



NEW ENGLAND CONGREGATIONAL SPIRITUALITY

A Study three of the Historical Documents of Congregationalism



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New England Congregational Spirituality in the 17th and 18th centuries
An Overview based on The Savoy Declaration of Faith, The Cambridge Platform and The
Heads of Agreement.

Our culture faces a major task, as people have largely abandoned organized religion in favor of being “Spiritual” we must renew and seek to understand what this means as creatures who are made up of spirit and body that live in organic wholeness. We may simply define being spiritual as being connected to the spirit world, though then we have to wonder what spiritual world we are a part of. For Christians, being spiritual likely follows closely to Allistar McGrath’s definition: ““In its basic sense, spirituality designates the Christian life – not specifically its ideas, but the way in which those ideas make themselves visible in the life of Christian individuals and communities. Spirituality represents the interface between ideas and life, between Christian theology and human existence.”¹ To sum up, Spirituality is where Christian teaching and Christian practice integrate on the individual and communal levels. This is difficult enough to understand, however, those who went before us had no concept of the idea of spirituality. They used words like Piety or Orthopraxy, words which mean something totally different in our modern age than they did then. This presents to us a difficulty since we want to avoid the sin of presentism; the reading of our own ideals onto those of the past, but if we have always been beings made of body and spirit then there has always been a spirituality among us.

This is as true about the first century as it is about us today, about Medieval Catholics as it is about New England Congregationalists. It is this last group that concerns this investigation.

¹ Alister McGrath, *Spirituality in an Age of Change, rediscovering the spirit of the reformers*, 1994, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.

In the rough New England frontier, what did spirituality look like for those living in the colonial and post-colonial America, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We will do this by looking through the three major documents of New England Congregationalism, The Savoy Declaration of Faith (1658) and the Saybrook Confession (1710), The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline (1648) and the Heads of Agreement (1708). The first two of these documents come from transatlantic conversations revolving around the Westminster Assembly in London which largely favored Presbyterian structure over Congregationalism² and the third was written out of a need for unity and uniformity among the churches in the colonies. All four, according to David Wells were “The guiding documents of congregationalism”³ until the mid-nineteenth century. As important as these documents are, they have not received the kind of attention by modern Congregationalists as they likely should. Though Congregationalist denominations like the Conservative Conference of Christian Churches⁴ require them to be read by pastors seeking Ministerial Standing. In exegeting these confessions and platforms we will also put them in context with other confessions of their time, specifically the Westminster Confession of Faith (1658) and The London Baptist Confession of 1689. We will also look at two of the divine’s ministering at this time, John Owen who is believed to have written the introduction to the Savoy Declaration and who influenced the colonies from London and

² Robert Davis, Alwyn York, Introduction to the Cambridge Platform, pg. 85-88, Historic Documents of Congregationalism, The Savoy Declaration of Faith, The Cambridge Platform, The Heads of Agreement, 2015, NextStep Resources, Minneapolis. From this point forward when we are dealing with the documents themselves the footnote will follow the Document name, Chapter Number and Page number in Historic Documents of Congregationalism (i.e. XX.I.63). When we are dealing with the introductions they will be given with the authors name as demonstrated below. There is one exception to this when a quote is presented from John Owen’s full introduction to the Savoy Declaration of Faith that comes from the full version of the text, not the abbreviated portion that is present in the Davis Book.

³ Davis, David F. Wells, Forward, pg 9-14, Historic Documents of Congregationalism

⁴ CCCC

Jonathan Edwards who labored as a congregationalist minister in New England while these documents governed the churches.

Before we begin there is one point of clarification that needs to be made. There is almost no variance between the Savoy Declaration and the Saybrook Confession despite over sixty years and an ocean between the two documents the writers at Saybrook essentially just added scripture references to the Savoy.⁵ For this reason when we talk about the documents, we will refer primarily to the Savoy Declaration as printed in *Historic Documents of Congregationalism* (2015). There are also significant points of agreement and disagreement between the Westminster and Savoy, thus clarification will be made on those differences and similarities when it is required. However, since the majority of the investigation deals with these three documents and the spirituality therein we will limit those comparisons, as well as comparisons to the London Confession to a minimum.

