The Confession of Faith

Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly

Series Editors
John R. Bower and Chad Van Dixhoorn

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THE WESTMINSTER
ASSEMBLY PROJECT

The Confession of Faith

A CRITICAL TEXT AND INTRODUCTION

by
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Dedicated to the memory of

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield
(1851–1921)

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FOREWORD

It is not often that a book containing a carefully researched critical text of an almost four-hundred-year-old document deserves to be greeted with widespread enthusiasm and studied with care and deep appreciation. But this work, whose centerpiece is a critical edition of the text of the Westminster Confession of Faith, well deserves all the plaudits it will doubtless receive. It has all the hallmarks of a careful scholarly comparison of texts and of a prolonged and deep-seated commitment to serve both the academy and the church by patient and painstaking labor. Given the widespread interest in Reformed theology in the twenty-first century, the publication of what now stands as the best and most accurate text of the Confession of Faith is an event to be welcomed. I, for one, am filled with admiration for the expertise and scholarly skills that Dr. John Bower has brought to this important task.

But in these pages, we are given more. For they contain a thesaurus of valuable charts comparing the original drafts and the final revised versions of the various chapters of the confession. These charts, alongside an accurate final text, add a sense of the dynamic interchanges that took place both in the committee work and in the plenary sessions on the floor of the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster Abbey in the critical and tumultuous years of the 1640s.

Not only so, but Bower has prefaced the whole with what amounts to a book-length introduction, providing a narrative of the actual composition of the confession's text. Here the door into the Jerusalem Chamber is opened for us, and we catch something of the very *Sitz im Leben* of the assembly and the atmosphere of its debates. We are given a new appreciation for the fact that a document which has, by and large, been viewed as though it had emerged virtually all at once from a single mind is a more remarkable production by far—the product of many learned and theologically astute minds focused on the same goal of producing a document that would serve as a symbol of deeper unity of doctrine among Reformed churches in the British Isles and beyond.

Here, too, we are given access to the side rooms in which committees of the assembly met and forged their joint theological convictions into a magisterial document that, while virtually falling to the ground in England, would in future years exercise a worldwide influence its framers never could have imagined. The production was a monumental one, but its calm exterior and measured progress through the theological loci can easily mask the fact that the document emerged in its final form only as a result of intense debate and sometimes disagreement within the chamber. Dr. Bower brings this all to life.

This narrative helps to "humanize" the assembly. It also at times sheds fresh light on the interpretation and significance of the text of the confession itself. I suspect that no one will be able to reach the end of this volume without having a deepened appreciation for the group of divines who labored long and hard to produce a document whose usefulness continues to the present day.

No preface to this work would be complete without a word of special appreciation to its author and text editor, John Bower. Many readers of these pages will already be familiar with Dr. Bower's earlier contribution to this series in his critical edition of the text of the Larger Catechism. This volume rises to a yet higher level, partly because of the significance of the text but also because of the extended way the story behind its composition is unfolded for us. It is a great achievement and places all who have an interest in Reformed theology and its history in Dr. Bower's debt.

Some readers familiar with the editor's previous contribution to this series might well assume that he is a doctor of theology who serves in a theological seminary and specializes in seventeenth-century theology. In fact, while his theological and historical expertise is evident on every page, John Bower's vocation is that of a physician of the human body. He is a medical doctor whose specialty is infectious diseases, an area in which he has served with distinction. Yet, clearly, he brings to the task the same patient sifting and analysis of evidence, and the ability to interpret it by means of forming sound diagnostic judgments, that he employs in his medical practice. He is to be saluted for the labor of love on behalf of both the church and the academy that this volume represents. It is no small gift and deserves to be consulted frequently, studied carefully, and treasured deeply.

Sinclair B. Ferguson
Westminster Theological Seminary
February 2020

SERIES PREFACE
Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly

In 1643, the Westminster Assembly was charged by the Long Parliament to formulate documents necessary to reform and unify religion in the three kingdoms. While this attempt to reform the church proved an English failure, it was a Scottish and Irish success. The directories, confession, and catechisms of the assembly were officially adopted by the Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as was a revised form of the assembly's Psalter. Through emigration and missionary activity, the ideals and teachings of the Westminster divines were spread around the world. Yale historian Sydney Ahlstrom judged that the Westminster Confession of Faith, in its original and altered forms, became "by far the most influential doctrinal symbol in American Protestant history." In fact, many consider the assembly's confession and catechisms, commonly known as the Westminster Standards, as the finest and most enduring statements of early modern Reformed theology.

When the Westminster Assembly began revising the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England in July 1643, a search was made to uncover the most "Authentike" copies of the original text. Assembly members demanded textual accuracy before critically examining the church's historic doctrinal formula. Nearly four centuries later, the Westminster Standards are now recognized in some fashion as the doctrinal formulas for Reformed and Presbyterian denominations worldwide. Nonetheless, a call today for the most authentic texts of these standards would leave many librarians and curators perplexed. Accurate critical editions of these texts are either incomplete or do not exist. Best known is the work of S. W. Carruthers, the historian and bibliographer who produced critical editions of the Confession of Faith (1937) and Shorter Catechism (1957).

