

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION
IN
THE CREEDS OF THE REFORMATION ERA

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION IN THE CREEDS OF THE
REFORMATION ERA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine the doctrine of Revelation as it is found in Creedal statements of the Reformation era. The first aim is to find the statements themselves which apply to the subject, then to evaluate them in the light of the situations from which they grew, then to compare the different statements with each other to determine their likenesses and differences and to show their emphases and omissions, and finally, to show the value of these conclusions for the present day.

II. JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS STUDY

The doctrine of Revelation deals fundamentally with the problem of religious authority, a problem which has constituted a great rock upon which the ship of Christian unity has, at times, been broken. Each of the great divisions of the Church of Christ has its own answer to this question: What is the final authority to which we may appeal for a saving knowledge of God? Every man seeking salvation has found this problem personalized in the question: How has God revealed Himself?

A. Diversity of Opinion

The variety of opinions which are given in answer to this problem prove its importance. For the moment, let us divide the Christian world into four groups: The Rationalists, the Mystics, the Ecclesiastical Authoritarians, and the Biblical Authoritarians.¹ The Rationalists claim that reason is paramount, or at least coordinate, authority in religion; that God reveals Himself primarily through the natural functioning of man's intellectual capacities; and that man must look to his own reasoning power as a means of God's saving revelation. The Mystics assume an internal supernatural light to which they attribute paramount or coordinate authority; that God is continually revealing Himself to each man individually and subjectively; and that salvation comes by acknowledgement of and obedience to the 'inner light'. On the other hand, the Ecclesiastical Authoritarians, for example the Romanists, look to the objective authority of an infallible church, claiming that God reveals Himself to the church as an organized group. They hold that He supernaturally guides the church through its designated authorities in the interpretation of Scripture and tradition, maintaining that saving knowledge is mediated by the church. Lastly, the Biblical Authoritarian declares that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the only infallible rule of faith and practice;² that God has revealed

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1. Cf. A. Hodge, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, p. 33

2. Cf. Belgic Confession, Art. VIII

Himself specially through them; and that a saving knowledge of God may be found in them only. The interest of the author lies in the exposition of the last view as it is found in the Creeds of the Reformation era.

B. Centrality in Reformation Thought

The answer to the question of Revelation constitutes the formal principle of Protestantism, namely, that the Scriptures are the rule and norm of faith. As such it assumes a position of highest importance in the system of doctrine and in the apologetic explanations of the Reformation. At that time Christian men were brought squarely before the issue of authority. There was no way of avoiding it, for the free spirits of the Reformers stood over against an institution, the Roman Church, which had for centuries claimed to be the final authority, and had exercised that authority to the limit. It was an authority that had equally supported tradition, the writings of the Fathers, and various rites and ceremonies alongside the authority of Scripture. In breaking from that institution, the Reformers' first task was to answer the same question which the Jewish religious leaders asked of Jesus, "By what authority doest thou these things?"³ Their answer was an appeal to Scripture as the Word of God. The importance of the study which we undertake is plainly evident, for we wish to determine how much of the thought of the Reformers was precipitated into the creedal statements.

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³. Luke 20:2

C. Present-day Interest and Importance

Periodically, since the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of Revelation has been in the foreground of religious thought, and also, at times, of philosophical thought. The problem of Epistemology was exposed to full view during the 18th Century under the impetus of John Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding. The following Deistic and Rationalistic developments put to severe test the whole field which we are studying. In more recent theological thought, the subjectivism of Schleiermacher and Ritschl has called in question the objective reality of Revelation, and still more recently the Barthian school has made a reinterpretation of the Reformers' position with the resultant claim that the orthodox position, as Dr. Emil Brunner calls it, is not the position of the Reformers. His statement is as follows: "For orthodoxy, the Bible is a book is the divinely revealed truth. It is thus a revealed thing or object. For unperverted Christian faith, however, Scripture is only revelation when conjoined with God's spirit in the present. The testimonium spiritus sancti and the clarity of God's word are one and the same thing. The Scripture-principle is therefore a paradoxical unity of autonomy and authority, of what is given and what is not given."⁴ In this view Dr. Brunner claims to go back to the thought of the Reformers

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⁴. E. Brunner, Philosophy of Religion, 1st ed., p. 151, 152

and at the same time to affirm that those who have claimed to follow the Reformers most closely, i.e., orthodox Protestants, have failed to interpret the Reformers aright on this point. In view of such developments, the importance of our study again shows itself, for the creeds reflect the mind of the church as it was at the time of their writing.

We see, then, in view of the past and present importance and interest in the doctrine of Revelation, that a study of comparative symbolics in reference to this subject should prove helpful and interesting.

III. DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION

A. The Term Itself

It may be well, first of all, to define the idea of Revelation itself. Revelation is the communication of the thoughts, of the actions, and of the characteristics of God to the mind of man. This is a truly religious conception in that it deals with the relationship in which God has placed Himself in regard to His creation. Revelation denotes every action proceeding from God to bring man into, and keep him in, that peculiar relation to Himself which is designated by the word "religion".⁵ Etymologically the word means "unveiling", and the divine revelation is God's unveiling of the truth regarding Himself in some manner and degree to the intelligence and heart of man.⁶

B. Two Personalities Involved

Revelation involves at least two personalities, God

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⁵ Cf. S. C. Nettinga, Class Notes in Theology

⁶ Cf. J. Orr, Revelation and Inspiration, p. 26

C. Objections to the Concept

It would be irrelevant to the subject at hand to do more than name the philosophical objections to this fundamental conception of Revelation. The first of these is that man knows only phenomenal things which come to him through sense perception. Here we come again to the above mentioned problem of epistemology. The thinkers of the age are far from being agreed upon this as an objection. Whatever else may be said on this subject, the fact remains that the phenomena indicate the being and the character of the noumena. The noumena can be known through the phenomena. To deny that is to deny the possibility of real knowledge. A second objection is that man knows only by analogy and that there is nothing which can be compared to God. But such objectors forget, or do not believe that man is made in the image of God, and that man, in a humble way, has many things in common with God. Again, it is said that since God has not revealed Himself completely, since we cannot know God fully, therefore we cannot know Him at all. This objection comes from a false assumption that partial knowledge is not real knowledge. Certainly, we cannot know fully, but, as Paul says, we do know "in part". Finally, it is said that all the attributes of God are negative and therefore furnish no Revelation. This is a statement based upon a misconception of God's attributes for certainly His love, His holiness, His self-sufficiency, and His self-existence, are positive

attributes.⁹ In these statements we have the questions which have given rise to the philosophical interest in the doctrine of Revelation.

D. Basic Presuppositions

To anyone who is a theist, the idea of Revelation is inescapable. It is a conception that is inherent in the very idea of God. In order to be known, God must reveal Himself in one way or another so that the limited senses of man can respond. As theists, we accept the basic presuppositions of Revelation. These necessary premises include: a belief in the capacity of the human mind for knowing God, or, in other words, that the laws of God's thoughts are the laws of man's thoughts; a realization that we can know God only as he reveals Himself to us; and a conviction that God has means by which He can actually come into relations with the mind and heart of man.¹⁰

These presuppositions are fundamental to our study because it is upon these that the Reformers based their thought and upon which the church based its creedal statements in reference to this doctrine.

IV. MODE OF PROCEDURE

A. Creedal Statements Used

The creedal statements to be used are as follows:

LUTHERAN

The Augsburg Confession, A. D. 1530

Luther's Smaller Catechism, A. D. 1529

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⁹ Cf. L. Berkhof, Dogmatic Theology, Vol. I, p. 17-21

¹⁰ Cf. A. Strong, Systematic Theology, 3rd ed. p. 2 ff.

Luther's Larger Catechism, A. D. 1529

The Smalcauld Articles, A. D. 1537

The Formula of Concord, A. D. 1576

The Saxon Visitation Articles, A.D. 1592

CONTINENTAL REFORMED

The Sixty-Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli, A.D. 1523

The Second Helvetic Confession, A.D. 1566

The Heidelberg Catechism, A.D. 1563

The French Confession of Faith, A.D. 1559

The Belgic Confession, A.D. 1561

The Canons of the Synod of Dort, A. D. 1619

BRITISH REFORMED

The First Scotch Confession, A.D. 1560

The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, A.D. 1563

The Lambeth Articles, A.D. 1595

The Irish Articles, A.D. 1615

The Westminster Confession of Faith, A.D. 1647

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, A.D. 1647

1. Basis of Choice of Creeds to be Used

The time span involved is from 1523 to 1648. The above division of the creedal statements is made partly on the basis of geographical relationships, but not for that reason alone. The division between Lutheran and Reformed is based upon a perfectly evident distinction between these two great parts of Protestantism. The reason for division between British and Continental Reformed may not be as clear. To divide the Reformed group into two parts will give a better

balance in the amount of material to be discussed in each section of this study. Also there is a difference in time, the British statements being generally of a later date than the Continental. Moreover, the Continental creeds represent a consecutive development, while the British are more of a composite of the other creeds, as will be shown later.

The basis for the selection of the above mentioned creeds includes several factors. The first of these is the time of its formation which must have been during the Reformation era. We consider that era to include the period from the posting of Luther's Theses in 1517 to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. A second requirement is that the creed must have been formulated by a Protestant church. In the third place, it must have had more than local acceptance and have elements which are not included or superseded by later statements which were little more than restatements of the same thoughts. In such cases, the later statements have been chosen for this study.¹¹ Likewise they must have some reference to the subject of Revelation.

In regard to the Lutheran division we include all the statements included in the official Lutheran publication, Concordia Triglotta, except the Apology of the Confession,

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11. The Sixty-seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli have been included not because of the authority which they had in the churches, for they were only locally received. Cf. P. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 4th ed., p. 364. These Articles have been included, rather, because they constitute the first formulated statement of Reformation principles and because the first Article has definite bearing upon the doctrine of Revelation.

which is more of a theological treatise in defense of the Augsburg Confession than a creedal statement. However, this work will be used as a subsidiary source in the explanation of the Lutheran position.

2. Particular Reasons for the Exclusion of Some

In regard to the Reformed confessions, there are several lesser statements which we have excluded from our study. The Ten Theses of Berne, 1528, have nothing that refers to our subject. The First Confession of Basil, 1534, was superseded by the Second Confession of Basil, 1534, which is also known as the First Helvetic Confession. This in turn was superseded and enlarged in the Second Helvetic Confession.¹² The First Helvetic Confession was the first creed to receive more than local acceptance. All the Reformed Cantons of Switzerland adopted it and it is still used in Basil and Muhlhausen.¹³ Yet we pass over it along with the Ten Theses of Berne and the First Confession of Basil because its content is found in the Second Helvetic Confession, and because the church of that day chose the Second Helvetic Confession rather than the First except for the two exceptions noted above. The Catechism of Geneva, 1541, is not included because it has been superseded by the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession.¹⁴ The Consensus of Zurich, 1549, and the Consensus of Geneva, 1552, are passed over because they are theological and polemical

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¹². Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 389

¹³. Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 211

¹⁴. Cf. ibid, p. 232

essays on the Lord's Supper and on Predestination rather than confessions of faith. The Second Scotch Confession, 1580, is a strongly anti-papal appendix to the First Confession and as such has no particular importance in this discussion. The Arminian Articles of Remonstrance, 1610, are omitted because they have no reference to the subject.

B. Method of Treatment of Material

We shall study the eighteen creeds mentioned above¹⁵ in the three divisions in which they are given, devoting a chapter to each division. All of the direct statements about Revelation and the implications upon the subject from other sections of the creeds will be discussed and related to each other. Upon the basis of all these findings the complete doctrine of Revelation will then be formulated. The conclusions to be drawn from the study of each of the sections in regard to their points of agreement, their points of disagreement, their common emphases and their common omissions will be presented next. Finally, we will show the central issues as set forth in the creeds and relate them to the present day in such a way as to show their value.

¹⁵. vide supra p. 8 and 9

CHAPTER II
LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

CHAPTER II

LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

I. DEFINITE STATEMENTS FROM CONFESSIONS

A. Acceptance of Scripture as the Rule of Faith

The Lutheran Confessions show a scarcity of statement on the doctrine of Revelation. The most highly regarded and generally accepted of the Lutheran standards, except for the three ecumenical creeds, is the Augsburg Confession. The other standards, found in the Concordia Triglotta, are not accepted by all Lutheran bodies.¹ The Augsburg Confession does not give a chapter, nor even a section, to Scripture. The Formula of Concord is the only one of the statements to define the Lutheran faith in the Scripture. Even there it is included rather as a part of the introduction than as a section or article of the body of the confession. The statement is as follows:

"We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas, together with all teachers, should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone, as it is written, Ps. 119:105; 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.' And Saint Paul: 'Though an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed.' Gal. 1:8

".....the holy Scriptures alone remain the judge, rule, and standard according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong."

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1. Cf. E. H. Klotsche, *Christian Symbolics*, p. 137
2. F. C., epit. Summary 1. All quotations made from the Lutheran standards will be according to the translation and numbering as found in *Concordia Triglotta*, 1921 ed.

"...we receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.

"...we confess, also, the First Unadulterated Augsburg Confession as our symbol for this time, not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it was been taken from God's Word and is founded firmly and well therein."³

Compared with the lengthy statements on some other points of doctrine, this may seem to be a very brief statement of so vital a point in the theology of the Lutheran Reformers. In spite of this brevity, the general view of the church of that day may be quite easily inferred from the statements in other sections of the Lutheran standards. The Augsburg Confession, as well as other statements, is "pervaded throughout with an appeal to the Gospel as the supreme test of truth and right."⁴ Never is it to be doubted that Luther and his followers took the Bible as the standard by which to judge all things. The preface to the Emperor states that, "in obedience to Your Royal Majesty's wishes, we offer, in this matter of religion, the Confession of our preachers and ourselves, showing what manner of doctrine from the Holy Scriptures and the pure Word of God has been up to this time set forth in our lands..." The Smalcald Articles add their testimony, saying, "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."⁵ From nearly every page of the Lutheran Confessions it may be implied that

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⁴C. A. Briggs, Theological Symbolics, p. 263

⁵S. A., Part II, II, 15

the Scripture is the final authority, the norm and rule of faith.

B. Rejection of Other Authority

Not only do these standards set the Scripture above all other authority, but they are explicit in their rejection of all others. Such rejections or denunciations include that of the authority of the Pope, of traditions, of the writings of the Fathers, of subjectivism, and of reason as coordinate with the Scripture.

1. Papacy

Of the rejection of anything that smacked of the Papacy there can be no doubt, although the Augsburg Confession is mild in its tone compared with the vitriolic utterances of some of the other statements. "But when they (the bishops) teach or determine anything contrary to the Gospel, then have the churches a commandment of God which forbids obedience to them: 'Beware of false prophets.'"⁶ The Apology says further, "We concede neither to the Pope nor to the Church the power to make decrees against this consensus of the Prophets."⁷ One of the causes for this mildness was a hope of reconciliation with the Roman Church which the reformers still entertained at the time of the writing.

The Smalcald Articles assume a sterner tone. "Hence it follows that all things which the Pope... has done and undertaken, have been, and still are, purely diabolical affairs and transactions... for the ruin of the... Christ-

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⁶A. C., XXVIII, 34

⁷Ap., XII, 66

ian Church."⁸ Again in the concluding section, Of The Power and the Primacy of the Pope, three of the false claims are mentioned concerning which it is said, "These three articles we hold to be false, Godless, tyrannical, and quite pernicious to the Church."

2. Traditions and Writing of the Fathers.

In regard to the traditions and the extra-Biblical writings, the confessions do not consider them on a level with the Scripture, but they do accord them a place of high esteem. Particularly the Augsburg Confession places some authority with the traditions and writings of the Fathers. The best example is in reference to the Mass. "Forasmuch, therefore, as the Mass with us has the example of the Church, taken from the Scripture and the Fathers, we are confident that it cannot be disproved, especially since public ceremonies, for the most part like those hitherto in use, are retained;....."⁹ Article XXVI raises objection to the distinction of meats. These are raised upon practical grounds as well as upon the Scripture. We also find leniency toward practices in the Roman Church which are not explicitly forbidden by the Scripture. "Unto the true unity of the Church, it is sufficient to agree concerning the doctrines of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human rites and traditions, nor ceremonies instituted by men should be alike everywhere."¹⁰ The Augsburg Confession makes its appeal first of all to Scripture, but it also gives a minor place to other sources of auth-

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8. S. A., Part II, II, 15
9. A. C., XXIV, 40
10. A. C., VII, 2

ority. The Fathers, as well as the Scriptures, are quoted, not, however, with the intention of setting up the writings of the Fathers and the traditions as equal with the Word of God. The Confession itself confirms this quite definitely. "This is about the sum of our doctrine, in which, as can be seen, there is nothing that varies from the Scripture, or from the Church Catholic, or from the Church of Rome, as known from its writers."¹¹

It remained for the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord definitely to sever all other writings and traditions from any place of authority. "The declaration of the papists that human traditions serve for the remission of sins... is altogether unchristian and condemned."¹²

"Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses, which are to show in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved."¹³

3. Subjectivism and Reason

It is of importance to note that these confessions also deny any authority to the subjective mystical or intellectual sources. The most definite of these state-

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11. A. C., XXI, 1
12. S. A., Part III, XV, 1
13. F. C., Epit, Summary, 2

ments comes in reference to the Anabaptists. "They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparation and works."¹⁴ In their insistence upon justification by faith, they also deny to the human intellect any final authority in religious matters.

"Of free will they (the Scriptures) teach that man's will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness, and to work things subject to reason. But it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness; since the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, I Cor. 2:14; but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Ghost is received through the Word.....

