The

THEOLOGY

of the

WESTMINSTER

STANDARDS

HISTORICAL
CONTEXT
&
THEOLOGICAL
INSIGHTS

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Introduction

The Westminster Standards (1646–1647) are loved by many and employed as the confessional standards by numerous Presbyterian denominations around the world. The Confession and catechisms of the Westminster Assembly have been praised by theologians, both in the seventeenth century and in our own day, as being the high-water mark of Reformed theology in the early modern period (ca. 1500–1800). Given that the Westminster Standards are admired and confessed, it is only natural that over the years theologians would write a number of books that explained the doctrine of the Standards. Such works appeared quite quickly following the creation of the Standards. Most notable, for example, is David Dickson's (1583–1663) *Truths Victory over Error*, or Thomas Watson's (ca. 1620–1686) *Body of Divinity*, which was a series of sermons upon the Shorter Catechism.[1] Other notable works include, but are not limited to, those by Thomas Boston (1676–1732), A. A. Hodge (1823–1886), and Edward Morris (1825–1915).[2] Theologians immediately saw a need to explain and comment upon the Confession and catechisms. Other commentaries were written, and the practice continues unabated in our own day, not only with the

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[1] David Dickson, *Truths Victory over Error* (Edinburgh: John Reed, 1684); Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1692).

[2] Thomas Boston, *Body of Divinity*, vols. 1–2 in *Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (1853; Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2002); A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding the Westminster Confession* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1958); Edward D. Morris, *Theology of the Westminster Standards: A Commentary Historical, Doctrinal, Practical on the Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the Related Formularies of the Presbyterian Churches* (Columbus, OH: n.p., 1900).

contribution of new commentaries but also with the republication of older volumes, as well as studies on specific sections of the Standards.[3]

But characteristic of the older commentaries, in contrast to their contemporary counterparts, is a better connection to the history, events, and theology of the seventeenth century. Dickson was alive during the creation of the Westminster Standards, interacted with theologians who were present, and was one of the theologians who wrote *The Summe of Saving Knowledge*, which was a summary of the Westminster Standards appended to the documents by the Scottish Kirk. Dickson, by virtue of being alive during the period, was intimately familiar with the context of the Standards. Present-day commentators, on the other hand, stand at a significant disadvantage. Not only are they separated from the assembly by hundreds of years, but also they often have different theological questions pressing them and at times different philosophical assumptions, given that they live after, rather than prior to, the Enlightenment.

For example, one commentary on the Larger Catechism discusses the theology of neoorthodoxy, especially the thought of Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Emil Brunner (1889–1966), in its treatment of the catechism's doctrine of Scripture.[4] As necessary as it is to bring the historic teaching of the Reformed faith to bear upon present-day theological challenges, it is important first to establish historically what the Standards have taught before its theology can be pressed into service. Another challenge to a proper understanding of the Standards is when contemporary historians and commentators read the Standards through the grid of later theological developments.[5]

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[3] See, e.g., G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1964); Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism for Study Classes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003); Rowland S. Ward, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Study Guide* (Wantirna, Australia: New Melbourne, 1996); John H. Gerstner et al., *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Guide, Commentary* (Signal Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1992); Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1998); Francis R. Beattie, *The Presbyterian Standards* (Greenville, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1997); J. Ligon Duncan, ed., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, 3 vols. (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003–2009); R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006–2007); Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009); Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Public Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007); Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, ed. G. I. Williamson (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002).
[4] Vos, *Larger Catechism*, 443.
[5] See, e.g., Ralph Cunnington, "Definitive Sanctification: A Response to John Fesko," *EQ* 84, no. 3 (2012): 234–52, esp. 240–45; Williamson, *Westminster Confession*, 23.

Recently promising steps have been made to situate properly the Westminster Standards within the doctrinal and historical context of the seventeenth century.[6] However, given the massive amount of primary-source literature and the scope of the Standards, there is much more that can be done to unearth the original context of the assembly. Much of this work has been greatly assisted by the publication of the extant minutes of the assembly, which provide the contemporary reader with a window into the inner workings, debates, and concerns of the assembly.[7] But the theology of the Standards does not lie exclusively in the minutes, as important as they are. Rather, the Westminster Assembly was part of a broader ongoing conversation with Patristic, medieval, Reformation, and contemporary seventeenth-century theologians. Anyone who wants to understand the thought and ethos of the Standards must enmesh themselves, as much as possible, in the literature of the period. What theological works, for example, were the Westminster divines reading? What were their theological interests, concerns, fears, and passions? What were the historical events of the day, and how did they shape seventeenth-century English life?

The Importance of the Original Historical Context

It is often said that the three most important rules to purchasing real estate are location, location, location. A similar maxim is true for good historical theology—context, context, context. The best explanations of the doctrine of the Standards must rest upon the testimony of the time.[8] Such a contextual reading of the Standards will undoubtedly produce several important results. By enmeshing the Standards in their original context, the reader is forced to look for cognitive dissonances, that is, things that do not quite fit the contemporary way of stating or understanding things. True, many people still profess the Reformed faith as found in the Westminster Standards, but much has changed over the last 350-plus years. Think for a moment about what was happening in our own country twenty-five, fifty, or one hundred

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[6] See, e.g., Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, passim; Muller and Ward, *Scripture and Worship*, passim.
[7] Chad Van Dixhoorn, ed., *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643–62*, 5 vols. (Oxford: OUP, 2012). Hereafter abbreviated as *MPWA*.
[8] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53.

years ago; things were quite different. The seventeenth century was a period that was marked, for example, by different general beliefs about the world. The seventeenth century was a period when most Protestant theologians, with little dissenting opinion, believed that the pope was the antichrist; this was a virtually unquestioned fact. It was also a period when people believed in ghosts and spirits. In one such account, the supposed testimony of the ghost of an old woman played a role in the execution of a bishop, John Atherton (1598–1640).[9] What has this ghost's tale to do with the Westminster Standards?

This slice of early modern English history is but one small example of how differently things functioned during the time of the Westminster Assembly. One might certainly debate the existence of ghosts in our own day, but to say with a serious face that a message from a ghost would play a part in the arrest, conviction, and execution of a church official must surely be the stuff of fiction, not history. Yet, this is precisely what happened in the case of Bishop Atherton's execution.[10] When the layers of this bizarre case are pulled away, they reveal that Bishop Atherton was opposed to Laud's imposition of high-church Arminian and Papist practices upon the Church of England, and that the rumors surrounding Mother Leakey's ghost, as well as the false charge of buggery, were quite possibly an elaborate conspiracy to discredit and remove Atherton and replace him with a bishop more congenial to Laud's policies.[11] Adding to the complexity of the politics and religion of the time, a number of Presbyterians, including Westminster divine Robert Baillie (1602–1662), saw the conviction of Bishop Atherton as further reason to reject and remove Episcopacy "root and branch," given its corruption.[12] This whole event is but one illustration of the differences between the seventeenth century and the present day.

Theologically speaking, the Standards contain curious turns of phrase, oblique rejections of doctrines without persons or responsible parties named, and peculiar terms—such things that often pass un-

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[9] Peter Marshall, *Mother Leakey and the Bishop: A Ghost's Story* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); cf. Nicolas Barnard, *The Penitent Death of a Woefull Sinner; or, the Penitent Death of John Atherton, Late Bishop of Waterford in Ireland* (London: W. Bladen, 1642).
[10] Marshall, *Mother Leakey*, 116.
[11] Ibid., 89–108.
[12] Ibid., 104.

noticed by contemporary readers but were well known to theologians of the period. What, for example, does the term *general equity* mean (19.4) and what is the difference between the moral law as a *covenant* and as a *rule* (19.5)? Why does the Confession say that the kingdom of Christ is the visible church (25.2), whereas *God*, not Christ, is the "Supream Lord and King of all the world" (23.1)? When the Confession states that God has ordained "whatsoever comes to pass," but at the same time his decree has not taken away "liberty or contingency of second Causes" but rather has established them (3.1), how can the divines affirm both a sovereign decree and contingency? Why do the Standards never employ the word *atonement* (or its variants) when such a word is commonplace in contemporary Reformed theology, especially with regard to popular terms such as *limited atonement*? All of these are questions that we need to ask when reading the Standards, and they can only be answered by investigating the Standards in their original context. Early modern Reformed theologians had a slightly different outlook on life and theology than we do today, and despite whatever similarities in doctrine and conviction are shared with theologians in the twenty-first century, the differences can be significant.

