

" I O W N A N D A C C E P T "
THE PRESBYTERIAN ORDINATION VOW

SCRIPTURE, THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION, AND THE DECLARATORY STATEMENT:

Their Relationship to One Another as confessed in the Presbyterian Church of Australia

by

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"I own and accept the *Subordinate Standard* of this Church [the *Westminster Confession*], with the explanations given in the Articles contained in the *Declaratory Statement*, as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the *Holy Scriptures*, and as a confession of my faith.

I further own the purity of worship practised in this Church, and the Presbyterian Government thereof, to be founded on the Word of God and agreeable thereto; and I promise that through the grace of God I shall firmly and constantly adhere to the same, and to the utmost of my power shall, in my station, assert, maintain, and defend the doctrine, worship, and government of this Church."

-- *Formula for Ordination in the Presbyterian Church of Australia*
(to be signed by Probationers when licensed and by Ministers and Elders when inducted)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page

Formula for Elders, Ministers and Probationers of the P.C.A.

Table of contents

Foreword -- by G.A.A. Procurator F. Maxwell Bradshaw (M.A., LL.M.)

" I O w n a n d A c c e p t " -- by Rev. Prof. Dr. Francis Nigel Lee

Preface

Outline

1. The Infallible Bible -- our only Supreme Standard
2. Confessions of faith in Holy Scripture
3. How the Patristic Church confessed her faith
4. Confessing Christ at the Protestant Reformation
5. Why Whimper or Whisper about Westminster?
6. A Summary of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*
7. Amendments to the *Confession* in the P.C.A. since 1901
8. Some Declaratory Statements and the *Confession*
9. The *Confession* not the *Statement* is our *Standard*
10. Australia's Presbyterian *Declaratory Statement*

Epilogue -- by Rev. Prof. Dr. B.B. Warfield

About the author

FOREWORD

Anything produced by Professor Nigel Lee, the distinguished occupant of the Chair of Systematic Theology at the Theological Hall of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, really requires neither Forward nor Introduction -- it speaks for itself.

In the light of Dr. Lee's known erudition I desire merely to draw attention to the great importance of what he says regarding the *Declaratory Statement*. Dr. Lee refutes the common error of regarding the *Declaratory Statement* as being part of the *Subordinate Standard* of the Church.

For such an approach leads to the erroneous view that it is possible to amend the *Statement*. Secondly, the *Declaratory Statement* is to be regarded for purposes of construction -- not as if it were a *Subordinate Standard* or part thereof, as such is understood in the Presbyterian Church, but as having the more limited function of declaratory legislation.

Its purpose is quite different from that of the *Subordinate Standard*. Special attention should also be given to what Dr. Lee says regarding the liberty of opinion provision in the *Declaratory Statement*.

F. Maxwell Bradshaw

[Late Procurator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia]

PREFACE

This pamphlet began embryonically with study papers I originally wrote as a Member of the Code Committee and of the G.A.A. Committee on Office in the P.C.A. (Presbyterian Church of Australia).

It next took further shape in some of the lectures to my theology students, especially in the Church History and Dogmatology courses.

It grew further, after I was invited to present some addresses on the *Westminster Confession* and the *Declaratory Statement* to the Presbytery of Darling Downs.

It later reached its final form -- after I traced man's confession of faith in the Triune God: from the Garden of Eden, until the Westminster Assembly.

I would like to thank Ruling Elder the late F. Maxwell Bradshaw (M.A., LL.M.) for his kind Foreword to this first edition of this booklet.

Advocate Bradshaw was a Barrister-at-Law and the much esteemed Procurator or Senior Legal Advisor of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. He was not only the author of the standard textbooks *The Law of Charitable Trusts in Australia* and *Basic Documents on Presbyterian Polity*. He was also an 'Old School' Puritan -- and formerly a leader in the Victorian Calvinistic Society.

But for him, there would hardly have been such a strong continuing Presbyterian Church of Australia after the schism in 1977 (when a majority left in order to unite with the Methodists). His sudden death in 1992 was a blow from which the Presbyterian Church of Australia has still not recovered.

It is to him, the intellectual powerhouse of the old *Presbyterian Church Association*, that this booklet is dedicated -- with much esteem and respect.

-- (Rev. Prof. Dr. Adv.) Francis Nigel Lee. January 1998.

OUTLINE

In our first chapter below, we deal with our *Supreme Standard*, the Holy Bible. As God's Word, it must necessarily be infallible and unamendable.

The second chapter below deals with human confessions of faith found in Holy Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, whenever God spoke His Word to man, the latter was required to respond by confessing his faith.

The third chapter deals with confessing the Christian faith in early post-apostolic times. Individuals from Ignatius to Cyprian did this. So too did the Church corporately -- as in the *Apostles' Creed* and the *Athanasian Creed*.

The fourth chapter deals with Calvinist professions of faith from the first (the 1557 *Hungarian Confession*) to the last (the 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith*) eighty years later.

The fifth chapter deals with the importance of the Westminster Assembly. For it was this, probably the greatest meeting of theologians in the history of the world, which gave us our own *Subordinate Standard*.

The sixth chapter deals with that fallible and amendable *Subordinate Standard*. There, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is briefly summarized.

The seventh chapter gives a brief history of the unamended *Westminster Standards* in Australia, before Union in 1901. It then deals with the two very minor amendments to the *Confession* made within the Presbyterian Church of Australia since Union.

The eighth chapter deals with some of the famous *Declaratory Statements* made anent the *Westminster Confession*. Interestingly, the first was issued within months of the completion of the 1646 *Confession* itself.

The ninth chapter demonstrates that not our *Declaratory Statement* but only the *Confession* is the *Subordinate Standard* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Yet the *Confession* is to be read in the light of the former.

The tenth chapter discusses the various provisions of the Australian Presbyterian *Declaratory Statement*. Throughout, it is seen that it consistently upholds the totality of the *Confession*. Even the Presbyterian Church's G.A.A. (alias the General Assembly of Australia) has no stated power to alter the Confession-upholding 1901 *Declaratory Statement*. For the latter is entrenched in the very constitution of the Federated Church itself.

1. THE BIBLE: OUR ONLY SUPREME STANDARD

According to the Sacred Scriptures, the Holy Bible itself is the Word of God written. John 5:46f & II Tim. 3:15f. It is true that God previously spoke much more to men, than what has been recorded in Holy Writ. John 20:30f & 21:24f and Heb. 1:1f. Yet now, since its God-ordained completion, the Bible alone is to be our only Supreme Standard. II Pet. 1:16-21 & 3:1-16.

For this is what the Lord says: "You shall not add to the Word which I command you, neither shall you diminish anything from it -- so that you may keep the Commandments of the Lord your God!" Deut. 4:2. "Every Word of God is pure. He is a shield to them who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His Words -- lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar!" Prov. 30:5-6.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* states that not even the illustrious Assembly which produced it but only the 66-book Bible itself, is devoid of error. "All synods or councils since the apostles' times...may err, and many have erred.... Therefore, they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice -- but to be used as an help in both." *W.C.F.* 31:4.

However, because God Himself is infallible, so too is the Bible -- precisely because it is **His** Word. Continues the *Confession*: "The Holy Scripture" is "most necessary" -- and, indeed, "infallible truth." Further: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture, is the Scripture itself." *W.C.F.* 1:1,5,10 & 2:2.

The 1901 'Basis of Union' constituting the Presbyterian Church of Australia, declares that its "Supreme Standard...shall be the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament" -- alias the Christian Bible. There is no provision to amend the Holy Scriptures. Nor could there be -- precisely because the Bible has, quite rightly, just been described as the very "Word of God" *etc.*

Consequently, also the *Declaratory Statement* repeatedly quotes the final authority of Holy Scripture. The *Statement* cites the Bible as our *Supreme Standard* -- in order to explain the meaning of our *Subordinate Standard* (namely the *Westminster Confession*). Thus, article 2 of the *Statement* quotes II Pet. 3:9 -- to explain section 1 of chapter 3 of the *Confession*. Further, article 6 of the *Statement* quotes Eph. 1:22 -- to explain parts of the *Confession* (such as 20:2 *etc.*).

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The special revelation of God's Holy Word has always been pre-eminent. For it has ever been above, and prior to, His general revelation throughout His world. His uncreated Word, the central Person of the eternal Trinity, has existed from all eternity past -- even prior to, as well as during, the very beginning of His world. Gen. 1:1-3 *cf.* Ps. 119:89f and John 1:1-18 & 17:5,24.

It is very significant that, at its very outset, the *Westminster Confession* (1:1) starts off by quoting precisely from Rom. 2:14-15. That verse implies that God had already **written** His special revelation on Adam's heart -- even before the latter began to survey God's general revelation in nature.

For in Rom. 2:14-15, the apostle Paul insists that even all pagans already **have** the Law of God written on their hearts. This has been so, from their very conception -- and indeed ever since the creation of their first ancestor. Rom. 1:20*f*. That Law of God has faithfully been transmitted, to all generations -- right down from Adam, the ancestor of the entire human race.

Thus God made Adam as His Own image, and wrote His righteous Law on the human heart -- even before our first ancestor opened his eyes for the very first time. "God made man upright." Eccl. 7:29 *cf.* Eph. 4:24. Only in the light of God's Word, could even the unfallen Adam ever understand God's world. Ps. 36:9 *cf.* Prov. 6:23 & 20:27.

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Furthermore, it is altogether possible that God's initially revealed Word was also **inscripturated** immediately thereafter. For it may well be that God's Word was soon **written down** in "the **Book** of the generations of Adam." Gen. 5:1. It is also possible, and perhaps even probable, that Noah accurately recorded the diluvian dates of important events -- writing them down during, or right after, the great flood. Gen. 7:11; 8:4,13,14. Indeed, Abraham too may well have chronicled statutes revealed to him by Almighty God. Gen. 18:17-19; 20:7; 26:4-5.

Jesus implies that Moses (later) recorded the Book of Genesis. See Matt. 19:4*f cf.* Mark 10:3*f*. The Old Testament itself teaches that Moses recorded the rest of the Pentateuch -- from Exodus to Deuteronomy. *Cf.* Ex. 17:14 & Dt. 31:9,24. Furthermore, Jesus clearly exalted the divine authority of the three great divisions of the Old Testament Scriptures: the Law (Genesis to Deuteronomy); the Writings (or Psalms and Proverbs *etc.*); and the Prophets (Joshua to Malachi). Collectively, Jesus calls them: "the Scriptures." Luke 24:27,44*f*.

Paul places the words of Jesus on the same level as Old Testament Scripture. Luke 10:7; I Cor. 7:1,10*f* ; I Tim. 5:18. Peter puts all the Pauline Epistles on the same level as "the other Scriptures" -- and also elevates the Old Testament writings far above his own unscripturated Petrine experiences. II Pet. 1:16-21 & 3:1-16*f*.

Luke says he wrote his Gospel, in order to make known with "certainty" the things which are "most surely" believed by Christians. He also wrote the book of Acts -- as a record of the "many infallible proofs" anent the truth of Christianity. Lk. 1:1-4 *cf.* Acts 1:1-3. Indeed, John too tells us his own New Testament writings are absolutely trustworthy. Jh. 20:31; 21:24*f* ; I Jh. 5:13; Rev. 1:1-4.

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We need to view Holy Scripture the way our Lord Jesus did. When tempted by Satan, three times our Saviour repelled His evil adversary -- by citing what had been **written**. Matt. 4:4,7,10. Christ insisted: "It is written that man shall..live by...every Word of God." Dt. 8:3 *cf.* Lk. 4:4. Jesus told the Sadducees they erred -- "not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." Mt. 22:29. Indeed, our Lord told sanctimonious Judaists: "Had you believed Moses, you would have believed Me -- for he wrote of Me. But if you do not believe his writings -- how shall you

believe My words?" Jh. 5:46f.

Jesus also told His listeners to live by all the 'jots' and 'tittles' of God's Word. This means: by every portion of each letter in all the words of Holy Scripture. Mt. 5:17-18; Lk. 16:17,29-31. For every "i" has been dotted, and every "t" has been crossed -- by God the Holy Ghost. So Christ insisted that those religious teachers who break even the least of God's Commandments, and teach men so -- shall themselves be called the very least as regards the Kingdom of heaven. Mt. 5:19. Jesus clearly taught Biblical infallibility. He insisted: "The Scripture cannot be broken." Jh. 10:35.

Paul, that greatest of all apostles, stated: "What does the Scripture say? ... Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning -- so that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.... The preaching of Jesus Christ...had been made manifest even by the Scriptures of the prophets according to the Commandment of the everlasting God." For in "the Holy Writings which...make wise unto salvation through the faith in Christ Jesus, all Scripture has been inspired by God" -- alias divinely breathed. Rom. 4:3; 15:4; 16:25f; II Tim. 3:15-16.

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So the Bible opens with "the generations of the Heavens and the Earth" and "the Book of the generations of Adam." Gen. 1:1 to 2:4 and 5:1f. It closes, in Rev. 22:16-19, where Jesus Himself solemnly warns: "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this Book, that if anybody shall add to these things, God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this Book.... If anyone shall take away from the words of the Book of this prophecy -- God shall take away his part from the Book of life and from the holy city and from the things which are written in this Book." This, I confess!

2. CONFESSIONS OF FAITH IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

In his work *Confessing Jesus Christ*, Rev. Prof. Dr. Cornelius Van Til stated "Christ Himself told

His disciples...**how** to confess Him before the world.... The church must first sit down at Jesus' feet to hear from Him just **Who** He is, **what** He did, and what He [still] **is doing** to save the world.

"The New Testament constitutes this witness of Christ both to Himself and to His work of redemption...based upon...the Old Testament. 'Search the Scriptures,' said Jesus to the Jews. 'For in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify about Me.' John 5:39.

"Again, 'Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father! There is one that keeps on accusing you, even Moses in whom you trust. For if you had believed Moses -- you would have believed Me. For he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings -- how shall you believe My words?' John 5:45-47." See (ed.) J.H. Skilton's *Scripture and Confession*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Nutley N.J., 1973, p. 217.

Going first to the Old Testament, it is seen how the Triune Lord God Jehovah Elohim called His people. Then He spoke His Word to them (infallibly) -- before asking them to confess Him (in their own fallible words).

"God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image!' ... So God created man in His own image..., male and female.... And God blessed them, and God spoke to them" by His Word. Gen. 1:26-28. "Then the woman [confessingly] said...: 'Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, **God has said** 'you shall not eat of it neither shall you touch it -- lest you die.'" Gen. 3:2-3.

After the fall, God saves His people -- before then expecting them to confess Him. Gen. 3:15 & 4:1. So too at Mt Sinai. God first reveals Himself to His people as their Saviour Lord. Then He asks them to confess Him, also by keeping His Commandments *etc.*

"I am the Lord your God Who brought you forth...from slavery: you shall have no other gods before My eyes!" Ex. 20:1-2. Thereafter: "Listen, O Israel, the Lord our God is a unique Lord! So you must love the Lord your God with all your heart!" Dt. 6:4f.

Thus the Triune God first gives His salvation revelation. Then He asks man to believe it -- and to respond to it. God's **Bible** informs man what he **should** believe about the Lord. The Church's *Confession* declares what she **says** she believes about God and His Word.

Declares the renowned church historian Rev. Prof. Dr. Philip Schaff: "The **Bible** is of God; the *Confession* is man's answer to God's Word.... The **Bible** is the rule of faith...; the *Confession* the rule of doctrine." *Creeeds of Christendom*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1983, I p. 5.

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Consider these confessions. "You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God!" Ps. 86:10. "The Lord says: 'you are My witnesses..., so that you may know and trust Me and understand that I am He; before Me no god was formed, neither shall there be after Me.'" Isa. 43:10-12.

"Know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God...and that My people shall never be ashamed! Then it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh." Joel 2:27f (cf. Acts 2:17f).

As suggested by the last passage, New Testament confession is essentially similar. Jesus answers the rich young ruler that "the first of all the commandments is: 'Listen O Israel, the Lord our God is a unique Lord; and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart!'" Mk. 12:29. To His Father, He Himself prayed: "May they know You, the only true God -- and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent!" Jh. 17:3. Indeed, Paul too insists that "there is no other God but one.... To us, there is but one God, the Father from Whom are all things...; and one Lord Jesus Christ by Whom are all things, and we by Him." I Cor. 8:4-6. For "God is one." Gal. 3:20.

Profession of faith in the one true God, is mandatory. Jesus enjoins: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father Who is in heaven; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Who is in heaven." Mt. 10:32f.

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Now true confession of faith involves not only an objective and outward admission anent divine truths. It involves also a subjective profession. This latter is a statement about what a man existentially believes. It is an affirmation that these things are thus and so -- for him **inwardly**.

Exhorts the psalmist: "Make a joyful noise to God, all you lands! ... Say to God, 'how terrible You are in Your works! Through the greatness of Your power, Your enemies shall submit themselves to You.' ... Come and listen, all you who fear God; and I will declare what He has done for my soul!" Ps. 66:1,3,16.

The confession of faith is further to be a **personal** profession -- in which the outward admission, and the inward affirmation, are combined together. Thus, Peter said to Jesus: "Lord, to whom shall we go? It is You Who have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are that Christ, the Son of the living God." Jh. 6:68f.

Thomas exclaimed -- "my Lord and my God!" Jh. 20:28. Also Paul assures Christians: "If you shall confess the Lord Jesus with your mouth, and if you shall trust in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead -- you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." Rom. 10:9-10.

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Centrally important are especially the various confessions of faith at Caesarea Philippi. First, Christ Himself **invited His disciples to confess Him**, there and then. For He enquired of them: "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"

He Himself here confesses that He is indeed the victorious and ascending and divine second Adam predicted in Dan. 7:13-14. This is the One Who would be enthroned at the right hand of God in heaven -- and Who would thenceforth start and keep on extending His rule over all the

nations (*cf.* Mark 14:61f & 16:15f).

Non-Christians give a different confession about Christ. "Some say [He was] John the baptizer; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Yet Jesus then asked His **Christian** disciples: "But who do **you** say I am?"

Simon Peter replied on behalf of the rest. Also he himself then professed, personally: "You are the Christ [the anointed and appointed Prophet and Priest and King]; the Son of the living God!"

Jesus then promised to build His Church and His Kingdom not upon Peter -- but upon Christ Himself as the Rock and Foundation at the base of that confession of Peter. Christ indicated He Himself would be killed -- but raised again, the third day.

Then, however, the fallible Peter attempted to change this confession by Christ. So Jesus called him 'Satan.' Indeed, Jesus then went on to promise that -- after His resurrection and, by implication, also His ascension -- He Himself would return. For He would finally come again -- with His angels, and in the glory of His Father -- to give all people their final deserts. Mt. 16:13-28.

The embryonic skeleton of the later *Apostles' Creed* is visible already in these various confessions at Caesarea Philippi. For here we see: Jesus' divinity; His humanity; His Christhood; His death; His resurrection; His Lordship; His Kingdom over all; and His final coming in judgment at the end of history.

