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Church Authority and Non-Subscription Controversies in Early 18th Century
Presbyterianism

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Abstract

The practice of confessional subscription, or giving assent to a confession of faith through signing a formula of approbation, was the subject of debate among Presbyterian Churches in the early eighteenth century. While other studies have examined the local controversies, this thesis offers a comprehensive examination of the question of subscription and the connections between the debates among English Dissenters, in the Church of Scotland, the General Synod of Ulster, the Synod of Philadelphia and the Presbytery of Charleston. It identifies the common background and influences, especially in questions of ecclesiastical authority in the Church of England that preceded and greatly influenced the subscription controversy, which itself was essentially a debate over Church power. The discussions within the different Church bodies are reviewed with the connections between the bodies being highlighted. The debates began with the attempt to introduce subscription among English Dissenters leading to the Salters' Hall Debate of 1719. Although there was not an open challenge to the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Church of Scotland, the tradition of subscribing inherited from emigrants and the involvement of ministers in correspondence with other Churches influenced the developments elsewhere. Next the development of Irish Presbyterianism from both English and Scottish traditions is shown followed by a discussion of the actual controversy in the General Synod of Ulster. In a chapter on the Synod of Philadelphia an interpretation of the American Adopting Act (1729) within the context of the international debate is offered. The closing chapter covers the much overlooked Presbytery of Charleston with insights from sources that have not previously been studied for that Church's history.

Contents

Abstract	2
Contents	3
Acknowledgements	5
Abbreviations	7
Introduction	8
Chapter 1: English Controversies: Exeter and Salters' Hall	18
The Background of English Presbyterianism	18
The 'Happy Union'	23
Developments on the Continent	27
Developments in England	31
Bishop Hoadly and the Bangorian Controversy	33
The Exeter Assembly	36
'The Flame Flew from Exeter to London'	52
Conclusion	65
Chapter 2: Confessional Subscription in the Church of Scotland	66
The Status of the Westminster Confession	66
Early Protests	71
The 'Auchterarder Creed'	78
Dunlop's Preface	81
Reactions to the External Controversies	90
Glasgow University	98
Further signs of unrest	101
Chapter 3: Background to the Irish Subscription Controversy: to 1720	104
The Presbytery of Dublin	104
Thomas Emlyn	107
The General Synod of Ulster	110
John Abernethy	114
Abernethy's Theology	117
The Members of the Belfast Society	119
Bid for Toleration	123
Personal Persuasion	125
'New Light'	129
Conclusion	130
Chapter 4: Ireland: From the Pacificum to the Expulsion of the Presbytery of Antrim (1720-1726)	131
The 1720 Synod and the Pacific Act	132
Haliday's Installation at Belfast	139
The 1721 Synod	141
The Non-Subscriber's Polity	148
A New Meeting House in Belfast	152
Publications	154
Nevin's Trial	162
Colville's Ordination	164
Expulsion	166

Chapter 5: The Synod of Philadelphia and the Adopting Act (1729)	169
Introduction	169
Background of the Initial Presbytery	170
The Question of the Synod's Authority	172
The Adopting Act	175
The Hemphill Case	182
Church Power and the 1741 Schism	187
Chapter 6: Subscription in the Presbytery of Charleston: 1722-1732	195
The Darien Colony	195
Archibald Stobo	198
Beginnings of Presbytery	200
Non-Subscription in Charleston	206
<i>A Preservation from Damnable Errors</i>	208
<i>The Divine Right of Private Judgement</i>	213
<i>Private Judgement Vindicated</i>	217
<i>The Divine Right of Private Judgment, Set in True Light</i>	219
Outcome: Congregational Divisions	223
Lay Pressure for Subscription	226
Conclusion	229
Bibliography	233

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The staff and librarians of many libraries and archives have provided assistance and I would like to acknowledge those of the Glasgow University's Library, Special Collections Department, Archives; New College Library, Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Library Special Collections; the National Library of Scotland; the National Archives of Scotland; the Irish Presbyterian Historical Society; Gamble Library, Union Theological College, Belfast; the Linen Hall Library; Houston Cole Library, Jacksonville State University; L.M. Greaves Memorial Library, Harding University Graduate School of Religion, Memphis; Florence-Lauderdale County Public Library; Belcher Library, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson; and Memphis Theological Seminary Library. Some have gone beyond what was required and it would be inexcusable to not acknowledge aid given by Stephen Gregory, Jane Williamson, Pat Spalding, Charlcie K. Pettway Vann, Paige Motes, Kyle Weir, Graham Whitaker, and David Weston.

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tience, financial support and encouragement of my family and the members and Session of the Allsboro Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Abbreviations

<i>DPRTA</i>	<i>Dictionary of Presbyterian & Reformed Tradition in America</i>
<i>DSCH&T</i>	<i>Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology</i>
EUL	Edinburgh University Library Special Collections
GUL	Glasgow University Special Collections
<i>FAPC</i>	<i>Fasti of the American Presbyterian Church treating of ministers of Irish origin</i>
<i>FES</i>	<i>Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae</i>
<i>FIPC</i>	<i>Fasti of the Irish Presbyterian Church</i>
<i>JPHS</i>	<i>Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society</i>
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>RSCHS</i>	<i>Records of the Scottish Church History Society</i>
WCF	The Westminster Confession of Faith

Notes:

Capitalization has been modernized in quotations, however the original spelling has been retained. All references to dates take 1 January as the beginning of a new year.

Introduction

As candidates for the ministry are licensed to preach, or ordained to the ministry in most Presbyterian denominations, they are asked to subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith as part of their vows of office. The practice of confessional subscription, common among Reformed Churches, had been challenged before but became especially divisive in the early eighteenth century.¹ The controversy in the Synod of Philadelphia was particularly important to the development of the denomination as it took place while it was developing its constitution. Indeed, as recent as 2006, the General Assembly of the largest American Presbyterian Denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), has referenced the initial requirement for confessional subscription, the Adopting Act of 1729, as a basis for allowing ordaining bodies to judge ‘Whether a candidate ... has departed from scriptural and constitutional standards [and] whether any departures constitutes a failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and polity’.² Opposing interpretations of the Adopting Act have been offered almost since it was passed. While most studies of the Colonial Church and the Adopting Act have noted the subscription controversies taking place in England and Ireland, they have not generally examined the primary sources in those debates.³ Moreover, the events in the American Church have been interpreted without adequate reference to the strong connections and continued interaction between Presbyterians in Scotland, Ireland and England. This is not a unique problem. While there are several studies of the subscription controversies, and most note the concurrent debates, there has been no comprehensive study of the subscription controversies in relation to each other. Thankfully, David Steers’ recent thesis goes a long way toward correcting this in regard to the connection among Presbyterians in United Kingdom.⁴

1. Peter Lillback, ‘Confessional Subscription among the Sixteenth Century Reformers’, in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. by David W. Hall, second edn., (Oak Ridge, TN, 2001), pp. 21-32; and W. Robert Godfrey, ‘Subscription in the Dutch Reformed Tradition’, in *ibid.*, pp. 67-76.

2. Minutes, 217th General Assembly, Part I, (Louisville, 2006), pp. 133, 534; *A Season of Discernment, The Final Report of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church* (2006), pp. 25, 36, 38-9.

3. Notable exceptions are Susan O’Brien, ‘A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755’, *The American Historical Review*, 91, no. 4, (1986), 811-32; Marilyn Westerlind, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (Oxford, 1988), and earlier; Charles A. Briggs, *American Presbyterianism* (New York, 1885).

4. A. David G. Steer’s, “‘New Light’ Thinking and Non-Subscription amongst Protestant Dissenters in

In the 1980s, some American scholars began reevaluating the Great Awakening in the context of what Susan O'Brien has called the 'Transatlantic Communion of Saints'.⁵ Marilyn Westerkamp's *Triumph of the Laity* and Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Holy Fairs* (Princeton, 1989) have shown the fruitfulness of studying the Colonial Church as part of the broader connection of Churches rather than as a detached body that would inevitably become a separate denomination in an independent state. These works have been the inspiration for me to study the earliest debate in American Presbyterianism as part of an international conversation rather than an example of a unique 'American Tradition'.⁶

The primary goal of this thesis is to examine the subscription debates in relation to each other, an area suggested by Roger Thomas in 'The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: the Salters' Hall Debate'. Thomas recognized that, 'The study of the Salters' Hall controversy needs to be broadened not only by reference to parallel controversies elsewhere but also by reference to its origins'.⁷ It seeks to understand to what extent members of different denominations were aware of and connected with the debates among fellow Presbyterians. Specifically it examines communications and participation across national boundaries as well as similarities in arguments presented in publications and decisions of Church courts. Likewise, it questions whether the way these denominations influenced each other in addition to how different contexts and situations affected the application of theories of ecclesiology, polity and Church authority.

A secondary goal is to consider the American Adopting Act within the context of the broader connection among Presbyterians and the preceding discussions. While this is not the sole aspect to inform an interpretation of the intent of the Synod, it is certainly a crucial one and is due for a reappraisal.

In pursuing these goals I have relied primarily on three types of sources. First, the minutes of the respective Church courts, when available, have been consulted. Minutes for

Ireland and England in the Early 18th Century and their Relationship with Glasgow University and Scotland' (unpublished PhD thesis, Glasgow University, 2006).

5. O'Brien, *ibid.*

6. Leonard Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition, a Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia, 1949)

7. 'The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: the Salters' Hall Debate', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 4, no. 2 (1953): 162-186, p. 182.

the Exeter Assembly are not available for the period.⁸ Minutes of the Presbyteries of Paisley and Auchterarder, the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr and General Assembly papers were consulted at the National Archives of Scotland. For the records of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland I relied on the *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, an annual contemporary publication summarizing the work of the Assembly. The *Records of the General Synod of Ulster* were used for the Irish sections; minutes for the Presbytery of Dublin, if any were kept during this period, have not survived.⁹ Minutes for the Presbytery, and subsequently the Synod of Philadelphia are transcribed in *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America. 1706-1788*.¹⁰ No records from the period are extant for the Presbytery of Charleston or the Circular Church which were destroyed by hurricane in 1716.¹¹ A later volume containing records for the Circular Church is lodged at South Carolina Historical Society. Unfortunately it was being restored and unavailable for consultation during my research and I have had to rely on transcripts in secondary literature and communications with the Church's historian.

The second group of texts used are the tracts and books published during the debates. The Eighteenth Century Collections Online was invaluable in this, providing the bulk of texts needed and allowing for some basic search capabilities within the texts which uncovered some publications not cited elsewhere and otherwise would not have been noticed. Additionally the National Library of Scotland has a large collection of these pamphlets, as does the Gamble Library at Union Theological College, Belfast, some of which appear to be unavailable elsewhere. Microfilmed copies of some American sources are available in the Early American Imprints collection. These works were examined first for the structure of the arguments presented, especially in connection with other publications, such as similarity in lines of reasoning, appeals to common authorities, similar Scriptural exegesis or in rebutting arguments presented in other publications. Additionally, they were

8. Allan Brockett, ed., *The Exeter Assembly: The Minutes of the Assemblies of the United Brethren of Devon and Cornwall, 1691-1717, as Transcribed by the Reverend Isaac Gilling*, Devon & Cornwall Record Society, New Series, vol. 6, (Torquay, 1963), p. xv.

9. *Records of the General Synod of Ulster from 1691 to 1820*, 3 vols., (Belfast, 1890-1898)

10. *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America. 1706-1788*, ed. by Guy S. Klett, (Philadelphia, 1976)

11. Joanne Calhoun, *The Circular Church: Three Centuries of Charleston History*, (Charleston, 2008), p. 17.

reviewed for citations, references, and allusions to other works in the debates over subscription and Church authority.

The final primary body used is the extensive collection of correspondence of Robert Wodrow at the National Library of Scotland. The Wodrow Collection is invaluable in showing the connection of the different Church bodies. Wodrow was minister at Eastwood, in the Presbytery of Paisley, from his ordination in 1703 until his death.¹² In 1697 he graduated from Glasgow where his father, James, had been Professor of Divinity, and where Robert served as librarian during his studies. He is best remembered for his *A History of the Suffering of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution*.¹³ As subscription was being discussed, Wodrow maintained correspondence with ministers in England, Ireland, and America, exchanging information about the debates and even acting as an advisor and advocate for the Irish Subscribers. Moreover, he was active in Church politics, traveling to Edinburgh during each year's meeting of the General Assembly from which he wrote letters to his wife giving details about discussions and meetings related to Assembly business. The Wodrow collection also includes several letters from ministers in America to John Stirling (c.1654-1727), Principal of Glasgow from 1701 until his death. These letters, which were mostly requests for assistance, describe details about the situation of the congregations in both the Synod of Philadelphia and the Presbytery of Charleston. Besides the extensive corpus of letters, Wodrow kept a record of events, conversations, and news related to the Church which have been transcribed and published. The four volume *Analecta* illuminates Wodrow's and his contemporaries understanding of the issues involved in the controversies.

As mentioned previously, David Steer's, "New Light" Thinking and Non-Subscription' studies the development of Non-Subscription among English and Irish Dissenters especially in connection with Glasgow University. It provides an integrated examination that identifies the core issue as 'not over theological unorthodoxy, at least not over the question of the Trinity, but was concerned with authority, reason and private judge-

12. *DNB*, 21, pp. 751-2, *FES*, 3, p. 135.

13. (Edinburgh, 1721-2); A. M. Starkey, 'Robert Wodrow and the History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland', *Church History*, 43, no. 4, (1974), 488-498

ment'.¹⁴ Steer's scope however is limited to the United Kingdom and focuses more on the role of Scottish Universities than the course of the debates within the different judicatories. Other examinations of Non-Subscription have focused much more on the individual bodies.

Salter's Hall has been treated in general surveys of English Dissenting history.¹⁵ Generally it has been used as either evidence of English Presbyterianism's 'insidious tendency to Arianism', or as 'the most critical event which has ever occurred in the history of Nonconformity' since it represented a rare stand on behalf of freedom of conscience and a defence of the sufficiency of Scripture.¹⁶ Aside from these surveys, two works provide a more focussed examination of events in England. Allan Brockett's *Nonconformity in Exeter 1650-1875* offers an examination of the events among the ministers of Devon and Cornwall.¹⁷ He shows that the ministers in Exeter were not subject to a heresy hunt, but became the subject of suspicion only after they failed to satisfy the laity's request to defend the orthodox position, partly in response to pressure from the established Church. Roger Thomas, who also has a chapter on the Salter's Hall debate in *The English Presbyterians From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* wrote, 'The Non-Subscription Controversy amongst Dissenters in 1719: the Salters' Hall Debate', the best published account of events, giving details of the pamphlets involved, recognizing the connection with the Bangorian controversy, and showing influence of concurrent events in Parliament.