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who teach that without the Holy Ghost, by the power of nature alone, we are able to love God above all things; also to do the commandments of God as touching the substance of the act."¹⁵

The Apology adds, "Our eyes are to be cast far from human reason." And also, "Reason does not see a righteousness other than the righteousness of the Law, understood in a civil sense."¹⁶

The Smalcald Articles, in speaking of the false repentance of the Papists, says, "Here we see how blind reason, in matters pertaining to God, gropes about, and, according to its own imagination, seeks for consolation in its own works"¹⁷

It is the Formula of Concord that gives the best statement, as follows:

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¹⁴.A. C., V, 4

¹⁵.A.C., XVIII, 1, 8

¹⁶.Ap. III, 173

"We are certainly in duty bound not to interpret and explain these words of the eternal, true, and almighty Son of God, our Lord, Creator, and Redeemer Jesus Christ, differently, as allegorical, figurative, topical expressions, according as it seems agreeable to our reason, but with simple faith and due obedience to receive the words as they are read, in their proper and plain sense, and allow themselves to be diverted therefrom by no objections or human contradictions spun from human reason, however charming they may appear to reason."¹⁸

It is interesting to note that the Lutheran confessions do not give a list of the canonical books of the Bible, and likewise, they have no explicit statement concerning the Apocrypha.¹⁹

C. Summary

These excerpts from the confessions readily show to us the fundamental position of the Lutheran reformers, namely, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the rule and standard by which every doctrine and custom of the Church is to be judged. The authority of the Pope, of traditions, of the writings of the Fathers, of subjectivism, and of reason were all denied. In fact, there was left, one, and only one, avenue through which a special, authoritative Revelation from God could come, and that was the Scripture. It was that which they heartily accepted. Further statement of the way in which the Scripture conveys the Revelation, and the further development of this doctrine must await the consideration of the history

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18. F. C., Thor. Dec., VII, 45

19. Cf. Klotsche, op. cit., p. 149

of these creedal statements, and of the personal views of Dr. Luther.

II. SIDELIGHTS FROM CONTEMPORARY SOURCES

The fundamental truths expressed in the creeds are timeless. The creedal statements themselves are very much the outgrowth of the age in which they were composed. The circumstances attendant upon their writing, the situation to which the authors addressed themselves, and the particular purpose in their formation at a particular time, all have great influence upon the form and the comparative emphases and omissions. Therefore, we must give due place to these considerations.

A. History of the Confessions

1. Augsburg Confession and Apology

On January 21, 1530, the Emperor, Charles V, proclaimed a diet to be convened at Augsburg in April of the same year. His purpose was to restore, if possible, the unity of the Church under the banners of Rome. This proclamation reached the Elector John at Torgau in March. He immediately commissioned Luther, Jonas, Bugenhagen, and Melancthon to draw up articles dealing with the controversial subject. Such a document was drawn up by these men as an apology rather than a confession. It treated such subjects as; Human Doctrines and Ordinances, Marriage of Priests, Mass, Confession, Power of the Bishops, and others.²⁰ While this was

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²⁰. Cf. Conc. Trig, op. cit., p. 15

being written, Dr. Eck, who was the spearhead of the Roman defense, accused Luther and his followers of almost every conceivable heresy. Because of these false accusations, the original plan of presenting only the controversial subjects was abandoned, and the document was enlarged to include almost every article of the Lutheran faith. This revision was done after the representatives had arrived at Augsburg. Luther was not present at this revision because he feared that the papal forces would not allow his safe return. Consequently, it was drawn up largely by Melancthon under the inspiration of Luther, who, although not present at the Diet, was in constant touch with the representatives at Augsburg.²¹ The result of this change was the First Unadulterated Augsburg Confession, signed by the Protestant princes and leaders and presented to the Emperor, Charles V, at the imperial diet of Augsburg.

"The celebrated confession, drawn up by Melancthon, in a conciliatory spirit, but defining clearly the essential tenets of Protestantism - a creed which has obtained more currency and respect than any other Protestant symbol - was read to the assembly."²²

Following that, a reply composed by Eck and other Catholic theologians was also presented. Then followed

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²¹. Cf. *ibid*, p. 17

²². G. Fisher, *History of the Reformation*, 2nd ed., p. 105

the unsuccessful efforts at compromise. The diet was a failure as far as accomplishing its main purpose was concerned, but great is its importance to Protestantism. When Charles V called the diet of Augsburg, he called into being, not a compromise, but a declaration of faith which has been honored by Protestants since that day. It stands as the progenitor of all the following great confessions.

This diet brought forth another statement, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. It was composed by Melancthon and approved by Luther in reply to the charges brought against them by Dr. Eck and the Roman theologians. It treats of the same subjects and is divided into the same heads as the Confession itself. It was subscribed to by the Protestant theologians at Smalcald in 1537.²³

When the Augsburg Confession was written, both Luther and Melancthon were in hopes of a compromise. The conciliatory spirit of Melancthon may be seen in his letter to Camerarius in 1530. "Oh would that I could, not indeed fortify the domination, but restore the administration of the Bishops. For I see what manner of Church we shall have when the ecclesiastical body has been disorganized. I see that afterwards there will arise a much more intolerable tyranny of the princes than there ever was before."²⁴

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²³. Cf. A. Hodge, op. cit., p. 27

²⁴. Conc. Trig., op. cit., p. 54

2. Smalcald Articles

The Smalcald Articles were written with a different purpose in view. Following the Diet of Augsburg, and for the purpose of self-defense, the Protestant princes joined together in The Protestant Defensive League of Smalcald. (1531) They admitted, also, four of the imperial cities of South Germany which had formerly been in alliance with the Swiss, adherents to the Zwinglian theology.²⁵ Due to theological differences among themselves, and because of the prospect of a council convoked by the Pope, the Elector John Frederick asked Luther to draw up articles which should represent the position of the Smalcald League. The Preface by Dr. Luther gives adequate explanation of their writing:

"Since Pope Paul III convoked a council last year, to assemble at Mantua about Whitsuntide, and afterwards transferred it from Mantua, so that it is not yet known where he will or can fix it, and we on our part either had to expect that we would be summoned also to the Council or fear that we would be condemned unsummed, I was directed to compile and collect the articles of our doctrine in order that it might be plain in the case of deliberation as to what and how far we would be willing and able to yield to the Papists, and in what points we intended to persevere and abide to the end.

I have accordingly compiled these articles and presented them to our side. They have also been accepted and unanimously confessed by our side, and it has been resolved that, in the case that the Pope with his adherents should ever be so bold as seriously and in good faith, without lying and cheating, to hold a truly free Christian Council, they be publicly delivered in order to set forth the Confession of our faith."

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²⁵. Cf. Fisher, op. cit., p. 136

From this last sentence it can be seen that Luther's patience with the Papacy had run out. Moreover, his health at that time was poor. At Smalcald, while suffering excruciating pain, he declared, "I shall die as the enemy of all enemies of my Lord Christ." When ready to leave Smalcald, he made the sign of the Cross over his followers and said, "May the Lord fill you with his blessing and with hatred against the Pope." He had also chosen as the epitaph over his grave: "Living, I was thy pest; dying, I shall be thy death, O Pope!"²⁶ He saw that the only unity of the church, for which he could hope, would be the unity of submission to the Pope. He would never submit!

Another reason for the severity of tone in the Smalcald Articles was the political aspect of the controversy. The formation of the Smalcald League and the impending formation of the Catholic princes into the Holy League, which took place in the following year, made the feeling tense. It served to increase the distrust and hatred of each other. It was under such circumstances that the Smalcald Articles were accepted in 1537. Melancthon accepted them with reservations because he felt that they were too severe. He still clung to the hope of reconciliation.

The Larger and Smaller Catechisms of Luther were prepared by him in 1530, "the first for the use of the

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²⁶Conc. trig., op. cit., p. 49

preachers and teachers, the last as a guide in the instruction of youth."²⁷ Since these have little bearing upon our subject, they need no further comment.

3. Formula of Concord

The Formula of Concord was preceded by several theological controversies within the Lutheran Church. It was the desire for settlement and the need for a clarifying statement that gave rise to the formation of this document. "This confession contains a more scientific and thoroughly developed statement of the Lutheran doctrine than can be found in any other of their public symbols. Its authority, however, is acknowledged only by the high Lutheran party; that is, by that party in the Church which consistently carries the peculiarities of Lutheran theology out to the most complete development."²⁸

The official high Lutheran decisions, in regard to these controversies, are given in the first eleven articles of the Formula. Article I dealt with the Flaccian Controversy. Article II settled the Synergistic Controversy. Article III dealt with the Osiandristic Controversy. Likewise, each of the eleven articles is concerned with one of the controversies of that time.²⁹

Jacob Andrea was the most persevering and successful of the Lutherans in his efforts toward peace in the Lutheran circle of theologians. In 1573, he published on the controversial subjects a series of sermons entitled, Six

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²⁷. A. Hodge, op. cit., p. 27

²⁸. ibid, p. 27

²⁹. Cf. Conc. Trig., op. cit., p. 103

Christian Sermons. Receiving a favorable reaction, these were revised under the name of Swabian Concordia, the first draft of the Formula of Concord. This was revised and called the Maulbrom Formula, a brief statement which eliminated technical Latin terms and all quotations except those from Luther's works. In this form it was quite widely approved. At Torgau, in 1576, this was again revised by a body of Lutheran theologians and called the Torgau Book, containing twelve articles in the same sequence as the Formula of Concord. Objections being raised because of its length, Andrea prepared a Summary of the content. Both the Summary and the Thorough Declaration were revised again by a company of theologians and named the Bergic Book or the Formula of Concord.

It was feared that to submit this document to a general convention would only lead to fresh controversy. Consequently, it was sent to the princes and theologians for them to subscribe to individually. As a result, the Formula of Concord was signed by the electors, dukes, princes, counts, barons, pastors, and teachers who represented about two-thirds of the Lutheran territories of Germany.³⁰

In view of the history of this document, it is evident that it should be the most thorough and scientific of the Lutheran Confessions.

The last of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church

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30. Cf. Conf. Trig. p. 247

to be written was the Saxon Visitation Articles. They were adopted in 1593 by the Electorate of Saxony in an effort to stamp out Crypto-Calvinism. Until 1836, all teachers and ministers of Electoral Saxony were required to subscribe to it.³¹

4. Results of Historical Study

The Lutheran Confessions grew out of the needs of the time in which they were written. That is self-evident from the historical survey given above. They were addressed to the problems that were foremost in the minds of the theologians and the people of that day. The development of the doctrine of Revelation in the creeds is dependent upon and governed by the necessity of the day. Let us, then, consider the creedal statements about the doctrine of Revelation in the light of these historical facts.

Since the formal principle of the Reformation is that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the rule and norm of faith, it would seem that so important a principle would receive very careful statement in the confessions. The opposite is the fact. This can be seen from the shortness of the quotations at the opening of the chapter. What is the reason for such paucity of statement?

One reason is the conciliatory tone of the earlier confessions. Of the Lutheran confessions, the most mild and conciliatory is the Augsburg Confession and its accompanying Apology. The reason is evident from the fact that there were still hope and great desire for reunion with the Roman Church. Because of this hope, the Reform-

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31. Cf. *Conf. Hist.* 109

ers wished to show that their position was not against the early church. They quoted not only Scripture, but also the Fathers. They appealed not only to the Word of God, but to the best of the writings of the Fathers and the traditions, showing that they were not in opposition to the true Apostolic Church. This does not mean that those who composed and subscribed to the Augsburg Confession were willing to take tradition and the writings of the Fathers as coordinate authority with the Scripture, but rather to convict the Roman Church of being out of harmony with the writings of its revered Fathers. Moreover, Luther and his associates would not make an issue of any of the traditions unless they were directly opposed to the Scripture. We conclude, in spite of the references to the traditions and the writings of the Fathers, that they were not meant to be coordinate authorities with the Scripture, but were introduced for other reasons.

The later confessions are not conciliatory, as can be seen from the quotations at the opening of this chapter. They definitely cut off the Lutheran Church from adherence to anything but Scripture. Luther and his followers were becoming constantly more opposed to anything that was a part of the Roman Church. No longer did they have anything to gain by compromise. This accounts partially for the stronger and clearer statement in the later confessions in regard to the final authority in Christianity.

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A second reason for the brevity of statement concerning the doctrine of Revelation is that the authority of the Bible and its inspiration were not severely challenged by either of the two major parties. The Roman Church, as well as the Protestant, accepted the Scripture. The contention was not over the Scriptures themselves, but whether there were other authorities besides the Scripture. Since the confessions were addressed to the needs of the times, it can be seen that the doctrine of Revelation as contained in Scripture, and Scripture alone, should escape careful definition. Later, when the Formula of Concord was written, this fundamental aspect of the controversy was seen in better perspective and given place.

Still another reason for such sparse reference to the doctrine of Revelation was Luther's own doubt, particularly about the canonicity of certain books of the Bible. The Lutheran symbols are silent on the extent of the canon. One of the modern Lutheran writers says, "Luther had doubts concerning the canonicity of James, Jude, Hebrews and the Apocalypse. The reason was that the Lutheran theologians did not accept the authority of any church for canonicity, but the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures bears testimony to the great truths of our salvation."³² Mention of Luther's views will again be made later in the chapter. Suffice to say

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³². Klotsche, op. cit., p. 150

here that Luther's doubts would tend toward a meager statement rather than to a lengthy exposition of his views.

A last consideration which bears upon the brevity of the Lutheran confession on this subject is that they are, in general, the earliest of the three groups of confessions which we are to study. Fundamental issues are not always clearly discerned in the early stages of a struggle such as this. Later theologians could see the struggle in a better perspective and a clearer understanding of the fundamental issues involved.

Whatever else may be said, the one basic statement, that Scripture was the final court of appeal in every controversy, still stands as the rock upon which the Reformers stood. And that is true, regardless of whether or not they saw the issue clearly. God's message was brought to them through the written Word alone.

B. Views of Luther

The greatest single influence upon the formation of all of the Lutheran confessions was the mind of Luther. Indeed, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology were given their form by Melancthon, but at a time when the minds of these two men were in closest harmony. It was Luther who inspired and gave his approval to the writing. Later, the Smalcald Articles came directly from the pen of Luther. The Formula of Concord contains quotations, besides those from Scripture, only from the writings of

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Luther. This shows the dependence of the Lutheran theologians upon Luther's thought even years after his death. Since Luther has so great an influence, it is well for us to use Luther's personal views as a background upon which to set forth the meaning of the confessions in regard to Revelation..

1. Emphasis on Justification by Faith

Anything that has already been quoted or determined from the Lutheran confessions will certainly apply to Luther's personal views. Scripture was his authority to which he continually appealed. Through it he had come to his own great experience of justification by faith. Our question is: How much farther did he go? The difficulty in answering this question lies in the fact that the Patriarch of Lutheranism never addressed himself to this problem in any extended writing. His views must be gleaned from his writings upon other subjects.

The theme of all the teachings of Luther was that men are justified by faith alone. That was the burden of the message of salvation. Even Scripture itself, the vehicle of this message, was judged by it. The oft quoted statement of Luther, "The Epistle of James is a veritable Epistle of straw,"³³ can be understood only in the light of his emphasis on faith. Since the Epistle of James stresses the ethical side of Christianity, it is natural that Luther should regard it with less esteem

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Quoted by Kensinger, Martin Luther's View of Inspiration, p. 34, from a translation of Luther's Preface to the New Testament, ed. of 1524, and translated from the Latin by Dr. Agide Pirazzini.

than some of the Epistles of Paul. To clarify his view, we quote from the Preface to Luther's Bible:

"As the Old Testament is a book in which the law and the commandments of God, as well as the history of those who have observed or disobeyed them, are written, so the New Testament is a book in which are contained the Gospel and the promises of God as well as the history of those who have believed or disbelieved them."

"....For what St. Paul teaches and exhorts with words and sayings from Holy Writ, St. Luke also shows and demonstrates by examples through history what actually did take place, namely what St. Paul says, that no law, no work, can justify man, but faith alone in Jesus Christ. You see in this book a beautiful mirror in which the doctrine of justification by faith is clearly represented. For you find in the historical parts examples which are at once sure and satisfactory testimonies which will never fail you, and upon which you may with confidence rely."³⁴

2. The Bible as the Word of God

The Bible was considered as the mirror in which the revelation of the Gospel, justification by faith, was seen in its historical setting. "Scripture is the cradle in which Christ lies."³⁵ Because of this, the Gospel and the First Epistle of John, and the Epistles of Paul, especially to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians were considered by him as the finest exposition of the justification which was accomplished by Christ.

We must not conclude, however, that Luther held a loose conception of the written Word of God. Kensinger says, "By this he could not have meant that the whole process by which God was revealing Himself was unnecessary.

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34. Quoted by Kensinger, op. cit., p. 30 from a translation by T. A. Readwin.

35. Quoted by Brunner, op. cit., p. 152

He did not mean that the whole Old Testament could be thrown aside, but rather that the practical value, accumulated in the process, is epitomized in these books, i. e., Epistles of Paul, etc."³⁶

We find Luther's firm stand expressed at Marburg, when, putting his finger upon the unerring Word of God, he said:

"God's word is God's word; that needs no long discussion. He that charges God with falsehood, or blasphemes Him in respect to one word, or says that it is a matter of little importance that He be blasphemed and charged with falsehood, blasphemes all of God, and makes light of all blasphemy of God."³⁷

Any book which he accepted as canonical was God's word, all of it.

3. Christ as the Revealer

For Luther, the priestly office of Christ seemed to stand above the prophetic, or revealing office. Jacobs confirms this by saying: "While giving prominence to the office of Christ as a Prophet, the Revealer of the Father's will, without Whose words we can know nothing of God aright, and Whose authority as a teacher, when contrasted with that of popes and councils, is supreme and final, he constantly shows that the goal of the Prophetic office is the Priestly office."³⁸

4. Authority in Interpretation

Who then is the authority in the interpretation of the Revelation? Luther answered that it is the individual believer who has the right to read and to know God's word.

