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Vorwort

Mitte der vierziger Jahre des 17. Jahrhunderts zeichnete sich das Ende jenes großen militärischen Konfliktes ab, der zu einer politischen Neuordnung Europas führte. Zu den politischen Konsequenzen des Dreißigjährigen Krieges zählten gesellschaftliche Modernisierungsprozesse nicht nur unter den direkt am Krieg beteiligten Mächten; Prozesse, die ebenso die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von territorialer Obrigkeit und Kirchen neu aufwarfen.

Diese gesellschaftspolitischen Neukontextualisierungen führten auch innerhalb von Kirchen und Theologie zu heftigen Diskussionen zwischen Traditionalisten und Reformern. Die Stellung der Kirchen innerhalb einer sich wandelnden Gesellschaft wurde von Theologen ebenso bedacht wie ihre inhaltliche Ausrichtung festgeschrieben.

Die in diesem Teilband edierten Texte umfassen den Zeitraum der Jahre von 1647 bis 1675; sie reflektieren die gesamteuropäische Problemlage, die bereits vor dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg die kirchenpolitische Situation bestimmte. So erscheint der neu vorgelegte Teilband als direkte Fortsetzung des Bandes 3/2, der insgesamt die Bekenntnistexte der Jahre von 1605 bis 1675 enthält. Auf diese Weise kommt die reformierte europäische Bekenntnisbildung des 17. Jahrhunderts insgesamt in einem Band 3/2 in den Blick. Ein Register für die Teilbände 3/1 und 3/2 schließt den Band ab. Mit ihm wird die inhaltliche Konzeption, die der Herausgeberkreis unter Professor Dr. J.F. Gerhard Goeters erarbeitet hat, zu ihrem Abschluss geführt.

Der Herausgeberkreis hat dem Rat und dem Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland erneut für die großzügige finanzielle Unterstützung zu danken, ohne die eine Umsetzung solch langjähriger Projekte nicht möglich wäre. Dank gebührt ebenfalls der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland für die gewährte Gastfreundschaft.

Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern in Bibliotheken und Archiven sowie studentischen wie wissenschaftlichen Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern danken wir für die tatkräftige Unterstützung. Frau Dr. Beate Magen und Herr PD Dr. Ferdinand Magen haben auch diesmal auf bewährte und stets zuverlässige Weise den Band redaktionell begleitet. Frau stud. theol. Anna Lena Schwarz hat das Register der Kirchenväterzitate durchgesehen und das Sachregister zusammengestellt. Ihnen allen haben wir für ihre Mitarbeit zu danken.

Im Auftrag des Herausgeberkreises
Andreas Mühlhölting

Torrance Kirby

81. The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1647

Introduction

The WESTMINSTER CONFESSIO*N* lays claim to being among the most influential creedal statements of the early-modern period, and indeed it has exercised a major influence on churches of the Reformed faith, especially in America, ever since its promulgation. Its serene statement of the principles of Reformed theology belies the stormy political circumstances of its gestation and birth in the midst of Civil War between King Charles I and the English Parliament. Although not himself a member of the Assembly of 150 divines, Richard Baxter describes them as »men of eminent learning and godliness, ministerial ability and fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may the more freely speak that truth which I know, even in the face of malice and envy, that so far as I am able to judge by the information of all history [...] the Christian world since the days of the apostles had never a Synod of more excellent divines«. ¹ Membership of the Assembly included a broad range of ecclesiological persuasions, including Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents, sprinkled with a leaven of ministerial delegates from the Scottish Kirk who, although declining formal membership of the Assembly, nonetheless exercised considerable influence on the final outcome.

When the Westminster Assembly convened on 1 July 1643 with 69 of those invited in attendance, it was initially occupied with the revision of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* of the Church of England. Without doubt the most decisive political event during the course of those summer months was the adoption of the *Solemn League and Covenant for reformation and defence of religion*, in essence a treaty between England and Scotland for the preservation of the reformed religion in Scotland, the reformation of religion in England and Ireland »according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches«, and the aboli-

¹ The Autobiography of Richard Baxter, ed. N.H. Keeble, London 1974, 72. First published *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ: or Mr Richard Baxter's narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and times*, ed. Matthew Sylvester, London: T. Parkhurst et al., 1696.

tion of episcopacy.² Drafted by Alexander Henderson in Scotland and approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on 17 August 1643, the *Solemn League and Covenant* was subsequently adopted by the House of Commons and the Assembly on 25 September following.³ It was then sent back to Scotland where it was formally signed and sworn to by the Committee of the Convention of Estates of the Scottish Parliament and by the Commission of the General Assembly of the Kirk, and was then sent throughout the realm to be subscribed by the people.

