

"WESTMINSTER CONFSSION" * AFTER THREE HUNDRED YEARS

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LAST summer there fell a notable religious anniversary. On 27 August, exactly three hundred years had passed since the document called *Confession of Faith*, after four years spent in perfecting it with other documents by which it might be explained or applied, was at length given to the world. That *Confession of Faith* still remains the acknowledged standard of the Presbyterian Church, like the *Augsburg Confession* of Lutheranism and the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of Anglicanism. It was a century later in its construction than those other two Creeds. All three are historic manifestoes of outstanding significance.

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Like the Lutheran and Anglican Confessions, the Presbyterian was a product of the Reformation. It was plainly important for the leaders of the Reformed Churches to keep before the public mind the reasons that they held to have justified the great breach of a hundred years before, and the principles on which they were building a substitute for the mediaeval structure they had abandoned. Throughout half of Europe lay the wreckage of what had been for a thousand years the people's spiritual home. The bulk of the laity were mystified as to what had taken place. Often the devout looked in horror at what a few daring leaders had done, very much as devout Russians in the autumn of 1917 looked on the Bolshevik Revolution. To great numbers such men as Luther, Calvin, Knox were as Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin to the pious Russian farmer of thirty years ago. They had watched the profanation of English Gothic churches,—altar cloths being torn away to make rugs for soldiers' horses—and they felt about it as many a terrified spectator felt watching, let us say, the Moscow burlesque of Christmas and Easter ritual. But, despite some coarse extravagances, what had happened in the countries where the Reformation struck its root was in truth utterly different from what was destined to happen in Russia four centuries later. It was no Secularist movement; it was in the deepest sense a religious awakening that the Reformers had undertaken. The various *Confessions* were meant to make this clear.

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In England the earliest agreed and published document with this purpose was the one called *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*. These were completed in 1536, at first only ten in number, extended to forty-two in 1552, finally settled about eleven years later at thirty-nine. Why had a substitute for them to be constructed a century afterwards? What objection arose to the *Articles*, or what inadequacy in them, that the *Westminster Confession* was designed to make good? These questions it will be my purpose in this lecture to answer. But first let me remind you that we are not discussing any contrast or any dispute of the present: we are thinking about events and circumstances of three centuries ago, which the tercentenary recalls. Neither Anglican nor Presbyterian of our time has to justify all then done or said in the name of his section of Reformed Christendom. Let us hope that much has been learned since then on both sides. I am convinced that these sections of the Reformed Church have done good to each other, each not only by its own independent development, but also by its criticism, even at times by its sharp condemnation, of the other through the centuries. By no means should Presbyterians resent or repel the claim thus made by a different Church. It was well that those of the Presbyterian type had not the sole disposal of events: no single type in Christendom is adequate to that. It was well for the future of religion in England to have such temperate, but not on that account less sincere, exponents in men like Richard Hooker, Ralph Cudworth, and many another learned Anglican who deprecated Puritan excesses. We can now at least in retrospect see the wisdom of those who urged, as these men did, such reform of the mediaeval Church as would spare more than the Westminster divines wanted to spare. We can see how the framers of the *Confession* were ruthless to some elements of real value in the ancient ritual. But I am speaking just now of the middle seventeenth century, when the fight against autocracy and superstition had still to be won; not of generations later, when the victors had to be restrained from intemperate use of the victory. One thing at a time. It is the *Westminster Confession*, not the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, whose 300th anniversary we are marking tonight, and a tercentenary is a time to emphasize merits before noticing defects.

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Though it became, and still remains, distinctive of the Presbyterian section of Christendom, the *Confession* was originally designed as a common statement for the Reform Movement all over the British Isles: to present articles of belief and rules of practice that all Christians who had broken with Roman Catholicism might adopt. The frontispiece makes this clear. It reads as follows:

CONFESSON OF FAITH

Agreed upon by

THE ASSEMBLY OF DIVINES AT WESTMINSTER

With the Assistance of

COMMISSIONERS FROM THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

as

A PART OF THE COVENANTED UNIFORMITY IN RELIGION
BETWIXT THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE
KINGDOMS OF SCOTLAND, ENGLAND AND IRELAND

This project of uniformity was not achieved. Except in London and some parts of Lancashire, the Presbyterianism that Parliament decided to establish for all England in the seventeenth century took little root. Only for Scotland and for Scottish settlers in Northern Ireland did the *Confession* stand as the accepted formula of religious faith and practice. It should not, I think, be difficult for anyone at all intimately acquainted with Scottish and English temperaments to understand why that document could not serve as a link to unite them.

