

Introduction in Confessional Theology

Introduction: The Context of American Evangelicalism

they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

Romans 10:2

It is not so much that evangelicals cease to believe anything theological, it is rather that belief is no longer central to their identity and program!

Richard Lints, *Fabric of Theology*

Round Table Discussion: “Dogma is the Drama”

I. The Importance of *Confessionalism* in the Church

What is “Confessionalism?”

Confessionalism is the process whereby the church adopts a corporate consensus as to what the scriptures principally teach, based upon shared exegetical conclusions and utilizes this consensus as the basis for Christian faith, practice and unity when acting as a church. Stated plainly, the *confessional* church is any church whose identity is most essentially “what it believes” and whose beliefs drives “what it does.”

Let the Redeemed of the Lord say so... Ps.107:2

The Ultimate Goal of Confessionalism: To Preserve the Apostolic Faith, not supplant it!

Our own confession teaches about itself that it is fallible (WCF 1:9, 31.3) and that “all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men and private spirits are to be examined and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WCF 1.10). And yet, without a corporate reading of scripture as within the organizational structure established by Christ through the apostles (Mt. 16, Eph. 2), we are left with private interpretations and a corporate identity crisis.

Mt. 28:20, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...

Acts 20:26-27, Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God

2 Thess.2:15, So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

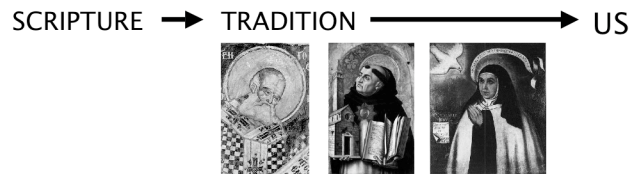
A Biblical History of Confessing

- An Intrinsic quality of faith-- *Let the Redeemed of the Lord say so... Ps. 107:2*
- A Confessing history of Israel-- see Dt.6:4-9, 26:5-9
- Peter’s Confession—see Mt.16:13-18
- Perhaps the earliest and briefest Christian confession—1 Cor.12:3, “Jesus is Lord.”
- Early Apostolic “statements”—Rom.1:3-4, 1Cor.15:3-4, 1Tim.3:16
- A call to confess—Rom.10:9, 1 Cor.11:2, 12:3, Jude 3, 2Thess.2:15

Three Options for Use of Creeds:

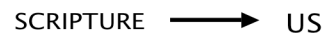
Worship, Scripture, Tradition

Roman Catholicism



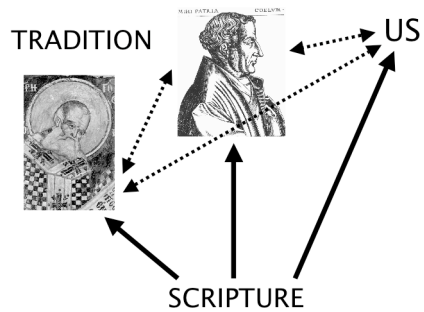
Worship, Scripture, Tradition

Anabaptist



Worship, Scripture, Tradition

Magisterial Protestant



The Use of Creeds to support Confessionalism

A "creed" is any summary and/or clarification of a certain belief or "a confess in writing." (The word "Creed" is derived from the Latin word "belief.") Therefore, a Christian creed is an interpretation of the general teachings of the Old and New Testament Scriptures categorized into general themes and topics of relevance to the Christian faith and subscribed to by the church.

2 Timothy 1:13, Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

2 Thess.2:15, So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

The Usefulness of Creeds: (Quotes by A.A. Hodge)

1. As a basis for Christian Unity

To act as the bond of ecclesiastical fellowship among those so nearly agreed as to be able to labor together in harmony.

Amos 3:3, "How can two walk together unless they be agreed?"

Phil. 1:27, "stand fast in one spirit with one mind"

1 Cor.1:10, "speak the same thing and be on one accord of one mind"

Philip. 2:2, Make my joy complete, be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Eph. 4:4, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Eph.4:13, "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God.

