

Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Statement of Adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith

In the Scriptures God has given to His Church His testimony. Being inspired, infallible, complete and invariable, they contain the authoritative revelation of His mind and will.

In both the Old and New Testaments God has charged His Church to declare this testimony to mankind.

"For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children" (Psalm 78:5,6).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland believes that in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms Larger and Shorter there is a systematic presentation of the teaching of Holy Scripture. In accordance with this belief the Church requires its members to accept them as its Doctrinal Testimony.

But in virtue of the sole Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ and His exclusive right to rule in and over His Church, and the consequent obligation of His Church to be guided in all her doings by His Word alone, no human interpretation can ever be regarded by the Church as final. She must always acknowledge her duty and maintain her right, to revise her Testimony whenever she is convinced that the Holy Spirit has led her to a new insight into, and a more perfect understanding of, Holy Scripture, and has revealed to her that certain statements in it are at variance with the witness of Scripture.

In particular the Church has reservations regarding two sections of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

1. Chapter 23, paragraph 3, and chapter 31, paragraph 2, should be interpreted in accordance with the decision of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland receiving the Confession in 1647. "The Assembly understandeth some parts of the second article of the thirty-first chapter only of kirks not settled or constituted in point of Government and that, although in such kirks a Synod of Ministers, and other fit persons, may be called by the Magistrate's authority and nomination without any other call, to consult and advise with, about matters of

religion; and although, likewise, the Ministers of Christ, without delegation from their Churches, may of themselves, and by virtue of their office, meet together synodically in such kirks not yet constituted, yet neither of these ought to be done in kirks constituted and settled." The Church's acceptance of this interpretation does not imply the granting of any authority to the magistrate other than the requesting of ministers and other fit persons to assemble together.

2. And also regarding chapter 24, paragraph 4, in the matter of marriage with a deceased wife's sister and deceased husband's brother - in view of the uncertainty amongst students of Scripture as to the true interpretation of the injunctions laid down, no disciplinary action is taken by the Church against those who contract such marriages or ministers who perform them.

Christ the King

The basic principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland are not different from those held by many reformed and evangelical churches. Such differences, as there are, lie in the application and implementation of these truths and particularly in the prominence which Reformed Presbyterians give to the kingship of Christ. The Covenanter banner, which bears the inscription "For Christ's Crown and Covenant," expresses the desire of the Reformed Presbyterian Church to proclaim and submit to Christ as King - to say in all things "Jesus is Lord."

A SCRIPTURAL TRUTH

The Bible teaches clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has received from His Father a position of glory, authority and kingship as a result of His great work for man's salvation. This is prophesied, for example, in the book of Daniel, where "one like a son of man ... approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." Thus, the risen Christ, on a mountain in Galilee, could say: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me." The apostle Paul states that, because of His obedience to death on a cross, "God exalted Him to the highest place

and gave Him the name that is above every name," and in another place he reminds the Corinthians that Christ "must (continue to) reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." The position given to Christ is referred to as "mediatorial kingship," in that He now reigns not simply by virtue of His eternal deity but as the God-man, the Saviour, the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

The early Christians recognised the vital importance of the kingship of Jesus and so we find Philip in Samaria preaching "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." In the account of Paul's ministry in Rome we are told that "from morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus," and the words with which the book of Acts closes sum up the apostolic message, "He preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." To emphasize the kingship of Christ is not to lay an unbalanced stress on something trivial and peripheral; it is to stand in the mainstream of apostolic tradition, for to them, as to us, Christ was "King Jesus."

AN ALL-EMBRACING TRUTH

The Lordship of Christ is a truth which embraces, affects and governs many other truths. It means that His people are not free to decide on matters of doctrine, church government or worship according to their own likes or dislikes. In all of these areas they are to be subject to the clear instructions which our Lord has left in His Word.

He has given these directions for the good of His people and for His glory so that it would be both arrogant and foolish to replace them with private ideas. The same principle applies to every aspect of our human existence. There is no area of life which is beyond the bounds of His rightful authority.

The following chapters of this book outline the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church on various issues and it should be understood that they form a coherent unity. Springing as they do from the same source, they all belong together. Reformed Presbyterianism is an attempt, imperfect and inadequate, admittedly, but nevertheless a serious and consistent attempt, to work out in practical terms the implications of the kingship of Christ. The ultimate explanation for everything we believe and everything we do should be found in the desire that "in all things He might have the pre-eminence."

A RELEVANT TRUTH

The doctrine of Christ's kingship is supremely relevant to the world. It is the one effective challenge to the various political and economic totalitarianisms which menace true freedom. It is the only answer to the moral chaos of a society which resembles that of the days of the Judges, when "there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." It is to be proclaimed by word and life in market-place, university and factory, to politicians, writers and businessmen, for it is the only message which is big enough and radical enough to

bring healing and salvation to all of life. The Reformed Presbyterian Church sends forth this Testimony as a partial fulfilment of its responsibility to set Christ's kingship before the world.

The Case for Creeds

A creed is a confession of faith for public use, a form of words setting forth certain articles of belief which are regarded as necessary for salvation and for the well-being of the Church. A creed may be extensive, covering the whole system of Christian doctrine, (as the Westminster Confession of Faith), or it may be a brief outline of fundamental beliefs (as the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds). A creed may also be catechetical in form, designed in particular for the instruction of the young.

THE ORIGIN OF CREEDS

Where there is faith and strong conviction, inevitably there will be confession. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." "I believe, therefore have I spoken." The apostle Paul declared, "We also believe, and therefore speak." Faith and confession are inseparable in the life of the Church.

There is evidence in the New Testament that there were creedal statements current during the life-time of the Apostles. There were brief statements of faith in Christ as the Son of God and in the incarnation (Rom. 10:9; 1 Jn. 4:2), and much longer creedal affirmations (1 Tim.3:16). The apostle Paul emphasises the importance of "holding the pattern of sound words," and teaches that the Church is the "pillar and ground of the truth." There

was apostolic concern that revealed truth should be clearly stated and maintained.

When the people of God rejoice in the truth and have a passion for the truth, they will be eager to affirm that truth systematically and succinctly. This is necessary for the edification of believers and as a rebuttal of false teaching. Both these functions of creeds are seen in the New Testament. It was found necessary to condense the great body of redemptive truth in order to provide the Church with a clearly visible framework of belief and at the same time to demolish the pernicious doctrines of false teachers.

The need for confessions and symbols did not cease with the close of the canon of Scripture. From those very Scriptures, attempts were repeatedly made to deduce doctrines which the Church saw as contrary to Apostolic teaching. While there would have been creeds even if there had been no doctrinal controversy, most of the historic Christian creeds and confessions were hammered out on the anvil of controversy. These creeds did not originate in mere speculative curiosity. They were statements of doctrine in which the imperilled Church sought to express truths that were vital to her very existence. In a certain sense they are to be seen as mile-stones in the history of Christian doctrine. The development of creeds throughout the centuries, and the controversies that gave rise to them, indicate the fallacy of the popular argument that, since we have the Bible, creeds are unnecessary. There have always been those

who wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction and to that of others (2 Pet.3:16).

THE AUTHORITY OF CREEDS

Creeds are never co-ordinate with, but always subordinate to, the Bible as the only rule of faith and conduct. At best a creed is an approximate and relatively correct interpretation of Scripture, and may be improved by the increasing knowledge that the Church derives from Scripture. The Bible remains perfect, infallible and absolutely authoritative. The Bible is of God; confessions are the response of the man in Christ to God's Word and his acceptance of that Word. The authority of Scripture, therefore, is divine and absolute, and that of confessions, ecclesiastical and relative. Creed and Scripture are related as stream and fountain.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland recognises Holy Scripture as its only Standard, but sees that Standard summarised, interpreted and applied in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms and in her Testimony. Thus the supremacy of Scripture is safeguarded and the subordinate authority of the Confession accepted.

Resistance to creedal statements arises from two quarters. Naturally, those who do not accept Scripture as the infallible Word of God will vigorously oppose subscription to a summary of its teachings. But there are those who see the sufficiency of Scripture imperilled by creeds. It has to be admitted that, if a creed is equated, in

practice at least, with Scripture, then the authority of Scripture has been undermined. That is why creeds and confessions can only be accepted on the grounds that they are founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, a perspective that must never be forgotten.

THE VALUE OF CREEDS

When a Christian Church sets forth in a confession her honest conviction of what the Scriptures principally teach, she is thereby identified as being apostolic in faith and practice, and as cherishing "the faith once delivered unto the saints." That Church is saying in her Confession "This is what the Scriptures teach."

Such a confession is a bond of union among those who profess "like precious faith." Those who love the truth of God will not see creeds as cages, but as agreed statements of Biblical truth to which they freely and gladly bind themselves. Unless there is unity in the truth, there is either a pretence of unity which masks doctrinal indifference, or there is unity in unbelief. Those who love the truth cannot tolerate a sham unity, or indifference to the truth. It has been said that "entire intellectual toleration is the mark of those who believe nothing."

Admittedly, the creeds are both apologetic and polemic, but that is not the primary motivation of the Church in drafting her creeds. The Church is not concerned to be a debating society, but to witness faithfully to divine truth. Where there is whole-hearted acceptance of a Scriptural

creed, there is true unity in the faith and a consequent incentive to evangelise.

As summaries of biblical doctrines and aids to their understanding, creeds edify the Body of Christ. The purpose of the early creeds was that of popular instruction. The more detailed confessions of later date are also useful in the instruction of the members and prospective members of the Church and the catechisms were designed expressly for this purpose. Thus creeds and catechisms are of importance in the prophetic ministry of the Church.

Creeds are also of service to the Church in the maintenance of internal discipline. They can be used to bring those who do not fully understand a church's confession to a clearer perception of the doctrines of grace, and, where there is hostility to the Gospel, creeds may subserve and assist disciplinary action. Thus creeds, when properly used, are guards against false doctrine and practice. It needs to be stressed that defective understanding of the truth results sooner or later in a serious collapse both in morals and church order.

No creed can, by itself, guarantee undiminished purity of faith and practice. The best churches have, at times, declined and become degenerate. Yet corrupt churches may be revived by the Spirit of God through the Word of God which abides forever. It is the responsibility of the confessional church to endeavour by God's grace to be faithful to its confession of Christ and His Gospel.

Covenanting

A covenant is seen in Scripture as a solemn bond of loyalty or solemn agreement, frequently confirmed by oath. Thus marriage is described as a covenant relationship in Malachi 2:14, " ... she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."

THE COVENANT IS OF DIVINE ORIGIN

The idea of covenant originates with God himself, for it is He who establishes a covenant with His people, and does so in terms of a marriage relationship (Jer.3:14). This takes place within the framework of the Covenant of Grace which is the historical outworking of God's eternal purpose of grace in Christ, a purpose first made known to man in the promise of Genesis 3:15. At his creation man stood in a relationship of covenant loyalty to God. God was his King and God's Law was his rule. When man sinned he broke his covenant relationship with God and transferred his allegiance to Satan. In the Covenant of Grace, Christ stands as the Head of a 'given' people (Jn.17:2) and in grace God restores the broken fellowship for all who are in Christ and they gladly respond to that grace in terms of loyalty and new obedience. Thus the covenant relationship between God and man is restored and in Christ it is now guaranteed.

The fact that God sovereignly establishes His covenant with His people, so that He is their God and they are His

people, receives considerable emphasis in Scripture. Again and again God declares "I will establish my covenant with you." In each case where God so speaks, the obedience and loyalty of His people are either stated or implied. Even when we read in Scripture of bilateral covenants, covenants between man and man, the essential element is that of sworn fidelity. Thus, when Abraham and Abimelech made a covenant to end the friction over water-rights, they confirmed it with an oath (Gen.21). From now on they would trust each other. Fidelity based on oath was of the very essence of their bond. The contractual aspect of a covenant, as, for example, in marriage, is necessary; but it is not of the essence of a covenant; that must exist in the underlying concept of loyalty.

COVENANT-RESPONSE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Israel as a nation first responded to God in covenant terms at Sinai. There Moses "wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments." God said to Moses on that occasion "In accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." The response of the people was emphatic: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." To Moses they said "Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey." That covenant was established by God and the people responded whole-heartedly.

Covenant-responses, initiated in times of national crisis by leaders like Asa (2 Chron.15:12), Hezekiah (2

Chron.29:10), Jehoiada (2 Kgs.11:17), Josiah (2 Kgs.23:1-3) and Nehemiah (9:32-38), related to all of life. They included every sphere of human activity. Such covenanting was a response in faith and obedience to the Covenant of Grace. It was simply a covenant-keeping on the part of the Lord's people.

