

THE WESTMINSTER DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

JAMES CRICHTON

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

FACULTY OF DIVINITY

1975

ProQuest Number: 11018036

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 11018036

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION		Page	1
Chapter 1	Confession and Community	Page	8
(a)	The Biblical Evidence	Page	8
(b)	The Evidence of the Creeds	Page	11
Chapter 2	The Seventeenth Century Confessions	Page	13
(a)	Europe	Page	13
(b)	The British Churches	Page	15
Chapter 3	Covenant, Confession, Compromise?	Page	19
(a)	The Theology of the English Church	Page	19
(b)	The Theology of the Scottish Church	Page	25
(c)	The Divisive Factor - Government	Page	29
(d)	The Solemn League and Covenant	Page	32
(e)	The Proof Texts	Page	39
(f)	The Westminster Machinery	Page	40
Chapter 4	Why Predestination	Page	43
(a)	The Day and Age	Page	43
(b)	The Supreme Judge	Page	47
(c)	The Biblical Evidence	Page	51
(d)	The God of Predestination	Page	59
(e)	The Author of Sin	Page	63
(f)	Human Freedom and Responsibility	Page	67
Chapter 5	History of the Doctrine	Page	71
(a)	Augustine	Page	71
(b)	Luther	Page	73
(c)	Calvin	Page	75
(d)	Beza and Supralapsarianism	Page	80
(e)	Arminianism	Page	83
(f)	Amyraldism	Page	89
(g)	Federalism	Page	91
Chapter 6	The Westminster Statement	Page	94
Chapter 7	The Doctrine in Practice	Page	109
(a)	Mission	Page	109
(b)	Assurance and Moral Effort	Page	115
(c)	Personal Faith	Page	119
Conclusion		Page	122
Bibliography		Page	126

SUMMARY

In scope this work is both theological and historical. The aim is to recover an understanding of the Christian doctrine of predestination as presented in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

As will be made clear in the Introduction, a part of Church teaching, once prominent, has become neglected and has even been disowned. This work is an attempt to get beyond the ignorance and misunderstanding that surround both doctrine and Confession. It is an attempt to see the Westminster teaching in its context. Whether the view is worth the journey will be known only when the journey is completed.

The first task will be to examine the confessional form and its place in the history and thought of the Church. While the confessional profusion of the Seventeenth Century will be given particular attention, study will be made first of the Bible and the ancient creeds to try and establish the relationship between confessions and the affirmation of community identity, a relationship which will be shown to be highly significant for the Westminster Confession.

The particular situation in which the Westminster Confession was composed will require detailed examination. This will include a survey of both English and Scottish Reformed theology prior to Westminster as well as a thorough investigation of the complicated background to the Assembly. This will set the Confession in its context.

A similar service must then be performed for the doctrine. The prominence enjoyed by the doctrine in the Confession cries out for investigation. So does the relationship of the doctrine to the understanding of God and man. That cry will be answered.

The development of the doctrine from its first formulation by Augustine through Luther and Calvin to the Seventeenth Century will be traced with particular reference to the options open at the time of the Assembly.

In this way the ground will have been cleared for the meaningful analysis of the Westminster statement which will then be attempted.

However, something more is required. In order to get a full, rounded picture of what the divines believed it will be necessary to consider the way they and their successors taught the doctrine. This will be done with an eye to arguments made against the alleged effects of their teaching.

The Westminster doctrine of predestination having been set in its context, historically and theologically, that doctrine having been analysed as theory and studied as practice, the Conclusion will attempt to assess its true significance.

INTRODUCTION

In August 1647 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in its twenty third session, passed an act adopting the Confession of Faith of the Westminster Assembly, "judging it to be most orthodox and grounded upon the Word of God" (1). In doing so the Assembly accepted, without comment, a belief in predestination and reprobation.

In May 1970 the Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine, acting on the instruction of the 1968 General Assembly, reported to the (General) Assembly on the place of the Westminster Confession within the church. In the course of that report it was stated that "the doctrine of predestination, and certain other matters, were a burden on their (ie "many people's") consciences and could no longer be accepted" (2).

The Church of Scotland had apparently changed its mind. A similar change can be seen in other churches within the Reformed tradition.

- (1) Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1842, edited by the Church Law Society (Edinburgh, 1843), pp.158f. The text of this act was printed with Scottish editions of the Confession and is included in The Subordinate Standards and other Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1955).
- (2) Reports to the General Assembly with the Legislative Acts 1970 (Edinburgh, 1970), p.171.

New such a change must have a cause. So the question arises, has more recent study found the doctrine of predestination to be at fault in some important way? What arguments have been raised against it? The 1970 Report offers no arguments. Nor do the subsequent reports of the Panel. The doctrine is said to be a "burden" but no attempt is made to examine this burden. Apparently by 1970 the Westminster teaching was so obviously wrong that all argument was superfluous.

However, arguments have not been lacking in the recent past and are still present in many minds. Indeed the Westminster doctrine has been attacked on several fronts.

In a sense the trouble is that the doctrine belongs to the wrong century. The Westminster Confession comes as "a worthy climax"(3) to the age of orthodoxy, that "age of vast dogmatic systems" (4). The pre-eminence of the Confession within this period is heightened, not lessened, by the appearance of the Savoy Declaration in 1658 for the later production, largely the work of John Owen, is no more than a "modification" (5) of certain parts of the Confession.

(3) E.Reuteley, Creeeds and Confessions (London,1962),p.119.

(4) H.R.Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London,1964), p.15.

(5) A.Cochrane, Reformed Creeeds of the 16th Century (London,1966), p.19

So the Westminster statement remains "the last great creed utterance of Calvinism"(6) and thus, to certain twentieth century minds, a rigid "legalistic"(7) propositional formulation.

All propositional theology is suspect in an age that has learned to mark the distinction between the "treasure" of Ultimate Truth and the "earthen vessel" of all human propositions about the Truth. In this age it has become almost a theological commonplace, at least in some circles, that "a dogma is not a statement of objective fact, but combines cognitive insight with existential concern"(8) and is thus relative. To absolutise the relative is the very thing the old propositional formulae are thought to do, blundering into an idolatrous "elevation of a preliminary concern to ultimacy"(9). So the confessional form itself makes the Westminster teaching uncongenial to some modern minds.

More, in an age conscious that "theology does not go on in a vacuum but in the midst of human and political realities"(10), the Westminster doctrine is suspect because of its historical situation. It was produced by the Westminster Assembly as part of the "Covenant" agreed to by the English Parliament in return for the assistance of the Scottish army in the English Civil War.

(6) W.A.Curtis, History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith (Edinburgh, 1911), p.275.

(7) G.S.Hendry, The Westminster Confession for Today (London, 1960), p.14.

(8) J.Macquarrie, God-Talk (London, 1967), p.143.

(9) P.Tillich, Systematic Theology (London, 1964), vol.1., p.16.

(10) J.Macquarrie, 'A modern Scottish theologian: Ian Henderson, 1910-1969', Expository Times, vol.82 No.7 (April 1971), p.200.

So it is asked, can a document from such a source be an authentic statement of genuine belief? Must it not rather be a compromise, the best one side could wring from the other through the pressure of external forces? Until that question is answered, the doctrine is under a cloud.

The doctrine itself has also been attacked as a doctrine. It has been argued that the Westminster statement is not true to Scripture but is "a product of human logic"(11), while reprobation is said to be no more than an "imagined possibility"(12), "a perverse belief in what God has not decreed"(13). The doctrine has been denounced variously as making God appear the Author of sin, as robbing Christ of His power to reassure the believer by suggesting an unknown will of God, and as denying the freedom and responsibility of man.

In addition, the doctrine is assailed because of the practical results it is said to produce. Briefly, a belief in predestination is held to preempt missionary enterprise, to encourage racism, and to foster an antinomian spirit. In short, the doctrine is harmful in its effect and therefore cannot be true.

These and related criticisms have been voiced over the years and have helped cause the change in church teaching. However, none of this means that the question is settled.

(11) E.Brunner, Our Faith (London,1965),p.36.

(12) J.Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (London,1970) p.303.

(13) G.C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (London,1956), p.107.

On the contrary, the very existence of so many arguments raises a question; if the case against the doctrine is apparently so strong, how did it ever come to enjoy such a prominent place and full expression in the Confession? Were the Westminster divines unaware of these arguments? Or, did they believe they had an answer?

It is the aim of the following pages to examine the Westminster teaching on predestination, to determine the factors that led to the composition of this particular statement, to see what was believed and taught - and why. In a sense the aim is not so much to provide a final answer as to keep open an important question.

This will involve an examination of creeds and confessions in an attempt to discover what caused such formulations. Particular reference will be made to the seventeenth century in order to trace the factors behind the number, length and complexity of these confessions. Perhaps the detailed propositions about God and man will be found to have resulted from more than the naivety of seventeenth century scholasticism.

The immediate background to the Westminster Confession will be studied to see how far the doctrinal statements were influenced by outside pressure. Perhaps it will appear that doctrine was discussed and formulated with more freedom and less disagreement than our ecumenical age would think possible.

Having thus ascertained the reasons why the Westminster Assembly composed a confession in such detail and with such precision the doctrine of predestination will come under inspection. The prominence of this doctrine in the Confession requires explanation and an attempt will be made to uncover the various causes. This will include consideration of the Biblical evidence as cited by the divines and thus lead on to an evaluation of the overall Bible picture. Perhaps the divines will be found to do justice to an aspect of scripture that a later generation has forgotten. The understanding of God and man involved in predestination will have to be made clear. Perhaps the God of predestination will prove to be more than either a lifeless abstraction or a whimsical tyrant. Perhaps, too, man will be found to make his own decisions and carry his own responsibility.

It will also be necessary to trace the development of the doctrine and to assess the options open at the time of the Assembly, including those not explicitly dealt with by the Assembly. Only thus can anyone possibly do justice to the Westminster statement. That statement will then be analysed in some detail. Perhaps that analysis will reveal a doctrine that cannot be simply passed over.

Finally it must be asked, how was this doctrine taught? An answer will be drawn from contemporary sources; sermons, diaries, testimonies. In this way it will become clear what those who framed the doctrine thought they were saying and what part predestination played in their Christian lives. Perhaps the doctrine will be found to occupy a rather different place and to exercise a rather different influence than is commonly supposed.

Perhaps at the end of this study one will be left with a new and challenging understanding of the Westminster doctrine of predestination.

(1) CONFESSION AND COMMUNITY

In the Introduction it was observed that the Westminster Confession of Faith belongs to, and is the typical product of, a distinct period in the history of the Christian church. However, while confessions of faith may be said to be characteristic of the age of Protestant Orthodoxy, they are not unique to it. On the contrary, what the confessions were meant to do is something the Church has always had to do.

Confessions of faith arise out of a basic need. For a confession is the public declaration of the religious beliefs held by a community. Confessions are produced in situations where a community has to establish or affirm its identity. One result of this is that these productions tend to have a defensive cast. This is because, as with all dogmas, "they protected something experienced as a living reality against distortions and misrepresentations and the invasion of foreign elements"(1).

(a) THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

The Old Testament affords evidence of this connection between confessional activity and community identity. There are few confessional forms as such in the Old Testament but this itself is significant.

(1) P.Tillich, Ultimate Concern (London, 1965), p.66.

Although in Deutero-Isaiah the missionary vision hinted at in passages like Genesis XII.1-3; XVlll.18; Amos IX.7; 1 Kings Vlll.41-43 becomes explicit, yet it remains true that the Old Testament religion is largely racial, the faith of a people. The need to formulate distinctive dogmas is not so great when the identity of a community is racially differentiated.

Yet there is the "shema" of Deuteronomy VI.4 which is performing the same function as a confession in a more basic form. So too Deuteronomy XXVI.5-10a and Joshua XXIV.2-13 are more than historic summaries, they are also meant to express the unique relationship between the community and God. A similar point can be made with the Ten Commandments. All these passages, essentially confessional, are attributed to a definite period, the period when Israel was emerging as a distinct people with their own beliefs.

The New Testament supplies more evidence. By some it is rather grudgingly admitted that "even within the pages of the New Testament we can detect the beginnings of a movement towards definition"(2). It is more than that. On investigation it becomes clear that "the element of confession is present in every stratum of the New Testament Scripture"(3).

(2) D.Lamont, The Church and the Creeds (London, no date), p.18.

(3) W.A.Curtis, p.42.

The Gospels provide "a striking abundance of confessional utterance"(4). This, of course, is in a very simple form but remembering the evangelistic function of the Gospels, this abundance is not surprising.

Three confessions are found in the Epistles - 1 Corinthians XV.3-7; Philippians 11.6-11; 1 Corinthians XI.23ff. - which while they are essentially Summaries of the Gospel also show signs of being a deliberate defence against misrepresentation. Here is the defensive element clearly emerging.

Again it appears that this was a time when a new religious group was being formed, a group committed to propagating their faith - Matthew XXV111.19; Acts 1.8; - and forced to differentiate themselves from their Jewish background. Evidence of this latter need is found in contemporary pagan writing, notably in the comment of Suetonius that "since the Jews constantly make disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus, he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome"(5). This confusion illustrates the way in which the outside world tended to regard Christianity as a sect within Judaism. Cf. Acts XXIV.5; XXV111.22.

So the Biblical evidence suggests that a community embarks on confessional activity when it has to establish or reaffirm its identity.

(4) W.A.Curtis, p.34.

(5) A New Eusebius, edited by J. Stevenson (London, 1965), pp.1f.

(b) THE EVIDENCE OF THE CREEDS

The connection between community affirmation and confessional composition is clearly shown in the early Christian creeds. Although it is possible to distinguish between creeds and confessions, yet both perform the same function, both emerge in situations where the beliefs of a community have to be defined or redefined.

A good example is the "Apostles' Creed". This is generally understood to have been compiled for the instruction of converts. "It grew out of the teaching practice of the early church in baptismal and confirmation classes"(1). In its present form the creed goes back to the mid eighth century but in essentials it can be traced at least to the second century and to Ignatius of Antioch, while similar statements are found in Iranaeus.

At the same time this creed bears the "scars of many a theological conflict"(2). Nor is this unexpected, for as Christianity made way into the world of Imperial Rome it had to develop its apologetic on several fronts. Periodically Christianity was seen as a threat to the state, while for many scholars like Celsus it was an affront to true philosophy, and always there was the threat from within, from heresy.

- (1) A.D.Galloway, 'Are the Creeds Redundant?', Enquiry, 1 (January, 1969), p.12.
- (2) W.Curtis, p.63.

Traces of these struggles can be seen in the text of the Apostles' Creed. The very first article - "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" - proves the point, for by this statement "Christianity separated itself from the dualistic interpretation of reality in paganism"(3). Here is the early church "rebuking the polytheism of the nations and condemning Marcionite and Gnostic"(4).

The same defensive element appears still more clearly in the seven ecumenical creeds. Each was the product of a council and each was born in controversy. "Each (council) produced its own credal statement directed against some particular deviation"(5). Thus the church in a time of crisis, reaffirms its doctrine by augmenting it with "the necessary additions"(6) to deal with a particular situation.

(3) P.Tillich, A History of Christian Thought (London,1968), p.20.

(4) W.Curtis, p.402.

(5) A.D.Galloway,p.12.

(6) W.Von Loewenick, 'Origin and Significance of the Apostles' Creed', in A New Look At the Apostles' Creed, edited by G.Rein, (Edinburgh,1969),p.12.

(2) THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CONFESSIONS

(a) Europe

The seventeenth century was the age of orthodoxy and confessional activity because it was the age that followed on the Reformation. That time of ferment created the need for readjustment and redefinition. "The sixteenth century was the revolutionary period in which these changes were made, the task of the seventeenth was the readjustment of the world in consequence of them"(1).

The need for definition was heightened by the divisions among those renouncing the Roman Church. In addition to the main Reformed-Lutheran split the movement called Anabaptism gave rise to numerous sects. Consequently "a confession became the manifesto of a communion which wishes to make clear its difference from another or from all others"(2). In turn this meant that any subsequent adjustment between communions would require confessional restatement.

Another factor, and a very powerful one, was the rise of nationalism and national churches. The unity of the Holy Roman Empire, although never all it claimed to be, had been shattered. For instance when Henry VIII of England rebelled against the pope he also called himself King of Ireland without consulting the emperor "in order to show that he repudiated the temporal as well as the spiritual dominion of Rome"(3).

(1) H. Macpherson, The Covenanters Under Persecution (Edinburgh, 1923), p.1.

(2) E. Routeley, p.6.

(3) J. Bryce, The Holy Roman Empire (London, 1906), p.262.

In Europe the degree of fragmentation was such that the rulers of even small German states attained to unprecedented independence. "Political concepts of unity were no longer imperial but national and correspondingly the unity of the church tended to be conceived in national terms"(4). All this added an impetus to confessional work for strict religious uniformity was seen as a prerequisite of national unity, "the only sure foundation for lasting peace"(5). "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the impetus towards orthodoxy was further strengthened by another traditional belief; that religious divergence was political treason"(6). With the emergence of new nations and states confessional writing was given priority.

The 1555 Peace of Augsburg enunciated the principle "cuius regio eius religio". As a result the princes demanded to know "exactly what a minister was supposed to teach"(7). This political influence was increased when after the wars of religion the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia formally recognised the existence of national churches. In this situation churches had to clarify their position. They had to do so in some detail.

- (4) J.T.McNeill, 'The Ecumenical Idea and Efforts to Realise It, 1517-1618', in A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948, edited by R.Rouse & S.C.Neill (London, 1967),p.28.
- (5) J.MacInnes, 'The Historical Background to the Westminster Confession', The Records of the Scottish Church History Society, 15 (1966),p.57.
- (6) G.L.Mosse, 'Changes in Religious Thought', in New Cambridge Modern History, edited by J.P.Cooper.(London,1970) IV, p.170.
- (7) P.Tillich, History, p.277.

(b) THE BRITISH CHURCHES

In Britain the Reformation left in its wake two national churches, each with its distinct identity. In Scotland the reformed church produced as part of its platform the Scots Confession of 1560, a confession said to embody "the true spirit of our Scottish Reformers"(1). Similarly in England the Elizabethan settlement produced the Thirty Nine Articles of 1563 with an English translation appearing in 1571. Here again are new communities affirming their identities in confessional forms.

In the same way in 1536 Henry VIII had issued the Ten Articles disowning papal authority while maintaining Roman doctrine.

When James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English throne - "his highest ambition"(2) - a new stage was reached in the history of the two churches. With the crowns united the idea of a united church began to grow.

The reasons are not hard to find. James wanted "to impose peace and unity on the church"(3). As King he felt it was part of his office to settle the church question, a viewpoint made clear in his "Basilikon Doron".

(1) The Scots Confession of 1560, introduction by G.D.Henderson (Edinburgh,1960), p.9.

(2) J.H.S.Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland (London,1961), p.206.

(3) M.Ashley, England in the Seventeenth Century (Harmondsworth, 1962), p.39.

Written first in 1598 for the benefit of Prince Henry, the book also made something else clear; that James wanted the English system of episcopal government in Scotland. Any lingering doubts were expelled in 1604 at the Hampton Court Conference when the king exclaimed "a Scottish presbytery agreeth as well with monarchy as God with the devil... no bishop, no king." The Stuarts, holding to a high doctrine of the divine right of kings, believed they had found the answer that they liked and therefore for them it was the only possible answer. So James "strove with tenacity and cunning to bring the Church of Scotland more nearly into line with that of England"(4), and then Charles strove for the same end with equal tenacity but less cunning.

The dream of a united church for the united kingdom was shared by others. The English politicians found the idea appealing because it would help secure their Northern frontier. It was for this reason that Elizabeth, alarmed at the possible consequences of Cateau-Cambresis, had supported the Protestant rebels. "The Scottish Reformation was the English strategic reaction to a very tricky situation indeed"(5). Significantly when John Knox was asking for English help he wrote to Sir William Cecil in the following terms "But, Sir, I hope that ye consider that our destruction were your greatest loss, and that when France shall be our full masters (which God avert) they will be but slender friends to you"(6). The same thought had occurred to the Duchess of Parma who wrote to King Philip of Spain warning him that if "the French once established themselves in Scotland, England is theirs"(7).

(4) G.S.Pryde, Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day (Edinburgh,1962),p.6.

(5) I.Henderson, Power Without Glory (London,1967),p.57.

(6) The Works of John Knox, edited by D.Laing (Edinburgh,1895),VI.p.68.