A. Taylor Innes briefly wrote about 'Controversies as to the Creed and Subscription in the Church of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century' in an appendix to the first edition of his *The Law of Creeds in Scotland*, but there has been little treatment of the subject in Scotland.¹⁸ More recently the question of the absence of a subscription debate in the

14. Steers, p. 275.

15. For example: Walter Wilson *The History and Antiquities of Dissenting Churches and Meeting Houses, in London, Westminster, and Southwark; Including the Lives of Their Ministers, from the Rise of Nonconformity to the Present Time. With an appendix on the origin, progress, and present state of Christianity in Britain*, (London, 1808); David Bogue and James Bennett, *History of Dissenters, from the Revolution in 1688, to the year 1808*, 4 vols, (London, 1810); A.H. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England: their rise, decline and revival* (London, 1889); J. Hay Colligan, *Eighteenth Century Nonconformity*, (London, 1915); C. Gordon Bolam, et. al., *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (Boston, 1968); Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978)

16. Drysdale, p. 550; Colligan, pp. 23, 33

17. (Exeter, 1962)

18. *The Law of Creeds in Scotland: a Treatise on the Relations of Churches in Scotland Established and Not Established to the Civil Law* (Edinburgh, 1867)

Church of Scotland has been the subject of two articles by Colin Kidd.¹⁹ In these he seeks to answer why, given the debates surrounding the Church of Scotland and the influence of the Moderate Party in the Church during the eighteenth century, the question was not openly debated there. ‘Scotland’s invisible Enlightenment’ surveys material and events throughout the century concluding that the Moderates, who were ‘staunch upholders of order and ecclesiastical polity’ recognized the foundational role of the Confession in maintaining peace especially after the Marrow Controversy and secession of 1733.²⁰ He also points to a confidence in history as developing in progressive stages, an aspect that is developed more fully in ‘Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History’.

The Irish controversy is also the subject of general histories, the fullest treatment of which can be found in the third volume of Killen and Reid’s *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*.²¹ Reid (1798-1851), who participated in a later debate over subscription, saw the Non-Subscribers as heterodox, who opened a door for the ‘Arianism and Socinianism’ of his own day.²² A more balanced and thorough study is Robert Allen’s thesis ‘Principles of Non-Subscription to Creeds and Confessions of Faith as Exemplified in the Irish Presbyterian Church’.²³ Allen however minimized the importance of the English Dissenters, seeing the University of Glasgow as the main liberalizing influence on Irish Presbyterians. The strong connection with parallel movements and the English Latitudinarianism are better covered in Peter Brooke’s *Ulster Presbyterianism* and M.A. Stewart’s ‘Rational Dissent in Early Eighteenth-Century Ireland’.²⁴ Stewart counters the previous understandings of the role of Glasgow University showing that ‘the movement of ideas is as much a movement from Ireland to Scotland, and its roots lie in the civil disabilities of

19. ‘Scotland’s Invisible Enlightenment: Subscription and Heterodoxy in the Eighteenth-Century Kirk’, *RSCHS*, 30, (2000): 28-59; and ‘Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55, no. 3 (2004): 502-19

20. Kidd, ‘Scotland’s Invisible Enlightenment’, pp. 49-51.

21. Reid, James Seaton, and W. D. Killen, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland: Comprising the Civil History of the Province of Ulster, From the Accession of James the First: with a Preliminary Sketch of the Progress of the Reformed Religion in Ireland During the Sixteenth Century, and an Appendix Consisting of Original Papers*, 3 vols., (Belfast, 1867)

22. Reid, pp. 120-22;

23. Robert Allen, ‘Principles of Non-Subscription to Creeds and Confessions of Faith as Exemplified in the Irish Presbyterian Church’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen’s University Belfast, 1944).

24. Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism: The Historical Perspective 1610-1970* (New York, 1987); M.A. Stewart, ‘Rational Dissent in Early Eighteenth-Century Ireland’, in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 1996)

the Irish Dissenters'.²⁵ A. W. Godfrey Brown's, 'A Theological Interpretation of the First Subscription Controversy (1719-1728)' correctly concluded that the question of the debate was primarily one of polity, noting that 'Their disagreement about the power of Church courts to require subscription was in itself a challenge to the Presbyterian view of Church polity'.²⁶ There are also a few works connecting Non-Subscription with later revolutionary thought such as A.T.Q. Stewart's *A Deeper Silence* and Ian McBride's *Scripture Politics* which show the close connections with Whig political views and the challenge to ecclesiastical authority.²⁷

Studies of the early American Presbyterian Church have been strongly influenced by nineteenth century histories that were themselves written in the context of a later Schism between the 'Old School' and 'New School'.²⁸ This later division of the 1830s and '40s was in part due to an alliance between the Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches which the 'Old School' saw as theologically liberalizing and undermining proper Presbyterian polity.²⁹ Briggs, seeking to vindicate 'New School' Presbyterianism unsurprisingly presented the first Presbytery as a union of moderate English and Irish Presbyterians and New England Congregationalists who were later outnumbered by immigrants from Scotland and Northern Ireland who imposed their own form of Presbyterianism.³⁰ The Old School, that believed that the liberal theology of the Congregationalists was diluting true Presbyterianism argued that the Presbytery of Philadelphia was a Scots style presbytery from the beginning and was unanimous in their views of strict subscription.³¹

25. Stewart, 'Rational Dissent', p. 46.

26. A.W. Godfrey Brown, 'A Theological Interpretation of the First Subscription Controversy (1719-1728)', in *Challenge and Conflict: Essays in Irish Presbyterian History and Doctrine*, ed. by J.L.M. Haire, (Antrim, 1981)

27. A.T.Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Roots of the United Irish Movement* (London, 1993); Ian R. McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998)

28. Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, (Philadelphia, 1851); Richard Webster, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America From Its Origin Until the Year 1760* (Philadelphia, 1857); William Hill, *A History of the Rise, Progress, Genius, and Character of American Presbyterianism* (Washington City, 1839); E. H. Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1834); Charles Augustus Briggs, *American Presbyterianism: Its Origin and Early History* (New York, 1885).

29. D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 Years of American Presbyterianism* (Phillipsburg, 2007), pp. 91-146; J. R. Fitzmier, 'Old School Presbyterians', in *DPRTA*, pp. 180-2; S.R. Pointer, 'New School Presbyterians and Theology', in *DPRTA*, pp. 174-5.

30. Briggs, p. 238.

31. Hodge, *Constitutional History*, pp. 88, 184-88.

Briggs' understanding was developed notably by Trinterud in his *The Forming of an American Tradition*, the most influential study since the mid-twentieth century.³² Trinterud proposed that the colonial Church was a merger of three traditions: Scots and Scots-Irish Presbyterianism, American Congregationalist Puritans, and those of Irish background who either immigrated at a young age or were born to immigrants who sided with the Congregationalists in respect to subscription and revivalism. As Elizabeth Nybakken has noted 'to a large extent, [historians of American Presbyterianism] have based their work on the categories, descriptions, and analyses of Leonard J. Trinterud's classic'.³³ These categories have been questioned by Mary Westerkamp in light of research on the leader of the 'New Side' party, Jonathan Dickinson, by Leigh Eric Schmidt and Bryan Le Beau.³⁴ Alternatives have been proposed, seeing the controversies rooted in conflict between the laity and clergy, but the legacy of *Forming of an American Tradition* remains. One of the more recent discussions, 'The Adopting Act Compromise', follows the same ethnic conflict theory.³⁵ Similarly, Thomas Cornman's *Caterpillars and Newfangled Religion* attempts to refine Trinterud's categories by noting the differences between Scottish and Irish Presbyterians, asserting that 'the failure to acknowledge the ongoing ethnic struggles represents a significant omission'.³⁶ As this thesis will show, the difficulty with studies that continue to seek a basis for the differences over polity in the diverse traditions in the American Church is that the 'Mother Churches' were not void of heterogeneous thought. That is precisely why controversies over subscription preceded the American debates.

More akin to Hodge's understanding is *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*.³⁷ This work reprints articles and essays by scholars from conservative American de-

32. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, p. 34; Cornman, pp. 2-7.

33. Elizabeth Nybakken, 'New Light on the Old Side', *Journal of American History*, 68 (1982) 813-32, p. 815.

34. Marilyn Westerkamp, 'Division, Dissension, and Compromise: The Presbyterian Church during the Great Awakening', *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 78, (2000) 3-18; Leigh Eric Schmidt, 'Jonathan Dickinson and the Making of the Moderate Awakening', *American Presbyterians: Journal of Presbyterian History*, 63 (1985), 341-53; Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism* (Lexington, 1997).

35. S. Donald Fortson III, 'The Adopting Act Compromise', in *Colonial Presbyterianism: Old Faith in a New Land*, ed. by S. Donald Fortson III, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, (Eugene, OR, 2007).

36. Thomas H.L. Cornman, *Caterpillars and Newfangled Religion: The Struggle for the Soul of Colonial American Presbyterianism*, (Lanham, MD, 2003). To their credit, Nybakken and Cornman recognize the distinctions between Scottish and Irish Presbyterianism, however Cornman still does not show an awareness of the distinct Presbyterian bodies in Ireland at the time, the General Synod of Ulster and the Presbyteries of Dublin and Munster.

37. ed. by David W. Hall, (Lanham, MD, 1995)

nominations in the context of modern discussions and contains an excellent bibliography on the issue of subscription.

The Presbytery of Charleston has been all but ignored by historians of American Presbyterianism. George Howe's 1870 *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* remains the best source. Erskine Clarke's *Our southern Zion*, though not dealing exclusively with the Presbytery updates Howe.³⁸ More recently the Presbytery and the subscription controversy are a substantial part of an article by Thomas Little in which he studies the Great Awakening in South Carolina.³⁹

This thesis will show that the subscription controversies were essentially a debate over Church authority and polity. Moreover, participants as far apart as Edinburgh and Pon Pon, South Carolina were well-informed about the publications and personnel elsewhere. Although they applied the issues to their own context, they were self-consciously in a transatlantic conversation. The first chapter of this thesis will show the background of Non-Subscription in a change in the understanding of the nature of faith. The Non-Subscribers argued against any attempt to impose, or coerce belief, which they understood, could only be the result of free, rational assent. This, along with discussions of the minimum belief needed to qualify as Christian, formed the background of the arguments against subscribing. The catalyst to all of these were events in England, first at Exeter and then at London.

Chapter Two will cover the tradition of subscription in the Church of Scotland, which was for many the 'Mother Church'. It will look at some of the subterranean discontent with subscription especially among university students. Moreover, an influential publication prefaced to a compilation of confessions that defended the practice is examined in detail. Further reactions to and interactions with the controversies elsewhere will also be explored.

38. Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: a History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa, 1996)

39. Thomas J. Little, 'The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Revivalism in South Carolina, 1700-1740', *Church History*, 75, 4, (2006), 768-808.

Debates in Ireland are the subject of Chapters Three and Four which will examine the background in Ireland and the actual debates respectively. In Ireland the traditions of English and Scottish Presbyterianism converged and so an overview of how these traditions were imported and developed is helpful. The treatment of the debates in Ireland will be surveyed, particularly with an emphasis on the connections with Churches elsewhere.

Chapter Five will examine the debates in the Synod of Philadelphia primarily with an interpretation of the Adopting Act and an examination of the connection of the arguments over Church power in the Schism of 1741 with the 'New Light' theology of the Irish Non-Subscribers.

Finally, the Presbytery of Charleston, which has often been overlooked in American Presbyterian histories, had a much more heated debate over the issue than the Synod of Philadelphia. This debate is the subject of the sixth chapter. The origins of the Presbytery, in part from a failed attempt of Scotland to establish a colony in Panama, is covered before reviewing the publications produced by the Charleston debate.

Chapter 1: English Controversies: Exeter and Salters' Hall

It was in England that a nexus of diverse, yet mutually supportive impulses coalesced into a systematic opposition to confessional subscription. The situation of the English Presbyterians as Dissenters, along with their theological outlook developed through late seventeenth-century controversies, formed a Presbyterian tradition that was barely recognizable as such to those who defined the term on the basis of the hierarchy of courts in the Church of Scotland and an adherence to strict Scholastic Calvinism. The differences were such that Edmund Calamy (1671-1732), a prominent English Presbyterian minister, recorded a Scottish mother's concern that her son had moved to England where they 'have with [them] no Kirk sessions, presbyteries, synods, and General Assemblies, and, therefore, have not the Gospel'.¹ These elements were supported with movements on the continent, the works of John Locke, and debates about ecclesiastical authority in the Church of England. This chapter will review these elements before examining the two major conflicts, at Exeter and Salters' Hall, from which the issue of subscription was spread to Scotland, Ireland, and America.

The Background of English Presbyterianism

Presbyterianism had developed along a separate course in England from Scotland that left lasting distinctions between the two bodies resulting in later conflicts as these two traditions met in Ireland and later in America. Although there were certainly vicissitudes with Episcopacy, the Church of Scotland, at least from 1578, had been reformed along Presbyterian lines.² English Presbyterians, on the other hand were a party within the Church of England. Moreover, there was no single Reformed polity, the belief in the parity of ministers, for example, did not necessarily lead to a conviction regarding other elements associated with Presbyterian polity, such as ruling elders, or a hierarchical system of

1. Edmund Calamy, *An Historical Account of My Own Life*, ed. by John Towill Rutt, 2 vols., second edn. (London, 1830), II, pp. 167-70.

2. J. Kirk, 'Presbyterianism', *DSCH&T*, pp. 673-675; c.f. W. Ian P. Hazlett, *The Reformation in Britain and Ireland: an Introduction*, (London, 2003), pp. 126-7.

courts.³ Scotland, for instance, in reforming a national Church did so looking not to the city of Geneva, but to the French Reformed Church which had developed a graded system of connected courts.⁴ English Presbyterians had diverse views on the particulars of polity, making a firm definition difficult. For some, ‘Presbyterian’ would refer to a polity similar to the Church of Scotland, for others, it was simply a synonym for ‘puritan’.⁵ One consistency for Presbyterians, distinct from Independents, was that, at least prior to the eighteenth century, they were convinced of the propriety of an established Church. That is until the ejection of 1662 they were members of the Church of England seeking to change the polity *as members*.⁶

Early English puritans who sought to establish a Presbyterian polity included Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603), Walter Travers (1548?-1635) and John Field (1545?-1587).⁷ There were early experiments of discipline ‘by equals upon equals as at Geneva’ such as one at Northampton in 1571 where members of a parish formed a voluntary association submitting themselves to discipline of a parochial presbytery, roughly corresponding to the Scottish Kirk Session and meeting outside of the regular times of worship for preaching and prayer.⁸ Neighbouring ministers joined for mutual edification and discipline as a classis.⁹ Among the regulations the Northampton meeting adopted was ‘that every minister, at his first allowance to be of this Exercise [the classis], shall by subscription declare his consent in Christ’s true religion, with his brethren, and submit to the discipline and order of the same’.¹⁰ While no formula is specified, nor is a creed or confession mentioned, it should be noted that the terms of membership specified are professing the common faith and submitting to the discipline of the classis. These early Presbyterians sought legal recognition within the established Church. They taught and published their

3. John Black, *Presbyterianism in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ([London], 1887), p. 13-4.

4. Andrew L. Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent* (Edinburgh, 1956), p. 12; Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confession: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. by John Hoffmeyer, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology, (Louisville, 1998), pp. 16-7.

5. *From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962*, ed. by Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick, (London, 1962), p. 50.

6. Griffiths, Olive M, *Religion and Learning: a Study in English Presbyterian Thought From the Bartholomew Ejections (1662) to the Foundation of the Unitarian Movement* (Cambridge, 1935), p. 6.

7. Patrick Collinson, ‘Cartwright, Thomas (1534/5–1603)’, *ODNB*, 4820; Alan Ford, ‘Travers, Walter (1548?–1635)’, *ODNB*, 27673; Patrick Collinson, ‘Field, John (1544/5?–1588)’, *ODNB*, 9248.

8. Drysdale, *History of the Presbyterians in England* (London, 1889), pp. 121-3.

9. *ibid.* A classis, or classical presbytery, is the court above the local congregation corresponding to the Scottish presbytery.

