

---

# The Constitutional Principle of the Scottish Reformation: 1547-1648

MATTHEW WINZER

*“The ministers that were took not their pattern from any Kirk in the world, no, not from Geneva itself; but, laying God’s Word before them, made reformation according thereunto, both in doctrine first, and then in discipline, when and as they might get it overtaken.”*

JOHN ROW<sup>1</sup>

Taking the statement of John Row at face value, the following article seeks to give a brief account of the way the Word of God was received as the fundamental authority by which the Reformed Church of Scotland was constituted. The aim is to demonstrate that this principle was the defining characteristic of the Scottish reformation as it took shape from 1547 to 1648. The time period is deliberately chosen. In 1547 John Knox commenced his public ministry and in 1648 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland adopted the last of the Westminster documents.

There is no intention to suggest that the government and worship of the Church was uniform throughout this period. Historians are right to point out areas of diversity where they existed. Diverse practices, however, are often emphasised to the point where they obscure the unified principles the reformers professed to follow. Drawing attention back to their own rule of action may serve to harmonise what appears

---

<sup>1</sup> John Row, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Printed for the Wodrow Society, 1842), 12. All quotations in this article reflect modern spelling.

contradictory and to highlight what is evident in John Row's testimony that the reformation, while not a perfect realisation, was being directed by the ideal that God's Word prescribes both the doctrine and the discipline of the Church.

The article begins with the early development of the reformation and then turns to examine the reforming principle of John Knox, the reforming movement of which he was a leader, and the constitution of the reformation. This is followed by a period of settlement in which the subordinate standards of the Church explicitly limited Church power to the Word of God and when subscription was utilised to preserve the attainments of the reformation. Brief examples of conflict are then provided in order to show the ground on which further reformation was to be sought. Finally, the second reformation is shown to have revived the constitutional principle with the intention of consistently applying it to the Church of Scotland and to inter-church relationships with England and Ireland.

## 1. Early developments

Historians of the Scottish reformation are in general agreement that the movement which produced ecclesiastical renewal in sixteenth century Scotland developed over time. A predominantly Lutheran influence over the budding movement in the 1520s and '30s is noted by James Kirk: "The spread, in scholarly circles and clandestinely through familial ties, of Luther's theology of grace, his denial of the 'treasury of merit' and of human ability to earn salvation, and his emphasis on the sufficiency of faith alone, went far towards undermining the clerical domination of religion."<sup>2</sup> Lutheran influence was superseded by Swiss reforming thought from about 1540, which is apparent "in the action taken by the authorities in 1543 and 1547 against 'sacramentarians', who stressed the commemorative and symbolic aspects of the Lord's supper", as well as in the preaching tours of George Wishart, the translator of the first Swiss Confession of Faith.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> James Kirk, "Reformation, Scottish", in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 694. Patrick Hamilton's "Loci Communes" and John Johnstone's "Comfortable Exhortation" are provided as examples of Luther's influence. Mention is also made of James V's hostile reaction to "favourers of the sect of Luther", *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 695.

The First Helvetic Confession, as translated by Wishart, laid the foundation for comprehensive Church reform according to the Bible. It opens with an uncompromising affirmation of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture as “the Word of God”, confessing it to be “the most perfect and ancient science and doctrine of wisdom” which “alone containeth consumately all godliness and all sort and manner of fashion of life”.<sup>4</sup> All human traditions which “withdraweth us and stoppeth us from the Scripture” are designated “things hurtful and unprofitable”.<sup>5</sup> The true Church is known “by certain external rites, instituted by Christ”;<sup>6</sup> and “Christ, verily, himself is the very true head of his Church and congregation, and the only pastor and head”, which imposes on teachers the obligation to “use the power of the Church well and lawfully”.<sup>7</sup> At the meeting together of the congregation specific ceremonies are to be abandoned and rejected because they are “unprofitable” and “serve to subvert the true religion of God”.<sup>8</sup> The Confession’s dependence on the authority of Scripture, condemnation of traditions and ceremonies contrary thereto, and acknowledgment of the headship and institutions of Christ, established a basis for limiting and regulating Church power according to the Word of God.

## 2. The reforming principle of John Knox

Building on this foundation John Knox proclaimed the necessity of divine institution in everything pertaining to the Church. From the time he commenced preaching in 1547, God’s commandment was the only warrant Knox would accept for Church reform. His message was the same as it had been from the beginning of the reformation: “justified by faith only”; “the blood of Jesus Christ purges us from all our sins.”<sup>9</sup> For Knox, however, this carried with it the implication that the true Church of Jesus Christ can only be discerned by its obedience to the unerring voice of Christ:

---

<sup>4</sup> “The Confession of Faith of the Churches of Switzerland; translated from the Latin, by George Wishart, 1536”, in *The Miscellany of the Wodrow Society* (Edinburgh: Printed for the Wodrow Society, 1844), 11.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 11, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), 191.

But before he began to open the corruptions of the Papistry, he defined the true Kirk, showed the true notes of it, whereupon it was builded, why it was the pillar of verity, and why it could not err, to wit, “Because it heard the voice of its own pastor, Jesus Christ, would not hear a stranger, neither yet would be carried about with every kind of doctrine”.<sup>10</sup>

When Knox, together with John Rough, was called to account for preaching what was derided as “heretical and schismatical doctrine”, he announced in no uncertain terms the reforming principle for which he contended: “the Kirk ought to do nothing, but in faith, and ought not to go before, but is bound to follow the voice of the true Pastor.”<sup>11</sup> This principle was not only to be applied to doctrine but also to ceremonies:

Now, if ye will prove that your ceremonies proceed from faith, and do please God, ye must prove that God in expressed words has commanded them: or else shall ye never prove, That they proceed from faith, nor yet that they please God; but that they are sin, and do displease him, according to the words of the Apostle, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin”.<sup>12</sup>

The ceremonies were to be limited to that which “God in expressed words has commanded”. Conversely, anything not commanded by God was to be condemned:

That God’s Word damns your Ceremonies it is evident; for the plain and strait commandment of God is, “Not that thing which appears good in thy eyes shalt thou do to the Lord thy God, but what the Lord thy God has commanded thee; that do thou: add nothing to it; diminish nothing from it” [Deut. 4]. Now unless that ye be able to prove that God has commanded your Ceremonies, this his former commandment will damn both you and them.<sup>13</sup>

In 1550 Knox was required to give an explanation as to why he believed the sacrifice of the mass was idolatry. The reforming principle forms the major premise of his argument: “All worshipping, honouring,

---

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 190.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 195.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 195, 196.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 199.

or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is Idolatry: The Mass is invented by the brain of man, without any commandment of God: Therefore, it is idolatry.”<sup>14</sup> God’s condemnation of the actions of King Saul proved that “disobedience to God’s voice is not only when man doth wickedly contrary to the precepts of God, but also when of good zeal, or good intent, as we commonly speak, man doth any thing to the honour or service of God not commanded by the express Word of God”.<sup>15</sup> Reference to other biblical precedents further established the sanctity of the principle, after which followed an application to the power of the Church:

In my judgement Jesus Christ confirmeth the same, saying, “My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger they will not hear, but flee from him”. To hear his voice (which is also the voice of God the Father), is to understand and obey the same; and to flee from a stranger, is to admit none other doctrine, worshipping, nor honouring of God than hath proceeded forth of his own mouth; as he himself testifieth, saying, “All that is of the verity, hear my voice”.<sup>16</sup>

The comprehensive nature of Knox’s reforming principle can be summed up in one proposition: “all the power of the Kirk is subject to God’s Word.”<sup>17</sup>

This was not a polemical device fitted to win an argument but a consistent rule of action. Richard G. Kyle calls the purification of worship one of Knox’s “most distinctive positions” by which “he insisted that everything in worship be done according to the specifications of Scripture. All else Knox regarded as idolatry and to be resisted.”<sup>18</sup> The same observation is made by W. Stanford Reid: “The service of God’s worship, including the administration of the sacraments, was to be determined completely by New Testament precept and example.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 3:34.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, 37.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Richard G. Kyle, “Knox, John”, in *DSCHT*, 466.

<sup>19</sup> W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God: A Biography of John Knox* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), 136.

This fixed and comprehensive reforming principle continued to guide Knox's thought on various questions pertaining to Church order in the 1550s. Two historical incidents stand out above the rest.<sup>20</sup> The first is recorded by David Calderwood while providing a summary of the reformer's ministry in England. In April 1553 Knox was called before a council to answer three questions, the last being, "why he kneeled not at the Lord's Supper?". He responded "that kneeling was man's addition or imagination". When the council expressed their sorrow that he was of a contrary mind to the common order, the reformer simply replied "that he was more sorry that the common order was contrary to Christ's institution".<sup>21</sup> He would later write in 1559 that he often repeated the same assertion: "I cannot give you other answer than oft ye have heard of my mouth, that in the Lord's action nothing ought to be used that the Lord Jesus hath not sanctified, neither by precept nor by practice."<sup>22</sup>

The second incident occurred a little later during the constrained exile under Queen Mary's reign, after an English congregation had been settled at Frankfort. This congregation followed a reformed order of service, which, as Stanford Reid notes, was "based on, and in many ways similar to, the simple order devised by Calvin when he was pastor in Strasbourg".<sup>23</sup> After the congregation had been established a new company arrived from England and sought to be associated with it. They soon created a disturbance when they insisted that the congregation must follow the service book of Edward VI. Knox rejected the imposition on the simple ground that "by the Word of God we must seek our warrant for the establishing of Religion, and without that, to thrust nothing into any Christian congregation".<sup>24</sup>

### 3. The reforming movement

The latter incident is of further interest because it demonstrates that Knox's reforming principle was not a matter of mere personal persuasion

---

<sup>20</sup> Other examples are provided by W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 136, who draws attention to the "declaration on prayer published in 1554, but written somewhat earlier", and "his letter to the Protestants in London (1554), in both of which he maintains that human inventions in worship is idolatry".

