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Th. Engelder

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

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Haec Dixit Dominus

By TH. ENGELDER

II

Men are asserting that Luther had no right to say of his teaching: "*Haec dixit Dominus.*" All that he could say was that according to his interpretation of Scripture He said so and so; and as his opponents said the same, the matter is left in doubt; no man can be divinely sure of his doctrine.

Dr. Pieper put it this way: "An objection is raised here: objective certainty does not guarantee subjective certainty. The teaching of Scripture may be the absolute truth, but it will always be doubtful whether you have correctly apprehended and understood Scripture." (*Christliche Dogmatik*, I, p. 121.) All that we can say of our doctrine is: "*Haec discut nostri interpretes.*" And since the opposing interpreters take a different view of the matter, doctrinal certainty is only a vain dream.

There is not a single doctrine of Holy Scripture whose validity has not been questioned on this ground. A treatise on Dr. Walther's life, published by G. F. Fritschel, has this: "After Walther's blessed end in the year 1887 a Lutheran periodical wrote that Walther was unable to distinguish between the Word of God and his *interpretation* of it. . . . I came to the conclusion that there is a wide difference between *Scripture* and the *interpretation of Scripture*, that it is a colossal self-deception for any mortal, subject as he is to error and imperfection, to imagine that his *understanding* of Holy Scripture is as errorless and unchangeable as the *Word of Truth*

is itself. In der Folge war ich aengstlich bemueht, zwischen dem Wort Gottes selbst und jeder menschlichen *Auslegung* desselben scharf zu unterscheiden. . . . Walther declared: 'My doctrine is the pure doctrine of the Word of God.' But that is simply the coarse assertion: I am right." Walther's companions in the controversy on conversion and election were treated the same way. We read in the *Lutheran Sentinel* of Nov. 11, 1946: "One of our fathers, Dr. Koren, says that when the Norwegian Synod, in the controversies through which it had to go, insisted on obedience to the Word of God, then the opponents would reply: Do you think you are infallible interpreters of Scripture?" The article goes on to say: "The opponents, says Koren, had given up the clearness of Scripture. . . . Scripture itself teaches that it is clear and does not need to be made clear by human interpretation. . . . We do not ask anyone to follow any human interpretation of Scripture, but to follow simply the Scripture itself." As late as Dec. 25, 1946, *Folkebladet* declared: "Dr. J. W. Behnken did not budge an inch from the old platform. Exactly as it was 60 years ago. It was 'doctrinal purity' which was at stake. That 'purity' which means *Missourian exegesis* of Scripture."

The doctrines that divide the Lutheran and the Reformed Churches are also merely matters of a different interpretation of Scripture. The *Lutheran Companion* said May 19, 1934: "Denominationalism is the embodiment of a sincere interpretation of Scripture." And no one can tell us which of the two Churches is right on the Lord's Supper. Writing in the *Lutheran Church Quarterly*, 1947, p. 107 ff., O. W. Heick declares: "The Lutheran Church differs from the Reformed Church in its interpretation of doctrine; in the opinion of the Missouri theologians, the Reformed interpretation departs from the Word of God, and any kind of fellowship whatever with false doctrine, they maintain, is forbidden by God and detrimental to the Church. . . . When those theologians speak of false doctrine, they, of course, assume that their own interpretation of the Bible is absolutely free from error." And V. Ferm writes thus: "We might well question whether or not the Christological doctrines of the ubiquity of Christ's body (a quasi-materialistic and pan-Christic doctrine borrowed from Duns Scotus), and *communicatio idiomatum* are satisfactory even from a Biblical point of view. Even the position which Luther

himself took on the interpretation of the Eucharist may fairly be challenged as a necessarily true Biblical exegesis." (*What Is Lutheranism?* p. 279.) Dr. Pieper hits the point well when he says: "Man will nicht sagen, dass die Reformierten keinen Schriftgrund fuer ihre Sonderlehren haetten; Zwingli und Calvin, und die ihnen nachfolgen, haetten die Schrift nur *anders ausgelegt* als Luther und die Seinen. . . . Man kann eigentlich nicht genau wissen, wer auf der Schrift stehe, denn es kommt nicht sowohl auf die *Schrift*, als auf die *Auslegung* der Schrift an, und diese Auslegung ist bei verschiedenen Menschen naturgemaess verschieden." (*Vortraege ueber die Ev.-Luth. Kirche die wahre sichtbare Kirche Gottes*, p. 48.) And Dr. Walther wrote this: "What is the language of the unionists all the way down the line to the most rabid unbelievers, when they are confronted with the letter of God's Word? 'Yes,' they say, 'those words are indeed written, but who will incontrovertibly prove to me that your or my exposition of this passage is the correct one? Does not all strife in Christendom arise out of human interpretation?'" (See *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, 1939, p. 833.)