As Rev. Prof. Dr. J.H. Skilton declares (*op. cit.* pp. 92f): "We who stand beyond Caesarea Philippi -- beyond the transfiguration, beyond the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension; beyond Pentecost; and beyond the completion of the New Testament -- have a rich and full and impregnable foundation on which our faith can rest. Surely we today with such a foundation should not only repeat Peter's confession, but should be able to set forth glorious implications of that confession...."

"Before the whole world, the Christian today will wish to make confession of his faith (Matt. 28:19-20). This is no time for concealment of the fact that Jesus is the Christ -- and of the truth that there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12)."

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Yet, as pointed out by Rev. Prof. Norman Shepherd in his essay *Scripture and Confession* (in *ib.* p. 10), a confessional "christocentrism does not amount to a christomonism" -- as in the thought of the Neo-Sabellian Karl Barth. For true christocentricity is in fact a trinitricity, with God the Son as the central Person in the Holy Trinity. Indeed, this is seen in the confession of faith which is given when Christians receive their triune baptism. I Cor. 12:3,13 *cf.* Mt. 28:19.

Moreover, the confession anent the three Persons of the Trinity is never isolated from the confession anent their several external **works**. Hence, the *Apostles' Creed* professes our faith not only in each Person of the Triune God *seriatim* -- God the Father, His only-begotten Son, and

Their Holy Spirit. It professes our faith also in Their various *opera ad extra* -- such as creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, vindication, ecclesiation, justification, sanctification, revivification, and consummation.

This incarnation of Jesus and His rule over all, is to be professed with joy -- and to both Jew and Gentile. Rom. 9:1-5. The true doctrine of our own future resurrection by Almighty God, is also to be professed -- even against the falsification thereof by heretics. I Tim. 2:16-18. Indeed, our confession is often to be accompanied by an *anathema* alias a curse upon all who do not love the Lord Jesus -- or who pervert His Gospel. I Cor. 16:22 & Gal. 1:8f.

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The rite of baptism and the baptismal formula in particular, is itself a Christian confession. It is also the root from which, increasingly, more elaborate professions of Christ's Lordship constantly spring forth. Thus, Jesus Himself couples the receipt of triune baptism with the need for ongoing instruction and the manifestation of continuing obedience -- individually, nationally, and internationally. Mt. 28:18f & Mk. 16:15f.

Consequently, the Ethiopian eunuch confesses: "Look! There is some water! What hinders me to be baptized?" So when Philip responds: "If you trust with all your heart, you may" -- the Ethiopian professes: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8:36f.

The doctrinal and ethical implications of the baptismal confession, are well set out in Rom. 6:1-23 and Heb. 6:1-6. In the former passage, the necessity of lifelong post-baptismal obedience to Christ -- with our entire personality -- is carefully articulated. In the latter passage, our baptismal confession is coupled also to other matters -- to the doctrines of initiation, confirmation, resurrection and everlasting judgment.

Also in Heb. 10:22f: "Let us keep on drawing near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having had our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and having had our bodies washed with pure water! Let us keep on grasping hold of the confession of confidence firmly -- and unwaveringly! For He Who has promised, is trustworthy. Let us keep on giving consideration to provoke one another unto love and good works --not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another more and more, as you see the day approaching!"

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Thus, confession is our response to hearing and reflecting on the good news. It is, Paul assures the Corinthian Christians, "your professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ." II Cor. 9:13.

Here, Rev. Prof. Dr. F.W. Grosheide comments that true confession does not go its own way. It seeks it at the Gospel, as the only way of salvation -- and wants to obey it. Indeed, confession is connected also to the teaching (or *didachee*). II Jh. 7-9.

Especially certain key doctrines about Christ, are to be confessed more specifically. Thus, Paul stresses especially the vital doctrines of Christ's death and resurrection -- according to the Scriptures -- and also the certainty of His return at the end of history. I Cor. 15:1-58. He also

doxologically professes the centrality of Christ's divinity and His humanity; and, as regards the latter, of His humiliation and His exaltation. Rom. 1:1-4 & Phil. 2:5-11.

True Christians are to **continue** in their Christian confession -- especially against heresies and false teachings. Enjoins the Apostle John: "Whosoever denies the Son, the same does not have the Father.... If that which you have heard from the beginning shall keep on remaining in you -- you too shall continue in the Son and in the Father.... Every spirit that keeps on confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is from God.... Whosoever shall keep on confessing that Jesus is the Son of God -- God dwells in him, and he in God...." I Jh. 2:23 & 4:2,15.

On the other hand, Christians are to reject those religious persons who do not keep on professing the great truths about Christ's incarnation. "Every spirit that does not keep on confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is not from God.... This is that spirit of antichrist.... He who knows God, listens to us; he that is not from God, does not listen to us. Hereby we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error....

"For the sake of the truth..., many deceivers have entered into the world who do not keep on confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Such is a deceiver and an antichrist.... Whosoever keeps on transgressing and does not keep on abiding in the **doctrine** of Christ, does not have God." I Jh. 4:3-6 & II Jh. 2-9.

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The noun 'confession' (*homologia*) is found frequently in the New Testament. See: II Cor. 9:13; I Tim. 6:12-13; Heb. 3:1; 4:14; 10:23. The cognate verb 'confess' (*homologein*) is also regularly encountered. See: Mt. 10:32; Jh. 9:22; 12:42; Rom. 10:9-10; I Jh. 2:22.

Explains Rev. Prof. Dr. S.C.W. Duvenage in his paper *Mutual Relationship of Scripture and Confession* (Potchefstroom, South Africa, 1970, p. 7): "The *homologia* was a public declaration or faith-witnessing. It was expressed on special occasions such as in entering into the communion of the Church (I Tim. 6:12); in public worship (Phil. 2:11); and in preaching (Rom. 10:8f). It was also employed in forensic controversies with Jews (Jh. 9:22 & 12:42); with heathen (I Tim. 6:13); with apostates (I Tim. 6:21); or with heretics (I Jh. 4:2f).... In I Jh. 4:15 and Jh. 9:22, it refers to the contents of that declaration."

Not just the individual Christian but also the Church herself is faithfully to profess the revealed truth. Thus, Paul insists that "the house of God which is the Church of the living God" is herself to be "the pillar and ground of the truth." For great is the revealed "mystery of godliness."

Indeed, "God was manifest in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, preached to the pagans, believed on in the world, and received up into glory." I Tim. 3:15-16. Consequently, the Church is required to confess and to promulgate the full range of all these teachings.

The confession of Christianity is something to be maintained, vigorously. The Gospel is to be defended and confirmed. Phil. 1:7,17. Thus, our "common salvation" and its contents are things for which we "should earnestly contend -- the faith which was once [and for all] delivered

to the saints." Jude 3.

Here Rev. Principal Ray Zorn (Reformed Theological Seminary Geelong) has said, in his notes on *Symbolics* (p. 4): "The faith has been definitively committed to God's people -- (*i.e.*, apostolic doctrine).... The faith must be contended for (*epagoonizesthai*) -- the thought is that of defending, preserving -- even propagating."

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Finally, in the last book of the Holy Bible, the Apostle John frequently confesses his Christian faith to the seven churches in the Presbytery of Asia Minor. "I, John, who also am your brother," bore witness "for the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Rev. 1:9. That Apostle "bore record of the Word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ...the faithful Witness." Rev. 1:2-5 (*cf.* 4:8-11 & 5:8-10f).

Moreover, John encourages all Christ-ians to confess Christ. Some had already been "slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held." Rev. 6:9 *cf.* 20:4. Yet he commends even those still alive and not yet dead, to "continue keeping the Commandments of God -- and to keep on having the testimony of Jesus Christ." Rev. 12:17. Indeed, they are to keep on doing so -- until "the kingdoms of this world have become that of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall keep on reigning for ever and ever." Rev. 11:15f.

Even the saints in glory still expect the latter yet to be achieved -- right here on earth. For right now, they too joyfully confess on the sea of glass in heaven: "Great and marvellous are Your ways, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, You King of saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your Name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You. For Your judgments are manifest." Rev. 15:1-4.

John goes on: "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and honour and power unto the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments.... Praise our God, all you servants of His and you who fear Him, small and great.... Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent is reigning. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him!'" Rev. 19:1-7.

Says the Word of God: "I, Jesus, have sent My messenger to testify to you these things in the churches." Rev. 22:16. Replies His confessing Church: "Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Rev. 22:20.

So then: especially at Baptisms, upon admission to the Lord's Supper, in missionary preaching, during public worship, for the refutation of heresy, and for praise in heaven even now -- the Christian 'Confession of Faith' was utilized also during the Apostolic Age. Thus: Seeberg, C.H. Dodd, Lohmeyer, Maurer, Stauffer & Cullmann. This then was the way man's faith in the Triune God was confessed -- from Genesis to Revelation.

3. HOW THE PATRISTIC CHURCH CONFESSED HER FAITH

The greatest Calvinist of the nineteenth century, Professor Dr. Abraham Kuyper, once wrote a famous monograph: *Calvinism and Confessional Revision* (see *Presbyterian and Reformed*

Review, 2, 1891, p. 388). There, he rightly maintained that "a creed is not for the purpose of stating our own surmises or conjectures, but for professing that of which -- on the basis of God's revelation -- we possess most certain knowledge."

His contemporary, the noted Scottish theologian John Macpherson, similarly asserts "that an ecclesiastical symbol...should be devotional.... It should give expression to the pious feeling rather than to the intellectual beliefs of the Christian community." *The Westminster Confession: The Character and Sources of Its Teaching*, 1898, p. 254f.

This is certainly true of the 'Old-Catholic' Creeds of the Early Patristic Church. Just compare the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed* and the *Creed of Chalcedon*. Always, they fervently profess the believer's pious feelings -- especially about Christ and His incarnation, and about the Holy Trinity.

Early individual creeds include those of Ignatius (107 A.D.), Irenaeus (180), Tertullian (200), Novatian (250) and Cyprian (255). That of Ignatius mentions Christ's Davidic ancestry, virgin birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. That of Irenaeus also incorporates God's creation of the world and Christ's second coming. Reminiscent of the *Apostles' Creed*, that of Cyprian states: "I believe in God the Father; in His Son Christ; in the Holy Ghost. I believe in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, through the holy Church."

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There is no doubt that the *Apostles' Creed* -- in spite of its uncertain beginnings and its variant forms -- is the earliest and by far the most famous of the Early Church's creeds. All of its elements are derived from and to be found in Scripture. Its seeds probably go back to about 100 A.D. (if not even earlier). It was much used against early gnosticism, and seems to root partly in Col. 2:3-23 and II Jh. 2-9. The Nicene Church Father Eusebius (born *circa* 265 A.D.) says he himself learned the *Apostles' Creed* -- when still a young catechumen.

In its 'Received Form' the *Creed* runs: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was: conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell (*hades*). The third day He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and [rulingly] sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe: in the Holy Ghost; the Holy Catholic [or Universal] Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."

Declares the famous Church Historian Rev. Professor Dr. Philip Schaff: "As the Lord's prayer is the Prayer of prayers; the Decalogue the Law of laws -- so the *Apostles' Creed* is the Creed of creeds. It contains all the fundamental articles of the Christian faith necessary to salvation...in simple Scripture language and in the most natural order..., from God and the creation down to the resurrection and life everlasting. It is Trinitarian, and divided into three chief articles expressing faith -- in God the Father...; in His only Son...; and in the Holy Spirit...

"As to the origin of the *Apostles' Creed*, it no doubt gradually grew out of the confession of

Peter, Matthew 16:16, which furnished its nucleus (the article of Jesus Christ)..., and out of the baptismal formula which determined the trinitarian order and arrangement." *Creeds* I pp. 14f. Down through the early centuries, it underwent expansion, variation and then completion.

The *Apostles' Creed* was used for catechism, baptism, and worship. In the Middle Ages, it attained a practical monopoly throughout Western Europe. Augustine calls it "a short and grand rule of faith; short as to the number of words, grand as to the weight of the sentences." Luther says: "Christian truth could not possibly be put into a shorter and clearer statement."

In his *Institutes* (II:16:18), Calvin says: "Hitherto I have followed the order of the *Apostles' Creed*, because it states the leading articles of redemption in a few words and may thus serve as a tablet in which the points of Christian doctrine most deserving of attention are brought separately and distinctly before us.... The general consent of ancient writers certainly does ascribe it to the Apostles.... Because...they thought it right to give the sanction of such authority to a compendium faithfully drawn up from the doctrine delivered by their hands.

"I have no doubt that, from the very commencement of the Church, and therefore in the very days of the Apostles, it held the place of a public and universally received confession.... From time immemorial, it was deemed to be of sacred authority by all Christians."

It is quoted in full by the *Hussite Catechism* before 1414 and also in the 1489 *Waldensian Catechism* (Q. 13f). It is further approvingly cited (in art. 2) of the 1504f *First Bohemian Confession* of the later Hussites, and also given in full by Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism* (Part II).

Not just Calvin himself, but also some of the Calvinistic Confessions -- utilize the *Apostles' Creed*. It is cited in art. 5 of Calvin's own 1559 *French Confession*, and in art. 9 of the 1561 *Belgic Confession*.

It is cited in full in Question 23, and serves as part of the skeleton for the 1563 *Heidelberg Catechism* (Questions 24-58). Indeed, Bullinger's 1566 *Second Swiss Confession* calls it "a compendious and short sum" of "the holy Scriptures" themselves (ch. 17). It is also cited in full, with approval, at the very end of the oldest editions of the 1647 *Westminster Shorter Catechism*.

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The *Apostles' Creed* is at the root of the (325 A.D.) *Nicene Creed* and of the latter's (381 A.D.) expansion into the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* -- on the deity of Christ. It is also at the root of the (451 A.D.) *Chalcedonian Creed* -- which sharply demarcates the Creator from the creature (cf. Rom. 1:19-25), while refuting the christological heresies of Apollinarius and Eutyches and Nestorius. Indeed, the *Apostolicum* is further at the basis of the so-called *Athanasian Creed* (alias the *Quicumque*) -- as the greatest confession of all time anent God's Ontological Trinity.

Significantly, the substance of all of these ancient creeds is adequately reflected in the structure of Calvin's 1542 *Second Genevan Catechism*. The *Apostles' Creed* is also found as the skeleton of the *Westminster Standards*. See WCF 2:1-3 & 8:2-7 and WLC 7-11 & 36-39f and WSC 4-22.

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The *Apostles' Creed* stresses the **threeness** of the Divine Persons. The *Nicene Creed* stresses Their **oneness** -- or rather Their **triuneness**. According to Eusebius (born *circa* 265 A.D.), even the 325 A.D. *Nicene Creed* had 'pre-Nicene roots.' The *Nicene* adds an *anathema* against the Arians. It was later rounded off as the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* -- after half a century's further struggle against Arianism. As thus finalized in 381 A.D., here it is:

"We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.

"And we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ the only-begotten Son of God, begotten by the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by Whom all things were made. He, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried.... The third day He rose again **according to the Scriptures**, and ascended into heaven, and sits [reigningly] on the right hand of the Father.... He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

"And we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life Who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; Who, with the Father and the Son together, is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the Prophets. And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

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The *Chalcedonian Creed* of 451 A.D., against the heresies of Apollinarius and Eutyches and Nestorius, is vital in defining the qualitative difference between the Creator and all creaturely material (such as even the human nature of the Lord Jesus). It is also important in anticipating the faulty christologies and sacramentologies of both Luther and the Anabaptists.

By this, we mean Lutheran errors like attributing the transmission of divine abilities also to the human nature of Christ. Such include the allegation that He walked through walls, and that His earthly body has been omnipresent ever since His ascension. The theory of consubstantiation, in both sacraments, is the clear consequence of these errors.

Here we also think of the heresies of Anabaptism. Such include: denying that Jesus partook of the flesh of Mary; divorcing the sacramental sign from the truth signified; and separating nature and grace. The rejection of the baptism of the infants of believers and strange views about the Lord's presence in His Supper are just two of the results of these errors.

States the *Chalcedonian Creed*: "We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial

[coessential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages by the Father according to the Godhead. In these latter days, for us and our salvation, He was born of the virgin Mary the mother of God according to the manhood (*kata teen anthroopoteeta*); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten; to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the *Creed* of the holy fathers has handed down to us."

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The so-called *Athanasian Creed* or *Quicumque* (alias 'Whosoever'), is also of very great importance. In its final form, it incorporates essential trinitarian and christological material formulated respectively by Augustine and Chalcedon. It was massively used by the Mediaeval Church -- especially against Judaistic and Moslem Unitarians, and against heretical and pagan Polytheists -- as the Church's chief confession anent God's Ontological Trinity. It pleased Luther, and is approved in Calvin's own 1559 *French Confession* (art. 5) and the 1561 Calvinistic *Belgic Confession* (art. 9).

It runs: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith, except one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

"The catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one; the glory equal, and the majesty co-eternal.

"Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal uncreated, the Son eternal uncreated, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

"And yet They are not three Eternals, but one Eternal; as also there are not three Incomprehensibles nor three Uncreated, but one Uncreated and one Incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet They are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.

"So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet they are not three lords, but one Lord. For as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the catholic faith to say there be three gods or three lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost

is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten but proceeding.

"So there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Ghost, not three holy ghosts. And in this Trinity, there is not first nor last, nor greater nor less; but the whole three Persons are coeternal together, and coequal. So that in all things, as it is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.

"Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the world; and man, of the substance of His mother, born in time. Perfect God and perfect man, having a reasonable soul and a human body. Equal to the Father according to His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as to His manhood.

"Who, although He be God and man, yet is not two but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God. He is not one by mixture of Substance, but by unity of Person. For the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and man is one Christ Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose against the third day from the dead.

"He ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At Whose coming, all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account of their own works. And they that have done good, shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.

"This is the catholic faith which, except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved." This, I confess. This I own and accept.

4. CONFESSING CHRIST AT THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

The Reformers were primarily **Pro**-test-ants, not Anti-test-ants. For they test-ified primarily **pro** alias "**for** the Word of God and the test-imony of Jesus Christ." Cf. Rev. 1:9.

Only secondarily did they testify **anti**- or against the errors of Rome -- and then, only because

their loyalty to Christ required them to do so. Indeed, many of them were then "slain **for** the Word of God -- and **for** the testimony which they held." Cf. Rev. 6:9.

Accordingly, the Protestants did not jettison the Early Church's Confessions. Rather did they re-affirm them -- by explaining their true meaning, over against the later mediaeval Romish and other perversions thereof.

A prime example of this, is Calvin's own personal *Brief Confession of Faith* (see ed. T.F. Torrance's *John Calvin's Tracts and Treatises*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1958, II pp. 130f). *Inter alia*, Calvin here professes:

"I confess that there is one God in Whom we ought to rest, worshipping and serving Him, and placing all our hope in Him alone. And although He is of one Essence, He is nevertheless distinguished into three Persons. Wherefore I detest all heresies condemned by the first Council of Nice, and likewise those of Ephesus and Chalcedon -- along with all the errors revived by Servetus and his followers....

