

Westminster Confession

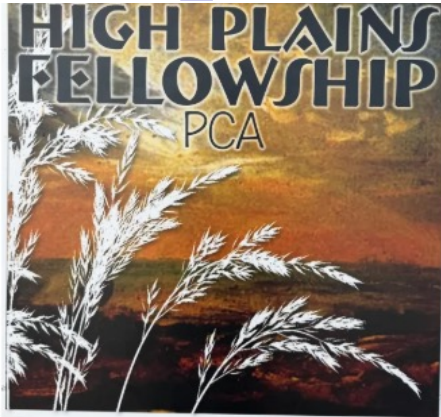
3. The Westminster Standards

Bill Petro

your friendly neighborhood historian

Where to find Slides & Recordings:

billpetro.com/highplains



Church History: *Westminster Confession*

Presentations for the [High Plains Fellowship Church](#)

Fall 2025, by [Bill Petro](#)

Updated 11/22/25

 Signifies audio recording

- Signifies the author's articles for *further reading*

<u>DATE</u>	<u>TITLE</u>	<u>Click the link below for the PDF</u>
Nov 9	1. Westminster: <i>Why Are We a Confessional Church?</i>  Recording: Nov-9_Confessional • Touring: Westminster Abbey, London • Life of Martin Luther • History of the Council of Nicaea	Confessional
Nov 23	2. Continental Reformed: <i>Three Forms of Unity and the English Reformation</i>  Recording: Nov-23_Continental-Reformed • History of the King James Bible	Continental Reformed
Nov 30	3. Westminster Confession  Recording: Nov-30_Westminster-Confession • History of Thanksgiving • Westminster Assembly Project	Westminster Confession

Review

- Continental Reformed Three Forms of Unity
- England's **Henry VIII** Supreme Head of C.o.E.
A different Reformation
- English Reformation Thomas Cranmer, A.B. of C.
 - *Edward VI*
 - *Mary I (Bloody)*
 - *Elizabeth I*
 - *James I, Charles I*Oliver Cromwell

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, you should be able to answer about the Westminster Standards:

- Why do we subscribe to it?
- Why was it needed?
- Who wrote it?
- What's in it? What *unexpected* is in it?
- What came from it? What *didn't*?
- What are the best uses of it?

WCF: Why do we subscribe to it?

- High mark of the Confessions
- Fullest flowering of Reformation thought
- No other Reformation or post-Reformation confessional standard rivals that of the Westminster Confession in depth or length
- Part of the *PCA Constitution* following the Scripture: WCF, Larger & Shorter Catechism, Book of Church Order.

WCF: Why was it needed?

- English **Civil War** forced church reform
 - Political stability = ecclesiastical reform
- Update the C.o.E.'s **39 Articles**
- To advise **Parliament** on church issues of:
 - 1. Doctrine
 - 2. Worship
 - 3. Church Government and Discipline.

WCF: Who wrote it?

- Who: Westminster Divines (theologians)
- When: July 1, 1643 – 1649 (1652): 1,163 meetings
- Where: Henry VII (Lady) Chapel.



Westminster Standards: What's in it?

- **Westminster Confession**
- **Larger & Shorter Catechisms**
- **Directory of Public Worship**
- *Presbyterian Polity,*
Covenant theology, Calvinism



WCF: Content Summary

Faith

- 1-6: Holy Scriptures, Trinity, Predestination
 - 7-9: Covenant theology, Christ's mediation, Free will
 - 10-18: Salvation aspects...
-

Duty

- 19-22: Law, Christian liberty, and Worship
- 23-24: Civil government and Marriage
- 25-26: Church
- 27-29: Sacraments
- 30-31: Church government and Discipline
- 32-33: Eschatology.