Learning to Read a Confession of Faith

A benefit of reading the Standards within their original historical and theological context is that the contemporary reader learns how to read a confession of faith. In the present day those who employ confessions of faith often fail to understand that confessions can be highly nuanced documents. The running joke in Presbyterian circles is, "Put three Presbyterians in one room and you'll get five different opinions." This humorous observation is equally true of Reformed theology in the early modern period. Confessions of faith were typically written to define truth and fence off heterodoxy and heresy while allowing a degree of doctrinal latitude within the boundaries of the confession. The Confession, for example, explicitly rejects certain doctrines, such as predestination based upon foreknowledge (3.2), justification based upon the worthiness of one's faith (11.1), or transubstantiation (29.6). However, the Westminster Confession is

equally silent about a number of other teachings, which typically were viewed as issues of doctrinal liberty—issues upon which theologians could disagree but still be within the bounds of confessional orthodoxy. In the debates over God's decree, for example, and the composition of the Confession's third chapter, one of the divines, George Gillespie (1613–1648), wanted the assembly to compose certain phrases in such a manner that "every one may injoy his owne sence."[13]

In other words, at many points the Confession is very specific in terms of what it rejects or teaches, but at other points it is brilliantly ambiguous or vague, thus allowing various theologians to assent to the document even though it might not advocate each theologian's precise view on a particular subject. Such deliberate ambiguity or vagueness can only be discovered by reading the Confession and catechisms in tandem with the minutes of the assembly and works of the period. For example, one of the more complex issues in theology, whether in the present day or in the seventeenth century, is the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the other covenants in Scripture; or alternatively stated, what is the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic law? Today many might not realize that at least five different views were held by various commissioners to the assembly. The Confession states the basics of what was the most common view, but when it came to its rejection of other views, it singled out only one position, namely, that of Tobias Crisp (1600–1643). Crisp advocated that there were two covenants of grace, something the Confession explicitly rejects (7.6). It is silent with regard to the other views held.

The Methodology of the Present Study

Given the importance of reading the Standards in their original context, in this study I have opted to place emphasis upon primary over secondary sources. There are numerous commentaries on the Standards that make theological and historical judgments about their doctrinal content, but do so devoid of primary-source analysis. Instead, while I have read much secondary-source analysis of the Standards

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[13] *MPWA*, sess. 520, October 20, 1645 (3:690).

over the years, I have chosen only to employ what is, in my judgment, essential or necessary secondary literature; I have given preference to primary-source literature, or literature that was within a generation or so of the Westminster Assembly. Moreover, I have chosen to use works not of my own liking, but rather those that primary sources have identified as important or noteworthy.

In this respect it is interesting to follow the bread crumb trail that many of the primary sources have left. In our own day many Reformed theologians would never positively cite Patristic, medieval, Lutheran, or pagan sources, but this is precisely what numerous early modern Reformed theologians did. Hence, for many contemporary readers the sources I have chosen to illustrate certain doctrinal points may seem counterintuitive, but for the early modern Reformed theologian they were perfectly natural, desirable, and necessary. Unlike our own day, when Reformed theologians are content to labor for their entire ministries in theologically sectarian-like settings where orthodoxy is measured by a very narrow set of criteria, the Westminster divines had a different index by which they measured orthodoxy. The divines considered themselves *reformed* Catholics and therefore did not want to isolate themselves from the rest of the church, but saw their broader engagement with other periods of history and other theological traditions as evidence of their catholicity.[14]

In my effort to return the reader to the seventeenth century, I have chosen to cite an original edition of the Westminster Standards with its archaic spelling and punctuation. This has a number of benefits. First, it causes the contemporary reader to slow down and reread each tenet rather than sailing over familiar words. The archaic spelling, punctuation, and capitalization give the contemporary reader a sense of what it would have been like for a seventeenth-century theologian to sit down and read this document for the first time. Second, contemporary readers might not be aware of this, but the original edition of the Confession and catechisms are different at key places in compari-

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[14] See, e.g., William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike; or, A Declaration Shewing How Neere We May Come to the Present Church of Rome in Sundrie Points of Religion; and Wherein We Must for Ever Depart from Them with an Advertisement to All Favorers of the Romane Religion, Shewing That the Said Religion Is against the Catholike Principles and Grounds of the Catechisme* (Cambridge: John Legat, 1598); Anthony Wotton, *A Defence of M. Perkins Booke, Called a Reformed Catholike against the Cavils of a Popish Writer* (London: Cuthbert Burby, 1606).

son with modern editions. Scripture proof texts have been changed, and punctuation, at least in one place where it affects the meaning of the statement about the active obedience of Christ, has also been changed. Such changes, while perhaps benefiting the contemporary reader's ability to move from the present day to the past, cloud the original meaning of the text.

The Plan of the Present Study

In setting forth the plan of this study, I should explain, first, what this study is not. It is not a line-by-line exhaustive commentary on the Standards. Such a work would undoubtedly be massive and encyclopedic. The Standards are exhaustive, and as such a line-by-line approach to them would need to be equally exhaustive. Therefore, I do not treat every single doctrinal issue raised within the Standards. There is still much work to be done in helping us to understand better the theology and history of the Westminster Standards. Nevertheless, I have sought to explore key subjects of the Standards in an illustrative fashion. Each chapter of the Confession, for example, could warrant a book-length study, but in order to keep this book to a manageable size, I have treated what, in my mind, are key elements within the Standards, and have *illustrated* these points as much as possible from primary sources.

Second, the study begins with an overview of the historical, religious, and political context in which the Westminster Standards originated. Many of the doctrinal assumptions and beliefs are connected to this all-important context. The study then proceeds with Scripture, God and the decree, covenant and creation, the person and work of Christ, justification, sanctification, the law and the Christian life, the church, worship, and eschatology. I do not doubt that some will pick up this book and be disappointed that I have not treated some subjects, such as church polity, divorce, or the Larger Catechism's exposition of the Decalogue. My hope is that this work will spur others to do historically sensitive studies of these and numerous other subjects that appear within the Standards. In this respect, this study is an introduction to the theology, history, and issues that appear in the Westminster Standards and therefore is not intended to be exhaustive.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to set the Standards in their original historical setting and explore the world of the seventeenth century. Like a deep-sea diver who plunges into the miry depths and must soon come up to his own world, my hope is that this brief exploration of the marvelous world of seventeenth-century Reformed theology will be interesting, instructive, and edifying for saints living in the twenty-first century and beyond.

The Historical and Theological Context

Politics, divorce, adultery, war, espionage, treason, violence, assassination, torture, and the end of the world are ideas seldom associated with the Westminster Standards. But history tells a different story, as such events and activities were part of the world surrounding the creation of the assembly. Such ideas were not only familiar to the assembly but, in many ways, part of its very formation. People in church pews who take up the Confession and begin to read it likely do not realize they are stepping into a period of history when the authors sometimes heard cannon fire in the background as they debated doctrine; they were writing their confession and catechisms in the midst of a civil war. The historical context is vital, therefore, to our having a fuller understanding of the Standards. Another important dimension of the Standards, one that adds significant texture and depth, is recognizing that the divines who wrote these documents were not one-dimensional Calvinists. Often in popular and academic literature authors apply the term *Calvinism* to the theology of the Standards, which creates the impression that its authors were overly indebted to the theology of John Calvin (1509–1564) or that they somehow departed from the norms that the Genevan Reformer established— in other words, Calvin is the garden of Eden and the Westminster Standards are the fall. The assembly's own interaction with sources

from the period easily demonstrates that such ideas are mythological rather than historical.

Hence, this chapter surveys the antecedent historical and theological context that led to the formation of the assembly and the creation of the Westminster Standards. It first explores politics and religion and the birth of the English Reformation. We then move to the subject of "wars and rumors of wars," which deals with a number of key conflicts that were shaped and driven by different theologies—Protestantism versus Catholicism. Events such as the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the notorious Gunpowder Plot of 1605 hardly register in the minds of contemporary readers of the Standards, but they were both prominent in the thought of a number of the divines. This chapter will then examine events on the Continent, including the Thirty Years War, which set part of the backdrop for the birth of the civil war between the king and Parliament and the creation of the Westminster Standards. The last two sections briefly explore the immediate theological context of the assembly, the theological chaos of the time, and multiple streams of influence that fed the theological interest and appetite of the assembly's participants. Given this background the reader will be equipped with key principles that will enable a better understanding of the Westminster Standards.

Politics and Religion

At the regal level the Reformation in England was not initially theologically motivated, as it was on the Continent with Martin Luther's (1483–1546) initial grievances against the Roman Catholic Church.[1] As many know, Henry VIII (1491–1547) challenged Luther's efforts at reforming the church and was subsequently awarded the title of *defensor fide* ("defender of the faith") by the pope.[2] However, other things were going on in Henry's life, particularly the quest for a male heir. Henry's first wife, Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536), was unable to give Henry a son to succeed him on the throne of England.

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[1] Henry VIII, *A Proclamation for Resysting and Withstandying of Most Damnable Heresyes Sowen within This Realme, by the Disciples of Luther and Other Heretykes, Perverters of Christes Religion* (London: Robert Pynson, 1529).

[2] For what follows, see G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation: Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 1–72.