"I likewise confess that God created...heaven and earth and whatever is contained in them.... I accordingly abominate the heresy of the Manichees, who imagined that the devil is wicked by nature, and derives origin and beginning from himself.... I detest all heresies contrary to this principle -- as those of Marcion, Manes, Nestorius, Eutyches and the like, together with the deliriums which Servetus and Schwenkfeld wished to revive....

"I confess that both the whole rule of right living and also instruction in faith are most fully delivered in the Sacred Scriptures -- to which nothing can without criminality be added; from which nothing can be taken away.... Thus I repudiate in general whatever has been introduced into the worship of God without authority from the Word of God. Of this kind are all the popish ceremonies....

"I acknowledge that the infants of believers ought to be received into the Church by baptism; and in this matter I detest the ravings of the Anabaptists.... I detest as intolerable sacrilege the execrable abomination of the Mass...., diametrically opposed to the purity of the sacrament of the Lord's supper."

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The Reformed Faith consciously links up with the Early Church, and preserves the continuity of true Christianity. Thus Calvin's 1559 *French Confession* (art. 5) declares: "We confess the three creeds, to wit: the *Apostles'*, the *Nicene*, and the *Athanasian* -- because they are in accordance with the Word of God." Similarly, the Belgian Calvinist Guido de Bres's 1561 *Belgic Confession* (art. 9) states: "We do willingly receive the three creeds -- namely, that of the Apostles, of Nice, and of Athanasius; likewise that which, conformable thereunto, is agreed upon by the ancient fathers."

Also Calvin's associate Bullinger's 1566 *Second Swiss Confession* (ch. XI) specifically approves "whatsoever things are defined out of the Holy Scriptures and comprehended in the creeds and in the decrees of those four first and most excellent councils held at Nicaea, Constantinople,

Ephesus and Chalcedon -- together with blessed Athanasius's creed and all other creeds like to these touching the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ; and we condemn all things contrary to the same. And thus we retain the Christian, sound, and catholic faith -- whole and inviolable. Knowing that nothing is contained in the aforesaid creeds, which is not agreeable to the Word of God and makes wholly for the sincere declaration of the faith."

Also the oldest editions of the 1647 *Westminster Shorter Catechism* cite the *Apostles' Creed* in full. They then close with an addendum thereanent -- signed, among others, also by the Prolocutor (alias the Moderator) of the Westminster Assembly itself.

That addendum states that "the substance of the doctrine comprised in that abridgment commonly called *The Apostles' Creed* be fully set forth in each of the [*Westminster Larger* and *Westminster Shorter*] *Catechisms*, so as there is no necessity of inserting the *Creed* itself. Yet it is here annexed..., because it is a brief sum of the Christian faith agreeable to the Word of God and anciently received in the churches of Christ."

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In addition, some of the Protestant creeds specifically condemned ancient heresies. Thus, Knox's 1560 *Scots Confession* (ch. 6) condemns "the damnable and pestilent heresies of Arius, Marcion, Eutyches, Nestorius and such others as did either deny the eternity of His [Christ's] Godhead, or the truth of His humanity, or confounded them, or else divided them." Again, Guido de Bres's 1561 *Belgic Confession* (art. 9) opposes the deological views of "the Jews, Mohammedans, and some false Christians and heretics (as Marcion, Manes, Praxeas, Sabellius, Samosatenus, Arius and such like), who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers."

Similarly, Bullinger's 1566 *Second Swiss Confession* (chs. I & III) states: "We therefore detest all the heresies of Artemon, the Manichaeans, the Valentinians, of Cerdon, and the Marcionites.... We therefore condemn the Jews and the Mohammedans and all those who blaspheme that sacred and adorable Trinity...as the Monarchists, the Novatians, Praxeas, the Patripassians, Sabellius, Samosatenus, Aetius, Macedonius, the Anthropomorphites, Arius, and such like" -- including even the rebaptistic "Donatists" (ch. XVIII).

Here, the condemnation of "Praxeas" and "the Novatians" seems to cover also that of Pentecostalism. Furthermore, where chapter IV states: "We approve the judgment of Lactantius" and of "Epiphanius" and "Augustine" against the ecclesiastical use of images -- it certainly seems to condemn such practices when used by the 'Greek-Orthodox'; by Romanists; and even by Non-Calvinistic 'Protestants.'

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Unfortunately, Rome would not be corrected -- and instead opposed Protestantism and its profession of faith. Indeed, it was partly for this reason that Rome then produced her own reactionary confessions -- which were mixtures of truth and error.

Such included her 1545 *Decrees of Trent*, her 1564 *Profession of the Tridentine Faith* (alias the *Creed of Pope Pius IV*), and her 1566 *Catechismus Romanus*. The latter was published by papal

command of the said Pius. The 1687 English version was printed in London. It is the same as the famous American *Baltimore Catechism* of 1829.

Accordingly, the Protestants responded. They too produced new Confessions. These not merely restate the truths of the old patristic creeds. Especially from the Holy Bible -- they also even more specifically refute the stated errors of Romanism.

At the same time, the new Protestant Confessions also hammer the dangerous doctrines of the aggressive Anabaptists. See A.C. Cochrane's *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1964).

Throughout, the new Romish Confessions appeal for their support to a variety of different sources -- always ecclesiastical; selectively scriptural; sometimes 'natural' and occasionally even 'rational.' The new Reformed Confessions, however, **appeal to Scripture alone** -- *sola Scriptura*.

Although the Protestant Confessions are almost invariably positive expositions of Biblical teaching, in the very course thereof they also oppose the false teachings then current. The principal errors condemned by the Protestant creeds, were those of Rome and of the Anabaptists -- both of which ran rife in the sixteenth century.

Thus, for example, even the very first 'Calvin-istic' symbol of national significance -- the 1557 *Czenger Confession* of the Hungarian Reformed Church. It first presents us, from the Bible alone, with a truly masterful profession of the Ontological Trinity. Then it proceeds to castigate the 'sub-trinitarian' and unbiblical Romish (though also the Lutheran and the Zwinglian) views of the Lord's supper. Next it rejects the Anabaptist attacks against infant baptism -- as if elect "children brought to the Church" by their believing parents, were themselves merely unclean "dogs and pigs."

Calvin's own 1559 *French Confession* (esp. in its chs. 28f), is strongly anti-papal. Knox's 1560 *Scots Confession* (arts. 18f) implies that Rome is "the Kirk malignant" -- and also damns "the error of the Anabaptists" (art. 23). So too does the 1561 *Belgic Confession* (arts. 29-36) and the 1566 *Second Swiss Confession* (chs. 18-30).

The 1563 *Heidelberg Catechism* (Q. 80) condemns the Romish Mass as "an accursed idolatry." And Ussher's 1615 *Irish Articles* (80f) condemn: "the Bishop of Rome" as "that man of sin"; his five extra 'sacraments' as a "corrupt imitation"; and "transubstantiation" as "gross idolatry."

The Reformed Confessions themselves purport to maintain the loyal support of their subscribers. Thus the 1560 *Scots Confession* maintains an oft-repeated refrain. Throughout, it protestantly professes: "we confess and acknowledge" *etc.* (chs. 1f,7,14f). Then it ends: "Give Thy servants strength to speak Thy Word with boldness, and let all nations cleave to the true knowledge of Thee! Amen" (ch. 25).

So too in the 1561 *Belgic Confession*. "We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth..." (art. 1). "We confess..." (art. 3). "We believe..." (art. 4). "We know from the testimonies of Holy Writ..." (art. 9). "We believe and confess..." (art. 11). "We believe and

profess" (art. 27) etc.

Similarly, the 1647 *Westminster Confession of Faith* (ch. 33): "As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity -- so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security and be always watchful. Because they know not at what hour the Lord will come, and may be ever prepared to say, 'Come Lord Jesus, come quickly! Amen.'"

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Interestingly, far more Reformed Confessions were made and recorded than those of the Greek-Orthodox and Romish and Lutheran Churches. Why so?

Firstly, Reformed theology is not church-centred but cosmos-embracing -- and covers a great gamut of distinctly different nationalities. Secondly, even some single cities (or groups of cities) drew up their own Reformed Confession. And thirdly, so too did certain gifted individuals. Thus, Schaff mentions thirty such Confessions -- while Mueller lists no less than fifty-eight.

Among these, we may note: the 1528 *Theses of Berne* (by Haller and Kolb); the 1530 *Confession of the Four Cities* (Constance, Lindau, Meiningen and Strassburg); the 1530 *Reasons for Faith* and the 1531 *Exposition of Faith* of Ulrich Zwingli; the 1534 *Earlier Basel Confession of Faith* and the 1536 *Later Basel Confession of Faith* alias the *First Helvetica*; the 1557 *Czenger Confession* of the Hungarian Reformed Church; and the 1570 *Polish Confession*.

Consider the various confessions of John Calvin alone. Apart from his previously-mentioned *Brief Confession of Faith*, he also wrote: the 1536 *First Genevan Catechism*; the 1542 *Later Genevan Catechism*; together with his friend Bullinger, his 1549 *Zurich Consensus* (against Zwinglianism); his 1552 *Genevan Consensus* (on predestination); together with his student Chandieu, his 1559 *French Confession*; and his 1562 *Confession of Faith*.

On their own, Calvin's students too produced Reformed symbols. Thus, we encounter the 1560 *First Scots Confession* of John Knox and others; the 1561 *Belgic Confession* of Guido de Bres in Belgium; and the 1562 *Heidelberg Catechism* of Baer alias Ursinus and Olevianus in Southwestern Germany (the Palatine).

The latter explains the Ten Commandments and the *Apostles' Creed*. It was soon translated into Hungarian, Dutch and English. Indeed, it was widely used in Scotland till well after the Westminster Assembly. Undoubtedly, it is the best-known Reformed Confession in many parts of the world today -- from Continental Europe, to Southern Africa.

Then there are also: the 1563 *Thirty-nine Articles* in England; the 1566 *Second Swiss* or the *Later Helvetic Confession* of Bullinger; the 1580 *Second Scots Confession* (alias the *National Covenant* or the *King's Confession*) of John Craig; the 1595 *Lambeth Articles* of Tyndal and Whitaker; and the *Brandenburg Confessions* from 1614 onward (in Prussia and Lithuania).

The 1595 *Lambeth Articles*, incorporating the influence of the Puritan-Anglican *Edwardine*

Articles of 1553 (with input from John Knox), enjoyed symbolic authority especially in Ireland. There they greatly influenced the 1615 *Irish Articles* of Archbishop James Ussher. They also influenced the British delegates to the 1618^f international Synod of Dort.

At that Synod of Dort, where the ‘Five Points of Calvinism’ (T-U-L-I-P) were drawn up, 58 of the 102 Commissioners were Dutchmen. The other 44 were from many other countries, including at least five from Britain.

Finally, we mention: the 1631 *Greek Confession* of Cyril Lucar, and the 1645 *Thorn Declaration* in Poland. But towering above all, stand the 1646 *Westminster Standards*, as the last and the very pinnacle of the great Reformed symbols.

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It should be noted that the Scottish Reformers George Wishart and John Knox both studied in Switzerland. Wishart took his 1536 translation of the *First Swiss Confession* back to Britain, about the end of 1542. Calvin’s 1542 *Second Genevan Catechism* was speedily translated from French into Latin -- and then further (in alphabetical order) into Dutch, English, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, and Spanish. And Knox took Calvin’s *Geneva Catechism* and *Geneva Service Book* back home to Scotland -- perhaps as early as 1555.

Moreover, there was a constant stream of heavy correspondence between the Reformed Churches in Switzerland -- and both the Anglicans and the Presbyterians, in Britain. Especially was this so between Bucer, Bullinger, Calvin and Peter Martyr on the one hand -- and Cranmer, Knox, Hooper, Jewel and Somerset *etc.* on the other.

England and Scotland produced nobody like Luther and Calvin -- but did produce many learned theologians, statemen and martyrs. Englishmen like Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, Hooper and Rogers were in constant correspondence with Switzerland’s Reformers (and also with Scots like John Knox). The Swiss Catechisms of Oecolampadius, Leo Judae, Calvin and Bullinger -- were all employed, massively, in Britain during the second half of the sixteenth century. For the European Reformers not only strongly influenced the Presbyterian Church of Scotland -- but also the Anglican Church in England.

Bullinger (and his *Decades*) and Beza (and his Latin New Testament) were well known in both Elizabethan and Puritan England. In 1587, Calvin’s *Catechism* was ordered by statute to be used in the British universities. His *Institutes* became the chief textbook of theology in Oxford and Cambridge. Especially the latter became a stronghold of Calvinism -- under the Rev. Professors Cartwright, Perkins and Whitaker. Indeed, Cambridge preferred Calvin to all other Christian writers who had ever lived since apostolic times.

The Reformed Church of England cultivated the Calvinistic Puritans. Cranmer solicited help from famous continental Reformed theologians -- like Peter Martyr Vermigli, Ochino, Laski, Bucer and Fagius. He gave them high positions in Oxford, Cambridge and London. Later, Micron and even the great Gomarus -- the hero of the ‘T-U-L-I-P’ Synod of Dort -- would teach in England.

Calvinism came to dominate even the Church of England -- particularly during the reigns of Elizabeth and James. This can be seen from the *Zurich Letters*, covering the entire epoch from the Reformation -- namely that of the *Edwardine* and *Elizabethan Articles*, the *Second Book of Homilies*, the 1595 *Lambeth Articles*, and the 1615 *Irish Articles*. The latter helped encourage King James to send English delegates to the international Reformed Synod of Dordt in 1618.

Both the sixteenth- and the seventeenth-century British Puritans were thus massively influenced by the paidobaptist (anti-anabaptistic) and Protestant (and anti-papal) Reformed theology of the Continent. Declares the Swiss-American 'German Reformed' theologian Rev. Prof. Dr. Philip Schaff (*Creeds* I pp. 593f, 622f & 657f):

"The most important chapter in the history of the Reformation, was acted [out] in that remarkable island which has become the chief stronghold of Protestantism in Europe...and the pioneer of modern Christian civilization and constitutional liberty.... The defeat of the Armada [in 1588] was that turning-point in history when the dominion on which the sun never sets, passed from Roman Catholic Spain to Protestant England."

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The American Church History Scholar, Rev. Prof. Dr. Lewis Bevens Schenck, has well stated that the *Decades* of Calvin's associate Bullinger were for some time the manual of the clergy in Britain. This was Swiss 'covenant theology' -- and the Britons would soon develop it yet further.

Hence, the covenant theology of 'federalism' on the Continent was even more forcefully expressed in the writings of the Britons. The English Puritans John Preston and John Ball both wrote important treatises on the covenant of grace. Ball's work was published after his death in 1645 -- and was recommended by Calamy, Reynolds, and other members of the Westminster Assembly.

Covenant theology soon became a most characteristic feature of Early British Puritanism. It appears in the writings of Cartwright, Ball and Ames in England -- as well as in those of Rollock and Howie in Scotland.

Most important of all, however, were the 1615 *Irish Articles* of the godly British Calvinist Archbishop James Ussher. For, as Rev. Professor Dr. Philip Schaff and Rev. Professor Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield both rightly claim, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* itself -- was chiefly influenced by Ussher and his *Irish Articles*.

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The renowned Archbishop James Ussher of Dublin was not only the greatest of all Episcopalians. He was also the greatest antiquarian, theologian and Puritan of his age. He produced the famous *Irish Articles* of 1615, which was the immediate ancestor of the *Westminster Confession* of the Westminster Assembly (to which he himself was elected). It is precisely the adoption of these *Irish Articles* with the full approval of King James, that induced Scottish Presbyterian Ministers to settle in Ulster.

In his *Creeds* (I pp. 664f), Schaff declares that these *Irish Articles* are clearly and fully in harmony with Calvinism. Substantially, they incorporate the *Thirty-nine Articles* -- and the *Lambeth Articles*. They teach absolute predestination and perseverance; they denounce the Pope as antichrist; and they inculcate the Puritan view of sabbath observance.

Says Schaff: "They prepared the way for the doctrinal standards of the Westminster Assembly. They were the chief basis of the *Westminster Confession* -- as is evident from the general order, the headings of chapters and sub-divisions, and the almost literal agreement of language in the statement of several of the most important doctrines."

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Just three years after the publication of the *Irish Articles*, we come to the meeting of the greatest international gathering of Calvinists ever held up to that time. It convened in Holland, as the 1618f *Synod of Dordt*. There, representatives from the Republic of the United Netherlands, from French-speaking Wallonia in the south of Belgium, from the Frisian-speaking regions on the Danish border, from the various German states, from the Swiss Republics, and from the United Kingdom of Great Britain -- met especially to hammer out the 'Five Points of Calvinism.'

However, Dordt does much more than just that. It also upholds at least three other traditionally Calvinistic views. Firstly, it identifies the Pope as antichrist. Secondly, it clearly implies that Baptism is not necessary for salvation. Thirdly, it maintains the validity of all Triune Baptisms administered in and by the Roman Catholic Church (and even by the Anabaptists).

King James sent at least five of his British theologians as delegates to the Synod of Dordt -- and they circulated its doctrines in Britain thereafter. They are: Bishop George Landaff of Wales; Rev. Professor Dr. John Davenant and Rev. Professor Dr. Samuel Ward, both of Cambridge; Rev. Dr. Thomas Goad of London; and Rev. Dr. Walter Balcanqual of Scotland. Indeed, there is some evidence that the Synod was attended even by the great British Puritan Rev. Dr. William Ames -- who soon thereafter became Professor of Theology in Frisia.

The British delegates brought back to King James a good report anent that Calvinistic Synod of Dordt. See *The Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britain concerning the Articles of the Synod of Dordt signed by them in the year 1619* (London, 1624).

The Stated Clerk of the Synod of Dordt, Rev. Dr. Festus Hommius, published a strong collection of *Theological Disputations Against the Papists*. There, he asserted the existence of saving grace in covenant infants even before their Infant Baptism. This work seems to have made an important impact on the later Westminster divine, Rev. Dr. George Gillespie.

Very frankly, all of the above-mentioned Reformed Confessions of Faith -- were quite inevitable. See Rev. Professor Dr. R.L. Dabney's essay *The Necessity and Value of Creeds*. It is to be found in the 1897 *Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly*, published in Richmond (Virginia) by the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

5. WHY WHIMPER OR WHISPER ABOUT WESTMINSTER?

"Let's leave the dismal 'doctrines of men' in the tomb of oblivion! Why whine and whinge about the cold concoctions of callous Calvinists more than three centuries old? Didn't the *Declaratory Statement* of our Presbyterian Church consign Westminster to the wastebasket of 'ancient' history? Why then be a wowsler? Why don't we just follow the Bible?"

Thus say the 'moderates' -- and the modernists. Yet such is not the verdict of the Christian Church of all ages! Indeed, as the great historian Groen van Prinsterer rightly wrote in his

famous book *Unbelief and Revolution*: "History is the flaming sword of the living God."

