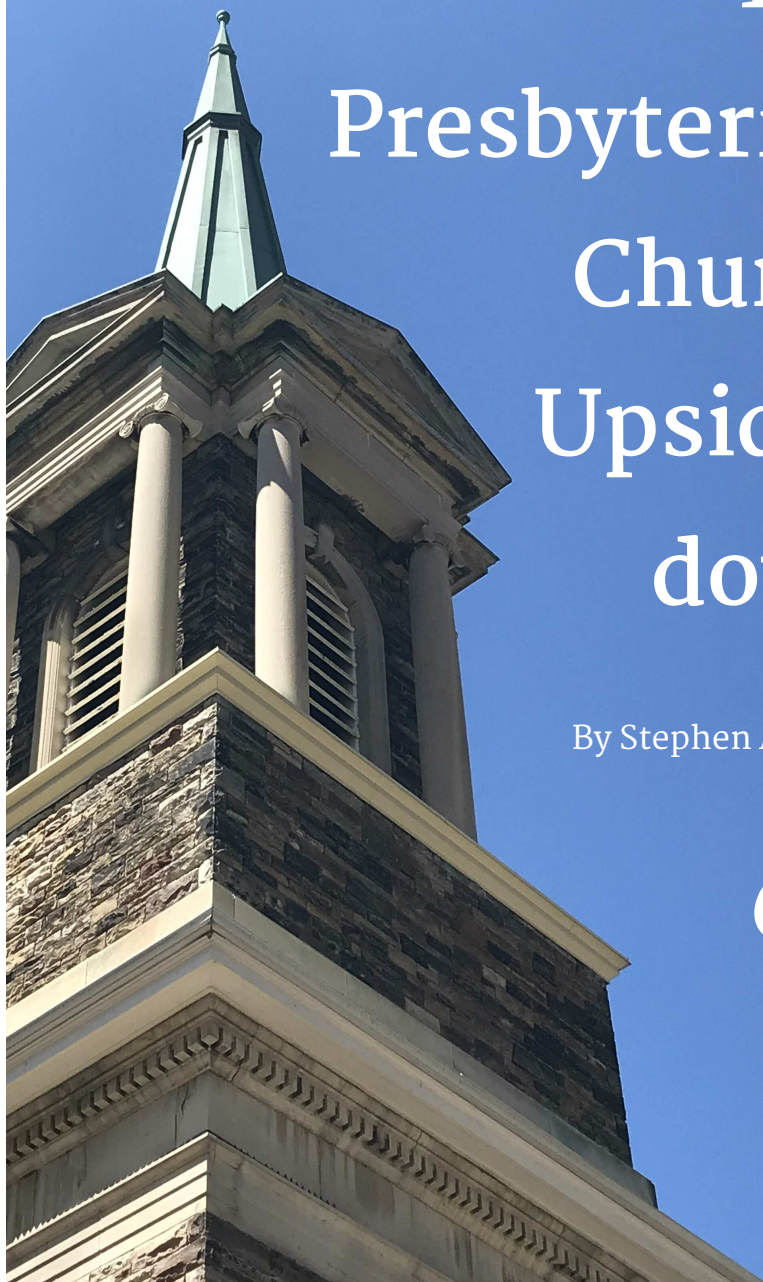


The Presbyterian Church in Canada

The Presbyterian Church Upside- down

By Stephen A. Hayes



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To Dr. R. J. Berlis and Dr. David Hay



The
**Presbyterian
Church**
in Canada

Introduction

Most of us are very happy to be Presbyterians.

We rightly take pride in our heritage. We have achieved an especially attractive blend of awareness of the past and openness to the present and the future. Our scholarly tradition has served us well and has led to the foundation of some of the best universities in the Western world. We continue to rejoice in an educated ministry and are pleased to belong to a church which allows us to worship not only with our hearts but our minds as well.

Presbyterians have always been concerned about sound doctrine: witness the work of our great theologians from Calvin to Barth and Brunner.

We have had a great missionary and evangelical emphasis and have long been interested in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

We have usually been open and ecumenical. At celebrations of the Holy Communion, we invite all who love the Lord and who are members of His Church to join with us in the Sacrament.

Time and again it is true that when Presbyterians study their origins and seek an increased understanding of their faith the happier are they to belong to this branch of Christ's Church. In our heritage, we find much depth, wisdom, love, and the finest traditions of the Church Catholic.

In so many ways, then, we rejoice in the name Presbyterian!

However, in the past few years, I have endeavoured to take a fresh look at Presbyterian origins. This re-examination of our roots has led me to ask some fundamental questions about

our present practices in the Church. While such study has renewed the conviction that much in our theological tradition must be preserved intact (there are exceptions, notably predestination), our theology as practiced and believed by so many people seems twisted at several important points. It is not that Presbyterianism is wrong; it is that current interpretations of such fundamental matters as Baptism and the Lord's Supper are a variance with the teachings of our Confessions.

Eventually I became fascinated by the simple concept of direction. Much of Presbyterian theology can be depicted as an arrow coming down (from God). But current interpretations all too often have the arrow going up (from man). The Presbyterian Church seemed to me to be upside-down, needlessly so.

The change of direction represents, in my judgment, a serious and damaging attack on the nature of our Church.

The need, therefore, is to recover our roots and to be what we are: the Catholic Church Reformed, with the Ministry and the Sacrament perceived as coming from God. It is also necessary, at some points, to correct our tradition in the light of further study of the Scriptures. This is especially the case with predestination. The correction has already been made by such scholars as Barth and Brunner, but alas, their revision is unknown to many in our Church.

The brief study presented here points to their work and that of others. It is not an original contribution but is intended to function as a road sign revealing the scholarly findings of others and pointing the way in which one person, at least, believes we should be going.

Sometimes on a journey the quickest way ahead is to stop and read the signs. To know where one is going, it is helpful to know where one is! So here, to see the way ahead, it is helpful to know something of the past and present.

While this study is addressed mainly to The Presbyterian Church in Canada, much in it will also apply to our sister churches in the United States of America.

Worship

We have turned worship upside-down in two ways:

- 1 By making the criterion of worship what we get out of it rather than what we give.
- 2 By regarding certain forms of worship as unpresbyterian which, in fact, were normal at the time of the Reformation and for many years thereafter.

The first of these we share with most other churches. How often do we hear, “That was a boring service; I didn’t get anything out of it.”

Granted, church services should be lively, relevant, and full of a sense of the glory of God. But still the main thing about worship is not what we get but what we give. Did we in the act of worship truly glorify God? Did we make the hymns into our hymns, the prayers into our prayers, the total action of worship the offering of ourselves in the service of Christ? Not until we have at least tried to do so can we fairly speak about services as “irrelevant.”