(7) E.Sitwell, the Queens and the Hive (Harmondsworth,1971),p.125.

Then at another crisis point Knox got word to Cecil through Gregory Railton at Berwick that Mary had quartered the arms of England with those of France and Scotland on her seal. Only then did the English soldiers come.

The 1560 Treaty of Leith/Edinburgh left the Scots to establish their own kind of Protestantism. However, it appears that the English "would have liked to have seen uniformity with their own church"(8). Certainly Cecil had instructed Sir Thomas Randolph, the ambassador to Scotland, "to press this question of uniformity"(9). Yet they were content not to press too hard always provided the religion of Scotland would not afford a pretext for war.

From the Scottish viewpoint one church would help ensure the peace that they were also coming to appreciate. Knox told Cecil "my eye hath long looked to a perpetual concord betwix these two realms"(10). At home his arguments for a new relationship with England were not without weight in the aftermath of Solway Moss. Similarly, "his love of peace" (11) was to be the driving force behind Alexander Henderson in his search for church uniformity. There is not a little significance in the title of his pamphlet "Arguments given in by the Commissioners of Scotland unto the Lords of the Treaty persuading conformity of church government as one principle means of a continued peace between the two nations".

(8) E.Whitley, Plain Mr. Knox (Edinburgh,1972),p.154.

(9) T.M.Lindsay, History of the Reformation (Edinburgh,1964), 11.p.301.

(10) J.Knox, Works VI.p.31.

(11) W.Campbell, The Triumph of Presbyterianism (Edinburgh,1958),p.49.

There was another reason why the Scots were eager to see their own kind of church established in England. In Europe their fellow Calvinists were on the defensive and although it could still be said that in Scotland "their's was a creed that was victorious"(12), yet they could easily foresee the threat of defeat and they knew that the best way to safeguard their position was to ensure an English church Calvinist and Presbyterian.

So it was that the changed political situation in Britain helped bring about a change in the ecclesiastical scene. That ecclesiastical change would involve a redefinition of theology, requiring new confessional composition. This is the background to the Westminster Confession. It is not, however, the whole story.

(12) D.Matthew, Scotland Under Charles I(London,1955),p.35.

(3) COVENANT, CONFESSION, COMPROMISE?

(a) The Theology of The English Church

The great question about any church union is the identity of the new church. In the seventeenth century the question was not one of theology but rather one of government. In both countries the churches shared in the one theological heritage, the Calvinist.

In England there was a strong native tradition that went back to Augustine. William Tyndale, Bible translator and martyr, was one of the main sources of the English Reformation and he can be safely identified as a pronounced Augustinian. John Wyclif and the Lollards belonged to the same school while Thomas Bradwardine of Oxford stands out as a staunch and successful defender of the Augustinian theology. In 1618 his treatise "De Causa Dei Adversus Pelagium" was republished in London by Archbishop Abbot.

This native tradition "the substratum of the Reformed teaching"(1), was strengthened by continental influences. During Edward VI's reign Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr came to England where their lectures on Romans and Ephesians, published in English, carried great weight.

At this time the dominant influence was Heinrich Bullinger. His influence increased when, during the Marian persecutions, English refugees found asylum in Zurich. Later, in Elizabeth's England, his "Decades" were required reading in the training of clergy. The men who came back from Zurich to positions of power included Jewel, Parkhurst, Grindal and Sandys.

(1) A.F.Mitchell, The Westminster Assembly. Its History and Standards (London, 1883), p.327.

However, none of this should be read as countering Calvin's influence. Rather these earlier figures, together with the example of the foreign congregations of John A'Lasco and Vallard Pullain, all helped prepare the way for the ascendancy of the Calvinist theology.

This does not mean that there was no difference between the early and the later positions. For example, while Bullinger can be called a Calvinist, he was "a very cautious and moderate one"(2). In particular in his "De Providentia Dei" of 1533 he disagreed with Calvin, "when he (Calvin) declares that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man and the unhappy state of his heirs, when he declares further that those whom He has vowed to perdition are by Him deprived of the faculty of hearing the Word and that preaching blinds them... those are explanations that the Early Church would never have allowed. As for me, I should never dare to speak like that"(3).

Nonetheless it remains true that Bullinger and the others did make it easier for the Calvinist theology to become "the prime theology"(4) of the English church.

Calvin himself had been careful to show an interest in English affairs. He wrote to Edward VI, to the Protector Somerset, to Sir John Cheke the king's tutor, to Archbishop Cranmer, and later to Elizabeth.

(2) W.Cunningham, The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation (London, 1969), p.190

(3) E.G.Leonard, A History of Protestantism: the Establishment (London, 1967), p.8.

(4) W.Campbell, p.134.

During the persecutions English refugees were allowed to conduct their own church in Geneva. Significantly this congregation produced their own confession of faith in 1558. They dealt explicitly with predestination and put the negative side first, "God, of the lost race of Adam, hath ordained some as vessels of wrath to damnation; and hath chosen others as vessels of His mercy to be saved"(5). The return of these exiles could not but strengthen English Calvinism.

Many of Calvin's works were translated into English and, significantly, the translators were men known "in the literary and social as well as the religious life of their time"(6). In 1561 the "Institutes" were translated by Thomas Norton, the same year that saw the appearance on stage of "Gorboduc". This, the first extant tragedy in English, was written by Norton in conjunction with Thomas Sackville. By 1592 there were twenty seven Collections of Calvin's sermons in English, together with all of his New Testament and most of his Old Testament commentaries and a number of his treatises. This reflects the width of Calvin's influence.

Although other aspects of Calvin's Geneva were not welcome in Elizabeth's England, the Calvinist theology was firmly established, fitting in as it did with the earlier views. "The Calvinist struggle for England seemed victorious so far as doctrine was concerned"(7).

(5) W.Dunlop, A Collection of Confessions of Faith (Edinburgh 1719)11, pp.3-9.

(6) B.Hall, 'Calvin Against the Calvinists', in John Calvin, edited by G.E.Duffield, Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology (Abingdon,1966),p.34.

(7) J.T.McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York,1967) p.314.

Schaff places the Thirty Nine Articles with "the Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches" and argues that "continental historians, both Protestant and Catholic, rank the Church of England among the Reformed churches as distinct from the Lutheran, and her articles are found in every collection of Reformed Confessions"(8). It is sometimes argued that the Articles "incorporate doctrines of both the Lutheran and Reformed versions of the Faith"(9), yet they are distinctly Calvinist in the key doctrines of predestination and the Lord's supper. Article XVII clearly states that there is predestination to everlasting life, that the predestinate cannot perish, that not all are predestinate - only those outwardly called by the Word, and inwardly by the Spirit - that the predestinate are justified by faith, sanctified by the Spirit and will be glorified in the eternal world.

In 1586 Thomas Rogers, chaplain to Archbishop Bancroft, wrote the first English commentary on the Thirty Nine Articles, "the Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England". Rogers emphasises the points made above and writes "in Christ Jesus, of the mere will and purpose of God, some are elected, and not others, unto salvation"(10).

When Arminian opinions began to be heard the Calvinist theology was strongly reaffirmed, the lectures of Peter Barro at Cambridge being answered by the Lambeth Articles of 1595. The prime mover was Archbishop Whitgift and although described by some as "mediatory"(11) the Articles are uncompromisingly Calvinist.

(8) P.Schaff, A History of the Creeds of Christendom (London,1877) p.622.

(9) E.Routeley, p.104.

(10) P.Schaff, p.636.

(11) T.M.Parker, 'Arminianism and Laudism in 17th Century England', in Studies in Church History (London,1964), 1,p.27.

The first article says "God from eternity hath predestined some unto life and reprobated some unto death"(12).

It was not until the 1630's that Arminian views gained any real support. This is so even although "Hooker at Oxford, Andrewes and Overall at Cambridge, must be regarded as the representatives of the new school of thought that was alive in England before Arminius began to lecture at Leyden"(13). Certainly it is true that Arminianism in England was "almost entirely a native growth"(14). Yet it was only with Archbishop Laud's High Church party that this theology gained ground. Even there the interest was more with ritual than doctrine, and it has been suggested that Laud's adoption of Arminianism was due rather to his opposition to the Presbyterianism and Puritanism of the strongest Calvinists rather than to purely theological considerations. Conversely, the fact that Laud was Arminian was "Sufficient to condemn the Dutch heresy in the eyes of Scotsmen"(15). The Scottish viewpoint has been fairly summarised as follows, "the ultimate enemy was Rome, and Episcopacy was its agent, and the Episcopalians were Arminian"(16). In both countries the word "Arminian" lost its purely theological significance and became "the odious label of the High Church and Royalist Party"(17).

(12) B.B.Warfield, 'Predestination in the Reformed Confessions', in Studies in Theology (London, 1932), pp.203f.

(13) A.W.Harrison, Arminianism (London,1937),p.123.

(14) J.MacInnes, p.67.

(15) H.Macpherson, p.56.

(16) G.D.Henderson, Religious Life in Seventeenth Century Scotland (London,1937),p.73.

(17) D.Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660 (London,1962) p.337.

Yet it was one of the Anglican Party - a King's man - who provided "the main source...almost the exact prototype"(18) of the Calvinist Westminster Confession. This was Archbishop Ussher and the Irish Articles of 1615. Indeed the resemblance between the two confessions is so striking that it is reasonable to conclude that the Westminster statement had "the purpose of showing the essential agreement of the Assembly with the doctrinal standards of the English and Irish Reformation"(19). It was meant to be "a bond of union"(20).

So it is clear that the English church shared the Calvinist theology until the 1630's when Laud's group adopted Arminian views. However, it remains true that in 1643 the English church, with that one exception was still by and large Calvinist.

(18) C.G. Mccrie, The Confessions of the Church of Scotland Their Evolution in History (Edinburgh, 1907) p.54.

(19) P.Schaff, p.761.

(20) A.F.Mitchell, the Westminster Assembly, p.379.

(d) The Theology of the Scottish Church

In Scotland the first influences were Lutheran. Patrick Hamilton "sat at the feet of Francis Lambert at Marburg while Lambert was still a Lutheran"(1). His "Places" reveal this influence, and he was subsequently accused of "disputing, holding and maintaining divers heresies of Martin Luther and his followers"(2).

The East coast ports which enjoyed trade with the continent became centres of literary smuggling. In 1525 Parliament forbade strangers bringing in Lutheran works, on pain of imprisonment and forfeiture of goods and ships(3). In 1527 the act was extended to include those assisting the spread of the new ideas. In 1535 it was felt necessary to restrict the purchase of heretical books to the clergy(4).

However, this early Lutheranism was "thoroughly Augustinian"(5). Among the sixteen articles on which Hamilton was tried and condemned are these:

- 1) "That man hath no free will".
- 12) "that none be saved but they are before predestined".
- 13) "that God is the cause of sin in this sense, that is, that He withdraweth His grace from men, whereby they sin"(6).

(1) J.Macleod, Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation, (Edinburgh, 1946), p.13.

(2) J.Foxe, Acts and Monuments (London, 1661), II, p.227.

(3) The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, edited by T.Thomson and C.Innes, (Edinburgh, 1814-75), II, p.295.

(4) Ibid., II, .p.341.

(5) J.Macleod, p.13.

(6) D.Calderwood, The History of the Kirk of Scotland, edited by T.Thomson, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1842), I, p.75.

This Augustinian emphasis was not altogether new. For generations Scottish students had attended the English Universities and the Rotuli Scotiae shows that the busiest period was c.1365 when eighty one Scottish students were at Oxford. This was when Wyclif was most influential and "Oxford seethed with Lollardy"(7). The Lollard views spread in Scotland and references to Lollards are found right down to the Reformation.

The Zwinglian tradition also affected Scottish ideas. George Wishart translated the First Helvetic Confession of 1536. Although this confession has nothing to say about predestination other than what can be deduced from Chapter X "of the Eternal Mind of God to Restore Man"(7a), Zwingli's Fidei Ratio of 1530 clearly asserts that "God freely determines and disposes concerning all things"(8).

All this prepared the way for the Calvinism that Knox brought home.

The Scots Confession of 1560 can safely be described as Calvinist. "The Calvinism of the Scots Confession is undoubted"(9). On election the chapter begins, "That same eternal God and Father, who by grace alone chose us in His Son Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was laid, appointed Him to be our head, our brother, our pastor and the great bishop of our soul"(10).

(7) T.M.Lindsay, p.277.

(8) B.B.Warfield, p.149.

(9) The Scots Confession of 1560, introduced by G.D.Henderson, p.18.

(10) The Scots Confession of 1560, translated by J.Bulloch, p.64.

(7a) The Miscellany of the Wodrow Society, edited by D.Laing (Edinburgh, 1844), I, p.13.

Thereafter the chapter concentrates on the redemptive work of Christ. This has led Barth to conclude that "its authors have made it known unambiguously that they wish the whole body of material which is called the doctrine of Predestination to be explained through Christology and conversely Christology to be explained through the doctrine of Predestination"(10a). Yet the reprobate are mentioned - their existence is not doubted. But the chapter does not begin to explain why there are any reprobate. Any argument from silence is dubious but it can certainly be said that the Scots Confession does say there are reprobate and it does refer election to "grace alone".

What is not argued at length in the Confession is to be found in other parts of contemporary Scottish Church teaching. Calvin's Catechism of 1541 was translated and used. There, in answer to Question 157, it says "For as the Lord reserves for Himself the freedom to show mercy to the children of the ungodly, so on the other hand He retains the power to elect or reject in the generation of the faithful: as it seems good to Him"(11).

(10a) K. Barth, the Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation (London, 1938), pp.69f.

(11) The School of Faith, edited by T.F. Torrance (London, 1959), p.29.

This catechism was replaced by that written by John Craig in 1581. Craig, minister at Holyrood and chaplain to the King, had been a Dominican and had been converted through studying the "Institutes". In Question nine he writes "the first cause of our salvation is God's eternal election, and here the progress of the same and the two ends of all flesh are declared"(12).

Knox devoted his largest work to predestination, defending the Calvinist position against an anonymous Anabaptist usually thought to be Robert Cooke. Although it has been suggested that this work is really only a tour de force, there is no reason to question what Knox wrote on a doctrine he felt "so necessary to the Church of God that without the same faith can neither be truly taught nor truly established"(13).

In that work Knox explicitly dealt with the reprobate: "nature hath made us equal concerning corruption and yet we see great diversity among men. We ask what is the cause of this?... we conclude that God hath as well His elect, whom of mercy He calleth, as also He hath His reprobate, whom for just causes He leaveth to themselves to languish in their corruption"(14).

(12) Ibid., p.99

(13) J.Knox, Works, V, p.25.

(14) J.Knox, Works, V, p.125.

Just why any were passed by is not known to man - "the just causes of reprobation are hid in the eternal counsel of God and known to His godly wisdom alone"(15).

When Episcopacy was imposed in Scotland there was no theological change. Although Scotland was not represented at Dort - Walter Balcanquhall, who accompanied four English representatives and the English chaplain at the Hague, was a Scotsman but a clergyman of the Church of England - yet the findings of Dort were welcomed. "It pleased God in this same year 1618 that there was a worthy and famous synod of divines out of several kingdoms convened at Dort, in the which heresies and corrupt doctrines of the Arminians were refuted, which was a great comfort to all that loved the truth of God"(16).

The Aberdeen Confession of 1616, largely the work of Robert Howie of St.Andrews, stands firmly in the Calvinist tradition. It teaches that God "according to the good pleasure of His Will, for the praise of the glory of His grace, did predestinate and elect in Christ some men and angels unto eternal felicity; and others He did appoint for eternal condemnation, according to the counsel of His most free, most just and holy will, and that to the praise and glory of His justice"(17).

(15) Ibid., p.114

(16) J.Row, The History of the Kirk of Scotland, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh,1842),p.317.

(17) C.G.McCrie, p.30.

It is significant that John Forbes, the leading Aberdeen "Doctor", was charged with Arminianism but cleared in 1640. The Presbyterian revival brought no theological changes, rather it strengthened the existing views.

Thus it appears that in both Scotland and England the Calvinist theology was dominant. The problem of the two churches becoming one centred elsewhere - in the field of government. In the talks that led up to and included the Westminster Assembly it is clear that the Calvinist theology was not seriously in dispute. This is vital. It means that despite all the compromise and outside pressures that marked the Assembly, the doctrinal formulations can be read as the authentic voice of British Protestantism in the 1640's.

(e) The Divisive Factor - Government

The concern over church government is demonstrated in the 1640-41 negotiations. In November 1640 the peace talks that followed the Second Bishops War were transferred from Ripon to London. The Scots took the opportunity to begin an intense propaganda campaign. What emerges is that they were trying to sell not Calvinism but Presbyterianism. Their services held in St. Antholius church drew great crowds and they "preached solid Presbyterianism to a packed church"(1).

(1) W. Campbell, p.46.

They were "the guests of the city... the favourites of the town"(2) and made the most of it. In fact they were so cheered by their reception that Robert Baillie's letters home have been described as "a continual purr of complacency"(3).

On 28th February 1641 Baillie wrote "think not we live any of us here to be idle; Mr.Henderson has ready now a short treatise, much called for, of our church discipline; Mr. Gillespie has the grounds of Presbyterian government well asserted; Mr. Blair a pertinent answer of Hall's Remonstrance; all these are ready for the press"(4). This reveals the issue at stake and the pamphlets that followed confirm this impression.

Baillie opened with "Canterburian's Self Conviction" which is a partial exception to the rule as the sub title indicates - "An Evident Demonstration of the Avowed Arminianism Popery and Tyranny of That Faction". In January 1641 Alexander Henderson produced "The Unlawfulness of Limited Prelacy". Baillie followed with "The Unlawfulness of Limited Episcopacy". Henderson next produced "Government and Order of the Church of Scotland" which did not push any divine right claim but did assert scriptural warrant for Presbyterianism. George Gillespie followed up with "Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland".

(2) G.M.Trevelayn, England Under the Stuarts (Harmondsworth,1960),p.193.

(3) H.Trevor-Roper, 'Scotland and the Puritan Revolution', in Historical Essays 1600/1750 (London,1963),p.87.

(4) The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, edited by D.Laing (Edinburgh,1841), I,p.308.

This campaign continued during the following years, Rutherford wrote "The Due Right of Presbyteries", "perhaps the most comprehensive apologetic of Scottish Presbyterianism ever written"(5). Henderson produced a more tactful move with his "The Reformation of Church Government in Scotland Cleared From Some Mistakes and Prejudices". Baillie added "An Historical Vindication of the Government of the Church of Scotland". The question of toleration was also dealt with in Samuel Rutherford's "The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication". In 1652 the papers exchanged between the parties were collected under the title "The Grand Debate concerning Presbytery and Independency by the Assembly of Divines Convened at Westminster by Authority of Parliament".

These titles show what was the stumbling block in the search for uniformity. This verdict is borne out in the events that led to the Solemn League and Covenant.

(5) W.Campbell, p.104.

(f) The Solemn League and Covenant

When the civil war broke out in England "Scotland's first instinct was to mediate"(1). However, the Scots soon realised that their own future would be very much in danger if Charles won; they knew that "in event of his triumph in England his first act would be to recommence the old struggle in Scotland"(2).

However, the Scots were Royalists at heart and hoped to come to some arrangement with Charles. Later this idea was to prove disastrous. At this time no arrangement could be reached as the king felt that to establish Presbyterianism in England was "a sin of the highest nature"(3). According to Bishop Burnet, the Royal offer made through the king's commissioner, James first Duke of Hamilton, was to give Scotland Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmoreland. In addition every office in the Royal household would go to Scots "in the third turn" while the Prince of Wales would live there and Charles would pay a visit every third year. However "it was impossible to bribe them into the king's quarrel"(4).

Parliament, finding the war going badly, especially in June and July with defeats at Adwalton Moor, Roundway Down, and Bristol, were ready to settle with the Scots on any terms.

(1) H.Watt, Recalling the Scottish Covenants (London,1946),p.63.

(2) P.H.Brown, History of Scotland (London,1902),II,p.327.

(3) G.Davies, The Early Stuarts:1603-1660 (Oxford,1962),p.143.

(4) G.Burnet, A History of His Own Times, edited by T.Stackhouse (London,1906),p.10.

The Scots wanted "a presbyterian crusade"(5) and held out for a covenant that would guarantee religious uniformity. Their "essential condition of help..... was uniformity of kirk government"(6). Baillie summed it up; "they were for a civil league, we for a religious covenant"(6a). So Presbyterianism had to be swallowed by Parliament "as the necessary price of the Scottish army in an hour of peril"(7).