The Merging of Reformation Strains

One thing that will stand out as we look over these documents is the intersection between some of the strains of the reformation. These intersections often occur in one or two areas, but when they do they significantly change how we view congregationalism. For instance, in the next section we will discuss the Congregationalist desire to select their own ministers and where that particular attitude came from. However, as we do this, we must remember that the idea of total autonomy did not exist in the seventeenth century In fact, the Cambridge Platform expressly states that: “Independent we affirm not.”⁶ Because of this their ecclesiology brings us back to the ideas of the magisterial reformers relying on the catholicity of the church and the Platonic

⁵ Davis, Introduction to the Savoy Declaration pg. 15-28, *Historic Documents of Congregationalism*

⁶ Davis, The Cambridge Platform, pg 95-130, *Historic Documents of Congregationalism*, pg 97

Construction of the Church brought into the reformation by Calvin.⁷ So it would be unnuanced to call them “Good Calvinists” a better term would be “good reformed” though that almost seems oxymoronic to voice.⁸

Spirituality and the Savoy Declaration of Faith:

As was stated above, the Savoy Declaration did not exist in a vacuum, it was created as a Congregationalist response to Westminster to speak to the formation of congregational polity and address church polity and to push back against the preference for Presbyterianism within the halls of Westminster. Still, it would be unfair to totally confer the title of Schismatic upon the Congregationalists even with their preference for selecting their own ministers. An idea they share with the Anabaptist Movement,⁹ they still maintain elements of the magisterial reformers, specifically and favorably towards John Calvin. However, we will look closer at this when we address the Cambridge Platform. For now we concern ourselves with the thirty-two chapters of the Savoy Declaration and the spirituality therein.

It is hard to argue that the original authors of the Savoy Declaration saw themselves as a confessional group. John Owen’s introduction makes that clear:

Confessions, when made by a company of professors of Christianity joyntly meeting to that end, the most genuine and natural use of such Confessions is. That under the same form of words, they express the substance of the same common salvation, or trinity of their faith ; whereby speaking the same

⁷ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion: IV.1.1-8* 2015, Fig Books, Ebook

⁸ Due to the Doctrine of Depravity

⁹ Gordon Isaac, *Lectures on the Anabaptist Spirituality*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, March 12, 14, 2019 9:30AM. This conclusion comes from the Anabaptist divorce of Church and Magistrate shifting the focus to non-government appointed ministers of the Gospel.

things, they see-cu themselves perfectly joy and in [iv] the same mind, and in the ^ Cor. i.i same judgement.¹⁰

Never in these documents do the divines affirm an idea of Solo Scriptura in line with the creed of modern fundamentalism¹¹ though they do affirm Solo Scriptura, they understand the importance of a confessional spirituality, that there needs to be commonality in the beliefs of the church. In modern Congregationalism that translates to the seven essential doctrines of the CCCC put forward by Park Street.¹² Though not considered a confession is in fact a confession of belief and why some argue Congregationalists should re-capture its confessional background.¹³ Or as Carl Truman points out in his book “The Creedal Imperative:”

The fact that I am a confessional Christian place me at odds with the vast majority of evangelical Christians today. That is ironic, because most Christian churches throughout the ages have defined themselves by commitment to some form of creed, confession, or doctrinal statement. This is the case for the Eastern Orthodox, for Roman Catholics, and for Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican Protestants. Some streams of Baptists have also had confessions; and many independent churches today that may not think of themselves as confessional have brief statements of faith that define who they are and what they believe.¹⁴

As though we cannot escape our Creedal and Confessional history. To our seventeenth century forebearers it would have seemed unthinkable to deny the churches confessional nature.

Even so, they did place a higher emphasis on Scripture than on their confessional nature. The first chapter of the Savoy Declaration lays out the what they believe to be the only inspired word of God. That being the sixty-six books of the modern protestant cannon. Thus, they

¹⁰ Walker, Williston. The creeds and platforms of Congregationalism (p. 354). 1893, New York, Scribner. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, 2006, Oxford University Press, London

¹² CCCCUSA, <http://www.cccusa.com/about-us/statement-of-faith/>, accessed, 3/19/19, CCCC

¹³ David F. Wells and Ken Swetland have both made this argument.