It would be wrong to view these covenants as simply man-initiated acts. No act of consecration and obedience should be so described. In conversion the regenerate soul obeys the Gospel, and in sanctification the believer works out his salvation with fear and trembling. Man's activity is definitely there, but Scripture declares that the initiative is with God and not with man (Phil.2:12,13). In the old administration of the Covenant of Grace, the Lord's people were obligated to loyalty and obedience. When they forgot God and turned to idols they had to repent and renew their covenant-allegiance. When restored to their own land after a generation in exile, they had to renew their covenant obedience before God. They were never released from their total response to the Covenant of Grace. Their happiness and peace were found only as they remained covenant-keepers.

COVENANT-OBLIGATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that believers are in a radically different position, vis-a-vis the Covenant of Grace, from that of believers in Old Testament times. Admittedly, the covenant is now differently administered. Outward forms have changed.

Much that was symbolic has been fulfilled. Yet, as stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith ch.7 para. 6, "there are not two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations." The Old Testament itself indicates that the covenanting principle will still apply in the new economy of Christ's day. Covenant-response is seen as a feature of the future Gospel age (Isa.19:18-25; 49:6-12; Jer.31:31f; 50:4,5; Zech.8:22,23). Fulfilment does not and cannot mean the casting off of something which was originally intrinsic. It is fallacious to argue that because the Old Testament passages (which envisage the covenanting spirit in the new dispensation) have been fulfilled in Christ, the concept of covenant-response now falls away. The status of covenant-response in the New Testament may be summarised as follows:

1. Continuity

The New Testament, focusing on Jesus Christ, the Mediator-King, presents the 'new' covenant as the fulfilment of the 'old'. This is clear from a passage like Luke 1:72. There we read Zechariah's words, " ... to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his Holy covenant, the oath He swore to our father Abraham" There is both unity and diversity between the old and new administrations of the covenant. What is abundantly clear is that the Covenant of Grace remains essential in the Kingdom of God. Differences in form and administration in no way weaken that continuity and underlying oneness.

2. Reconstruction

This feature is clearly seen at Pentecost when the Church was removed from the swaddling clothes of Jewish nationalism, ceased to be national and became supranational. Thus it was completely restructured for its task of world-mission and equipped in a new way by the Spirit of God to enable it to obey the Great Commission. This restructuring of the Church did not result in discarding anything which previously had been essential and intrinsic. The Church remained a covenant society and the people of God were still bound in covenant loyalty to their Lord. Paul sees the covenant, which was renewed with the patriarchs, as the perpetual charter of the Church, something which the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years after the patriarchs, could not disannul. (Gal.3:14-18).

3. Permanence

In the New Testament, covenanting, like the position and privileges of children in God's Church, is not expressly commanded or defined; but, because this has been done in the Old Testament and has never been abrogated, it remains in full force. It is clear, however, from the New Testament that God's relationship with His people remains covenantal. For example, the Lord's Supper is a covenant-renewal sacrament. At the institution of the Supper, Christ said "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The Church is described in covenantal terms taken from the Old Testament, "You are a chosen people, a

royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God ... ". There is, therefore, no biblical ground for assuming that we may now dispense with individual and corporate covenant-response any more than we can assume that the position of the children of believers is radically different to what it was in Old Testament times, or that God cares less about the Sabbath now than when He gave the fourth commandment to Moses. It is readily agreed that symbolic rites and ceremonies which have been fulfilled in Christ are now set aside, but those things which have to do with man's faith, love and loyalty to God remain and can never become obsolete. Sabbath-keeping, covenant-response and the like are in a completely different category from typical rites and ceremonies.

4. Pre-eminence of Christ

Christ is "the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy." Here the primacy of Christ is stressed, His primacy in creation and in redemption. His lordship is absolute. Christians are called to acknowledge that total lordship in every area of life. It is thus that their covenant-response reaches its climax in this personal devotion and loyalty to their Royal Saviour. Thus it must be concluded that covenanting is not an optional extra. It is intrinsic in Christianity. It is simply the conscious outworking of what is intrinsic in conversion to all of life.

In terms of biblical history, covenanting is linked to the moral law rather than to the ceremonial law, and the moral law proclaims God's supreme authority and man's accountability to God; therefore, covenanting is always a proper duty. Whenever God's people assemble in worship, the covenanting principle is implied. The members of that gathering meet in joint dedication to God, vowing to perform all religious duties, presenting in prayer the desires of the heart, uniting in praise with oneness of mind and affection joyfully expressed and presenting themselves as a living sacrifice to God. Covenanting is the formal, solemn and conscious expression of that. It is the statement and application of the very quintessence of Christian discipleship. It is not a sectarian practice, but the fullest expression of the believer's, the Church's and the Nation's allegiance to the Lord God.

COVENANT-RESPONSE TODAY

Since apostolic times, formal covenanting has occurred either in times of crisis or during revival. The Waldensians ratified their testimony by solemn oath and the Pilgrim Fathers renewed their solemn covenant on several occasions. During the time of the Reformation, there were covenants in Geneva, Hungary, Holland and France. Bands or covenants occurred in Scotland at intervals from 1556, the most famous being the National Covenant of Scotland (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant of England, Scotland and Ireland (1643). Godly men and women died because of their acceptance of Christ's royal prerogatives as stated in those

covenants, their motto being "For Christ's Crown and Covenant."

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland inherits the convictions and insights of the Scottish Covenanters and upholds the great principles of the Scottish Covenants, covenants which, like those of Old Testament times, were a response to God's Covenant of Grace. The question immediately arises as to whether such a covenant can bind posterity. There is clear Biblical proof that it can and does. From the stand-point of God's initiative, this is beyond question. Moses could say with God's authority "I am making this covenant, with this oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today, in the presence of the Lord our God, but also with those who are not here today." Much earlier God declared to Abram, "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you." Abram's descendants were perpetually obligated to covenant obedience primarily by what God had done.

Some of the Old Testament covenant-responses were patently relevant to posterity. Jeremiah charged the Jewish nation with breaking the covenant made with their fathers and gave this as the reason why the land suffered from the Chaldean invasion (Jer.11:1 - 11; 34:13f.). This implied the continuing identity of a people and society and of continuing obligation. So strong is this continuing identity with its consequent inescapable responsibility that God could say to the Israelites almost a millenium after the Exodus, "I covenanted with YOU

when YOU came out of Egypt." Later, Peter was to remind the Jews "You are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers."

The State, as a divine institution (Rom.13:1) distinct from the Church, is equally under obligation to recognise the Lordship of Christ and in covenant obedience to honour and uphold His laws and protect His Church (Ps.2:8-12; Isa.49:23). God repeatedly asserts His authority over the nations and warns the apostate State of judgment (Ps.9:17; Isa.60:12). He blesses the nations that own Him (Ps.33:12) and breaks in pieces the nations that reject Him. This is the whole tenor of Scripture. Christ is the "King of kings and Lord of lords." His mediatorial dominion is a fact, whether the world recognises it or not.

The Biblical principle of covenanting can be applied in any country. The total lordship of Christ should be acknowledged in every area of human activity - politics, business, science, hygiene, medicine, legislation etc. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland regards the principles of the Scottish Covenants as still binding, unreservedly accepts the obligation imposed by them, and grieves because they have been repudiated by the nation to its incalculable loss. It is imperative that, in the present day, Christians should recognise the duty of covenant-response in the light of God's ever-abiding Covenant of Grace within which they are confronted with the claims of Christ, their rightful King.

The Church and the State

THE STATE

The State is a divine institution, and as such has Scriptural authority for its existence. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." The State is the whole body of people under one government, and is composed of the recognised subjects of a country, whether they be men, women or children. It is the will of God, clearly revealed in the Scriptures and declared in the constitution of human nature, that men ought to associate in civil society for the Divine glory and individual and social good. Civil government, therefore, is not merely the suggestion of necessity, nor is it the invention of man; it is the moral ordinance of God, and civil officers are the ministers of God for good. Their function is to punish those who do evil and to secure the protection of those who do well. The State, as a Divine institution, is responsible to God to acknowledge His lordship in all things.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

Church and State are two distinct institutions, each independent in its own particular sphere, but co-operating for the glory of God and the welfare of society. In a truly

Christian State such co-operation would aim at the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The duty of the State in relation to the Church is to encourage and maintain conditions favourable to the spread of the Gospel (1Tim.2:1-4). The Church's responsibility to the State is to preach the Word of God, to identify and protest against national sins and to provide instruction in principles of righteousness. While God has entrusted to the State physical means of enforcement, the Church employs sanctions which are purely spiritual. Civil officers, as such, have no right to exercise authority over the Church, although they have authority over the members of the Church in their civil relations. The Church possesses spiritual independence under Christ, being subject to Him alone.

CHRIST'S KINGSHIP OVER THE STATE

Nations, as such, by the immutable decree of God the Father, have been given to Jesus Christ that He may rule over them as their supreme Lord. They are, therefore, required to acknowledge and serve Him in all their ways, and submit to His mediatorial authority insofar as it has been revealed to them.

The nations of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland are in serious breach of this requirement. Many of their laws are in blatant contradiction of the Law of God. In defiance of scriptural injunctions (Exod.18:21; 2Sam.23:3), no moral or religious qualifications are demanded of those who aspire to political office. There is no adequate recognition of Christ as King of the

nation. This exclusion of the Lord Jesus from national life is in breach of a solemn covenant engagement undertaken in 1643 on behalf of England, Ireland and Scotland and known as the Solemn League and Covenant.

Where the government of a nation thus flouts the authority of Jesus Christ, the rendering of unqualified allegiance to Him by Christians will require them to withhold their unqualified allegiance to the State. They will have to separate from the State where the State separates from Christ. The only position consistent for the Christian is the position of dissent from any constitution or form of government which refuses or neglects to own allegiance to Jesus Christ, since professing Christians in nations, which give moral support to such constitution or form of government, share in the responsibility for its anti-christian character. (Matt.6:24; Acts 4:19; Exod.23:2; Ps.94:20; 2Cor.6:17; Eph.5:11).

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland holds that the Church must explain the teaching of the Word on national responsibility, in order that there may be an awareness of the guilt which rests upon a Christ-rejecting, covenant-breaking people. Politicians, too, need to be instructed that they derive their authority from Jesus Christ, that they are obliged to exercise it in complete conformity with His revealed will, and that they will answer to Him for their stewardship at the day of judgment.

While fully entitled by the civil law to all the rights of membership in the governing society, Christians, because of their primary allegiance to Christ, ought not to avail themselves of the exercise of those rights when they conflict with His supremacy. In particular, Christians should vote only for candidates for political office who recognise the kingship of Jesus Christ by:-

- (a) giving evidence of consistent Christian character;
- (b) promising to frame all their policies in accordance with the Word of God and to resist all pressures of political expediency and party discipline which might compromise such obedience;
- (c) making an explicit declaration of dissent from everything within their sphere of government which is contrary to the Word of God and pledging themselves to work for public and national recognition of Christ;
- (d) refusing, where applicable, to take the present oath of allegiance, and making instead an affirmation of loyalty which would specifically safeguard their primary loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Covenanters have a most positive contribution to make to national life. They recognise their responsibility to honour and pray for those in government, to submit to the powers that be, to pay taxes and serve the country to the best of their ability. Political dissent is a painful sacrifice, made only because of the demands of a higher loyalty. The position of the Church is an expression, not

a denial, of our patriotism. The greatest service which one human being can perform for another is to lead him or her to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is precisely the service which Covenanters wish to perform for their beloved nations.

THE STATE AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

The State as a divine institution is given the responsibility of protecting the lives of its subjects. This is its supreme task in that God has placed a very high value on human life. It is the duty of the State therefore to impose the severest sanction on those who would take away human life by murder.

The sanction to be imposed upon the murderer is that which God himself has prescribed. In Genesis 9:5,6, we read, "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Here the verb may be future or imperative, and taken in isolation this passage may be interpreted as a command or a prediction. Most expositors take this passage in its context as a command. This position is reinforced when we bear in mind that in its Mosaic application it was understood as a command. The alternative interpretation which sees Genesis 9:5,6 as a prediction, is weak because not everyone who commits murder shall himself be murdered. The interpretation of the passage in Genesis as a command is further reinforced when we take into account the principle that the Old Testament is relevant to the subject, and when we recall the unique reason given in Genesis 9:6b for the sanctity of life - "for in the image of

God made he man," it is clear that God sanctions the death penalty, capital punishment, for murder.

