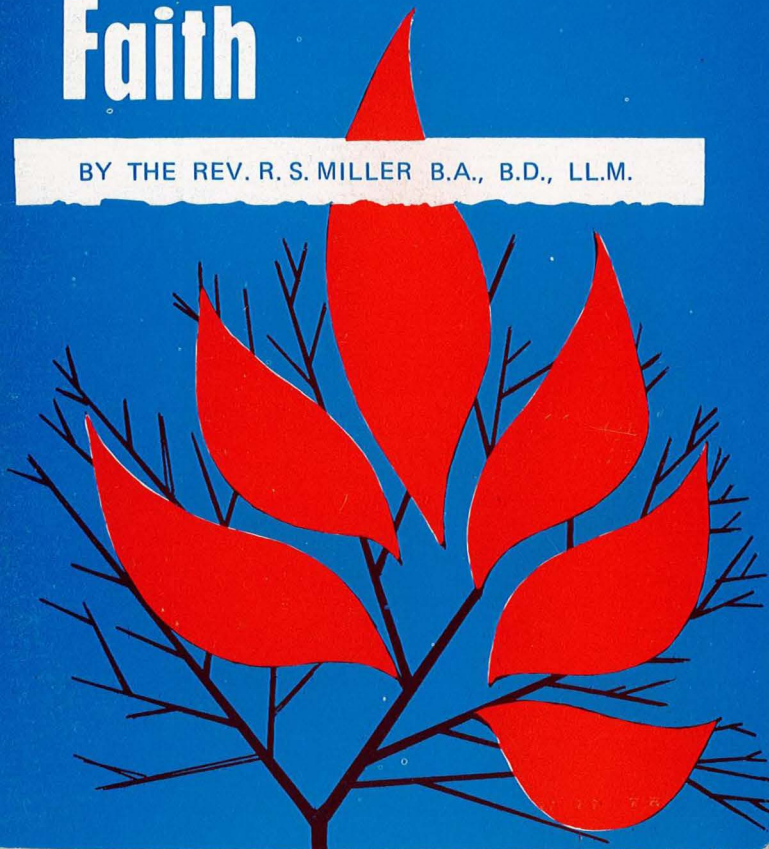


# Our Presbyterian Faith

BY THE REV. R. S. MILLER B.A., B.D., LL.M.



*Our  
Presbyterian  
Faith*

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## FOREWORD

In recent years we have been well served with study books on the Christian Faith in general and our Presbyterian Faith in particular. One thinks of "Basic Christianity" by Dr. John Stott, "Towards a Basic Christian Doctrine" by Rev. R.S. Miller and "Continue Presbyterian!" by Mr L. McKinnon.

However, it is felt that the need has arisen for a brief summary of our Presbyterian Faith for wide distribution to Presbyterians and interested friends so that in a clear and concise manner we might come to understand the reason for the existence of the Presbyterian Church, her place in the total context of the Christian Church, and the necessity for her witness to be maintained in our day and generation.

We are conscious that since the earliest days, Presbyterian Churches have often endured great stress, with recent years being no exception. However, the Presbyterian Church of Australia, through all her members, moves confidently forward under the mighty hand of God to maintain her rich heritage of Doctrine, Devotion and Discipline in the Reformed tradition. As the Rev. Dr. Stuart Parker, late Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Toronto, Canada wrote: "The Burning Bush of Moses was not a greater miracle than the Presbyterian Church. For generation after generation it has been set on fire. Sometimes by incendiary from without; sometimes by combustion from within. BUT IT IS NOT YET CONSUMED!"

The Christian Education Committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Australia is deeply grateful to the Rev. R.S. Miller, B.A., B.D., LL.M., Minister of St. Andrew's Kirk, Launceston, for completely rewriting this booklet "Our Presbyterian Faith" so that it meets the expressed needs of the present circumstances. So that all may share in a clearer

understanding of our noble heritage as Presbyterians, Mr Miller has brought to bear the depth of his knowledge and the warmth of his devotion to our Lord and His Church, and we heartily commend his endeavours to our people.

C.R. Thomas  
Convener, Christian Education Committee,  
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## DOCTRINE

"I am ever more confirmed in the persuasion that the Reformers laid in their Exegesis a foundation for their Dogmatic, and in their Dogmatic built upon it a structure which cannot be demolished, and to which little — compared to their much — has been or can be added".  
**(John Duncan LL.D.)**

### 1. SOURCE

The Presbyterian Church of Australia, as constituted by a union of the six State Churches on 24 July 1901, acknowledges as its "Supreme Standard" and "only rule of faith and practice", "the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments".

Which raises the question: Is the Bible, wholly and entirely, the Word of God? Or does it merely contain the Word of God, in the way that a lode of quartz may contain gold, or a seam of clay may contain diamonds?

The case for the former, or plenary, view of Holy Scripture is strong. How often does the reader come across such expressions as "God said" (Gen. 1:3); "God spoke all these words" (Ex. 20:1, introducing the Ten Commandments); "Thus saith the Lord" (Isa. 43:1; etc.); "It is written" (Mt 4:4ff).

The two leading Apostles of Christ were emphatic, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (or, is literally "God-breathed", 2 Tim. 3:16); and that "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21); the reference being in both cases to the Old Testament.

History and experience confirm the insistence of Scripture, that it is "the Word of God"; and, as such, is "quick, (living, vital), and powerful, and sharper than



any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). Well did the Psalmist write: "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Ps. 138:2).

The teaching of our Supreme Standard in this connection, is the teaching also of our "Subordinate Standard", the Westminster Confession of Faith. This document, in its much-praised opening chapter, equates "Holy Scripture" with "the Word of God written"; and declares that all sixty-six canonical books, from Genesis through Revelation, were "given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life". By way of contrast, the Apocryphal books are denied the status of "Holy Scripture", and are rated simply as "human writings".

That this was the clear and firm conviction of the men of Westminster, appears also from their Larger Catechism. Its answer to the question, "What is the Word of God?" is that "The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience".

At first glance, however, their better known and more popular Shorter Catechism seems to contradict this teaching, with its mention of "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments ..."

We are bound to ask, therefore, what the word "contained" means, in that context? Does it mean "fully contained", as a glass filled to the brim fully contains water? Or does it mean only "partially contained", as in the case of a glass which is a quarter or half full?

Exegetically and historically, there can be only one answer. The Bible is the Word of God, in the sense that it fully contains that Word. That being the case, the word "contained" is well dispensed with, in any description of it. In the mounting theological debate of last century, Professor A.H. Charteris of Edinburgh University wrote to Professor A.F. Mitchell of St. Andrews University: "I am anxious, like yourself, to

avoid that shifty idea of the Word of God **contained** in the Scriptures".