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36. Kensinger, op. cit., p. 31

37. Quoted by Jacobs, Martin Luther, p. 352

38. Jacobs, op. cit., p. 359

Man is not able to comprehend this by himself, but is enlightened by the power of the Holy Ghost. Luther states this clearly in his commentary on Galatians:

"Wherefore it (the Gospel) is the kind of a doctrine that is not learned or gotten by any study, diligence, or wisdom of man, not yet by the law of God, but it is revealed by God Himself, as Paul saith in this place; first by the external word: then by the working of God's spirit inwardly. The Gospel, therefore, is a divine word that came down from heaven, and is revealed by the Holy Ghost, who was also sent for the same purpose: yet is such sort, notwithstanding, that the outward word must go before. For Paul himself had no inward revelation, until he had heard the outward word from heaven, which was this, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Acts 9:4. First, therefore, he heard the outward word, then afterwards followed revelations, the knowledge of the word faith, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost."³⁹

We also quote from Luther's Address to the Nobility:

"They (the Papists) must acknowledge that there are pious Christians among us, that have the true faith, spirit, understanding the mind of Christ; why, then, should we reject their word and understanding, and follow a Pope, who has neither understanding nor spirit? What, then, becomes of St. Paul's words: 'But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man'? (I Cor. 2:15) Balaam's ass was wiser than the Prophet. If God spake by an ass against a prophet, why should he not speak by a pious man against the Pope?"⁴⁰

5. Summary

Luther, we conclude, believed that the Bible as interpreted by the individual, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, was the final authority to which anyone may appeal. He questioned the canonicity of certain books, but those that he fully accepted as a part of the

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39. Luther, Commentary on Gal., edited by S. S. Schmucker, 1840, p. 191

40. Quoted by Jacobs, op. cit., p. 159

canon, were God's Word, inspired and preserved by God. These inspired books were different from all others. He believed that the authors had more than the ordinary "illumination of the spirit" which every Christian may have. On the other hand, he was more concerned with the meaning of Scripture than with the words, and he was cognizant of the human element in their composition. To Luther, God could reach man, and man could reach God, only through the Incarnate Word made available to the heart by means of the written and preached Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

III. FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE

With this understanding of the theology of the most influential mind of the early Reformation, we will formulate the doctrine of Revelation as found in the confessions which came as a result of his teaching and inspiration.

It is evident from the preceding discussion that the confessions hold firmly to the Scripture as God's Word. The terms "Scripture" and "God's Word" are at times used interchangeably.⁴² Moreover, appeal is continually made to Scripture as authoritative. We go on to inquire how much more of this doctrine is actually formulated in these statements. We proceed to set forth as much as we can reasonably infer from other passages. In this matter, it is against our wishes to make any inferences or to build any theories besides those that are intimated in these

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⁴¹. Cf. Kensinger, op. cit., p. 45

⁴². Cf. Ap. II, 4

documents. There are three factors in the Lutheran confessions which bear upon this subject, namely, the function of Jesus Christ as Revealer, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the inspiration of the Scriptures. We will base the following discussion upon these three headings.

A. Function of Christ as Revealer

The function of Jesus Christ as the Revealer finds small place in the Lutheran Confessions. The great emphasis in reference to the Savior is the fact of redemption from sin rather than the revelation of God.⁴³ No section or article is given to this subject. The clearest intimation is found in the Formula of Concord under the relation between the Law and the Gospel.

"....the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

"But if the Law and the Gospel, likewise also Moses himself as a teacher of the Law, and Christ as a preacher of the Gospel, are contrasted one with another, we believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel is not a preaching of repentance or reproof, but properly nothing else than a preaching of consolation, and a joyful message which does not reprove or terrify, but comforts consciences against the terrors of the Law, points alone to the merit of the Christ, and raise them up again by the lovely preaching of the grace and favor of God, obtained through Christ's merit.

"As to the revelation of sin, because the veil of Moses hangs before the eyes of all men as long as they hear the bare preaching of the Law, and nothing concerning Christ, and therefore do not learn from the Law to perceive their sins aright, but either become presumptuous hypocrites as the Pharisees, or despair like Judas, Christ takes the Law into His hands, and explains it spiritually. And thus the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all sinners, how great it is; by this means they are directed to the Law, and then first learn from it to know aright their sins - a knowledge which Moses could never have forced out of them.

43. F. C., thor. Dec., VIII, 47

"Accordingly, although the preaching of the suffering and death of Christ, the Son of God, is an earnest and terrible proclamation and declaration of God's wrath, whereby men are first led into the Law aright, after the veil of Moses has been removed from them, so that they first know aright how great things God in His Law requires of us, none of which we can observe, and therefore are to seek all our righteousness in Christ:

"Yet as long as all this proclaims God's wrath and terrifies man, it is still not properly the preaching of the Gospel, but the preaching of Moses and the Law, and therefore a foreign work of Christ, by which He arrives at His proper office, that is, to preach grace, console, and quicken, which is properly the preaching of the Gospel."⁴⁴

Here is the intimation of Christ's work of revelation, the revelation of the Gospel, of grace and peace, and also of sin and the wrath of God. It is to be noticed, however, that there is clear distinction between the Law and the Gospel; and the revelation of the Law is clearly attributed to Moses. There was certainly an underlying recognition in the mind of the authors of the revealing work of Christ, and of His work made plain and preserved for us in the Scripture, particularly the New Testament; but this office is overshadowed by the sacrificial work of Christ for the sins of mankind.

In theological circles the offices of Christ are often treated under three heads, designated Prophet, Priest, and King. It is the Prophetic office which treats Christ as the Revealer. The Lutheran position may be partially determined from several quotations from its present-day exponents.

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⁴⁴. F. C., Epit., V, 6 - 10

"The Christian Faith assumes the historical reality of Jesus Christ, and from this as a center, derives all knowledge and reaches all conclusions."⁴⁵ Certainly the Lutheran Confessions would confirm that. But the Lutheran Confessions do not treat the mediatorial office of Christ under the aspect of the Prophet. "In describing the work of Christ they emphasize neither His teaching, nor miracles, nor example, but they do emphasize His sacrifice."⁴⁶ Following the Reformed theologians, as E. H. Klotsche admits, the Lutherans now use the terminology of Prophet, Priest, and King. H. E. Jacobs defines the Prophetic office as "That by which Christ declares to men, for all time, and for all places, the nature and will of God."⁴⁷

We conclude, in regard to the function of Jesus Christ as Revealer, that the Lutheran Confessions imply that He is the great and final Revelation, but that this office is subservient to His mediatorial work. Moses is the one who revealed the Law. These revelations come to us in the Holy Scripture. We may infer that the revelations recorded in the Old Testament also include those given to the Prophets, since the Prophets are quoted with the same authority as other portions of Scripture. We have, then, Moses and the Prophets bringing to Israel revelations from God, recorded for us in the Word of God. As the supreme Revelation stands Jesus Christ.

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- 45. Jacobs, Summary of Christian Doctrine, 1905 ed., p. 3
- 46. Klotsche, op. cit., p. 160
- 47. Jacobs, Sum. of Chris. Doc., p. 161

B. Work of the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation lies in the transfer of that Revelation as recorded in the Word of God to the heart and mind of mankind in the present time as well as in the past. This means that the Holy Spirit was instrumental in bringing the Revelation not only to the heart of the believer, but also to the one who originally received the Revelation.

The following quotations show clearly the Lutheran belief in regard to the work of the Holy Spirit:

"Likewise, the article concerning Christian liberty also is here at stake, which the Holy Ghost through the mouth of the holy apostle so earnestly charged His Church to preserve."⁴⁸

"Without the outward Word, however, they were not holy, much less would the Holy Ghost have moved them to speak when they were still unholy; for they were holy, says he, since the Holy Ghost spake through them."⁴⁹

"And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may be protected against the enthusiasts,..... For the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word."⁵⁰

"They (the adversaries) have condemned several articles contrary to the manifest Scripture of the Holy Ghost; so far are they from overthrowing our propositions by means of the Scriptures."⁵¹

"If bishops have the right to burden churches with infinite traditions, and to ensnare consciences, why does Scripture so often prohibit to make, and to listen to, traditions? Why does it call them 'doctrines of devils'? In Tim. 4:1 Did the Holy

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- 48. F. C., Thor. Dec., X, 15
- 49. S. A., Part III, X, 3
- 50. S. A., Part III, VIII, 7
- 51. Ap., Intro., 9

Ghost in vain forewarn of these things?"⁵²

"God the Holy Ghost, however, does not effect conversion without means, but uses for this purpose the preaching and hearing of God's WordAnd it is God's will that His Word should be heard, and that man's ears should not be closed. Ps. 95:8 With this Word the Holy Ghost is present, and opens the hearts, so that they, as Lydia in Acts 16:14, are attentive to it, and are thus converted alone through the grace and power of the Holy Ghost, whose work alone the conversion of man is."⁵³

"That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for ourtown merits, but for Christ's sake justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake."⁵⁴

It is impossible to accuse these confessions of a lack of clarity on two points, namely, that the Holy Ghost is the One who brings the original Revelation to the mind of the prophets and apostles, and that it is He who enlightens the heart of the believer so that he receives the Revelation which is written in the Word of God. Moreover, it was upon this testimony of the Holy Ghost in the hearts of the believers that the authority of Scripture was founded.

C. Theory of Inspiration

The Lutheran Confessions contain no doctrine of Inspiration. This is ~~no~~ positive statement that can be deduced from them in this regard. However, they do contain presuppositions upon which varying theories of Inspiration have been founded. As quoted above, we read that "the Holy Ghost warns of these things." The Bible is quoted as if it were verbally inspired. The

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52. A. C.; XXVIII, 49
53. F. C.; Epist. II, 4, 5

fact that the Holy Ghost guided the writing of the Scripture leads to the fact of some kind of Inspiration which sets apart the Bible from all other books. What theory of Inspiration that shall be is not determined by any of the creedal statements.

In this view, we are supported by E. H. Klotsche, who is himself a Lutheran.⁵⁵ However, Engelder, Arndt, Graebner, and Mayer, in their book entitled Popular Symbolics, have set forth a doctrine of Inspiration presumably based on the Symbols of the Lutheran Church.

"The Lutheran Church teaches that the Bible does not merely contain the Word of God, but that every word of it is, because of verbal inspiration, the direct, immediate word of God. The Holy Ghost 'spake by the prophets.' Nicene Dr. 7. 'The Holy Ghost spake through them.' S. A., P. III, VIII, 13.....The Lutheran Confessions identify Holy Scripture with the Word of God. 'God's Word of Holy Scripture.' Ap. II, 4....The Holy Ghost is the author of Scripture; it is the 'Scripture of the Holy Ghost.' Ap., Preface, 9. What Paul wrote the Holy Ghost wrote. Ap. IV, 88, 107. Thus there can be no errors in Holy Scripture.....

".....The prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are authentic as written by the prophets and apostles. A correct version is God's Word as truly as the original Hebrew and Greek."⁵⁶

At first sight, this seems to be a logical inference. But upon further study, it seems to the author that it is a misuse of the confession to try to adduce proof from them in support of any personal view of Inspiration.

In the first place, there is no passage that attempts to set forth a view of Inspiration. Secondly, the passages cited were not meant by the writers of the con-

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55. Cf. Klotsche, op. cit., p. 149

56. Engelder, Arndt, Graebner, Mayer, Popular Symbolics, 1934 ed., p. 26, 27

fessions to prove a doctrine of Inspiration. Thirdly, the fact that the Holy Ghost spoke through the prophets does not imply that the very words were given to them. Fourthly, to use "Holy Scripture" and "Word of God" synonymously certainly does not make a theory of verbal inspiration necessary. In the fifth place, "the Scripture of the Holy Ghost" implies Inspiration, but is far from proving that the Holy Ghost is the verbal author of the scriptures. Lastly, the flabbiness of the argument comes to light in the statement, "What Paul wrote the Holy Ghost wrote." There is no such statement in the confessions. The two references cited are several pages apart. One of them speaks of the writings of Paul, and the other speaks of the writings of the Holy Ghost. Both passages are in a context of justification by faith. The idea of Inspiration has not the slightest bearing upon the discussion, to say nothing of proving a sectarian theory of verbal Inspiration. I repeat that this is an illègitimate use of the creeds of the Christian Church. The Reformers and their followers did not intend, evidently, to make any hard and fast dogma concerning the way in which God inspired His Holy Word.

D. Comparison with Luther's Views

The best check upon the rightness of these conclusions, as we have made them throughout the chapter, will be to see how they dove-tail with the personal views of Dr. Luther. As can easily be seen, there is great similarity. Both appeal to Scripture as the norm and rule of faith, although they do not address themselves to this topic in any extended discourse. Both stress the redemptive work of
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Christ at the expense of the prophetic office. Both are vague about the extent of the canon. Both hold strongly to the work of the Holy Spirit. Truly, the confessions were cast from the glowing words of the ardent follower of Christ, Martin Luther.

IV. SUMMARY

A. The Final Authority

From nearly every page of the Lutheran Confessions it may be implied that the Scripture is the final authority, the rule and norm of faith. They also are explicit in their rejection of other authority such as that of the Pope, of traditions, of the writings of the Fathers, of subjectivism and reason.

B. Historical Study

Our historical study has shown above all that the Lutheran Confessions grew out of the needs of the times. The doctrine of Revelation was fundamental to the Reformation, yet its creedal expression is very brief. The several causes were as follows: the desire for conciliation at the time of the formation of the earliest symbols, the fact that revelation through Scripture was not challenged by either major party, the doubts of Luther himself concerning the canonicity of certain books, and the possibility that the fundamental issues of the Reformation were not clearly seen in all their ramifications during the early stages of the struggle.

C. Views of Luther

With reference to the personal views of Dr. Luther, we

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conclude that he believed the Bible, as interpreted by the individual under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to be the final authority. He questioned the canonicity of certain books, but those which he fully approved he believed to be God's inspired Word. He believed that the authors had more than the ordinary illumination of the Holy Spirit. Yet to him it was the meaning and the content, rather than the form, that he most zealously defended.

D. Final Statement of Doctrine

Although not fully stated, the Lutheran Confessions imply that the supreme revelation of God is Jesus Christ. Revelations were also made to Moses and the prophets. These revelations are recorded for us in the Old and New Testaments. The part of the Holy Spirit lies in the special guidance of the authors and in the illumination of Scripture to the reader so that it may be comprehended by him as the Word of God. It would be a misuse of the confessions to attempt to formulate from them a specific theory of Inspiration, for they do not contain such. They do, however contain the basic presuppositions upon which such a theory may be built. These presuppositions are: that there has been a special revelation, that this is conveyed by the Bible, that the Bible is unique and authoritative, that its authors were especially guided by the Holy Spirit, and that Scripture passages are quoted in the confessions as being the Word of God. Certainly the confessions support the fact of Inspiration. On the other hand, there is no explicit theory as to the means or extent of it.

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E. Emphases and Omissions

We have, as the final consideration of this chapter, the pointing out of the emphases and omissions of the Lutheran Confessions. Let it be said, first of all, that in comparison with the complete statement of some of the other doctrines, such as justification by faith and the Sacraments, the doctrine of Revelation has only a minor place.

The strongest emphases lie upon two points, namely, Scripture as the rule and norm of faith and practice, and the function of the Holy Spirit in making a Revelation possible to the believer. Concerning the former, it is fully implied in all of the confessions and stated in the Formula of Concord. Concerning the latter it may be found in stated form in all except the catechisms.

In regard to the omissions, it has already been shown that there is no theory of Inspiration set forth. The doctrine of Christ as the Revealer finds very little place. There is no mention of the status of the Apocrypha, not a list of the canonical books. The importance of these considerations will come to light in the succeeding comparative study of the Lutheran, Reformed, and English confessions.

CHAPTER III
CONTINENTAL REFORMED CONFESSIONS

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CONTINENTAL REFORMED CONFESSIONS

I. BASIC STATEMENTS CONCERNING THE DOCTRINE

A. The Scripture as the Rule and Norm of Faith

The Continental Reformed confessions give a more complete statement of the doctrine of Revelation than do the Lutheran standards. All those which we are to consider, except the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, have in the opening sections a statement concerning the authority to which they appeal in making a confession of the fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith.

As in the preceding chapter, the first consideration will be the Bible as the rule and norm of faith. A cursory glance at these standards will show beyond a doubt that the Reformed churches adhered as firmly to the Bible as the final court of appeal as did the Lutheran.

The very first confession to be written, the Sixty-seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli, is, in one sense, the Protestant declaration of dependence upon the Scripture alone as the final authority. The first confessional sentence ever written by any of the Reformers, Lutheran or Reformed, is this: "All who say that the gospel is nothing without the approbation of the Church err and cast reproach upon God."⁵⁷

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57. 67 Art., I. The text of the Reformed confessions may be found in Schaff, *Cr. Chris.*, Vol. III.

Turning the pages of the other confessions, such statements as these may be found:

"We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: Nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith."⁵⁸

"In the cause of faith we do not admit any other judge but God Himself speaking by the Holy Scriptures, what is the true and what is the false."⁵⁹

Even the casual reader can readily ascertain that these confessions are based upon the Scripture as the final authority. It is God's Word.

B. Rejection of All Other Sources of Authority.

Quotations have already been given from the Sixty-seven Articles which demonstrates the rejection of the authority of the papacy. The French Confession makes the following concise statement: "We believe that the Word contained in these books has proceeded from God, and receives its authority from him alone, and not from men.... No authority, whether of antiquity or custom, or numbers, or human wisdom, or judgements, (etc.), should be opposed to these Holy Scriptures."⁶⁰ From the following excerpts it will be seen that the other confessions share the same view as the French:

"The Power of the Pope and the Bishops has no foundation in the Holy Scriptures and the doctrine of Christ."⁶¹

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58. Belgic, VII
59. II Helv., II, 3
60. French Conf. V
61. 67 Art., 34

"We reject all human inventions and all laws which man would introduce into the Worship of God,..."⁶²

"Equally do we reject all human traditions....."⁶³

"Neither may we compare any writings of man, though they be ever so holy, with these divine Scriptures: nor ought we to compare custom, (etc.) with the truth of God. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever doth not agree with this infallible rule."⁶⁴

"We do not despise the interpretations and explanations of the holy Greek and Latin fathers... from whom nevertheless, we humbly recede when they are discovered to bring forward, or to allege anything unbecoming, or unwholesome, or contrary to Scripture."⁶⁵

C. The Extent of the Canon and Rejection of Apocrypha

The content of these statements is the common expression of both the Lutheran and the Reformed confessions. There are, however, two statements which are nowhere found in the Lutheran creeds: one is in regard to the extent of the canon; and the other is the rejection of the Apocrypha as an equal authority with the Scripture. These two statements are complementary to each other. They both depend upon the church's decision as to what books shall be considered as a part of God's Word. One is the positive statement of that decision, and the other is the negative.