When the children of Israel were constituted a nation at Sinai, God gave them laws which imposed the death penalty for crimes other than murder, i.e., adultery, blasphemy and Sabbath-breaking. But these laws were in force only until "the time of reformation." They belonged to the ceremonial and judicial laws which God gave to the Jews in the time of Moses. The ceremonial laws partly prefigured the redemptive work of Christ and partly enforced certain moral duties. The judicial laws related to the Jews in their political capacity, i.e., as a nation, and applied to their civil government, at a time when God was establishing a theocracy in which He was supreme Lawgiver and Head.

The ceremonial laws are, to quote the Westminster Divines, "abrogated under the New Testament" (Col.2:16,17; Eph.5:16), and the judicial law ceased to apply with the disintegration of the Jewish nation. The ceremonial and judicial laws of Israel were of limited and temporary use. The moral law contained in the Ten Commandments is of perpetual obligation. (Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 19).

The rending of the Temple veil and the dispersion of the Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, plainly indicate that the ceremonial and judicial laws of the Mosaic period are no longer binding, "not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require" (Westminster Confession of Faith). But the

law protecting human life by the death of the murderer was given by God to Noah (Gen.9:6) and stands independently of the ceremonial and civil regulations delivered to the nation of Israel in the time of Moses. There is no indication anywhere in the Bible that it has been cancelled.

Further evidence in support of capital punishment is found in two New Testament passages: Acts 25:11 and Romans 13:1-4. In the former Paul says, "If I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die", thus showing that he would not resist capital punishment were he guilty of such a crime and that there was an authority with the right to execute the death penalty in certain circumstances. It should be noted that Paul was appearing before a Roman tribunal, not a Jewish court. It cannot be argued that he was merely acknowledging a Jewish law. In Romans chapter 13, the use of the sword, which must involve the extreme penalty, is stated to be the prerogative of the civil magistrate - "If thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Thus this passage sanctions capital punishment as the penalty the State must impose upon the murderer.

We are profoundly conscious of the solemnity of this punishment which matches in justice the ultimate crime in human society; and if it be asked what right have we to administer this penalty, we would reply in the words of Martin Luther, "Therefore if such a person is killed, even though he is killed by the human sword, he is

nevertheless correctly said to have been killed by God" (comment on Gen. 9:5,6). God says "Thou shalt do no murder"; and God decides the penalty. So solemn a subject must be viewed against the background of God's righteousness, which He never abandons, as the Cross so eloquently declares.

God did not impose the death penalty in cases where the killing was unintentional. Nevertheless, as the Scriptures serve to indicate, the taking of life unintentionally was viewed with extreme seriousness. While showing compassion or maybe leniency one should never minimise the fact that human life has been taken.

The Church

"The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God." The Word of God tells us that the Church of Christ is glorious. The Church is in her very nature glorious, having a glorious Head in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The nature of the Church is defined in 1Peter 2:9 as "... a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God"

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The Church as she exists on earth is not a building or a denomination, but is the assembly of the covenant people of God. She consists of men and women called by God the Father into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ. Wherever such people meet in Jesus' name, there is the Church of God.

We trace the origin of the Church to the garden of Eden. Immediately following the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God, in pronouncing a curse upon the serpent, promised deliverance for His people (Gen.3:15). When the time had fully come, God sent His Son to redeem His people (Gal.4:4) and call them into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Cor.1:9).

Many rich word-pictures are used in both the Old and New Testaments to describe the Church. Each illustrates and emphasises some different aspect of the Church.

Some of the chief metaphors are: the Church as the household or family of God, where, by God's initiative, He begets and adopts us in love (Hosea 11:1; 1John 3:1); the Church as the Bride of Christ with whom Christ has established a marriage covenant (Ezk.16, Eph.5:25-27); the Church as the Temple of God, where God dwells (1Cor.3:11,16; Eph.2:20,22); the Church as the Body of Christ (1Cor.12:12ff.). The Church receives life and direction from her head i.e., Christ, and the members work together interdependently and harmoniously (Rom.12).

THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Scripture teaches that Christ, who is Head of all things, is sole King and Head of the Church (Col.1:18; Eph.1:22,23; 5:23,24). The Church should not be thought of apart from Christ. To think of the Church apart from Christ, is to be guilty of a dismemberment; this is a severing of what God has joined together. It is also inconsistent with the central doctrine of the Christian faith which is that "Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it."

Christ, as Head of the Church, is the source of all its authority (Col 1:18). He rules it by His Word and Spirit. This has two important implications:-

1. There must be no interference from outside the Church. No man must come between Christ and His Church. It was in seeking to maintain this principle in

the seventeenth century that many Covenanters suffered and lost their lives.

2. There must be no innovation from within the Church. Since Christ is the Head, the Church must take her directions solely from Him. Consequently, the Church is not free to organize herself in response to popular demand (Eph.5:24). This means that the Church is under obligation to receive from Christ the doctrines of her faith, the institutions of her worship, and the principles of her fellowship, order, government and discipline. Whatever Christ commands must be obeyed (John 2:5). The Church must not presume to do that which He has not commanded.

THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

A practical distinction has been drawn between the 'invisible church' and the 'visible church'. This distinction applies to the Church on earth. In her spiritual nature the Church is invisible except to God, yet in her profession, organization and service the Church is visible. In the Old and New Testaments we see a 'visible church'. The members of the visible Church consist of all those who, upon profession of faith in Christ, are received into the fellowship of the Church, together with their children (Gen.17:7; Acts 2:38,39). (See chapter on 'The Sacraments'.) The members of the invisible Church consist of all those in every age who are savingly united to Christ. The two are not necessarily always identical. All, who are in the visible, may not be in the invisible Church, in that, in the former, there may be those whose

profession of faith in Christ is groundless (Matt.13:20,21). It is also true that some who belong to the invisible Church may not have been received into the visible Church in that they have not identified with the organised Church of Christ on earth as New Testament believers did. Every true believer is a member of the Body of Christ; and it is his duty to make acknowledgment of that by uniting with His Church on earth and to witness to His kingly rule in the world.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

A true Church will be distinguished from a false system of religion by the presence of the following marks:-

(a) The true preaching of the Word (1Jn.4:1-3; 2 Jn.9; 2 Tim 2:2,15.).

(b) The proper administration of the Sacraments according to the institution of Christ (1Cor.11:23-30; Matt.28:19; Acts 2:42). "For wherever we find the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the Sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there, it is not to be doubted, is a church of God" (Calvin).

(c) The faithful exercise of discipline (Matt.18:15-18; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor.5:1-5; Tit.3:10; 1Tim.1:20; 5:20).

The true preaching of the Word is the most important mark because the other two are dependent upon that Word.

THE MANDATE OF THE CHURCH

Christ has given the Church an unchanging mandate which she cannot ignore; neither can she take upon herself duties which have not been assigned in the Scriptures. There is no Biblical warrant for extra-ecclesiastical organizations established to do any part of the work which God has entrusted to His Church. The Church as commissioned by Christ has the following functions:

1. Worship

Man's chief end is to glorify God. This principle governs all of life and it is exemplified in the Church by the fact that worship is her principal function. As a holy priesthood, the Church is to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving (1 Peter 2:5,9; Heb 13:15).

2. Mission

This is the essence of the Church's life. "... my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." The Church has an urgent and immediate responsibility to take the gospel to those who are beyond her bounds (Matt.28:18,20; Acts 2; 13:1-4; 14:26,27).

In 1 Timothy 3:15 the Church of the living God is called "the pillar and foundation of the truth." "The Church is called the pillar of truth, for the office of administering doctrine, which God has put in its hands, is the only

means for preserving the truth, that it may not pass from the memory of men." (Calvin)

3. Fellowship

Members of the Church have an important responsibility towards one another: to encourage, exhort, admonish and to promote one another's spiritual edification (Heb.10:23-25; Eph.4:7-16; Col.3:9-17; Rom.12:4-16; Gal.6:1,2).

4. Compassion

The Church has a responsibility to the whole man and, therefore, has a duty to exercise a ministry of compassion to those in need (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim.5:3-16; Rom.16:1,2; Gal.2:9,10; 6:10). To a large extent this ministry has ceased to be an arm of the Church, largely because the State in many instances provides help for the needy. Nevertheless, this still remains a responsibility of the Church and there is ample scope for this compassionate ministry to be exercised. The neglect of this ministry has meant that the Church's witness to Christ has been greatly impaired (James 2:14-16).

The Church and Worship

Christian worship is the response of the believer to the revelation of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. This response must come from the whole man: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."

The object of worship is God alone (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt Thou serve." Worship must not go beyond what is appointed in the Word of God and it can be rendered only through the One Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. It must be offered in spirit and in truth.

The settings of worship are the secret place, where the individual believer has fellowship with God, the home, where a family unites in worshipping the Heavenly Father, and the meeting-house where the congregation of God's people assemble for worship.

Occasions for worship are unlimited, but there is one special day appointed for congregational worship to be diligently observed - the Sabbath. The first day of the week, which is the Christian Sabbath, is to be observed as a day of rest from all regular employment, except such duties as may be considered works of necessity and mercy. The Sabbath should be devoted particularly to the public and private exercises of Christian worship and to the performance of good works.

Congregational worship, as revealed in the Word of God, consists of praise, prayer, the reading, preaching and hearing of the Word of God, (Acts 2:42; 2Chron. 29:30) tithes and offerings, the benediction and the administration of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (Matt. 28:19; 1Cor.11:23-26; 1Tim. 5:17; 2Tim. 2:2). The climax of this worship is preaching of the Word. Congregational worship is ordinarily under the leadership of an ordained pastor, and the preaching, in particular, is committed to those who are duly qualified and who have been regularly appointed. There are also references in Scripture to special observances such as solemn vows and covenants, thanksgiving and humiliation. (Ex. 24:7; Jos. 24:24; 2Kgs. 11:17; 23:3).

The Bible makes it clear that God has a particular care for the purity of His own worship. Its constituent elements are not left to man's choice or opinion. The punishment of Nadab and Abihu, who offered, "strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not"; of Saul, who assumed the duties of a priest in defiance of the command of Samuel; and of others, (1 Sam.13:12,13), who worshipped in their own way, emphasises the danger of what the Bible calls "will-worship" (self-devised worship), and the urgent necessity of strict conformity to God's requirements. Whatever is not commanded in the worship of God is forbidden.

PRAISE

The Book of Psalms, part of the Scriptures given by inspiration of God, is divinely appointed for praise in worship, to the exclusion of all songs and hymns of merely human composition. To substitute anything else for the Divinely-appointed Book of Psalms is to fail to realise that the Divine provision for our praise is perfect and adequate. It is clear that the use of the Psalms in worship is commanded in both the Old and New Testaments. It should be noted that the command in Colossians 3:16 - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (cf.Eph.5:19) - does not authorise the use of songs for worship other than those contained in the Book of Psalms, for the "psalms," "hymns" and "spiritual songs" referred to there, were the titles attached to the Psalms in the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament which was in general use in the Apostolic Church.

The fact that certain songs of praise preserved in the Old Testament are not included in the Psalter, has been used as an argument against exclusive psalmody. The Bible itself, it is affirmed, goes beyond the 'exclusive psalmody' restriction. Passages cited include the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10); the psalm of Jonah (Jonah 2:3-9); the song of Hezekiah (Isa. 38:10-20); the song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43; Ex. 15:1-18); the song of Deborah (Judges 5:1-31); the song of Habakkuk (Hab. 3:1-19).

It is clear that the Psalms of the Psalter grew out of a liturgical milieu, many of them being anonymous. They cover a span of almost a millenium, from the time of Moses (Psalm 90) to the period of the Exile (Psalms 126 and 137). The existence of songs of praise prior to the final collection and close of the Psalter, but not included in that collection, is not a problem. Not all the songs and canticles of the Old Testament period were included when the Psalter was completed, just as not all the apostolic epistles were included in the canon of Scripture (1Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16). What the Holy Spirit has given us in providence is adequate for our needs.

The Psalms contain many references to Christ and He frequently quoted them during His earthly ministry. Their beauty has endured throughout the centuries and they provide a common ground upon which all who accept God's Word can worship together.

There is no warrant for instrumental accompaniment to the singing in New Testament worship. In Hebrews 13:15, Christians are called upon to "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name." It seems clear that the constitution and form of worship of the New Testament Church were patterned after the Synagogue which did not have instrumental music and not after the Temple, which did as part of its sacrificial ritual. (2 Chron.29:27-30). If we are to follow the pattern of worship of the New Testament Church, which is our standard, our praise in worship will consist of psalms sung without instrumental accompaniment.