¹⁴ Carl R. Truman, The Creedal Imperative, 2012, Crossway, Wheaton, pg 14

rejected the apocrypha, even going so far as to not consider it uninspired.¹⁵ They saw Revelation 22:18-19¹⁶ as the official closing of the canon and therefore nothing can be added or removed from it without incurring condemnation on those who do. This also led to a fervent belief in the doctrine of inerrancy of the texts in their original languages.¹⁷

Also relevant to the spirituality of the New England Congregationalists according to Savoy was the Trinitarian Role of the Godhead which included a robust understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit which was the agent by which we were in Union with Christ. Further, they followed Calvin in their doctrine of salvation in that one receives an effectual calling from God out of his Depravity, provided by grace, to the elect only whom God knew would be saved from the beginning of time all of this being mediated by Christ through his death and resurrection. We are thus saved by grace and justified by faith alone.¹⁸ Christians were then saved for good works, not by them, that it was by God's work in us that we were capable of doing good works in the first place. Good works then were the "fruits and evidences of living a life of faith."¹⁹ Our disposition towards others in the church then was to be in light of their position as parts of the communion of saints, ordained and elected to life through the adoption as sons.²⁰ Furthermore the sabbath was to be strictly observed, though not legalistically, meaning it was to be primarily a day of rest and recovery for the week when men and women saw to the

¹⁵ Savoy I.III.35

¹⁶ Rev. 22:18-19: I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll. New International Version

¹⁷ Savoy 1.VIII.37

¹⁸ Savoy VI-XVIII

¹⁹ Savoy XVI.II.56

²⁰ Savoy XXII.54

care of their souls.²¹ These are all points of agreement with the Westminster Assembly²² and with the London Baptist Declaration.²³

As for the Civil Magistrates the Divines at Savoy saw it as essential that Christians pray for and encourage the magistrates.²⁴ This was because all magistrates were “Appointed by God” and therefore serve at his will and should be encouraged to protect Christians, their professors and even the religious liberty of others.²⁵ A Christian could also accept the appointment of Civil Magistrate so long and he “might...maintain justice and peace of the wholesome laws of the commonwealth.”²⁶

Finally, when dealing with Savoy we must discuss the role of Sacramental Theology in the Savoy statement and in Congregationalism. Again, here they follow Calvin and the Westminster Divines by putting forth the idea of spiritual presence specifically in the Lord’s Supper and the Baptism of infants into the Covenant by two believing parents.²⁷ The writers of Savoy wanted to make sure that the Sacraments could not be denied based on the works of the pastor.²⁸ The longest section of the statement on the Sacraments reads:

The grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments rightly used is not conferred by any power in them: neither does the efficacy of the sacrament depend upon the piety or intention of him who does administer it. But by the work of the spirit and

²¹ Savoy XXII.I-VIII.65-67

²² Westminster Divines, The Humble Advice of the Divines at Westminster, The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1658, Westminster Assembly, London, From here Westminster I.III.3 (Kindle Location)

²³ PP, The London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689, Pavlik Press, Kindle Edition From this point Baptist I.II.3 (Kindle Location)

²⁴ Savoy XXIV.IV.70

²⁵ Savoy XXIV.I-III, 69

²⁶ Savoy XXIV,II,69

²⁷ Savoy XXVIII, XXIX, XXX, In New England this would later give way to the Half-Way Covenant of Solomon Stoddard which allowed children of one believing grandparent to be baptized as a response to the French and Indian War. Jonathan Edwards would later try to overturn this, leading to his dismissal from the Pulpit at Northampton which Stoddard, his Father-in-Law had previously preached.

²⁸ This is a response to Interdiction, a Roman Catholic practice that denied the Eucharistic Mass to churches, regions or even nations who would not obey Papal bulls.

by the word of institution which contains, together with a precept authorizing thereof a benefit to all worthy receivers.²⁹

Thus, just as with salvation it was the Holy Spirit working within the sacrament that brought grace to the one receiving and not based on the piety of the person dishing out the sacrament. Sacraments were still the “Sign and seal of covenantal grace”³⁰ where grace was imparted in the act of partaking, in regard to The Lord’s Supper.³¹ Or at the time of effectual calling, as in the case of Baptism.³² Within the Sacraments it was to be understood that the sacramental elements themselves shared the spiritual presence of Christ, but Transubstantiation, a change in substance was to be completely rejected.³³ The Lord’s Supper was to be administered to all believing children of God, worthy recipients were considered to be reaping the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ through spiritual means.³⁴ This can be contrasted with the Baptist declaration of faith who see The Lord’s Supper as a mere “remembrance” or “memorial” of the sacrifice of Christ. Not that he was “Sacrificed again and again” but was merely to remind us of his sacrifice. There was thus no “Spiritual presence” in the bread and the cup and no grace conferred to the partaker.³⁵