Rev. Professor Dr. A.F. Mitchell of St. Andrews University, the great authority on the theology and literature of the Westminster period, has demonstrated quite conclusively that the order followed by the Westminster divines in their *Westminster Confession of Faith* -- is that of the 1615 *Irish Articles*. That, in turn, was based upon the 1595 *Lambeth Articles* and the 1563 *Thirty-nine Articles* and the 1553 *Edwardine Articles*. And the latter had received input even from the great Scottish Presbyterian John Knox himself.

See: Mitchell's *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1867); his *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly* (1874); his *Westminster Assembly, Its History, and Standards* (1883); and his *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (1886). Also see A.F. Mitchell & J. Struthers: *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (1874). Further consult B.B. Warfield's *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (rep. 1972).

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By 1643, Calvin's influence was dominant throughout the British Isles (England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall, Cumbria, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands). Britain was already exporting Calvinism to Holland, North America, the West Indies, and elsewhere. Indeed, also from Continental Europe, the ongoing influence of Post-Calvinian Calvinism further strengthened the already strong native Calvinism of Great Britain herself.

There was nothing narrow about the 1643^f Westminster Assembly. It had a wide acquaintance with many creeds -- Greek, Latin, Continental Reformed, and British. Among the latter, Westminster thoroughly scrutinized the 1563^f *Thirty-nine Articles*, the 1595 *Lambeth Articles*, and the 1615 *Irish Articles*. Also the 1618^f international Synod of Dordt and its 'T-U-L-I-P' *Decrees* (alias the 'Five Points of Calvinism') had a massive influence upon it.

The distinguished American Presbyterian scholar Rev. Professor Dr. L.B. Schenck has drawn the correct conclusion from all this. Thus he remarks that the whole gamut of Calvinist Confessions -- as well as the best Reformed theologians -- were drawn upon by the Westminster Assembly. Such was the interaction between Northern Europe and the whole of the British Isles in the maturing of Calvinism -- that there was little room for independent development.

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So then, what really happened -- at Westminster? It was a time of grave national crisis. The English House of Commons had spent several years searching its sombre soul.

In 1642, Civil War threatened even the continuing existence of England. Urgently needed was a basis on which to promote the extension and consolidation of Biblical religion -- throughout the churches of Britain. Finally, Parliament acted.

On April 7th, the House of Commons stated that "the Lords and Commons do declare that they intend a due and necessary reformation of the government and liturgy of the Church." The Commons added that both Houses intended "speedily to have consultation with godly and

learned divines."

The House of Lords too assented. Then, on April 12th, 1642, Parliament adopted the nominating procedures -- for the summoning of the Westminster Assembly.

All of this was months before the August 22nd outbreak of the 1642 English Civil War. The Assembly would still have met --even if the war had never erupted. Even the Commons believed that the threatening war could -- and sincerely hoped that it would -- never occur.

Why then did the Westminster Assembly never meet right after the parliamentary enactment in April -- to help stop the war from breaking out in August 1642? It couldn't.

King Charles loved his Romish wife; but hated Calvinism. So he repeatedly refused to give his royal assent -- to the parliamentary enactment.

Charles now raised his royal banner -- "Render unto Caesar!" -- and attacked the Parliamentary Puritan Army. Soon he marched against even Parliament itself.

Some ten months later, a new bill to convene the Westminster Assembly got approved by both Houses. This was done at the very beginning of July 1643.

Immediately, the Assembly itself then held its first meeting. Altogether, those meetings were to last for the next decade.

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The Westminster Assembly was thus ordained by Parliament on April 7-12th -- before the August 22nd (1642) outbreak of the English Civil War. Yet the first meeting of the divines was actually convened by Parliament for July 1st, 1643 -- nearly a year after the war had commenced. The Scots had previously prepared that international political treaty called the *Solemn League and Covenant* -- for the purpose of getting it considered and signed first by the English and then by the Scottish Parliament. Quickly, the Westminster Assembly assented to that document.

The divines themselves then produced the *Westminster Directory for the Publick Worship of God* and their *Form of Presbyterial Church-Government*. These two documents were subsequently adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland -- respectively on February 3rd and 10th, 1645.

Thereafter, the Westminster divines completed the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (without Biblical proof-texts) on December 4th, 1646. This was soon to be adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

On April 26th, 1647, the Westminster Assembly completed the proof-text references -- for the previously-finished *Confession*. Then, on August 27th, 1647, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland approved the text.

Respectively by October and November, 1647, the Westminster Assembly had completed its

Larger and its *Shorter Catechism* (without proof-texts). The latter were delivered to Parliament on April 14th, 1648.

These two Catechisms were then approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland -- respectively on July 2nd & 28th, 1648.

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On January 30th, 1649, after being found guilty of high treason, the king was executed. This soon led to the final end of England's Civil War. Shortly thereafter, on February 22nd 1649, the Westminster Assembly carefully chronicled its 1163rd session. Thereafter, it ceased to number its various meetings.

It was, of course, still obligated to continue advising Parliament -- on all matters submitted to it for its consideration. Yet the Westminster Assembly now had few -- and only intermittent -- subsequent sessions. It finally petered out altogether -- possibly before October 26th, 1649. At any rate, its relevant parliamentary committee last met on March 25th, 1652.

During its heyday (from July 1643 to February 1649), the Westminster Assembly held frequent meetings of some 156 Commissioners. These consisted of 121 Calvinist Theologians -- as well as 35 Scottish Presbyterian Elders and Puritan Members of the English Parliament (from both Commons and Lords).

Everyone of them had to affirm this statement: "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 -- nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God's glory and the peace and good of this Church."

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The Assembly met for five hours daily, every weekday -- for more than 1162 numbered sessions. Even after February 1649 -- there were probably at least fifty further meetings. This adds up to more than 6000 hours of collective Bible study -- alias the equivalent of more than 150 weeks of work, by a team of more than 150 Commissioners.

Undeniably, the Westminster Assembly was the greatest Calvinist convention of all time. In many ways, it far surpassed even the famous 1618-19 international 'T-U-L-I-P' Synod of Dordt.

The Congregationalist Rev. Richard Baxter knew many of the Westminster divines personally. Though not a member of that Assembly, in his own *Life and Times* that godly pastor truthfully testified: "The divines there congregated were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities and fidelity.... Being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more freely speak the truth even in the face of malice and envy.... The Christian world since the days of the Apostles had never a Synod of more excellent divines."

The renowned Methodist Professor Rev. Dr. W.B. Pope -- discussing "the *Westminster Confession*" -- insisted: "Not excepting the *Canons of Dordt*, no Confession so fully expresses

the doctrine of the Reformed branch of the Reformation, and none has exerted so much influence in Christendom." And the liberal Anglican Dean, Rev. Stanley, insisted that of all the Protestant symbols -- the *Westminster Confession* displays "far more depth of theological insight than any other."

The 1850 German Historian General von Rudloff -- in his study *Die Westminster Synode* -- stated that "a more zealous, intelligent and learned body of divines seldom if ever met in Christendom." And the Swiss-American 'German Reformed' Theologian Philip Schaff said Westminster is "likely to last to the end of time."

Even the notorious Rev. Professor Charles A. Briggs -- whose unbiblical views helped derail the degenerating 'Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.' -- made a very significant concession. Said he: "Looking at the Westminster Assembly as a whole, it is safe to say that there never was a body of divines who labored more conscientiously, carefully and faithfully -- and produced more important documents or a richer theological literature -- than that remarkably learned, able and pious body which sat for so many trying years in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey."

The South African Reformed Theologian Rev. Professor Dr. P.J.S. de Klerk said of the *Westminster Confession* (to which he did not subscribe): "Of all the existing confessions, it is the clearest on all points.... In every respect, it is a decidedly Reformed elaboration of the *Thirty-nine Articles* in the spirit of the *Lambeth* and the *Irish Articles*."

Himself likewise committed to the earlier *Heidelberg Catechism*, the American-Australian 'Dutch Reformed' Theologian Rev. Principal Ray Zorn (of the Geelong Theological Seminary) added: "The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is the most mature systematic expression of the Reformed faith."

The Westminster Assembly is also probably the most important Theological Conference ever held -- whether Greek-Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, or Romish. It is certainly the most stupendous religious gathering of Bible Scholars ever known to have convened. Well should we then study its insights!

6. A SUMMARY OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIOIN OF FAITH

For an ecclesiastical Confession -- as opposed to say the charter of a Christian political party -- the thirty-three chapters of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* are amazingly comprehensive. Let us briefly summarize it.

Chapter 1 deals with *Holy Scripture*. It sets out the clarity of the light of nature (especially before the fall); the pre-biblical modes of special revelation; and the cessation of the latter upon the completion of the inscripturation of Holy Writ (as our only enduring and infallible guide in

our fallen state). It lists the various books of Holy Scripture, and distinguishes them from the unauthoritative apocryphal books. It discusses the infallible authority of Scripture; the grounds of its authority; and its relation to natural revelation. It notes the clarity of Scripture; its inscripturation in the Hebrew and Greek autographs; their faithful transmission down through all the ages; and the need for their accurate translation into the common tongues of men. It explains the infallible rule for interpreting Scripture; and it then elevates Holy Writ far above all church councils, ancient writers, and private opinions.

Chapter 2 deals with *God...the Holy Trinity*. Here our *Subordinate Standard* deals with God's singularity, and especially with His negative attributes. Positively, it then majors on His ethical and teleological qualities. It next gives particular attention to His independence and infallibility. Then it notes His Tri-unity -- and briefly discusses the different personal attributes respectively of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3 deals with *God's Eternal Decree*. Here it deals with double predestination. Implicitly condemning both Arminianism and Barthianism, it then gives some reasons for God's decrees. Finally, it cautions against carelessly mishandling them.

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Chapter 4 deals with *Creation*. This sets out God's exnihilation of all things -- and His subsequent manufacture of the universe "in the space of six days, and all very good." It then deals with His creation of man, male and female -- and their original condition in relation to the Law of God. Next, it notes that "they were happy in their communion with God -- and had dominion over the creatures."

Chapter 5 deals with *Providence*. Here, the complex problems are addressed as to the relationship of God the First Cause to secondary causes -- in connection with creaturely freedom. The matter of miracles is briefly touched upon. Especially emphasized is the way in which divine providence relates to the sins of angels and men. God's providence is absolute. Indeed, His singular care extends especially to His Church.

Chapter 6 deals with the *Fall of Man*. This sets out man's loss of original righteousness; the imputation of Adam's original sin; and its terrible consequences to all of his progeny.

Chapter 7 deals with *God's Covenant with Man*. It distinguishes between the 'covenant of works' made before the fall, and the 'covenant of grace' made thereafter. Regarding the latter, it notes the difference in administration before and after Calvary. It also stresses that in both cases, it equally centres in Jesus the promised Messiah.

Chapter 8 deals with *Christ the Mediator* -- and the precise relationship between His deity and His manhood. It discusses the texture of His human nature, His offices, His humiliation and His exaltation. It also mentions the efficacy of His work on behalf of those for whom He died.

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Chapter 9 deals with man's *Free Will*. While stressing his natural liberty before the fall and his

responsible agency thereafter, it insists that conversion is only from the Lord. For God alone liberates the will of certain men -- so that they then, willingly, follow Christ.

Chapter 10 deals with *Effectual Calling*. Only those whom God is pleased to call, are thus called, in His good time and unto salvation -- by His Word and Spirit. They are effectually drawn to Christ -- yet wholly by the Spirit of God. Elect infants who die in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit -- as too are all other elect persons incapable of being outwardly called by the Ministry of the Word. However, others not elected -- in spite of all common operations of the Spirit upon and within them -- cannot be saved. Indeed, to assert and maintain that they may -- is very pernicious and detestable.

Chapter 11 deals with *Justification*. Of this, we learn that trust in Christ and His righteousness is the alone instrument. Nevertheless, it is always either accompanied or followed by other health-bringing graces too. Although God from eternity past decreed to justify all the elect, the latter are not justified until the Holy Spirit regenerates them. Thereafter, God continues to forgive the fresh sins of those that have been justified.

Chapter 12 deals with *Adoption*. Those justified for Christ's sake, are adopted and taken into the number of the children of God. They have His name put upon them [in Holy Baptism], and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God. Though thereafter often chastened by Him, yet are they never cast off. Instead, they are sealed unto the day of redemption -- as heirs of everlasting salvation.

Chapter 13 deals with *Sanctification*. Those specially indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are progressively strengthened in all saving graces. There, the Spirit wars against the works of the flesh. Through the continual supply of strength from Christ's sanctifying Spirit, the regenerate aspect overcomes. Thus the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

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Chapter 14 deals with *Saving Faith*. This is imparted by the Spirit. It is increased and strengthened by the Word, by the Sacraments, and by Prayer. By faith, a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word. This faith is different in degrees; weak or strong. Yet it gets the victory -- growing up in many, to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ.

Chapter 15 deals with *Repentance unto Life*. This is to be preached by every Minister. By it, a sinner senses his filthiness and contrariety to the Law of God, and so grieves for and hates his sins -- as to turn from them all to God. The penitent thus purposes and endeavours to walk with God in all the ways of His Commandments. None may expect pardon without repentance. Indeed, even a Christian who nevertheless scandalizes his brother or the Church of Christ -- ought to be willing to declare his repentance to those that are offended.

Chapter 16 deals with *Good Works*. These are only such as God has commanded in His Holy Word; only such as are done in obedience to His Commandments; and only such as are the fruits and evidences of a true and living faith. For these to be produced -- in addition to the grace of justification, a further ongoing influx or "actual influence of the same Holy Spirit" into the believer is required. Believers are to stir up the grace of God that is in them. For such works

-- to be good indeed -- must proceed from God's Spirit alone.

Chapter 17 deals with the *Perseverance of the Saints* -- or rather with the perseverance of God in the saints. It depend not upon man's free will, but upon the immutability of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father. Indeed, it is effected by "the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them."

Chapter 18 deals with the *Assurance of Grace and Salvation*. This infallible assurance does not so belong to the essence of faith that a true believer may wait long before he partakes of it. Yet he may, without extraordinary revelation -- in the right use of ordinary means -- attain to it. Thereby, his heart is enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost; in love and thankfulness to God; and in strength and cheerfulness to obey.

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Chapter 19 deals with the *Law of God*. It was given to Adam and all his descendants, and republished to the Israelites on Mount Sinai in Ten Commandments. This Moral Law for ever binds all, both justified persons as well as others, to obey it. Neither does Christ in the Gospel in any way dissolve, but much strengthens this obligation. The Spirit of Christ then subdues and enables the will of man to do freely and cheerfully that which the will of God, revealed in the Law, requires to be done.

Chapter 20 deals with *Christian Liberty*. God's children obey him freely, and out of child-like love. However, those who upon pretence of Christian liberty practise any sin -- destroy liberty. Such as publish opinions or maintain practices contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity, may be censured by both Church and Civil Magistrate (each in its own peculiar way, the Church ecclesiasticly and the Magistrate juridicly).

Chapter 21 deals with *Religious Worship*. God may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men -- or in any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. Only the Triune God is to be worshipped; and all vocal prayer is to be uttered only in a known tongue. Psalm-singing by the congregation and daily family worship at home are both commanded -- as too is the weekly sanctification of the sabbath day. It is then that we are to rest -- from all worldly employments and recreations.

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Chapter 22 deals with *Lawful Oaths and Vows*. Here, God Himself is called as a witness in oaths that ought to be taken -- when imposed by lawful authority. It is sinful to refuse such oaths. On the other hand, popish monastical vows of perpetual single life are superstitious and sinful snares -- in which no Christian may entangle himself.

Chapter 23 deals with the *Civil Magistrate*. God, the King of all the world, has ordained political governments -- to reward the good, and to punish evil-doers. A Christian may himself become such a 'Magistrate' -- but the latter is not to interfere in the domestic affairs of the Church. All religious leaders are to obey the Magistrate's just and legal authority. From this, ecclesiastical persons are not exempted. Much less does the pope have any power or jurisdiction

over him.

Chapter 24 deals with *Marriage and Divorce*. Matrimony was ordained for the increase of mankind -- and especially of the Church, with a holy seed. Such as profess the true reformed religion -- should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters. Marriage ought not to be within the degrees of consanguinity forbidden in the Word. Adultery and wilful desertion are sufficient cause to dissolve the marriage. After that, the innocent party is as free to marry another -- as if the offender were dead.

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Chapter 25 deals with the *Church*. The Visible Church consists of all throughout the world professing the true religion, together with their children, congregating in particular churches where public worship is more or less purely performed. Some churches have so degenerated as to remain no churches of Christ. Instead, they have become synagogues of Satan. Christ is the only Head of the Church. Nor can the pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof. For he is that antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition who exalts himself in the Church against Christ.

Chapter 26 deals with the *Communion of Saints*. Here, all Christians are united in love and enjoy each other's gifts and graces. They are obliged to perform such public and private duties as conduce to their mutual good. This excludes community of goods and possessions -- and precludes blasphemously trying to partake of the substance of the Godhead.

Chapter 27 deals with the *Sacraments*. These put a visible difference between church members and worldlings, and obligate the former to serve Christ according to His Word. In the New Testament, there are but two Sacraments. Both of them derive their efficacy neither from the piety of the administrator nor the worthiness of the receivers -- but only from the work of the Spirit and the Word of the institution. Nevertheless, Sacraments should be administered only by lawfully ordained Ministers of the Word.

Chapter 28 deals with *Baptism*. This engrafts into the Visible Church, and is a sign and seal of regeneration. It obligates the recipient to keep on walking in newness of life. It is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water. Indeed, it is intended not only for professing adults -- but also for their infants. It is a great sin to neglect this ordinance. Yet salvation is possible without it. Not all baptized persons shall be saved. Furthermore, this Sacrament "is but once to be administered to any person."

Chapter 29 deals with the *Lord's Supper*. It is contrasted to "the popish sacrifice of the mass" -- which "is most abominably injurious." The Supper is to be given only "to the communicants -- but to none who are not then present in the congregation." Romish "transubstantiation by consecration of a priest or by any other way, is repugnant." Indeed, it is opposed "not to Scripture alone -- but even to common sense and reason." It "is the cause of manifold superstitions -- yea, of gross idolatries." Even the "ignorant" -- when coming to the Supper -- "are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation." For such "cannot without great sin against Christ...be admitted thereunto." See *Larger Catechism* 173 & 177.

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Chapter 30 deals with *Church Censures*. Christ Himself appoints His Elders. He empowers them to use censures -- "for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren.... The Officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the Church -- according to the nature of the crime and demerit of the person."

Chapter 31 deals with *Synods and Councils*. These were instituted "for the better government and further edification of the Church.... It belongs to Synods and Councils ministerially to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience; to set down rules and direction for the better ordering of the public worship of God and the government of His Church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same." Yet, because "all Synods or Councils since the Apostles' times...may err, and many have erred..., they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice." Instead, they are "to be used as an help in both."

Finally, our *Subordinate Standard* concludes on an eschatological note. Chapter 32 deals with the *State of Men after Death*. Here, it teaches the conscious continued existence of all people after physical death -- either in heaven or hell. "Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none." On the last day, "the dead shall be raised up with the very same bodies and none other -- although with different qualities -- which shall be united again to their souls for ever."