If not unity of "faith" then unity of what?

2. For Instruction

To be used as instruments in the great work of popular instruction.

1 Tim. 4:6, If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.

1 Tim. 6:3, Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness...

2 Tim.4:3, For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires.

3. For Ecclesiastical Discipline

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing--for that would be harmful to you.

4. As a basis for evaluating true from false teaching and teacher qualification.

To discriminate the truth from the glosses of false teachers, and accurately to define it in its integrity and due proportions.

Romans 10:2, they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge.

2Pet. 2:1-2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Even so, many will follow their licentious ways, and because of these teachers the way of

truth will be maligned.

2John 1:10 *Do not receive into the house or welcome anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching;*

5. For Preserving the “Faith of our Fathers” such as to better protect against cultural “blind-spots.”

To mark, preserve, and disseminate the attainments made in the knowledge of Christian truth by any branch of the church in any grand crisis of its development.

2Tim. 2:2 *and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.*

II. Our “Confessional” history...

- Other families:
 - Pre-Reformation Period: East, West (Rome, Constantinople)
 - Reformation Period: Lutheran, Anabaptist, Reformed...
 - Post-Reformation: Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist...
 - Modern: Fundamentalism, Liberal, Charismatic, etc.)
 - E.g. We are “Christians” before we are “reformed Christians” and share together such expressions of faith as articulated by:
 - The Council of Nicaea (A.D.325)
 - The Council of Constantinople (A.D.381)
 - Both were especially related to the doctrine of God, the Trinity, Historicity of Salvation Accomplished and Applied.
 - Our Family Tree, assuming it begins with Apostolic foundation, continues with Augustine and proceeds through Calvin, especially regarding our understanding of how God saves us from the penalty and misery of our sin.
- 5th Century A.D.—Pelagius vs. Augustine
Humankind born innocent vs. original sin... humankind responsible in salvation vs. saved by grace through faith alone “to the praise of God’s glorious grace” (Eph.1:3-14, 2:10ff). Pelagianism rejected at Synod of Carthage in A.D. 418. Again rejected at Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431.
- 16th Century A.D.-- Our most “important” immediate ancestor? John Calvin (1509-1564) and thus the word Calvinism”
- Calvin’s reliance upon Augustine’s theology, especially against Pelagianism
 - Calvin’s earlier contemporary and theological ally, Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) where together allied and associated with the reforms of Martin Luther (1484-1546)
 - Calvin’s most significant followers including such leaders as Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Theodore Beza (1519-1605) and John Knox (1514-1572)
- 16th Century A.D. -- Pelagianism reappeared through Dutch theologian named Arminius—(Arminianism or “Semi-Pelagianism)
- Humankind only partially fallen rather than not fallen at all, but with the same result as Pelagianism—both assume human responsibility
 - Arminianism specifically rejected at the Synod of Dort in A.D. 1618-1619.

- 16th-17th Century A.D. - Reformed Confessional Tradition is further expressed various other significant contexts:
- The Scots Confession (1560)—approved by Reformation Parliament and Church of Scotland, attaining full legal status with the departure of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1567.
 - The Genevan Confession (1536)—together with a translation of Calvin’s Catechism (1541)
 - The Second Helvetic Confession (1561) and approved by General Assembly in 1566 in the Reformed Scottish Church.
 - Heidelberg Catechism (1563)
 - Westminster Confession (1646)
 - Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675 A.D.)

Therefore, in a family context, reformed Christians have discerned the need to “say so” as the redeemed people of the Lord (Ps.107:2)

So what is it?

III. *A Reformed-Theological Worldview*

1. Biblical Theology: We are committed to the Old and New Testament Scriptures as our only rule of faith and practice.

While believing that God powerfully manifest his infinite glory in a general way through creation, our Christian faith and practice is grounded in God’s works of redemption in history as explained to us through the divinely appointed means of inspired Scripture. We believe that all things necessary for salvation are sufficiently revealed to us by the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We believe also that all special revelation has ceased until the next and final redemptive act of God in history when Christ will return to judge the living and the dead. It is, therefore, our ambition to teach the whole counsel of God’s word, not adding to, or subtracting from, anything contained within it, recognizing no other source for divine revelation, whether by ecclesiastical traditions or private revelations.