To some this has seemed "a most wantonly aggressive measure"(8), but it was not the only factor that decided the Scots. "Ulster more than Laud brought Scotland in on the Parliamentary side"(9). In 1639 and 1640 the Scots had been threatened with invasion from Ireland and during 1640 an army had been raised in Ireland to fight against the Scots. Under pressure from Parliament it was paid off at 45% of their pay. This produced bitter discontent. In 1641 there was a rising directed mainly against the Scottish "planters". In the ensuing massacre "several thousands were killed in cold blood and probably two or three times as many perished from exposure and privation"(10). This had a profound influence on Scotland. Session records(11) note relief given to refugees, and pamphlets enlarged on the cruelties of the Irish. In May 1642 the Earl of Antrim was captured by the Scots army in Ireland and letters found in his possession seemed to implicate the king in invasion plots.

(5) A Source Book of Scottish History, edited by W.C.Dickinson & G.Donaldson (London,1961),III,p.121.

(6) H.Trevor Roper, Historical Essays, p.90.

(6a) R.Baillie, Letters, II,p.90.

(7) G.M.Trevelayn,p.196.

(8) W.L.Mathieson, Politics and Religion in Scotland (Glasgow,1902) II,p.63.

(9) W.Campbell, p.34.

(10) G.Davies,p.117.

(11) J.K.Hewitson, The Covenanters, (Glasgow,1913),I, Appendix VI, p.494.

Certainly it was "the reputation of the king which suffered ... for it was hard to believe that the king's supporters would take part in such plots without his knowledge"(12). It was then discovered that Charles was again dealing with the Irish Roman Catholics and his "Cessation" of September 1643 hardened opposition being "the last intolerable manoeuvre among many"(13).

So Scotland and the English Parliament were joined in what could be called a "shotgun marriage". An understanding of this background had led some to question the authenticity of all the Westminster standards. The Confession of Faith has lost prestige lately because it "owes its origin to the desire of the English Parliament to have the support of the Scots army in its war against Charles I"(14). However, as has been shown the sphere of doctrine was almost completely free from dispute and the Confession of Faith was not significantly affected by the other debates.

On 8th August the Assembly of 1643, meeting in the East division of St.Giles, received a deputation of six from the English Parliament. They were able to tell the Scots that they had abolished episcopacy and had called an assembly of divines. They also brought a letter from seventy English ministers asking for church union, while the assembly of divines who had been in session at Westminster since 1st July, also sent a letter referring to their desire for "nearer agreement" with the Church of Scotland.

(12) D.Stevenson, The Scottish Revolution, (Newton Abbot,1973),p.273.

(13) J.K.Hewitson, I,p.368.

(14) I.Henderson, Scotland, Kirk and People (Edinburgh,1969),p.96.

Alexander Henderson and Sir Archibald Johnston of Warriston drafted the proposed agreement. The aim was declared "to bring the Churches of God in the three Kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and conformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church government, directory of worship and catechising"(15). However, a clause was inserted by the Englishman Sir Harry Vane that made more than one interpretation possible. The phrase was "according to the Word of God, and the example of the best Reformed Churches"(16).

Controversy still rages over this insertion, seen by some as a "surreptitious monkey wrench...cunningly slipped into the works"(17). However, the Scots had no reason to worry over the phrase which was a favourite of their own. They were convinced that Presbyterianism was "according to the Word of God", and although later that same year the Westminster Assembly was to send invitations to the New England divines Cotton, Hooker and Davenport, and to the Belgic, French, Helvetic and other continental churches, yet the Scots had no difficulty in recognising themselves as one of the "best Reformed Churches". Burnet would have it that "the Scots thought the...words...made sure game for the Scottish model, since they counted it indisputable that Scotland could not miss that character"(18). Possibly they did count on "the overwhelming influence they would wield when invincible Scots soldiers had won the war"(19).

(15) Records of the Kirk of Scotland edited by A.Peterkin (Edinburgh,1838),pp.362f.

(16) Ibid.p.363.

(17) J.D.Douglas, Light in the North (Exeter,1964),p.32.

(18) G.Burnet, Memoires of the Dukes of Hamilton (London, 1677) p.240.

(19) C.V.Wedgewood, The King's War (London,1959),p.257.

Perhaps the fairest verdict on the Solemn League and Covenant is that it "bound Parliament morally though not verbally to establish the Presbyterian system which it had once rejected"(20). Again, church government is seen as the stumbling block.

In such a situation of compromise the importance of the Scottish army - twenty one thousand trained men under the veteran Earl of Leven - was crucial. This is openly acknowledged by the Scottish Commissioners but what emerges from their comments is the fact that doctrine as such was not a divisive issue at Westminster.

When sent to London to "sell" the Solemn League and Covenant, Henderson wrote to Douglas - "if the Scottish army were here the Covenant would go through the more easily"(21).

In December, Baillie could write "we propose not to meddle in haste until it pleases God to advance our army, which we expect will much assist our arguments"(22). This is a direct reference to the Independent party encountered at the Assembly. Again it shows the real problem.

In January 1646 Baillie wrote to Ramsay - "Had our army been one fifteen thousand men in England our advice would have been followed quickly in all things"(23). What called forth this judgement was the intransigence of Parliament on church government.

(2?) G.M.Trevelayn, p.250.

(21) Wodrow Manuscripts, fol.25,no.13.

(22) R.Baillie, Letters, II,p.111.

(23) Ibid., pp.336f.

Conversely, the news of Montrose's victories over the Covenanter armies in Scotland sent the commissioners to prayer, asking "why our forces there have received defeat upon defeat even these five times from a despicable and inconsiderable enemy"(24). They knew that these defeats cost prestige and lost "the military authority on which they had counted to maintain their moral dominance over their allies"(25). With the rise of Oliver Cromwell and the formation of the New Model Army the need for the Scottish troops diminished - as did the last hopes for a Presbyterian England. However, the theology of Westminster was broadly accepted and is not mentioned in these references to the power struggle.

Perhaps it is also significant that the ability of the Scots in debate is always celebrated in the story of Gillespie's victory over John Selden. Selden, whose memorial tablet at Oxford bears the title "Antiquariorum Coryphoeus", was undoubtedly "the most learned member of the Assembly"(26). However, Gillespie's reply not only convinced the Assembly but also served to "astonish and confound Selden himself"(27).

This story "has often been told"(28), and still remains a favourite of Scottish writers. The point at issue was not doctrinal so much as governmental, concerning excommunication and which authority was to exercise that power.

(24) Correspondence of the Scots Commissioners in London, 1644-6, edited by H.W.Meikle (Roxburghe Club, 1917) p.97.

(25) C.V.Wedgwood, 'The Covenanters in the First Civil War,' the Scottish Historical Review, 39 (1960), p.14.

(26) J.H.S.Burleigh, p.226.

(27) J.D.Douglas, p.41.

(28) A.Smellie, Men of the Covenant (London, 1962), p.22.

It has been shown that the three main issues to engage attention at the Assembly were Erastianism, Sectarianism, and Tolerationism (29). The Confession itself was "not quite but almost an afterthought"(30). The attitude of the Scots was quite clear - "what hope can there be of unity in religion, of one confession of faith, one form of worship and one catechism till there first be one form of church government?"(31).

The Confession afforded common ground to those who differed on governmental matters, it was "the part of its work in which Presbyterians, Independents and evangelical Episcopalians were most nearly agreed"(32).

Thus it appears that the Westminster Confession of Faith can be accepted as a true statement of what was believed and taught in the Reformed Churches at this time. The Chapter on God's Eternal Decree is "the well - pondered and thoroughly adjusted expression of the living belief of that whole body...the solemn and carefully formed expression of its reasoned faith"(33).

(29) J.MacInnes, *passim*.

(30) *Ibid.*, p.74.

(31) A.Peterkin, Records, p.329.

(32) Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines edited by A.F.Mitchell & G.Struthers (Edinburgh, 1874), p.XII.

(33) B.B.Warfield, The Westminster Assembly and its Work (London, 1931), pp.146f.

(g) The Proof Texts

In trying to arrive at a correct understanding of the Westminster teaching on Predestination there are two other points that have to be mentioned. One is the proof texts. Originally the Confession had none. Therefore care must be exercised in assessing their importance.

It was at the insistence of Parliament that the proof texts were added rather grudgingly. Parliament had the right to do this as the Assembly had been called by ordinance of June 12, 1643, to advise Parliament. The original one hundred and fifty one members were all nominated by Parliament and answerable to it. Baillie wrote "you know this is no proper Assembly, but a meeting called by the Parliament to advise them in what things they are asked"(1).

In fact on at least one occasion the Scots used Parliament to expedite the work of the Assembly. In July 1646 Baillie claimed the credit; "I dealt so with Mr. Rouse and Mr. Tate that they brought in an order from the House to lay aside the questions till the Confessions and Catechisms were ended"(2).

However, the Scots were not so pleased about this message. "The House of Commons requires to put Scripture to it before they take it to considerations; and what time that will take up, who knows"(3).

(1) R. Baillie, Letters, II, p. 186.

(2) Ibid, pp. 378f.

(3) Ibid, p. 411.

It was seen as a delaying tactic that could give rise to needless argument. There was nothing sinister about this reluctance. Earlier confessions did not include proof texts. Obviously it would take up extra space and extra time.

A committee - Wilson, Byfield, Gower - was appointed and by Monday April 5th. "the Confession was finished"(4). On April 29th Dr. Peter Smith presented the Confession to the English Parliament.

The Scots had left before this but seem to have been reconciled to the addition of the proofs - "it will be for the advantage and strength of the Work"(5).

(4) Mitchell & Struthers, Minutes, p.345.

(5) R. Baillie, Letters, III, p.2.

(h) the Westminster Machinery

In evaluating the Westminster contribution to the understanding of the Predestination question it is important to know something of the way in which the divines went to work.

On July 6th, 1645 a committee was given the task of preparing a chapter on "God's Eternal Decree". It should be noted that some confusion surrounds the committee structure at Westminster, the references being not at all clear. What seems to have happened is that on the morning of Tuesday August 20th, 1644 a committee of nine - Temple, Gouge, Hoyle, Gataker, Arrowsmith, Burrough, Burgess, Vines and Goodwin - were appointed to join with the Scots commissioners and

started work.

The Committee was augmented on September 4th and perhaps again on May 9th 1645, only to be replaced by a smaller committee - the Scots plus seven - on May 12th. The work was then submitted to the three main committees who brought it to the Assembly.

In addition it appears that occasionally special difficult subjects were given to ad hoc committees. For example, on January 29th 1645 Coleman reported on "Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience". On February 16th this thorny subject was given to a select committee and Seaman reported on March 10th.

On July 8th 1645 a small committee was appointed to correct the wording. Significantly, they were to consult with the Scots before reporting to the Assembly. On December 8th a larger committee was set up to review the Confession as it was finished at the Assembly. On Thursday 26th November 1646 the entry states "the Confession of Faith was finished this day"(1). This was not quite true. Further revision took place and the final text was not completed until December 4th. It was presented to Parliament and read on the 7th. Baillie presented it to the commission of the Scottish Assembly on January 21st 1647.

In presenting the document to Parliament the prolucutor said "if either the things do seem long, or that they have been long in perfecting of it, that you will consider that the business is matter of great weight and importance"(2).

(1) Mitchell & Struthers, Minutes, p.303.

(2) House of Commons Journals, (London, 1803), IV. 739.

It is obvious that the divines took their task seriously and wanted to say exactly what they felt. This care is illustrated in their work on Chapter III.

The first report on Chapter III was on August 29th 1645. The title and the phrasing of the first section were debated. September 3rd and 11th were spent on the form of the second half of the second section. November 3rd and September 23rd 1645 - an extra debate - were on section three. October 3rd and 17th were on section five. October 20th and 21st concentrated on Section six and the last clause of that section - "the elect only" - was discussed on October 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 30th and 31st. Section seven was covered on November 6th, 7th and 11th. Section eight was mentioned on June 18th 1646 when the whole chapter was being reviewed. Parliament debated it on May 28th 1647.

In addition, the Third Chapter was discussed on the following days when the particular point at issue is not specified - September 2nd, 8th and 9th 1645.

Together with Chapters 1, 8, 20 and 23 this chapter provoked the lengthiest debate.

Well might Baillie write "we had long and tough debates about the Decrees of election"(1).

This confirms what has been found before, namely that Chapter III can be safely taken as a true statement of the beliefs of the Reformed churches in Britain in the 1640's.

(1) R. Baillie, Letters, II, p. 325.

4 WHY PREDESTINATION

(a) The Day and Age

The Westminster Confession teaches the doctrine of predestination because the Westminster divines thought they found it in the Bible.

Other factors helped make this doctrine congenial to the Protestants of mid seventeenth century Britain. In those years of crisis - "a warlike, various and tragical age"(1) - the church "felt the need of an all-resistless arm, of an all-subduing sovereignty"(2). This was true in a general way of the whole post-Reformation period. Tillich suggests that doctrines emphasising the sovereignty of God had appeal in that time of "catastrophes and external changes, and of profound anxiety internally"(3).

This need for reassurance was felt by the Reformed Churches in Britain. Both the Scottish and English communions could look back to years of struggling and with the Ulster massacres of 1641 so fresh in their memories they knew they faced the possibility of defeat and destruction. So the Westminster divines would find the idea of a sovereign God with an irresistible will particularly comforting.

There might even be truth in the argument that "in times like these, churches, as well as individuals, unconsciously become Calvinist"(4).

- (1) A.Cowley, the Metaphysical Poets, edited by H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, 1963), p.26.
- (2) J.Walker, The Theology and Theologians of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1888), p.53
- (3) P.Tillich, History, p.267.
- (4) T.D.Witherspoon, 'The Westminster Assembly Itself' in Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly, the American Presbyterian Church (Richmond, 1897), p.62.

However, while this might explain in part the reason this doctrine enjoyed a special prominence - "they took the doctrine of predestination as their dialectical weapon because it seemed to them to offer the most rational assurance for restored confidence in the future of mankind" (5) - yet none of this means that the divines invented it to suit their own situation. The doctrine, when found, did have particular appeal but it was thought to be found in the Bible and taught for that reason.

Again it has been suggested that in that age the idea of God's sovereignty would be strengthened by observations from nature. The Westminster Confession of Faith while denying any saving efficacy to "the light of nature" does say that this light together with "works of creation and providence" do in fact manifest the "Goodness, wisdom and power of God" (6). Thus nature, for the divines and their followers, furnished "concrete examples of the Divine sovereignty over the world" (7).

John Blackadder in his account of a Covenanter communion at East Nisbet in 1674 can write that "there was a solemnity in the place befitting the occasion and elevating the whole soul to a pure and holy frame" stimulated by a very strong sense of the "invisible protection of the Lord of Hosts" (8).

(5) W.Haller, the Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1957), p.84.

(6) the Westminster Confession of Faith (Edinburgh, 1963) Chapter I, Section I. All references are from this edition.

(7) H.MacPherson, p.68.

(8) J.Blackadder, Memoirs, edited by A.Crichton (Edinburgh 1823), pp.198-207.

Alexander Peden could speak on a famous occasion of a convenient mist as the "lap of God's cloak"(9). The Covenanters of the 1670's - 1680's driven to seek refuge in wild areas, do seem to have found in their awesome surroundings signs of God's absolute mastery.

A similar point is made less sympathetically by Sir Walter Scott. Recounting an old tradition in which two Covenanters, Halbert Dobson and David Dun, enjoyed a victorious encounter with the Devil, he concludes "it cannot be matter of wonder to any one at all acquainted with human nature, that superstition should have aggravated, by its horrors, the apprehensions to which men of enthusiastic character were disposed by the gloomy haunts to which they had fled for refuge"(10).

It is interesting to note that on another occasion Dun was arrested with two companions but escaped when a sudden thunder storm surprised the troopers on a hill. The Covenanters saw the storm as "a friendly deliverer"(11).

However, while their experiences of nature undoubtedly did reinforce their belief in God's sovereign power those experiences were not the ground of that belief.

(9) K.Hewat, Peden the Prophet (London,1911),p.61.

(10) W.Scott, Old Mortality (Edinburgh, no date), Note XVIII, p.519.

(11) R.Simpson, Traditions of the Covenanters (Edinburgh, no date), p.38.

It has also been suggested that, although a form of the doctrine was taught in the Roman Church, predestination appealed particularly to the Reformers and their successors because of what it denied. By putting the believer's destiny absolutely in the hands of God this belief "declared redundant the church's pre-Reformation expensive mechanism for providing a better fate for the loved one after death"(12). In other words, "the important thing about the doctrine of predestination is not what it asserts ... but what it denies"(13).

Undoubtedly the doctrine had that effect or rather as part of the Reformed understanding of justification it contributed to that effect. Yet predestination was never advanced simply as the logical extension of another doctrine.

Although it is clear that a number of factors combined to make the idea of predestination especially appealing to the Westminster divines, yet it remains true that the doctrine is taught because of the Biblical evidence the divines believed they found.

(12) I.Henderson, Power Without Glory, p.67.

(13) I.Henderson, Can Two Walk Together? (London, 1948), p.108.

(b) The Supreme Judge

The attitude of the Westminster divines to the Scriptures and their authority is given in the fact that the very first chapter of the Confession is "of the Holy Scriptures". It is one of the longest chapters in the Confession - a possible hint of its importance (as well as its complexity).

On reading the chapter it becomes clear that the confession is meant to reflect the teaching of the Bible. "The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture"(1).

This point is worth emphasising as it is often argued against the Confession that it "tended to oust scripture as the supreme standard of the church"(2).

There is some justification in this criticism. It is possible to trace the process by which the Confession gained in authority. On July 30th 1649 the Assembly passed an act ordaining that in every house there should be one copy of the Westminster catechisms, directory of worship and confession of faith (3).

(1) Westminster Confession of Faith, I.10.

(2) Assembly Report 1970, p.174.

(3) Acts of the General Assembly, p.211.

In the 1690 settlement the Assembly required all probationers and ministers to "subscribe their approbation of the confession of faith".(4) In 1694 each minister was to declare the Westminster document "the confession of his faith".

The result was that the Confession became the rule of sound doctrine. "It was by the confession of faith that accused heretics were tried"(5). This tendency reached its peak in 1830 when John McLeod Campbell was deposed for heresy. The presbytery told him "we are far from appealing to the Word of God on this ground; it is by the Confession of Faith that we must stand; by it we hold our livings"(6).

Now, of course, the Confession of 1647 cannot be judged on the basis of its 1830 interpreters. However, the point is that this 1830 interpretation was natural, being in-built in the confessional system. Indeed there is evidence of similar decisions being taken on the basis not only of the Westminster Confession but of the Synod of Dort. The 1638 Assembly condemned David Mitchell in the following terms; "this is a sufficient ground of a sentence against him that his doctrine is the doctrine of the Remonstrants that they avowed at the Council of Dort, contrary to the doctrine of all the Reformed Kirks...and consequently to the doctrine of the Kirk of Scotland"(7). It is also known that James Affleck was required to subscribe to the Synod of Dort or be deposed (8).

(4) Acts of the General Assembly, p.225.

(5) W.D.Niven, Reformation Principles (Glasgow, 1953), p.48.

(6) Proceedings in the Case of John MacLeod Campbell (Greenock, 1831), pp.XXVII - XXIX.

(7) A.Peterkin, Records, p.160.

(8) R.Baillie, Letters, I, p.173.

It is argued that any confession will tend to grow in authority and that the Westminster Confession did so until this subordinate standard replaced the supreme standard of Scripture to all practical purposes. Thus the argument of the 1970 Report: "The suggestion that we should now abandon altogether the idea of a subordinate standard is intended to eliminate for the future this type of confusion and to ensure for scripture its proper place as 'the supreme standard of faith and life'"(9).

The reply is that the intention of the divines was to interpret Scripture faithfully and they expected the Confession to be accepted only as it was true to the Bible. They explicitly put Scripture first and in Chapter thirty-one they roundly declare that "all synods or councils.. may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice"(10). The attitude of the Confession then is clear, "creeds... have no proper authority, that being given only to the Truth or God's Word"(10a). "Scripture alone is normatively normative, ~~is norma normans~~. A confession is only normatedly normative, is norma normata"(10b). The verdict stands that "immunity from criticism is the last thing its authors would claim for the Confession. Their main endeavour is to refer us to the Word of God"(11).

