole world, and existing in all ages, yet bound together by the one doctrine, and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord. With this Church we deny that we have any disagreement. Nay, rather, as we revere her as our mother, so we desire to remain in her bosom.”<sup>3</sup>

In response to Sadolet’s charge that the reformers were tearing up and destroying a Church that had existed for fifteen hundred years with the “uniform consent of the faithful,”<sup>4</sup> Calvin appeals to the reformers’ *agreement with antiquity*. He claims Sadolet knows full well, “that not only is our agreement with antiquity far closer than yours, but that all we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the Church, which, at

---

<sup>1</sup> Payton, “*Sola Scriptura*,” 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Reply*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Reply*, 6. No doubt Calvin had Cyprian’s, “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother,” in mind.

<sup>4</sup> *Reply*, 6.

first sullied and distorted by illiterate men of indifferent character, was afterwards flagitiously mangled and almost destroyed by the Roman Pontiff and his faction.”<sup>1</sup>

Calvin turns Sadolet’s argument back on him. From the reformers’ point of view, it was the Romanists who had “mangled” the unity of the Church, and they were themselves a “faction”.<sup>2</sup>

Since Calvin has seized the ecclesiastical high ground, he must now prove how Protestants are really a continuation of the true church. Calvin distinguishes between two pure churches, or between the *pure church in two phases*:

I will not press you so closely as to call you back to that form which the Apostles instituted (though in it we have the only model of a true Church, and whosoever deviates from it in the smallest degree is in error), but to indulge you so far, place, I pray, before your eyes, that ancient form of the Church, such as their writings prove it to have been in the age of Chrysostom and Basil, among the Greeks, and of Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine, among the Latins; after so doing, contemplate the ruins of that Church, as now surviving among yourselves...

Will you here give the name of an enemy of antiquity to him who, zealous for ancient piety and holiness, and dissatisfied with the state of matters as existing in a dissolute and depraved Church, attempts to ameliorate its condition, and restore it to pristine splendor?<sup>3</sup>

In this statement, we are given important information about Calvin’s view of church history. First, we need to note that Calvin distinguishes between the “apostolic” church and the “ancient” church. The two, at least in this passage, are not synonymous for

---

<sup>1</sup> *Reply*, 6. Calvin’s charge of “illiteracy” seems out of place, until we remember that Calvin was following all the literary rules of northern humanism and was charging the medieval corrupters of the church with “sophistry” (scholasticism) and “illiteracy” (ignorance of history and antiquity). Those in the Dark Ages, for Calvin, were unlettered, and did not understand how far they had departed from Scripture and the ancient church. This is further proof of Payton’s thesis that Calvin’s *Reply* is a prime example of humanist rhetoric in practice. Obviously, those in the middle ages could read. Calvin is conjuring up Renaissance notions of literacy of being a humanist “man of letters”.

<sup>2</sup> *Reply*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Reply*, 6.

Calvin. There seems to be an inherent tension here. Calvin says that whoever deviates from the Apostolic model in the least degree is in error, but then goes on to praise the *ancient* church. The implication would be that Calvin believes the ancient church was in error, but not as corrupt as the medieval Roman church. Asking Sadolet to reform to the Apostolic model is too much, but can't the Roman church even act like the ancient church?

One senses Calvin's sarcasm here, but if the argument is turned around, it creates a problem for Calvin. He is drawing many of his arguments and theological categories from the ancient church, which according to his scheme, was partly in error. How does one sift the wheat from the chaff? As always, the Word of God is supreme over tradition, and so whatever aspects of the "ancient church" are opposed to the Word must be rejected. This reminds us that Calvin is not writing an analysis of early church doctrine, but is using the ancient church as a rhetorical and apologetic weapon.<sup>1</sup>

#### *v. Conclusion*

In his authoritative study of Calvin's use of the church fathers, Anthony Lane concludes that Calvin is an important example of a Protestant response to the charges of theological novelty and an anti-historical attitude.<sup>2</sup> But, there are two areas in which Calvin's project ultimately fails. The first is the progress of scholarship and growing awareness of differences between the fathers and the Reformers.<sup>3</sup> Second, there is the issue of a static, versus a developmental, view of church history: "Calvin operated with an essentially

---

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to James Payton for the basic wording here.

<sup>2</sup> Lane, *John Calvin*, 54.

<sup>3</sup> Lane, *John Calvin*, 54.

static concept of doctrine where we, living in a post-Newmanian age, see doctrine more in terms of development and other such dynamic concepts.”<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, all Protestants seeking to be honest with the facts of church history have much to learn from Calvin.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lane, *John Calvin*, 54.

## CHAPTER 2

### APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN OTHER REFORMATIONAL CONTEXTS

#### 1. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

##### a. Foundations of the English Reformation

The first generation of English reformers, like most of the continental reformers, did not want to abandon everything that had happened in the history of the Church. Cranmer and the English reformers were noteworthy for their patristic scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Basil Hall credits Cranmer with formulating the traditional “three-legged stool” of Anglican authority.

Cranmer operated, “not with a haphazard clutter of opinions borrowed from his contemporaries but on the threefold basis of the Bible, the Fathers, and right reason,” and although this framework is typically attributed to later Anglican divines, Cranmer established this theological method at the beginning of the English Reformation.<sup>2</sup>

Cranmer shared the humanist enthusiasm for the early church: “Erasmianism gave Cranmer a thirst for biblical learning and its values in the practice of piety and a new energy of reappraisal in theology; and through patristic studies it gave him the stimulus to inquire into the discipline, liturgy, priesthood and ecclesiology of the Church of the Fathers.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Horton Davies, *Worship & Theology in England*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Basil Hall, “Cranmer’s Relations with Erasmianism and Lutheranism” in Paul Ayris and David Selwyn, eds., *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, 11. See also Maria Dowling, “Cranmer as Humanist Reformer” in Ayris and Selwyn, eds., *Thomas Cranmer*, 89-114.

The intent to recover the teachings and liturgy of the ancient church is manifest in Cranmer's preface to the Book of Common Prayer:

Similarly the preface to the first Book of Common Prayer appeals to the "ancient fathers" whose order it is attempting to restore; even when Cranmer seems most to be moving away from tradition, as in the publication of the Great Bible in English, he is careful to insist that the Saxon forefathers of the English had their Saxon translations, and his very motives and considerations for reading the vernacular Scriptures are drawn from John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzus ... The study of the Fathers was a proof that her [the Church of England's] firm intention was renovation.<sup>1</sup>

In remaining faithful to the early church, the reformers thereby sought to avoid the "wax nose" syndrome, whereby each believer imposes his own interpretation on the text of Scripture. The English reformers thought it important to stand, now, with those who had been faithful in the past.<sup>2</sup> A second reason encouraging the English reformers to study church history was clearly the same as the one we have seen set forth by Calvin, Bucer, and Melancthon:

The second ground for seeking the approval of the apostles and fathers of the early church was the desire to return beyond corruption to the first five centuries of Christian history, where the foundation of the primitive church was in the Scriptures, and its explication in the four general councils and the writings of the early Church Fathers. This linking of

---

<sup>1</sup> Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 1, 16-17. White confirms that Cranmer was mistaken in implementing some of what he thought were patristic reforms: "Cranmer's intent, as he makes quite clear, was that he believed (wrongly) that the 'Godly and decent order of the ancient fathers' was a scheme for daily reading through from 'all the whole Bible'," *Protestant Worship*, 103. Dom Gregory Dix, in his monumental study, is also critical of Cranmer: "No scholar with a modern knowledge of patristics who reads, e.g., Cranmer's *Defense of the True and Catholic Doctrine*, followed by Gardiner's attack on it in his *Explicayon*, followed again by Cranmer's *Answer*, can fail to be aware that though Gardiner convicts his opponent of more actual abuse of patristic evidence than Cranmer was able to bring home to him, both parties are equally thorough in their interpretation of the patristic and primitive church solely in the light of their own post-mediaeval situation," *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), 627. See also Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 467-469 for Cranmer's use of the fathers in the *Defense*. For details on how Cranmer revised the liturgy see Bryan D. Spinks, "Treasures Old and New: A Look at Some of Thomas Cranmer's Methods of Liturgical Compilation," in Ayris and Selwyn, eds., *Thomas Cranmer*, 175-188.

<sup>2</sup> Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 1, 15.

Scripture and the primitive church was central to the establishment of religion in England.<sup>1</sup>

A prime example of this rhetorical and apologetic stance is John Jewel (1522-1571). In his *Apology* he writes: “Further, if we do show it plain that God’s Holy Gospel, the ancient bishops, and the primitive church do make on our side, and that we have not without just cause left these men [the Roman Catholics], and rather have returned to the apostles and old catholic fathers.”<sup>2</sup>

But, like the continental reformers, the English reformers did not follow the fathers slavishly. The fathers were simply witnesses of a more pure period of the church, before the corruptions of the medieval papacy took hold of the church. Hugh Latimer put it well: “These doctors, we have great cause to thank God for them, but I would not have them always to be allowed. They have handled many points of our faith very gladly, and we have a great stay in them in many things; we might not well lack them; but yet I would not have men sworn to them, and so addict as to take hand over head whatsoever they say.”<sup>3</sup> As with every other reformer, Latimer believes the ultimate authority is Scripture. Yet, he acknowledges his debt to the fathers.

#### **b. Puritan Conflict – Movement Towards a “Primitive Church”**

Although the reformation in England began with an earnest desire to maintain continuity with the ancient church, the changing historical vagaries conspired against this desire. In the early years of the English reformation (before it was really a reformation), King

---

<sup>1</sup> Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 1, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 1, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, *Worship and Theology*, 17.

Henry pressured Convocation to agree to articles of religion which sounded very similar to the appeals to antiquity voiced by the early reformers. Hetherington, in his hagiographic history of the Westminster Assembly, summarizes the section of the articles germane to this study: “In these articles, the standards of faith were declared to be,—the Bible, the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, and the decrees of the first four general Councils, without regard to tradition or the decrees of the Church ...”.<sup>1</sup> Initially, the English reform efforts retained continuity with the early church.

Later, as the conflict between Anglicans and Puritans intensified, the Anglicans voiced an opinion reminiscent of the continental reformers: “The court reformers held that the practice of the primitive Church for the four or five earliest centuries was a proper standard of Church government and discipline, even better suited to the dignity of a national establishment than the times of the apostles; and that, therefore, nothing more was needed than merely to remove the more modern innovations of Popery.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the Puritans adhered to a “regulative principle” by which everything in worship and the life of the church must be regulated by Scriptural commands and precedent. The intricacies of this argument are too complicated to pursue here, but it should be noted at this point that the Anglicans took up the basic argumentation used by the early continental reformers. The Puritans, though wanting to purify the English Church according to Scripture, “and the best Reformed Churches” (as the Solemn League & Covenant put it) actually went beyond the continental reformers in some respects. Specifically, they *stopped appealing to the ancient church as an example to be imitated.*

---

<sup>1</sup> William M. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1856; reprint, Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Hetherington, *History*, 37.



At a certain point in the debate, the Puritans turned self-consciously away from their Reformation heritage of appealing to the ancient church. Of course, this was partly a reaction to Anglican claims of continuity with the ancient church. Bozeman writes: “Official spokesmen from Matthew Parker to William Laud increasingly were convinced that, to strengthen their position in the face of Puritan criticism, Anglican ‘*Divines* must become [more] studious, of [that] *pious and venerable antiquitie*,’ upon which a substantial part of the church’s legitimacy must rest.”<sup>1</sup> So, while the heightened Anglican appeal to the ancient church was partly a reaction to Puritanism, the Puritan devaluing of the ancient church was, in turn, a reaction to Anglican claims.

John Cotton provides a succinct statement of the typical Puritan position: “No new traditions must be thrust on us, ... *But that which [we] have had from the beginning ... True Antiquity ... is that which fetches its originall from the beginning ...* if [a religious form] have no higher rise than the [early] Fathers, it is too young a device, no other writings besides the Scripture can plead true Antiquity ...”<sup>2</sup> This is the key point of departure. As we have seen, the first-generation reformers often appealed to continuity with the *ancient* church. Cotton, and other Puritans, went beyond the ancient church to the *primitive* church, and claimed continuity with the purely apostolic model.

This was expressed by the *Admonition to Parliament*, which began the “Admonition Controversy” in 1572 and gave direction to the burgeoning Puritan movement in England.<sup>3</sup> It is also expressed by one of the most famous English Puritans. John Owen

---

<sup>1</sup> Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*, 10-11. The heavy editing is Bozeman’s.

<sup>3</sup> Bard Thompson, ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (1961. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 312.

clearly states the case for apostolic purity, according to Bard Thompson: “The Puritan ideal was the revive the simplicity and vitality of the Apostolic Church, or, as John Owen (1616-83) put it, ‘the old glorious beautiful face of Christianity’.”<sup>1</sup>

We also find these sentiments in John Newton, whose unfinished *Ecclesiastical History* provides a typical Puritan view of the church fathers: “When I come to the lives and conduct of those called the *Fathers*, whose names are held in ignorant admiration by thousands, I shall prove, on the one hand, that the doctrines for which the Fathers were truly commendable, and by which many were enabled to seal their profession with their blood, were the same which are now branded with the epithets of *absurd* and *enthusiastic*; and, on the other hand, that the Fathers, however venerable, were men like ourselves, subject to mistakes and infirmities, and *began very soon to depart from the purity and simplicity of the Gospel*” (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup> Here the emphasis falls on how quickly the ancient church fell away from primitive “purity” and “simplicity,” rather than stressing elements of continuity.

### **c. Schaff on the Puritans**

Support for this view of the Puritans comes from no less an authority than Philip Schaff. The figure of Philip Schaff towers in 19<sup>th</sup> century theological history. Part of Schaff’s historical project was to combat the legacy of the Puritans. Specifically, Schaff claimed that neglecting the creeds of the church would lead to heresy. In regard to the rise of German rationalism, Schaff claims: “The undervaluation of the church and her symbols

---

<sup>1</sup> Thompson, *Liturgies*, 317.

<sup>2</sup> John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, vol. III (1820; reprint Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust 1988), x.

led gradually to the undervaluation of the apostles and their writings, and terminated finally in a denial of the divinity of Christ himself.”<sup>1</sup>

Schaff identifies rationalism and sectarianism as the chief evils of his time, and places much of the responsibility for the sectarian mentality on the Puritans: “Puritanism in particular ... through a false spritualistic tendency and an utter misapprehension of the significance of the corporeal and outward, showed itself in this case rash in its zeal, and has sacrificed many beautiful customs ... All this, it is much more difficult to recover, than to cast away. It is always more easy to destroy than to build.”<sup>2</sup> We should next ask in particular what it is the Puritans threw away so rashly. Schaff claims it is their historical heritage: “With this rugged, abstract spritualism stands closely connected *the unhistorical, revolutionary tendency of Puritanism. It has no respect whatever for history.* It would restore pure, primitive Christianity, with entire disregard to the many centuries of development that lie between, as though all had been labor in vain, and the Lord had not keep his own promise to be with the church always to the end of the world” (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> In Schaff’s view, to resort to an ideal of “pure, primitive Christianity” is to deny that God has always preserved his Church. He also shows that the sects that stand on Scripture alone invariably are simply standing on their sectarian understanding of Scripture. Schaff believes we cannot have Christianity without church history.

At the end of *The Principle of Protestantism*, Schaff lists 112 Theses for the Times.

Numbers 47-49, in the section entitled “The Reformation,” deals with Puritanism. To

---

<sup>1</sup> Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker, eds. Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology, vol. 1, *The Principle of Protestantism*, by Philip Schaff (United Church Press, 1845; reprint, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Principle*, 112.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Principle*, 146.

fully understand Schaff's view of the Puritans, in both its positive and negative aspects, it will be useful to reproduce theses 47-49 in their entirety:

47. Puritanism may be considered a sort of second reformation, called forth by the reappearance of Romanizing elements in the Anglican Church, and as such forms the basis to a great extent of American Protestantism, particularly in New England.

48. Its highest recommendation, bearing clearly a divine signature, is presented in its deep practical earnestness as it regards religion, and its zeal for personal piety, by which it has been more successful perhaps than any other section of the church, for a time, in the work of saving individual souls.

49. However, it falls far behind the German Reformation by its *revolutionary, unhistorical, and consequently unchurchly character*, and carries in itself no protection whatever against an indefinite subdivision of the church into separate atomistic sects. For having *no conception at all of a historical development of Christianity*, and with its negative attitude of blind irrational zeal toward its own past, it may be said to have armed its children with the same right and the same tendency, too, to treat its own authority with equal independence and contempt (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Schaff clearly recognizes the need for a “second reformation” in the English church. He affirms much good in the Puritan movement. But, since we are studying unintended consequences, we must note that in reacting to the claims of the Anglicans, the Puritans abandoned their ecclesiastical heritage in many important respects. The most basic proof of this is the charge of sectarianism that Schaff brings against the Puritans. Rejecting the authoritative teaching of the church in history opened the way for the multiplication of sects, all united around their own idiosyncratic interpretation of Scripture.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Principle*, 226.

## 2. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN ANABAPTIST THOUGHT

It is beyond my purview to prove any specific influence of Anabaptism upon Protestant confessional development, but it is important to establish the Anabaptist view of church history as one competing with the classical Protestant view. This section will present the Anabaptist view of history as embodying McGrath's "Tradition 0". This view of church history, "rejects tradition, and in effect places the private judgment of the individual or congregation in the present above the corporate traditional judgment of the Christian church concerning the interpretation of Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

The basic difference between the Anabaptist view of church history and the classical Protestant view of church history is perhaps best understood when we contrast their respective courts of appeal, or the standard by which they judged the corruptions of the time. Both the reformers and the Anabaptists wished to reform the church, but they disagreed on what standard to appeal to in reform efforts. The classic reformational position appealed to the Scriptures and the catholic substance of the early church. The Anabaptists, however, appealed solely to the apostolic church. Put another way (trying to use the terms actually employed by the two groups): the reformers appealed to the *ancient* church (apostolic + first 500 years of church history), while the Anabaptists appealed to the *primitive* church (only apostolic).

The Anabaptists believed firmly in the fall of the church from primitive and apostolic purity. Usually, this fall was dated at the conversion of Constantine. Thus, the Anabaptists strove to recover the truly primitive church. As White notes: "Above all, the

---

<sup>1</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 182.