As for Baptism, we have already seen how it was a means of grace for all who took it, as well as a seal of the covenant. The difference was that unlike the Lord’s Supper: “The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to the moment of time wherein it was administered.”³⁶ And thus could be ministered at any time and by any means, be that sprinkling or dipping, in the life of a person from infant to time of confirmation of confession of faith.³⁷ Though the Savoy Divines considered

²⁹ Savoy XXVIII.III.74

³⁰ Savoy XXVIII.I.73

³¹ Savoy XXVIII.I.73, XXX.V.76

³² Savoy XXIX.VI.75

³³ Savoy XXVIII.II.73, XXX.VI.76

³⁴ Savoy XXX.VII.77

³⁵ Baptist. XXX.II.1320

³⁶ Savoy XXIX.IV.75

³⁷ Savoy XXIX.III-IV.74

Baptism important they did not want to tie it to salvation, therefore a believing person who had not been baptized was not in sin for failing to be baptized because regeneration was not done by the waters.³⁸ Still it was important that baptism only be administered once in the lifetime of the individual and that they not be rebaptized because they partook of a Roman Baptism.³⁹

Again, this differs from the statement of baptism in the London Baptist Confession. For the Baptist it was considered absolutely essential what mode of baptism was used, that is, baptism had to be completed by “immersion” to be considered the “due administration of this ordinance.”⁴⁰ And could only be administered to: “Those who actually profess faith”⁴¹ which automatically denied baptizing of infants, in fact this is expressly forbidden and meant that any infant baptized would need to be rebaptized upon making such a profession of faith.

The congregational system of Savoy was still in place during the time of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and it is likely his own church submitted to Savoy/Saybrook (1710) as well as The Cambridge Platform and the Heads of Agreement. It was likely his use of the Cambridge Platform that caused him trouble in discipling the teens caught in the “Blue-Bible scandal” of the late 1740’s.⁴² Even so, Edwards adheres to all these points brought out in the Savoy Declaration and Saybrook Confession. He also used the Westminster Catechism in his church and relies heavily on Calvin’s Theology in his own method of putting forward theology. In fact, I have argued in the past that Edwards “Religious Affections” a response to Charles Chauncy’s critic of the First Great Awakening actually places the affections back in their proper place within Calvinism.⁴³ Edwards

³⁸ Savoy XXIX.V.75

³⁹ Savoy XXIX.VI.75

⁴⁰ Baptist. XXIX.III-IV.1299

⁴¹ Baptist. XXIX.II.1299

⁴² George Marsden, Jonathan Edwards: A Life, 2003, Yale University Press, New Haven.

⁴³ Jonathan Faulkner, A New And Controversial Conversation: The Debate Between Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy over the events of 1740-42. April 2017, Academic Paper, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hamilton

had a thorough Calvinism and thoroughly reformed outlook despite his puritan upbringing with its focus on experientialism in salvation.

The Cambridge Platform

Now we turn our attention to the second⁴⁴ of these documents, the Cambridge Platform.⁴⁵ Which was the result of a “Transatlantic conversation between the colonies and congregationalists in England.”⁴⁶ Meant to bring order to the congregational churches. One of the critics of the New Testament Church leveled by David F. Wells in his forward to the Cambridge Platform is that they were “disorderly”⁴⁷ and that disorderliness hindered them in their ability to exchange and share resources. The Cambridge Platform was designed to be an ordering, especially for the churches on the frontier of New England. Ministers in England and in New England were particularly interested in the reform of the Church and in what form a truly reformed church might take.⁴⁸ To these reformers the church must be formed after the mold which Christ gave to the Church of Christ on Earth before he left.⁴⁹ Therefore, they wanted to diligently search the scriptures to discover what that meant in terms of church governance. The church catholic also in its basic form took on two forms, Triumphant and Militant. This is similar to Calvin’s idea of Visible and Invisible⁵⁰ as the Church Triumphant consists of those who have received effectual calling and dwell in union with Christ whether living or dead. While the church Militant exists in the world and is responsible for the purpose of advancing the Gospel on Earth.⁵¹ It was the goal of the Cambridge Platform to offer

