

Dear Friends,

I encourage you to read over the following material prior to viewing the Book of Order workshop. Among this material are four worksheets to complete in preparation:

1. Your Timeline – Divide your life experience of the Christian faith into three sections and write down any experience of faith that you believe played a role in your spiritual development.
2. Faith Is . . . – Just follow the printed directions.
3. Pretest – Just follow the directions. Please do not look for the answers in the Book of Order. Just what you think.
4. The Devil's Advocate – What would your response be to each of these situations? Please do not look for the answers in the Book of Order. Just what you think.

Please do not spend a lot of time on the worksheets; just put down the first things that come to mind.

Then peruse the rest of the documents. Don't worry, there won't be a quiz!

Doing these ahead of time will enhance your learning about the new Book of Order.

The Rev. Dr. Roy A. Martin, Jr.
General Presbyter

Pretest

This is only for our own awareness and not an examination. It is not designed to find out who is "right" or "wrong" but rather to clarify where we are in relation to our Constitution. This pretest will not be "corrected," but we will share our various perceptions. (Check one after each statement.)

	Agree	Disagree	Question
1. The membership of a particular church of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) includes baptized members, active members, inactive members, and affiliate members.			
2. A Presbyterian minister is not a member of the local congregation but is a member of presbytery.			
3. A presbytery is made up of equal representation from each congregation within its boundaries.			
4. The presbytery does not exercise power over any congregation but acts only by making recommendations or suggestions.			
5. In his or her work as pastor, a minister is not responsible to the session but to the presbytery that installs him or her.			
6. The congregation votes on the members to be received after they have appeared before the session.			
7. The board of deacons is independent and is not therefore under the supervision or authority of the session.			
8. The synod has the authority and responsibility to review the record of its presbyteries and to give oversight and support to the session and churches and other agencies in its area.			
9. The General Assembly is the supreme legislative and administrative body of the Presbyterian Church.			
10. The session is the only group in the church that has anything to say about the pastor's salary.			
11. The budgets of the women's organization, men's council, or other groups in the church are not subject to the approval of the session.			


The Devil's Advocate

D.A. to young parents:

"It does not matter that the minister is out of town. Any one of the elders can baptize your baby."

Response:

According to church order, are elders authorized to baptize?




D.A. to church school teacher:

"You are the teacher. Just go ahead and use whatever materials you like."

Response:

According to church order, who is responsible for the content of church teaching?




D.A. to organist:

"You know more about music than anyone else in the congregation. Choose the hymns and special music that sound best to you."

Response:

Who has the authority to choose the music for worship according to church order?




D.A. to custodian:

"You are the one who has to clean up this place, so you should decide when the building should be used and by whom."

Response:

According to church order, who is accountable for the use of church property?




D.A. to minister:

"Since you are the head of the church, you can decide who should be accepted as members and who should not be received."

Response:

According to church order, can the minister receive and dismiss members? Who does have this power?




D.A. to session:

"If you don't like what the minister preaches, do something about it. After all, you are the governing body. You can choose which passages of Scripture should be read and decide what is preached from *your* pulpit."

Response:

What does church order say about the authority for selecting Scripture and freedom of interpretation?




D.A. to session:

"If you permit the nominating committee to present a woman as an elder nominee, you will be opening the door to a complete takeover. As the session you can decide whom you do or don't want in this office."

Response:

What does church order say about the qualifications for being an elder? Can the session refuse to accept a woman?




D.A. to young adult group:

"Since you are the parents of most of the children in the church program, you can decide when church school and the service of worship take place. You can even cut out these activities if they conflict with vacation or family plans."

Response:

According to church order, who has the authority for deciding when and where the service of worship will be held?




D.A. to deacons and elders:

"You are free agents. When it comes to a decision of what you want, this has priority over anything you may have promised at the time of your ordination."

Response:

What does church order say about ordination vows? Note the difference between one's immediate preference and the dictates of conscience.



D.A. to congregation:

"Doesn't it make you feel good when a child is baptized in your church? Now about those nice responses you make: You don't have to be concerned, because you are not really going to be held accountable for the Christian nurture of those children."

Response:

What does church order say about the congregation's responsibilities to baptized children?

YOUR
BIRTH DATE

Your Time Line

(Indicate on the line where you are at the present time.)

LIFE REFLECTION

TODAY'S DATE

Column A—Years _____ through _____	Column B—Years _____ through _____	Column C—Years _____ through _____

Faith Is . . .

Please rank items in order of importance to you in your faith now. (1 is most important; 8 is least.)

Faith is . . .

- _____ personal commitment to Jesus Christ.
- _____ a gift of God.
- _____ adherence to the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church.
- _____ assent to revealed truth.
- _____ a way of interpreting life.
- _____ a conviction that I am loved by God.
- _____ trust.
- _____ witness to Gospel values.

After everyone has indicated his or her order, share your response with one other person.

As an entire group, explore what you discovered.

Note similarities and differences.

The Early Church—A Biblical Perspective

The church, like love, is a many-splendored thing. All of us know what the church is, yet none of us knows all that it is, and we need to be reminded of what we do know. The Biblical material about the church is extensive and varied. For the purpose of this study we shall have to assume some things and omit others, focusing on six important Biblical teachings about the church. Each of these has practical implications for you as you are about to assume a position of leadership in the church.

I. The church is called into existence by God and belongs to God.

The Reformed view of the church is that the church is under the Lordship of Christ, who is present with the church in both Spirit and Word. The call of Abraham (*Gen. 12:1-3*) is at God's initiative. There is no indication in the story that Abraham was chosen because he was uniquely qualified to participate in the covenant that God made with him. We are not told that he was more religious or more intelligent than other members of his family or other people of his time; God chose him because God chose to choose him. (Compare *Deut. 7:7-8*.) So it is with us. It is not for us to try to discover why we are called, but rather to rejoice and tremble that we are called and to inquire what that calling requires of us.

The New Testament church knew that it was called by God, and it sometimes described itself as the new Israel and as "members of the household of God" (*Eph. 2:19*). It knew that its calling related it in a special way to Jesus Christ, who was recognized as Lord. That special relationship was symbolized by describing the church as "the bride of Christ," as a building "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone," and as a body made up of various parts, all of which are responsive to Christ as head. These terms remind us that the church is not only called into existence by God but is also dependent on Christ for continued existence and meaning. Jesus made this clear when he said to his disciples:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (*John 15:5*)

Read *John 15:1-11*.

II. The church is for the world.

The call of God to Abraham was "so that you will be a blessing." "By you," God said, "all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (*Gen. 12:1-3*.) God's

primary purpose was not to do something special just for Abraham but, rather, to use Abraham and his descendants to help the whole human race find meaning and fulfillment.

One of the great tragedies in the history of Abraham's successors, Jewish and Christian, has been that we often forget the reason we were called and proudly think that God is interested only in us. Then the church turns inward, caring only for itself and organizing itself to keep God's attention. When the church behaves like that, it is not a body responsive to the Christ who set his own ministry in the context of a Scripture passage from Isaiah:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because God has anointed me to preach good
news to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim release to the
captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

(*Luke 4:18-19*.)