"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."⁶⁶

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- 62. Belgic, 32
- 63. II Helv., II, 4
- 64. Belgic, VII
- 65. II Helv., II, 2
- 66. French IV

"Apocrypha may be read for instruction, so far as they agree with the canonical books, but they are far from having such power and efficacy as that we may from their testimony confirm any point of faith or of the Christian religion."⁶⁷

It is these two confessions just quoted, the French and the Belgic, that also contain the list of the canonical books. The list of the books is identical with the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible except that the Belgic confession omits the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

D. Summary

From the above quotations several general statements may be deduced. It may be said that the Reformed confessions stand for the Scriptures as the final authority and that these Scriptures consist of the canonical books listed in the confessions of faith. It follows that all other writings are inferior to the canonical books, whether it be the writings of the Fathers or the Apocrypha. The principle that the Scriptures are the sole authority bars the Pope, the traditions, the powers of reason, and the insight of intuition from any place of final authority in religion. The Word of God to man may be ascertained truly and authoritatively in and through the written Word.

II. SIDELIGHTS FROM OTHER SOURCES

A. The Zwinglian Reformation

Any creedal statement must be regarded as the product of a historical situation. In regard to the Reformed confessions, the dictum of Scripture was undoubtedly the controlling factor, but certainly not the only one to have its

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⁶⁷. Belgic VI

effect upon their composition. Although this thought has been previously expressed, it can bear repetition for it is basic in a proper interpretation of the creedal statements.

1. The Influence of Zwingli

The complexion of one man's mind can at times have great influence upon the development of thought in his age and in succeeding ages. We have only to think of the influence of John Locke upon Eighteenth Century thought. Another example in Emanuel Kant who scarcely left his native village throughout his life, yet his philosophical conception is known as one of the great water-sheds of modern philosophical speculation.

The Swiss reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, holds a somewhat similar position in relation to the field of Revelation. Few men would claim for him the acuteness of reason attributed to such a man as John Calvin, nor the fiery convictions of such a one as Martin Luther. Nevertheless, circumstances conspired to give him a place of importance in the formulation of the doctrine of Revelation as contained in the creeds.

Zwingli was known in his youth as a somewhat religiously inclined humanist. He became acquainted with Erasmus in 1515. He was a student of the Latin classics and taught himself Greek in order that he might read the New Testament. In 1516 he took a charge as a priest at Einsiedeln, which was the home of one of the famous pilgrim shrines.

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The most flagrant abuses practiced by the Church were often in connection with shrines. He was thus brought into daily contact with one of the least Scriptural manifestations of the Roman Church.⁶⁸ His earlier humanistic training had set him free from overbearing prejudice in favor of the Church. As a result he was better able to give honest judgment as to the Scriptural basis for the manifold practices which sprang up under the shelter of the shrine. As he studied the New Testament, the conviction grew upon him that there were great differences between the Scriptures and the Church of Rome. He was aware of the store of legends, the liberal indulgences, the image of Mary, and the peculiar sanctity which characterized Einsiedeln. Without directly assailing the worship of the Virgin, he preached the doctrine of salvation by Christ. To the pilgrims who thronged to hear him it seemed that they were hearing a new truth. It was then that he fully "made up his mind to go to the Word of God as the ultimate authority in preference to the dogmas of men."⁶⁹ In 1519 he was transferred to the Cathedral Church of Zurich. He went there with a firm purpose of expounding only the Bible to his hearers.⁷⁰ He soon won for himself a controlling influence in the city.

One of the turning points in his career came in 1523 at the public Disputation held in the great council Hall. It was there that he presented his Sixty-seven Articles,

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- 68. Cf. Walker, *The Reformation*, p. 151
- 69. Fisher, *op. cit.*, p. 122
- 70. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 122

the opening sentence of which is as follows: "All who say that the Gospel is nothing without the approbation of the Church err and cast reproach upon God."⁷¹ At an assembly of more than six hundred men and with the city council as judges he triumphantly maintained his position. It resulted in an injunction from the Council to all the clergy of Zurich to preach the Scriptures alone. Thus the Swiss Reformation, under the guidance of Zwingli, was begun upon the theme that the Bible is the supreme authority. This was clearly set forth and confirmed by an injunction from the council.

The impress of that action and the precedent set by it may be seen in the formation of all the Reformed creeds. The Scripture principle is dominant, not clouded by any of the lesser principles, nor confused with other grievances against the Church of Rome. "Zwingli begins with the objective principle of Protestantism, namely, the exclusive and absolute authority of the Bible in all matter of Christian faith and practice. The Reformed confessions do the same."⁷² Ulrich Zwingli, a man who was wise enough to see the fundamental principle, and courageous enough to stake his life upon it, stamped upon the Reformed churches and their creeds this principle of authority.

2. The Historical Succession of Zwinglian Confessions

In 1520 this principle received a more exact expres-

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71. 67 Art., I

72. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 369, 370

sion in the Declaration of the Evangelical States of the Empire of Spires. The statement is as follows: "We intend by the grace and help of God to hold forth this, that God's Word and the holy Gospel of the Old and New Testaments as contained in the Biblical books shall alone be preached sincerely and purely and nothing contrary thereto."⁷³

There is a maze of creedal statements which have come forth from this period. Most of these never acquired wide or lasting authority. Today they are considered merely as dogmatic expressions of the theological mind of a former generation. It is true that many of them are of little use to us in our present-day thinking, but on the other hand, many of these statements are the progenitors of great and lasting confessions. Great confessions have lineage as well as great men. Let us, then, trace through the development of the confessions which we have chosen as representative of the mind of the Continental Reformation.

A brief statement of belief was composed in 1526 by Berthold Haller and Francis Kolb who were ministers at Berne. These were revised by Zwingli and presented in 1528 before a large body of ministers and theologians gathered at Berne. From that conference the name The Ten Theses of Berne was derived. They were approved by the leading Swiss reformers and by Bucer and Capito of Strasburg.⁷⁴

The Diet of Augsburg was the occasion for the writing
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73. Quoted by Gumlich, Christian Creeds and Confessions, p. 53

74. Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol I, p. 208

not only of the famed Augsburg Confession but also of two other statements of doctrine, one composed by Zwingli and named by him The Confession of Faith to Emperor Charles V, and the other composed by Bucer, Capito, and Hedio, called the Tetrapolitan Confession.⁷⁵ Neither of these was presented at the Diet. The Tetrapolitan Confession was written in the same moderate tone as the Augsburg Confession, but begins by saying that nothing should be taught from the pulpit but what is clearly deduced from Scripture.⁷⁶

In the following year Zwingli wrote the last of his statements, An Exposition of Faith to King Francis I. This was composed only a few months before the death of the great reformer.⁷⁷

The First Confession of Basel was composed in 1534. Basel is situated on the border between Germany and Switzerland. This geographical position between the two great movements of the Reformation seems to be reflected in the creedal statement. It is one of the few Reformed confessions that does not begin with an assertion of the Bible principle. However, it concludes with the following statement: "We submit this our confession to the judgment of the divine Scriptures, and hold ourselves ready always thankfully to obey God and His Word if we should be corrected out of said holy Scriptures."⁷⁸

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- 75. Cf. Harmony of Confessions, 2nd ed., p. 2
- 76. Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 366
- 77. Cf. ibid p. 368
- 78. Quoted by Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 387

The First Helvetic Confession was written by Bucer and Capito. These men were present at the acceptance of the Ten Theses of Berne and at the presentation of the Augsburg Confession. It seems natural that they should have had well in mind the form and content of all the previous confessions. The composition is Zwinglian in character and begins with the usual statement of the authority of Scripture. This was the first of the confessions to gain wide recognition. It was adopted by all of the Swiss Cantons.⁷⁹

Finally, in 1562, one of the successors of Zwingli, named Bullinger, composed the Second Helvetic Confession. This is the best of the Swiss confessions, as is evidenced by its wide acceptance. For that reason it has been chosen to set forth the Zwinglian Reformed position in regard to the doctrine of Revelation. It follows closely the form and material of the First Helvetic Confession but is more complete and more clearly stated. Bullinger was an elderly man at the time of the writing. He had been an active supporter of Zwingli more than thirty years before and had since that time been steeped in his doctrine and teaching.

3. The Later Tendency Toward Biblicism

We wish here to anticipate one of our later conclusions. The reason for such anticipation is that it logically follows the preceding discussion of the Swiss confessions. Our object is to show that there was a tendency among the followers of the reformers toward Biblicism. By Biblicism we mean the objectifying of the Bible as the literal Word of God. It is a tendency which led to views similar to

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⁷⁹.Cf. ibid, Vol. I, p. 211

that of the mechanical inspiration of the Bible.

It is the opinion of B. F. Westcott that the followers of the reformers "invested the Bible as a whole with the attributes of mechanical infallibility which the Romanists had claimed for the Church. Pressed by the necessities of their position, the disciples of Calvin were contented to maintain the direct and supernatural action of a guiding power of the very words of the inspired writers.⁸⁰

This principle that Westcott has set forth is well illustrated by the Swiss confessions. The Second Helvetic Confession does not set forth any specific doctrine of Inspiration. However, there was another statement written a century later, the Helvetic Consensus Formula of 1675. This document asserts the literal inspiration of the Scriptures and the integrity of the traditional Hebrew text of the Old Testament, including the vowels as well as the consonants.⁸¹

The situation which called forth this rigid statement was the fact that Louis Capel, who was active during the first half of the century and was a great student of the Scriptures, denied the authority of the Hebrew vowel points. He opposed the theory of the Scholastics who asserted that the vowel points dated back to Adam. It was this situation that brought forth a reflection in this creedal expression. It was a reflection of the dominant mind of the time.

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80. Westcott, Intro. to Study of Gospels, p. 37

81. Cf. Klotsche, op. cit., p. 205

Here are exquisitely illustrated two very important principles. The first is that the creeds are the outgrowth of the mind of the age and address themselves to the situation at hand. The other is the principle expressed by Dr. Westcott that the Scholastic movement brought with it an over-emphasis upon the external and literal acceptance of the very words and syllables of the Bible, an emphasis beyond that of the Reformers.

B. The Calvinistic Reformation

1. The Interplay among All Confessions

The liberty has been taken to separate the Reformed creeds into the Zwinglian and Calvinistic families. Let it be clearly understood that by separating these into groups and families it is not to be implied that there were no other influences in the making of the creeds than those influences which came from the same family of symbols. Who can say how wide was the influence of the Augsburg Confession upon all later statements? Who would affirm that the teachings of Calvin did not influence the writer of the Second Helvetic Confession? It is well known that the various reformers in the several countries of Europe were well aware of the thoughts and theological trends of other countries and could not but be influenced by them.

The decade beginning with 1559 is the outstanding period in the formation of the Reformed symbols. Not only did it bring forth the Second Helvetic Confession, but it

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also bore four more of the great confessions which we are to consider. The Gallican or French Confession was composed in 1559, the Belgic Confession in 1561, the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563, and the First Scotch Confession, which we will consider under the British Reformed confessions, in 1560.

2. The Historical Succession of Calvinistic Confessions

The first draft of the French Confession was made by John Calvin. It is the only one of the great confessions which came from his pen. This was slightly revised, a preface addressed to King Francis II was added, and it was adopted by the Synod of Paris. Although it is a good statement of doctrine and received the approval of Calvin, it has never acquired popular approval comparable to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. One reason for this is its length which makes it less suitable for a common confession of faith. Another reason may be the later misfortunes of the French Church.

Among the most widely approved of confessional statements is the Belgic Confession. It was prepared chiefly by Guido de Bres in 1561 and publicly adopted by the Synod of Antwerp in 1566.⁸² All of the Belgian churches gave their approval. Later it was confirmed by the Synod of Wesel in 1568, of Emden in 1571, or Dort in 1574, of Middleberg in 1581. In 1619 it was somewhat revised and subscribed to by the Synod of Dort.⁸³ This document is

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82. Cf. Harmony of Confessions, p. 3

83. Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 504

thoroughly Calvinistic in character as is evident from its acceptance by the Synod of Dort in 1619. This was the same body which adopted that most thoroughly Calvinistic document, the Canons of Dort.

The next great statement to be written was the Heidelberg Catechism. It was composed by Ursinus and Olivianus, two men of the German Reformed church. One of its authors, Ursinus, was trained by Melancthon and Beza. The other was instructed under the Swiss reformers. They were guided in the composition by the catechisms of Calvin, Lasky, and Bullinger. Heidelberg is so situated geographically that the influences of all three movements, Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinistic could have full play. It was this composite of training and influence that bore that fine, moderate, stately document still dear to the hearts of thousands of people in America and Europe.

Calvinism reached its height of statement in the Canons of Dort. This symbol again provides an example of the way in which confessions grow out of circumstances. At the opening of the 17th Century Holland and Belgium were in the throes of the great Arminian controversy. In 1618 and 1619 the Synod of Dort considered and rejected the Articles of Remonstrance, composed by the Arminians, and accepted the Canons of Dort as a supplement to the Belgic Confession. This document has only five heads treating the particular points of difference from the Arminians. Therefore it has no section devoted to Scripture. Any

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statement in regard to Revelation must be gleaned from the discussion of other points of Doctrine.

3. Minor Confessions

There are many other statements which were accepted in certain localities but did not gain wide nor lasting authority. There are two that deserve mention here. They are the Second Bohemian Confession and the Hungarian Confession. The cause for their mention is that they state that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the clear testimony of God's will.⁸⁴ These, however, are obscure statements accepted only by very small groups of people. In the Harmony of the Confessions, printed first in 1586 and revised in 1643, there is a parallel statement of the doctrine of twelve confessions. Of these twelve the Augsburg Confession is the only one that does not have a section on the authority of the Scripture. Each of them plainly states the acceptance of Scripture to the exclusion of all other sources of authority.⁸⁵

C. The Influence of Calvin

1. The Place of His Institutes

Certainly no one would deny the preponderant influence of John Calvin upon the views held by Reformed theologians. His Institutes of the Christian Religion are known as the most outstanding exposition of the time on Reformed doctrine. As Luther influenced the Lutheran theologians, so Calvin did the Reformed. Therefore, his view of Revelation will

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⁸⁴. Cf. Harmony, op. cit., p. 6

⁸⁵. Cf. ibid, pp. 4 - 16

be examined briefly before formulating the doctrine as contained in the creeds.

2. His Theory of Knowledge.

The Institutes begin with an exposition of Calvin's theory of knowledge. The knowledge of God and that of man, says Calvin, are interdependent. A knowledge of man is necessary for a true knowledge of God. "The knowledge of ourselves is not only an incitement to seek after God, but likewise a considerable assistance toward finding him. On the other hand, it is plain that no man can arrive at a true knowledge of himself, without having first contemplated the divine character, and then descended to the consideration of his own."⁸⁶ We are never able to know our own unrighteousness and folly until we look above and see the holiness of God, for as long as we look only to ourselves we do not know what perfection is. Nor are we able to comprehend the holiness of God until we have seen our own unholiness.

The knowledge of God is not merely the notion that He exists, but also "an acquaintance with whatever we ought to know concerning Him, conducting to His glory and our benefit.....Our knowledge should tend to teach us fear and reverence, and to instruct us to implore all good at his hand, and to render him the praise of all that we receive."⁸⁷

Calvin continues by saying that the mind naturally possesses a general knowledge of God. Even Cicero observed

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86. Institutes, B. I., Ch. I, 1 and 2

87. ibid, Ch. II, 1 and 2

that there was no nation so barbarous as not to be persuaded of the being of God. Some sense of divinity is inscribed upon every heart. It will always be evident to persons of correct judgment that the idea of a Deity impressed on the mind of man is indelible. This knowledge which results in worship of God is the only thing that makes men superior to the brute creation.⁸⁸ This knowledge, however, has been blighted and corrupted partly by ignorance and partly by wickedness. "After the impious have wilfully shut their own eyes, it is the righteous vengeance of God upon them, to darken their understanding, so that, seeing, they may not perceive..... At length they involve themselves in such a vast accumulation of errors, that those sparks which enable them to discover the glory of God are smothered, and at last extinguished by the criminal darkness of iniquity."⁸⁹

3. Natural and Special Revelation

There are two means by which man may acquire a knowledge of God. The first is through the natural world. We see in the construction and government of the world the hand and mind of an omnipotent God. Moreover, in the continual care of his people we see a God who abundantly provides the needs of those who live in the world. In spite of natural manifestations of God, however, men derive no advantage therefrom for they persist in error rather than in truth.⁹⁰

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88. Cf., ibid, Ch. III

89. ibid, Ch. IV

90. Cf., ibid, Ch. V

Therefore, we need another and better assistance properly to direct us to a knowledge of God. "As persons who are old, or whose eyes are by any means become dim, if you show them the most beautiful book though they perceive something written, but can scarcely read two words together, yet, by the assistance of spectacles, will begin to read distinctly, - so the Scripture, collecting in our mind the otherwise confused notions of Deity, dispels the darkness, and gives us a clear view of the true God."⁹¹ It was undoubtedly by the assistance of Revelation that the Patriarchs were able to attain a familiar knowledge of God.

