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# THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY'S PROBABLE APPROPRIATION OF JAMES USSHER

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## INTRODUCTION

Ever since James Ussher (1581-1656) died, scholars have regularly cited him as a significant influence on the Westminster Assembly and its confessional documents.<sup>1</sup> He was the Irish Reformation's leading theologian, first teaching at Trinity College Dublin, and later becoming Archbishop of Armagh. He never attended the Westminster Assembly, but at least one seventeenth-century author still claimed that the Westminster Larger Catechism was simply an 'Epitomiz'd' version of 'Bishop Usher's *Body of Divinity*.'<sup>2</sup> Modern historiography, however, requires primary source documentation. The Assembly's writings, Ussher's correspondence, and his friendship network indicate a high probability that the Westminster divines appropriated Ussher's theology, but this probability does not definitively prove Ussher's mark upon the Assembly. This essay does

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all works cited in this essay were published in London. Chad Van Dixhoorn (ed.), *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652*, 5 volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), I, 141-2 (henceforth abbreviated as MPWA); Richard A. Muller, "'Inspired by God—Pure in All Ages": The Doctrine of Scripture in the Westminster Confession', in Richard A. Muller and Roland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), pp. 39-42; J.V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), pp. 60, 125-68; Crawford Gribben, *Irish Puritans James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), p. 87; A.A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 165; John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vol. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), IV, 221; Crawford Gribben, 'A New Introduction', in James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), p. xi; Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity: A Study in Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2012), pp. 39-79; R. Scott Clark, 'Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy', in Herman J. Selderhuis (ed.), *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 426.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, *The Life & Death of Stephen Marshal* (1680), p. 27.

not argue that Ussher was the Assembly's foremost source, but that he was demonstrably one source. Ussher had direct connections to many divines, was given unique preferential treatment, and it appears his works were used to compose the Assembly documents. This essay demonstrates these claims, which indicate that most probably Ussher was an important source at the Assembly.

The Westminster Assembly met from 1643 to 1652 during political upheaval. Parliament called it as an advisory committee regarding ecclesiastical reform. Ussher had come to England in 1640 and, when the Irish Rebellion of 1641 prevented him from returning to Ireland, he preached the rest of his life in England. During the English civil war, Ussher's loyalties were divided between the king he believed God had appointed and the Reformed theology Parliament's Assembly was enshrining. Parliament invited him to attend the Assembly and, although these invitations were really summons, Ussher's theological politics outweighed the risks for absentsing.<sup>3</sup> Although Ussher sided with the king, his theology was closer to that of the Assembly than to Charles I's religious agenda.<sup>4</sup> Ussher's friends at the Assembly likely felt betrayed when he absented and moved to Charles's camp in late 1642.<sup>5</sup> Evidence still suggests they may not have been satisfied to go without Ussher's contributions, even in his absence.

## CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

'Influence' is notoriously difficult to prove, which is why this discussion is framed in terms of the Westminster Assembly's 'probable appropriation' rather than influence. Footnotes were not mandatory in the early-modern period, which means that the lack of references to Ussher in the Assembly's documents can cut both ways. As already noted, Ussher's absence was a sore spot for many divines, but, nevertheless, they still highly esteemed Ussher. At least three participants in the Assembly dedicated books to him, and at least twenty-three contributors to the Assembly cited him approvingly in at least forty-seven works. Almost all of these instances included multiple citations within the work and some examples evidence

<sup>3</sup> MPWA, vol 1, p. 141; James Ussher, *The Sovereignes Power, and the Subjects Duty: Delivered in a Sermon, at Christ-Church in Oxford, March 3 1643* (Oxford, 1643), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and Britain* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 257-71.

<sup>5</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, p. 261.

thorough dependence on Ussher.<sup>6</sup> Many divines corresponded with him before and during the Assembly and Joshua Hoyle (bap.1588-d.1654) and Stanley Gower (bap.1600-d.1660) both trained under him. Admittedly, these connections between Ussher and contributors to Westminster do not prove they used his theology, but it illustrates that they respected his scholarship. These factors make it likely that when the Assembly's documents appear to reflect Ussher's theology, they in fact do. This section samples the Westminster divines' inclination to appropriate Ussher.

Assemblymen cited Ussher before, during and after the Assembly met. These publications began in 1624 and extended to the late seventeenth century. This timeframe's end relates to the divines' lifespans more than a wane in Ussher's reputation. Scottish minister George Gillespie (1613-1648) published *A Dispute Against the English-Popish Ceremonies* in 1637, arguing the Laudian regime imposed Catholic superstition upon the Church of Scotland. He repeatedly cited Ussher, using Ussher's *Answer to [...] A Jesuite and a 1624 sermon*.<sup>7</sup> Gillespie had refused ordination by a bishop, which heightens these citations' significance.<sup>8</sup> When *Dispute* was published, Ussher was the Archbishop of Armagh, and, although Ussher shared many 'puritan concerns,' he had mixed views on worship. He had written against Catholics concerning ceremonies and had defended the