Why did Dr Charteris call it a "shifty idea"? Because it covered and concealed a shifting standard, or sliding scale. Which prompts the question: What would be the effect, in commercial life, if there were no "Standard Weights and Measures"? Would not the result be chaos, with metre, litre, and kilogram varying, at the whim or caprice of the vendor?

In contrast, God's Word is a sure rule, a fixed standard, a dependable measure, Holy Writ, the Word of truth. It has been well said that "God has spoken, and He has not stuttered in His speech".

There is strength in this position. "The Sword of the Spirit", as God's Word is termed in Eph. 6:17, is not a broken sabre or blunted scimitar, but "a right Jerusalem blade", as John Bunyan called it; a reliable weapon, with a keen cutting edge. As witness its power to speak, from the most unlikely portions, and in the most unexpected circumstances, as Bible Society and other reports so often remind us.

The high doctrine of Holy Scripture is impressively set forth in the first chapter of our Subordinate Standard, the Westminster Confession of Faith. Dr B.B. Warfield considered this "the finest single chapter in any Protestant Confession". Dr Philip Schaff pronounced it "the best Protestant counterpart to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the rule of faith".

Its fifth paragraph is choice. Here we have "the central core of the finest chapter in any Reformed Confession". It reads: "We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture. And the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire

perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God. Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word of God in our hearts”.

True, “the Bible without the Spirit is a sundial by midnight” (Coleridge). Yet the Holy Spirit normally speaks “by and with the Word”; that Word being “the place of meeting between God’s Spirit and man’s spirit” (T. Chalmers). And when

“The Spirit breathes upon the Word  
And brings the truth to sight;  
Precepts and promises afford  
A sanctifying light.

A glory gilds the sacred page,  
Majestic, like the sun:  
It gives a light to every age;  
It gives, but borrows none”.

We do well, therefore, to approach the “Burning Bush” of Holy Scripture humbly, prayerfully, and in faith. John Calvin stressed the need for faith: “That the Scripture is the Word of God cannot be known without faith”. J.B. Lightfoot, while teaching at Cambridge, before becoming Bishop of Durham, underlined the need for prayer: “After all said and done, the only way to know the Greek Testament properly is by prayer”. The Scots Covenanter, William Guthrie of Fenwick, urged our dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord must witness the divinity of the Scriptures, and that it is the infallible Word of God, far beyond all other arguments that can be used for it”.

Woodrow Wilson, a Presbyterian who became President of the United States of America, is reported to have said: “When you have read the Bible, you will know that it is the Word of God, because you will have found the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty”.

## 2. SUBSTANCE

On this firm foundation, “The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture” (W.E. Gladstone), the men of Westminster erected the substantial edifice of Christian truth, set forth in the Subordinate Standard of our Church.

In framing their Confession of Faith, they followed the Biblical order of revelation, from God and Creation, through to the Last Things, the things concerned with our final and eternal destiny. In this, they followed the lead of the Ancient Creeds, and of the earlier Reformed Confessions.

In striking contrast to much modern thought, they began with God, not man! They confessed that “There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure Spirit”. They then added, paradoxically, that “In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit” (Chap. 2).

John Calvin regarded the doctrine of the Trinity as “the chief article of our faith”. Herman Bavinck, modern Dutch theologian, wrote: “Now in the confession of the Trinity throbs the heart of the Christian religion”. And he warned that “every error results from, or upon deeper reflection may be traced to, a wrong view of this doctrine”.

Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons, with other contemporary sects and cults, go astray here. They snap the golden thread of the Trinity, with a resultant scattering of the other gems of Christian truth. For truth is a unity. And the tri-une God is the principle and centre of that unity.

The God of our fathers is shown to be sovereign. His sovereignty is expressed, first, in the realm of Creation. “It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power,

wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible" (Chap. 4).

There is no theorising or speculation here. And why should there be? For the Bible commences with Divine Creation: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). And the truth there affirmed, is re-affirmed some five hundred times in Scripture. A point made so frequently and emphatically, must surely be very important.

Man is then presented, as the crown and show-piece of God's handiwork. "After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it" (Chap. 4).

What a fine picture we have here of "Homo sapiens", of man as made in the image of God! John Duncan observed: "We must always remember that man was created before he fell. It is good to take a walk in Eden".

The classic opening sentence of the Shorter Catechism further reminds us that "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever". We must glorify Him in life, here on earth, if we are to experience and enjoy His ever presence hereafter in Heaven.

God's sovereignty is expressed next in the sphere of Providence, which may be thought of as continued creation. The basic teaching is that "God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence" (Chap. 5).

According to a modern song, "He holds the whole wide world in His hands": the stars of illimitable space, the myriad islands of the sea, the tiniest bird or insect on the wing (Mt. 10:29), the wayward sons of men.

The most remarkable instance of the working of Divine Providence in the Old Testament, is to be seen in the life of Joseph. "Sold down the river" by his jealous brothers, he yet rose to be viceroy of Egypt, then the leading world power.

But when his brothers came begging bread, and he had the chance to get even with them, he refused to do so. Instead he said: "No therefore, do not be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life ... So now it was not you who sent me hither, but God" (Gen. 45:5, 8).

The finest statement of this doctrine in the New Testament, is to be found in Paul's letter to the Romans: "And we know that all things work together for good (the Geneva Version of 1560 had, **for the best**), to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Thomas Watson's exposition of this verse is entitled: "A Divine Cordial". It is indeed. It is a sheet anchor of faith and hope.

God's sovereignty is, however, most wonderfully displayed in the realm of grace and redemption. The first man and woman God made did not suffer from environmental pollution. They polluted their environment by their sin (Chap. 6). They thus adversely affected, not themselves only, but also their posterity, down to the end of time. For "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

Since "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), a holy and righteous God, whose gift of free will had been thus abused, might justly have left sinful man to his fate. This is what all deserve, since all are sinners by nature and sinners by practice. We are guilty of "sin, both original and actual" (Chap. 6). Does not the state of society and of the world today, sharply and starkly sheet home this truth?

Ah, but "God so loved the world, that he gave his



only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). One, who considered himself "the chief of sinners", could write: "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ ..." (Eph. 2:4f).

God did for us, what we could never have done for ourselves. He bridged the yawning gulf that sin had opened up; and provided a way into "the holy place" of Heaven, "by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19). The pledge and token of this salvation is "the new covenant" (Heb. 8), or "Covenant of grace; whereby He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved" (Chap. 7).

The Mediator of this Covenant is God's only begotten and well beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; who is our "Prophet, Priest and King; the Head and Saviour of His Church; the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world" (Chap. 8). He was "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance"; being "very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man" (Chap. 8).

Christ's active obedience in life was the necessary prelude to His passive obedience in death; when He really did sound the depths, the sufferings of His soul being the soul of His sufferings. Through them all, however, "The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, has fully satisfied the justice of the Father, and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father has given unto Him" (Chap. 8).