Westminster Confession: Table Of Contents

THE CONTENTS OF THE CHAPTERS IN THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

- I.—Of the Holy Scripture.
- II.—Of God, and of the Holy Trinity.
- III.—Of God's Eternal Decree.
- IV.—Of Creation.
- V.—Of Providence.
- VI.—Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment thereof.
- VII.—Of God's Covenant with Man.
- VIII.—Of Christ the Mediator.
- IX.—Of Free-Will.
- X.—Of Effectual Calling.
- XI.—Of Justification.
- XII.—Of Adoption.
- XIII.—Of Sanctification.
- XIV.—Of Saving Faith.
- XV.—Of Repentance unto Life.
- XVI.—Of Good Works.
- XVII.—Of the Perseverance of the Saints.
- XVIII.—Of the Assurance of Grace and Salvation.
- XIX.—Of the Law of God.
- XX.—Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience.
- XXI.—Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day.
- XXII.—Of Lawful Oaths and Vows.
- XXIII.—Of the Civil Magistrate.
- XXIV.—Of Marriage, and Divorce.
- XXV.—Of the Church.
- XXVI.—Of the Communion of Saints.
- XXVII.—Of the Sacraments.
- XXVIII.—Of Baptism.
- XXIX.—Of the Lord's Supper.
- XXX.—Of Church Censures.
- XXXI.—Of Synods and Councils.
- XXXII.—Of the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection of the Dead.
- XXXIII.—Of the Last Judgment.

Westminster Confession: Chapter 1, *Of the Holy Scripture*

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 unexcusable;

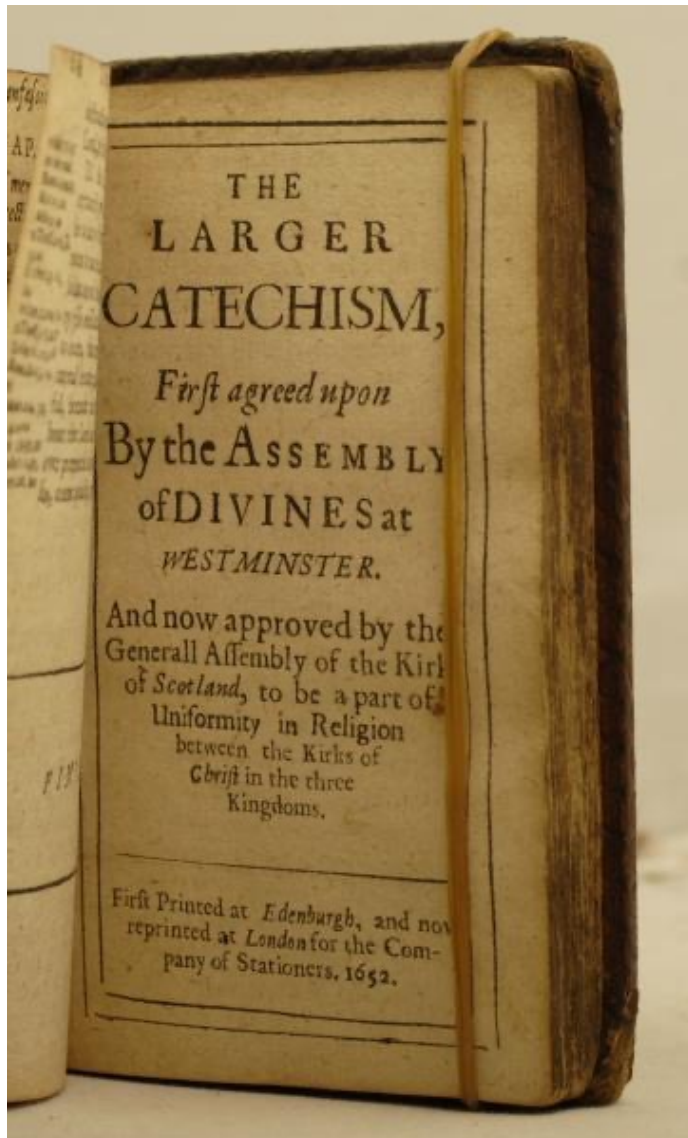
yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation.

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.

Catechism contents

Larger Catechism: 196

Shorter Catechism: 107



- God as Creator
- Original sin
- Man's fallen nature
- Christ the Redeemer
- Ten Commandments
- Baptism
- Holy Communion
- Lord's Prayer.