10. *ibid.*, p. 124.

views and circulated a *Disciplina Ecclesia*, in manuscript, among the several classes that had developed.¹¹

The *Disciplina Ecclesia* was primarily the work of Travers.¹² In 1644, as the Westminster Assembly was meeting, it was printed.¹³ The proposed polity had similarities with that of the Church of Scotland in that it recognized the office of lay elder which, along with ministers constituted a presbytery.¹⁴ As Bolam has noted, the Discipline distinguished between elements that were ‘the sacred discipline of the church described in the Word of God’ and ‘synodical discipline’ which was merely ‘gathered out of the synods and the use of the churches’.¹⁵ As a signal of the shape English Presbyterianism would take, the congregational presbytery was part of the former and therefore ‘necessary, essential and common to all ages of the church’. Courts above it, however, were included in the latter and ‘profitable’ but ‘not expressly confirmed by the authority of the Holy Scripture’.¹⁶ While it was intended to serve as a basis for the restructuring of the Church of England’s polity, the idea of regular courts beyond the parochial presbytery received little enthusiasm.¹⁷

The Book of Church Discipline did serve as a model for the polity approved by the Long Parliament in 1646.¹⁸ In order to ensure their alliance with Scotland the new structure provided for a system of graded courts, but this was never fully implemented.¹⁹ The Westminster Assembly consisted of members with diverse convictions concerning the hierarchical system and even when they agreed with Scottish co-religionists, there were noticeable distinctions between the two in their understanding of ecclesiology and of Church offices.²⁰ The Church of Scotland, for example, insisted on ordination to serve a particular congregation, in this they sided with the English Independents against the English Presbyterians who believed in ordination *sine titulo*, that is without a specific call, as many of

11. C. Gordon Bolam, et. al., *The English Presbyterians*, pp. 30-1.

12. Alan Ford, ‘Travers, Walter’.

13. *A Directory of Church-Government* (London, 1644); *Paradigms in Polity*, ed. by David W. Hall & Joseph H. Hall (Grand Rapids, 1994), p. 248; Bolam, p. 31.

14. Griffiths, pp. 4-5.

15. *A Directory of Church-Government* (1644), quoted in Bolam, p. 32.

16. *ibid.*

17. Bolam, p. 32.

18. Charles E. Surman, ‘The Presbyterian Classical System 1646-1660’, *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, 10, no. 4, (1954), 193-202, p. 193.

19. Surman, pp. 193, 200.

20. Ethyn Williams Kirby, ‘The English Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly’, *Church History*, 33, no. 4, (1964), 418-28, (pp. 418-9).

their own Episcopal ordinations had been.²¹ Likewise, many English Presbyterians did not see Biblical justification for the office of lay, or ruling, elders.²²

The establishment of Presbyterianism was for the most part theoretical; only twelve classes and two Synods were formed; moreover, these served not as Church courts, but primarily as ordaining bodies.²³ With the failure to establish an extensive system, Presbyterians formed voluntary associations with Independents.²⁴ These ‘Baxterian associations’, so called because they were modeled after the Worcestershire Association that formed under the leadership of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) handled ordinations, served as consultative bodies and distributed financial support among congregations and ministers.²⁵

Baxter profoundly influenced English Presbyterianism and consequently the debates over subscription elsewhere. He was born in Rowton, Shropshire and served at Kidderminster from 1641 until his death in 1691.²⁶ He was an incredibly prolific writer, served as a chaplain under Cromwell, and led the Presbyterians in attempts to reach a settlement after the Restoration.²⁷ Baxter was not comfortable with the term Presbyterian and did not see Scriptural warrant for the office of lay elder.²⁸ He wanted to see discipline strengthen, and as far as polity, he favoured the moderate Episcopal system presented by Archbishop James Ussher’s (1581–1656) *Reduction of Episcopacy*.²⁹ Desiring a broad accommodation of all who could uphold the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and Ten Commandments, he famously described himself as a ‘Meer Christian’.³⁰ When told that his requirements for communion would admit ‘Socinians’ and ‘Papists’, he replied ‘so much the better’.³¹ This desire for a minimal creed, as well as the experience of ejection led Baxter to oppose demands for subscription. He regretted his own subscription to the

21. *ibid*, p. 423.

22. *ibid*, p. 424.

23. Alan P.F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches: Studies in an English Tradition* (San Francisco, 1992), p. 122; T.S. James, *The History of the Litigation and Legislation respecting Presbyterian Chapels and Charities in England and Ireland between 1816 and 1849* (London, 1867), p. 15.

24. Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick, eds., *From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962* (London, 1962), pp. 172-3; Griffiths, p. 11.

25. Nuttall and Chadwick, pp. 172-3.

26. N.H. Keeble, ‘Baxter, Richard (1615-1691)’, *ODNB*, 1734.

27. Bolam, pp. 70-79.

28. *ibid*, p. 46-48.

29. Bolam, pp. 61-3, 75.

30. *ibid*, p. 59.

31. *ibid*.

Thirty-Nine Articles, and believed that proper discipline, rather than the imposition of confessions was a more certain safeguard to orthodoxy:³²

The remedie for heresie is not to impose another rule of faith than Scripture (as if this was insufficient and we could mend it) but to exercise Church Government carefully, and if any be proved to teach any doctrine contrary to the Scripture, that magistrates and pastors do their parts to correct such and restrain them.³³

Part of Baxter's platform for a Church settlement under the Restoration included the request that 'Scripture sufficiency as the test of our religion and only universal law of Christ may be maintained; and that nothing unnecessary may be imposed as necessary'.³⁴

In addition to his direct opposition to subscription, at least beyond the fundamentals of the faith, Baxter also held a moderate Calvinism which influenced later Presbyterians, especially in their opposition to subscription. First, Baxter placed a greater emphasis on the capacity of human reason.³⁵ Reason was needed to properly interpret and evaluate the Scriptures, indeed it was necessary to discern if a book was inspired.³⁶

Second, unlike traditional Calvinism's belief that Christ's death only atoned for the elect, Baxter believed that Christ died 'equally for all men'.³⁷ Although redemption is finally limited to only the elect, or those to whom the Spirit gives grace, the atonement extended a new condition of salvation to all humanity.³⁸ In his view of the atonement Baxter was similar but not identical to Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664). Though he developed his views independently, Baxter corresponded with Amyraut and advised one student 'Beware of extremes in the controverted points of Religion. When you avoid one error, take heed you run not into another ... The middle way which Camero, Ludov, Crocius, Amyraldus, Davenant, &c. go, I think, is nearest the Truth'.³⁹

Amyraut, a French Reformed theologian at the Saumur Academy, like Baxter believed that Christ's death redeemed all humanity on condition of faith, however only the

32. Packer, *The Redemption & Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver, 2003), p. 28.

33. Packer, p. 306, fn. 63 quoting Baxter's, *The Judgement and Advice of the ... Ministers of Worcestershire ... Concerning the Endeavours of Ecclesiasticall Peace ... which Mr. John Durey doth present* (1658), p. 5.

34. Richard Baxter, *A Sermon of Repentence ... April 30, 1660*, pp. 42-3, quoted in Bolam, p. 71.

35. Bolam, p. 104, 111.

36. *ibid*, p. 104.

37. Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver, 2004), p. 218.

38. Boersma, p. 197.

39. Keeble, I, p. 53; see also pp. 117-8, 119-20.

elect come to faith and are regenerated.⁴⁰ Presaging those who would follow, Amyraut also hoped for a union with the Lutherans and opposed subscription.⁴¹ In 1637 he was tried for heresy by the National Synod of Alençon but exonerated and ordered not to publish his ideas.⁴² In response to Amyraldianism and other teachings of the Saumur Academy, the Swiss Reformed Churches adopted the Helvetic Consensus Formula in 1675.⁴³ Beginning in 1679, subscription to this Formula was required for those entering the ministry in Geneva.⁴⁴

There is a connection between an emphasis on human reason and the weakening of the doctrine of limited atonement. If salvation is within the reach, at least hypothetically, of all humanity, then some faculty must be capable of grasping it. Or inversely, if reason is not seen as ‘wholly defiled’ then it is theoretically possible for a person to come to an understanding of God through natural revelation.⁴⁵ As will be seen, the reappraisal of the effects of original sin and the possibility of knowledge of God apart from special revelation are common beliefs of those who would lay a foundation for Non-Subscription. By the early eighteenth century, this ‘middle way’ Calvinism had become the dominant theology among English Presbyterians, in part, due to a theological controversy that soon followed their toleration.

The ‘Happy Union’

Following the Restoration, Presbyterians continued to hope for a place within the established Church. The Act of Uniformity, however led to the ejection of about 2000 ministers in 1662.⁴⁶ Though the older generation held out the hope of eventual comprehension, the Presbyterians eventually reconciled themselves to their position as Noncon-

40. Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, London, 1969), p. 64-5; Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., second edn., (Grand Rapids, 2003), I, p. 76; Stephen Strehle, ‘Universal Grace and Amyraldianism’, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 51, (1989), 345-57. For more on the similarity and differences of Baxter and Amyraut see Boersma, pp. 197-200.

41. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 78, 62-3.

42. Brian Armstrong, ‘Amyraut (Amyraldus), Moïse (1596-1664)’, in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. by Donald K. McKim, (Louisville, 1992), p. 6.

43. *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, ed. by Philip Schaff, rev. by David S. Schaff, 3 vols., (1931, repr. Grand Rapids, 1998), I, pp. 477-89; Donald D. Grohman, ‘Helvetic Consensus Formula’, in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, p. 171; Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 113-4.

44. Linda Kirk, ‘Eighteenth-Century Geneva and a Changing Calvinism’, in *Religion and National Identity: Papers Read at the Nineteenth Summer Meeting and the Twentieth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. by Stuart Mews, *Studies in Church History* Vol. 18, (Oxford, 1982), p. 334.

45. WCF, VI, ii.

46. Bolam, p. 83-4.

formists.⁴⁷ Toleration was granted, after William's accession, through the 1689 Toleration Act which required subscription to the doctrinal portions of the Thirty-Nine Articles.⁴⁸ In taking advantage of toleration the ministers formalized their position outside of the established Church, leaving Presbyterians, if not by conviction, at least by political circumstance in a *de facto* independency. This, along with the theological similarity of the two, led to more cooperative endeavours. In 1690 they organized a Common Fund to assist needy ministers, students and congregations.⁴⁹ For political solidarity they joined with the Baptists in a Committee of the Three Denominations in 1702.⁵⁰ The two also united to establish lectures in Hackney (1669) and the Merchant's Lecture at Pinner's Hall (1672).⁵¹ In 1691 the London ministers formed an alliance under the *Heads of Agreement*, which was imitated by Dissenting ministers elsewhere.⁵² The Dissenters expressed their belief in the sufficiency of Scripture as a test of faith, while at the same time declaring their general doctrinal beliefs, in the Eighth Article of the *Heads of Agreement*, 'Of a Confession of Faith':

As to what pertains to soundness of judgment in matters of faith, we esteem it sufficient that the Church acknowledge the Scriptures to be the Word of God, the perfect and only rule of faith and practice; and own either the doctrinal part of those commonly called the Articles of the Church of England, or the Confession, or Catechism, Shorter or Larger, compiled by the Assembly at Westminster, or the Confession agreed on at the Savoy, to be agreeable to the said rule.⁵³

This 'Happy Union' was a cooperative work, not a merger, and distinctions remained between the two denominations. The Presbyterians, for example, continued to uphold the ideal of a parish as opposed to the Independents' gathered congregation.⁵⁴ Membership in an Independent congregation therefore required satisfactory testimony of a conversion experience approved by the congregation.⁵⁵ Presbyterians on the other hand simply required a credible profession of faith. Likewise, the governance of the local worshipping communities reflected the distinctive understandings of the Church. The mem-

47. Bolam, p. 95; Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, pp. 123-4.

48. *Uniformity*, pp. 209-231; Bolam, pp. 89, 92; *Protestant Nonconformist Texts*, ed. by R. Tudur Jones, et. al., 4 vols., (N.L., 2007), I, pp. 397-400.

49. Bolam, p. 101.

50. *Uniformity to Unity*, p. 261.

51. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978), p. 289.

52. *ibid.*, pp. 14-5, *Protestant Nonconformist Texts*, I p. 400-4

53. *Protestant Nonconformist Texts*, I, pp. 403-4.

54. Bolam p. 54; Watts, p. 291.

55. Alan P.F. Sell, 'Confessing the Faith in English Congregationalism', *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 4, no. 3, (1988), 170-215, (p. 210); Bolam, p. 21.

bership of Independent congregations was given a vote in making decisions and calling the minister.⁵⁶ While lay committees would look after some affairs in a Presbyterian congregation, such as the trustees who had oversight of property; the minister was in a considerably more powerful position than his Independent counterpart, who was under the governance of the congregational vote. Additionally, he would not be accountable to a higher judicatory as would Scottish ministers.⁵⁷

The ministers of both denominations would join together on an *ad hoc* basis to examine and ordain ministers.⁵⁸ The ordinand would be examined and give a personal confession of their faith. Rather than subscribe to a standard confessional statement, these confessions were written by the ordinand and were normally extensive treatments of their theology that were often later published.⁵⁹

The ‘Happy Union’ in London did not last for long. Within a few years of the establishment of the Merchants’ Lecture a theological debate was revived with the republication of the sermons of Tobias Crisp (1600-1643), by his son Samuel (1671?–1718).⁶⁰ Crisp, and the like-minded John Eaton (1575-1641) and Henry Denne (d. 1660?), had been the subject of the ‘Antinomian Controversy’ during the time of the Westminster Assembly.⁶¹ The Antinomians taught that the experience of salvation was the discovery of their eternal justification apart from good works.⁶² As such, justification was not conditioned on repentance severely undermining the moral law. When Crisp’s sermons were republished in 1689, they were prefaced with an attack on Baxter’s ‘middle-way’ Calvinism, that had already been the subject of controversy among the Dissenters. The book also contained a certification that the sermons were genuinely Crisp’s, signed by twelve Dissenting ministers.⁶³ Baxter, taking the certification as a veiled endorsement, responded in a sermon at the Merchants’ Lecture in January 1690, accusing those who signed the certificate of giving their approval to the work. The sermons at the Merchants’ lecture became a debate

56. James, p. 701.

57. Watts, p. 290.

58. *Uniformity to Unity*, pp. 172-3.

59. James, p. 20; Wilson, pp. 211-2; Sell, ‘Confessing the Faith’, p. 707.

60. Drysdale, pp. 469-78; Boersma, p. 63, Bolam, p. 107-8.

61. R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, new edn., (Oxford, 1997), pp. 185-194.

62. Kendall, p. 186.

63. Bolam, p. 104-8; Colligan, *Eighteenth Century Nonconformity*, p. 11.

between Baxter and his opponents. This developed into arguments through publications primarily between Isaac Chauncy (1632-1712), an Independent who defended the antinomian position, and Daniel Williams (c.1643-1716) who succeeded Baxter at the Merchants' Lecture.⁶⁴ Williams, who had previously served at the Wood Street congregation in Dublin, was a personal friend and a 'devout disciple' of Baxter.⁶⁵ According to Chauncy, Williams presented an understanding of the Gospel as a 'New Law', that is, as a gracious replacement of the sterner requirements of the 'Old Law'.⁶⁶ Accordingly Baxter's and Williams' beliefs were dubbed 'Neonomianism'.⁶⁷ Eventually Williams was forbidden from preaching at the Merchants' Lecture leading the Presbyterians to establish an alternate lecture at Salters' Hall.⁶⁸ In 1695 the Independents withdrew from the Common Fund and set up their own Congregational Fund.⁶⁹ The Happy Union was divided in London. Elsewhere, such as in Devon and Cornwall the associations continued. Most of those who agreed with Crisp's hyper-Calvinism were Independents. To begin with, Presbyterians included members of both sides of the debate, however as the controversy escalated they moved further apart from the Independents. The end result was 'that Presbyterianism had become predominantly and consciously Baxterian'.⁷⁰

By the time of the subscription debates the English Presbyterians had received a tradition that, when fortified by other developments, would form the basis for anti-subscription thought. As Dissenters they had been forced into a position of Independency in practice if not in theory. As will be seen in later discussions, their position of Dissent came to be defended on the right of liberty of conscience rather than doctrinal differences with the established Church. Further, through their experience in the antinomian controversy they identified with a 'middle way' Calvinism that leaned towards an Arminian universalism and emphasis on the faculty of reason.