But at its best the church seeks to fulfill its concern for the world by its proclamation of the Kingdom of God (*Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:45-47; Rom. 10:14-17*); by living in love in the fellowship of the Christian community (*John 13:34-35*); and by a life-style of radical obedience to the Biblical Word concerning the Realm of God (*Matt. 5:14-16; 25:31-46; Mark 12:29-31; Rom. 12:1-2*). Whether these three are called evangelism, or witness, or mission, or action is unimportant. They are all of these. The church's ministry to the world is incomplete when any of the three is omitted.

In all three it is God who is glorified, and it is in the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit and for the sake of God's world that these things occur.

(*Illustrating the three announcements as wall charts may help create interest and make connections in this study.*)

III. The church is a human, and therefore imperfect, instrument of God's will.

"We are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure" was the way Paul put it (*II Cor. 4:7*, NEB). Scripture shows the heroes of the faith honestly, warts and all. We are told that Abraham and Sarah despaired of God's promise and sought to provide an heir through Sarah's servant. We read how Moses resisted the call of God with arguments very similar to those now used by church members when approached to do a job. We

learn how David was lured by his passion into adultery, deception, and finally murder, which are rather extreme sins, and also how he was constantly having trouble with his sons, which makes him kin to most of us. We see Peter making great professions of commitment but not having the strength to carry them through, saying the right words but being unwilling to accept what the words meant.

There are no "plaster saints" in the Bible. God's people have always been what they are today—sinners. The church on Main Street is often like the church at Corinth, not understanding the implications of its theology for daily life, not able to handle the Sacraments without sin, falling out with its minister, breaking up into cliques, overtolerant sometimes and lacking in forgiveness at other times. These are the people with whom we serve, the people we are called to lead. Understanding that makes a difference in how we relate to the local congregation and the governing bodies of the church.

Something else is equally important to understand. We are also sinners. If it were not for the conviction that the church is called into existence by God and belongs to God, the conviction of our sin would paralyze us. Knowing that God calls us, we can face who we are and who our fellow members are. We can learn to be honest and compassionate toward one another, and grateful toward God.

IV. The church is always changing.

Anyone who says, "We've always done it this way in the church," has either a very short memory or a limited understanding of the church. The inevitability and appropriateness of change, as underscored by church history, are abundantly evident in Scripture. Take the place of worship, for instance. God's people have worshiped at stone altars in the field, in tabernacles, temples, synagogues, and homes, on riverbanks, and in rented halls. Yet always they worshiped God; the essential matter did not change.

Today, as in New Testament times, the church must realize that it lives by the direction of the Holy Spirit. It must seek the guidance of the Spirit and remain flexible. We live under the weight of many centuries of church history and should not despise the lessons of our heritage. If we could not learn from the past, we would always be starting at the beginning. But we must be sensitive to God's immediate direction, counting all baggage expendable in fulfilling God's purpose.

V. The church worships.

The life of the church is directed and sustained in

worship. The church is a body, and Christ is the head that gives impulse and direction to the body. The disciples of Jesus are branches that have no life except through the vine. Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing." (*John 15:5.*)

Contact with God, openness to God's word, responsiveness to God's will are necessary to the existence of God's people. The Abraham story is punctuated with worship experiences. At every crucial turn of that story, Abraham built an altar. The provision for proper worship is a major theme of the law of Moses. One of King David's great desires was to provide a worthy place for worship in Jerusalem. The Temple was built by Solomon. Renewed interest in worship sparked the reform of King Josiah. The first priority of the exiles returning from Babylon was to rebuild the Temple.

Jesus was at home in both synagogue and Temple. Much of the teaching and healing took place in the synagogue. When he was still a boy, Jesus called the Temple "my Father's house." He precipitated his arrest and execution by driving out those who profaned the Temple.

The early church continued a close association with both the Temple (*Acts 3:1; 5:12*) and the synagogue (*chs. 13:14; 14:1*) until it developed its own worship based on the synagogue service.

The crucial nature of our contact with God in worship is epitomized in the service of Communion, in which our life is joined with the life of Christ on the most intimate terms. Jesus said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (*John 6:53-54.*) The church lives by worship.

VI. The church nurtures.

It has been said that the church is only one generation away from extinction. Aware of this, and responsive to the specific commands of its Lord (as in *Matt. 28:20* or *John 21:15*), the church throughout the ages has taught young and old.

A contemporary statement lists four intentions of the church's educational purpose: (1) to be a continuing means of sharing the gospel and of helping persons make their own responses of faith; (2) to equip persons to understand, to enter into, and to help develop the life and ministries of a contemporary community of faith, rooted in the Christian heritage and charged with mission; (3) to help persons achieve full humanness; and (4) to enrich, change, and effect reconciliation within and through social structures and systems.

A Study of the Historical Development of the Church

The church is called into existence by God and belongs to God. The world—its institutions and people—are and always have been in rebellion against God's will. The world has a different agenda, different goals, and different means from those God has in mind for creation: That means that the church, by definition, marches to the beat of a different drummer. Insofar as it is obedient to its Lord, the church operates in an alien or even hostile environment.

But the church is "for the world." God also called the world into existence, and God loves it. God called us to be the church in order that the world may learn the true meaning of its existence. "By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves" was the way God put it to Abraham. The task of the church, then, is to communicate God's powerful concern for the world and to demonstrate the quality of life belonging to those loyal to God's purpose.

The problem with this straightforward purpose is that the church, like the world, is made up of people often ignorant of—and even rebellious against—God's will. We are not ourselves perfectly attuned to God's purpose. We are sometimes more and sometimes less rebellious, but the church has never been a pure and true instrument. The history of the church is a mixture of insight and ignorance, courage and cowardice, self-seeking and self-giving. Because the church is never completely on target, and because the world is constantly changing, the church is always making adjustments, always trying something different, always reforming.

The history of the church, then, is the record of how the church has fared in its mission to enable the families of the earth to accept God's blessing. This history is complicated, with thousands of particular responses. These may be summarized by organizing into five categories the major responses of the church through the centuries:

1. Proclamation and persuasion
2. Flight or conservation
3. Accommodation to the world
4. The use of force
5. Service to the world

Each of these responses has been dominant at one or more periods of history, but each has been operative many times. Each remains a live option for the church today; each, in appropriate situations, can be chosen in full obedience to the leading of God's Spirit.

PROCLAMATION AND PERSUASION

Some of God's people have thought they knew something that had to be told. They told it, no matter what the consequences.

"If I say, 'I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,'
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire
shut up in my bones,
and I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot."

(Jeremiah, explaining why he was a prophet; *Jer. 20:9.*)

"We must obey God rather than men."
(Peter, letting the council know what to expect after it told him not to teach in the name of Jesus; *Acts 5:29.*)

"Necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

(Paul, explaining to one church that he wasn't a preacher for the money in it; *1 Cor. 9:16.*)

"My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."
(Martin Luther, explaining to the emperor his unwillingness to change his testimony under heavy pressure.)