For one thing, it abounds in subtleties of doctrinal discussion—the sort that delight the average Scotsman, but bore and even exasperate the average Englishman. George Meredith knew his own countrymen well when he deplored the difficulty of getting the typical Englishman to “settle his muzzle in a nosebag of ideas.” But that is where the Scotsman likes to have his muzzle—munching, munching, munching. I am speaking, of course, strictly of averages: much of the subtlest argument on religious doctrines that we possess has been the product of an English mind. It was indeed Englishmen who drafted the *Confession*, but they were Puritan Englishmen, far from typical, as the Restoration years were so soon to show. Moreover, they had the aid of four Scottish assessors, and I suspect that on the part of many of the Commissioners there was much “signing along the dotted line.” A religious mystery,

something incomprehensible in doctrine, is what the Scottish mind cannot give up or even forget until exhausted, if not by solving it, at least by classifying all possible solutions. The corresponding Englishman, on the other hand, will just accept the mystery with the utmost readiness, if it is part of the national ritual to do so. Thomas Hobbes expressed his mind and disposition in this respect exactly. Theological doctrines, he said, are like pills from a doctor: they do you good if you swallow them whole; but if you chew them up, they make you sick. No doubt One Hundred and Thirty-Nine Articles, if issued with official sanction in Elizabethan England, would have been accepted with the same docile concurrence as the actual Thirty-Nine. People would have said that they "believed" them, meaning thereby, as Sir John Seeley remarks, no more than this, that as many of the words used conveyed no idea whatever to their minds, so they aroused no opposition therein. But a Scotsman of the sixteenth century was less receptive. So, too, was the sort of Englishman whom the Scots had then begun to infect on religious matters. The *Confession of Faith* proved as hard to impose on the English (because there was so much arguing in it) as Laud's Service-Book (because it was so authoritative and, hence, dispensed with argument) had been to impose on the Scottish. An act like that of Janet Geddes with her stool in St. Giles Cathedral might be imagined from an English listener, demanding from a Knox or an Andrew Melville in the pulpit "Wouldst thou argue philosophy at my lug?"

The Westminster divines did not countenance such mental sloth. They would praise God, and teach others to praise Him, with the understanding as well as with the heart. Troubled, as Montaigne would have said, by importunities of the mind from which others were so pleasantly free, they would analyze each mystery, define it, set it in suggestive comparison or contrast with other mysteries. Even if they failed (as they so often did) to explain it, they would delight in having shown just why it could not be explained, though neither could it be doubted. Not that they thought they could explain everything: very far from it. But they would explain as much as they could, content to die dialectically in the last ditch, but not in the first.

The contrast is in part explicable by the fact that the Reformation in England, unlike that in Scotland, had been primarily an enterprise in political adjustment. Its initiative

was not from the people nearly so much as from the Throne. Elizabeth in particular tried to combine in the National Church a uniformity of practice with the utmost variety of conviction ("Articles of Peace, leaving opinion free") so as to retain very different groups in that common allegiance to herself which was the one thing she valued. In this effort she took little note of a class among her subjects to whom such manipulating of solemn convictions as if they were so many conveniences or minutiae of Court etiquette would seem blasphemous. For example, the cunning ambiguity she contrived for the formula of the Eucharist, such as the believer in Transubstantiation would interpret one way and the Reformer in a way exactly opposite!