64. Bolam, pp. 117-8; Colligan, *Eighteenth Century Nonconformity*, p. 15; Watts, pp. 292-297.

65. Bolam, p. 117; David L. Wykes, 'Williams, Daniel (c.1643--1716)', *ODNB*, 2949; R. Buick Knox, *History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland: A Supplement of additions, emendations and corrections*, (1996), p. 57. For a full biography see Roger Thomas, *Daniel Williams 'Presbyterian Bishop'*, (London, 1964).

66. Colligan, *Eighteenth Century Nonconformity*, pp. 15-6.

67. Isaac Chauncy, *Neonomianism Unmask'd*, (London, 1693).

68. Drysdale, p. 473; Colligan, *Eighteenth Century Nonconformity*, p. 17; Bolam, p. 119.

69. Watts, p. 296; Bolam, p. 121.

70. Bolam, p. 125; Griffiths, p. 100.

Developments on the Continent

Since legislation barred Dissenters from English universities, most were educated at either academies or foreign universities.⁷¹ This exposed them to influences that reinforced their own inherent opposition to confessional subscription. These may be helpfully divided according to where they appear to have been predominant: anti-subscription movements and Arminianism on the continent and the influence of John Locke in the academies. These were joined with debates on Church power in the Church of England.

Several English Presbyterians were educated at Leiden and Utrecht, an influence that was, as Griffiths has noted, ‘unquestionably liberalizing’.⁷² The Dutch Republic provided an example of a workable toleration.⁷³ This more liberal toleration to religious Dissenters allowed the Remonstrants, after an initial period of exile, to establish congregations and a school.⁷⁴ Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), the leader of the Remonstrants following Arminius’ death, was Professor of Theology at the Remonstrant seminary in Amsterdam after his return from exile.⁷⁵ He, along with Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557-1644) and Philippus van Limborch (1633-1712), who also served as Professor of Theology at the Remonstrant seminary in 1667 developed views on toleration and the right to freedom of conscience.⁷⁶ Limborch was close friends with Locke who dedicated his *Letter on Toleration* to him.⁷⁷ Uytenbogaert, and the other early Arminians opposed confessional subscription years prior to the Synod of Dort which had condemned their teachings.⁷⁸

This mature Arminianism has been called ‘an Arminianism of the head’ distinguished from the later Wesleyan ‘Arminianism of the heart’, or as Sell terms it ‘rationalis-

71. Griffiths, *Religion and Learning*, pp. 33-4. Students could not matriculate at Oxford without full assent to the Church of England’s Articles; they could matriculate to Cambridge but could not graduate without subscription.

72. Griffiths, p. 54; see also Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, pp. 135-6 and Griffiths, pp. 54-67.

73. K.H.D. Haley, ‘The Dutch influence on English Toleration’, *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 4, no. 4, (1989): 255-65, p. 256-8.

74. Haley, p. 256.

75. H. C. Rogge, ‘Episcopius (Bisschop), Simon’, in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson and others, (London, 1909), vol. IV, pp. 159-160; Carl Bangs, ‘Episcopius, Simon’, in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Reformation*, ed. by Hans J. Hillerbrand, (Oxford, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 54-55.

76. Haley, pp. 258-9; ‘Limborch, Philipp van’ in *A Religious Encyclopædia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal and Practical Theology*, ed. by Philip Schaff, 4 vols., third edn., (New York, 1891), II, p. 1321.

77. Haley, p. 259.

78. Donald Sinnema, ‘The Origin of the Form of Subscription in the Dutch Reformed Church’, *Calvin Theological Journal*, 42, no. 2, (2007): 256-282, pp. 266-8; Bangs, pp. 224-6.

tic Arminianism’.⁷⁹ It ‘came to signify the application of unfettered reason to Scripture regarded as supreme (especially over creeds and confessional statements)’.⁸⁰ It was this concept of rational, unhindered Biblical interpretation, rather than direct conflict with the articles of the confessions that provided the fundamental opposition to subscription.

In addition to the Remonstrants ideas of toleration and Scriptural sufficiency, an opposition to confessional subscription on the basis of Protestant unity among the Swiss Churches followed.⁸¹ Jean-Alphose Turretin (1671-1737) of Geneva, Jean Frédéric Osterwald (1663-1747) of Neuchâtel, and Samuel Werenfels (1657-1740) of Basel, the ‘Swiss Triumvirate’, hoped to reach unity with Lutherans and Anglicans on the basis of commonly held doctrines and the removal of disputed points as terms of communion.⁸² They also had close connections with ministers in the Church of England, especially Archbishop of Canterbury William Wake (1657-1737), helping introduce their works there.⁸³

In 1706 Turretin, the Rector and Professor of Theology and Church History at the Academy of Geneva, led the successful campaign against subscription to the Helvetic Consensus Formula.⁸⁴ Ironically, he was the son of Francis (1623-1687) who had led in in Formula’s adoption. In his studies and friendships he was influenced by the Saumur school, the Remonstrants (Limborch and LeClerc) and John Locke.⁸⁵ Responding to the criticism of Deists, Atheists and Socinians, he developed an apologetic based on natural revelation and a rational interpretation of the Scriptures without the need for the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which he saw as too close to enthusiasm.⁸⁶ This led to a denial of

79. Bolam, p. 22-3; Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, p. 68.

80. Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, p. 118.

81. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)*, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 5, (Chicago, 1989), p. 17-8; Rohls, pp. 265-71.

82. Martin Klauber, ‘The Drive toward Protestant Union in Early Eighteenth-Century Geneva: Jean-Alphonse turrettini on the “Fundamental Articles” of the Faith’, *Church History*, 61, no. 3, (192):334-49, p. 340; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 18. For Osterwald see Robert Grébillat, *Jean Frédéric Osterwald: 1663-1747* (Neuchâtel, 1904) and Jean-Jacques Von Allmen, *L’Eglise et ses fonctions d’après Jean Frédéric Osterwald: Le Problème de la théologie pratique du début du XVIIIe siècle* (Neuchâtel, 1947).

83. *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850*, ed. by, Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge, 1998), p. 120; Maria Chritian Pitassi, ‘Quand le calvinisme genevois parlait anglican: les relations théologiques et ecclésiastiques entre Genève et l’Angleterre dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle’, *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 152, (2007), 231-243.

84. Linda Kirk, ‘Eighteenth-Century Geneva and a Changing Calvinism’, in Stuart Mews, *Religion and National Identity: Papers Read at the Nineteenth Summer Meeting and the Twentieth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, Studies in Church History Vol. 18 (Oxford, 1982), pp. 368-9. For a complete account see Martin Klauber, *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671-1737) and Enlightened Orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva* (Selinsgrove, 1994), pp. 143-164.

85. Klauber, *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism*, pp. 46, 53-59, 72-74.

86. *ibid*, pp. 62-77; 104-110.

the noetic corruption of original sin aligning him more with Arminianism than the traditional Scholastic Calvinism of his father.⁸⁷ He also shared views with the Arminians in relation to his understanding of Fundamental Articles which would profoundly shape the Non-Subscribers.⁸⁸

In 1719 Turretin published *Nubes Testium* which was translated into English and published in London the following year as *A Discourse Concerning Fundamental Articles*.⁸⁹ ‘Fundamental Articles’ was a technical term referring to the doctrines that are the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith.⁹⁰ The category had developed as part of the Calvinist High Orthodoxy of the late seventeenth century and in that scheme it was limited to ‘those articles necessary for salvation’.⁹¹ These articles were understood to be accessible only through special, as opposed to general, or natural, revelation. In the *Discourse*, Turretin defines Fundamental Articles as ‘those principles of religion, which so relate to the essence and foundation of it, and are of so great importance, that without them Religion cannot stand, or at least will be destitute of a chief and necessary part’.⁹² Furthermore, they are necessary for salvation, ‘Fundamental Articles are such as are necessary to be known, and believed, in order to obtain the favour of God, and the Salvation of our souls’.⁹³ In agreement with most divines of the time he understood that these doctrines should serve as the basis of communion, they ‘are necessary to be profess’d, in order to hold communion with any particular person, or with any religious society’.⁹⁴

The blueprint he offers for Church unity is to distinguish between fundamentals and non-fundamental doctrines and to not require adherence to the latter as a term of communion.⁹⁵ ‘Persons also may err fundamentally two ways; either by expressly denying something that is fundamental, or by joining something to the foundation, that does really

87. *ibid*, p. 70.

88. Klauber, ‘The Drive toward Protestant Union’, p. 340.

89. Jean-Alphonse Turretini, *Nubes Testium pro Moderato et Pacifico de Rebus Theologicis Judicio, et Instituenda inter Protestantas Concordia. Praemissa est brevis & pacifica de articulis fundamentalibus disquisitio* (Geneva, 1719); *A Discourse concerning Fundamental Articles in Religion. In which a method is laid down for the more effectual Uniting of Protestants, and promoting a more general toleration amongst them* (London, 1720). The work was dedicated to William Wake.

90. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, ed by Donald K. McKim, (Louisville, 1996), p. 110.

91. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols, 2nd edn. (Grand Rapids, 2003) I, pp. 406, 411, for a full treatment see Ch. 9, pp. 406-50.

92. Turretini, *A Discourse*, p. 3.

93. *ibid*, p. 4.

94. *ibid*.

95. *ibid*, pp. 8-13, 38-56.

destroy it'.⁹⁶ As many of the Non-Subscribers would argue, Turretin sees the development of confessions as making the mistake of adding to the Fundamental Articles:

Hence also creeds and confessions of faith, and then catechisms took their rise; which contained the first principles of religion, such as it was thought proper for catechumens, or beginners to profess their belief of. And in the first ages these things were short and plain: but afterwards, through the dissensions that arose in the Church, they were exceedingly multiplied and enlarged; insomuch that Hilary [of Poitiers] complained, that confessions were fram'd at every one's pleasure.⁹⁷

While he gave guidelines to help determine what Fundamental Articles were, such as that they are simple, 'adapted to common capacities', 'few in number', and 'often ... repeated and inculcated in Scripture', Turretin denied that these could be enumerated.⁹⁸ 'To reduce them to a certain and definite number, so as to be able to say there are neither more nor less, is more than we, together with all Protestant Divines, think to be either necessary or possible'.⁹⁹ The reason, he argues, is 'because these articles are not the same to all men'.¹⁰⁰ 'Fundamental Articles ... differ according to the different degrees of revelation, and according to the different capacities and circumstances of men'.¹⁰¹

Previous discussions on the nature of Fundamental Articles, including Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* made a distinction between the fundamentals as what was required for an individual to believe for personal salvation and as the common beliefs essential to a Christian Church.¹⁰² The younger Turretin however conflates these into simply what is required for individual acceptance before God, yet even this is qualified:

when we say that Fundamental Articles are such as are necessary to be known and believed, in order to obtain salvation, we would not be so understood, as if we thought that none who are ignorant of any one of these articles, or mistake concerning it, can possibly arrive at salvation.¹⁰³

96. *ibid*, p. 6.

97. *ibid*, p. 13; In his 'Address to Constantine', Hilary of Poitiers (c.300-c.368) wrote 'Since the Nicene Council, we have done nothing but write about the Creed. While we fight about words, inquire about novelties, take advantage of ambiguities, criticise authors, fight on party questions, have difficulties in agreeing, and prepare to anathematise one another, there is scarcely a man who belongs to Christ ... Every year, nay every month, we make new Creeds to describe inscrutable mysteries', Samuel Gosnell Green, *The Christian Creed and the Creeds of Christendom: Seven Lectures Delivered in 1898 at Regent's Park College, London* (London, 1898), pp. 58-9. This is quoted or referred to in Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of the Late Reverend and Pious Mr. Richard Baxter*, 4 vols., (London, 1707), I, p. 779; Matthew Tindal, *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted*, 3rd edn., pp. 198-9 and John Abernethy, *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, p. 93.

98. *ibid*, pp. 26-7, 31-5.

99. *ibid*, p. 31.

100. *ibid*, p. 31.

101. *ibid*, p. 23.

102. Muller, pp. 414-6, referencing *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, (Edinburgh, 1857) I.xiv.

103. *ibid*, p. 7.

Two aspects of Turretin's understanding of Fundamental Articles were shared by the Non-Subscribers. First, was the idea that terms of communion among Christians should be limited to the few, simple doctrines that are truly fundamental. Second, was the belief requiring anything beyond these articles was a sinful error. As he explained, 'our first principle is this; that we are not under a necessary obligation to know, or believe any truth, but what is clearly revealed unto us, and for the belief of which, God hath indued us with necessary abilities'.¹⁰⁴ For the Non-Subscribers this included the practice of requiring adherence to extra-Biblical confessions.

Developments in England

In addition to the foreign universities, the English Dissenting academies were also places for investigating and discussing new ideas that would shape the views of subscription as well as challenge the old orthodoxy. Through these academies, the writings of John Locke had a profound influence on the Dissenters.¹⁰⁵ Through his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, *Letter on Toleration* and *The Reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures* Locke shaped the Dissenters ecclesiology and Biblical interpretation.¹⁰⁶ It would be difficult to overstate the impact of Locke on the Dissenter's theology; as one historian stated, Presbyterian theology of the eighteenth century was 'an alliance between the new philosophy of Locke and the Scripturalism of the old Puritans'.¹⁰⁷

Locke gave a primacy to reason as an authority in theology.¹⁰⁸ His denial of innate ideas, made experience the ground of all knowledge, including moral.¹⁰⁹ This was consistent with the more optimistic view of human ability he held; he denied that Adam's sin was imputed to his posterity.¹¹⁰ Though denying total depravity, Locke did believe that reason was impaired.¹¹¹ People are inclined to evil as a result of the fall, but they could be

104. *ibid*, p. 22.

105. Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, p. 5; *Dissenting Thought*, p. 130; Bolam, pp. 139-40.

106. Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism Through the Centuries* (Oxford, 1996), p. 71; Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, p. 129.

107. J.J. Tayler, *Retrospect of Religious Life in England* (London, 1845), p. 372, quoted in Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, p. 94.

108. Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought*, (Newark, 1993), pp. 21-4.

109. Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, pp. 28-9; Griffiths *Religion and Learning*, p. 107; Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 370

110. Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, pp. 101-2, 210; Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, p. 231; Griffiths *Religion and Learning*, p. 96.

