

## THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION SINCE THE REFORMATION

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An important but neglected point in the current discussions of the inspiration and authority of Scripture concerns the development of the various conflicting positions as they have entered into the twentieth century. The four centuries between the Reformation and the New Reformation have been characterized as the time of "the making of the modern mind." During the period between the *Ninety-Five Theses* of Martin Luther and the *Commentary on Romans* by Karl Barth, a growing divergency within the intellectual and theological worlds set a climate of opinion that would enable the scientific method to be used to challenge the very Word of God within the Church. Although critics and supporters alike would come to apply the so-called "dialectical method" to develop their own doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the actual historical process suggests that something quite different was involved between the deviations and departures from the historic teaching of the Church on the one hand and the attempts by Christian apologists to defend the traditional doctrine of Scripture on the other. The following investigation will attempt to address these matters as they affected all the major branches of Christianity during these four centuries.

The first major deviations from the orthodox doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture emerged following the Reformation of the sixteenth century. They arose in the period that ushered in the modern era of scientific and secular thought. When these departures did arise, they were neither universally accepted nor directly focused on the traditional teaching of the various branches of Christianity concerning the doctrine of Scripture. As one writer puts it,

Christians early inherited from the Jews the belief that the biblical writers were somehow possessed by God, who was thus to be reckoned as the Bible's proper author. Since God could not conceivably be the agent of falsehood, the Bible must be guaranteed free from error. For centuries the doctrine lay dormant, as doctrine will: accepted by all, pondered by few. Not until the 16th century did inspiration and its corollary, inerrancy, come up for sustained review.<sup>1</sup>

Even then the mainstream of Christian thought continued to adhere to the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

In the following discussion, a survey of the more-or-less official and formal expressions of the teachings from each of the major traditions within the Christian communion will reflect the central Christian position on the doctrine of Scripture as it entered the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup>J. T. Burtchaell, *Catholic Theories of Inspiration Since 1810* (Cambridge: University Press, 1960) 1-2.

## I. FORMAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION

Historically all evangelical Christians have held that the Bible alone is the complete and sufficient guide in matters of religious faith and practice, and yet all denominations have prepared their own particular forms of doctrinal expression. These documents are numerous, some are widely accepted, and many are held in great esteem. They have been used to express and to teach the fundamental truths of Christianity, and they generally agree in the more prominent teachings of the Scriptures even when they differ in minor details. Whether they are called "creeds" (*credo*, "I believe"), "confessions" (*confessio*, "confession, declaration"), "symbols" (*symbolon*, "token, sign"), or "articles of faith" (*articulus fidei*, "something believed"), they perpetuate the essential religious truth and convictions of the group they serve as the vehicles of systematic instruction. Although some of these "creed-forms" sometimes tended to become an end in and of themselves, they were based on and drawn from the Word of God, the Bible. The Reformation era of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was an era of creeds and confessions, since each denominational group or sect sought to articulate and to perpetuate the doctrinal expression of its own tradition.

1. *The Anabaptist and Baptist tradition (c. 1524-c. 1918)*. These noncreedal and nonsacramental bodies view their origins in one of three basic traditions.<sup>2</sup> (1) Baptist successionism traces its heritage back to the NT among groups existing outside the historic Roman Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup> (2) The Anabaptist spiritual kinship approach is a modification of the previous view that does not espouse a necessarily organic relationship among those groups who held to common spiritual principles from apostolic times to the emergence of modern Anabaptists and Baptists.<sup>4</sup> (3) The English separatist dissent position asserts that Baptists developed out of the Protestant Reformation by separating themselves from English Congregationalists who had previously separated from the Church of England.<sup>5</sup>

In the first two of these positions the teachings of the Anabaptists are reflected in the writings of John Wycliffe, John Hus (c. 1369-1415), Balthasar Hubmaier, "The Schleitheim Confession" of the Swiss Anabaptists (1527), Martin Bucer and Menno Simons (1496-1561).<sup>6</sup> The third position is consonant with the stance of the Church of England, and the so-called "Magisterial Reformation" provided

<sup>2</sup>A. W. Wardin, Jr., *Baptist Atlas* (Nashville: Broadman, 1980). See also E. T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Valley Forge: 1894).