His bodily resurrection is the pledge and assurance of this. "On the third day He arose from the dead, with the same body in which He suffered; with which also He

ascended into heaven, and there sits at the right hand of His Father, making intercession; and shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the world" (Chap. 8).

Man's problem is, however, that "By his fall into a state of sin, (he) has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation". The result is that he "is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto" (Chap. 9). In consequence, if he is to be saved, the process must be initiated by God. And it is so initiated, in what is described as "Effectual Calling".

By this key overture, God "is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call (men), by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; Yet" — and note well what follows! — "so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace" (Chap. 10).

And who is there, who would not readily and gladly acknowledge, with Principal William Cunningham, "that if God had not chosen him, he never would have chosen God, and that if God, by His Spirit, had not exerted a decisive and determining influence in the matter, he never would have been turned from darkness to light, and been led to embrace Christ as his Saviour"?

The benefits which follow, and flow from, this gracious, invincible and irreversible call of God, include "Justification" through faith in Christ alone (Chap. 11); "Adoption" into the family and household of God (Chap. 12); and "Sanctification", which is a life-long process, stemming immediately from Justification



(Chap. 13), and resulting in "the Christianising of the Christian" (J.B. Green).

In addition, just as "faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:26), so great spiritual benefits imply and entail corresponding religious obligations. The responses due by the believer to His Lord, under the Covenant of Grace, include "Faith" (Chap. 14), "Repentance" (Chap. 15), "Good Works" (Chap. 16), "Perseverance" in his Christian pathway and profession to the end of his life (Chap. 17), and the "Assurance" that he is already in a state of grace, and will not come short of eternal glory (Chap. 18).

The commendation of Good Works is noteworthy. They are, of course, not the cause but the effect of salvation (Eph. 2:10). Yet, through the performance of them, "believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life" (Chap. 16).

The Christian is obliged to render obedience to the will of God, as revealed in His Word, and epitomised in the "Moral Law" or Ten Commandments (Chap. 19; cf Ex. 20, Dt. 5, Mt. 5-7, etc). This heaven-minted code of religion and morality (explained more fully in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, whose teaching will repay careful study), is both "a perfect rule of righteousness" and "a rule of life". For "not only degenerate but regenerate man is subject to the divine law" (A. Lecerf).

Our age of increasing permissiveness and lawlessness needs firmly to be reminded that "The moral law does for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof" (Chap. 19). And professing Christians need to be reminded that, "neither does Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much

strengthens this obligation" (Chap. 19). In His preface to the Sermon on the Mount, He said emphatically: "I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Mt. 5:17). He fulfilled the law **for** us; the Holy Spirit fulfils the law **in** us (Rom. 8:4).

It may seem strange that the topics of "The Law of God" and "Christian Liberty" should be dealt with in consecutive chapters of our Confession of Faith (Chaps. 19, 20). But any contradiction is apparent, not real. For "the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free" (Gal. 5:1), is a freedom **from** sin, not a licence **to** sin. "True freedom is not liberty to do as you please, unless you please to do right" (J.B. Green).

Another precious privilege is that of "Liberty of Conscience" (Chap. 20). This includes the right and responsibility of private judgment, to which the Reformers so definitely laid claim. It is good to remember that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith or worship" (Chap. 20). Here is the charter of Evangelical freedom, under the Word and Spirit of God.

The last theme worked out in our Subordinate Standard, is that of man's final destiny. What happens to a person at death? Briefly, his body returns to the dust from which it came (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 12:7), while his soul or spirit comes under the immediate judgment of God (Lk. 23:43; 16:22f).

In choice phraseology, the Westminster divines go on to affirm that "The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies" (Chap. 32). This experience is what mystics have long called "The Beatific Vision".

The alternative is solemn. "And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments

and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day" (Chap. 32). Is such language too strong? Then what of Jesus' teaching as recorded, say, in Mt. 25, or Mk. 9?

Canon H.P. Liddon wrote: "Eternal punishment is certainly taught by our Lord Himself, as in St Mark 9. It is the correlative to Eternal joy. To deny an endless penalty for sin is to deny an endless blessedness in heaven. The same word in Scripture warrants each ..."

But is there no third option, no purgatory, through which the soul can be gradually purified and prepared for the mansions of the blessed? The historic witness of our Church is that "Beside these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledges none" (Chap. 32).

John Calvin had earlier protested: "We should exclaim with all our might, that purgatory is a pernicious fiction of Satan, that it makes void the cross of Christ, that it intolerably insults the Divine mercy, and weakens and overturns our faith".

A greater authority still, our Supreme Standard, informs and warns us that "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

"The Spirit calls today:  
Yield to His power;  
O grieve Him not away,  
'Tis mercy's hour".

The immediate judgment of God on every individual at death, will be followed by a final judgment on the entire human race, at Christ's Second Coming (Chap. 33; cf Chap. 8). Those living will then be changed, and the dead simultaneously will be "raised up, with the selfsame bodies and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls for ever" (Chap. 32).

For "it is the uniform teaching of the New Testament that the redemption of the body is the final act in the

redemption of man. The redemption of the will from sin and the redemption of the body from death are the two foci of the Gospel" (D. Lanont).

What a day of rejoicing that will be! "Then shall the righteous go into everlasting life, and receive that fulness of joy and refreshing, which shall come from the presence of the Lord; but the wicked, who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (Chap. 33).

When will this be? When will the Lord come again, to judge the world in righteousness, and to reward the righteous? If only we knew! Would not the sure and certain knowledge keep us up to the mark? Or would it?

For good and obvious reasons, this remains the "top secret" of the Father. It is withheld from those living, "that they may shake off all carnal security, and be always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be prepared to say, 'Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.'" (Chap. 33; cf Rev. 22:20).

"Come, almighty to deliver;  
Let us all Thy life receive;  
Suddenly return, and never,  
Never more Thy temples leave".

### 3. SPRING

In the foregoing outline of our Presbyterian Faith, we have sought to present "the truth", and "nothing but the truth". But we have not yet given "the whole truth". For any reader, who is at all familiar with his Confession of Faith, will know that we have glided over the Third Chapter, "Of God's Eternal Decree" or plan.

Why did we do that? Why have we kept this topic till the last? For a number of reasons. It is a truth that

concerns believers, and can only be accepted and grasped by them. It belongs more to the philosophy of the Christian religion, than to its daily practice. It can easily be overstated, or unwisely explained.

The consequence is that it has not infrequently become the subject of keen, and even bitter, controversy. With respect, we feel that even the Westminster Confession overstates the matter. Dr A.H. Charteris wrote: "I am a Calvinist. I could not pray if I did not believe in undeserved grace and mercy which come when asked for. But I have always held the expression of Calvinism in our Confession of Faith to be ruthless and hard". Doubtless he had in mind specially paragraphs 3 and 4 of this chapter, regarding which Dr J.B. Green wrote: "I have thought and still think that these sections may be omitted without loss or detriment to any principle essential to the integrity of the Calvinistic system".

Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones found, in Deut. 29:29, "one of the most important rules in the Christian life". It reads: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but the things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law".

Nothing is more clearly revealed in Scripture, than that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13; cf Rom. 9:33; 10:11; Jn. 3:16; Rev. 22:17; etc). One could go through life, staking his all on these and other free and unfettered invitations to pilgrimage.

But some of "the secret things" are also outlined in Scripture, and we may be sure that there is good reason for this. Jesus said: "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that you should go and bring forth fruit ..." (Jn. 15:16). He also said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand" (Jn. 10:27f). He is further spoken of as the "Author and

Finisher", or "Pioneer and Perfecter" of our faith (Heb. 12:2); and as the "Alpha and Omega", "the beginning and the ending", of our salvation (Rev. 1:8).

Paul, however, is pre-eminently the teacher of prevenient Divine grace. His witness, in this respect, is not confined to his Letter to the Romans, though there it comes into sharpest focus. In Ephesians, for example, he magnifies the grace of God, "who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. 1:3ff).

In Romans 8, this teaching is expanded, as the sequel to the Apostle's "Divine Cordial": "And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:28ff).

But it is in the next three chapters, Romans 9-11, that Paul really comes to grips with this high truth of Divine revelation, and secret spring of our salvation. He shows clearly, that God is "the Potter", and we are "the clay" (9:21ff); and that salvation is "not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (v. 16).

And yet, right in the middle of this most predestinarian passage in the whole Bible, three jewels of open invitation are firmly set: "whoever believes on him shall not be ashamed" (9:33; 10:11); "whoever shall call



upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (10:13).

In the long and strong tradition of our Church, the view has consistently been taken, that this testimony to the pre-venience and pre-eminence of Divine grace, is a part, and an important part, of "the whole counsel of God" (Ac. 20:27). John Calvin was thus led to remark that "We shall never be clearly convinced, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the fountain of God's free mercy, till we are acquainted with His eternal election, which illustrates the grace of God by this comparison, that He adopts not all promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what He refuses to others". And this is the ground taken in our Confession.

Some think of the doctrine of Election as a discouraging teaching, if not even a counsel of despair. In our view it is, to the contrary, a ground of encouragement and of hope. It is an encouragement to ministers and missionaries, to "go, labour on, spend and be spent", convinced that the Lord, who has called and commissioned them as "ambassadors for Christ", will call out, convert and consecrate a people through their ministry.

And it is an encouragement to those who hear the Word, to believe that the promises of Scripture are addressed to them personally; and that, if they sincerely embrace the offer of salvation in the Gospel, and follow the Christian pathway consistently and persistently through life, they will make both their "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

Dr A. Mitchell Hunter has written: "Calvin's doctrine of predestination might well have issued in a fatalism which induced a paralysis of ethical endeavour. It actually did the very reverse. It braced men's wills. It saturated them with aspiration. It inspired them to a strenuous and heroic activity which brought about a very miracle of moral revolution in all spheres of life and all quarters of the world".

Wanted today: a rebirth of this massive and manly faith, in the hearts and lives of our people, as we continue the historic witness of the Presbyterian Church, in, to, and from, Australia, to the greater glory of God.

## DEVOTION

"He has an equal right to dictate to our faith, and to regulate our practice. Our obligation consists as much in believing what He declares, as in doing what He commands" (Andrews Thomson D.D.)

### 1. OBJECT

The Second Chapter of our Confession of Faith, on "God", lays down that "To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them". In the 21st Chapter, the direction is that "Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and to Him alone". The last clause sounds strange grammatically, but makes an important point theologically.

That God, and God alone, is to be worshipped, is clear from innumerable passages of Holy Scripture, our Supreme Standard. For instance, Jesus' rejection of the suggestion that He should worship Satan, was drawn from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Mt. 4:10, quoting Dt. 6:13).

The Book of Psalms, the first, oldest and finest Book of Common Worship in the possession of the Christian Church, abounds with such directions as the following: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name ...

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2). "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (Ps. 95:6).

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ..." (Mt. 6:9). He further indicated that "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24).

Paul commenced one of his notable prayers with the words: "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named ..." (Eph. 3:14ff).

John, who was entrusted with the extraordinary message revealed in the Book of Revelation, made the — not altogether surprising — mistake of worshipping an angel. He was quickly told to "Worship God" (Rev. 19:10). Yet he did it again! (Rev. 22:9). So easy is it for man to worship and serve "the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Rom. 1:25).

The older symbol of our mother Church of Scotland, the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), begins with a chapter on "God", the first sentence of which is: "We confess and acknowledge one only God, to whom only we must cleave, whom only we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we must put our trust".

We feel a sense of continuity with that declaration and emphasis, when we commence our Services of Public Worship, as we generally do, with the announcement: "Let us worship God". For, in Tersteegen's phrase, "Him alone, God we own".

The RULE of our Devotion, as well as of our Doctrine and Discipline, is the Word of God. We readily agree that "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" (Chap. 21).

Idol-worship is strictly and repeatedly forbidden in the Old Testament, most notably in the Second Commandment of the Decalogue (Ex. 20:4ff; Dt. 5:8ff). The omission of this Commandment from Roman Catholic manuals is noteworthy. To keep up the appearance of ten commandments, the last is arbitrarily divided into two. Martin Luther followed and perpetuated this unfortunate and mistaken lead, in his otherwise excellent Catechisms.

The 1st Epistle of John ends with the caution: "Keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn. 5:21). Bishop Westcott defined an idol as "anything which occupies the place due to God". The wide range of this principle and prohibition is not difficult to see. This well known scholar added: "This comprehensive warning is probably the latest voice of Scripture"; his assumption being that 1st John is the last of the New Testament writings.

The New Testament also censures "will worship" (Col. 2:23). This is explained by Calvin as "voluntary worship, invented by men, without the word of God". Books of Common Order and of Common Prayer can come into this category, if their use is made mandatory; and they become, not guides, but chains.

The Bible itself is quite the best Book of Common Order and Prayer. Its range and variety are so much wider and richer than any merely human compilation. In due subordination to it, we have also the guidance of our Confession of Faith (especially Chap. 21), and "Directory for Public Worship". These deserve more attention than they commonly receive.

## 2. OUTLINE

The principal elements of public worship are praise, prayer, Bible reading, and preaching. The sacraments of

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are also observed, normally in the context of such worship, and as occasion requires. They have been described as "sealing ordinances"; being invariably accompanied by the preaching of the Word, to which they are "seals".

## [A] PRAISE

The Old Testament Book of Psalms is our oldest hymnbook. It is a remarkable collection of religious lyrics, which were clearly designed for use in public worship; most if not all, with musical accompaniment.