PRAYER

Prayer is an ordinance of congregational worship in which, in ordinary circumstances, one person leads the worshippers and speaks for them to God. It is to be offered, like private prayer, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the utmost reverence in thought, language and manner, with simplicity and with deep humility such as becomes sinners in approaching the presence of the Holy God. The worshippers should consciously, in sincerity and in truth, identify themselves with the prayers which are being offered. It is probable that in the New Testament Church the people signified such identification and assent by responding 'Amen' at the end of the prayers. The Scriptural postures in congregational prayer are standing, kneeling or prostration.

READING AND PREACHING THE WORD

God has appointed the reading and preaching of the Word by His messengers as the way by which His redemptive work is made known to men, so that they are made wise unto salvation. The proclamation of the Word is the centre and climax of public worship. The working of the Holy Spirit must be prayerfully sought in order that He may make the Word read and preached an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up, in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation. Preaching requires careful preparation of heart and mind on the part of both preacher and hearers.

All should attend to it with diligence, preparation and prayer, receive the Word with meekness, faith and love, lay it up in their hearts, and practise it in their lives. (Shorter Catechism Q.90), (Heb. 4:2; James 1:21).

OFFERING

The giving of tithes and offerings is an appointed and fitting part of congregational worship. God requires His people to give a portion of their substance to Him. This should be done cheerfully, regularly and proportionately as He has prospered them.

BENEDICTION

Congregational worship is fittingly concluded with the pronouncing of the benediction by the minister, as the servant of God, who prays that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit may be with His people.

SACRAMENTS

The only sacraments of the New Testament Church are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are holy ordinances instituted by Christ "wherein by sensible signs Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers" (Shorter Catechism Q. 92). For a fuller treatment of this theme see the chapter; The Church and the Sacraments.

WORSHIP AND LIFE

The Bible emphasises that worship and conduct cannot be separated. Repeatedly the prophets preached that laxity in conduct could not be compensated for by ritual observance. Also Christ Himself linked our worship of God inseparably with our conduct towards our fellowmen. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." The purpose of worship can be realised only when, through it, the will of the worshipper is conformed to the will of God.

The Church and Government

A proper structure in church government is essential to preserve good order and to maintain the purity and peace of the Church. Three main forms of organization are found in the visible Church :- Prelacy, Independency and Presbyterianism.

Prelacy, represented by Anglicanism, holds that there are different orders such as deacons, priests, canons, deans, bishops and archbishops. These orders are of an ascending nature and form a hierarchy. Prelacy makes a clear distinction between 'clergy' and the 'laity'.

Independency, on the other hand, sees no difference in rank among ministers, but holds that each congregation is autonomous and subject to no higher ecclesiastical authority.

Presbyterianism is that form of Church government exercised by presbyters or elders, among whom there is no distinction of rank or order. It is of the essence of Presbyterianism to recognise the authority of ascending courts, that is, Session, Presbytery, Synod, etc. The Reformed Presbyterian Church believes that this is the form of church government outlined in Holy Scripture.

GOVERNMENT BY ELDERS

The sole headship of Christ over His Church implies that in government, as in all things, we are to be guided by the teaching of Scripture. The principles of Church government, its institutions and offices, are outlined in the Word of God. The Bible teaches that those who exercise the gifts and functions of government are called elders. Toward the end of Paul's first missionary journey he and his companion Barnabas retraced their steps and "ordained them elders in every church." Titus was left in Crete to ordain elders in every city (Titus 1:5). Those so ordained were called bishops (Titus 1:7). From Miletus Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the Church to come and visit him (Acts 20:17). He called them bishops or overseers who had the responsibility for the welfare of the Church (v.28). Peter, speaking as an elder, exhorted his fellow-elders to provide spiritual food and oversight for the welfare of the flock (1Peter 5:1,2). In the New Testament the word translated 'bishop' is identical with 'elder' in respect of function and office, and these terms are used interchangeably (Titus 1:7; Acts 20:17, 28); the one indicating function (oversight), the other, maturity of the person holding this office.

Parity and Plurality

1Timothy 5:17 makes it clear that all elders have equal authority to rule and that others, in addition to ruling, have the responsibility of preaching the Word. The passages of Scripture referred to in the previous paragraph make it clear that there was a plurality of elders in every church. Thus the principle of parity stands side by side with that of plurality. There is no

evidence in the New Testament of any form of hierarchy. The elders exercised their supervision in unison and on a parity with one another.

In the outworking of these principles, Presbyterian churches must be careful not to invest the minister with an authority that is contrary to the Word of God. It is true that those "who labour in the Word and doctrine" are to be given due respect on account of their knowledge and experience, but, with regard to ruling, the minister of the Word is on a parity with other elders. Presbyterianism must be adhered to in practice as well as in theory.

Eldership restricted to Men

The Scriptures clearly teach that the office of the eldership is restricted to men (1 Tim.2:11-3:7). "But I suffer not a women to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." The reason is clearly defined: "It was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman, being quite deceived, fell into transgression." In 1Tim.2:13 we are shown that the order of creation is the determining factor for authority. Man, in being created first, is endowed with dominion and authority, and woman, being created after man, is to be in subjection. In verse 14, the Fall is introduced and attention is drawn to the fact that it was the woman who was deceived. Paul does not elaborate on this. It is possible, however, that he introduces this incident to demonstrate that when the roles established by God in creation were reversed it had

a disastrous effect. Therefore, we see that this prohibition is made, not on cultural grounds, but on account of a creation ordinance.

This does not mean that the woman is in any way inferior to the man. Before God they stand as equals. They share created dignity, being both made in the image of God (Gen.1:27). They have in common their native depravity, both being sinners (Rom.3:23). They also share the same redemptive privilege, for in the kingdom of God "there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Equality, however, does not imply that God has given to each the same role in the life and work of the Church.

While women are not permitted to rule or to teach, they have unique gifts that should be used in the service of the Church. We have the examples of Dorcas, Priscilla and Phebe, who, by exercising their God-given gifts, brought great blessing to many in their service for Christ and His Church. (Matt.27:55,56; Acts 9:36; 18:26; Rom. 16:1; Prov.31:20)

THE OFFICE OF DEACON

In the New Testament Church it soon became apparent that an order of officers was needed to be responsible for the compassionate outreach, the practical administration and other forms of service in the Church. In Acts chapter 6 we read that the Greek-speaking believers felt that their widows were not getting a fair share of what had been contributed for the benefit of the poor. Seven men were

appointed and ordained to take charge of this important work, thus leaving the apostles more time for the ministry of the Word and prayer. While the term deacon is not used in Acts 6, we believe that the practice here described was foundational to the office of deacon.

A deacon, therefore, is a servant of the Church. The qualifications for the deacon are clearly defined in 1 Timothy 3: 8-13.

COURTS OF THE CHURCH

In the administration of government within the Church there is an application of these basic principles in the functioning of a gradation of church courts. The primary court is the Session. A higher court is the Presbytery which has the supervision of a number of congregations in a defined area. Traditionally, its membership is composed of the ministers in that area and one other elder from each of the congregations.

The supreme court in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is the Synod which exercises authority over the Presbyteries, the Sessions and the Congregations. Its function is mainly legislative and its decisions are transmitted to the membership of the Church through the Presbyteries and Sessions. An example of Presbyterial oversight is found in Acts chapter 15 where the apostles and elders assembled to consider a problem which had arisen at Antioch. "And the apostles and elders met to consider this question."

The general rules for the appointment of officers in the various courts of the Church and for the management of business in these courts are set out in the Code, the Book of Government and Order of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. The purpose of such a document is that "all things be done decently and in order."

The Church and Mission

Mission is at the heart of the gospel. 'Mission' literally means sending, and at the heart of the gospel is the truth that "the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world." Mission began there and the missionary responsibility of the Church has no meaning apart from that divine initiative and that unique sending. The Church finds its call to missionary effort and its authority for obeying that call in the divine example, for Christ said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

The Church's task today is the climax of a series of sendings in the Bible. God sent Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees that he might be a blessing to the world. The Old Testament tells the story of the commissioning of Israel as God's witness to the nations. Though for the most part they failed or misunderstood their task, there was always the promise given of a faithful remnant and of people from every nation coming to God in willing obedience and eager worship. While our Lord was upon earth it is recorded that He sent out the twelve and later the seventy with certain clearly defined responsibilities.

It is, however, the commission given by the risen Christ which primarily supplies the standing orders for the Church today. Each of the writers of the Gospels repeats our Lord's command to His Church, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation". "You will be my witnesses..... to the ends of the earth." These together with Luke 24:47 and John 20:21 show that the importance of missionary endeavour in the plan of the Church's King and Head cannot be doubted. Our supreme objective in life is the glorifying of His Name. The carrying out of Christ's Commission is one of the ways in which He is particularly honoured.

While the kind of world in which we are called to witness is very different from that of the early Church, nevertheless the needs of mankind, the principles directing our work and the goals in view are unchanged. We rejoice in all of the developments in so many areas of life especially in this century. This has contributed to a greater quality of life being enjoyed by many, yet the spiritual plight of man, if anything, is even greater than before. His basic sinfulness remains; he belongs to the fallen race of Adam, subject to death and the wrath of God, but his technological achievements have tended to produce a pride and a corresponding lack of awareness of God. However, we still affirm that man remains accountable to God and that God "commands all people everywhere to repent, for he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed."

The kind of ministry which the Church should exercise can be discovered as we examine the methods and approach of the apostles and early Church. The means which God has chiefly used to the salvation of many has

been the preaching of those whom He has specifically called to that work. Paul sought to preach in every city he visited, either in some public place, or where those who professed to be the people of God met. He sought to proclaim the death and resurrection of Christ, and called all who heard to repentance and faith, that they might receive forgiveness of sins. While the Church is to proclaim the whole counsel of God, the message of salvation by faith alone through Christ is especially to be emphasized.

It is clear, however, that all who are followers of Christ, whether ordained or not, are to be involved in the missionary task. "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." From the example of the early church in Acts 8:4 and 11:19-20 together with Eph.4:11-12, "he gave. . . some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up," it is clear that all who profess the name of Christ must accept responsibility for making Him known. Each in his own natural surroundings by word and life should be seeking to extol Christ, as well as co-operating fully in the evangelistic ministry of the congregation.

The mission field is the world. We are to be concerned for our immediate and our more distant neighbours, seeking to have a breadth of interest in the world equal to our Lord's. We are subject to Him and His Word. That means that there is freedom to relate unchanging truth to a changing scene. In every situation and country there is no stereotyped style for the Church's life and obedience.

Every culture and tradition is to be examined in the light of Scripture, therefore the Church's missionary programme should reflect both flexibility and faithfulness.

The Great Commission, however, is concerned with more than merely winning converts. Those converts are to be taught "to obey everything which Christ has commanded", and also to be baptised. As baptism is the outward initiatory rite of admission into the membership of the Church, and as the teaching is intended to present the Lordship of Christ over every area of life, it is obvious that this Commission can only be fulfilled by the Church. She alone has been designated as "the pillar and ground of the truth". All true missionary endeavour will result in the strengthening of the Church. "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved". Here our Lord demonstrates that the goal of mission is the growth of His Church. As this happens He is glorified.

In all our missionary activity we are conscious of Christ's victory and Lordship and of the outcome of His mediatorial reign. We are glad that, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

The Church and the Sacraments

An excellent definition of a sacrament is found in the Shorter Catechism. "A sacrament is an holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed and applied to believers" (Q.92). The sacrament functions as an outward sign available to the senses giving a symbolic (or pictorial) representation of a work of God's grace, and as a seal certifying the validity of God's promises and the genuineness of God's blessings and benefits.

In the Old Testament these ordinances were the Passover (Exodus 13:9,10) and Circumcision (Gen 17:11). Both of these ordinances involved the shedding of blood. With the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross, this aspect of the ordinances was fulfilled. Consequently, the members of the Church in the New Testament era are commanded to observe special ordinances which do not involve the shedding of blood but which, in every other sense, are parallel to their Old Testament counterparts. These special rites or sacraments appointed by Christ are the Lord's Supper (1 Cor.11:23-26) and Baptism (Matt.28:18-20).