<sup>3</sup>J. T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists* (2 vols.; Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1922-26). For a critique of this position see W. M. Patterson, *Baptist Successionism: A Critical View* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969).

<sup>4</sup>T. Armitage, *A History of the Baptists; Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices, from the Time of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to the Year 1886* (New York: Bryan, Taylor, 1887).

<sup>5</sup>R. G. Tolbert, *A History of the Baptists* (3d ed.; Valley Forge: Judson, 1969).

<sup>6</sup>*The Dordrecht Confession* (1632), as adopted by the Mennonites on April 21, 1632, represents the mature development of Anabaptist thought. Of these eighteen articles "Article V. Of the Law of Christ, Which is the Holy Gospel, or the New Testament" expresses their position on Scripture. See *Creeds of the Churches* (rev. ed.; ed. J. H. Leith; Atlanta: John Knox, 1973) 292-308.

the basic doctrine of Scripture for these Baptists.<sup>7</sup> In all these groups during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries harsh and negative attacks from the established Church groups compelled them to prove the orthodoxy (in Protestant terms) of the great body of Baptist doctrine. On other occasions they sought to distinguish themselves from those with whom they differed or to express the common ground of agreement for joint activities and fellowship with other Baptist groups. Throughout their history Baptists have sought to avoid prescriptive or creedal statements in favor of descriptive or sermonic expressions of their confessional statements. Well into the twentieth century the Baptists have held to the highest views of the inspiration and authority of Scripture that were enunciated in their particular historical, sociological and theological setting.<sup>8</sup>

The typical Baptist confessional statement rests firmly on the text and teaching of Scripture, and particularly the NT, which are cited profusely at each point in the statements they presented. In addition Baptists have tended to build their confessional statements on earlier models within their specific tradition.<sup>9</sup> Three years before the Church of England published its famous *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), for example, seven Baptist churches in London published *The Confession of Faith* (1644). This precedent-setting confession was "presented to the view of all that feare God, to examine by the touchstone of the Word of Truth." Its 52 articles are replete with Scripture citations, and two specific articles are directed to their doctrine of Scripture:

## VII

The Rule of the Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not mans inventions, opinions, devices, lawes, constitutions, or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but onely the word of God contained in the Canonick Scriptures.

Joh. 5.39. 2 Tim. 3.15,16,17. Col. 21.18,23. Matts. 15.9.

## VIII

In this written Word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needfull for us to know, believe, and acknowledge, touching the Nature and Office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.

Acts 3.22,23. Heb. 1.1,2. 2 Tim. 3.15,16,17. 2 Cor. 1.20.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>For an outstanding treatment of the distinctions among the various branches of the "Radical Reformation" and their contact with the "Magisterial Reformation" see G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962). See also W. R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Broadman, 1963).

<sup>8</sup>For an excellent, up-to-date, balanced treatment of this point see L. R. Bush and T. J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1980).

<sup>9</sup>J. E. Carter, "American Baptist Confessions of Faith: A Review of Confessions of Faith Adopted by Major Baptist Bodies in the United States," *The Lord's Free People in a Free Land: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of Robert A. Baker* (ed. W. R. Estep; Ft. Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976), chap. 5, presents an overview of the characteristics, background, etc., of such statements.

<sup>10</sup>Reprinted by the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma as "The London Confession of 1644," *Baptist Messenger* 58/32 (August 14, 1969) 3-8.

The popularity of the *Westminster Confession* soon enabled it to dominate the English scene, although *The London Confession of 1644* was reprinted on numerous occasions. After 1661 the Episcopalians had regained control of the machinery of the Church of England and had begun to introduce a series of coercive acts known as "The Clarendon Code" in an attempt to suppress dissent and to achieve religious uniformity in the Established Church. Finally, by 1677, the so-called *Second London Confession* was published.<sup>11</sup> It became the most generally accepted confession of the Regular or Calvinistic Baptists in England. It was republished again in 1688 and 1689 as *A Confession of Faith put forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country*. This statement was a slight modification of the *Westminster Confession* of the Church of England and the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) of the Congregational churches in order to suit the distinctives of Baptist church polity and baptism. This *Second London Confession* was "adopted by the Baptist Association met at Philadelphia, Sept. 25, 1742." It followed the model of the *Westminster Confession*, placing the doctrine of Scripture in Article I (paragraphs 1-10). Under the heading "Of the Holy Scriptures" this *Philadelphia Confession* asserts:

(1) The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all-saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. . . . (4) The authority of the Holy Scriptures, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.<sup>12</sup>

*The Philadelphia Confession* was widely used among Baptists in the south and southwestern United States, and its definitive edition was published by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. This admirable statement of Christian doctrine was too long and too abstruse to be used in general circulation, and other statements were composed to fill such a need.

During the early nineteenth century, Baptists in both the northern and southern United States came to use the shorter and moderately Calvinistic statement, *The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith* (1833). Basically a consensus statement written well after the "Calvinistic-Freewill" controversies among New England Baptists had ceased following the Great Awakening, it was reprinted in several widely-used Baptist church manuals as the most popular statement of faith for nearly a century throughout the United States. *The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith* was the focal point of the theological controversy that occurred within the Northern Baptist Convention after that denomination was organized in 1907. The same statement was adopted, with some deletions, changes in wording, ten additional articles, and a separate section on science and religion, as *A Statement of the Baptist Faith and Message* of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925. Like its predecessors *The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith* contains an article on Scripture:

<sup>11</sup>"The Second London Confession" (1677) is reprinted in W. L. Lumpkin, *The Baptist Confessions of Faith* (rev. ed.; Chicago: Judson, 1959) 241-295. Article I, "Of the Holy Scriptures," is on pp. 248-252.

<sup>12</sup>*The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (6th ed.; Philadelphia: Baptist Association, 1743) was printed by Benjamin Franklin.

### I. Of the Scriptures

We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction;\* that it has God as its author, salvation for its end,\* and truth without any mixture of error for its matter;\* that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us;\* and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union,\* and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.\*<sup>13</sup>

The 1925 *Statement* of the Southern Baptists adopted this article verbatim, but the Northern Baptists were unable to come to any agreement about a doctrinal statement for their entire constituency because of the impact of the doctrines of modernism and the fundamentalist controversy that ensued. In 1963 the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirmed and even strengthened this particular article in their adoption of *The Baptist Faith and Message*. In their convention meetings of 1980 and 1981 the Southern Baptists focused much attention on the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture in the process of reaffirming their adherence to the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message* statement. In the meantime, as the Northern Baptist Convention went through the throes of the so-called liberal-fundamentalist controversy, groups that moved out of its ranks and other independent Baptists adopted *The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith* as their own doctrinal expression.

2. *The Lutheran tradition (c. 1530-c. 1918)*. During the period from the Reformation to the twentieth century the Lutheran Churches espoused nine creeds and confessions in which they stated what they believe. These statements include "The Ecumenical (or Universal) Creeds" and "The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," which consist of six confessional expressions. All nine of these statements comprise the *Book of Concord*, first published in 1580 (although it was not until 1584 that the first authentic Latin edition was published).<sup>14</sup> In the "Epitome of the Articles [of Concord]," published in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, the first item presented is "Of the Compendious Rule and Norm" touching theological controversies. In three articles concerning the various symbols of the faith the Lutherans "believe, confess, and teach that the only rule and norm, according to which all doctors ought to be esteemed and judged, is no other whatever than the prophetic and apostolic writings both of the Old and of the New Testament."<sup>15</sup> Although this document appeared in the beginnings of the

<sup>13</sup>Article "I. Of the Scriptures," *The New Hampshire Declaration of Faith*, as published in *Baptist Messenger* 58/32 (April 1969) 9-12. There are numerous Scripture citations at each place asterisked in the text of this article, albeit not all issues of the *Declaration* contain the Scripture references as so indicated.