"There is something quite definite I have to say, and I have it so much upon my conscience that (as I feel) I dare not die without having said it. For the moment I die and thus leave this world (as I understand it), I shall in the very same second . . . be infinitely far away, in a different place where still within the same second . . . the question will be put to me: Have you uttered the definite message *quite definitely*. And if I have not done so, what then!"

(A Danish Christian named Kierkegaard, whose troubled conscience still troubles all who read his books.)

"To be reconciled to God is to be sent into the world as [God's] reconciling community. This community, the church universal, is entrusted with God's message of reconciliation and shares [God's] labor of healing the enmities which separate [human beings] from God and from each other. Christ has called the church to this mission and given it the gift of the Holy Spirit. The church maintains continuity with the apostles and with Israel by faithful obedience to his call."

(The Confession of 1967, 9.31, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.)

"To commit ourselves more fully to the work of evangelism, believing that witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is basic to the life of his church; thereby strengthening this commitment on all levels of the church's life and ministry; and giving appropriate attention and support to those who serve Christ in international ministry in these critical and decisive times."

(The first priority set for 1975 by the 113th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.)

Proclamation and persuasion have been useful strategies for the church in fulfilling its mission, but church history alerts us to problems that have sometimes accompanied this noble task. Here are some things to consider:

- Proclamation often brings persecution, and not many of us care for that.
- Sometimes the strongest proclamation has been on peripheral matters. This has often led to a fragmentation of the church.
- The proclaimer has sometimes been unable to entertain any truth except what the proclaimer has already grasped.

The church has often done it inadequately, but proclaiming the truth that is in Jesus Christ remains a major way in which the church fulfills its purpose.

FLIGHT OR CONSERVATION

The church, assaulted by a hostile world, has sometimes chosen to withdraw. The motives vary. Sometimes Christians simply are fleeing a world they see as incurably evil in order to conserve what is in danger of being lost, but often the deliberate intent is to prepare themselves to return to the world to minister to it.

Two members of the church in its early years went to extraordinary lengths to avoid the outside world in order to strengthen the spirit. Simeon Stylites sat for thirty years on top of a high pillar in order to be uncontaminated by people. Macarius is reported to have lived naked in a marsh for six months, with his body a happy hunting ground for insects.

Such strange behavior might have discredited the attempt to withdraw from the world if it had not been for the sixth-century man named Benedict. He institutionalized the movement of flight from the world. The monasteries and convents that have flourished from his time to the present are little self-contained worlds. In Benedict's time and for many centuries following, Europe was a difficult and dangerous place in which to live. The monastery was a refuge. Not only was it safely behind walls, but in those communities learning and the arts flourished in a world that was overrun by barbarians. Many of the most precious treas-

ures of the church, including the Bible, were preserved in monasteries. But the monastery and convent were meant to be not just places of refuge but also outposts for mission.

Some Christians today, feeling pressures against their growth as Christians or being shaken by future shock, have chosen to withdraw into Christian communes or into communities of like-minded people. The Amish are a good example of flight from the world in our day. Another example, which most of us would find more acceptable, are the Mennonites, many of whom wear distinctive garb and keep apart from the culture of the day, but respond to human need—as in cases of tornado, flood, or hunger—with self-sacrificing personal involvement.

From the catacombs to the Christian communes, the church has made use of flight in order to conserve what it cherishes and to make an environment in which the Christian faith can flourish. Church history warns us that such flight has some built-in problems. We can retreat from the world but not from ourselves, and most of the human problems flourish within us. Flight also tends to suggest that the church can be divided into first- and second-class Christians. This may lead to pride and pretensions of spiritual power on the part of those who have withdrawn and to a lack of commitment and responsibility on the part of others. History also shows that flight from the world often was not so much for the preservation of the Christian faith as it was for self-preservation.

The options of flight or conservation, however, must remain open for the Christian, who remembers that Jesus often sought solitude in order to return with renewed vigor to his task in the world and that the early church understood that we are strangers and pilgrims on this earth.

ACCOMMODATION TO THE WORLD

The church learned quite early to use the things of the world in order to fulfill its own purpose. Paul used his Roman citizenship, Roman roads, and the protection of the Roman military presence and system of justice in his missionary activity. Even in prison he rejoiced that the Praetorian Guard had heard the gospel, because he was aware of their considerable influence in the Empire.

When the Roman emperor Constantine made Christianity an official religion of the Empire, many people came into the church willing to use power and money on behalf of the church in the same way they had used them in business and politics. The church became a political and economic superpower, often in direct confrontation with other powers.

John Calvin, Oliver Cromwell, and the Puritans who

founded New England all sought to establish Christian faith and practice by the use of political power. In more recent times, civil-rights leaders, many of whom were motivated by Christian faith, used the courts as a way to establish justice for minorities. One of the major causes of tension in the American church scene today comes from a disagreement on the validity of this option for the church.

The church has throughout its history accommodated itself to the world not only in the use of power but also in the area of culture. The great cathedral at Chartres was built on the site of the Druid worship of the Celtic tribe of the Carnutes. When the Druids were displaced by the Roman occupation, a Roman temple was erected in which a statue of a mother goddess was worshiped. When the Christians came to Chartres, they worshiped on the same spot, renaming the Roman goddess the Virgin, "Our Lady of the Earth." Similar attempts to communicate the Christian message through existing culture are being made in current liturgical experimentation and in a newly self-conscious effort to communicate the faith internationally in terms of the culture of each land, rather than in terms of Western culture. Church history has written in large letters two comments on the use of this option:

POWER CORRUPTS
CULTURE DISTORTS

Still, Jesus said that his disciples should be as "wise as serpents" in dealing with the world. He used the cultural expectation of the Passover pilgrimage as a vehicle for announcing his own Messiahship on Palm Sunday. The church can make legitimate use of accommodation, though it must be aware of the risks.

THE USE OF FORCE

Although the church as an institution would rarely admit to using violence to achieve its purposes, individual Christians have been aggressive as a way of fulfilling what they understood to be God's mandate. The church has not only described itself with military metaphor but has also taken advantage of the militant behavior of its members and others to advance its own cause.

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. . . . He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. . . . From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron."

(The writer of Revelation, who saw the real situation through many a warlike metaphor; *Rev. 19:11-15*.) It is said that the Emperor Constantine, before the battle of Milvian Bridge, saw the sign of a cross in the sky and the words "In this sign conquer." However accurate that story may be, the Christian faith and the military posture have often been intertwined from that time to this. The age of chivalry took seriously the similarity between the shapes of cross and sword. The Crusades were an incredible mixture of base and noble intention, a death-wedding of faith and fighting.

"Like a mighty army
Moves the church of God;
Brothers, we are treading
Where the saints have trod;
We are not divided,
All one body we,
One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity."

(Familiar lines written in England at a time when it was difficult to separate the spread of the British Empire from the missionary movement.)

"I think that I can see from your letter that you, like all of us—yes, like all of us!—are suffering under the quite uncommon difficulty of taking 'certain steps' in the present chaos. But should it not dawn on you that that is no reason for withdrawing from this chaos, that we are rather required in and with our uncertainty, even if we should stumble or go wrong ten times or a hundred times, to do our bit, whether we then help our cause or damage it?"¹

(Part of a letter from theologian Karl Barth to a young German Christian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in 1933. Bonhoeffer took the letter seriously and eventually joined in a plot to kill Hitler. He paid for this with his life.)