Henry had married Catherine in 1509, soon after his ascension to the throne, but as early as 1510 he was reported to have been unfaithful to her. However, a young woman by the name of Anne Boleyn (ca. 1501–1536) caught Henry's eye, but Anne refused to consent to the king's sexual advances and told him she would settle for nothing less than being his wife. The challenge of a young, ambitious woman contributed to a chain of events that eventually led to Henry's divorce from Catherine, England's break from the Roman Catholic Church, and the creation of the Church of England with Henry as its new royal head.[3]

Henry's case for his divorce was supported by the likes of Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), who, among others, was interested in reform and who made the legal and theological case for the legitimacy of the king's divorce.[4] Henry, notorious for his numerous wives in the quest for a male heir, would eventually die, and his son, Edward VI (1537–1553), born by Henry's third wife, Jane Seymour (ca. 1508–1537), would ascend the throne. Under Edward's reign the reformation of England flourished. The reformation of the Church of England proceeded far beyond Henry's nominal reforms, largely owing to the theological advisors that surrounded Edward, who, at the time of ascension, was only nine years old. Under Edward's reign Continental Reformers such as Martin Bucer (1491–1551) and Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) were invited to teach at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Another Continental Reformer, Johannes à Lasco (1499–1560), a Polish theologian, was given charge over the London's Strangers' Church, which was allowed to set up its own form of church discipline and worship. All three theologians, Bucer, Vermigli, and à Lasco, spent a great deal of time with Cranmer in his home, and it was through the influence of these three that Cranmer's views on the Lord's Supper shifted and took on a decidedly Reformed cast.[5] Another influential Continental theologian who carried on significant epistolary friendships and offered sage counsel to English Reformers was

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[3] Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480–1642* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 27.
[4] See, e.g., Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 41–78; Carl Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525–1556* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).
[5] Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 235–37.

Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575).[6] The capstones to the reforms under Edward's reign appeared in 1552 and 1553 with the composition and publication of the Book of Common Prayer and the Forty-Two Articles, largely written by Cranmer.[7]

But during the drama of Henry's divorce, Mary I (1516–1558), his daughter by Catherine, carefully observed her mother's mistreatment.[8] Mary was naturally against the divorce and was very dedicated to her mother's Roman Catholic faith. The seeds of resentment sown during the divorce proceedings would later flower in the persecution of Protestants throughout England. In Mary's mind, Protestants had unjustly treated her mother, and she was determined to restore the Roman Catholic faith to England. Upon Edward's death, Mary, also known as "Bloody Mary" because of her persecution of Protestants, led England back toward Rome. This return was evidence that though the Church of England was officially Reformed under Edward's reign, the Reformation had taken hold only among a small segment of the population.

Shortly after Mary's ascension in 1553, the imperial ambassador from Spain noted how Londoners had obediently taken Easter Communion according to Roman Catholic custom. But among the Protestants, there were many who were resolutely dedicated to the Reformed faith, and more than 280 were martyred, including Cranmer, John Hooper (ca. 1495–1555), Hugh Latimer (ca. 1487–1555), and Nicholas Ridley (ca. 1500–1555).[9] In the wake of the Marian persecutions more than eight hundred Englishmen, gentry, ministers, and those preparing for the ministry went into exile in various Reformed European cities, such as Emden, Strasbourg, Zurich, Basel, and other cantons of Switzerland. But when many of these exiles eventually returned to the British Isles, including theologians such as John Knox (ca. 1514–1572), they brought many theological ideas and plans for reformation with them.[10] In many respects, Mary's persecution had the opposite effect upon the English Reformation than she intended—it made it stronger.[11]

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[6] Marshall, *Reformation England*, 128.
[7] Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 238.
[8] Marshall, *Reformation England*, 103.
[9] Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 241.
[10] Ibid., 242.
[11] Marshall, *Reformation England*, 109.

After Mary's short-lived but nevertheless violent reign, she was succeeded by Elizabeth I (1533–1603). The daughter of Anne Boleyn, Henry's second wife, Elizabeth was raised in the home of Catherine Parr (1512–1548), Henry's sixth bride. Catherine Parr was Protestant by conviction, and her influence upon Elizabeth was significant. Moreover, if Elizabeth rejected the Protestant faith, then it would ultimately entail the acknowledgment of the illegitimacy of her parents' marriage, and hence her claim to the throne would be nullified.[12] Under Elizabeth's reign Reformed theology once again flourished, and more than half of the initial set of Elizabethan bishops came from among those who had sought exile under the Marian persecutions. The first post-Marian archbishop of Canterbury, for example, was Matthew Parker (1504–1575), the executor of Martin Bucer's will; and his successor, Edmund Grindal (1519–1583), was a pallbearer at Bucer's funeral. In Elizabeth's England, John Jewel's (1522–1571) *Apology of the Church of England* (1564), the Geneva Bible—which contained theological notes in the margins written by Continental Reformers—and John Foxe's (1516–1587) *Acts and Monuments* were all published. These were highly influential and further inculcated a new generation in the Reformed faith. They also steeled the nation's resolve regarding its chief place in the apocalyptic battle between the church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church, the antichrist.[13]

In this history antecedent to the Westminster Assembly two chief things should be noted. First, politics and religion were intertwined. The popular notion that the Reformation was strictly a religious movement, inspired by preaching alone, is closer to mythology than history. As noted earlier, history is typically messy, and such is the case with the English Reformation. While Henry likely pursued reformation for personal benefit and his overactive libido, others such as Cranmer undoubtedly had better motivations. Second, the success and progress of the Reformed faith in the sixteenth century were largely dependent upon the ascension or demise of monarchs. In other words, in England, the Reformation largely flowed from the top to the bottom; it was not a popular democratic movement but rather a movement driven by an

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[12] Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 244.
[13] Ibid., 244–45.

oligarchy. This dynamic did not vanish like the morning mist once England crossed the threshold into the seventeenth century. On the contrary, this same relationship between church and state colored the reign of James I of England (1566–1625) and especially that of his son, Charles I of England (1600–1649). The tensions between church and state would eventually give birth both to the Westminster Assembly and to regicide, with the beheading of Charles. More will be said about these events below.

Wars and Rumors of Wars

For contemporary readers of the Westminster Standards, the original historical context is at some distance, not simply in terms of the number of centuries that have passed, but also in terms of the theological culture of early modernity. In the present, people associate religious violence with radicals, extremists, or those religions committed to spreading their beliefs by such means, such as Islam. But in the early modern period, a consequence of the irrefragable bond between politics and religion was that religion and war were also inextricably linked. A microcosm of this reality appears in the life of one of the Reformation's first-generation leaders, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531). In the early days of the Reformation a number of Swiss cities embraced the embryonic reform movement, and Zwingli encouraged them to form a political alliance, the Christian Civic Union (1529). Zwingli's intent was not only to strengthen the bonds among the various Swiss cantons that had embraced the Reformed faith but also to reach other cities and add them to the alliance to advance the Reformation. A number of Zwingli's allies warned him about such a move because they feared reprisal by those cities still under Roman Catholic control. Zwingli and the Reformed cities fought a brief war in the summer of 1529, which was followed by the Peace of Kappel; he was somewhat successful and able to expand the influence of the Reformation among other Swiss communities.

Zwingli and the leaders in Zurich became overconfident and overextended themselves by imposing an economic blockade against the Catholic Inner States of Switzerland. In response, the Roman Catholic cantons raised an army and marched on Zurich, routing the Protes-

tant army. Zwingli, wearing a full suit of armor, was with the Protestant army and was killed in battle.[14] Some have claimed that he was merely a chaplain who accompanied the army into battle; however, if he were merely a chaplain, then why would he dress in armor, wear a helmet, and carry a sword and a battle axe?[15] The tragedy of Zwingli's death is accented by its brutality. He was hunched over a dying man, consoling him, when a soldier wielding a stone struck him in the head; Zwingli picked himself up off the ground but was hit again multiple times until he was run through with a lance.

After the battle Catholic soldiers scoured the field looking for wounded Protestants, and upon finding them, finished them off. These soldiers eventually stumbled upon Zwingli, "that vile heretic . . . rascal, that traitor," under a tree and in the throes of death; they drew a sword and cut his throat. The Catholic soldiers wanted to dismember Zwingli and send pieces of him to each of the five cantons allied with the Reformation. However, some objected, and instead he was tried, he was quartered for treason, and then his body was burned for heresy. When his remains were burned, the ashes of pigs were mixed with Zwingli's dismembered body and then the mixture was cast into the air by the mob that had gathered to watch the proceedings.[16]

Was Zwingli a minister or a soldier? Was the Reformation a theological or a political movement? Was the Reformation a theological or a military phenomenon? The answer to these questions is yes. The Reformation was all of these things, and Zwingli's death is but one example of how interconnected and messy the events of early modernity were. As military strategist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) has argued, stripped to its essence, war is simply the exercise of force in order to bring about a political goal—it is merely the implementation of political policy.[17] In this case, given the symbiotic relationship between church and state, war was a natural instrument for advancing or defending theological causes. And this principle generally colored Protestant and Roman Catholic interaction during early modernity.

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[14] Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490–1700* (London: Penguin, 2003), 175–76.
[15] J. H. D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 4 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1872), 450.
[16] Ibid., 451–54.
[17] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 1.1.24 (p. 99).

As has been noted above, under the Marian persecutions nearly three hundred martyrs died for their faith. However, this is not to say that Protestants were innocent of bloodshed. Roman Catholics suffered under Protestant rule, which was an accelerant to the already burning fires of conflict between the two parties.

The animus between the Reformed and Roman Catholics was fueled by regular armed conflict, such as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre (1572). Tensions between the Reformed and Roman Catholics were running high in France. Over the years the Reformed faith had spread quickly; between 1555 and 1570 approximately 1,240 churches were planted in France, and about 10 percent of the French population vowed its allegiance to the Reformed faith.[18] With the untimely death of the French king Henry II (1519–1559), power passed to his widow, Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589). Political unrest marked Catherine's reign, and, coupled with religious strife between the Reformed and Roman Catholics, a number of brief wars broke out.