The series of texts in the Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly differ from previous works in that they tell the story of a birth rather than a life. Our intent is to reconstruct the principal documents of the Westminster Assembly

as they were originally intended in the seventeenth century. By scrutinizing and collating all available copies of the text immediately supervised by the assembly, the critical edition strives to emend the inaccuracies of individual textual sources. Consequently, the resulting emended text emerges as an essentially unique edition. This differs from the editions of Carruthers and others in that no attempt is made here to trace the editorial history of the text after the time of the assembly.

The proposed series includes the assembly's six documents originally intended for establishing uniformity of religion: the Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Public Worship, the Directory for Church Government, and the Psalter. Each edition will include a historical introduction, the critical text, and parallel columns comparing original manuscripts and authoritative editions, retaining both the original spelling and punctuation. All texts are collated from original manuscripts and printed sources rather than copies.

We hope these critical texts will become the standard among historians and theologians for critical work on the assembly, and the best base from which translators, commentators, and modern editors of the text can work.

John R. Bower
Chad Van Dixhoorn

PREFACE

In offering a new critical edition of the Confession of Faith, some justification is necessary given that a serviceable edition by Samuel W. Carruthers has existed for more than eighty years.[1] In fact, this earlier text has provided the documentary source for many, if not most, of our modern editions of the Confession of Faith and remains a valuable resource into its textual history. Yet the critical approach taken by Carruthers envisioned more than a restoration of the original text; at the same time he traced centuries of textual variants over generations of editions, mapping their sources and commenting on their significance. Moreover, Carruthers considered it necessary that the critical text adapt itself to the "modern eye" by updating capitalization and spelling and, when possible, modernizing punctuation. The resulting critical work succeeded in removing centuries of error from the face of the confession, but in doing so it perceptibly altered the document's expression and introduced some new errors along the way.

Like the Carruthers work, this critical edition is concerned with correcting the text, but rather than an edition meant to accommodate modern readers, the current work is chiefly intended as a scholarly historical text that best approximates how the assembly originally intended its Confession of Faith to appear. It is hoped that, used as a reference, this edition will facilitate work on more accurate and thoughtfully edited modern editions. For despite its seventeenth-century garb, what emerges is neither a static facsimile nor a past event unconcerned with the future. Instead, this critical text supplies a tangible link across the centuries, helping to connect the assembly's original text and vision for the confession with

1. S. W. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an Account of the Preparation and Printing of Its Seven Leading Editions, to Which Is Appended a Critical Text of the Confession* (Manchester: Aikman, 1937; repr., Greenville, S.C.: RAP, 1995). The first modern critical text, however, was by S. W. Carruthers's father, William Carruthers: *The Confession of Faith of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster: With the Texts of Scripture Annexed; From the Original Editions Printed, under the Care of the Assembly, by Order of the House of Commons, in 1646 and 1647, Collated with the Edition Issued by Authority of Parliament in 1648* (London: Presbyterian Church of England, 1903).

today's church. Reflecting this purpose, original errors undetected by the scribes and printers are corrected. Details of punctuation and capitalization are carefully preserved out of regard for their potential to subtly maneuver meaning, especially in an early modern theological formula. Likewise, original spelling is retained to guard against potential misconstructions, such as may arise when updating archaic words. Together, the preservation of these seventeenth-century elements of language will hopefully serve to communicate greater meaning and accuracy into the twenty-first century.

In addition to restoring the text itself, a significant portion of this critical edition is taken up with the history of how the assembly created its new confession. In a real sense, tracing the history of the document is a part of its textual restoration. Sifting through the synod's deliberative process, various fragments of debate are collected and sorted that, when pieced together, help to reconstruct either what the assembly may have intended by a particular phrase or, just as likely, what it did not intend. Past accounts of the making of the confession have provided either brief surveys of the general process, such as that by C. A. Briggs and most general histories of the assembly, or deeper plunges into specific aspects of the work, as exemplified by B. B. Warfield's examination of the confession's first three chapters and the textual histories of William and Samuel Carruthers.[2] This study seeks to reach beyond the twenty months that traditionally bracket the confession's debate and consider the assembly's broader confessional experience from 1643 to 1648, following the complex and often interwoven trail marked out by the sessional minutes and other key documentary sources.