<sup>6</sup> Robert Baillie, *The Life of William* (1643), pp. 15, 21; Thomas Bayly, *Certamen Religiosum* (1651), pp. 256, 325-6; Cornelius Burges, *A Case Concerning the Buying of Bishops Lands* (1659), p. 27; idem, *Reasons Shewing the Necessity of Reformation* (1660), p. 53; idem, *No sacrilege* (1660), pp. 35, 59, 60; Edmund Calamy, *The City Remembrancer* (1657), p. 13; James Durham, *Commentarie Upon the Book of the Revelation* (Edinburgh, 1658), pp. 341, 499; idem, *Practical Exposition of the X Commandments* (1675), sig. D2v-D3r; idem, *The Law Unsealed* (Glasgow, 1676), [to the reader, p. 7]; John Dury, *An earnest plea for a Gospel-communion* (1654), pp. 79-83; idem, *summaries account of Mr. Iohn Dury's former and latter negotiation* (1657), p. 7; Daniel Featley, *The Romish Fisher Caught* (1624), sig. K3v, sig. P3v; idem, *Roma Ruens, Romes Ruine* (1644), p. 33; idem, *the Dippers Dipt* (1645), p. 12; idem, *The League Illegal* (1660), pp. 24, 39; Thomas Gataker, *Last Will and Testament* (1654), p. 4; Thomas Hill, *The Best and Worst of Paul* (Cambridge, 1648), p. 15; Stephen Marshall, *Defense of Infant-Baptism* (1646), p. 34; William Nicholson, *Ekthesis Pisteos* (1661), p. 38; Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (1645), pp. 5-6, 52, 59; John Wallis, *A Defence of the Royal Society* (1678), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> James Ussher, *An Answer to a Challenge Made by a Jesuite in Ireland* (Dublin, 1624); idem, *A briefe declaration of the universalitie of the Church of Christ* (1624).

<sup>8</sup> K.D. Holfelder, 'George Gillespie (1613-1648).' ODNB.

scriptural basis for worship practices.<sup>9</sup> Gillespie listed Richard Hooker as his first opponent in *Dispute*, but Ussher sympathised with Hooker's arguments.<sup>10</sup> Gillespie likely knew that Ussher held somewhat different views, but this knowledge did not stop him from enlisting Ussher's work. He cited Ussher to defend the Reformed view of Christ's mystical presence in the Lord's Supper.<sup>11</sup> Ussher shared this view, but crucially Gillespie cited him as 'the Archbishop of *Armagh*,' indicating he would happily side with a prelate when he was not imposing unbiblical ceremony. Gillespie further cited Ussher's sermon preached to James I on June 20, 1624.<sup>12</sup> Gillespie did not depend upon Ussher's full arguments in these citations and it seems he wanted to indicate that he sided with Archbishop Ussher. Gillespie's *Dispute* released prior to the Assembly, but he was called to act as one of the Scottish commissioners in September 1643.<sup>13</sup> He clearly respected Ussher's scholarship and took that into the Assembly.

In contrast to Gillespie's use of Ussher concerning worship, an English Presbyterian and an Independent cited him regarding theology proper. Francis Cheynell (b.1608-d.1665) cited him against the authority of popes and to establish the ecumenical councils' importance in founding proper Trinitarianism.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) argued Ussher proved that the early church taught the Son's divinity.<sup>15</sup> Cheynell's work was published while the Assembly met, but Goodwin's book was likely prepared well after the Assembly and Ussher's death. Goodwin's continued dependence on Ussher reveals his enduring legacy among at least some of the Westminster divines. In 1650, when Cheynell's work was released, Ussher was not long back to London after travelling with Charles I. This would have been the time he was most likely to be blacklisted. An objection that Cheynell was working on this book before 1650 fails because that was when Ussher was accompanying Charles. Charles was executed in

<sup>9</sup> Ussher, *Answer*; CUL MS Add. 69, fol. 16r-17r.

<sup>10</sup> 'Hooker is good on ceremonies.' Queen's College, Oxford MS 217, fol. 42v.

<sup>11</sup> George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English-Popish Ceremonies* ([Leiden], 1637), 3.4.9, 3.4.13.

<sup>12</sup> Gillespie, *Dispute*, 3.8.1; Ussher, *briefe declaration*.

<sup>13</sup> MPWA, vol. 1, pp. 23-7.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Cheynell, *The Divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (1650), pp. 259, 296, 299, 363. Cheynell also cited Ussher in *Sions Memento, and Gods Alarum* (1643), pp. 25, 26; idem, *Chillingworthi novissima* (1644), sig. D4v, sig. E2r.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Of The Knowledge Of God The Father, And His Son Jesus Christ*, in Thankfull Owen and James Barron (eds.), *The works of Thomas Goodwin* (1683), p. 16; T.M. Lawrence, 'Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680)', *ODNB*.

1649, but Ussher's reputation seemed to remain intact among the divines. Cheynell was not attempting to re-establish Ussher's reputation after the royalist experience since the mountain of works by Assembly members citing him show he was an abiding authority for them. Goodwin was certainly not trying to re-establish Ussher's good name with Parliament since he wrote his work during the Restoration. Ussher was simply an important theologian among the Westminster divines.

Assemblymen dedicated a handful of books to Ussher. Edward Leigh (1603-1671) was an MP nominated to serve the Assembly as a teller.<sup>16</sup> His *Treatise of Divinity* has been called 'one of the more important resources' for understanding the Assembly's theology.<sup>17</sup> He cited Ussher in this important work, but also throughout his writing corpus.<sup>18</sup> He dedicated two books to Ussher, even bragging that he 'was the last who dedicated a Book to that great Light of all the Reformed Churches, my Lord of Armagh,' and wrote immensely high praise for the Archbishop.<sup>19</sup> He pervasively cited Ussher and, if Leigh's work is important for understanding the Assembly, Ussher's works are crucial to understanding Leigh.<sup>20</sup> John Ley (1584-1662) was on the committees that wrote the confession and examined ministerial candidates.<sup>21</sup> He corresponded with Ussher, cited him in several works, and dedicated his 1641 *Sunday a Sabbath* to him.<sup>22</sup> Joshua Hoyle, an English Presbyterian, represented Trinity College Dublin, and is one of the most important connections between Ussher and the Assembly. He studied at Trinity College during Ussher's professorship, and succeeded Ussher as professor of theological controversies. Hoyle made many speeches on the Assembly floor and was a favourite for conducting Parliament's opening prayers.<sup>23</sup> He had resisted the imposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles on the Church of Ireland and defended

<sup>16</sup> John Sutton, 'Edward Leigh (1603-1671)', ODNB.