Chapter 33 deals with the *Last Judgment*. All will then appear before God -- to give account of their lives. Thereafter, the elect will go into everlasting life, and the reprobate into everlasting destruction. Knowledge of the certainty of judgment day, should "deter all men from sin." Especially the godly should "be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come." When He does, may they ever be prepared to say: "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Amen!"

7. AMENDMENTS TO THE *CONFESSIO* IN THE PCA SINCE 1901

This present writer gave a lecture in 1968 to the faculty and students at Faith Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Philadelphia -- and again in 1975 to the faculty and students of the Scottish Free Church at their Theological Hall in Edinburgh. What he then said as regards amending the *Westminster Confession*, he would still say to everybody also today. Namely:

"Certainly we **may** change the *Westminster Confession*.... Indeed we **should** change it -- if it were to be proved to be an inaccurate or inadequate statement of Scripture.

"After all, a confession, although normative, is still only a *fallibly* normative attempt to express

the truths of Scripture -- which alone is infallibly normative. Scripture alone is normatively normative (*norma normans*). A confession is only normatively normative (*norma normata*). That is to say, infallible Scripture is not subject to a fallible confession; but a merely normatively normative confession, is always subject to normatively normative Scripture.

"Indeed, the *Westminster Confession* has in fact been changed a number of times by some of the Presbyterian Churches which have subscribed to it -- in order to bring it more into line with what their Synods, after mature reflection, have considered to be the true teaching of the Word of God....

"It is a very serious thing indeed to revise a Church's Confession.... This does, in fact, imply that previous generations in the Church either incorrectly or inadequately confessed the teachings of Holy Scripture [at least for what are deemed to be the needs of the present time].

"It is true that no confession is *norma normans* (or an infallible norm). Only Scripture is that. But fallible though every confession is, it is nevertheless *norma normata*. Though fallible, it is still a norm, and therefore normative.

"Accordingly, no mere congregation -- and still less an even merer individual Christian -- should tamper with the *Confession*. For 'it belongeth to **Synods**...to determine controversies of faith...and authoritatively to determine the same. Which decrees and determination -- if consonant to the Word of God -- are to be received with reverence and submission.' *Westminster Confession* 31:3....

"Now it is true that since apostolic times 'all Synods or Councils...whether general or particular may err.' Indeed, 'many have erred' -- as also the *Confession* declares in its chapter 31:4.

"However, I am not aware that the Westminster Assembly erred in its establishment and adoption of its *Confession* and *Catechism* more than three hundred years ago. And so I do not recommend any material alteration of the *Westminster Confession* or *Catechisms* -- from the form in which we presently confess them.

"A good argument could perhaps be advanced to replace certain obsolescent words and phrases in the *Confession* by more understandable current terminology and, in the light of the modern problems of society, to put more stress than is often done at present, on the socio-economic teachings of the *Confession* [see e.g. chs. 19f & 26].... But I must nevertheless conclude that, apart from such matters, I personally see no merit at all in the organized 'Church of the Twentieth Century' confessing Christ fundamentally differently from the way that the organized 'Church of the Seventeenth Century' did in the *Westminster Confession* which it then wrote.

"I myself unequivocally reject the anti-historical or liberal *quatenus* point of view, fine though it sounds. I accept the *Westminster Confession* not merely *quatenus*, **in so far**, as it agrees with Scripture -- as says the '(United) Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.' in its apostate *Confession of 1967*. I myself accept the *Westminster Confession* totally and indeed *quia* -- **because** it wholly agrees with Scripture.

"Let the '*quatenus* theologians' demonstrate where the *Westminster Confession* is unscriptural

-- if they can! Until then, I will defend it as it is. And I will continue to assert that it is an accurate expression of the basic teachings of Scripture, just as it stands." Dr. F.N. Lee: *The Westminster Confession and Modern Society*, Scottish Reformed Fellowship, Edinburgh, 1972, pp. 12-14.

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Rightly did perhaps the greatest Australian Presbyterian of all time, Rev. Dr. John Dunmore Lang, assess the *Westminster Confession*. Preaching at the opening of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Hobart in 1835, Lang told his Tasmanian audience "that the doctrines or articles of religion which the Presbyterian Church of Scotland professes to hold, are contained in the *Confession of Faith* and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechism* of the General Assembly of divines held at Westminster in the year 1644 -- an Assembly which...was perhaps without exception the most pious, the most learned and the most judicious that the Christian world has ever beheld."

Dr. Lang then continued: "It will be the bounden duty of your future pastor to declare and to enforce these doctrines. It will be your duty, my Christian friends and brethren, to lay them up in your hearts and to exhibit in your lives that holy influence which they are calculated to shed on your whole character and conduct." Rev. Dr. J.D. Lang: *The True Glory of a Christian Church*, Bull, Sydney, 1835, p. 13.

In Queensland, many of the first Presbyterian Ministers came from the highly Calvinistic Presbyterian Church of Ireland -- in Ulster. Most of the others were Scots -- who hailed from conservative circles within the Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church (and who were recruited both from Ireland as well as from Scotland).

Indeed, they were recruited especially from the then very Calvinistic Scottish Free Church. To a lesser extent, they were recruited also from the latter's sister denomination, the Synod of Eastern Australia. See R.S. Ward's *The Bush Still Burns: The Presbyterian and Reformed Faith in Australia 1788-1988*, Wantirna, Victoria, 1989, pp. 95f, 162 & 206.

Queensland Presbyterianism was established officially by the conservative Church of Scotland Minister Rev. Thomas Mowbray at a Kangaroo Point meeting in 1849. There, it was decided "to form a Church in which the great doctrines of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and other *Standards* adhered to by the Evangelical Presbyterians of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Ireland will be maintained -- and where the ordinances of religion will be administered in the manner they deem most accordant with Scripture."

In the 1863 *Basis of Union* of the above-mentioned conservative Irish and Scottish groups into the new Presbyterian Church of Queensland, it is stated: "1) that the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule of faith and practice; 2) that the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*, the *Form of Presbyterian Church Government*, the *Directory of Public Worship* and the *Second Book of Discipline* are the subordinate standards and formularies of this Church." R. Bardon: *The Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland*, Smith & Paterson, Brisbane, 1949, pp. 20-31.

Similarly, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland itself declared in

1875 (Min. 58): "The *Confession of Faith* contains the creed to which, as a confession of his own faith, every office-bearer in the Church must testify in solemn form his personal adherence.... I do hereby declare that I do sincerely own and believe the **whole** doctrine contained in the *Confession of Faith*...to be in accordance with the Word of God, and I do own the same as the confession of my faith" (emphasis mine B.F.N. Lee).

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The Presbyterian Church of Australia came into being in 1901, when many of the Presbyterian denominations in the several ex-colonial new States within the Continent of Australia confederated together. The P.C.A., even today, maintains the *Westminster Confession* in its original 1646 form -- almost totally. For only since confederation has it effected any amendments at all to the *Confession* -- and merely two very minor ones at that.

This was done, only after sustained reflection on the requirements of Holy Scripture. The motive behind the minor amendments was thus to bring previous practices more into conformity with a fuller understanding of the infallible Word of God.

The amendments were effected by constitutional process. This requires all restatements of the doctrine of the *Subordinate Standard* first to be approved by most of the broader or higher courts of the denomination. Needed here, is approval: (i), by a majority of all State Assemblies; (ii), by three-fifths or more of all of their Presbyteries; and (iii), by a majority of three-fifths of the members present at the final vote of the General Assembly of Australia. (1901 Basis of Union, section III.)

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Chapter 24:4 of the 1647 *Westminster Confession*, concerning prohibited degrees of consanguinity, states that "the man may not marry any of his wife's kindred nearer in blood than he may of his own, nor the woman of her husband's kindred nearer in blood than of her own." To this, the Australian text has added the following: "except the case of the deceased wife's sister or the case of a deceased husband's brother."

Chapter 27:4 of the original *Confession*, concerning the administration of the two Sacraments, states: "neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a Minister of the Word lawfully ordained." To this, the Australian text has added the following: "(saving where the General Assembly has made a special provision to the contrary, that the people of God may not be left without these sealing ordinances)."

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As done earlier in other Presbyterian denominations, the 1912 General Assembly of Australia commenced the process of amending the *Confession* (anent the prohibited degrees of consanguinity within marriage). So it tentatively approved the insertion of the words "except the case of the deceased wife's sister" into and right after chapter 24:4k of the *Confession*.

This was done, tentatively, only after consideration of a massive amount of systematized Biblical

data bearing specifically on this very issue. See: Lev. chs. 18 & 20; Matt. 14:3f; I Cor. 5:1f; etc. Minute 53 then resolved that the General Assembly of Australia "send the...Overture down to State Assemblies, and through them to Presbyteries."

Two years passed. Then, in the 1914 Blue Book of the General Assembly of Australia, the *Report of the Committee on Marriage and Divorce* of the Presbyterian Church again discussed this possible change to the *Confession*. On page 134, the *Report* stated: "To alter the *Confession* by a mere resolution of the Assembly, under our Constitution...cannot be done. No change in the *Confession* shall be made, save in the duly appointed way (see Section III of the Basis of Union). This clause was inserted to prevent a bare majority of an Assembly changing the *Standards*, to the detriment of a minority."

Explained the *Report*: "It would be a breach of the Deed of Union to do what was proposed" by those who now wanted to amend the *Confession* in the Presbyterian Church of Australia -- if it were to be done by simple majority vote. Instead, it could be done constitutionally -- only by the required three-fifths majority, after prerequisite Barrier Act procedure.

The *Report* then continued: "Our Church [alias the denomination] stands in the position that it may make any change in the *Standards* without losing its property, if it change them in the manner provided" -- viz., by way of Sections III-V of the 1901 *Basis of Union*.

Consequently: "That unusually favourable position makes it all the more incumbent on the Church not to attempt to make changes otherwise. A bad precedent set in our circumstances, might so readily be fatal.... This change, if made at all, should be made only in this way. Because it is only by altering the *Confession* that any Ministers who remain of the same opinion as the Church was, and who cannot change with it, can have the benefit of the clause which would permit the Church to let them go with their property." Thus far the *Report*.

The 1914 General Assembly's *Blue Book* (page 199) then lists the "Returns to Remit Anent Marriage with Deceased Wife's Sister." It declares: "Approve, 36 Presbyteries." No disapprovals are noted. Minute 113 then records: "The Returns on the Remit to Marriage with Deceased Wife's Sister, were submitted by the Convener of the Business Committee. The Remit was approved, and the proposed change made in the *Confession of Faith*" (at 24:4k).

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In that same year, 1914, the *Blue Book* of the General Assembly of Australia (at its Minute 61) refers to another very interesting matter. This relates to a great difficulty Ministers of the Word and Sacraments then had. During that time of inadequate and slow transportation, it was very hard for them efficiently to administer the Sacraments in the then inaccessible parts of the vast Australian Continent.

Here, Professor MacIntyre had moved that the *Confession of Faith* (at chapter 27:4) be amended -- in order to allow Home Missionaries, even if never ordained as Ruling Elders, to administer Baptisms.

However, Rev. Professor Dr. Rentoul successfully amended this motion. He did so, by getting

inserted into it -- right after the phrase 'Home Missionaries' -- the words "who have received ordination as Elders" *etc.* Naturally, this then had to go down by Barrier Act procedure to the State Assemblies and their Presbyteries --for their required approval or disapproval.

Two years passed. Then, the 1916 *Blue Book* of the General Assembly of Australia (at page 89) lists the 'Returns to Remits.' The Remit 'Anent Amending *Confession of Faith*' -- previously referred to at Minute 61 in the 1914 *Blue Book* -- was the Remit relating to the MacIntyre-Rentoul Overture to permit Home Missionaries to administer Baptisms [but not the Lord's Supper].

The 1916 *Blue Book* (at page 89) shows that the Remit had been approved by a sufficient number of State Assemblies and their Presbyteries. However: in Tasmania, it was approved by only 6 votes to 5. In the New South Wales State Assembly, the Remit was amended -- and approved only after omitting the words "who have received ordination as Elders."

In South Australia, the Presbytery of Penola approved the Remit only "on the clear understanding that the measure proposed be regarded as a temporary administrative arrangement." Indeed, the Remit was rejected altogether and "disapproved by the Presbyteries of Hobart, Launceston, New England, Orange and Seymour."

On the same page, a separate Return is listed to the Remit 'Anent Amending the *Confession of Faith*' at chapter 27:4. It states that the proposed amendment was (insufficiently) disapproved by the "Presbyteries of Bathurst, Hobart, Launceston, New England, & Orange."

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The same 1916 General Assembly of Australia, at Minute 70, implicitly endorsed the administration of the Sacraments -- **ideally!** -- only by Ministers of the Word. For the General Assembly left the *Confession* unamended at 28:2 and 29:3 -- where only Ministers of the Word and Sacraments are entrusted with the administration of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper.

Moreover, even in the *Confession* at 27:4k, the General Assembly left intact the statement that "neither of which [Sacraments] may be dispensed by any but by a Minister of the Word lawfully ordained." To this, the General Assembly of Australia then simply added: "(**saving** where the General Assembly has made a special provision to the contrary, **that** the people of God may not be left without these sealing ordinances)." Both emphases mine -- F.N. Lee.

The same Minute then further states: "The Returns on the Remit relative to amending the *Confession of Faith* were received. The Remit, having been approved by a majority of the State Assemblies and by three-fifths of the Presbyteries of the whole Church, was by a unanimous vote of the Assembly approved and declared the law of the Church."

The 1916 General Assembly of Australia, Minute 71, declares: "The Returns on the Remit relative to Home Missionaries administering Baptism were received. The Remit was approved with the omission of the words 'who have received ordination as Elders' and declared to be the law of the Church."

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A further matter should be noted. The administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by Home Missionaries, though perhaps permissible by the prior resolutions recorded at Minute 70 of the 1916 General Assembly of Australia, was not specifically authorized by Minute 71 immediately above.

Such specific authorization first came only much later -- and even then, only under the most stringent conditions of presbyterial permission and Ministerial supervision. See Minute 69 of the 1922 General Assembly of Australia. Note too the 1959 General Assembly of Australia's Minute 128, and also the 1970 GAA *Code* at its sections 203-212.

Such amendments provide only for exceptional situations. The general norm requires the services specifically of an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacraments. That **norm** is yet found in the **unamended** chapters 28:2 and 29:3 of the *Confession*.

For 28:2 still states that candidates are "to be baptized...by a Minister of the Gospel lawfully called thereunto." Indeed, 29:3 (on the Lord's Supper) further insists that "the Lord Jesus hath...appointed His Ministers to declare His Word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine; and...to give both to the communicants but to none who are not then present in the congregation."

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The slow "horse and buggy" days are now gone forever. Also, with vastly increased demographic shifts of population from remote country areas to the cities, the urgency for this amendment is hardly still with us. Rescission of the amendment, or at least the discontinuance of what it permits, could therefore appropriately be considered.

Finally, the 1928 General Assembly of Australia's *Blue Book* records the augmentation of the 1914 amendment (permitting marriage to a deceased wife's sister). The 1928 Assembly dealt with the "Remit on Marriage of Deceased Husband's Brother."

It explains it was approved by the State Assemblies of Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and West Australia -- and also by 36 Presbyteries. Minute 57 records the approval of this amendment to the *Confession* (at 24:4), and declares it the law of the Church.

Only as regards these two small matters -- the definition of marital consanguinity, and special provision for sacramental administration by Home Missionaries where no Ministers are available -- has the *Confession* ever been amended on the Continent of Australia. Apart from those two matters, the Presbyterian Church of Australia still maintains the original and unamended version of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as its Subordinate Standard.

8. SOME DECLARATORY STATEMENTS AND THE *CONFESSION*

A 'Declaratory Statement' on a 'Confession of Faith' aims not to amend -- but to explain it. As such, it presupposes the accuracy of the Confession it seeks to declare. It does not attempt to alter it.

Various attempts in other parts of the world -- and notably in the United States (first in 1788 and again in 1903) -- were made to **amend** certain portions of the original 1646 *Westminster Confession*.

No such attempts **to amend**, at all, were ever made in Australia within that time frame (1788 to 1903). Since then, the two small Australian amendments (to chapters 24 and 27) have not materially altered the Biblical teaching of the *Confession* -- nor even affected its sense in any

substantial way.

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Yet there have indeed been several attempts, since 1646, to **explain** the meaning of unamended portions of the *Westminster Confession*. That has been done by way of Declaratory Statements.

The first such attempt was made by the 1647 General Assembly of the Presbyterian *Church of Scotland* itself. That was just a few months after the completion of the *Confession* in London.

The 1647 Scottish General Assembly warmly approved the *Westminster Confession* as "most agreeable to the Word of God..., most orthodox and grounded upon the Word of God" -- and as an "excellent confession of faith." It then went on to add the following about the *Confession* in general, and its chapter 31:2 in particular:

"It is hereby expressly **declared** and provided, that the not mentioning in this confession [of] the several sorts of ecclesiastical officers and assemblies, shall be no prejudice to the truth of Christ in these particulars."

Again: "It is further **declared** that the [1647 Scottish Presbyterian General] Assembly understandeth some parts of the second article of the thirty-one [or 31st] chapter, only of kirks not settled or constituted in point of government" *etc.* See the *Subordinate Standards of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1933, p. 13.

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A similar situation arose in 1846, at the very inception of the new Free Church of Scotland. At its very first General Assembly, it too issued a *Declaratory Statement*.

The Free Church then thought it "right to declare that...the Church firmly maintains the same Scriptural principles as to the duties of nations and their rulers in reference to true religion and the Church of Christ, for which she has hitherto contended." By "hitherto" is here meant: embryonically, within the maternal womb of the Church of Scotland. *Ib.*, p. 372.

At the same time, continued the 1846 *Declaratory Statement* of the Free Church (testifying about herself), "she disclaims intolerant or persecuting principles." For she "does not regard her *Confession of Faith* or any portion thereof, when fairly interpreted, as favouring intolerance or persecution -- or consider that her office-bearers, by subscribing it, profess any principles inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment." *Idem.*

The above 1846 Free Church of Scotland *Declaratory Statement* is the direct ancestor of the similar passage in our own Australian Presbyterian *Declaratory Statement*. See Section vi -- in the Presbyterian Church of Australia's 1901 *Declaratory Statement*.

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In 1904, Rev. Professor Dr. B.B. Warfield wrote a very important article -- *The Confession of*

Faith as Revised in 1903. There he referred, *inter alia*, to the American *Declaratory Statement* of 1903 -- which had itself been formulated from Scottish Declaratory Statements similar to those somewhat influencing the production of the Australian *Declaratory Statement* of 1901.

"The 'Declaratory Statement,'" explains Warfield, "is not a 'revision' of the text of the *Confession*, nor an 'addition' to the text of the *Confession*; it is only an 'explanation' of the text of the *Confession*. The text [of the *Confession*]itself, it [the 'Declaratory Statement'] leaves intact. And it not only leaves the text intact. It reaffirms that text. What it sets itself to do, in fact, is to protect this text from false inferences -- and to strengthen it by explication."

