

It is likely we will offer some observations on these various credal documents and the emphasis that makes them diverse but for the moment we only note them for the stress they place on the authority of the Word. The credal stress did make for tighter denominational alignments and for a good bit of sharp theological distinction which less loving persons are prone to call "hair-splitting."

5. The Pietistic Response

Pietism responded against the theological tones of the reformation by de-emphasizing the authority of the revelation and maximizing experience and emotiveness. It did not do this "on purpose" but that was the result. The heart was more important than the head, in popular jargon. The role of the Scripture as binding on the individual and the church was downplayed so that men might enjoy a fuller emotional joy in the simple experiencing of the doctrines. Pietism was a well-meaning movement and did a good service in its day. It is a reminder to us, however, that if the authority role accorded the Bible is minimized at all, the result is loss of prominence in the affairs of the church and eventual displacement to some other authority voice. In the case of pietism and many similar movements the new voice was that of feeling.

6. Observation

The Reformation earnestly sought to have the Scripture returned to the role of doctrinal/practical rule in the church. Perhaps the most difficult factor was that, as the church divided into segments, each took the Scripture as the basis for its division. This proliferation of ideals had a tendency to make the authority basis weak. It would seem obvious that diverse opinions could not fully cite the same authority basis while also claiming unambiguity for its understanding. The institutional church had failed to keep Scripture in an authoritarian point as it allowed the machinery to replace the work of God. The multiple churches actually lost what they gained (in the long run) in that they made the Scripture the victims of their whims and understanding.

The Westminster Assembly could not correct all of this but one cannot help but note that in its defense of the canon it states what constitutes Scripture and in its understanding of interpretation it allows the Scripture to be the basis for other understanding than its own...thereby allowing the Word of God to be the real authority...one to which even the confession must bow.

F. Biblical Criticism and Rationalism

For this section we offer only a few brief notes...the material is generally touched on in other courses.