<sup>14</sup>The Ecumenical Creeds consist of the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian creeds. The six Confessions are the *Augsburg Confession* (1530), *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1530-31), *Smalcald Articles* (1537), *Luther's Small Catechism* (1529), *Luther's Large Catechism* (1529) and *Formula of Concord* (1576). See *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine* (rev. ed.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1965) 210. See also P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (6th ed. rev. and enlarged; New York: Harper, 1877).

<sup>15</sup>Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 93-94. See also "Articles V-VI" on the relationship "of the Law and the Gospel" and "of the Third Use of the Law," pp. 126-135.

period of so-called "Protestant scholasticism," the conclusion of M. Reu is appropriate as it relates to the issue of the position on the Scriptures at the time of the *Book of Concord*:

And, indeed, as long as the divine authority of the Bible is maintained, and as long as it is conceded that it is the product of a unique cooperation of the Holy Spirit and the human writers and, therefore, as a whole and in all its details the Word of God without contradiction and error, so long the question after the mode of inspiration is of an entirely secondary nature, and so long one is in harmony with the best Lutheran theologians from Luther up to the year 1570.<sup>16</sup>

This teaching was the accepted and approved position of Lutheranism in confession and catechism until well into the twentieth century.

3. *The Evangelical Reformed tradition (c. 1536-c. 1918)*. The groups associated with the reform tradition of John Calvin were scattered throughout Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Switzerland their doctrinal expression was presented in *The Sixty Articles of Uldrich Zwingli* (1523), *The Ten Theses of Bernae* (1528), the *First Helvetic Confession* (1536) and *The Second Helvetic Confession* (1566). In France the work of Calvin was perpetuated in *The Gallican Confession* (1559) and a somewhat modified and abridged form of it as represented in *A Brief Confession of Faith of the Reformed Churches of Piedmont* (Waldenses) published in 1655. In the Low Countries the great confessions of the Reformed tradition were set forth in three basic treatises: *The Belgic Confession* (1561), *The Heidelberg (Palatinate) Catechism* (1563) and *The Canons of the Synod of Dort* (1618-19).<sup>17</sup>

*The Gallican Confession* asserts: "We believe that the Word contained in these [canonical] books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men."<sup>18</sup> *The Belgic Confession* was carefully revised by comparing the texts of French, Dutch and Latin copies by the National Synod at Dort (1619). It devotes five articles to the Scriptures and asserts

that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that *holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*, as the apostle Peter saith. And that afterwards God, from a special care which he has for us and for our salvation, commanded his servants, the Prophets and Apostles, to commit his revealed Word to writing; and he himself wrote with his own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup>M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup>These *Canons of Dort* are also called the *Five Articles Against the Remonstrants* in response to *The Five Arminian Articles* (1610). See Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 545-597. See also the *Doctrinal Standards of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, 1962).

<sup>18</sup>Article V, *Confessio Fidei Gallicana*, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 356-382. Articles II-V, pp. 360-362, concern the Scriptures.

<sup>19</sup>*Confessio Belgica*, Article III, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 384-385. See also *Doctrinal Standards*, p. 3.

Following its presentation of the canonical books and their sufficiency *The Belgic Confession* ends its statement on Scripture by concluding:

Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have taught us, saying, *Try the spirits whether they are of God. Likewise, If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.*<sup>20</sup>

*The Belgic Confession* was adopted as the official doctrinal standard for the Reformed Churches following its revision at the Synod at Dort (1619) and remained so into the twentieth century.

4. *The Westminster tradition (c. 1538-c. 1918)*. Unlike the continental Reformation, which was first religious and then political, the English Reformation was first political and then religious.<sup>21</sup> As a result an outward conformity became the desired objective of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) when she ascended to the throne of her father Henry VIII (1509-1547). During the years following his separation from Rome in 1534 the Church of England moved dramatically and sometimes violently from one theological position to another. Finally after numerous previous efforts *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England* became the legal formularies of the Church of England (1571) and of Ireland (1615).<sup>22</sup> The *Thirty-Nine Articles* combined features of both the Swiss (or Reformed) and Lutheran confessions. These *Articles* were first published in an *Editio Latina Princeps* in 1562, then in English (1571), and subsequently revised for the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (1801).<sup>23</sup> The Article "Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation" affirms that "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."<sup>24</sup>