The doctrine which divides the Lutherans and the Reformed from the Roman Catholics—justification by faith alone—also becomes doubtful. "You cannot appeal to Rom. 3:28, because the Catholics have a different 'interpretation' of that text." (See *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY.*, 1943, pp. 392—394.) "And what about the doctrine which the Lutherans and the Reformed and the Catholics consider essential, the deity of Christ? You cannot appeal to Rom. 9:5 and John 20:28. The Unitarian will say: I have found a different interpretation of these texts." (*L. c.*) William Adams Brown found himself in perfect agreement with a Mohammedan who had previously clashed with a Roman Catholic on the doctrine of the deity of Jesus. They agreed "that the Supreme Being, whom Mohammedans and Christians alike recognize as Creator, had given us, in the person of Jesus, whom Mohammedans as well as Christians revere, our clearest revelation of what He is like" (*Beliefs That Matter*, p. 171), and Brown could do that because he used the Bible as "a compendium of simple principles capable of indefinite application and therefore needing continual *reinterpretation* in the light of expanding experience" (*A Creed for Free Men*, p. 230).

And, of course, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture cannot be upheld as the doctrine of Scripture. The Modernists declare that because there are many different interpretations with regard to the inspiration of Scripture within the Church, we cannot be sure which is the correct, pure doctrine in the matter. *Folkebladet*, in its issues of Jan. 20 and Feb. 7, 1937, wrote: "Pure doctrine is a relative concept. . . . That which is pure doctrine in one place is not necessarily pure doctrine in another. No one had the truth revealed to him in such a way that, when he speaks, he speaks the truth itself. . . . Sometimes we have wondered whether the German theologians, the most prominent of whom are the Missourians, do not place their propositions or interpretations higher than the Bible. . . . The Missourians think that the theory of verbal inspiration is 'pure doctrine.' And the others hold that it is not 'pure doctrine.' Therefore the doctrine of verbal inspiration is a relative concept." (See CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY, 1937, p. 622 ff.) The commissioners of the U. L. C. A. took the same view at the convention of 1938. "The disagreement [on the doctrine of verbal inspiration] relates, furthermore, to a matter of theological interpretation, which, in addition, applies only to a non-existent original text of the Scriptures." (See *The Lutheran*, Oct. 5, 1938.) That is to say that no one has the right, after having preached a sermon on Verbal Inspiration, to declare: "*Hæc dixit Dominus.*"

Over against all such talk we say: We do not base our knowledge of the divine truth on somebody's interpretation of Scripture, but on Scripture itself. All doctrines of Scripture are presented in passages that need no interpretation. Ps. 119: 105: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." And Ps. 19:7: "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." And 2 Pet. 1:19: We turn unto the Word of Prophecy "as unto a light that shineth in a dark place." Scripture does not need the light that comes from the interpreters. It shines in its own light. *Scriptura sua luce radiat*. And the old axiom: *Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur* does not merely mean that the clear passages of Scripture interpret the obscure passages, but it means primarily that the clear passages are clear in themselves. *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*. "These testimonies are so manifest that, to use the words of Augustine . . . they do not

need an acute understanding, but only an attentive hearer." (Apology, *Trigl.*, p. 129, 33.) "There is no doctrine of Christian theology which is not set forth in unmistakable terms in some text of Scripture — the *sedes doctrinae*. It is because of these texts, chiefly, that also the layman in theology, who does not enjoy the advantages of linguistic and hermeneutical training, can, even without the assistance of learned expositors, derive directly from the inspired Word a correct knowledge of all the doctrines which make us wise unto salvation." (*Theol. Quarterly*, 1902, p. 111.) Hoenecke puts it thus: "Besides Scripture we do not need any helps or any helper, exegete, interpreter, as modern theology so frequently asserts. . . . The statement, e. g., 2 Tim. 3: 15: 'The holy Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation,' means that Scripture interprets itself. If Scripture had to call in some other interpreter in order to make us wise unto salvation, it would be the interpreter and not Scripture itself which makes us wise." (*Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, I, pp. 415, 425.) And Luther says: "Be quite assured and do not doubt, there is nothing more luminous than the sun, that is to say, the Scriptures" (St. L., V. 310).