<sup>17</sup> Fesko, *Westminster Standards*, p. 405.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Leigh, *Treatise Of Divinity* (1646), p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Leigh, *Annotations upon All the New Testament* (1650), sig. A4r; idem, *Treatise Of Religion & Learning* (1656), sig. A3r ff, p. 359; idem, *Foelix Consortium* (1663), A3r-A4v.

<sup>20</sup> Leigh, *Religion & Learning*, pp. 104, 122, 170, 172, 230, 301; Leigh, *Annotations*, pp. 147, 148, 186-7.

<sup>21</sup> MPWA, vol. 1, p. 127.

<sup>22</sup> *The Correspondence of James Ussher, 1600-1656*, 3 vol. (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2015), 1:211-4, 2:715-6, 3:843-51; Ley, *A Letter (against the erection of an altar)* (1641), p. 12; Ley, *Defensive Doubts* (1641), sig. B2v-B3r; idem, *Sunday A Sabbath* (1641), sig. A2r-C2r.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. *Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 6*, 1643 (1767-1830), p. 648; *Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 7*, 1644 (1767-1830), p. 439; *Journal of the House*

keeping the Irish Articles, of which Ussher was the primary author.<sup>24</sup> He had written to Ussher over the years and Ussher referred to him in other correspondence.<sup>25</sup> In 1641, he dedicated his book *A Reioynder to Master Malones Reply* to Ussher.<sup>26</sup> The work was actually a sequel to Ussher's *Answer to [...] A Jesuite*.<sup>27</sup> Hoyle perhaps most clearly and directly links Ussher's works and the Assembly documents, as he had important roles on the committees that produced the Confession and the Larger Catechism.<sup>28</sup> Hoyle, Leigh, and Ley, however, were all important figures at the Assembly who gave credence to Ussher by dedicating works to him.

Many more connections exist between Ussher and contributors to the Assembly. William Twisse (1577/8–1646), the Assembly's first prolocutor, cited Ussher to defend predestination.<sup>29</sup> William Bridge (1600/1–1671) also cited Ussher to the same effect.<sup>30</sup> Henry Hammond (1605–1660) referred to Ussher concerning eschatology.<sup>31</sup> John Selden (1584–1654) was Ussher's trusted friend, corresponded extensively with him, and cited him.<sup>32</sup> Thomas Westfield (1573–1644) said 'The Lord Primate of Armagh, never to be mentioned without honour, for his unparallel'd Workes'.<sup>33</sup> Stanley Gower, once Ussher's personal chaplain, helped publish some of Ussher's sermons.<sup>34</sup> This merely samples of the connections between Ussher and the Assembly.

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*of Lords: Volume 9, 1646* (1767-1830), p. 494; *Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 9, 1646* (1767-1830), p. 435.

<sup>24</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>25</sup> *Correspondence of James Ussher*, vol. 2, pp. 489, 627; vol. 3, pp. 1159-61.

<sup>26</sup> Hoyle, *Reioynder to Master Malones Reply Concerning Reall Presence* (Dublin, 1641), sig. C3r.

<sup>27</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> MPWA, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>29</sup> *Riches of Gods Love unto the Vessells of Mercy* (Oxford, 1653), vol 1, pp. 58, 59; vol. 2, pp. 13, 89, 90.

<sup>30</sup> *Gospel-Marrow* (1659), sig. a2r-a2v (This preface's pagination does not begin on the first page of the preface. The page numbers here are what is marked on the pages where Ussher was cited).

<sup>31</sup> *Paraphrase of Annotations* (1659), pp. 865, 875; Hammond also cited Ussher in *A Letter of Resolution* (1653), p. 463; *A Vindication of the Dissertations Concerning Episcopacie* (1654), pp. 41, 60, 146-7, 150-1; *An Answer to the Animadversions* (1654), pp. 9, 10-11, 16, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 104, 267-8; *Correspondence of James Ussher*, vol. 1, pp. 246, 250, 319-20, 326, 327, 327-8; vol. 2, pp. 408; vol. 3, pp. 1085-6, 1087, 1088-90, Selden, *Of the Dominion* (1652), p. 274.

<sup>33</sup> *England's Face* (1646), p. 2.76.

<sup>34</sup> Jacqueline Eales, 'Stanley Gower (b.1600?, d.1660)', ODNB. James Ussher, *Eighteen Sermons, Preached in Oxford* (1662).

Further, Ussher received significantly preferential treatment from Parliament and Assembly contributors. Parliament had sequestered royalist libraries, but when Ussher requested that his be returned, they obliged.<sup>35</sup> When Ussher returned to London in 1647, they voted to pay him £400 annually 'in respect of his great Worth and Learning.'<sup>36</sup> Parliament then voted to invite him again to the Assembly, indicating desire to have his influence there, and in person.<sup>37</sup> They even sent Ussher to the Isle of Wight as an envoy to the king.<sup>38</sup> The Assembly itself examined ministers for English pulpits, which means that they must have approved of Ussher when Parliament appointed him to preach at Lincoln's Inn.<sup>39</sup> Ussher's preaching appointment contrasts with how Assembly member Daniel Featley was imprisoned supposedly for mailing his speeches from the Assembly to royalist conspirators, but the recipient of those speeches was Ussher.<sup>40</sup> Whereas Featley died in prison for consorting with royalists, Ussher was given a pension and a pulpit. Although this atmosphere of respect for Ussher does not itself prove divines made use of his works in their confessional documents, it does reveal a context in which possible instances of Ussher citations become highly probable instances of dependence on him.