Puritanism arose in England about the time of the publication of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* as a movement committed to "a radical purification and reconstruction of Church and State on the sole basis of the Word of God, without regard to the traditions of men. It was a second Reformation, as bold and earnest as the first."<sup>25</sup> The Puritans were not a separate organization or sect but an advanced

<sup>20</sup>*Confessio Belgica*, Article VII, *ibid.*, pp. 388-389. See also *Doctrinal Standards*, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>W. H. Griffith-Thomas, *The Principles of Theology: Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles* (5th ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1880 [reprint 1977]) xxxiv.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. xxix-xlix, lists among other items the *Ten Articles* (1536), *Thirteen Articles* (1538), *Six Articles* (1539), *Forty-Two Articles* (1553) and *Thirty-Eight Articles* (1562) as well as other treatises.

<sup>23</sup>Schaff, *Creeds*, vol. 3, places all three texts in parallel columns (pp. 486-516).

<sup>24</sup>Article IV, Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 489. The American Revision (1801) is here cited. The italics indicate the only textual variation from the 1571 edition, which has "as" inserted instead of "or" in the text.

<sup>25</sup>Schaff, *Creeds*, 1. 703. In a note Schaff indicates that the name *Puritans* (from "pure"), or *Precisians*, occurs first in 1564 or 1566. This matter may be pursued by referring to H. W. Clark, *History of English Nonconformity*, and more recent attempts at synthesis by M. M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism: A Chapter in the History of Idealism* (Chicago: University Press, 1939), and W. Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938; reprint as Harper Torchbook, 1957).

wing within the national Church. During the seventeenth century they vied with Anabaptists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and other Conformist and Nonconformist elements for control of the Church of England. These struggles had a practical and conservative character that operated within the bounds of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* by Richard Hooker (c. 1554-1600). By "representing the Church as a legislative body which had power to make and unmake institutions and rites not affecting the doctrines of salvation laid down in the Scriptures and oecumenical creeds,"<sup>26</sup> Hooker set the tone for subsequent efforts to steer a course between Romanism on the one hand and Lutheranism and Calvinism on the other. Within her ranks Calvinistic Puritans, Arminian Methodists, liberal Latitudinarians, and Romanizing Tractarians and Ritualists were able to operate by conforming to the official formulas of the Church of England.

The Westminster Assembly of Divines was called in 1642 to legislate for Christian doctrine, worship and discipline in the state Church. Its work stands at the forefront of Protestant councils. The Assembly produced *A Confession of Faith* (1647) and two "Catechisms" that were written in English and used throughout Anglo-Presbyterian churches into the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> The first article of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* is devoted to the subject "Of the Holy Scripture." Because of the insufficiency of mankind's knowledge of God, his will and salvation,

it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in diverse manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.<sup>28</sup>

Later the *Confession* adds that "the authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any 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."<sup>29</sup> And

yet, notwithstanding, our 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.

<sup>26</sup>Schaff, *Creeds*, 1. 607. Four books of the *Laws* were published in 1594, another in 1597, and three more were added after Hooker's death in 1600.

<sup>27</sup>*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, completed in 1646, was adopted along with the two *Catechisms* in 1647 and published as *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament, Sitting at Westminster, Concerning A Confession of Faith: With Quotations and Texts of Scripture Annexed* (London, 1647). Commonly known as *The Westminster Confession*, it was accompanied by *A Larger Catechism* (1647) and *A Shorter Catechism* (1647). See Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 598-673; 674-675 (facsimile of title pages of the *Larger Catechism*); 676-704 (the text of *A Shorter Catechism*). For the text of *The Westminster Confession*, see Leith (ed.), *Creeds* 192-230.

<sup>28</sup>Chapter 1, "Of the Holy Scripture, I," in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 600-601.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, I, I, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 602.