While understandable, the insistence that the emphasis is more on what we get than what we give in worship can too easily become but another aspect of the “me” generation: “I

want to let me be me.” In worship it is the other way around: we are offering ourselves in the service of God to be what God wants us to be.

But Presbyterians also have a way of turning their own history upside-down. This brings us to the second observation. Many now regard certain forms of worship as unpresbyterian and yet these same forms were often typically Presbyterian in the time of Knox and thereafter.

Before we list some of these forms it is necessary to present a few facts about the history of Presbyterian worship.

When Mary came to the throne of England in 1553, the Protestant cause was for a time lost and many confessing the new faith fled to the continent. Among these was John Knox who went first to Frankfurt and then to Geneva. In Geneva the City Council granted the English refugees the use of the church of Marie la Nove. The English congregation was here for only four years and its membership small, never exceeding 186 persons, but its influence on worship in English-speaking Presbyterianism was as great as any Church in history.

For it was at Geneva in particular that Knox’s convictions about worship took definite shape and these convictions have influenced Presbyterian worship to this day. Relying on an order of service that he and others had put together at Frankfurt, and greatly influenced by Calvin in Geneva, Knox wrote a Service Book that has come to be known by a variety of names: *The Form of Prayers*, *Knox’s Liturgy*, and its most common designation today, *The Book of Common Order*. Since the book often included the Psalms it was known in popular usage as the *Psalm Book*. From 1564 to 1644 no less than

seventy editions of the latter were printed—clear evidence of its wide use in the Church. After Knox returned to Scotland in 1559, his book was adopted for worship in the Church of Scotland and continued in use until the Westminster Directory superseded it in 1645.

If one wants to know what worship was like in Scotland in the time of Knox, many answers are found simply by consulting the *Book of Common Order of 1560*.

Here is a partial list of ideas about worship that have from time to time been regarded as somehow unpresbyterian.

USE OF A SERVICE BOOK

Use of a Service Book, along with the idea of read prayers and congregational responses, from time to time has been regarded as unpresbyterian.

It is instructive to be told, then, that prior to the introduction of the *Book of Common Order* in 1560, many congregations in Scotland used the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and such practice was not considered inappropriate.

Indeed, to understand exactly what the *Book of Common Order* did for worship in Scotland it is enlightening to be told what worship was like just prior to the Reformation. Church services on the whole were poorly attended. Many churches were in bad repair. With the exception of the very large centres there were few responses in the service, and these were largely between priest and choir. There was no prayer book in the hands of the people and contrary to the sort of guess Protestants might make about such worship, Communion was infrequent, except for the priest.

The point is that Knox did not decrease congregational participation. He increased it. While his Service Book contained no responses, nonetheless the book in many cases was in the hands of the people. Typical worship in Knox's time included congregational singing of the Psalms, followed by the Gloria Patri (Glory be to the Father, etc.). Both the Lord's Prayer and the Creed often formed part of the service though they were said by the minister alone. Most significant of all was the change from Latin to English, though the change had not been initiated by Knox.

Though his book clearly shows Knox's preference for simple forms of worship, it nonetheless represents a massive and dramatic shift in the direction of congregational participation. While few would regard his book as representing the ideal form of worship, it is this *direction* that is of importance.

Happily, today many of these questions of responses, read prayers, and use of a Service Book by the congregation are decided on their own merit. However, our tradition should help us to be open rather than closed in dealing with these matters.

For reasons we shall mention later in this booklet, Presbyterian worship went into a decline from about 1650 until about 1865 with services as bare and as simple as any in Christendom. The work of the Church Service Society from 1865, recalled the Church to its heritage in worship and a new Book of Common Order called *Euchologion* was issued. Since then there have been several editions of both Scottish and Canadian Books of Common Order and these have greatly assisted in the general elevation of worship in our churches.

KNEELING FOR PRAYER

While there is some debate about the normal posture for prayer in Scotland at the time of the Reformation, there is definite evidence for kneeling in some cases. There is nothing unpresbyterian about kneeling for prayer!

For the Sacrament the people and the minister knelt for prayer but rose and were seated to receive the elements.

The early Church adopted the posture of standing for prayer and this is a symbol of the resurrection.

FREQUENT COMMUNION

We shall discuss this more thoroughly in another section, but here let it be noted that Calvin wanted weekly celebrations as part of the Sunday morning worship. He had to settle for less. Knox suggested monthly celebrations in the *Book of Common Order*. Even the *Westminster Directory* (directions on worship produced by the Westminster Assembly [1643–1647]) states of Holy Communion that it is “... frequently to be celebrated.”

Weekly Communion seems to have been the practice of the New Testament and early Church.

FREQUENT PUBLIC WORSHIP

Few of our churches now are open other than on Sunday for public services of worship. At the time of the Reformation the General Assembly directed that daily services be held in the large towns. Also, it was not uncommon for churches to be left open for prayers during the day.

RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION OTHER THAN IN THE PEW

Going forward to receive the Sacrament is now regarded by many as unpresbyterian. However, the practice of receiving the elements of the Lord's Supper in the pews arose in the 19th century and was first introduced in St. John's Church, Glasgow, in 1824. Until then the congregation came forward to receive the elements at the Communion Table.

Some congregations are now experimenting with various ways of re-capturing the corporate element by having people come forward to receive the elements while standing around the Table. The corporate nature of the Sacrament is seen in the use of a single chalice, single loaf ("Because there is one loaf, we, many as we are, are one body; for it is one loaf of which we all partake." 1 Corinthians 10:17), and the action of passing the elements from one person to another.

Because Christ is the Host of the Sacrament, the corporate element—that this something that we do together—must never be lost. We should no more be absent from this Table than from our family dinner table. It is undoubtedly true that, for instance, the size of a congregation and other practical considerations will limit what we can do, but in word and action we must always try to convey the corporate nature of the Sacrament.

Worship is of critical importance in our churches today. Our loss of authority is directly related to the loss of depth in our spirituality. People do not believe us because we do not come across as real. To recover our spirituality, we do well to look to our roots. When we know where we have come from we shall have a better idea of where we are going.

The Reformers had a keen perception of themselves as

stewards of the catholic tradition. They were not trying to start something new. They simply wanted to return the Church to its original strength and purity. We do not argue that they totally succeeded nor that we should slavishly imitate them. But we do well to nourish ourselves on the traditions they have left us.

It has been remarked that at the Reformation the ascending movement of the mass (as Christ was offered through it) was replaced by the descending movement of the sermon (the declaration of the sovereign will of God by the minister). So also, the ear (the sermon) replaced the eye (the mass) as the central feature of worship.