## ECHOES OF USSHER'S WORKS IN THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

This section argues that the Westminster Assembly used Ussher's works as primary sources. Ussher's absence from the Assembly means his impact was necessarily indirect. The seventeenth century remark that the Assembly 'Epitomiz'd Bishop Usher's *Body of Divinity*' in their catechisms shows

<sup>35</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 5, 1646-1648* (1802), p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> *House of Commons: 1646-1648*, 326; *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 6, 1648-1651* (1802), p. 247.

<sup>37</sup> *Journal of the House of Lords: Volume 9, 1646 (1767-1830)*, p. 643.

<sup>38</sup> *House of Commons: 1648-1651*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Chad Van Dixhoorn, *God's Ambassadors: The Westminster Assembly and the Reformation of the English Pulpit, 1643-1653* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), pp. 41-61; *House of Commons: 1646-1648*, pp. 393-4; *House of Lords: 1646*, p. 643. In personal conversation, Dr. Van Dixhoorn said that he never came across Ussher's name in the records of examined ministers, but that simply means that possibly Ussher was not officially examined before the committee. If this were the case, the obvious explanation, which Van Dixhoorn supported, would be that the committee felt no need to go through the examination process with someone of Ussher's repute.

<sup>40</sup> Arnold Hunt, 'Daniel Featley (1582-1645)', ODNB.

that Ussher was linked to the Assembly's documents within a short time.<sup>41</sup> This section demonstrates the Westminster Confession (WCF) included significant portions of the Irish Articles (1615) (IA). Although there has been some scholarly disagreement, Alan Ford has recently argued Ussher was at least the primary author of the IA, and Ussher's prominent role in their production is generally accepted.<sup>42</sup> In that respect, its use at the Assembly represents his influence.<sup>43</sup> Even in the seventeenth-century, Ussher's defenders and opponents accepted his predominant role in the Articles, calling it 'Usher's own private Opinions'.<sup>44</sup> Manuscript evidence shows there was an early draft of the IA in Ussher's own hand, and this draft extensively used material from Ussher's other catechisms.<sup>45</sup> This evidence points to Ussher's role as primary author of the IA, particularly the exact linguistic links between the confession and Ussher's own writings, and that means any use of the IA in the WCF is use of Ussher. Aside from the connections between the IA and the IA, there are also links between the Larger Catechism (LC) and Ussher's *Body of Divinitie*.<sup>46</sup> Some have disputed that he authored the Body, but extensive manuscript evidence proves it was also his work.<sup>47</sup> The IA and the *Body of Divinitie* are the written works linking Ussher to the Assembly.

Most scholars accept that the IA was a primary source for the WCF.<sup>48</sup> Several have documented the general overlap of the content and the same

<sup>41</sup> Anon., *Life & Death of Stephen Marshal*, p. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 85-103; R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), pp. 16-24; Amanda Louise Capern, 'The Caroline Church: James Ussher and the Irish Dimension', *The Historical Journal* 39 no 1 (1996), pp. 72-3; Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 83-8; cf. Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590-1641*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), pp. 157-9.

<sup>43</sup> Fesko, *Westminster Standards*, p. 408.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Heylyn, *Aerius Redivivus* (Oxford, 1670), 394-5; Nicholas Bernard, *Life and Death [...] James Usher* (1656), p. 49; Richard Parr, *Life of [...] James Ussher*, pp. 14-15, 42-3.

<sup>45</sup> TCD MS 287, fol. 102r-105r.

<sup>46</sup> James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie* (1645).

<sup>47</sup> Harrison Perkins, 'Manuscript and Material Evidence for James Ussher's Authorship of *A Body of Divinitie* (1645)', *EQ* 89.2 (2018), pp. 133-61.

<sup>48</sup> Muller, 'Inspired by God', pp. 40-2; Fesko, *Westminster Standards*, p. 60; Alexander F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1884), pp. 372-85; Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), pp. 62-83; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1959; repr. Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), p. 59.

basic topical outline.<sup>49</sup> Parliament tried to use the IA to interpret what the Church of England should be and proposed a bill to make the IA authoritative alongside the Thirty-Nine Articles (EA), which should dissuade doubts about their importance for Parliament's Assembly and should nullify concerns about whether language that appears verbatim both in the IA and the WCF came from another document.<sup>50</sup> The IA were printed in London in 1628 and 1629, which likely related to Parliament's attempt to give them official status in England around that time.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Joshua Hoyle represented Trinity College Dublin at the Assembly, was important in the committees that wrote the WCF and the LC, and he had vigorously defended maintaining the IA when Laud imposed the EA in Ireland in 1634.<sup>52</sup> Hoyle is a demonstrable link between the two confessions, but given Parliament had wanted to adopt the IA, and the general respect for Ussher among Reformed theologians, he was not likely alone in wanting to use Ussher's confession as the basis for the new one. A sample of quoted phrases and sections should sufficiently show connections between the two confessions.<sup>53</sup>

On the doctrine of God, the WCF used several instances of identical wording to the IA. The later document, however, did not always keep its citations from the IA together. WCF chapter two split the eighth IA and used sentences from it in paragraph one and three.