Anabaptists must be seen as people trying to recover the pure church of apostolic time ...”.<sup>1</sup> This meant going *beyond* (or rather behind) the credal statements of the catholic church. The Anabaptists were not terribly interested in substance. On the contrary, they opposed most of it as the corruption and degeneration of true Christianity.

The Anabaptist view of church history has been authoritatively summarized by Franklin Hamlin Little.<sup>2</sup> He writes: “There is something deeper than mere Biblicism in this social program. It is part of an outlook on life which can best be described under the concept of primitivism. If we inquire as to the goal of these Anabaptist groups we are driven first not forwards but backwards. Their objective was not to introduce something new but to restore something old. ‘Restitution’ was their slogan, a Restitution grounded in the New Testament.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the reformers and Anabaptists shared much of the same Renaissance primitivist view of history, the Anabaptists went further in their zeal to conform to the apostolic pattern. Little writes: “In its determined Restitution of the type and style of the Early Church, Anabaptism in fact introduced quite new elements in Christian history.

Although the heroic period of faith [the apostolic martyr church] is taken as normative, the forerunners of the Free Church way departed radically from patterns of ‘magisterial Protestantism’ which had obtained for more than a millennium.”<sup>4</sup> One new element (and the only one out of many directly relevant to this study) is the *denial of credal authority*.

---

<sup>1</sup> James White, *Protestant Worship*, 82.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin Hamlin Little, *Anabaptist View: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism* (Boston: Starr King Press), 1958. See especially chapters 2, “The Fall of the Church” and 3 “The Restitution of the True Church”.

<sup>3</sup> Little, *Anabaptist View*, 47.

<sup>4</sup> Little, *Anabaptist View*, 54.

The church in history had no true authority for the Anabaptists because *history had swallowed up the “true” church*:

In the marginal “Anabaptist” movement at Munster they said that there had been no True Church for fourteen hundred years. Sebastian Franck, Caspar Schwenckfeld, and David Joris believed the continuity was broken, and that only a prophet with direct divine commission could gather again a community of believers—introducing by his appearance the New Age.<sup>1</sup>

Because of this emphasis on discontinuity in church history, with the corresponding emphasis on the Golden Age of the Apostles as the only pattern for reform Little propounds two different theories of church history. He speaks of the “Anabaptist revolution” and contrasts it with the magisterial reformation. Thus, in Little’s view, we could sharply distinguish these two views of church history: the Anabaptist “Church of the Restitution,” and the classical Protestant “Church of the Reformers”.<sup>2</sup> This split in interpreting the history of the church has lasted to the present, influencing countless denominations in the “Free Church” tradition. As will be shown below, one area of freedom prized by the Free Churches is the *freedom from authoritative creeds and confessions*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Little, *Anabaptist View*, 76.

<sup>2</sup> Little, *Anabaptist View*, 79.

## CHAPTER 3

### APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN PROTESTANT CONFESSIONS

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Now that we have seen how the reformers persistently, and explicitly, claimed continuity with the ecumenical creeds and church fathers, we can examine the confessional statements which guided different reform movements from Luther to the Puritans and beyond. This overview will demonstrate that the *majority of Protestant confessions explicitly claim continuity with the church in history*. This appeal takes two forms: (1) citations of, or appeals to, church fathers (in general or to specific fathers), (2) stated subscription to the historic creeds (usually the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds). The Westminster Confession and Scots Confessions are notable and influential departures from this pattern, and subsequent confessions in the Congregational and Baptist traditions stress individual and private judgment, rather than corporate & historical confession.

My purpose in this section is to *explore how Protestants stopped appealing to church history as the confessional lines between Protestant and Roman Catholic hardened*. The evidence under consideration will be the actual Protestant confessions themselves. A brief survey of these confessions will chart changing Protestant attitudes to the creeds of Christendom.



### a. Preliminary Observations

First, however, we must establish that *Protestant confessions did, for the most part, make explicit claims of continuity with the ancient catholic church*. Timothy George confirms this: “Significantly, when Protestants published their own evangelical confessions in response to the exigencies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they did not, as it were, begin all over again with new statements and original reflections on the person of Christ or the reality of the Holy Trinity. Rather they accepted the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, ‘as the unanimous, Catholic, Christian faith,’ pledging themselves to uphold the doctrine set forth in these classic standards ...”.<sup>1</sup>

Philip Schaff, with his concern for catholic unity, also stressed the fact that the reformers wanted to preserve continuity with the “catholic substance” of the faith, even as they were forced (in his interpretation) to leave the Roman church:

The Reformers were baptized, confirmed, and educated, most of them also ordained, in the Catholic Church, and had at first no intention to leave it, but simply to purify it by the Word of God. They shrank from the idea of schism, and continued, like the Apostles, in the communion of their fathers until they were expelled from it. When the Pope refused to satisfy the reasonable demand for a reformation of abuses, and hurled his anathemas on the reformers, they were driven to the necessity of organizing new churches and setting forth new confessions of faith, but they were careful to maintain and express in them their consensus with the old Catholic faith as laid down in the Apostles’ Creed.<sup>2</sup>

### b. Differences and Distinctions in Protestant Confessions

Schaff helpfully summarizes the characteristics and confessions of each century in regard to the production of confessions. The sixteenth century was the great creative period of

---

<sup>1</sup> Colson, *Your Word*, 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 206.

Protestantism, as well as the period when Protestants were continually defending themselves from Rome.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the first Protestant confessions, “embody the results of the great conflict with the Papacy.”<sup>2</sup> In the seventeenth century, after Protestant churches had established themselves throughout Europe, internal divisions occasioned the massive declarations of Dordt and Westminster. In the eighteenth century, although there was an explosion of practical piety and missionary zeal, the reigning mood was, according to Schaff, “irreligious and revolutionary, and undermined the authority of all creeds.”<sup>3</sup> The nineteenth century saw an upsurge of scholarly interest in the history of creeds and confessions, which was the context of Schaff’s own pioneering work.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, it is important to remember the changing polemical contexts in which Protestant confessions were written.<sup>5</sup> As with the ecumenical creeds, different heresies and doctrinal battles called forth different responses. We should not expect all Protestant confessions to say the same thing. There is, however, a noticeable distinction in Protestant confessions: the majority of major confessions make some sort of explicit appeal to continuity with the ancient church (primarily as expressed in the three creeds). Other confessions (such as the Scots, Westminster, and most Anabaptist/Congregational confessions) veer away from these explicit affirmations. The rest of this thesis will document evidence to support this observation, and offer some tentative explanation of this shift in emphasis.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pelikan, *Credo*, chapter 16.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 209.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 209. See also Pelikan, *Credo*, chapter 17.

<sup>4</sup> Pelikan, *Credo*, 505-508.

<sup>5</sup> Pelikan, *Credo*, chapter 7.

## 2. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

### a. Augsburg Confession (1530)

Before examining the confession itself, it is important to examine more closely the views of the authors (Melanchthon, aided by Luther) and the interplay of ideas between them.

#### *i. Authorial Evidence: Melanchthon*

The Augsburg Confession is immensely important, not only in Lutheran history, but also for the entire Protestant movement. It marked a coming of age for the Protestants, as they took a brave and dangerous stand against Emperor Charles V. The political situation was quite volatile. Emperor Charles V had commanded the German princes to present a statement of faith so that the religious controversy could be brought to a close and attention could be focused on the Turkish threat.<sup>1</sup> It is a unique document, since it was penned by Melanchthon, but inspired by Luther (who was still in hiding).<sup>2</sup> Thus, in the Confession, we have a record of two brilliant minds struggling to authenticate their core beliefs, as well as stave off disaster for the Lutheran states.

The Confession, and the history of its composition, is particularly illuminating as it illustrates the differing personalities of Luther and Melanchthon. The differences between these two theological giants show up clearly in their views of church history.

John Headley notes that the occasion of the Augsburg Confession forced Luther to clarify

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 226.

<sup>2</sup> “Luther thus produced the doctrinal matter of the Confession, while Melanchthon’s scholarly and methodical mind freely reproduced and elaborated it into its final shape and form, and his gentle, peaceful, compromising spirit breathed into it a moderate, conservative tone,” Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 229.

his thoughts on church history: “No less a person than Philip Melanchthon compelled Luther to present explicitly his understanding of traditions and their relation to the authority of Scripture. Writing from the Diet of Augsburg, Melanchthon complained that nothing had plagued him more in the negotiations than the question of customs or traditions.”<sup>1</sup> Luther and Melanchthon did not quite agree in the matter of retaining ecclesiastical customs for the sake of political peace. In writing to Luther from Augsburg, Melanchthon waxed eloquent about the causes and origins of traditions, and in the ensuing discussion, the two reformers clearly disagreed. While Melanchthon leaned toward tolerating certain traditions for the sake of political and ecclesiastical peace, Luther subjected all traditions to rigorous examination by the Word of God.<sup>2</sup>

Headley captures the tension between these two men as well as their differing views of church history:

During the subsequent months a significant correspondence came to pass between the Coburg and Augsburg that revealed the different outlooks and temperaments of the two great leaders of the Reformation: Melanchthon—patient, careful, irenic, a giant in any age, yet dwarfed by the colossal dimensions of his colleague; Luther, who exhorted, admonished, importuned—decisive in his disapproval, swift to indignation, uncompromising in his convictions, highly critical, frequently irritable, the banner of faith. Although the latter often lashed out with impatience and dissatisfaction, the correspondence reflects a profound, mutual regard and an enduring partnership. Yet despite a curious harmony and complementing of abilities which constituted their collaboration, seldom did this partnership appear under greater strain than during these trying weeks. Melanchthon began from a natural distaste and dreadful fear of all strife and controversy. While zealous in proclaiming true evangelical doctrine, he sought the far more difficult goal of ecumenical peace and unity. Luther began with the conviction that strife and controversy were an essential feature of Church history and the life of faith. Certain of

---

<sup>1</sup> Headley, *Luther's View*, 90.

<sup>2</sup> Headley, *Luther's View*, 90-92.

God's effecting action in history and of the world's imminent end, he found an ecumenical concord neither possible nor desirable.<sup>1</sup>

Melanchthon was deeply despondent after the Confession was delivered, fearing that he had attacked Christ's catholic church too strongly. Apparently, he was quite ready to make many concessions to the papal party for the sake of unity.<sup>2</sup> But, this apparent weakness (as it seemed to Luther and countless other zealous reformers) was actually part of Melanchthon's humanistic worldview, as well as his desire to retain continuity with the historic church:

Melanchthon had no reason to question the fundamental principles of his friend as statements of doctrine. Yet in actual practice he operated from different assumptions and with different intentions. His humanistic training and his respect for the fathers made him more sensitive to the ancient traditions of the Church and more desirous of preserving the old polity in a modified form. Melanchthon revealed an unwillingness to dissolve the bond with Rome and endanger both an ecumenical unity and European civilization. He appeared as the great representative of a historical Christendom to Luther, who rebuked his young colleague for his excessive concern for posterity and the public peace and his anxiety in attempting to fashion the future.<sup>3</sup>

The Augsburg Confession is thus noteworthy as the first thorough statement of Protestant beliefs and the product of two major Protestant thinkers. Though Luther and Melanchthon differed on how much authority should be given to the past, the Confession is noteworthy (compared to other Protestant confessions) in its insistence that, in seeking reform, Protestants are actually following the practices of the ancient church.

Throughout, we see signs of Melanchthon's patristic knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Headley, *Luther's View*, 258-259.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 230.

<sup>3</sup> Headley, *Luther's View*, 261.

<sup>4</sup> Pelikan has a brief, but masterful, summary of Luther's and Melanchthon's attitudes toward church history and the creeds at the time of writing the Augsburg Confession. He notes that even as Melanchthon

As one of the finest scholars and educators of his day, Melanchthon was very concerned with catholic substance. However, Luther and Melanchthon differed in their approach to church history. A large part of Melanchthon's desire to remain loyal to the catholic substance can be attributed to his humanist training, as opposed to Luther's scholastic education. Melanchthon's knowledge of the church fathers was extensive. His contribution to the development of the Reformation will be examined further below, but his general position on the authority of the church fathers can be laid out here.

James Payton writes: "The influence of Christian humanism, with its enthusiasm for the ancient Church, is evident in these developments in the thought of Bucer and Melanchthon, who utilized these Christian humanist concerns in support of a nuanced affirmation of *sola scriptura*."<sup>1</sup> But, although Melanchthon was a typical humanist in some respects, his view of church history was not static, and changed in response to theological and polemical developments.

Payton summarizes the similarities in the thought of Bucer and Melanchthon as they developed their ecclesiologies concurrently in 1539: "As Melanchthon and Bucer made their way to the Colloquy of Leipzig to be held in the early days of 1539, then, one can properly state that they were faithful proponents of *sola scriptura* in the sense that Scripture was for both of them the ultimate religious authority. It was not for these men, however, the only religious authority ... both Bucer and Melanchthon believed that the works of the fathers of the ancient Church offered a hermeneutical authority to which

---

made strong statements about continuity with "catholic consensus," he was struggling against the patristic research of Oeclampadius, who assaulted Luther's understanding of the Lord's Supper, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 176-177. No wonder Melanchthon experienced so much inner turmoil writing the Confession!

<sup>1</sup> Payton, "Sola Scriptura," 102.

conformity was necessary, and that the empirical history of the Church possessed an instrumental authority, according to which it was necessary to stand in the historical line of the true Church.”<sup>1</sup>

This was in 1539. As with Luther, Bucer and Calvin, Melancthon’s view of the fathers was not static. The reformers were plagued with controversies throughout their lives, and their opinions and usage of the church fathers changed in response to the different situations confronting them. Hendrix writes: “Later in his career, when Protestant unity and survival were at stake, Melancthon found patristic opinion to be more coherent and reliable as a theological guide.”<sup>2</sup> This found particular expression in the controversies that raged over the real presence of Christ. Hendrix relates that Melancthon was content to appeal simply to what he saw as the patristic consensus in favor of the doctrine of the real presence.<sup>3</sup>

Melancthon’s respect for church history found permanent expression in the Augsburg Confession. As I will show later, the Augsburg Confession evinces a strong interest in retaining the catholic substance of the faith. As the first major Protestant confession, it is a cornerstone for the study of Protestant symbolics. The circumstances surrounding the confession’s composition also show that Melancthon was more concerned about

---

<sup>1</sup> Payton, “Sola Scriptura,” 101-102.

<sup>2</sup> Hendrix, “Deparentifying the Fathers,” 64.

<sup>3</sup> Hendrix, “Deparentifying the Fathers,” 64. Bruce Gordon concurs: “Melancthon insisted that any discussion of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper had to be limited to biblical expressions (especially 1 Corinthians 10:16) and patristic usage,” “The Epistolary Friendship of John Calvin and Philip Melancthon” in Karin Maag, ed. *Melancthon in Europe: His Work and Influence Beyond Wittenberg* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 41. Gordon concludes that Calvin, and most subsequent historians, have not appreciated this source of Melancthon’s “moderation” and perceived “timidity”: “This moderation was thus not a character flaw, nor did it arise out of genuine fear in the face of persecution. It was a stubborn refusal to venture beyond the biblical and patristic witness in theological discourse,” Maag, 43.

catholic substance than was Luther. Broadly speaking, Melanchthon was more anxious to preserve unity with church history. As opposed to Luther, “Neither of them [Bucer and Melanchthon] was content, however, with a unity in truth through history rooted only in a supernatural activity or in the divine attributes of Scripture alone. Both sought out the historical manifestation of truth confessed, setting forth the possession of this truth as the unique treasure of the Catholic Church, which both of them unhesitatingly affirmed was to be found in their day among the Protestants.”<sup>1</sup>

Payton summarizes the basic position of Melanchthon (and Bucer) well:

Bucer and Melanchthon both considered the ancient Church a period of light superior to any subsequent period in the history of the Church. Both of them viewed the ancient fathers as having taught the Word of God with such clarity and faithfulness that what could not be found in their common teaching could not be properly viewed as the faithful teaching of Scripture: no other group of men in the history of the Church were accorded such standing. It was, truly, a standing with significant authority: the fathers of the ancient Church possessed, according to both Bucer and Melanchthon, a hermeneutical authority for the understanding of Scripture. Scripture could not be rightly understood if the supposed understanding conflicted with what the ancient Church had commonly taught. One might embrace what they had taught as the meaning of Scripture without consciously realizing that he had done so or even intending to do so because of their authority, but whether their authority was consciously recognized or not, it was an inescapable authority to which submission was necessary.”<sup>2</sup>

## *ii. Documentary Evidence*

The opening of Part 1, Article 22 is representative of the Confession’s attitude to the historic church: “This is about the sum of doctrine among us, in which can be seen that there is *nothing which is discrepant with the Scriptures, or with the Church Catholic, or*

---

<sup>1</sup> Payton, “Sola Scriptura,” 103.

<sup>2</sup> Payton, “Sola Scriptura,” 178.



*even with the Roman Church*, so far as that Church is known from writers [the Fathers]. This being the case, they judge us harshly who insist that we shall be regarded as heretics,” (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup> The Augsburg Confession was, by necessity, a document written to demonstrate the “catholic substance” of the Reformation. Although it firmly criticizes Roman corruptions, there is still the lingering hope that separation with Rome is not final. The polemical tone of the confession is also softened because of the politics of the matter. Charles V wanted religious unity in his Empire, and the Lutheran princes had to maneuver carefully in opposing his desires.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the Confession begins in such a way as to demonstrate loyalty to the Emperor.

The laws of the Empire demanded subscription to the ancient Trinitarian doctrine of the church.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Confession immediately states its agreement with the ancient Trinitarian creeds. In the very first article, the Nicene Creed is affirmed without qualification.<sup>4</sup> Not only this, but the fathers’ usage of theological terms in the Arian controversy is set forth as normative: “And they [the Lutherans] use the name of person in that signification in which the ecclesiastical writers [the fathers] have used it in this cause, to signify, not a part or quantity in another, but that which properly subsists.”<sup>5</sup> The

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 26-27. A parallel statement is found in the beginning of Part Two: “Inasmuch as the churches among us dissent in no articles of faith from [the holy Scriptures, or] the Church Catholic [the Universal Christian Church], and only omit a few of certain abuses, which are novel [in part have crept in with time, in part have been introduced by violence], and, contrary to the purport of the Canons, have been received by the fault of the times ...,” *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 28. The brackets indicate Schaff’s insertions of the “best” German additions to the confession.