"It was clear that throughout . . . the consultation the use of violence as a means of overcoming exploitation and misery was not even questioned. One of the peasants said: 'We have already tried peaceful means, telling these people that we are dying of hunger and that we want land so that we can grow food and live.'"

(Report of a consultation in a Central American country between church leaders and others.)

Most of us would agree that true faith cannot be forced, and many feel that any use of force seems inappropriate to those who follow the Prince of Peace. Yet we cannot avoid the fact that in many countries, Christianity was spread by conquering Christians. Furthermore, as evident in the last quotation above, there are times and situations in which force seems to be the only way to achieve justice.

¹From *No Rusty Swords*, edited by Edwin N. Robertson. Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965.

It is highly unlikely that the church will ever again attempt to gain forced conversions. However, the option of fighting against the forces of evil on behalf of the oppressed is still one that Christians must consider. When and how to fight may be the only debatable issue when the church faces entrenched cruelty.

SERVICE TO THE WORLD

Still another option open to the church, and one taken by countless Christians through the ages, is service to humankind.

"I am among you as one who serves."

(Jesus, who is the best example for the church to follow; *Luke 22:27*.)

"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

(The words of the ruler at the Last Judgment to those who fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick and the prisoner. For the whole story, read *Matt. 25:31-46*.)

The first new structure of the church after Pentecost was the selection of seven for the duty of distributing food to the widows. (See *Acts, ch. 6*.)

"Your monasteries are houses of the sick. Your cell is a hired room; your chapel, a parish church; your cloister, streets of the city; your walled-in dwelling is simply obedience; the gate that guards you is the fear of God; your veil is modesty."

(Vincent de Paul to the Daughters of Charity, which he founded.)

Time fails us to speak of William Wilberforce, John Howard, Jane Addams, Narcissa Whitman, Walter Rauschenbusch, and all who have founded and staffed hospitals and schools around the world, or of those unnamed thousands who are serving Christ as they help the needy.

Unfortunately, church history warns us that even service may be used to manipulate and dominate others and that honest service can be misused for distorted ends. Yet when is the church more like Christ than when it serves?

The Role of Confessions Within the Church

The Westminster Shorter Catechism gives a clear statement of the Reformed view of the central authority of Scripture:

"The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him."

But Scripture does not provide a systematic statement of theology. The church has through the centuries written and subscribed to a great many creeds. Karl Barth suggests two purposes for such a statement: to define the character of those who subscribe to it to outsiders and to give guidance for the doctrine and life of the community. Times of stress are most productive of creeds, because in such times the church feels most strongly the need to define the faith by which it lives and witnesses. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with their political and religious turmoil, produced a great many creeds. The twentieth century is proving to be another productive time for creeds. The church in this century has witnessed the mass destruction of the Jewish people by Nazi Germany, has experienced the awesome power of the atom, is off-balance from the rapid rate of change, and is experiencing attacks and threats from both without and within. The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. approved the Confession of 1967; and, as this is being written, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is at work on a new confessional statement.

The formulation of new creedal statements is very much in accord with our Reformed history, which has produced more than sixty creeds. This prolific production points to the Reformed conviction about their importance, but equally to the conviction about their limitations. Karl Barth carefully limits his definition of a Reformed creed. He writes:

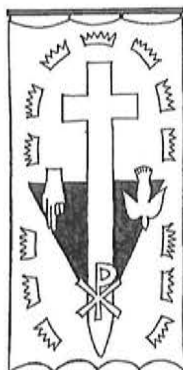
"A Reformed creed is the statement, spontaneously and publicly formulated by a Christian community within a geographically limited area, which, *until further action*, defines its character to outsiders; and which, *until further action*, gives guidance for its own doctrine and life; it is a formulation of the *insight currently given* to the whole Christian Church by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, witnessed to by Holy Scriptures alone."²

So many creeds have been written because Reformed Christians have realized that the faith must find contemporary expression and that each such expression is limited by its occasion, which tends to narrow its focus, and by the finiteness and sinfulness of those who framed it. The relation of particular creedal statements to their historical setting is clearly seen in the fact that many of the great Reformed creeds were written at the instigation of political powers or under political pressure.

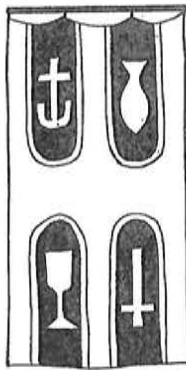
This does not invalidate the witness of creeds from the past. We can affirm these creeds as faithful witness and instruction for those who understand the context in which they were written. They are valid statements in the continuing dialogue by which the church understands itself and confesses its faith. The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., when it approved the Confession of 1967, also approved a *Book of Confessions* from the rich heritage of its history.

The *Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) consists of two confessional statements from the early centuries of church history and six distinctively Reformed confessions. A brief description of each of them follows.

²From *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928*, by Karl Barth, Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1962.



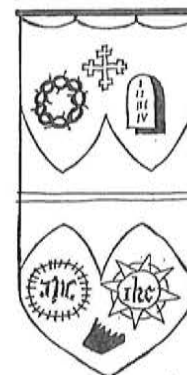
Nicene Creed
4th Century



Apostles' Creed
6th Century



Scots Confession
of 1560

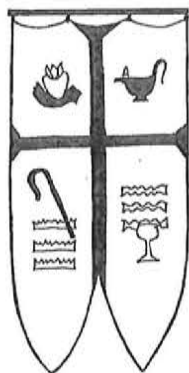


Heidelberg Catechism
of 1563

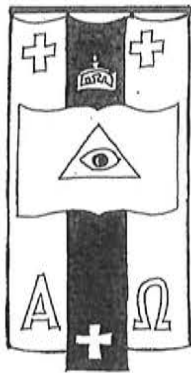
(A display of banners or bulletin board display could create interest and involvement for a congregation.)