<sup>21</sup> David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Printed for the Wodrow Society, 1842), 280, 281.

<sup>22</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 6:83, 84.

<sup>23</sup> W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 120.

<sup>24</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 4:32.

but a conviction which gave rise to a distinct reforming movement. This is made apparent by the outcome of the dispute which broke out in Frankfort. When the Prayer Book party rose to form a majority of the congregation they began to act in a prejudicial manner against those with whom they differed, and, amongst other things, prohibited Knox from preaching. They went so far as to accuse him before the City Council of speaking against Mary of England and Charles and Philip of Spain, which left the authorities no choice but to expel Knox from the city. Those who remained at Frankfort afterwards found it impossible to function under the tyranny of the majority and eventually decided to leave the city, with a number choosing to settle in Geneva. Here the exiles found a congenial home and established a congregation according to the pattern which was originally observed at Frankfort. They elected Knox along with Christopher Goodman to be their pastors.<sup>25</sup>

An order of service was agreed upon by the congregation at Geneva and published in February, 1556. The title of the order was, "The form of prayers and ministration of the sacraments, &c. used in the English Congregation at Geneva: and approved, by the famous and godly learned man, John Calvin". It was included in the nineteenth century edition of the Works of John Knox on the consideration of "Knox's share in preparing the following Order, his sanctioning its use, and its being usually known under his name".<sup>26</sup> The degree to which the Scottish reformer influenced the Order is not known but his comprehensive reforming principle is clearly stated in the prefatory epistle. It explains that this "form and order of a reformed church" has been

limited within the compass of God's Word, which our Saviour hath left unto us as only sufficient to govern all our action by; so that whatsoever is added to this Word by man's device, seem it never so good, holy, or beautiful, yet before our God, which is jealous and can not admit any companion or counsellor, it is evil, wicked, and abominable.<sup>27</sup>

It was this distinct reforming movement which eventually prevailed in Scotland in 1560.

---

<sup>25</sup> See W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter of God*, 126-129, for a more detailed account.

<sup>26</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 4:147.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 160, 161.

From Frankfort Knox went to Geneva and then returned to Scotland in 1555. He afterwards accepted the call to be one of the pastors of the English Church at Geneva. After his departure in July, 1556, the clergy passed sentence against him and caused his effigy to be burned at the cross of Edinburgh. "Against this sentence," writes Thomas M'Crie, "he drew up his Appellation, which he afterwards published, with a supplication and exhortation, directed to the nobility and commonalty of Scotland."<sup>28</sup> The Appellation gives an open account of the doctrines he taught while he was in Scotland. Amongst other things he declared the necessity of God's commandment for acceptable service:

And therefore I feared not to affirm, that of necessity it is, that such as hope for life everlasting avoid all superstition, vain religion, and idolatry. Vain religion and idolatry I call whatsoever is done in God's service or honour, without the express commandment of his own Word.<sup>29</sup>

Knox's brief visit, according to Thomas M'Crie, "was of vast consequence. By his labours on this occasion, he laid the foundations of that noble edifice which he was afterwards so instrumental in completing." In particular, the friends of Protestantism "were brought together in different parts of the nation, and prepared for being organised into a regular Church, as soon as Providence should grant them external liberty, and furnish them with persons qualified for acting as overseers".<sup>30</sup> The foundation was laid for the Church to be reformed according to the Word of God.

The reformation proceeded in the absence of the reformer. In November, 1558, the Protestants petitioned Mary of Guise and reminded her Grace of

what controversy hath been, and yet is, concerning the true religion, and right worshipping of God, and how the clergy (as they will be termed) usurp to themselves such empire above the consciences of men, that whatsoever they command must be obeyed, and whatsoever they forbid must be avoided, without

---

<sup>28</sup> Thomas M'Crie, "Life of John Knox", in *Works*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1855), 93.

<sup>29</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 4:468.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas M'Crie, *Works*, 1:93, 94.

farther respect had to God's pleasure, commandment, or will, revealed to us in his most holy word.<sup>31</sup>

They pressed the great need of "a public Reformation" and intimated that they "of conscience dare no longer dissemble in so weighty a matter, which concerneth the glory of God and our salvation".<sup>32</sup> Their desire was to see Christ's religion "restored to the original purity" with the effect that "the grave and godly face of the primitive Church reduced [brought back], ignorance may be expelled, true doctrine and good manners may once again appear in the church of this realm".<sup>33</sup>

May 1559 saw the return of Knox. By his own account the work of reformation had been carried on before his arrival.<sup>34</sup> He was uncertain at first "what God shall further work in this country", but set himself for a great battle.<sup>35</sup> David Hay Fleming observes, "By the beginning of September, though troubled with fever, he had travelled through most of the country, and found men of all sorts and conditions embracing the truth".<sup>36</sup> Knox himself described the success of the reforming movement: "for now, forty days and more, hath my God used my tongue in my native country, to the manifestation of his glory." He recorded that "the thirst of the poor people, as well as of the nobility here, is wondrous great, which putteth me in comfort, that Christ Jesus shall triumph for a space here in the North and extreme parts of the earth".<sup>37</sup> Thorough reformation was imminent.

#### **4. The reformation constituted**

"A Contract of the Lords and Barons, to defend the Liberty of the Evangel of Christ," was entered into on 27th April 1560, in which they promised to "set forward the Reformation of Religion, according to God's Word".<sup>38</sup> Two days later the reformers were charged to give their

---

<sup>31</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 1:302.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 303.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 303, 306.

<sup>34</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 6:22.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> David Hay Fleming, *The Reformation in Scotland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 240.

<sup>37</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 6:26, 27.

<sup>38</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 2:61.

judgement concerning the reformation of religion.<sup>39</sup> They subsequently commenced preparing what James Kirk has called a “programme for the polity and endowment of the reformed Church”, which eventually took final shape in the First Book of Discipline.<sup>40</sup>

The principle that the Word of God is the fundamental authority for the order of the church was embodied in the Book of Discipline. In submitting their judgement to the Great Council of Scotland the reformers requested,

as we will not bind your wisdoms to our judgments, further than we are able to prove the same by God’s plain scriptures, so must we most humbly crave of you . . . that ye repudiate nothing, for pleasure nor affection of men, which ye are not able to improve by God’s written and revealed word.<sup>41</sup>

Under the first head, of doctrine, the authors confessed the truth that “Christ Jesus is he whom God the Father has commanded only to be heard, and followed of his sheep”.<sup>42</sup> In the explication they maintained the authority and sufficiency of the Scripture, and stated, “In which books of Old and New Testaments we affirm, that all things necessary for the instruction of the Kirk, and to make the man of God perfect, is contained and sufficiently expressed”.<sup>43</sup> They also opposed “contrary doctrine”, which was identified as “whatsoever men, by laws, councils, or constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God’s Word”.<sup>44</sup> Concerning such things that “in God’s scriptures . . . neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from this Realm”.<sup>45</sup>

The Reformation Parliament which met in July and August officially severed links with the Church of Rome and adopted a Protestant Confession. This was the Scots Confession drawn up by the “six Johns” – Knox, Willock, Winram, Spottiswoode, Row, and Douglas. It is important to observe the dependence of this national revolution on

<sup>39</sup> As noted in the preface to “The Book of Discipline”, in John Knox, *Works*, 2:183, 184, the charge was dated 29th April 1560.

<sup>40</sup> James Kirk, *DSCHT*, 697.

<sup>41</sup> “The Book of Discipline”, in John Knox, *Works*, 2:184.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 185.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 186.

what had gone before. As James Kirk has stated, “Far from marking the starting point of the Reformation, the proceedings of this parliament were a belated reflection of the work of Reformation already undertaken in local communities”.<sup>46</sup> This can be seen in the preface to the Confession, in which the Estates of Parliament declared, “Long have we thirsted, dear brethren, to have notified unto the world the sum of that doctrine which we profess, and for the which we have sustained infamy and danger”.<sup>47</sup> It was not worldly policy but humble appreciation and love for “the purity of Christ’s Gospel” which moved them to adopt the Confession.<sup>48</sup> This was deemed “so precious that we were determined to suffer the extremity of worldly danger, rather than that we will suffer ourselves to be defrauded of the same”.<sup>49</sup> Nor was it looked upon as a temporary measure, but “by the assistance of the mighty Spirit . . . we firmly purpose to abide to the end in the Confession of this our Faith”.<sup>50</sup>

Along with the other articles of the Christian faith the reforming principle of John Knox received constitutional recognition:

Good works we affirm to be these only that are done in faith, [and] at God’s commandment, who in his law has expressed what be the things that please him: And Evil works, we affirm, not only those that are expressly done against God’s commandment, but those also that, in matters of religion and worshipping God, have no [other] assurance but the invention and opinion of man, which God from the beginning has ever rejected.<sup>51</sup>

Accordingly the Confession defines the Church as “a company and multitude of men chosen of God, who rightly worship and embrace him, by true faith in Christ Jesus, who is the only head of the same Kirk”.<sup>52</sup> The notes or marks of the Church are, “the true preaching of the Word of God”, “right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed to the Word and promise of God”, and “ecclesiastical

---

<sup>46</sup> James Kirk, *DSCHT*, 697.