<sup>2</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> “The churches, with common consent among us, do teach that the decree of the Nicene Synod concerning the unity of the divine essence and of the three persons is true, and without doubt to be believed,” Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 7.

first article closes with a far-ranging condemnation of ancient heresies (Manichees, Valentians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and Samosatenes).<sup>1</sup>

However, the Confession does not simply call for a return to antiquity: “Lutheran writers have characterized the Lutheran Reformation as simply a *returning to apostolic conditions* ... But it is a mistake to think that the Lutheran Reformation had simply an aim of re-establishing former conditions; it was rather a further development of Christian doctrines. It received much of its content from men and from conditions which had their existence long after the apostolic times.”<sup>2</sup>

Pelikan supports this judgment when he contrasts Luther and Zwingli. He writes concerning Luther: “But it is inaccurate to designate his work as that of restoring the Bible to the church. It would be more accurate perhaps to interpret it as the task of restoring the gospel to the Bible. For he did not seek to re-pristiniate New Testament Christianity. When he thought that Zwingli was trying to do something like that in his mode of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, Luther repudiated this mode as irrelevant. What was always relevant in New Testament Christianity was its gospel.”<sup>3</sup> Since the gospel had been at work throughout history, Luther was content to leave many things as they were. He did not seek to jettison all of church history.<sup>4</sup> Thus, “the traditionalism of the confession is its striking feature.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> There is evidence that the emphasis placed on the ecumenical creeds was not lost on later Lutherans: “Indeed, the ordination formulas of sixteenth-century Lutheranism suggest that the Augsburg Confession was viewed as a commentary upon the ecumenical creeds, just as later Lutheran symbols, in turn, were commentaries on it,” Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 43.

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Neve, *History of Christian Thought*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), 220.

<sup>3</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Because of this stance toward historical and liturgical development, many other reformers thought Luther did not go far enough, Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 185-186.

<sup>5</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 43.

As a rhetorical and polemical strategy, Melanchthon and Luther seized the high ground of agreement with the ancient, catholic substance of the church. After they demonstrated their continuity with church, they were in a better position to criticize it.<sup>1</sup> For instance, in article 3, the nature of the Son of God is explained, and the Apostles' Creed is mentioned as the source of these true doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Fittingly, Pelikan observes, "the Augsburg Confession sought to root its protest against Rome in the Catholic tradition."<sup>3</sup>

Liturgical continuity with the ancient church is also claimed: "Although among us in large part the ancient rites are diligently observed. For it is a calumnious falsehood, that all the ceremonies, all the things instituted of old, are now abolished in our churches."<sup>4</sup> In arguing for communion in both kinds, Melanchthon states that this was the custom of the historical church: "And this custom remained a long time in the church; neither is it certain when or by what authority it was changed; although the Cardinal de Cusa relates when it was approved."<sup>5</sup> He says, quite strongly, that communion in only *one* kind violates the normative authority of Scripture, *and* of the ancient church: "Now this custom has been received, not only against the Scripture, but also against the ancient Canons and the example of the Church."<sup>6</sup>

When Melanchthon attacks the Mass, he is careful to frame it in such a way that the Mass appears unhistorical, not the reforms proposed by the Protestants: "For the Mass is retained still among us, and celebrated with great reverence; yea, and almost all the

---

<sup>1</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 45.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 30.

ceremonies that are in use, saving that with the things sung in Latin we mingle certain things sung in German at various parts of the service, which are added for the people's instruction. For therefore alone we have need of ceremonies, that they may teach the unlearned."<sup>1</sup> Melanchthon is careful to say that Protestant worship service is trying to approximate the worship of the early church: "Seeing, therefore, that the Mass amongst us hath the example of the Church, out of the Scripture, and the Fathers, we trust it can not be disapproved; especially since our public ceremonies are kept, the most part, like unto the usual ceremonies; only the number of Masses is not alike, the which, by reason of very great and manifest abuses, it were certainly far better to be moderated."<sup>2</sup>

Melanchthon's three-fold appeal reveals his respect for church history: Church, Scripture, and Fathers. This is the sort of language which made the Puritans uneasy and eventually disappeared from later Protestant confessions.

In addition to broad claims of continuity with church history, specific fathers, such as Augustine, are quoted in defense of the Reformation. Augustine is quoted numerous times. Article 18, on free will, contains a large quote from the *Hypognosticon*, Book 3. Naturally, Melanchthon would not pass by an opportunity to quote the greatest doctor of the West, especially in connection to a doctrine in which there could be little doubt as to what Augustine really taught. Melanchthon also makes a general appeal to Augustine in Article 20 (Of Good Works): "Augustine doth in many volumes defend grace, and the righteousness of faith, against the merit of works."<sup>3</sup> Just before this quote, Melanchthon had said that "testimonies of the fathers" support Protestant doctrine in the matter of good

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 34.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 22.

works.<sup>1</sup> But, previous to that statement, Melanchthon had quoted Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Although he calls in the fathers as expert witnesses, Melanchthon views Scripture as the primary authority.

Ambrose is cited in several places. In article VI, he is quoted to support the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>2</sup> His *De Vocatione Gentium* is also cited in Article 20, right after Augustine.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the Augsburg Confession explicitly claims continuity with the ancient church numerous times. Standing at the head of the Protestant movement, it bears much more of a burden to justify itself. Perhaps this is one reason why Melanchthon falls into historical summary so often. He is not just setting forth abstract truths. He must clearly explain (to the German princes and Emperor) why there is all this commotion in the Empire. So, in narrating Roman abuses, the Confession gives us an interesting window into how the Protestants saw late medieval history. A prime example of this is found in Article 20, where Melanchthon narrates the darkness of late medieval piety.

Another example of degeneration through history is clerical marriage and celibacy. After claiming that it was the custom for a long time for priests to be married,<sup>4</sup> and that they were violently compelled to remain single by Roman imposition, Melanchthon appeals to the witness of the church. He writes that such actions were, “contrary to all laws divine

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 22.

<sup>2</sup> “The same also do the ancient writers of the Church teach; for Ambrose saith: ‘This is ordained of God, that he that believeth in Christ shall be saved, without works, by faith alone, freely receiving remission of sins’,” Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 11.

<sup>3</sup> “The redemption made by the blood of Christ would be of small account, and the prerogative of man’s works would not give place to the mercy of God, if the justification which is by grace were due to merits going before; so as it should not be the liberality of the giver, but the wages or hire of the laborer,” Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 31.

and human, contrary to the Canons themselves, that were before made not only by Popes, but also by most famous Councils.”<sup>1</sup> Later in the same article, he appeals to a provision in the canons which says that the “old rigor” can be relaxed according to the “weakness of men”.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the confession, Melanchthon is concerned to maintain continuity with the catholic substance and history of the church, while also pointing out the necessity for reform. The Protestants, according to the Confession, do not want to start from ground zero: “The churches do not desire of the Bishops that they would repair peace and concord with the loss of their honor (which yet good pastors ought to do): they only desire that they would remit unjust burdens, which are both new and received contrary to the custom of the Catholic [Christian Universal] Church.”<sup>3</sup> In the conclusion it is repeated that, “in doctrine and ceremonials among us there is nothing received contrary to the Scripture or to the Catholic [Universal Christian] Church, inasmuch as it is manifest that we have diligently taken heed that no new and godless doctrines should creep into our churches.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 32.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 32. He relates a similar provision of laxity in the canons for those who vowed chastity before they were mature, Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 73.

## b. Formula of Concord (1577)<sup>1</sup>

The Formula begins with a strong statement of the primacy of Scripture: “We believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all dogmas and all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament ...”.<sup>2</sup> Since Scripture is the primary source of dogma, it provides the framework by which all other writings are to be interpreted: “But other writings, whether of the fathers or of the moderns, with whatever name they come, are in nowise to be equaled to the Holy Scriptures, but are all to be esteemed inferior to them, so that they be not otherwise received than in the rank of witnesses, to show what doctrine was taught after the Apostles’ time also, and in what parts of the world that more sound doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles has been preserved.”<sup>3</sup>

Immediately we notice the concern with distinguishing Scripture from other writings.

This is a telling difference from the Augsburg Confession, which began with an affirmation of the “Nicene Synod” and Trinitarian orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> The most obvious explanation for this difference is that the forty-six years between the Augsburg

Confession and the Formula had proven the need for Protestants to explicitly state their

---

<sup>1</sup> Because of space limitations, as well as gaps in my own knowledge, I cannot survey the four authors of the Formula (Jacob Andreae, Martin Chemnitz, David Chytraeus, and Nikolaus Selnecker) and their views of the ancient church. See Theodore R. Jungkuntz, *Formulators of the Formula of Concord: Four Architects of Lutheran Unity* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977) for brief biographies of all four authors. For Chemnitz, see Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 49-53. Pelikan also notes the appeals to antiquity contained in the Formula’s appendix: “The authors of the Formula of Concord, especially Martin Chemnitz, had elaborated and systematized Luther’s doctrine [of Christology] and in the process had compiled an appendix to the Formula, entitled ‘Catalogue of Testimonies,’ intended to demonstrate the continuity of Lutheran christology with that of the ancient church fathers and church councils,” *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 352.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 94.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 7.

fundamental reliance on the word of God. In contrast, for Melanchthon, to state agreement with Nicea was to claim unity with the universal Catholic church, and was a time-honored way to begin a confessional document. For instance, this is the language of the Council of Ephesus, which promulgated:

We will state briefly what we are convinced of and profess about the God-bearing virgin and the manner of the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God—not by way of addition but in the manner of a full statement, even as we have received and possess it from old from the holy scriptures and from the tradition of the holy fathers, adding nothing at all to the creed put forward by the holy fathers at Nicea. For, as we have just said, that creed is sufficient both for the knowledge of godliness and for the repudiation of all heretical false teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Melanchthon was following in the tradition of the catholic church as he opened the Augsburg Confession. And although he repeatedly claims that the Protestants are teaching nothing at odds with the Scriptures, the Church, or the Fathers, it is notable that there is no article, or even any section of an article, devoted to the doctrine of the Scriptures. Of course, there is no section specifically on the authority of the Fathers, either, and both Scripture and Fathers are quoted as authorities throughout the Confession. Their authority is *assumed*, and Melanchthon's use of Scripture shows that it clearly has the priority over patristic testimony. But, this contrast with the Formula of Concord reveals how Protestants were forced to clearly state the primacy of Scripture in the face of continued resistance from Rome. It was no longer sufficient to point out similarities between Protestants and the early church. Scripture must judge the church.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman P. Tanner, S.J., ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, trans. G. Alberigo, vol. 1 (London: Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 69.

<sup>2</sup> By including a statement of the doctrine of Scripture, the Formula is moving closer to the Reformed confessional tradition. Richard Muller identifies this as a key difference between Lutheran and Reformed confessions: “whereas the latter moved quickly toward the identification of the doctrine of Scripture as a



After stating the primacy of Scripture, the Formula also embraces the early creeds. Even though Scripture has ultimate authority, the Formula also speaks very highly of creedal statements:

And inasmuch as immediately after the times of the Apostles, nay, even while they were yet alive, false teachers and heretics arose, against whom in the primitive church symbols were composed, that is to say, brief and explicit confessions, which contained the unanimous consent of the Catholic Christian faith, and the confession of the orthodox and true Church (such as are the APOSTLES', the NICENE, and the ATHANASIAN CREEDS): we publicly profess that we embrace them, and reject all heresies and all dogmas which have ever been brought into the Church of God contrary to their decision.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly striking are the phrases that some associate with Roman Catholic claims of infallibility: “unanimous consent,” “orthodox and true church”. The early Lutherans embraced the primitive church, and believed they were continuing in the same tradition. It is precisely the *absence* of this sort of language in later Protestant confessional documents that is so intriguing.<sup>2</sup>

The Epitome closes with further clarification about the authority of Scripture: “But the other symbols and other writings, of which we made mention a little while ago, do not possess the authority of a judge—for this dignity belongs to Holy Scripture alone; but merely give testimony to our religion, and set it forth to show in what manner from time to time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the Church of God by

---

first topic in the confessional body of doctrine, the former maintained the model of the *Augsburg Confession*, where the *sola Scriptura* was assumed but not elaborated. Only with the *Formula of Concord* did the scriptural *principium* appear fully enunciated—and even then not in the detail of the Reformed documents,” *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 70.

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 94-95.

<sup>2</sup> It is part of the irony and melancholy of human frailty that the Formula next describes the Augsburg Confession in terms of “unanimous consent,” even while the Formula was written to address splits and divisions within the Protestant camp.

the doctors who then lived, as respects controverted articles, and by what arguments, dogmas at variance with the Holy Scriptures have been rejected and condemned.”<sup>1</sup>

The acceptance of the historic catholic church is interesting in the closing summary. The Formula does not distance Lutherans from what God has done in the past in His Church. The other symbols and writings are part of the Lutheran heritage, although they are subordinate to Scripture.

As with the Augsburg Confession, the Formula evinces a concern to retain “catholic substance”. Lutheran scholar Herbert Bouman writes: “Another attitude that is prominent in the Formula, as in the rest of the Book of Concord, is its conservatism, or traditionalism, or genuine endeavor to be catholic in the breadth of its theology and opposed to any sectarian peculiarity or abridgement of the full biblical message. The Lutherans begin their creedal collection with items that are not even Lutheran in origin, the ecumenical, or catholic creeds. For them, as for Luther, reformation did not mean revolution, annihilation of existing structures and a new start from scratch, but a recognition of the continuity of the church, not to be repudiated but re-formed. This involved a conscious effort to conserve what was valid in the accumulated heritage of Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 96-97. The normative authority of these three symbols is repeated at the end of the Formula.

<sup>2</sup> Bouman, “Retrospect and Prospect,” 104.

### 3. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN REFORMED CONFESSIONS

#### a. Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)

The Tetrapolitan Confession was submitted to the same Diet of Augsburg at which Melancthon presented the foundational Augsburg Confession. It was hastily composed by Martin Bucer, Wolfgang Capito, and Caspar Hedio.<sup>1</sup> We have seen how the Augsburg Confession appealed regularly to antiquity, and will now find that the Reformed branch of the developing Protestant movement also sought to justify their reform efforts by appealing to antiquity.

Bucer must, unfortunately, be given short shrift here, since most of his writings remain un-translated, and are not accessible to me at this time. An entire thesis, or dissertation, could be written (and needs to be written) about Bucer's view of church history and his continual (some would say excessive) habit of appealing to antiquity in pursuit of catholicity. Bucer was censured by many, even by Calvin, for his enthusiastic view of the fathers and the early church.<sup>2</sup>

The Tetrapolitan Confession, like the Augsburg Confession, manifests the optimism that spurred on the early Reformation. The authors of the Confession appeal regularly to the ancient church and the fathers, hoping to persuade the Emperor and his Diet that the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 52. Old treats the patristic knowledge of these three reformers in *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), chapter 2, 119-138.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin wrote to Bucer: "You are constantly asserting the authority of the Fathers in this fashion, but on this basis any falsehood you like can be represented as the truth. Is this the true hallowing of God's name, to ascribe so much weight to man that his truth no longer holds sway over us? Surely sufficient honour is paid to the Fathers if we resolve that they must not be rejected or disregarded even if at many points they are found to be in error?" D.F. Wright, ed., *Commonplaces of Martin Bucer* (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 40.

reformers are not seeking to destroy the Church, but rather to bring it back to its foundations.

In chapter one (On the Subject-Matter of Sermons), the fathers are held up as an example of faithful preaching: “For it seemed to us not improper to resort in such a crisis whither of old and always not only the most holy fathers, bishops and princes, but also the children of God everywhere, have always resorted—viz., to the authority of the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

Several church fathers are appealed to in the confession. Augustine is referenced in chapters four<sup>2</sup>, five<sup>3</sup>, fourteen<sup>4</sup>, and sixteen<sup>5</sup>. Chrysostom is referenced in chapters seven<sup>6</sup>, eight<sup>7</sup>, and nine,<sup>8</sup> while Irenaeus and Eusebius are summarized in chapter eight.<sup>9</sup> Jerome, Epiphanius, Athanasius, and Lactantius are all mentioned in chapter twelve.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to appealing to specific fathers, the “example of the apostles and of the earlier and purer Church” is appealed to in chapter twelve.<sup>11</sup> The mass is condemned in chapter nineteen, not only because it conflicts with Scripture, but also because, “it is diverse in many ways from that which the holy fathers observed”.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, besides a brief mention of the Apostles’ Creed in chapter fifteen,<sup>13</sup> the confession closes with an appeal to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 56.

<sup>2</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 59.

<sup>3</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 74.

<sup>6</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 62.

<sup>7</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 62-63.

<sup>8</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 63.

<sup>10</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 80-81.

<sup>11</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 62.

<sup>12</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 73.

Emperor to imitate the godly emperors of the early church who presided over ecumenical councils.<sup>1</sup> Thus, it is clear that the Tetrapolitan Confession appeals explicitly to the ancient church (though only to one creed).<sup>2</sup>

### **b. First Helvetic Confession (1536)**

The First Helvetic Confession (also known as the Second Confession of Basel) was prompted by Paul III's calling of a general council, which would become the Council of Trent. The Protestants tried to secure greater unity, and so a committee of Bullinger, Grynaeus, Myconius produced the First Helvetic Confession (influenced by Bucer and Capito).<sup>3</sup>

The confession is not especially long, and does not appeal much to the ancient church. However, the subtitle of the confession reads: "A Common Confession of the Holy, True and Ancient Christian Faith ...".<sup>4</sup> Additionally, although Scripture is honored as the "more ancient, most perfect, and loftiest teaching,"<sup>5</sup> the "holy fathers" are given honor as "elect instruments through whom God has spoken and operated" (if they have faithfully expounded the *Scriptures*).<sup>6</sup>

### **c. French Confession of Faith (1559)**

The French Confession (or Gallican Confession), is the product of the Reformation's spread in France. Calvin was himself a Frenchman, forced to flee persecution in his own

---

<sup>1</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 83-86.

<sup>2</sup> Additional appeals are found in chapters twenty one and twenty two.

<sup>3</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 97.

<sup>4</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 100.

<sup>5</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 101.

country. Many more of his countrymen joined him in Geneva, seeking asylum. There they were trained and many sent back into France as evangelists and church-planters.<sup>1</sup> Some of the French Reformed churches numbered in the thousands, and there were just as many French Protestant martyrs.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the French Confession was a product of a turbulent time: a time of tremendous growth, and a time of brutal persecution. Such is often the context of Christian confessions and creeds.