Calvin does not discuss the place of Christ in Revelation in these opening chapters of the Institutes, but refers the reader to a later part of the book where he treats the work of Christ. Calvin thinks of Christ as fulfilling three offices, that of Prophet, King, and Priest. Christ is the one who supremely reveals God to man. Although the Old Testament is also the Revelation of God and authoritative as such, still it is Christ Who, in all that He said and did, truly shows unto us God.⁹²

There is one more factor essential to Revelation, according to Calvin. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. This is necessary to a belief in the Scripture as the Word of God. The Holy Spirit Who inspired the writers also speaks in the heart of man to persuade him of the truth of the Word. Although we may demonstrate by logical proof that the Scriptures are true, still, the

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91. Cf. Institutes, Bk. I, Ch. VI, 1

92. Cf., ibid, Ch. XV, 2, Bk. II

final proof is the testimony of the Spirit. This is superior to all reason.⁹³ On the other hand, we cannot discard the Scriptures under the pretense of resorting to immediate revelations. God speaks through the written Word. There are no revelations that come to man without the Word. Christ gave the final and complete Revelation of God.⁹⁴

4. Lack of Statement Concerning Inspiration

Calvin does not define any specific doctrine of Inspiration except to state the fact of it. There are two statements which throw light upon his belief. "Whether God revealed Himself to the Patriarchs by oracles and visions, or suggested, by means of the ministry of men, what should be handed down by tradition to their posterity, it is beyond a doubt that their minds were impressed with a firm assurance of the doctrine, so that they were persuaded and convinced that the information they had received came from God."⁹⁵ And again, "Since we are not favored with daily oracles from heaven, and since it is only in the Scriptures that the Lord hath been pleased to preserve His truth in perpetual remembrance, it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself."⁹⁶ The first of these quotations would seem to indicate that he did not hold to a rigid view of verbal Inspiration because

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93. Cf. Institutes, Bk. I, Ch. VII

94. Cf. ibid, Ch. IX

95. Cf. ibid, Ch. VI, 2

96. Cf. ibid, Ch. VII, 1

he speaks of things which God "revealed or suggested" should be handed down by tradition to their posterity. The use of the word "suggested" and of the phrase "handed down by tradition" would not come very readily from the pen of one who held a rigid view of Inspiration. On the other hand, the second quotation shows that he felt that it was as much the Word of God as if God Himself had spoken it. Since Calvin is indefinite upon this point, those who expound his doctrines should refrain from fabricating his supposed views.

5. Summary

By way of a summary of the view of Calvin it may be said that he considered Revelation both from a subjective and an objective point of view. The subjective side consists of an ineradicable human capacity to know and worship the Creator in spite of the universal abuse thereof, and the implantation of faith by the inward operation of the Holy Spirit whereby the outward manifestations are made internally effective in human lives. The objective side consists of: the divine glory as reflected in the natural world and in the human constitution; the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the key for understanding the universe and for setting forth the doctrine of salvation centered in the life and work of Christ; the historical manifestation of God Himself in the incarnate Christ.⁹⁷

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⁹⁷. Cf. L. DeMoor, Revelation, Evangelical Quarterly, Oct. 1937, p. 368

The importance of the views of Calvin in relation to our discussion is twofold. In the first place, the Institutes set forth the basic theory of knowledge upon which the Reformed theologians built their doctrine of Revelation. In the second place, the views of Calvin give us a background upon which to set forth the doctrine as found in the creeds. Undoubtedly the writers of the later confessions as well as those who accepted them in the various synods and conferences were well acquainted with this great exposition of doctrine, and agreed, in general, with its tenets.

III. FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE AS FOUND IN THE CONFESSIONS

A. Belgic Confession

With this background, we are in position to consider and to expound the doctrine as it is found in the confessions. Our procedure will be to quote in its entirety the statement as found in the Belgic Confession and then to expound it and compare it with the other statements. The Belgic Confession has been chosen because it is the most complete and concise of the confessions which are to be considered in this chapter.

II. BY WHAT MEANS GOD IS MADE KNOWN UNTO US

"We know him by two means: first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his eternal power and God-head, as the apostle Paul saith, (Rom. 1:20) All which things are sufficient to convince men, and

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leave them without excuse. Secondly, he makes himself more clearly and fully known to us, by his holy and divine word; that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation.

III. OF THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD

"We confess 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 it and 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.

IV. CANONICAL BOOKS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

"We believe that the Holy Scriptures are contained in two books, namely, the Old and New Testaments, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged. These are thus named in the Church of God."⁹⁸

V. WHENCE DO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES DERIVE THEIR DIGNITY AND AUTHORITY?

"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.

VI. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CANONICAL AND APOCRYPHAL BOOKS

"We distinguish those sacred books from the apocryphal; viz: the third and fourth book of Esdras, the book of Tobias, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Syrach, Beruch, the appendix to the book of Esther, the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace, the history of Susannah, of Bell and the Dragon, the prayer of Manasses, and the two books of Maccabees. All which 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 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.

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98. The rest of this section contains a list of the canonical books as found in the Bible, except for the omission of the Lamentations of Jeremiah.

VII. THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES
TO BE THE ONLY RULE OF FAITH

"We believe that these Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: Nay, though it were an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul saith. For since it is forbidden, to add unto or take away any thing from the word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear, that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. 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. 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."⁹⁹

The first article quoted has a parallel statement in the French Confession. "As such this God reveals himself, firstly, in his words, in their creation, as well as in their preservation and control. Secondly, and more clearly, in his Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterwards committed to writing in the books which we call the Holy Scriptures."¹⁰⁰

Broadly speaking, revelation includes every act of God by which man may know Him. God reveals Himself in the constitution of universal nature,¹⁰¹ in the natural

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⁹⁹.Belgic, Art. II - VII
¹⁰⁰.French II
¹⁰¹.Ps. 19

law,¹⁰² in the history and preservation of the race, and in the Scripture.¹⁰³ In the exposition of the doctrine both the statements in the confessions and the Scripture references which they give will be used in order that the full meaning of the statements may be determined.

B. Natural Revelation

In speaking of the natural revelation, the creeds refer most frequently to the Nineteenth Psalm, which we shall quote:

"The heavens declare the glory of God;
The firmament showeth His handiwork.
Day unto day uttereth speech,
And night unto night showeth knowledge.
There is no speech nor language;
Their voice is not heard."¹⁰⁴

This Psalm is an exquisite jewel portraying to us the gloriousness of God's revelation in nature. Nowhere in all literature can we find a more beautiful picture of God's manifestation of Himself in His own handiwork. Notice the idea of perpetual testimony conveyed by the figure "day unto day.....and night unto night", following each other as witnesses in unbroken succession. The absence of articulate language, far from weakening the testimony, makes it stronger, for who can put into words the glories of God there revealed? All nature is but a theater for the display of God's glory.¹⁰⁵ What mortal is there so mean that his soul does not look up, that his

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102. Heb. 1:1-2

103. Rom. 1:20

104. Ps. 19:1-3

105. Cf., Calvin, op. cit., Bk. I, Ch. 4

heart does not yearn for the high and the holy when he sees the grandeur of the universe about him? Who does not feel that behind it all stands the unspeakable Lord of Lords? Are not the mountains "the raised letters upon which we blind children put our fingers and spell out the name of God?"¹⁰⁶ It must have been with this and other like passages in mind that the Reformers wrote and subscribed to this section of the creed.

We turn our attention for a moment to the Heidelberg Catechism because it adds a complementary idea which is not found in the other confessions. "Ques. 19. Whence knowest thou this (i. e. Jesus as Mediator) - Ans. From the Holy Gospel, which God himself revealed first in Paradise,....." God not only reveals Himself in nature, but He also endued man with an original revelation. The presentation of the first chapters of Genesis is that God gave a knowledge of Himself to the first human beings and that they recognized Him as their Maker.

Both the Belgic and the French Confessions speak not only of the creation, but also of the preservation and government of the universe as a part of the natural revelation. From one point of view, the natural revelation has remained unchanged from the creation. In another and wider aspect, natural revelation is ceaselessly progressive and growing as man's own thoughts grow wider, as his knowledge of himself and of the natural universe increases, and as the scroll of God's purposes is gradually unrolled in his-

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¹⁰⁶. G. H. Barrows, quoted by Strong, op. cit., p. 15

tory.¹⁰⁷ The breadth of natural revelation is measured by the wideness of God's actions. In history His justice and goodness and purposes are progressively shown. The internal world of man witnesses His personality, rationality, and morality. The government of society reveals God in the same measure as the general revelation in nature and history.¹⁰⁸

This revelation, the Belgic Confession continues, is sufficient to leave man without excuse. "Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man," says the Apostle Paul.¹⁰⁹ God has given a revelation to man which is sufficient to show men the difference between right and wrong, and to cause man continually to worship and praise Him for His glory and goodness.

C. Distinction Between Natural and Special Revelation

The first article quoted from the Belgic and French Confessions contains a very important point in the Reformed doctrine of Revelation. It is the plain distinction between natural and special revelations. The paragraph construction, with its "firstly" and "secondly" clearly shows this distinction. Moreover, Calvin makes this point very explicit in the Institutes.¹¹⁰ God has acted in two distinct ways, naturally and supernaturally. The clarity of this distinction was certainly established

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107. Cf. Orr, op. cit., p. 39

108. Cf. Garvie, The Fatherly Rule of God, p. 101

109. Rom. 2:1

110. Cf. Calvin, op. cit., Bk. I, Ch. VI

in Reformed theology during the Arminian controversy.

The five points of the Canons of Dort are: divine predestination, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. Not one of these points could be logically held without a clear distinction between God's natural and His special acts. That fact is fundamental to Calvinism. There must be a clear distinction between God's natural revelation and His special revelation. The clarity of this distinction is one of the outstanding points of the Reformed view. God does act in a natural way to reveal Himself, but that is not sufficient. God must also put forth special energy and use extraordinary means. Without this conception the five points settled at the Synod of Dort would fall.

Other systems of theology may hold that God acted in a special way, that He specially revealed Himself, but none draw this sharp distinction between the two ways in which God works. The prominence in Reformed theology of the two phrases, "common grace" and "special grace" are a commentary upon this distinction. This same fact applies to the doctrine of Revelation. The uniqueness of Reformed theology at this point is based upon the sharpness of this distinction. It is the very core of this doctrine. God has revealed Himself in a way other than natural. Let us illustrate this uniqueness of distinction between "natural" and "special" by calling to mind the lack of distinction in other theological systems. The

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Romanists befuddle the issue by their insistence upon revelations mediated by the Church. The Mystics lose the distinction in their doctrine of the "inner light". The Rationalists fain would believe that there is no distinction. The Deistic inclination is to call all revelations natural, while the Pantheists have stolen our word and called all revelations "supernatural". In all cases the line of demarcation is dimmed. Only Reformed theology allows for the possibility of making it clear cut and sharp.

Before leaving this discussion it is necessary to point out that although natural and special revelation are distinct, yet they are complementary. The Psalmist in Psalm Nineteen is not content to extol God's revelation in the natural world, but turns to the revelation in the law of God. "Without general revelation, special revelation would lack that basis in the fundamental knowledge of God as a mighty, wise, righteous, and good, Maker and Ruler of all things, apart from which the further revelation of God's intervention in the world for the salvation of sinners could not be either intelligible, credible, or operative."¹¹¹ There are two books, Nature and Scripture; one unwritten, the other written; and there is need of studying both. The illustration which Calvin gives is apt. He says that the Scriptures are the spectacles by which we collect in our mind the otherwise confused notions

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¹¹¹. Warfield, Revelation and Inspiration, 1927 ed., p. 7

of Deity.¹¹²

D. Special Revelation

For the Reformers, all Revelation converges in the Scriptures. It interprets the natural and reveals the special revelations of God. It is the fusing point between the mind of God and the mind of man, between the subjective and the objective revelations, between the historical revelations to the prophet and the revelation to the believer. The distinct character of this special revelation in the Scriptures as separate from all other knowledge is basic to every other major proposition stated in the Reformed confessions. We state briefly these propositions. (1) The objective revelation came through the Prophets and Apostles and supremely in Christ. (2) This revelation of God is contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible, and no other book has equal authority. (3) The authority of Scripture is based upon the work of the Holy Spirit, first in the delivery and recording of the objective revelation, and then in the subjective response of men to that revelation. (4) The objective revelation is clear and entirely sufficient for a saving knowledge of God. We will consider each of these propositions in order.

1. Mode of Delivery

The third article of the Belgic Confession¹¹³ illustrates, in the main, the first proposition, particularly in

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112. Vide supra P. 65

113. Vide supra P. 69

regard to the place of the Prophets and Apostles. Regarding the revelation in Christ, we read, "God therefore manifested his justice against his Son when he laid our iniquity on him;...."114 The other statements read as follows:

"The sum of the gospel is that our Lord Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has made known to us the will of his heavenly Father, and redeemed us....."115

"God reveals himself.....in his Word, which was in the beginning revealed through oracles, and which was afterwards committed to writing in the books which we call Holy Scripture."116

"Whence knowest thou this? From the Holy Gospel, which God first revealed in Paradise, afterwards proclaimed by the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law, and finally fulfilled by his well-beloved Son."117

"Why is He called Christ? Because He is ordained of God the Father, and annointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption...."118

"From the beginning of the world, God hath employed as teacher the most excellent of all men in the world, namely, the Patriarchs, with whom God not unfrequently spoke through his angel. Moses followed them, with the prophets, very much celebrated throughout the world. But after these our Heavenly Father sent His only-begotten Son, to be the infallible and most perfect teacher of all the world, in whom is hid infinite and Divine wisdom, and by whom it is communicated to us, through that most sacred, pure, and most perfect doctrine of all, even through the gospel."119

"We teach that the will of God is explained to us by the law of God.....Therefore we confess that the law is good, and righteous and holy. And verily in some instances, it has been written by the Spirit of God in the hearts of men, and then it is called the law of the divine nature; but at another time it was written by the finger of God, on the two tablets of Moses."120

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- 114. Belgic XX
- 115. 67 Art., II
- 116. French, II
- 117. Heid. Q. 19
- 118. Heid. Q. 31
- 119. II Helv. XVIII - 2
- 120. II Helv. XII - 1

These quotations are self-explanatory. Christ is the supreme Revelation while the Prophets and Apostles were the recipients and the instruments for the recording of Revelation.

2. Extent

The second proposition, that the Revelation of God is contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible and no other book has equal authority, is fully illustrated in the fourth and sixth articles of the Belgic Confession in which the inspired books are named and set above the Apocrypha. A parallel statement may be found of the French Confession. We have already treated this phase at the opening of this chapter.¹²¹

3. Authority.

The third proposition concerning the work of the Holy Spirit is one of the clearest and most constantly recurring statements about Revelation. The work of the Holy Spirit is both objective and subjective, both in the historical revelations and in the reception of it by man. We will give a few representative quotations.

"We reject all the heresies of Artemon, and others, who denied that the Scriptures proceeded from the Holy Ghost, or who did not receive from them, or who inserted something into them, and corrupted them."¹²²

"What is true faith? It is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also a hearty trust which the Holy Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins.....are given by God."¹²³

"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 inward testimony and illumination of the Holy Spirit, which en-

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121. Vide Supra, p. 50
122. II Helv. I - 3
123. Heid. Q. 21

ables us to distinguish them from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however, useful, we cannot found any article of faith."¹²⁴

These three quotations give three functions of the Holy Spirit. He is instrumental in the reception and recording of the Scripture by means of the Prophets and Apostles. He works in the hearts of men for the acceptance of the Gospel. He is the final authority which testifies to the veracity of the written Word.

4. Sufficiency

Finally, the confessions affirm the completeness and sufficiency of Scripture. There is reference to this in the seventh article of the Belgic Confessions.¹²⁵ There is also a parallel reference as follows:

"For God himself spoke to the father, prophets, and apostles; and he still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in these, the Church.... hath the most complete explanation of all things which pertain unto a saving faith.....Therefore we know that all true wisdom and piety are to be sought for out of these very Scriptures."¹²⁶

E. Lack of Statement Concerning Inspiration

In regard to the Inspiration of the Scripture, no one can doubt that the creeds affirm the fact. But, as with the Lutheran confessions, we refrain from formulating a specific doctrine. God can certainly be called the Author of Scripture. But what content would the Reformers put into the word "author"? Does it mean that every idea and word is from God? Or does it mean that the ideas are from God with human editorship? What was the mode by which the Holy Spirit operated upon the human

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- 124. French, IV
- 125. Vide supra, p. 70
- 126. II Helv. I - 1

subject? What was the nature and extent of illumination? How was it different from the common illumination that comes to every believer? What is the range and scope of trustworthiness? There are questions of Inspiration which are not dealt with in the confessional statements.¹²⁷ Therefore, no venture will be made to formulate the doctrine of Inspiration.

IV. SUMMARY

A. Unanimity of the Confessions

It is indeed remarkable that among these confessions there should be such unanimity. In spite of the fact that at least seven men of different nationality and training has a hand in their writing, they are alike in many respects. Moreover, they represent the interest of Swiss, French, Belgian, Dutch, and German people. None of the statements is identical in content, nor do they treat the same points. Yet there is no major point at which they are not in harmony. Concerning Revelation, there is no one confession which has compassed all the points which have been made in this chapter. On the other hand, there are no points that are incompatible with the doctrines expressed in other statements.

There are several reasons for this similarity. The first is the influence, as previously shown, of two leading men, Calvin and Zwingli. Another reason is the exchange and interplay of thought on the Continent which tended to keep ideas and the development of thought uniform. Still another reason is the family relationship which the confessions sustained to each other by which the later statements grew out of their antecedents. And then

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127. Cf., Paterson, *The Rule of Faith*, p. 63

finally, perhaps the most important reason for similarity and compatibility was that the doctrine of Revelation grew out of the same situation in all of the countries. No matter what the local situation might have been, all localities faced the issue of authority in their break with the Roman Church. Everywhere the question was asked, What is the authority for doing as you do? And everywhere the appeal was to Scripture. In the following summary it will be seen how the Reformers met this question.

These six confessions might be thought of as a great masterpiece of music, of which each confession is a movement. The great central theme is that of the Scripture as the rule and norm of faith. Not the Pope, nor the Apocrypha, nor any other source, but the sixty-six books of the canon were the source of the Revelation of God.

B. Summary of Development

This theme was first struck in its simplicity and greatness by Ulrich Zwingli as he penned the first of the Sixty-seven Articles. It recurs again and again in its variations, its local color, and its innovations, but always the same basic theme. It emerges in the grand finale, the Second Helvetic Confessions, which is the consummate statement as fully developed by the Swiss Reformers. A century later the theme is heard again, not in its rich mellow tones, but stilted and stiffened by the hand of the Scholastic.

In the meantime, the reform under Calvin had caught

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up the theme, one which had echoed from France to the borders of Germany. For a decade, beginning with 1559, this theme echoed back and forth across the Continent from France to Belgium, from the Palatinate to Switzerland and across the English Channel to Scotland. The result was the composition of the theme made in several arrangements to fit the needs and wishes of the several nations of Europe.

Calvin might be spoken of in symbolical terms, but it would be a question whether to call him another composer, or merely the conductor who uses this great theme. It was he who undergirded the doctrine of Revelation with a theory of knowledge and brought to it the results of the thought of his own great mind. It was he who precipitated the thought which the age held in solution and reproduced it in his great work, The Institutes of the Christian Religion.