As an inspired Book of Common Praise, the Psalter has the sanction of the earliest ages of Christianity. Its use in the Early Church was extensive. Set to metre at the time of the Reformation of the Church in the 16th century, it long formed the only hymnbook of those of the Presbyterian persuasion.

Though reduced to a selection, spread through the Third Edition of the Scottish Church Hymnary (1973), it is still available in full, in the Scottish Psalter printed with the Second Edition of the Church Hymnary (1929). We are given to understand that this latter edition will remain in print as long as there is a significant demand for it; and we predict a strong continuing demand for it in the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Our Confession of Faith urges the "singing of psalms with grace in the heart" (Chap. 21). Scripture paraphrases were added to our praise, in the 18th century, and hymns in the 19th century. The practice in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (with its roots in the Free Church of Scotland), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (mainly in Tasmania), is still to sing Psalms only, without musical accompaniment. We have friends in both communions, and respect them for their conviction, while differing from them in this regard.

For it seems to us that the New Testament itself envisages a wider range of Christian praise. Thus the

Incarnation was the occasion of quite an outburst of song (Lk. 1, 2). And the worship of the Church Triumphant in Heaven is shown to include the "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Worthy is the Lamb" (Rev. 19, 5). Between this exciting past, and glorious future, the order of reference for the present is surely that stated by Paul, in Ephesians: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19); and in Colossians: "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

And so, while we love the 23rd Psalm (to **Crimond**, or **Orlinton**, or **Covenanters**), the 24th (to **St George's, Edinburgh**), the 100th (to **Old Hundredth**), and the 145th (the second version, by John Craig, to **Duke Street**); we could not, and would not dispense with such God-honouring and Christ-exalting hymns as "Rock of Ages" (Toplady), "When I survey the wondrous Cross" (Watts), "Love Divine, all loves excelling" (C. Wesley), and "Glory be to God the Father" (H. Bonar). At the same time we wonder if this recognised and respected difference could not be regarded as a non-essential?

Sometimes the call is heard for more liturgical responses in our Presbyterian services of worship. But it needs to be borne in mind, in this connection, that the element of praise was brought in by the Reformers for this purpose. Hence the more intelligently and heartily the Psalms and hymns are sung, the more real and genuine is the response of gratitude and praise to the God from whom all blessings flow.

## [B] PRAYER

It is the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith that "Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men;



and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to His will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue" (Chap. 21).

In every public service of worship, prayers are offered by the minister or leader on behalf of all present: prayers of adoration, confession, supplication, intercession, thanksgiving, dedication. "And because the prayer which Christ taught his disciples is not only a pattern of prayer, but itself a most comprehensive prayer, we recommend it also to be used in the prayers of the church" (D.P.W.).

Who would dare to set limits to the power of prayer? James cited the example of Elijah, who prayed for rain when the heavens seemed as brass; and whose experience showed that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas. 5:16). It is commonplace to say that "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of". Prayer has been described as the "mightiest of all instruments which created natures can wield" (H. Martin). Prayer moves the Hand that moves the world.

Yet there are limits to its scope. "Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter; but not for the dead ..." (Chap. 21). Why not for the dead? Because they have passed beyond the reach of the living. Dr J.B. Green has well written: "For prayers for the dead there is no warrant of Bible command or Bible example. Prayer without warrant of the Word is not an act of faith but of superstition".

Prayer, we are told, should also be "in a known tongue". It is not clear whether this phrase in our Subordinate Standard was directed against the use of Latin in the Roman Catholic Church, or the phenomenon of tongues as manifested by the "charismatics" of the day? But either way, the edification is open to question if the language is not understood. It will be noticed how

careful Paul was to regulate the latter exercise, in 1 Cor. 14:26ff.

Should prayer be liturgical or spontaneous; from a book or other composition, or from the heart? Whatever be the presently prevailing practice, it can be said, without fear of contradiction, that our Presbyterian tradition has definitely favoured the use of free prayer. Professor A.F. Mitchell, a recognised authority on the Westminster Assembly, wrote that "Free prayer, which from the first (1560) had been permitted and encouraged, and had latterly, if Calderwood is to be trusted, become general, was now (1647) made imperative on the minister".

Why was it made imperative? The explanation given in the Directory for Public Worship is that the use of the English Book of Common Prayer had proved "a great means ... to make and increase an idle and unedifying ministry, which contented itself with set forms made to their hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the gift of prayer, with which our Lord Jesus Christ pleases to furnish all His servants whom He calls to that office".

George Gillespie, a Scots Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, held that "the man who stirs up his own gifts does better than he who uses set forms". Late last century, Dr A.H. Charteris strongly maintained "the privilege and duty of free prayer". He affirmed that "free prayer is a priceless privilege, a gift of the Spirit of inestimable value, which can never be surrendered". The Preface to the Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland (1940) admits that "The General Assembly by authorizing these books have recognized that the provision of such forms implies no desire to supersede free prayer. Liberty in the conduct of worship is a possession which the Church of Scotland will not surrender". There does not appear to be a comparable recognition, in the Book of Common Order of the Presbyterian Church of Australia (2nd edition, 1965). Why is this?

We have sometimes wondered if the modern Charismatic movement is not, in one sense, a protest against the stifling of the Spirit of God by set forms and liturgical correctness? Three decades in the parish ministry have certainly convinced us that there is more than a passing connection between spontaneity in prayer and atmosphere in worship.

### [C] BIBLE READING

Our Directory for Public Worship recommends the reading of lessons from both Old and New Testaments at every service, normally a chapter from each. The readings, we are told, should be "in the common tongue, out of the best allowed translation, distinctly, that all may hear and understand".

The justification for reading from both Testaments regularly is that "The New Testament is latent in the Old; the Old Testament is patent in the New" (Augustine). But should we read consecutively through the Bible, as the Directory suggests, and as Matthew Henry did, as the basis of his massive Commentary on the whole Bible? Or should we read passages appropriate to the theme of the service? The latter course would surely be the obvious one to follow; while, for the expository preacher, it will often mean consecutive reading.

Living, as we do, at a point in history when there are no fewer than 340 English versions of Scripture, the question arises as to which is to be regarded as "the best allowed translation"?

When called to St Andrew's Kirk, Launceston, in 1966, the writer found the pews stocked with a uniform edition of the Authorised or King James Version (1611), for responsive reading; and he has been content to continue the practice. For that version has proved, in Canon Liddon's phrase, "one of God's greatest gifts to our Church and people". And Dr James Denney

thought that "What a man can't find in King James' version has little to do with the kingdom of God".

But its 17th century language does not become any more modern with the passing of the years. It is not the easiest version, as the writer has discovered, for a migrant population. And if he were to make a change, it would be to the New International Version, the New Testament portion of which appeared in 1974, the whole Bible being expected late in 1978.

But be the version what it may — Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, Living Bible, Good News for Modern Man, or whatever — the important consideration is that it is the Word of **God** that is being read. It should therefore be read distinctly, "that all may hear", and intelligently, "that all may understand".