Herein lay the genesis of the gathering that adopted and issued the *Confession of Faith*. Deeply rooted in the minds of the men who signed the *National Covenant* was the conviction that Anglicanism with its *Thirty-Nine Articles* and its *Book of Common Prayer* lent itself to the joint abuses of a superstitious worship and a regal usurpation. Certain events immediately preceding 1643 imparted at least plausible colour to this. To the task, then, of restating the essence of Christianity so as to rescue it from such surroundings, the Westminster divines were appointed. We wonder at some features of the *Confession* they drew up, because we have not these circumstances adequately in mind. For example, the insistent and at times painful precision of statement, on matters about which most of us now feel that it is impossible to be sure, and an obvious duty to be tolerant, is explained by the evil use that had so long been made of vague ambiguities.

The *Confession* was indeed a great document, not faultless or complete, by no means anticipating or formulating in advance the religious insight of the next three hundred years. To suppose that this or any other document of human authorship should or could have done so, is not merely absurd: it shows by implication profane disbelief in the promise of continued guidance into all truth. But in its essentials, its picture of God and man and destiny, together with its great moral and spiritual contrasts, the *Westminster Confession* remains by far the ablest summary ever yet issued of the Reformed Faith. Its faults are those it shared with other such statements of the period. Its merits are unique.

The Westminster Assembly had 150 members—120 of them clergy, 30 laymen—the laymen were all members of parliament, 20 from the House of Commons, 10 from the House of Lords. These, together with the four Scottish “assessors” whom I have mentioned, set to work in the first place upon the task of revising the *Thirty-Nine Articles*.

To one of the Scotsmen, Robert Baillie, whose *Letters* constitute an invaluable source for all who have written the history of seventeenth century England, we owe our fullest and most enlightening account of the proceedings of the Westminster Assembly. At the first it defined its own purpose as by no means that of constructing brand new standards, but of revising and improving the standards already acknowledged in the Church of England. For this purpose it divided the *Thirty-Nine Articles* into groups, assigning each group to a Committee for examination and report. It was not, the Commission declared, from any love of novelty, or any desire to disparage the first Reformers, that they were planning change. They felt sure that the authors of the *Articles*, if they had been still alive, would have joined in this work of further and deeper reform, which the experience of another century had suggested. Those predecessors, the Assembly acknowledged with gratitude, had been “excellent instruments, raised by God, to begin the purging and building of His house.” But it was for their own generation to complete that obviously still unfinished task.

They did not proceed very far with revision of the *Articles*. It cannot be too carefully borne in mind that these divines were at work on a project assigned to them by parliament; that parliament, in a degree never known before or since, had undertaken to draft and enact a detailed scheme of national religion, and that from parliament came periodically to the group at Westminster, as to any other group working under government commission, notice of the report at the time most urgently needed. The Committee on the *Articles* had got through the first fifteen and had drawn up the changes they meant to recommend, when instruction came that another job was more pressing and that this one must be postponed. Parliament was set on obtaining as soon as possible a *Directory for Publick Worship*: it had forbidden, under penalties, the use of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* in any church or chapel of the Establishment. But it felt that some other standard of worship must without delay be provided as a substitute, and so it enjoined the divines to draft this as a safeguard against anarchic forms

of devotion, leaving over for a later and more convenient season the defining of theological niceties in Creed.

The manner in which this would be done depended on the personnel of the Assembly, and it is thus important to note within it the various groups. Of the 150 Commissioners summoned, about 30 never attended at all, and about 20 attended so seldom as scarcely to count in the proceedings. The great bulk of the clerical members had been episcopally ordained, but only some of these were of austere High Church principles, regarding non-episcopal ordination as invalid. They for the most part absented themselves, either from the first or after they had found the mass of their colleagues bent on abolishing the hierarchie system—expecially after the King, to whom they thought passive obedience was due, had issued a warning to his faithful subjects against co-operation of any sort with the Westminster divines. Of those in regular attendance the strongest group by far was that which favored transformation of the Church of England after the Presbyterian pattern set by the Reformers in Scotland: the Scottish assessor, Robert Baillie, was for these a constant and impressive spokesman. But there was a sturdy and vociferous group of Independents, protesting against any organization of Church Courts in grades from Kirk-Session to Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly. They insisted on the local autonomous rights of each separate congregation. This was the group to which the one living English poet of genius lent his support. "Presbyter," wrote John Milton, "is but priest writ large". Over against both Presbyterians and Independents, refusing to be excited either by the argument that a scheme of graded Church Courts is according to divine prescription or by the argument that it is contrary to such prescription, stood a small but eloquent handful, arguing that the Most High has given no sign of preference on such a matter, and that the form of Church government anywhere is to be set by Christian prudence in the light of local or temporal circumstances. Of this group, commonly but most inaccurately described as "Erastians," the chief oracle was John Selden, the marvel of his age for exact learning, and a terror in controversy on the Scriptures. "Perhaps," he would say, "in your little pocket Bibles with gilt leaves the translation may be thus, but the Greek and Hebrew signify thus and thus." And that, says the narrator, would silence his opponents.

