

Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith is a Reformed confession of faith, in the Calvinist theological tradition. Although drawn up by the 1647 Westminster Assembly largely of the Church of England, it became, and remains the 'subordinate standard' of doctrine in the Church of Scotland and has been influential within Presbyterian churches worldwide (with appropriate changes it has also been adopted by some Baptists and Congregationalists).

In **1643**, the English Parliament called upon "learned, godly and judicious Divines", to meet at Westminster Abbey in order to provide advice on issues of worship, doctrine, government and discipline of the Church of England. Their meetings, over a period of five years, produced the Confession of Faith, as well as a **Larger Catechism** and a **Shorter Catechism**. For more than three centuries, various churches around the world have adopted the Confession and the Catechisms as their standards of doctrine, subordinate to the Bible.

Historical Context:

During the English Civil War (1642-1649), the English parliament raised armies in an alliance with Scotland, against the forces of the king, Charles I of England. The purpose of the Westminster Assembly, in which 121 Puritan clergymen participated, was to provide official documents for the reformation of the Church of England. The Church of Scotland had recently overthrown its bishops and adopted presbyterianism (see Bishops' Wars). For this reason, as a condition for entering into the alliance with England, the Scottish Parliament formed the Solemn League and Covenant with the English Parliament, which meant that the Church of England would abandon episcopalianism and consistently adhere to Calvinistic standards of doctrine and worship. The Confession and Catechisms were produced in order to secure the help of the Scots against the king.

The Scottish Commissioners who were present at the Assembly were satisfied with the Confession of Faith, and in 1647, the document was sent to the English parliament to be ratified, and submitted to the General Assembly of the Scottish Kirk (church). The Church of Scotland adopted the document, without amendment, in 1647. In England, the House of Commons returned the document to the Assembly with the requirement to compile a list of proof texts from Scripture. After vigorous debate, the Confession was then in part adopted as the Articles of Christian Religion in 1648, by act of the English parliament, omitting some sections and chapters. The next year, the Scottish parliament ratified the Confession without amendment.

In 1660, the restoration of the British monarchy and of the Anglican episcopacy resulted in the nullification of these acts of the two parliaments. However, when William of Orange replaced the Roman Catholic King James II of England, he gave royal sanction to Scottish parliament's ratification of the Confession, again without change, in 1690.