"The 'Declaratory Statement' is as far as possible from antagonizing the passages of the *Confession* with which it deals.... The passages with which the 'Declaratory Statement' deals, now, are specifically the Third Chapter (Of God's Eternal Decree), and the Third Section of the Tenth Chapter, which sets forth the method of the salvation of infants dying such."

Warfield then concludes: "The 'Declaratory Statement' therefore reaffirms the confessional doctrines of the Decree of God and of the method of the Salvation of Infants dying such." *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co.), 1973 ed., II, pp. 373f.

Indeed, the very language of the 1903 American *Declaratory Statement* here discussed by the great Warfield, is practically identical to that used two years earlier in the Australian Presbyterian *Declaratory Statement* (sections two and three). Warfield: *op. cit.*, p. 375. See too *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, being its Standards Subordinate to the Word of God* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications), 1908, p. 138b.

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The most queried section in the earlier Australian *Declaratory Statement* of 1901 -- as well as in the almost identical 1903 American section -- is unquestionably the claim that God has "provided a salvation sufficient for all and adapted to all and offered to all in the Gospel" *etc.*

Precisely here, however, Warfield himself insists that God loves the whole human race as such. Indeed, he proves this with judicious citations from many famous Presbyterian and Reformed Theologians. Such include: Calvin, Dabney, Edwards, Girardeau, A.A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, Shedd, Thornwell, Turretin, and Twisse. The latter, be it noted, was the Prolocutor (alias the Moderator) of the Westminster Assembly itself. See Warfield: *op. cit.*, pp. 375f.

It is in section four of the Australian *Declaratory Statement* that the doctrine of common grace is set forth. In this regard, Warfield claimed that 'common grace' is "only a repetition of doctrine already set forth with fulness and emphasis in the First Chapter of the *Confession*." Indeed, it "gives a comprehensive statement of a great and distinctively Calvinistic doctrine not hitherto incorporated in detailed statement into the *Confession* -- the doctrine, to wit, as it is currently designated by the systematizers of 'Common Grace.'"

"This important doctrine, first worked out by Calvin, passed from him into the systems of the

Reformed divines in general, to be most richly developed in our own day by perhaps Dr. Charles Hodge and...Dr. Abraham Kuyper and Dr. Herman Bavinck.... This distinctively Reformed doctrine was not unknown to the framers of the *Confession*. It may be found more or less fully expounded in their private writings, and is always adverted to by them with a high sense of its value. Cf., e.g., Twisse, *Riches*, pp. 243, 253." Thus Warfield: *op. cit.*, pp. 386f.

More importantly, the doctrine of 'common grace' is clearly presupposed by key phrases in the *Westminster Confession* itself. Observe the phrase "common operations of the Spirit" --in *W.C.F.* 10:4. Also note the words "common sense and reason" -- in *W.C.F.* 29:6. Further consider the references to the "light of nature" in *W.C.F.* 1:1 & 1:6 & 20:4 & 21:1 -- and the expression "law of nature" in *W.C.F.* 21:7. See too F.N. Lee's *Common Grace Debate* (2001).

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Thus far as regards 'Declaratory Statements' about the true meaning of the *Westminster Confession*. Quite different, however, is the more 'liberal' way taken -- when a denomination issues a *Testimony*, in addition to its confession.

Such is the way in which even the Reformed Presbyterian Church understands the confession of its faith. For, in its *Testimony* -- specified in its very *Terms of Communion* -- it announces that it is "not pledged to defend every sentiment or expression" in its confession of faith. Similarly, also the United Original Secession Church also avails itself of its *Testimony* -- in order to set out its own views in this regard. See A.A. Hodge: *The Confession of Faith*, 1869 ed., p. 429, App. No. III.

We conclude, then, that 'Declaratory Statements' -- unlike 'Revisions' and even 'Testimonies' -- never try to amend but only to interpret the true text of confessions of faith. This is precisely the case in respect of the Australian Presbyterian *Declaratory Statement* of 1901.

9. THE *CONFESSION* NOT THE *STATEMENT* IS OUR *STANDARD*

The *Supreme Standard* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia -- as mentioned in Section I of her original *Basis of Union* (24th July, 1901) -- is "**the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament.**" Emphases mine B.F.N. Lee.

Implicitly, according to Section III of the *Basis of Union*, that Supreme Standard is **unamendable**. On the other hand, Section II of that 1901 *Basis of Union* refers to the Subordinate Standard. Unlike the *Supreme Standard*, it is clear that the *Subordinate Standard* (namely the *Westminster Confession of Faith*) can indeed **be amended**.

Thus the subsequent Sections III-VI of the *Basis of Union* make provision for "any proposed revision or abridgement of the *Subordinate Standard* of the Church, or re-statement of its

doctrine, or change of the Formula...to be signed by Ministers and Elders at their ordination or induction and by Probationers on receiving licence."

A very important question now arises. Precisely **what is** this amendable and *Subordinate Standard* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia?

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This *Subordinate Standard* is indeed mentioned in Section II of the original 1901 *Basis of Union* (and elsewhere). However, there is some debate as to the exact meaning of these words "*Subordinate Standard*" in Section II.

Is our Subordinate Standard the *Westminster Confession*? Is it the *Declaratory Statement*? Is it "the *Westminster Confession* read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*"? Or is it: "the *Westminster Confession*," -- note that comma! -- "read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*"?

One comma -- is the only difference between the last two of the above four alternatives. Does that comma really matter? Yes -- very much so.

In the 'comma-less' extant Greek manuscript copies of Luke 23:43, our Saviour says to the penitent thief on the cross: "Truly I tell you today you shall be with Me in paradise!"

What does this sentence signify? It could have at least two possible meanings, each different from the other. Each of the two possible meanings would depend on the placement of an obviously implied **comma**.

Which of the two following English versions of those words, here conveys the true meaning of our Lord Jesus Christ? *Viz.:*

(1) "Truly I tell you, today you shall be with Me in paradise!"

OR

(2) "Truly I tell you today, you shall be with Me in paradise!"?

We think the first reading above -- (1) -- reflects the correct meaning. There, it is significant that the word "today" appears immediately after the first occurrence of the word "you" -- and immediately before the words "you shall be with Me" *etc.*

In the Greek text of the extant unpunctuated ancient manuscript copies of the sentence, the placing of the word "today" precisely as just stated -- presumes an intended **comma**. Such a comma is thus to be presumed, right after the first occurrence of the word "you" -- and right before the words "today you shall be with Me in paradise!"

How would the Greek sentence have read, if the second reading above -- (2) -- were correct? Then, the word "today" would probably have stood immediately after the word "truly" and immediately before the word "I" -- in order to give this sense unambiguously in the original Greek. Thus: "Truly, today I tell you, you shall be with Me in paradise!" This, however, is not what the Greek says.

What does (1) -- the first (traditional) reading -- then **mean**? It signifies that the dying penitent thief without doubt, and **already that very same day**, surely went to paradise together with Jesus. This, we believe -- for the reasons previously given -- is the correct meaning.

The second (incorrect) reading -- (2) -- is popular with Jehovah's witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists. It would mean the **Jesus would have been telling the thief precisely on the very day they were both then dying** -- that the thief would **someday** be in paradise with Jesus.

That would then mean the thief would join Jesus in paradise only at some unspecified future time -- and probably only a very long while after the thief had died. In order to accommodate their heterodox views favouring 'soul sleep' *etc.*, Jehovah's witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists postpone that unspecified future time -- even till the second coming of Christ.

The precise placement of the implicit comma in the above sentence of Jesus, is thus of much significance. Similarly, a comma is also of very great importance in Section II of the 1901 *Basis of Union* -- within our Presbyterian Church of Australia.

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Fortunately, the text of the latter -- signed on 24th July, 1901 -- is quite indisputable. The comma, clearly found in the original text, is a matter of fact which can be verified with ease.

Yet even that 1901 text, also has an important historical background. We now give a brief chronicle of the events which led up to the signing of that undisputable text. For this should help clarify even more -- the nature and the precise meaning here of the text itself.

Excerpts from official historical records kept in the Church Offices of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, now follow. They were inspected personally, by this writer himself.

Before 1882, there were two meetings of the *General Conference of the Presbyterian Churches of Australasia*. Then, in 1882, the *Report* of the 'Third Conference' appeared. It was published by A.W. Beard of Sydney. According to that *Report* -- the Conference was attended by representatives respectively from the Presbyterian Churches of New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and Western Australia.

From 1886 till 1901, there existed a new body called the *Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Australia and Tasmania*. It provided a platform on which the various Presbyterian Churches in the six Australian colonies might unite. The thought was to do so by way of confederation, and thus still to preserve their previous regional identities. The body finally drew up a *Scheme of Union* -- and then, on the 24th July, 1901, constituted itself as the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Especially in the seven years before the 1901 Union, the body was very active. In 1894, the Federal Assembly proposed (note the next comma!) that "the *Subordinate Standards* of the United Church shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Shorter Catechism*, read in the light of a *Declaratory Statement* such as that in use in the Church of Victoria." *1894 Proposed Scheme of Union*, clause 1. On that (1882) Victorian *Declaratory Statement* itself,

see at pages 63-71 below.

In 1898, the *Report of the Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Australia and Tasmania* appeared. It was published by Samuel E. Lees of Sydney. See especially pages 13 and 22 of that document.

That Assembly was held in Sydney -- in September 1898. It was attended by representatives from eleven Presbyteries in New South Wales, four in Queensland, two in South Australia, one in Tasmania, and eight in Victoria. The 'General Mission Agent' was the internationally famous Rev. Dr. J.G. Paton of New Hebrides' fame (in the Pacific Ocean country now known as Vanuatu).

Four Victorian Presbyteries strongly opposed the then *Proposed Scheme of Union* at that time. Accordingly, there was a recommendation that it first be improved.

In 1899, another *Report of the Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Australia and Tasmania* appeared. It too was published by Lees of Sydney. There, an adjourned meeting of the Assembly took place in April. See especially pages 10 and 12 of that document.

Interesting is the *Proposed Basis of Union* (III:IV), there discussed. It provided: "That, with the view of protecting any minority of a fifth or more of the congregations which may protest against any change in the *Basis of Union*, Articles shall be duly framed to secure their rights and the relation of their congregational property."

Further, it was moved that "the Assembly -- having considered in detail the *Scheme of Union* contained in the *Union Committee's Report* -- agrees to: adopt it as amended; express gratification that this stage in the movement has been reached with so much unanimity and cordiality of feeling; [and] further remit the Scheme to the various Supreme Courts of the Federated Churches."

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In 1900, yet another *Report of the Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Australia and Tasmania* appeared. It too was published by Lees of Sydney. See especially pages 5 and 8f of that document.

It records an adjourned meeting of the Assembly, in Melbourne, in June 1900. This, it states, was attended by representatives from New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria. At that meeting, Sections III, IV and V of the *Basis of Union* were adopted. Those sections relate to: parameters of possible changes in doctrine; procedures necessary to effect this; and provision for those unable to accept such contingencies.

The above is then followed by an *Appendix*. That starts off by giving: "The Scheme of Union Adopted by the Federal Assembly, March 1900, and remitted to the Federated Churches."

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Here are some excerpts from the Minutes of the Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Australia and Tasmania (for June 1900). Heading: "*Scheme of Union Adopted by the Federal Assembly March 1900 and remitted to the Federated Churches.*" Preamble: *Inter alia*, "to unite on the following basis, and subject to the following articles, to be subscribed by the Moderators of the respective [ex-colonial State Presbyterian] Churches in their name and on their behalf."

Note, in the above, the distinctions made between the "basis" (of union), and the "articles" (of agreement)! In the *Basis of Union*, the agreed-upon Section II thereof was to state: "The Subordinate Standard of the United Church shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, read in the light of the following Declaratory Statement" *etc.*

That comma in the above sentence -- the comma immediately after the phrase "*Westminster Confession of Faith*" -- is highly significant. It clearly evidences the **ecclesiastical intention behind** -- and existing **immediately prior to** -- the 1900-1901 **Acts of the Colonial or 'State' Parliaments**. (Those Colonial Acts were needed to 'enable' the effecting of the ecclesiastical acts **at the federal level**.)

Now the ecclesiastical intention was clearly stated here. It was this: not the '*Declaratory Statement*' but only the *Westminster Confession* should be the *Subordinate Standard* of the proposed new denomination to be known as the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Its *Subordinate Standard* of the *Westminster Confession* was, however, to be read in the light of the '*Declaratory Statement*.'

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Very significantly, the comma concerned -- regardless as to its possible statutory interpretation -- is also found in the *Schedules* attached to most of the **subsequent** State Acts **co-creating** the Presbyterian Church of Australia. (The prior 1899 **enabling** Act of South Australia, however, does not refer to such a Schedule.)

The enabling Acts of the several colonial parliaments, were precisely that. They were non-ecclesiastical colonial statutes designed to enable the statutory confederation of pre-existing Presbyterian Churches in the several colonies which were then becoming States, into the new Presbyterian Church of Australia.

These parliamentary Acts did not create and neither did nor do they maintain either the pre-existing Presbyterian Churches of Christ within this continent or elsewhere, nor the Presbyterian Church of Australia then being brought into being. For Christ alone is their sole Creator and Maintainer. Indeed, the parliamentary Acts recognized the prior existence of these Churches -- and simply enabled them to confederate so as to convey civil law benefits to the new Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Those Acts are: New South Wales Act II Private (pg. 73); Queensland 64 Victoria No. 34; South Australia (62 & 63 Victoria); Tasmania 1 Edward VII No. 2; Victoria Act 1707; and Western Australia 1 Edward VII No. 4.

The South Australian Act is the only Act without a Schedule containing a parliamentary textual

version of Section II & III (*etc.*) of the *Basis of Union* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Statutes of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania all have the comma in Section II. The Victorian Statute does not -- nor does the later *ex post facto* Western Australian version of 9 October 1901, derived from the Victorian version.

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As regards Section III, the various colonial Presbyterian Churches had agreed it would read: "Any proposed revision or abridgment of the subordinate standard of the Church, or re-statement of its doctrine, or change of the formula," *etc.* All of the enabling colonial Acts substantially agree with that wording -- and with one another's wording.

Except for the hyphen in the above word "re-statement" the Schedule in the Queensland Statute is congruent to the pre-agreed and pre-signed ecclesiastical text. The New South Wales Schedule has: "any proposed revision or abridgment of the subordinate standard of the Church, or restatement of its doctrine, or change of the formula" *etc.* The Tasmanian Schedule has: "any proposed revision or abridgment of the subordinate standard of the church, or restatement of its doctrine, or change of the formula" *etc.* Collectively, all these versions of the Schedule are conveniently referred to as: "the Eastern version(s)."

The Victorian Schedule and the *ex post facto* Western Australian Schedules both read: "Any proposed revision or abridgment of the subordinate standard of the church or restatement of its doctrine or change of the formula" *etc.* Collectively, these two versions of the Schedule are conveniently referred to as: "the Western version(s)."

Thus, the two 'Western versions' do not capitalize any words after the opening word "Any" -- until the words "General" and "Assembly" in the last line. Nor do the 'Western versions' have any commas, until immediately after the first usage of the word "presbyteries" in their version of Section III.

These minute differences in Sections II & III, are immaterial. For: (a), the ecclesiastical text signed in March 1900 and again in identical form on 24th July 1901 is definitive; and (b), in all of the above versions of Section III the all but congruent phrase "or restatement of its doctrine" or alternatively "or re-statement of its doctrine" in the total context of both Sections II and III as well as in the wider context of Sections II-VI -- can refer to restatement of the doctrine of the *Subordinate Standard* alone.

As to this very slight difference between the 'Eastern version(s)' and the "Western version(s)" of the colonial enabling Acts, Section 118 of the *Commonwealth Constitution* requires that "full faith and credit shall be given, throughout the Commonwealth, to the laws...of every State." Thus in the States of Victoria, Western Australia and the 'Scheduleless' South Australia "full faith and credit" shall be given to the provisions of the dominant 'Eastern version(s)' of the Acts as being the laws of the Eastern States which indeed do have "the full force and effect of law" *etc.*

But quite apart from those overriding considerations of a legal nature, also the definitive ecclesiastical text is quite unassailable. There, one encounters no variants whatsoever. And

there, Section II has the comma -- and Section III upholds the 'Eastern versions' with their commas.

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What was the **version** (alias the **exact text**) of the *Westminster Confession* then being referred to (in the prior **ecclesiastical Basis of Union**, as well as in the majority of the subsequent **enabling** State Acts) here in Australia? It was simply the **original** and **unamended** version of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, as formulated by the 1643^f Westminster Assembly itself. For not till way after 1901 was even a single 'jot' or 'tittle' in the *Westminster Confession* ever amended.

That original unamended text of the *Westminster Confession* was, however -- in the 1900-1901 *Basis of Union* -- to be "read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*" then being agreed upon for immediate adoption by the *Presbyterian Church of Australia* then about to be constituted. That is to say -- within that new denomination -- the *Confession* was to be read in that light. Indeed, this was the very way in which the 1901 'Founding Fathers of Australian Presbyterianism' believed the *Confession* was **originally** understood -- and therefore always **should** be understood.

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In 1901, the *Report of the Final Session of the Federal Assembly of the Presbyterian Churches of Australia and Tasmania* appeared. It too was published by Lees of Sydney. That Assembly was held there, on 23rd July, 1901.

Also in Sydney -- on 24th July, 1901 -- the *Scheme of Union* was signed. Thus according to the *Minutes of Consummation* of the Union -- and of the First General Assembly of Australia of the new 'Presbyterian Church of Australia.' Those Minutes (5-7) record that the *Scheme of Union* was laid on the Table, as certified and adopted by all State Assemblies. The Preamble and the *Basis of Union* and the *Articles of Agreement* were taken as read, adopted, and signed. See page 14 of those Minutes.

Later (on page 84 of those Minutes), there is a record of this "*DEED OF UNION*." It states it was "solemnly assented to and signed by the Moderators of the six State Assemblies in Sydney" -- on "Wednesday, 24th July, 1901."

Each of those Moderators signed on behalf of the State Assembly of the Presbyterian Church respectively in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia. Thus was the Union of the various Presbyterian Churches in the several States consummated -- as the new 'Presbyterian Church of Australia.'

Minute 7 of the *PCA Minutes of the Consummation of the Union (etc.)* reads thus: "The *Deed of Union*, comprising the Preamble, the Basis and Articles of Agreement, engrossed on parchment, was then signed, in duplicate, by the Moderators of the State Assemblies."

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Right there -- under '*BASIS OF UNION II*' -- follows a clear statement. This contains a very important **comma**. It declares: "The *Subordinate Standard* of the United Church shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, read in the light of the following *Declaratory Statement*" etc. Page 84 of the relevant Minutes gives the precise text of the Preamble and of Section II (with the comma) and of Section III (with the commas) -- precisely as set out in the June 1900 *Minutes of the Scheme of Union adopted by the Federal Assembly in March 1900* (exactly as set out above). The *Articles of Agreement* then follow, ending at Article XIII.