REFORMED CONFESSIONS			
Date	Name	Occasion	Key Issues
4th Century	The Nicene Creed	The Emperor Constantine, having made Christianity the official religion of the Empire, wanted doctrinal agreement to strengthen the power of the church as a cohesive element for the Empire.	This short creed is concerned with the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity.
5th Century	The Apostles' Creed	This creed is based on a baptismal creed used in Rome at the end of the second century and reflects doctrines current at least by the end of the first century. It was affirmed by those seeking membership in the church through baptism, and later it was used more widely by the church.	A brief general statement of Christian belief based on a trinitarian outline.
1560	The Scots Confession	This creed was written in the crucial and confusing time when Presbyterians asserted their faith and held their first General Assembly in Scotland. Mary, Queen of Scots, a Catholic, ruled the land while Elizabeth of England gave support to the Scottish Protestants. John Knox had just returned from his exile in Geneva and was a major contributor to the confession.	The Presbyterian Church in Scotland held to the Apostles' Creed but devised this fuller explanation of the church's belief. It sought to clarify points it felt the Roman Catholic Church had obscured or confused.
1563	The Heidelberg Catechism	The area around Heidelberg, Germany, had both Lutheran and Reformed influences, as well as a considerable Catholic population. Frederick III ordered the writing of this catechism in order to have a definitive doctrinal statement to settle the unrest in his kingdom. The two men he asked to write this statement had been influenced by the Swiss Reformation, and they produced a strong Reformed confession.	The catechism is divided into three sections: Of Man's Misery, Of Man's Redemption, and Thankfulness.
1566	The Second Helvetic Confession	The Heidelberg Catechism, with its strong Reformed emphasis, increased theological tension. Frederick III found it necessary to justify that statement. He asked Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's son-in-law and successor, to provide him with an exposition of the faith. Bullinger sent him this statement, which had been written five years earlier as a personal confession. It was also ratified by the Reformed Churches in Switzerland.	This rather long statement is moderate in tone and emphasizes Christian experience. Like the Scots Confession, it gives considerable emphasis to the church.

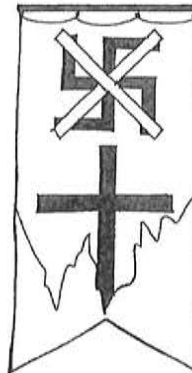
Date	Name	Occasion	Key Issues
1645	The Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms	The writing of this confession was commissioned by the Long Parliament in England as a means of articulating its Protestant viewpoint against the Catholic King Charles. The assembly, chosen by Parliament, included members of the House of Lords, the House of Commons, and ministers.	The Westminster Assembly chose not to use a historical framework for its doctrinal statement, but rather to set down its confession in abstract terms in order to be more precise. The confession opens with a chapter on the Holy Scripture, an indication of the importance of Scripture. The sovereignty of God and the covenant with humanity are major themes. Two thirds of the confession deals with the Christian life, indicating the importance of a life obedient to God's will.
1934	The Theological Declaration of Barmen	This statement was made by the German Confessional Churches (Lutheran and Reformed) in the face of the rising power of Hitler and his attempts to make the church subservient to the state. The declaration sets six statements from Scripture against six false doctrines current in the Germany of that day.	Jesus Christ is Lord.
1967	The Confession of 1967	This confession is a response of The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to the conviction that the church must bear "a present witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ." It declares that "confessions and declarations are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as Scriptures bear witness to him."	"Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ. Accordingly this Confession of 1967 is built upon that theme."



Second Helvetic Confession of 1566



Theological Declaration of Barmen, 1934



Westminster Confession of 1646



Confession of 1967

Major Theological Concepts

This paper obviously does not provide a comprehensive study of theology; rather, it points to a few concepts central to the Christian faith. These are not peculiar to Reformed theology but are held in common by the vast majority of Christians. They are not specifically aimed at church officers but are the foundation on which they and all other Christians stand. These concepts are: God the sovereign Creator, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Biblical authority, and the nature and calling of humanity. Even these concepts are of necessity painted with broad strokes.

GOD THE SOVEREIGN CREATOR

When we think of God as Creator, our thoughts travel back in time to the beginning of the world and of the human race. We look for some ultimate source of our existence, and the Christian calls that source God. To know oneself to be a creature, the handiwork of Almighty God, is to attain a significant self-knowledge. To recognize God as the source of our life and all that we know is to have learned something deeply significant about the nature of God.

The Biblical view of God as sovereign Creator certainly includes the recognition of God as the ultimate source of life. However, it also affirms that God is immediately involved in our existence. The Hebrew world view is that of a world surrounded by chaos; God created the world out of the chaos, but the world is always in imminent danger of being overwhelmed. Hence our life is made possible only by the constant activity of God, who holds back the chaos to give us living space. *Psalms 121* confesses the faith that God the Creator is awake and active in caring for God's people.

"My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved,
he who keeps you will not slumber." (*Ps. 121:2-3*.)

G. K. Chesterton, in a lighthearted but deeply significant passage, describes the continuing creativity of God in terms of the vitality of a child. He writes:

"The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in

children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, 'Do it again'; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again,' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again,' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical *encore*."³

Jesus healed a man who was at a pool where invalids gathered hoping for a cure. Jesus commanded the man to pick up his pallet and go home. It was the Sabbath, and the man carrying a large burden attracted unfavorable attention. When Jesus was criticized for healing on the Sabbath, he replied, "My Father is working still, and I am working." (*John 5:17*.)

Jesus made the point that the Sabbath rest of God described in Genesis does not mean that God made the world and then left it alone. God is constantly at work for human good, and Jesus as the true expression of God on earth must also be at work for good. The belief that God continues at work in the world even beyond the physical presence of Jesus accounts for the amazing assertion of Jesus to his disciples in the upper room: "He who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (*ch. 14:12*).

In summary, the Biblical view is that God is the source of our life and all that we know, and that God is presently and constantly at work for good. Scripture also sees God's sovereign creativity in terms of final victory over every destructive and death-dealing force. The prophet Isaiah expressed that conviction in poetry:

"For behold, I create
new heavens and a new earth.
Former things shall no more be remembered
nor shall they be called to mind.
Rejoice and be filled with delight,
you boundless realms which I create;
for I create Jerusalem to be a delight
and her people a joy;

³From *Orthodoxy*, pp. 106-107. John Lane Company, 1908.

I will take delight in Jerusalem and rejoice in my people;
weeping and cries for help
shall never again be heard in her.”

(*Isa. 65:17-19; NEB.*)

This imposing vision of God's sovereign creativity was taken up by the writer of Revelation and forms a fitting climax to the Biblical witness. (See *Rev., ch. 22.*)

JESUS CHRIST

Ask the average, informed Christian who Jesus Christ is and the answer may well be: "He is the Son of God and my Savior." A good answer! But the earliest Christian creed seems to have been: "Jesus is Lord." (See, for instance, *1 Cor. 12:3.*)

What does this creed mean?

1. Jesus is Lord because he is the perfect expression of what God means the human creation to be. Jesus is the paragon, the standard, the ideal. The standard has the authority of being that by which everything else is judged. The goal of what God is doing in the church is that we may attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (Read *Eph. 4:1-16.*) *Hebrews, ch. 1*, has a great statement about Jesus as the full and final Word of God. *John 1:1-18* is also a significant statement, in which Jesus is seen to be the Word or intention of God that has become flesh. Jesus himself said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (*John 14:9.*) God's nature is fully expressed in Jesus. Jesus is Lord; he carries the full authority of God.

2. Jesus is Lord because only through him is life possible for us. He has the authority of a lifeline thrown to a drowning person. He is our link with life; he is the one who rescues us. The Scriptures describe this salvation in a number of figures. Among them are these:

Justification—a courtroom figure; we who are guilty and without hope before the bar of justice are declared acquitted in Christ Jesus.

Ransom—a figure from warfare; a prisoner is reclaimed by the payment of a ransom.

Reconciliation—this figure views us as enemies of God, alienated from the source of life; Jesus is the one who brings us together.

Redemption—a figure that sees us as slaves to sin or to evil powers; Jesus buys our freedom.