Implications:

1. The Only Authority of Scripture:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. (WCF 1:6)

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. WCF 1:9

2. A Redemptive Historical Method of Interpretation: R/H approach as to reflect the “fulfillment” principle

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. WCF 1:9

Thus, Christocentric-- (1 Cor.2:1ff, 2 Cor.5:20)
Luke 24:13 An Emmaus Road Event

3. A Hermeneutic of Tradition:

We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverend esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is, to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof (WCF 1:5)

4. Expository Preaching that reflects *sola scriptura*— E.g. assumes the burden of “thus saith the Lord.”

“It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; EXAMINE WHAT THEY HEAR BY THE SCRIPTURES; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.”

Therefore, a sermon that is text driven and text structured (e.g. Biblical topics in biblical proportions (1 Cor.1:20, Neh.1:1-8)

5. Divine Wisdom—Sufficiency of Scripture with Illumination (Module #3)

2. Theology of Sovereign Grace: We are committed to the teachings of grace as they are summarized in the historic *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

Whereas the Holy Scriptures is our *only* rule of faith and practice, our Church unity is predicated upon a consensus about what the Scriptures principally teach. Our consensus is reflected in the 350--year--old *Westminster Confession of Faith*. In summary, it affirms that God is no less sovereign in our salvation than He is sovereign in our creation to the praise of God’s glorious grace! This means that we are accepted by God, from beginning to end, not by our own works or attempts at being approved by God, but by faith alone in the perfect and all sufficient work of Christ on our behalf, faith itself being the free gift of God! While many people join our church without knowing or affirming all the teachings contained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, our church, when acting and speaking corporately, seeks to be in accord with the Westminster Standards.

Implications:

1) So Goes Sovereignty so goes Grace!

- ✓ WCF 3.5 Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his **mere free grace** and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his **glorious grace**.
- ✓ WCF 10.2 This effectual call is of God's free and special grace **alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man**, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the **grace offered and conveyed in it**.
- ✓ WCF 11.3 Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in

their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of **free grace**; that both the exact justice and **rich grace** of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, 25 to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

Jude 24

2. The “five points of Calvinism”—T.U.L.I.P.

- ✓ Total Depravity: or “not to deny common grace wherein God preserves some goodness in humanity for the common good, but that there is no goodness in humanity that is pure and without defect of moral imperfection and capable of satisfying God’s holy standard of righteousness.”
- ✓ Unconditional Election: or “conditioned only upon God’s immutable, eternal, perfect counsel and omnipotent will.”
- ✓ Limited Atonement: or “Christ’s death is applied only to the elect”
- ✓ Irresistible Grace: or “God’s grace is received only by those who are given faith by the Holy Spirit through “new birth” unto “newness of life.”
- ✓ Perseverance of the Saints: or “The perseverance of God on behalf of the saints such that God is faithful, even when we are faithless, to enable us over and over again to confession, repentance of self-trust and faith in God for our salvation.”

3. TULIP Revisited—F.A.I.T.H. (from Jim Osternhouse)

- ✓ *Fallen Humankind*—people are by nature completely unwilling morally and unable functionally to save themselves from sin and its consequences...

Rom. 1:18ff, Rom. 5:12ff, Rom. 3:23ff, Eph. 2:1

- ✓ *Adopted by God*—Based on God’s own, self-sufficient character of love, God has chosen some people to be members of his family to the praise of his glorious grace.
Eph. 1:3-12, John 6:35-40, Acts. 13:48

- ✓ *Intentional Atonement*—Jesus took the penalty of God’s justice against sin upon himself in order to save his people from taking the eternal consequences themselves.