Like the other parts of public worship, the reading of the lessons has often proved a means of grace. The present Archbishop of Sydney, in his life of Bishop J.C. Ryle, links the latter's conversion with the reading of Ephesians 2, in a Church he had just entered while the service was in progress. It was verse 8 that specially impressed him: "that verse was like an arrow strung to the bow of an Archer Divine, and its flight was winged in mercy straight to the heart of the chosen mortal".

### [D] PREACHING

The Directory for Public Worship further lays down that the "Preaching of the Word, being the power of God unto salvation, and one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel, should be so performed, that the workman need not be ashamed, but may save himself, and those that hear him".

The preacher should therefore be well equipped and well trained. Principal David Brown of Aberdeen outlined three requisites for an ideal ministry: "1. Fidelity

to the doctrines of Holy Scripture, especially as to the way of salvation. 2. Intellectual culture and mastery of the great questions of the day. 3. Evangelical fervour and evangelistic earnestness, springing out of a vivid sense of the natural condition of men, and fed continually by the grace of the Holy Spirit”.

Industry is also necessary. “Preaching that costs nothing accomplishes nothing” (Jowett). To a young minister, John Newton wrote: “I recommend you to be very choice of your time, especially the forepart of the day. Let your morning hours be devoted to prayer, reading, and study; and suffer not the importunity of friends to rob you of the hours before noon, without a just necessity”.

Of the many duties a minister is now called on to fulfil, the most important is still preaching. Principal G.D. Henderson, recent historian and Moderator of the Church of Scotland, was emphatic that “Preaching remains the chief task of the ministry”. Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has further emphasised this point, in his fine volume, “Preaching and Preachers” (1971).

What should one preach? Paul’s ordination charge to Timothy was, “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2). That first. That above all. His own message centred in “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He majored on “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ac. 20:21). But his full order of reference was “the whole counsel of God” (Ac. 20:27).

R.M. McCheyne’s advice was, “Expound much; it is through the truth that souls are to be sanctified”. Professor Charteris wrote: “I think the main work of a minister is to expound Scripture, not to teach from his own experience”. Of the Scots pulpit round about the turn of the 20th century, Dr R.J. Drummond recalled in 1951: “the great source was the Epistles”. “It was strong meat”, he added, “but it fed souls. It was doctrine, but doctrine that was the basis of life and called for practice”.

How should one preach? With or without notes? With a full manuscript; by committing the sermon to memory; or extemporaneously? Examples can be adduced of each and all of these methods being used and blessed by God. The lesson accordingly is, that each must find his own style; and that no one has a right to legislate for others in this regard.

More important than manner, is matter and motivation. The Westminster Directory is specially helpful here. Dr A.F. Mitchell remarked that “Probably the most remarkable and not least useful part of this formulary is the section ‘Of Preaching the Word’ ”.

The seven points made are that “the servant of Christ, whatever his method be, is to perform his whole ministry”. “Painfully (i.e. painstakingly), not doing the work of the Lord negligently”; “Plainly, that the meanest (or humblest) may understand”; “Faithfully, looking at the honour of Christ, the conversion, edification, and salvation of the people, not at his own gain or glory”; “Wisely, framing all his doctrines, and especially his reproofs, in such a manner as may be most likely to prevail”; “Gravely, as becomes the Word of God”; “With loving affection, that the people may see all coming from his godly zeal and hearty desire to do them good”; and “As taught of God, and persuaded in his own heart, that all that he teaches is the truth of Christ”.

## [E] THE SACRAMENTS

The simplest definition of a sacrament is that it is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace. The two Christian sacraments, instituted by our Lord Himself, and observed from time to time in the context of corporate worship, are Baptism (Mt. 28:19), and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:23ff).

Baptism marks the admission of the person into the visible Church; and is “a sign and seal of the covenant



of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life" (Chap. 28).

The teaching of our Church regarding the mode of its administration is that "Dipping of the person into the water (more commonly called immersion) is not necessary; but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person" (Chap. 28).

As regards the subject of baptism, our conviction is that "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptised" (Chap. 28). This rite, as given to infants, has been well termed "the sacrament of prevenient love" (G. Aulen).

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ "for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death"; and is a rich means of "spiritual nourishment and growth in Him" (Chap. 29). It is not a re-enacted sacrifice, as some teach, but a memorial observance — "a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all" (Chap. 29).

The elements of bread and wine are not changed, either by "transubstantiation" or "consubstantiation", into the actual body and blood of Christ; since, for one thing, His risen and glorified body is in heaven. Yet there is a real, though spiritual, presence of Christ in the ordinance, to the faith of true believers.

How often should we observe this sacrament? The New Testament gives no clear indication. Church practice varies from daily, through weekly, semi-monthly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, and half-yearly, to even yearly observances.

Our Presbyterian tradition has leaned to the side of infrequency. The First Book of Discipline of the Church of Scotland (1560) may be taken as expressing the mind

of John Knox and his co-reformers: "Four times in the year we think sufficient to the administration of the Lord's Table".

Four centuries later, Dr G.B. Burnet, in a careful study of "The Holy Communion in the Reformed Church of Scotland, 1560-1960", gave the figures for 1956, presumably the latest available to him. Of 2,290 congregations, nearly a half (1,104) had only two Communion a year; 457 had three, and 648 had four. Thus all but 81 congregations had a frequency of quarterly or less.

But whatever the frequency, the important consideration is the meaning of the observance. This has been neatly stated by Professor William Childs Robinson as follows: "The Lord's Supper is a memorial of a departed Friend, a parable of a present Friend, and a prophecy of a coming Friend". It may be more than that; it is certainly not less. And thus,

"By Christ redeemed, in Christ restored,  
We keep the memory adored,  
And show the death of our dear Lord,  
Until He come".

### 3. OCCASION

The genuine and growing Christian will be sure to have private devotion daily, morning and evening, featuring Bible study and prayer. "These are his golden hours; and when thus employed, how poor and trivial does all that the world calls great and important appear in his eyes" (John Newton).

It is well if, for the Christian household, there can be family worship daily. With us, it includes praise, as well as Scripture reading and prayer. The Westminster Assembly issued a "Directory for Family Worship", as well as a Directory for Public Worship; and it also is worth consulting.

Bible study groups are presently the "in thing"; and they are best conducted within the setting of a local congregation, and related to it. John Newton gave these his warm approval: "I look upon prayer meetings as the most profitable exercises (excepting the public preaching) in which Christians can engage; they have a direct tendency to kill a worldly, trifling spirit, to draw down a Divine blessing upon all our concerns, compose differences, and enkindle (at least to maintain) the flame of Divine love amongst brethren".

But such meetings are additional and optional. Public worship on the Lord's Day is the Christian's first priority. Attendance on this appointed means of grace is obligatory. The teaching of our Subordinate Standard on this point is clear and forthright:

"As it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding men in all ages, he has particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

"This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs before hand, do not only observe a holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy" (Chap. 21).