Beginning with the lesser-known revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles in 1643, attention turns in chapter 2 to the events and details surrounding Parliament's order to take up the confession, including the assembly's first de novo theological work, the articles of knowledge, and the editorial roles served by

2. C. A. Briggs, "The Documentary History of the Westminster Assembly," *The Presbyterian Review* 1 (1880): 127–63. Notable general histories include A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London: James Nesbit, 1883); W. A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church during the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth, 1640–1660*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900); and W. A. Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (New York: Robert Carter, 1859). Contributing substantially to our detailed understanding of the making the Confession of Faith is B. B. Warfield's series of articles: "The Westminster Doctrine of the Holy Scripture," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 4 (1893): 582–655; "The Making of the Westminster Confession and Especially of Its Chapter on the Decree of God," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* (April 1901): 226–83; "The Printing of the Westminster Confession," *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* (October 1901): 606–59; and "The Westminster Assembly and Its Work," *Princeton Theological Review* 6, no. 3 (July 1908): 353–91.

various committees. The next four chapters enter into a detailed overview of the assembly's deliberative process, following the divines in their work of drafting, debating, and editing, beginning with the principles of religion in the confession's first nineteen sections and concluding with the remaining headings as they deal with the doctrines of godly service, especially within the church. This editorial survey concludes with chapter 7 as it recounts the confession's transcription and the passage from manuscript through an evolution of three privately printed versions. Each of these four copies was directly superintended by the assembly's scribes, and together they represent the confession's only authoritative textual sources. Parliament, however, only partially accepted the "humble advice" of its advisory body, leading to the creation of a fifth version of the confession in 1648. Bound up with each of these five copies of the text is a unique story illuminating the document's history, ranging from issues of manuscript provenance to the remarkable work of the prooftext committee.

In approaching this work, several qualifications are worth noting. First, it must be acknowledged that this history draws very heavily on the work of Chad Van Dixhoorn, both the *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly* and his transcription of John Lightfoot's previously unknown journal, the only source for understanding the assembly's first two months. Hopefully this reliance will be appreciated as a mark of the groundbreaking and foundational nature of Dr. Van Dixhoorn's contribution. Second, it must be stressed that this introduction is not a historical theology of the Westminster Confession but rather a history of the writing of the confession's theology meant to aid the historical theologian's understanding of the assembly's doctrines by uncovering instructive in situ perspectives into their formulation. Lastly, it is necessary to note that, as every editor of past editions has found, the process of removing old errors without introducing new ones is daunting. While close attention has been paid to every one of the document's nearly eighty thousand characters that comprise the text and prooftexts, any claim to being error free remains to be proved.

It is hoped that this critical edition and historical introduction will serve as an aid toward sustaining and advancing the confession's historical, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical relevance for today. Particularly, by exploring the ground that lies between debate and agreement (a route well-traveled by the assembly's divines), it is hoped that new insight can be gained not only into the meaning of the text but also into the purposes and processes of creedal formulation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Confession of Faith ranks as perhaps the assembly's most significant and enduring contribution to England's plan for religious uniformity. Not surprisingly, therefore, this new critical edition of the confession occupies an important place in the Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly series, a position underscored not only by the scope of the document's introduction but also by the number of original copies that were collated for the text. Consequently, I find myself deeply indebted to many contributors in this effort.

Foremost on that list is Chad Van Dixhoorn, who has made this work possible at several critical points, beginning with his scholarly contribution of *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*. No meaningful textual study of the Westminster Assembly can be conducted apart from what is now the chief historical and documentary resource of its proceedings. On a more personal level, Chad has advanced this work throughout by offering advice and needed resources, assisting in the formulation of editorial criteria for the critical text, and graciously submitting to the task of reviewing at least three separate drafts of the introduction.

I wish to thank Reformation Heritage Books for continuing this series and for the editorial labors and patient guidance of Joel R. Beeke, Jay T. Collier, and their team at Reformation Heritage Books. As part of their broader commitment to promoting scholarship into the Westminster Assembly and its members, they have materially enhanced the accuracy and usefulness of this work.

Having had the opportunity to collate multiple copies of the three authoritative printed editions, I gratefully recount the kindness and advice of the rare book and special collections departments of the British Library, Cambridge University Library, Trinity College (Cambridge), Queens College (Oxford), the National Library of Scotland, the University of Edinburgh, Guildhall Library, Trinity College (Dublin), the Philadelphia Library Company, and the Folger Shakespeare Library. I especially thank the archivists at Westminster College in Cambridge,

Helen Weller and Margaret Thompson, who not only provided access to printed resources but also extended the privilege to consult the Braye Manuscript with its copy of the Confession of Faith. Moreover, they provided the equally unique opportunity to examine the personal papers of S. W. Carruthers. I also thank Helen Carron at Emmanuel College for locating editions of the confession and in providing copies of manuscript notes by S.W. Carruthers.

Lastly, and most importantly, this work was made possible by my wife and coworker, Dorothy, who, with encouraging optimism and considerable skill in reading early modern texts, persevered alongside me in proofreading multiple editions of the confession and drafts of the authoritative text.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Introduction:
The Making of the Confession

CHAPTER 1

Revising the Articles

In confessions of faith, we cannot be too carefull or too short.