WCF: What's unexpected

-WCF: Chapter 25, VI. *Of the Church*

“There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ;

nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof;

*but is that **Antichrist**, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.”*

WCF: What's unexpected, *cont.*

Also called such by:

- Jan Hus
- Luther / Melanchthon
- Zwingli / Bullinger
- Calvin / Knox
- Thomas Cranmer, AB of C
- Puritans
- Roger Williams (Baptist)
- John Wesley (Methodist)
- Seventh Day Adventists.

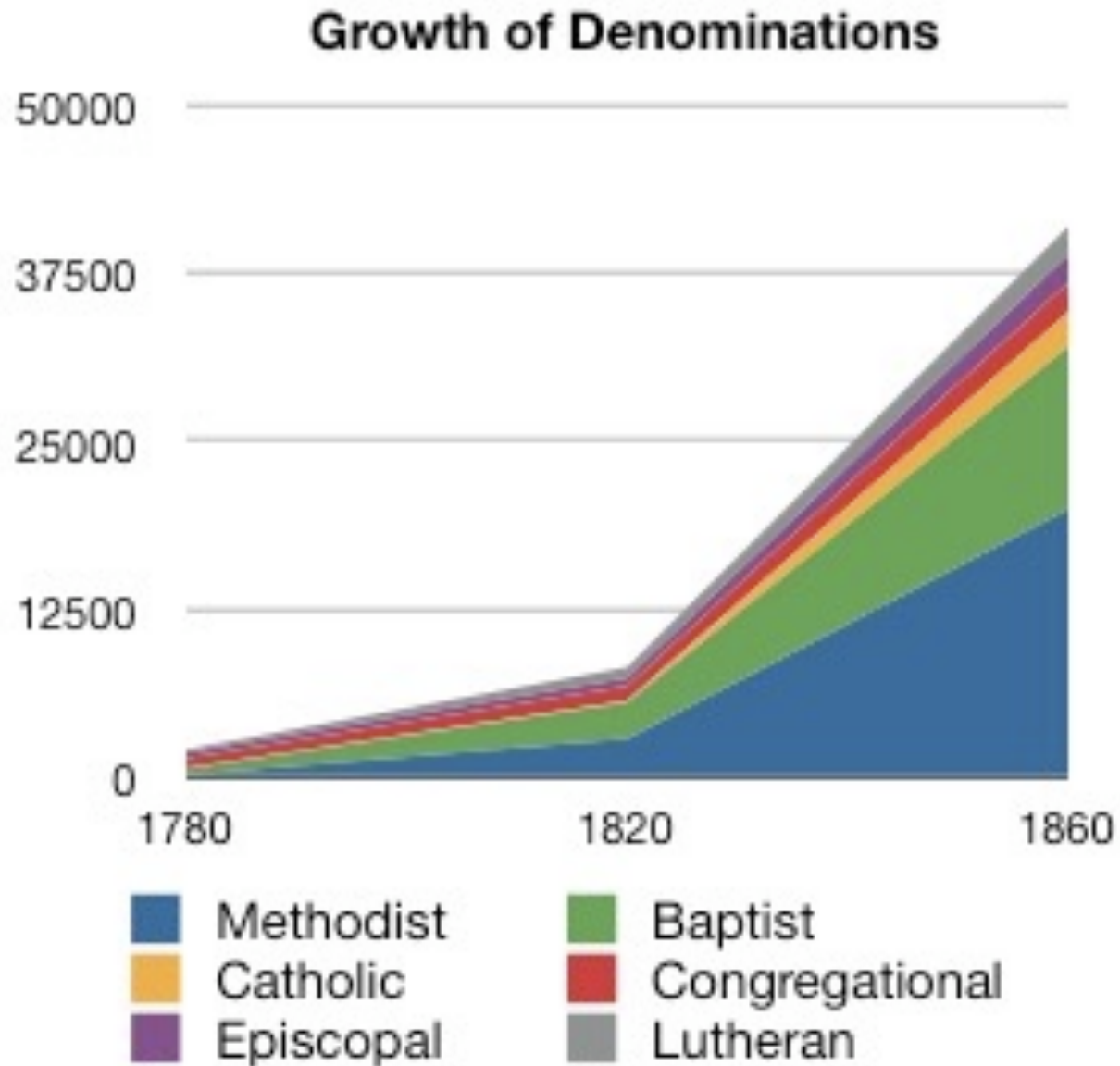
WCF: What's unexpected, *cont.*

- Catholic Mass is a form of idolatry
- Civil Magistrates have divine authority to punish heresy
- Bans marrying close kindred of deceased spouse
- Forbids marriage to non-Christians.