Did the men of Westminster thus set the standard too high? We do not think so. John Newton wrote: "A sure effect of His grace is a desire and longing for Gospel ordinances; and when they are afforded, they cannot be

neglected without loss". Captain Hedley Vicars, Crimean War hero, recalled that, for several months after his conversion, "the only inward sanctifying proof I could, on examination, bring to assure myself that I had indeed been made an 'heir of Christ', was this longing desire for the Lord's Day".

In his excellent "Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian Standards" (1951), now unfortunately out of print, Dr J.B. Green observes that, "After the wear and tear of six days (man) needs time to lay down the tools of his trade, and to straighten up, clean up, dress up, and look up. The Sabbath is one of God's best gifts to this weary world". We do well to make the most of it.

## DISCIPLINE

"The Moderator's closing address was solemn and weighty. It referred mainly to the duty of standing upon the solid ground of God's Word, and taking that Word as our only rule in regard to all matters, not of doctrine only, but also of government and worship."

(T. Smith, *Memoirs of James Begg D.D.*)

### 1. REALM

The realm or sphere of Christ's present reign over His people on earth is the Church. He purchased this Church "with his own blood" (Ac. 20:28). His promise was: "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

Our English word "Church" (cf Scots **Kirk**, Dutch **Kerke**, German **Kirche**) is a translation of the Greek word **ecclesia**, which is reproduced in our language in such words as "ecclesiastical" and "ecclesiology".

**Ecclesia** is used 109 times altogether in the Greek New Testament. With only three or four exceptions, "it denotes the Christian assembly, the company of Christ's people, the congregation of the faithful. This is the sacred use of the term" (W. Binnie).

The word is used most frequently of local congregations, such as those organised and witnessing in Antioch (Ac. 13:1), Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2), and the seven cities named in Revelation 2 and 3, from Ephesus to Laodicea.

Sometimes, however, the word is applied to a group or cluster of congregations in a particular region or area. Examples are the "churches ... throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria" (Ac. 9:31), and "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2). "The churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16) may even be a reference to the whole visible church; as may Mt. 16:18.

But the highest use of the word is reserved for the ideal or true Church, 'the sacramental host of God's elect', His faithful people in all ages, "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. 12:23), the body and bride of Christ, her Head and heavenly Lover (Eph. 5:25ff).

Our Confession of Faith recognises this distinction between the actual and the ideal. "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; and is the spouse (bride), the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Chap. 25).

By comparison with it, "The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law) consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (Chap. 25).

It can be seen at a glance that the ideal or true Church is a much wider conception than that of the Church actually visible at any time in history, as for example in 1977 A.D. For it comprises all the redeemed, seen in the light of a completed history and of a future eternity. The visible Church, on the other hand, comprises only that portion of the total manifestation of Christianity, represented at a particular period on earth.

In fact a further qualification must be made. Membership of the Church visible is by profession of faith. But even in New Testament times, there were cases of insincere profession, such as those of Judas (Ac. 1:16ff), Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1ff), Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), and possibly Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9f).

Over against these, the penitent thief on Calvary (Lk. 23:40ff) will doubtless not have been the last person to enter "paradise", though never a member of a visible Church.

Membership of such a Church is nevertheless obligatory, not optional (cf Heb. 10:25). And ideally there should, and will, be a correspondence between the actual and the true; vital membership of a Church here being a sign and seal of ultimate enjoyment in the Church Triumphant in Heaven.

The Church on earth today is made up, not only of innumerable local congregations, but also of a considerable variety of wider groupings, including regional, national and international denominations and communions. The most highly organised of these is the Roman Catholic Church, with a visible head in the Vatican.

The other major communions, while constituted as a rule on a regional or national basis, also have their international associations. The oldest of these is the one with which Australian Presbyterianism has been involved from the first: the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, formerly the World Presbyterian Alliance. This was launched in Edinburgh a hundred years ago, on 3 July 1877.



The World Evangelical Alliance is an older, and wider, but looser association, dating originally from 1846. In recent years it has been revitalised, and given a fresh impetus. It is a practical option for those who are not happy about some of the attitudes and involvements of the World Council of Churches, which was formed at Amsterdam, Holland, in 1948.

A professed aim of the last-named expression of ecumenism is the drawing together of the various branches of the Christian Church into a single world Church. The recent formation of the Uniting Church in Australia, from three divergent traditions, is a local expression of that objective.

The U.C.A. includes some, but by no means all, Presbyterians in this country. The Presbyterian Church of Australia continues in strength, both at the national level and in all six States, because of a widespread preference for its tested and proven basis of belief, worship and order.

And we would raise the question whether Christ's will is best performed, and the interests of His kingdom most effectively furthered, by unions of Churches involving inevitable compromise or surrender?

Dr E.B. Pusey, a high church Anglican, considered that "Denominationalism sacrifices money, not principle or faith". Which leads us to ask: Which are more important, economics or essentials?

Dr Pusey further wrote: "Denominationalism, rude as it is, has something earnest about it". And is there not need for earnestness in our Christian witness? His biographer added: "He was no mere enthusiast for unity; the Faith was to him the primary consideration".

The Presbyterian Church of Australia makes no exclusive claim to the grace of God. It professes simply to be "part of the Holy Catholic Church". It regards the Lord's Table as His, not ours; and opens it to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

While conscious of a special affinity to other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed family of Churches in this country, it accepts as allies in the cause of God and truth, all bodies in which it can discern the marks of a true Church.

What are those marks?

In his "Institutes of the Christian Religion", John Calvin declared that "wherever we find the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a Church of God".

The Scots Confession of Faith (1560) added a third mark: "ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribed, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished". Dr G.D. Henderson thought that, in past days, "The Kirk Session may, to use Jeremy Taylor's phrase, 'have too much squinted towards Moses' ", or been too rigid and harsh. But there is clearly an opposite extreme of indifference and laxity, which is also to be avoided.

In a useful handbook on "The Church", Dr William Binnie offered a fourth mark: "the prevalence of vital religion among the members". He suggested that, "In certain circumstances this note may be more trustworthy than any other".

It might be a useful test for us to ask ourselves: Do we discern these marks in our own congregation and communion?

## 2. RULE

The Westminster Confession of Faith is emphatic that "There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ" (Chap. 25). As Paul wrote: "He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18; cf Eph. 1:22f).

It has been remarked that some give Christ a place in their lives, while some even give Him prominence. But He demands the pre-eminence. Preaching on this text, in Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge, Charles Simeon is reported to have exclaimed with vigour: "And He **will** have it! And He **must** have it! And He **shall** have it!"

As it is with the individual Christian, so it must be with the Church. In her public utterance, as on the solemn occasions of ordination and induction, the Presbyterian Church of Australia acts "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church".