The Assembly of 1647 approved the Confession "judging it to be most orthodox, and grounded upon the Word of God"(12), but in fact they felt free to criticise the Confession especially "some part of the second article of the thirty first chapter".

- (9) Assembly Report 1970, p.174.
- (10) Westminster Confession of Faith, XXI,4.
- (10a) A.T.Innes, The Law of Creeds in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1847) footnote on p.62.
- (10b) F.N.Lee, The Westminster Confession and Modern Society (Edinburgh, 1972), p.12.
- (11) G.S.Hendry, p.12.
- (12) Acts of the General Assembly, pp.158f.

This was the standard Reformed position. The Irish Articles and many continental confessions began with a statement on the Bible, emphasising its unique authority. The Scots Confession has the winsome preface - "if any man will note in this our confession any article or sentence repugning to God's holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian charity's sake, to admonish us of the same in writ; and we, of our honour and fidelity do promise Him satisfaction out of the mouth of God, that is, from Holy Scripture, or else we shall alter whatever he can prove to be wrong"(14). In Chapter twenty it says of general councils - "being human, some of them have manifestly erred, and that in matters of great weight and importance"(15). "These statements plainly assert the supreme, final and unique authority of scripture"(16).

So strong was this attitude in the Reformed Churches that Tillich can talk of the Bible as "the formal principle of orthodoxy"(17).

With regard to the doctrine of predestination it is highly significant that Calvin first included a chapter on this subject in his 1539 "Institutes". The significance lies in the fact that he had then just completed his commentary on Romans.

(14) the Scots Confession, p.60.

(15) Ibid., p.73.

(16) D.Macleod, 'The Theology of the Scots Confession', Reformed Forum, I, No.3 (December, 1972), p.5.

(17) P.Tillich, History, p.280.

In other words, although he did have to defend the doctrine against the attacks of Bolsac and Pighius, Calvin came to make his definitive statement on predestination only after intensive Bible study.

Calvin's attitude has been thus described; "seeing that predestination is taught by the scriptures, it must be admitted, and not only admitted but preached in public"(18). In reply to those who argued, as did Reynolds at Westminster - "let us not put disputes and scholastic things into a confession of faith"(19) - that predestination should not be mentioned even if true, Calvin said "whoever therefore, throws obloquy on the doctrine of predestination, openly brings a charge against God, as having inconsiderately allowed something to escape from Him which is injurious to the church"(20).

(18) F.Wendel, Calvin, the Origin and Development of His Religious Thought (London, 1965), p.271.

(19) A.F.Mitchell & G.Struthers, Minutes, p.151.

(20) J.Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, translated by H.Beveridge (London, 1962), III, 21,4.

(c) The Biblical Evidence

One could start by examining the Scriptures proofs appended to the Westminster Confession of Faith. On the face of it that sounds fair as the divines would naturally pick the strongest evidence they could find.

However, that is not necessarily the best way to get the true picture of what the Bible actually says. Nor is it necessarily the best way to understand what the Westminster divines thought as those who drew up Chapter III were not all present when the texts were added.

The very title of the chapter - "Of God's Eternal Decree" - is often criticised in this respect. The word "Decree" is not found in the New Testament. In fact it is used only once with reference to election - Psalm II,7. However, the English word does convey the sense of other expressions that are found in both Testaments.

The Old Testament lacks a word for expressing the idea of predestination in "an abstract and generalised form"(1). More than that, it has been argued that "the thought that God really is the sovereign disposer of all that is belongs so essentially to the Old Testament that its explicit expression is neither frequent nor required"(2). Nevertheless there is important evidence to be found in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament often does talk of God ordaining and determining. It does so in a way that makes clear the absolute priority and independence of God's purpose. The most illuminating examples include Psalm CXXXIX,16; Isaiah XIV,24-27; XIX,17; XlVI,10f; Jeremiah XlIX,20 (especially in Moffat); Daniel IV,24f.

(1) J.I.Packer, 'Predestination' in the New Bible Dictionary, edited by J.D.Douglas (London,1965),p.1024.

(2) J.K.S.Reid, 'Determinate' in A Theological Word Book of the Bible, edited by A.Richardson (London,1950),p.65.

Predestination is implicit in the monotheism so strongly affirmed in Israel. There is only one God and therefore His will is sovereign, His purpose sure. The absolute sovereignty of God is evidenced in the matter of His name Exodus III,4. The independence of His will and purpose is seen in His use and control of evil - Isaiah XXII,11; XXXVII,26.

In particular the idea of God's elective grace is "fundamental to the Old Testament"(3). "The notion of election was dominant in Israel's faith from the beginning"(4). It is seen in the choice of Abraham - Genesis, XVIII,18; - of Isaac - Gns. XXI,12; and Jacob - Gns. XXVIII,1ff.

God has chosen His own people - Zechariah VIII,22f.; - and subsequent to their failure there is a chosen remnant - Joel II,32.

The Old Testament also makes clear that this elective grace is totally undeserved. It is consistently attributed "only to the unmerited favour of Yahweh"(5). "Long before there was any human action in response, this love chose the people for God's own possession"(6). This is made clear in Deuteronomy VII,7f; and Amos III,2.

On turning to the New Testament one finds a number of words that express different aspects of the same idea.

(3) W.Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament (London,1961) I,p.286.

(4) J.Bright, A History of Israel (London,1966),p.133.

(5) Ibid., p.133.

(6) W.Eichrodt, p.94.

"Pro orizo" is the word which the Vulgate translates "praedestino", hence the English "predestine". In the Authorised Version this is the invariable translation with six exceptions where the reading is "foreordain". In the case of all these six exceptions the verb has no personal object. "Pro orizo" is used only with God as subject. It expresses His appointing a person for a situation or, less commonly, a situation for a person.

There are a number of related verbs which cover the same activity. Most are listed with references that clarify their particular shade of meaning.-

- "Protasso" - to arrange beforehand - Acts XVII,26
- "Proetoimazo" - to prepare beforehand - Romans IX,23
- "procheirizomai" - to appoint beforehand - Acts III,20
- "Procheirotoneo" - to choose beforehand - Acts,X,41
- "Problepo" - to foresee, with sense of efficacy - Galatians III,8; Hebrew XI,40
- "Proginosko" - to foreknow, with sense of efficacy - Romans VIII,29; 1Peter I,20

In addition words such as "boule" or "thelenon" do refer to God's planning events - eg. Acts II,23; Ephesians I,11. The absolute sovereignty of God is clearly affirmed in Matthew X,29; VI,26; VII,11, and 1 Corinthians XV,28. Therefore the New Testament does speak of God's predestination of people and events.

This predestination is seen most clearly in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus - Luke XXII,22. The New Testament witness is to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Writing on the unanimity of this New Testament witness, a modern scholar summarises the evidence - "all the New Testament books, with the exception of James, bear clear testimony, diversely expressed yet united, to the fulfillment feature of the character of the Christ event"(7).

(7) J.N.Alexander, 'the United Character of the New Testament Witness to the Christ-Event' in the New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective, edited by H.Anderson & W.Barclay (Oxford,1965),p.12.

The idea of fulfillment, found in the most primitive apostolic preaching, obviously implies God's predestination of the Christ event. One way in which the idea of fulfillment is given frequent expression is in reference to "the appointed time" - cf. Matthew XXVI,45; John VII,30; XVII,1; XII,27. "Nothing seems to have impressed itself more deeply on the mind of the Apostles as, in the first momentous days of their mission to the world, they reflected upon the message they were to proclaim, what happened in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus had occurred by the inexorable decree and ordination of God"(8).

However, this raises more questions. If, as is clear, the Christ event was God's plan then that plan is not complete until His coming again. As in the life and death of Jesus people were used to unfold the plan, is it not the case that people are still being used to complete that plan? In other words, does not the predestination of the Jesus event imply the predestination of all men? More than that, if the Jesus event involved the predestined sin and condemnation of certain people - cf. Luke XXII,22 and Acts II,23 - then is it not at least possible that the outworking of the rest of the plan will again involve predestined sin and condemnation? In other words, are there people who can be classed as reprobate?

The Bible takes up this question. The word "reprobate" first occurs in Jeremiah VI,30. It is a metaphor from metal refining and has the idea of something corrupt failing God's test and being rejected. Similarly the New Testament word - "adokimos" - was used of counterfeit money and of stone rejected as unfit for use by masons in building.

(8) J.K.S.Reid, 'Determinate', p.67.

In the New Testament the word is used both of the Gentile world - e.g., Romans 1,28, and of professing Christians - e.g., 1 Corinthians IX,27. In such passages the sense is that of man failing God's test, hence New English Bible "depraved" in the Romans passage and Revised Standard Version "disqualified" in 1 Corinthians.

However, there are other passages - eg. 1 Peter II,8 and Jude 4 - where the implication is that this human failure is part of God's plan.

The locus classicus is Romans IX, especially in verses 19-21. It has been suggested that there is "a profound difference in tone"(9) between this passage and that part of the Westminster Confession of Faith that purports to explain it. However, that verdict is debatable as it is by no means beyond dispute that the third chapter "breathes an air of dread and doom"(10).

Nor is the meaning of the passage beyond dispute. Indeed it has been argued that these chapters "put into triple harness divine election, human responsibility, and universal salvation" because "all three solutions are necessary to do justice to the breadth and profundity of God's plan of salvation"(11). Bearing in mind the line of argument in verses 1-18, the point of verses 19ff. would seem to be that God has the right to harden or have mercy as He wishes - and that He has done so! Does not the figure of the potter able to make different things of his clay, to some an "unhappy analogy"(12), imply that God is able to do the same with His creation? Does not the existence of different vessels mean He has done so?

(9) G.S.Hendry, p.51.

(10) Ibid., p.51.

(11) G.B.Caird, 'Expository Problems: Predestination - Romans 9-11', the Expository Times, LXVIII, No.II(August,1957),pp.324-327.

(12) A.M.Hunter, the Gospel According to St.Paul (London,1966),p.73.

However, long before Brunner argued that "it is explicitly stated that it is not God who has made them what they are"(13), Arrowsmith at Westminster said "I desire to have it punctually observed that the vessels of wrath are only said to be fitted to destruction without naming by whom"(14).

The use of the passive "Katartis mena" could indicate a present condition. This reading is given in New English Bible "due for destruction" - a suggestion made earlier by Moffat's "ripe and ready to be destroyed". Barclay is more expansive - "men and women who deserved nothing but His wrath and who were fit for nothing but destruction".

The argument is that God did not make them fit for destruction, their condition being in no way attributed to God. However, following on the picture of the potter this argument, while grammatically sound, does not seem the natural interpretation.

What can be said is that the passage stresses not God's wrath, nor even His sovereignty, so much as His patience. The point of Romans IX is to demonstrate God's invincible patience and resourcefulness. It is most clearly put by Barclay, supported by New English Bible footnote; "God must have wished to demonstrate His wrath and to display His power. In spite of that He bore very patiently"...

Significantly, the Jeremiah passage which Paul adapted - XVIII, 1-10 - is intended to show the potter's patience.

(13) E.Brunner, the Christian Doctrine of God (London,1966),p.330.

(14) Mitchell and Struthers, Minutes, p.LXI

So when the Romans passage is meant to make a quite different point, can it properly be used to imply reprobation? Seen thus in its context, Romans IX does not satisfy speculation. It does not explicitly say that God has chosen some for a life of sin and ultimate damnation. However, it does assert His right to do so, and affirms the existence of those fit for destruction. The implication - although never confirmed - seems to be that those of God's creation made fit for destruction are, in some sense, so made by God. Yet, over against this, the passage argues for God's patience.

The argument of Romans IX is part of Paul's explanation of the Jewish rejection of Jesus and their future place in God's plan. It is not without importance that in Romans XI it is clearly said that "all Israel will be saved" - verse 26.

Taken as a whole, the Biblical evidence does suggest that the Westminster doctrine is a serious attempt to explain a problem found in the Bible. The answer the divines arrived at can be shown to reflect Scriptural teaching. Whether it does justice to all that the Bible says on this subject is still open to question. It may be that the divines developed the theory too rigidly in one direction - although it should be noted that their teaching does reflect some of the ambiguity found in the Bible. All that can be said with certainty is that the Westminster teaching provides one possible solution. Whither it is the best solution or not will become more clear when the doctrine is examined in the various stages of its development and in its implications.

(d) the God of Predestination

Chapter II of the Westminster Confession is entitled "of God and of the Holy Trinity". The fact that this chapter immediately precedes that on God's Eternal Decree is of the utmost importance.

The Westminster arrangement is a departure from Calvin who delayed his account of predestination until he came to deal with the application of Redemption. Beza in his "Tractationes Theologiae" had been the first Reformer to consider this doctrine under that of God and Providence - where Aquinas had put it. For some this change represents a shift away from Christocentric teaching into the more abstract concept of God as First Cause.

Calvin, as will be more fully demonstrated later, did wish to centre attention on Christ - "we cannot find the certainty of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we look at Him apart from the Son. Christ, then, is the mirror in which we ought and in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election"(1), "we must always come to our Lord Jesus Christ when we talk of our Election"(2).

(1) J. Calvin, Institutes, III, 24,5.

(2) J. Calvin, 'The Doctrine of Election' in The Mystery of Godliness and Other Sermons (Grand Rapids, 1950), p.45.

However, as will be demonstrated later, Calvin is not altogether successful in focusing attention on Christ. His presentation seems to rely heavily on his experience as a preacher. He starts his chapter by observing "The covenant of life is not preached equally to all, and among those to whom it is preached, does not always meet with the same reception"(3). It is also true that in treating election Calvin at least suggests that there is a divine decision higher than Christ. To this extent it is arguable that Calvin is less Christocentric than he claimed to be - "all the dubious features of Calvin's doctrine result from the basic failing that in the last analysis he separates God and Jesus Christ"(4).

Nor is it altogether proven that the Westminster teaching is abstract or speculative. On the contrary, before discussing God's sovereignty it has already made clear what this sovereign God is like. "God's purposes (Chapter 3) are the expression of His Character (Chapter 2)"(5). It can be argued that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, is supremely the expression of God's character and hence by tying predestination in with the character of God, the Westminster Confession of Faith does point to Christ. However, although Chapter II does treat of the Trinity, the person and work of Christ are not dealt with until Chapter VIII. Therefore the second chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith must be looked at to see whither the God of predestination is the God revealed in Christ Jesus or the god of speculative logic.

There is a tradition that the Westminster wording was based on an extempore prayer of Gillespie. Be that as it may the result has been described as "a hotch-potch"(6).

(3) J. Calvin, Institutes, III, 21.1.

(4) K. Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh, 1957), II, 2, p. 111.

(5) D. Macleod, The Westminster Confession Today (London, 1972), p. 8.

(6) R. G. Smith, The Doctrine of God (London, 1970) p. 58.

Inevitably, as with all attempts to define God, the impression is given that the writers have almost reduced God to "the object of systematic thought"(7). Yet while this impression is unmistakable for the Mid twentieth century reader, it is not altogether fair. Certainly any attempt to write about God carries with it the danger of appearing to infringe the second commandment. Certainly Protestant Orthodoxy had developed along scholastic lines. Certainly there is something about the long list of adjectives that gives the impression of an attempt at scientific scrutiny. However, the divines did try to emphasise the transcendence of God - "incomprehensible" should not be overlooked in the catalogue of divine attributes. And in the first chapter it has already been said that "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 may be deduced from scripture"(8). In other words, the divines will try to say nothing about God that is not found in the Bible. Some may argue that their deductions go beyond revelation, but no one can seriously doubt their intention to be faithful to the Bible.

It can be fairly concluded that the Westminster chapter on God, while it may appear to be too much of an impersonal description, does reflect something of the God revealed in Christ Jesus.

(7) R.G.Smith, p.61.

(8) Westminster Confession of Faith, I,6.

The Confession is concerned to stress the absolute sovereignty of God - something clearly revealed in the Christ event. God is "most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory"(9). God "hath most sovereign dominion over them (all things), to do by them, for them, or upon them, whatsoever Himself pleaseth"(10).

Obviously with such a developed awareness of God's sovereignty, the writers can speak of events as happening only according to God's will. Hence Chapter III begins by stating "God from all eternity did ordain whatsoever comes to pass"(11). Similarly, Chapter V, "of Providence", starts "God, the creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions and things"(12).

This follows on naturally and forcefully from the picture of God held by the divines. However, there is one obvious difficulty; does this interpretation not make God the author of sin?

(9) Westminster Confession of Faith, II,1.

(10) Westminster Confession of Faith, II,2.

(11) Westminster Confession of Faith, III,1.

(12) Westminster Confession of Faith, V,1.

(8) The Author of Sin

The Westminster Confession insists "neither is God the Author of sin"(1) . Again in the chapter "of Providence" it says that God "being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin"(2). An explanation is still required.

The traditional Calvinist explanation involves the controversial notion of a double will of God. According to this argument there is a will of decree which is secret and a will of command which is revealed in the Bible. The idea is that when God tells man how to live He is expressing His will. Yet the fact that man breaks God's Law, defying God's revealed will, must also be part of His will, albeit in a different sense. Otherwise this defiance would not occur as "without His permission neither men nor devils can do anything"(3).

Nor can any escape be found in the notion of permission. That God permits sin means that He has chosen to do so, The only alternative would be to suggest a limit to God's power. So the conclusion follows that God's Law is broken "not by a bare permission"(4) as God "neither permits it ignorantly or unwillingly, therefore knowingly and willingly"(5).

(1) Westminster Confession of Faith, III,1.

(2) Westminster Confession of Faith, V,4.

(3) J.Zanchius, Absolute Predestination (Grand Rapids,1971),p.12.

(4) Westminster Confession of Faith, V,4.

(5) J.Zanchius, p.21.

The paradox is presented in the form of a double will. The clash between the two wills is not denied, but rather it is admitted that God's will of decree "includes many things which He forbids in His preceptive will, and excludes many things which He commands in His preceptive will"(6).

Not surprisingly this theory has been denounced as "an intolerable dualism"(7). However, Calvin and his followers have been careful to point out that there are not really two wills but that "in condescension to the present capacities of man"(8) this is the only way the paradox can be discussed. Calvin expresses the argument succinctly; "while in Himself the will is one and undivided, to us it appears manifold"(9).

The two wills are one, for God wills only good. This means that the sin willed by God in His preceptive will "must ultimately be directed to some wise and good end, otherwise He could not will it"(10). Even sin is made serve "His own holy ends"(11).

(6) L.Berkhof, "Systematic Theology" (London,1969),p.79.

(7) P.Schaff, History, p.454.

(8) J.Zanchius, p.13.

(9) J.Calvin, Institutes, I, 18,3.

(10) J.Zanchius, p.21.

(11) Westminster Confession of Faith, V,4.

Man is unable to see the full picture. The small part he can see may seem to contradict what he knows of God's revealed will. Yet he has this assurance that it too fits into the whole and, despite appearances, is fulfilling God's purpose.

There is strong Biblical evidence to support this interpretation. In particular close study should be made of Genesis XXII, 12; Exodus IV,21; Matthew XXVI, 34; Acts II,23. In each case man does something that, judged by any standards, is evil. Yet each evil act is presented as being part of God's plan. Then it is seen that the ultimate result of the action is good. The final proof is the death of Christ. Looked at one way this is the supreme evil. Yet it is God's will. And it becomes the supreme good.

However, the matter cannot be left there. The difficulty is suggested by the title of one of Calvin's chapters, "the Instrumentality of the Wicked employed by God, while He continues free from every taint"(12). Can God use sin even for good ends without in some sense being guilty? And can the end justify the means? The only answer Calvin can give is that "in His boundless wisdom He well knows how to use bad instruments for good purposes"(13). Man cannot do it. Does that mean that God cannot do it either? With man the end does not justify the means for the means affect the end. With God, however, the end transforms the means.

(12) J.Calvin, Institutes, I,14.

(13) J.Calvin, Institutes, I,17,5.

The argument that God wills only good and uses the evil which He chooses to permit in order to bring good, this argument leads to a further question about the nature of evil. Either the use of evil affects God or God affects evil. If the former alternative is refused, the latter must be considered. The logical conclusion would be that ultimately evil is not evil at all. Although the final expression of such an understanding belongs to the realms of Christian Science, the idea had occurred to those in the Calvinist tradition. Rutherford has been quoted as saying "admit that sin is an entity and you destroy the idea of Deity"(14).

Perhaps the only thing to be said is that such speculation has wandered far beyond revelation and therefore is incapable of final resolution. Yet the Calvinist argument has this much validity and value; we do know that God is in control of all, that even sin, while the Christian is to avoid it, must ultimately serve His purpose. How this happens man cannot know, that it happens he may believe. The cross of Christ is our guarantee.