WCF: What came from it?

- 140 different texts
- Three volumes of minutes
- Journal of debates
- Thousands of certificates about ministers' and candidates' theological examinations
- Planted “seed” of Denominationalism.

American Denominationalism



WCF: What came from it?

Subscribed to by:

Europe

- Church of Scotland
 - Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
 - Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Australia
 - Evangelical Pres. Church in England & Wales
-

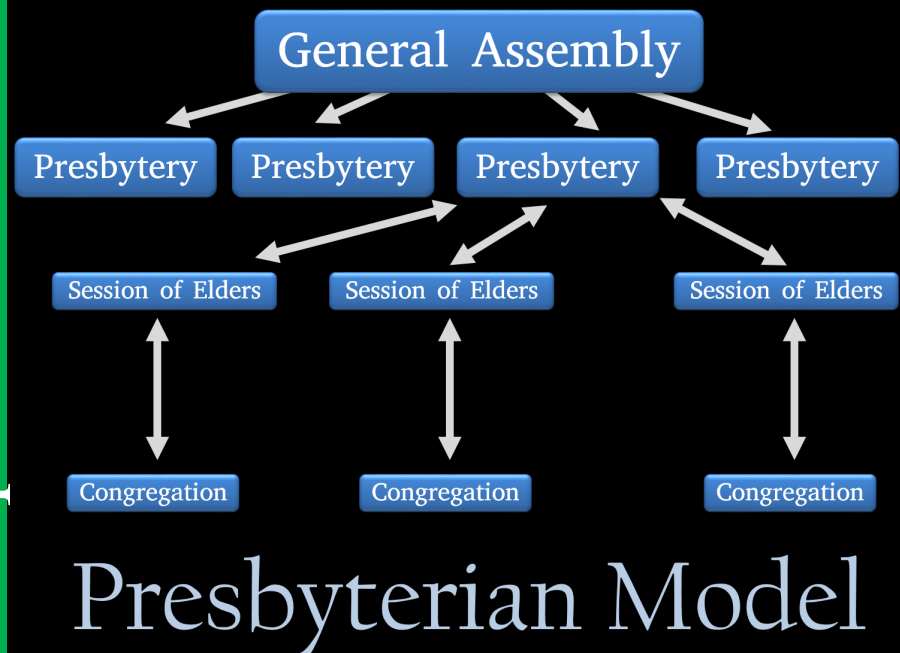
America

- 1788: Presbyterian Church in the U.S. of A.
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- American Presbyterian Church
- *Presbyterian Church in America*
- CRPC, RPCUS, RPCGA.