Too, Section VI of the *Basis of Union* is undisputed and undisputable. This is so: in the ecclesiastical drafts prior to the State Acts; in the *Schedules* of the State Acts themselves; and also in the subsequent *Deed of Union* (dated 24th July, 1901).

Thus, the *Formula* in Section VI clearly 'interprets' Section II of the *Basis of Union*. Indeed, it does so by itself **distinguishing** the *Subordinate Standard* -- alias the *Westminster Confession* -- from the '*Declaratory Statement*.'

Indeed, the *Formula* at Section VI requires all Ministers and Elders and Probationers in the Presbyterian Church of Australia clearly to declare: "I own and accept the *Subordinate Standard* of this Church, with the explanations given in the Articles contained in the *Declaratory Statement*, as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the *Holy Scriptures*, and as a confession of my faith."

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For all of the above reasons, we submit that Section II of the *Basis of Union* -- whenever reprinted -- should always show the most important **comma**. It should clearly reproduce that comma -- which appears in the original text immediately after the words "*Confession of Faith*" and immediately before the words "read in the light" etc. Accordingly, Section II of our *Basis of Union* should always be printed to read: "The *Subordinate Standard* of the United Church shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, read in the light of the following *Declaratory Statement*" etc.

10. AUSTRALIA'S PRESBYTERIAN DECLARATORY STATEMENT

The 1901 *Scheme of Union* created the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The *Scheme* was constitutionally signed, by the respective Moderators, in the name and on behalf of the various denominations then thereby confederating themselves into that Union. Those denominations -- all "holding the same Doctrine, Government, Discipline and Form of Worship" -- were the Presbyterian Churches of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia.

Apart from the introductory 'Preamble' -- that *Scheme of Union* itself consists of two parts. Those are: the fundamental *Basis of Union*; and the (more easily amendable) *Articles of Agreement*.

The *Basis of Union* itself consists of six sections. They are: I, the *Supreme Standard*; II, the *Subordinate Standard* and the *Declaratory Statement*; III, provision for revision of the *Subordinate Standard*, or for restatement of the Church's doctrine, or for change of her *Formula*;

IV, provision for those objecting to such revision; V, the mechanism for executing proposed changes to Sections III & IV above; and VI, the *Formula* to be signed by Ministers -- *etc.*

Section I of our *Basis of Union* is the very foundation of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. There, it is declared that "the *Supreme Standard*" of our Church "shall be **the Word of God** contained in **the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments**" (emphases mine B F.N. Lee). Being unimprovable, God's Word clearly cannot be amended.

[In the *Westminster Confession* (1:2), our *Subordinate Standard* explains: "Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the Books of the Old and New Testaments" *etc.* It then names each of the sixty-six books concerned, from "Genesis" to "Revelation."]

Section II contains the next declaration. There, it is stated that "the *Subordinate Standard*...shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*." [In terms of Section III, also the *Subordinate Standard* can be (and has been) amended.]

Yet it is not the 'Declaratory Statement' but rather the "*Westminster Confession*" which has been amended. Indeed, the *Basis of Union* makes no explicit provision for amending the '*Declaratory Statement*' -- but only the *Subordinate Standard* (alias the *Westminster Confession*) and the *Formula*.

Like the *Formula*, the *Confession* too can indeed be amended still further -- but only by the due process set out in Section III and discussed further in Sections IV and V. Interestingly, there is no specific provision for amending Section VI itself.

In Section VI, we find the following *Formula* 'to be signed by Ministers at their ordination or induction, and by Probationers on receiving licence':-

"I own and accept **the *Subordinate Standard*** of this Church, with the explanations given in the Articles contained in the *Declaratory Statement*, **as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the *Holy Scriptures***, and as a confession of my faith.... I promise that through the grace of God I shall **firmly and constantly adhere** to the same, and to the utmost of my power shall, in my station, **assert, maintain, and defend the doctrine**, worship and government of this Church" (all emphases mine B F.N. Lee).

The above is also 'the true formula to be subscribed by Elders.' Thus, *inter alia*, Minute 26.5 of the (June 23rd) 1977 General Assembly of Australia.

Accordingly, both Ministers of the Word and Sacraments as well as Ruling Elders promise to defend the doctrine of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. They are to uphold it as our only *Subordinate Standard*.

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The *Declaratory Statement* itself consists of six Articles [(i)-(vi)]. We now present them in full. Only thereafter will we then go on to comment on them (*seriatim*).

"(i) That in regard to the doctrine of redemption as taught in the *Subordinate Standard*, and in consistency therewith, the love of God to all mankind, His gift of His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and the free offer of salvation to men without distinction on the ground of Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice, are regarded by this Church as vital to the Christian faith. And inasmuch as the Christian faith rests upon, and the Christian consciousness takes hold of certain objective supernatural historic facts, especially the Incarnation, the atoning Life and Death, and the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord, and His bestowment of His Holy Spirit, this Church regards those whom it admits to the Office of the Holy Ministry as pledged to give a chief place in their teaching to these cardinal facts, and to the message of redemption and reconciliation implied and manifested in them."

"(ii) That the doctrine of God's eternal decree, including the doctrine of election to eternal life, is held as defined in the *Confession of Faith*, Chapter III, Section I, where it is expressly stated that according to this doctrine, 'neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established,' and further, that the said doctrine is held in connection and harmony with the truth -- that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, that He has provided a salvation sufficient for all, and adapted to all, and offered to all in the Gospel, and that every hearer of the Gospel is responsible for his dealing with the free and unrestricted offer of eternal life."

"(iii) That while none are saved except through the mediation of Christ, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, Who worketh when and where and how it pleaseth Him; while the duty of sending the Gospel to the heathen who are sunk in ignorance, sin, and misery is imperative; and while the outward and ordinary means of salvation for those capable of being called by the Word are the ordinances of the Gospel; in accepting the *Subordinate Standard* it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in His sight."

"(iv) That in holding and teaching according to the *Confession of Faith* the corruption of man's nature as fallen, this Church also maintains that there remain tokens of man's greatness as created in the image of God, that he possesses a knowledge of God and of duty -- that he is responsible for compliance with the Moral Law and the call of the Gospel, and that, although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God unto salvation, he is yet capable of affections and actions which of themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy."

"(v) That liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the doctrine therein taught, the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace."

"(vi) That with regard to the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion as taught in the *Subordinate Standard*, the Church holds that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, 'and Head over all things to the Church, which is His body.' It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles, and does not consider its office-bearers, in subscribing the *Confession*, as committed to any principle inconsistent with the liberty of conscience, and the right of private judgment, declaring, in the

words of the *Confession*, that ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience.’”

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The 1901 ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ is therefore **not at all** our *Subordinate Standard* -- nor any part of it. According to the *Formula* for Ministers and Elders in Section VI of our *Basis of Union*, the "explanations given in...the *Declaratory Statement*" are quite **distinct from** (but no way opposed to) the *Westminster Confession of Faith* itself as "the *Subordinate Standard* of this Church."

That not the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ but only the *Westminster Confession* is our *Subordinate Standard*, is also stated at the very beginning of Section II of the *Basis of Union*. There, the original text reads: "The *Subordinate Standard*...shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*." Indeed, such is the teaching also of the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ itself.

Article i of that ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ refers at the very outset to "the doctrine of redemption as taught in the *Subordinate Standard*" alias the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Only thereafter, does the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ itself go on to interpret that Westminster doctrine. In Article ii, the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ next records that "the doctrine of election to eternal life is held as defined in the *Confession of Faith*" and so on.

In Article iii, the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ further mentions its own holding to and "accepting the *Subordinate Standard*" -- alias the *Westminster Confession*. The ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ then adds that "it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means" *etc.*

Similarly, also in Article iv, the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ --while "holding and teaching according to the *Confession of Faith* the corruption of man’s nature as fallen -- nevertheless distinguishes itself from that sole *Subordinate Standard*. And in Article v, the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ once again distinguishes itself from "the *Subordinate Standard*."

The same is then done in Article vi. There, the ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ refers "to the doctrine...taught in the *Subordinate Standard*." The ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ then itself refers to Presbyterian Office-bearers "subscribing to the *Confession*" -- and so on. Finally, it approvingly quotes the very "words of the *Confession* [20:2] that ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience.’”

The ‘*Declaratory Statement*’ is thus **quite distinct** from our sole *Subordinate Standard* (the *Westminster Confession of Faith*). The ‘*Statement*’ carefully distinguishes the *Confession* as such -- from **possible misinterpretations** thereof.

Yet the ‘*Statement*’ itself is not our *Standard* -- nor any part thereof. It is, however, a valuable -- and a binding -- commentary thereon.

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The 'Declaratory Statement' of 1901 originated chiefly from the Presbyterian Church of Victoria's 1882 *Declaratory Act*. The latter was drawn up largely by 'Strict Calvinists' -- like the **anti**-modernistic (and also anti-**hyper**calvinistic) Rev. Professor Dr. J.L. "Fighting Larry" Rentoul, and Rev. Professors Murdoch Macdonald and A.J. Campbell (who prescribed first A.A. Hodge and then Charles Hodge for Systematic Theology at the Melbourne Hall).

Also prominent in the production of the Victorian *Declaratory Act*, was the Highland Calvinist D.S. McEachran. Indeed, and further, also the Clerk of Melbourne Presbytery, James Ballantyne.

Confession-upholding Calvinists like the above, levelled the 1882 *Declaratory Act* **against** the **anti**-confessionalists. The latter were then represented chiefly by Rev. Dr. Charles Strong -- and also by his Elder, J.C. Stewart (the Victorian Law Agent, and later Lord Mayor of Melbourne).

Strong had heretically downgraded the importance of Christ's historicity. Stewart had **wrongly** asserted the *Confession* explicitly teaches that God created the world in six days **each exactly 24-hours long**. Indeed, he had then sought to **ridicule** even the very **possibility** of that time frame.

Stewart had further misalleged that the *Confession* teaches the elect will be saved even **without** personal faith in Christ. He misrepresented the *Confession* as insisting that the heathen were damned **simply** because they never knew Christ.

Indeed, Stewart even accused the *Confession* of implying that **most** who die in infancy are necessarily lost. Thus, according to Stewart, the *Confession* teaches their damnation rather than their salvation.

These views of Stewart in the eighteen-eighties were quickly debated and refuted in the Victorian Presbyterian Church. Indeed, they are the **very** misstatements about the **true** teaching of the *Westminster Confession* -- which **same** misstatements were also so ably **refuted** two decades later. Especially was this latter then done -- in the six articles of the 1901 'Declaratory Statement' of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Thus, the 1901 'Declaratory Statement' was designed to **strengthen** the Calvinistic position -- by removing **misconceptions** about the *Westminster Confession*. To document this claim, consult the following authorities (here listed alphabetically):

- 1, PCA NSW Theological College Lecturer Rev. C.D. Balzar's M.Th. dissertation *Australian Presbyterians and the Westminster Confession 1823 - 1901* (pp. 130f).
- 2, PCA General Assembly Procurator F. Maxwell Bradshaw's 1984 *Basic Documents on Presbyterian Polity*, (pp. 89-99).
- 3, J. Cameron's *Centenary History of the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales* (1905), I-II.
- 4, D. Chambers' *Theological Teaching and Thought in the Theological Hall of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria 1865-1906*.
- 5, PCA NSW Theological College Lecturer Rev. Paul Cooper's article *What is the 'Declaratory Statement' and What is its Purpose?* (in the March 1987 *Australian Presbyterian Life*) -- and his further remarks in the April 1989 edition of *Australian Presbyterian Life*.

- 6, PCQ Ex-Moderator Rev. R.H.C. Crowe's 1962 address on *The Declaratory Statement* -- Brisbane: Presbyterian Church of Queensland (1980).
- 7, W. Phillips' *Defence of Christian Belief in Australia 1875-1914*.
- 8, Rev. Professor Dr. Robert Swanton's 1975 inaugural lecture *Our Heritage and Destiny* (Victorian Presbyterian Theological Hall, Melbourne, 1975).
- 9, Rev. Dr. R. Swanton's 1985 *The Westminster Confession and the Declaratory Statements* (in *The Reformed Theological Review*, XLIV).
- 10, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia's Rev. Dr. R.S. Ward's 1989 *The Bush Still Burns: The Presbyterian and Reformed Faith in Australia 1788-1988* (pp. 266f).

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What is the attitude of the *Declaratory Statement* itself toward the *Westminster Confession of Faith*? The former **warmly upholds** the latter -- as our sole *Subordinate Standard*.

At the outset, the 'Statement' (Article i), refers to "the doctrine of redemption **as taught in the Subordinate Standard**" alias the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. More specifically, the 'Statement' here refers to God's "gift of His Son to be the propitiation" -- by virtue of "Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice" -- as being "vital to the Christian faith." Very significantly, the 'Statement' here insists that the "propitiation" effected by "Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice" is absolutely "vital" to Christianity.

Why? Because -- continues the Australian Presbyterian '*Declaratory Statement*' -- "the Christian faith rests upon...certain objective supernatural historic facts -- especially the Incarnation, the atoning Life and Death, and the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord and His bestowment of His Holy Spirit."

Now here, the 'Statement' asserts the importance of especially "certain objective supernatural historic facts." These "facts" are **objective** -- and not just personal (mis)perceptions. They are "supernatural" -- and cannot be explained merely in terms of natural causes. They are "historic" -- or important events which really happened.

The '*Declaratory Statement*' then gives particular examples of such important facts. Specifically referred to are: "the Incarnation" of the Son of God in human flesh; "the atoning Life and Death" of Jesus; "the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord"; and Christ's miraculous "bestowment of His Holy Spirit" on Pentecost Sunday *etc.*

This word "atoning" in the '*Declaratory Statement*' is especially significant. Throughout, however, the 'Statement' here presupposes **all** the relevant teachings on redemption in the *Westminster Confession* -- at the latter's chapters 3:6; 8:5-8; 10:1-3; 11:1 to 12:1; 20:1; 25:2; 28:5; 30:2; *etc.* For in Article i of the '*Declaratory Statement*' it already **starts off** by referring to "the doctrine of redemption **as taught in the Subordinate Standard**" (alias the *Westminster Confession*) and so on.

Article i of the 'Statement' then draws its conclusion. "This Church regards those whom it admits to the office of the Holy Ministry as pledged to give a chief place in their teaching to these cardinal facts, and to the message of redemption and reconciliation implied and manifested

in them."

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In Article ii, the '*Declaratory Statement*' next tells us "that the doctrine of God's eternal decree, including the doctrine of election to eternal life, is **held as defined** in the *Confession of Faith*, Chapter III, Section I." Here, the '*Declaratory Statement*' clearly upholds the Classic Calvinistic doctrines of everlasting predestination and eternal election.

Yet all fatalistic **misunderstandings** of those doctrines, are unbiblical -- and therefore uncalvinistic. Consequently, our Calvinistic '*Declaratory Statement*' then rightly directs itself specifically against the heresy of **hyper-**'calvinism.'

For the '*Statement*' here declares that God "has provided a salvation sufficient for all and adapted to all and offered to all in the Gospel" *etc.* Consequently, "every hearer of the Gospel is responsible for his dealing with the free and unrestricted offer of eternal life."

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Next, in Article iii, the '*Declaratory Statement*' teaches that "none are saved except through the mediation of Christ." Here, the '*Statement*' insists on "**accepting** the *Subordinate Standard*" -- which, of course, teaches precisely the same.

For the *Westminster Confession* 10:1-4 insists that only those "predestinated unto life" are granted "salvation by Jesus Christ." It adds that "elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit"; but that "others not elected...cannot be saved" *etc.*

At the same time -- continues Article iii of the '*Statement*' -- this doctrine taught in the *Confession* (10:1-4) certainly needs to be interpreted **properly**. Thus, this doctrine of the *Confession* -- insists the '*Statement*' -- should be so understood that "it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His grace to any who are without [or outside] the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in His sight."

For the *Westminster Confession* (10:1-4) -- on effectual calling unto salvation by the Holy Spirit -- does **not** deal with the **number** of God's elect who die in infancy. **Nor** does it deal with their ability **measurably to respond** to the preached Word. Neither does it ever imply the hopelessness of "all other elect persons...incapable of being **outwardly** called" *etc.*

Instead, it suggests just the contrary. For it clearly declares that even "**elect** infants dying in infancy" and "all other **elect** persons who are incapable of being outwardly called" are nevertheless graciously "**regenerated** and saved by Christ through the Spirit."

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In Article iv, the *Declaratory Statement* unreservedly approves "**holding and teaching according to the *Confession of Faith*** the corruption of man's nature as fallen" *etc.* This indicates that the *Declaratory Statement* upholds also the hamartiology of Westminster. See the

Confession (at: 5:4-6; 6:1-7; 7:3; 8:2; 9:3; 16:1-7; and 19:2).

Nevertheless -- the *Declaratory Statement* then continues -- even after the fall "there remain tokens of man's greatness as created in the image of God." For even fallen man "possesses a knowledge of God and of duty." Thus, "he is responsible for compliance with the Moral Law and the call of the Gospel."

Furthermore, "although unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God unto salvation -- he is yet capable of affections and actions which of themselves are virtuous and praiseworthy." This is the doctrine of 'common grace' -- already implied in the *Confession* (at: 1:1,6; 10:4; 19:1,5; 20:4; 21:1,6 & 29:6).

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The *Declaratory Statement* next declares (in Article v) "that liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the doctrine therein taught, the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace."

Now here, this Article implicitly **denies** "liberty of opinion" in all "matters in the *Subordinate Standard*...**essential** to the doctrine therein **taught**" etc. Emphases mine -- F.N. Lee. The *Declaratory Statement* thus clearly upholds the authority of the **entire** *Westminster Confession* as a **whole** (1:1 - 33:3). For the "liberty of opinion" mentioned here, is very strictly circumscribed.

How so? The *Declaratory Statement* would allow liberty to hold opinions only on matters in the *Westminster Confession* -- read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement* -- which were not prescriptively formulated in both or either of these documents. Such liberty is only "allowed on matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the doctrine therein taught."

One example of this -- specifically addressed by Australian Presbyterians in 1882 (see below), would be the freedom to hold different theories about the likely **length** of each of our world's first six light-periods or days (alias *yamim*, from *chaamam* to heat up and hence to illuminate). For the **precise length** of each of those days is nowhere **clearly expressed** in Holy Scripture (Genesis 1:5f & 1:14f & 2:2f & 2:4) -- nor in the *Westminster Confession* (4:1 & 8:4-6 & 12:1 & 18:2 & 20:3 & 21:7-8 & 32:1-2 & 33:1-3).

The latter-mentioned section of the *Confession*, cites also Matthew 12:36f & 24:36 and Acts 17:31 and Jude 6. Doubtlessly thinking also of Psalm 90:1-4 & Second Peter 3:8-10 & Revelation 20:1-7 (if not even of 21:23-25 & 22:5 and First Corinthians 4:3-5), that section was amended by the fundamentalistic Bible Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to read: "God hath appointed a day (which word in Scripture...may represent a period of time including the thousand years following the...return of Christ) wherein He will judge the world" etc.