Rom. 3:23-26, Heb. 5:4, Heb. 5:5, John 5:22, John 5:27, Matt. 28:18, Eph. 1:4, "

: "The business of man's salvation was transacted upon covenant terms between the Father and the Son from all eternity... What grace was that which was given us in Christ before the world began, but this grace of redemption which was from everlasting thus contrived and designed for us, in that way which hath been here opened? "

John Flavel p.61

For whom does Jesus lay down his life... for everyone?

John 10:14

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

- ✓ *Transformed by the Holy Spirit*—The Holy spirit regenerates those who are chosen by God, starting with giving them faith in Jesus and continually working more and more faith and godliness in them until their perfect glorification at death.

1Cor. 2:14, Rom. 5:5, Acts 16:14, Eph. 2:8

God did not just provide us with a potential salvation (offering salvation through the atoning work of Christ (objective)... but actual salvation (because of the salvation the Holy Spirit enables us to have by faith!)

- ✓ *Held by God*—Believers are held safe in God’s family and plan of salvation for all eternity.

Rom. 8: 35-39, Philip. 1:6, 1Pet.1:3-5, John 10:24-30

IV. Reformed Worldview in Context to Other Religions/Christian Families:

Who are we historically:

1. Apostolic (Canonical) vs. Other World Religions--- A Christ Centered Faith

Eph. 2:17-22

2. Protestant vs. "Catholic"--

- ✓ Sola Scriptura: Scripture is our only rule for faith and practice. (vs. ecumenical councils)
- ✓ Priesthood of all believers: Our access to God is through Christ alone as the only redeemer of God's people. (vs. a human succession of the priesthood)
- ✓ Justification through faith *alone*: Only by God's grace through faith are we saved, not be any works of our own. (vs. Grace through the effectual application of it by the sacraments)
- ✓ Church is a "means" of grace vs. "agent" of grace

3. Classic Protestant ("evangelical") vs. Modernist (liberal Protestantism) or Fundamentalist (dispensational)

- ✓ We do believe in an "open system" universe such that salvation is rooted in miraculous works of redemption in history.
Among other things:
 - a. Historic resurrection of Christ
 - b. Personal and super-natural Conversion through repentance and Faith
- ✓ The kingdom is both now and not yet—"optimistic realism" vs. either "triumphalism" or "pessimism" concerning the world.
- ✓ In the world but not of the world...

4. Reformed vs. "broad evangelical"

- ✓ Salvation by sovereign grace of God vs. Salvation by human cooperation with grace (which then would cease to be grace at all)
 - I.e. Election, effectual calling (regeneration), conversion, Justification, adoption, sanctification, assurance, perseverance, glorification
 - Vs. Mere foreknowledge, conversion, regeneration, etc.
- ✓ Theologically driven vs. POM driven—e.g. traditional or anti-traditional....
- ✓ "Ecclesial" vs. Individualistic: The Church IS an essential element of the gospel
 - a. The Church is Christology Applied:
Prophetic office now mediated through Authorized Preaching

Priestly office now mediated through Prayer and Sacraments
Kingly office now mediated through authorized "shepherds"/elders

b. The Church Has A Succession of Ministry

The language of "appoint" as applied to the offices of ministry is clearly used in the pastoral Epistles. This is significant since the pastoral Epistles were written as instructions for the church as it was to continue on after the apostolic era (Titus 1:5). The appointment of "officers" (however one may name them) in the church is accompanied by the "laying of hands" first by the apostles (Acts 8:18) and later by the "presbytery" (1 Tim. 4:14, KJV), indicating an authorization that is ultimately traced back to Christ insofar as he authorized the apostles to do this (Mat. 16:18, Eph. 2:20). Therefore, where we do not hold to a human succession traced through human lineage as the Roman church does, we do recognize a lineage that has been handed down through "presbyteries," or that "corporate body" called the "church" in 1 Tim. 3:15, which is the guardian of the Truth

c. The Church Has a Sacramental Gospel vs. merely a rationalistic gospel
I.e. The gospel is not merely a saving "idea" but also a saving "presence" as mediated by Christ through the means of grace in the church.