The confession has a sterling pedigree, according to the traditional account: “The Gallican Confession is the work of John Calvin, who prepared the first draft, and of his pupil, Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, who, with the Synod of Paris in 1559, brought it into its present enlarged shape.”<sup>3</sup> However, more recent research has raised doubts as to whether Calvin wrote the initial draft of the confession<sup>4</sup>, and there is some speculation as to how well the section on the ecumenical creeds represents Calvin’s position.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 493.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 493.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 493.

<sup>4</sup> John Leith presents some evidence against the traditional view of Calvin’s authorship. Most interesting is Leith’s summary of Jacques Pannier’s (apparently the noted authority on the French Confession) insights to the effect that, “Calvin was on principle opposed to the idea of a confession written by a single hand. Hence the Reformer saw a special significance in the traditional belief that the Apostles’ Creed was a collective work. In all probability the draft confession was not the work of Calvin alone, but of himself and his Genevan colleagues co-operatively—including, no doubt, Beza and Viret,” *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, revised edition, (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1973, 128.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen M. Reynolds, “Calvin’s View of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds” *Westminster Theological Journal* 23 (1960): 33-37, relates how Calvin refused to subscribe to the Athanasian Creed in his controversy with the heretic Caroli. But Caroli was trying to maneuver Calvin into a corner. Reynolds’ argument is somewhat convoluted, but I think that is because the polemical situations Calvin worked in were also convoluted. Although it can seem that the reformers contradict themselves by first praising the creeds and fathers, and then dismissing them as irrelevant, it is important to remember the reformers’ unswerving loyalty to the Word of God. They were quite willing to criticize non-scriptural terms in the creeds and subject the fathers to harsh criticism. We must remember who the reformers were fighting at the time when we examine their statements about church history, since different enemies challenged different aspects of Reformation project.

The French Confession begins with a prefatory letter to King Francis II. In this preface, we find a two-pronged attack. The preface argues that: (1) Word of God is the sufficient and ultimate authority, (2) the Roman church has departed from the primitive church.

The relevant section of the preface reads:

For the articles of our faith, which are all declared at some length in our Confession, all come to this: that since God has sufficiently declared his will to us through his Prophets and Apostles, and even by the mouth of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we owe such respect and reverence to the Word of God as shall prevent us from adding to it any thing of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rules it prescribes. And inasmuch as the Roman Church, forsaking the use and customs of the primitive Church, has introduced new commandments and a new form of worship of God, we esteem it but reasonable to prefer the commandments of God, who is himself truth, to the commandments of men, who by their nature are inclined to deceit and vanity. And whatever our enemies may say against us, we can declare this before God and men, that we suffer for no other reason than for maintaining our Lord Jesus Christ to be our only Saviour and Redeemer, and his doctrine to be the only doctrine of life and salvation.<sup>1</sup>

As with Reformed confessions in general,<sup>2</sup> the French Confession enumerates the canonical books of Scripture, and is careful to emphasize the self-authenticating nature of Scripture:

IV. We know these books to be canonical, and the sure rule of our faith, not so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however useful, we can not found any articles of faith.<sup>3</sup>

V. We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men. And inasmuch as it is the rule of all truth, containing all, that is necessary for the service of God and for our salvation, it is not lawful for men, nor even for angels, to add to it, to take away from it, or to change it. Whence it follows that no authority, whether of antiquity, or custom, or numbers, or

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 357.

<sup>2</sup> Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 210.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 361-32

human wisdom, or judgments, or proclamations, or edicts, or decrees, or councils, or visions, or miracles, should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures, but, on the contrary, all things should be examined, regulated, and reformed according to them. And therefore we confess the three creeds, to wit: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, because they are in accordance with the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

Article VI continues in the same vein. It presents the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity and concludes with a strong claim to catholic continuity:

And in this we confess that which hath been established by the ancient councils, and we detest all sects and heresies which were rejected by the holy doctors, such as St. Hilary, St. Athanasius, St. Ambrose, and St. Cyril.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis, of course, is on the supreme authority of God's Word. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the three creeds are confessed. However, they are confessed *because* they accord with the Word of God. Here we see that it is entirely orthodox (according to Reformed Protestant confessional standards) to believe the creeds are a subordinate standard, but a standard nonetheless. The French Confession does not jettison the entirety of church history before the Reformation.

### **c. Heidelberg Catechism (1563)**

Question twenty-two of the eminently practical Heidelberg Catechism asks: "What is it, then, necessary for a Christian to believe?" The answer states: "All that is promised us in the Gospel, which the articles of our catholic, undoubted Christian faith teach us in sum."<sup>3</sup> The Catechism then proceeds to state the Apostles' Creed (Question 23), and explicate each part of the Creed (Questions 24-58). So, then, a large section of the

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 362.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 363.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 314.



Catechism is concerned with explaining the doctrines of the historic church. It seems Schaff is generally correct when he says: “As a standard of public doctrine the Heidelberg Catechism is the most catholic and popular of all the Reformed symbols.”<sup>1</sup> The Catechism may not quote church fathers explicitly, and it does not refer to the Nicene or Athanasian Creed, but the amount of space given to explaining the Apostles’ Creed certainly makes up for any deficiency!

John Williamson Nevin, introducing Ursinus’s own *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, waxes eloquent, as only Nevin could, on the catholicity of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Its catholicity appears in its sympathy with the religious life of the old Catholic Church, in its care to avoid the thorny dialectic subtleties of Calvinism, in the preference it shows for the positive in religion as opposed to the merely negative and controversial, and in the broad and free character generally, which marks the tone of its instructions. Considering the temper of the times, and the relations out of which it grew, it is remarkably free from polemical and party prejudices. A fine illustration of the catholic, historical feeling now noticed, is found in the fact, that so large a part of the work is based directly upon the Apostle’s Creed.<sup>2</sup>

However, it could seem unfair to only hear opinions from Schaff and Nevin, the two Mercersburg theologians, who were manifestly concerned to recover catholicity. Bierma provides a more recent assessment:

The Catechism soon became renowned throughout the Reformed churches of Europe for its irenic expression of the Reformed faith—personal, practical, and devotional in tone; muted, for the most part, in its polemics against Roman

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, vol. 3, 540.

<sup>2</sup> Nevin, in *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Willard, 4<sup>th</sup> American Edition (Cincinnati: Elm Street Publishing Company, 1888). I assume the introduction is by Nevin: the author is only identified by the initials J.W.N. But, given the subject matter and the date of publication, he is the only suspect who fits the crime. For an excellent treatment of Nevin’s own appeals to the ancient church see D.G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2005).

Catholicism and the strict Lutherans; and relatively free of such controversial Reformed teachings as predestination, limited atonement, and covenant.<sup>1</sup>

We must also hear the voices of the authors themselves.

#### a. Zacharias Ursinus

A former pupil of Melanchthon, Ursinus shared his teacher's concern for catholicity and continuity with the ancient church. In his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, Ursinus presents a summary of the standard Protestant view toward creeds and confessions. The Apostle's Creed is both apostolic and *catholic*. It is *apostolic*, not because the apostle's actually wrote it (as legend had it), but because it presents *apostolic teaching*. It is also *catholic*, not because it is the sole possession of the Roman Catholic church, but because it is universally believed by all orthodox Christians.<sup>2</sup> Ursinus answers the hypothetical question, "Then why the proliferation of creeds" in this way: "[T]hese are not properly other creeds differing in substance from the Apostle's creed, but are merely a repetition and clearer enunciation of its meaning, in which some words are added, by way of explanation, on account of heretics, who took advantage of its brevity, and corrupted it."<sup>3</sup>

He also enumerates the reasons why the ancient church wrote the creeds and presents reasons for why the Apostles' Creed is the *secondary* foundation of all further creedal development. The *primary* foundation, however, is always the Scriptures: "The truth of the other creeds, however, does not consist in the authority or in the decrees of men, or of

<sup>1</sup> Caspar Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker Books and Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Ursinus, *Commentary*, 117.

<sup>3</sup> Ursinus, *Commentary*, 117-118.

councils, but in their perpetual agreement with the holy Scriptures, and with the teachings of the whole church from the time of the Apostles, retaining and holding fast to the doctrine which they delivered, and at the same time giving testimony to posterity that they have received this doctrine from the Apostles and those that heard them, which agreement is obvious to all those who but give the subject a careful consideration.”<sup>1</sup> Here Ursinus expresses the classical Protestant understanding of Apostolic Succession: there is a real succession from the Apostles, but it is measured by conformity to the Apostles’ teaching, not merely in episcopal ordination. Likewise, the Apostles’ Creed (and other creeds developing from it) are said to be “apostolic” because they teach the same things as the Apostles.

#### **b. Caspar Olevianus**

While older scholarship credited Olevianus with helping craft the Heidelberg Catechism, the consensus of modern scholarship is that the Catechism was largely produced by a committee, and that Olevianus’s role, if he had a role at all, was small.<sup>2</sup> Bierma, however, argues that the many parallels between Olevianus’s *A Firm Foundation* (written as an exposition of the Apostles’ Creed) and the Heidelberg Catechism shows that Olevianus is an important indicator of how the Heidelberg Catechism was *interpreted*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Olevianus’s view of the Apostles’ Creed is relevant because it indicates the general theme Protestant appeals to antiquity which formed the background of the Heidelberg Catechism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ursinus, *Commentary*, 118.

<sup>2</sup> Lyle D. Bierma, introducing Olevianus’s *A Firm Foundation*, xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Bierma, *A Firm Foundation*, xxviii.

Olevianus is quite clear that he intends to exposit the *ancient* faith: “There is no doubt that these articles are an ancient summary and confession of the apostolic faith. It is also certain that whatever is (or even appears to be) contrary to one or more of the Articles of Faith must be false.”<sup>1</sup> Besides quoting Irenaeus in the introduction to *A Firm Foundation*, his subtitle clearly shows his attitude to the ancient church: “That is, the Articles of the Old, True, Undoubted Christian Faith, Written and Explained for the Benefit of Christians Who in These Dangerous and Troubled Times are Seeking a Sure Comfort from God’s Word.”<sup>2</sup>

Additional evidence comes from Question 14 (“Is this a new faith?”). Olevianus answers: “It is the old, true, undoubted Christian faith that the apostles confessed and preached. And this short confession of faith is a reliable guide for recognizing and judging whether something is orthodox or not. For whatever is contrary to one or more of the Articles of Faith must be false. If one simply sticks to the Articles of Faith, one cannot go wrong.”<sup>3</sup> For Olevianus, there was no tension in expositing the Apostles’ Creed as a “firm foundation,” because it offered Scriptural truth to troubled souls in troubled times.

#### **a. Belgic Confession (1561)**

The Netherlands was a hotly-contested region during the spread of the Reformation. As a center of trade, the Holy Roman Emperors would not surrender it lightly to the Protestants. Philip II of Spain and his henchman the Duke of Alva fiercely persecuted

---

<sup>1</sup> Bierma, *A Firm Foundation*, xli.

<sup>2</sup> Bierma, *A Firm Foundation*, xli.

<sup>3</sup> Bierma, *A Firm Foundation*, 12.

Protestants in the Low Countries. The bloodshed was horrendous: “The number of her martyrs exceeds that of any other Protestant Church during the sixteenth century, and perhaps that of the whole primitive Church under the Roman empire.”<sup>1</sup>

The Confession itself was written, like the Augsburg Confession and Calvin’s *Institutes*, to justify the Protestants before their persecutors. The Confession was addressed in vain to Philip, with a full expectation and readiness of martyrdom.<sup>2</sup> As with the Formula of Concord and French Confession, the writers felt more pressed to distinguish their beliefs from Roman Catholicism. Thus, in contrast to the Augsburg Confession, these three confessions clearly state the supremacy of Scripture. The Scripture’s authority is self-authenticating, and does not depend on the witness of church history. As Article V states:

We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing, without any doubt, all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves. For the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling.<sup>3</sup>

As a product of the developing Reformation and changing polemical situations, the Belgic Confession clearly distinguishes between canonical and Apocryphal books. However, the authors of the Belgic Confession do not dismiss the Apocrypha altogether: “All which [Apocryphal books] the Church may read and take instruction from, so far as they agree with the canonical books; but they are far from having such power and

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 503.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 503.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 387.

efficacy as that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion; much less to detract from the authority of the other sacred books.”<sup>1</sup>

In Article VII, the Confession states the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture, and places Scripture above all human writings: “Neither may we compare any writings of men, though ever so holy, with those divine Scriptures; nor ought we to compare custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times or persons, or councils, decrees, or statutes, with the truth of God, for the truth is above all: for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself.”<sup>2</sup>

The Belgic Confession stands in the stream of orthodox Christianity in its doctrine of the Trinity and explicitly claims continuity with orthodox teaching: “The doctrine of the Holy Trinity hath always been defended and maintained by the true Church, since the times of the Apostles to this very day, against the Jews, Mohammedans, and some false Christians and heretics, as Marcion, Manes, Praxeas, Sabellius, Samosatenus, Arius, and such like, who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers.”<sup>3</sup> This section of the Confession is noteworthy for its concern to reject the same heretics that the catholic church in history has rejected. Additionally, the confession implies that one mark of the true church is its Trinitarian orthodoxy, since the doctrine of the Trinity has always been “defended and maintained by the true Church”.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 387.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 388.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 392-93.

<sup>4</sup> Focusing on Trinitarian orthodoxy as a mark of the true church might help refocus many discussions of ecumenism and religious pluralism.

The confession goes on to subscribe to the standard three creeds: “Therefore, in this point, we do willingly receive the three creeds, namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice, and of Athanasius; likewise that which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers.”<sup>1</sup> Taken at face value, the confession seems to broadly endorse the writings of the ancient fathers. Of course, there is a standard to measure these writings (namely the three creeds and the Scriptures), but the confession has no qualms about aligning itself with the orthodox and Scriptural beliefs of the fathers.

Article XXVII provides a reformed definition of the catholic church: “We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of true Christian believers, expecting all their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **e. Second Helvetic Confession (1566)**

Since the Second Helvetic Confession is, according to Schaff, “the most widely adopted, and hence the most authoritative of all the Continental Reformed symbols, with the exception of the Heidelberg Catechism,”<sup>3</sup> it certainly deserves examination.

#### ***i. Authorial Evidence***

After a fortuitous rescue from the dust bins of history, Heinrich Bullinger is emerging as one of the most influential second-generation reformers. Old gives a succinct statement of Bullinger’s accomplishment: “Henry Bullinger (1504-75) was a man of enormous

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 393.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 417.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 394.

ability. Educated at the University of Cologne in pure *via antiqua* scholasticism, he knew Thomas Aquinas (1225?-74), Bonaventure (1217-74), and Duns Scotus (1266-1308) well. His knowledge of patristic, exegetical, and historical literature was encyclopedic. He had read everything in his long life. He started out as a child prodigy, succeeding Zwingli while he was only twenty-seven years old, and for more than forty years he capably directed the reformation of Zurich securing for it an international influence.”<sup>1</sup>

His influence in England was profound. Philip Benedict quotes Patrick Collinson to this effect. Collinson argues that Peter Martyr was in fact the most important theological influence on the Elizabethan Church, but Bullinger was not far behind: “... And at least equally influential was Bullinger, whose view of the religious role of Christian magistracy was well adapted to political reality in Elizabethan England’.”<sup>2</sup>

Bullinger clearly believed his theology was continuing in the stream of the ancient church. Garcia Archilla, in his study of Bullinger’s view of history, writes: “He does not sever the patristic church from the apostolic church, rather he receives patristic tradition inasmuch as it coherees to the witness of the apostolic church present in the canon: the Evangelical church is in communion with and in succession of the catholic church of all times which receives this witness. It is not a question of attacking the tradition of the church for Bullinger; much to the contrary he seeks to affirm the true tradition of the church catholic, which consists in the witness of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Old, *Worship*, 170.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Garcia Archilla, “Truth in History: The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1989), 277-280.



Bullinger embraced the *scriptural* teaching of the church fathers and the ancient church: “But here we do not repudiate or hold in contempt in the least the disputations and scriptural expositions of the Blessed Fathers, the antistes or doctors of the ancient church, as for example Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and others like these, as long as both their exposition and conclusions depart in nothing from those apostolic rules [of faith].”<sup>1</sup>

### **b. Documentary Evidence**

Written initially by Bullinger for his own personal use as the creed he wished to die confessing,<sup>2</sup> the Second Helvetic Confession has found a lasting place of authority. This wonderful confession repeatedly claims continuity with the ancient church. Schaff writes: “It proceeds on the conviction that the Reformed faith is in harmony with the true Catholic faith of all ages, especially the ancient Greek and Latin Church.”<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt this is a thoroughly Protestant confession; yet, it is filled with references to the ancient church, the ecumenical creeds, and quotes from the church fathers.

The full title of the confession reveals its concern for catholic orthodoxy. The full Latin title, as found in Schaff, reads:

Confessio et Expositio *simplex Orthodoxæ Fidei, et Dogmatum Catholicorum synceræ Religionis Christianæ*. Concorditer ab Ecclesiæ Christi Ministris, qui sunt in Helvetia, Tiguri, Bernæ [Glaronæ, Basileæ], Scaphusii [Abbatiscellæ], Sangalli, Curia Rhetorum, et apud Confœderatos, Mylhusii item, et Biennæ: quibus adjunxerunt se et Genevensis [et Neocomensis] Ecclesiæ Ministri [una cum aliis Evangelii Præconibus in Polonia, Hungaria, et Scotia]; edita in hoc, ut *universis*

<sup>1</sup> Archilla, *Truth in History*, 286. “Antistes” is “a traditional designation of the head pastor of the Zurich church,” and so Bullinger applies this Swiss term to the describe the fathers, Archilla, 4, f.n. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 392.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 394-95.

*testentur fidelibus, quod in unitate veræ et antiquæ Christi Ecclesiæ  
perstent, neque ulla nova, aut erronea dogmata spargant, atque ideo etiam  
nihil consortii cum ullis Sectis aut Hæresibus habeant (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>*

The Confession begins with the typically Protestant affirmation of the primary authority of the Scriptures. Interestingly, Bullinger does not admit that the Apocrypha may be usefully studied in his own day, and in this move, he departs from other Protestant confessions. Schaff notes: “This is the first symbolical exclusion of the Apocrypha from the Canon. The Lutheran symbols leave this question open.”<sup>2</sup> Later confessions will follow Bullinger in this attitude to the Apocrypha which, no doubt, reflects the changing polemical circumstances.