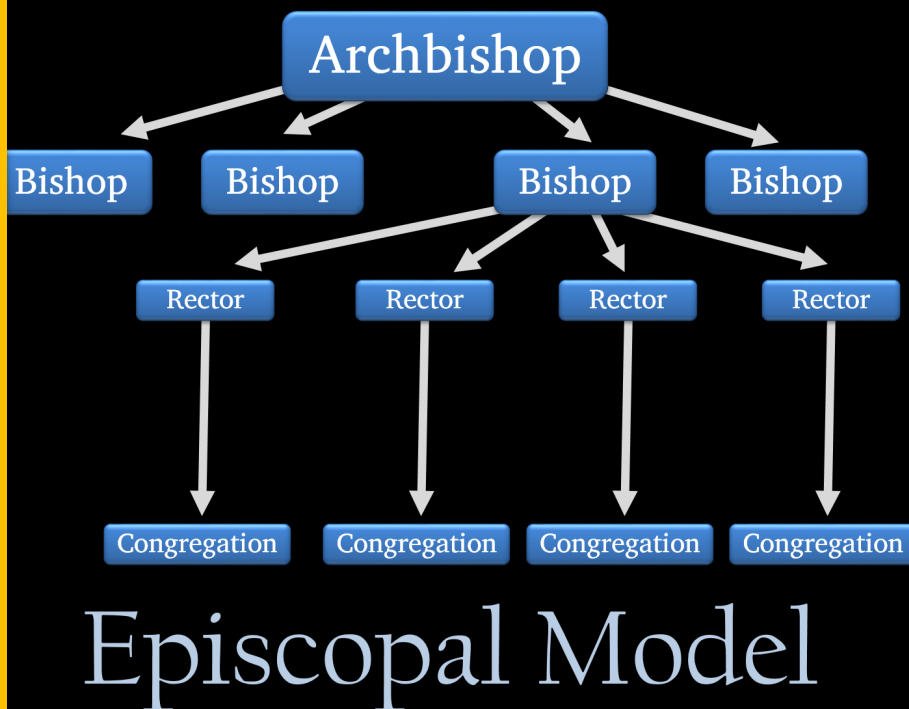
WCF: What *didn't* come from it?

1650's: Chaos in England:
Presbyterians vs.
Congregationalists vs.
Episcopalians

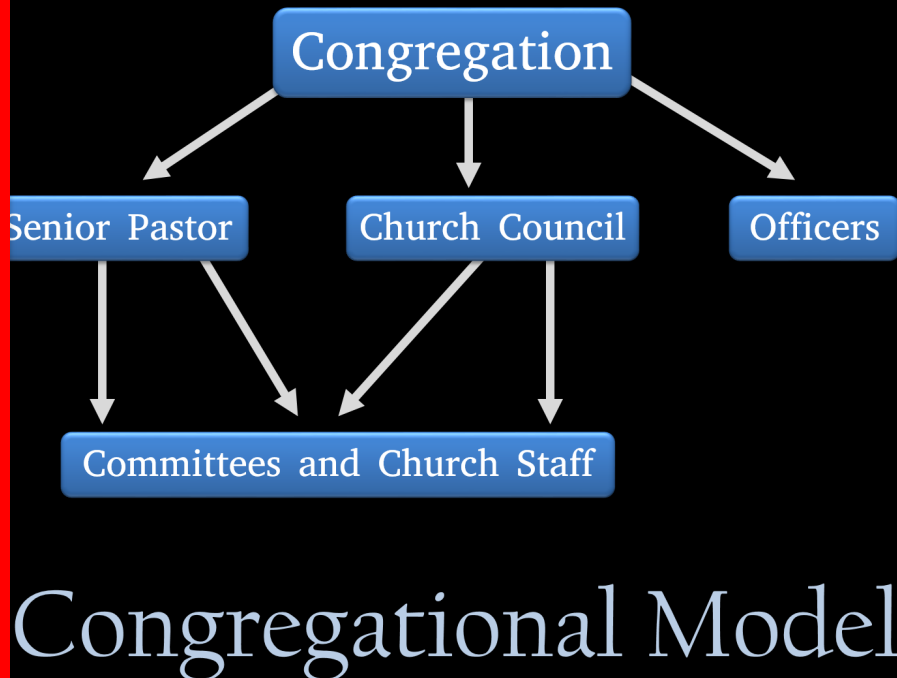
Representative



Hierarchical



Democratic



WCF: What *didn't* come from it?

- 1660: **Charles II** was restored to the monarchy with a promise to Puritans...
- Repudiated WCF: episcopal church government was reinstated in England
- Persecuted Puritans
- Secretly promised to convert to Catholicism in future
- Later, dissolved Parliament.



However...