(14) J.Walker, "The Theology and Theologians of Scotland"
(Edinburgh, 1888), p.60.

(f) Human Freedom and Responsibility

It is often argued that predestination denies human freedom. Chapter three of the Westminster Confession affirms the opposite; "nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures"(1). Chapter nine starts by insisting that man's will has a "natural liberty"(2).

Yet is there not a fundamental contradiction; if God's predestination is absolute, can man be free or responsible? Tillich finds no difficulty, "the levels are different and there is no possible contradiction on different levels"(3). In other words, as man does not know what God has foreordained that foreordination does not affect man's freedom. For example, when a decision has to be made the fact, supposing it is a fact, that the decision is part of God's plan does not deny the reality of the choice.

Here the idea of a hidden and a revealed will proves useful. Man knows God's revealed will, the secret will is secret. So his responsibility is with the revealed will. "Secret things belong to God... when we meet a plain precept we should simply endeavour to obey it"(4). If we fail to obey such a precept, if we choose not to do so, we ourselves are to blame. That our choice was predetermined is no excuse as we were totally unaware of God's decretive will.

(1) Westminster Confession of Faith, III,1.

(2) Westminster Confession of Faith, IX,1.

(3) P.Tillich, History, p.269.

(4) J.Zanchius, p.15.

However, the argument has to be taken further. It is all very well to say that God's predetermining will, being unknown, has no bearing on man's responsibility. There is a complication. Man is fallen and being fallen is unable to choose good. For the Calvinist this was part of God's plan. So the question is asked, does not the notion of a bondage of the will deny human freedom?

In reply the Calvinist drew another distinction. Man has the natural ability to choose the right but since the Fall he lacks the moral ability so to do. Man's will is free from "any absolute necessity of nature"(5). Yet he has "wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation"(6). Calvin expressed the same idea when he wrote that fallen man "has not been deprived of will, but of healthy will"(7).

However, is this distinction valid? If all men are unable to choose good, is there any difference between denying free will and affirming a will that is free but "unhealthy"? The result is the same, but there is this difference; a will that is free means a conscious human choice and that the Calvinist insists on while saying that the actual choice made by man must be wrong because of his fallen nature.

(5) Westminster Confession of Faith, IX,1.

(6) Westminster Confession of Faith, IX,3.

(7) J.Calvin, Institutes, II,3,5.

In other words it may be a fact that, left to himself, a man will always choose evil but it remains true that he does choose and his choice is, or at least feels, free. Men "will do evil for the simple reason that this is the one thing they want to do"(8). The same point is put the other way round by Jerome Zanchius, an Italian monk converted under the ministry of Peter Martyr, "the will of man is by nature enslaved to evil only, and, because it is fond of that slavery, is therefore said to be free"(9).

Yet, once again, the argument must be taken further. It may be true that sinning man is guilty in the sense that he must be answerable for his conscious choice but if God has created man like this can he "fairly be called to account and punishment by the God who has rigged his every move?"(10). Can any act be "subject to moral praise or blame unless the responsibility for it rests on the agent himself?"(11).

Perhaps there can be no final resolution of this paradox either. The Bible does stress that man is free and quite definitely responsible. It also stresses that all of life is predetermined by God. Undoubtedly these two truths are compatible, experience teaching the reality of human choice, faith holding to the hope of Divine election.

(8) G.I.Williamson, The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes (Philadelphia,1964),p.31.

(9) J.Zanchius, p.22.

(10) A.Flew, 'Divine omnipotence and human freedom' in New Essays in Philosophical Theology (London,1966),p.163.

(11) H.D.Lewis, Philosophy of Religion (London,1965),p.270.

However, the idea of fallen man's inability to choose right is a complication that is not solved by the distinction between moral and natural ability. All that can be said is that man must be answerable for his own conscious choice, because as far as he knows it is his own choice which he feels free to make.

What clearly emerges is the fact that this picture of man strengthens the case for predestination. Unable of himself to choose good man must receive grace. The efficacy of that grace cannot ultimately depend on "unhealthy" human will. The final word, which is also the first word, lies with God.

(4) HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE

(a) Augustine

It has been said that "before Augustine there was no doctrine of predestination"(1). It is certainly true that Augustine was the first to systematise Christian thinking on this question. It is also true that in earlier days the Christian concern was more to emphasise the responsibility of man. Yet the idea of predestination was not new. The struggle against Gnosticism, the monotheistic affirmation, all this did imply a purpose and a plan of the one sovereign God.

Significantly the Reformation was largely a return to Augustinian theology and on the predestination question most of the Reformed thinking had been anticipated in Augustine's writings. Luther, trained in the Augustinian order, followed Augustine's lead in this and in other matters. Zwingli and Calvin are in the same tradition. "All three - and all their colleagues with them till the later period of Melancton - followed in Augustine's footsteps and maintained in some form double predestination"(2).

Augustine's understanding of predestination followed on from his conviction that the efficient cause of man's salvation is God's Grace alone.

(1) E.Brunner, Doctrine of God, p.340.

(2) J.I.Packer, 'Calvin the Theologian' in John Calvin, ed. G.E.Duffield, p.171.

At times he seems to argue that predestination is based on foreknowledge - "since He did foreknow that man would make bad use of his free will - that is, that he would sin - God prearranged His own purpose so that He could do good to man"(3). "God foresaw withal that His grace should adopt the godly, justify them by the Holy Spirit, pardon their sins, and rank them in eternal peace with the angels"(3a). However, when it comes to the individual application of the doctrine he affirms the priority of God's choice - on Jacob and Esau he writes "the apostle... did not want us to understand that it was because of God's foreknowledge that the younger was elected to be served by the elder"(4).

Augustine insisted that mankind is divided into two classes and that "grace alone separates the redeemed from the lost"(5). All are sinners deserving God's wrath but God has chosen to save some. "By giving to some what they don't deserve, He has certainly willed that His Grace should be free and thus genuine Grace; by not giving to all, He has shown what all deserve"(6).

It is admitted that man cannot tell why some are chosen. "He decides who are not to be offered mercy by a standard of equity which is most secret and far removed from human powers of understanding"(7). Augustine however, can see a reason for some not being chosen - They can be the means by which the elect are warned and led to salvation, "thereby those on whom He has mercy may find an opportunity of salvation"(8).

(3) Augustine, 'Enchiridion' in Augustine: Confession and Enchiridion, translated by A.C. Outler, Library of Christian Classics, VII (London, 1954), p.402.

(3a) Augustine, the City of God, Book 12, chapter 22, translated by J.Healey (London, 1945), I, p.367.

(4) Augustine, 'To Simplician, on Various Questions' in Augustine: Earlier Writings, translated by J.H.S. Burleigh, Library of Christian Classics, VI (London, 1953), p.390.

(5) Augustine, 'Enchiridion', p.398.

(6) Augustine, 'On the Gift of Perseverance', in A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. A. Richardson (London, 1969), p.265.

(7) Augustine, 'To Simplician', p.398.

(8) Ibid., p.401.

He is hesitant about saying that God actually predestines any to damnation. Rather he tends to think in terms of pretermission - "We must not think that anything is imposed by God whereby a man is made worse but only He provides nothing whereby a man is made better"(9). It is doubtful if the concept of pretermission does remove the offence of the doctrine as the withholding of mercy is no less arbitrary than the predestinating to sin. However, Augustine is trying to mark the distinction between the deserved fate of the unregenerate and the undeserved gift to the elect. He is trying to be true to the Bible teaching that man is condemned for his own sin and saved only by Grace. In this too the Calvinist followed Augustine and the Westminster Confession struggles to resolve the same difficulties in much the same way.

(9) Augustine, 'To Simplician', p.397.

(b) Luther

There is some dispute about Luther's contribution to the development of the doctrine. It is certainly true that in later life his views underwent a change of emphasis but it is also arguable that "there had not been any theological abandonment of the earlier position"(1).

(1) K.Barth, Dogmatics, p.66.

Basically he stood in the Augustinian line. His "De servo Arbitrio" makes this clear, and Luther never went back on that book - "I regard no book so much my own as the 'Bondage of the Will' and the Catechism"(2). There "double" predestination is at least implied - "God has the will and power of hardening, showing mercy, and doing all things"(3). Again, Luther puts God's action above and beyond the human understanding - "Nor is it for us to ask why He does so, but to stand in awe of God, who can do, and wills to do such things"(4).

However, from 1525 there was a change in Luther's teaching. He talks of the universalism of the Gospel offer and attributes the condemnation of some to their own sin. "For the Gospel offers to all men, it is true, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through Christ; but not all men accept the promise of the Gospel... but the fact that all men do not accept Christ is their own fault"(5). With this the Calvinist would agree. The difference is that while he would go on and trace the sin back to God's decision, the later Luther would not. For him that was to leave revelation for speculation. Revelation would lead one to the God of revelation and hence one would know oneself among the elect. "If thou dost cling with firm faith to the revealed God.. then art thou certainly predestined and thou knowest the hidden God"(6). "Concerning predestination, it is best to begin below, at Christ, as then we both hear and find the Father; for all those who begin at the top have broken their necks"(7). This, for Luther after 1525, was the only way predestination can be understood. However, in practice this was the way the Calvinist taught the doctrine so the difference is more apparent than real.

(2) M.Luther, Letter to Capito.

(3) M.Luther, the Bondage of the Will (London,1957),p.200

(4) Ibid., p.176.

(5) E.Brunner, the Christian Doctrine of God, p.343.

(6) Ibid.,p.344.

(7) M.Luther, the Table Talk of Martin Luther, edited by W.Hazlitt (London,1890),p.279.

(c) Calvin

Calvin is often accused of being speculative in his approach to the problem. It is admitted that in his preaching Calvin concentrated on election in Christ through faith. This can be illustrated from his sermon on II Timothy where he states "we must put the cause and fountain of our salvation in Him (Christ) only...let us learn to come directly to Jesus Christ if we will not doubt God's election - we must always come to our Lord Jesus Christ when we talk of our election"(1).

However, it is argued that in his dogmatic studies he forgets this. It is suggested that in treating predestination Calvin is led beyond the revelation in Christ, and if one asks why, it is said that "one word may fairly be given in answer: Logic"(2). Significance is found in the fact that he opens discussion by observing "the covenant of life is not preached equally to all, and among those to whom it is preached does not always meet with the same reception"(3). It is said that Calvin bases his argument not on Scripture but on experience and his deductions from that experience. "He did buttress his doctrine so emphatically by the appeal to it (experience) that we can hardly fail to recognise that much of the pathos and emotional power with which he defended it and to an extent the form in which he did so, were determined by this experience, the effects of which were inevitably serious from the point of view of the purity of the doctrine"(4).

(1) J.Calvin, 'The Doctrine of Election', pp.39-51.

(2) J.S.Whalen, The Protestant Tradition (London,1960),p.141.

(3) J.Calvin, Institutes, III,21,1.

(4) K.Barth, Dogmatics, p.39.

While it is the earlier works of Calvin that are most criticised in this respect the definitive edition of the "Institutes" reveals the same use of experience in the argument. In addition to the opening sentence already quoted, he argued "experience shows that this will... is not such as to make Him touch all their hearts"(5) and he uses the same example again - "among a hundred to whom the same discourse is delivered, twenty, perhaps, receive it with the prompt obedience of faith; others set no value upon it, or deride, or spurn or abominate it - hence we will always be entangled until we call in the aid of Paul's question, 'who maketh thee to differ', intimating that some excel others, not by their own virtues, but by the mere favour of God"(6).

However, Calvin is not the first to refer to the preaching experience in discussing predestination. Augustine made the very same point - "many hear the word of Truth; but some believe, while others contradict"(7). Knox was also to remark on the same phenomenon and draw the same conclusion. "Now, of this manifest diversity which we see in mankind we conclude that God hath as well His Elect... as also that He hath His reprobate"(8). Zanchius' first proposition on reprobation begins "let it be observed that in all ages the much greater part of mankind etc"(9).

(5) J. Calvin, Institutes, III, 24, 15.

(6) Ibid., III, 24, 12.

(7) Augustine, On the Predestination of the Saints, in A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. A. Richardson (London, 1969), p. 265.

(8) J. Knox, Works, V, p. 125.

(9) J. Zanchius, p. 70.

When all is said and done, is Calvin basing his argument on experience? First, be it noted his experience is by no means peculiar to him and therefore unlikely to make his conclusion peculiar. Rather the question with which he starts is one often asked and, more important, one that Calvin thought the Bible answered. In fact it has been said that "it is just Calvin's doctrine of election which proves that he is not a speculative thinker"(10). Certainly it has to be admitted that "he believes that he has derived his doctrine entirely from the Holy Scriptures"(11).

Calvin makes clear his opposition to speculation. "The moment we go beyond the bounds of the Word we are out of the course, in darkness, and must every now and then stumble, go astray, and Fall"(12). Worse than that speculation keeps man "perpetually miserable, subjects him to dire torment, or throws him into a state of complete stupor"(13).

The answer for Calvin is to look to Christ. For him, as for Luther, this made predestination a comforting doctrine, bringing real assurance. As has been made clear already when discussing the factors that helped make this doctrine so prominent during this period, the need for assurance was deeply felt.

(10) W.Niesel, The Theology of Calvin (London, 1956), p.160.

(11) E.Brunner, Doctrine of God, p.345.

(12) J.Calvin, Institutes, III, 21, 2.

(13) Ibid., III, 24, 4.

So Luther is able to show the usefulness of the doctrine - "now that God has taken my salvation out of the control of my own will and puts it under the control of His, and promised to save me, not according to my working or running, but according to His own grace and mercy, I have the comfortable certainty that He is faithful and will not lie to me, and that He is also great and powerful so that no devils or opposition can break Him or pluck me from Him"(14).

So too with Calvin who spends five sections in Chapter twenty-four on vindicating "the certainty of election". This certainty is based on Christ. "Christ then, is the mirror in which, without deception, we may contemplate our election"(15). Thus it is argued that on predestination Calvin's teaching is "wholly centred on Jesus Christ"(16).

But is it? Despite Calvin's reiterated call to look to Christ does his teaching in fact not prevent this by talking of an unknown will of God that is prior to the Christ event? By positing this unknown and unknowable will of God does Calvin not rob Christ Jesus of His power to assure man of his election? This is the thrust of Barth's criticism - "the fact that Calvin in particular not only did not answer but did not even perceive this question is the decisive objection which we have to bring against his whole doctrine of predestination"(17).

(14) M.Luther, the Bondage of the Will, p.314.

(15) J.Calvin, Institutes, III,24,5.

(16) W.Niesel, p.181.

(17) K.Barth, Dogmatics, p.111.

However, it must be argued in reply that we cannot simply equate the Son with the Father. There are some things that have not been revealed even to the Son - Cf. Matthew XXIV,36 (although it should be said that this is a disputed reading and rates no better than a C in the 1966 Greek text). The point behind the Calvinist position is that the revelation in Christ is not a complete revelation. For the seventeenth century thinker this could only mean that there were parts of God's thoughts kept secret, "arcana consilia". The twentieth century mind might see it in terms of a partial revelation of the whole of God's thought rather than the whole revelation of parts. However, the Calvinist would argue that while only knowing part of God's will men can trust what has been revealed to him, the unknown parts would not contradict the revealed. So although there remains a hidden will of the Father, the will revealed by the Son gives sufficient grounds for hope and trust. Hence we can know the certainty of our election in Christ.

What then of reprobation? Calvin was quite unashamedly of the opinion that there are reprobate men, foreordained by God. Does this mean that one can know oneself to be of the reprobate? The answer is "no". One cannot speculate on one's destiny. The only thing one can do with certainty is give oneself to Christ and thus be sure of one's election.

Thus Calvin tries to do justice to the absolute priority of God's decision without losing sight of the centrality of Christ in election and the real responsibility of man for sin. The Westminster Confession has the same aim. However, this does not mean that the Westminster teaching can be simply labelled Calvinist, rather it is Calvinism seventy years on.

(d) Beza and Supralapsarianism

Theodore Beza took over Calvin's system and began what some see as a process of Protestant scholasticism. This is clearly seen in his treatment of predestination where he changed Calvin's arrangement. In his "Tractationes Theologiae" Beza takes the doctrine and puts it under the doctrine of God while Calvin only considered it when writing on the appropriation of salvation. Beza was in fact returning it to where Aquinas had left it.

This change has been seen as a shift away from the revelation in Christ. While it does tie in predestination with God, it is almost God as deified will. In this respect it is unfortunate that Chapter III of the Westminster Confession of Faith begins with the general statement - "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain what soever comes to pass"(1). This is to concentrate attention away from Christ and on God as the First Cause, Prime Mover. So, to this extent, it opens the door to speculation and to deterministic theorising.

The same tendency is seen in Beza's teaching on Supralapsarianism. At times Calvin seems to draw close to the Supralapsarian position - "it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before He made him, and foreknew, because He had so ordained by His decree"(2).

(1) Westminster Confession of Faith, III,1.

(2) J.Calvin, Institutes , III,23,7.

Yet he refused to be over explicit - "it is right to treat this whole question sparingly, not because it is abstruse and hidden in the inner recesses of the sanctuary of God, but because an idle curiosity is is not to be indulged"(3). Calvin was anxious to keep within the Biblical revelation and not to take his argument any further than was made clear there. He had no time for asking questions not answered in the Bible.

Beza felt less inhibited. In his "Tractationes"(4) he explained his supralapsarian scheme as follows, God's original purpose is to manifest His mercy and justice in saving some and rejecting others, then God decrees to create the human race, and then comes the decree to permit Adam to sin. Obviously, sin is included in God's purpose. It is still sin and the supralapsarian cannot explain why God has willed it. Although some have felt that "it is hardly necessary to criticise this view"(5), the scheme has the advantage of putting God's free grace first - "we cannot but recognise that in its choice and unconditional assertion of this starting point it did aim to treat of the God of Holy Scripture"(6). Yet it has the disadvantage of making God look the author of sin.

Over against this view emerged the Infralapsarian. It too insisted on a primal, basic plan of God in which the Fall is included. The difference is that the decree to create is put before that to elect.

(3) J. Calvin, Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God, translated by J.K.S. Reid (London, 1961), p. 125.

(4) T. Beza, Tractationes Theologiae (Geneva 1570-82), I, pp. 344, 362, 418; III, p. 404.

(5) H.H. Farmer, The World and God (London, 1963), p. 230

(6) K. Barth, Dogmatics, p. 135.

This means that out of the fallen mass of mankind - why man has been created able to fall is unknown - God has chosen some. It is fallen man who is the object of election. The reference in Romans IX to "one lump" was felt to strengthen this argument.

This infralapsarian argument was really a reaction against the supralapsarian. However, in trying to avoid the appearance of calling God the Author of sin, the infralapsarian has been accused of judging God by human standards. The idea of God creating man to fall in order to show His love and justice is felt to be wrong and is therefore dropped in favour of one that is thought to show Him in a more flattering light. Yet this is to make man the measure.

On the other hand, can a doctrine be acceptable if it does make God look the author of sin? Certainly it is wrong for man to judge God, but then it is not God that the Infralapsarian judges but rather the supralapsarian picture of God.

Neither theory is satisfactory but both point to aspects of the truth. The Supralapsarian is right in showing God's free grace to be totally independent of man's desert. The Infralapsarian reminds that God must not be made to look as though He were the Author of sin. Taken together, the theories suggest that "decrees" are not a very adequate model. As already shown, the word "decree" is only once used in the Bible with overtones of predestination. It is an attempt to explain the mystery as a series of decisions. The Bible gives no encouragement to such speculation and the whole approach is scholastic in the worst sense. It illustrates the dangers inherent in any developed theological system.

What the Westminster divines made of this dispute will be seen when Chapter III is examined in detail.

(e) Arminianism

The biggest single influence on the doctrine of predestination in the years after Calvin is Arminianism. The system known by that name had been hinted at long before Arminius began to lecture and it has been shown that a native version of the theory evolved in England. Yet it was with Arminius and his continental disciples that the theological argument was most fully developed.

Jaëob Arminius (D.1605) earned distinction as a student at Geneva and after serving as a minister in Amsterdam became the successor of Junius at Leyden. It was when Beza's theories were attacked by Coornhert that Arminius discovered that he was unable to defend the Calvinist position. Gradually he worked out his own theory. He sought to explain election in terms of four divine decrees (1).