Would you attempt to shed light on the sun by means of a candle or a lantern? Can the interpreter make the Scripture clear? It is a noteworthy fact that St. Paul sent his Letters to the various congregations without any commentaries. He expected the Scriptures he wrote to these congregations to shine in their own light. He did not expect the exegetes of Rome and Ephesus to add notes to his Epistles to make them clear.¹ Luther: "Therefore you are to know that Scripture without any gloss is the sun and the whole light, from which all teachers receive their light; they do not shed light on the Scriptures" (XVIII: 1292). Again: "Also ist die Schrift sich

¹ We are not saying one word against the exegetes of Rome and Ephesus, of St. Louis and Springfield. We need exegetes — who know their business. And the business of the true interpreter is, besides shedding light on the obscure passages of Scripture, to lead their hearers to the understanding of the text. They are not to add anything of their own to the text, but to unfold the meaning of the text. — By the way, here is an apt parable. "Dr. Adam Clarke, the eminent commentator, once presented a copy of his commentary to a Scotch woman, a great student of Scripture. Afterwards asking her how she liked it, she replied enthusiastically: 'Fine, sir! I never had any trouble in understanding the Bible, and I think I'll be able to understand your explanations of it when I have studied them a little longer.'" (*The Watchman-Examiner*, April 4, 1935.) There is nothing more luminous than the sun, the Scriptures. The business of the exegete is to make men see that.

selbst ein eigen Licht. Das ist denn fein, wenn sich die Schrift selbst auslegt. . . . Dieser Irrtum ist fast tief eingerissen, dass die Schrift dunkel sei und muesse durch Menschenlehre erleuchtet werden. Welches ein trefflicher Irrtum ist und eine Gotteslaesterung, und heisst eigentlich, den Heiligen Geist zur Schule fuehren oder ihn erst lehren reden." (XI:2335.) Quoting these words, Dr. Pieper adds: "It is a characteristic of the Lutheran Church that it does not base its doctrine on an interpretation, not on the interpretation of Luther, but on the words of Scripture themselves, while the Papists and the Reformed, in the doctrines in which they disagree with the Lutheran Church, do not stand, as can be easily shown, on Scripture itself, but on an 'interpretation' of the Pope or Zwingli and Calvin, etc." (*Christliche Dogmatik*, I, p. 390.)²

Take the doctrine of the deity of Christ. *Scripture* teaches it, not the exegete. "Two gentlemen were once disputing the Divinity of Christ. One of them, who argued against it, said, 'If it were true, it certainly would have been expressed in more clear and unequivocal terms.' 'Well,' said the other, 'admitting that you believed it, were you authorized to teach it, and allowed to use your own language, how would you express the doctrine to make it indubitable?' 'I would say,' replied he, 'that Jesus Christ is the *true God*.' 'You are very happy,' replied the other, 'in the choice of your words; for you have happened to hit upon the very words of inspiration. St. John, speaking of the Son, says, "This is the *true God* and eternal life."'" (*The Presbyterian*, Sept. 8, 1939.)

Or take the doctrine of justification by faith without the

² Years ago somebody said: "Doctrine is always dependent on the exegesis and application of a passage according to sound hermeneutical principles." That can be understood correctly, but it must not be understood in the sense that the professional knowledge of hermeneutical principles is needed to find the saving doctrine in the Bible.—H. Sasse makes the statement: "All exegesis has a very human side, and the reverse side of Luther's ingenuity as an exegete and translator was the subjectivity of his judgment." (*Here We Stand*, p. 117). We object to the "all." Some "exegesis" is very human and proceeds from the frailty which is common to all humans, but the exegesis which clings to Scripture does not fall into that category.—We doubt whether Sasse wanted to convey such an idea. We are sure that he did not; for on page 161 we read: "The preacher [who follows Barth] descending from the pulpit can never quote Luther and say with joyful assurance that he has preached the Word of God. Think of Luther's words in 'Wider Hans Wurst' (W.A. LI [St. Louis Ed., XVII:1343]), in which he says that a preacher should declare with St. Paul and all the Apostles and Prophets: '*Haec dixit Dominus*.'"

deeds of the Law. Will any man in his right senses deny that Scripture teaches it? In the days of Luther a monk, sitting in a tavern, happened upon a translation of the Bible, looked up Rom. 3:28, and threw the book away with the remark: "This Paul, too, is a Lutheran."³ There can be no doubt, the Lutheran doctrine of justification is the Scripture doctrine.