Revelations 21:3-4 from Lev. 26:9, Eph. 1:22-23, Eph. 2:19-22

5. Presbyterian vs. "Other" Confessional Protestant

- ✓ An organic understanding of the "connected" church vs. independent church
- ✓ Representative form of government vs. congregational or prelatical),
- ✓ Two or Three Office view of Church Government

Representative/Connectional Polity Compared:

✓ Connectional vs. Independent

An organic understanding of the "connected" church vs. independent church

The organic concept of the church that appears in the New Testament... presents a more theological, Christ-centered, spiritual view of the church as defined not by one earthly hierarchical center nor by many earthly congregational centers, but by a heavenly center that requires multiform earthly manifestations. Earthly assemblies do not define but manifest the nature and the center of the church.

Edmund Clowney

✓ Representative elders vs. congregational or hierarchical

1. Prelacy: administered by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons and other ecclesiastical offices on a hierarchical system by hierarchical appointment vs. representative or congregational determined offices. All things are general. (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Methodist)

James Bannerman:

The Proper and essential distinction between the two systems is the assertion by Episcopalians and the denial by Presbyterians of Scriptural warrant for a third order of ordinary and permanent office-bearers in the Church above presbyters and deacons, having exclusively in their hands the "power of ordination" and the "power of jurisdiction." (Vol.2, p.263-4)

In other words, the difference asserted by the Episcopalian theory between the order of bishops and the order of presbyters is exhibited in the right belonging to bishops, and not to presbyters, of ordaining to office in the Church and further, in the power of appertaining to bishops and not to presbyters, of exercising government and administering discipline in the Christian society.

2. Independency: Each separate congregation is under Christ subject to no external jurisdiction.

All things are local.

Congregational Independency (Baptist, Congregationalism)

Representative Independency (Reformed Baptist)

3. Presbyterianism: Representative government that enjoy jurisdictional/ecclesiastical connectedness to other churches within same denomination. Some things are originally local; some are general. Even originally local matters may become general, through review, complaint, or appeal.

1. Local Courts: (Session)

1 Cor. 5:11-13

2. Higher Courts: (Presbytery and Assembly)

Acts 15: 1-6

Acts 16:4

Note: Decrees made by court (Acts 15) constituted a standard for the churches to follow.

- ✓ Covenant Theology of Salvation and Church: i.e. Infant Baptism vs. anti-infant baptism (note-- we do believe our children are believers albeit unconfirmed... thus not to be distinguished from "credo-baptistic) views.
- ✓ Presence Theology fulfilled by Spiritual presence acting through means of grace

The Church Has a Sacramental Gospel vs. merely a rationalistic gospel

I.e. The gospel is not merely a saving "idea" but also a saving "presence" as mediated by Christ through the means of grace in the church.

Revelations 21:3-4 from Lev. 26:9, Eph. 1:22-23, Eph. 2:19-22

E.g. Covenant Theology vs. Individual Theology of Church

- ✓ Covenant Theology of Salvation and Church: i.e. God's salvation is ordinarily by means of His presence being mediated in communal, sacramental and confessional context. Sacraments themselves are therefore efficacious, not merely memorial. They are administered in a manner that reflects their intended means to and end:
 - Baptism: Entrance Rite—Used to set apart and include all those who are under the headship of Christ vis-à-vis the church—thus requires membership in church, albeit via household or “federal” memberships
 - Lord's Supper: Renewal Rite—Used to confirm and renew the graces of the gospel vis-à-vis the means of grace in the church. Thus requires both membership and adult examination (1Cor 10-11)