The first war, occurring between 1562 and 1563, was instigated by the massacre of unarmed Huguenots, adherents to the Reformed faith. An attempt by Protestants in 1567–1568 to seize power failed, leading to another conflict between Huguenots and Roman Catholics, in which the Huguenots were unsuccessful. Catherine and her son, Charles IX (1550–1574), who had ascended the throne at age ten, were convinced that one way to end the strife was to carry out a series of assassinations against Huguenot leaders. At 4:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 23, 1572, Roman Catholics in and around Paris began breaking into Huguenot homes and killing anyone found inside. The massacre went on for two days, and at least three thousand were killed in Paris; approximately another three thousand were killed in the surrounding provinces in the following weeks. The St. Bartholomew's Day massacre, the Marian persecution of Protestants in England, and the Spanish Inquisition (1480–1834) would be recalled, recounted, and seared into the collective memories of Protestants across Europe for generations to come and, as such, set the broader context for Reformed–Roman

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[18] Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 134; Meic Pearse, *The Age of Reason: From the Wars of Religion to the French Revolution 1570–1789*, The Baker History of the Church 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 44.

Catholic conflict in England, which played a part in creating the Westminster Assembly.[19]

Collective memories are much shorter in the contemporary period than they were in early modernity. For many today the Second World War (1939–1945) or even the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, are but a distant memory. But such amnesia was not the case for the English Reformed. In a sermon preached on July 18, 1644, before both houses of Parliament, Scottish divine Alexander Henderson (ca. 1583–1646) invoked the "deliverances from the Armada" and "the powder treason" to remind his audience of how God had delivered England from the machinations of their Roman Catholic foes.[20] Henderson was referring to England's victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605, events that were fifty-six and thirty-nine years before but, in the minds of many, ever-present realities and reminders of the continuing threat of Romanism and the need for Reformation in England. Remember: theology, politics, war, and matters of national security were inseparably entangled.

The conflict between Spain, a Roman Catholic nation, and England, a Protestant nation under Queen Elizabeth, was ultimately rooted in King Henry's convoluted line of successors to his throne. Under Mary's rule, Spain and England had good relations, given her commitment to Roman Catholicism, her persecution of Protestants, and the Spanish blood that coursed through her veins. As mentioned above, Mary's mother was Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of King Ferdinand II (1452–1516) and Queen Isabella of Spain (1451–1504), who was famous for underwriting Christopher Columbus's journey to the new world. When Mary died and Elizabeth ascended the throne, many in England were eager to roll back the influence of Catholicism as well as curtail Spanish political power and influence on English soil.

Elizabeth diligently balked at the marital advances of King Philip II of Spain (1527–1598) when he suggested that Elizabeth replace her half-sister in his marriage bed; he had been married to "bloody" Mary

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[19] Pearse, *Age of Reason*, 43–47.
[20] Alexander Henderson, "Sermon on Matthew 14:31," in *Sermons Preached before the English Houses of Parliament by the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly of Divines 1643–45*, ed. Chris Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali, 2011), 116.

in an attempt to solidify the political and theological alliance between England and Spain. But it soon became evident that Elizabeth had no intention of marrying Philip, and so she came to represent everything that he detested—a Protestant bastard queen who was repressing Roman Catholics under her rule, encouraging piracy against Spanish shipping, and assisting Protestant rebels against Philip's war in the Netherlands.[21]

By contrast, Philip represented everything that English Protestants feared and loathed. He was waging war against the Reformed faith throughout Europe, oppressing the Reformed in the Netherlands, sowing seeds of treason through espionage and subterfuge in England, and sponsoring Irish Roman Catholics to rebel against Elizabeth's authority. Moreover, Spain was but a short distance from England and was an ideal location from which to launch an invasion of the Protestant island. All signs pointed to war, and the respective monarchs each carried a theological banner, the Reformed or Roman Catholic faith. Elizabeth was also without an heir, and her nearest relative was Mary Queen of Scots (1542–1587), who also happened to be a devoted Roman Catholic. Under the right circumstances, Spain might be able to invade England, remove or kill Elizabeth, and place Mary Queen of Scots upon the throne. More gasoline was poured onto the fires of brewing conflict when Elizabeth pursued a failed attempt to bring Mary to trial and when Pope Pius V (1504–1572) issued the papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* (1570), which declared that Elizabeth was deposed and excommunicated, and that her subjects were no longer bound to their vows of loyalty. Various plots were also hatched to assassinate Elizabeth, some of which were reported to involve Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth eventually caved in to the pressure from her advisors and signed Mary's execution order. Mary's execution then gave Philip of Spain warrant to invade England.[22]

At this point in history, the greatest naval power in the world was Spain.[23] The Spanish fleet consisted of roughly 130 ships, 7,000 sailors, and 17,000 soldiers for the invasion of England. In addition

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[21] Pearse, *Age of Reason*, 65.
[22] Ibid., 65–67.
[23] J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain: 1469–1716* (New York: St. Martin's, 1963), esp. 237–44. My thanks to John Stovall for alerting me to this source.

to this the fleet was supposed to pick up another 17,000 soldiers from the Netherlands to join the invasion force. Yet this enormous strength and superiority was put under the command of the Duke of Medina-Sidonia, Alonso Pérez de Guzmán (1550–1615), who was selected not because of his naval prowess but because of his pedigree. Indeed the duke knew very little about naval combat. Another problem for the Spanish fleet was that it was more like a convoy of vessels than an effective combat unit. The duke brought these shortcomings to the attention of the king, but Philip was confident that he was God's instrument to punish England for its heresy and restore the one true faith to its shores; in fact, Philip received a papal blessing from Sixtus V (1521–1590), which in his mind all but guaranteed a Spanish victory.[24] As can be imagined, the English were just as certain that God would grant them victory.

Philip had planned for the Spanish fleet, after an initial skirmish, to harbor in the Dutch port of Flushing to pick up additional soldiers for the invasion, but Dutch Protestant forces captured the port, thus forcing Philip to harbor in Calais, France. The English navy located the fleet at Calais, sent fire ships—older vessels loaded with flammable materials and set ablaze—and flushed out the Spanish fleet where it was, cutting it to pieces by superior English naval gunfire. The Spanish fleet retreated and sailed north to Scotland with plans to sail around it and down the western coast of Ireland, but along the way the fleet ran into a violent storm, called the "Protestant wind," which battered and destroyed much of the armada. In the end, half of the 130 ships were sunk, and between 5,000 and 15,000 Spanish sailors and soldiers perished. Naturally, this event was interpreted as a vindication of the Reformed cause, and in terms of the grand narrative set forth by Foxe in his *Acts and Monuments*, England was an elect nation chosen by God and was engaged in a battle of apocalyptic proportions against the pope, the antichrist.[25] But just because England won the battle, that did not mean the war was over.

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[24] Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485–1714: A Narrative History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 140.

[25] Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 141–43; cf. John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of Matters Most Speicial and Memorable* (London: Company of Stationers, 1610). For an extended treatment of the battle, see Neil Hanson, *The Confident Hope of a Miracle: The True History of the Spanish Armada* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

On the heels of Elizabeth's death Roman Catholics once again saw a window of opportunity to install a monarch who would return the nation to the one true faith. At the time, many Catholics believed that the martyrdom of Mary Queen of Scots acquired merits that would win them the grace of God and the conversion of the new king, James I, to Catholicism.[26] Roman Catholics desired this theological change because they had suffered under Elizabeth's rule. If Catholic priests were discovered performing the mass or in possession of vestments, they were typically thrown in prison, or even executed for treason. Such executions, however, were long, tortuous affairs. Priests convicted of treason were hung and drawn, and while they were still alive, were disemboweled, were emasculated, had their hearts cut out, and then were quartered.[27] Treason might seem like a strange crime for a priest, but in this context, and especially given the ongoing conflict between England and Spain and the failed invasion, priests were suspected of being foreign spies. These spies reported either to the pope, who had encouraged sedition against Elizabeth through his papal bull, or to the likes of the king of Spain.[28] By the time James ascended the throne in 1603, three women and fifty-eight men had been put to death under Elizabeth's reign.[29]

Eager to restore Roman Catholicism to England, Guy Fawkes (1570–1606), a native of England who fought with Spanish forces in the Netherlands in an effort to raise sympathy and military support for English Roman Catholics, took matters into his own hands when it became clear that Spain would not act to invade England or assassinate King James.[30] Fawkes and other conspirators devised a plot to blow up Parliament in its opening session. This would eliminate not only England's ruling body but also its monarch, King James, and would then clear the way to install a Roman Catholic monarch on England's throne. Fawkes and twelve others planned their assassination and moved thirty-six barrels of gunpowder into the "cellar" of Westminster. Estimated at between one and five tons of explosives, such a quantity would have literally

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[26] Antonia Fraser, *Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot* (New York: Anchor, 1996), xxix.
[27] Ibid., 20.
[28] Ibid., 24.
[29] Ibid., 29.
[30] Ibid., xxx.

blown the roof off Westminster.[31] Someone loosely associated with the conspiracy had a twinge of conscience and wrote an anonymous letter to the authorities alerting them to the plot. In the wee hours of November 5, Fawkes was discovered lurking about Westminster's cellar, guarding the explosives. He was arrested and then interrogated.[32]