Although the word 'sacrament' is not found in the Bible, we use it in its accepted ecclesiastical sense of an outward sign of great spiritual realities, involving solemn

pledges of loyal obedience to the Lord. It is the duty and privilege of believers to observe the sacraments which, if rightly used, are a means of strengthening their faith and love.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

This sacrament has been misinterpreted in various ways. On the one hand, there is the Roman dogma of "transubstantiation," which teaches that in the "miracle of the mass" the bread is changed into the literal body of Christ and the wine into the literal blood of Christ. Not far removed from "transubstantiation" is the Lutheran teaching of "consubstantiation." It teaches that, while the bread remains bread and the wine remains wine, at a certain moment the actual body and blood of Christ become present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine, in much the same way as electricity can become present in a metal wire without the wire changing. On the other hand, the teaching of Zwingli of Zurich tended to suggest that the Lord's Supper was merely a memorial feast.

John Calvin, in developing a truly biblical doctrine, taught that the Lord's Supper, as well as being a memorial feast, was also communion with the living Saviour. He also rejected the "real presence" in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran senses, yet taught there was the "real presence" in the spiritual sense. Calvin's position is expressed in the Shorter Catechism: "The Lord's Supper is a sacrament wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's

appointment, His death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace" (Q.96).

Thus for the partaker, there is more than remembrance; there is communion with Christ. As he reflects on Christ's death and its abiding significance, faith is strengthened, love is deepened, and the spirit is refreshed and nourished. These result in a heightened fellowship between Christ and His people, leading to an increased expectation of His return.

In the Lord's Supper Christ's atoning death is proclaimed, and by partaking of it the believer makes a public profession of his faith in Christ and dependence on His finished work. In the "one loaf and one cup" (1Cor.10:17) communicants profess the unity of their fellowship.

The Lord's Supper is to be administered only to believers, and that after suitable preparation and self-examination (1 Cor.11:28,29). It is the minister's duty, in all simplicity, to follow the example of Christ in giving thanks, breaking the bread and giving it and the cup to the communicants. This may be preceded by the reading of the 'words of institution' (1 Cor.11:23-27) and giving suitable exhortation in order that the participants may discern the Lord's body, thus avoiding the danger of eating and drinking unworthily. For the believer, the

elements received by faith are a means of spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

There is no express biblical direction for the frequency with which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is to be observed. The important point, however, is that, as often as the Lord's Supper is observed, there should be due reverence and careful preparation.

BAPTISM

The Meaning of Baptism

The Scriptures teach that baptism is the sign and seal of God's Covenant of Grace. It signifies the inner work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, applying the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, cleansing from the defilement and guilt of sin, forgiveness, union with Christ in all His saving work and admission into His body, the Church. The mark of God's Covenant of Grace established in Genesis 17 was circumcision, which signified and sealed the spiritual blessings of the covenant: union with God (Gen.17:7), the removal of defilement (Deut.10:12ff; 30:6, Rom.2:28-29) and justification by faith (Rom.4:11). Christ in ending the national administration of this covenant extended the 'new' administration to all nations and replaced circumcision, as the mark of the covenant, with baptism (Matt.28:19,20). This is confirmed in Colossians 2:11,12 which teaches that the spiritual realities of circumcision and baptism are the same. Whereas in the Old Testament the Covenant sign to be administered to those who were

brought into the Church was circumcision (Gen.17:9-14; Ex.12:48), in the New Testament, at Christ's command, the sign of the Covenant was to be baptism (Matt.28:18-20).

The New Testament makes it clear that baptism signifies the inward work of the Holy Spirit. Baptism with water is associated with baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt.3:11; Acts 2:33; 10:44-48; 11:15,16) in fulfilment of Ezekiel 36:25-28 (cf. John 3:5; 4:14; 7:37-39). The water used in baptism signified the Holy Spirit's sovereign and mysterious regenerating and sanctifying work, which can come before, with or after the administration of the sacrament (John 3:5-8; Luke 1:15). Baptism symbolizes the work of the Spirit in applying the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, in particular, cleansing from the defilement and guilt of sin (Acts 22:16; 1Pet.3:21), forgiveness (Acts 2:38 cf., 5:31; 11:18), saving union with Christ (Rom.6:3; Col.2:11,12), and admission into the visible Church of Christ (1Cor.12:13; Gal.3:27,28).

Baptism is also a seal of God's Covenant of Grace. It certifies that God's promises are sure and that the blessings promised in Christ are valid. In this sacrament our Saviour seals the truth of His everlasting Covenant. In the case of baptised adults, baptism conveys the assurance of spiritual blessing.

To the baptised children of believers the seal is an assurance that God will unchangeably adhere to His Covenant and that He will bestow all promised blessings

on all who, by faith, willingly receive them. Such children also find baptism a confirming seal when they reach years of discretion and, by God's grace, look in faith to Christ and His finished work.

A sign and seal can never be the substitute for that spiritual reality which is signed and sealed. Sacraments are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace, but they are not the grace itself. They should never become the ground of our confidence and hope. That there is a distinction between the sign and seal and that which they illustrate and confirm is made clear in Romans 4:11, where we read of Abraham, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised ..." Here the sign and seal of circumcision are clearly distinct from the faith of Abraham.

The Subjects of Baptism

With regard to the subjects of baptism the Larger Catechism states "Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible Church, and so strangers to the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to Him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptised." (Q.166) No direct command to baptise infants is found in the New Testament. Such a command, however, is not required because God had already made clear in the Old

Testament the status of such infants. They were recognised as being included in the Covenant of Grace.

This Covenant revealed in Genesis 3:15 became explicit and was formally established with Abraham (Gen.17:1-14). God established His Covenant as an everlasting Covenant with Abraham and with Abraham's seed after him (Gen.17:7). Abraham's response was saving faith (Gen.15:6; Rom.4:2,3,11,13). Likewise, "all who are of faith are Abraham's seed" (Gal.3:6,7,9,14,27; Rom.4:16,17), saved through the one Covenant of Grace. From the beginning the infant children of believers were included with their parents in the Covenant relationship and privilege, receiving the mark of church membership (Gen.17:9-13; Acts 2:38). The sign and seal of the Covenant, speaking of union with God through inner cleansing and saving faith, set Covenant children apart, as belonging to God's Church in its visible aspect. In Colossians 2:11,12 baptism is identified as 'Christian circumcision' (cf. Gal.3:27-29). Thus while the outward form of administering the Covenant has changed the Covenant still stands.

God, in the New Testament era, has not withdrawn from the children of believers the privileges enjoyed in the Old Testament. In Acts 2:38,39 Peter is alluding to the Covenant promise made to Abraham in Genesis 17:7, "For the promise is unto you and to your children, ...". Peter was preaching to a congregation of Jews drawn from many different countries. These people would have been shocked and grieved if they had learned that the promise of the Covenant of Grace in the light of its

fulfilment in Christ was not widened and extended but narrowed and restricted. Consequently, if God's grace and the sign and seal of the Covenant were to be limited in their application to believers only, with their children no longer enjoying the benefits, such a radical change would require a full explanation. The apostle Peter does not mention any such change. Rather, in declaring to his hearers the message "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," it is clear that the application of these words is the same as when God established His Covenant with Abraham. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

There is no new command, therefore, to baptise infants in the New Testament because such a command is not necessary. The New Testament evidence corroborates the view that God still treats children of believers as part of His Church in her visible aspect, and as such eligible for baptism. Of the twelve baptisms recorded in the New Testament, at least three are household baptisms (the word "household" includes the family) e.g. Acts 16:15; 16:31-34; 1Corinthians 1:16. In 1Corinthians 7:14 it is stated that the children of one believing parent are "holy", i.e. set apart with different status and privileges. Finally, throughout the Old Testament infants always had a definite standing in the congregation of God's people (Deut.29:10-12; Jos.8:35; 2Chron.20:13; Joel 2:15,16; 1Cor.10:2, c.f. Exod.12:37). Therefore, on the

authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, we are required to baptise adults from a non-Christian background who profess faith in Christ. We are also required to baptise the children of believers (i.e.covenant children).

The Mode of Baptism

It is claimed by some that 'immersion' is the only valid mode. A biblical study, however, leads to the conclusion that 'pouring' or 'sprinkling' are also valid modes.

1. The Language Used

Those who advocate immersion claim that the word "baptizo" can only mean 'immerse'. New Testament usage of "baptizo" shows that it can also mean 'pour' or 'sprinkle' (Luke 11:38; Mark 7:4). In Hebrews 9:10 we read of the rites of purification which were performed by sprinkling. In the original these are called baptisms, commonly translated "washings". No ceremonial "washings" of the Old Testament required immersion.

2. New Testament Practice

In Acts 8:26-40 we read of Philip and the eunuch "going down into" the water and "coming up out of it." The original language only requires, however, that they went down to it, or even stepped into it, and then came up from where it was. The "baptism with the Holy Spirit" at Pentecost was not by immersion but by pouring (Acts 2:3,17; 11:15,16; 10:44ff cf. Ezek.36:25-28). Finally, the

Philippian jailer was baptised in the jail or in his house and from Acts 10:47 it may be inferred that Cornelius and his family were baptised in the house. The circumstances of these baptisms, rather than supporting immersion, render it unlikely.

3. The Baptisms of John and of Christ

It has often been argued that the baptism of John and of our Lord should be taken as models for Christian baptism.

The Baptism of John

The baptism of John cannot be used as a model for Christian baptism. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance and was intimately connected with his message of judgment. As such it was not a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace. Covenant baptism was instituted at that point in redemptive history when Christ commanded His followers to go and "teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Furthermore, there is an example of those who had been baptised by John being rebaptised (Acts 19:3-5).

The Baptism of Christ

The baptism of our Lord was a unique event and there can be no comparison between His baptism and that of Christians today. No precedent or practice can be established, therefore, because the baptism that Christ

received was not Christian baptism. The background to John's baptism is to be found either in the practice of baptising proselytes who embraced Judaism, or in the Old Testament ceremonial washings which people, on various occasions, were required to observe (Lev.11-15; Num.19).

John's reluctance to baptise Jesus (Matt.3:14) shows that this was no ordinary baptism. Our Lord, however, persuaded John to proceed with His baptism when He said, "Let it be so now: it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness."

The righteousness He would fulfil is probably that referred to in Isaiah 53:11, "by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and He will bear their iniquities." John Calvin comments that "the reason for Christ's undergoing baptism was to offer His Father full obedience". This includes the role of the 'Suffering Servant' (Isa.53). Thus from the beginning of His ministry our Lord submitted Himself to the Father's will, from Whom came recognition and approval (Matt.3:17).

Why, then, was Christ baptised? In baptism He associated Himself with those who received John's baptism. Christ, being sinless, needed no cleansing, yet He submitted Himself to a sinner's baptism. In so doing, He stood in the place of sinners, identifying Himself with those for whom He came to die as a substitute. Thus Christ began His ministry by identifying with sinners and this was to be its chief characteristic throughout.

While there can be no comparison between our Lord's baptism and that of believers, as regards purpose, there is a considerable similarity in their symbolism (e.g. cleansing from sin). For believers, baptism "signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the Covenant of Grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's." (Shorter Catechism Q.94) For Christ, however, baptism marked His identification with sinners and His engagement to the elect.

4. The Theological Argument

The theological argument for immersion is based on an interpretation of Romans 6:3-6 and Colossians 2:11,12. It is asserted that going down into and coming up out of water is an analogy portraying going down into the grave with Christ in His burial and rising again in His resurrection. Those who advocate immersion conclude that this gives instruction regarding meaning and mode. This interpretation is invalid for the following reasons:-

(a) Paul does not have the outward rite of water-baptism uppermost in his mind. He is referring to "baptism with the Holy Spirit" which is symbolized by water baptism. Water-baptism could only produce the results Paul speaks of if one believed in baptismal regeneration.

(b) The central thought of these passages is union with Christ. In describing this Paul speaks not only of being "buried with" Christ and "raised with" Him, but also of being "crucified with Him" and "planted together with Him." (In Galatians 3:27 he speaks of union as a "putting

on of Christ" i.e., as a garment.) To select arbitrarily two of these terms (burial and resurrection) and insist that their imagery instructs as to the mode of baptism, while ignoring the others (crucifixion and planting) does violence to the text and distorts its message.

(c) Christ was not lowered into a grave but placed on a ledge in a cave-like sepulchre. Thus immersion in water is not a proper symbol of Christ's burial. In these two passages Paul is not dealing with the mode of baptism, but with its meaning, i.e. it is a sign and seal of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing us into saving union with Christ on the basis of His redemption.