Ironically, although he does not acknowledge the usefulness of the ancient Apocrypha, he appeals to antiquity in setting the Apocrypha apart from the rest of Scripture: “And yet we do not deny that certain books of the Old Testament were by the ancient authors called *Apocryphal*, and by others *Ecclesiastical*; to wit, such as they would to be read in the churches, but not alleged to avouch or confirm the authority of faith by them. As also Augustine, in his *De Civitate Dei*, book xviii., chapter 38, makes mention that ‘in the books of the Kings, the names and books of certain prophets are reckoned;’ but he adds that ‘they are not in the canon,’ and that ‘those books which we have suffice unto godliness.’”<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that while Bullinger definitely places the Apocryphal books below the inspired Scriptures, he does so by appealing to the witness of antiquity, and to Augustine in particular.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 420.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 396.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 833.

Additionally, Bullinger explicitly affirms continuity with the best of what the church fathers have written: “Wherefore we do not despise the interpretation of the holy Greek and Latin fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we do modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures. Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings matched with the Canonical Scriptures, but bid us allow of them so far as they either agree with them or disagree. And in the same order we place the decrees and canons of councils.”<sup>1</sup> Bullinger believed he was a faithful student of the fathers by honoring *their* desire to be subordinate to the Scriptures.

This is not all he says about the decrees of the councils: he affirms them explicitly. In chapter 3, on the Trinity, Bullinger sums up the matter, saying, “In short, we receive the Apostle’s Creed, because it delivers unto us the true faith.”<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, one of the most wide-ranging affirmations of the ecumenical creeds in *all* the Protestant confessions I have surveyed is found in chapter 11:

And, to speak many things in a few words, with a sincere heart we believe, and with liberty of speech we freely profess, whatsoever things are defined out of the Holy Scriptures, and comprehended in the creeds, and in the decrees of those four first and most excellent councils—held at Nicæa, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon—together with blessed Athanasius’s creed and all other creeds like to these, touching the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; and we condemn all things contrary to the same.

And thus we retain the Christian, sound, and Catholic faith, whole and inviolable, knowing that *nothing is contained in the aforesaid creeds*

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 833-34.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 836.

*which is not agreeable to the Word of God, and makes wholly for the sincere declaration of the faith (emphasis mine).*<sup>1</sup>

Bullinger's affirmation of the ecumenical creeds is quite remarkable. He goes beyond the typical affirmation of the "three creeds" and affirms Ephesus and Chalcedon, as well. Most remarkable is his strong statement that *nothing* in the creeds conflicts with the Word! Although Bullinger clearly believes the "Canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men,"<sup>2</sup> this does not prevent him from affirming the authority of the Church's confession in history.

It is also useful to note, not only what Bullinger explicitly *affirms* in continuity with catholic substance, but also at what he *denies*. As with most creeds and confessions throughout church history, specific heresies and heretics are forcefully rejected. In chapter 3, he rejects the "Monarchists, the Novatians, Praxeas, the Patripassians, Sabellius, Samaosatenus, Aetius, Macedonius, the Anthropomorphites, Arius, and such like ..."<sup>3</sup> Bullinger claims continuity with what the catholic tradition has both believed *and* rejected. He believes he is standing in the stream of historic orthodoxy.

In chapter 4, as he deals with icons, he does not hesitate to appeal to the church fathers: "Therefore we approve the judgment of Lactantius, an ancient writer, who says, 'Undoubtedly there is no religion where there is a picture.'"<sup>4</sup> Bullinger also cites the godly example of "the blessed bishop Epiphanius" who tore down a veil with an

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 854.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 821.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 836.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 837.

image of Christ or a saint painted on it.<sup>1</sup> Bullinger ends his appeals to antiquity in this section with a quote from the venerable Augustine: “Moreover, we approve this sentence of St. Augustine, ‘Let not the worship of men’s works be a religion unto us; for the workmen themselves that make such things are better, whom yet we ought not to worship’ (*De Vera Religione*, cap. 55).”<sup>2</sup>

Further appeals to Augustine are found as Bullinger argues that the saints should not be adored and worshipped, but rather imitated in their godly lives.<sup>3</sup> He also argues from the examples of the “ancient holy men” and how they treated the bones and relics of the saints, but there are not specific historical referents. It seems, though that Bullinger is alluding to the early church and its stance towards venerating the saints.<sup>4</sup> Also, in chapter 6, (Of the Providence of God), Bullinger quotes Augustine three times.<sup>5</sup> He could hardly fail to do so, as the reformers believed they were recovering an Augustinian doctrine of election, free will, and providence.

#### **f. Declaration of Thorn (1645)**

The Declaration of Thorn is a product of the fierce controversy surrounding the Thirty-Years War. The controversy was lamentable, not only because of the bloodshed between Protestants and Roman Catholics, but because of the irrational sectarianism within the Protestant camps. Reformed warred against Lutheran, and Lutherans warred within themselves ( in the syncretist controversy). In 1645, the Roman Catholic king of Poland,

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 837.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 837.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 839.

<sup>4</sup> See R.A. Marcus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 6, for the view of the early church towards saints and martyrs.

<sup>5</sup> The first quotation is from *De Agone Christi*, cap. 8. The second is not given a source, and the third comes from Augustine’s exposition of the 148<sup>th</sup> Psalm, Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 840-841.

Wladislaus IV, strove to bring peace and called representatives of the factions to Thorn, in West Prussia.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic party was not at all interested in peace, and the Lutherans were quite divided among themselves. The Reformed party was honored by the presence of the great unionist and Moravian bishop, Jan Amos Comenius. Although each party produced a statement of their beliefs, the Lutheran statement was not even read, so we will only examine the Reformed confession. It achieved lasting importance by incorporation into the Brandenburg Confessions.

The Brandenburg Confessions, and the Declaration of Thorn, are not especially significant, except for the comment Schaff makes in a footnote. I highlight this as another piece of evidence proving the existence of a *Protestant confessional tradition of claiming continuity with church history*. Schaff's footnote reads:

In the expression of *agreement with the ancient Church* the Declaration of Thorn is *more explicit than any other Protestant confession*, Lutheran or Calvinistic or Anglican. After saying that the summary of Scripture doctrine is contained in the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Words of Institution of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Declaration proceeds:

*'Si quid vero, in hisce Doctrinae Christianae capitibus, dubitationis aut controversiae de genuino eorum sensu exoritur, profiteamur porro, nos amplecti ceu interpretationem Scripturarum certam et indubitam, Symbolum Nicenum et Constantinopolitanum, iisdem plane verbis, quibus in Synodi Tridentinae Sessione tertia, tanquam Principium illud, in quo omnes, qui fidem Christi profitentur, necessario conveniunt, et Fundamentum firmum et unicum, contra quod portae inferorum nunquam praevalerunt, proponitur.*

*'Cui etiam consonare Symbolum, quod dicitur Athanasianum, agnoscimus: nec non Ephesinae primae, et Chalcedonensis Synodi Confessiones: quin etiam, quae Quinta et Sexta Synodi, Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum reliquiis opposuerunt: quaeque adversus Pelagianos olim Milevitana Synodus et Arausicana secunda ex Scripturis docuerunt. Quinimo, quicquid primitiva Ecclesia ab ipsis usque Apostolorum temporibus, unanimi*

<sup>1</sup> In this entire section, I am dependent on Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 554-563.

*deinceps et notorio consensu, tanquam Articulum fidei necessarium, credidit, docuit, idem nos quoque ex Scripturis credere et docere profiteamur.*

*'Hoc igitur Fidei nostræ professione, tanquam Christiani vere Catholici, ab omnibus veteribus et recentibus Hæresibus, quas prisca universalis Ecclesia unanimi consensu ex Scripturis rejecit atque damnavit, nos nostrasque Ecclesias segregamus'* (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Schaff's claim is quite strong, and it the Declaration's affirmation of catholic substance is equally strong, but it is debatable whether it is the strongest, compared to the other confessions surveyed thus far. Luckily, we do not have to decide the question now, but can simply add the Declaration of Thorn to our growing list of Protestant confessional claims to true catholicity *via* continuity with the ancient church.

#### **g. Confession of the Waldenses (1655)**

Our survey of Protestant confessional claims of continuity with catholic substance ends with another minor confession from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Confession of the Waldenses is significant, not only because it witnesses to the continuing reverence for catholicity on the Continent, but also because so much of Protestant historical apologetics appealed to

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 562. My former colleague, Samuel Jackson, M.A., was kind enough to furnish this translation: "If indeed any doubt or controversy should arise in these chapters of Christian Doctrine from a sincere reading of them, we profess furthermore that we embrace the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creed, in the same clear words as in the third session of the Council of Trent, as a certain and unquestionable interpretation of the Scriptures, just as if a Starting ground is laid out on which all who profess Faith in Christ may stand together with respect to what is essential, a Foundation both firm and unique, against which the gates of hell will never prevail. With which, also, we acknowledge the Creed that is called Athanasian to agree: neither do the Confessions of the First Ephesian and Chalcedonian Synods disagree: but also the Fifth and Sixth Synods, which opposed the remnants of the Nestorians and Eutychians: each [synod] against the Pelagians in former times taught from the Scriptures, the Synod of Milevum and the Synod of Orange. And indeed, *whatever the primitive church from all the way back to the times of the Apostles believed and taught as an essential Article of Faith*, with one heart singly expressed total agreement, this same things we profess that we also from the Scriptures believe and teach. By this profession of our Faith, therefore, as *truly Catholic Christians*, we separate ourselves and our churches from all ancient and recent heresies that the *ancient universal Church* rejected and condemned with unanimous agreement, from the Scriptures," (emphasis mine).

the Waldenses as a link with the ancient church. The sections of the confession relevant to this study read as follows:

IV. We acknowledge the divinity of these sacred books, not only from the *testimony of the Church*, but more especially because of the eternal and indubitable truth of the doctrine therein contained, and of that most divine excellency, sublimity, and majesty which appears therein; and because of the operation of the Holy Spirit, who causes us to receive with reverence the *testimony of the Church* in that point, who opens our eyes to discover the beams of that celestial light which shines in the Scripture, and corrects our taste to discern the divine savor of that spiritual food (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

This article is a masterful summary of the Protestant doctrine of scriptural authority. Elements that are overemphasized and separated in other statements of the same doctrine (such as the “testimony of the Church,” the internal evidence of Scripture itself, and the illumination of the Spirit) are here held together in a judicious balance. Especially significant is the statement that the Spirit opens our eyes to see both the internal evidence of Scripture’s inspiration, but also to “reverence the testimony of the Church” in this regard. The Waldensian Confession does not teach the theory of autonomous and individualistic interpretation so prominent in certain Protestant circles; rather, it sets forth a hermeneutic of humility, of reverent submission to the Word of God, and to the words of the Spirit-led Church.

This reverence for the testimony of the church also appears in Articles thirty-one and thirty-three. In Article thirty-one, the confession appeals to the pattern of the primitive church’s ministry:

XXXI. That it is necessary the Church should have pastors known by those who are employed for that purpose to be well instructed and of a good life, as well to preach the Word of God as to administer the

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 759-760.



sacraments, and wait upon the flock of Christ (according to the rules of a good and holy discipline), together with elders and deacons, after the manner of the *primitive Church* (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

In Article thirty-three, the Apostles' Creed is included among other "fundamentals" of the faith:

XXXIII. Finally, that we ought to receive the symbol of the Apostles, the Lord's Prayer, and the Decalogue as fundamentals of our faith and our devotion.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, in a final addition to their creed, directed against Roman Catholic calumnies, the Waldensians make clear that they do not reject everything remotely smelling of Roman Catholicism. Number 14 reads: "That we despise, because we do not invoke, the most holy Virgin and glorified saints; while in fact we pronounce them blessed and worthy both of praise and imitation, and hold above all the holy Virgin Mary to be 'blessed amongst women.'" Most heirs of the Reformation would feel very uncomfortable with this language. This is ironic because the Waldensians themselves were the classic argument against Roman hegemony. It was argued that since the Waldensians had preserved the true light of the gospel throughout the middle ages, there was a direct line of descent from the more pure age of the church to the beginnings of the Reformation.<sup>3</sup> At any rate, the Waldensians clearly stand in the Reformed tradition of appealing to continuity with catholic substance.

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 767.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 768.

<sup>3</sup> "More usually in Puritan/Dissenter and relatively rarer in Anglican thought, the core of the Protestant claim to antiquity often centered on the twelfth-century movement of the Poor Men of Lyons, also known as the Waldenses from the name of their founder Valdes, and their survivors in the valleys of Piedmont," S.J. Barnett, "Where Was Your Church before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined" *Church History*, 68 (March 1999): 14-41. A classic example of using the Waldensians to prove the "apostolicity" of the Protestant movement is found in Bard Thompson's preface to Schaff's *The Principle of Protestantism*. Schaff's original lecture responded, in part, to a sermon by Joseph F. Berg, a

#### 4. APPEALS TO ANTIQUITY IN ANGLO-PURITAN CONFESSIONS

##### a. Scotch Confession (1560)

The Scotch Confession<sup>1</sup> strongly states the primacy of Scripture over all other authorities in Articles 18 and 19. Article 19 further states that Scripture does not derive its authority from the church, but from God. Article 20 acknowledges that general councils do have a place in the life of the church: “So farre then as the councell previs the determination and commandment that it gives bee the plaine Worde of God, so soone do we reverence and imbrace the same.”<sup>2</sup> But, in contradistinction to the other Protestant confessions surveyed thus far, the Scotch Confession contains no affirmation of the three creeds and does not appeal to any church father. There is a definite shift of focus.<sup>3</sup>

The confession does not reject councils and creeds as useless. On the contrary, it claims continuity with any conciliar pronouncement which accords with the “plaine Worde of God”. Still, one is left wondering *which* conciliar decisions and creeds are biblical? It is assumed that the Scriptures are so clear in every detail that we can easily determine which creeds are biblical. But, if church history has proved anything, it has proved that immensely intelligent and godly men can be immensely confused about what Scripture

---

major figure in the German Reformed Church. Berg made a striking claim about the Waldensians: “from the Waldensian records which have been preserved, it is evident that the doctrines of the Reformation in their purity and strength were maintained from the days of the apostles until the age of Luther.” It was against this narrow view of the true church that Schaff wrote his explosive defense of Protestant Catholicity.

<sup>1</sup> This confession is called “Scots,” “Scottish,” or “Scotch,” depending on the source. I will opt to follow Schaff’s usage.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 465.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth notes this in *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 19. I disagree with Barth’s treating appeals to the ancient church as mere formalities in Reformed Confessions, but his brief treatment does present more evidence that needs to be incorporated into a comprehensive study of this issue.

says! In this case, what the Scotch confession *failed* to say is perhaps more significant than what it *did* say about continuity with catholic substance.

The discontinuity of the Scotch Confession with the continental confessions (in the matter of explicitly affirming catholicity) is hard to account for, especially as it appears the Scots were prepared to affirm certain of the continental confessions: “Besides, the General Assembly approved and recommended also the Second Helvetic Confession, which Beza transmitted to Scotland (1566), Calvin’s Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism, but no subscription to these foreign confessions was ever exacted.”<sup>1</sup>

One factor causing this departure from the Protestant confessional tradition (that of explicitly affirming the creeds) was the course of the Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland. David F. Wright observes: “The Fathers were not prominent in Renaissance humanist learning in Scotland, although how significant a minor role they played should become clearer from a growing concentration on this phase of Scottish religious and intellectual history. John Knox never mentions Erasmus. Scottish readers were dependent on England or the Continent for texts or translations of the early Christian writers. Even by 1700, no works of any of the Fathers had issued from a Scottish press.”<sup>2</sup>

I will have to leave this anomaly largely unexplained, since this thesis is not about the Scotch Confession only, but perhaps we have some clues in the thought of John Knox, one of the principal authors of the Scotch Confession<sup>3</sup>. Explaining the Scotch Confession

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 682.

<sup>2</sup> D.F. Wright, “John Knox and the Early Church Fathers,” in *John Knox and the British Reformation*, ed. Roger Mason (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing House, 1998), 99.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff states that Knox was probably the principal author of the Scotch Confession, though a commission of six men (all named John!) produced the document at the behest of the Scottish parliament, in August,

by only referring to Knox is not possible<sup>1</sup>, but he definitely exerted a powerful influence on the Scottish reformation. We can also see, possibly, sources of the Puritan mentality in the theology of Knox.

Knox shared the standard reformational allegiance to the Word above all other authorities. But, according to Kyle, Knox's interpretation of the Word went further than other reformers: "Knox interpreted the Bible very literally, more literally than most of the reformers, and he left us with no political theories or critical remarks that tended to diminish the authority of God's Word. In his stress on the Word of God and on the rejection of all beliefs and practices for which no biblical warrant could be found, Knox may have surpassed the other Magisterial Reformers."<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to find the Scotch Confession containing one of the strongest statements of Biblical authority in Protestant confessions.

The Scotch Confession, in not claiming continuity with catholic substance, perhaps also mirrors Knox's individual use of such claims. Kyle writes: "Knox highly respected the church fathers and cited them when they added weight to his argument. Yet, patristic references in Knox's writings appear to be scanty when compared to the writings of other reformers such as Calvin."<sup>3</sup>

The Scotch Confession, in its preface, has one of the strongest statements in Protestant confessions regarding its own fallibility. All conciliar pronouncements are to be

---

1560. Knox was well qualified for the task, as he had been consulted in the preparation of the English Edwardian articles. See Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 681.

<sup>1</sup> See Richard G. Kyle, *The Mind of John Knox* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1984), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Kyle, *Mind of John Knox*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Kyle, *Mind of John Knox*, 32. On the other hand, Schaff relates that Knox converted to Protestantism through studying the Bible, Augustine, and Jerome, *Creeeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 673.

measured and validated by the Scripture. However, this did not preclude reverence for, and submission to, conciliar decisions. Though his beliefs did not make it into the Scotch Confession (for whatever reason), Knox had a very high view of the first four councils of the church: “Knox, however, considered the four ancient councils to be in agreement with God’s Word and thus of high authority. In a dispute he would accept the authority of church councils providing nothing be admitted against the plain truth of God’s Word, nor against the four early councils whose decisions he regarded as co-equal with the authority of the four gospel writers.”<sup>1</sup>

To conclude, there is a marked shift in focus in the Scotch Confession. John Knox respected the catholic substance of the church, but he did not make as many strong claims to continuity when compared to other reformers. The Scotch Confession, for whatever reason, takes a different stance in regard to church history. This is highly significant because of the key role the Scotch Commissioners would play in the Westminster Assembly.