While appreciating these changes it can only be said that we would be wise to recover some balance in our services. For instance, should not the descending movement be augmented by an ascending one through the use of congregational responses, silent prayer, and instruction in the fact that the offering is part of our self-offering? Would it not be helpful in this visual age in which we find ourselves (TV, movies, magazines) to stress the eye as well as the ear in worship? Many congregations are already doing this through colourful pulpit falls, banners, symbols, and bright choir gowns. We also ask: has the time come for ministers to abandon black Geneva gowns and academic hoods for the conduct of public worship? Why black? Why on Sunday, the (weekly) festival of the resurrection?

In 1981, the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada recommended (but did not require) that ministers wear vestments other than black in colour.

Holy Communion

We have turned Holy Communion upside-down by regarding it as something that we do—we gather, we take bread and wine, we remember—rather than what God does for us. It is easy to show that this is a complete reversal of Reformation teaching.

John Knox and five other men, all named John, wrote the *Scots Confession* in 1560. If one wants to know Knox's views on many important matters of theology one simply has to read that document.

There Knox and others expressed their belief about Holy Communion: "... in the Supper rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us that he becomes the very nourishment and food of our souls."

The Reformers taught that we are united to Christ by Baptism but that we are fed as his body through Holy Communion.

Calvin wrote:

The signs are bread and wine which represent the invisible food which we receive from the body and blood of Christ. For as God, regenerating us in baptism, ingrafts us into the fellowship of the Church, and makes us His by adoption, so ... He performs the office of a provident parent in continually supplying the food by which He may sustain and preserve us in the life into which He has begotten us by His Word. (*Institutes*, IV; 17, 1.)

Clearly, the first statement to be made about this Sacrament is that it is God's gift to us. The emphasis is not on what we do but rather on what God does for us!

The heart of Presbyterian teaching about Holy Communion is that there is a sacramental union between the sign and the

thing signified, between the bread and the wine and the body and the blood of Christ. Christ is truly present in the Sacrament and it is participation in His body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Knox wrote: “And so we utterly condemn the vanity of those who affirm the sacrament to be nothing else than naked and bare signs... in the right use of the Lord’s Table, (the faithful) do so eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus...” (*Scots Confession*) Such also is the teaching of *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. This, and not something else, is what our Church teaches.

How far removed is this from many modern ideas of the Sacrament! Too many believe that we are gathered merely to remind ourselves of what Christ has done for us. It is like Remembrance Day when we go down to the town square and stand before the War Memorial to remind ourselves of the cost of our freedom. So also, many think that in the Sacrament we jog our memory through taking the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper.

Of course, that is part of it. We are indeed present to remember. But there is much more to it than that.

Instead of the word “remembrance” the New English Bible offers the more accurate translation of “memorial.” That is, by our action in the Sacrament, God makes the past alive in the present, much as the Jews of the Old Testament made the events of the Passover alive through partaking of the Passover Meal. Thus, while the Sacrament does not involve the sacrifice of Christ anew—against this all the Reformers protested—it does mean that we gather to plead his eternal sacrifice. As our present *Book of Common Order* has it: “Wherefore, having

in remembrance the work and passion of our Saviour Christ and pleading His eternal sacrifice, we thy servants do set forth this memorial which He hath commanded us to make...”

The Sacrament is also a thanksgiving—the Eucharist, to use a New Testament word and one which Calvin himself employed. We gather to give God thanks. This provides a joyful element in our worship, and also balances the solemnity with which we celebrate Holy Communion.

We also are there to discern the body—both of Christ in the Sacrament and of our oneness together as his body. Indeed, in a sense we are there continually to be built up as his body and for this reason the Eucharist is also a sacrifice, not of Christ but of ourselves in his service. Once more our present Service Book puts it well in stating: “And here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice...”

One way of understanding our tradition is to see it in relation to other views:

Zwingli: A Swiss Reformer, he taught the real presence in the Sacrament but believed that “real” meant “spiritual.” Christ is present in the Sacrament much in the same way as he is present at prayer. Many Presbyterians incorrectly regard this view as the teaching of our Church.

The Westminster Confession, essentially following Calvin and Knox teaches a sacramental union between the elements and the body and the blood of Christ. The Confession states that “worthy receivers... inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive and feed upon Christ crucified and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in,

with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.”

Here “real” means “spiritual” but also signifies a union between the elements and the body and blood of Christ. To use an analogy from Calvin, as the sun remains in the heavens and yet its power and light are conveyed to us, so also are the body and blood of Christ given to us in the Sacrament.

Luther: Although he never used the word, his view is now known as consubstantiation. For him the bread and the wine do not change literally into the body and blood of Christ. They are rather like a sponge which absorbs water. The sponge remains a sponge and yet the water thoroughly surrounds it. So also is Jesus Christ “in, with, and under” the elements of bread and wine.

Roman Catholic: Known as transubstantiation, the Roman Catholic view teaches that the outward appearance does not change but the inner core of Christ’s body and blood takes the place of the inner core of the bread and the wine.

Our Church teaches, then, that in the Sacrament we truly feed upon the body and blood of Christ albeit in a spiritual fashion. Our Lord is present by his Spirit to nourish and to bless us. The emphasis is on what Christ does for us and not on what we do for him.

Of course, exactly how Christ can be in the elements is a mystery. But he did say that the bread and the wine were his body and blood and we are to remain faithful to his teaching.

Not surprisingly, the Reformers in an endeavour to recover New Testament practice wanted frequent celebrations of the Sacrament. In the last century in Scotland a great leader of

the Presbyterian Church, G. W. Sprott, stated that infrequent communion was the greatest hindrance to spiritual religion in the Church. Is that also true of our Church now?

In the Sacrament we focus upon Christ. We are not talking about Christ, we are worshipping him and feeding upon him. We turn away from the immaturity that afflicts much modern religion with its intense and sometimes neurotic emphasis on self—**my** religion, **my** experiences, **my** faith. Too much in modern religion is unbridled selfishness rather than an objective movement towards Christ in worship and a desire to bring him glory. Little wonder we are weak!

St. Augustine once wrote:

Since you are the body of Christ and his members, it is your mystery that is placed on the Lord's Table; it is your mystery that you receive. You hear the words: 'The body of Christ' and you answer 'Amen.' Be therefore members of Christ, that your 'Amen' may be true... If you have received well, you are that which you have received.

"It is your mystery that is placed on the Lord's Table."