111. Spellman, pp. 124, 210; Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, p. 113.

improved through moral education.¹¹² The natural law given by God, most clearly revealed by Jesus' teaching, was nevertheless able to be understood by natural reason, and thus by all people.¹¹³ Locke therefore believed that human reason could possibly lead people to an understanding of God apart from Divine revelation.¹¹⁴

With his higher view of the ability of reason, Locke saw valid Biblical interpretation as based on reason apart from the restrictions of tradition or preconceptions, even the addition of chapter and verse divisions obscured a pure reading.¹¹⁵ While reason could not exhaustively understand the depths of Scripture, similar to Baxter, Locke understood that it was the basis to judge whether revelation was from God.¹¹⁶ Locke exemplified this approach in his posthumously published *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St Paul*.¹¹⁷ This renewal in Scriptural interpretation led to the adoption of alternate understandings of the nature of Christ that initiated the subscription controversy in Exeter.¹¹⁸

In his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke argued against civil disabilities for religious beliefs on the basis of his understanding of faith. Similar to the neonomians he believed that 'the law of faith is allowed to supply the defect of full obedience' to the moral law.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, faith is not opposed to reason, therefore one can not be compelled to believe something they find irrational.¹²⁰ Civil authority had no right to compel religious belief or observance since faith, by definition, must be personally accepted from reasonable persuasion.¹²¹ 'No man can, if he would, conform his faith to the dictates of another'.¹²² This would serve as the basis of his views on toleration.¹²³ Additionally, toleration

112. Spellman, pp. 121-5.

113. Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy from Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment*, (Cambridge, 1996), p. 57; Spellman, p. 62.

114. Spellman, p. 142.

115. Cornwall, p. 22; Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, p. 130; Watts, p. 373.

116. Sell, *Dissenting Thought*, p. 130; Wiles, pp. 70-1.

117. Wiles, p. 75.

118. J. Hay Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England* (Manchester, 1913), p. 46.

119. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Deliver'd in the Scriptures. To which is added, a first and second vindication of the same; from some exceptions and reflections in a treatise by the Rev. Mr. Edwards, intituled, Some thoughts concerning the several causes and occasions of atheism*, sixth edn., (London, 1736), p. 21.

120. Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, p. 86.

121. *ibid*, p. 160; Spellman, p. 73.

122. John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *The Works of John Locke*, 3 vols., (London, 1714), II, p. 234.

123. Cornwall, p. 21.

of other religious views was necessary according to Natural Law and for the peace of a society:

the toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion, is so agreeable to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.¹²⁴

While Locke was discussing the authority of the state, Non-Subscribers applied this principle to the power of the Church in their arguments against demanding belief in doctrines beyond Fundamental Articles. This was consistent with a contractual view of the Church that Locke presented, ‘a Church then I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the publick worshipping of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls’.¹²⁵ As will be shown in later chapters this view of the Church as a society in which individuals judge what is appropriate worship and acceptable to God and give their free consent to will profoundly affect views of Church authority, the role of judicatories and the propriety of demanding subscription to a confession.

Locke also believed a comprehension based on the minimal, essentials of belief believing that divisions in the Church are the result of ‘multiplying articles of faith, and narrowing the bottom of religion by clogging it with creeds and catechisms and endless niceties about the essences, properties, and attributes of God’.¹²⁶ His *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, in which he called for communion on the basis of Fundamental Articles, was published in the midst of the antinomian controversy.¹²⁷ For Locke the minimal belief was that Jesus was the Messiah.¹²⁸

Bishop Hoadly and the Bangorian Controversy

Locke’s views had a strong impact in the Church of England as well. Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761), the son of a schoolmaster, had read Locke as a student at Cambridge and adopted his views, especially on toleration and contract theory.¹²⁹ Hoadly came from a

124. Locke, *Works*, II, p. 234.

125. Locke, *Works*, II, p. 235.

126. John Locke, ‘Reflections upon the Roman Commonwealth’, quoted in H.R. Fox Bourne, *The Life of John Locke*, 2 vols., (New York, 1876), I, p. 148; Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, pp. 185-188; Cornwall, p. 23.

127. Sell, *Locke and the Eighteenth-century Divines*, pp. 186-8.

128. *ibid.*, p. 186-7.

129. William Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate: Benjamin Hoadly, 1676-1761* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 45-6; E.R. Bingham, ‘Political Apprenticeship of Benjamin Hoadly’, *Church History*, 16, no. 3 (1947), 154-65, (p.

Puritan family, his patriarchal grandfather, John, emigrated to New England during Charles I's reign, returning to England in 1653 to be appointed by Cromwell as chaplain of Edinburgh Castle in 1655.¹³⁰ His mother's father had been a member of the Westminster Assembly.¹³¹

Hoadly became friends with Samuel Clarke while the latter was one of his father's pupils and he later adopted Clarke's view of the Trinity.¹³² Theologically, he was a latitudinarian who, influenced by Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity*, saw the source of faith in personal conviction rather than institutions and tradition.¹³³

Hoadly had risen to national prominence as a leader of the Low Church movement and Whig controversialist.¹³⁴ He was appointed Bishop of Bangor in 1715 and as a royal Chaplain in 1716.¹³⁵ He had preached and written on political subjects since 1703 when he defended the Bishops who had voted against a bill that would have alienated Dissenters.¹³⁶ In 1708, he presented his Lockean views of contractual government and the right of resistance in a *Humble Reply to the Lord Bishop of Exeter* (London, 1709).¹³⁷ He built upon this in his *The Original and Institution of Civil Government discussed* (London, 1709).¹³⁸

Hoadly's views on reason, faith and the right made him sympathetic to the the arguments for Dissent:¹³⁹

If there be persons who will be persuaded by no arguments that a compliance with these terms is ... lawful, I confess it is my opinion that, whilst they are thus persuaded, it is as much their duty to separate from us, as it is our duty to separate from the Church of Rome.¹⁴⁰

In accordance with this view he worked for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts which made taking communion in the Church of England a requirement for holding civil offices.¹⁴¹

159); Reed Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs* (Baton Rouge, 1982), pp. 67-8; Stephen Taylor, 'Hoadly, Benjamin (1676-1761)', *ODNB*, 13375.

130. Gibson, pp. 41-3.

131. Taylor, 'Hoadly, Benjamin'.

132. Gibson, p. 44; Colligan, pp. 30, 38.

133. Gibson, p. 52.

134. Bingham, 'The Political Apprenticeship', pp. 154-6.

135. Gibson, p. 131-2.

136. Bingham, p. 156, Ofspring Blackhall (bap.1655, d.1716), Bishop of Exeter, had preached before Queen Anne claiming immediate, divine authority for the magistrate.

137. *ibid*, pp. 158-9,

138. *ibid*, p. 159.

139. Gibson, 69.

140. Hoadly, *Works*, I, p. 282.

141. Cornwall, p. 26; Bougue and Bennett, pp. 132.

On 31 March 1717, Hoadly preached *The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ*.¹⁴² He had already angered the High Church Party by attacking pretensions to divine authority in his *A Preservation against the Principles and Practices of the Non-Jurors*.¹⁴³ Moreover, since 1690 the High Church Party had been involved in the most ‘raucous and protracted claim’ for the Church’s autonomy known as the Convocation Controversy.¹⁴⁴ It was in this context that Hoadly, preaching on John 18:36, ‘My Kingdom is not of this world’ took an extreme erastian position and abdicated all claim of authority to the Civil powers. His sermon began a dispute known as the Bangorian Controversy. The issues were the same as those that would arise in the Salters’ Hall debate leading some to see it as an extension of the Bangorian Controversy among the Dissenters.¹⁴⁵ While this is true to the extent that the core question in the subscription controversy was Church power, the distinctives of the Dissenters’ theological tradition and political context does make it unique.

Hoadly saw in Christ’s statement about his Kingdom two propositions: first that Christ is King and secondly that the Kingdom is heavenly only.¹⁴⁶ As King, Christ is the sole legislative power in the Church:

He is himself the sole law-giver to his subjects, and himself the sole judge of their behaviour, in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation ... he hath, in those points, left behind him, no visible, humane authority; no vicegerents ... no interpreters, upon whom his subjects are absolutely to depend; no judges over the consciences or religion of his people.¹⁴⁷

Secondly, if Christ’s Kingdom is not of this world, then his laws ‘have nothing of this World in their view’. This forbids ‘erecting any sort of temporal kingdom, under the covert and name of a spiritual one’.¹⁴⁸ Like Locke, Hoadly believed that true faith cannot be the result of coercion or force of any kind and therefore the Civil authorities have no right to reward or punish religious views in an attempt to coerce faith.¹⁴⁹

142. *The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ. A sermon preach’d before the King, at the Royal chapel at St. James’s, on Sunday March 31, 1717* (London, 1717), Rupp, pp. 91.

143. Rupp, pp. 90-1.

144. Cruickshanks, p. 167.

145. Thomas, p. 180.

146. Hoadly, *Nature of the Kingdom*, pp. 11, 18.

147. *ibid*, pp. 11-12.

148. *ibid*, p. 18.

149. *ibid*, pp. 20-1.

From this Hoadly makes three observations. First, the debates between different societies over the externals of religion encroaches on the authority of Christ as ‘law-giver’ and ‘judge’.¹⁵⁰ Second, to add to the conditions of membership in the Church beyond what is presented in the Gospels (i.e. Fundamental Articles, though he does not use the term) usurps the authority of Christ.¹⁵¹ Finally, Hoadly challenges implicit faith:

it evidently destroys the rule and authority of Jesus Christ, as king, to set up any other authority in his kingdom, to which his subjects are indispensably and absolutely obliged to submit their consciences, or their conduct, in what is properly called religion. There are some professed Christians, who contend openly for such and authority, as indispensably obliges all around them to unity of profession; that is, to profess even what they do not, what they cannot, believe to be true.

There was such an uproar in the Lower House of Clergy in the Convocation who prepared to bring charges of subverting ‘Church Government and discipline’.¹⁵² To protect Hoadly, the King prorogued the convocation; it would not reconvene for 135 years.¹⁵³ The debate itself generated several pamphlets and tracts, some of which were reprinted in New York.¹⁵⁴ Hoadly popularized the views of Locke and applied them to the Church inspiring many Dissenters who saw his arguments as consistent with their own defence of Nonconformity.

The Exeter Assembly

English Dissenters generally did not require that their ministers subscribe a confession, but there were a couple of minor conflicts over the issue on a congregational level before it was debated more widely. In 1711 Samuel Bourn (1689-1754), a Presbyterian, declined to sign the Shorter Catechism at his ordination to the Crook congregation near Kendal.¹⁵⁵ Some of the local ministers refused to participate in the service, but Bourn was ordained and remained there until 1720 when he followed Henry Winder (d. 1752) at Tunley, near Wigan.¹⁵⁶

150. *ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

151. *ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

152. Switzer, p. 158; Rupp, p. 99.

153. Switzer, p. 150.

154. Gibson, p. 34; Philanagnostes Criticus [Thomas Herne], *An Account of All the Considerable Pamphlets that Have Been Published on Either Side in the Present Controversy, between the Bishop of Bangor* (London, 1719)

155. Alan P. F. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches: Studies in and English Tradition*, (San Francisco, 1990), p. 136.

156. Alan P. F. Sell, ‘Bourn, Samuel (1689-1754)’, *ODNB*, 3000.

A second incident occurred in 1716, when Daniel Wilcox, a Presbyterian minister at the Monkwell Street, London congregation called Henry Read as an assistant.¹⁵⁷

Wilcox, suspecting Read of Arminianism, insisted that he subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith. The London ministers advised Wilcox that the requiring of ‘subscription to human words’ was ‘an unwarrantable imposition’.¹⁵⁸ Wilcox ignored their advice and dismissed Read.

Wilcox published his account of events with reasons for requiring subscription in *The Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words*.¹⁵⁹ The ‘form of sound words’, a phrase taken from 2 Timothy 1.13, he defines as ‘either of the doctrine of the gospel in general, or else very probably of a collection of some of its principle heads, which the Apostle had chosen, and put together in the order and dress he thought best’.¹⁶⁰ From this, Wilcox infers ‘that ‘tis of great use and advantage both for ministers and private Christians, to have the great truths of the gospel cloath’d in sound words, collected together and dispos’d’ and that among such forms The Westminster Confession of Faith ‘for excellency has been most admired and commended’.¹⁶¹ Others would follow this definition and the phrase would be used as a synonym for the Confession in the controversies to follow.¹⁶²

Noting that the use of confessions ‘is now so much decry’d by Protestants of loose principles’ he defends their use for two purposes: ‘for the more easy instruction of the Church and people of God’ and ‘to be a test of truth and error, by which doctrines and men are to be examin’d and try’d, and so a bank to keep out error’.¹⁶³ He points to the Church of Scotland’s requirement for subscription and in a line of reasoning that would be followed by others later claimed that the Westminster Assembly’s ‘Form of sound Words ...

157. Thomas, ‘The Non-Subscription Controversy’, pp. 183-4; C. Gordon Bolam, *et. al.*, *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism*, (London, 1968), p. 152.

158. [Daniel Wilcox], *The Noble Stand. Second Part*, (London, 1719), p. 34.

159. [Daniel Wilcox], *The Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words. Refer’d to the Assembly’s Catechisms, and Confession of Faith; and Fit to Bind with them to which is added, A List of the Divines in that Assembly: The Vow taken by every Member of his Entrance; with a Word of their Character*, (London, 1717).

160. *ibid.*, p. 5.

161. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

162. See for example Charles Masterton, *An Apology for the Northern Presbyterian in Ireland; wherein requiring a subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith, as a condition of ministerial communion among them is justify’d. In answer to the seasonable advice from Dublin, and other late performances, publish’d in opposition to the practice of the best Reform’d Churches, relating to Creeds and Confessions*, (Glasgow, 1723), p. 15; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, p. 205 quoting an Act of the Commission of the Assembly

163. Wilcox, *The Duty*, pp. 4, 9.

is a proper test of orthodoxy and error, as they assert nothing but what they produce Scripture for, and with the greatest strength and clearness prove from thence', that is the Confession's legitimacy is derived from its Scriptural foundation.¹⁶⁴ In support of the need for an extra-Biblical test of orthodoxy, he contends that the Bible is not a sufficient test as any sect can 'pretend to own the Bible'.¹⁶⁵

Although Read's dismissal was not as great of a controversy as would later come, *The Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words* did draw criticism, most notably in an article in *The Occasional Paper*, 'Of Orthodoxy'.¹⁶⁶ *The Occasional Paper*, or the 'BAGWHEEL Papers', from the names of authors, was a journal by Dissenters established to 'seek truth without attachment to party and to propagate a sense of civil and Christian liberty'.¹⁶⁷ This article helped carry discussions to Scotland and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.¹⁶⁸ Since Wilcox's arguments preceded the other debates and due to the influence of Dunlop's work, *The Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words* laid out the basic line of reasoning many later defenders of subscription would follow and build on.

The event that brought the debates to the world began among the ministers in the Exeter Assembly. The Presbyterian and Independent ministers of Devon and Cornwall had formed an association along the lines of the Happy Union under the leadership of John Flavel (1627-1691).¹⁶⁹ They had accepted the *Heads of Agreement* and met twice a year at Exeter; for this reason they were referred to as the Exeter Assembly.¹⁷⁰ The Assembly controlled funds to assist students and smaller congregations in addition to examining and ordaining candidates for the ministry.¹⁷¹

164. *ibid*, p. 10.

165. *ibid*, p. 11.

166. [Moses Lowman], 'Of Orthodoxy', in *A Collection of the Occasional Paper for the year 1717*, (London, 1718).

167. *Occasional Papers* (1716), Preface; David L. Wykes, 'Avery, Benjamin (bap. 1684?, d. 1764)', *ODNB*, 923; The authors were Simon Browne (c.1680-1732), Benjamin Avery (d. 1764), Benjamin Grosvenor (1676-1758), Samuel Wright (1683-1746), John Evans (1679/80-1730), Jabez Earle (c.1673-1768) and Moses Lowman (bap. 1679, d. 1752). For the importance of the *Occasional Paper* in disseminating progressive ideas see Andrew C. Thompson, 'Popery, Politics, and Private Judgment in Early Hanoverian Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 45, 2, (2002), 333-56.