#### **b. Thirty-Nine Articles (1562)**

Anglicanism has typically maintained a self-conscious sense of catholicity. Thus, in the Thirty-Nine Articles, it is not surprising to find passages more reminiscent of the Lutheran confessions and first-generation Reformed confessions, rather than the Westminster Confession or the Scots Confession. From the beginning of the English reformation, we find an emphasis on the ancient creeds. Hetherington notes that part of

---

<sup>1</sup> Kyle, *Mind of John Knox*, 34.

Henry's "reform" had been the promulgation of the Bible and the "three creeds" as the "standards of faith".<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, Article VI, "Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation" contains teaches the supreme authority of the Word of God:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite *or* necessary to salvation.

In the name of *the* Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.<sup>2</sup>

But, this standard Reformation dogma did not preclude an affirmation of the early creeds.

Article VIII clearly affirms the authority of the "three creeds":

The three Credes, Nicene Crede, Athanasian Crede, and that whiche is commonly called the Apostles' Crede, ought throughlye to be receaved and bleaued: for they may be proued by moste certayne warrauntes of holye scripture (chapter 8).<sup>3</sup>

There does seem to be some Continental influence in the matter of the Thirty-Nine Article's attitude towards the creeds. Henry was interested in joining the German Schmalkaldic League, primarily for political reasons. In 1536, he sent English envoys to Germany and they agreed to the Wittenberg Articles, drawn up by Melanchthon. These articles, as Pelikan points out, contain a very strong affirmation of catholic substance:

We confess simply and clearly, without any ambiguity, that we believe, hold, teach, and defend everything which is in the canon of the Bible and in the three creeds, i.e. the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, in

---

<sup>1</sup> Hetherington, *History*, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 489-90.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 492.

the same meaning which the creeds themselves intend and in which the approved holy fathers use and defend them.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, from the beginning, the English reformation was clearly concerned to maintain continuity with church history.

In his study of the Thirty-Nine Articles, Oliver O'Donovan explains the motivations behind these affirmations of the catholic (universal) creeds. Although he writes about the English Reformers and the 39 Articles, his point holds true for the majority of Reformers and Protestant confessions: "Nevertheless, it is clear what the Reformers wished to establish by their selection of documents: points of contact with the pre-Nicene church, with the Niceno-Constantinopolitan settlement of the trinitarian question, and with the Chalcedonian settlement of the Christological question (to which the Athanasian creed gave the most convenient documentary access). And in establishing these contacts with the church of the first five centuries they intend to be free of the opinions of any individual theologian, however great, and associate themselves only with the most considered doctrinal confessions of the church speaking as a whole". In other words, the English Reformers did not want to be "Augustinians," "Lutherans," or "Calvinists," in the sense of following the teachings of any one man. Rather, they affirmed the wise consensus of the church throughout history. They were not starting a brand new church; they were *reforming* something already there. However, this stance would be surrendered by those interested in a more radical reform.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pelikan, *Credo*, 274.

### c. Irish Articles of Religion (1615)

James Ussher, the purported author of the Irish Articles of Religion, was well-versed in church history and patristics. His polemical treatise, *A Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and British* (1631), sought to prove that Irish Christianity was older than Roman Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in his *Answer to a Challenge made by a Jesuit in Ireland* (1625), he had responded to Roman Catholic attacks by adopting the standard Protestant appeal to antiquity. As Gribben writes: “Ussher’s *Answer* was a compilation of quotations which affirmed that many of the most important Catholic doctrines had no foundations in the traditions of the early church.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, Knox relates that Ussher was so scholarly and judicious that he was sometimes accused of Roman Catholic sympathies himself, even while he was specifically refuting Roman Catholic claims!<sup>3</sup> Given Ussher’s polemical use of church history, it is not surprising to find references to the “three creeds” of Christendom in the *Irish Articles*.

According to Schaff, Ussher “had an extraordinary familiarity with Biblical and patristic literature, and, together with his friend Vossius of Holland, he laid the foundation for a critical investigation of the oecumenical creeds.”<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere Schaff describes Ussher as: “the greatest English divine of his age, who in eighteen years had mastered the whole

---

<sup>1</sup> Crawford Gribben, *The Irish Puritans: James Usher and the Reformation of the Church* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Gribben, *Irish Puritans*, 35.

<sup>3</sup> R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press), 1967.

9. The Roman Catholics were eager to exploit this judicious attitude towards church history. Thus, legends sprung up quickly that he had returned to Rome on his deathbed, or in secret. Knox discusses these legends and demonstrates their implausibility, 77-79.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 663.



mass of patristic literature;”<sup>1</sup> Ussher obviously had a deep knowledge of church history, and so it is not surprising that the Irish Articles also affirm the three creeds.

Ussher clearly believed he stood in the stream of the historic church. He did not believe a new church started with the Reformation: “We preach no new faith, but the same Catholic faith that ever hath been preached; neither was it any part of our meaning to begin a new Church in these latter days of the world, but to reform the old; a tree that hath the luxurious branches loped off, and the noxious things that cleave to it taken away, is not by this pruning and purging of it made another tree than it was before; neither is the Church reformed in our days another Church than that which was deformed in the days of our forefathers, though it hath no agreement for all that with popery.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Schaff, the Irish Articles laid a foundation for the Westminster Confession<sup>3</sup>, and so it is all the more interesting to compare Westminster’s attitude toward the creeds, as compared with preceding Protestant confessions.

#### **d. Westminster Confession (1647)**

The difference between a significant number of Protestant confessions and the Westminster Confession is apparent on the question of the creeds. While most other Protestant confessions affirm the continuing authority of the early creeds, the Westminster Confession does not. Thus, the Westminster Assembly appears to be a watershed in the history of Protestants relating to church history. Prior to Westminster, Protestant confessions abounded with quotes from the church fathers, affirmations of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 606.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Knox, *James Ussher*, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 665.

three creeds, and general protestations of loyalty to the ancient paths. During the Westminster Assembly, the Apostle's Creed was hotly debated, no fathers were quoted in the actual confession, and even still some contemporaries thought the Assembly had not gone far enough in repudiating the trappings of Romanism.

Thus, this section will ask whether the *Westminster Confession moved out of the Protestant confessional "tradition," as measured by explicit affirmations of the creeds and fathers*. In the polemical context of the English reformation and the Puritan movement, true catholicity was increasingly defined as *pure Scriptural doctrine*, rather than continuity with the early creedal and patristic doctrines of a more pure (because more biblical) age in history.

### ***i. History of the Westminster Assembly***

The Westminster Assembly had at first been called to simply revise the *Thirty Nine Articles*. However, with the adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant, their task expanded into the much more ambitious mission of laying a new ecclesiastical groundwork for England and Scotland.<sup>1</sup> Two items revised even before the Solemn League and Covenant were the matters of the ecumenical creeds and the Apocrypha. Article VI's reference to the Apocrypha is stricken out, and Article VIII's affirmation of the "three creeds" was deleted in most printed copies.<sup>2</sup>

### ***ii. Puritan View of History***

Schaff generalizes about the attitude of the Westminster Divines to the creeds:

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 754-55.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 755.

The Assembly certainly had no objection to the doctrine of the oecumenical [sic] creeds, and teaches it in its own standards. And yet the omission of all allusion to them in the Confession of Faith is so far characteristic as *it reveals a difference of stand-point*. The *Puritan Assembly* was unwilling to adopt any rule of faith except the *Scripture explained by itself*; while the *Episcopal Church* was reformed on the basis of the Scripture as interpreted by the *ancient Church*, or at all events with *respectful reference to primitive creeds and canons* (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Schaff is correct to say that Westminster's omission of explicit affirmation of the ecumenical creeds "reveals a difference of standpoint". This difference not only distinguishes the English and Scotch Puritans from their Anglican and Episcopalian brothers, it also *marks a change in Protestant attitudes toward church history*. As has been proven above, the majority of major Protestant confessions included affirmations of the ecumenical creeds, alongside strong statements about the primary authority of Scripture. Westminster is thus a useful and fascinating document in charting the development of post-reformation ecclesiology.

An inherent irony is seen here. Even in trying to emulate the more "purely reformed" churches on the continent, the English and Scottish Puritans departed from one of the standard polemical strategies of the continental reformers, that of claiming continuity with the ancient church and the ecumenical creeds. The change came about for many reasons, one of which was the development of the Puritan view of history.

John MacLeod (an heir of the Puritans himself), characterizes the difference between the Puritans and their opponents as a difference in defining the "primitive church". He claims the Puritans, "sought to bring the life and practice of the Church back to the *truly primitive Faith*. They stood for the *unabated avowal of the primitive Faith*" (emphasis

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 755.

mine).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Anglicans and Conformists, though also appealing to the primitive church, actually appealed to the *patristic* church.<sup>2</sup> The Puritans, then, departed from the standard Reformation appeal to the first five hundred years of the “ancient church,” and seized the high ground of *direct continuity* with the *Apostolic* period.

### *iii. Liturgical Differences in Westminster*

Another factor in this changing attitude toward the ancient church was the liturgical debate. Davies finds the chief differences of the Puritan and Anglican parties in how they viewed the authority of Scripture in worship: it was a matter of their liturgical hermeneutic. The Puritans applied Calvin’s view of Scripture, while the Anglicans found Luther’s approach more congenial.

Davies shows how the Puritans went further than Calvin in some liturgical matters. Can we see the same further movement at the confessional level? Is it the case that while the Puritans appealed to Scripture and the “best reformed churches,” they actually departed from the practices of the best reformed churches? The question is a large one, with implications in many fields of theological study. The Puritans’ dual appeal to Scripture and the “best reformed churches,” is obviously polemical, and changes in worship and confessional formulation cannot be understood without reference to the changing polemical situations. However, other scholars have noted this important difference between the Puritan program and the reformers’ program.

---

<sup>1</sup> John MacLeod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), 7.

<sup>2</sup> MacLeod, *Scottish Theology*, 7.

Hughes Oliphant Old is a renowned scholar of reformed liturgy and worship history. His dissertation, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*, is a classic treatment of the reformers' use and indebtedness to the church fathers. In a more popular work, Old treats the history of Reformed worship briefly, yet authoritatively.<sup>1</sup> At several points in his narrative, the differences between the Puritans and their Reformation forefathers is evident.

In discussing the Westminster Directory for Worship, Old notes that the Westminster Divines laid out directions for the “reading” of the Word to be distinct from the “preaching” of the Word. Although this reflects the Puritans' high view of Scripture, and shows they believed the reading of the Word to be an act of worship, this still departs from the Continental Reformed tradition of the pastor reading and preaching contiguously.<sup>2</sup> While not problematic in itself, this bifurcation between the reading and preaching of the Word led to the abandonment of *lectio continua*, the reading and preaching of the Word verse-by-verse. This, in turn, led to the Puritans focusing solely on topical preaching. This is more than a liturgical variation, since the Reformers had stressed *lectio continua* precisely because it was the practice of church fathers like Augustine and Chrysostom. Thus, the Puritans were actually drifting away from the practice of the fathers *and* the reformers.

According to Old, this slight departure from the fathers and the Reformers had negative liturgical implications:

---

<sup>1</sup> Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*, revised ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Old, *Worship* 80.

The occasional sermon tended to go adrift from the liturgy. It is unfortunate that the Puritans lost the unity between word, prayer, and sacrament that the Continental and Scottish Reformers had tried to recover. In England the old medieval separation between preaching and the Communion liturgy, on the one hand, and between preaching and the order for morning and evening prayer, on the other hand, was not healed by the Reformation. It is therefore not at all surprising that in the Westminster Directory for Worship preaching has lost much of its liturgical character.<sup>1</sup>

Old also criticizes the Puritans for departing from the Continental and patristic traditions in the placement of prayers in the service.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the differences between the Puritans and the earlier reformers emerges to such an extent that Old finally concludes by distinguishing two different Reformed “traditions”: “... [O]ur tradition, at its most simple and at its most classical, revolves around two foci, the Continental Reformers of the sixteenth century and the English Puritans of the seventeenth century.”<sup>3</sup>

One difference between these two traditions was the use of the Apostles’ Creed in worship. The liturgical scholar Horton Davies comments: “It is surprising that the Puritans who trace their theological descent from John Calvin, whose famous *Institutes* is a commentary on the framework of the Apostles’ Creed, should have discarded the Creed in public worship.”<sup>4</sup> However, the Puritans used the Apostles’ Creed at first: “It was in universal use among the Reformed Churches

---

<sup>1</sup> Old, *Worship*, 81.

<sup>2</sup> Old, *Worship*, 102-103.

<sup>3</sup> Old, *Worship*, 161.

<sup>4</sup> Davies, *Worship of the English Puritans* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1997).

and was included in the first Puritan Prayer-Books.”<sup>1</sup> The differences between the two traditions were thus revealed, not only by a refusal to acknowledge the catholic creeds at the confessional level, but by substantive changes and departures from the catholic liturgical tradition.

*iv. Theological Differences in Westminster*

This departure is also seen in the actual structure of the confession. James B. Torrance draws attention to this, among other perceived weaknesses of the confession: “Again these [weaknesses] emerge, not so much in what it says in individual articles, but in the whole *schema* and understanding of the *ordo salutis* vividly illustrated by Perkins’ diagram from *The Golden Chain* (1590) ... The pattern is no longer the Trinitarian one of the Creeds or Calvin’s *Institutio* of 1559, but is dominated by the eternal decrees and the scheme of Federal Theology. This in turn produces serious weaknesses in the understanding of God, of grace, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Davies, *Worship of the English Puritans*, 273.

<sup>2</sup> James B. Torrance, “Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology” in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, ed. Alasdair I.C. Heron (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1982).

In his explanation of why he did not include Westminster in collection of Reformed confessions, Cochrane offers the characterization (among other, more technical, reasons):

Indeed, it can be argued that in the symbols of the seventeenth century the seeds of a departure from the Reformation may be detected ... the Westminster standards do not belong to the Reformation but are products of Puritanism and post-Reformation scholasticism. They reflect a legalism, moralism, and rationalism that is foreign to the Confessions of a century earlier. They lack the spontaneity, freshness, and joyfulness of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

One need not agree with all of Cochrane's assessment in order to appreciate the fact of a basic change in Westminster's tone and emphasis in regard to the creeds and fathers.

#### *v. Possible reasons for the Differences*

Now that we have noted the difference between the Westminster Confession and most other major Protestant confessions in their attitudes to church history and catholic substance, we are prepared to further examine the reasons for this change. Old noted the emergence of two Reformed "traditions". What, then, led to this departure from the Protestant confessional tradition?

### **1. Anabaptists & Separatists**

One source of this change seems to be the influence of an *Anabaptist view of history* on the Westminster divines, or on Puritans in general. There is a most definitely a difference

---

<sup>1</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions*, 30. Muller also notes this trend in his treatment of Reformed orthodoxy. According to Muller, studying the period of Reformed orthodoxy and its continuity/discontinuity is made difficult by changes in style, "particularly when the rather kerygmatic, discursive, and even 'existential' style of the Reformers is compared with the dogmatic, scholastic, and objective style of their orthodox successors," *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 6. Muller examines this change in regard to the doctrine of Scripture, and is it a pure coincidence that references to creeds and church fathers dropped out of Protestant Confessions at the same time that the doctrine of Scripture was developed further?



between the Anabaptist view of church history, as compared with the view of the magisterial reformers. In speaking of the difference in attitude toward tradition manifested by the mainstream reformers and the “left wing” (Anabaptists), Stephen Holmes writes: “Both sides of this debate thought that the tradition that had been handed to their generation was in serious need of critique and reformation, but they disagreed over how to relate to it.”<sup>1</sup> He goes on to contrast the Anabaptist view of history with Calvin’s:

For the Anabaptists, the history of the Church was a narrative solely of decline ... The process of tradition, the handing on of the faith, was a wholly negative process from which true Christians would only seek to escape. Calvin, by contrast, not only saw the patristic period as a largely successful attempt to hold on to and to explore ‘the faith once for all delivered’ (the ecumenical creeds, for example, were useful summaries of the heart of biblical faith, and so to be welcomed and affirmed), but also saw even the recent failures of tradition as important, as part of the context in which the work of recovery had to be done. *To make the point with a slogan, the Anabaptists sought to refound the Church, whereas Calvin sought to reform it* (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup>

The Westminster Divines respected Calvin and the continental reformers greatly. They attempted to reform the English churches according to Scripture and the “best reformed churches,”<sup>3</sup> which, in the context of the Solemn League and Covenant, meant the continental Reformed churches. But, Anabaptist thought seems to have influenced the deliberations at Westminster, whether they knew it or not.

One important contemporary source blames the Separatists for influencing the English Puritans to remove mention of the Creed in the Westminster Confession: “Baillie, a

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Holmes, *Listening to the Past*, 16-17.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, pg. 690.

Scottish Commissioner at the Westminster Assembly, lays the blame for the disuse of the Creed at the feet of the Brownists: ‘The Apostles’ Creed they detest, as an old Patchery of evil stuff; Christ’s descent into hell, they count as a blasphemous Article.’”<sup>1</sup> The Independents, as well, wanted to avoid anything that was associated with Roman Catholic worship. John Milton expressed the extreme Puritan position: “They object that if we must forsake all that is Rome’s, we must bid adieu to our creed; and I had thought our creed had been of the apostles, for so it bears title. But if it be hers, let her take it. We can want no creed so long as we want not the scriptures.” John Calvin claimed continuity with the catholic creedal tradition, but John Milton is willing throw out anything tainted with Romanism.

## 2. Hermeneutical Method

Behind these possible Anabaptist influences was a simple difference in hermeneutical method. The Westminster Assembly, like every other Protestant ecclesiastical gathering, wrestled with the problem of authority in the church. Like all Protestants, the Westminster Divines affirmed the sole, normative authority of Scripture. They also upheld the authority of the church to declare and summarize the contents of Scripture. But in wrestling with the question of the normative authority of the creeds, the Divines produced a different answer than the majority of previous Protestant confessions.