IA 8: There is but one living and true God everlasting, without bodie, parts or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead, there be three persons of one and the same substance, power, and eternity: the Father, the Sonne, and the holy Ghost.<sup>54</sup>

WCF 2.1: There is but one only, living, and true God: who is infinite in Being and Perfection, a most pure Spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions, immutable, immense, eternall, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, *Westminster Assembly*, 372n1; Warfield, *Westminster Assembly and Its Work*, pp. 62-83; Muller, 'Inspired by God', pp. 40-1.

<sup>50</sup> John McCafferty, 'Ireland and Scotland, 1534-1663', in Anthony Milton (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume I: Reformation and Identity, c.1520-1662* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 251; Ford, *James Ussher*, p. 140.

<sup>51</sup> McCafferty, 'Ireland and Scotland, 1534-1663', p. 251.

<sup>52</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 43, 199-200; MPWA, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>53</sup> Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, p. 64 documented an extensive list of proposed corresponding sections.

<sup>54</sup> IA, sig. B1r.

holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the Counsell of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory;<sup>55</sup>

WCF 2.3: In the Unity of the God-head there be Three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.<sup>56</sup>

It could be objected that the Westminster divines could potentially have used other sources. The EA did say,

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodnesse, the maker and preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the father, the Sonne, and holy Ghost.<sup>57</sup>

The matching wording of all three documents might appear to support the objection about other potential sources besides the IA. There are, however, serious considerations that reduce that objection. The IA used the EA as a source, and it is not surprising that explanations of ecumenical doctrines were adopted unchanged. The following considerations show that the corresponding language between the EA and WCF most likely owe to the EA's use in the IA.<sup>58</sup> When the Scottish commissioners, including George Gillespie, arrived at the Assembly in September 1643, they were opposed to the EA.<sup>59</sup> This commission was important in Assembly debates, and did play real roles in shaping the Westminster standards.<sup>60</sup> The Scottish participation in the Assembly, and their general objection to English style religion, suggest that the IA are the probable source of language in the WCF over the EA. The IA had used the EA, but had diverted from them in crucial ways that would be important to the Westminster Assembly. For example, the EA clearly affirm that tradition and common authority can establish practices that are mandatory for worship as long as those practices are not forbidden or contrary to Scrip-

<sup>55</sup> *The humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Confession of Faith* (London, [1646]), p. 7. Henceforth abbreviated WCF.

<sup>56</sup> WCF, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> *Articles Agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops of both Provinces* (1628), sig. B2r. (Henceforth abbreviated EA.)

<sup>58</sup> Muller, 'Inspired by God', pp. 39-41.

<sup>59</sup> MPWA, vol. 1, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> MPWA, vol. 1, pp. 23-31.

ture.<sup>61</sup> The IA, however, affirmed that worship cannot include anything 'besides or contrary to the Scriptures,' which was far more aligned with the 'puritan' concerns of the Westminster Assembly.<sup>62</sup> The divines most probably used the IA rather than the confession that was contrary to their views on something that had been a highly inflammatory issue.<sup>63</sup> Further evidence from the IA and WCF shows that the latter used a good deal of material from the former that was not found in the EA, most especially the more explicit Reformed viewpoints on predestination, covenant theology, and the Pope as the antichrist. In other words, for wording on the doctrine of God and subsequent doctrines, the divines followed confessional trajectories Ussher's work set.

In some of the corresponding sections, the WCF adopted the strong predestinarianism of Ussher's confession.

IA 11: God from all eternity, did by his unchangeable counsell ordaine whatsoever in time should come to passe: yet so as thereby no violence is offered to the wils of the reasonable creatures, and neither the liberty nor the contingency of the second causes is taken away, but established rather.<sup>64</sup>

WCF 3.1: God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy Counsell of his own Will, freely, and unchangeably ordaine whatsoever comes to passe: yet so as thereby neither is God the Author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the Creatures, nor is the Liberty or contingencie of second Causes taken away, but rather established.<sup>65</sup>

The WCF repeated the twenty-first IA in two different chapters. The passage from the IA dealt with humanity's creation, and how God built the covenant of law into human nature, as well as the ability to fulfil that covenant. WCF 4.2 adopted that description of how man was created, and WCF 7.2 used the idea of a covenant with Adam. Some of the language about man's creation was cited exactly. That is not the case with the covenant between God and Adam, but the IA was the first Reformed confession to name this covenant. The terminological shift between 'covenant of law' and 'covenant of works' is insignificant.<sup>66</sup> The idea of a covenant with

<sup>61</sup> EA, sig. D1r.

<sup>62</sup> IA, sig. C4r (article 52); WCF, p. 34; Ward, 'Background and Principles', pp. 85-109.

<sup>63</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 92-4.

<sup>64</sup> IA, sig. B1r-B1v.