Authorities tortured Fawkes in an effort to get him to reveal the names of others involved in the plot to assassinate the king along with Parliament. They put him on the rack, even though such practice was contrary to English common law employed under Henry VIII's reign.[33] Under torture Fawkes folded and gave up his fellow conspirators, some of whom were hunted down and killed, while others were imprisoned, tried, and eventually executed by hanging, then drawn and quartered. One of the conspirators, Everard Digby (ca. 1578–1606), was hung from the halter for a short time and then cut down, which meant he was fully conscious when he was drawn and quartered. When the executioner tore out Digby's heart, he lifted it up, showed it to the crowd, as was the custom, and said, "Here is the heart of a traitor."[34] But such brutality did not mean that all in the crowd were unsympathetic to those being executed, as during some executions people cried for the executioner to allow the condemned to hang until he was dead so that the subsequent drawing and quartering would be done upon a corpse rather than a conscious person.[35]

The execution of the Roman Catholic conspirators was not the end of the infamous Gunpowder Plot, as the effects would echo into the immediate and distant future. The plot was firmly etched into English culture, given its daring and potentially earth-shattering proportions. As in our own day, such events quickly seep into the imagination, and art imitates life. William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) *Macbeth*, first performed in 1606 and written on the heels of the failed plot, involves the assassination of a king; and *King Lear*, also performed in 1606, contains the words, "Friendships fall off, brothers divide . . . in countries, discord; in palaces treason."[36] The political and religious

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[31] Ibid., 120–21.
[32] Ibid., 168.
[33] Ibid., 176–77.
[34] Ibid., 231.
[35] Ibid., 266.
[36] Ibid., 143 (quoting *King Lear*, act 1, scene 2), 280.

consequences were significant; in the wake of the failed plot Roman Catholics were not allowed to practice law, serve in the army or navy, act as executors of wills, be guardians to minors, possess weapons, receive university degrees, or vote in an election. These prohibitions would not be lifted until 1797, when Catholics were allowed to vote in local elections, and 1829, with the Catholic Emancipation. And in 1613 a bill was introduced in Parliament to require Roman Catholics to wear red hats, as was required of Jews in Rome, so they could be easily identified and ridiculed, but the measure was defeated.[37]

The events of the failed Spanish invasion and the Gunpowder Plot also echoed in the theological literature of the period and weighed heavily on the minds of a number of the Westminster divines. Bishop Godfrey Goodman (1582–1656) published his memoirs about forty years after the failed plot, right about the time when the assembly was meeting, and in them he recounted the events and essentially cast a shadow over Roman Catholics, implying that any Catholic might be a terrorist.[38] Moreover, sermons were typically preached in remembrance of both events. Such sermons were preached by Westminster divines Cornelius Burgess (ca. 1589–1665), Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), and William Strong (d. 1654).[39] Not only were these events seared into the collective memory of Reformed English Protestants, but they were also regularly mentioned in theological works of the period.[40] To say the least, Roman Catholicism was not merely an ideology or something to be debated over coffee, but a threat both to the church

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[37] Ibid., 283.

[38] Godfrey Goodman, *The Court of King James the First*, 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), 2:110–18; Fraser, *Faith and Treason*, 284.

[39] Cornelius Burgess, *Another Sermon Preached to the Honorable House of Commons Now Assembled in Parliament, November Fifth, 1641* (London: P. Stephens and C. Meredith, 1641); Thomas Gataker, *An Anniversarie Memoriall of Englands Delivery from Spanish Invasion* (London: Philemon Stephens and Christopher Meredith, 1626); William Strong, *The Commemoration and Exaltation of Mercy. Delivered in a Sermon Preached to the Honorable, the House of Commons, at Margarets Westminster, November 5, 1646. Being the Day of Their Publike Thanksgiving, for That Eminent and Ancient Mercy, the Deliverance of Them, and the Whole Kingdome in Them, from the Popish and Hellish Conspiracy of the Powder Treason* (London: Francis Tyton, 1646).

[40] See, e.g., Thomas Cartwright, *A Confutation of the Rhemists Translation, Glosses and Annotations on the New Testament* (Leiden: William Brewster, 1618), comm. Rev. 22:20 (p. 761); John Mayer, *A Commentary upon All the Prophets Both Great and Small* (London: Abraham Miller and Ellen Cotes, 1652), dedicatory epist. (fol. A4r); Richard Baxter, *The Unreasonableness of Infidelity*, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, vol. 20 (1655; London: James Duncan, 1830), 105, 309; Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1692), 259; John Downame, *The Christian Warfare against the Devil World and Flesh* (London: William Stansby, 1634), 2.34.7 (p. 1003); William Twisse, *A Discovery of D. Jackson's Vanitie* (Amsterdam, 1631), 317; Thomas Adams, *A Commentary or, Exposition upon the Divine Second Epistle General Written by the Blessed Apostle St. Peter* (London: Jacob Bloome, 1633), 18, 552.

and to national security, according to many Reformed theologians of the period.

Encroaching Threats and the Formation of the Assembly

The immediate historical context of the assembly carried much of the Reformed–Roman Catholic baggage with it; just because a number of years had passed since the failed Spanish invasion and foiled Gunpowder Plot, that did not mean all was quiet. For a number of years before the assembly met—as well as during the assembly's most productive years, 1643–1647, when it produced the Confession and catechisms—the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) raged on the Continent. Like most conflicts of the period, this war was driven by, among other things, theology. The two sides were the Protestant Union and the Catholic League.[41] The trigger for the war was the takeover of Bohemia. Because of the earlier reforms of John Huss (ca. 1369–1415), the Roman Catholic Church had lost its monopoly over Bohemia's two million residents; the Bohemian Protestants were tolerated under the reign of Rudolf II (1552–1612), the Holy Roman emperor. Rudolf's successor was supposed to be the Archduke Ferdinand of Styria (1578–1637), a devout Roman Catholic. Bohemian Protestants naturally feared their freedom would be curtailed under this new king.[42]

The Protestant citizens of Bohemia decided to make their opposition known to Ferdinand through a celebration of the "Defenestration of Prague," which originally occurred in 1418 when Hussites tossed church officials out a large castle window, from which they plummeted to their deaths. On the bicentennial of this event, Protestants seized two leading Catholic nobles and another bystander, and reenacted the event, though to a lesser end; the victims landed in a pile of dung and emerged unharmed. Still, this event brought repercussions. Riled by the defenestration celebration, the Bohemians raised an army of sixteen thousand men and invaded and captured the Catholic city of Pilsen. Naturally, King Philip III of Spain (1578–1621) sent reinforcements, and others sympathetic to their cause joined the Bohemian

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[41] Pearse, *Age of Reason*, 152.
[42] Ibid., 153. Styria is in modern-day Austria.

Protestants.[43] The Protestants were ultimately unsuccessful, Bohemia was re-Catholicized, more than a hundred thousand Protestants were exiled, and the University of Prague was given over to the control of Jesuit theologians.[44] This conflict would eventually spread, engulf thousands, and as is usually the case, involved butchery, cruelty, and savage atrocities committed by both sides.

An example of the brutality of the conflict comes from Sweden and King Gustavus Adolphus (1594–1632), a committed Lutheran. Adolphus and his German allies unsuccessfully engaged Roman Catholic forces, which laid siege to and sacked the city of Magdeburg in 1631. When the Catholic forces approached the outskirts of the city, citizens loyal to the Holy Roman emperor ran out to greet their liberators, only to be slaughtered. Fearful citizens fled to the safe haven of churches, but Roman Catholic soldiers locked the doors and burned them down though they were full of women and children. Protestant clergy were dragged out of their homes and burned with their libraries, and women were singled out, dragged behind horses, and raped. It was also reported that Croat and Walloon soldiers spiked children on their lances and then threw them into bonfires. In the end roughly twenty thousand of the city's thirty thousand inhabitants were slaughtered.[45] The Thirty Years War brought the forcible imposition of the Roman Catholic faith, which Bohemia, Hungary, and significant portions of Austria suffered, and only armed resistance prevented the same from happening in the northern Palatinate, Bavaria, and southern Germany. The Westminster divines, therefore, lived under the long shadow and threat of Roman Catholicism.[46] In early modernity, theology was no ivory tower endeavor—theology often wrote checks that were cashed in blood.

The Westminster divines, however, not only had reason to fear Roman Catholicism abroad, especially with the Thirty Years War raging on the Continent, but also had homegrown reasons to be concerned. King James I was generally sympathetic to Reformed theology

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[43] Ibid., 153–54.
[44] Ibid., 156–57.
[45] Ibid., 159–60. For a broader treatment of the Thirty Years War, see Cicely Veronica Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (1938; New York: New York Review Book, 2005).
[46] Pearse, *Age of Reason*, 162.

and allowed it to flourish under his reign. One of the most notable examples was the fact that he sent a delegation to the Synod of Dort (1618–1619).[47] However, James's son, Charles, was not so inclined. With the sound of "Remember, remember, the fifth of November" echoing in their minds reminding them of the failed Gunpowder Plot, many Englishmen were leery of their new king because of his perceived Roman Catholic sympathies. Under his reign Charles promoted William Laud (1573–1645), who became bishop of London in 1628 and, later, archbishop of Canterbury in 1633.