All these figures deal with rescue. We are in a bad situation from which we are unable to extricate ourselves, a situation that restrains us from the fulfillment of our potential and that leads to death. Jesus rescues us from that restraint. We affirm him as our Lord not only because we are grateful but also because only in him do we remain free to be fully ourselves.

3. Jesus is Lord because only in the closest relationship with him do we have the possibility of continuing the process of fulfilling our potential. Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room:

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (*John 15:5.*)

4. Jesus is Lord of the church because he has called it into existence to be his body, functioning for him and at his direction. (Read *1 Cor., ch. 12*, for an excellent exposition of the church as the body of Christ.) The church has no other reason for being except to be responsive to Jesus as Lord.

What is the practical significance of affirming that Jesus is Lord?

1. It means that we take what he said seriously. We cannot ignore his clear words about how we are to live if we affirm him as Lord.

2. It means that we take what he did seriously. His life is the inspiration for our life. We learn to love as he loved and to take up our cross daily and follow him. His death and resurrection are a source of continuous thanksgiving and praise. Every day is a day of liberty granted us by Jesus.

3. It means that we take his real presence seriously. We do not worship a dead hero but seek to be responsive to an eternal contemporary. We listen for his present word and expect his guiding power.

4. It means that we take his coming again seriously. That is, we believe that his rule will be firmly and fully established, that he is the ultimate truth, that he remains when all else fails. He has the final victory. We live securely under the Lordship of Christ.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

A moving incident recorded in the Fourth Gospel tells us a great deal about the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. On Easter evening the risen Christ came to where the disciples were shut up in a room, full of fear. Jesus showed them his hands and his side, and the disciples were glad to see their Lord alive. Then Jesus commissioned them to be for him what he was to God. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (*John 20:21-22.*)

The Holy Spirit is the breath of the risen Christ. This breath is the atmosphere that sustains the Christian.

To put it another way, the Holy Spirit is the unfettered personality of the risen Christ. The names "Holy Spirit" and "Spirit of Jesus" seem to be used interchangeably in the New Testament. (See *Acts 16:6-7.*) The Holy Spirit is also spoken of as the Spirit of God. The Holy

Spirit is God relating to us, God indwelling, illumining and empowering us.

God's Spirit is not confined to the church, but the church cannot exist without that Spirit. The Spirit is what makes a living and functioning body out of the individual parts. The Spirit gifts the individual members with what they can contribute to the total enterprise of the church. Read *1 Cor. 12:4-11*. In Ephesians these are called Christ's gifts, pointing up again that there is no clear demarcation in Scripture between Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit prepares the world for the good news (*John 16:8-11*), leads the church into all truth (*vs. 13-15*), and guides and empowers the church in doing what God wants done (*ch. 14:12-17*). The Holy Spirit is to the church what breath is to the body. Without the Spirit, the church is dead.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD

"Word" is a symbol of God's commitment and revelation to human beings. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, the perfect expression of what God has to say to us. The entire life of the church is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ because he is the perfect communication from God the sovereign Creator. Christ is the Word to the church that forms its life, the Word through the church to the world for which the church exists. Christ is the truth into which the Spirit guides us (*John 16:13*). This is the good news we are to proclaim to the whole world (*Matt. 28:19*).

The Bible is God's written word revealed to humankind. The church listens for a message from God as it worships. Hence Scripture is central to the worship of the church, because it is the authoritative witness to what God had done throughout history—particularly in Jesus Christ. In Scripture we learn of God's purpose for humanity and of God's gracious concern and powerful action on our behalf. This concern finds its highest expression in the life, death, and rising again of Jesus Christ. All we know of God is understood by what we know in Jesus.

Scripture is not only a record of what God has done but also an instrument by which God engages us directly to communicate to us. Scripture is a way by which the Spirit leads us into truth. When we confess the Bible to be our rule of faith and practice, we acknowledge that it is through Scripture that God reveals what we are to believe and how we are to live. To this authoritative witness we submit ourselves in Jesus Christ.

Preaching is another means by which God's truth is communicated. A sermon relates Jesus Christ, the living Word, and God's word revealed in Scripture to the life we are living. It is a way God uses a human instrument to "get through to us." Preaching is both speaking

and hearing. It is a dialogue through which the Holy Spirit confronts us with God's will.

The Sacraments are instruments through which the various senses are alerted to respond to God. The elements, the action, and the words combine to enable us to experience what truth God has for us.

Scripture, preaching, and the Sacraments illustrate the three sources of authority that Christians have discovered through the centuries: the Bible, the tradition of the church, and experience. These are all related and all witness to Jesus Christ, God's Word made flesh. Of these three, Scripture has primacy. It is first because it is the rule, the standard, the norm. By it we interpret the Sacraments, and from it the sermon springs. It has a special place because its text is there to confound distortions. It cannot be so easily manipulated as either tradition or experience.

Jesus Christ is Lord, and his authority is apprehended in Scripture, tradition, and experience. To put it another way, the Holy Spirit is at work through these instruments to form the life of the church. Thus the authority of the living Word and of the written Word is not just something that the church proclaims but is that by which the church orders its life.

THE CONDITION AND PLACE OF HUMANITY

Theology by definition is a study of God, but no list of theological concepts would be complete without some word about us. Theological doctrine is the way we as human beings express our understanding of God's revelation of God to us and how that understanding bears on who we are and what we are called to be. We may summarize under three topics what Christians understand about themselves.

First, humankind was created in God's image and was given the high task of being stewards or overseers on earth. The Genesis stories see humanity as the apex of Creation. Definitely a part of creation—and so subject to God—nevertheless humankind stands above the rest of creation. The psalmist catches the tension between smallness and greatness when he writes:

"When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?"

"Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor."

(*Ps. 8:3-5*)

Second, we are sinners. We have sought to wrest our destiny from our Maker. We have lived—and do live—in rebellion against our Lord. We resist the Holy

Spirit. We deny the authority of the Word. Cutting ourselves off from the source of life, we are dead in our sins. Turning away from the light, we live in darkness. Refusing the truth, we exist on lies. We are incapable of discovering the truth or of finding life. We are lost and helpless. John Calvin calls this "total depravity." This does not mean that every act is evil but rather that no part of us remains untainted. No kernel within us is capable of nourishing life by itself. We are without hope, except for the grace of God offered us in Jesus Christ. He establishes a relationship that we could not establish. Christ accepts us when we are unacceptable and provides the life that we could never find. Just as our life is first the gift of God the Creator, so meaningful life (eternal life, as Scripture calls it) is the gift of God the Savior.

Third, we are called to be the expression of God's will on earth. The Reformers spoke of "the priesthood of all believers." This points to the personal response that we make to God. We are personally accountable to God. We are followers of Jesus Christ, who is the great high priest. We are the example, the conduit

through which God communicates truth to the world. We are also servants who are so committed to God's will that we offer ourselves completely in God's service. Paul put it this way:

"I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (*Rom. 12:1.*)

"The priesthood of all believers" is a phrase descriptive of our caring ministry to one another, after the manner of Christ. Robert McAfee Brown writes:

"The phrase does not mean that 'every man is his own priest.' It means the opposite: 'every person is priest to every other person.' It does not imply individuality. It necessitates community. Christians are to offer themselves to one another, to pray for one another, to sacrifice themselves on behalf of one another, so that through them all, the high-priesthood of Jesus Christ may be more effectually communicated to them all."⁴

⁴From *The Spirit of Protestantism*. Oxford University Press. Copyright © 1961, 1965 by Oxford University Press.