⁴⁴ It was actually adopted before Savoy

⁴⁵ Sited as “Cambridge.I.II.3

⁴⁶ Davis, York, 87-94, *The Historic Documents of Congregationalism*

⁴⁷ Davis, Wells, Forward to the Cambridge Declaration, 83, *The Historic Documents of Congregationalism*, I would debate this with him, I see a highly ordered system within the churches out of necessity.

⁴⁸ Davis, York, 87 *The Historic Documents of Congregationalism*

⁴⁹ Cambridge I.I.95

⁵⁰ In fact this is subject of chapter IV and V of the Cambridge Platform

⁵¹ Cambridge II-V.I-III.96-97

ordering for the second state, the Church Militant. Below we will briefly look at aspects of Church Polity as put forward in the Cambridge Platform. Including Covenants, Offices and Membership⁵² and their form in the Church.

Church Covenants: To the divines at Cambridge, since Covenant Theology was so central to how they understood Scripture,⁵³ Calvinism and by it, their theology, covenant was essential to the formation of the individual churches. This was to be a: “visible political union among them”⁵⁴ that distinguished them as a church. To the divines, like a house whose materials are gathered to be built, does not become a house until all the work is done. So a church does not become a church until the people are “knit together”⁵⁵ by the bond of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of a covenant. The covenant was to place the members in mutual submission to Christ to follow his ordinances, this was to be a “Voluntary Agreement”⁵⁶ between the saints that would guide how they lived out scripture together and in relation to the world. The Covenant was thus essential to how the congregational churches formed and were maintained and when that covenant was neglected, a church ceased to be.⁵⁷

Church Offices: The Cambridge Platform writers made one thing clear, they believed that officers were not a necessary part of the Church and the church could function without them. That being said, they accepted officers because Christ appointed officers and therefore officers of the church must be in some way “Useful.”⁵⁸ Those officers were to be the office of the Pastor and

⁵² Obviously there is much more to Cambridge Platform than these three, however time does not permit a full exegesis of this text.

⁵³ Cambridge IV.II.100

⁵⁴ Cambridge IV.I.99

⁵⁵ Cambridge IV.I.99

⁵⁶ Cambridge IV.IV.100

⁵⁷ Cambridge III.III-IV.99

⁵⁸ Cambridge VI.I.102

Teacher,⁵⁹ who were responsible for exhortation and preaching of the word⁶⁰ and the Elders and Deacons who were responsible to oversee the care of the church, its finances and its people. They were intended to work with the pastor and aid him in the spiritual work.⁶¹ In modern New England Congregational Churches sometimes before a congregational meeting we read “The Warrant” or more specifically an Elder reads The Warrant to summon the congregation to an annual meeting. This is left over from the Cambridge Platform. Furthermore the Deacons were to be “helps” to the pastor in doing the work of the Church, this included widows who were to visit the sick and provide food for them.⁶² Finally, an officer could not confer upon himself the position of elder or deacon, pastor or teacher but had to have a calling by God that was confirmed by the community and they had to be tested to prove the assurance of that call.⁶³ All these positions were to be confirmed by “Ordination through the Laying on of Hands” by the congregation.⁶⁴

Membership: The opening line of the Cambridge Platform reads as follows: “The doors of the churches of Christ do not by Christ’s appointment stand so wide open that all sorts of people, good and bad, may enter therein at their pleasure.”⁶⁵ For the New England Congregationalist there were certain standards for entrance into the Church. That being said, they go in section three of chapter eight to say: “Even the smallest measure of faith is acceptable.”⁶⁶ Those standards were two-fold, one must have repented of sin and turned from it and confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior and that was the only standard by which men were to be examined.⁶⁷ Members also could be