—Charles Herle, while debating
the Thirty-Nine Articles

During the summer of 1643, "Learned and Godly divines" from the Church of England were called to advise the two houses of Parliament in a sweeping reorganization of the national church. Promising the nation's godly a "further and more perfect reformation," Parliament charged the assembled clerics to reaffirm the church's historic Calvinism and replace its liturgy and government with new forms "most agreeable to Gods 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."[1] Upending the church's established authority and regular routine was a radical step for a society already convulsed by a yearlong civil war. But the King's steadfast opposition to ecclesiastical reform, and his involvement in the controversial policies of Archbishop William Laud, figured prominently in the conflict that now left England in political, economic, and religious chaos. Reforming the institutional church was crucial to the Long Parliament's comprehensive strategy for preserving order in godly society and a vital adjuvant to bolstering the nation's faltering struggle against Royalist forces.[2]

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1. *An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament. For the Calling of an Assembly of Learned, and Godly Divines to Be Consulted with by the Parliament* (London: Printed for J. Wright, 1643), 1.

2. John Morrill, *The Nature of the English Revolution: Essays by John Morrill* (London: Longman Group, 1993), 45–68; John Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67–88.

A Further Reformation

As their inaugural task, the assembled divines were handed the church's existing doctrinal standard, the Thirty-Nine Articles, to review and fortify. But after three months pursuing this course, the assembly's mandate suddenly veered from rehabilitating the Church of England to building an entirely new multinational system of religious uniformity. Driving this abrupt change in direction was the ratification of the Solemn League and Covenant, a vital treaty with the Scots whereby the English Parliament not only secured crucial military assistance in its war with the King but also introduced a fresh paradigm for church reform.[3] Under this agreement the churches of England, Scotland, and Ireland obligated themselves to "the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship and catechizing."[4] It now fell to the English synod, aided by a handful of Scottish consultants, to craft an entirely new documentary foundation, one that not only advanced Reformed orthodoxy but accommodated the varied cultural and ecclesiastical needs of three national churches.

Among the six documents conceived by the Solemn League and Covenant and given birth to by the assembly, the Westminster Confession of Faith stands apart as perhaps the guiding banner of religious uniformity. Neither highly original nor excessively controversial, the confession's well-rehearsed teachings made it the most fundamental and inclusive expression of conformity within the church and the undisputed benchmark for consensus. Extolling the new creed's broad appeal, Robert Baillie reported that it was received by both houses "without considerable dissent of any." Indeed, "even many of our greatest opposites," he continued, hail it as "the best Confession yet extant"—a significant assessment given that the Reformed community had by this point spawned dozens of confessions.[5]

What made the Confession of Faith the keystone for covenanted uniformity was that its twelve thousand words constituted more than a doctrinal repository. The document supplied the basic organizational blueprint for the church and its work, thereby supplying coherence to the broader plan of uniformity by

3. Wayne Spear, *Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners on the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 29–31.

4. *A Solemn League and Covenant* (London: Printed for Edward Husbands, 1643).

5. Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journal of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Printed for Robert Ogle, 1841), 3:2. For a review of the depth of Reformed confessionalism, see James Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

defining, informing, and integrating the various operational guides of government, worship, and education into a single comprehensive model of the church. Moreover, as an expression of the national church's mind, the Confession of Faith provided a societal standard for both doctrinal orthodoxy and godly living that spoke as the nation's collective conscience, offering approval or judgment for actions at every level of civil and ecclesiastical service.[6]

Revising the Articles: A De Facto Confession

Despite the Confession of Faith's proposed strategic role in covenanted uniformity, nearly two years passed before work on the new national creed began in earnest. Behind this delay was the pressing need of Parliament and its Scottish allies to reform the Church of England's highly idiosyncratic forms of worship and government: the two points in which England stood at greatest distance from other Reformed churches.[7] In crossing this gaping ecclesiastical chasm of worship and government, the assembly's divines would need to proceed cautiously, for they were entering, as they well knew, "paths that have hitherto been untrodden by any Assembly in this Church."[8] England's doctrinal footing, however, was far more certain as its Thirty-Nine Articles lay solidly within the pale of established Reformed orthodoxy and shared the same sixteenth-century Reformed tradition as Scotland and the Continental Reformed churches.[9] Doctrinal matters, therefore, while no less significant to the work of uniformity, could be confidently deferred since agreement was widely expected.

Further bolstering England's doctrinal credentials were the three months already invested by the assembly in reviewing and affirming the first fifteen of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Although the project was prematurely abandoned, the fifteen completed articles succeeded in covering the core principles of religion, from God through redemption, and offered a viable "consensus statement" of faith for the rebooted national church. As such, the freshly revised articles offered the nation a de facto confession, a temporizing symbol of the reforming Church

6. Norman Shepherd, "Scripture and Confession," in *Scripture and Confession*, ed. John Skilton (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), 20–24.

7. Document 55, "A Letter to the Church of Scotland," January 6, 1645, in Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5:161 (hereafter abbreviated as *MPWA*).

