

STUDIES IN THE  
CONFESSION OF FAITH

*A Woman's Perspective*

Jeanne T. Patterson

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1700 North Brown Road, Suite 102

Lawrenceville, Georgia 30043

Bookstore: 1-800-283-1357

[www.ppacep.org](http://www.ppacep.org)

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I did not grow up as a Presbyterian and therefore was not exposed to the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms until I was a grown woman. Perhaps this is the reason for my excitement now and why I so desperately want you, my reader, really to appreciate what we have as Presbyterians.

Doctrinal study need not be boring, but a challenge! It helps to give meaning to life, and life can be very exciting wherever you are. I will admit that the preparation of these studies has required discipline, prayer and study and so will your growth in Christ. But it has expanded my mind and I hope that it will do the same for you.

Partly because my husband's father was a Scotsman and a Presbyterian minister I revered the *Westminster Confession of Faith* while still a Baptist. However, after marrying a man who was to become a Presbyterian minister himself, I began to take more than a casual look at this document. Today, as a Presbyterian minister's wife, I have a profound respect and love for it.

Meditating in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, where the Standards were written, and visiting St. Giles Church in Edinburgh, where John Knox was the pastor, I was moved when I read the words of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, written on August 27, 1647, in the city of Edinburgh. From this I quote in part, "... the said Confession being, upon due examination thereof, found by the Assembly to be most agreeable to the Word of God, and in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this kind... the General Assembly doth therefore, after mature deliberation, agree unto and approve the said Confession [judging it to be most orthodox, and grounded upon the Word of God) ... the Assembly doth also bless the Lord, and thankfully acknowledge His great mercy, in that so excellent a Confession of Faith is prepared. ..."

"It was the formulator's (sic) of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* pious intention at once to instruct the ordinary person in the fundamentals of his Faith, and to provide, by this document itself, a basis for church unity... there is not a more potent bastion against error" (Publisher's preface to *The Reformed Faith* by Robert Shaw. 1831)

You, my reader, may never have read the Confession. Perhaps you are only vaguely familiar with it. In a day, however, when error is on every hand and the Word of God is ignored or maligned, I would challenge you to dig deep in Scripture as you study this great document. Use this little book merely as a guide. It is intended as a beginning from which you should go on to the great works of gifted writers.

This is a study of doctrine! Approach it with a real desire to grow and to "always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect...." (1 Peter 3:15)

This study guide is written primarily for individual, at home, "quiet time" study rather than to be covered in its entirety in a group study. Try together looking up Scripture references or answering a question or two or reading an illustration. Do not labor to cover the complete lesson at each meeting. This becomes too long and involved.

A number of chapters of the Confession have had to be omitted in our limited study, but I have tried to select those most needed among us.

I want to thank those who have helped me in making this study guide available to you ... Dr. Morton Smith, who patiently read my attempts and guided me over some of the rough places; Phyllis Thomas, who spent many hours working each chapter from the "woman's approach" and made valuable suggestions; Barbara Fortenberry, who typed my original, handwritten manuscripts; Catherine Trinkle, now a busy minister's wife,

who typed the manuscript and arranged it in its finished form; Judi Horton, my husband's secretary, whose artistic talents have brought much joy to our lives; the hundreds who have been steadfast in prayer that this be completed by my deadline; and my dear father, who has been so careful not to disturb during study hours and who has had more than a few meals served late.

Try not to study casually or hurriedly, but ask God to open the treasures of His Word to you. While we are studying the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, our sole authority of faith and practice is the written Word of God, the Bible. We have a rich heritage in the Reformed faith, and I pray that Christ in all His glory will be revealed to each reader. May He be your Savior and be seen in you!

Jeanne T. Patterson

## FORWARD

As one of its first actions, after organizing itself, the First General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church adopted the historic *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as the doctrinal part of its Constitution. By so doing the National Presbyterian Church took her stand as a truly Presbyterian or Reformed Church. For many of us this is the first time that we have belonged to a Church that not only professes on paper its adherence to these Standards, but also wants truly to understand them and to live by them. This being the case, it is imperative that all of us in this new Church study these great doctrinal Standards, so that we can have a better understanding of the Gospel and its implications for our lives.

One of the "elect ladies" of this new Church, Mrs. Jeanne Patterson, wife of Dr. Donald B. Patterson of the First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Mississippi, has undertaken the task of preparing this introductory guide to the Confession for use by women in the Church. She has been involved in this labor for a good portion of this past year. She attended my introductory course at Reformed Theological Seminary. Then, she borrowed a number of books on the Confession and Catechisms. Finally, she has written the present volume. I have tried to assist her by serving as a resource person throughout, but to her goes the full credit for the book itself. I believe that for its purpose as an introductory guide to begin the study of the Confession, it can be very helpful, and I commend it as such.

Morton H. Smith  
Professor of Systematic Theology

TO

My husband,  
Donald B. Patterson  
who, patiently and lovingly  
encouraged me in this writing.

[And with whom she now has been  
reunited in their heavenly home.]

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>W. C. F.</b>	Westminster Confession of Faith
<b>L. C.</b>	Larger Catechism
<b>L. C. Q.</b>	Larger Catechism Question
<b>L. C. A.</b>	Larger Catechism Answer
<b>S. C.</b>	Shorter Catechism
<b>S. C. Q.</b>	Shorter Catechism Question
<b>S. C. A.</b>	Shorter Catechism Answer



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