VI. 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. . . .

IX. The infallible rule and interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; . . .

X. 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.<sup>30</sup>

While the Church of England (and the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States) and the Anglo-Presbyterian churches followed these formulas, the Congregationalists modified the *Westminster Confession* to suit their own church polity in *The Savoy Declaration* (1658). As they met in various national councils during the nineteenth century they drew up individual statements such as *The Oberlin Declaration of the National Congregational Council* (1871) in the United States. In this brief declaration the messengers assembled state that they

agree in the belief that the Holy Scriptures are the sufficient and only infallible rule of religious faith and practice; their interpretation thereof being in substantial accordance with the great doctrines of the Christian faith, commonly called Evangelical, held in our churches from the early times, and sufficiently set forth by former General Councils.<sup>31</sup>

Although John Wesley (1701-1791) desired to remain within the Church of England, his followers in America formed the first Methodist society in New York (1766) among Irish immigrants. After the American Revolution Wesley drew up *The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion*, which were adopted by the American Methodists in 1784. The *Articles* were a liberal and judicious abridgment of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* with Calvinistic and other features omitted. Nevertheless Wesley set forth in Article II "The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation":

The Holy Scriptures contain 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 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>32</sup>

He frequently affirmed his belief in the inspiration and authority of Scripture as "the oracles of God,"<sup>33</sup> written by "men divinely inspired."<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere he assert-

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., I, I-X, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 603-606.

<sup>31</sup>See Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 737. *The Declaration of the Congregational Union of England and Wales* (1833) and *The Declaration of the Boston National Council* (1865) speak of the Scriptures as "the testimony of God"; *ibid.*, pp. 730-736.

<sup>32</sup>Schaff, *Creeds*, 3. 808.

<sup>33</sup>J. Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872, reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 8. 45-46.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 10. 80.

ed, " 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' consequently, all Scripture is infallibly true."<sup>35</sup>

The early followers of Wesley unanimously continued in this same high view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. The Irish Wesleyan Adam Clarke (c. 1762-1832) frequently affirmed his belief in the plenary inspiration and infallibility of Scripture as "the only complete directory of the faith and practice of man."<sup>36</sup> The first systematic theologian of the Wesleyan movement was Richard Watson (1737-1816), who defended Christianity against the attacks of Sir Edward Gibbon. Watson's understanding of inspiration was that "the sacred writers composed their works under so plenary and immediate an influence of the Holy Spirit, that God may be said to speak by them to man, and not merely that they spoke to men in the name of God, and by his authority."<sup>37</sup> It was not until the opening years of the twentieth century that Methodism moved from its moorings in this high view of Scripture. Even then the move was based on other tendencies than the objective and historical record of Scripture. That shift came as a result of the impact of subjectivism, secularism and the methodology of modern science as the basis of authority in social matters that were transferred to theology.

5. *The Roman Catholic tradition (c. 1545-c. 1918)*. Following the meeting of the Council of Trent, which held sessions from 1545 to 1563, the Roman Catholic position was set down in *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent* (1563). Roman Catholicism demonstrated less flexibility in the expression of its doctrine of religious authority than did the various communions of the non-Roman traditions. It continued to perpetuate the view that Scripture and tradition were the dual basis of religious authority, and it set forth this position in the twelve articles of the *Profession of the Tridentine Faith* (1564). They asserted in Article III that the faithful must agree to certain admissions, including: "I also admit the Holy Scriptures, according to that sense which our holy mother Church has held and also does hold, to which it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; neither will I ever take and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers."<sup>38</sup> In *The Papal Syllabus of Errors* (1864) Pope Pius IX attacked the positions of "Pantheism, Naturalism, and Absolute Rationalism" by listing among their errors the view that "5. Divine revelation is imperfect, and therefore, subject to a continual and definite progress of human reason. . . . 7. The prophecies and miracles set forth and narrated in the Sacred Scriptures are fictions of poets . . . mythical inventions, and Jesus Christ is himself a mythical fiction."<sup>39</sup>

This tradition was continued in *The Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council concerning the Catholic Faith and the Church of Christ* (1870), which set forth

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 5. 193.

<sup>36</sup>A. Clarke, *Miscellaneous Works* (13 vols.; London: T. Tegg, 1839-45), 12. 80, 83, 122. See also 6. 420.

<sup>37</sup>R. Watson, *The Works of Richard Watson* (12 vols.; London: John Mason, 1834-37), 6. 11.