<sup>47</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 2:95. See D. Hay Fleming, *Reformation*, 244, for evidence that the preface was intended to run in the name of the Estates of Scotland.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 96.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 108.

discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribed".<sup>53</sup> The Scriptures are confessed to be "sufficient to instruct and make the man of God perfect", and their authority is affirmed "to be of God"; consequently they are regarded as "the voice of her own Spouse and pastor", which the true Church "always heareth and obeyeth".<sup>54</sup> Lawfully gathered general councils are bound to the Word of God: "So far then as the Council proveth the determination and commandment that it giveth by the plain Word of God, so far do we reverence and embrace the same"; on the other hand, that is "the doctrine of devils which draws our souls from the voice of our only God, to follow the doctrines and constitutions of men."<sup>55</sup>

Fully committed to a thorough reformation according to the Word of God, the Parliament gave a commission to the "six Johns" to prepare a statement on discipline to accompany the Confession. The Book of Discipline, according to James Kirk, was a "revision and expansion of the earlier 'Book of Reformation', carried out between August and December".<sup>56</sup> He also notes that it "was ready for scrutiny by the General Assembly in December 1560", and, "in January 1560/1 it was presented for approval to a convention of nobles in Edinburgh, where the Privy Council and many of the nobles present with some qualifications consented to the FBD, the implementation of whose program became the Church's priority".<sup>57</sup>

Qualifications to and disagreements over the Book of Discipline were concerned with its "radical financial proposals" rather than any substantial matter of Church order, and it was only the political instability caused by the return of Mary, Queen of Scots, which served "to frustrate efforts at implementing the authors' programme in its entirety".<sup>58</sup> While the political scene was in a state of uncertainty, Stanford Reid writes, "the leaders of the Church had decided that whether The Book of Discipline was accepted by the nobles or not, they would proceed to organise according to its plans".<sup>59</sup> Though the reformation was not completed at once, a pattern of reform had been

---

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, 110.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, 112.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> James Kirk, "First Book of Discipline", in *DSCHT*, 321.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter*, 225.

established. The comprehensive reforming principle of John Knox had received constitutional recognition.

Two examples will serve to show how the Church now considered itself to be limited and regulated by its constitutional principle: first, in the adoption and use of the Book of Common Order; and secondly, in inter-church correspondence.

For the first example, it appears from the Book Discipline that the 1556 “Form of Prayers”, which provided an Order for the English congregation at Geneva, was also employed in Scotland after Knox’s final return. Reference is made to “the Catechism, as we have it now translated in the Book of our Common Order, called the Order of Geneva”.<sup>60</sup> Another reference indicates that the directions given in the Book were at least generally to be followed.<sup>61</sup> It was subsequently approved in part (1562), enlarged (1562-1564), and then received (1564), by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.<sup>62</sup> As previously observed, the Book of Common Order, as it came to be known, sets forth “a form and order of a reformed church, limited within the compass of God’s Word”.<sup>63</sup> Difference of opinion exists as to the nature of some practices contained in the Book,<sup>64</sup> but it should be obvious that the main intent of the Church in adopting it was to prescribe limits to the order of worship, government, and discipline, and to regulate these according to God’s Word.

A second example of constitutional limitation may be observed in an inter-church correspondence in 1566.<sup>65</sup> Theodore Beza of Geneva had sent a copy of the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith to Knox and his colleagues requesting them to signify their approbation of it. Assembling at St. Andrews they read over each chapter by itself and “left nothing unexplored”. The Christian faith was found to be “faithfully, holily, piously, and indeed divinely explained”, and in conformity with the doctrine taught in the pulpits of the Scottish Church. The assembly,

---

<sup>60</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 2:210.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, 239.

<sup>62</sup> See H. R. Sefton, “Book of Common Order”, *DSCHT*, 85; David Laing, *The Works of John Knox*, 210, footnote.

<sup>63</sup> John Knox, *Works*, 4:160.

<sup>64</sup> The most notable difference pertains to the “prayers” and the extent to which these were to be used as “forms”. See W. Stanford Reid, *Trumpeter*, 135, 136, who provides a reasonable explanation.

<sup>65</sup> “To the very eminent Servant of Christ, Master Theodore Beza, the most learned and vigilant Pastor of the Genevan Church”, in John Knox, *Works*, 6:544-550.

however, could not refrain from mentioning their disapproval “with regard to what is written in the 24th chapter of the aforesaid Confession concerning the ‘festival of our Lord’s nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension, and sending the Holy Ghost upon his disciples’.” They intimated “that these festivals at the present time obtain no place among us; for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day than what the divine oracles have prescribed”.<sup>66</sup> It is evident that the office-bearers believed the exercise of their power was limited to the prescription of God’s Word.

## 5. The constitutional principle settled

Knox departed this earthly scene in 1572, but in his absence the Church possessed a constitution explicitly subject to the Word of God which could safely guide her through the difficulties to come; and the years 1572 to 1578 were certainly difficult times. During this period the Regent pursued a policy of conformity with England, and introduced what Thomas M’Crie (the Younger) has called “phantom bishops, for most of them had no episcopal ordination; and they had no share in the government of the Church”.<sup>67</sup> Their phantom nature, however, did not render them harmless, for “the introduction of these nominal dignitaries threatened the future peace of the Church”.<sup>68</sup> Into the midst of this struggle Andrew Melville returned home in 1574 and, in the words of John Macleod, “was at the head of his fellows as they stood for the intrinsic freedom that resides in the Church of God to do the will of her Head as He has made it known in His Word”.<sup>69</sup> At the General Assembly held in August, 1575, Melville expressed his conviction that “prelacy had no foundation in the Scriptures and was necessarily hurtful to the interests of religion”.<sup>70</sup>

Melville was appointed to take part in a committee which commenced drafting a form of Church polity agreeable to the Word of God. The labours of this committee eventually produced the Second

---

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 547, 548.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *The Story of the Scottish Church from the Reformation to the Disruption* (London: Blackie & Son, 1875), 64.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in relation to Church History since the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), 43.

<sup>70</sup> As quoted in Thomas M’Crie, “The Life of Andrew Melville”, in *Works*, 2:51.

Book of Discipline. Thomas M'Crie describes the biblical nature of this polity:

Its leading principles rest upon the express authority of the Word of God. Its subordinate arrangements are supported by the general rules of Scripture; they are simple, calculated to preserve order and promote edification, and adapted to the circumstances of the Church for which they were intended.<sup>71</sup>

The Second Book of Discipline declares the Word of God to be the fundamental authority of the Church: "This power ecclesiastical is an authority granted by God the Father, through the Mediator Jesus Christ, to His Church gathered, and having the ground in the Word of God."<sup>72</sup> Church power is specifically designated a "spiritual government which is exercised by the members appointed thereto by the Word of God; and therefore is given immediately to the Office-bearers, by whom it is exercised to the well-being (benefit) of the whole body".<sup>73</sup> Being a spiritual government it is distinct from civil government: "This Power and Polity ecclesiastical is different and distinct in its own nature from that power and polity which is called the Civil Power and appertains to the civil government of the commonwealth."<sup>74</sup> The spirituality of the government depends on the fact that it flows immediately from the mediatorial dominion of Jesus Christ: "this Power Ecclesiastical flows immediately from God and the Mediator Jesus Christ, and is spiritual, not having a temporal head on earth, but only Christ, the only Spiritual King and Governor of His Church."<sup>75</sup> He who dares to usurp headship over the Church is called "Antichrist". Jesus Christ is "the Only Head and Monarch of the Church".<sup>76</sup> It follows as a matter of course that "this power and polity of the Church should lean upon the Word immediately as the only ground thereof, and should be taken from the pure fountains of the Scriptures: the Church hearing the voice of Christ, the only Spiritual King, and being ruled by His laws".<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, 2:58.

<sup>72</sup> "The Second Book of Discipline", in *Basic Documents on Presbyterian Polity*, ed. F. Maxwell Bradshaw (Lawson, NSW: Mission Publications of Australia, 1984), 51.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

Those who bear office in the Church are “to exercise and do their office according to the Word of God”, and “the spiritual ruler judges both inward affections and external actions, in respect of conscience, by the Word of God”.<sup>78</sup> The Church consists of some “appointed to be rulers”, while the rest are “to be ruled, and obey according to the Word of God and inspiration of His Spirit, always under One Head and Chief Governor, Jesus Christ”.<sup>79</sup> Office-bearers are not only to be called of God and have the inward testimony of a good conscience, but are also to have “the lawful approbation and outward judgment of men, according to God’s Word”.<sup>80</sup> Being raised up by God they ought “to know their message to be limited within God’s Word, without the which bounds they ought not to pass”.<sup>81</sup>

Pastors are “appointed to particular congregations, which they rule by the Word of God, and over the which they watch”.<sup>82</sup> Besides the “teaching of the Word of God”, the Pastor is to “discharge his conscience, as God’s Word prescribes to him”.<sup>83</sup> The Elders are not necessarily teachers of the Word. “What manner of persons they ought to be” is referred “to the express Word of God, and specially the canons written by the Apostle Paul”.<sup>84</sup> The Deacons are to collect and distribute ecclesiastical goods “as the Word of God appoints”.<sup>85</sup> There is also provision made for a Doctor, but “no more offices ought to be received or suffered in the true Church of God established according to His Word”.<sup>86</sup>

As might be expected the “bishops” are made a point of special focus, and again, the Word of God is the decisive voice:

It agrees not with the Word of God that Bishops should be Pastors of Pastors, Pastors of many flocks, and yet without one certain (particular) flock, and without ordinary teaching. It agrees not with the Scriptures that they should be exempt from the correction of their brethren, and discipline of the particular Eldership of the Church where they shall serve; neither that they usurp the office of

---

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, 53.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, 54.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 56.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, 57.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, 58.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 66, 67.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

visitation of other churches, nor any other function beside other Ministers, but so far as shall be committed to them by the Church.<sup>87</sup>

Those who were presently exercising the function of “bishops” were “to agree to that order that God’s Word requires in them, as the general Church will prescribe to them . . . or else to be deposed from all function in the Church”.<sup>88</sup> At the General Assembly held at Dundee in July, 1580, “the whole Assembly in one voice declared the office of a bishop, as then used and commonly understood, to be destitute of warrant from the Word of God, and a human invention tending to the great injury of the Church”.<sup>89</sup> The bishops were required to demit their pretended office and to be admitted to the ministry in the ordinary way.