⁵⁹ Cambridge VI.V-VI.103

⁶⁰ Cambridge VI.V.103

⁶¹ Cambridge VI.II:III.104

⁶² Cambridge VI.VII.105

⁶³ Cambridge: VII.I.105, this was based on 1 Tim 3:1-12

⁶⁴ Cambridge VIII.1.107

⁶⁵ Cambridge XII.I.113

⁶⁶ Cambridge XII.III.113

⁶⁷ Cambridge XII.II.113 Scripture reference given Acts 2:38-42

removed if they renewed their sinful lifestyles, failed to make regular attendance or moved away⁶⁸ They could also face excommunication for stirring up division or causing harm to the body of Christ.⁶⁹ And were the church was required to work together with other churches and view those churches as equals, coming together to help with aid and communal needs.⁷⁰ This last issue would help lead to the Heads of Agreement and indeed would be part of the final article of the Heads.⁷¹

The Heads of Agreement

Because much of what was discussed in Savoy and Cambridge largely role over into the Heads of Agreement, we will only deal with them in brief. Suffice it to say, we continue to fight over Congregational or Presbyterian Polity almost three hundred years after. Propagated by Increase Matter in 1861, John Howe a Presbyterian and Matt Mead, a Congregationalist, sat down to hammer out agreement on points of ecclesiastical unity. These heads of agreement were accepted in the colonies when Cotton Mather preached through them and they were more readily accepted there than in England, the same thing of which had happened with Savoy. Still the battle has raged over ecclesiastical polity, but still give us hope for union today.⁷²

Conclusion:

As we have seen, the Savoy Declaration of Faith lays out a thoroughly reformed doctrine of the faith. It is relatively coherent and tailored for a very specific group, the Congregationalists. It sets out a reformed Spirituality that relies heavily on the spirituality of John Calvin while

⁶⁸ Cambridge XIII.IV.115

⁶⁹ Cambridge XIV.I-IV.117

⁷⁰ Cambridge XV.I-IV.120-124

⁷¹ Heads of Agreement X.I-III.140

⁷² Davis, Introduction to the Heads of Agreement, 130-132, The Historic Documents of Congregationalism.

maintaining an emphasis on the independence of their churches. Justification was by faith alone, salvation was by grace alone, Christ is the head of the Church and the sacraments are signs and seals of the covenant which confer grace. In all this man must be called by God's effectual calling to be elected unto life. In the Cambridge Platform we find a church interested in maintaining unity within its membership, whose officers are ordained by God through the laying on of hands and who are called Pastors, Teachers, Elders and Deacons. The members of Churches are required to have repented of their sin and believe in Jesus as Lord in Savior and the churches must work together and live in peace with one another since one is not superior to another. Finally, there is agreement beyond the lines of denomination found in the Heads of Agreement that had not before been seen in the colonies.

Adopting These Documents Today:

There is a thrust behind the work put together by David F. Wells and Robert Davis putting forward these documents of Congregationalism. That we, as Congregationalists might readopt these confessions (Savoy and Saybrook), the Cambridge Platform and The Heads of Agreement. This is a good goal for a modern Congregationalism that has either abandoned its theological heritage for liberalism or for such churches who experience Charismatic renewal and then reform, a movement that is happening now in the United Churches of Christ. History shows that those who are unaware of their history will repeat it and may even be surprised by it when they do learn it. It must be said that these are good documents in and of themselves, though the Heads of Agreement may need to be updated for our modern denominationalism. R. Scott Carter has argued the same thing, that reformed recover our confessional nature in his book entitled: *Recovering our Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety and Practice*. Which issues the same call as Davis and Wells to

reformed Presbyterians. We can also look at modern confessions like the *Reforming Catholic Confession* which tries to establish protestant catholicity after the teachings of Philip Schaff.⁷³

Perhaps though we do not need to just go back to and readopt these documents alone. Perhaps we need to go back to the Church Father's to rediscover a Nicene faith like what is put forward in Timothy George's *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Recovering our Apostolic Witness*. To take into account the full testimony of Church History and restate to our congregations why Church History is important and matters. Interestingly enough, in our current times perhaps this kind of historical rediscovery, especially of the ancient Church may help us better exegete our own times when the Church was not at the centers of attention and power. Whatever is done, it is time for us to reclaim our reformed heritage and its confessions rooted in historical theology and understanding. So that we may show the world a unified Church that is found in Christ.

⁷³ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Interpretation after Babel*, 2016, Brazo's Press, Grand Rapids

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