Under Laud's leadership far more Arminian ministers were promoted to key posts in the Church of England, whereas formerly under James, ministers who held to Reformed theology were regularly promoted.[48] Laud ordered that all Communion tables be moved back to the eastern ends of churches, their location when the Church of England was still under papal authority. He also required ministers to wear vestments, bow at the utterance of the name of Christ, and strictly follow the Book of Common Prayer, which involved kneeling at the Lord's Supper, a practice that looked very similar to the Roman Catholic veneration of the host; and he banned unlicensed preachers—Congregationalists who were, usually, of Reformed conviction. Laudians believed they were restoring beauty to the church, but their detractors thought all of this was a thinly veiled return of Roman Catholic practices.[49]

Another cause for alarm arose with respect to the king's choice of a bride. In 1625 Charles married the daughter of Henry IV of France (1553–1610), Henrietta Maria (1609–1669). Henrietta was a Roman Catholic, and among the stipulations for this royal union was that she would be allowed to worship according to her convictions. This meant that the king had to staff a chapel with Roman Catholic clergy, which in many ways was a symbolic eyesore to many Reformed ministers; they, after all, had a den of theological iniquity nestled within the very court of the king. But of equal concern was the question of offspring and in whose faith they would be raised. This was not an unfounded

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[47] M. W. Dewar, "The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort—1618–19," *EQ* 46, no. 2 (1974): 103–16.
[48] Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 236–37.
[49] Ibid., 237.

fear because the pope allowed Henrietta to marry this heretic king with a secret proviso given specifically to Henrietta that she raise the children as Roman Catholics. Given all of these factors, his appointment of Laud, the persecution of Reformed ministers, his marriage to Henrietta, who would corrupt the king's theology, and his toleration of Papists in the heart of his court, many believed that Charles was a crypto-Roman Catholic.[50]

The straw that broke the proverbial camel's back and started a chain reaction that would eventually lead to civil war and the formation of the Westminster Assembly was the effort of Charles and Laud to impose Anglican worship practices upon Presbyterian Scotland. The Scottish Kirk did not have a formal liturgy like that prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, and so the imposition of a perceived Arminian high-church liturgy caused many Scotsmen to believe that they were being forcibly led back to Rome. This action created a firestorm of resistance not only among the politicians and church leaders but also among the Scottish population.

On July 23, 1637, the ill-fated day when the new liturgy was supposed to be performed, the dean of Edinburgh arrived at St. Giles Cathedral to carry out his task. As he began to read from the Book of Common Prayer, an old woman, Jenny Geddes, stood up and cried out, "Villain, dost thou say mass at my lug," and she took her stool in hand and threw it at the dean's head. Others quickly followed her lead and bedlam ensued. The dean threw off his vestment and took off running, and so the bishop of Edinburgh mounted the pulpit to try to restore order, which drew a cascade of sticks and stones and shouts from the congregation, "A Pope, a Pope, Antichrist." To say the least, the Laudian priests gave up on trying to impose the liturgy upon Scotland.[51]

The imposition of Laud's liturgy was formally rejected when representatives of nearly every key constituency of Scotland, excluding Roman Catholics, signed the National Covenant (1638) in the Greyfriars' churchyard in Edinburgh. The document states that the Scots rejected "all kind of Papistry" and that Roman Catholics were

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[50] Ibid., 238–39.
[51] Roy Middleton, "Historical Introduction," in George Gillespie, *A Dispute against the English Popish Ceremonies*, ed. Chris Coldwell (Dallas: Naphtali, 2013), xxv.

"damned and confuted by the word of God and Kirk of Scotland." But the signatories especially detested and refused the "usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist upon the scriptures of God, upon the kirk, the civil magistrate, the consciences of men." The National Covenant then enumerates the various points that the Scots perceived as the corruption of doctrine, and these largely anticipate many, if not all, of the subjects that the divines would later reject in the Westminster Standards. For example:

> His corrupted doctrine concerning original sin . . . our justification by faith only, our imperfect sanctification and obedience to the law; the nature, number, and use of the holy sacraments; his five bastard sacraments . . . his blasphemous opinion of transubstantiation . . . his dispensations with solemn oaths, perjuries, and degrees of marriage forbidden in the world . . . his devilish mass . . . blasphemous priesthood; his profane sacrifice for the sins of the dead . . . calling upon angels or saints departed, worshipping of imagery, relicks, and crosses . . . his general and doubtsome faith; his satisfaction of men for their sins; his justification by works . . . works of supererogation, merits, pardons . . . his erroneous and bloody decrees made at Trent.[52]

The National Covenant bound its signatories to propagate and defend the Reformed faith "all the days of our life." In many respects the National Covenant was a declaration of theological war against the attempted invasion of Charles and Laud.

But as was the case in early modernity, declarations of theological war were tantamount to declarations of war *simpliciter*—there was no separation of church and state. For the church to reject the authority of the state in theological matters was tantamount to treason, and naturally Charles perceived the National Covenant in precisely this manner.[53] So he called upon his noblemen and lords to raise an army and march on Scotland, and the Scots responded in kind by raising an army of their own. The Scots were motivated by theology and love of country, and were well trained because they had many veterans of

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[52] All quotations of the National Covenant come from *The Westminster Confession* (1646; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995), 347–54.
[53] Marshall, *Reformation England*, 211–15.

Continental wars. Charles counted on the English hatred of the Scots to motivate his army, but many of those who were conscripted were reluctant to leave their homes and invade Scotland to fight fellow Protestants. Many of the Englishmen may have disliked the Scots, but they had greater contempt for Laud.

Rather than engage in battle, Charles opted for a truce, the Treaty of Berwick, in June 1639. But by 1640 the king was nearly bankrupt, had a hostile Scottish army to the north, and consequently had to call Parliament, which had not met for some eleven years. Parliament was not inclined to meet the king's request for money to fund his war with the Scots until the king heard their grievances. Charles was unwilling to work with Parliament and quickly dissolved it. He nevertheless plunged headlong into battle against the Scots and was roundly defeated. The Scots defeated the king's army, occupied Durham and Northumberland Counties, and forced Charles to sign the Treaty of Ripon, which required him to pay £850 per day until a permanent agreement could be reached. The biggest problem, however, was that there was now no English army between Scotland and London, and so Charles had to call Parliament once again.[54]

What has now come to be called the Long Parliament, which was officially in session from 1640 to 1660 and consisted largely of Protestants of Reformed conviction, sought to restrict the king's power so that he could not impose Roman Catholic worship upon England as he had done under Laud's leadership in the 1630s.[55] During the initial meetings of Parliament Charles and the MPs negotiated back and forth, with both sides reluctant to give in to the other's demands. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1641 the Roman Catholics of Ireland arose and took up the sword against their Protestant countrymen; and approximately three thousand to four thousand Protestants were killed in this uprising. However, by the time word of this rebellion reached Parliament, the number killed had been exaggerated to two hundred thousand, which only stoked Protestant fears and confirmed, in the minds of many, the need to spread the Reformed faith throughout the kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Many Protestants feared

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[54] Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 243–44.
[55] Ibid., 245.

that the Irish would invade England and try to impose Catholicism upon them.[56] These events finally and irretrievably fractured whatever spirit of cooperation existed between Charles and Parliament, and civil war ensued.

The king departed London with 236 royalist MPs in his wake, which left 302 members of Parliament in the capital.[57] At the outset of the civil war, royalist forces were successful, gaining a number of victories, and even captured the port of Bristol. The occupation of Bristol was crucial because its strategic port allowed Charles to shuttle troops and supplies from Ireland; Charles made an alliance with the Roman Catholics of Ireland in order to bolster the size of his army. Parliament sought outside assistance as well and reached out to the Scots in the North, who had one of the most effective armies in the British Isles. In so doing, Parliament signed the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) with Scotland.[58] To be clear, the messiness of the situation is best captured by Robert Baillie's (1602–1662) famous characterization of this alliance: "The English were for a civill Leage, we for a religious Covenant."[59] In other words, Baillie and other Scots were well aware that the English wanted and needed the Scottish armies to defeat Charles; on the other hand, the Scots were not so much concerned about Charles as interested in seeing Presbyterianism and the Reformed faith take hold in England.

The Solemn League and Covenant was written to promote and bind its signatories to the reformation and defense of religion in the three kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland. Many of the same concerns voiced in the National Covenant of 1638 were repeated in the Solemn League and Covenant. However, the covenant specifically states:

> We shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour, in our several places and callings, the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, against our common enemies;

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[56] Ibid., 248.
[57] Ibid., 250–51.
[58] Ibid., 255.
[59] Robert Baillie, "Letter to Mr. W. Spang, 26 July 1643," in *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, vol. 2, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841), 90.

the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of God, and the example of the best reformed Churches; and shall endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship and catechizing; that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us.[60]

This covenant and the pursuit of reformation in the three kingdoms laid the blueprint for the Westminster Standards and its attending documents, such as the Form of Government and Directory for Public Worship. To that end, Parliament called the Westminster Assembly, which at first was tasked with revising the Thirty-Nine Articles, but was later given the responsibility to write a new confession of faith, catechisms, and attending documents. To ensure that the assembly would stay on course, the Scots sent six representatives to serve as advisors to the assembly. The differences and interests of the parties surfaced in the origins of each set of representatives—the English divines were called and authorized by Parliament; the Scottish divines were commissioned and authorized by the Kirk of Scotland.[61]

Theological Chaos

It would be a mistake to think that the only perceived theological threat against the Reformed faith in England was the Roman Catholic Church. Rome was certainly the antichrist in the minds of many Reformed ministers in seventeenth-century England, and therefore it was one of the chief foci of theological polemic. However, theology did not exist on a continuum with Roman Catholicism on the left and Reformed theology on the right. Rather, early modern England, especially London, was a hotbed of religious pluralism that included but

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[60] All quotations from the Solemn League and Covenant come from *The Westminster Confession* (1646; Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995), 358–60.
[61] S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 45.

was not limited to Arminians, Anabaptists, antinomians, enthusiasts, Erastians, Familists, Brownists, Papists, Quakers, Socinians, and the like. One work that documented the various sects and theological groups was that of heresiographer Thomas Edwards (1599–1647), *Gangraena*, which was a catalog of errors, heresies, and blasphemies extant in London between 1642 and 1646.[62] In this three-part work Edwards provides a list of errors and relevant passages from the person or group advocating the doctrinal error.