The Book also contains “Certain Special Heads of Reformation which we Crave”. Here, again, it is what “God’s Word craves” which is of fundamental importance. Particular attention is given to the free election of persons who are called to ecclesiastical functions. The intrusion of any person upon any congregation is rejected “for so much as that manner of proceeding has no ground in the Word of God, but is contrary to the same”, and “ought not now to have place in this light of reformation”. This liberty is pressed upon “whosoever will embrace God’s Word, and desire the kingdom of His Son Christ Jesus to be advanced”.<sup>90</sup>

The chapter on “special heads of reformation” indicates that the Second Book of Discipline was to be submitted to the civil power that it might be established by law. The diligence of the Church in seeking this establishment was evident in July, 1579, when the commissioners of the General Assembly presented a supplication to King James VI in order to recommend the printing of the Geneva Bible. David Calderwood records how they encouraged him to press forward “in this great work of reformation of religion and building of the spiritual temple of the Lord”, and particularly desired “that the work may be prosecuted, and the building brought to a great perfection, by establishing of discipline and meet policy in the kirk of God, not taken out of the cisterns of the traditions of men, but of the pure fountains of God’s holy Word”.<sup>91</sup> As stated by James Kirk, when civil endorsement was not forthcoming, “the general

---

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> As quoted in Thomas M’Crie, *Works*, 2:53, 54.

<sup>90</sup> “Second Book of Discipline”, 75.

<sup>91</sup> David Calderwood, *History*, 3:452.

Assembly pressed ahead as best it could to give effect to the programme of 1578, and in April 1581 formally registered the Second Book of Discipline among the acts of Assembly”.<sup>92</sup> Although not established by civil law, the Church had competently used its independent spiritual jurisdiction to settle its own constitution as it was grounded in and founded upon the Word of God.

Great assistance had been given to this settlement in 1580 by the drafting of the National Covenant. As reported by Thomas M’Crie (the Younger), this marked “one of the most important eras in the history of the Church of Scotland”.<sup>93</sup> At the king’s request his chaplain, John Craig, drew up “the king’s confession” as a formal abjuration of Popery and solemn oath to support the Protestant religion. The king and his household subscribed it in January, 1581, and was subsequently followed “by all ranks of persons through the kingdom; the ministers zealously promoting the subscription in their respective parishes”.<sup>94</sup>

The Covenant renewed national commitment to the “Confession and Form of Religion . . . as unto God’s undoubted truth and verity, grounded only upon his written Word”.<sup>95</sup> All kind of Papistry was “damned and confuted by the Word of God and Kirk of Scotland”, especially the Roman’s Antichrist’s “erroneous doctrine against the sufficiency of the written Word”, including “his five bastard sacraments, with all his rites, ceremonies, and false doctrine, added to the ministration of the sacraments without the Word of God”. Further detestation was expressed against “all his vain allegories, rites, signs, and traditions brought in the kirk, without or against the Word of God, and doctrine of this true reformed kirk”.<sup>96</sup> The conjunction of the Word of God and the true Reformed Kirk is unmistakable, as also is the condemnation of any ceremony that is introduced without the warrant of God’s Word. As appraised by John Row, “This was the touch-stone to try and discern Papists from Protestants, . . . the Kirk acknowledging that to be the principal means, by the blessing of God, for the preventing of, and reclaiming from, apostasy and backsliding”.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> James Kirk, “Second Book of Discipline”, in *DSCHT*, 766.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *Story*, 70.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>95</sup> “The National Covenant; or, the Confession of faith”, in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994 rpt.), 347.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, 347, 348.

<sup>97</sup> John Row, *History*, 78.

## 6. Constitutional conflict

The Reformed constitution of the Church was now firmly established; but a constitution, like a machine, is under the control of its operators. As Thomas M'Crie (the Younger) has noted, "while this solemn transaction had a powerful influence in quieting the public mind, and rivetting the attachment of the nation to the Protestant faith, it did not prevent the royal favourites from prosecuting their obnoxious measures".<sup>98</sup> The king himself, though he praised the Reformed Kirk as "the sincerest Kirk in the world", would prove to be one of the main causes of disturbance by asserting his supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs. Such contradictory behaviour led G. N. M. Collins to conclude, "if sincerity was a quality in the Church it certainly was lacking in the king".<sup>99</sup>

It is not necessary to trace all the details of the conflict but two examples in particular illustrate how the constitutional principle saved the Church, albeit a minority, from falling away from reformation attainments.

The first example of conflict centred on the introduction of bishops. In March, 1603, James succeeded to the English and Irish crowns as James I, and moved his court to London. As K. M. Brown observes, "The King's preference for bishops – summed up in his phrase 'no bishops, no King' – was already apparent before 1603, but was given added impetus by his desire for religious uniformity within his three kingdoms".<sup>100</sup> The General Assembly was discharged and prohibited from meeting by the king in June, 1605, "without naming any other day or place for another assembly", writes John Howie; "and so the series of our assemblies expired, never to revive again in due form till the Covenant was renewed in 1638".<sup>101</sup> Notwithstanding the king's prohibition a number of the ministers met together in July to do nothing more than constitute and then dissolve. Many of them were subsequently imprisoned or banished. John Welch was sent "from prison to prison, till he was banished to France, never to see Scotland again".<sup>102</sup> While in prison he wrote: "These two points: 1. That Christ is the head of His Church; 2. That she is free in her government from all other

---

<sup>98</sup> Thomas M'Crie, *Story*, 71, 72.

<sup>99</sup> G. N. M. Collins, *The Heritage of our Fathers* (Edinburgh: The Knox Press, 1976), 10.

<sup>100</sup> K. M. Brown, "James VI (I)", in *DSCHT*, 441.

<sup>101</sup> John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, and Company, 1870), 126.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

jurisdiction except Christ's; these two points, I say, are the special cause of our imprisonment being now convicted as traitors for the maintaining thereof."<sup>103</sup>

By 1606 matters had reached a head. Parliament having done many things to further the establishment of episcopacy, a Protestation was drawn up by Patrick Simson and signed by forty-two ministers, including Andrew Melville. The protesters drew attention to the necessity which was laid upon them in virtue of their office: "that which Christ commandeth necessity urgeth, and duty wringeth out of us, to be faithful office-bearers in the Kirk of God."<sup>104</sup> Parliament was exhorted "to advance the building of the House of God, reserving always into the Lord's hands that glory which he will communicate to neither man nor angel, to wit, to prescribe from his holy mountain a lively pattern, according to which his own tabernacle should be formed".<sup>105</sup> It was declared that Jesus Christ alone possesses "absolute and unbounded authority in this world", and therefore it properly belongs to Him "to rule the Kirk, according to the good pleasure of his own will, as it belongeth to him to save his Kirk by the merit of his own sufferings".<sup>106</sup> A solemn warning ensued: "All other authority is entrenched so within the marches of Divine commandment, that the least overpassing of the bounds set by God himself, bringeth men under the fearful expectation of temporal and eternal judgments."<sup>107</sup>

In objecting to the introduction of bishops the protesters urged their human origin: "if ye should (as God forbid) authorise the authority of bishops, and their pre-eminence above their brethren, ye should bring into the Kirk of God the ordinance of man."<sup>108</sup> They appealed to the subscription which was made to the reformed constitution of the Church embodied in the Covenant, called the King's Confession. The Noblemen and Estates were to have nothing less than "reverence of the oath of God . . . to hold them back from setting up the dominion of Bishops; because it is of verity, that they subscribed and sware the said Confession, containing not only the maintenance of the true Doctrine, but also the

---

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, 127.