Strangely, in our frenzy to find ourselves we shall most learn who and what we are as we turn away from ourselves to Christ. Our mystery is that we are children of God in union with his Son, Jesus Christ.

It might also be noted that Presbyterians have never had what is called the "reserved Sacrament," the taking of consecrated bread and wine and retaining them during the week on the Communion Table or elsewhere.

For us the Sacrament is an *action*. It is Christ with us. It is readings, prayers, breaking bread, pouring out wine, eating, drinking, sharing, worshipping. By definition these actions

cannot be reserved, but end when completed. Therefore, it makes no sense to us to reserve part of the Sacrament, the bread and the wine.

Of course, we do take elements already consecrated to sick and shut-in people for Communion (as our *Book of Common Order*, following the practice of the early Church, directs). But we regard this as an extension of the action of the Sacrament and not its reservation.

We began this section by indicating that the direction of the Sacrament matters. It is an arrow pointing down, Christ himself feeding his people. This direction should also be expressed in the order in which the Sacrament is celebrated. Both the Scottish and the Canadian *Book of Common Order* direct that the minister serve himself first, then the elders, and lastly the congregation. It is this order, the teaching of our Church, that we should follow.

As Christ's representative the minister should serve himself or herself first and not be served by an elder (an action that would have shocked the Reformers). Nor should false notions of politeness allow the minister to partake last, for by receiving the elements first, he or she helps the congregation to understand that the Sacrament is from Christ.

The Sacrament is a ministerial action, not that of the Session. Once the elements are consecrated, anyone may distribute them even though normally elders do so. To emphasize that the Sacrament is from Christ through his ministers it is also wise not to constitute Sessions for Communion Sundays.

Baptism

We have turned Baptism upside-down by regarding it as rite of dedication, something that we do for God, rather than something that God does for us. As with Holy Communion it is easy to demonstrate that this is contrary to the teaching of Knox, Calvin, and *The Westminster Confession of Faith*.

The teaching of our Church is that Baptism means chiefly two things:

- 1 Union with Christ
- 2 Incorporation into the Church

That is, in Baptism we are by the Holy Spirit united with Christ and incorporated into the family of God, the Christian Church.

The Sacrament has two parts: the outward and the inward. The outward is what we do. Ministers baptize with water in the name of the Trinity. Parents take vows of faithfulness to Christ and his Church. The Congregation receives the child and blesses it.

The inward is what God does. By the Spirit God ingrafts the child to Christ making the child part of the Church.

To leave the Sacrament only at the level of what we do is radically to depart from Presbyterian teaching and to fail to believe that God will be true to God's Word.

While our Church does not teach Baptismal regeneration in the sense that the Sacrament itself automatically confers new life in Christ, it does teach that Baptism is a sign and seal of the work of the Spirit in the life of the person. Can one be united to Christ and be part of his Church without having Christ's life within oneself? Of course not! To be part of the family of God involves regeneration—being born again.

The concept of regeneration as linked to Baptism is found in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (28:1), *The Larger Catechism* (165), Calvin's *Institutes* (see the quotation in the previous section), *The Heidelberg Catechism*, (71) and Craig's *Catechism* of 1581. Of these many references we may quote question 165 of *The Larger Catechism*:

Q. What is Baptism?

A. *Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, and regeneration by his Spirit, of adoption and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.*

While stressing that Baptism is not a bare and empty sign, our *Confession of Faith* nonetheless wisely builds a hedge around the concept of regeneration stating that “not ... all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated” and that “The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered” (28.5, 6). However, “... by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost” (28.6).

Some may ask: Is our historic belief biblical?

The answer is “Yes.” In Romans 6, we are clearly told that Baptism is union with Christ. Can there be such union without rebirth, forgiveness, adoption into the family of God?

Our Lord states in John 3:5, speaking I believe of Baptism, that “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter

into the kingdom of God.”

Perhaps most tellingly we read in Titus 3:5 “He saved us through the water of rebirth and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit.”

The *Special Commission on Baptism* of the Church of Scotland (1955) stated that “... Baptism occupies a far larger place in the teaching of the New Testament than we have given it. In many respects the Early Church was right in regarding it as the Great Sacrament....” As a biblical Church we must see to it that we give this Sacrament no less a place in the life of our fellowship.

Others may ask: But what of Baptism which appears to bear no fruit in adult commitment? Does this not deny the effectiveness of Baptism?

Two quotations from *A Manual of Church Doctrine* are exceptionally helpful in dealing with these important questions:

- i) Baptism is not the Sacrament of what we do, but a Sacrament of what God has already done in Christ and therefore of what He offers us in the Gospel.
- ii) What is grafted may wither. What is generated may not come to birth. What is born may die... Yet the grafting, the generating, the birth, the adoption, took place.

Let us see to it that while we maintain a laudable emphasis on the need for personal faith, we do not in fact deny that God will do that which has been promised in this Sacrament.

Moreover, we should continue our historic position (*Larger Catechism*, 166) and insist on both personal confession of faith and Church membership on the part of at least one of the parents whose child is being baptized. Exceptions are occasionally made for those who do not have their names on

the Communion Roll and yet attend services, support the work of the Church, and are themselves baptized. We dare not administer the Sacrament to the children of those who are not serious about the Gospel.

In some moments of despair during the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther would occasionally write before himself these words: *Baptizatus Sum*, "I have been baptized."

What was his consolation in writing these words? Was it that his parents had taken solemn vows on his behalf? Was it that a priest had sprinkled water on his head? No, it was the conviction that God was true to the promises made.

Something had actually happened at Baptism. Luther had been adopted into the family of God and united with Christ.

The Sacrament assured him that he belonged to Christ.

Such assurance belongs to us all. To surrender the teaching of our Church on Baptism is to lose a priceless part of our heritage.

Ministry

We have also turned our understanding of the Ministry upside-down.

Our Church teaches that the Ministry is from above, that it is Christ's gift to the Church. As *The Westminster Confession* puts it: "... unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry..." (25:3).

But many if not most in our Church now regard the essential movement as from below upward. The emphasis is on what we do rather than what God does: we (men and women) respond to God's call, receive special training, are set aside

through licensing and ordination as ministers. Hence the stage is set to regard the Ministry not so much an office in the Church proceeding from God but rather a practical measure. Men and women are ministers, on this view, because of their special training—just as others are dentists or doctors because of their education.

The modern Church has wisely emphasized the role of the laity. We are all God’s people. We all have a call to serve God wherever we find ourselves. Regrettably, this “high” view of the laity has needlessly led to a “low” view of the ministry. Ministers are not just lay people with special training!