8. Document 21, "A Letter to the Church of Scotland," May 17, 1644, in *MPWA*, 5:71.

9. Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, 52–57; Mark Noll, ed., *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 211–13.

of England's orthodoxy and doctrinal trajectory at home and abroad.[10] It was in this unofficial role as a creedal placeholder that the synod would invoke the revised articles as assurance of England's theological harmony with Scotland: "Concerning one Confession of Faith, and forme of Catechisme, we make no question of a blessed and perfect harmony with you. The publick doctrine held out by our Church to all the world, (especially when it shall be reviewed, which is in great part done,) concurring so much with yours, may assure you of your heart's desire in those particulars, so soon as time and opportunity may give us liberty to perfect what we have begun."[11]

Even after the Solemn League and Covenant forced England's revolutionary party to abandon its effort at individual reform, attention periodically returned to the revised articles. In 1645, immediately prior to starting the Confession of Faith, the divines briefly considered whether their early work might serve as an interim standard for the national church.[12] Two years later, when the assembly submitted its finished draft of the Confession of Faith to the Long Parliament, the divines were also ordered to submit their work on the revised English Articles.[13] Titled the *Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines upon the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*, the work appeared alongside the first complete edition of the Confession of Faith (1647).[14] Significantly, the revised articles were also included in Parliament's negotiations with the King on the Isle of Wight in 1647, hoping perhaps to present a less contentious standard for doctrinal agreement. Missing from the assembly's fifteen articles, however, was the controversial

10. *House of Lords Journals*, 3:121 (July 1643) (hereafter abbreviated *LJ*). The journals can be accessed at British History Online, www.british-history.ac.uk/. The Lords' instructions for the first ten articles were "to vindicate them from all false Doctrine and Heresy." The summoning, or calling, ordinance also mentioned the correction of "false calumnies" and "misconstructions."

11. *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1638–1842* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Printing and Publishing Co., 1843), 113. In a letter dated January 6, 1645, the English synod explained, "The chief reason of laying aside the review of our publick doctrine, after the happy and much desired arrivall of your reverend commissioners here, was, the drawing up and accelerating of a Directory for Worship, and of a Forme of Church Government."

12. *MPWA*, 3:583, session 421 (April 21, 1645).

13. *Journals of the House of Commons*, 5:2, 156 (1802) (hereafter abbreviated as *CJ*). These journals can be accessed at British History Online, www.british-history.ac.uk/. See also *MPWA*, 5:323–28, document 122, "Revisions of *Thirty-Nine Articles*, Submitted to Both Houses of Parliament" (April 22, 1647).

14. *Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines upon the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1647). The revised articles were printed by order of the House of Commons along with Edition 3 of the Confession of Faith. See *CJ*, 5:156 (April 29, 1647).

article 8, which never received the synod's final approval.[15] These same fourteen articles surfaced again in 1654, bearing a new title, *The Fourteen Pillars of the Church of England*, and were now commended to Oliver Cromwell as a provisional national creed following his dissolution of the Rump Parliament.[16]

More importantly, for the purpose of this introduction, the revised articles left an abiding mark on the assembly and its work. By starting with the English Articles, the divines were immediately obliged to think and debate "confessionaly."[17] Through the process of open debate on the assembly floor, the divines scrutinized and debated the central tenets of religion and confronted the challenges of drawing confessional boundaries amid a host of doctrinal distinctions. Collectively, members hurdled numerous theological obstacles, including the role and limits of creeds, the nature of Christ's obedience, the moral law, original sin, justification, and the place of good works. All the while, the synod's culture of engagement and rules of procedure were being formulated within a context of pursuing broad doctrinal agreement.[18] Equally important, the work of revising the old articles generated an inventory of doctrinal and organizational insights that later contributed to the new articles. In fact, between July 8 and October 12, 1643, more than fifty sessions were devoted to debating the core doctrines of God, creation, the fall, and redemption—nearly the same number of sessions spent debating the same subjects in the later Confession of Faith.[19] With this effort, as Robert Norris observes, "there can be no doubt

15. English Article 8 ("Of the Three Creeds") was left out of the proposition for settling church government in negotiations with the King since final action by the assembly on this article never occurred and significant differences within the assembly existed over its utility (see *CJ*, 5:332 [October 14, 1647]). The text of the fourteen revised articles was included in the last of the four bills presented to Charles, noting that "this indulgence shall not extend to tolerate the printing, publishing or preaching of any thing contrary to the principles of the Christian religion, as they are contained in the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Articles of the Church of England, according to the true sense and meaning of them, and as they have been cleared and vindicated by the Assembly of Divines, now sitting at Westminster; nor of any thing contrary to those points of faith, for the ignorance whereof men are to be kept from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as they are contained in the rules and directions for that purpose, passed both Houses the 20th of October, 1645."

16. *Articles of Religion; or, The Fourteen Pillars of the Church of England, Presented to Our Late King Charles at the Isle of Wight* (London: Printed for John Tompkins, 1654).

17. Robert Norris, "The Thirty-Nine Articles at the Westminster Assembly" (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 1974), lx.