Now there is no such amendment in the Presbyterian Church of Australia. Nor does one there have any freedom to advocate variant views about the **clearly stated number** of days concerned. For the Bible says quite categorically that God formed our world in precisely **six** days -- and therefore neither in five days, nor in five billion days, nor in five-trillionths of a second.

That the above is in part indeed the true meaning of Article v, is patently obvious from the 1882 *Declaratory Act* of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria -- the immediate antecedent of the 1901 *Declaratory Statement* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia. For it will be remembered that the former was refuting the views also of the theologically-'liberal' Elder J.C. Stewart, who had falsely accused the *Confession* -- of teaching that God created the world in six days **each specifically and exactly only 24-hours long**.

Stewart's narrow misinterpretation of the *Confession* was refuted right at this very point. For the 1882 Victorian *Declaratory Act* then stated "that, in accordance with the practice **hitherto** observed in this Church, liberty of opinion is allowed on such points in the *Standards* as are not essential to the system of doctrine therein taught -- as the **interpretation** of the '**six days**' in the Mosaic account **of creation** -- the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace."

It will further be remembered that, with a view to Federal Church Union of the various Presbyterian denominations in the several Australian colonies shortly to become States, the 1894 Federal Assembly had proposed that the (1901) "*Subordinate Standard...of the United Church shall be the Westminster Confession of Faith...*, read in the light of a *Declaratory Statement* such as[!] that in use in the Church of Victoria." 1894 *Proposed Scheme of Union*, clause one.

This rather clearly links the 1901 *Declaratory Statement* of the Australian Church to the 1882 Victorian *Declaratory Act*. The link is specifically stated above, and is undeniable.

Thus, Article v of the 1901 *Declaratory Statement* requires compliance with **everything** clearly taught in the *Confession* -- within "the system of doctrine therein taught." It grants liberty of **opinion** only in respect of "matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the doctrine therein taught."

Article v thus grants liberty of opinion as to the precise **length** of each of the six days of formation following exnihilation at creation. Yet it grants no liberty of opinion whatsoever to deviate from the teaching in the *Confession* (4:1) that God in the beginning created the world **out of nothing** -- and **then manufactured** it precisely "in the space of **six** days."

However, even while granting liberty of **opinion** in such matters as are not clearly taught in the doctrine of the *Westminster Confession*, the 1901 *Declaratory Statement* grants no liberty whatsoever to keep on expressing unnecessarily contentious opinions. Particularly is this the case, wherever this is causing "injury" to the "unity and peace" of "the Church."

This is reminiscent of the *Christian Liberty* guaranteed also in the *Subordinate Standard* itself B namely in chapter twenty of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. There it is stated that God's children obey him freely, and out of child-like love. "However, those who upon pretence of Christian liberty **practise** any sin -- destroy liberty. Such as **publish opinions** or maintain practices contrary to the light of nature or to the known principles of Christianity, may be censured by both Church and Civil Magistrate" B each, of course, in its own way.

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Finally, in Article vi, the *Declaratory Statement* upholds "the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion **as taught in the Subordinate Standard**" and so on. See: *Westminster Confession* 19:4; 20:4; 22:3; 23:1-4; 24:6; 30:1; 31:2,5.

The same Article of the *Declaratory Statement* then itself goes on to insist that "the Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church, 'and Head over **all** things to the Church which is His body.' It disclaims, accordingly, intolerant or persecuting principles, and does not consider its Office-bearers, in subscribing the *Confession*, as committed to any principle inconsistent with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment."

Quite the contrary. For the *Declaratory Statement* continues by "declaring, **in the words of the Confession** [20:2], that 'God alone is Lord of the conscience.'"

Clearly, Article vi of the *Declaratory Statement* expressly upholds "the doctrine of the civil magistrate and his authority and duty in the sphere of religion **as taught in the Subordinate Standard**." It then goes on to quote the very words of the *Confession* -- that 'God alone is Lord of the conscience.'

This latter Article had several extremely important antecedents. They help make its meaning even plainer.

One such antecedent is to be found in the 1854 proposed *Basis of Union* between the Presbyterian Synod of Australia in connection with the Established Church of Scotland, and the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. There, it was stated "that the civil power has no right...in the infliction or remission of church censures."

Another precedent is to be found in the agreed 1854 *Basis of Union* between the Presbyterian Synod of Victoria [of the Presbyterian Synod of Australia], and the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria. There, reference was made to "the views and principles laid down in the said *Confession* -- on the duty of the Civil Magistrate in regard to religion."

It states that "he is bound and required to use his official power and influence for the maintenance, protection, and support of the truth." It further states he is bound also in "the restraining and putting down error and ungodliness."

However, it then also states "that this is to be done only in accordance with the requirements of the Word of God, and within the sphere to which mere civil authority is by that Word restricted." For, "in subscribing to the said *Confession*, the Ministers and Elders of this Church are not to be understood as encouraging or countenancing persecuting or intolerant principles -- or as professing any views inconsistent with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment."

Further. "According to the views and principles laid down in the said *Confession* in regard to the sole Headship of Christ over His Church, and the authority with which He has invested her rulers, they have an independent and exclusive jurisdiction in the government of the Church in all spiritual things."

Thus, "it belongs to them alone to admit or exclude Members and Office-bearers, and to license

and ordain.... It is equally presumptuous and unwarrantable in the Magistrate to interfere, and faithless and sinful in the Church to permit or submit to such interference.... From any of the decisions of her judicatories in reference to such spiritual matters, there can be no appeal to any civil authority whatsoever."

The above is highly significant. For compare it with the Presbyterian Church of Australia's *Code of the General Assembly of Australia* -- articles 164 & 174f

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Now our only *Subordinate Standard* -- the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, as amendable and as later amended -- is indeed to be **understood as explained by the *Declaratory Statement***. For "the *Subordinate Standard*" of the Presbyterian Church of Australia "shall be the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*." See the *Basis of Union*, Section II.

All alone, and without also the *Westminster Confession* to fall back on, the *Declaratory Statement* itself would clearly be extremely deficient. For, unlike the *Westminster Confession* (1:1-10 *cf.* 21:3-5), the *Declaratory Statement* on its own is quite devoid of any discussion on the in-spir-ation of the Bible.

It is also silent about either the ongoing occurrence, or alternatively the first-century cessation, of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yet -- just like the *Confession* -- also the *Declaratory Statement* itself is indeed a document which warmly witnesses about the wonderful work of the Spirit of God.

Thus, it beautifully states (in Article i) that "this Church regards those whom it admits to the Office of the Holy Ministry, as pledged to give a chief place in their teaching" *inter alia* to Christ's "bestowment of His Holy Spirit" *etc.* It also insists (in Article iii) that "none are saved except through the mediation of Christ and by the grace of the Holy Spirit" *etc.* Indeed, it further adds (in Article iv) that fallen man is "unable without the aid of the Holy Spirit to return to God unto salvation" *etc.*

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Now the *Declaratory Statement* indeed concedes (in Article v) that "**liberty of opinion** is allowed on matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the doctrine therein taught" *etc.* This means that Ministers and Elders in the Presbyterian Church of Australia are at liberty to hold differing opinions about some few matters in the *Westminster Confession*, read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement* -- provided those matters are not essential to the doctrine taught in the *Westminster Confession*, read in the light of the *Declaratory Statement*.

For example. The *Declaratory Statement* itself maintains (in Article iii) that "it is **not required** to be held that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means" *etc.* Thus, Ministers and Elders are personally free to affirm this -- or to deny it. Here, either way, what is at stake is not the teaching of the *Westminster Confession* as such -- but only a possible (mis)interpretation of it, which the text of

the *Confession* itself does not clearly teach.

Other examples would include one's own personal opinions even about **matters mooted in but not defined by the *Westminster Confession* itself**. Here, one thinks of various views about: election (whether supra- or infra-lapsarian); the exact length of each of our planet's first six days; the number of the infantly-dying children of unbelievers that will be saved; and the salvation, though only through God-given faith in Christ, of those never hearing the preached Word.

Other examples would further include: the nature and knowability of the 'sin unto death'; baptism by sprinkling (whether by single or by triple affusion); the frequency of the Lord's Supper; and the inauguration of the millennium (whether a-, pre-, or post-millennialistic); *etc.* See the *Westminster Confession* 3:3-5; 4:1; 8:8; 10:3; 21:4; 28:3; 29:1-8; and 32:2*f*.

However, it is also necessary that any such **expressed** affirmations or denials under the "liberty of opinion...allowed" (in Article v) -- must be employed judiciously. Such opinions may certainly be held **in-wardly**. Yet, if they are also orally or writtenly **ex-pressed**, they must not cause disharmony in the denomination -- "the Church guarding against the abuse of this liberty to the injury of its unity and peace." Thus, once again, Article v.

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The *Declaratory Statement* and the *Formula* for Ministers and Probationers and Elders corroborate one another. For they both require **loyal assent to and defence of the *Westminster Confession***.

States the *Declaratory Statement* (in Article ii), even "the doctrine of God's eternal decree -- including the doctrine of election to eternal life -- is **held as defined in the *Confession of Faith***." Furthermore: the *Formula* to be **signed** by Ministers, Probationers and Elders at their licensure or ordination or induction -- requires them to accept the *Subordinate Standard* alias **the *Westminster Confession*** "as an exhibition of **the sense in which I understand the *Holy Scriptures***" *etc.*

Thus, then, the *Basis of Union* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, Section VI. It is to be signed **as such** by all our Ministerial Candidates and also by both Ruling and Teaching Elders.

The language of the *Formula* approved in 1901 for the Presbyterian Church of Australia, is very significant. It requires the ordinand to "own and accept the *Subordinate Standard* [alias the *Westminster Confession of Faith*]...with the explanations given...in the *Declaratory Statement* as an exhibition of the sense in which I understand the Holy Scripture and as a confession of my faith.... I shall firmly and constantly adhere to the same, and to the utmost of my power shall in my station assert, maintain and defend the doctrine" *etc.*

Now this flowed forth from the 1883 *Declaratory Act* of the Presbyterian Church of Victoria. In the Victorian *Formula*, the ordinand undertook "to own and believe the '**whole**[!]' doctrine contained in the *Standards*,' the system of doctrine in its unity, formulated in the *Confession of Faith*.... The Church has always regarded, and continues to regard, those whom it admits to the office of the Ministry as pledged to profess, defend, and teach this system in its **integrity**" -- alias

as an undivided whole.

Thus -- continues the 1883 Victorian *Formula* as the immediate 'ancestor' of that of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 1901 -- the ordinands are to uphold the *Confession*. Indeed, they are to keep on "giving due prominence in their teaching to **all**[!] the doctrines it includes."

Yet they are also "to give a chief[!] place to the central and most vital doctrines thereof." Such include "those objective supernatural facts on which they rest -- especially the Incarnation, the Perfect Obedience and Expiatory Death, and the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord." Indeed, while so doing, they are to keep on "avoiding such forms of teaching as might be fitted to weaken or destroy the faith of the people in the same."

Further comment seems altogether superfluous. Here, the causal nexus between the 1883 Victorian *Formula* and that of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in 1901 -- as well as Article i of the *Declaratory Statement* of the latter -- seems quite undeniable.

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So, then -- not the *Declaratory Statement* but solely the *Westminster Confession of Faith* itself is thus the **only** *Subordinate Standard* in the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

As New South Wales Presbyterian Theological College Lecturer Rev. Paul Cooper declared: "The *Declaratory Statement* of our Church was drawn up in 1901 to combat the same trend in Australia which the American Churches...sought to oppose through their emphasis on the fundamentals. In this historical sense, anyone who honestly subscribes to the *Subordinate Standard* of our Church -- would also be a 'fundamentalist'....

"The *Declaratory Statement* is [therefore] not a '*Confession-denying*' *Statement*, but a '*Confession-affirming*' *Statement*.... It is time our Church began to discipline those whose views are causing injury and dislocation to the cause of Christ, by their desertion of our Confessional Standard."

Rev. Professor Dr. Swanton observed of the *Declaratory Statement* of the Presbyterian Church of Australia: "The declaration that 'liberty of opinion is allowed on matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the doctrine therein taught'...follows the Victorian *Statement*. This elsewhere designates the doctrine of the *Confession* as that 'historically known as the Calvinistic or Reformed system of Doctrine'.... There is thus no freedom to diverge from this.

"Again, this 'liberty of opinion' is limited." Indeed, "the liberty conferred is only one of private personal opinion and does not cover an official function such as the preaching office." For "this [Australian Presbyterian] Church, through its Ministry, is closely bound to its *Confession*."

Procurator Bradshaw is adamant. He states: "The use of the expression *Subordinate Standard* with respect to the *Confession of Faith* does not mean that one is free to appeal from the *Subordinate* to the *Supreme Standard* -- unless what is put forward in this regard is directed to setting in motion the constitutional machinery for making changes in the *Subordinate Standard* [in terms of section III of the *Basis of Union*]."

Elder Bradshaw further continues: "John Macpherson, in his [book] *Confession of Faith* (p. 2), states the position thus -- "To appeal from the *Confession* to *Scripture* on doctrinal points in the way of repudiating the confessional statement in favour of the scriptural, involves the abandonment of that communion of which the *Confession* is the bond. If any particular doctrine has been formulated in the *Confession*, our adoption of that *Confession* is an expression of our belief that the doctrine thus formulated is the very truth revealed in Scripture. We must not therefore suppose that by calling our *Confession of Faith* a **subordinate standard**, we give ourselves liberty to set its exposition of doctrine aside in favour of any other interpretation of Scripture passages bearing on that doctrine."

He then concludes: "The *Subordinate Standard* is the *Westminster Confession* -- **not**: the *Westminster Confession* **plus** the *Declaratory Statement*.... It would be hard to find matters in the *Subordinate Standard* not essential to the **whole** teaching it contains.... What is granted is liberty of opinion, not liberty of expression.... There is nothing in section 5 of the *Declaratory Statement* to justify a church court in not adhering to the **whole** doctrine of the *Confession* as part of the general body of the law of the Church binding upon it.... The section does not relieve the courts of the Church from maintaining the **whole** doctrine of the *Confession*."

Holy Scripture **alone** -- because infallible -- is our unamendable **Supreme Standard**. The *Westminster Confession* -- though amendable -- is our sole *Subordinate Standard*. While safeguarding against misinterpretations, our '*Declaratory Statement*' upholds our *Westminster Confession*.

Indeed, in the words of Article i of the '*Declaratory Statement*': all Ministers in the Presbyterian Church of Australia are "pledged" to give a chief place in their teaching to "certain objective supernatural historic facts" -- alias the 'fundamentals' -- as the "cardinal facts" of Christianity. For thus it is written. This: "**I own and accept**"

EPILOGUE

"The *Declaratory Statement*, then, is not a 'revision' of the text of the *Confession*, nor an 'addition' to the text of the *Confession*. It is only an 'explanation' of the text of the *Confession*. The text itself, it leaves intact.... It not only leaves the text intact. It reaffirms that text. What it sets itself to do, in fact, is to protect this text from false inferences and to strengthen it by explication.... This is the real state of the case.

"The *Preamble* [to the 1903 American Presbyterian '*Declaratory Statement*'] confines the *Declaratory Statement* to two things: (1) 'a disavowal of certain inferences drawn from statements in the *Confession of Faith*'; and (2) 'a declaration of certain aspects of revealed truth which appear at the present time to call for more explicit statement.'

"It is not the 'statements' [in the *Confession*] that are disavowed, but 'certain inferences drawn from them.' The disavowal of inferences is a protective measure designed to defend the statements themselves; and to defend statements is the precise contrary of disavowal of them. The 'statements in the *Confession of Faith*,' with which this *Declaratory Statement* deals, are, therefore, so far from being repudiated, that they are reaffirmed by it.

"Again, to speak of making a 'more explicit statement' of 'certain aspects of revealed truth,' is

to say that what already stands stated, is 'truth,' and specifically 'revealed truth'; and to imply that even the aspects of this revealed truth which it is now proposed to emphasize, are already present in the existing statements, implicitly at least, if not only somewhat less explicitly than it now seems desirable to state them.

"The fuller explication of certain aspects of statements, is the very opposite of disavowal of these statements. It is, again, their reaffirmation.... The *Declaratory Statement* is as far as possible from antagonizing the passages of the *Confession* with which it deals.... What is purposed is...to develop more fully in certain directions the truths contained in the confessional statements."

-- Rev. Professor Dr. B.B. Warfield: *Selected Shorter Writings* [II] (Nutley: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 1973 ed., pp. 373f.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Francis Nigel Lee was born in 1934 in the Westmorland County of Cumbria (in Great Britain). He is the great-grandson of a fiery preacher whose family disintegrated when he backslid. Though Lee's father was an Atheist, he married a Roman Catholic who raised her son in that faith.

At the onset of the Second World War, Lee's father was appointed by the Royal Navy as Chief Radar Officer (South Atlantic). So the family then moved to South Africa. There, Lee became a Calvinist; had the great joy of leading both of his parents to Christ; and became a Minister of God's Word and Sacraments in the Dutch Reformed Church of Natal.

Emigrating to the U.S.A., Lee attended the very first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America; transferred his ministerial credentials to that denomination; and pastored Congregations in Mississippi and Florida. He was also: Professor of Philosophy at Shelton College in New Jersey; Visiting Lecturer at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Ms.; Staley Distinguished Visiting Lecturer at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis; Research Scholar-in-Residence at the Christian Studies Center in Memphis; and Academic Dean of Graham Bible College in Bristol, Tennessee. He was then the only person in the World serving on the Executives of both the British Lord's Day Observance Society and the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States.

Preacher, Theologian, Lawyer, Educationist, Historian, Philosopher and Author, Lee has produced more than 335 publications (including many books) -- and also a multitude of long unpublished manuscripts. Apart from an honorary LL.D., he has twenty-one earned degrees -- including eleven earned doctorates for dissertations in Education, Law, Literature, Philosophy and Theology.

Lee rises early; reads God's Word in ten languages; then walks a couple of miles before breakfast. He has been round the World seven times; has visited one hundred and ten countries (several repeatedly); and also every Continent (except Antarctica). He is in demand as a Promoter of Doctoral Students in Australia, England, Germany, South Africa and the United States. He has lectured and/or preached in all of those countries, as well as in Brazil, Scotland, Korea, Japan, Namibia, New Zealand, and Zambia.

A diehard predestinarian, Lee now lives in Brisbane, Australia. Until his retirement at the end of 2000, he was the Professor of Systematic Theology and Caldwell-Morrow Lecturer in Church History at the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College.

His wife Nellie is in fulltime Christian Service as a godly Homemaker. Their elder daughter Johanna has completed her M.A.; and teaches English, German and Modern History in Brisbane at the Parkridge High School. Their younger daughter Annamarie (B.A. & Dip. Lib. Sc.), whom Dr. Lee baptized as a baby in 1970, was until 1998 Secretary/Librarian at the Queensland Presbyterian Theological College, Brisbane, Australia. After completing her Dip. Ed., she became a Educationist -- and now teaches at Earnshaw College at Nudgee near Brisbane.