Our *Book of Common Order* gives the teaching of our Church on this matter with great clarity:

Our Lord Jesus Christ appoints some in the Church with authority to preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments and exercise pastoral rule in His name. This ministry is an historic order continuing from the Apostles, which Christ perpetuates as He wills by calling and setting apart others to carry onward this true apostolic succession until the end of the age.

The teaching of our Church is clear. The ministry is an order in the Church proceeding from God. It is Christ’s gift to the Church.

Historically, the best word that can be used to describe the order in which Ministers of Word and Sacraments are placed is Presbyter. Proceeding from the Bishop-Presbyter of the New Testament for almost 2,000 years of history, this has been the basic order of ministry in Christ’s holy catholic Church. It would not have occurred to the Reformers to try to found a new order. Their intention was to reform the Roman Catholic Church as they then knew it including its ministry.

When we turn the ministry upside-down many damaging results ensue.

Then the minister is supposed to please the congregation. His conduct of the service tends to be regarded as a performance. In Knox's time the congregation had to measure up to the minister: now the reverse tends to be true (happily our system of government provides some important checks on that). Of course, the truth lies elsewhere: both are there to please Christ. Because the office of the minister has become so diluted, church discipline has become almost nonexistent. While we do not want to return to the rough treatment of former days when, for instance, sinners had to sit on a penitent's stool in one corner of the church, some recovery of discipline is nonetheless in order.

Ministers are now often referred to as "teaching elders." To be sure, one of the great tasks to which ministers are called is to preach and to teach the Gospel. They are indeed there to teach. Nonetheless, the phrase "teaching elder" must be used with care.

The Westminster Assembly nowhere refers to ministers as "teaching elders." In terms of strict legality, the title is inaccurate for they are both teaching and ruling elders as their participation in Church courts makes amply clear. Indeed, ministers are elders only in the sense that the higher office—that of Presbyter (Minister of Word and Sacraments) includes the lower office of elder. Furthermore, the phrase "teaching elder" does not describe the function of the minister with sufficient accuracy as set forth by the Westminster Assembly in *The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government*.

The above document views the minister primarily as the *spiritual leader* of the congregation. As such, of course, the minister is to teach, and preach, and administer the Sacraments. But first and foremost, he or she is there to lead spiritually: “First, it belongs to this office to pray for and with his flock as the mouth of the people unto God, where preaching and prayer are joined as several parts of the same office.” The minister is also “to bless the people from God.” The word “teach” is but once mentioned and the phrase “teaching elder” never used.

What is the result of this change from regarding the minister basically as a spiritual leader to seeing him or her as a teacher? The stage has been set for the classic Presbyterian error in our approach to the Christian life: the substitution for the things of the spirit by the things of the mind. Intellect replaces spirit. Talk *about* Christ takes over from the *worship* of Christ.

Our tradition, as already mentioned, has stressed that all Christians have a ministry. We are all called to serve God wherever we are. We serve him at work, in our homes, in our communities, as well as through his Church.

“Ministry” then, does not only mean work in the Church. It means relating the Gospel to daily life as well as service through the Church. You don’t need to be a minister of Word and Sacraments in order to live for Christ!

Having a ministry at work means at least three things:

- 1 It means doing your job well. An honest day’s pay deserves an honest day’s work. Being a Christian on the job means being a good worker with all that implies: honesty, integrity, hard work.

- 2 It also means serving God through personal relations on the job and in the community. All of us are required to live out the difficult demands of Christian love in daily life. That means seeking what is best for those we associate with. In each situation we will ask: What does love demand of me here? And the answer is not always either easy or obvious.
- 3 It means being a witness to Jesus Christ. Not all are called to be evangelists. But all are called to be witnesses to Jesus Christ. Of course, we witness by our actions, but as the occasion arises, we should also seek to witness to Christ as Saviour and Lord by our words.

As we seek to live for Christ at home, on the job, in the community we shall have no trouble discovering that we all have a ministry.

Catholics

From time to time Presbyterianism has been marked by a sectarian spirit (the “we’re right and they’re wrong” attitude). The word “sectarian” derives from the same root as the word “sect.” That is the issue: are we a sect or part of the Church worldwide (the catholic Church)? Our best leaders, led by Knox and Calvin, have always insisted that we are catholics first and foremost. To insist on anything else would be to turn the Church upside-down.

Indeed, the word “Presbyterian” was almost unknown at the time of the Reformation in Scotland, the most common designation of the Church simply being “The Church of Scotland.” “Presbyterian” became widely used only after the Revolution Settlement of 1690.

Part of the sectarian spirit started with the efforts of King James VI (1567–1625) to unify Britain by imposing a uniformity of religion. In practice this meant he tried to make the Church of Scotland more like the Church of England with bishops and a liturgy similar to the *Book of Common Prayer*. It is not that the Scots were either so opposed to bishops or to a prayer book—Knox’s *Book of Common Order* was full of read prayers—it was the fact of imposition, of being told what to do, that rankled.

Things became even worse under Charles the First who, with Archbishop Laud, ran roughshod over the Church of Scotland. In 1636 Kirk Sessions and Presbyteries were abolished. A new *Book of Common Prayer* (“Laud’s Liturgy”) was imposed. These arbitrary actions provoked violent reaction in the northern kingdom culminating in the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643.

Since Laud wanted responses in worship, naturally the Scots went in the other direction. Since Laud wanted bishops, naturally bishops became anathema to the Church of Scotland. From that time the movement of worship and Church government was away from much represented either by the *Book of Common Prayer* or bishops. It is this movement *away from* that has come to constitute much of the ethos of modern Presbyterianism, only now being overcome. We restore our balance by seeing our history in light of the Reformation as well as the time of the Covenanters.

But interestingly enough the balance was not totally lost for *The Westminster Confession* (1643–1647) comes from this period. While it makes some statements about the Church that most now would not accept (e.g., “The Pope... is that antichrist, that man of sin” 25:6), it nonetheless has a strong

sense of the catholicity of the Church. The word “catholic” is found several times in section 25. Section 26, *Of Communion of Saints*, speaks eloquently of our oneness in Christ:

All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their head by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces... And being united to one another in love, they have a communion in each other’s gifts and graces and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good...

Where is sectarianism in that?

Both Knox and Calvin had an enormously great sense of the unity of the Church.

Knox (in the *Scots Confession*): “This Kirk is catholic, that is, universal...” Calvin: “We strive for nothing else than the restoration of the church to its primitive condition.”

Thus, the true spirit of Presbyterianism, while assuredly standing within a specific tradition, is nonetheless open rather than closed. We are catholics first and Presbyterians second.

In Baptism we enter the Church catholic. There is no “Presbyterian Baptism.”