<sup>38</sup>*Profession of the Tridentine Faith* (1564) in Schaff, *Creeds*, 2. 207.

<sup>39</sup>*The Papal Syllabus of Errors* (1864), I, 5-7, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 2. 214-215.

the position that "divine revelation" can "be known by every one with facility, with firm assurance, and with no admixture of error. . . . Further, this supernatural revelation, according to the universal belief of the Church, declared by the sacred Synod of Trent, is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us."<sup>40</sup> As James T. Burtchaell has suggested, "The Catholic Church has displayed little spontaneous desire to refine, revise, and improve her doctrinal formulations. Only when she is goaded and provoked from without does she bestir herself to this apparently disagreeable task."<sup>41</sup>

6. *The Eastern Church Tradition (c. 1643-c. 1918)*. Although the Eastern Church had developed its own separate tradition from the west, its position on Scripture was quite similar to Roman Catholicism in maintaining the dual authority of Scripture and tradition. As recent as 1839, for example, *The Longer Catechism of the Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church*<sup>42</sup> contains a lengthy presentation in its "Introduction to the Orthodox Catechism"<sup>43</sup> for use of *The Orthodox Confession of the Eastern Church* (1643).<sup>44</sup> In this "Introduction" the discussion "On Divine Revelation" asks, "Why are not all men capable of receiving a revelation immediately from God?" and answers that it is "owing to their sinful impurity, and weakness both in soul and body."<sup>45</sup> After naming the prophets, our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles as the heralds of divine revelation, the "Introduction" addresses the question, "Can not man, then, have any knowledge of God without a special revelation from him?" and answers by stating that "this knowledge is imperfect and insufficient, and can serve only as a preparation for faith, or as a help towards the knowledge of God from his revelation."<sup>46</sup> In its section "On Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture" the "Introduction" asks, "How is divine revelation spread among men and preserved in the true Church?" The answer: "By two channels—holy tradition and holy Scripture."<sup>47</sup> The "Introduction" also says that "the most ancient and original instrument for spreading divine revelation is holy tradition"<sup>48</sup> but that Holy Scripture was given "to this end, that divine revelation might be preserved more exactly and unchangeably."<sup>49</sup> Question 23 raises the issue of the relationship of the two: "Must we follow holy tradition, even when we possess holy Scripture? We must follow that tradition which agrees with the divine revelation and with holy Scripture, as is taught us by holy Scripture itself. . . . 2 Thess. ii, 15."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Schaff, *Creeds*, 2. 240-241.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. Q. 15, ans., pp. 447-448.

<sup>41</sup>Burtchaell, *Theories* 1.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. Q. 16, ans., p. 448.

<sup>42</sup>See Schaff, *Creeds*, 2. 445-542.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. Q. 21, ans., p. 449.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. 445-455.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. Q. 22, ans., p. 449.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. 275-400.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. Q. 23, ans., p. 449.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. Q. 13, ans., p. 447.

## II. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

During and after the Reformation era, Christianity entered into an age of "creed-forms" and confessions as the individual groups, denominations and sects sought to articulate and to perpetuate their own doctrinal tradition. These more or less official and formal expressions proliferated with the spread of Christianity in these various movements. They reflect a basic commitment to the doctrines of historic Christianity in general and to the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture in particular. "The Reformers and Counter-Reformers were disputing whether all revealed truth was in Scripture alone, and whether it could dependably be interpreted by private or by official scrutiny. Despite a radical disagreement on these issues both groups persevered in receiving the Bible as a compendium of inerrant oracles dictated by the Holy Spirit."<sup>51</sup> When placed into the larger context this limited view may be challenged, but when the various "creed-forms" and confessions are reviewed—whether they reflect the nonsacramentarianism of Anabaptists and Baptists or the official statements of creedalism—they indicate that the mainstream of Christianity continued its traditional commitment to the orthodox doctrine of Scripture. Throughout its broad and diverse ranks, Christians officially adhered to the belief that the Scriptures are the divinely-inspired, authoritative, infallible and inerrant Word of God.

<sup>51</sup>Burtchaell, *Theories* 2-3.