- (1) J.Arminius, 'A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius', in The Works of Arminius, translated by J. Nichols (London,1825), I,pp.554 ff.

First was the decree to "appoint His Son Jesus Christ for a Mediator, Redeemer, Saviour, Priest and King" to destroy sin and obtain salvation. Then, there is a decree to include all who "repent and believe". Third, God decrees to provide the "sufficient and efficient" means. Lastly, God decrees to save and damn particular persons, on the basis of His foreknowledge.

This theory was taken further by the Remonstrants' Five Points when in 1610 the Arminian party, guided by John Uytenbogaert - chaplain to Prince Maurice - drew up their "Remonstrance". Briefly the five points are:

- 1) The decree of salvation refers to those who shall believe and persevere.
- 2) Christ dies for all though only believers are benefited.
- 3) Man can do no true good until born again through the spirit
- 4) Grace is not irresistible
- 5) The believer can fall and must desire Christ's help and be "not inactive".

With the production of a "Counter - Remonstrance" and controversy boiling over on to the streets, the States General called a synod to meet at Dort. There the main battle was fought, although the result was predetermined by the clear majority enjoyed by the Gomarist Party in the Dutch church.

Five points were asserted, often described as the "Five Points of Calvinism". These are;

- 1) Unconditional election,
- 2) Limited atonement,
- 3) Total depravity,
- 4) Irresistible grace, and
- 5) The perseverance of the saints.

This European controversy had only indirect bearing on the Westminster Assembly. In England, Arminians were King's men and therefore they were not present at the Assembly. "If there was an Arminian in all the body, he did not have the courage to lift his head"(2). However, Arminianism had this much influence - it pushed the Calvinist to a more thorough statement of the disputed aspects of predestination. After Dort no Calvinist was going to water down his orthodoxy.

The differences between the two schools are obvious. The Arminian protest was partly a return to medieval semi-Pelagianism with its concern to safeguard the dignity of man - and to stimulate effort. While it was not a live option at Westminster it did provide a choice for those troubled by aspects of Calvinism.

While God, through Christ, takes the initiative, man is left to decide his own fate. This implies a different understanding of fallen man. Man, for the Arminian, is able to choose - with God's help. This help, however, is offered to all - "Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man"(3) - and so in effect the decisive thing is man's choice.

(2) T.D.Witherspoon, p.62.

(3) P.Schaff, Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches (New York, 1882), pp.545-549.

In a sense the Calvinist would agree that man is responsible for his reaction to the Gospel offer. The one who rejects that offer incurs guilt. However, according to the Calvinist, no one will make any other than the wrong choice unless God give His grace. The fact that different men do make different decisions is thus understood as showing that God has chosen to help some and not others.

The Calvinist is then forced to explain how God can offer the Gospel to some and yet not give them the grace to accept it. However, the Arminian has no less difficulty for he is arguing that Christ dies for all but that none might actually benefit and certainly some will not. Neither scheme appears to offer a final solution although both bring out the difficulty.

As part of the Arminian picture of man's dignity it is argued that God's election is conditional on His foresight of man's reaction to the Gospel - "God by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ His Son... hath determined out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ.. those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this His Son Jesus and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith through this grace even to the end"(4). That is, there is a divine plan from all eternity but this plan is only to act on what He foresees. The Calvinist would say that there is a fundamental contradiction in God saving by His grace only those who will accept His offer, because it makes God's action depend on man's. In fact it almost suggests that "God loves those who respond to Him"(5), a total inversion of the Bible message that "we love because God first loves us" (I John IV,19).

(4) P.Schaff, Creeds, pp.545-549.

(5) P.Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (London,1966),p.176.

The Gospel insists that God moves in love freely and not in dependence on man's choosing. On this point - and it is crucial for the whole understanding of election-the Calvinist is surely in the right.

However, that is perhaps not the last word. For it can be argued that God in deciding to act according to His foresight is nevertheless making a free decision, and if that decision is to limit His power in a way that emphasises the responsibility of man, it is in accord with what has been revealed of divine love. So while the Calvinist emphasis on unconditional election does more directly point to the priority and independence of God's purpose, it is - perhaps - possible to argue that the Arminian also affirms this.

There is another aspect of this debate which is of great practical importance; which theory brings assurance to the troubled soul? Now, of course, a doctrine cannot be judged sound merely because it would be a comfort, but the Gospel is meant to bring comfort and therefore a doctrine that is comforting and backed by Scriptural evidence is more likely to be true to the God revealed in Jesus Christ. By insisting on man's choice as being decisive, the Arminian undermines assurance, for the comfort of election lies in the conviction that it is God's choice that is decisive. Man, being chosen by God, does make a decision but that decision he is only able to make because God has given him the necessary grace. Having that grace, he is able to commit himself to Christ. Now what happens after? Man may waver in his loyalty, his faith may grow faint, his hold on God may slip. Both Calvinist and Arminian admit this and both urge the Christian to work. However, the Calvinist has the comfort of knowing that his being a Christian is the work of God and therefore cannot be undone.

So although he may fall he will not be lost. Christ Jesus has promised to keep safe all who are His - (Cf. John VI, 37-39) - "there is no danger of their falling away, since the Son of God, who asks that their piety may prove constant, never meets with a refusal"(6). Although Arminius himself did not wish to say that the elect may fall, and although the "Remonstrance" says that the question "must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture"(7), logically the Arminian theory cannot give assurance and this was subsequently admitted.

It is possible that this fact had not a little to do with the struggle between the schools. As shown, Calvinism was dominant at a time when people felt the need for some kind of assurance. As Europe grew more settled and as the various churches made their theological positions clear, fear and confusion were lessened and it is at this later date that Arminianism began to flourish.

The ways in which this controversy affected the churches in Britain will be seen more clearly when the Westminster Statement is examined. However, before that, account must be taken of other developments.

(6) J. Calvin, Institutes, III, 24, 6.

(7) P. Schaff, Creeds, pp. 545-549.

(f) Amyraldism

The Calvinist orthodoxy was challenged by a new system. Known variously as "New Methodism", "Salmurianism" and "Amyraldism", its founder was John Cameron. "Restless and speculative, with a dash of ambition in his nature, and more or less, too, of the brilliant about him"(1), Cameron briefly succeeded Robert Boyd as Principal of Glasgow University but made his name as Professor of Theology at Saumur. His theology suffered because of his Erastian views. In fact those views led to his being fatally injured in a street assault at Montauban.

His students, notably Cappel, Blondel and Daillie, together with the man who gave his name to the system - Moses Amyrault - worked Cameron's ideas into an integrated theory. Briefly, they taught a "hypothetical universalism" in place of a limited atonement. All were meant to be saved provided they repented and believed. This was the first decree. Then, seeing that natural man cannot repent or believe, God chooses some and gives them the requisite grace. This theory is not unlike the infralapsarian idea in that it tries to make God's election look less arbitrary, but does not succeed.

The Amyraldian wants to do justice to the universalistic side of the Gospel offer and yet retain the distinction between the elect and the non-elect. Now, all sides were agreed that the death of Christ was of sufficient value to purchase the forgiveness of all men and all were also agreed that all men were not forgiven. The Arminian traced this to the different reactions to the Gospel, the Calvinist took it farther back to a prevenient decision of God, the Amyraldian also makes God's decision decisive but tries to suggest that this was not what God really wanted.

The result is that the Amyraldian has to say either that God willed something that He did not do, or that He purposed an end without providing the means. Either way the new theory broke down. The Amyraldian's first decree does not mean anything in practice for it says that God offers salvation on an impossible condition and "a universalism based on an impossible condition is an unfruitful abstraction"(2).

This viewpoint was expressed at Westminster, rather to the chagrin of Baillie - "unhappily Amyraut's questions are brought in on our assembly. Many more love their fancies here than I did expect"(3). However, not so many as to give the doctrine a place in the confession. The actual debate will be seen reflected in the analysis of Chapter III.

(2) P.Schaff, History, p.483.

(3) R.Baillie, Letters, II,324.

(g) Federalism

Another development within the Reformed School did influence Westminster. This was Federalism. "Only in one direction was there a substantial modification of rigid Calvinism - Federalism"(1).

The idea of Federalism is that God's relationships with men are always through and by means of covenants. Thus it was argued that Adam, as representative man, is promised immortality conditional upon obedience - the first covenant. Following the Fall, the new relationship between man and God is the Covenant of Grace whereby a Saviour is given.

This was a new development. Calvin only spoke of one covenant, that of grace, and is on record as declaring "God has never made any other covenant than that He made formerly with Abraham and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses"(2). He never mentioned a covenant of works made with Adam.

From hints in continental scholars like Musculus and Ursinus, the first clear statement on a covenant of works came in the writings of a Scotsman, Robert Rollock, in his "Questiones et Responsiones" of 1595.

The reasons for the rise in popularity of this view are rather uncertain - but interesting. Partly it arose out of the tendency to schematise theology, a tendency already apparent in the Infra/Supralapsarian debate. It also reflects the movement throughout Europe "to change social relationships from status to contract"(3). This was a powerful force and would appeal to the Scots with their "De Jure Regni" of George Buchanan and "Lex Rex" of Samuel Rutherford.

(1) H. Macpherson, p. 57.

(2) J. Calvin, Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations transl. by J. Owen, (Edin. 1850-55), IV, p. 127.

(3) P. Toon, Hyper Calvinism (London, 1967), p. 21.

The Covenant idea was taken a stage further by the Englishman William Ames in his "Medulla Sacrae Theologiae" of 1623. He distinguished between a covenant of redemption and a covenant of grace. The first referred to the agreement of the Trinity to save man and the latter to the offer of the Gospel to man.

This theory found its fullest and most popular expression in 1650 with the publication of "The Sum of Saving Knowledge". The work was issued anonymously but is understood to be written by James Durham and David Dickson. So highly was it regarded that it was printed together with the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and so strong a hold did this theory gain that "the old theology of Scotland has indeed been described as a covenant theology"(4).

Certainly Federalism is incorporated in the Westminster Confession. Chapter VII is "of God's Covenant with Man". There in paragraph two it reads "the first Covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience".

This was new and, quite clearly, it cut across the teaching on predestination. In a way it is repeating the Amyraldian mistake. The Amyraldian says that God decides to save man if man repents and believes - which man cannot do.

(4) J.Walker, p.40.

The Federalist says God agrees to grant man eternal life if man is obedient - which man cannot do. Again we have a theory that suggests God offers terms that He knows man cannot meet, terms which He has planned that man cannot meet.

The other development distinguishing between a covenant of redemption and a covenant of grace is not found in the Confession. There is, however, at least a hint of it in the Shorter Catechism - "God... did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer"(5).

While federalism, particularly the concept of a covenant of works is a theory with a flaw, it is a theory with a personal touch. The God of orthodox predestination looks rather impersonal and remote, almost reduced to deified will. Indeed it is partly for this reason that Calvin and the others, when it comes to preaching, try to concentrate attention on Jesus. The picture of God presented in federalism is closer to that of a loving Father, for God on this account binds Himself freely to man. This does not mean that the covenants are to be thought of as agreements contracted between equals, but rather they represent "voluntary condescension on God's part"(6). So strong is this personal element in federalism that some argue that it explains the success of the new school - "the covenant of grace was produced by the anguished effort to soften the outlines and character of the awful God of predestination"(7).

(5) the Shorter Catechism (Edinburgh 1963), Q.20.

(6) Westminster Confession of Faith, VII,1.

(7) A.French, Charles I and the Puritan Upheaval (London,1955),p.247.

It is thus clear that the Westminster teaching of predestination would be Calvinist, but Calvinist only in a limited sense, for the later developments within the school as well as opposing theories from outside would all shape the Westminster statement.

It is now possible to examine that statement.

(5) THE WESTMINSTER STATEMENT

The Westminster Confession makes its statement on the mystery of predestination in the third chapter. The title of that chapter - "Of God's Eternal Decree" - is important.

On the same head the Irish Articles bear the title "Of God's Eternal Decree and Predestination". This was no tautology, but was read as meaning God's decree in its general and particular aspects. However, the Westminster divines felt the mention of predestination to be unnecessary and dropped it.

The use of the singular "decree" is interesting. It seems to argue that the fate of all mankind is decided at one time by the one act of God's will.

Yet in Section three the Confession will argue that there is a difference between election and foreordination and this has led to talk of God's decrees. Both catechisms ask "what are the decrees of God?"(1). The use of the singular in the confession has the effect of emphasising the independence and priority of God's choice, while the use of the plural points to what is subsequently argued at length - that there is a difference between the way in which God chooses some for life and others for damnation.

There was some discussion on the first section with the apparent aim of simplifying the Irish wording which was broadly accepted. The force of the paragraph is that God, of His own will, ordained "whatever comes to pass".

At this point an alteration should be noted; the dropping of the Irish "in time" after "comes to pass". The idea seems to be to emphasise God's sovereignty even more by avoiding all suggestions that events happening out of man's time are not subject to God's purpose. It also avoids pre-empting discussion on the Infra/Supralapsarian Controversy, as the phrase "in time" could be understood as implying the Infralapsarian interpretation.

- (1) the Longer Catechism, Q.12.
the Shorter Catechism, Q.7.

The divines thus take care to put God's sovereignty beyond all dispute. For them, this must come first, everything else they have to say must be understood in the light of this affirmation.

This leads to an immediate difficulty. If God is sovereign and ordains "whatsoever comes to pass", does this not make Him responsible for Sin? The Confession insists that "God is not the Author of Sin" and refers to James I and I John 1,5. However, no explanation is offered and the point was not debated at Westminster. Apparently the traditional Calvinist explanation in terms of God's two wills was accepted.

No variation of the Calvinist theology can finally explain the existence of evil. Infralapsarian and supralapsarian alike cannot give a reason. Nor can the Amyraldian nor the Arminian - neither attempts to do so. This, however, is not surprising as the Bible gives no final answer. Calvin was unhappy with attempts to find an answer the Bible does not give - "it is not right that man should pry with impunity into things which the Lord has been pleased to conceal within Himself"(2). All parties admit that the existence of evil in God's creation is "an inscrutable mystery which we in our present state of knowledge cannot fully explain"(3).

(2) J. Calvin, Institutes, III,21,1.

(3) L. Boettner, the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination (Philadelphia, 1969), p.228.

However, given the fact of evil, can man be held responsible for his sin? The Confession says he can for he has freedom of choice. Each has the choice of obeying God or following sin. This freedom is limited and in practice man chooses sin. However, the limit on freedom is not imposed by God but rather results from Adam's disobedience. This leads to the question lying behind the Infra/Supralapsarian debate - is man's initial choice, that of Adam, part of God's plan? The answer both give is affirmative - but for different reasons - the Fall is part of God's plan. However, Adam sinned freely because whether or not his sin was predestined he did not know, and he had a clear choice. Consequently natural man's bias toward sin cannot be blamed on God's predestination of Adam, for each man is given the same choice and that choice is free because man feels free and obeys only his own wish.

So the Confession is unable to explain the existence of evil and argues for man's freedom. However, over against both it affirms God's sovereignty. Evil there may be but it is never outwith God's purpose and control. Man may be free to reject God's offer of grace but his choice is part of God's plan.

Mention of "Second causes" at the end of the paragraph bears this out. The "liberty or contingency" of these causes is said to be established by God's sovereignty. For the Calvinist this is obvious; laws of nature, laws of psychology, all are part of God's plan. A man may trace his conversion, say, to the influence of a particular sermon, but behind that sermon lies the ultimate cause - God's plan.

The second paragraph is not found in the Irish Articles. Some difficulty seems to have been experienced with the wording and the section was sent down to a special committee. It appears at least possible that it was not at first intended as a separate paragraph.

The point of the paragraph is to deny the Arminian argument that God's decision depends on His foresight. To the Calvinist this would make God "The prisoner of His creation rather than its Lord"(4). Whither this is in fact the case has already been discussed. The Westminster divines admitted that "God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions" yet traced this to His own will, and they explicitly denied that God's decrees depend on "anything because He foresaw it as future". This follows on from the affirmation about God's sovereignty made in the first paragraph.

Paragraphs three and four apply the argument to "men and angels". Although a modern writer suggests that "the chief problem that arises is in connection with section three"(5), yet at Westminster these two sections did not occasion much debate. There are in fact no details extant on any discussion on Section IV, but on November third there was talk of excluding the phrase "foreordained to everlasting death" from Section III, and in September 1646 Whitaker again challenged the wording and recorded his dissent when he lost.

- (4) R.A.Finlayson, 'Does the Westminster Confession Teach Double Predestination?' Reformed Forum, I, No.1 (Jan.1972), p.11.
- (5) J.Philip, the Westminster Confession of Faith·An Exposition (no date, no place) Part 1, p.25.

Paragraph three states that "some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death". This has become known as "double predestination". However, "double predestination" is less than accurate. The framers of the Confession, who are obviously careful with every word, employ two different words - "predestinate" and "foreordain". They never confuse the two but always reserve "predestine" for the elect. So it appears that they intend to mark a distinction.

It has to be admitted that etymologically there is no real distinction between the words. However, it is one way of differentiating between the two aspects of God's decree, and this the Calvinist is anxious to do - "Calvinists in general have held that there is an important difference between the way and manner in which the decree of election bears or operates upon the condition and fate of those who are saved, and that in which the decree of reprobation, as it is often called, bears or operates upon the condition of those who perish"(6).

The distinction derives from the concern to do justice to God's free grace and man's responsibility for sin, both. In other words, "God saves a man not because of his character. He does condemn a man on the ground of His character and deserts"(7).

(6) W.Cunningham, Historical Theology (Edinburgh, 1870), II, p. 422.

(7) R.A.Finlayson, p. 13.

No one deserves to be saved and so God saves some only because He chooses to do so, while the others receive only what they deserve - "while election is sovereign, reprobation is judicial"(8). The details will become clearer in paragraphs five and six. It is interesting to note that the term "reprobation" is not used although it is found in the Lambeth and the Irish articles. It is clear that the divines do not wish to detract in any way from God's sovereignty but do wish to emphasise man's responsibility. This fact has to be emphasised as it is often overlooked - even by reputable authorities like the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church which claims that the Confession teaches the reprobate are foreordained "without any fault on their part"(9).

Paragraph four has led to the accusation that the doctrine precludes all missionary enterprise for it teaches that "so certain and definite is the number of the elect that it cannot be either increased or diminished". So it is argued that "if this doctrine were seriously believed by any church it would petrify the whole spiritual energy of that church"(10). It is also advanced as "a historical fact", that "when it was thought that God's saving purpose was restricted to the elect the church as a whole was remiss in its obedience to the great comission"(11).

(8) D.Macleod, Westminster Confession, p.9.

(9) 'Predestination' in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, edited by F.L.Cross and E.A.Livingstone (London, 1963), p.1099.

(10) D.Lamont, p.90.

(11) G.S.Hendry, p.123.

These arguments find various expressions. It has been said that predestination implies racialism - "Calvinism, with its great insistence on 'election', is the ideally suitable religious doctrine for white South Africa... I believe that the Calvinistic theology is largely to blame for the present tragedy in South Africa"(12).

Again, it has been asked "can a Calvinist pray?"(13). Believing that all must happen according to God's plan, has a Calvinist any motive to pray, especially intercessory prayers?

Whither in fact the Westminster divines and their successors did pray, preach, or practice racialism will be seen when examination is made of their use of this doctrine. At present it should be noted that the doctrine as stated does not preclude evangelism. Zanchius insists - "it does not follow... that all precepts reproofs and exhortations on the part of God, or prayers on the part of man, are useless, vain and insignificant"(14). On the contrary, the Calvinist position is summed up in this quotation from Augustine that Calvin repeated in his "Institutes" - "Because we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined, or does not, our desire ought to be that all may be saved, and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace"(15).

(12) T.Huddleston, Naught for Your Comfort (London, 1956), pp.64 & 233.

(13) W.R.Spear, 'Can a Calvinist Pray?', the Bulwark (June/July 1973), pp. 12-15.

(14) J.Zanchius, pp.86f.

(15) J.Calvin, Institutes, III,23,14.

Paragraph five of the Confession deals with "those of mankind that are predestined unto life". The only hint of disagreement at Westminster was over the phrase "unto everlasting glory" which some felt was superfluous.

Mention is made of God's "eternal and immutable purpose", the point being that God's will has not changed but was determined "before the foundation of the world". As shown, both Infralapsarian and Supra/lapsarian agreed on this but disagreed as to the place of the Fall in this divine plan. That was taken up in the next paragraph. However, in five the text is unquestioned.