The predominant Presbyterian Commissioners, guided by

the four Scottish assessors, made the *Directory of Publick Worship* a perfect reproduction of the spirit of the Scottish Kirk. This appears perhaps most conspicuously in the tremendous emphasis laid upon the *sermon*, a novelty indeed in either Roman Catholic or Anglican practice. As a pre-requisite for the new duties of religious exposition with which it was designed to charge the preacher, the educational qualifications for ordination were made such as must have amazed those accustomed to the mere perfunctory following of a routine. "The Liturgy," said the Westminster divines, "hath been a great means to make and increase an idle and unedifying ministry, which contented itself with set forms made to their hands by others." Having a far deeper and wider purpose in mind, the framers of the *Directory* prescribed as follows:

It is presupposed (according to the rules for ordination) that the minister of Christ is in some good measure gifted for so weighty a service, by his skill in the original languages and in such arts and sciences as are handmaids unto divinity; by his knowledge in the whole body of theology, but most of all in the Holy Scriptures, having his senses and heart exercised in them above the common sort of believers.

Still more notable is the regulation in the official paper, entitled *Form of Church Government*. It is there set forth not only that a candidate for ordination shall be examined touching his skill in the original tongues, but that this skill shall be shown by his translating from the Hebrew and Greek Testaments into Latin, and if he should be found defective in this, that he must compensate by unusual riches in other sorts of learning, especially in logic and philosophy. We speak of our own educational progress, but I am a little apprehensive of what might be the fate of many of our candidates for ordination if they had to evince competence in translating the Hebrew and Greek of Old and New Testaments into Latin.

It is not only for guidance of the preacher, it is likewise for the discipline of the congregation that this *Directory* is meant. The worshipper is instructed to enter church in a grave and seemly manner, but not with any act of adoration, any bowing towards one place or another: the genuflections of the mediaeval Church are to be shunned. When public worship has begun, the people, says the *Directory*, are wholly to attend to it; they are not to read anything, except by way of following the minister; and there are to be no whisperings, conferences, salutations, or doing reverence to any person present or coming

in. Moreover, they are to abstain throughout the service from all gazing, sleeping and other indecent behaviour that may disturb minister or people.

The preacher is told by the *Directory* what in the pulpit he must aim to do. It gives a detailed outline of what a sermon should contain, of the manner in which the Scripture text ordinarily used as its topic should be connected in significance with the whole structure of the Christian Faith, of the method by which the misunderstandings or confusions probable in the minds of his listeners should be cleared away by the preacher's using his own resources of historical and critical preparation, and he is reminded of his constant duty to keep in view those handicaps of "the unlearned" for which his superior knowledge may provide relief. A great office is that of the pulpit as conceived by the authors of the *Directory*. Milton expressed their mind in memorable terms, requiring the sermon to be no "formal preachment, huddled up at the odd hours of a whole lazy week." It would make a great difference, not merely to the spiritual but to the intellectual life of many a congregation, if the preacher of our time were to follow the plan of that seventeenth century *Directory*, rather than those devices of a religious circus of which one reads with such shame in the Saturday night "Church Page" of so many newspapers.