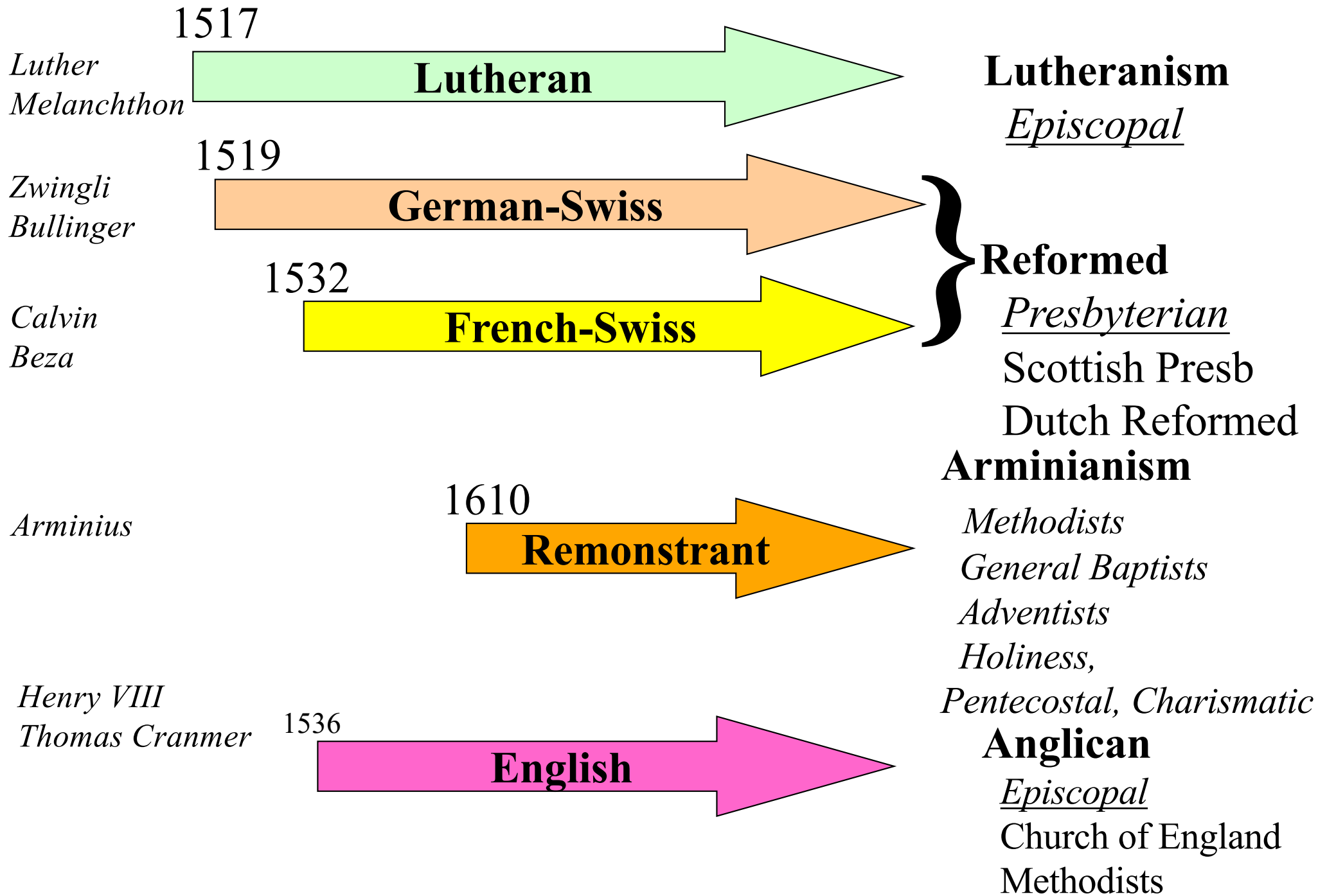
- 1658: Savoy Declaration (Congregationalists)
- 1689: London Confession of Faith (Baptist)

Westminster Standards:

What are the best uses of it?

- Training of children and adults: *catechisms*
- Quality of Pastors & Elders: *doctrinal compass*
- Unified Lay people: *devotional study of God's faithfulness to us*
- Individual: *reason to praise God*
- Me: *historical context: faith in God, duty to God.*

Reformation Traditions



Summary

- We are a *confessional* church
- WCF: Most complete summary of biblical truth, Calvinistic doctrine, Covenant theology, elder-governed church
- Clear explanation of Presbyterian distinctives.