Pouring or sprinkling are better symbolical modes than immersion. The writer to the Hebrews speaks repeatedly of the sprinkling of Christ's blood to cleanse (ch.9,10,12) as does Peter in I Peter 1:2. Furthermore, since baptism with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was by pouring that mode is still suitable. It is noteworthy that in a prophecy of the blessings to be experienced in New Testament days, God says "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean," and the purifying Spirit (whose work is symbolised in baptism) was poured out upon the Church (Acts 2:33). The Westminster Confession of Faith sums up the Biblical position regarding the mode of baptism, "Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person" (ch.28:2).

CONCLUSION

The sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are given by Christ. It is, therefore, the Christian's duty and privilege to observe them. It is his duty because Christ has expressly commanded it; and it is his privilege because the sacraments, when used in the right manner, are means by which we receive blessing from Christ.

The Church and the Family

THE FAMILY AS A DIVINE INSTITUTION

The family is a divine institution which has existed from the beginning. The injunction was given to our first parents while they were in a state of innocence, to "be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." The ordained means of obeying this injunction was that of marriage.

After the Fall the institutions of marriage and the family were in no way suspended; it was to the family that the covenant promises were given. It was not Noah only, who was preserved in the ark, but his whole household. The sign of circumcision was given to Abraham as a token of God's Covenant. "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised." In the New Testament the covenant promises are no less extensive. At Pentecost the Apostle Peter assured those who were "pricked in their heart" that the promise was unto them and to their children, and on three occasions it is recorded that whole households were baptised, baptism being the New Testament's symbol of the Covenant blessings.

The true pattern for the earthly family is found in that family which in heaven and earth is named after Christ.

The fact that God has condescended to assume a Covenant relationship as a Father to the redeemed is a source of encouragement and comfort to all the people of God. The divine love is declared by the Lord Jesus Christ to be far above that of human parents. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Thus it is known that parents are required to be "imitators of God as dear children," ever seeking to carry out their responsibilities according to the pattern God has revealed in His Word. Our Heavenly Father, in the instruction of His adopted family, adapts His communication to the ability and capacity of each member. All the children of Zion are "taught of the Lord." "The sincere milk of the word" is given to babes while "strong meat" is for those who have grown to maturity.

It is through family life that many of the great doctrines of the Bible can be understood. The Incarnation involved the birth of Jesus Christ into a human family. The Fatherhood of God becomes meaningful through what we have learnt of human fatherhood in a human home. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." The love of God is illustrated for us by the love that has surrounded us from our earliest days. It is through the forgivenesses and reconciliations of the home that we come to understand the central experience of our faith, the forgiveness of sins.

God is to be acknowledged in all the relationships which He has ordained. Such acknowledgement is to be expressed in the family relationship by the observance of family worship, consisting of praise, prayer and the reading and study of the Word. The Old Testament patriarchs built altars, not merely as a token of personal dedication to God, but to introduce their families to the worship of God. The moral principle behind their action is to be imitated by Christian parents. For example, it is not sufficient to pray for children, but it is necessary to pray with them so that they may come to know prayer as a means of enjoying the Covenant blessings and as a special privilege bestowed by God upon His people.

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE FAMILY

Husband and Wife

God created man male and female and, from the beginning, ordained marriage as a natural relationship of life. It was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, the increase of mankind with a legitimate offspring, the increase and building up of the Church with a holy seed and for the promotion of private and public morality and religion. It is an agreement between one man and one woman only, in which the parties solemnly vow and covenant with each other that they will live together in mutual love and faithfulness.

While it may not always be the will of God for a person to marry, it is lawful for all kinds of people to do so who are able with judgment to give their consent; yet in order

that the important ends of marriage may be attained, Christians should marry only in the Lord, should cultivate mutual love, bear with and help each other's infirmities, keep the marriage covenant inviolate and carefully avoid all mutual recriminations.

The husband is the head of the wife. He is called to love her "as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it." Husbands are also commanded "to love their wives as their own bodies." The wife is to be submissive to her husband in the Lord and is to help him in the care and instruction of children and the creation of a loving and God-honouring home (Gen.2:18; Eph.5.22-24; Prov.31:10-31). The exchange or confusion of roles in the family in ordinary circumstances results in God's displeasure and in consequent unhappiness.

Marriage ought not to be contracted within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity prohibited in the Word of God. No law of man or consent of parties can make legitimate any such incestuous connection. In view of uncertainty regarding the interpretation of Scripture with regard to marriage with a deceased wife's sister or a deceased husband's brother, the present stand-point of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is that no disciplinary action should be taken in such cases.

Though the moral validity of the marriage depends upon mutual vows of the parties and is independent of official administration, yet in order to prevent rash and inconsiderate connections and to impress the parties with the solemnity of the ordinance and the importance of the

duties involved, the solemnization of it should be exclusively committed unto those duly authorised. Christian marriage should be solemnised in a religious service.

Marriage is a civil contract as well as a religious one. The marriage laws of the State, however, should not in any way contravene the laws of God, but should in all respects conform to them. In the event of such contravention Christians are to act in accordance with the law of God.

The marriage contract is for life between the parties concerned and is dissolved only by death except in the case of adultery or of wilful, causeless and irremediable desertion. These causes do not in themselves dissolve the marriage contract, but only give the right to the innocent party to demand that it shall be dissolved by competent authority. After the divorce has been regularly obtained on Scriptural grounds, it is lawful for the innocent party to marry another as if the offending party were dead. (Confession of Faith, ch. 24 para. 5)

In cases where the civil authority grants a divorce upon any grounds other than those allowed by the Word of God, it is the duty of all Christians and Church courts to obey God rather than men, and consequently, regard such unscriptural divorce as null and void; and if the parties in a marriage unrighteously dissolved marry again, they are to be regarded as living in the sin of adultery. In counselling people who have become involved in immoral relationships it is the duty of the

Church to show the compassion of Christ. The motive behind any disciplinary action necessary must be to "restore such a one in the spirit of meekness."

Since God created man "male and female," (Gen.1:27) sexuality is an integral part of our nature and is therefore not to be denied, but affirmed as good and positive (1Tim.4:4). Its expression, however, must be within God's order and plan. Abuse or misuse of it will distort our humanness and bring judgment from God. Such abuses include adulterous and pre-marital sexual relationships, both forbidden in the Scriptures (Exod.20:14; Gen.39:7-9). Homosexuality is a grave perversion of human sexuality and is expressly condemned as unnatural in the Word of God (Rom.1:26,27). While the Church must condemn all such forms of sin, it is a Christian duty to show the love of Christ to all who repent and to offer them patient help towards overcoming their sin in the strength which Christ provides. It should also be remembered that sexual activity is not the centre of our experience and that it is possible for us to be fulfilled as persons outside marriage. It is as men and women made in the image of God and restored to fellowship with Him through Christ that we are fulfilled, and not as married or unmarried.

Parents and Children

Christian parents are bound to provide for the material needs of their children (1 Tim.5:8) and to see that they obtain a suitable education. The earliest and most important educational institution is the home, where

children are taught, by precept and example, the foundations and principles of godly living (Deut.6:6-9; Ps.78:2-7; Prov.22:6). In view of the fact that much of the instruction in State schools is based on a philosophy which gives little place to God, parents should be careful to ensure that their children are trained to understand everything from a biblical viewpoint. Such training will include a continual evaluation and, if need be, correction of what is taught in school, or, where necessary and possible, the establishment of Christian schools controlled by parents.

Parents are bound to dedicate their children to God, pray for them that they may be renewed by the Holy Spirit and so brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the Gospel, instruct them in the Christian Faith, set them a good example and direct and encourage them to make a public profession of their faith in Christ. Children are bound to honour and obey their parents in the Lord. All relationships within the family must be subject to the lordship of Christ.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND STATE

The family is the basic and essential unit in society, and when the family unit is maintained and the marriage bond held in honour, this is then reflected in a strong and happy society. However, when family life is held in scant regard, and when marriage is viewed, not as God's ordinance, but as a social convenience, the structures of society will totter and ultimately crumble.

As it is the duty of the State to create the conditions necessary for a stable society and to maintain the same, the State must therefore promote and encourage family life. This should be reflected in its various laws affecting the family. Likewise, the family, should recognise its responsibility to the State and seek to fulfil the obligations laid upon it.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FAMILY AND THE CHURCH

The relationship between the family and the Church should be mutually beneficial, each making a contribution to the well-being of the other. The Church should recognise the family as her basic unit and seek to foster religion within the home. Care should be taken that the various activities in which the members of the family engage do not destroy its unity but rather draw the members more closely together. In turn, the family should recognise the duty of gathering together with the people of God for corporate worship and as a witness to the world.

The Christian family functioning as a unit should be a blessing to the world. Believers are the "light of the world" and the "salt of the earth" and to families, that are separated unto God, the assurance is given, "I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing."

The Holy Spirit

In recent years a great deal has been said and written regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. One result of this has been an alienation between so-called Charismatics and the more traditional branches of the Christian Church. This chapter seeks to set out the Biblical evidence.

THE PERSON OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Scriptures clearly assert the deity of the Holy Spirit as a person within the Godhead (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor.13:14). His personality was taught by Christ (John 14:16). Paul speaks of His mind (Rom.8:27), His emotion (Eph.4:30) and His will (1Cor.12:11). His deity is evidenced by His divine attributes such as omnipresence (Ps.139:7-9), omniscience (Isa.40:13,14), omnipotence (Zec.4:6), eternity (Heb.9:14) and His divine activities such as creation (Gen 1:2, Job 33:4), inspiring prophets (Num.11:25- 29), endowing with special skills (Exod.35:30), giving life to the dead (Ezek.37:9-14) and speaking with a divine voice in Scripture (Heb.3:7-9, 10:15,16).

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Holy Spirit was intimately involved at every point in Christ's life - in his birth (Luke.1:35), baptism (Matt.3:16), temptation (Mk.1:12), preaching (Lk. 4:4ff), miracles (Matt.12:22ff), death (Heb.9:14),

resurrection (Rom.8:11), ascension (Jn.16:7). Moreover, having been involved in the incarnation of the Word, He gave the written Word, which bears infallible witness to Him, both the Old Testament (2 Sam.23:1,2; Matt.22:43; Acts 28:25; Heb.3:7,8; 2Tim.3:16) and New Testament (Jn.14:26; 16:13; 1Cor.14:37; 1Pet.1:12; 2Pet.1:19-21). The Holy Spirit interprets and applies Scripture (1Cor.2:10-13) to the human heart (2 Cor.3:15-17).

The sovereign work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential if man in his natural state of total depravity and inability is to be saved. The Holy Spirit must effect the new birth (Jn.1:12,13; 3:3-6), convict of sin (Jn.16:8), grant repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18) and saving faith (Eph.2:8) before a sinner can and will receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation. He then confirms his adoption (Rom.8:15,16) and gives assurance of justification (1Jn.3:23,24).

Not only does the Holy Spirit effect regeneration, thus bringing to life those who were spiritually dead, but He also sanctifies those whom He has resurrected from spiritual death. By this gracious work of the Spirit, the whole man is renewed after the image of God so that there is a hatred of sin and a longing for righteousness which result in evangelical obedience and a clear evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. i.e., love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal.5:2,23). The Holy Spirit guides the believer through the Word and unites him with others in the Church (Eph.4:3-6). In sanctifying He helps the believer in prayer (Rom.8:26,27), praise (Eph.5:18-20;

Col.3:16), preaching (1Cor.2:4) and witnessing (Acts 1:5).

BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Baptism with the Spirit is referred to seven times in the New Testament. The first six of these refer to Christ's work of "baptising with" (or pouring out) the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the coming of the Messiah as a time when there would be a universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Is.44:3; Ezek.36:25-27; 39:28,29; Joel 2:28). Christ referred to this outpouring as the "baptism" with the Holy Spirit and he saw this as the climax and completion of His work of redemption. Christ effected this baptism at Pentecost (Acts 2:17,39) and the Apostles recognised that the "gift of the Holy Spirit" had been bestowed. This meant that the day of Pentecost (and the extension of Pentecost to the Samaritans in Acts 8 and finally to the Gentiles in Acts 10:44; 19:1-7) was as unrepeatable as the other redemptive events, i.e. Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. Viewed doctrinally in terms of the history of redemption, as described in the book of Acts, the baptism with the Spirit happened once-for-all at Pentecost.

In 1 Cor. 12:13 we are taught that Christians are baptised with the Spirit unconditionally at the very beginning of their Christian experience, i.e., at conversion. Paul is speaking here of the new birth by the Spirit, which issues in personal trust in Christ and union with the body of

Christ. Thus the "baptism with the Spirit" is the initiatory experience of all believers.