The paragraph goes on to talk of God's "secret counsel". The significance of this expression is that God's wisdom is above and beyond that of man. It is impossible for man to see why God chooses one and not another. No system has claimed to be able to provide an answer but rather all state that there is no answer for man. All are sinners and deserve condemnation. That any are chosen is due alone to God's grace. Why those chosen are chosen rather than others cannot be explained.

Those chosen are chosen "in Christ". This is very important. It prevents discussion wandering too far into the realm of speculation and concentrates attention on Christ.

However, as has been argued against Calvin, the orthodox presentation of predestination tends to obscure the person and work of Christ. Instead the line of argument can lead to unfruitful speculation about the order of divine decisions.

This objection is strengthened by the fact that this is the only part of the chapter - paragraph five and six - where Christ is mentioned. Nevertheless the Confession does say that the elect are chosen in Christ and emphasises the truth that this is the only way to find assurance. In other words, there is no way of knowing God's will other than the way He has revealed. This is made clear in these two paragraphs where the unique place of Christ in election is stressed.

There is some repetition of points already made as the divines insist that God's choice is "out of His mere free grace and love". Explicitly excluded is "any foresight of faith or good Works etc."

This paragraph explains the reason for God's election as being "to the praise of His glorious grace". This does not mean that God is being gracious for the sake of being recognised as such. The divines would recoil in horror from such an accusation. What they mean is God's reasons are His own and His action reveals to man His glory and His grace. That is, man cannot question God but God in His act of election shows His true nature as Loving Father.

It was paragraph six that occasioned most debates. It also displays that good sense of the divines. There was a clear difference of opinion. Twisse, the prolocutor, was "a zealous supralapsarian" while most members "were on the other side"(16). There was debate but the final wording proved acceptable to all parties because it simply said "wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed in Christ". As Gillespie said "every man can enjoy his own sense".

(16) C.Hodge, Systematic Theology (London,1960), II, P.317.

This deliberate ambiguity is borne out in the way commentators still disagree about the meaning. While one can argue that the pervasive theology is supralapsarian (17), another declares that "our confessional standards embody the Infralapsarian position"(18).

The point of the paragraph is that God in choosing the elect has also "foreordained all the means thereunto". They are called, justified, adopted, sanctified and "kept... unto salvation". This is the great comfort the doctrine brings, teaching that one's salvation depends not on one's own efforts but on God's irrevocable decision.

The paragraph also suggests that once the process of salvation begins it cannot stop. However, the idea is not that of some mindless mechanism but of God's all-providing care. The point made is much the same as that found in the first paragraph that God's plan includes all "second causes". If to be saved one must persevere through temptation, then, the one chosen for salvation will be given the grace to persevere.

In mentioning the calling of the elect, care is taken to stress that they are "effectually called". Chapter X of the Confession is "of Effectual Calling". It is in this way that the Calvinist acknowledges that while all may be called by "the ministry of the word"(19), only those chosen are saved. This means that the Calvinist is free to preach the Gospel to everyone. The response of his hearers lies ultimately with God.

(17) W.M.Campbell, p.140.

(18) L.Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p.125.

(19) the Westminster Confession of Faith, X, 4.

It was the last three words of the paragraph that sparked off "one of the most notable debates reported in the minutes"(20). The words are - "the elect only".

It was at this point that the Amyraldian party made their big effort. Edmund Calamy, minister of St.Mary's Aldermanbury, London, argued that "Jesus Christ did not only die sufficiently for all" - something all agreed on - "but God did intend, in giving of Christ, and Christ in giving Himself, did intend to put all men in a state of salvation in case they do believe"(21).

The weakness of this argument was pointed out by "the cautious Dr. Reynolds"(22). He said that the implication was that Christ dies to save people "upon a condition that they cannot perform and God never intends to give them"(23).

There then followed a debate on the exegesis of several passages. This shows that for the divines any new theory, such as Amyraldianism was, had to be judged by appeal to the final authority of the Bible. Calamy turned to John III, 16 to argue that Christ died for the whole world, and to Mark XVI, 15 to say that universal redemption must be possible.

(20) B.B.Warfield, The Westminster Assembly, p.138.

(21) Mitchell & Struther, Minutes,

(22) Ibid., p.LV

(23) Ibid.,

In reply Gillespie and Rutherford suggested that "world" in John III meant the elect everywhere in the world. Lightfoot and Harris held that it refers to the Gentiles, while Price argued that talk of God loving the "world" did in no way contradict the idea of an elect chosen from that world.

On Mark, Rutherford replied that Calamy's argument would logically imply that all will be saved. Gillespie drew a distinction between God's command and His intention, illustrating his point by referring to the command to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis XXII). This argument of Gillespie's ties in with what was said about effectual calling; man is told what to do and this is what is to be his concern - not God's plan which may involve the apparent contradiction of that particular command.

At Westminster Calamy and his few followers were defeated, and the disputed words stood. However, some have tried to read the paragraph as meaning that it is the sum of the blessings to which the elect alone are entitled. This would leave the possibility of a bare redemption to others, a small concession to Calamy. However, that is a very unnatural reading and there is no doubt that "the Confession must be regarded as teaching that it is not true of any but the elect alone, that they are redeemed in Christ, any more than that any others are called, justified, or saved"(25).

Of paragraph seven the Minutes reveal only that the wording was gone over with care. The phrase "sovereign power" was debated but no details are given.

(25) W.Cunningham, Historical Theology, II, p.328.

This section deals with "the rest of mankind". The non-elect are not left with any "hypothetical" chance but are said to be "passed by". Again there can be no possible explanation for this in human terms, it is "according to the unsearchable counsel of His own Will". All sinners deserve damnation but why some are passed by is no more knowable than why some are chosen for life "it must be attributed to the exercise of His holy sovereignty"(26).

The paragraph goes on to refer God's passing by to "the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures". This does not mean that God is showing off His power but rather it firmly and reverently closes the door to human speculation - there are some things beyond the comprehension of man and he can only give the glory to God. Calvin reminds us that in the Romans passage "Paul does not want to claim for God an inordinate power but the power which He should rightly be given"(27). A proper understanding of predestination will help man appreciate his own nature and that of God.

God is said to "pass by" the non-elect. This is an attempt to avoid saying that God is responsible for their sin. The sin is their own, it is only that they have not been saved from their condition. The sin, being their own, is the reason for their "dishonour and wrath". The argument has been summarised as "grace to some, but injustice to none"(28).

(26) R.A.Finlayson, p.13.

(27) J.Calvin, Commentary of Romans (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 210.

(28) R.A.Finlayson, p.14.

However, as already shown, there is a difficulty here in that the Confession teaches both that God has one decree "from all eternity", and that man is condemned for his sin. The truth seems to be that the idea of election, however expressed, does lead to an appearance of partiality. All the different schools were aware of this but there is no way round the problem - "it is impossible to preserve a balance in this matter, either in thinking or speaking, since the Bible does not do so"(29). All that can be done - and the Confession marks the limits of one attempt - is do justice to all that the Bible teaches and hold the opposing truths in tension. God's sovereignty is undoubtedly shown by the Bible. So too is man's responsibility. That some men are saved is a fact that must be understood in the light of these two truths.

No details exist as to what was discussed in paragraph eight. Yet this paragraph is of the utmost importance for it explains how the doctrine is to be handled. Straightway the divines insist that it has to be used with "special prudence and care". Obviously they are well aware of the attendant dangers. The great aim, as they see it, is that people might be "assured of their eternal election". The doctrine is to be used positively and thus "afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the Gospel."

The other side of this is not argued at length but is of great importance; if the doctrine is felt to cause distress or unbelief it is a certain sign that the doctrine has not been properly understood.

(29) R.A.Finlayson, p.14.

Thus in paragraph eight the divines were sounding a warning; there is more to the doctrine of predestination than a casual glance might suggest. Any criticism of predestination must be based on serious study and not on instinctive reaction.

(6) THE DOCTRINE IN PRACTICE

(a) Mission

It has already been seen in connection with paragraph four that the doctrine of predestination has been thought to preclude missionary enterprise. It has also been seen that Calvinism had an answer. Now it must be asked, what happened in practice - did those brought up in the Calvinist tradition, especially those who came after Westminster, neglect evangelism?

Foreign mission has often been seen as a field neglected by the Reformers and their Calvinist successors. There is one statement that is often quoted as illustrating the alleged Calvinist viewpoint, that of Ryland to William Carey - "when God pleases to convert the heathen He will do it without your aid or mine"(1).

There is no doubt that foreign mission did not occupy the forefront of Reformed thought. However, it is interesting - and is significant - that while he can find six reasons for this, Latourette does not mention the doctrine of predestination(2).

- (1) J.I.Packer, 'Calvin the Theologian' in John Calvin, edited by Duffield, p.151.
- (2) K.S.Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity : Three Centuries of Advance (London, 1943),

The plain fact is that the Reformed churches were in no position to launch large-scale missionary enterprise. For centuries they were on the defensive, "Protestants were fighting for their very existence and had little leisure for anything outside Western Europe"(3).

Yet there was some missionary activity and it was Calvin who sent the first Protestant missionaries when in 1555 Nicholas Durand led an expedition to an island off Brazil. Nor was this an isolated incident; Gustavus Vasa sent missionaries to the Lapps, and in 1587, Richard Hakluyt said in a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh that one of the purposes of exploration was to bring the Word of God to the natives.

The same spirit is reflected in the Charter of James I for Virginia in 1606. One of its purposes was to take "the Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God"(4). James was a Calvinist.

Among those adhering to the Westminster Confession the fact would be noted that the Confession teaches that "the gathering and perfecting of the Saints in this life"(5) is part of the work of the church. That this fact was not overlooked is revealed in Walter Smith's "Rules for Society Meetings". There it is explicitly taught that Christians should pray for both "the outcasten of Israel..that the promised day of their ingrafting might be hastened" and for the "poor pagan world" that "the Lord's written and preached word may be sent to enlighten them"(6).

(3) K.S.Latourette, p.25.

(4) Charters to the Old English Colonies in America, edited by S.Lucas (London,1850),p.2.

(5) Westminster Confession of Faith XXV,3.

(6) P.Walker, Six Saints of the Covenant, edited by D.H.Fleming (London,1901),II,p.94.

It is significant that when Presbyterianism was established by the 1689-90 settlement, the Calvinist Church of Scotland did back missionary effort. In 1699 Alexander Shiels and three others with his brother Michael as secretary were sent to take part in the third Darien Expedition. Their express purpose was "to labour among the heathen"(7). In 1702 the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge was founded by James Kirkwood, an Episcopalian. In 1704 the General Assembly authorised presbyteries to raise money for the work of the Society and in 1709 the first meeting of the Society was held in Edinburgh with William Carstares among those invited. Clearly, then, missionary work both overseas and in the Highlands of Scotland was not forgotten and even when unable to do anything concrete the Calvinist did feel concerned. The prayer of the Calvinist Scots Confession - "Give Thy servants strength to speak Thy word with boldness and let all nations cleave to the true knowledge of Thee"(8) - was remembered.

It was not forgotten at the local level. Preaching was regarded as "the first duty of a minister"(9) and of preaching in seventeenth century Scotland, G.D.Henderson affirms "there is much simple evangelical appeal and we know of the rather extraordinary revivalistic success of Dickson and Livingstone"(10).

(7) J.Barr, the Scottish Covenanters (Glasgow 1947), p.243.

(8) the Scots Confession of 1560, p.80.

(9) D.Matthew, p.43.

(10) G.D.Henderson, Religious Life, p.205.

Although John Wesley, and many since, argued that a belief in predestination "renders all preaching vain"(11), yet in practice the Calvinist preached an open Gospel as Calvin and Augustine had urged. For example, Donald Cargill on John VIII,36 emphasises the "open proclamation of the Gospel" saying clearly that Christ is ready to accept "all that come"(12).

William Guthrie affords more examples. From "the Christian's Great Interest" - a book still enjoying popularity in paperback form - we read "He hath made open proclamation in the Church that whosoever will put aside all thoughts of saving themselves by the covenant of works, or inherent righteousness, and will agree heartily to be saved by Christ Jesus, they shall be restored... and shall be saved"(13). "Let them remember that peace and salvation are offered on universal terms to all without exception... God excludes none if they do not exclude themselves"(14).

James Renwick, towards the end of the Killing Time, made a similar appeal - "if you except not yourself, He will not except you. His invitation is unto all. His invitation is to everyone"(15). And "He is a free Saviour, for all who are here this night, young or old, men or women, may have Christ Jesus"(16).

(11) J.Wesley, Journals, edited by N.Curnock (London, no date), V, pp.116ff.

(12) Sermons in Time of Persecution, edited by J.Kerr (Glasgow, 1880), p.489.

(13) W.Guthrie, The Christian's Great Interest (London, no date), p.133.

(14) Ibid., pp.137f.

(15) the Sermons of James Renwick, edited by W.Wilson (Glasgow, 1776), p.19.

(16) Ibid., p.107.

In fact the Calvinist Covenanters retained the vision even in the hour of death. James Guthrie in his speech from the scaffold said "all that are profane amongst you, I exhort them to repentance... there is yet a door of mercy open for you, if you will not despise the day of Salvation"(17). Similarly Captain William Govan urged "you that are profane, leave off your profanity, forbear sin and seek mercy"(18).

It is of course to be understood that in speaking like this the Covenanter preacher held that only the elect would respond - "I pray the Lord, that He may open the eyes of all the elect, who are yet strangers to regeneration"(19) said Walter Smith, while John Cochran stated that he was "bound to pray for all that were within the bounds of election"(20).

However, while in England a school of thought arose under Joseph Hussey that there should be no offer of grace, the Scottish Calvinist felt bound to offer Grace to all. Only the elect could respond but not knowing the elect, the preacher had to treat all as possible believers, leaving the rest to God.

(17) The Cloud of Witnesses, edited by J.H.Thomson (Glasgow,1870),p.71.

(18) Ibid., p.74.

(19) Ibid., p.354.

(20) Ibid., p.459.

The argument about racialism, being a more recent form of the old criticism, deserves a more recent reply. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod, comprising those churches adhering to an unqualified confessional commitment, met in Sydney, Australia, during 1972. Among the resolutions passed are the following; "to reject every form of racial discrimination and racism" and "to reject every attempt to maintain racial supremacy by military, economic, or any other means" (21). The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa concurred, "Scripture teaches and maintains the essential unity of the human race, together with the primaevial cohesion and equality in principle of all nations (peoples)"(22), and explicitly said that where differing "the difference is not one of ideals and aims but of the best method of achieving them"(23).

There is no evidence to support the thesis that a belief in predestination leads to the practice of racialism. On the contrary, the Calvinist position is that no one can speculate on another's predestined lot. Therefore it is impossible for a Calvinist to erect any system of discrimination.

(21) 'Resolutions on Race Relations (revised)', supplement No.28, in Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Australia 1972 (Grand Rapids, 1972), p.330.

(22) 'Report on Race Relations (from Dutch Reformed Church, South Africa)', Supplement No.9, Acts, p.227.

(23) Ibid., p.238.

(b) Assurance and Moral Effort

It is sometimes argued that the doctrine of predestination with its promise of assurance led to antinomianism. In England it helped produce the Ranters "some of whom believed that God's grace had made them incapable of sin and acted upon that belief"(1).

Scottish literature affords two striking illustrations of this attitude. Both belong to the eighteenth century but as that age bore the fruits of Westminster teaching the illustrations are valid.

One is Robert Burns' "Holy Willie's Prayer" where we read:

"O Thou that in the heavens does dwell
Wha, as it pleases best Thyself'
Sends ane to heaven an' ten to hell,
A' for Thy glory
And no' for onie guid or ill
They've done afore Thee".

A recent commentator on the Confession has it that this is "a reasonable comment on this section of the Confession"(2). It is about as reasonable a comment on predestination as is Parson Adams' comment on justification by faith (3). Burns takes no notice of the fact that the Confession insists that the reprobate suffer for their sin.

(1) C.Hill, The Century of Revolution 1603-1714 (Edinburgh,1961),p.167.

(2) J.Philip, p.32.

(3) H.Fielding, Joseph Andrews (London,1965),p.55.

Willie, believing himself a "chosen sample", can excuse his "fleshly lust" on that account and can even see it as a "fleshly thorn" to keep him from being too good. Willie is not unlike the Ranter and while his reasoning is not true to Westminster teaching it does perhaps suggest how the doctrine could be misunderstood.

Even more striking is James Hogg's "Confessions of a Justified Sinner". The central character, believing he is predestined to salvation, is led to think that all his sins up to and including murder, are not sins at all. Gradually he falls completely under the power of his mysterious "friend", too late recognising him as the Devil. Significantly, an early conversation includes this; "I asked if he (the friend) believed in the eternal and irrevocable decrees of God, regarding the salvation and condemnation of mankind? He answered that he did so; aye, what would signify all things else that he believed, if he did not believe in that?... He took me to dwell much on the theme of the impossibility of those ever falling away who were once accepted and received into covenant with God, for he seemed to know that in that confidence, and that trust, my whole hopes were centred"(4).

Obviously Hogg felt that predestination could lead to antinomianism of an extreme kind, and his book has been seen as truly illustrating "a departure from sanity to which fundamentalist Calvinism could run when followed out to the bitter end"(5).

(4) J.Hogg, the Confessions of a Justified Sinner (London,1970),p.112.

(5) D.Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People (London,1961), p.196.

In England a kind of antinomianism did appear. The leaders of this school were Saltmarsh, once a chaplain in Cromwell's army and described by Fuller as a man "of fine and active fancy, no contemptible poet, and a good preacher"(6), Eaton, Crisp and Lancaster. They taught eternal justification and argued that a man's actual justification in time is merely the realising of what he already had. The dangers of such a theory are obvious. However, what is equally obvious is the fact that the Westminster Confession explicitly denied this theory - "they (the elect) are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them"(7).

The same confession also warns that the elect can "fall into grievous sins"(8) and far from encouraging laziness or complacency it says that the doctrine should produce both "humility" and "diligence"(9).

That it did have this effect cannot be doubted. The Calvinists could see the dangers of their theory. Hugh McKail urged his fellow covenanters to "make it your entire study, night and day to keep your very garments clean... be free of the sin as ye would be of the judgements"(10).

(6) C.H.Firth, Cromwell's Army (London,1962),p.321.

(7) Westminster Confession of Faith., XI,4.

(8) Westminster Confession of Faith., XVII,3.

(9) Westminster Confession of Faith, III,8.

(10) Cloud of Witnesses, p.112.

Nor did Calvinist preachers feel any of Holy Willie's superiority but rather as Cargill wrote to the Gibbite sect - "you will join with none in public worship but those who have infallible signs of regeneration. This seems fair, but it is both false and foul: false, because of the false foundation, viz. that the certainty of one's interest in Christ may be known to another; whereas the scripture says that none know it but he that has it; foul also, for this disdain has pride in it"(11).

Faults were admitted. Rutherford provides a most interesting example. He wrote "if the meekness and gentleness of our Master had got so much place in our hearts that we might have waited on gainsayers and parties contrary minded; we might have driven gently, as our Master Christ, who loves not to overdrive, but carries the lambs in His bosom"(12).

In fact the Calvinists were "well known for their moral enthusiasm and moral strictness"(13). Predestination did not lead to moral laxity nor to sanctimonious posturing. "In practice the doctrine of election, so far from discouraging effort, stimulated it... it is interpreted as vocation, an individual trust and call from God"(14). And then there is the other side of the argument, for "the evidence certainly does not show that neglect of this doctrine has produced that humility, diligence and abundant consolation that has marked the church in better days - days when this doctrine was so handled"(15).

(11) Cloud of Witnesses, p.348.

(12) Ibid., p.56.

(13) A.C.Ewing, Ethics (London, 1962) p.164.

(14) G.D.Henderson, the Claims of the Church of Scotland (London, 1951), p.44.

(15) G.I.Williamson, pp.39f.

(c) Personal Faith

It has been noted that the Confession picture of God at times seems little more than a cold abstraction. Yet to those trained in that tradition, those who affirmed the Westminster standards, God was loving Father, and many talked and wrote of His love as an experienced reality.

Alexander Wedderburn sees love as God's fundamental attribute - "God is love, and not only loving, but love itself"(1). Livingstone, one of the most winning preachers of the day, challenged the angels to "sit down and sum up the count of His love" and concluded "No, No, give it over, give it over, it cannot be summed"(2).