Our Presbyterian Heritage

OUR NAME

The name "Presbyterian" comes from the Bible. In the Greek Bible we find a word, *presbyteros*, that occurs about sixty times in the New Testament and about a hundred times in the Old Testament. This word, when pronounced in Greek, sounds very much like the word "presbyterian." It means an elder. Literally speaking, a Presbyterian church is a church governed by elders.

Studies of the primitive church make it clear that the exact type of government then in use varied from place to place. It is impossible to claim that any present form of church government was divinely ordained for all time. Nevertheless, the Presbyterian Church believes that its form of government is in harmony with that set forth in The Acts of the Apostles and in the New Testament letters. Having said this, however, we acknowledge that the greatest church is not the one that has the most Scriptural form of government but the one that holds in purest form the gospel of Christ, that is most obedient to the Spirit, and that is doing most to advance God's Reign on earth.

THE CHURCH CHANGES

Between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1500, while the mainstream of Christianity was departing from the New Testament ideals, there were always many groups of Christians, in the Roman Catholic Church and out of it, who were preaching a purer gospel, living purer lives, and trying to call the church back to New Testament Christianity.

But the efforts of these groups did not stay the tide, and the hour struck for the Protestant Reformation. Numerous individuals, such as John Wycliffe in England and John Hus in Bohemia, and several movements, like the new learning, prepared the way for that hour.

MARTIN LUTHER

But it was on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, that the Reformation began in earnest. Luther's theses challenged beliefs and practices of the church of that day.

Martin Luther was brought up a devout Catholic and was ordained to the priesthood. But by the study of the Bible he came to the deep conviction that the Bible is the Word of God and the final authority in religion. To the Roman Catholic the church was the final authority. Going back to the Bible, Luther preached the doctrines of salvation by grace, justification by faith alone, and the universal priesthood of believers, as over against

the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by the Sacraments, administered by intermediary priests. Those who joined in these doctrines of Luther called themselves "evangelicals," that is, adherents of the gospel.

Thus Martin Luther became the leader of the Protestant Reformation, and he stands out as one of the great heroic figures of all the ages.

(Charts, music, dress, displays, or skits can help us appreciate our heritage.)

JOHN CALVIN

John Calvin worked out from Scripture the profound system of theology known as Reformed theology, or Calvinism, and the representative form of church government that we call Presbyterian.

John Calvin was born in Noyon, a cathedral town of France fifty miles northeast of Paris, on July 10, 1509, of Roman Catholic parents. His father planned to educate him for the priesthood and gave him the best education that was obtainable. He studied logic, philosophy, law, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew literature.

Conversion to Protestantism. We do not know the exact date of his conversion from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism, but it was probably in the year 1533. Calvin described his experience as "a sudden conversion." His study of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew literature led him to the study of the Bible in those languages. These studies also threw him with men and women who were devotees of the new learning, some of whom had already embraced the Protestant faith. Soon after his conversion to Protestantism he found it necessary to flee from Paris for his life. During the next three years he lived in hiding under an assumed name. Much of this time was spent in the private libraries of friends.

The Institutes. In the spring of 1536, Calvin published a profound little book on theology, which he named *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The book created a sensation. Calvin kept on revising this work for the next twenty-three years, until it grew into two large volumes. It was translated into practically every language of Europe. Theologians still study and refer to Calvin's *Institutes*.

His Life Work in Geneva. John Calvin was not quite twenty-seven years of age when he first published his *Institutes*. From that time on he was a marked man. As the persecution of Protestants in France grew more severe, Calvin decided to leave his native land and pass over into the Protestant part of Germany. The safest journey was through Switzerland. So one hot night in August 1536 he pulled up at an inn in Geneva

to spend the night, expecting to continue on his journey the next day. But God had other plans for him. John Calvin, who had planned to spend only one night in Geneva, spent the rest of his life there, with the exception of about three years that he spent in exile in Germany.

John Calvin began his work in Geneva on September 1, 1536, by preaching a sermon in St. Peter's Cathedral. The sermon created a sensation, and the people crowded around him, insisting that he must preach again the next day. What was it about the sermon of this twenty-seven-year-old preacher that created such a stir? It was simply an expository sermon on one of Paul's letters. That does not sound very sensational to us, but it was something new to that audience. They had never heard any opening up of the Scriptures like that. This sermon was followed by many more just like it. John Calvin became a great expository preacher and a great interpreter of the Scriptures. It is here that we find the main secret of his power. He went back to the Bible for everything relating to the Christian life and to the church. The Bible was the seat of authority in religion as far as John Calvin was concerned.



(A Pagniet might add interest to an interview or dialogue presentation.)

Calvin preached several times each week, taught theology, wrote commentaries, superintended a whole system of schools, wrote books and pamphlets, carried on an extensive correspondence with Reformation leaders all over Europe, and took oversight of the Reformation movement in Geneva. He was interested in everything that affected the lives and welfare of the people. He believed that Christianity should be carried into

every relationship of life. A distinguished historian states it this way:

"The material prosperity of the city was not neglected. Greater cleanliness was introduced, which is next to Godliness, and promotes it. Calvin insisted upon the removal of filth from houses and the narrow and crowded streets. He induced the magistrates to superintend the markets, and to prevent the sale of unhealthy food, which was to be cast into the Rhone. Low taverns and drinking shops were abolished, and intemperance diminished. Mendicancy in the streets was prohibited. A hospital and poorhouse were provided and well-conducted. Efforts were made to give useful employment to every man who could work. Altogether Geneva owes her moral and temporal prosperity, her intellectual and literary activity, her social refinement, and her worldwide fame very largely to the Reformation and the discipline of Calvin. He set a high and noble example of a model community."

John Knox, the Scottish Reformer, was a refugee in Geneva from 1554 to 1559. Afterward he gave this testimony concerning the work of Calvin in Geneva: "It is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was in the earth since the days of the Apostles. In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so seriously reformed, I have not yet seen in any places besides."

Christian Education. John Calvin believed in Christian education. He believed that religion and learning should always go hand in hand. Accordingly, he organized a complete system of education in Geneva, beginning with the primary schools for children and ending with the Academy (or University) where young men might be prepared for the ministry and other walks of life. These schools were controlled and supervised by the church. Only Christian teachers were employed. Thus John Calvin set up standards for Christian education that have been admired and followed by Presbyterians from that day to this. George Bancroft, the American historian, says: "We boast of our common schools; Calvin was the father of popular education, the inventor of the system of free schools."

THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

One of the most significant events in Presbyterian history took place in England when the Puritans controlled Parliament in the 1640's. Among other things this Puritan Parliament turned its attention to religious matters. For seventy-five years the Puritans had been urging that the Church of England should have a purer and more Scriptural form of church government, purer doctrines, purer worship, and purer living. Their time had now come. Parliament accordingly called together

what is known in history as "The Westminster Assembly of Divines." The Assembly was composed of 121 of the ablest ministers who could be found in England, twenty members of the House of Commons, and ten members of the House of Lords. All the divines except two were ministers in the Church of England and had received their ordination at the hands of bishops. Practically all of them were Puritans, Calvinists, and university graduates.

The Presbyterians of Scotland sent six commissioners to the Westminster Assembly—four ministers and two ruling elders. These Scottish commissioners took part in the work of the Assembly but did not vote. However, they exercised an influence on the Assembly out of all proportion to their numbers.

The Assembly met in Westminster Abbey, London, on July 1, 1643, and continued in active session for five years, six months, and twenty-two days. During that time there were 1,163 meetings of the full Assembly, and many hundreds of meetings of committees and subcommittees. The Directory for the Public Worship of God was completed in December 1644 and was approved by Parliament in January 1645. It took the place of *The Book of Common Prayer* in the worship of the church.

The Form of Government was completed in November 1644 and was approved by Parliament in 1648. It was a Presbyterian form of government and took the place of the episcopal form of government in the Church of England, with its bishops and archbishops.

The Confession of Faith was completed in December 1646 and was approved by Parliament in March 1648. The Larger and Shorter Catechisms were completed in the autumn of 1647 and were approved by Parliament in September 1648.

However, when Charles II became king in 1660, after the overthrow of Cromwell, episcopacy was restored, so the Westminster Standards were no longer the standards of the Church of England. It was different in Scotland. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland promptly adopted the Westminster Standards. That is one of the most remarkable facts in Presbyterian history. It is remarkable that the Scottish Presbyterians should lay aside their own Confession of Faith, catechisms, Book of Government, Directory of Worship, and psalms and hymns, all dating from the time of John Knox, and adopt the Confession of Faith, catechisms, Form of Government, Directory of Worship, and psalter prepared by the Westminster Assembly. It is all the more remarkable when we remember that the Westminster Assembly was composed of 121 English Puritan ministers and only four Scottish Presbyterian ministers.

Why did the Scottish Presbyterians do this? One reason was the intrinsic merit of the Westminster Standards. But the main reason was that the Scots believed that this action on their part would promote unity among the Presbyterians of England, Scotland, and Ireland. They had a vision of a great unified Presbyterian Church in these three countries. In this they were disappointed, inasmuch as the Presbyterian Church was disestablished in England.

Although the Scottish Presbyterians were disappointed in their vision, their adoption of the Westminster Standards accomplished more than they had ever dreamed possible. After Presbyterianism went into eclipse in England, the Westminster Standards continued to live in the hearts of the Scottish people. Through the migrations and missions of the Scottish Presbyterians, these standards were carried into North Ireland, America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

(An action bulletin board can help involve the entire congregation in church history.)

PRESBYTERIANISM IN AMERICA

Calvinists and Presbyterians were among the very first settlers in colonial America. They came from the various countries of Europe. Among them were British Pilgrims and Puritans, Dutch Calvinists, French Huguenots, Scottish and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and German Reformed.

The First American Presbytery. In 1706, in or near Philadelphia, the first American presbytery was organized by Francis Makemie. It was called the General Presbytery. There were only seven ministers and "certain elders" present. Makemie tells us that it was "a meeting of ministers for ministerial exercise to consult the most proper measures for advancing religion and propagating Christianity." That was the beginning of organized Presbyterianism in America.

In 1717 the first synod, consisting of four presbyteries, was organized in Philadelphia and was named the General Synod. There were seventeen ministers and several elders at the meeting of that first synod. At that time the Presbyterian Church in America had only nineteen ministers, forty churches, and about three thousand communicants.

In the South, Hanover Presbytery was organized in 1755. It included everything south of the Potomac River.

The First General Assembly. While statesmen were preparing a Constitution for the United States of America, churchmen were planning the organization of a General Assembly that would include all the Presbyte-

rian churches in the United States. To this end the Presbyterian Synod of New York and Philadelphia, in May 1788, divided itself into four synods, composed of a total of sixteen presbyteries. The four synods were as follows: the Synod of New York and New Jersey, the Synod of Philadelphia, the Synod of Virginia, and the Synod of the Carolinas. Each synod was directed to meet at a certain time in a certain place. For example, the Synod of Virginia was directed to meet at New Providence Church (in the Shenandoah Valley) on October 22, 1788, and the Synod of the Carolinas was directed to meet at Centre Church in Iredell County, North Carolina, on November 5, 1788.

The synods met as directed and thus helped pave the way for the organization of the General Assembly, which held its first meeting in Philadelphia on May 21, 1789, and which took the name of "The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America." That was just three weeks after George Washington was inaugurated the first President of the United States. Thus the Presbyterian Church became a church of nationwide outlook. There were within the bounds of the General Assembly 177 Presbyterian ministers, 431 churches, and about 20,000 members.

Division. In the course of time there was a distinct cleavage in the church along theological lines. One party was known as the Old School and the other as the New School. The breach became wider and wider with the passing years. In 1837 the Presbyterian Church split almost in half, and each half became a separate and distinct denomination of Presbyterians. The Old School Presbyterian Church had about 120,000 members, and the New School Presbyterian Church about 100,000 members, about 10,000 of whom lived in the South.

After the division into the Old and the New Schools

the Old School made more progress, but neither church grew very rapidly. It was not a good time for church growth. The war clouds were gathering on the horizon. In 1845 the Baptist and Methodist Churches split into North and South over the question of slavery. In 1861 the Old School Presbyterian General Assembly passed the Gardiner Spring Resolutions, calling on Presbyterians, North and South, to support the Federal Government in Washington in its conflict with the states that had seceded and had set up the Confederate Government. These resolutions split the Old School Assembly into North and South. The Southern members withdrew, and on December 4, 1861, in the city of Augusta, Georgia, organized The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America, later the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Fraternal relations between the two denominations were established in 1882, twenty-one years after the separation. After that the relationship between the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. were cordial. In 1958 the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. and the United Presbyterian Church in North America were united, forming The United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. From time to time the question of the reunion of the two bodies was raised. Negotiations toward that end continued, and the reunion was completed in 1983.

Space forbids a fuller treatment of the Presbyterian denominations since 1861. Check the Bibliography for resources to bring this story up to date.

The material in this statement has been drawn from *Presbyterians, Their History and Beliefs*, by Walter L. Lingle and John W. Kuykendall, Fourth Revised Edition (John Knox Press, 1978), and from *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, Fourth Edition, by Lefferts A. Loetscher (The Westminster Press, 1984).

W-4.4003 Constitutional Questions for Ordination, Installation, and Commissioning

The moderator of the council of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the body of membership and to answer the following questions:

- a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?
- c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
- d. Will you fulfill your ministry in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
- e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?
- f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?
- g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?
- h. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?
- i. (1) (For ruling elder) Will you be a faithful ruling elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(2) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