168. p. 81

169. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 65; Brockett, ed., *The Exeter Assembly*, p. vii.

170. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 64.

171. *ibid*, p. 65.

The City of Exeter had three Presbyterian congregations served by four ministers: James Peirce (1674-1726), John Lavington (c.1690-1759), Joseph Hallett (1656-1722) and John Withers (b.1669).¹⁷² The financial business of the congregations was managed by a Committee of Thirteen.¹⁷³

Around 1712 the works of William Whiston (1667-1752) and Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) began to circulate among the students in Hallett’s local academy.¹⁷⁴ These leaders of the ‘Arian revival’ had reassessed traditional dogma with the reasonable approach to reading Scripture espoused by Locke, who himself came to a subordinationist view.¹⁷⁵ Their ‘Arianism’ was not a continuation of the fourth century teaching of Arius who taught that the Son was created, and thus had a beginning, has no direct communion or knowledge of the Father, rather the term in the eighteenth century referred to any anti-Trinitarian teaching.¹⁷⁶ Whiston had been removed from the Lucasian chair at Cambridge in 1710 for his public Arianism and published his views in *Primitive Christianity Reviv’d*.¹⁷⁷ In 1712 Clarke published his influential *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* in which he presented his anti-Trinitarian beliefs and understanding of the nature of Christ.¹⁷⁸ While he denied the equality of the Son and the Holy Spirit with the Father, Clarke, unlike Arianism proper, accepted the pre-existence of the Logos.¹⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, they too opposed subscription.¹⁸⁰ Whiston recorded in his memoirs ‘I heartily wish that all doubtful oaths, tests, and subscriptions were taken away; and that all christians might unite to enquire after, and obey only those doctrines, laws, and discipline, which were originally established by Christ and his apostles’.¹⁸¹

172. *ibid.*, p. 71; David L. Wykes, ‘Peirce, James (1674-1726)’, *ONDB*, 21782; David L. Wykes, ‘Lavington, John (c.1690-1759)’, *ONDB*, 16137; David L. Wykes, ‘Hallett, Joseph (II) (1656–1722)’, *ODNB*, 12009; 173. Gordon ‘The Story of Salters’ Hall’, in *Addresses Biographical and Historical*, (London, 1922), pp. 129-131.

174. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 80; Wiles, p. 138.

175. *ibid.*, p. 70, Colligan, *Arian Movement in England*, pp. 33-46.

176. Wiles, pp. 1-7, 62; J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised edn., (Peabody, MA, 1978) pp. 226-231.

177. Wiles, pp. 93-110; Stephen D. Snobelen, ‘Whiston, William (1667–1752)’, *ODNB*, 29217. *Primitive Christianity Reviv’d* was a series of translations of early Church works with commentaries published 1711-12.

178. *ibid.*, pp. 110-34; John Gascoigne, ‘Clarke, Samuel (1675–1729)’, *ODNB*, 5530; Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity: wherein every text in the New Testament relating to that doctrine is distinctly considered* (London, 1712).

179. Colligan, *Arian Movement in England*, p. 37.

180. Wiles, pp. 122-24.

181. Whiston, *Memoirs*, p. 184, see also pp. 27, 224

The works of Whiston and Clarke were received by many of the students ‘with too much fondness’ as one alarmed member of the Committee of Thirteen later reported.¹⁸² In November 1716 one student, Hubert Stogdon (1692-1728), who had adopted Clarke’s doctrine discussed them incautiously with the ‘strictly orthodox’ Lavington.¹⁸³ Although Lavington denied disclosing Stogdon’s beliefs, concerns about Arianism at Hallett’s academy began to rise.¹⁸⁴

In December word began to spread that some members of Peirce’s Congregation had adapted the Clarkian view.¹⁸⁵ Peirce himself had become a friend of Whiston while he served as minister to a congregation in Cambridge.¹⁸⁶ From their friendship he came to hold a similar subordinationist belief.¹⁸⁷ He was also influenced by Clarke stating that he ‘could not fall in with the doctor in everything; but saw clearly, [that he] must part with some beloved opinions, or else quit [his] notion of the authority of the Holy Scriptures’.¹⁸⁸ Peirce had studied at Utrecht and Leiden before receiving a call to Exeter in 1713.¹⁸⁹ Peirce confirmed the earlier introduction of Clark and Whiston writing that ‘The common vogue of the people is, that there was nothing of this doctrine [i.e. Arianism] in the city before my coming into it; that I was the first who brought it among them ... but there is no truth in this report’.¹⁹⁰

In February 1717 Lavington preached an orthodox sermon on the Trinity, prompting a comment from one hearer to express concern having been told by Stogdon and others that ‘Christ was not God’ and that the text of Lavington’s sermon, 1 John 5.7, was not in the Bible.¹⁹¹ In May, while Peirce was away in London, Henry Atkins, a neighbouring minister, preached at the Wednesday lecture to Peirce’s congregation.¹⁹² Atkins preached

182. *An Account of the Reasons Why Many Citizens of Exon Have Withdrawn from the Ministry of Mr. Jos. Hallet and Mr. James Peirce. Being an Answer to Mr. Peirce’s State of the Case* (Exeter, 1719), p. 4; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 78.

183. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 80; for Stogdon see Patrick Woodland, ‘Stogdon, Hubert (1692-1728)’, *ODNB*, 26553.

184. James Peirce, *The Western Inquisition: or, A relation of the controversy, which has been lately among the Dissenters in the west of England*, (London, 1720), p. 13.

185. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 80.

186. Wiles, p. 138.

187. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 76; Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 7-8.

188. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 8.

189. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 76; Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters*, III, pp. 218.

190. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 11.

191. *A Plain and Faithful Narrative of the Differences Among the Dissenters at Exeter Relating to the Doctrine of the Ever Blessed Trinity so far as gave concern to some London Ministers* (London, 1719), p. 6; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 80.

192. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 80; *An Answer to Mr. Peirce’s Western Inquisition, &c.* (London,

‘very warm and furious’ on the Trinity, ‘charging some among the Dissenters of Exon with damnable heresies, denying the Lord that bought them’.¹⁹³ Peirce returned to find his ‘people in a great flame’.¹⁹⁴

Upon his return, the Thirteen requested that he preach on the satisfaction of Christ; they also provided a text — 1 John 2.2.¹⁹⁵ As Peirce recounted:

They urged, that the next Lord’s day being the day in course for the administration of the sacrament, nothing could be more proper than a discourse upon the satisfaction of Christ, which they seem’d to think must be intirely overthrown, unless our Saviour were acknowledg’d to be the supreme God.¹⁹⁶

Peirce complied with the Committee’s request. In his sermon, following an explanation of propitiation and a demonstration that Christ served as such, Peirce explained what made his death unique, ‘to what it was owing that the death and sacrifice of Christ is of so great virtue, that it is a propitiation for our sins’.¹⁹⁷ Rather than explain this referring to the unique nature of Christ as both divine and human, he argued that his dignity, holiness, and most importantly his divine designation made him a suitable sacrifice, God’s ‘appointment alone, if we were let into nothing farther, might assure us of the sufficiency and efficacy of it’.¹⁹⁸ Peirce claimed that immediately afterwards ‘both sides were ready to plead what I said was in their favour’ and that only after six months someone complained that he had lessened the effects of sin.¹⁹⁹ The Committee of Thirteen however said that some took notice that Peirce had preached the ‘new notion of the unity of the Godhead’.²⁰⁰

While Peirce’s sermon might have been enough to keep the controversy subdued, the issue was finally brought before the full Assembly with the ordination of Hubert Stogdon, who ‘spake his mind with a great deal of freedom and did not seem to be in the least upon his guard’.²⁰¹ Stogdon had enthusiastically adopted Clarke’s views proclaiming that

1721), pp. 14-6.

193. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 14.

194. *ibid.*

195. ‘And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world’; *An Account of the Reasons Why Many Citizens of Exon Have Withdrawn from the Ministry of Mr. Jos. Hallet and Mr. James Peirce. Being an answer to Mr. Peirce’s State of the Case* (Exon, 1719); Colligan, *The Arian Movement in England*, (Machester, 1913), p. 48.

196. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 14.

197. *ibid.*, p. 15.

198. *ibid.*, p. 17.

199. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 26.

200. *Account of the Reasons*, p. 4.

201. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 82; Peirce, *Western Inquisitions*, p. 13.

he was an Arian and that he ‘hoped Arianism would be as extensive as the gospel’.²⁰² He was scheduled to request ordination at the September 1717 meeting of the Assembly; but, in order to prevent the ‘affair’s being brought into our Assembly’, Peirce, Withers and Hallett suggested Stogdon go outside their jurisdiction for ordination.²⁰³ The three ministers, with Lavington abstaining, sent a certificate with Stogdon which read:

Whereas Mr. Hubert Stogdon has been examin’d by order of the Assembly which meets in this place, and receiv’d a testimonial of their approving him as a candidate, and has now some design of leaving this country, and therefore desir’d us, whose names are subscribed, to give some account of him: we do hereby certify, that his conversation since, as well as before, his examination, has been, so far as we have ever heard, sober and Christian; and that his preaching in these parts has met with good acceptance.²⁰⁴

Stogdon was subsequently ordained and took a position in Somerset.²⁰⁵

They managed to avoid a confrontation at the September Assembly; but during a sermon preached the week of Christmas 1717 Peirce commented ‘that the ever blessed God should send one so nearly ally’d and related to himself into the world, to live and die in it, was a surprizing instance of his love’.²⁰⁶ Lavington, questioned the reference of Christ as ‘one so nearly ally’d and related’ to God and brought it before the Committee of Thirteen.²⁰⁷ In response, the Committee asked each minister to ‘assert the eternity of the son of God’ from the pulpit.²⁰⁸ While Peirce accused the Committee of assuming ‘another kind of power, without any authority from the body’ and beginning an interrogation of him, they seem to have been genuinely seeking that their most capable minister publicly defend the orthodox position. Only after an equivocating defence did they begin to suspect him of Arianism.²⁰⁹

Lavington had initiated the questioning of Peirce, but after December 1717, John Walrond, Presbyterian minister at Ottery St. Mary and a member of one of the leading Exeter families began to take the lead against Peirce.²¹⁰ In July 1718 Peirce again went to London, probably seeking advice, knowing that a confrontation was inevitable.²¹¹ During

202. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 41.

203. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 43-7.

204. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 45; Thomas, p. 163.

205. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 82.

206. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 47; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 82.

207. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 48-9; *Answer to Western Inquisition*, pp. 42-43.

208. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 48-50; *Answer to Western Inquisition*, p. 46.

209. *ibid.*, p. 49; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 83; *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, pp. 7-8.

210. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 83.

211. *ibid.*, p. 84.

his absence, the news of Stogdon's ordination and of their ministers' letter of recommendation reached Exeter.²¹² Upon hearing of this, Walrond and John Ball (1654-1745), the Presbyterian minister of the Bridge Meeting at Honiton, wrote a letter to William Tong (1662-1727) giving an account of the situation and asking for advice.²¹³ Tong had been minister of the Presbyterian congregation that met at Salters' Hall since 1702 where he was lecturer.²¹⁴ He was also on the board of the Presbyterian Fund, the Committee of the Three Denominations, and the board of Trustees of Dr. Williams' charity.

A group of twenty-five Presbyterian and Independent ministers met at Salters' Hall on 25 August to discuss the matter.²¹⁵ Tong and Benjamin Robinson (1666-1724), Presbyterian minister of Little St Helen's, Bishopsgate and Moderator of the meeting, responded to Walrond and Ball with a letter unanimously approved by this body of ministers.²¹⁶ They explained that none of the London Dissenters 'openly avowed' the doctrines troubling Exeter, although some had 'own themselves to be in doubt and suspence about them'.²¹⁷ While insisting that they were not 'competent to give advice to so judicious and numerous an Assembly' as the Ministers of Devon and Cornwall, they did offer some 'general rules' which they would use if they were in a similar position.²¹⁸ These rules were: first, that they would not suspect anyone without good reason; second, they would not to be too hasty with those who were in doubt and seeking an answer; third, they would show 'the great danger of denying the proper Godhead of Christ and of the Holy Ghost'; fourth, they would explain that they could not recommend anyone to the ministry who held those views; and finally, if anyone 'fall into that pernicious error, and persist in it, and teach men so' they would feel obligated 'to warn people of it'.²¹⁹ Ironically, the letter contained a postscript penned by Robinson who wrote concerning the unanimity of the group, 'in the midst of all our fear I cannot but look upon this as a happy presage, that so many brethren

212. Thomas, p. 164.

213. *ibid*; Alexander Gordon, 'Ball, James (1654-1745)', rev. by, David Keep, *ODNB*, 1216.

214. David L. Wykes, 'Tong, William (1662-1727)', *ODNB*, 27534.

215. Thomas, 'The Non-Subscription Controversy', p. 164.

216. *A Plain and Faithful Narrative*, pp. 10-14; Alexander Gordon, 'Robinson, Benjamin (1666-1724)', rev. by, S. J. Skedd, *ODNB*, 23830.

217. *ibid*, p. 10.

218. *ibid*.

219. *ibid*, pp. 10-11.

as were together upon this occasion, broke up with so cool, so christian, and truly catholick a temper, as did appear among us'.²²⁰

As September drew near, Walrond and Ball prepared for the Assembly by writing to 'two or three ministers desiring their presence at the Assembly', or as Peirce described it, with a 'great riding about, and writing of circular letters to form a party in the Assembly, and to appoint a cabal previous to it'.²²¹ Prior to the official meeting Walrond hosted a private meeting with Ball, Withers and Peirce for a final attempt to resolve the situation before the Assembly.²²² Walrond was adamant that the Assembly make a declaration of belief in the Trinity which Peirce considered a pretense for raising suspicions and for 'setting up an inquisition'.²²³ A meeting of ministers prior to the official meeting of the Assembly was proposed, which Peirce objected to, believing that it would be an orthodox caucus.²²⁴ In the course of the discussion it was suggested that candidates be given more rigorous examinations, to which Peirce and Withers agreed. When the meeting ended Peirce and Withers had been invited to the preliminary meeting, however there was a misunderstanding about plans for the Assembly.²²⁵ Peirce and Withers believed that they had reached a compromise, that the call for a declaration of faith would not be brought to the Assembly granted that candidates would receive closer scrutiny.²²⁶ Although Ball and Walrond were pleased that they had agreed about candidates' examinations, they had not changed their plan to have the Assembly make a public declaration.²²⁷

Walrond's party met on two occasions before the Assembly's business meeting.²²⁸ Tuesday, the evening following the first session 'the greater part of those that compose the Assembly', including Peirce, met at the home of John Pym to discuss the growing Arianism.²²⁹ Pym was the Assembly's treasurer and one of the Thirteen.²³⁰ In the discussion Peirce said that he 'insisted upon [his] right, that no accusation should be receiv'd against

220. *ibid.*, p. 12.

221. *Answer to Western Inquisition*, p. 53; Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 69; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 85.

222. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 69-70; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 85.

223. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 70; *Answer to Western Inquisition*, pp. 53-4

224. *ibid.*, p. 70.

225. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 85.

226. *ibid.*

227. *Answer to Western Inquisition*, pp. 57-8.

228. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, pp. 85-6.

229. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 75; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 86.

230. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 86.

[him], but under two or three witnesses' and 'that if they design'd a test, I would submit to none beside express Scripture'.²³¹ Withers offered his reasons against the declaration being brought before the Assembly, arguing among other things, that 'bringing such a test is contrary to the good old rule, allowed by all divines and lawyers, that no man is bound to accuse himself' and that it would allow for further innovations, 'We have one test this year, perhaps we shall have another next; and every man that can get to be head of a party, will be for making a new Creed, and we shall never know where to stop'.²³² Neither swayed the majority of the ministers.