Whatever be the true theory of the origin of civil society, yet in regard to the relations of the church, as originally an outgrowth of the family, we are not left to speculation. It is distinctly declared to have thus originated. For a series of generations, the family was the only divinely appointed government. In the family, as a government, were lodged both State and church; the head of the family being both magistrate and priest...When that family increased to a nation of three millions of people, the church was re-organized, and adapted to the new circumstances. It became now a distinct government, embracing many families as *families*, for not only were the families theoretically the constituent element of the government, but the actual representation in the government was by heads of families – elders of the people. And when in the fullness of time, the last and complete organization of the church took place under apostles, specially

commissioned by Christ, to do for the church what the convention of 1789 did for the American people; and the church of one nation was adapted to become the church of all nations; the same principle was announced, – "the promise is to you and to your children." When a citizen was received under the new form of naturalization, "he and all his household" were thereby received. And hence, the record makes allusion to the church that is in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, of Nymphas, and of Philemon. (Rom. 16:G; Col. 4:15; and Phil. 1:2.) In accordance with these statements of the Scripture, our standards declare "The visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, *together with their children.*" And this, as distinguished from "the invisible church," which "consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

Stuart Robinson

Representative Creeds: Westminster Confession vs. London Baptist Confession...

Conclusion:

According to the Reformers and the Puritans, the message of Christianity is not simply about how man is to be saved, it is about how God is glorified in mans salvation.

Ian Murray

Whatever else is "true" about good religion, it is first and foremost about God!

I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. (Rev. 1:8)

"Now the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that , properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety."(Book 1,Ch. 2,1)

What help is it, in short to know a God with whom we have nothing to do? Rather our knowledge should serve first to teach us fear and reverence, secondly with it as our guide and teacher we should learn to seek every good from him and having received it to credit it to his account." (Book 1, Ch. 2, 2)

John Calvin

WCF 2.1-2

There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever

himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain. He is most holy in all his counsels, in all his works, and in all his commands. To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.

Addendum:

1. The Westminster Standards

Ashbel Green comments that "the Catechism on which the subsequent lectures are to be founded is the production of some of the most learned and pious divines that ever lived." (p.30) This estimation of the quality of people assembled to develop a system of Faith derived from the teachings of the Bible is not unique. Philip Schaff, perhaps one of the most respected historians of the church and church creeds, could say about the Westminster Assembly that "whether we look at the extent or ability of its labors, or its influence upon future generations, it stands first among Protestant Councils." (p.728, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 1) He later quotes Anglican Puritan Richard Baxter, although himself not a member of the Assembly but well qualified under any estimation to evaluate its quality as saying;

The divines there congregated were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities, and fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more freely speak the truth even in the face of malice and envy, that as far as I am able to judge by the information of all history of that kind, and by any other evidences left us, the Christian world since the days of the apostles had never a synod of more excellent divines that this and the Synod of Dort." (p.729, Schaff)

The Westminster Assembly occupied about five years and six months for the completion of its proper work. (July 1, 1643- February 22, 1649) It held no less than 1163 regular sessions. It met every day except Saturday and Sunday, from nine o'clock till one or two in the afternoon. The afternoons were spent in committees. The divines which attended consisted of 121 men from several different affiliations such as Episcopalian, the Belgic, French, Helvetic and other Reformed Churches, Presbyterians, etc. . There were two classes of Presbyterians corresponding to the Low and High Church Episcopalians.

The significance of such facts ought to jump out to the modern reader. Yes, we could start from scratch and develop our own interpretation of scripture. In fact, every student of the Bible necessarily does this in the very process of understanding and digesting it's teaching. And if we refuse the assistance afforded by the statements of doctrine that were meticulously and cautiously elaborated and defined by the church over a period of 1163 intensive days by some of the most able of men in the church's history, we must then make out our own creed by our own unaided wisdom. So the real question is really not weather or not we have a creed. Every time we use the scripture to determine our belief, we have in effect created one. The real question is will we be humble and wise enough to utilize the great wealth of wisdom represented in such a document as the Westminster Confession of Faith. Common sense tells us we should consider the collected wisdom of the church throughout the ages as represented in our church's creed. And why not give our children the added benefit of not being left to the hurried attempts of even the most ambitious modern teacher. So we at Christ Presbyterian, while never relinquishing our responsibility to teach our children, will humbly utilize those grand statements of faith that might provide greater depth and less error in what we do teach.