<sup>65</sup> WCF, p. 8

<sup>66</sup> Richard A. Muller, 'The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology

Adam had been in use for some time, but Ussher codified the covenant of works into the confessional mainstream, and Westminster followed his lead.<sup>67</sup>

IA 21: Man being at the beginning created according to the Image of God (which consisted especially in the wisdom of his mind, and the true Holiness of his free will) had the covenant of the Law ingrafted in his heart: whereby God did promise unto him everlasting life, upon condition that he performed entire and perfect obedience unto his Commandments, according to that measure of strength wherewith hee was endued in his creation, and threatned death unto him if hee did not performe the same.<sup>68</sup>

WCF 4.2: After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, indued with knowledge, righteousness and true holiness, after his own Image; having the Law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it.<sup>69</sup>

WCF 7.2: The first Covenant made with Man, was a Covenant of Works, wherein Life was promised to Adam, and in him to his Posterity, upon condition of perfect and personall obedience.<sup>70</sup>

Both confessions stated that Adam was created with natural ability to fulfil the law. The confessional position was that he did not need extra help to do the law or meet the terms of the covenant. This was a response to the Roman Catholic notion of the *donum superadditum*, a doctrine that said Adam would have fallen had God not given him grace.<sup>71</sup> The Westminster divines used the Irish confession to continue a polemic against Catholic presuppositions.

Perhaps the largest divergence between the IA and the WCF concerns the civil magistrate. This is not surprising since Ussher did not attend the Westminster Assembly because of his royalist commitments and Parliament was the governing force for the divines. The IA reflect Ussher's royalism by explicitly naming the King as the magistrate in question, whereas the WCF confined its references to 'the Civil Magistrate,' how-

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of Herman Witsius and Wilhemus à Brakel', in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: OUP, 2003), p. 175.

<sup>67</sup> Harrison Perkins, 'Reconsidering the Development of the Covenant of Works: A Doctrinal Trajectory', *Calvin Theological Journal* 53.2 (2018), pp. 289-317.

<sup>68</sup> IA, sig. B2v.

<sup>69</sup> WCF, pp. 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> WCF, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Harrison Perkins, 'James Ussher and the Covenant of Works', (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 2018), pp. 65, 68-9, 76-8.

ever defined. Even given these political differences, there is still striking overlap between the two documents. The WCF used specific phrases from the IA to guard the church's authority over the spiritual kingdom, but amended the language to downplay aspects that did not match their political sensibilities.<sup>72</sup> Both documents share the same view about the spiritual authority of the church.

The IA was the first Protestant confession to mention the covenant of works explicitly, the WCF following suit, but the IA was also the first confession to call the Pope the antichrist. Although this was a commonly held view among Protestants, no church *confessed* this before 1615. The Westminster Assembly again followed suit and included reference to the Pope as antichrist. The WCF does not repeat the exact wording, but it does build a confessional trajectory that started with the IA.<sup>73</sup> Although Protestants in the period commonly held this doctrine, Ussher still paved the way for this doctrine into the confessional mainstream. And yet again, Westminster followed his lead. This sample should be adequate to demonstrate WCF's direct appropriation of the IA.

The LC also bears striking resemblances to Ussher's *Body of Divinitie*. Some have denied Ussher was the author of the *Body*, but manuscript evidence, and comparison with his other works and personal papers, makes this denial untenable.<sup>74</sup> John Downname, however, was the licenser of books for Westminster in the 1640s and on the Assembly's committee to examine ministers, and he published Ussher's work in 1645.<sup>75</sup> Downname's preface praised both Ussher and this book. Ussher was displeased with this initial publication, which makes it seem that it was primarily agents of the Westminster Assembly who wanted Ussher's catechism in print. Downname also published a set of two briefer catechisms by Ussher, again without his permission, although he later revised these and approved their publication.<sup>76</sup> Downname and five Westminster divines had previously written to Ussher to convince him to help produce a full body of divinity.<sup>77</sup> John Dury, who wrote the new prefaces for the 1677 edition of Ussher's *Body of Divinitie*, forged a letter from Ussher so to appear to have the Archbishop's support for the project.<sup>78</sup> The divines' previous efforts,

<sup>72</sup> IA, sig. C4v; WCF, p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> IA, sig. D4r; WCF, p. 43.

<sup>74</sup> Perkins, 'Manuscript and Material Evidence', pp. 133-61.

<sup>75</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, sig. A3r-A3v.

<sup>76</sup> James Ussher, *The Principles of Christian Religion* (1645); Ussher, *The Principles of Christian Religion* (1653).

<sup>77</sup> Dury, *earnest Plea for Gospel-Communion*, p. 83.

<sup>78</sup> *Correspondence of James Ussher*, vol. 3, pp. 1095-6. Elizabethanne Boran convincingly argued the letter was forged; *Correspondence of James Ussher*, vol.

which also included Downname, to produce a theology with Ussher's name on it suggests the 1645 publication of the *Body* was an extension of those efforts. Parliament was growing anxious in 1645 for progress on the Assembly's catechisms.<sup>79</sup> They had begun writing a catechism in 1643, but there were continual setbacks.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps some divines set forward Ussher's works to placate impatient onlookers. This publication of Ussher's work says a great deal about his importance to the Assembly, and significantly heightens the probability that Ussher's works were used as sources.

There are certainly instances where the LC took Ussher's exact words from the *Body*. For instance,

BOD: *Why is he called Jesus?* He is called Jesus, that is, a Saviour, because he came to save his people from their sins [...].<sup>81</sup>

LC: Q. *Why was our Mediator called Jesus?* A. Our Mediator was called Jesus, because he saveth his people from their sins.<sup>82</sup>

And again,

BOD: *What is the summe of the first [table of the law]?* Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy Soule, and with all thy strength, and with all thy minde, *Deutero. 6[.]5. Mat. 22.37, 38. Luke 10.27.*<sup>83</sup>

LC: Q. *What is the summe of the four Commandments, which contain our duty to God?* A. The summe of the foure Commandements containing our duty to God, is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our minde.<sup>84</sup>

In both examples, the answers themselves are not the noteworthy aspect, since they are at least partially scriptural quotations, but it is noteworthy that these citations were paired with the same question in both texts. It could be objected that this may have been a commonplace understanding,

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3, p. 1095n1.