There are no Scriptural grounds for a "baptism with the Spirit" as a second dramatic experience, to be accompanied by ecstatic utterances or experiences, following conversion. No Christian therefore ought to seek such an experience.

It is not to be denied, however, that the believer, subsequent to conversion may, on occasions, experience in greater measure the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in his life. He may, after wrestling with and overcoming some particular sin, after a period of seeming spiritual barrenness, or after some trial of faith, feel anew the presence of God and the love of Christ, and be charged with a new zeal for the work of the Kingdom. But such an experience must be interpreted properly. It is not a 'baptism with the Spirit' in the sense that some understand it, namely, receiving of that measure of the Holy Spirit and His power not given at conversion. Rather, it should be conceived of as a special visitation of the Almighty at a time of special need resulting in the believer being especially filled with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, it may be possible that this experience, instead of being subsequent to conversion, is the actual experience of conversion.

"Since we live by the Spirit" the command is to "keep in step with the Spirit" and not to "grieve" or "quench" Him through disobedience. The Christian is to be "filled with the Spirit." This is a command to the whole Church and

it is in the present continuous tense. To "keep on being filled" by the Spirit is therefore the duty of every believer. This will result, not so much in private mystical experience, as in right relationships in the home, church and place of work and in worship (Eph.5:18-6:9; Col.3:15-4:1).

THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.

From 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 we can define the gifts of the Spirit as certain capacities which the Triune God gives to members of the body of Christ to fit them for a specific service within that body. In the four lists of gifts found in the Epistles (1Cor.12:8-10;28; Rom.12:6-8; Eph.4:11) there are no less than twenty mentioned, the majority of which are neither miraculous, startling nor mystical. No two lists are the same and so it seems the Apostle is selecting from a wide range of gifts, some of which are clearly distinct from others. Moreover, we see that the word 'charisma' (gift) is used flexibly in other passages (e.g., 2 Cor.1:11; 1Cor.7:7; 1Tim.4:14). The point is that every 'charisma' is simply a manifestation of God's grace ('charis'). Since the whole Church exists only because of God's 'charis', it must be seen as 'charismatic' in all its aspects and activities. It is quite wrong for a group of Christians to call themselves 'Charismatics' to the exclusion of other believers, as if only a privileged few in the Church experience God's 'charis'. The Church is a 'charismatic' community and all Christians are 'charismatic' in the true sense. Spiritual gifts are bestowed on every believer (Rom.12:6; 1Cor.12:11; Eph.4:7) and he should use whatever 'charisma' (gift) he

has received to serve others as a good steward of God's 'charis' (grace) in its various forms (1Pet.4:10,11). Since gifts are bestowed for "the edifying of the Church" and for "the common good", failure to use them will be detrimental to the Church. No believer should belittle his own gifts or despise the gifts of others (1Cor.12:15-25). A spiritual gift is not something spectacular to be anxiously sought; it is any capacity for service in the Church with which the believer has been endowed.

THE CESSATION OF CERTAIN GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Some believers sincerely hold that all those gifts of the Spirit mentioned in the New Testament references above are still present in the Church. This would appear to be a mistaken view. There are four gifts which call for consideration in this respect: apostleship, prophesy, miraculous gifts of healing, speaking in tongues.

1. Apostleship

The term "apostle", used in the strict sense, applied only to the disciples and Paul. These men were unique in that they were eye-witnesses of the resurrected Christ, were called by Christ Himself to be apostles, were very conscious of inspiration and were used to perform miracles. Further, these men wrote and spoke with special authority and they were used in the writing of the New Testament. They laid a foundation on which the present Church builds and they continue to teach through their writings. The very nature of their office, i.e., to lay

a foundation for the New Testament Church, means that they can have no successors.

2. Prophecy

A Prophet was one who spoke the very word of God. After the resurrection of Christ there was a measure of divine revelation through prophets. Since God's direct revelation through His apostles and prophets is now complete and the canon of Scripture is closed, we see that prophesy has, in this strict sense, ceased and there are no such prophets today. Like the Apostles, the New Testament prophets were foundational to the organization of the New Testament Church (Eph.2:20). Moreover, since God has revealed to us all we need to know, it is dangerous error to seek for fresh revelation, thus ignoring the completeness and the all-sufficiency of Holy Scripture (Rev.22:18,19).

3. Miraculous gifts of healing

While the Scriptures teach that a Sovereign God can heal miraculously they provide no evidence to support the neo-pentecostal claim that God intends miracles to be a regular feature of the Christian life today. A careful study of Scripture reveals that miracles wrought through God's servants established them as His spokesmen, giving to them authority to convey new revelation (Exod.4:5). Miracles in the New Testament had a special purpose as attesting or authenticating signs (Heb.2:3,4). They were signs of the apostles (2 Cor.12:12). They had a special function for a special time in the history of

redemption, authenticating special revelation. Consequently, the miracles of the Bible coincide with great redemptive events when there was further revelation, e.g., the Period of the Exodus and the Life of Christ. It follows, therefore, that with the completion of Scripture, the age of miracles, as wrought through men, has ceased. There are, however, no biblical grounds for saying that miracles cannot happen today. It is God's sovereign prerogative to demonstrate His Almighty power in works of miracles whenever He pleases. For example, in response to the prayers of His people, God may heal some for whom there is no further medical help.

4 Speaking in tongues

"Tongues" or Spirit-controlled speech in another language occurred at Pentecost in fulfilment of Joel 2:28-32, when many nationalities heard the gospel in their own tongues all at once (Acts 2:5-11). In 1 Corinthians 12-14, however, we find Paul seeking to regulate the abuse of tongues, pointing out the dangers involved, showing the harmful effect this may have on Christian witness (I Cor 14:23) and the relative unimportance of tongues when compared with the exercise of other spiritual gifts. Things were out of control in Corinth. There was utter confusion in this carnal and divided New Testament church. Many regard the 'glossolalia' (tongue speaking) of Corinth as the gift of speaking in other languages which could be "interpreted" or "translated," rather than ecstatic speech or free vocalisation. Paul instructs that this gift,

necessary before the completion of Scripture in a cosmopolitan city, was not for all; was inferior to prophecy; was not to be excessively used; was to be under the speaker's control, only to be used when an interpreter was present (with only two or three speakers on any given occasion); and that it had the purpose of acting as a "sign" of God's judgment for those who doubted (1Cor.14:19-32). He castigates the indiscriminate or involuntary exercise of such a "sign". Moreover, he predicts the cessation of "tongues" and this actually happened in the history of the Church.

Consequently there is no justification in Scripture for the neo-pentecostal claim that tongues, in the sense of ecstatic, uncontrolled, free vocalisation, are an evidence of "baptism of the Spirit" and an important mark of maturity for all likewise "baptised." The need today is rather for the exposition and application of the Word of God.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church asserts the full deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, acknowledges His sovereign work in salvation, and encourages her members to use to the full all the gifts He has given. These gifts are for the express purpose of building up the Church; failure to use them means quenching the Spirit and harming the Church. Moreover, the Church encourages her members to pursue holiness; otherwise the Spirit is grieved by disobedience.

The Church and Secret Societies

There are several secret societies in existence. Some are older than others and some are more prominent than others. The Church's attitude to such organisations must be determined by a study of Scripture. From such a study we find that the teaching and practice of secret societies are in conflict with the Word of God in the following ways:-

1. Unscriptural Secrecy

The practice of secrecy is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God, and to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He said "I have spoken openly to the world, ... I said nothing in secret." Secrecy is also damaging to society and is contrary to its well-being. "Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

2. Unlawful Oaths

Membership in secret societies involves taking an oath before being aware of the obligation. No man is at liberty to bind his conscience by oath without a knowledge of the nature and extent of his undertaking. In doing so he is being bound to a law other than, and, in the light of further knowledge, possibly in conflict with,

the revealed law of God. "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge", "It is a trap for man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows".

3. Unsocial Benevolence

The benevolence of secret societies is confined to a "brotherhood" which is not warranted by the Word of God. Scripture gives clear direction for our good works. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

4. Unchristian Fellowship

True fellowship exists only between those who are united by saving faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Freemasonry, for example, excludes the mediation of Christ and accepts, as brothers, representatives of many non-Christian religions. Scripture, however, clearly teaches that we can have fellowship with one another only because "our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ."

Two of the secret societies most in evidence in Ireland are Freemasonry and the Orange Order.

FREEMASONRY

There are additional reasons why membership in the Masonic Order brings a Christian into conflict with the teaching of Scripture.

1. Its Pseudo-Religious Structure

The symbols, rites and temples of Freemasonry are essentially religious in nature. Masonic writers have frequently claimed that their Craft is a religion. A leading masonic author, J.S.M. Ward, declares, "I boldly aver that Freemasonry is a religion, yet in no way conflicts with any other religion, unless that religion holds that no one outside its portals can be saved." Further, Freemasonry claims to transcend all other religions and to include men of all faiths. Thus the masonic writer, A.G. Mackey, asserts, "The truth is that Masonry is undoubtedly a religious institution, its religion being that universal kind in which all men agree." Such claims are a complete contradiction of the teaching of our Lord, who said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

2. Its Antichristian Character

While paying lip-service to many Christian values, Masonry strikes at the heart of the Gospel when it claims that its rituals are fully sacramental and that salvation is by our own works. J.S.M. Ward boldly affirms "Freemasonry has taught that each man can, by himself, work out his own conception of God and thereby achieve salvation." Another masonic writer, W.F. Hammond, says, "Masonry's conception of immortality is something for which man must qualify while still in the flesh. Through fellowship of a moral discipline Masons are taught to qualify for the fellowship of eternal life." Thus Masonry rejects salvation by grace through faith.

Masonry worships a false god, teaches a false gospel and maintains a false brotherhood. It denies the teaching of Holy Scripture in its totality.

Some sincere Christians, failing to understand the true character of Freemasonry, are members of the Order. That in no way alters the fact that membership in the Masonic Order is inconsistent with Christianity.

THE ORANGE ORDER

The Orange Order recognises the need for a faithful witness against the errors of Roman Catholicism and that all true Protestants should be united in their faith. Nonetheless, the first three reasons mentioned above (Unscriptural secrecy, unlawful oaths, unsocial benevolence) can be cited against membership in the Orange Order. In addition, we believe that the Orange Order is in error because:-

(a) it usurps the place of the Church

God has ordained the Church as His instrument in the world for the defence of the Faith and the propagation of the Gospel. Scripture teaches that "the Church of the Living God" is the "pillar and foundation of the truth." The existence of a secret society which claims to have this authority of Christ, the Church's King and Head;

(b) of its political emphasis

The Orange Order lays great stress on the political aspect of the Revolution Settlement of 1688. By doing so it fails to acknowledge the Kingship of Christ over the nation. It was precisely because the Revolution Settlement did not acknowledge either Christ's Kingship or the doctrines of the Second Reformation that Covenanters stood aside from it;

(c) of its unqualified allegiance to the British Constitution

In becoming a member of the Order a person commits himself to support and maintain the British Constitution and the Laws of the Nation. Such allegiance denies the Crown rights of King Jesus whose kingly rule is not acknowledged by this Constitution and whose authority is flouted by unbiblical laws.

For these reasons it is inconsistent for Christians to identify with this Order.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church believes that the Christian should not become a member of an oath-bound secret society. It strongly affirms that Christians are called to show benevolence to all men (Gal.6:10), to enjoy true fellowship (1John 1:3), and to bear a faithful witness in the world (Acts 1:8). This must be done in a way which God has directed and which will honour His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Church and False Ideologies

Scripture teaches that the Church is "the pillar and ground of the truth." It is her task to uphold divinely revealed truth among men. Thus the Church is not to lurk amid the shadows, holding the truth merely for her own comfort. Rather, she must defend and propagate the truth. The Christian Church proclaims a message which is radically different from all other ideologies and all other religions. The basic antithesis is between Christianity and all false religions, including humanism which is a deification of man. The most aggressive of modern non-Christian ideologies are Humanism, Communism and the religion of Islam. Christianity must relate its witness to these powerful movements.

HUMANISM

Humanistic philosophy is atheistic to the core. Its basic presuppositions are human autonomy, the idea that man is sovereign and can determine his own future; the sufficiency of reason, the belief that, given enough time, man can correctly interpret his history and environment, and come to a true understanding of reality by the use of his own unaided reason; and the ultimacy of chance, the rejection of divine Providence. In modern times humanism has usually been wedded to an evolutionary philosophy which sees man as an intelligent animal. Ironically, in seeking to exalt man, humanism has in fact

shorn him of his true dignity and glory as God's image-bearer.