<sup>104</sup> Row, *History*, 424.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, 425.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*

Discipline professed within this realm of Scotland”.<sup>109</sup> The reformed constitution of the Church was bound to the Word of God as its fundamental authority and prohibited all human innovations: “the Kingdom of Christ, the office-bearers and laws thereof, neither should nor can suffer any derogation, addition, diminution, or alteration, besides the prescript of his holy Word, by any inventions or doings of men, civil or ecclesiastical.”<sup>110</sup>

The second example of conflict relates to the innovation of ceremonies. In 1617 the king visited “his native and ancient kingdom” with the belief that “the people and their ministers were now quite submissive to all his wishes on the point of Church government”.<sup>111</sup> During this visit he “convoked a meeting of the clergy” and “proposed to them five articles of conformity with the English Church”, namely, “1. Kneeling at the communion. 2. The observance of certain holidays, viz. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. 3. Episcopal confirmation. 4. Private baptism. 5. Private communion.”<sup>112</sup> Consideration of the articles was postponed but the next year an Assembly was held in Perth “for the purpose of extorting something like a sanction to the obnoxious ceremonies”.<sup>113</sup> Though there was a minority of forty-five who followed conscience and kept the Church “from absolute degradation”, a large majority passed the “Five Articles of Perth”.<sup>114</sup>

David Calderwood has preserved the objections to the articles which were presented to the Assembly. The first point of concern for the objectors was the lack of regard which had been shown to reformation attainments. The innovations threatened to

change the estate of this Church, so advisedly established by ecclesiastical constitutions, acts of parliament, approbation of other kirks, and good liking of the best reformed Christians without and within this kingdom, and so evidently blessed with happy success and sensible experience of God’s greatest benefits, by the space of fifty-eight years and above. So that we may boldly

---

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 426.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, 428.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *Story*, 109.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, 116.

say to the praise of God, that no Church hath enjoyed the truth and purity of religion in larger liberty.<sup>115</sup>

Departing from these attainments “grieveth reformed professors tenderly affected to our reformation, and giveth occasion to our adversaries to reprove our separation from them”.<sup>116</sup> The articles “bring a sensible blot . . . in so far as we depart from that reformation so wisely brought in, appointed and established”.<sup>117</sup> Theodore Beza’s commendation of the Church was quoted to show the way good doctrine and good order are bound together: “This is a great benefit of God, that ye have brought into Scotland true religion, and good order, the band that retaineth doctrine at one time. So I beseech you and obtest, that ye retain these two together, so that ye remember, that if the one be lost, the other cannot endure long.”<sup>118</sup>

It was specifically reformation according to God’s Word which the objectors were zealous to maintain. The articles could not be regarded as indifferent because “they give way to human inventions, and bring the wrong key of man’s wit within the house of God, whereby toys and trifling ceremonies in number and force are multiplied, as men’s wits are variable to invent. Who requires these things at your hands?” Moreover, human inventions would make the Christian Church “inferior to the Jews” because “their ceremonies were all divine”. Human inventions “press down religion itself with servile burdens, so that the estate of the Jews is more tolerable, who, howbeit they did not acknowledge the time of their liberty, are subject notwithstanding to the burdens of the law, not to the presumptions of man”.<sup>119</sup> The innovations were “declared by this Church to be contrary doctrine”, which was defined as, “whatsoever men by laws, councils, or constitutions, have imposed on the consciences of men, without the express commandment of God’s Word”.<sup>120</sup>

Closely connected with the concern over maintaining reformation attainments was the alarm sounded over the unconstitutional nature of the proceedings. With respect to innovations, “nothing should be obtruded upon the churches by synods against their will”. The assembly

---

<sup>115</sup> David Calderwood, *History*, 7:325.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, 325.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*, 328.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, 329.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 327.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, 329.

“can by no warrant bind nor oblige their unwilling presbyteries and congregations to their votes. . . . Who can bind a kirk disassenting and unwilling?”<sup>121</sup> That the articles were an innovation was proved by the fact that “there stand in force divers Acts of Parliament in favour of our present order”.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, “the ministers of this Church” promised “at their admissions . . . to submit themselves most willingly to the wholesome discipline of this Church, by the which they were then called to the office and charge”.<sup>123</sup> Reference is also made to the renunciation of ceremonies “without the Word of God” in the National Covenant.<sup>124</sup>

Reaction to the articles helped to mark out the ground on which the Reformed Church was established. When this reaction is taken in connection with the protestation over bishops it is possible to see a constitutional position emerging out of the conflict. First, Church power is grounded in and founded upon the Word of God alone. Secondly, this constitutional principle is articulated in subordinate standards. Thirdly, subscription binds office-bearers to maintain and defend the subordinate standards of the Church and thereby preserve its constitutional principle.

The two battles, first with episcopacy and then with ceremonies, were not unrelated. It became apparent that the earlier intrusion of bishops eventually led to the imposition of the ceremonies. If the tenet of the king was, “No bishop, no king”, the tenet of the bishops was “no ceremony, no bishop”. This is the observation of David Calderwood as he reflected on the development of the conflict:

As long as the government of the Church of Scotland stood in integrity, as it was established by laws, civil and ecclesiastical, according to God’s Word, so long was the worship of God preserved in purity. Since the former government was altered, and the insolent domination of Prelates hath entered in by unlawful means amongst us, popish rites and superstitious ceremonies have followed, and are like to prevail universally. They have verified in their persons their common tenet, *No Ceremony, No Bishop*.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, 329, 330.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, 330.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, 330, 331.

<sup>125</sup> David Calderwood, *Perth Assembly* (no place of publication, 1619), epistle to the reader.

The reasoning is clear: when Church power is grounded in the Word of God it is also bound by the Word of God. Those who lawfully exercised Church power were constitutionally hindered from instituting anything in worship without the warrant of God's Word. The prelates, on the other hand, unlawfully exercised Church power and therefore assumed the liberty to innovate in the worship of God.

This antithesis was fully developed by Calderwood in *The Pastor and the Prelate*. The connection between government and worship is reiterated:

Now may be seen what was said before, that the government of the kirk and the worship of God are like the twins spoken of by Hippocrates, and that the one of them dwining away, and dying among us, the whole face of the other looketh pale, and pitifully proclaimeth (if the cry of our sins would suffer us to hear), that religion herself is sick at the heart.<sup>126</sup>

The true pastors of the Church stand on one side of the conflict. They are bound by the constitution, and especially by subscription to the Covenant, to uphold the order of the Reformed Church of Scotland. This requires them to oppose any attempt to add to God's worship:

for beside the obligation that is common to us with other reformed kirks, we stand bound by solemn oath, covenant and subscription, published in the world, to defend the doctrine and discipline of this kirk, and to oppose the hierarchy and all rites and ceremonies added to the worship of God. Silence in such a cause may be sin to other kirks, but to us it is perjury in the sight of God.<sup>127</sup>

The prelates stand on the other side with their own tenets: "the prelates profess in public, 'That no ceremony no bishop, no bishop no king.'" They are identified as those who seek to add to God's worship: "The pomp of ceremonies and pride of prelacy are pillars artificially wrought by the wit of man."<sup>128</sup>

For Calderwood, the fundamental authority of the Church was the Word of God: "That the worship of God, and the government of the kirk, which is the house of God, are to be learned out of his own Word, is a

---

<sup>126</sup> David Calderwood, *The Pastor and the Prelate or Reformation and Conformity Shortly Compared* (Philadelphia: Published by Samuel Agnew, 1844), 13.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

truth against which the gates of hell shall never prevail.”<sup>129</sup> This meant that the Church had no power to do anything without divine institution:

We ought humbly to acknowledge, that the kirk hath no power . . . to make new laws, or to institute any new office or office-bearer, any minister, or part of ministration in the house of God. But that it is her part to see the will of God obeyed, and to appoint canons and constitutions for the orderly and decent disposing of things before instituted.<sup>130</sup>

In both government and worship the distinguishing feature of the pastor was his submission to Christ as the lawgiver of the Church while the prelate was characterised as making himself a new lawgiver. The pastor only acknowledges “pastors, teachers, elders and deacons, appointed by Christ, as sufficient for the weal of the kirk”. The prelate “setteth up one hierarchy of archbishops and lord-bishops, . . . and suffragans, deans, archdeacons, officials, &c., never named in Scripture”.<sup>131</sup> In worship the pastor “feareth defection, and still urgeth reformation, till every thing be done in the house of God according to the will of God”. The prelate “resteth in his indifference and lukewarmness, and rather inclineth downward to farther defection, than aimeth at any higher reformation”.<sup>132</sup> Whereas the pastor “giveth no power to the kirk to appoint other things in the worship of God, than are appointed already by Christ, the only lawgiver of his kirk”; the prelate, “as a new lawgiver, will appoint new rites and mystical signs in the kirk”.<sup>133</sup>

*The Pastor and the Prelate* gave a systematic presentation of the constitutional position. The necessity of scriptural institution and the rejection of human innovations were fundamental to the constitution of the Church. Government and worship are both bound to the constitutional principle. That principle limits the exercise of ecclesiastical power which in turn regulates the way God is to be worshipped. Subordinate standards articulate the principle and subscription avows it.

---

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, 18.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, 57, 58.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

## 7. The constitutional principle revived

The constitutional crisis was brought to a climax with the extreme policy of James' son and successor, Charles I. He was determined, according to K. M. Brown, "to go beyond his father's moderate Episcopalian policies and to exploit further the Erastian role of bishops in the state. More dangerously, he insisted on the enforcement of the Five Articles of Perth, and on introducing Anglican- and Arminian-inspired liturgical innovations."<sup>134</sup> The summit of this policy was reached with the introduction of a new service-book which had been drawn up by Archbishop Laud. As described by Thomas M'Crie (the Younger), Laud's liturgy went beyond the English service-book by "much more nearly resembling the popish breviary; and in various points, particularly in the communion-service, borrowing the very words of the mass-book".<sup>135</sup>

In defending the Church against these encroachments the leaders of the second reformation occupied the ground which had already been established for them. The "Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies", penned by George Gillespie and published in 1637, appeals first and foremost to the constitutional principle of the Church:

The Church of Scotland was blessed with a more glorious and perfect reformation than any of our neighbour churches. The doctrine, discipline, regiment, and policy established here by ecclesiastical and civil laws, and sworn and subscribed unto by the king's majesty and several presbyteries and parish churches of the land, as it had the applause of foreign divines, so was it in all points agreeable unto the word.<sup>136</sup>

Gillespie dealt with his opponents' arguments one by one, and proved from Scripture with the assistance of reformed authorities that the ceremonies were neither necessary, expedient, lawful, nor indifferent. He was able to assert the last point on the basis of the National Covenant: "the ceremonies are not things indifferent to the Church of Scotland, because she did abjure and repudiate them by a most solemn and general oath". Such ceremonies, even if they were indifferent in themselves, "cannot be indifferently embraced and used by the Church

---

<sup>134</sup> K. M. Brown, "Charles I", in *DSCHT*, 165.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas M'Crie, *Story*, 140.