In the doctrine of the Lords' Supper the Lutherans adhere to the text, while the Reformed depend for their teaching on "interpretations." Luther: "And first you shall take note of the Sacramentarians' own confession. For they confess, and must confess, that our understanding is as the words themselves naturally read and that if one speaks in accord with the words as they read, our understanding is right without any doubt. However, they contend that the words should not be understood as they read. . . . Since they now confess that if the words were to be taken as they read, then our understanding would be correct, they herewith free us by their own testimony, so that, first, we do not have to prove our understanding any further than to relate the words as they stand and read. This is the one thing, mark it well. . . . So, then, this strong text stands firm and pure on our side. The Sacramentarians must rely on their naked, miserable glosses. . . . For even if I were a Turk, Jew, or heathen, who held nothing of the Christian faith and yet heard or read such Scripture concerning the Sacrament, I would have to say: 'I indeed do not believe in the Christian doctrine, but this I must say: If they want to be Christians and adhere to their doctrine, then

³ The Roman Catholics get their doctrine of justification by works by means of glosses, through exegetical tricks. The Douay version translates Rom. 3:28 correctly: "We account a man to be justified by faith, without the works of the law." But there is the footnote: "The faith [here mentioned] is a faith working through charity in Jesus Christ, Gal. 5:6. In short, a faith which takes in hope, love, repentance and the use of the sacraments. And the works which he here excludes are only the works of the law, that is, such as are done by the law of nature or that of Moses, antecedent to the faith of Christ; but by no means such as follow faith or proceed from it." The new revised Catholic version has this footnote on Rom. 3:21: "The justice of God through faith is . . . that grace which He imparts to the soul to make it really intrinsically pleasing and holy in His sight. The necessary condition for obtaining the infusion of this divine grace is faith . . . which through the love of God effects the observance of the commandments and the performance of other good works." This proves what Luther said: "Scripture is its own light. But this error is widespread, that Scripture is obscure and needs to be illuminated through the doctrines of men. . . . It means that men must teach the Holy Ghost how to speak." (XI:2335.)

they must believe that Christ's body and blood are eaten and drunk bodily in the bread and wine.'" (XX:1036, 1093.) The Lutheran Church sticks to the text and does not permit any "glosses" to darken the text. It appeals from the "interpreters" of the text to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. "Now, surely there is no interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ as faithful and sure as the Lord Christ Himself, who understands best His words and His heart and opinion and who is the wisest and most knowing for expounding them. . . . He explains them more clearly with the words: 'Given for you,' 'shed for you.'" (*Trigl., F. of C., pp. 989 f.*)

The fact that all the clear texts of Scripture have had to suffer from many interpretations does not make the clear Scripture unclear. In Luther's day seven different interpretations of the Words of Institution clamored to be put in place of the clear Scripture. Krauth tells us that "at the beginning of the seventeenth century there were twenty-eight contradictory views urged by the Calvinists" (*The Conservative Reformation, p. 607*). By today the number has considerably increased. Ought not that to give us pause in our insistence on sticking to the clear text? By no means. We read in *The Pastor's Monthly* years ago and have not forgotten it: "The fact that a question has been much debated is no proof that it is debatable." (November, 1931, p. 654.) When one hundred "interpreters" cast doubt on the words of the Holy Ghost, we want to be found on the side of the Holy Ghost. — "Even among church people sayings like this have obtained some currency: 'All church-bodies stand on the Scriptures and differ only in their *interpretation*.' That is not true! Reformed bodies do not stand on the Scriptures, so far as they differ from us, but on Zwingli's, Calvin's, etc., *interpretation* of the Scriptures. The Lutheran Church, on the other hand, does not stand on interpretations of Scripture, but on Scripture itself." (*F. Pieper, Conversion and Election, p. 103.*)