The Presbyterian Church has a distinguished record for the more exacting discipline it, in comparison with other Churches, has imposed as preparation for its ministry. Its special concern with preaching, where others treat this as of little account and the ceremonial routine as far more important, prescribes their character to theological colleges in the very spirit of the *Directory*. The mediaeval priest seldom preached at all, in any manner that we can recognize under that name. So a manual of the most meagre sort compiled by Peter Lombard, Archbishop of Paris, under the title *Book of Sentences*, gave all the theological education most of them had. In Elizabethan England the Church Services had almost no sermon, and the Queen, with her crafty method, which she called "tuning the pulpits," had no mind to encourage the exercise of a preacher's independent gift. The initiation of real preaching in the English-speaking world was thus a Presbyterian achievement, and for systematic account of its right character (as determined by its purpose) we can still find no better source than in the *Directory*.

When (from shaping public worship) they returned to the

project of defining the conceptions of God and Man, of Duty and Destiny, which these usages of worship imply, they soon decided to frame a completely new *Confession* rather than to amend the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. So much of what they wanted to eliminate was intimately bound up, either by explicit statement or by logical implication, with those traditional dogmatic formulae: so much that could be separated only by sacrifice of an Article's specific character. They were, no doubt, much influenced also by the existing *Scots Confession*, drafted half a century before to express the faith of the Scottish Reformation Church. In essence the work of the Westminster divines reproduced it.

The document they composed was of about 10,000 words, the length of two substantial magazine articles. It was meant to set forth in compact form what the divines called in a still shorter accompanying publication *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and what they presented in Catechisms, with question and answer, for use in Sunday-Schools or in the religious training of the home. Its central doctrines are the Sovereignty of God, His moral government of the universe, the revelation of His will in the Holy Scriptures, the fall and corruption of mankind, the scheme of redemption through the Saviour made known in the New Testament, the response to this which is required of those who would be saved, and the future state (of bliss or woe) contingent on such personal reaction to the divine mercy. Eighty years before, Calvin had completed his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: no one can mistake the influence of that book on the framing of the *Confession of Faith*. But this was far from being its sole, or even its principal, source. The sections of the *Confession* that in form most strongly suggest the *Institutes* are in essential teaching identical with the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, which certainly owed nothing to Calvin. I refer in particular to the account of Predestination and Election, which is often absurdly described as the distinctive Presbyterian doctrine. It is in St. Augustine that one finds the first statement of it, and the *Thirty-Nine Articles* are just as explicit on it as is the *Confession of Faith*. The same doctrine is implicit in Lutheranism. But neither *Augsburg Confession* nor *Thirty-Nine Articles* faced, as the *Confession* faced, the difficulty of reconciling divine sovereignty with human responsibility. Here is one of the many, many illustrations of the difference made to the Reformation development by the preliminary training of Calvin as a lawyer, in contrast with that of Luther

as a monk and that of Cranmer as a politician. The lawyer's determination to think things through to a consistent and coherent statement is manifest everywhere in the *Confession of Faith*, whose inspiration in this respect was undoubtedly that of Calvin.

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Like every other product of human thought, the *Westminster Confession* had its faults, of commission and of omission, which later critics have been quick to point out. Remarkable as they were, those Westminster Commissioners pretended no infallibility. In their recoil from the scandals of papal dominance, and their refusal to substitute for it the religious dominance of a King, they over-stated at once the extent and the character of the Bible's sole authority. At a loss for a standard to put in the place of the standard they had given up, they made claims for the verbal inerrancy of Holy Scripture, apparently even in its English translation, which the writers of the Bible nowhere made for it, and which they somehow forgot that Jesus Christ in the clearest and strongest terms had denied. In the three centuries that have passed since 1647, the truth into which the Church has been led includes, we now believe, an historical criticism of the sacred documents, power to arrange those writings of the past in their true local and temporal setting. This has cast a flood of light on the different parts of the Bible, so that one is now often amazed at the use of so-called "proof-texts" in the *Confession*, taken indiscriminately from the Scriptures everywhere—a verse from *Judges* or the *Song of Solomon* being used to explain the *Sermon on the Mount* or the *Fourth Gospel*. The Westminster Assembly was likewise at work before the rise of what we now know as the Science of Religions: it had no such appreciation as that which we owe to the great anthropologists and historians of culture showing how the search for God has been universal; how in the non-Christian religions of the world the divine illumination has had its part; how—as a fine Scottish teacher forty years ago liked to put it—if in Christianity God has given us the sunlight of the religious firmament, it is not to be forgotten that He made there the stars also. Forgetful of this handicap, we wonder at the narrowness of those limits within which the *Confession* acknowledges any possible insight into His works and ways except for such as have had access to the Christian Bible. Yet another handicap was that due to the Civil War that was raging while the Commissioners