At the meeting the following morning John Ball made the following motion:

Mr. Moderator, I desire to know whether we shall declare against the errors of those, who deny the divinity of our Saviour. 'Tis thought necessary by several minister here present, that we declare against the errors and heresies relating to the divinity of the Logos and the Holy Ghost.²³³

Heated debate followed, so that the Moderator had difficulty maintaining order.²³⁴

The 'several ministers' were resisted not only by those like Peirce who held controversial views, but also by a number of orthodox ministers who 'were against impositions, and determining matters by mere authority'.²³⁵ Eventually, the question was brought to a vote, 'Whether we shall make any Declaration in this Assembly, concerning the errors relating to the doctrine of the holy Trinity?'.²³⁶ The question was answered in the affirmative and debate continued over what method to use in declaring such faith.²³⁷ Peirce desired that only Scriptural phrases be used; it was finally decided to allow each minister to profess their beliefs in either their own words or 'Scripture-terms' alone.²³⁸

It should be noted that while the Assembly was insisting that the ministers declare their beliefs, they were not demanding subscription. Each minister was allowed to state their faith either in whatever method they chose; there was no confession or article to which members were required to give assent. Moreover, while the ill consequences of holding to a non-traditional view of the nature of Christ or the Holy Spirit might have been

231. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 75.

232. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 79-81.

233. *ibid.*, p. 83.

234. *ibid.*, p. 85; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 87.

235. *ibid.*, p. 84.

236. *ibid.*, p. 85; *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, p. 15.

237. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 87.

238. *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, p. 15; Brockett, p. 87.

apparent, it was not the case that the Assembly had threatened exclusion for anyone who's declaration was found unacceptable. In the aftermath, when ministers were excluded from office, it was done, not by the Assembly, but by the members of their congregations. The Assembly was primarily attempting to make a corporate statement of orthodoxy in response to the concerns of the laity.

Joseph Hallett, as the senior minister began the declarations by saying 'since divines generally hold, that the doctrine of the sacred Trinity is a mystery sublime and ineffable, I humbly conceive that it can't be better express'd than in the words of God himself'.²³⁹ He then proceeded to quote several texts of Scripture and disowned the errors of the Arians, Sabellians and Socinians.²⁴⁰ He closed stating that 'two things have set the Church on fire, and been the plagues of it above a thousand years', namely enlarging the Creed and requiring more fundamentals than God and in imposing new creeds of human authority.²⁴¹ Withers followed with an orthodox declaration using his own terms.²⁴²

Peirce, for the first time publicly, professed his belief in subordinationism, declaring:

I am not of the opinion of Sabellius, Arius, Socinus, or Sherlock. I believe there is but one God, and can be no more. I believe the Son and Holy Ghost to be divine persons, but subordinate to the Father: and the unity of God is, I think, to be resolved into the Father's being the fountain of the divinity of the Son and Spirit.²⁴³

Three others refused to make any declaration, one stating 'I disown any authority that any man, or body of men, or this Assembly hath to demand my opinion; and therefore refuse to make any declaration'.²⁴⁴ Following the personal declarations the clerk recorded a note in the minutes, 'Tis the general sense of this Assembly, that there is but one living and true God; and that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the one God'.²⁴⁵ The Assembly had extracted declarations from the ministers but it was uncertain what would follow.

While having a collective profession of orthodoxy might have satisfied those who primari-

239. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 103-4.

240. *ibid.* Peirce lists the texts he quoted: Luke 1.32, 6.35, John 1.1, Romans 9.5, Acts 5.3,4, I Cor 6.19, I Cor 3.16-7 and 8.6.

241. *ibid.*, p.104.

242. *ibid.*, p. 104; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 87.

243. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 105.

244. *ibid.*, p. 106; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 87.

245. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, pp. 106-7; *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, p. 15. Peirce claims that the minute was recorded solely at the direction of Lavington, however the author of the *Plain and Faithful Narrative* states that 'after much struggle, was put to the vote ... and was carried to be the collected sense of a great majority, and accordingly was enter'd as a minute'.

ly wanted the Assembly to respond to the criticism of the Church, the congregations of the ministers who's personal statements were less than satisfactory were caught in a dilemma.

Pamphlets and tracts, beginning with *The Innocent Vindicated*, followed.²⁴⁶ Primarily, these debated the nature of Christ and the facts of the controversy more than the principles of Church power and right to demand subscription that would part of the debates to follow. The author of *The Innocent Vindicated* argued for subordinationism, stating that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is clear and plain in the Scriptures; but Creeds and Councils have obscured it.'²⁴⁷ In November the Committee of Thirteen, as they explained, were concerned that 'some of their Ministers would not make what stand they ought against the spreading of those pernicious errors'.²⁴⁸ The Committee met with the four Exeter ministers in November demanding that they 'give them satisfaction' through signing either the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Sixth Answer of the Westminster Shorter Catechism or the declaration from their September meeting.²⁴⁹ This was the first time they called for a subscription to a specific formula. Only Lavington agreed, Peirce again stated his belief in the subordination of the Son and conviction that the Thirty-Nine Articles and Westminster Shorter Catechism 'went farther then they were warranted by the Word of God' in their teaching of the Trinity.²⁵⁰ The Thirteen were technically only responsible for the building and 'other temporal affairs of the Dissenters', but while they were the only representative body of the congregations and the closest thing to a Consistory or Session, they had no authority over the ministers.²⁵¹

On 22 November, the Thirteen sent a letter to Tong, and other ministers in London asking for advice.²⁵² A reply did not come until 6 January 1719.²⁵³ The response from the

246. *The Innocent Vindicated: or, those falsly call'd Arrians defended, by a few plain texts of Scripture, from the Wicked Aspersions of Uncharitable Men, who think themselves infallible, and are wise above what is written* (Exon, 1718); 2nd edn. (London, 1719). Many of these were published in two editions, first in Exeter and shortly afterward in London. A list of works published in relation to both the Exeter and Salters' Hall controversy was published in *An Account of all the considerable Books and Pamphlets that have been wrote on either side in the controversy concerning the Trinity, since the year MDCCXII. In which is also contained, an account of the Pamphlets writ this last year on each side by the Dissenters, to the end of the Year, MDCCXIX* (London, 1720).

247. *ibid*, p. 14.

248. *Account of the Reasons*, p. 6.

249. *Account of the Reasons*, p. 6.

250. *ibid*, p. 6.

251. Peirce, *Western Inquisition*, p. 49; Gordon, *Addresses Biographical and Historical* (London, 1922), p. 130.

252. *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, pp. 21-2.

253. *ibid*, p. 24.

London ministers expressed concern not to appear to be exercising any sort of jurisdictional authority over the Exeter ministers, ‘we are only afraid to go beyond the bounds of order’, and recommended that the most appropriate course of action be to seek advice from ministers closer to Exeter, ‘it has always been thought fit, that where there are misunderstandings between ministers and people, neighbouring ministers should have the first hearing of the case’.²⁵⁴

Following the advice of the London ministers, the Committee invited seven neighbouring ministers to intervene: John Ball, William Horsham, Samuel Hall, John Moore, John Walrond, Josiah Eveleigh and Joseph Manston.²⁵⁵ These came together on 19 January and the following day met with Peirce, Hallett and Withers.²⁵⁶ Following this meeting the ‘Seven’ came to three resolutions:

1. That there are some errors in doctrine which are sufficient ground for the people to withdraw from their ministers holding such errors.
2. That the denying the true and proper divinity of the Son of God, viz. that he is one God with the Father, is an error of that nature; contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and common faith of the Reformed Churches.
3. That when so dangerous an error is industriously propagated, to the overthrowing of the faith of many, we think it the indispensable duty of ministers, who are set for the defence of the Gospel, earnestly to withstand it; and to give reasonable satisfaction to their people of their soundness in the faith. And we likewise recommend to the people, as their duty; to hold fast the truth in love; avoiding anger, clamour and evil speaking, and to behave themselves with all sincerity and meekness as becometh Christians.²⁵⁷

This was the first time that the removal of office was mentioned in the Exeter situation. Notably, the pivotal point was not the basis of communion among ministers, as would be the case in Ireland, but the responsibilities of ministers to their congregation and the justifiable cause people might have for withdrawing. The influence of Locke’s contractual understanding of the Church is seen here among even the orthodox party who saw the dispute as the ministers relinquishing their obligations.

The ‘Seven’ requested that the Thirteen delay any action until their decision could be confirmed by colleagues in London and other neighbouring ministers.²⁵⁸ Before they

254. *ibid.*, p. 25.

255. James Peirce, *The Case of the Ministers Ejected at Exon. By James Peirce, one of them ([Exeter], [1719])*, p. 2; *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 89.

256. *ibid.*, p. 89.

257. *Account of the Reasons*, pp. 27-8.

258. *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, p. 27.

met however, Peirce had sent a Letter to his own friends in London.²⁵⁹ This letter brought the controversy to the London ministers which will be the subject of the following section. At the London minister's request, the 'Seven' postponed their meeting until they had a chance to deliberate.²⁶⁰

There would in fact be two separate letters of advice sent from London; the Non-Subscribers' received on 17 March and the Subscribers' on April 7. By 4 March however, the Seven decided to wait no longer and submitted their resolutions to the Committee of Thirteen before hearing back from London.²⁶¹ Roger Thomas believed that had they waited the advice from the Non-Subscribers would have arrived first and would have been followed, Brockett however persuasively argues that they had already heard about the divisions in London and realized that advice from a divided body would not be decisive.²⁶² Regardless, on 5 March, in accordance with the recommendation of the neighbouring ministers the Thirteen asked them to profess their belief in the 'true Deity of Jesus Christ' by giving assent to one of the three previously requested statements or to the phrase 'that the Son of God was One God with the Father'.²⁶³ Lavington complied, Withers gave a statement from Bishop Pearson's (1613–1686) *Exposition of the Creed* (1659):

Tho' the Father and the Son are two distinct persons, yet since the Son is of and from the Father, as the fountain of the Deity, and intimately united with him, I conceive, in this sense he may be said to be one God with the Father.²⁶⁴

This was not accepted by the Committee and over the following days, as it became apparent that he would be ejected, Withers offered to subscribe to the Nicene Creed and eventually to the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles.²⁶⁵ Peirce and Hallett refused to yield. Peirce asked for Scriptural support for the claim that the Father and the Son were one God, refusing to subscribe to anything but expressly Scriptural terms saying that he would refuse to subscribe that 'three and two make five' if they had made it a religious test.²⁶⁶

259. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 90.

260. *ibid.*, pp. 91-2.

261. *Account of the Reasons*, p. 7.

262. Thomas, p. 166; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, pp. 91-2.

263. *Account of the Reasons*, p. 8.

264. Peirce, *Case of the Ministers*, p. 4; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 92.

265. Peirce, *Case of the Ministers*, p. 5; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 93.

266. Peirce, *Case of the Ministers*, p. 4.

While the Committee of Thirteen dealt with the financial matters of the Dissenters as a whole, the three Meeting Houses were owned by their respective Boards of Trustees. On Friday, 6 March, the Trustees of the James' Meeting House, which included two members of Lavington's family, locked Peirce and Hallett out of the building and told them that they might preach at another congregation that Sunday.²⁶⁷

The following Monday, 9 March 1719, John Ball published *Arius Detected and Confuted* which further inflamed the people and the following day the Trustees of all three Meeting Houses ejected Peirce and Hallett.²⁶⁸ That Sunday, Peirce preached to a congregation of about three hundred in a private home. He later published the sermon on 1 Corinthians 1.13, 'is Christ divided?', under the title *The Evil and Cures of Divisions*.²⁶⁹ Peirce was followed by some wealthier members of the other Churches, who managed to raise enough funds to build a new Meeting House at the Mint, the following year.²⁷⁰

In addition to *Evil and Cure of Divisions*, Peirce also published a response to *Arius Detected* in his two part *Plain Christianity Defended* as well as *The Case of the Ministers ejected at Exon*, giving his side of the controversy.²⁷¹ In response to Hallett and Peirces' case, the Committee of Thirteen gave their side in *An Account of the Reasons why many citizens of Exon have withdrawn from the ministry of Mr. Jos. Hallet and Mr. James Peirce*. The *Account* insists the dispute as one over the 'doctrine of the Trinity in unity, and of the true deity of the Lord Jesus Christ as One God with the Father'.²⁷² They claimed that Arianism was boasting of their strength and size.²⁷³ Further, they believed it was the ministers 'bounden duty' to 'preach down and discourage those dangerous errors'.²⁷⁴ The failure to fulfill this duty was what the Committee primarily found fault with, 'not so much

267. *ibid*, pp. 5-6; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 92.

268. Peirce, *Case of the Ministers*, pp. 6-7; Thomas, p. 162; Colligan, *The Arian Movement*, p. 50; *Arius Detected and Confuted: or, a short and familiar Direction for Plain Christians, that love the Lord Jesus, and hearken to his Voice, how to understand the Language of the Disciples of Arius, that they may not, by their good Words and fair speeches, be drawn to acknowledge and worship two Gods, or rather One God and a Creature, contrary to many plain and express Texts of Holy Scripture (Exeter, 1719)*

269. James Peirce, *The Evil and Cure of Divisions. A sermon preach'd at Exon, at the opening of a new meeting-house, March 15. 1718-9. Being the first Lord's Day after the ejection of the ministers (London, 1719)*.

270. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 93.

271. James Peirce, *Plain Christianity Defended: being an answer to a pamphlet lately printed at Exon, intituled, Arius Detected and Confuted, &c. Part I (London, 1719); Plain Christianity Defended: Part II, being a continuation of the Answer to a Pamphlet lately printed at Exon, intituled, Arius Detected and Confuted, &c. (London, 1719); The Case of the Ministers ejected at Exon ([Exeter],[1719])*.

272. *Account of the Reasons*, p. 3.

273. *ibid*, p. 5.

274. *ibid*, p. 9.

for preaching up these new notions, as for not preaching them down'.²⁷⁵ They rejected the claim that demanding a statement was an inquisition, saying that it 'is evidently one of the plainest duties in the world; that men should be open in confessing their faith'.²⁷⁶ Coming from the lay Committee, the *Account* shows the importance of the lay influence on behalf of subscription that would be a part of the debates elsewhere as well. They compare the demand for ministers to profess an orthodox faith with the requirement for anyone to make a profession to be admitted to baptism or the Lord's Supper.²⁷⁷ It concludes with a declaration that liberty of conscience is not for the clergy alone, 'if ministers will claim a liberty to chuse a new faith, the people will claim their liberty to chuse new ministers'.²⁷⁸

In May of 1719 the Exeter Assembly met and following the actions of the London Subscribers a majority offered a voluntary subscription to either the Church of England's First Article, the Shorter Catechism's Fifth and Sixth questions or the form in the minutes of the previous Assembly.²⁷⁹ They also introduced a subscription requirement for any further ordinations:

We who have subscribed and declared our assent to the first Article of the Church of England ... farther declare, that we cannot in conscience give our approbation of any persons being admitted to preach as a candidate, or to be ordained, or recommended by us to any congregation, unless he professeth his assent to the above-said Article, or to the answers to the fifth and sixth questions of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, or to the collective sense of the last September Assembly.²⁸⁰

While the majority subscribed, either at the Assembly or later, thirteen ministers and six candidates refused. While not formally excluded, those who refused did not return to future meetings of the Exeter Assembly and ministers and candidates were required to profess an orthodox view of the Trinity and nature of Christ.²⁸¹ George Jacomb, who refused to subscribe, was denied ordination. This began another series of pamphlets debating the question of subscription between him, John Enty (1675?–1743) and Peirce.²⁸²

The events in Exeter anticipate the debates to follow, most notably in the influence of the laity in insisting that ministers subscribe. While, as we will see, Salters' Hall erupt-

275. *ibid.*, p. 10.