For example, in the third part of his work, Edwards discusses the error of the anthropomorphites, those who believed that God had a physical body, as well as those who believed that the narrative of Adam's fall was merely an allegory.[63] Westminster divine and Scottish advisor Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) wrote a similar work, entitled *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist*. In it he explains and refutes Familism, a sixteenth-century antinomian sect, as well as the teaching of other antinomians of the period, including John Saltmarsh (d. 1647), William Dell (d. 1664), Tobias Crisp (1600–1643), and John Eaton (1575–1630).[64] To say the least, English religious culture was fragmented, and the divines of the Westminster Assembly sought to bring theological uniformity in doctrine and practice.

The Work and Influences of the Assembly

A parallel to the doctrinal pluralism of early modern England was the plurality of streams of theological influence that flowed into the Westminster Assembly. One of the repeated mantras of the present day is the idea that John Calvin is the normative theologian of the Reformed tradition. What Martin Luther is for Lutheranism, Calvin is for Calvinism. This notion appears on a number of levels but is likely fueled by the use of the term *Calvinism*, whether in popular or academic literature. While historians and theologians will acknowledge that there were many other Reformers and theologians who contributed to the

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[62] Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena; or, A Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time*, 3rd ed. (London: Ralph Smith, 1646); Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena; or, A New and Higher Discovery of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies, and Insolent Proceedings of the Sectaries of These Times* (London: Ralph Smith, 1646).
[63] Edwards, *The Third Part of Gangraena*, 2, 6.
[64] Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist* (London: Andrew Crooke, 1648).

work of the Reformation, the term nevertheless persists.[65] However, in the early modern period *Calvinism* (as well as its variants) originally was used as a term of derision to marginalize Reformed theologians as sectarians.[66] Calvin, though influential, was but one among a host of theological contributors in the early modern period. His relative influence can be measured by the number of times his name was invoked or cited in the minutes of the Westminster Assembly.[67]

Of the more than six hundred names cited in the assembly's minutes we find the following selected names, among others:

Names Cited	Times Cited
Ainsworth, Henry (1569–1622)	3
Ambrose (337–397)	4
Ames, William (1576–1633)	6
Amyraut, Moïse (1596–1664)	2
Aquinas, Thomas (ca. 1225–1274)	3
Aretius, Benedictus (ca. 1522–1574)	2
Aristotle (384–322 BC)	7
Arminius, Jacob (1560–1609)	1
Augustine (354–430)	25
Bellarmine, Robert (1542–1621)	5
Beza, Theodore (1516–1605)	29
Bucanus, Gulielmus (d. 1603)	1
Bucer, Martin (1491–1551)	8
Bullinger, Heinrich (1504–1575)	1
Calvin, John (1509–1564)	25
Cameron, John (ca. 1579–1625)	11

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[65] See, e.g., Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, with its subtitle, *A Social History of Calvinism*; Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

[66] Richard Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 51–69; Muller, "Reception and Response: Referencing and Understanding Calvin in Seventeenth-Century Calvinism," in *Calvin and His Influence, 1509–2009*, ed. Irena Backus and Philip Benedict (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 182–202.

[67] "Register of Citations," in *MPWA*, 1:148–61.

Names Cited	Times Cited
Cartwright, Thomas (1534–1603)	12
Chamier, Daniel (1565–1621)	8
Chrysostom, John (347–407)	16
Cotton, John (1585–1652)	11
Cyprian (d. 258)	12
Davenant, John (bap. 1572, d. 1641)	4
De Dieu, Louis (1590–1642)	2
Dort, Synod of (1618–1619)	2
Downame, John (1571–1652)	1
Du Moulin, Pierre (1568–1658)	3
Gerhard, Johann (1582–1637)	3
Gomarus, Franciscus (1563–1641)	4
Junius, Franciscus (1545–1602)	6
Knox, John (ca. 1514–1572)	1
Lasco, Johannes à (1499–1560)	1
Luther, Martin (1483–1546)	12
Melanchthon, Philip (1497–1560)	3
Musculus, Wolfgang (1497–1563)	2
Olevianus, Caspar (1536–1587)	1
Piscator, Johannes (1546–1625)	12
Scotus, John Duns (ca. 1265–1308)	3
Second Helvetic Confession (1566)	1
Tertullian (ca. 160–220)	10
Tilenus, Daniel (1563–1633)	5
Ursinus, Zacharias (1534–1583)	1
Ussher, James (1581–1656)	1
Vermigli, Peter (1499–1562)	2
Voetius, Gisbert (1589–1676)	2

Names Cited	Times Cited
Ward, Samuel (1572–1643)	2
Whitaker, William (1547–1595)	11
Zanchi, Girolamo (1516–1590)	4
Zepper, Wilhelm (1550–1607)	3

Immediately evident in this sampling of the six-hundred-plus citations is the broad variety of cited authorities, which includes philosophers such as Aristotle, Patristic theologians (Augustine, Cyprian, Tertullian), sixteenth-century Reformers (Beza, Bucer, Bullinger, Calvin, Ursinus), Lutheran theologians (Gerhard, Luther, Melanchthon), contemporaries of the divines (e.g., Cameron, Cotton, de Dieu, Voetius), other confessional documents (Second Helvetic Confession, Synod of Dort), and other theologians who fall into the "dark age" of Reformed theology.

The "dark age" is from 1560 to 1640, a period corresponding roughly to the time of Calvin's death until the start of the Westminster Assembly. This is a dark age not because of a lack of learning, skill, knowledge, or theological acumen, but due to the lack of awareness on the part of contemporary readers of this period. A popular pattern in the analysis of Reformed theology is to explain and define the Reformed tradition in terms of Calvin's *Institutes*, then hop to the Westminster Standards (1646–1647), and then leap into the present day.[68] Little to no effort is expended to examine, whether positively or negatively, the sources that the Westminster divines themselves were using. The above-cited list of names illustrates the point that the theological conversation was broad and was carried across a number of historical, theological, geographical, and generational boundaries. This is not to say that the divines engaged all of these sources in a positive manner; sometimes they were cited critically, and other times positively. What the list does show is the need to illuminate the Westminster Standards by the surrounding theological sources and conversation partners of the period.

One such example comes from Edward Leigh (1602–1671), a lay

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[68] See, e.g., Richard B. Gaffin, "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *WTJ* 65 (2003): 165–79; cf. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 39.

theologian who also wrote on numerous other subjects, including law and history. He was a colonel in the parliamentary army and was a member of Parliament during the composition of the Westminster Standards. He was elected an MP for Stafford in place of a member who was no longer physically able to carry out his duties.[69] Leigh was educated at Oxford under the tutelage of William Pemble (1591–1623).[70] Among the many works that Leigh authored was his *Systeme or Body of Divinity*, published in 1654, with a second edition issued in 1662.[71] The subtitle of this work gives a hint as to its breadth and depth in covering the theological issues of his day:

> Wherein the Fundamentals and main Grounds of Religion are Opened: The Contrary Errours Refuted: Most of the Controversies Between Us the Papists, Arminians and Socinians Discussed and handled. Several Scriptures Explained and vindicated from corrupt Glosses: A Work seasonable for these times, wherein so many Articles of our Faith are questioned, and so many gross Errours daily published.

In Leigh's work a quick glance at the marginal notes and citations immediately disabuses the reader of the notion that Calvin was the normative theologian of the period. For example, on one page from his treatment of the doctrine of Scripture Leigh cites John Rainolds (1549–1607), Francis Junius, Tertullian, John Lightfoot (1602–1675), Cicero (106–43 BC), Daniel Chamier, Wolfgang Musculus, Josephus (37–ca. 100), Origen (184–253), Sixtus Sinensis (1520–1569), Robert Bellarmine, and Eusebius (263–339).[72] Such citation patterns are common throughout Leigh's work and provide a window into the theology of a person who was present, interacted with the divines, and to a certain extent participated in the process of creating the Westminster Standards.[73]

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[69] *Notitia Parliamentaria: Concerning an Account of the First Returns and Incorporations of the Cities, Towns, and Boroughs, in England and Wales, That Send Members to Parliament . . . and . . . A Series or Lists of the Representatives in the Several Parliaments Held from the Reformation 1541, to the Restoration 1660* (London: Browne Willis, 1750), 249.