Let us then sum up the component parts of this doctrine of Revelation. In general, Revelation includes every act of God by which man may know him. Revelation has two avenues of approach to the mind of man, the avenue of the natural world and that of Scripture. These two are distinct, yet complementary. This distinction is fundamental to all Reformed theology as well as to the doctrine of Revelation.

The Scripture is the point at which every special

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revelation of God is converged. It is the screen upon which God has cast his own image and likeness, a likeness which man has partly forgotten and confused by looking at a world thrown out of joint by sin and seen through eyes darkened by error. Attention should be called to the major propositions stated concerning special revelation. The objective revelation came through the Prophets and Apostles and supremely in Christ. This revelation is contained in Scripture alone. It is true and authoritative because the Holy Spirit delivered it through the prophets and Apostles, and He convinces men of its veracity. This revelation is clear and sufficient for salvation. It was by these four basic statements that the Reformers met the dictatorial claims of the Roman Church. Scripture, they said, is authoritative in itself; it gives a sufficient knowledge of God; it is made clear to the believer by the Holy Spirit; and it is efficacious in leading him to salvation.¹²⁸

C. Emphases and Omissions

A point of vantage has been attained from which the Reformed confessions may be viewed for their high points and their emphases and omissions.

The foundation stone of the doctrine is the distinction between the natural and special revelations of God. Upon this are raised several towers of doctrine, one of which is Revelation. It cannot be said that Revelation holds a place superior to any other doctrine in the Reformed confessions. It finds no more prominence than is due to so

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128. Cf. Paterson, *op. cit.*, p. 59

fundamental an issue of the Reformation. The place of the Holy Spirit in His several functions is the most prominent spire of this tower. Another spire that is clearly silhouetted against the skyline is that of the extent and authority of the Canon, rising above the Apocrypha and all other writings. Not so clearly defined, yet having its own place, is the spire of Christ as the supreme Revelation of God to man. Still a fourth point is the sufficiency and efficacy of the Scripture for salvation. Like many Gothic towers, which characterized the age in which the confessions were written, there were these several spires; the work of the Holy Spirit, the extent of the Canon, the place of Christ, and the sufficiency of Scripture. They constituted the strong tower by which the Reformers withstood the authoritarian claims of the Roman Church.

Conspicuously missing among these spires is that of Inspiration. The foundation for such a doctrine is laid in the confessions, but no clearly defined statement has been made. That task remained for a later generation. We are also glad to say that the bristling spears of denunciation of the Pope and traditions and the Roman Church, although very much in evidence in the earlier statements were withdrawn to some extent later. The vehemence of language and the spirit of denunciation were mollified by time and tolerance.

While speaking in symbolical terms, let the analogy

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be pressed one point further to a comparison of the Reformed and Lutheran confessions. The Lutherans built into their confessional edifice a doctrine of Revelation, not as a prominent point in the structure but as part and parcel of the total construction. On the other hand, the Reformed theologians built a confessional edifice of which one of the towers, with its own particular outline and its own spires, is the doctrine of Revelation. Further comparison must be withheld until the third group of confessions, the British Reformed, have been discussed.

CHAPTER IV
BRITISH REFORMED CONFESSIONS

CHAPTER IV

BRITISH REFORMED CONFESSIONS

I. DEFINITE STATEMENTS

A. Acceptance of Scripture as the Rule of Faith

Again a survey of the ground work is necessary of a third group of creeds, the British Reformed. Although the thoughts expressed are repetitions of the first quotations in the preceding chapters, yet they are fresh and interesting for the display of local color and the ways in which different groups of people express themselves. Our first consideration will again be the Scriptures as the rule of faith and practice. Of particular interest is the Scotch Confession because of the mode of expression peculiar to the Scotland of that day. Notice, in the first of the following quotations, the informal attitude in comparison with the formal statements of the latter quotations.

"Protestand that gif onie man will note in this our confessioun onie Artickle or sentence repugnand to Gods halie word, that is wald plie him of his gentleness and for christian charities sake to admonish us of the same in writing; and we upon our honoures and fidelitie, be Gods grace do promise unto him satisfioun fra the mouth of God, that is, fra his haly scriptures, or else reformation of that quhilk he sal prove to be amisse."¹²⁷

"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 by any man, that it should be believed as an article of

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127. Scotch, Preface: All following quotations will be given with modern spelling. The quotations from the creeds in this section are taken from Schaff's Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III.

faith, or be thought necessary of requisite to salvation."¹²⁸

"The ground of our religion and the rule of faith and of all saving truth is the Word of God, contained in the Holy Scripture."¹²⁹

"The Old Testament of Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so that in all controversies in religion the Church is finally to appeal to them."¹³⁰

B. Rejection of Other Authority

Leaving the fact of the acceptance of Scripture as self-evident, another section that has a very familiar ring concerns the various rejections of other authorities outside the Scriptures. The rejection of the Papacy, of the traditions, and of all other writings is explicit. As on the Continent, the Reformers left open only one avenue for man's reception of a special revelation from God and that was the Scripture. Perhaps the most harsh statement ever accepted by any Protestant body is the Second Scotch Confession which is an anti-papal appendix to the First. It sets forth the Scotch abhorrence of anything tainted by Romanism. We will, however, confine our quotations to those confessions which we have chosen to study in this chapter.

"When controversy then happens, for the right understanding of any place or sentence in Scripture, or for the reformation of any abuse within the Kirk of God, we ought not so much to look what men before us have said or done, as unto that which the Holy Ghost uniformly speaks within the body of the Scriptures and unto that which Jesus Christ himself has

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- 128. 39 Art., VI
- 129. Irish, I
- 130. West, Ch. I, Sec. VIII

done, and commanded to be done....If then the interpretations, determination or sentence of any Doctor, or Kirk, or Council, repunge to the Scripture, it is a thing most certain, that there is not a true understanding and meaning of the Holy Ghost, although Councils,.....have approved and received the same."¹³¹

"The bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England."¹³²

". . . it is not lawful for the church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written...."¹³³

"It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly alike."¹³⁴

"All worship devised by man's phantasy besides or contrary to Scripture...hath not only no promise of reward in Scripture, but contrariwise threatenings and maledictions."¹³⁵

"The other books, commonly called the Apocrypha did not proceed from such inspiration, and therefore are not sufficient authority to establish any point of doctrine."¹³⁶

"All synod or councils....may err, and many have erred: therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith and practice....."¹³⁷

"The Apocrypha....are no part of the Canon of Scripture; and therefore are no authority in the Church of God."¹³⁸

Other statements might be quoted expressing the same sentiments, but the above are sufficient for illustration. In these confessions there are three lists of the canonical books and also the consequent denial of the authority of

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- 131. Scotch, XVIII
- 132. 39 Art., XXXVII
- 133. 39 Art., XX
- 134. 39 Art., XXXIV. In Art. XXI and XXII it is said that Councils may err, and that certain of the Romish rites need not be observed.
- 135. Irish 52
- 136. Irish 3
- 137. West. Chapt. XXXI, Sec. IV
- 138. West. Chapt. I, Sec. III

the Apocrypha. They are found in the Thirty-nine Articles, the Irish Confession, and the Westminster Confession. In all of these points there is perfect agreement with the confessions which we have previously studied. Consequently, no longer exposition of this phase is necessary but rather an effort will be made to discover the situation out of which these statements arose.

II. SIDELIGHTS FROM OTHER SOURCES

A. Historical Background of the Thirty-nine Articles

1. English Reformation in General

The English Reformation presents a phase of the Protestant movement that is unique and important. When it is realized that England today is the chief stronghold of Protestantism in Europe, its chapter in Reformation history is most certainly important.¹³⁹ The historian, George Park Fisher, characterizes the movement as follows: "The peculiarity of the English Reformation lies, not in the separation of a political community - in this case a powerful nation - from the papal see; for the same thing took place generally where the Reformation prevailed; but it lies in the fact that it involved immediately so little departure from the dogmatic system of the medieval Church. At the outset, the creed, and to a great extent, the polity and ritual, of the Church in England remained intact."¹⁴⁰ The fact that there was only a gradual change is true also of the doctrine of Revelation. Henry VIII and his advisors were not motivated by any great doctrinal conviction, and their changes in doctrine were very little more than those which were neces-

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139. Cf., Schaff, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. p. 593

140. Fisher, *The Reformation*, p. 271

sitated by the political and ecclesiastical changes which they wished to make.

2. Articles of Henry VIII

The first of the doctrinal statements comes under the title, Articles Devised by the King's Highness. In these articles there is a definite change in the final authority to which appeal should be made in religious matters. The King prescribed to the bishops the Bible, the three oecumenical creeds, and the first four oecumenical councils as the basis of doctrine. He even went so far as to claim infallibility for these sources of authority.¹⁴¹ Whether or not the King gave the doctrine of Revelation a serious thought as he penned these articles, or whether he thought only of the political and ecclesiastical aspects, is hard to say. At least he did not set forth the true Reformation principle which rests its authority solely upon the Scripture. Henry accepted every source of authority common to Roman Catholic doctrine except the authority of the Pope. The traditional rites and ceremonies of the Catholic Church continued as before with no attempt on the part of Henry to stop them. The king remained a Catholic at heart until his death and the Church of England reflected the sentiments of the King.¹⁴² It was the natural thing that the Reformed doctrine of Revelation should not find pure or concise statement in this, the earliest of the English Reformed creeds.

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141. Cf. Hunt, Religious Thought in England, Vol I, 1870 ed. p.8

142. Cf. Schaff, op. cit., Vol I, p. 595

3. Causes for More Thorough Reform

Meanwhile, events had been happening which were to bring about a more thorough reform upon English soil. Wycliff had long since planted the seeds of reform, kept alive in the Lollard movement, which still had its adherents throughout the country, particularly in the north of England and the south of Scotland.¹⁴³ This movement particularly prepared the lower classes of England for reform. The revival of learning had its effect upon the upper strata of society. Many came under the liberating influence of Erasmus and his friends.¹⁴⁴ Added to that was the influence of Luther's writings. As early as 1527 his writings were read with avidity by students in Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁴⁵ All these influences prepared the way for a more thorough reform under Edward VI and Elizabeth.

4. The Forty-two and the Thirty-nine Articles

Following the composition of the Ten Articles by the King in 1536, there is only one other statement of any importance composed during the reign of Henry VIII. It is the Thirteen Articles composed in 1538. These never gained authority or the approval of the King. Their importance lies in the fact that they were used as a basis for the later articles of Edward VI. They were never approved by Henry because they were too drastically Reformed. They very closely follow the articles of the Augsburg Confession. In fact, some of the passages were taken verbatim from the Lutheran document.¹⁴⁶

143. Cf. Fisher, op. cit., p. 270

144. Cf., *ibid*

145. Cf., Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 600

146. For a comparison, see Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 624

When the Forty-two Articles were composed during Edward's reign they were based on the Thirteen Articles. When Elizabeth ascended the throne these were again revised and became the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. Thus the influence of the Augsburg Confession upon these Articles of the Church of England may be plainly traced.

It was, however, not only the influence of Lutheranism that had its effect upon the formation of the Thirty-nine Articles. The Reformed theologians of the Continent also had their influence upon the English, and it is the latter rather than the Lutheran that bore fruit in the doctrine of Revelation because of the greater emphasis which the Reformed theologians placed upon it. Calvin's books had been prohibited by Henry, but Edward frequently called upon the Reformers for aid.¹⁴⁷ Bucer was called in to assist in the revision of the Prayer Book in 1552.¹⁴⁸ "Bishop Jewel, the final reviser of the Thirty-nine Articles, wrote to Peter Martyr at Zurich (February 7, 1562): 'As to matters of doctrine, we have pared every thing away to the very quick, and do not differ from you by a nail's breadth; for as to the ubiquitarian (i.e., the Lutheran) theory there is no danger to this country. Opinions of that kind can only gain admittance where the stones have sense.'¹⁴⁹ It is evident that even during the life time of Calvin the influence of the Reformed theologians was deeply felt in England.

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147. Cf., Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 602

148. Cf., Hunt, op. cit., p. 11

149. Cf., Fisher, op. cit., p. 603

B. Scotch Reformation

Attention must now be turned to another movement, the Scotch Reformation begun under the leadership of John Knox. Very little is known of Knox's early life. By 1552 he had won such a place for himself as a preacher and reformer that Edward VI offered him an English bishopric. This he refused, but continued his preaching until he was driven from the country by the agents of Queen Mary.¹⁵⁰ He then spent several years in exile in close contact with Calvin and Bullinger. In 1555 he revisited Scotland and was allowed to preach for a time. By 1557 he seems to have been the chief advisor of the Protestant Lords of Scotland.¹⁵¹ In that same year a number of Protestant nobles and gentlemen signed, at Edinburgh, a 'Covenant' to maintain and defend the true Kirk. In 1560, after the death of the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise, and the expulsion of the French troops, the Scotch Parliament convened at Edinburgh. At that session the Protestants were requested to present a confession. John Knox and three others drew up the document in four days and presented it to the Parliament which approved it "as a doctrine grounded upon the infallible Word of God."¹⁵² This was followed by acts which made Romish practices illegal. The Scotch Confession was the only legally recognized doctrinal standard of both the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches in Scotland until it was superceded by the Westminster Confession in 1688. It is thoroughly Calvinistic

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¹⁵⁰. Cf., The English Reformation and Puritanism, 1908 ed., Hulbert, p. 159

¹⁵¹. Cf., Ency. Brit., 14th ed. Art. Knox, Vol. 13, p. 468

¹⁵². Cf., Schaff, op. cit., Vol I, p. 681

in content, a fact that finds its reason in the theology of John Knox, who was in perfect sympathy with the movement of Calvin at Geneva. Having been drawn up at the close of a heated controversy with those who would set up the Papal system, its tenets are set forth in the strongest of language by an author who knew well how to use strong language.

C. Lambeth Articles and the Irish Articles of Religion

Attention is now called to two other statements of doctrine, the Lambeth Articles and the Irish Confession. The individual importance of these two is not as great as is that of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Westminster Confession which followed, but they are useful in showing the great preponderance of the Calvinistic influence which developed in the British Isles during the latter half of the Sixteenth Century and leading up to the formation of the Westminster Confession.

D. Influence of Calvinism

The Lambeth Articles were the outgrowth of a conflict over certain doctrines of Calvinism. The University of Cambridge was the stronghold of Calvinism during the latter half of the 16th Century. The controversy began with a sermon in which Baro, a French refugee, and a professor at the University, took exception to several points of Calvinistic doctrine. He was soon forced to leave his professorship, but his cause was taken up by William Barrett, a fellow at Caius College, who attacked the honored names of Calvin, Beza, and others. To prevent further trouble, the

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heads of the University sent two representative to London to confer with Archbishop and other eminent divines. As a result, Nine Articles were adopted at Lambeth in 1595. They are thoroughly and uncompromisingly Calvinistic. Any one who reads the article on election and saving grace will be convinced that the church which looks with favor upon these articles must be truly Calvinistic at heart. It teaches that those who are not predestinated to life shall necessarily be damned.¹⁵³ Although these Articles never received full authority, they are an indication of the mind of the time. Like the Canons of Dort, there is no article that refers directly to the doctrine of Revelation, and for that reason it is not as important to this discussion as are some other statements except as it shows the prevailing Calvinistic tendencies of the age.

Another statement, likewise expressing the Calvinism of the times comes from Ireland. This was drawn up by Archbishop James Ussher in 1615 and accepted by a Convocation at Dublin by the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland. The Irish Articles are arranged under nineteen heads. "They are a clear and succinct system of divinity, in full harmony with Calvinism, excepting the doctrine of the ecclesiastical supremacy of the crown...They incorporate the substance of the Thirty-nine Articles and the Lambeth Articles, but are more systematic and complete."¹⁵⁴ These

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153. Cf., Schaff, op. cit., p. 660, Vol. I.

154. Ibid, Vol. I, p. 664

Articles are the chief basis for the Westminster Confession.

August Toplady, in a long dissertation in defense of Calvinism, sums up the results of numerous quotations from the English theologians as follows: "We have seen in the three preceding Sections, 1. That the Reformers of the Church of England were zealous Calvinists, as to matters of doctrine: 2. That Calvin himself has a very considerable hand in reducing our liturgy to that purity and excellence which it still retains: and, 3. That Calvin, Beza, Zanchius, Sadell, Bullinger, and Gualter entertained very respectful sentiments, concerning the ritual, decency and order, together with the episcopal regimen, of our incomparable Church."¹⁵⁵ Although this statement may be exaggerated to some extent, and in spite of the fact that there were many cross-currents of thought in England during the century in which the creeds were written, still the influence which most consistently made its impact upon the creedal statements was Calvinism. After the accession of Elizabeth, it may be said, the Institutes of the Christian Religion was generally in the hands of the clergy and might be considered the text-book in theology.¹⁵⁶ The following discussion is based upon the belief that there was a general Calvinistic tenor in the religious life of the English people.

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155. The Words of A. Toplady, ed. 1837, p. 163

156. Cf. Fisher, op. cit., p. 288

E. Westminster Confession

The final part of this historical discussion must center in the Westminster Confession and the events leading up to it; and rightly so, for that confession is the consummating effort of Protestant England to formulate its common beliefs.

1. Political and Ecclesiastical Events

It was a series of political, ecclesiastical and theological conflicts that brought about the Westminster Assembly. Already in the reign of Elizabeth the Church of England was divided in sentiment between Puritan and Episcopal parties. Scotland had become predominantly Presbyterian and, as has been said before, the whole church was generally Calvinistic. Under James I and Charles I the Episcopal party had the favor and support of the Court. The Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity had shown clearly the demarcation between the two parties.