<sup>79</sup> John R. Bower, *The Larger Catechism: A Critical Text and Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Bower, *Larger Catechism*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>81</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, p. 167.

<sup>82</sup> *The humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by the Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Larger Catechism* (London, [1647]), pp. 9-10. Henceforth abbreviated WLC.

<sup>83</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, pp. 208-9.

<sup>84</sup> WLC, 27.

and it may have been, but historical probabilities are the focus here. Given the other evidence presented – Ussher's link to Hoyle who worked on the LC, and Assembly's circle of influence published Ussher's *Body* – seeming connections between Ussher's texts and the Assembly's are probably genuine. Ussher wrote in his briefer catechism, '*What is God? Ans. God is a Spirit, most perfect, most wise, Almighty, and most holy.*'<sup>85</sup> This was almost certainly the template the divines used when they wrote, 'Q. *What is God? A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternall, and unchangeable in his being wisdom, power, holinesse, justice, goodnesse, and truth.*'<sup>86</sup> Even if this phrase was used in a prayer by George Gillespie Assembly as legend holds, we know Gillespie read Ussher and he could have taken it from Ussher's catechism. This answer's expansion is easily explained by noting both the *Body* and the *Principles* addressed the essence of God in several questions, but the divines rolled that discussion into one question.

In addition to instances of direct quotation, the LC condensed Ussher's longer material into single paragraphs or phrases. The different lengths of the *Body* and the LC create difficulties in correlation, making it better to search for phrases repeated from Ussher's book in the catechism than whole passages. The Christological sections provide examples of exact borrowed phrases:

BOD: *Why was it requisite that our Saviour should be God?*

Because, first, none can satisfie for sin, nor be a Saviour of soules, but God alone; *Psal. 49.7. 1 Thess. 1.10.* For no creature though never so good, is worthy to redeem another mans sin, which deserveth everlasting punishment.

Secondly, the satisfaction for our sins must be infinitely meritorious, otherwise it cannot satisfie the infinite wrath of God that was offended; therefore that the work of our Redemption might be such, it was necessary our Saviour should be God, to the end his obedience and sufferings might bee of an infinite price and worth, *Acts 20.28. Heb. 9.14.*

Thirdly, No finite creature was able to abide and overcome the infinite wrath of God, and the sufferings due unto us for our sins; Therefore must our Saviour be God, that he might abide the burthen of Gods wrath, in his flesh, sustaining and upholding the man-hood by his divine power, and so might get again, and restore to us the righteousness and life which we have lost.

Fourthly, our Saviour must vanquish all the enemies of our salvation, and overcome Satan, Hell, Death, and Damnation, which no creature could ever doe. *Rom. 1.4. Heb. 2.14.*

<sup>85</sup> Ussher, *Principles* (1645), pp. 3-4.

<sup>86</sup> *The humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines [...] Concerning a Shorter Catechism* ([1647]), p. 2. Henceforth abbreviated WSC.

Fifthly, he must also give efficacie to his satisfaction, raising us up from the death of sin, and putting us in possession of eternall life.

Sixthly, he must give us his Spirit, and by it seale these graces to our soules, and renew our corrupt nature, which only God can doe.<sup>87</sup>

LC: Q. *Why was it requisite, that the Mediator should be God?* A. It was requisite that the Mediator should be God, that he might sustain and keep the humane nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death; give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience and intercession; and to satisfie Gods justice, procure his favour, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.<sup>88</sup>

Another example where a long section is condensed into a brief statement:

BOD: *Why was it requisite that our Mediatour should be Man? was it not sufficient that he was God?*

No, it was further requisite that he should be man also; because

1. Our Saviour must suffer and die for our sins, which the Godhead could not doe.
2. Our Saviour also must perform obedience to the law, which in his Godhead he could not doe.
3. He must be man of kin to our nature offending, that he might satisfie the justice of God<sup>89</sup> in the same nature wherein it was offended, *Rom. 8.3. 1 Cor. 15.21. Heb. 2.14, 15, 16.* For the righteousnesse of God did require, that the same nature which had committed the sin, should also pay and make amends for sin, and consequently that onely nature should be punished which did offend in *Adam*: Man therefore having sinned, it was requisite for the appeasing of Gods wrath, that man himself should die for sin; the Man Christ Jesus offering up himself should die for sin; the Man Christ Jesus offering a sacrifice of a sweet smelling favour unto God for us, *1 Tim. 2.5. Heb. 2.9, 10 & 15, 15. Rom. 5.12.15. Eph. 5.2.*
4. It is for our comfort, that thereby we might have free accesse to the throne of Grace, and might find help in our necessities, having such an high Priest as was in all things tempted like unto ourselves, and was acquainted with our infirmities in his own person, *Heb. 4.15, 16, & 5.2.*<sup>90</sup>

LC: Q. *Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be Man?* A. It was requisite that the Mediator should be Man, that he might advance our nature, per-

<sup>87</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, p. 161.

<sup>88</sup> WLC, p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> This phrase also links to the antecedently quoted Larger Catechism answer.

<sup>90</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, p. 164.

form obedience to the Law, suffer to make intercession for us in our nature, have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities; that we might receive the adoption of sons, and have comfort and accesse with boldnesse unto the throne of Grace.<sup>91</sup>

These explanations overlap phrasing and demonstrate that the divines trimmed long sections from Ussher into terse statements for memorizing.