<sup>136</sup> George Gillespie, "A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies", in *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, and Oliver & Boyd, 1844), viii.

of Scotland” because that Church has “given her great oath solemnly to the God of heaven” that she detests “ceremonies . . . brought in the kirk of God, without or against the Word of God”.<sup>137</sup>

The friends of reformation immediately rallied under the banner of the National Covenant. The length to which the Church had defected was measured by this sacred bond. The imposition of the ceremonies, according to Gillespie, meant that “the Church of Scotland hath treacherously broken her bonds of oath and subscription wherewith other churches about us were not so tied”. As a result there was a fearful expectation “that after so many mercies, so great long-suffering, and such a long day of grace, all despised, he is to send upon us such judgments as should not be believed though they were told”.<sup>138</sup> For Samuel Rutherford the defection of the Church had almost signalled her complete desolation: “Our Service Book is proclaimed with sound of trumpet. The night is fallen down upon the prophets! Scotland’s day of visitation is come. It is time for the bride to weep, while Christ is a-saying that He will choose another wife.”<sup>13</sup> With his keen sense of vision, however, Rutherford could perceive a coming day of revival: “But our sky will clear again; the dry branch of cut-down Lebanon will bud again and be glorious, and they shall yet plant vines upon our mountains.”<sup>139</sup>

As soon as the service-book was introduced on the 23rd of July, the reformation sprang into action once more. Rioting ensued, and eventually “petitions and remonstrances poured into the privy-council” for the suppression of the service-book.<sup>140</sup> Instead of conciliating the petitioners Charles issued a new proclamation, “enjoining strict obedience to the canons, and instant reception of the service-book, condemning all the proceedings of the supplicants . . . and discharging all their public meetings, under pain of treason”.<sup>141</sup> All that now remained for the petitioners was to appeal to the court of Heaven, and this was promptly carried out by means of renewing the Covenant. Those who were commissioned to represent the petitioners before the privy council, “considering the critical state both of Church and nation, agreed to renew the national covenant, with a bond applicable to the present

---

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*, 209.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>139</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984 rpt.), 191, 192.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *Story*, 142.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, 143.

conjunction”.<sup>142</sup> Two additions were made to the Covenant. The first was a legal warrant drawn up by Archibald Johnston of Warriston listing the numerous Acts of Parliament which had established the Reformed religion. This was followed by a second addition from Alexander Henderson designed to apply the bond to the present crisis.<sup>143</sup> It was solemnly subscribed on 28th February 1638, in Greyfriars Church, and subsequently found support across the land.

About the end of March or beginning of April, Alexander Henderson delivered a sermon on Psalm 110:3, which expresses the mood and the mind of the covenanters. A general feeling prevailed among them that they were experiencing the Lord’s power recalling the Church from its past defections. On this special day of humiliation Henderson remarked,

There has been a day of defection in this land this time past, and now there is a time of the Lord’s power in bringing back this defection again: and indeed this very instant time that now is is an hour of that day of the Lord’s power. . . . The Lord did arise and manifested his power when the enemies were become insolent, and when they had determined that they would set up such a [mode] of worship as they thought meet, and noways according to the pattern shown upon the mount.<sup>144</sup>

While it was a fresh experience of God’s power it was not a new cause. Henderson explained,

it is God’s cause ye have in hand, and it is no new cause to us. It is almost sixty years old; it is no less since this same Confession of Faith was first subscribed and sworn to. And it has been still in use yearly to be subscribed and sworn to in some parts, among some in this land, to this day. And I think it would have been so in all the parts of the land if men had dreamed of what was coming upon us.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, 145.

<sup>143</sup> See D. Hay Fleming, *The Story of the Scottish Covenants* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1904), 31; J. D. Douglas, “National Covenant”, in *DSCHT*, 620.

<sup>144</sup> Alexander Henderson, *Sermons, Prayers, and Pulpit Addresses* (Edinburgh: John Maclaren, 1867), 16, 17.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, 20.

The additions made to the Covenant were regarded as being interpretative of the original document: “Whatever is added to it at this time, it is nothing but an interpretation of the former part; and if men will be willing to see the right, they may see that there is nothing in the latter part but that which may be deduced from the first.”<sup>146</sup> There was no thought of altering the constitution of the Church, but only of setting forth the true intent of the constitution as it applied to new challenges: “And in the [keeping?] of a Covenant we are not bound to keep only these same words that were before, but we must renew it; and in the renewing thereof we must apply it to the present time when it is renewed, as we have done, renewed it against the present ills.”<sup>147</sup> It was only because the Covenant had suffered from “sinister glosses” that there was a need to provide further explanation:

For the first part of this Confession of faith, there is not a word changed in it; and if so be that men had kept that part of it free of sinistrous glosses, and had applied it according to the meaning of those who were the penners thereof, there needed not to have such a thing ado as there is now; but because they have put sinistrous glosses upon it now and misapplied it, therefore it behoved to be explained and applied to the present time.<sup>148</sup>

In presenting the claims of the Covenant to his audience Henderson spoke of five duties which the subscriber was obliged to perform. First, “constantly to adhere unto and defend the true religion”. Secondly, “That ye suspend and forbear the practice of all novations already introduced in the matters of the worship of God . . . till they be tried and allowed in free assemblies and in parliaments”. Thirdly, “We promise and swear against the Service-book, Book of Canons, and High Commission, with all other innovations and ills contained in our Supplications, Complaints, and Protestations”. Fourthly, “to stand to the defence of the king’s majesty, in the defence and preservation of true religion: as also, every one of you to the mutual defence of another in the same cause”. Fifthly, “to keep yourselves within the bounds of your Christian liberty, and to be good ensamples to others in all godliness, soberness, and righteousness, and of every duty ye owe both to God and

---

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, 20, 21.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, 28.

man”.<sup>149</sup> In summary, the Covenant bound the subscriber to maintain the true religion, the freedom of the Church, its purity of worship, the king’s majesty and his subjects, and vital godliness.

By renewing the Covenant the subscribers only intended to bring the Reformed Church of Scotland back to its established constitution and to protect that constitution from misinterpretation. As expressed by the legal addition to the Covenant, the purity of religion which was desired was nothing more than “that purity of religion, and liberty of the Church” as it “was used, professed, exercised, preached, and confessed, according to the reformation of religion in this realm”.<sup>150</sup> By adhering to the attainments of the first reformation the covenanters effectively secured the liberties and privileges of the Church as they were grounded upon the Word of God. This point is explicitly stated in the practical addition to the Covenant, which takes up the original obligation to defend the true religion “as it was then reformed, . . . and which hath been for many years, with a blessing from heaven, preached and professed in this kirk and kingdom, as God’s undoubted truth, grounded only upon his written Word”.<sup>151</sup> Thus the “second reformation”, as it has come to be called, was essentially the renewal and consistent application of the constitution of the first reformation.

With the revival of the constitution there was a renewed emphasis given to the Word of God as the fundamental authority of the Church and its worship. To quote one of Alexander Henderson’s sermons from 1638:

For, if it can be said that there is no warrant from the truth of God for that which we do, it is enough to convict us that it is wrong. If any error were never so gross, and had never so many arguments against it, yet this is sufficient to confute the error thereof, that it is not commanded in the Word of God. . . . So that whatever we do in God’s worship, it is either written in God’s Word, or else we have no persuasion for it: or if we think we have a persuasion, yet it is nothing else but a presumption, if it be not written in God’s Word.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, 28-30.

<sup>150</sup> “The National Covenant” in *Westminster Confession*, 350.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, 352.

<sup>152</sup> Alexander Henderson, *Sermons*, 47.

If the conflicts of the previous fifty years had taught the reformers anything, it was the need to apply this rule consistently to all matters pertaining to God's worship, even the least: "indeed, there are some things in religion not fundamental, but oft-times this is ill applied also; for at the first we will think that to be but a little matter, which in end will turn to a pest and great infection." Hence every detail of God's worship must be warranted by God: "We must not only take heed not to change anything that is fundamental, but we must also take heed that we obey nothing, which is not warranted by God himself in the matters of his worship."<sup>153</sup>

Basically the same points were made by Samuel Rutherford. In his volume of 1642, entitled, *Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Paul's Presbytery in Scotland*, he sets forth the Church's commitment to its fundamental constitutional principle:

We acknowledge the Scriptures of God contained in the Old and New Testament to contain the whole doctrine of faith and good manners; our Covenant rejecteth all traditions contrary, without and beside the Word of God, and so it rejecteth all religious observances, all human Ceremonies, all religious symbolical signs, all new means of worshipping God, all images, positive Rites which have any influence in God's worship as will-worship, and impious additions to God's Word.<sup>154</sup>

At a later period, in *The Divine Right of Church Government*, Rutherford reiterated Henderson's application of this rule to the smallest details of God's worship:

We urge the immutability of Christ's Laws, as well in the smallest as greatest things, though the Commandments of Christ be greater or less in regard of the intrinsical matter; as to use water in Baptism or to Baptise is less than to Preach Christ and believe in him, 1 Cor. 1.17, yet they are both alike great, in regard of the Authority of Christ the Commander, Matt. 28.18, 19. And it's too great boldness to alter any commandment of Christ for the smallness of the matter, for it lieth upon our conscience, not because it is a greater or a lesser thing, and hath degrees of