worked, and to the resentments that had brought the Puritan host into the field. The recurring fierce denunciations of what the *Confession* calls "Popery and Prelacy" are thus a product of the period; and a like allowance must be made for its account of the civil magistrate, composed not—as Martineau said—in a calm religious atmosphere, but amid the clash of faction and the reverberation of the Naseby guns.

Yet it is not just the tribute fitting at a tercentenary, it is sober truth to say that the greatness of its service far outweighs its indisputable defects. In three distinguishable aspects here was an achievement not merely notable and urgent at the time, but invaluable for all time.

First, it completed the English Reformation. It drew together the essential elements of the Reformation Faith at a time of wide and paralyzing perplexity. Amid a chaos of discordant and incompetent interpretations of what the great sixteenth century change had meant, it summed up the record in a short, clear, compact volume, which still stands after three hundred years as so sound in its essentials that no revision of it has been attempted in the great Church whose standard it remains.

But the *Confession* did much more than summarize the work of the Reformers. It presented to an England still but partially reformed how much further and more decisively it must proceed. No doubt in places it was needlessly destructive of traditional usage. Much that its framers forbade has since been reestablished without damage to anyone. But this has come back—thanks largely to the work of the Westminster Commissioners—under limits and reinterpretations that have made it relatively safe. Often in their language of reprobation they may seem, in the judgment of our milder time, to have exaggerated, to have found formidable peril in what was no more than decorous usage, and to have neglected the other danger—of a spiritual anarchy—which they were incurring instead. But theirs was a time when our mild measures of justice would have been very quickly frustrated. In their enterprise of anti-clericalism, the Westminster Commissioners were not inventing a peril. The history of the previous half-century in England was strewn with savage cruelties inflicted in the name of supernatural right of bishops to direct an Englishman's conscience. Besides those who made their escape on the *Mayflower* to establish religious freedom in New England, those who stayed at immense personal risk in Old England, to fight the battle there

to a finish, deserve—and still more than the fugitives—the gratitude of those who enjoy that freedom now.

Second among the achievements of this memorable document was its assertion, in clear, explicit terms, of the autonomous rights of the Church. Not the right of any Pontiff to autocratic control over souls, any more than the right of a King to invade a citizen's civil liberties. By the same men and in the same spirit the civil and the religious franchises of Englishmen were won. In the *Confession of Faith*, half a century before Locke wrote his *Treatises on Civil Government* to vindicate it, the justification of such autonomy was presented. When the Civil War was at its height, the meditative Robert Baillie said he hoped that the progress of the Puritan army would help the Puritan argument. It did, and the stern warriors of the New Model had no doubt that the two causes were the same. As they moved into battle, rejoicing greatly as the historian says at sight of the enemy, it was to the strains of the Psalm "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered."

The key to this mood is in that part of the *Confession* that repudiates and denounces such an idea as that of the Church's being a sort of branch of the Civil Service. At the Westminster Assembly there was no tolerance for the conception of it as a national institution, as if it were something like the House of Commons, or the Privy Council, or a Club organized to serve some specific and alterable purpose defined by the Civil Government. It is indeed quite unfair to say that the Reformed Church of England was the creation of Henry VIII; but in the period of nearly one hundred years covered by the reigns of himself, his son and his two daughters, the stamp of royal domination had been somewhat heavily imprinted upon it. In that respect the first two Kings of the House of Stuart had continued the Tudor tradition, and the Anglican ecclesiastics had shown perfect willingness not merely to acquiesce in this domination but to justify it. Against such sacrilege, asserting the rights of the Church in the very language that would serve three hundred years later against a similar claim by Adolf Hitler in Germany and by Benito Mussolini in Italy, the *Confession* set a pattern to real churchmen for all time. In pursuit of this purpose, they sedulously avoided some current forms of speech in which they thought the reverse was implied. Not once in the *Confession* or in the *Form of Church*