Cargill, often thought of as one of the more austere Covenanters, wrote "the more you delight in God, the more He will delight in you"(3).

Renwick could write of that "infinite and transcendant love, in the profound depth of the admiration where of angels drowned"(4) and later "However you may be surrounded with the world's malice and hatred, His love is still about you and always next to you"(5). Towards the end, the day before his execution, Renwick wrote his testimony - "I have found His cross sweet and lovely unto me, for I have had many joyful hours, and not a fearful thought since I came to prison...welcome scaffold for precious Christ... I commit my soul unto Thy eternal rest"(6).

(1) A.Wedderburn, the Believer's Priveleges (Edin., 1682)p.35.

(2) Select Biographies, edited by W.K.Tweedie, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh 1845), I, p.272.

(3) W.H.Carslaw, Life and Times of Donald Cargill (Paisley, 1902), p.35.

(4) W.H.Carslaw, The Life and Letters of James Renwick (Edinburgh 1893) p.26.

(5) Ibid., p.227.

(6) Cloud of Witnesses, p.560

Similar sentiments were expressed by other, less famous, Covenanters. For example, James Wood could thus state the ground of his faith - "I have been under several shakings, but that word hath stayed me 'Him that cometh to me, I will in no ways cast out', blessed be the mouth that spoke it, may I not trust to it?"(7). This statement also illustrates the centrality of Christ Jesus in the faith of those in the Westminster tradition. Devotion to Christ is seen in testimonies like that of John Neilson of Corsack - "if I had many worlds, I would lay them all down, as now I do my life, for Christ and His cause"(8).

On the Westminster divines, Rutherford in his letters gives lyrical expression to his faith. These letters have been an object of controversy ever since they appeared in print, but it is not without significance that they are still in print. Although some may still feel that Rutherford's raptures are "of the grossest and most indecent kind"(9), yet it is at least obvious that Rutherford's religion is no lifeless intellectualism. Just after his wife died "after long disease and torment", he can write "welcome, welcome, Jesus, what way soever Thou come, If we can get a sight of Thee"(10).

(7) Cloud of Witnesses, p.80

(8) Ibid., p.103.

(9) W.L.Mathieson, p.224.

(10) S.Rutherford, Selected Letters, edited by H.Martin (London,1957) p.21.

Among his own last words as they are recorded - "I said to the Lord 'If He should slay me five thousand times five thousand, I would trust in Him... as really as ever He spake to me by His Spirit, He witnessed to my heart, that His grace should be sufficient"(11).

Gillespie, prematurely aged, died at thirty five. In his "latter will" he wrote "Being through much weakness and sickness in expectation of my last change, I have thought good, by this my latter will, under my hand to declare first of all, that the expectation of death, which appeareth not to be far off, doth not shake me from the faith and truth of Christ, which I have professed and preached"(12).

Henderson could talk of his approaching death with the same calm faith - "never schoolboy more longed for the breaking-up than I do to have leave of the world"(13).

Thus it appears that those who helped formulate the Westminster Confession and those who held by its standards were men of a strong personal faith, a faith that was tried and tested in full. For them the doctrine of predestination was a source of real comfort, and they saw it and taught it not as a fearful message but as the final proof of God's sovereign grace.

(11) Cloud of Witnesses, p.51.

(12) Ibid. pp.43f.

(13) A.Smellie, p.21.

CONCLUSION

"Others apart sat on a hill retired,
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate -
Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end, in wandering mazes lost"(1).

Although Milton was describing fallen angels a feeling persists that he might have been writing of the Westminster divines. However, if one asks why those divines devoted a whole chapter of their confession of faith to this question of predestination, there are several important answers.

On one level the Westminster Confession does owe much of its content and its expression of that content to its historic situation. Coming at the end of the immediate post Reformation period, it reflects the search for clarity and precision that the preceding period had made vital. For political as well as theological reasons a confession of faith had to be able to show exactly where a community stood with regard to the disputed doctrines of the Christian faith. This explains not only the form confessions took but the authoritarian air they are sometimes supposed to exude. The Westminster Confession is a child of its age.

The actual doctrine figures prominently for reasons both political and theological. The political reasons are to be found in the state of ferment in which not only Scotland and England but the whole of Europe was plunged.

(1) J.Milton 'Paradise Lost', Book II, lines 557-561, in The Poetical works of John Milton (London,1919),p.42.

Changes were happening, often with dramatic suddenness, causing confusion and uncertainty. The Protestant churches knew themselves to be in danger of destruction. Hence men were drawn to consider the question of God's will - could it be overturned? Would any of God's promises fail? Were the events of the day part of God's plan? So, out of existential concern and not out of mere academic interest, the scholars and divines searched for an answer.

It was to the Bible they turned for that elusive answer. That cannot be doubted. Even allowing for the fact that their attempts to systematise their findings often led them to strange conclusions they did try to remain faithful to what they believed the Bible said.

That the Bible has much to say on this subject is obvious. In both Testaments there is clear emphasis on God's sovereignty. In Christ Jesus there is supremely revealed this sovereignty in its Character of Grace.

However, the Bible also brings out with equal force man's freedom and responsibility. This is the consistent message; God's will is sovereign and man's freedom is real, both. This paradox is the source of all the difficulties experienced by the divines. It would be relatively simple to construct a theory that integrates all that the Bible says about one or the other truth. The trouble starts when both truths have to be brought together.

The history of the development of the doctrine in the years preceding Westminster illustrate this point. Each theory evolved within the Reformed school is an attempt to resolve this problem, an effort to redress the imbalance of other efforts. None can be called a success; each is true to one or other aspect, but all fail to hold the whole picture together. All end up sooner or later confessing their inadequacy, even when proclaiming their superiority to rival theories. Thus it is not surprising, and not even a damning indictment, to say that the Westminster Confession is not a fully integrated account. The divines acknowledge this, at least indirectly in paragraph eight when they call for "special prudence and care" in handling this "high mystery"(2). That is to their credit.

What can be asked of their theory, is, does it do justice to the two truths already mentioned? The answer is that it does. Perhaps Twentieth Century divines would prefer simply to acknowledge the paradox and hold the truths in tension knowing that it is "beyond our understanding how both can operate simultaneously"(3) but the Seventeenth Century required some attempt at reconciliation. That this attempt failed, was bound to fail, does not change the fact that the Westminster divines were right in identifying and affirming the truth of God's sovereignty and man's freedom.

(2) Westminster Confession of Faith, III,8.

(3) 'Election' in the Lion Handbook to the Bible, edited by D.&P. Alexander (Berkhamsted, 1973), p.586.

The doctrine and the Confession that contains it have both suffered from neglect and distortion. The aim of these pages has been to remove some of the many mistaken notions that surround doctrine and confession and to attempt to do justice to what the divines felt they had to say. To them the doctrine of predestination was a source of strong comfort, an impetus to bold action. For them the God of predestination was the Father of Christ Jesus to whom alone they trusted for salvation, only thus daring to believe themselves elect. It was in the light of this faith that the doctrine of predestination was believed and taught and given confessional status. Apart from that faith, the doctrine cannot properly be understood.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

The Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638-1842, Church Law Society (Edinburgh, 1843)

Berkouwer, G.C., The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth (London, 1965)

Brunner, E., Our Faith (London, 1965)

Cochrane, A., Reformed Creeds of the Sixteenth Century (London, 1966)

Curtis, W.A., History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith (Edinburgh, 1911)

Hendry, G.S., The Westminster Confession for Today (London, 1960)

Mackintosh, H.R., Types of Modern Theology (London, 1964)

Macquarrie, J., God Talk (London, 1967)

Macquarrie, J., 'A Modern Scottish Theologian: Ian Henderson, 1910-1969', The Expository Times, Vol. 82, No. 7. (April, 1971).

Macquarrie, J., Principles of Christian Theology (London, 1970)

Reports to the General Assembly with the Legislative Acts. 1970 (Edinburgh, 1970)

The Subordinate Standards and Other Authoritative Documents of The Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1955)

Routeley, E., Creeds and Confessions (London, 1962)

Tillich, P., Systematic Theology I (London, 1964)

CONFESSION AND COMMUNITY

Galloway, A.D., 'Are the Creeds Redundant?' Enquiry I (Jan., 1969)

Lamont, D., The Church and the Creeds (London, no date)

- Stevenson, J., ed., A New Eusebius (London, 1965)
- Tillich, P., Ultimate Concern (London, 1965)
- Tillich, P., A History of Christian Thought (London, 1968)
- Von Loewenick, W., 'Origin and Significance of the Apostles' Creed' in A New Look At the Apostles' Creed, ed. G. Rein (Edinburgh, 1969)

The SEVENTEENTH CENTURY CONFESSIONS

- Ashley, M., England in the Seventeenth Century (Harmondsworth, 1962)
- Bryce, J., The Holy Roman Empire (London, 1906)
- Burleigh, J.H.S., A Church History of Scotland (London, 1961)
- Campbell, W., The Triumph of Presbyterianism (Edinburgh, 1958)
- Henderson, I., Power Without Glory (London, 1967)
- Knox, J., The Works of John Knox, ed., D. Laing, V & VI (Edinburgh, 1895)
- Lindsay, T.M., History of the Reformation, II (Edinburgh, 1964)
- MacInness, J., 'The Historical Background to the Westminster Confession', The Records of the Scottish Church History Society, 15 (1968)
- McNeill, J.T., 'The Ecumenical Idea and Efforts to Realise It, 1517-1618' in A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948, eds., R. Rouse and H.C. Neill (London, 1967)
- Macpherson, H., The Covenanters Under Persecution (Edinburgh, 1923)
- Matthew, D., Scotland Under Charles I (London, 1955)
- Mosse, G.L., 'Changes in Religious Thought' in New Cambridge Modern History, IV, ed. J.P. Cooper (London, 1970)
- Pryde, G.S., Scotland from 1603 to the Present Day (Edinburgh, 1962)
- The Scots Confession of 1560, introduced by G.D. Henderson, translated by J. Bulloch (Edinburgh, 1960)
- Sitwell, E., The Queens and the Hive (Harmondsworth, 1971)
- Whitley, E., Plain Mr. Knox (Edinburgh, 1972)

COVENANT, CONFESSION COMPROMISE

Baillie, R., The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh, 1841)

Brown, P.H., History of Scotland, II (London, 1902)

Burnet, G., Memoires of the Lives and Actions of James and William Dukes of Hamilton (London, 1677)

Burnet, G., A History of His Own Times, ed. T. Stackhouse (London, 1906)

Bush, D., English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660 (London, 1962)

Calderwood, D., The History of the Kirk of Scotland, I ed., T. Thomson, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1842)

Cunningham, W., The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation (London, 1969)

Davies, G., The Early Stuarts: 1603-1660 (Oxford, 1962)

Dickinson, W.C., & Donaldson, G., eds. A Source Book of Scottish History, III (London, 1961)

Douglas, J.D., Light in the North (Exeter, 1964)

Dunlop, W., ed., A Collection of Confessions of Faith, II (Edinburgh, 1719)

Foxe, J., Acts and Monuments, II (London, 1661)

Hall, B., 'Calvin Against the Calvinists' in John Calvin, ed. G.E. Duffield, Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology (Abingdon, 1966)

Harrison, A.W., Arminianism (London, 1937)

Henderson, G.D., Religious Life in Seventeenth Century Scotland (London, 1937)

Henderson, I., Scotland, Kirk and People (Edinburgh, 1969)

Hewitson, J.K., The Covenanters, I & II (Glasgow, 1913)

Laing, D., ed., The Miscellany of The Wodrow Society, I (Edinburgh, 1844)

- Leonard, E.G., A History of Protestantism: the Establishment (London, 1967)
- McCrie, C.G., The Confessions of the Church of Scotland. Their Evolution in History (Edinburgh, 1907)
- Mackenzie, A.M., Scottish Pageant 1625-1707 (Edinburgh, 1949)
- Macleod, J., Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since The Reformation (Edinburgh, 1946)
- McNeill, J.T., The History and Character of Calvinism (New York, 1967)
- Mathieson, W.L., Politics and Religion in Scotland, II (Glasgow, 1902)
- Meikle, H.W., Correspondence of the Scots Commissioners in London, 1644-46 (Roxburghe Club, 1917)
- Mitchell, A.F., & Struthers, G., eds., Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (Edinburgh, 1874)
- Mitchell, A.F., The Westminster Assembly. Its History and Standards (London, 1883)
- Parker, T.M., 'Arminianism and Laudism in Seventeenth Century England' in Studies in Church History, I (London, 1964)
- Peterkin, A., ed., Records of the Kirk of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1838)
- Row, J., The History of the Kirk of Scotland, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1842)
- Schaff, P., A History of the Creeds of Christendom (London, 1877)
- Smellie, A., Men of the Covenant (London, 1962)
- Stevenson, D., The Scottish Revolution (Newton Abbot, 1973)
- Thomson, T. & Innes, C., eds., The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland, II (Edinburgh 1814-75)
- Torrance, T.F., ed., The School of Faith: the Catechisms of the Reformed Church (London, 1959)
- Trevelayn, G.M., England Under the Stuarts (Harmondsworth, 1960)
- Trevor-Roper, H., 'Scotland and the Puritan Revolution' in Historical Essays 1600-1750 (London, 1963)

Warfield, B.B., 'Predestination in the Reformed Confessions' in Studies in Theology (London, 1932)

Warfield, B.B., The Westminster Assembly and its Work (London, 1931)

Watt, H., Recalling the Scottish Covenants (London, 1946)

Wedgwood, C.V., The King's War (London, 1959)

Wodrow Manuscripts, Folio 25, No.13 (1643)

Wedgwood, C.V., 'The Covenanters in the First Civil War', The Scottish Historical Review, 39 (1960)

Journals of the House of Commons, IV (London, 1803)

WHY PREDESTINATION

Alexander, J.N., 'The United Character of the New Testament Witness to the Christ-Event' in the New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective, ed. H. Anderson & W. Barclay (Oxford, 1965)

Blackadder, J., Memoirs, ed. A. Crichton (Edinburgh, 1863)

Bright, J., A History of Israel (London, 1966)

Brunner, E., The Christian Doctrine of God (London, 1966)

Caird, G.B., 'Expository Problems: Predestination - Romans 9 - 11', The Expository Times, LXVIII, No.11 (Aug. 1957)

Calvin, J., Institutes of the Christian Religion (London, 1962)

Calvin, J., 'The Doctrine of Election' in The Mystery of Godliness and Other Sermons (Grand Rapids, 1950)

Cheyne, A.C., 'The Westminster Standards: A Century of Re-Appraisal', Records of the Scottish Church History Society, 14 (London, 1960)

Cowley, A., The Metaphysical Poets, ed. H. Gardner (Harmondsworth, 1963)

Eichrodt, W., Theology of the Old Testament, I (London, 1961)

Flew, A., 'Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom' in New Essays in Philosophical Theology (London, 1966)

- Haller, W., The Rise of Puritanism (New York, 1957)
- Henderson, I., Can Two Walk Together? (London, 1948)
- Hewat, K., Peden the Prophet (London, 1911)
- Hunter, A.M., The Gospel According to St. Paul (London, 1966)
- Innes, A.T., The Law of Creeds in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1847)
- Lee, F.N., The Westminster Confession and Modern Society (Edinburgh, 1972)
- Lewis, H.D., Philosophy of Religion (London, 1965)
- Macleod, D., The Westminster Confession Today (London, 1972)
- Macleod, D., 'The Theology of the Scots Confession', Reformed Forum, 1, No.3 (December, 1972)
- Niven, W.D., Reformation Principles (Glasgow, 1953)
- Packer, J.I., 'Predestination' in The New Bible Dictionary, ed. J.D. Douglas (London, 1965)
- Proceedings in the Case of John Macleod Campbell (Greenock, 1831)
- Reid, J.K.S., 'Determinate' in A Theological Word Book of the Bible, ed. A. Richardson (London, 1950)
- Scott, W., Old Mortality (Edinburgh, no date)
- Simpson, R., Traditions of the Covenanters (Edinburgh, no date)
- Smith, R.G., The Doctrine of God (London, 1970)
- Walker, J., The Theology and Theologians of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1963)
- Wandel, F., Calvin, the Origin and Development of His Religious Thought (London, 1965)
- The Westminster Confession of Faith (Edinburgh, 1963)
- Williamson, G.I., The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes (Philadelphia, 1964)
- Witherspoon, T.D., 'The Westminster Assembly Itself' in Memorial Volume of the Westminster Assembly, the American Presbyterian Church (Richmond, 1891)
- Zanchius, J., Absolute Predestination (Grand Rapids, 1971)

HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE

- Augustine, The City of God, I (London,1945)
- Augustine, Earlier Writings, ed., J.H.S. Burleigh (London,1953)
- Augustine, Confessions and Enchiridion ed. A.C. Outler (London,1954)
- Arminius,J., 'A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius' in The Works of Arminius, I, ed. J.Nichols (London,1825)
- Armstrong,B.G., Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy (Wisconsin, 1969)
- Barth,K., Church Dogmatics II, 2 (Edinburgh,1957)
- Berkhof,L., The History of Christian Doctrines (London,1969)
- Beza,T., Tractationes Theologiae (Geneva,1570-82)
- Calvin,J., Commentary on Jeremiah and Lamentations, IV (Edinburgh,1850-55)
- Calvin,J., Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God (London,1961)
- Farmer,H.H., The World and God (London,1963)
- French,A., Charles I and the Puritan Upheaval (London,1955)
- Luther,M., The Table Talk of Martin Luther, ed. W.Hazlitt (London,1890)
- Luther,M., The Bondage of the Will (London,1957)
- Niesel,W., The Theology of Calvin (London,1965)
- Packer,J.I., 'Calvin the Theologian' in John Calvin, ed. Duffield
- Parker,T.H.L., 'Predestination' in A Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. A.Richardson (London,1969)
- Schaff,P., Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches (New York,1882)
- Toon,P., Hyper Calvinism (London,1967)
- Van Buren,P., The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (London,1966)

THE WESTMINSTER STATEMENT

Boettner, L., The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination (Philadelphia, 1969)

Calvin, J., Commentary on Romans (Edinburgh, 1961)

Cunningham, W., Historical Theology, II (Edinburgh, 1870)

Finlayson, R.A., 'Does the Westminster Confession Teach Double Predestination?' Reformed Forum, I, No.1 (January, 1972)

Hodge, C., Systematic Theology, II (London, 1960)

Huddleston, T., Naught For Your Comfort (London, 1956)

Philip, J., The Westminster Confession of Faith, An Exposition (no place, no date)

'Predestination' in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone (London, 1963)

Spear, W.R., 'Can a Calvinist Pray?' the Bulwark (June/July, 1973)

THE DOCTRINE IN PRACTICE

Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Australia 1972 (Grand Rapids, 1972)

Barr, J., The Scottish Covenanters (Glasgow, 1947)

Burns, R., Poems and Songs (London, 1963)

Carslaw, W.H., The Life and Letters of James Renwick (Edinburgh, 1893)

Carslaw, W.H., The Life and Times of Donald Cargill (Paisley, 1902)

Craig, D., Scottish Literature and the Scottish People (London, 1961)

Ewing, A.C., Ethics (London, 1962)

- Fielding, H., Joseph Andrews (London, 1965)
- Firth, C.H., Cromwell's Army (London, 1962)
- Guthrie, W., The Christian's Great Interest (London, no date)
- Henderson, G.D., The Claims of the Church of Scotland (London, 1951)
- Hill, C., The Century of Revolution (Edinburgh, 1961)
- Hogg, J., The Confessions of a Justified Sinner (London, 1970)
- Kerr, J., ed., Sermons in Time of Persecution (Glasgow, 1830)
- Latourette, K.S., A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Three Centuries of Advance (London, 1943)
- Lucas, S., ed., Charters to the Old English Colonies in America (London, 1850)
- Rutherford, S., Selected Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. H. Martin (London, 1957)
- Thomson, J.H., ed., The Cloud of Witnesses (Glasgow, 1870)
- Tweedie, W.K., ed., Select Biographies, I, Wodrow Society (Edinburgh, 1845)
- Walker, P., Six Saints of the Covenant, ed., D.H. Fleming, II (London, 1901)
- Wedderburn, A., The Believer's Priveleges (Edinburgh, 1682)
- Wilson, W., ed., The Sermons of James Renwick (Glasgow, 1776)

CONCLUSION

- 'Election' in The Lion Handbook to the Bible, ed. D. & P. Alexander (Berkhamsted, 1973)
- Milton, J., The Poetical Works of John Milton (London, 1919)