[70] "Edward Leigh," in *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 32, ed. Sidney Lee (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 432–33.

[71] Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity: Consisting of Ten Books* (London: William Lee, 1654).

[72] Leigh, *Body of Divinity*, 1.5 (p. 55).

[73] Though the *Dictionary of National Biography* states that Leigh's theological reputation "procured him a seat in the Assembly of divines," his name does not appear in the minutes of the assembly.

Further evidence that the divines were committed to the principles enunciated in the Solemn League and Covenant, that they would reform the churches of the three kingdoms according to the best examples of the Reformed churches, comes in their correspondence with other ecclesiastical bodies. Not only did the divines regularly communicate with the Kirk of Scotland; they also wrote letters to the churches of Bremen, Switzerland (Geneva, Berne, Zurich, Basel, Schafhausen), Holland (Zealand, Holland, East-Holland, Gelderland, Over Ysell, Utrecht, Frizeland, Groningen), France, Poland, Germany (Hesse, Anhalt, Hanau), and Transylvania (modern-day Romania).[74]

Another theological stream is the influence of James Ussher and the Irish Articles (1615). Ussher was the archbishop of Armagh, Ireland, and one of the more influential theologians of his day. He was also chiefly responsible for overseeing the creation and composition of the Irish Articles; he was initially nominated to serve in the assembly but declined, given his support of Charles.[75] In 1648 the House of Lords again considered adding Ussher to the assembly, but there is no record that he ever joined it.[76] Ussher may have been absent in body but not in spirit, as the divines referred to the Irish Articles in their creation of the Westminster Standards; at times, they borrowed significant sections, albeit slightly reworded, from the Irish Articles.[77] The divines neither wrote their documents *ex nihilo* nor cribbed the work of one theologian, such as Calvin. They used a wide variety of sources.

Another stream of influence is the education of the Westminster divines. A cursory survey of the curriculum in place at Cambridge University in the early seventeenth century, the time when a number of divines matriculated, reveals the many subjects that future divines learned. The study of ethics at Cambridge, for example, meant intense

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Hence as a member of Parliament, he was undoubtedly involved in the broader process but likely did not participate in the actual debates and composition of the Standards as a formally called and elected divine.

[74] *MPWA*, sess. 190, April 2, 1644 (2:659); see also 5:41–43, 73, 179.

[75] Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 85–103; Charles Richard Elrington, *Life of Archbishop Ussher*, in James Ussher, *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, 17 vols. (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1847–1864), 1:43–44.

[76] *MPWA*, 1:141.

[77] B. B. Warfield, "The Westminster Doctrine of Holy Scripture," in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. E. D. Warfield et al., 10 vols. (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 6:169–90.

use of Aristotle alongside Protestant authors such as Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon and Remonstrant Hugo Grotius (1583–1645).[78] Students would have also studied Aristotelian metaphysics.[79] The theological curriculum involved weekly theological disputations between students, which were observed not only by students but also by scholars.[80] In these disputations it should come as no surprise that the questions posed usually dealt with subjects hotly debated between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

In one random sampling of seven manuscripts there were fifty-one questions, out of which thirty-six were distinctly Protestant, and fifteen were over commonly held Protestant and Roman Catholic beliefs. There were twenty-one questions on grace, justification, and free will, four on the nature of ministry, four on the papacy, four on the Lord's Supper, three on the intermediate state, two on the use of images, six on ethics, and seven miscellaneous questions. That twenty-one out of fifty-one questions covered grace and justification, with the pronouncements of the Council of Trent as the chief foil, should come as no surprise, given that this was one of the main issues dividing Protestants and Roman Catholics.[81] Students were also catechized through catechisms written by John Preston (1587–1628) and Anthony Tuckney (1599–1670), among other documents; Tuckney would eventually serve as one of the divines to the assembly.[82]

Beyond immediate influences, such as disputations and catechetical activities, students at Cambridge were exposed to a broad swath of theological thinking, as notebooks from the period are peppered with references to Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure (1221–1274), Duns Scotus, and Peter Lombard (ca. 1096–1164). In addition to this students were encouraged to read a host of other church fathers and medieval theologians.[83] Over at Oxford University there was a similar educational pattern, and the earlier presence and influence of two

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[78] E.g., Philip Melanchthon, *Enarratio Aliquot Librorum Ethicorum Aristotelis* (Vitebergae, 1545); Melanchthon, *Ethicae Doctrinae Elementa, et Enarratio Libri quinti Ehicorum* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1578); William T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth-Century Cambridge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 64.

[79] Costello, *Scholastic Curriculum*, 70–83.

[80] Ibid., 110.

[81] Ibid., 113.

[82] Ibid., 111.

[83] Ibid., 121–22.

Continental Reformed theologians, Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli, left an indelible impression upon this institution.[84] Other Continental influences upon English Reformed theology include Zacharias Ursinus and the Heidelberg Catechism. The catechism was originally written in 1563, largely under the guidance and leadership of Ursinus, and it was first translated and published in English in 1572.[85] The Heidelberg Catechism was required reading along with other key theological documents and works, including Alexander Nowell's (ca. 1507–1602) *Catechism*, Calvin's catechism, likely the *Geneva* Catechism of 1541, and Andreas Hyperius's (1511–1564) *Elements of the Christian Religion*. Students were encouraged to supplement their required reading, if they desired, with Heinrich Bullinger's *Catechism*, Calvin's *Institutes*, John Jewel's *Apology of the Church of England*, and the Thirty-Nine Articles.[86]

Westminster divines such as Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) recalled using the Heidelberg Catechism as young men; Goodwin writes: "I received the sacrament at Easter, when I was fourteen years old, and for that prepared myself as I was able. I set myself to examine whether I had grace or not; and by all the signs in Ursin's Catechism, which was in use among the Puritans at the College, I found them all, as I thought, in me."[87] But Goodwin also reports that he attended the lectures of Richard Sibbes (ca. 1577–1635), "whose lectures the Puritans frequented," and that he read Calvin's *Institutes*.[88] Hence, though the assembly was a decidedly English event, it was by no means a theological island. The assembly had numerous streams of influence that must be taken into account: its broader reading habits, connec-

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[84] C. M. Dent, *Protestant Reformers in Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), 4–16.

[85] See, e.g., *The Catechisme, or Manner How to Instruct and Teach Children and Others in the Christian Faith Appointed to Bee Read in All the Lands and Dominions of the Late Right and Mightie Prince, Frederike, Countie Palatine of the Rhein, One of the Electors of the Holy Empire, and Duke in Bauier / newly translated out of Latin and Dutch into Englishe* (London: Henrie Middleton, 1578); R. Scott Clark and Joel R. Beeke, "Ursinus, Oxford, and the Westminster Divines," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan, 3 vols. (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003–2009), 2:9.

[86] Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism Written in Latin*, ed. Goerge Elwes Corrie, trans. Thomas Norton (Cambridge: CUP, 1853); Andreas Hyperius, *Elementa Christianae Religionis* (Erlangen: George Böhme, 1901); Heinrich Bullinger, *Caechesis pro Adultiorbius Scripta* (Tiguri: Frosch, 1563); John Jewel, *An Apology of the Church of England* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1839); Dent, *Protestant Reformers*, 88.

[87] Thomas Goodwin, *Memoir of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (1861–1866; Eureka: Tanski, 1996), 2:lii; Clark and Beeke, "Ursinus, Oxford, and the Westminster Divines," 10.

[88] Goodwin, *Memoir*, lii.

tion to other Reformed churches on the Continent, interaction with other Reformed confessions and catechisms, as well as the education of a number of its members at Cambridge and Oxford. Any attempt to skip over this all-important theological and historical context or to anchor the assembly's theology to one source, such as Calvin, is likely to distort the meaning of the Standards.

Conclusion

Early modern England was far from simple; as with present-day events, complexity marked the history surrounding the formation of the assembly. Out of the tangled web of politics, war, theology, and passion the assembly produced a Confession and two catechisms. Against this backdrop, modern readers can have a greater understanding of what often lurks beneath the surface in some of the Confession's cryptic statements, such as its identification of the pope as the antichrist. And at the same time, readers can have a greater appreciation of the Confession's sobriety at many points; the divines were not swayed by the winds of antinomianism, on the one hand, or neonomianism, on the other. The Confession and catechisms are marked by a great deal of circumspection. But against the intellectual and theological backdrop, hopefully contemporary readers will have the bearings to be able to appreciate the acumen, depth, and clarity of the Standards. They represent the very best of the doctrine, government, and worship of the Reformed churches. Equipped with this historical and theological context, then, we are now prepared to begin to explore the theology of the Westminster Standards and its doctrine of Scripture.

For centuries, countless Christians have turned to the Westminster Standards for insights into the Christian faith. These renowned documents—first published in the middle of the 17th century—are widely regarded as some of the most beautifully written summaries of the Bible's teaching ever produced.

Church historian John Fesko walks readers through the background and theology of the Westminster Confession, the Larger Catechism, and the Shorter Catechism, helpfully situating them within their original context. Organized according to the major categories of systematic theology, this book utilizes quotations from other key works from the same time period to shed light on the history and significance of these influential documents.

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HISTORICAL THEOLOGY