This should be, and must be, no mere platitude. Christ rules His Church by His Word and Spirit. We acknowledge that Word to be "the only rule of faith and practice"; and recognise our dependence on the Holy Spirit for its right understanding. Thus enlightened and guided, we must yield Him "the Crown Rights of the Redeemer".

The Lord Jesus Christ, as King and Head of the Church, has appointed under-shepherds "to feed the Church of God" (Ac. 20:28), including the "lambs" as well as the "sheep" (Jn. 21:15ff).

The Form of Presbyterian Church Government lays down that "The officers which Christ has appointed for the edification of his church, and the perfecting of the saints, are, some extraordinary, as apostles, evangelists, and prophets, which are ceased. Others (are) ordinary and perpetual, as pastors, teachers, and other church-governors, and deacons". The "other church-governors" in view here are the "officers reformed churches commonly call Elders".

Note first that the office of Apostle is said to have ceased. "We do not admit that the Apostles had any successors" (A.H. Charteris). Nor do we entertain any mechanical theory of apostolic succession. We are concerned, however, that our Church should show herself to be in the true succession of faith and life to our Lord and His Apostles, the authentic founders of the Church (Eph. 2:20).

Some lay claim to an order of Prophets, and a gift of Prophecy, in the Church today. But the pronouncements from such sources, which have come to our attention, do not impress either for originality or insight.

The suggestion that the office of Evangelist has ceased may be thought strange, in view of the activity, over the past century, of men like D.L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, Wilbur Chapman, Lionel Fletcher and Billy Graham. But perhaps their's may be thought of as specialised ministries, all but the first-named having been actually ordained to the work of the ministry. It is a fact too that most evangelism has been, and is, conducted at the parish level, as Christian people witness to their faith, and ministers "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Regular ministry in the Church is now by Pastors and Teachers. Our formulary lays down that it belongs to the pastor's office, "To pray for and with his flock, as the mouth of the people unto God"; "to pray for the sick, even in private, to which a blessing is especially promised"; "to read the scriptures publicly"; "to feed the flock by preaching of the Word, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, and comfort"; "to catechise", or have a teaching ministry for youth; "to administer the sacraments"; "to bless the people from God"; and "he has also a ruling power over the flock as a pastor".

The pastor is ordained and set apart to his work, by prayer and the laying on of the hands of his fellow-ministers in Presbytery. Principal D.S. Cairns has written that "Presbyterianism is sparing of ritual, but it puts its heart into the few ritual and symbolic actions that it has preserved. Ordination is one of these. The laying on of hands is really an act of believing prayer".

All of our Ministers form a single grade or order. We have no hierarchical arrangement: no Pople, Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Archdeacons, etc. The Moderator, of Assembly or Presbytery, during his year of

office, is simply **primus inter pares**, first among equals.

This principle of the parity (par = equal), or equality in status, of the ministry, is a prime element in our Presbyterian polity. There is a real sense in which it makes every Minister a bishop, with his parish as diocese, in which, in association with his Kirk Session, he confirms his own communicants.

Scottish Church History is, from one point of view, a sustained protest against any and every attempt to impose a hierarchical episcopacy on the Church. John Livingstone, of Ancrum, Ulster, protested (in 1662): "I cannot find it in all His Word". At the turn of this 20th century, Sir William Robertson Nicoll, founder of "The British Weekly", was "thoroughly opposed to Episcopacy as a form of Church government". He thought it "the least democratic of all forms of Church government".

No Church has made a fuller use, than the Presbyterian, of its laity. In fact the name of our Church is derived from the office of **Presbyter** or Elder. We are really the **Elderian** Church! While continuing in their regular lay callings, Elders are ordained to rule and have oversight in the parish, and to be associated with their Minister in a Kirk Session. They also attend to the practical affairs of the parish, particularly its property and finance, with the additional help of Deacons or Managers, who meet in a Deacons' Court or Board of Management for that purpose.

### 3. REGULATION

Though we do not have a personal hierarchy in the ministry, we do have a hierarchy or gradation of Church Courts, for the better ordering of the life of the Church, at the local, regional and national levels.

The oversight of the local congregation, or group of congregations, is in the hands of the Kirk Session. This

consists of the Minister, who is called, and the Ruling Elders, who are elected, by the members of the congregation. The Elders are ordained and inducted into office by the Minister, who, in turn, is ordained and inducted by the Presbytery.

The congregations or parishes of a particular district or region, are grouped into, and placed under the jurisdiction of a Presbytery. Every sanctioned charge is represented in Presbytery, through its Session, by its Minister and an Elder.

Some Presbyterian Churches, such as the Church of Scotland, have Synods as the next court above Presbytery. In Australia, State General Assemblies came, historically, before the General Assembly of Australia (1901); and there is a division of authority between them. State General Assemblies meet normally every year, and are attended, like Presbyteries, by the Minister and a representative Elder from every full charge.

Final authority rests with the General Assembly of Australia in such areas as Missions, Theological Education, and constitutional issues such as Church Union. There is provision also, in the Presbyterian Church of Australia Act, 1971, for a new constitution, which would make ours a National, rather than a Federal, Church; with Synods in place of State Assemblies. But this has yet to be invoked.

The General Assembly of Australia has met, as a rule at two-yearly or three-yearly intervals, in either Sydney or Melbourne. Because, no doubt, of the cost involved in bringing representatives together from such a widespread constituency, it is comprised of only one in four or five of our Ministers, and a comparable number of Elders.

The Presbyterian Church thus gives to its Eldership a controlling influence at the parish level, where the Minister has no deliberative vote; and a full and equal participation with the Ministry in all the higher courts.



And it is of the first importance that Elders should fully avail themselves of these privileges, and thus make their Church in fact a Church of the people.

Of this well tried system, one of the architects, Alexander Henderson, leader of the "Second Reformation" in the Church of Scotland, and a Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, declared: "Here is a superiority without tyranny ... Here there is parity without confusion and disorder, for the Pastors are in order before the Elders, and the Elders before the Deacons ... And here there is a subjection without slavery ..."

Such, in brief outline, is the pattern of Doctrine, Devotion and Discipline we are called on to maintain in the Presbyterian Church of Australia. We believe that its insights are thoroughly Biblical; that it is 'by test the best'; and that we ought to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering" (Heb. 10:23).

We take our stand afresh beside the Burning Bush of Moses' dramatic experience; and we rejoice that, in the honoured tradition of our Church, the Bush still burns.

We recall the story told about a Highland Piper, who was captured by the French, and required to play a martial air for the entertainment of Napoleon. He was then asked to sound a retreat, but explained that he could not do that, for they never retreated in his country!

The call to us today is, not only not to retreat, but to engage in a fresh advance, that will plant the Blue Banner of Presbyterianism in every part of our great Commonwealth, and overseas as well.

NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR  
(Neither yet was it consumed).