The key doctrine driving the Puritan movement (to oversimplify horribly) was the absolute primacy of the Word of God. All doctrines and all liturgical practices not

---

<sup>1</sup> Davies, *Worship of the English Puritans*, 273.

explicitly taught in Scripture were to be jettisoned. Accordingly, the Westminster Confession has one of the most authoritative statements of the self-attesting, spiritual authority of the Scriptures: “The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God” (I.IV).<sup>1</sup> The Confession does include a place for being moved by the “testimony of the Church” (I.V), but the distinct and lasting contribution of Westminster (following Calvin) is the insight that the “full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts” (I.V).<sup>2</sup>

So, because the Westminster Confession affirms the Bible, it does actually affirm and defend the “catholic substance” of those creeds, without actually affirming the creeds themselves:

Framed, as it was, by men of distinguished learning and ability, who were thoroughly conversant with the history of the Church from the earliest times till the period in which they lived, it contains the calm and settled judgment of these profound divines on all previous heresies and subjects of controversy which had in any age or country agitated the Church. *This it does without expressly naming even one of these heresies* ... Each error is condemned, not by a direct statement and refutation of it, but by a clear, definite, and strong statement of the converse truth (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup>

While this statement is true, we are reminded again that Westminster is the product of a more scholastic age. Westminster can claim to follow the example of the Nicene Creed, which includes phrases (“God of God,” “begotten, not made”) designed to exclude

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 602.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 602-603.

<sup>3</sup> Hetherington, *History*, 351.

Arianism, without actually naming the Arians. And while it may be better taste and more polite to refute heretics without actually naming them, Westminster *is* departing from the Protestant tradition, which had no difficulty in calling heresies by their names.<sup>1</sup>

#### **f. The Debate over the Apostles' Creed**

But saying Westminster affirms the creeds *implicitly* is still to recognize the fact that the Westminster Divines departed from the Protestant confessional tradition, which largely affirmed the creeds *explicitly*. The strong Scriptural hermeneutic of the Divines led them away from an explicit affirmation, but the history of how occurred has been only recently revealed. Before the Assembly received the mandate to write a new confession of faith, and when they were simply concerned with revising the 39 Articles, they only wanted to re-translate the Creeds, and give some explanation about the harsh portions of the Athanasian Creed. Chad Van Dixhoorn's groundbreaking research (which uncovered John Lightfoot's journal of the Assembly's proceedings, as well as lost minutes of the Assembly) has revealed that the Assembly quickly found this task impossible.<sup>2</sup> Debate over the "descensus ad infernus" of the Apostles' Creed occupied the Assembly from July 12 to August 25, 1643. During these early debates, the Divines decided that every doctrine must be supported by clear Scriptural warrant, and thus the traditional doctrine of Christ's descent into hell was scrutinized.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Examples can be found in the Augsburg Confession (Art. I), Formula of Concord (Art. I, II, VIII, XII), Second Helvetic Confession (Art. I.8), Belgic Confession (Art. IX), Scotch Confession (Art. VI), and Thirty-Nine Articles (Art. IX).

<sup>2</sup> Chad Van Dixhoorn, "New Taxonomies of the Westminster Assembly (1643-52): The Creedal Controversy As Case Study," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 6.1 (2004): 82-106.

<sup>3</sup> Van Dixhoorn, "New Taxonomies," 88.

VanDixhoorn comments on the broader implications of this early debate: “The theological issues at stake in the debate held the attention of the divines. But of equal significance for the Assembly’s future work was the way in which so many debates, this one included, were complicated by their relevance to both Scripture and the creeds. The relation of the creeds to Scripture was not self-evident for some divines.”<sup>1</sup> The divines for whom this relation was not “self-evident” eventually won the day, especially with the arrival of the Scottish delegation and signing of the Solemn League and Covenant.

This is all the more interesting because, as Van Dixhoorn points out, individually considered and prior to the Assembly, the Westminster Divines never thought to do away with the creeds/ fathers.<sup>2</sup> For example, Stephen Marshall, the “best preacher of his age,”<sup>3</sup> appeals quite profusely to the fathers in a sermon preached to the Assembly on the subject of infant baptism. Marshall sets himself against the Anabaptist interpretation of history:

This priviledge of the baptizing of such Infants the Christian Church hath been in possession of for the space of fifteen hundred yeers and upwardes, as is manifest out of most of the Records that we have of antiquity, both in the Greek and Latine Church; which I the rather mention in the beginning, because many of the Anabaptists blush not to say, that the Antients, especially the Greek Church, rejected it for many hundred yeers[.]<sup>4</sup>

Marshall’s response to this claim includes quotes and appeals to the following

<sup>1</sup> Van Dixhoorn, “New Taxonomies,” 91.

<sup>2</sup> Van Dixhoorn, “New Taxonomies,” 105.

<sup>3</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, “New Taxonomies,” 743.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Marshall, “A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants” (London: original 1644 edition; photocopy), 3.

fathers: Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Gregory Nazianzes, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Augustine. It is obvious that Marshall believes he is continuing in the catholic and apostolic practice of the church.

His explanation of the term “tradition” as used by the fathers also shows his own high view of the church and the catholic tradition:

*Origen, who lived in the beginning of the third Century, in his Treatise upon Rom.6.lib.5. saith, The Church received this tradition of Baptizing of Infants from the Apostles: and Homily 8. upon Leviticus, Secundum Ecclesia observantiam, Baptismum parvulis dari concedit, Hom.14. in Lucam, Parvuli baptizantur in remissionem peccatorum: he calls it indeed a Tradition, according to the expression of the Ancients, who ordinarily called the greatest points of Faith, by the name of Traditions received from the Apostles. Traditions being onely such things as are delivered from one to another, whether written or unwritten. And so did the Apostle himselfe, 2 Thess.2.15. when he charged them to hold the Traditions which they had been taught, either by word or Epistle. However his calling it a Tradition received from the Apostles gives us a sufficient prooffe, that time out of mind, it had been received in the Church, that it was delivered over to the Church in his time, and was of antient use in the Church before his time (original italics).<sup>1</sup>*

Strangely, even though Marshall, and most of the other Divines, had a high view of history, this did not manifest itself in the confession they wrote together. The Westminster Assembly is thus a powerful example of group dynamics:

The previous century had seen a plethora of debate over the creeds, but no orthodox theologian seriously suggested removing the creeds altogether ... Certainly, I have found no indication that the individuals called to the Abbey suggested the removal or any creed in their private manuscripts or published works penned prior to the Assembly. Nevertheless, when

---

<sup>1</sup> Marshall, “A Sermon of the Baptizing of Infants,” 4.

convened together in the stalls of Henry VII's chapel and then in the stands of the Jerusalem chamber, conservative Assembly-men discovered others seated around them who were frighteningly willing to question the legitimacy of creeds entirely. In a matter of weeks, a body (perhaps with a teetering majority of moderates) began to pull the Assembly back and forth, from innocent arguments against isolated weaknesses in the creeds to radical suggestions that the imposition of any forms—not simply liturgical forms or ecclesiastical structures—were in tension with a biblical Christianity or a free people. The creeds began to disappear in the Assembly's documents, and by the close of the Assembly the Apostle's Creed was reduced to a catechetical appendix with a marginal gloss. The other creeds are not even mentioned at all. Somehow, what would have seemed impossible with the divines individually considered, happened easily when the divines were gathered corporately.<sup>1</sup>

Robert S. Paul agrees, though he is concerned with the Assembly's work in general, and not with their attitude to the creeds: "The history of the Westminster Assembly suggests that radical change may not always be in the hands of those who seek novelty for its own sake, but that it may spring from those who, on the basis of their own traditional and even conventional convictions, bring a new intensity to that faith as they try to respond to the challenge of their own time."<sup>2</sup>

### **g. Conclusions**

It seems, then, that Westminster departed from the broad consensus of Protestant confessional theology in the matter of affirming catholic substance. There are, of course, many possible reasons, both historical and theological, why Westminster departed from the Protestant confessional tradition. One of the more obvious reasons is the drastically different politico-religious landscape. Protestants were no longer fighting for their very

<sup>1</sup> Van Dixhoorn, "New Taxonomies," 105.

<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of The Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 544.

survival (as at the Diet of Augsburg). Protestants were a force to be reckoned with, and there was no need to make any hint of concession or compromise with the Roman Catholics (as Melancthon and Bucer did at different points in their careers).

Additionally, Westminster was written after the Council of Trent, in which Roman Catholicism defined itself squarely in opposition to the Protestant challenge. No one had any more delusions of an ecumenical council meeting to decide all the difficulties. The lines had been drawn, and the ravages of the Thirty Years Wars had already torn Christendom apart.

Throughout his discussions of Puritan worship, Old reminds us that the Westminster Directory (and Confession) was a “compromise document.”<sup>1</sup> This should be borne in mind as we examine and criticize the work of the Westminster Assembly. Each generation inevitably makes compromises. Even though Athanasius stood *contra mundum*, he still “compromised” at times.<sup>2</sup> To flesh out the implications and unintended results of a compromise is not necessarily the same as censuring those who made the compromise. But nor should we forget this aspect of creedal and confessional development, especially when creeds and confessions are regarded as normative by large segments of the Christian world. What the Puritans did for the sake of peace and political unity should not necessarily be taken as the authoritative tradition of the Reformed church. An *authoritative* tradition need not be an *infallible* tradition.

---

<sup>1</sup> Old, *Worship*, 81, 102.

<sup>2</sup> In discussing the turbulent history of the Council of Ephesus, Davis quotes G.L. Prestige: “But neither Cyril nor Nestorius was an Athanasius; none of the chief figures combined his strong grasp of truth with his sympathetic penetration of the minds of others and his large-hearted charity; they lacked something essential to that great and exceptional synthesis of character,” Leo Donald Davis, S.J., *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils: 328-787* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 142.



I must repeat what I said earlier: to identify a change in confessional theology is not necessarily the same as censuring those who made the change. The Westminster Divines responded to the challenges of their time with all the resources they had. The confession they produced is a monumental summary of theological truth and has exerted a powerful influence of the Presbyterian world. The motives which led the Divines to question the creeds, and ultimately leave out any explicit affirmation of them, were the highest and noblest. They sought obedience to the Word of God, rather than the words of men. However, Westminster's departure from the Protestant confessional tradition was an indication of how Protestants would relate to the creeds in the future, as will be shown below.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **IN THE WAKE OF WESTMINSTER**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the section that follows, it is not claimed that Westminster Divines were at all *responsible* for the actions of following generations. What is under scrutiny is simply how the Westminster confession was changed and altered by later generations. The movement away from the historic creeds is carried much further by the generations after Westminster. *What Westminster left out, later generations did not put back in.*

It is probable that Westminster made this transition easier, but it seems certain that the later changes would have happened in any case. The spirit of the age was one of subjectivism and scientific inquiry. All things were open to investigation, including the creeds. On the other hand, the principle of *sola Scriptura* was subtly changing into what would later bloom on the American frontier into a tradition-discarding *solo Scriptura*, which is to say Scripture interpreted radically *alone* and cut off from church history, supposedly in a hermeneutical vacuum.<sup>1</sup> But, to explore the development of *solo Scriptura* in modern times would require another thesis entirely. We will have to settle for a very brief overview of developments in the Congregational and Baptist churches, which both took shape during the Puritan era, and who partly defined themselves in opposition to the Westminster Assembly and its work.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. CONGREGATIONALISTS, BAPTISTS & ANTI-CREEDALISM

The Congregationalists, though they participated in the Westminster Assembly, later distanced themselves from claiming continuity with catholic substance. The preface to

---

<sup>1</sup> “Solo Scriptura” is a term coined by my former professor, Douglas Jones, to capture the individualistic meaning of the term in much modern usage.

<sup>2</sup> Other groups continued in the primitivist (or restorationist) tradition and tried to revive Apostolic church practices and piety. See James Patrick Callahan, *Primitivist Piety: the Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996) and Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The Primitive Church in the Modern World* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

the Savoy Declaration (1658) states that several controversial issues in the Westminster Assembly tarnished the Westminster Confession. In particular, chapter 31 (“of Synods and Councils”) is rejected. The Congregationalists took issue with the confession’s treatment of who has power to call church councils (the civil magistrate), and what “force” the “Decrees and Determinations” of councils and synods possess. These chapters contain, “doubtful assertions, and so unsuitable to a Confession of Faith, as the Honorable Houses in their great Wisdom thought it fit to lay them aside ... So that there are two whole Chapters, and some Paragraphs in other Chapters in their Confession, that we have upon this account omitted”.<sup>1</sup>

Later confessional statements move even further from the notion of an authoritative and binding confession or creed. The Preliminary Notes of the *Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales* (1833), provide a stark contrast with virtually every confession of the Reformation:

1. It is not designed, in the following summary, to do more than to state the leading doctrines of faith and order maintained by Congregational Churches in general.

2. It is not proposed to offer any proofs, reasons, or arguments, in support of the doctrines herein stated, but simply to declare what the Denomination believes to be taught by the pen of inspiration.

3. It is not intended to present a scholastic or critical confession of faith, but merely such a statement as any intelligent member of the body might offer, as containing its leading principles.

4. *It is not intended that the following statement should be put forth with any authority, or as a standard to which assent should be required.*

5. *Disallowing the utility of creeds and articles of religion as a bond of union, and protesting against subscription to any human formularies as a term of communion, Congregationalists are yet willing to declare, for general information, what is commonly believed among them, reserving to every one the most perfect liberty of conscience.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 715.

6. Upon some minor points of doctrine and practice, they, differing among themselves, allow to each other the right to form an unbiased judgment of the Word of God.

7. They wish it to be observed, that, notwithstanding their jealousy of subscription to creeds and articles, and their *disapproval of the imposition of any human standard*, whether of faith or discipline, they are far more agreed in their doctrines and practices than any Church which enjoins subscription and enforces a human standard of orthodoxy; and they believe that there is no minister and no church among them that would deny the substance of any one of the following doctrines of religion, *though each might prefer to state his sentiments in his own way* (emphasis mine).<sup>1</sup>

Remarkably, the authors of this declaration did not seem to notice the inherent irony in setting forth a statement which, though claiming to disallow the utility of creeds, still continues in the tradition of confessing their Christian belief. One wonders if they expected anyone to believe their declaration? Why should one state *anything* officially at all if everyone is left to their own private judgment?<sup>2</sup> In these preliminary notes, it is obvious that we are in a different world than the sixteenth century magisterial reformers. This declaration is not authoritative or binding in any way: it simply serves the purpose of disseminating “general information”.

This move away from authoritative creeds is clearly expressed in Principles of Church Order and Discipline, put forth by the same body of Congregationalists: “They believe that the New Testament contains, either in the form of express statute, or in the example and practice of apostles and apostolic churches, all the articles of faith necessary to be believed, and all the principles of order and discipline requisite for constituting and

<sup>1</sup> Text is taken from Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 730.

<sup>2</sup> Williston Walker clarifies the point of the non-binding confessions: “Congregationalism has always accorded large liberty to local churches in their interpretation of doctrine and polity. Its creeds are not exclusively binding, and its platforms have always been held to be open to revision. They have been witnesses to the faith and practice of the churches rather than tests for subscription,” quoted in Pelikan, *Credo*, 247.

governing Christian societies; and that human traditions, fathers and councils, canons and creeds, possess no authority over the faith and practice of Christians.”<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the Congregationalists of Great Britain, American Congregationalists acknowledged their debt to the ancient (or *apostolic*) church, though without giving the creeds normative status. Instead, they profess faith in their own early American Puritan confessions. The Declaration of Faith of the National Council of Congregational Churches (1865), begins: “Standing by the rock where the Pilgrims set foot upon these shores, upon the spot where they worshiped God, and among the graves of the early generations, we, Elders and Messengers of the Congregational churches of the United States in National Council assembled—like them acknowledging no rule of faith but the Word of God—do now declare our adherence to the faith and order of the *apostolic and primitive churches* held by our fathers, and substantially as embodied in the confessions and platforms which our Synods of 1648 and 1680 set forth or reaffirmed” (emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup> What is being specified here is the congregational order of church government, which they claim is “apostolic and primitive” (later the Declaration speaks of “our free system of apostolic order”). Though we find here a claim to continuity with the primitive church, it is a very narrow claim.

It is not terribly surprising to see Congregationalists departing from the Protestant tradition in this way. The very nature of independent and congregational church government wars against binding creedal statements. Each church may have broad agreement with others, but each church is ultimately independent from others. As Schaff put it so well: “The effect of the Congregational polity upon creeds is to weaken the

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 733.

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, 734.

authority of general creeds and to strengthen the authority of particular creeds. The principle of fellowship requires a general creed, but it is reduced to a mere declaration of the common faith prevailing among Congregationalists at a given time, instead of a binding formula of subscription. The principle of independency calls for as many particular creeds as there are congregations.”<sup>1</sup>

### 3. BAPTIST AMBIVALENCE TO CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

This Congregational attitude towards creeds and confessions is also normative (traditional!) in the specifically Baptist tradition. William Lumpkin introduces his classic collection of Baptist confessions with these words: “For them [Baptists] confessions have ever been simply manifestos of prevailing doctrine in particular groups. No confession has ever permanently bound individuals, churches, associations, conventions, or unions among Baptists. Even when issued, the confessions have allowed for individual interpretation and perspective, so that each signatory was made to feel that the statements spoke for him.”<sup>2</sup>

Steven R. Harmon proposes a brief explanation of how this typical Baptist attitude developed. It is striking when compared to the writings of early Baptists, who frequently appealed to the fathers.<sup>3</sup> Harmon cites the work of Smith, who found a sharp decline in patristic references in Baptist writings, culminating in a “complete absence of interaction

---

<sup>1</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1, 828. B.A. Gerrish says much the same thing: “The promulgation of an authoritative creed demands a centralized ecclesiastical government of some kind. But it is the essence of congregational polity that the local church is not responsible to any higher judicatory. No creed, even if prepared by an assembly of Congregationalist or Baptist ministers, can be regarded as anything more than optional in the local church,” *The Faith of Christendom: A Source Book of Creeds and Confessions* (Cleveland & New York: Meridian Books, 1963), 41.

<sup>2</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Michael A. Smith, “The Early English Baptists and the Church Fathers” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982).

with the Fathers after 1701.”<sup>1</sup> Smith explains this as a result of the 1689 Act of Toleration, which meant Baptists no longer had to appeal to the ancient church to justify their own existence. Harmon proposes two more reasons for the sudden change in theological method. They are worth quoting here because they apply equally to other branches of the developing Protestant world:

First, the decline in credal terminology in Baptist confessions coincides with the intellectual upheaval of the Enlightenment. Even those who did not embrace the anti-supernaturalism of the Enlightenment worldview experienced some attraction to its anti-traditionalism. That Baptist confessions became less traditional in their wording during this time is hardly surprising. Second, the radical individualism of the American soil in which the Baptist tradition took root and flourished during the next two centuries had little room for ancient doctrinal norms that might limit the freedom of individual conscience. Confessions that expressed doctrine by means of biblical texts allowed individuals to interpret those text according to the dictates of their consciences.<sup>2</sup>

Harmon concludes by exhorting his fellow Baptists to return to more explicitly credal (Nicene) terminology in any future confessional development.