In Confirmation, we are confirmed by Christ as members of his Church. The emphasis in confirmation is more on Christ *confirming us* rather than on our confirmation of vows our parents took on our behalf in Baptism. Here, too, we have turned things upside-down.

At ordination, ministers become stewards of the mysteries of God in the Church catholic and only secondarily are they “Presbyterian ministers.”

The true spirit of Presbyterianism is an open, catholic one. It shows generosity and love towards all of our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Wherever Christ is, there is the catholic Church.

A Manual of Church Doctrine of the Church of Scotland gives an excellent definition of the concept of being catholic.

It points out that the word “catholic” firstly means universal.

Secondly, it points to the Faith: continuous and permanent from generation to generation.

Thirdly, it normally implies Trinitarian Faith: acceptance of the early Creeds with their central assertion that God is one and yet threefold.

Hence the *Second Helvetic Confession*, the statement of belief of the Swiss Reformation, remarks: “Since we are then every one of us of this Faith and Religion, we trust that we shall be held by all not for heretics, but for Catholics and Christians.” Here is a classic expression of the Reformed Church with its concern to be regarded in continuity with the Church of the ages.

Indeed, we often misunderstand the Reformers themselves, naively thinking that they wanted to get rid of anything Catholic in order to foster Protestantism. *A Manual of Church Doctrine* provides us with the right emphasis: “It is precisely because of this adherence to Catholic doctrine that it (the Presbyterian Church) has opposed the innovations in Doctrine and practice of the Roman Church as detracting from catholicity.”

However, we now live in a new era. In 1964, Cardinal Bea of the Vatican Secretariat for Unity said: “The Counter-Reformation is over.” But as Bishop John Robinson points out

in his book, *The New Reformation*, such a statement can only be fully true if we can also make the statement “The Reformation is over.”

Certainly, relations with the Roman Catholic Church have progressed with a speed un contemplated even a quarter of a century ago. Is it true, however, that for us the Reformation is over? Have we ceased simply to react negatively to anything that is not of our tradition?

The recovery of our self-confidence and, strangely, our strength of conviction as Protestants is at stake in our self-perception as Catholics. Not to believe in our Catholicity is to de-church ourselves, to become a sect. To affirm our oneness with the Church universal is to recover our sense of place in the Church Catholic.

Predestination

It cannot be said that modern Presbyterians have this doctrine upside-down, for it is more accurate to say that they do not have “it” at all. Most have either no interpretation of this doctrine or a hopelessly confused notion of what it is all about. However, the traditional doctrine as taught by Calvin and as found in *The Westminster Confession* is certainly upside-down. There it is seen as a harsh and unremitting statement of God’s arbitrary actions towards humankind, electing some, damning others.

It was this picture of God that caused John Milton to write: “I may go to hell but such a God (as that of the Calvinistic teaching) will never command my respect.” To use Karl Barth’s phrase, the traditional doctrine had fallen under a shadow and in the mind of our modern Church the shadow with all its

confusion is still in the ascendancy.

But now, thanks to Barth and Brunner (both Presbyterians) and others, the shadow can be lifted. Presbyterians no longer need to accept the teachings of Calvin and *The Westminster Confession* about predestination.

The point is that, traditionally, this doctrine was largely one of doom and gloom. Of great comfort to believers, it nonetheless seemed effectively to damn the majority of the world's population to hell.

Let's look at the teaching of *The Westminster Confession*. We read:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death (3:3).

The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice (3:7).

The *Confession* makes it clear that our predestination does not depend on any goodness that God saw in us but rather proceeds from a hidden decree choosing us in Christ to salvation.

Unfortunately, as can be seen from the two quotations, it does not leave the matter there but rather goes on to speak of what is called "double predestination"—or nearly so. Double predestination means that some are not only

predestinated to salvation but that others are likewise predestinated to damnation. The *Confession* comes as close as it is possible to saying this without using exactly those words. The two expressions it settles on are “foreordained to everlasting death” and “... to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour.”

Most modern scholars would maintain that while predestination is taught by the Bible, double predestination, even in the slightly altered form of the *Confession*, is not.

In contrast to *The Westminster Confession*, how wise is that earlier Presbyterian standard, the *Scots Confession*, which speaks simply of our predestination in Christ and leaves it at that—as does the Bible!

As the Bible teaches it, predestination is regarded as a decision made by God in pre-history to move savingly towards mankind in Jesus Christ. It has to do with our salvation and as such is part of the Gospel. Without any merit on our part, God had decided lovingly and savingly to move towards us in Jesus Christ. Christ is the final Word of God to mankind and there is no hidden decree behind him by which God acts.

The doctrine of predestination as *The Westminster Confession* presents it drives a wedge between the Son and the Father making the highest point of God’s relation to us a hidden decree. The Bible, needless to say, teaches no such thing. Christ is God’s greatest and final Word to us.

Ephesians 1:4–6 speaks of our predestination:

In Christ he chose us before the world was founded, to be dedicated, to be without blemish in his sight, to be full of love; and he destined us—such was his will and pleasure—to be accepted as his sons through Jesus

Christ, in order that the glory of his gracious gift, so graciously bestowed on us in his Beloved, might redound to his praise.

This, along with other passages, might be cited to prove that predestination is indeed a biblical doctrine.

Are there passages that teach double predestination?

The chief references given in *The Westminster Confession* to support its teaching on this matter are Romans 9: 22, 23, Ephesians 1:5,6, and Proverbs 16:4. The Ephesians passage is above and it will readily be seen that it is void of reference to double predestination. What of Romans 9:22, and 23? Let us quote them:

But what if God, desiring to exhibit his retribution at work and to make his power known, tolerated very patiently those vessels which were objects of retribution due for destruction, and did so in order to make known the full wealth of his splendour upon vessels which were objects of mercy, and which from the first had been prepared for this splendour?

This complicated passage is part of a larger section which deals not with everlasting rewards and punishments but rather with God's principle of selection in history. The fact that God chooses to work through some rather than others (as in the choice of the children of Israel in the Old Testament) does not mean that all others are damned! See Romans 11:32.

The context of this passage is not predestination. It is about how God works in human history. Furthermore, the "vessels... due for destruction" are such because of their stubborn refusal to obey God and not because they were predestinated

to be stubborn. It is not true to this passage to read into it a later debate about predestination, even though it is exactly this that many have done.

The other verse cited in the *Confession* in support of foreordination to damnation is Proverbs 16:4: “The Lord has made each thing for its own end; he made even the wicked for a day of disaster.”