18. S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian Historical Society, 1943), 44–58.

19. The number of sessions involved debating the Confession of Faith refers to the first drafts of

that when the Confession of Faith came to be drafted, the clear and defined thinking that resulted from these first debates on the revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles reduced the time needed for discussion, and conduced to the clarity and conciseness that are hallmarks of the Westminster Standards."[20]

A notable limitation to past efforts to study the assembly's early work, most notably in revising the Thirty-Nine Articles, is the lack of sessional minutes prior to September 4, 1643. The only firsthand account for this period is the four-volume personal journal of John Lightfoot, an active member of the assembly. Unbeknown to historians, however, the edition of Lightfoot's journal published in 1824 omitted much of the material concerning these first two months. But the rediscovery and transcription of Lightfoot's complete journal by Chad Van Dixhoorn casts new light on this period, revealing that the editor of the 1824 text had deleted nearly 85 percent of what he deemed "extraneous" text—nearly all of which related to work on the Thirty-Nine Articles.[21] What Lightfoot's original journal provides is a wellhead of fresh insight into the scope, energy, and impact of these early debates, which underscores not only the importance of the assembly's early work in doctrinal formulation but also its impact outside the Westminster Abbey's Jerusalem Chamber, particularly in countering antinomianism.[22]

The First Confession: To Defend and Vindicate

Key to guiding the assembly's confessional groundwork in the Thirty-Nine Articles was the restriction imposed by Parliament's summoning ordinance

these chapters and does not include the assembly's extended debate on the eternal decree.

20. Norris, "Thirty-Nine Articles," lx.

21. Chad Van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652," 7 vols. (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), consisting of vol. 1, "Reforming the Reformation"; vol. 2, "Appendix A"; and vols. 3–7, "Appendix B, Minutes of the Westminster Assembly." "Appendix A" (vol. 2) is a transcription of John Lightfoot's original first journal by Van Dixhoorn, which will be referred to hereafter as Lightfoot, *First Journal.* Van Dixhoorn's account of Lighfoot's original journal appears in 2:viii–xvii.

22. For a discussion of the Westminster Assembly's work contending with antinomianism, see Whitney Gamble, *Christ and the Law: Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018). It is important to note that the assembly's efforts to oppose antinomianism in these early sessions clearly counter Robert Paul's objection that the assembly's first months of doctrinal introspection had no impact on a society in crisis. Paul remarks that it was "not because they produced anything that lasted, but precisely because they produced nothing." *The Assembly of the Lord* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1985), 82. Other historians, such as Jack Rogers, have long recognized the assembly's work as part of Parliament's legitimate effort "to settle the religious affairs of England." See Jack Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 133.

that the assembly limit itself only to fortifying the church's doctrinal defenses against attack and misinterpretation.[23] This narrower approach to defending and vindicating the Church of England's doctrinal repository constrained the assembly to dwell more on countering potential ambiguities and erroneous constructions of the existing text than in honing truth with new content. Yet the task was not without merit, for despite its orthodoxy the Thirty-Nine Articles had fallen prey to manifold "calumnies," "false accusations," and "misrepresentations," especially from the growing and vocal ranks of sectarian preachers and writers.[24] In this light, the assembly's work is perhaps best viewed as a form of confessional deconstruction: examining and refurbishing the existing articles in an effort to improve existing content and silence critics.[25] The divines regretted this revisional bias to approaching the old articles, for as they later acknowledged, "we made fewer alterations in them and additions to them, then otherwise we should have thought fit to have done, if the whole matter had been left to us without such limitation."[26]

Yet while lamenting the constraint imposed by Parliament's order to address only erroneous understandings, the divines clearly welcomed the opportunity. Sermons preached before the assembled members of the two houses by godly clergy, including many from the assembly itself, regularly invoked the dangers of theological error and urged leaders to uphold their vow "to maintain and defend" the "doctrine of the Church of England."[27] Failure to quell "licentious spirits, who took occasion, as to vent their own fancies," cautioned Oliver Bowles, risked not only the spread of their errors but exposed members of Parliament to censure as indirect "fautors [patrons] of such opinions."[28]

When investigating such unmerited attacks (or "aspersions") on the Thirty-Nine Articles, the synod ordered "every Committee to bring in aspersions under

23. *An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament for the Calling of an Assembly*, 1.

24. B. Reay, introduction to *Radical Religion in the English Revolution*, ed. J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 9–10. See also Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), 98–106; and David Como, *Blown by the Spirit* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 20–32.

25. Alexander Mitchell and John Struthers, eds., *The Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 541. See also Rogers, *Scripture*, 134.

26. *Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines upon the Thirty Nine Articles*, "To the Honourable House of Commons Assembled in Parliament," 1–2.