Passing over many intervening events, a brief summary will be made of the political situation just previous to the formation of the Westminster Confession. The Liturgy of Archbishop Laud, who headed the Episcopal party, was rejected by the Scotch Church in 1638. It then became Presbyterian in government as well as in belief. The Protestant Church of Ireland was still Episcopal in its organization, but Puritan and Presbyterian in its doctrine under the influence of Archbishop Ussher. In 1640 the deliberate attempt of Charles I to rule England without a Parliament failed and the country sent that famous body

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known as The Long Parliament. On June 12, 1643, the Parliament passed an act entitled, "An ordinance of the Lords and Commons in Parliament, for the calling of an Assembly of Divines and others, to be consulted with by the Parliament for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England, and clearing of the Doctrine of said Church from false aspersions and interpretations."¹⁵⁷ This ordinance also named the ablest of the English clergy as delegates to the Assembly and called upon the Scotch to send representatives. Such were the political and ecclesiastical events which led up to the Westminster Assembly.

2. Old and New School Calvinism

Of more direct bearing upon the doctrine of Revelation is one of the theological controversies which had begun in the French School of Saumur. It precipitated a conflict between the Old and New School Calvinists. We have already mentioned the work of Louis Cappel and the resulting Helvetic Consensus composed by the Old School. This same conflict concerning the inspiration of the Scripture was at its height in England at the time of the writing of the Westminster Confession. The Assembly was divided in its opinions. A large proportion of the British divines were moderate Calvinists and therefore in sympathy with the School of Saumur, but there were also theologians who belonged to the Old School and therefore sided with the Swiss in this conflict. As will be shown later, the Westminster Confession bears the marks of this conflict,

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¹⁵⁷. Quoted by Hodge, op. cit., p. 36

but it did not absolutely decide any of these mooted questions.¹⁵⁸

3. Westminster Assembly

To show the attitude of this Assembly toward the Scriptures, it is necessary only to quote the pledge which was publicly recited by the divines at the opening of each week of the sessions: "I do seriously promise and vow in the presence of Almighty God that in this Assembly whereof I am a member I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God."¹⁵⁹

The actual writing of the Confession was done by a committee, consisting of the following persons: Dr. Hoyle, Dr. Gouge and Messrs. Herle, Gataker, Tuckney, Reynolds and Vines.¹⁶⁰ This Confession is one of the few that does not have the name of some great leader attached to its composition. In fact, it is characteristic of the English Reformation that there is no great single moving spirit embodied in any person around which the movement centered. Germany had Luther, the Reformed movement had Zwingli and Calvin, Scotland had Knox, but England had no such name. Her Reformation was brought about by a body of men consecrated to the cause of the English Church, sometimes hindered, but often helped by men whose motives were purely political and ecclesiastical. Thus it is a Confession which is a composite, amalgamated in the fires of English political and theological strife.

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158. Cf., Briggs, op. cit., p. 374

159. Quoted by Steward, Creeds and Churches, 1916 ed., p. 199

160. Cf. Hodge, op. cit., p. 39

4. Acceptance

The Westminster Confession was presented to Parliament in 1646, but was recommitted in order that the "Assembly should attach their marginal notes, to prove every part of it by Scripture."¹⁶¹ On March 22nd, 1648 the following statement for the two Houses of Parliament was made: "The Commons this day (March 22nd), at a conference, presented the Lords with a Confession of Faith passed by them, with some alterations (especially concerning questions of discipline), viz.: That they do agree with their Lordships, and so with the Assembly, in the doctrinal part, and desire the same may be made public, that this kingdom, and all the Reformed churches of Christendom, may see the Parliament of England differ not in doctrine."¹⁶² With this action of the Parliament, the curtain was rung down upon the historical stage which had produced the great confessions of the Reformation period.

III. FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE

Proceeding to a discussion of the Doctrine of Revelation as found in these British statements, each of the confessions will be separately treated giving the greatest attention to the Westminster Confession because it shows the developments of a later age than that of the other confessions.

A. Scotch Confession

The first of these is the Scotch Confession since that

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¹⁶¹. Quoted by Hodge, op. cit., p. 39

¹⁶². Quoted from Hetherington's "Hist. Westminster Assembly," p. 245, by Hodge, op. cit., p. 39

was the first to receive its final form. It is evident that from a reading of this confession the doctrine of Revelation was not one of the foremost in the mind of Knox and his associates. The chief point was simply that the Scripture had the authority of God's voice and was a sufficient guide to lead men to salvation. The confession gives one article to Scripture in which these thoughts are very briefly set forth as follows:

"As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make the man of God perfect, so do we affirm and avow the authority of the same to be of God, and neither to depend on men nor angels."¹⁶³

How the Scripture has become the Revelation of God is very hazily dealt with under the heading of the Revelation of the Promise. After the defection of Adam, God sought him again and gave him the promise,¹⁶⁴ which was repeated to the Patriarchs and Prophets and so forth to the Incarnation of Christ.¹⁶⁵ In this article Christ is not considered specially in the light of the Revealer, but rather as the fulfilment of the promise which had been revealed to Israel. The rudiments of a doctrine of Christ as the Revealer are there, but they are thrown into the background by the greater consideration of His redemptive work. Another indefinite reference to Christ as the Revealer is found in the article on the Incarnation of Christ. It speaks of the Son as the "eternal Wisdom" of God. This is not satisfying to one who is interested in the doctrine of Revelation.

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163. Scotch, XIX
164. Gen. 3:15
165. Cf., Scotch, Art. VI

There is one section that is concerned with the Holy Ghost, but with almost no reference to Revelation. "For of nature we are so dead, so blind, and so perverse, that neither can we feel when we are pricked, see the light when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is revealed, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will."¹⁶⁶ Another reference to the Holy Ghost is given in regard to doctrinal controversies as follows: "When controversy then happens, for the right understanding of any place or sentence of the Scripture, or for the reformation of any abuse within the Kirk of God, we ought not no much to look what men before us have said or done, as unto that which the holy Ghost uniformly speaks within the Body of the Scriptures, and unto that which Christ Jesus himself did, and commanded to be done."¹⁶⁷ These are the clearest of the references to the work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation, and as can be seen, they are not explicit.

From the Scotch Confession, it may be gathered that Revelation was not one of the chief concerns of the authors. Justification and sanctification overshadow it in importance. It is probable that the impetuous and zealous nature of John Knox was not attracted by the thorough explanations of the intellectual basis of this doctrine. Moreover, the need of the year, 1560, was not for a perfectly defined doctrine of Revelation, but for a concrete expression of

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166. Scotch, XII
167. Scotch XVIII

the things that were uppermost in the minds of the people. It is to be noted that there is no mention of the extent of the Canon nor of the Apocrypha.

B. Thirty-nine Articles

The Thirty-nine Articles are in one respect more complete than the Scotch, but in another they are even more incomplete. This will be apparent from a reading of the sections that refer to the doctrine. "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."¹⁶⁸ This statement is followed by a list of the Canonical books. The Canon, its authority, and its sufficiency is clearly taught. In these respects it is more complete than the Scotch Confession. But, on the other hand, no explanation of the means and the mode of Revelation are given. Christ is scarcely mentioned as the Revealer except as follows: "For Holy Scripture doth set out unto us only the Name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved."¹⁶⁹ Even this reference is very indirect. Another neglected part is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is plain from this that a doctrine of Revelation was not in the foreground in the early years of the English Reformation.

C. Lambeth Articles

The Lambeth Articles contain no statement upon which to base any doctrine of Revelation.

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168. 39 Art., VI

169. 39 Art., XIX

D. Irish Articles of Religion

The Irish Articles of Religion incorporate the substance of the Thirty-nine Articles and the Lambeth Articles, but are more systematic and complete.¹⁷⁰ The effect of the Thirty-nine Articles can be plainly seen. The first chapter is devoted to the Scripture in which the Canonical and Apocryphal books are given and the Scripture is asserted to be given by inspiration of God. The Bible should be translated into the vernacular and men "exhorted to read the same with great humility and reverence, as a special means to bring him to the true knowledge of God and of his own duty."¹⁷¹ The perspicuity of Scripture is also asserted as well as the sufficiency.

"Although there be some hard things in the Scripture, (especially such as have proper relation to the times in which they were first uttered, and prophecies of things which were afterwards to be fulfilled), yet all things necessary to be known unto salvation are clearly delivered therein; and nothing of that kind is spoken under dark mysteries in one place which is not in other places spoken more familiarly and plainly, to the capacity both of learned and unlearned.

"The holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation, and are able to instruct sufficiently in all points of faith that we are bound to believe, and all good duties that we are bound to practice."¹⁷²

As far as Scripture itself goes and the interpretation of the words and hard sentences, the Irish Articles are full and explicit. They assert its authority, extent, sufficiency, and the means of interpretation.

On the other hand, there is again a great lack of explanation of the doctrine of Revelation. Again the place of the Holy Spirit and of Christ in Revelation is

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170. Cf., Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 664

171. Irish IV

172. Irish, VII & VIII

neglected. It has been common among all the British confessions thus far studied that these two phases of the doctrine of Revelation have been neglected in comparison with the statements of the Continental Reformed.

E. Westminster Confession and Catechism

The Westminster Confession is not surpassed by any other confession in its complete and full statement of several phases of the doctrine of Revelation. We quote in full the sections which have the most bearing upon our discussion.

"Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers 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 the 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."¹⁷³

"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.

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent 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, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority,

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173. West. Conf., Chapt. I, Sec. I. Sections two and three are omitted because they refer to the Canon and the Apocrypha which have been discussed previously.

is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

"The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is rather 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.

"All things in Scripture are not alike plain themselves nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

"The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them.....

"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.

"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."¹⁷⁴

No eulogy is necessary to show the manifest excellence of this statement of doctrine. It is the result of the com-

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174. West. Conf., I, 4-10

bined effort of the flower of English clergy in the Seventeenth Century.

The first section sets forth clearly the distinction between natural and special revelation, showing that the natural light of man is sufficient to leave man without excuse but not to lead him to salvation. Therefore, God gave a special revelation which is wholly contained in Scripture. The only special revelation which now comes to man is in the Scripture since the former means of direct revelation have ceased. Here, again, as in the Continental Reformed Confessions, there is an absolute distinction between the two kinds of God's revelation.

The second and third sections limit the extent of Revelation to the canonical books of the Bible and exclude the Apocrypha.

The fourth and fifth sections are concerned with the authority of the Scripture as the Revelation of God. This authority rests finally upon God Himself. There are both external and internal evidences of a divine origin of Scripture, such as the dictum of the Church and the perfections of the Holy Writ. Nevertheless, the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit is the final authority whereby men may ascertain its divine origin.

The sixth section affirms the sufficiency of Scripture for all practical necessities of believers, and that there are no new revelations. However, the action of the Holy Spirit is necessary for a proper understanding of the

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Word. Moreover, there are details left to the prudence of Christian men. This section shows the result of the experiences of the preceding century. Controversies in which both of the opposing parties appealed to Scripture has been all too common. If the Word of God gives sufficient knowledge, why should such controversies arise? The Westminster divines answered this question by saying that the minor things about which Reformers differed were matters to be solved by the Christian conscience and by prudence. This is a new note not found in the earlier confessions.

The seventh section asserts the perspicuity of Scripture. Even the unlearned may find therein all that is necessary for salvation.

No section reflects as clearly the conflict between the Old and New School Calvinists as does the eighth. The Old School held to a theory of verbal Inspiration while the New School was more free in its interpretation of Scripture. This statement is the result of a compromise. The very mention of the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts is sufficient to show this controversy. This section makes two essential statements, namely, that the original autographs are inspired and authentic, and that these autographs have come down to us in essential purity. Upon these two statements theologians have built at least three views of inspiration: that the Greek and Hebrew texts are verbally inspired, that the original autographs

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were verbally inspired without error, and that the Bible is fully inspired (plenary Inspiration). From this it can be seen that the Westminster Confession does not expound any particular theory of Inspiration. The Westminster divines cautiously averted this point of controversy.

The ninth section states plainly that the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself. The clear parts and teachings are the standard by which to judge those that are obscure.

Finally, the tenth section sums up the results of those which precede by stating that Scripture is the Supreme Judge in all controversies.

It is evident that the Revelation of God centers in the Word and the Spirit. The Westminster Confession gives no sentence explaining how Revelation came from the mind of God to the mind of the prophets and apostles. It is interesting to note that there is no chapter given to the Holy Spirit, although the Father and the Son each have several chapters. The confession certainly asserts that the influence of the Holy Spirit is essential for a proper understanding of Scripture, but nowhere is the work of the Holy Spirit defined. Not a word is said of His work as the conveyer of the original revelations or the preserver of the sacred writings. Moreover, the work of Christ as Revealer receives only scanty attention. Christ is known as the Savior, and His work as such completely overshadows His Prophetic office. Only one refer-

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ence is given to Christ as Prophet, and even in that case it is only one of several titles given.¹⁷⁵ Slightly more light is cast upon this office by a statement in the Catechism as follows: "Christ executeth the office of a Prophet, in revealing to us by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation."¹⁷⁶ The lack of expression concerning the Holy Spirit and Christ as Revealer points to one conclusion, namely, that the Westminster divines made no attempt to explain how Scripture came to be. The written Word was taken as the objective Revelation, the origin of which they did not attempt to explain. They were concerned only with the Word of God as the instrument for bringing a true revelation to the mind of the man who reads it.

To state briefly the substance of these sections, it may be said that the Westminster Confession asserts the authority, the extent, the basis for the authority, the sufficiency, the perspicuity, the inspiration, the interpretation of Scripture by Scripture itself, and the supremacy of its teachings. On the other hand, it gives no theory of Inspiration, nor does it explain the means by which Scripture, as a written Revelation from God, originated.

IV. SUMMARY

A. Scripture as the Rule of Faith

In summing up the outstanding features of the British

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175. Cf. West. Conf., Chapt. VIII - 1

176. West. Shorter Cat., Ques. 24

Reformed Confessions, there can be no question concerning the acceptance of the Scriptures as the absolute rule of faith to which every appeal for authority must be made.

B. Historical Considerations

The history of these confessions shows above all that it was a political as well as an ecclesiastical movement, one which included both Church and State. As Schaff says, "Good and bad men, from pure and low motives, took part in the work, but were overruled by a higher power for a noble end."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, England produced no single reformer whose name towers above all others, but rather, many able and learned prelates and statesmen. The mark of the teachings of both Luther and Calvin may be seen in the confessions; Luther's being the first in the point of time, but Calvin's being the more lasting.

Although Henry VIII had written the Ten Articles in 1537, the doctrine of Revelation in the Scripture was not clearly defined until the reign of Edward VI in the Forty-two Articles. These were slightly revised under Elizabeth and known as the Thirty-nine Articles. They are moderately Calvinistic.

The name of Knox stands high in the Reformation in Scotland. It was chiefly he who composed the Scotch Confession.

The Lambeth Articles and the Irish Confession grew out of the increasing influence of Calvinism in England during the last half of the sixteenth century.

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¹⁷⁷. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 594

With these confessions as a background, and in the midst of the conflict between the Old and New School Calvinists, the Westminster Confession was written. It was this document which culminated the long succession of confessional statements which we have been studying.

C. Emphases

The doctrinal emphasis of the British Reformed Confession is upon the objective Scripture and its relation to the believer. The extent of the Canon is defined in the Thirty-nine Articles, the Irish Articles, and the Westminster Confession. The authority of Scripture is based upon God speaking in Scripture through the Holy Spirit. The perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture for salvation is plainly taught. The Westminster Confession adds to this the teaching that Scripture is interpreted by Scripture itself. The Westminster Confession contains the finest and most complete statement of these points. Yet, generally speaking, the rudiments may be seen in the preceding confessions. This clarity of statement concerning the objective Scripture as the revealed Word of God is the strength and the emphasis of these confessions.

D. Omissions

On the other hand, the British churches did not commit themselves to any specific theory of Inspiration, nor did they explain with any degree of clarity the means by which the Scripture, as a written Revelation from God, originated. This is evi-

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denced by a general lack of consideration of the work of the Holy Spirit and of Christ as a Revealer. The work of the Holy Spirit in Revelation is expressed only in relation to the present revelation to the heart of the believer, not in relation to His past work in the recording and preserving of the original revelation. The work of Christ in justification overshadows his work as the Revelation of God.

CHAPTER V
COMPARISON OF THE VARIOUS CREEDS

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. General Agreement of the Creeds

One of the outstanding facts concerning the doctrine of Revelation in the Creeds of the Reformation Era is that contradiction is non-existent. Of the many sentences and paragraphs which have been taken from the various creeds, it is well nigh impossible to find two that may be said positively to disagree. Although they may emphasize different aspects of Revelation and approach the subject from different points of view, yet there is a residuum of common truth whereby one statement is made the corollary of the other, rather than its opposite. Consequently, when the differences between the various creedal statements are mentioned, there will be no implication of contradiction, but rather of the particular emphasis as over against its omission in another statement.

The great reason for this unanimity was a common opposition. One of the unifying influences of any movement, one which history has many times demonstrated, is that of a common enemy. Every Protestant church stood on common ground in its opposition to the authoritarian principle

of the Roman Church. This principle was one of the chief points of cleavage between the Roman and Protestant worlds. Both Romanists and Protestants insisted upon authoritative Revelation from God, but the difference lay in the medium by which it was manifested. The Romanists made the Church the chief medium; the Protestants, the Bible. The Protestants, as has been abundantly shown in the previous chapters, encouraged the use of the Bible among the people, but the Romanists discouraged and at times prohibited it. The Roman attitude may best be seen from the restrictions made at the Council of Trent.

"Inasmuch as it is manifest from experience, that if the Holy Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, be indiscriminately allowed to every one, the temerity of men will cause more evil than good to rise from it; it is, on this point, referred to the judgment of the bishops or inquisitors, who may, by the advice of the priest or confessor, permit the reading of the Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue by Catholic authors, to those persons whose faith and piety, they apprehend, will be augmented, and not injured by it; and this permission they must have in writing."¹⁷⁹

The Protestants counteracted these claims and restrictions by an appeal to the Scripture as the Word of God. In this they were unified against the Roman Church. The differences among the Protestants lay in the interpretation and the emphasis placed upon certain ramifications of this basic principle.

