

The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland maintains a whole-hearted allegiance to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* — a confession which, for scripturalness, comprehensiveness, and precise definition, has not been bettered. This document, the outcome of several years' labour, was formulated by some of the ablest and most learned Scottish and English divines of the 17th century. It was approved by Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647. After "mature deliberation" it was judged to be "most orthodox and grounded on the Word of God". Thankful acknowledgement was made to God for His great mercy "in that so excellent a Confession of Faith" was agreed to in both Kingdoms, and it was looked upon as "a great strengthening of the Reformed religion against the enemies thereof". It was ratified by the Scottish Parliament in 1649, and again after the Revolution in 1690. The Westminster Confession of Faith has, therefore, the force of Statute law.

It is this Confession that forms the subordinate standard of our Church — subordinate, of course, to the Word of God. There was a time when every major Presbyterian Church worldwide subscribed this Confession. We believe that the Church in Scotland cannot prosper until she returns to the doctrine it presents and the practice it requires.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

WHILE THE TESTIMONY of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland precisely coincides with the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession, there is a certain distinctiveness that colours her particular testimony. This distinctiveness does not lie in any addition to, or subtraction from, the Westminster standards. It resides rather in the Church's adherence to certain doctrines which other Churches have either entirely abandoned, or else in respect to which they hold defective views. These are:

1. *The Headship of Christ*

He is the sole Head of the Church and has appointed Church officers to administer its affairs, distinct from the civil magistrate. These officers possess a spiritual jurisdiction, co-ordinate with, and not subordinate to, the civil jurisdiction of the civil magistrate. But, further, we hold that Christ is not only King of saints, but also King of nations, "Lord of lords and King of kings" (see Jeremiah 10:7; Psalm 2; Revelation 17:14, etc.), and that the State, as such, is under obligation to acknowledge and support His cause and truth. We believe in what is called the Establishment Principle.

2. *The Biblical doctrine of the atonement as presented in the Westminster Confession*

We believe that Christ died for the elect only, and we are opposed to the doctrine of universal redemption, as also salvation by man's good deeds. We stress the

sovereignty of God in salvation, but we also emphasise man's responsibility. Hence, in line with Scripture, we proclaim Christ crucified for sinners, "that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

3. *The doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture*

We disown all theories of partial inspiration. We maintain that the Bible is the Word of God, inspired and infallible, from beginning to end.

4. *Purity of worship*

We oppose the use of instrumental music in the public services of God's house, and at the same time maintain that the Book of Psalms is the divinely appointed manual of praise in the worship of God. Consequently, we do not employ in our public devotions uninspired hymns or mere paraphrases of Scripture.

5. *The exercise of a firm discipline, in the spirit of the Gospel*

This discipline is not lordly but ministerial; it is delegated by Christ to those who rule in the Church (Hebrews 13:7, 17). To dispense with discipline is to dispense ultimately with the Gospel. Without it the purity of the Church is jeopardised.

All the above points have their basis in Scripture, and are enunciated in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

IT NEED HARDLY BE SAID that our form of Church government is Presbyterian. While this aspect of the Church, we admit, is not essential to salvation, still it is a point of divine revelation, and therefore cannot be overlooked. How can the whole counsel of God be conserved if a scriptural government is not established and maintained? While we agree that the rigid detail of organisation which marked the Old Testament Church is not to be looked for in the New, which enjoys greater liberty, yet we do assert that the principal features of the new mode of government may be clearly discerned in the history of the early Christian Church. We are, therefore, to follow the pattern shown us in the New Testament.

An examination of the main principles which entered into the polity of the early Church of the apostles shows that the form of Church government was Presbyterian. The central feature of this system of ecclesiastical government is that it entrusts the rule of the Church under Christ to presbyters or elders in their corporate capacity.

The following six principles characterised the government of the early Christian Church (see Witherow's *Apostolic Church*):