Government does the name "Church of England" occur. Why did the framers avoid it? Surely it is a convenient, and to our ears an altogether suitable, name. But it was no accident that those Westminster Commissioners avoided it. To them the Church was not an aspect of any particular country. Such a word as "Anglicanism" was to them, for the same reason, objectionable. It was Scottish Presbyterians who inspired the *Confession*, though it was Englishmen who issued it, and I think those four assessors were inconsistent in this matter of the name, for they called their own Church quite freely "the Church of Scotland." But it is not unusual to become aware of a fault in someone else that one has long failed to notice in one's self. And they were not wholly inconsistent in the matter. The Presbyterian Church can be truly said to have sprung up after the Reformation in Switzerland, in the Netherlands, in Scotland. But it would strike one as amazing to hear it described in other countries now as the Swiss Church in Canada, or the Dutch Church in Canada, or the Church of Scotland in Canada. No such unfitness seems to be noted in the term "the Church of England in Canada." We are just now insistent on the term Presbyterian Church *in* Canada, not Presbyterian Church *of* Canada, and the jest of ignorance is sometimes heard about our concern for the correct preposition. But that difference of prepositions has serious meaning. What we insist upon is that we are no institutional contrivance of a civil ruler's sagacity, modifiable at his will, but represent in this country the Presbyterian Church throughout the world.

For like reason a jarring and somewhat impious note was struck for those of our way of thinking and valuing when the Act of Supremacy in 1534 declared the English Sovereign to be "Head of the Church." To Presbyterian ears this has a profane ring, however innocently meant. The Church for them has throughout the world but one Head. Every General Assembly is constituted and dissolved with the formula that implies it: "In the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, King and Head of the Church."

The third conspicuous service rendered by the *Confession*, and the *Directory* in which its principles were applied, may be seen in the tradition they set of a highly educated ministry. A three-year course in theology following a three or four year course in Arts has its justification in what these documents

describe as the work expected from a Presbyterian minister. I know no other Church that has required so much in preparing for the office. Look at the picture drawn in the *Directory* of the leadership in thought with which the parish minister is charged, of the capacity he must show to meet the layman's recurring difficulties from his own fuller knowledge of the origin and development of the Faith. No doubt it is an ideal, far beyond what anyone can profess to reach, that is there sketched. But ideals, though unrealizable, have immense value as a stimulus, and what the Scottish parish minister has meant throughout many generations as an educational force in the Scottish parish, the intellectual light for city and town and glen that has shone from Scottish manses, has been emphasized in countless histories of the country.

Are we maintaining this tradition? Those who shaped the Westminster standards had it in mind that the guidance of a mediaeval priesthood in thought and in practice was over and done with for England. They discerned the urgent need of a substitute, and drew the outline of a reformed ministry that would lead worship without a liturgical mass and would direct thought otherwise than by enforcing papal decrees. They knew the disorder in people's minds, and foresaw further such disorder that only the wisest leadership could control. With incomparable skill and effectiveness they provided for this in accordance with the knowledge of their time. Are we doing the like in accordance with the knowledge of our time? Or are we conniving at excuses to whittle down the educational preparation of those who will have responsibility for so great a task, and to substitute for the great studies of their office the acquisition of some wretched expertness in institutional management? I must admit that I feel far from happy as I look over the shelves of book-stores that now provide what is thought attractive to the divinity student. Where I used to observe the great expositions of Christian history and doctrine, I find instead some little American-made set on the tactics for becoming popular in the promotion of young people's societies. I cannot think of a more wholesome exercise at this tercentenary than to return to those old documents, not in pride but in humility, that we may learn from them what was the principle of religious life and work on which the Presbyterian section of Reformed Christendom began a world service that has been so enormously productive and fruitful through three

centuries. If our problems are very different from those of the Westminster Assembly—and further reflection with increasing knowledge has made some of their solutions no longer tenable—nothing in such change should reduce our reverent gratitude to the men who set that great pattern, almost alone in their time, of a reformed ministry with genuine equipment for its task.