27. This vow was taken by members of Parliament in May 1641. For the text, see *CJ*, 2:132 (May 3, 1641).

28. Oliver Bowles, *Zeal for Gods House Quickened* (London: Printed by Richard Bishop, 1643), [A2r–A2v].

the aspersers owne name & wordes & the bookes also quoted for the thing, for the Assemblies ocular & full satisfaction."[29] Coming under greatest scrutiny were the teachings and books of the antinomians, particularly when the time came to consider article 7 ("Of the Old Testament"). Having reviewed the antinomian teachings, the divines sent a "humble Petition" to Parliament, asking that the chief exponents of antinomianism appear "before the Assembly to give an account of their damnable Doctrine."[30] Consequently, a joint committee on antinomianism composed of assembly members, together "with some members of the house of Commons," was appointed for the purpose of examining prominent antinomian leaders.[31] Following these interviews, the new committee presented a summary of the major antinomian errors, citing also the various English Articles these teachings principally opposed—namely, 7, 9, 15, 16, and 27.[32] The committee, which was anxious "to quicken the house of Commons for the surer quelling of these hereticks," then concluded its report with a dire warning: "If we that have this worke committed to us, do not something for the vindicating of Gods truth & honour, we cannot but expect that sentence, Cursed be he that doth the worke of the Lord negligently."[33]

Despite the assembly's urging of Parliament to suppress heresy, the divines themselves stood aloof from labeling specific teachings as heresy, including those of the antinomians. During the assembly's debate on the report concerning antinomianism, John Selden, representing the House of Commons, called on assembly members to specifically label the list of antinomian errors as heresy, but the assembly demurred. Anthony Burgess cited the Act of Supremacy under

29. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 37–38 (August 21, 1643). This was modified the next day to read, "that the aspersions should be prepared by the Committees as they go along, but not debated nor determined of by the Assembly till the 39 Articles be gone thorough by proofes." Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 38 (August 22, 1643).

30. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 25 (August 9, 1643). The petition was sent on August 10, 1643.

31. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 30 (August 11, 1643). Those examined included Giles Randall, "a ringleader of that sect," along with John Simpson. Another prominent antinomian leader examined by the committee was Robert Lancaster, a publisher of several influential antinomian works, who, along with Randall, Simpson, and six others, had been named in the assembly's petition to Parliament. Lancaster was singled out particularly for his publication of John Eaton's *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (London, 1642).

32. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 89–92 (September 20, 1643). With the exception of article 27 ("Of Baptism"), the assembly had either completed or was already revising the remaining articles that directly concerned the antinomian error, which were article 7 ("Of the Old Testament"), article 9 ("Of Original, or Birth-Sin"), article 15 ("Of Christ Alone without Sin"), and article 16 ("Of Sin after Baptism").

33. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 92 (September 20, 1643).

Elizabeth I, explaining that the designation of heresy exceeded their authority.[34] By this reference Burgess inferred that since heresy bore civil punishments, such a pronouncement was limited to those errors judged heretical by the first four general ecumenical councils or by Parliament with the assent of the church.[35] Selden, however, argued that it was necessary for Parliament to know if a teaching was heresy, otherwise the houses were unable to proceed.[36] Thomas Temple, the antinomian committee's chair, was inclined to agree with Selden, but the assembly as a whole remained opposed. Objections were offered against the assembly having any role in deciding punishment (a consequence that likely awaited those branded as heretics), while others argued that there existed a distinction between schism and heresy and in degrees of heresy, for as Edmund Calamy cautioned, "A man may hold an error and not be a heretic."[37]

Preparing for Debate

Parliament managed the assembly's work of revision cautiously by incrementally apportioning the articles to be revised, beginning with articles 1–10 and followed later by articles 11–19. In limiting the divines to these nineteen articles, Parliament ensured that its advisory body remained confined to basic doctrine and barred from the contentious doctrines of ecclesiastical authority that begin with article 20 ("Of Authority of the Church"). Mindful of this implicit barrier between basic doctrine and ecclesiology, the assembly proceeded cautiously, even deferring the Second Committee's report on article 19 ("Of the Church") "till liberty be given to treat concerning discipline."[38]

Work began by apportioning members "into three equall commitees" according "to the order as their names stood" in the assembly's summoning ordinance.[39] Articles 1–3 were assigned to the first new standing committee, articles 4–6 to the second, and articles 7–9 to the third.[40] Before moving any further, a committee was first appointed to carefully search "for Coppies of the 39 Articles

34. *MPWA*, 2:146, session 62 (September 22, 1643).

35. See John Reeves, *History of the English Law, from the Time of the Romans, the End of the Reign of Elizabeth: A New Edition in Three Volumes* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1869), 788.

36. *MPWA*, 2:145, session 62 (September 22, 1643).

37. *MPWA*, 2:145–49, session 62 (September 22, 1643).

38. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 104 (October 4, 1643); *MPWA*, 2:163, session 68 (October 4, 1643).

39. *CJ*, 3:156 (July 5, 1643). These three permanent committees were likely patterned on the Synod of Dort and would come to draft or edit a number of the assembly's documents.

40. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 5 (July 8, 1643).

that the proceeding may be upon the most Authenticke."[41] Decades of reprinting had introduced a number of printing errors. Even more concerning were later changes that impacted the text itself, most notably a controversial amendment to article 20.[42] The chairman of the assembly's search-and-collate committee, John Selden, had earlier served on a select committee of the House of Commons "to take Consideration of the Differences in the several Impressions of the 39 Articles."[43] No doubt familiar with the relevant texts and their location, and a well-known collector of manuscripts himself, Selden returned a week later bearing "many coppies" for comparison.[44]

Another provision intended to aid the divines in the proceedings was a series of operating rules established by Parliament with input from the assembly.[45] Yet the rules themselves soon stirred controversy. In particular, the fifth rule required that "what any man undertakes to proove as necessary, he shall make good out of Scriptures." Questions over this rule surfaced almost immediately when the First Committee's inaugural report on article 1 failed to supply any supporting prooftexts. The committee may have simply interpreted the fifth rule as applying only to members citing proofs during open debate, but the assembly quickly made it clear that the drafting committees "should produce Scripture for the 'cleering & vindication of those Articles wherewith they were intrusted.'"[46] Assembly members may have soon regretted this decision as debate

41. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 5 (July 8, 1643).

42. The phrase in article 20, that "The Church hath power to decree Rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith," appears variously in later editions and has occasioned a long history of debate. See Anthony Collins, *An Historical and Critical Essay on the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London, 1724), 26–35, 41–42.

43. *CJ*, 1:926 (February 5, 1629). Selden was considered an expert on the Thirty-Nine Articles (see Reid Barbour, *John Selden: Measures of the Holy Commonwealth in Seventeenth-Century England* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003], 163–65. The same House session recounts an investigation into an inaccurate printing of the Thirty-Nine Articles in which the King's printers were summoned and asked "what Copy they followed in the Printing of them; written, or printed," to which they answered, "They followed a printed Copy of 1616." When then asked what led to the discrepancy "between their Two last Impressions, on the 20th Article," they replied "there was left out, in the first Impression, a Line, through the Corrector's Negligence; which being found, they (after divers of them vented) amended the other, by adding that Line."

44. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 7 (July 15, 1643).

45. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 3–4 (July 6, 1643); *CJ*, 3:156. These rules were discussed by a committee that included members of the assembly. Several months later, while still revising the Thirty-Nine Articles, the "committee for regulating the assembly" offered additional rules "for our better proceeding & quicker expediting of worke." Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 97 (September 28, 1643).

46. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 6. The rules received by the House of Commons from the Lords (*CJ*,

over the proofs frequently sparked disagreement between members and repeatedly hindered progress. Indeed, the delays created while debating the proofs for the Thirty-Nine Articles may have prompted the assembly's later decision to avoid simultaneously approving Scripture proofs while drafting the Confession of Faith.[47]

Debating Articles 1–10

On July 8, 1643, the First Committee opened debate with its report on article 1 ("Of Faith in the Holy Trinity"). The article passed quietly and wholly unchanged from the original, except for the addition of Scripture proofs to each of its ten clauses.[48] Article 2 ("Of the Word, or Son of God") remained intact except for a single addition, one that proved highly controversial. Members of the committee had voiced concern that the original article failed to adequately express important aspects of the suffering of Christ. Their solution was to enlarge on the words "truly suffered" by inserting "who for our sakes truely suffered most grievous torments immediately in his soul from God."[49] Undoubtedly the phrase was appropriated from Irish Article 30, save for the substitution of *suffered* for *endured* and the assembly's addition of the important concluding words *from God*.[50] A passionate exchange ensued and the new clause was finally endorsed, but only after removing the word *immediately*.[51] The phrase later resurfaced in the Confession of Faith, but this time preserving the Irish Articles' original wording.[52]

3:156 [July 5, 1643]) are the same as those recorded by Lightfoot. The following day, however, the Commons agreed to all "except the Fifth Clause, which was Resolved negatively" (*CJ*, 3:157 [July 6, 1643]). It is unlikely that this failed "Fifth Clause" was the rule to produce Scripture. More likely it applied to the original fifth rule that sought to limit lengthy speeches, The Lords' journal simply leaves out the number *5* and then numbers the intact fifth through eighth rules as 6–9 (*LJ*, 6:124, 124 [July 6, 1643]).

47. *MPWA*, 5:310–11, document 113 (October 13, 1646).

48. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 9 (July 18, 1643). All twenty-three proofs offered by the committee were received.

49. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 10. This perceived deficiency in article 2 was felt even earlier, such as in Alexander Nowell's catechism, in which the suffering of Christ is more fully opened. See Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism or First Instruction for Learning of Christian Religion* (London: Printed for John Daye, 1575), 32–36.

50. Revised English Article 2: "for our sakes truely suffered most grievous torments in his soul from God." Irish Article 30: "for our sakes he endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body."

51. Lightfoot, *First Journal*, 10 (July 18, 1643).

52. WCF 8:4: "endured most grievous torments immediately in his soul, and most painful sufferings in his body."