In terms of ethics, humanism has no standard to which it can appeal, consequently it has produced a floating morality, every man doing that which is right in his own eyes. The result has been a grave moral collapse in every area of human life - the family, the school, the market place and parliament. Humanism is the consistent application of revolutionary ideas introduced by Satan in the garden of Eden, when man was invited to pit his reason against divine revelation, behave as if he were master of his destiny and so become "as gods."

Much of modern Western society is permeated by humanistic ideas which are often subtly expressed in books, plays, television and radio programmes, popular family magazines and the like. So subtle and persistent is this indoctrination, that Christians can, if not on their guard, unwittingly imbibe certain humanistic ideas. They must, therefore, deliberately seek to be moulded by the Word and Spirit of God and not by the spirit of this age.

COMMUNISM

Communism is a political and economic system based on humanistic ideas. It is thoroughly atheistic. Marx declared, "I hate all gods." Its brand of materialism is known as 'economic determinism,' which asserts that man can think and act only according to his economic environment. He is seen to be depraved because of an evil economic environment, said to have been created by

capitalism. On this view he can be regenerated only by cleansing the entire social order.

Communism, therefore, proposes to end the age-old struggle between the exploiting and the exploited, the ruling and the oppressed, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and so usher in a golden age of actual Communism in which the economic law, in the words of Marx, would be, "From each according to his ability, and to each according to his need." Then all evil, regarded as the fruit of class struggle, would, it is said, disappear; art and culture would flourish and universal happiness would reign. To this vision of an earthly paradise millions of men have dedicated their lives.

While Communism, viewed as an economic system, has patently failed, its basic philosophy frequently appeals to the man in the street and to the intellectual. The poor are attracted by the promises of Communism and the intellectuals are often fascinated by the thought of transforming the human race by scientific methods. Communism has proved to be the root-stock of Liberation Theology which thrives in areas where the poor are ruthlessly exploited and where there is no social justice. While Liberation Theology is right in condemning such injustice and in championing the cause of the oppressed, its fatal weakness is seen in its failure to recognize the real nature of both sin and redemption.

Communism, in whatever guise it manifests itself, has no hope or gospel worthy of the name. In its long, arduous march to a promised land mankind is simply expendable

material, with no hope beyond the grave. If the golden age of Communism could be achieved, it would be enjoyed by the people of that era only for their life-time.

That is the best that Communism can offer the world, whereas the Christian doctrine of Redemption teaches that through the love of God, all in Christ benefit, no matter when they lived or died, and that not merely for a few decades of time.

In condemning Communism, the Church must be equally and vigorously opposed to a Christless capitalism which is just as humanistic at heart as the Communism it professes to abhor, and which by its denial of social justice to the masses in the past, prepared the ground for the emergence of Communism.

ISLAM

Islam is the youngest of the world religions. The name ISLAM means 'submission'. Moslems or Muslims are 'those who have submitted,' that is , those who accept Islam. Islam is a religion of militant monotheism (belief in one god) which borrowed from Jewish and Christian sources and which in large areas of Africa rapidly replaced polytheistic paganism. Islam, then, is to be seen as a reaction to a crude polytheism with its worship of moon and stars and many gods and goddesses. As a boy of twelve years, Mohammed came in contact with Jewish and Christian beliefs. This led him to question many of the ancient Arabian beliefs and customs. Later in life he claimed to have seen visions of the angel

Gabriel and thus came to the conviction that he had been called to be a prophet of Allah, the Arabic word for 'God'.

The religion of Islam spread partly by conquest and partly by persuasion, and in less than a century it had reached India and beyond. In recent decades it has spread rapidly in Europe and parts of China. As a religious system of monotheism, Islam rejects the biblical doctrine of the Trinity. It places Moses and Jesus in a class with Mohammed who is seen as the last and greatest of the prophets. While giving the Jewish and Christian Scriptures some standing, Islam claims for the Koran a position of absolute and unique authority. It is said to be an exact copy of an original in heaven.

In the religion of Islam salvation is obtained by human works. This tends to promote a spirit of pride and self-righteousness, so that there is stubborn resistance to the Christian Gospel of redemption from sin. The religion of the broken heart is repugnant to Islam.

While Islam demands liberty of expression in lands where it is in a minority, it is totally intolerant of any other religion in lands where it is in the majority. This constitutes its very real threat to lands that have known the Gospel and which still enjoy civil and religious liberty.

Faced with the challenge of false ideologies and religions, it is imperative that the Church stresses the uniqueness of Christianity, the only religion that teaches

salvation by grace alone and the only religion that proclaims a Saviour. Apart from the risen, reigning Christ, Christianity could not exist: it does not consist in a mere set of ideals and principles, but in a relationship to Christ as Redeemer and King. It is equally important to counter all false systems with a positive presentation of the Gospel, always remembering that the Spirit of God alone can deliver from the bondage of error and enable men and women to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

Roman Catholicism

Much of Protestantism today, contrary to the teaching and practice of the Reformers, openly accepts Roman Catholicism as Christian. As this clearly points to a change in attitude on the part of many, its validity is an issue for inquiry. The marks by which the true Christian Church is known are as follows:-

- (a) the true preaching of the Word (John 8:31,32,47; 14:23; 2 John 9);
- (b) the proper administration of the sacraments (Matt.28:19; Acts 2:42; 1Cor.11:23-30);
- (c) the faithful exercise of discipline (Matt.18:18; 1Cor.5:1-5,13; 14:33,40; Rev.2:14,15,20).

Roman Catholicism must be examined to see if it is truly Christian, and has a right to be included as a part of the Church of Christ.

THE PREACHING OF THE WORD

Traditionally, Roman Catholics have accepted the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Furthermore, the reading and preaching of the Word have always been integral parts of its liturgy. The introduction, in recent days, of the use of the vernacular in its worship, and openness to translations formerly banned and a relaxation in the prohibition on the 'laity' reading the

Scriptures in private are seen as steps in a positive direction.

Roman Catholicism, however, errs in using unreliable translations and interpretations; by adding to the Scriptures certain uncanonical books and by subtracting from them (e.g. the second Commandment). Furthermore, in recent decades the authority of Scripture within Roman Catholicism has been seriously undermined by the fact that the 'Higher Criticism', which for so long has characterised much of modern Protestantism, is now increasingly prevalent in Rome.

Its greatest deviation is in the area of authority. It rejects the principle 'sola scriptura' (Scripture alone) as the sole and final authority. Rather, it sees tradition, the decisions of councils, and ex cathedra pronouncements of the Pope, as having the same authority, and as equally binding, as Scripture. This was emphatically re-affirmed at the councils of Vatican I (1870) and Vatican II (1962-1965) with such statements as, "... both Scripture and Tradition should be accepted with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.... sacred Tradition, Holy Scripture, and the Church's magisterium (official teaching office) are by God's most wise decree so closely connected and associated together that one does not subsist without the other two, and that all of them, and each in its own manner, under the impulse of the one Spirit of God, contribute efficaciously to the salvation of the soul... it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra, ... is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine

Redeemer willed that his church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith and morals and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable...".

It is insufficient, however, to say that, on the matter of authority, Roman Catholicism simply places, on a par with Scripture, other sources of revelation. This is only partially true. Above both the Bible and tradition, Roman Catholicism asserts the authority of the Church. It was the Church, it teaches, which gave the Bible and likewise it is the Church which determines which traditions are truly apostolic. The logical outcome of this is, as one Roman Catholic theologian rightly observed, that "tradition gets the better of Scripture, and the teaching office in turn gets the better of tradition, because it decides what the tradition is and hence also what Scripture is."

From this scheme it follows that the preaching of the Word within Roman Catholicism cannot be regarded as 'true.' Instead of proclaiming the Word of God, and it alone, its message contains both the words of God and man, God's Word usually being changed, misrepresented, or in some cases ignored to suit man's worldly wisdom. This is particularly true in relation to the central theme of the gospel - justification by faith alone. The Scriptures make it abundantly plain that justification is an act of God's free grace in which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as "righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone." "Knowing that a man is not

justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ ... because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." "But if it is by grace, it is no more works: otherwise grace is no more grace." In justification, then, a person is pronounced righteous. This is the opposite of condemnation. As an act of free grace, justification is complete and cannot be lost or increased.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is obscure and complicated. There is a tendency to confuse justification and sanctification. Roman Catholicism teaches that the benefit of Christ's redemptive work is bestowed in baptism. It holds to the doctrine of human merit, making penance a sacrament. It teaches that the justified state may be lost, and that it can be increased. It rejects outright the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Consequently, the Canons of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) pronounced an anathema against those who maintain that justification is by faith alone, that it cannot be lost or increased and who deny that the good works of the justified are meritorious. For example, Canon 12 reads "If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing less than confidence in the Divine mercy pardoning sins for Christ's sake; or that it is that confidence alone by which we are justified, let him be accursed." This is the antithesis of the gospel of Christ. Subsequent Roman Catholic councils (e.g. Vatican I and II) did not retract the position established at Trent. Hence, the teaching of

that Council on justification remains the official teaching of Roman Catholicism.

Furthermore, the lack of a final and absolute authoritative base for its teaching has resulted in Roman Catholicism introducing into its worship beliefs and practices that are contradictory to the clear teaching of Scripture, e.g., the doctrine of Mariolatry, the mediation and worship of 'saints' and the use of images.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

In Roman Catholicism the two Biblical sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are acknowledged. In the former, the element of water is employed and infants as well as adults are recognised as proper subjects for baptism. In the latter, the elements of bread and wine are used, and more recently the people have been permitted to receive the wine as well as the bread.

Here the resemblance of the rites observed in Roman Catholicism to the Biblical sacraments ends, both Sacraments being seriously corrupted. Roman Catholicism holds that, when infants are baptised, they are 'born again' (baptismal regeneration). The Mass is radically different from the Biblical sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Rome claims that in the Mass the bread and wine are miraculously changed into the body and blood of the Lord. "The Mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, because in both we have the same victim and the same offerer; for the same Christ, who once offered Himself a bleeding victim to His Heavenly

Father on the cross, continues to offer Himself in an unbloody manner, by the hands of His priest on our altars." Further, these 'sacraments' are surrounded by much superstition.

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only sacraments sanctioned by Scripture. Roman Catholicism, however, has added five additional 'sacraments' of its own: confirmation, penance, extreme unction (anointing of the dying), marriage and holy orders (ordination). A Biblical sacrament, however, must satisfy four qualifications:-

- (a) be commanded by Christ;
- (b) be a sign and symbol of God's grace in Christ;
- (c) be perpetual, i.e., to be observed in the Church until Christ returns;
- (d) be a seal intended to strengthen the faith of those who receive it.

The five additional 'sacraments' of Rome, rejected by the Reformers, obviously do not qualify as true sacraments of Christ's Church.

THE EXERCISE OF DISCIPLINE

When we come to consider Roman Catholic discipline we are confronted by a strange combination of exclusiveness and inclusiveness, both of which we find

to be at variance with the Biblical doctrine of the Church.

The official position of Roman Catholicism has been that it is the one, true Church. Traditionally, it has seen those beyond its bounds as outside the kingdom of God, a view which naturally gave rise to intolerance and persecution. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there has been a subtle restatement of Roman Catholic exclusivism to bring it into line with modern, ecumenical theology. Rome's new definition of the Church and salvation as stated by Vatican II, has been illustrated by a series of concentric circles. At the centre of the circles is Christ. The innermost circle is comprised of Roman Catholics and these are said to be 'incorporated' in Christ. The second circle contains those described as 'non-Catholic Christians', who are said to be 'linked' to Christ. The third circle includes the non-Christian religions, such as Jews, Hindus and Moslems. They are said to be 'related' to Christ. The final circle is made up of atheists, described by Roman Catholic theologians as 'anonymous Christians'. Thus Rome stills holds to her ancient dictum, 'No salvation outside the Church (of Rome)'. However, as we have seen the meaning of the word 'church' has been stretched.

In practice, Roman Catholicism tends to see itself as a vast, all-embracing religious organization, rather than a community of saints. Biblical standards are not upheld and frequently gross sins among its adherents go unchecked. The emphasis on penance rather than

repentance has produced distressing laxity in the moral and ethical spheres.

CONCLUSION

As the Reformers rightly maintained, there are individual Roman Catholics who are true believers. Most Roman Catholics, however, are in gross spiritual darkness and are to be regarded as a legitimate missionary target. In view of the foregoing, we have no alternative but to conclude that the Roman Catholic 'Church' is not a Christian Church.