Philip E. Thompson agrees that there is tension in the typical Baptist attitude towards their own confessional history:

They are beset by a tension created by the desire on the one hand to honor and preserve their heritage, and the desire on the other hand not to grant to their confessions such authority that they lapse into a creedalism they regard as antithetical to that heritage ... Simply stated, Baptists most often regard the confessions as primarily declarative or descriptive, with significance limited to the time in which they were drafted ... The inadequacy of this approach is readily apparent.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Steven R. Harmon, “Baptist Confessions of Faith and the Patristic Tradition,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29 (Winter 2002): 349-358.

<sup>2</sup> Harmon, “Baptist Confessions of Faith and the Patristic Tradition,” 354.

<sup>3</sup> Philip E. Thompson, “Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29 (Winter 2002): 336-348.

There is, however, an inherent irony in the anti-creedal attitude of the independent churches. Although they are uncomfortable with affirming the historic Creeds of Christendom, minor points of doctrine often become badges of orthodoxy among independent churches.

Carl Henry notes the perils of both *ecumenism* and *independency*: “Each has its own tensions and perils. Independency tends to be intolerant, Church Unionism to be tolerant. The former moves in the direction of exclusivism, the latter toward inclusivism. One holds a low view of the Church in its visible and historical aspects, and the other a high view. The one glorifies separateness, while the other reaches out toward ecclesiasticism. Independency remains highly creedal in minute detail, while Church Unionism becomes vague and ill-defined in theological basics.”<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, by focusing on unity of doctrine in some supra-historical plane, independent churches lose their connection with the “great cloud of witnesses” described in Hebrews 11: “While concentrating on the heavenly body, or the invisible Church, Independency often loses sight of the empirical Church in history, and fails to realize its own continuity with this historical phenomenon.”<sup>2</sup>

Much more could be said about this subject, but my main point is to draw attention to the continued development of McGrath’s “Tradition 0” in the Protestant confessional tradition. Since the Anabaptists and their successors set themselves against the reformers

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Henry, “The Perils of Independency” in Millard J. Erickson, ed., *Readings in Christian Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 242.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, “Perils,” 345.



in numerous ways, it is not surprising to see their confessions adopting a different attitude towards the ancient church.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **A RETURN TO CATHOLICITY**

As we have seen, the reformers saw their mission as purifying the Catholic church. They wanted to keep the unity of the Church, and believed true unity could only be founded upon true doctrine. As Old argued, in the reformers' theology, adherence to the Word did

not rule out all of the Church's traditions: "The Reformers believed that the worship of the Church must be 're-formed' according to the Word of God. They wanted nothing less than to find again the traditions established by Christ, handed down by the Apostles and practiced by the ancient Church."<sup>1</sup>

The evidence surveyed in this thesis supports three conclusions Paul Avis reaches at the end of his comparative study of Reformation ecclesiology. His first conclusion is: "There is remarkable agreement among the mainstream Reformers on the essentials of the doctrine of the Church. Protestantism is often accused of being divisive, but the extent to which the Reformers stood together on this matter should not be underestimated."<sup>2</sup> We have seen this agreement particularly in how the majority of Protestant confessions appeal explicitly to the "ancient church" in the form of the creeds and church fathers.

Avis continues: "Full weight should be given to the 'catholic intention' of the Reformers. Paradoxical as it may seem when we consider the sad divisions of the Church that stem from the Reformation, the fact is that the Reformers believed that their work was to save the catholic Church. But in order to save the Church they had first to save the gospel."<sup>3</sup>

The reformers believed the Roman Catholic church had corrupted the gospel, which had been preached more or less purely for the first five hundred years of church history.

Further, the three creeds taught Biblical doctrine. Therefore, it was not inconsistent for Protestant confessions to affirm *both* early church tradition *and* the normative authority of Scripture.

---

<sup>1</sup> Old, *Patristic Roots*, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Avis, *Church in The Theology of the Reformers*, 215.

<sup>3</sup> Avis, *Church in The Theology of the Reformers*, 216.

From these two points, Avis draws a further conclusion: “Only slowly and reluctantly did they come to accept that division was inevitable. The Reformers were definitely not sectarian and ceaseless efforts were made to restore unity among themselves and with Rome.”<sup>1</sup>

The absence of explicit affirmations of the creeds in the Westminster confession and other English confessions is part of a much larger “dilemma”: that of the Protestant view of history. How does one “protest” the corruptions of the Church in history and yet not totally reject the entire history of the Church? Some sects and radical Protestants chose this latter option, but a significant number of Protestant confessions profess some loyalty to the historical church. The main indicator of this is explicit affirmations of the “three creeds”.

In this study I hope to have proved that the Westminster Confession marks a decisive turning point in Protestant attitudes towards history. It is a point where the two lines of Protestant attitudes toward history intersect. The Puritan view of church history, with possible Anabaptist influences, has been contrasted with the sixteenth century reformers’ views. Stated somewhat provocatively, we may ask whether the Puritans abandoned part of their rich Reformation heritage as they de-emphasized the authority of the church in their confessional documents? Although their stance was undoubtedly an apologetic maneuver directed against the claims of the Established Church, perhaps it contributed to the rampant individualism and anti-historical mentality of modern Protestants (especially in America)? These are questions for further research, but I think I have proven that Westminster, and later Protestant confessions in the Independent tradition, did depart

---

<sup>1</sup> Avis, *Church in The Theology of the Reformers*, 217.

from the *Protestant confessional tradition* in at least the matter of affirming catholic substance in the form of the ancient creeds.

Returning to the stance of affirming catholic substance advocated by the early reformers is a worthwhile goal. While, admittedly, the patristic and historical knowledge of the all parties during the sixteenth and seventeenth century was not as full as our knowledge now, there are still good reasons to think such an approach would contribute to healing the wounds and scars which mar the unity of Christ's Body.

Others have voiced similar opinions in recent years. Leo Donald Davis, a Jesuit scholar, closes his book on the seven ecumenical councils with some sobering words. After noting that the Roman Catholic Church officially accepts twenty ecumenical councils, the Orthodox (and some Protestants) only accept the first seven ecumenical councils as authoritative. He then writes: "Perhaps, in the interests of better relations with the Orthodox and Protestants, the time has come to reconsider the whole question and accept with them only the first seven great councils as the truly ecumenical pillars of the faith."<sup>1</sup>

Another perceptive and important voice calling for a return to the ancient church is Thomas Oden. In his work, Oden stresses "consensual theology". He defines his purpose as: "to set forth an ordered view of the faith of the Christian community upon which there has generally been substantial agreement between the traditions of East and West, including Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox,"<sup>2</sup> He continues: "This effort is therefore ecumenical in a larger sense than is usually assumed in the modern ecumenical movement. It wishes nothing more than to identify and follow that *ancient ecumenical*

---

<sup>1</sup> Davis, *First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, 325.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Living God* (Peabody: Prince Press, 2001), i.

*consensus of Christian teaching of God ... that still embraces and empowers not only centrist Protestants and traditional Roman Catholics and Orthodox but also great numbers of evangelicals, liberals, and charismatics” (emphasis mine).*<sup>1</sup>

Other voices have called for a return to catholicity from a Lutheran perspective. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson have written: “The Reformers did not set out to create a new church. They aimed to reform a church that lived in continuity with the church and Creed calls ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic’.”<sup>2</sup> But, they warn us not to idolize the Reformation conceptions of catholicity and appeals to antiquity: “Thus the ‘catholicity of the Reformation’ does not point to a historical phenomenon of the sixteenth century that we would aim to repristiniate; in fact the movements created by the Reformation experienced in some ways a diminishment of catholicity, such as the lost of the episcopal office. Yet this was not the intention of the Reformers. Their aim was to return to the Scriptures and ancient church tradition, to increase rather than decrease the church’s catholicity.”<sup>3</sup>

They also warn that there is danger in stressing “Protestant principle” at the expense of “Catholic substance”. Quoting Gustav Aulen, they conclude: “‘there can be no doubt about the will of the Reformation to certify its catholicity, or more correctly the catholicity of the Church.’ He warned against seeing the relation of Protestantism to

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Living God*, i.

<sup>2</sup> Braaten and Jenson, eds., *Catholicity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Braaten and Jenson, *Catholicity*, viii.

Catholicism mainly in terms of contrast. By defining itself as anti-Catholic, Protestantism progressively loses essentials of the faith confessed in the Creeds.”<sup>1</sup>

It is such a concern which inspired this study, and I hope it will contribute, in whatever small way, to a return to catholicity among Protestants who have forgotten their history, thus forgetting their identity. Modern Protestants must recover a sense of reformed catholicity and this can only be done by recovering a sense of continuity with the consensus of the historical church, as manifested in her ecumenical creeds.

---

<sup>1</sup> Braaten and Jenson, *Catholicity*, x.

## Bibliography

- Archilla, Garcia. "Truth in History: The Theology of History and Apologetic Historiography in Heinrich Bullinger." Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1989.
- Armstrong, Chris. "'The Bible Alone'? Not for John Calvin!" *Christianity Today*, January 16, 2004.  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2004/jan16.html>
- Avis, Paul D. L. *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers*. London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott: 1981. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002.
- Ayris, Paul and David Selwyn, eds. *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993.
- Backus, Irena. *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.
- , "The Church Fathers and the Canonicity of the Apocalypse in the Sixteenth Century: Erasmus, Frans Titelmans, and Theodore Beza," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (1998): 651-665.
- , "Calvin's Judgment of Eusebius of Caesarea: An Analysis" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (1991): 419-37.
- , ed. *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West: From the Carolingians to the Maurists*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001.
- Barnett, S.J. "Where Was Your Church before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined." *Church History*, March (1999): 14-41.
- Barth, Karl. *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*. Translated by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- Battles, Ford Lewis. *Interpreting John Calvin*. Robert Benedetto, ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Benedict, Philip. *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2002.
- Bouman, Herbert J. A. "Retrospect and Prospect: Some Unscientific Reflections on the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Formula of Concord" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, no. 4 (1977): 85-104.

- Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Braaten, Carl E. and Robert W. Jenson, eds. *The Catholicity of the Reformation*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.
- Bucer, Martin. D.F. Wright, ed. *Commonplaces of Martin Bucer*. Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972.
- Buerher, Richard L. "John Calvin's Humanistic Approach to Church History." Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1974.
- Callahan, James Patrick. *Primitivist Piety: the Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996.
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill and Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics, Vols. 20-21. London: SCM Press, and Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.
- . *Tracts and Treatises. With a short life of Calvin by Theodore Beza*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958.
- Church, F. Forrester and Timothy George, eds. *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History: Essays Presented to George Huntston Williams on the Occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979.
- Cochrane, Arthur C., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966.
- Colson, Charles and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. *Your Word Is Truth: A Project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Davies, Horton. *The Worship of the English Puritans*. Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Ministries, 1997.
- . *Worship and Theology in England*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970.
- Davies, Michael. *Cranmer's Godly Order: The Destruction of Catholicism Through Liturgical Change*. Ft. Collins: Roman Catholic Books, 1976.
- Davis, Leo Donald, S.J. *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils: 328-787*. Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1983.



- Dillenberger, John, ed. *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*. New York: Anchor Books, 1962.
- Dix, Dom Gregory. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945.
- Erickson, Millard J. ed. *Readings in Christian Theology*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.
- Evans, G.R. *Problems of Authority in Reformation Debates*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Fitzer, Joseph. "The Augustinian Roots of Calvin's Eucharistic Thought", *Augustinian Studies* 7 (1976): 69-98.
- Furcha, E.J. (ed.). *In Honor of John Calvin: Papers from the 1986 International Calvin Symposium McGill University*. Montreal: FRS/ ARC, 1987.
- Gamble, Richard C. "Brevitas et Facilitas: Toward An Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 47 (1985): 1-17.
- . *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*. Vol. 2: Calvin's Early Writings and Ministry.
- George, Timothy. *Theology of the Reformers*. Nashville: Broadman, 1988.
- Gerrish, B.A. *The Faith of Christendom: A Source Book of Creeds and Confessions*. Cleveland & New York: Meridian Books, 1963.
- Grane, Leif, A. Schindler, M. Wriedt, eds. *Auctoritas Patrum: Zur Rezeption Der Kirchenväter Im 15. Und 16. Jahrhundert*. Mainz: Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, 1993.
- . *Auctoritas Patrum II: New Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1998.
- Gribben, Crawford. *The Irish Puritans: James Usher and the Reformation of the Church*. Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2003.
- Harbison, E. Harris. *The Christian Scholar in the Age of the Reformation*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.
- Harmon, Steven R. "Baptist Confessions of Faith and the Patristic Tradition," *Perspectives* 29 (Winter 2002): 349-358.
- Hart, D.G. *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 2005.

- Haugaard, William P. "Renaissance Patristic Scholarship and Theology in Sixteenth Century England". *Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (1979): 37-60.
- Headley, John M. *Luther's View of Church History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.
- Hendrix, Scott H. *Tradition and Authority in the Reformation*. Aldershot, Great Britain: Variorum, 1996.
- Hetherington, William M. *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1856. Reprint, Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993.
- Hillerbrand, Hans. *The Reformation*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964.
- Holmes, Stephen R. *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Hunter, A. Mitchell. "The Education of Calvin", in Gamble, ed. *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*; v. 2.
- Hughes Richard T., ed., *The Primitive Church in the Modern World*. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Jungkuntz, Theodore R. *Formulators of the Formula of Concord: Four Architects of Lutheran Unity*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977.
- Knox, R. Buick. *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh*. Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1967.
- Kyle, Richard G. *The Mind of John Knox*. Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1984.
- Lane. Anthony N.S. *John Calvin: Student of the Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.
- Leith, John, ed. *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*. Revised edition. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1973.
- Little, Franklin Hamlin. *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*. Boston: Starr King Press, 1958.
- Lumpkin, William L., ed. *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959.
- Luther, Martin. *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*. Edited by John Nicholas

- Lenker. Translated by John Nicholas Lenker and Others. Vol. 1.1-2. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.
- Maag, Karin, ed. *Melanchthon In Europe: His Influence Beyond Wittenberg*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.
- MacCulloch, Diarmaid. *Thomas Cranmer*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- MacLeod, John. *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation*. Edinburgh: Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943.
- Marcus, R.A. *The End of Ancient Christianity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Mathison, Keith A. *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper*. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002.
- Mason, Roger, ed. *John Knox and the British Reformation*. Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing House, 1998.
- McGrath, Alister. *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.
- . *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- . *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- McKim, Donald K., ed. *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- McNeill, John T. *Unitive Protestantism: A Study in Our Religious Resources*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1930.
- Meyers, Jeffrey J. "Der Grund der Seligkeit: Luther's Evangelical and Christological Method of Distinguishing Doctrine Within the Early Church Councils and Fathers". Unpublished paper.
- Muller, Richard. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*. Vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993).
- . *After Calvin*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.
- Nauert, Charles G., Jr., "The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics: an Approach to Pre-

- Reformation Controversies” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 4, no. 1 (1973): 1-18.
- Neuser, W.H. and Brian Armstrong, eds. *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex. Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion*. Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997.
- Neve, J.L. *A History of Christian Thought*. Vol. 1. Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946.
- Newman, John Henry. *Development of Doctrine*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989.
- Newton, John. *The Works of John Newton*, Vol. 3. 1820. Reprint, Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988.
- Oberman, Heiko. *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- . *The Dawn of the Reformation*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1986.
- . *Luther: Man Between God and Devil*. Translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart. New York: Image Books, 1989.
- Oden, Thomas. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, *The Living God*. Peabody: Prince Press, 2001.
- Old, Hughes Oliphant. *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*. Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975.
- . *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture. Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*. Revised ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- . *The Shape of the Reformed Baptismal Rite*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.
- Olevianus, Kaspar. *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*. Translated by Lyle D. Bierma. Grand Rapids: Baker Books and Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995.
- Olin, John C. *A Reformation Debate: Sadoletto’s Letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s Reply*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966.
- Pabel, Hilmer M. “Retelling the History of the Early Church: Erasmus’s Paraphrase on Acts” *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 63-85.
- Paul, Robert S. *The Assembly of The Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster*

- Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'*. Edinburgh. T&T Clark. 1985.
- Payton, James R, Jr. “*Sola Scriptura* and Church History: The Views of Bucer and Melancthon on Religious Authority in 1539.” Ph.D. diss., University of Waterloo, 1982.
- . “Calvin and the Legitimation of Icons: His Treatment of the Seventh Ecumenical Council,” *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte*. Jahr. 84 (1993): 222-241.
- Pabel, Hilmer M. “Retelling the History of the Early Church: Erasmus’s Paraphrase on Acts” *Church History* 69, no. 1 (March 2000): 63-85.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther’s Reformation*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964.
- . *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 5 Vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989.
- . *The Vindication of Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- . *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Peter, J.F. “The Place of Tradition in Reformed Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*. Vol. 18, no. 3 (Sept. 1965): 294-306.
- Reynolds, Stephen M. “Calvin’s View of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 23 (1960): 33-37.
- Schaff, Philip, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 Vols. New York: Harper and Row, 1931. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998.
- . *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. 8, *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation*. Charles Scribner’s Sons: 1910. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976.
- Smith, Michael A. “The Early English Baptists and the Church Fathers.” Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982.
- Steinmetz, David. *Calvin in Context*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.
- . *Luther in Context*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995, 2002.
- Tanner, Norman P., S.J., ed. Translated by G. Alberigo, et. al. *Decrees of the Ecumenical*

- Councils*. Vol. 1. London: Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990.
- Thompson, Bard, ed. *Liturgies of the Western Church*. 1961. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980.
- Thompson, Bard and George H. Bricker, eds. Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology. Vol. 1, *The Principle of Protestantism*, by Philip Schaff. United Church Press, 1845. Reprint, Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004.
- Thompson, Philip E. "Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29 (Winter 2002): 336-348.
- Ursinus, Zacharias. *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*. Translated by G.W. Willard, 4<sup>th</sup> American ed. Cincinnati: Elm Street Publishing Company, 1888.
- Van Dixhoorn, Chad B. "New Taxonomies of the Westminster Assembly (1643-52): The Creedal Controversy As Case Study." *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 6.1 (2004): 82-106.
- White, James. *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.