Once more, one cannot take the developed thinking of the New Testament about the afterlife and simply read it all back into the Old Testament. This passage speaks not of heaven and hell but of earthly punishment.

As we have indicated, most modern scholars believe that the Bible teaches predestination but not double predestination. Modern Presbyterian scholars such as Barth and Brunner have provided a most important corrective to this doctrine as traditionally taught in our Church. They have freed the Bible to let it speak for itself on this matter.

The reason it is time that this question of predestination was addressed openly in our church is that our failure to speak up has led to its abandonment on the practical level. Few in our church now either believe or disbelieve in predestination; most have steered away from it in confusion.

But our Fathers derived much positive benefit from the doctrine.

They had a tremendous conviction that the hand of God had been laid upon them for a purpose. Contrast that to the present aimlessness now so common in many of our congregations.

They had an enormous sense of direction and comfort from their belief that they had been chosen by God. Far from this

making them sit back and relax saying that there is nothing to be done because God is in charge, they were remarkably energetic and alive in the world and in the Church.

We should take seriously their words about predestination: “So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God, and of humility, diligence and abundant consolation, to all that sincerely obey the Gospel” (*The Westminster Confession* 3:8).

It is worth adding that predestination has nothing to do with fatalism, the idea that whatever will be will be. Presbyterians are not fatalists! Also, as the Bible presents it, the emphasis is on the predestination of the group and not the individual.

In 1970 the General Assembly as an interim answer to the request for a statement on predestination adopted a statement that is similar to the position presented here. Among other things, it says “The so-called double predestination, or double decree, must... be rejected as an inference which is not in itself a part of direct Biblical evidence. (p. 291, Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1970).

The Ascension of Our Lord

In some ways, oddly, we even have our Lord upside-down by emphasizing the incarnation at the expense of the ascension.

The ascension receives so little emphasis partly because so much of the civil year highlights the Church year at Christmas and Easter, but not so at Ascension. Both in church and society there is a great stir at Christmas and Easter but not on Ascension Day.

How strange is this omission, for it is the ascended Lord we now worship. Why fix our image on Christ as he was in the days of the flesh? Why not as he is now in his ascended glory?

The Scriptures usually describe Christ as active in heaven on our behalf. He is in heaven *interceding* before God for us (Hebrews 9:24). Stephen in his martyrdom had a vision of our Lord standing as if to greet him (Acts 7:56). In Revelation our Lord walks among the seven golden candlesticks, representing the Churches (Revelation 2:1).

Jesus is our great high priest and as such is active on our behalf even now (Hebrews 7:17).

The governing image of the ascended Lord, then, should be active rather than passive. Our image of him has been too dominated by a much-misunderstood picture of him seated at God's right hand. Even this image of our Lord, derived from the Apostles' Creed (and which dominates the thinking of most people) is an active one. Jesus' *sitting* is a posture of active ruling rather than rest from labour.

In a remarkable book written by Professor Milligan of Aberdeen, Scotland, *The Ascension of our Lord* (1892), we are reminded of the importance of not dwelling on the incarnation alone. We are meant to concentrate also on the ascension. In this way we are meant to dwell on those super-earthly realities which were so much a part of the life of the New Testament Church. So also we are to make them part of our life and worship now.

Milligan, and others, remind us that the Eucharist is an occasion in which we make particular contact with our Lord's heavenly intercession. The ascended Christ not only remembers our needs but continually appears before the Father as our mediator.

The *Larger Catechism*, puts it this way in Question 55:

Q. How doth Christ make intercession?

A. *Christ maketh intercession by appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth, declaring his will to have it applied to all believers...*

As Donald Baillie of St. Andrew's, Scotland, once wrote: "...in the sacrament, Christ Himself being truly present, He unites us by faith with His eternal sacrifice, that we may plead and receive its benefits and offer ourselves in prayer and praise to God."

As a memorial the Eucharist unites us with our Lord's heavenly intercession.

Our daily worship should also reflect this contact with the ascended Christ. There should always be something of the glory of the risen and ascended Christ in our worship. Our public services in particular should be full of the glory of God. How sad that they so often fail in this respect and this in a Church which has always prided itself in believing that the central and controlling idea in its theology is the glory of God! Part of our weakness today is that our worship fails so often to capture the sense of triumph found in our Lord's ascension. Lacking this, it so often then lacks colour and drama and strength.

Professor Milligan reminds us in the book already referred to that our worship should primarily promote the glory of God rather than benefit the worshiper. Worship on earth should also reflect worship in heaven. Therefore, every aspect of worship—our buildings, colour, ornaments, music (especially music!) sermons, prayers—should reflect the beauty and joy of

heaven. Is the glory of heaven and of our ascended Lord seen in our services of worship?

Too often we base our joy on religious experience rather than on our Lord. Is joy absent in our services because we have failed either to believe in or to concentrate on the ascension?

The ascension also affects our belief in salvation. Of course, salvation depends on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the benefits of which we receive through the faith. We must never surrender this great evangelical conviction.

But nonetheless our salvation is rooted in the present in the sense that our Lord is alive right now. We are dealing with Christ as he is now; not as he was 2,000 years ago.

Salvation, in this sense, is a present occurrence even though its fullness can only be known in the future (1 Peter 1:5).

Our Faith then is fixed not on a past, dying and humbled Lord. The focus is on a present exalted and reigning Lord. Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

The Need For Reason

Ours is an orthodox Church. We have always had a proper concern for sound doctrine.

We are also evangelical. We strive to be men and women of faith who seek to share the good news with others.

As already indicated, we are also catholics, part of the Church world-wide.

But in and through all these facets of our being we also strive to be reasonable. We seek to make sense of what we believe and commend it to the mind. Faith working itself out through reason is part of our ethos.

It is not surprising therefore to discover an ancient and proud connection between the Presbyterian Church and learning. The foundation of many leading universities is Presbyterian. We have always had a high standard of education for the ministry.

From time to time, however, efforts are made to undermine this important tradition. Currently we are right-side-up on this issue, but it is a continual struggle not to give in to obscurantists and those who wish to turn our Church into a sect-like group fighting a rear-guard action against the advances of the twentieth century.

Some resist the application of learning to the study of the Bible. They ask how Christians can approach the Bible using the tools of modern criticism. We reply, how can a Christian not do so? Others resist a similar application of reason to the doctrines of the Church or to Church history. Again, the answer is “Why not?” There are many very human aspects to the development of doctrine. It is common sense to recognize that. So also Church history reveals that the glory is God’s, not man’s. History reveals many acts of bravery and sacrifice done in the name of Christ. It also reveals sin, littleness, and from time to time, rotten decay within the Church. To fail to consider these matters and to recognize the forces that have shaped us would be disastrous. No one should feel pride in being naive.