B. Importance of Revelation in Various Creeds

The Reformed confessions, in general, lay more emphasis

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179. Quoted by Fisher, op. cit., p. 446 from App. i. ad are translated by Mindham, The Literary Policy of the Church of Rome, p. 63 seq.

upon the doctrine of Revelation than do the Lutheran. The Reformed Confessions commonly are begun by an exposition of the Bible as the rule and norm of faith and practice. This formal principle of Protestantism, in its prominent place at the opening of the creedal statements, shows the importance attached to it by those who composed and accepted the statements. The Lutherans were not as fully conscious of this principle since it was overshadowed by that of justification by faith.¹⁷⁹ However, all of Protestantism was clear on the principle that a church may not claim inerrancy for creed or confession on the ground of inherent infallibility, but upon conformity to the Word of God.¹⁸⁰

II. EMPHASIS UPON THE WRITTEN WORD

As the Reformation progressed, there was a stronger emphasis upon the objective written Word. This is evidenced by the defining of the limits of the Canon. The Lutheran confessions make no attempt whatsoever to name the books which should be included in the Canon or to set apart certain books as Apocryphal. In fact, the Augsburg Confession and the Apology give a place of subordinate authority to the Ecumenical Councils and to the writings of the Fathers, which shows the lack of clear demarcation between that which is the Word of God and that which is not.

A clear development is shown in the Continental Reformed which definitely limits the extent of the Canon. This was a great step toward the objectifying of the Bible as the Word of God. The Apocrypha were rejected as

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180. Cf. Paterson, op. cit., p. 60

human, as something that belonged to the body of religious literature, but not to the Word which God has revealed to man. The Reformed theologians departed entirely from the authority of ecclesiastical traditions and rigidly adhered to the divine Word without reference to what had been done in the past.¹⁸¹ Such a position demanded the assertion that the Bible is entirely sufficient and efficient for the salvation of men, that it is a perfect instrument requiring no addition from other sources. The freer position of the early Lutherans towards the Canon as an historical document and towards the single writings was left behind by the Continental Reformers in their struggle with the authority of Rome on the one hand, and with spiritual enthusiasts on the other.¹⁸²

Still another step was taken by the British in the Westminster Assembly, namely, to lay down rules for the interpretation of the holy written Word of God. Differences of opinion based upon the same passage of Scripture had arisen. The general rules had already been intimated in the Continental creeds, but they were made specific by the Westminster Assembly. Scripture is its own interpreter. The original Hebrew and Greek rather than the vernacular translations are the true Word of God.

Finally, the step that would next be expected in this progressive objectifying of the Scriptures would be to assert verbal Inspiration. This development of the Schol-

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181. Cf. Klotsche, op. cit., p. 204

182. Cf. Gumlich, op. cit., p. 53

astic period was avoided in the Westminster Assembly through the influence of the New School Calvinists. That step was actually taken two decades later in the Helvetic Consensus.

This principle may be laid down, namely, that Revelation was progressively objectified throughout the history of the confessional statements. There will be occasion to refer to this conclusion later as further comparisons are made. Although the early Lutherans did not objectify the Scriptures as did the later Reformed, yet it is well known that the later Lutherans passed through the same period of Scholasticism as did the rest of the Protestant world and in the later period they were as ready to objectify the Scriptures as were their neighbors.

III. SEPARATION OF NATURAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION

Coordinate with this movement toward the objective Revelation was that of the separation of the natural and special revelations of God. This is nowhere stated in the Lutheran confessions, but the Reformed confessions emphasize it very clearly. This is the greatest single defense against the claims of an authoritarian Church and of human reason. The Bible is possible as an inspired book only because it is a special revelation set apart from all others, one which is under God's special care and direction. It was, and still is, a necessary emphasis in a day when men tend to minimize the infinite mercy of God and attempt to substitute their own innate capacities

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in order that they may come to a knowledge of the Infinite. Although not completely stated with all its ramifications, this is the basis for the answer to the epistemological problem which the conservative Protestant world has given to the question of the source of knowledge.

IV. PLACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Up to this point, it has been the Lutheran confessions that have shown the least development. But now in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit the opposite tendency is true, for the Lutherans gave as full consideration to this power of God as did any of the other Reformers. In fact, the Lutheran symbols give this phase of the doctrine of Revelation stronger emphasis than any other. God speaks to the heart of the believer by means of the Scripture. But by it he comes to a true understanding of the message of Scripture, a message by which he realizes that he himself may have salvation by the glorious work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. By the Word, the Holy Spirit is given and brings faith to those who hear the Gospel.¹⁸³ The Word and the Spirit, working in unison, form the bulwark of the Lutheran doctrine.

It is also the function of the Holy Spirit to bring into existence the written Word which is the Revelation of God. He it is Who inspired and authenticated the writers and their writings so that the parts of revealed truth which came to them might be preserved.

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183. Cf. Augs. Conf., V

This doctrine of the Holy Spirit was well utilized by the earlier Reformed theologians, particularly by Calvin in defense of the authority of the Scriptures. Although men might prove and the Church might affirm its veracity, yet the final proof lay in the inward conviction of the Holy Spirit. The Continental Reformed confessions also set forth very clearly this dual aspect of the function of the Holy Spirit. He is, in a sense, the Author of Scripture, for He had guided the Prophets and Apostles in recording the revelations which He had given to their minds and hearts. The other aspect of the function of the Holy Spirit is in His activity in the heart of the believer. The reader of the Bible is able truly to understand it only as the Spirit makes it plain to him. Then only will he be convinced that God is speaking to him.

In the British Reformed confessions, the work of the Holy Spirit does not have the same clear emphasis except in the Scotch Confession. Knox, its chief author, had come back to Scotland from the Continent where he had been under the influence of Calvin and other Swiss reformers who had molded the trend of his thinking. Outside of that confession, there is almost no reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. Even the Westminster Confession has no section referring specifically to His work, although it does state that the authority of Scripture depends wholly upon God, Who is the Author.¹⁸⁴ It also states

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184. Cf. West. Conf., I, 4

that conviction of the truth of Scripture comes by the persuasion of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁵ Each of these is given in a single sentence and does not make any further explanation. Concerning the influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Prophets and Apostles, the British confessions are silent. They make no attempt to explain how Revelation came to be objectified in Scripture alone.

This tendency to neglect the work of the Holy Spirit supports the principle previously set forth that Revelation was progressively objectified throughout the course of the history of the Reformation.¹⁸⁶ It is the Holy Spirit that represents the subjective, the personal, and the spiritual elements of Revelation as over against the objective written Word. As the Bible came to be looked upon more and more as the literal Word of God, the necessity for the personal and subjective and spiritual elements became less apparent. The Bible, as a means of conveying spiritual truth, tended to become an object of veneration just as any object conveying spiritual truth may be revered for its own sake. The fundamental elements of the doctrine in the earlier confessions were the Word and the Spirit coordinating to bring truth to the heart of the believer. But the idea of the written Word slowly encroached upon the place of that which is essential in any true revelation from God to man, namely, the

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185. Cf. ibid., I, 5

186. Vide supra, p.

personal work of the Holy Spirit. This does not imply that the divines who wrote and accepted the British confessions were not spiritually enlightened men, but rather that the necessity for emphasis upon the Spirit was not as clearly seen as in the earlier years.

V. CHRIST AS REVEALER

The place of Christ as the supreme Revealer of God's truth finds, at best, only a secondary place in any of the confessions. The same thing may be said in relation to the Prophets and Apostles as transmitting instruments of the divine Word. It may be quite easily implied, however, that the supreme Revelation is Christ, Himself. In the Lutheran confessions that is superceded by His work in the justification for sins. Turning to the British confessions, there is scarce mention of the Prophetic office, but, as in the Lutheran standards, the general fact may quite readily be implied. The British divines occupied themselves almost entirely with the objective Scripture and the transmission of its truth to the heart of the believer. The Reformed Confessions of the Continent make the clearest recognition of Christ as the Prophet Who has most perfectly revealed God's character and will. It might be supposed that the British creeds would more fully develop this phase which had been somewhat expounded in the sister confessions composed across the channel, particularly in the Westminster Confession. Such is not the case, for the thought of the latter half of the Reformation period

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did not swing in that direction. This omission on the part of the Westminster Confession again points to the progressive objectification of the Scripture of which mention has already been made. It is clear that the Westminster Assembly did not intend to explain how the Revelation of God came to be in the Scripture, but rather to take the Scripture as a body of revealed literature, the Word of God.

VI. CAUSTIC DENUNCIATIONS

Although the vitriolic utterances of some of the confessional statements are not of vital importance to the doctrine of Revelation, yet they do have a connection with it by virtue of the fact that some of the strongest statements are made in the rejection of other authorities for revelations outside of the Bible. It is generally true that the earlier confessions use stronger language than do the later. This may be attributed to the fact that the first confessions were written in the midst of what seemed to the writers to be a life and death struggle. They were framed in the heat of conflict when emotions and enthusiasms ran highest, when the cooler contemplation of quiet meditation was not attainable. It is to the credit of the reformers that, in days when the fervor of battle for what seemed right ran at a high pitch, they were able to produce such fine, stately, and moderate statements as we have in the best of the confessions.

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VII. INSPIRATION

The outstanding omission common to all the confessions is that of a doctrine of Inspiration. No confessional statement in itself is sufficient ground for the basis of a well rounded theological statement of Inspiration. Certainly the Bible is the Word of God, the Word of the Holy Spirit, the writing of men who were specially moved by God's Spirit, but that is only a statement of the fact of Inspiration, not of the doctrine. Attention previously has been called to the Helvetic Consensus,¹⁸⁷ which was written two decades after the Westminster Confession. That statement shows the later Scholastic development of the Reformation in which a doctrine of Inspiration was developed and affirmed by a section of the Reformed Church. But within the period of our study there was no outstanding confession which developed that doctrine. The Westminster Assembly carefully avoided the issue. That there is no formulated statement of the doctrine is proved by the fact that the Old and the New School Calvinists who differed strongly at this point, both accepted the same confession.

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187. Vide supra, p. 58

CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I. Summary

To sum up briefly the results of this study, attention is called again to the outstanding points which may be attributed to each group of confessional statements.

A. Lutheran Confessions

The Lutheran standards place the spotlight of interest upon two points; the Scripture as the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. The Scripture is the outward standard, the authoritative Revelation of God which has come to us. This conception did not come to full fruition in the Augsburg Confession because of the conciliatory attitude toward Rome. Consequently, it makes reference to sources of authority accredited by the Roman Church such as the Ecumenical Creeds and the writings of the early Fathers. Nevertheless, the Scriptures did hold the place of supreme importance and authority. The full expression of the idea of Scriptural authority did come in the Smalcald Articles and the Formula of Concord. The other center of attention, the work of the Holy Spirit, was stressed throughout the confessions. His function in Revelation was both in the recording of Holy Writ, and in making it efficacious to the believer. It was the Word and the

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Spirit working in unison that formed the crux of the Lutheran thought upon Revelation. The extent of the Canon, the place of Christ, and Inspiration were overlooked.

B. Continental Reformed Confessions

The Continental Reformed confessions likewise emphasize these points and add to that a definition of the extent of Revelation. They clearly separate the natural and special revelations of God, which is in accord with the emphasis of the rest of their theology. They assert plainly the authority and sufficiency of Scripture for salvation. The relation of Christ, the Prophets, and Apostles, and the Law, to Revelation finds fuller expression than in any other group of confessions. In this way they partially explain the means by which Revelation came to be centered in Scripture. They omit any specific doctrine of Inspiration.

C. British Reformed Confessions

The British Reformed Confessions, particularly the Westminster Confession, give the best explanation of the Word of God as it is interpreted by and applied to the believer. This was embodied in a more complete set of rules for the interpretation of the objective Scriptures than were given in the other confessions. They also affirm the absolute authority, sufficiency, and efficacy of the divine Word. They limit it to those books which are included in the Canon. The means by which Revelation

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came to be objectified in Scripture, including the work of Christ, the Prophets and Apostles, and the influence of the Holy Spirit, is their chief omission. They also refrain from expressing a concrete doctrine of Inspiration.

D. General Trend of Thought

The general trend of thought throughout the course of the Reformation was toward Scholasticism, which flowered in the Seventeenth Century. The generations following the great Reformers busied themselves with putting in order the finer points of the chief doctrinal conceptions of their illustrious predecessors. In doing so, the warmth and vitality of a living faith was lost and in its place came a cold intellectual formula known as orthodox Protestant theology.

The development of Revelation demonstrates this trend in the growing objectivity of the revealed Word of God. It would be unfair to say that one nationality, or one section of the church made the Scripture itself a greater object of veneration than any other. The decade in which a confession was written is more of a determining factor in this regard than is the section of the country in which it originated, although the locality and denomination cannot be overlooked. The objective treatment of Revelation in Scripture in the British confessions may be attributed in good part to the fact that they were written at a later date. The necessity for an authority other than the Roman

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Church continued through the latter period of the Reformation, but was manifest in a different form. During the early decades it was of a more pragmatic nature, a real and living guide for men who sought to be practically led in the path of truth and righteousness. They had broken from tradition and precedent and had started on a new path with Scripture as their guide. Later, however, the conflict centered in the intellectual and theological demands for a credible source of authority. Pressed by these demands, the followers of the Reformers developed a full-fledged doctrine based upon the external Word of God. This development is in full accord with the rest of Reformation and post-Reformation history.

II. CONCLUSIONS

A. Outstanding Place of Scripture

The most outstanding point in the Reformation doctrine of Revelation is the positive distinction between the natural and special revelations of God. The Word of God, which embodies the special revelations, was looked upon as coming from a higher source than any other knowledge. This is a necessary emphasis in the present day when rationalistic and humanistic philosophies are common, and when men tend to minimize the Bible in their attempts to substitute their own innate capacities as a means for knowing the Infinite. Although not completely stated with all of its intricacies, this doctrine is the basis for the Protestant answer to the epistemological problem of contemporary phil-

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osophy. Such a presentation of the doctrine as the creeds contain will help to restore respect for the Scriptures as something special and unique, God's work, not the result of man's intellectual and spiritual advancement. It is the only view which will keep the Scriptures in their position separate and apart from all the writings of men.

B. Practical Sufficiency

Since the Reformation, philosophers and theologians have been digging at the foundations of the doctrine of Revelation to test its validity. They have spun vast and intricate webs of theory to connect the Bible with the past, to show its historicity, to explain its development, to prove or disprove its authenticity and value. Sometimes these have been helpful and at other times harmful to the common respect for Holy Writ. This is an age when proof and reason are held in high esteem. When considered from that point of view, it seems that the creeds are very insufficient in regard to Revelation, that there is need for Protestantism to explain and support its position.

On the other hand, what more should or could be said? There is no theory upon which men could agree. The thought of this age still seems to be in solution. It would be helpful to put in current language the thought of the church today, rather than in the language of the Sixteenth Century. There is no single confession that has completely stated the entire doctrine as found in the creeds as a whole. It would be well to combine all the thoughts which are scattered throughout the confessions into a single comprehensive state-

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ment. Then men might clearly see the stand that was taken at the time of the Reformation and by conservative Protestantism today. These assertions must be granted. Outside of modernizing the language and combining the statements, what more should be done? Creeds and confessions are not meant to be complete theological expositions. They are plain, concrete statements of the basic truths of Christianity as seen through the eyes of the Christians who compose and confess them. They are meant for practical purposes. Although the theological and speculative world is intensely interested in Revelation today, the vast majority of Protestant people need and want concrete and practical truth. The Reformers emphasized the Word and the Spirit. It is the same emphasis that the men of today need. The creeds are meant for the average Christian, and for him the importance is the Word and the Spirit. If he has these two, he has life eternal. If he does not have them, no matter how refined and intellectual he may be, he has missed the mark. This is the sentiment of the creeds themselves. Profound respect is due to the Reformers who were able to give so simply the essence of the doctrine of Revelation as applied to normal Christian life. It is because their words were born of a living faith rather than speculation and dogma.

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C. Absence of Dogmatic Extremes

The Reformers held to the fundamental principles of Revelation without attempting to express the intricacies in creedal form. They did not set up details as the sine qua non of Christianity. Their firm hold upon the fundamentals and yet their tolerance of the lesser things may well be emulated by men today. This does not mean that Calvin and Luther did not think about the more technical side of Revelation, but they refrained from forcing their views upon others.

D. Views Based Upon Confessions

Another value that has come from this study is in regard to views which theologians of the present attribute to the Reformers and the creeds. Theories of Revelation and Inspiration are expounded for which the support of the Reformers and the creeds are claimed.¹⁸⁸ No one should claim the authority of the confessions for any dogma of Inspiration or for the minute details of the doctrine of Revelation. Such a procedure is a perversion of the proper use of the confessions. That does not mean that the Christian of today should not defend his faith in Revelation and Inspiration.

E. Respect for Creeds in General

A study of this nature enhances the esteem for creeds in general. The beauty and stateliness of language with

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188. Cf. vide supra, p. 4, 42

the simplicity and profundity of thought excites respect and admiration for the men who conceived them and the age which bore them. It is common in some circles to discredit the confessions as useless and belonging to a less intelligent age. Men who are so inclined are apt to credit the superior intelligence of the modern age because they have exposed the true nature of these hoary documents. They say that this age has gone beyond, has stepped out ahead of, that in which the confessions were made. They believe that they and their contemporaries are the first to realize the defects of the creeds, that it is the modern age that has shown the moth holes and the rust in the confessions which millions in the past have loved and revered. Such men are mistaken when they assume that this age is the first to revolt against the confessions and throw to the winds the doctrinal standards. Such opposition is nearly as old as the confessions themselves. In 1724 William Dunlop edited a new edition of the Westminster Confession with a preface in which he defended its value. He opens his discourse as follows:

"At a time when Creeds and Confessions of Faith are so generally decried, and not only exposed to contempt as useless inventions, without any force of efficacy to promote the interests of truth and religion.....we thought it might be of some use... to give a short account of the end and design of composures of this nature, and of the chief purposes which the Christian Churches intended to promote, in framing and publishing these several Confessions;....."189

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189. Dunlop, A Preface to the Confession, p. 3

When men decry the value of the confessions, it is not necessarily a sign of deep and considered thought. It may be that they are merely following the precedent which was set centuries ago. The limitations of creeds and confessions must be recognized. They, in themselves, do not satisfy the desires of those who are theologically minded. That is as true in Revelation as in any other doctrine. But when everything else has been said, the fundamental truths remain, attested continually by the witness of Scripture and by the experience of those who know God.

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