On 18 September 1643, while the Westminster Assembly had begun revising the sixteenth article of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, »Of sinne after Baptisme«, an order plainly inspired by the *Solemn League and Covenant* came from both Houses of Parliament commanding the divines »upon serious Consideration of the present State and Conjuncture of the Affairs of this Kingdom [...] do forthwith confer and treat among themselves, of such a Discipline and Government as may be most agreeable to God's holy Word, and most apt to procure and preserve the Peace of the Church at Home, and nearer Agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other reformed Churches abroad, to be settled in this Church, in Stead and Place of the present Church Government by Archbishops, Bishops, their Chancellors, Commissaries, Deans, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and other Ecclesiastical Officers depending upon the Hierarchy, which is resolved to be taken away; and touching and concerning the Directory of Worship or Liturgy hereafter to be in the Church; and to deliver their Opinions and Advices of and touching the same, to both or either House of Parliament, with all the convenient Speed they can«. ⁴

In implementing this order, the Assembly entered upon prolonged debates on a radical overhaul of church government during the remainder of 1643 and throughout 1644. Their labours produced *A Directory for the publique worship of God* and *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government*, both agreed upon by the Assembly.⁵ They were also approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in February 1645. Thus the preparation of a confession common to the churches of England and Scotland came to be viewed as the inevitable out-

2 A solemn league and covenant, for reformation and defence of religion, the honour and happiness of the King, and the peace & safetie of the three kingdoms, Aberdene: Edw[ard] Raban, 1643.

3 The Covenant: with a narrative of the proceedings and solemn manner of taking it by the Honourable House of Commons, and reverent Assembly of Divines the 25th day of September, at Saint Margarets in Westminster, London: Thomas Vnderhill at the Bible in Wood-Street, 1643.

4 Journals of the House of Commons, vol. 3: 1643-1644 (1802), 246.

5 A directory for the publique worship of God, throughout the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland: together with an ordinance of Parliament for the taking away of the Book of common-prayer, London: Evan Tyler et al., 1644. See also Act of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, approving the Propositions concerning Kirk-government, and Ordination of ministers, Assembly at Edinburgh, 10 February 1645, Sess. 16.

come of the *Solemn League and Covenant*.⁶ Consequently, the initially modest task of revising the Thirty-Nine Articles had been shifted dramatically at the behest of Parliament to the more demanding commission of reforming the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England in order to bring it into closer conformity with the Scottish presbyterian exemplar.

On 20 August 1644, a committee appointed by the Assembly gathered in the magnificent Chapel of Henry VII at Westminster Abbey to commence drafting the CONFESSION OF FAITH. After nearly two years of deliberations, when the Assembly had formally communicated on 22 July 1646 the death of its prolocutor, Dr William Twisse, and their election of Charles Herle to take his place,⁷ the House of Commons took the opportunity to resolve that the assembled divines »be earnestly moved to expedite the Catechism, and the publick CONFESSION OF FAITH: And the Members of this House that are of the Assembly, are to acquaint the Assembly of Divines herewith«. ⁸ Their urging clearly had an effect, for on 24 September 1646, the first nineteen chapters, more than half of the CONFESSION OF FAITH, were sent to the House of Commons for consideration. The Commons appointed that this preliminary draft of the CONFESSION should be considered in »Grand Committee« (i.e. a committee of both Houses) on 9 October, and ordered copies to be printed for the use of members; John Selden and Zouch Tate were appointed »to prepare some convenient expression to be put upon the title-page that the said books are printed to the end the members of both Houses may advise thereupon«. ⁹ On 26 November 1646 the minutes of the Assembly record that »The CONFESSION OF FAITH was finished this day, and by order of the Assembly the Prolocutor gave thanks, in the name of the Assembly, to the Committee that had taken so good pains in the perfecting of the CONFESSION OF FAITH«. ¹⁰ On 7 December the House of Commons ordered the

6 S.W. Carruthers, *Westminster Confession*, 10.

7 William Twisse (1578-1646) was anonymous author of the tract *The doctrine of the synod of Dort and Arles, reduced to the practise*, Amsterdam: Successors to G. Thorp, 1631?; repr. 1651. Anthony à Wood described Twisse as »the mightiest man« in the controversies of his age in *Athenæ Oxonienses*, 2 vols. 1691-1692; new edn., ed. P. Bliss, 4 vols. 1813-1820; repr. 1969, 3:171 – Cf. E.C. Vernon, *William Twisse*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27921>, accessed 4 Nov 2012. Charles Herle (1597/98-1659) was a clergyman of the Church of England of Independant sympathies and author of a Reformed catechism. See Herle's *The Independency on Scriptures of the Independency of Churches*, London: Thos. Brudenell, 1644 and *The principles of Christian religion, proved by scripture, propounded by questions and answers*, London: R.L. for Samuel Man, 1645 – See Vivieene Larminie, *Charles Herle*, in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, online edition <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13080>, accessed 4 Nov 2012.

8 *Journals of the House of Commons*, vol. 4: 1644-1646 (1802), 622.

9 *Ibid.* 685, 688.

10 See *Minutes of the sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* [...], November 1644 to March 1649, ed. A.F. Mitchell and J. Struthers, Edinburgh/London: W. Black-