On what did Walther base his doctrine of conversion and election? Is it true that he gained it by means of "interpretation"? "He insisted that never an exegesis, but always the *naked* text, without exegesis, must be the determinative factor in the heart and conscience of the theologian." (*Conversion and Election, p. 97.*) The whole long controversy hinged on this point. "In the recent controversy *Bible-text* and *exegesis*

stood in opposition to each other. The other side insisted with much emphasis that the few Scripture-texts treating of Predestination were 'obscure' and must be 'interpreted' in order that universal grace might be preserved. Dr. Stelhorn said in 'Worum handelt es sich,' etc., p. 10: 'This universal comfort of the Gospel can only be preserved if the few texts of Holy Writ, in part not easily understood, which treat of a few persons who will infallibly be saved are not interpreted in such a way that the many clear texts of the universal grace of God towards all men are darkened or suppressed, but if, on the contrary, the few dark passages are interpreted by means of the many clear passages.' We on our part maintained that the texts treating of election are sufficiently *numerous* and *clear*. . . . We have suggested that a Christian of average intelligence who knows nothing of the controversy be found and such passages as 2 Tim. 1:9 or Eph. 1:3 sqq. be read to him, with no interpretation added. The result would be that the believer would recognize faith and the Christian estate not as an *antecedent*, but as a *product* and *result* of eternal election." (*Op. cit.*, p. 100 f.) Walther based his doctrine on the *nuda Scriptura*. And having God's Word on his side, he was sure of his position. He was certain of his doctrine. He said: "*Haec dixit Dominus.*" "We were reminded of Walther's attitude over against the Word by an utterance of his made during his last illness a month or two before he died. Looking back to the controversy on conversion and predestination, he said that if the Lord Christ would ask him on Judgment Day why he had taught as he did, he would say: Thou hast misled me into doing it, O Lord, by Thy Word." (*Op. cit.*, p. 96.)

And, finally, as to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, we *know* that Scripture teaches Verbal Inspiration. The fact that many theories of inspiration have been set up, and many, many differing interpretations of the pertinent words of Scripture are being offered, fills our hearts with sorrow but cannot shake our certainty that Scripture means what it says when it declares: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," 2 Tim. 3:16. The fact that Verbal Inspiration has been much debated does not make it debatable. We agree fully with Dr. Lenski in his interpretation of Acts 28:25 — which is not an "interpretation," but an unfolding of the sense of Scripture —: "Here again we meet the entire doctrine of Verbal

Inspiration, all in most simple language. "The Holy Spirit made utterance through Isaiah the prophet, by saying." The thing is a *fact, just a fact*. "Theory"? no theory nor hypothesis appears. The Holy Spirit is the speaker — he 'made utterance, saying.' He used as His medium Isaiah the prophet, for *διδ* states the medium. At times we read: 'through the mouth of the prophet,' which makes *Verbal* Inspiration still clearer. The Spirit spoke what He wanted to say, using the prophet as His mouth-piece, the entire prophet with mind, heart, will, and tongue, in a way so dynamic (favorite term!), so removed from anything mechanical (favorite term in false objections), so little like one who uses an automaton (another objection), that human language has never more clearly expressed this simple fact. If you ask *how* the Spirit did or could do this we refer you to Isaiah himself, or to some other man whom the Spirit inspired verbally; but we doubt whether he could tell you just how the Spirit did what beyond the least question he did." And Lenski might have closed this exposition with the *Haec dixit Dominus!*

We are sure, infallibly sure, of our doctrine, because we base our doctrine not on a human interpretation of Scripture, but on the sure, clear word of Scripture itself.⁴ President P. Brand said in the presidential address at the 1898 convention of the Eastern District: "The charge that we consider ourselves infallible is made for the purpose of stamping the doctrine which we confess as uncertain. Let me direct your at-

⁴ But are not some of the false teachers also "infallibly" sure of their position? Some — not all, for according to the prevalent opinion of modern theology nobody can be sure of his doctrine — do assert that they are divinely assured that their interpretation of Scripture is right and ours is wrong. We shall have to repeat Walther's remark: "The false teachers cannot be divinely assured of their doctrine, for only the Word creates divine assurance" (see Footnote 2 in the preceding article). We add Dr. Pieper's remarks in his *Vortraege*, p. 64 f.: "It is certainly not the fault of Holy Scripture, but it is solely men's own fault when they deduce different doctrines from one and the same Scripture. Scripture clearly and unmistakably reveals all Christian doctrines and protests just as clearly and unmistakably against false doctrine in the Church. . . . God has given the Holy Scripture such a form that one not only *can* but *must* derive the truth from it, as long as one is willing to abide by the words of Scripture. Here you will ask: What is the reason that so many err in their interpretation of Holy Scripture? I answer and the whole Lutheran Church answers: The reason is that men would interpret Scripture instead of letting Scripture interpret itself; men would explain Scripture instead of permitting Scripture to explain itself. If men would permit Scripture to explain itself, there would be no *dissensus* but a perfect *consensus* in all doctrines."