To avoid overstatement, Ussher's *Body* was not the only source the divines used to write the LC. Ussher's phrases were scattered into LC answers combined with other phrases and explanations. The divines tended to wrap what they thought Ussher put well into other material, as seen in the section on the sacraments.

BOD: *What is Baptism?* It is the first Sacrament of the New Testament, by the washing of water (*Ephes. 5.26.*) representing the powerfull washing of the blood and spirit of Christ, (*1 Cor. 6.11. Heb. 10.22.*) and so sealing our regeneration, or new birth, our entrance into the Covenant of Grace, and our ingrafting into Christ, and into the body of Christ, which is his Church, (*Joh. 3.5. Tit. 3.5. Act. 8.27.*)<sup>92</sup>

LC: *Q. What is Baptisme?* A. Baptism is a Sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water, in the name of the Father, and of the Sonne, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a signe and seale of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sinnes by his bloud, and regeneration by his spirit, of Adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible Church, and enter into an open and professed ingagement to be wholly and onely the Lords.<sup>93</sup>

The answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism piled phrases from Ussher's work more clearly together:

WSC: Baptisme is a Sacrament, wherein the Washing with Water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, doth signifie and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, and our ingagement to be the Lords.<sup>94</sup>

Phrases with the language of 'washing,' 'ingrafting,' and 'sealing' all appear in the texts of Ussher and the divines. The divines also leaned on Ussher's definition of the Lord's Supper.

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<sup>91</sup> WLC, p. 9.

<sup>92</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, p. 411.

<sup>93</sup> WLC, pp. 47-8.

<sup>94</sup> WSC, p. 15.

BOD: *So much for Baptism: What is the Lords Supper?* It is the second Sacrament of the new Testament, wherein God by the signes of bread and wine signifieth sensibly, and exibiteth to every faithfull receiver the body and bloud of Christ for his spirituall nourishment and growth in Christ, and for so sealing unto him his continuance, with increase in the body of Christ, which is his Church, confirmeth him in the Covenant of grace. Or thus: It is a Sacrament of the Gospel, wherein by the outward elements of Bread and Wine, sanctified and exhibited by the Minister, and rightly received by the communicant, assurance is given to those that are ingrafted into Christ, of their continuance in him, and receiving nourishment by him unto eternall life.<sup>95</sup>

LC: *Q Wherein doe the Sacraments of Baptisme and the Lords Supper differ?*  
A. [...] whereas the Lords Supper is to be administered often, in the Elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spirituall nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him, and only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves.<sup>96</sup>

Although rearranged, some phrases from Ussher about the Lord's Supper reappeared in the catechism. The pattern of borrowed phrases explains why many concluded that the *Body* was the foundational text behind the LC.<sup>97</sup> The LC repeatedly seems to mirror the theology of the *Body*, likely because the latter was the source.

The LC's connections to the *Body* may not appear as direct as those between the IA and the WCF. The summaries and phrases that appear in the catechism may not definitively persuade sceptical readers, but key factors must be remembered. The *Body* was not just a possible source. The Assembly knew and read it because they, not its author, published it, and they praised it highly.<sup>98</sup> Dury had gone to great lengths to link Ussher to his international theological project.<sup>99</sup> Downname may have published the *Body* in 1645, near the time the Assembly worked on the LC, so the

<sup>95</sup> Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, p. 422.

<sup>96</sup> WLC, p. 52.

<sup>97</sup> Mitchell, *Westminster Assembly*, p. 364; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vol (Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1877), 1:786n2; 'Westminster Catechisms', in Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 1745.

<sup>98</sup> James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity: Or, The Sum and Substance of Christian Religion Catechistically propounded and explained, by way of Question and Answer, Methodically and familiarly handled, For the Use of Families*, 7th ed. (1677), sig. A2r-A2v, pp. 1-40.

<sup>99</sup> *Correspondence of James Ussher*, vol. 2, pp. 605-8, 614-5, 630-1, 633-5, 637-9, 653-4, 661-3, 665-9, 721-4, 775-7, 809-10, 811-2, 839-41; vol. 3, 1095-6.

divines could access it as they composed their catechisms.<sup>100</sup> The divines, therefore, almost certainly drew from the *Body* as a source document.

## CONCLUSION

The Assembly first met in Westminster Abbey's Henry VII chapel. In a final show of deference in 1656, Oliver Cromwell insisted Ussher be buried in the Abbey and he still rests in the St. Paul Chapel.<sup>101</sup> This chapel, however, is just at the bottom of the stairs to the Henry VII chapel. Ussher's grave marks the same relationship he had to the Assembly in life: present but just outside. In life and death, Ussher was the ghost in the corner of Westminster. The Assembly's appropriation of Ussher evades definitive proof, as its minutes leave no explicit mention of him. Committees, however, drafted the public documents and floor debates discussed substance and phrasing, not whom the committees cited. Committees were not permitted to discuss their work outside the Assembly, which means discussions of citations are lost. Probability remains. Not only was it possible that Ussher's views were often discussed in committee work, the divines' demonstrable dependence on Ussher in published works makes it most probable that his works were consulted. Ussher echoes in the Assembly's documents were noticed early on, but until now no one argued that these reveal Ussher's influence. Ussher's reputation, the echoes of his works in the standards, and the considerable instances in which Ussher or his works were connected to the Assembly all suggest that his influence was highly probable. Historical factors, therefore, indicate it is most likely that Ussher's legacy lives on through the documents of the Westminster Assembly.

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<sup>100</sup> Perkins, 'Manuscript and Material Evidence', p. 144.

<sup>101</sup> Ford, *James Ussher*, pp. 270-1.