---

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>154</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Paul's Presbytery in Scotland* (London: Printed for John Bartlet, 1642), 308, 309.

obligatory necessity lying in it for the matter; but it tieth us for the Authority of the Law-giver.<sup>155</sup>

This comprehensive application of the rule was necessitated because the advocates for human ceremonies had argued that such things might be justified as circumstances of worship. It was maintained that circumstances which were not forbidden were lawful if they were edifying. Their reformed opponents quickly saw that this argument effectively created a class of religious actions which were beside the Word in matters of faith and worship. Their response was clear and concise: any action which served as a means of worship was a moral action and required the warrant of God's Word. To the point, Rutherford asserted, "In actions or Religious means of Worship, and actions Moral, whatever is beside the Word of God is against the Word of God".<sup>156</sup>

The second reformation theologians became very precise in their definition of a circumstance of worship, and in providing that definition they made a positive contribution to the reformed tradition's understanding of the nature of worship. Genuine circumstances, they argued, are non-religious and merely facilitate the performing of that action which God has prescribed. As Rutherford explained, "there be means of Worship, or Circumstances Physical, not Moral, not Religious, as whether the Pulpit be of stone or of timber, the Bell of this or this Metal, the house of Worship stand thus or thus in Situation".<sup>157</sup> A circumstance was deemed to have no religious significance whatsoever; it was simply that without which the action as an action could not be performed. The same explanation was provided by George Gillespie, who carefully distinguished between "common circumstances and sacred ceremonies" in a sermon before the House of Commons:

I know the Church must observe rules of order and conveniency in the common circumstances of Times, Places, and Persons; but these circumstances are none of our holy things: they are only prudential accommodations, which are alike common to all human Societies, both Civil and Ecclesiastical; wherein both are directed by the same light of nature, the common rule to both in

---

<sup>155</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: printed by John Field, 1646), 19, 20.

<sup>156</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right*, 119. The pagination is disordered and should read 109.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

all things of that kind; providing always, that the general rules of the Word be observed.<sup>158</sup>

Two basic marks characterised a “circumstance”. First, “these circumstances are none of our holy things”, meaning that they have no religious value; and secondly, “they are only prudential accommodations”, that is, convenient means for carrying out the action required by God.

In summary, the second reformation leaders took up the constitutional ground which had been prepared for them. They renewed the Covenant and revived the principle that Church power is grounded in, founded upon, and bound to the Word of God. By carefully interpreting this principle they prepared the way for its consistent application to every detail of Church order.

## **8. Second reformation attainments**

The work of the General Assembly from 1638 to 1640 was mostly concerned with reconstruction. The various disorders in government and worship which had crept into the Church were individually addressed and removed. In 1640 and 1641 the Church was given a new focus. South of the border the English were participating in their own work of reformation by means of the Puritan revolution. Unlike the king, the Parliament heeded the petitions of its citizens and initiated a “root and branch” reform of the Church. As many of the conflicts in Scotland were the result of the king’s desire for uniformity in all his kingdoms, it occurred to the Scots that co-operation with the reforming Church of England might lead to a new type of uniformity which prohibited royal intrusion and preserved the unity and peace of the Church. Hence, “even at that early period”, writes Thomas M’Crie (the Younger), “the Scots contemplated, and earnestly pleaded for, a uniformity in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, between the two Churches of England and Scotland”.<sup>159</sup> The prosecution of this plan eventually led to the adoption of new standards regarded as the attainments of the second reformation.

---

<sup>158</sup> George Gillespie, *A Sermon Preached Before the Honourable House of Commons at their late solemn fast*, Wednesday, 27th March 1644 (London: Printed for Robert Bostock, 1644), 29. The phrase, “common circumstances and sacred ceremonies”, is from the margin.

<sup>159</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *Story*, 192.

In 1642 the Parliament's firm commitment to resist the king's claim to absolute power and to seek the redress of grievances had led to the outbreak of civil war. On 12th June 1643, it passed an Ordinance calling for "an Assembly of learned and godly Divines, and others, to be consulted with by the Parliament, for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England; and for vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the said Church from false aspersions and interpretation".<sup>160</sup> Prelatical government was removed with the resolution "that such a government shall be settled in the Church as may be most agreeable to God's holy Word, and most apt to preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other Reformed Churches abroad".<sup>161</sup> It is important to observe that the Ordinance recognised, first, that the Church of Scotland was already "Reformed", and secondly, that it might serve along with other reformed churches as a model for the reformation of the Church of England.

As the military situation worsened in England the possibility of a royal victory threatened the work of reformation altogether and convinced the Parliament that it needed the aid of the Scots. An alliance was entered into under the terms of "the Solemn League and Covenant". It is quite possible that Robert Baillie was polarising the situation but he seems to have summed up the sentiment of each party when he wrote, "The English were for a civil League, we for a religious Covenant".<sup>162</sup> While negotiations resulted in a combination of both it must be said with D. C. Lachman that "the Solemn League and Covenant, as thus agreed, was first of all a religious covenant".<sup>163</sup> The civil terms are brought in only after the religious points have been settled, and there is no doubting the fact that civil co-operation is promised solely on the condition that religious reformation is pursued. The Solemn League and Covenant was drafted by Alexander Henderson, and approved by the Convention of Estates and by the General Assembly on 17th August, and by the

---

<sup>160</sup> "An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, for the calling of an Assembly", etc, "12th June 1643", in *Westminster Confession*, 13.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, ed. David Laing, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1841-1842), 90.

<sup>163</sup> D. C. Lachman, "Solemn League and Covenant", in *DSCHT*, 786. D. Hay Fleming, *Story of the Scottish Covenants*, 36, footnote, has drawn attention to the fact that "an international Protestant league was not a new idea", and refers to a similar proposal by the Convention at Edinburgh in 1572 as well as the League that was concluded at Berwick-on-Tweed in 1586.

Westminster Assembly and the English Parliament with slight alterations. According to D. Hay Fleming, “In Scotland it evoked more enthusiasm than in England; and, for a time at least, produced marvellous unanimity”.<sup>164</sup>

Like the Ordinance of Parliament the Solemn League and Covenant recognised that the Church of Scotland was already “reformed in religion” while the kingdoms of England and Ireland still required the reformation of religion “in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the Word of God, and the example of the best reformed Churches”.<sup>165</sup> Unlike the Ordinance, however, the new bond of union made it a point of avowed duty before God “to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of Church-government, directory for worship and catechising; that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us”.<sup>166</sup>

On the basis of this new arrangement the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland sent commissioners to the kingdom of England “to propone, consult, treat, and conclude” with the assembly of divines. “Full power and commission” was given to Alexander Henderson, Robert Douglas, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Baillie, and George Gillespie, Ministers, John Earl of Cassilis, John Lord Maitland, and Sir Archibald Johnstoun of Warristoun, Elders, “or any three of them, whereof two shall be Ministers.” They were to concern themselves “in all matters which may further the union of this Island in one Form of Kirk-government, one Confession of Faith, one Catechism, one Directory for the worship of God”, and “to do all things which may further the so much desired union, and nearest conjunction of the two Churches of Scotland and England”, but always to act in submission to the Assembly’s instructions.<sup>167</sup>

Neither the Church nor its commissioners considered the Assembly of divines an ecclesiastical court with power to establish the doctrine, worship, discipline, or government of the Church. In the eyes of Robert Baillie it was “no proper Assembly, but a meeting called by

---

<sup>164</sup> D. Hay Fleming, *Story of the Scottish Covenants*, 37.

<sup>165</sup> “The Solemn League and Covenant”, in *Westminster Confession*, 359.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> “Commission of the General Assembly to some Ministers and Ruling Elders, for repairing to the Kingdom of England”, in *Westminster Confession*, 15.

Parliament to advise them in what things they are asked”.<sup>168</sup> The commissioners themselves only acted in an advisory capacity to what was already an advisory body. They participated in discussions but did not vote, and they “met frequently with a committee from the Assembly and Parliament to discuss the acceptability to the Scottish Kirk and nation of the work in progress”.<sup>169</sup>

The advice of the commissioners generally aimed at presenting and pressing the reformed constitution of the Scottish Church as a model worthy of imitation. This is made plain in a volume published by the commissioners in 1644, in which they undertook to vindicate the reformation of Church government in Scotland.<sup>170</sup> They expressed their delight in the work of reformation “unto which an entrance is made by a solemn League and Covenant”, but found it necessary, as a result of prejudices and misrepresentations,

to give that testimony unto the order and government of the Reformed Churches, and particularly of the Church of Scotland, which they do well deserve, and to honour them whom the Lord hath so highly honoured, in advancing the Kingdom of his Son, in the converting and saving of so many souls, and in opposing and suppressing a world of corruptions, Heresies, and Schisms, by his wonderful blessing upon their order and Government.<sup>171</sup>

Their own reforming predecessors were commended because “they had no other rule and pattern of reformation but the Word of God, and the practice of the Apostolic Churches in the Word”.<sup>172</sup> They certainly “made use of the light which such notable servants of Jesus Christ did hold forth, in doctrine and discipline, and in all thankfulness they did desire and wish, that their names might be had in eternal remembrance”; but “they looked with singleness of mind to the rule of Scripture”.<sup>173</sup> Their steadfastness in observing this rule was also praised: “What they had once received, not upon probable grounds in way of

<sup>168</sup> Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:186.

<sup>169</sup> S. B. Ferguson, “Westminster Assembly and Documents”, in *DSCHT*, 863.

<sup>170</sup> *Reformation of church-government in Scotland, cleared from some mistakes and prejudices, by the commissioners of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, now at London* (Printed for Robert Bostock, 1644).

