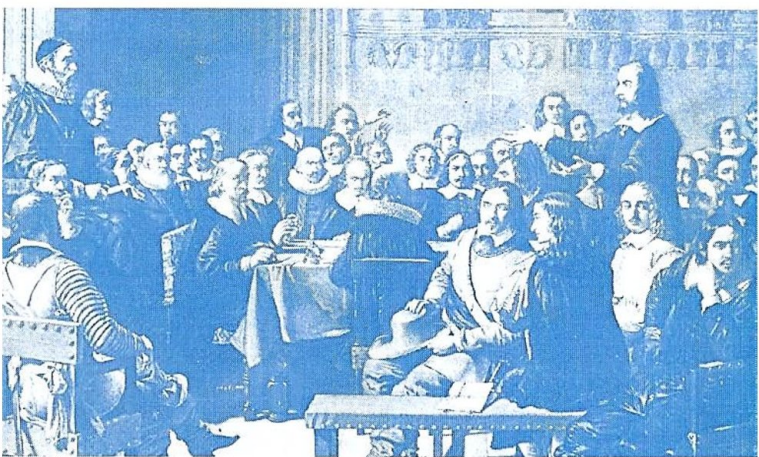


A TRIBUTE TO THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH (1646)

Elijah Thomas Chacko

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- *Delineating the virtues of the Confession of Faith*
- *Repudiating any form of amendment*
- *Highlighting the creedal role in Christendom*
- *Affirming the identity of the Antichrist*
- *Advocating the Establishment Principle*

While we acknowledge that creeds and confessions cannot take the place of the Holy Scriptures as the pre-eminent, final and entirely complete rule of life and faith for all men, yet it will be utter folly to undermine their vital role and value in Christendom. The worth of creeds and confessions was particularly underlined by the pivotal function they had played in the battle for the historic faith.

Of all the creeds and confessions, those formulated in the Protestant Reformation, which spanned from the 16th to the 17th century, are without doubt the most outstanding in the annals of church history. One predominant reason for this was because the battle against apostasy came to a climax at this point. The Antichrist, papacy, was convincingly routed and debunked for what it is. The creeds and confessions were essentially constituted to refute and repudiate the false teachings propounded and proliferated by the Roman Catholic church and her offspring churches.

The most famous of this is The Westminster Confession of Faith, the product of the aggregate learning and wisdom of some of Britain's ablest spiritual men ever, possessing almost unrivalled acumen and judgment. It was constructed in the first half of the 17th century during the reign of Charles I and was actually completed in 1646. In comparison to other creedal

works, the Confession of Faith is matchless in terms of accuracy, cogency, clarity and comprehensiveness. It is theology compressed into a compendium and the incredible thing is that it is crafted so eloquently. Notwithstanding its staggering brevity, none of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith are precluded from its purview. Therein contains the genius of the Reformation teachings. It is Calvinism in its quintessence. Undoubtedly it is an excellent exposition of historic faith.

Now, I aver again, the essence of the Westminster Confession of Faith is Calvinism, so called in deference to the work and life of John Calvin, a Frenchman who laboured in Geneva, making it then the Reformation capital of the world. While John Calvin, being its ablest and strongest disseminator, rightly deserves the honour of having his name ascribed to identify this particular mode and system of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, he is by no means its sole exponent. Indeed, he was preceded by other illustrious men, some way back to the time since the pristine New Testament church. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) was a renown proponent of Calvinism. It was practical Calvinism that motivated and impelled the Separatists, the Puritans, the Pilgrim Fathers, the English Non-Conformists, the Scottish Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the American Congregationalists and the Presbyterians. Hence it is no sur-

prise that almost all the Christian denominations mentioned hereat embraced the Westminster Confession of Faith as their subordinate standard, firstly, for the interpretation of the Bible and secondly, for the declaration of their doctrinal alignment.

It is our affirmation that Calvinism is the only veritable and proper interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and there can be no other. With the avalanche of wrong teachings (like Arminianism, Dispensationalism, Charismatism, Pentecostalism and Higher Criticism) conceived in the womb of apostasy and spawned in Christendom with alarming rapidity, the necessity of creeds becomes acutely imperative. We are therefore infinitely indebted to God for the fact that we have inherited Calvinism and its pastoral implications. Thereby, by the fear of God, we refuse to condone all other modes of interpretation. The corpus of teachings found in Calvinism, sometimes known as the doctrines of the sovereign grace of God, is bequeathed to us because our godly forbears stood stedfast and faithful in their grounds for the truth despite the fierce persecutions and martyrdom they had to suffer. It is our postulation that this glorious legacy called Calvinism finds its expression in full bloom in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Before concluding, it is needful for me to comment on a matter which warrants a great sense of gravity. We are adopting the

original version (1646) of the Confession as our official creed and in doing so, we are categorically renouncing all other amended versions, including the 1903 adaptation. The latter, among other things, precludes the Establishment Principle. We now affirm the said principle, thanks to the godly influence wielded by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The refutation of the Establishment Principle unequivocally wrests from Christ Jesus His rightful sovereignty over the nations (Psalm 2 & Psalm 110). In profiling the sacred coronation of Christ in the second psalm, the psalmist did not merely confine the scope of His royal sceptre over Zion alone but to all the other nations of the world. Difficulties in comprehending how the doctrine could be practically implemented in many parts of the world should not in any way prevent us from embracing it by faith. Our conviction in the tenets of our faith is never dependent on their feasibility from the perspective of human logic. Those who advocate Voluntaryism stands grossly guilty of denying Christ His claim of dominion over all nations and thereby are inclined to depose our Lord from the rightful realm of His reign.

Apart from the deletion of the Establishment Principle, another salient point that has been obliterated from the 1903 version is the acknowledgment of the fact that the Romish papacy is the Antichrist. This confession of the identity of Antichrist has

been the consistent stance of almost all the renown Reformers (including Martin Luther, John Calvin and John Knox) and the Puritans. However the 1903 version literally expunges this, reflecting the spiritual declension of those who advocated the amendment, namely those in Princeton Seminary at the turn of the 19th/ 20th century. It is our conviction that the denial of the Pope as the Antichrist effectually paves the way for Protestant churches to be amalgamated with Rome. One ought to be wary of the bearing of Princeton around this particular time and since then, for in significant aspects it had defected nefariously from the conservative reformed thinking. We do not rule out the possibility of the involvement of the Jesuits in this matter. But to think of the enormous power exerted by Rome so that even a Reformed citadel like Princeton should capitulate!

In any case, this espousal of the original version marks another watershed in the process of reformation in our churches. We here in our churches in Singapore and Malaysia are very grateful for the grace of God in enabling us to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and to its ancillary works, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, in their original version, naturally. ❧



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