Our Lord described the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). There is simply truth—not “religious truth” or “scientific truth” or any other kind of truth. All truth in some way is a gift of the Holy Spirit. To refuse to think is not a mark of the Spirit’s presence! To be thoughtful and to seek truth, all truth, is a sign that the Holy Spirit is with us. It is most

important that Presbyterians affirm that their scholarly aspirations very much have to do with the Spirit of truth with us. The Holy Spirit is still with the Church. The prophetic voice is alive in our preaching. But it is also alive in our scholarship. We must never allow a hostile group to drive a wedge between our scholarship and the work of the Spirit in our midst.

A Christian is committed without reserve to intellectual integrity. That means that we follow the evidence wherever it leads. We acknowledge truth wherever we find it. As John Calvin once wrote: "If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver" (*Institutes* II, 2, 15).

This reasonable approach to Christian faith not only encourages scholarship, it also permits the development of a broad and humane approach to ethics (concepts of right and wrong). Ethics does not mean the blind acceptance of every moral injunction in the Bible regardless of the context one finds it in. Rather we are to think things through. We are to ask what each verse means in its setting.

For instance, in past generations all sorts of strange arguments were used from the Bible to oppose birth control. We must humbly confess that the great advances in this area were not made because of, but rather in spite of, the Christian Church.

With sadness we confess that many of the arguments used against it were shallow and even stupid. Few in our Church now oppose birth control. It was the application of reason to

faith that allowed us to see not only that birth control should be permitted but that it is important to foster its acceptance. In a world that is rapidly running out of living space it has become crucially important to control the size of the earth's population.

Sometimes groups within Protestantism seek to overthrow the reasonable aspect of faith by insisting on the primacy of religious experience. While affirming that there is indeed place for both religious experience and emotion—often we need more of these not less!—we must nonetheless be cautious.

Little do many people realize how easy it is to induce such experiences through group dynamics and the manipulative effects of a powerful leader. Some point to changed lives through such techniques: but what of the equally radical changes produced by cult groups? Others point to church growth. Indeed, many churches, having adopted a narrow theology and having learned adeptness in group dynamics, have grown spectacularly. But then so have many other groups using much the same techniques but which have not so much as named the name of Christ. Clearly, we must be careful. The numerical success of a group is no test of either its truthfulness or Christ-likeness.

In addition to looking for a confession of Christ as Saviour and Lord, we ask what fruits these organizations bear. What sort of people do they, in effect, produce? Are their members more loving, more open, more human, more like the free Spirit of Christ? Or are their personalities strangely twisted, less human, judgmental, fanatical in the sense that they think they are always right and somehow everyone else always wrong? Are they compulsive personalities or are they relaxed?

Do they love Christ or are they rather in love with their experience of Christ (for there is a difference)?

Yes, let us be open both to religious experience and emotion. It is not for us to place limits on the movement of the Holy Spirit. But growth in Christian faith includes the use of our intelligence (Matthew 22:37). We are to love God with our minds as well as our emotions. After all it is God himself who gave us our minds. God intends that we use them! The Spirit of God today summons us to the ever-thoughtful assessment of our doctrine, history, and worship, as well as to evangelism. May the light of reason ever burn brightly in our Church, and this to the glory of God!

Church Government

A distinctive feature—perhaps *the* distinctive feature of the Presbyterian Church is its government.

Presbyterians may be justly proud of this system operating through Church courts (Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, the General Assembly). The system, by and large, works very well and allows many people a participation in the decision-making process, an important factor in keeping people involved in the life of the Church.

So similar is the system to the concept of representative government that it is sometimes confused with democracy.

When this confusion is made, it is to have the system upside-down. The basic nature of Presbyterian Church government is theocratic (from God) and not democratic (from the people).

The direction appears to be from the bottom up; in fact, it is from the top down. That is, authority is meant to come from

God himself to the people of the Church. For this reason, we have a hierarchy of courts, the lower subject to the higher. Sessions are under Presbyteries which are under Synods, all of which is under the General Assembly. Furthermore, election to the eldership could not be further removed from representative government. The elder is to seek the will of Christ in the decision-making process. The elder is not there to reflect the will of the electors.

Nonetheless, a representative element is undeniably present and much power is in the hands of the elders. Also, ruling elders who vote at Presbytery meetings are called “representative elders.” In certain matters elders are obliged to vote at higher courts as directed by lower courts. The representative, or democratic element, is also seen in the fact that the entire congregation may vote both at annual meetings and at the calling of a minister. Thus, there is a movement of power from the grass-roots up through Church courts.

The genius of Presbyterianism is the balance between this movement upwards and the movement downwards. A great deal of participation is rightly allowed in the decision making process but the essential direction of authority from top down is preserved. This direction is also seen in the minister’s relation to the congregation. Much power is given to Sessions over such matters as the order of worship. But the minister is not captive to his congregation: they have no authority—nor has the Session—over the pulpit. The minister is responsible to God, under the Presbytery, for his preaching and ministry.

The Presbyterian system has carefully evolved over the past four centuries. It contains much wisdom and balance and we should be grateful and appreciative of what we have. By and

large the system is an excellent one. But it is not perfect, and we should be open to consider improvements in it.

Presbyterians also should have no doubts about the validity of their system. From time to time we are told that our ministers are not true ministers of Christ because they are not in the apostolic succession. That is, they have not been ordained by a bishop who in turn was ordained by another bishop in a line extending back to the apostles.

To this we reply that no one has yet produced a list of bishops going back to the apostles and hence no Church can be certain of such succession. Moreover, ordination by a bishop—as by a Presbytery—guarantees neither sound doctrine nor purity of life. A glance at Church history proves that!

In Britain right into the 17th century there was no real question of the validity of Presbyterian ordination. Many ministers served in the Church of England on the basis of Presbyterian ordination alone. When King James VI (1567–1625) imposed bishops on the Church of Scotland, some were ordained to the episcopal office on the basis of Presbyterian ordination alone.

Though enriched by many countries—Ireland, France, Holland, Hungary, to name but a few—Presbyterians in North America basically stand in the tradition of the Church catholic mediated through the Church of Scotland. As such we are in continuity with a Church that can assert as well as any, its origins through to the early Church and the apostles. There is succession for us but it is through Presbyteries.

However, we regard an absolutely authenticated succession not only as unproveable but also as unnecessary. The true apostolic succession is that of sound doctrine and

membership in a Church where the Gospel is truly preached, the Sacraments rightly administered, and Church discipline practiced.

We assert therefore the validity of our Church and ministry to the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel.

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