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*, 1, 2.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, 9, 10.

conjecture, but upon the warrant of the Word, and by the teaching of the Spirit, with certainty of faith, that they resolved to hold fast, and did hate every false way contrary unto it.”<sup>174</sup> Special attention was given to their rejection of scepticism on the basis that it “keepeth the mind uncertain, unstable”, and “is a fountain of perpetual alterations in the Church of God, an open door to all heresies and schisms to enter by, and a ground of despairing to bring questions and controversies to a final issue and determination”.<sup>175</sup>

The stance of the commissioners in entering into discussion on reformation was one of openness and commitment. There was an openness to further reformation according to the Word but also a resolution to abide by the attainments of the reformation to which they had subscribed:

And for us . . . we are most willing to hear and learn from the Word of God, what needeth further to be reformed in the Church of Scotland: Yet God forbid, that we should never come to any certainty of persuasion, or that we should ever be learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth; we ought to be resolute and unmoveable in so far as we have attained; and this we take to be the ground, as of other practices, so also of Covenants and Oaths, both assertory and promissory, in matters of Religion.<sup>176</sup>

So far as their own affiliation was concerned,

we account it no small happiness, that we have been educated in the Church of Scotland, and are acquainted with the practice of Church-government there, which giveth us much light and confidence against such scruples and doubtings as are powerful enough to suspend the assent of others, who by reason of their education in other Churches, are strangers unto it.<sup>177</sup>

Any suggestion that it might have been better to be “left to ourselves to be moulded by our own private thoughts” was repudiated.<sup>178</sup>

Attention was also given to the high esteem in which the reformation in Scotland had been held by others: “the Church of

---

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, 6, 7.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*

Scotland was honoured from abroad, both from England and other Nations, with the testimony of such a Reformation, as other Churches accounted to be the greatest happiness upon earth, and when they were wishing after a Reformation, they made it the measure of their wishes.”<sup>179</sup> The English brethren were reassured that the Scottish considered “the Church of England in the midst of her Ceremonies, to have been a true Church, and the ministry thereof, notwithstanding the many blemishes and corruptions cleaving unto it, to have been a true ministry, and shall never deny unto them that praise”.<sup>180</sup> Nor was there any intention “to ascribe to the Church of Scotland such absolute purity and perfection, as hath not need or cannot admit of further Reformation”. There was, however, an acknowledgment of “a wide difference betwixt the one and the other . . . in the Common Covenant”.<sup>181</sup> After describing the many advantages which had flowed from the order and government of the Church of Scotland, the commissioners concluded with the wish to see the Church of England made a praise in the earth by means of “this Reformation and Uniformity with other Reformed Churches, which all of us have solemnly sworn and subscribed, sincerely, really, and constantly through the grace of God, to endeavour in our several places and callings”.<sup>182</sup>

It is evident from the testimony of the commissioners that they intended to adhere to the constitution of their Church. Any idea that further reformation meant starting from nothing was outrightly rejected. They regarded their own Church order as divinely instituted and lawfully constituted, themselves bound by subscription to maintain, assert, and defend it, and urged it as a model of reformation for the Church of England.

The same attitude was apparent when the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland adopted the Westminster Standards. The Acts of the Assembly reveal two important facts. First, that each standard was properly examined and received because of its agreement with the Word of God and the constitutional position of the Church. Secondly, that the standards promoted the desired goal of uniformity in fulfilment of the obligations contained in the Solemn League and Covenant; and this meant “the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of

---

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, 14, 15.

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government”. Each of these points demonstrates the fact that the reception of the Westminster Standards in no way implied an alteration in the constitutional position of the Church.

First, with respect to the constitutional reception of the standards, the Directory for Public Worship was established and put in execution on 3rd February 1645. Prior to its acceptance the General Assembly “most seriously considered, revised, and examined the Directory . . . after several public readings of it, after much deliberation, both publicly and in private committees”. After due process it was unanimously approved on the provision “that this shall be no prejudice to the order and practice of this kirk, in such particulars as are appointed by the books of discipline, and acts of General Assemblies, and are not otherwise ordered and appointed in the Directory”.<sup>183</sup> The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government was also diligently examined before it was approved on 10th February 1645. The General Assembly indicated from the outset that it desired the establishment and preservation of a form of Church government “according to the Word of God, books of Discipline, acts of General Assemblies, and National Covenant”; and subsequently approved the Form “after mature deliberation”.<sup>184</sup> The Confession of Faith, approved 27th August 1647, “upon due examination thereof”, was found “to be most agreeable to the Word of God, and in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this Kirk”.<sup>185</sup> Likewise, both the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, approved 2nd and 28th July 1648, were, “upon due examination thereof”, found to be “agreeable to the Word of God, and in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this Kirk”.<sup>186</sup>

Secondly, the reception of the standards provided a basis for peaceful church relations and guaranteed the preservation of the Reformed constitution of the Church of Scotland. The title page of each of the documents draws attention to the fact that the standard was “a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland”. This reflects the Acts of Assembly, which declared in each instance that the Solemn

---

<sup>183</sup> *Westminster Confession*, 371, 372.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*, 396.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, 128, 286.

League and Covenant was the motivation for receiving the standard. The reception of the Directory for Public Worship, being the first in the series, gave expression to the “happy unity, and uniformity in religion amongst the kirks of Christ, in these three kingdoms” which was desired by all and “revived in the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms; whereby they stand straitly obliged to endeavour the nearest uniformity in one form of Church government, Directory of Worship, Confession of Faith, and Form of Catechising”. This uniformity was, “in point of conscience, the chief motive and end” of all the civil and ecclesiastical sacrifices which had been made in the preceding years.<sup>187</sup> It was in this spirit that the General Assembly eventually adopted the Form of Church Government, the Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

As far as the Scottish Church was concerned its new standards were intended to preserve, not change, its constitution. Once the three Churches stood on the same Reformed footing the policy of uniformity could no longer threaten the Reformed constitution of the Church of Scotland. The Solemn League and Covenant promoted the work of Reformed uniformity and thereby promised to secure the Church’s constitution. Provision was even made for subscription to the Covenant. The Form of Church Government included the requirement that an ordinand for the ministry “bring with him a testimonial of his taking the Covenant of the three kingdoms”.<sup>188</sup> He was also to indicate “his persuasion of the truth of the reformed religion, according to the scriptures”.<sup>189</sup> Just as subscription to the National Covenant obliged ministers to preserve reformation attainments in Scotland, subscription to the Solemn League and Covenant would have bound the ministers of all three Churches to the attainments of the second reformation.

Finally, the new standards provided a fuller and clearer declaration of the fundamental constitutional principle of the Reformed Church, that all Church power is limited to and regulated by the Word of God. The Confession of Faith teaches the entire sufficiency of Scripture (1.6): “the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence

---

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*, 371, 372.

<sup>188</sup> *Westminster Confession*, 412.

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, 414.

may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”<sup>190</sup> It also binds men to the commandment of God in doing good works (16.1): “Good works are only such as God hath commanded in His holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men, out of blind zeal, or upon any pretence of good intention.”<sup>191</sup> There is no liberty given to any man to require any action of worship which is beside the Word of God (20.2): “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship.”<sup>192</sup> Two classes of actions are identified – moral and positive. In moral actions, what God has not forbidden is indifferent, and may or may not be done; in positive actions, or matters of faith and worship, what God has not commanded is forbidden, and must not be done.

Scripture alone *prescribes* the way God is to be worshipped, and without this prescription the mode of worship is unlawful (21.1): “the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”<sup>193</sup> The Larger Catechism (answers 108, 109) emphasises the necessity of divine *institution*: “The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his Word”;<sup>194</sup> “The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself.”<sup>195</sup> Every action of worship must be positively instituted in Scripture or it is forbidden.

---

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*, 22. Compare Larger Catechism, answer 3, “The holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the *only* rule of faith and obedience”, *ibid.*, 130; and the Shorter Catechism, answer 2, “The Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the *only* rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him”, *ibid.*, 287.

<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, 89, 90.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*, 191.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, 192.

The language of the Confession and Catechisms reflects the work of the second reformation theologians, who had carefully defined the true nature of worship in order to distinguish it from the circumstances of worship. Their precise language came to be reflected in the full and clear teaching of the Westminster Standards. This teaching in turn received constitutional recognition in the adoption of the Westminster Standards. By means of these Standards the constitutional principle of the Church was better protected from misinterpretation and misapplication.

## **9. Conclusion**

In briefly surveying the period from 1547 to 1648, attention has been given to the way the Word of God was received as the fundamental authority of the Reformed Church of Scotland. Little doubt can remain that this was a defining characteristic and constitutional principle of the Scottish reformation. John Knox consistently proclaimed it from the beginning of his ministry, and it received official recognition in the earliest standards of the Church. When the constitution was settled with the adoption of the Second Book of Discipline, all Church power was explicitly grounded in and founded upon the Word of God. The practice of subscription to the Covenant then bound the Church to uphold the attainments of the reformation, and majority challenges to the constitutional authority of the Church resulted in minorities adhering to the terms of their subscription and protesting against human innovations. When Providence opened the door the leaders of the second reformation renewed the Covenant with the intention of reviving adherence to the subordinate standards of the Reformed Church of Scotland, and gave considerable thought to the consistent application of the constitutional principle to the government and worship of the Church. Finally, the adoption of uniform standards throughout Scotland, England, and Ireland was carried out in the hope of preserving the reformed religion in Scotland, and these standards reinforce the constitutional principle that all Church power is limited to and regulated by the Word of God.