tention to what Dr. Walther said on this point: 'As long as we stand unwaveringly on God's Word, this charge need not bother us, for in the clear Word of God we have the infallible truth, though we ourselves are always subject to error. God's Word is the true infallible ecumenical council, for it is the great council of all prophets and apostles, in which the judicial voice of Christ Himself always, as often as we ask its advice, gives us an unequivocal answer. Let our opponents pretend that they are fighting only against the infallibility of our human interpretation of the ambiguous Word of God: the doctrine which we confess is not our interpretation, but nothing else than the clear and infallible Word of the Lord, which interprets itself.' (*Brosamen*, p. 458.)" (See *Proceedings*, p. 13.)⁵

In his address at the opening of the winter semester at Zehlendorf, Rektor Martin Willkomm said: "The last sentence in the foreword to Dr. Theodor von Zahn's '*Grundriss der Einleitung in das Neue Testament*' reads: 'May God save our theological youth . . . from teachers who keep them in suspense regarding the important questions in theology.' . . . A theologian who publicly appears as a teacher of the Church must be sure of his case. Otherwise his assumption of the teaching office would be sheer arrogance. One who in these important matters, where the eternal weal or woe of man is at stake, is not certain but offers only uncertain conjectures, views, and opinions, shall not presume to act as teacher but should keep silence—and learn. . . . '*Homo est certus passive.*' That means that man does not produce the certainty, but he is *made certain*. Luther explains it thus: 'When this Word takes possession of the heart by true faith, it makes the heart as firm, sure, and certain as it is itself . . . for it knows that the Word of God cannot lie. Such a man is a *hukam, stabilitus, substantiatus, constantius, substantificatus, hypostaticus, certus*

⁵ The presidential address continues, on page 14: "*The Observer*, organ of the General Synod, made these bitter remarks in 1854: 'It is true, there are several small factions which claim the Lutheran name, but they are not of us; and there is no hope that the Missourians and the Buffalo-men and other small communions will ever become wise in their generation. But we entertain the hope that their children and grandchildren will outgrow the narrow prejudices of their fathers and become sensible and wholesome Christians. As we said before, we do not consider these factions Christians; they have stolen some of the livery of Luther, but they do not possess his spirit and would be disavowed by the great Reformer, if he were still on earth.'" How will the grandchildren meet this challenge?

passive, sicut Verbum Domini certum est active. Thus Paul, 2 Tim. 1:12: 'I know and am persuaded.' (III:1887). . . May God give us, who are called to be your teachers and assistants in the study of theology, grace and help that we do not leave you in suspense in these questions but set your feet upon firm ground." (*Schrift und Bekenntnis*, Nov.-Dez., 1928.)

The Historical Background of the Westminster Assembly

By THEO. HOYER

The Presbyterians are this year observing the tercentenary of the Westminster Confession. The Westminster Assembly, the body which formulated the chief Confession of the Presbyterians, was called into being by an ordinance of Parliament, June 12, 1643, for the avowed purpose of establishing a form of church government, "most agreeable to God's Holy Word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other Reformed Churches abroad." To this end it was "thought fit and necessary to call an Assembly of learned, godly, and judicious Divines, who, together with some members of the Houses of Parliament, were to consult and advise of such matters and things." The summons contained 151 names; 10 from the House of Lords, 20 from the House of Commons, and 121 divines. Six Scottish commissioners, four ministers, and two elders met with them.

The first task of the Assembly was a revision of the 39 Articles; but when they came to the 15th article, they were instructed to stop and begin to draw up an entirely new Confession of Faith. They prepared and presented to Parliament five documents: The Westminster Confession (The Confession of Faith), the Larger and the Shorter Catechism, the Form of Government, and the Directory for the Worship of God. They were never adopted by Parliament in their full form; but they were adopted by the Church of Scotland and so became the basis of the constitution of all the Presbyterian