276. *ibid.*

277. *ibid.*, p. 12.

278. *ibid.*, p. 16.

279. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 93-4.

280. George Jacomb, *A Particular Account of the Proceedings of the Assembly at Exon, May 6, 1719. Upon Mr. Jacomb's Offering a Confession of Faith in Scripture-words, in order to his ordination* (London, 1719)

281. *ibid.*, p. 96.

282. Patrick Woodland, 'Enty, John (1675?–1743)', *ODNB*, 8826.

ed quickly into division, at Exeter events moved slowly and deliberately. The issue of subscription did not begin the events there, rather it was a response to the spread of anti-Trinitarian teachings within their congregations.

‘The flame flew from Exeter to London’²⁸³

The divisions in Exeter might have remained isolated had the parties not sought advice from London. Though both groups sent for advice, it was Peirce’s letter to his friends that brought the Exeter debates to London. The ‘Seven’ had originally corresponded with ministers who would have agreed with them.²⁸⁴ This prompted Peirce to seek advice from his own friends, one of whom was John Shute Barrington, M.P. (1678-1734).²⁸⁵

Barrington was the son of a London merchant. He had studied at Thomas Rowe’s Academy at the same time as Isaac Watts, and later at Utrecht where he received a doctorate.²⁸⁶ He was a ‘disciple and friend’ of Locke and shared Locke and Baxter’s ideal of creedal minimalism.²⁸⁷ He also had defended Dissenters in *The Rights of Protestant Dissenters*.²⁸⁸ Barrington had been instrumental in gaining support in the Church of Scotland for the Union of Parliaments after which he inherited two estates and won a seat in Parliament, representing Berwick in 1715 and again in 1722.²⁸⁹ Jonathan Swift described him as ‘the shrewdest head in England, and the person in whom the Presbyterians chiefly confide’.²⁹⁰ He was a member of Thomas Bradbury’s (1677-1759) congregation at New Court.²⁹¹ Bradbury, an Independent minister and strict Calvinist would become a leading proponent of subscription resulting in Barrington’s decision to move to the more moderate Pinnars Hall.²⁹²

283. Calamy, II, p. 409.

284. Thomas, p. 167.

285. Thomas, p. 167.

286. Arthur H. Grant, ‘Barrington, John Shute, first Viscount Barrington (1678-1734)’, rev. by Philip Carter, *ODNB*, 1531; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Common-Wealthman: studies in the transmission, development, and circumstance of English liberal thought from the restoration of Charles II until the war with the thirteen colonies* (Harvard, 1959; repr. Indianapolis, 1987), pp. 228-30.

287. Thomas, p. 168.

288. John Shute Barrington, *The Rights of Protestant Dissenters. In two parts. The first being the case of the Dissenters review’d. The second, A vindication of their right to an absolute toleration, from the objections of Sir H. Mackworth, in his treatise, intitul’d, Peace at home* (London, 1705).

289. Robbins, p. 229; Grant, ‘Barrington’, *ODNB*, 1531.

290. Jonathan Swift, *Works*, (1824), 15, p. 318, quoted in Grant, ‘Barrington’, *ODNB*, 1531.

291. John Handby Thompson, ‘Bradbury, Thomas (1676/7-1759)’, *ODNB*, 3169; Fred I. Powicke, ‘The Salters’ Hall Assembly and the Advices for Peace’, *Congregational Historical Society Transactions*, 7 (1917), 213-223 (p. 213).

292. Robbins, pp. 230-1.

When Barrington received Peirce's letter he was campaigning for the repeal of the Schism and Occasional Conformity Acts.²⁹³ A Bill to such ends had been introduced to the House of Lords on 13 December 1718 and the news of Arianism among the Exeter Dissenters gave reason for its opponents attempt to add a requirement for a Trinitarian test arguing that Dissenters were 'wavering and unsettled' on the doctrine.²⁹⁴ The Bill had passed the Lords in December but Barrington knew that they needed to remain united in the face of High Church opposition.²⁹⁵

To settle the matter, Barrington took the advices he had drawn up and intended to send to Exeter to an informal 'committee of ministers and gentlemen' on 5 February for their review.²⁹⁶ The Advices were next taken to the Committee of the General Body of the Three Denominations.²⁹⁷ This Committee decided to submit them, with some changes, to the whole body of London ministers so that, as Calamy explained, 'what was done might have the more weight'. Barrington, apparently foreseeing the controversy, advised against this.²⁹⁸ Others, such as Calamy, foresaw the contentions and 'took up a resolution to have no hand in it'.²⁹⁹ The Advices were preceded with a call to remain united on 'that undoubted Protestant principle ... that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of the faith and practice of Christians' against 'those that wait for opportunities to overturn the liberty we at present enjoy' and whatever 'human declarations, or doctrinal tests the civil or ecclesiastical powers ... have thought fit to enjoin'.³⁰⁰

The following five Advices were brought before the body.³⁰¹ First, everyone should 'endeavour to allay all unreasonable jealousies concerning the sentiments and opinions of others' and promote mutual charity and forbearance. Second, no accusation should

293. Robbins, p. 229.

294. Calamy, II, pp. 402-3; Powicke, 'Salters' Hall Assembly and Advices for Peace', p. 214.

295. Thomas, p. 168; Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 91; Powicke, 'Salters' Hall Assembly and Advices for Peace', p. 214.

296. *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Tong, Mr. Robinson, Mr. Smith, & Mr. Reynolds. Occasion'd by the late Differences amongst the Dissenters. Wherein is Consider'd the Regard Dissenters ought to pay to Human Forms in Matters of Faith. With Some General Remarks on their late Book. To which is added an appendix, containing two letters sent by some Dissenting Gentlemen to their Ministers and other Papers*, 2nd edn., (London, 1719). 81-85; Thomas, p. 170. Brockett notes the similarity of Barrington's advices with the points Peirce had made in his defense in *Nonconformity in Exeter*, p. 91.

297. Geoffrey F. Nuttall and Owen Chadwick, eds., *From Uniformity to Unity 1662-1962* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), p. 261; *Plain and Faithful Narrative*, p. 29.

298. Thomas, pp. 170-1, Calamy, *An Historical Account*, II, p. 402.

299. Calamy, II, p. 411.

300. *Letter to Tong*, p. 82.

301. *Letter to Tong*, pp. 83-5; Powicke, 'Salters' Hall Assembly and Advices for Peace', p. 215-6.

be considered against anyone without at least two people openly and clearly bringing a substantiated charge; the intent being to avoid gossip and rumour. Third, any accusation should first be brought before the accused privately. The Fourth, is best quoted in full:

If at last any shall be called to so difficult a work, as that of judging the faith of their brethren, and determining their titles to the name of Christians, their capacity of being members of Christian Churches and their hopes of salvation; we assure ourselves they will, in a matter of so great moment, adhere steadfastly to the Protestant principle; will make use of no human decisions, human forms or compositions, either to torture or condemn their Christian brethren: that they will think nothing, but the plain and express declarations of Holy Scripture, a sufficient authority to justify their condemning any, as not holding the faith necessary to salvation; and that in so awful a case as judging the servants of our common Lord and Master they will, we doubt not, act as those who expect his appearance.

Finally, they ask that if any minister or congregation disagrees with the previous methods, that they will maintain ‘charity and communion’ with those that adopt them.

When the body of ministers met at Salters’ Hall they did so to consider advice on basic form of discipline. Even an elementary order of discipline would have helped in providing some structure to the confusion in Exeter, the Committee genuinely seemed in need of guidance and one of Peirce’s continual complaints was that he was not actually charged with error nor given an adequate opportunity to defend himself. While they are obviously not intended to serve as a directory for discipline or order, it is interesting that the Advices make no distinction between ministers and laity, either in method for handling accusations or in terms of communion. Not only did the Fourth Advice forbid the use of a confession or formula, such as the one from the Exeter Assembly; it assumes the basis of communion, for both ministers and laity, as Fundamental Articles — ‘holding the faith necessary to Salvation’. The final clause reveals that disagreement on the use of confessions or articles was already significant.

The Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in and about London met on 19 February, the day after the Bill passed the Commons.³⁰² Joshua Oldfield (1656-1729), Tong’s colleague at Coventry was elected Moderator.³⁰³ When the paper was presented, the ministers decided to consider it paragraph by paragraph and after a day of doing so adjourned without incident.³⁰⁴ They reconvened on 24 February when the question ‘whether in some

302. Robbins, p. 230; *Authentick Account*, p. 17.

303. Alan Ruston, Oldfield, Joshua (1656-1729), *ODNB*, 20681; Drysdale, p. 504

304. Thomas, p. 171; *Authentick Account*, p. 18

part of the Advices ... there should be inserted a Declaration of Faith in the Holy Trinity'.³⁰⁵ In the midst of 'a great deal of bustle, heat, invective, and over-bearing treatment' the vote was called for.³⁰⁶ Amidst the confusion a division of the house was requested with those opposed to a declaration going upstairs to the galley, at which point someone called out 'You that are against persecution, come up stairs!'; this was countered with the cry 'You that are for the Doctrine of the Trinity, stay below!'.³⁰⁷ When the votes were counted those opposed to inserting a statement on the Trinity were in the majority 57 to 53, as was later reported 'the Bible carried it by four'.³⁰⁸ The meeting then adjourned until 3 March.³⁰⁹

It was at this meeting that 'the United became the divided ministers'.³¹⁰ When the ministers reconvened, those who had previously voted for a declaration 'renewed a debate' by making a motion that the previous decisions should be 'laid aside' until they had gone through all of the Advices.³¹¹ The Subscribers explain that those who voted against the Declaration were complaining that their orthodoxy had been called into question, to which it was answered that 'subscribing an immediate declaration of their faith in the Holy Trinity' before moving on with business would remove any suspicion.³¹² They insisted that they had presented a different motion, calling for a Declaration 'distinct from the Advices, and without relation ... to them'.³¹³ Their motion was ruled out of order by the Moderator and the meeting degenerated into complaints and arguments over the previous meeting.³¹⁴ Finally, someone raised a scroll signaling a walk out.³¹⁵ On the scroll was written the First Article of the Church of England and the 5th and 6th Answers to the Shorter Catechism, the same forms the Committee in Exeter had wanted their ministers to subscribe. Several ministers withdrew to the vestry to sign the scroll while the others remained to continue considering the Advices.³¹⁶

305.Powicke, p. 216; Thomas, p. 171.

306.Barrington, *An Account of the Late Proceedings*, p. 10.

307.*ibid.*, p. 10.

308.William Whiston, *Memoirs* (1749), p. 220.

309.Thomas, p. 172.

310.Calamy, II, p. 411.

311.[Grosvenor], *An Authentick Account*, p. 16.

312.Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, p. 6.

313.*Vindication of Subscribing Ministers*, p. 22.

314.*ibid.*, p. 23.

315.[Grosvenor], *An Authentick Account*, p. 16; Thomas, p. 174.

316.Thomas, p. 174. Some sources say that they withdrew to the gallery, Thomas shows that Mist's *Weekly*

To their surprise, those who had left to subscribe the Articles realized that they were the in the majority.³¹⁷ Wilcox, in *The Noble Stand*, reports that 60 withdrew and about 50 remained.³¹⁸ They sent a formal protest to the other group's meeting, demanding that the Moderator step down to no effect.³¹⁹ The Subscribers considered themselves to be the legitimate body as the majority and, after subscribing, adjourned until 9 March.³²⁰

The others, now properly called Non-Subscribers, continued, as Grosvenor explained, 'not thinking ourselves at all concerned with what our Brethren were doing, out of place, time, and order'.³²¹ They continued to meet into the evening, considering the first three Advices before adjourning until 10 March.³²² To their credit, they adjourned before discussing the most controversial fourth Advice, which rejected the use of confessions as tests of orthodoxy until it could be discussed by the whole body. They also sent notice of the meeting on the 10th to those who had withdrawn.³²³ Although both sides had members of different denominations, the majority of Presbyterians tended to side with the Non-Subscribers and a larger percentage of Independents with the Subscribers.³²⁴

The Subscribers met on 9 March and approved the following Advice:³²⁵

We are clearly of the opinion, that there are errors in doctrine of such a nature, as will not only warrant, but oblige the people to withdraw from those ministers that maintain and teach them. And that the people have a right to judge what those errors are ... and therefore we humbly advise:

1. That when such differences do arise, the people would consider, tho' they have the power of judging what minister and doctrines are fit for them to hear, yet they must by no means suffer their passions, prejudices, or unreasonable jealousies, to byass their judgment; but must search the Scriptures, and be determined by them ...
2. If the people shall see fit (which in many cases may be expedient) to call for the advice of neighbouring ministers and others ... [those called] should be free, open and faithful in the advice they give, without being in the least influenced by the any personal respect or disrespect on either hand.
3. If any ministers is suspected by his heareres to hold dangerous errors, and the people in a serious and respectful manner desire him to be plain with them, and let

Journal, 4 April, is surely correct in recording that they went to the vestry.

317. Colligan, *The Arian Movement*, p. 57.

318. Wilcox, *Noble Stand*, pp. 8-9.

319. *ibid.*, p. 9.

320. *ibid.*

321. [Grosvenor], *An Authentick Account*, p. 20.

322. Thomas, p. 174.

323. Thomas, pp. 174-5.

324. Powicke, 'The Salters' Hall Controversy', pp. 111-123; Griffiths, p. 116. Powicke bases his numbers on those who signed the two sets of Advices, which would include many who were not at the Salters' Hall meetings.

325. *A True Relation of some Proceedings at Salters-Hall By those Ministers who sign'd The First Article of the Church of England, and The Answers to the Fifth and Sixth Questions in the Assemblies Shorter Catechism, March 3. 1719* (London, [1719]); quoted in *Protestant Nonconformists Texts*, II, pp. 67-8.

them know what his real belief is ... we think it reasonable he should comply with their desire, and be ready to give and account of the hope that is in him ...

4. That the people in this case should be always ready to receive a reasonable satisfaction; and if it does appear either that their ministers never held those errors ... or have ... relinquish'd them ... the people should regard them with all respect and kindness ... receive them in the Lord, and attend upon their ministry...

5. If all attempts to mutual satisfaction, union and agreement, between ministers and people should prove ineffectual, and either the minister should judge it his duty to withdraw from the people ... or the people shall judge it their duty to withdraw from their minister ... they should resolve to part without wrath and bitterness ...

The letter also contained a statement that 'the denying of the true and proper divinity of the Son of God and the Holy Spirit, viz. that they are One God with the Father, is an error contrary to the Holy Scriptures and common faith of the Reformed Churches' as therefore a justifiable reason to withdraw from a minister. It concluded with a declaration of their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity:

We who have subscrib'd these Advices, have also subscrib'd the First Article of the Church of England, and the Answers to the fifth and sixth questions of the Assemblies Catechism; as what we believe to be the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

The Declaration of Faith was accompanied by seventy-eight signatures.³²⁶ Although more Independents sided with the Subscribers, Presbyterians were still a slight majority of that party. It is therefore remarkable to see how much authority was given to the laity in these Advices. They saw the calling of neighbouring ministers, in the second Advice, merely as 'expedient' in 'many cases'. The responsibility for judging the minister was given over entirely to their congregation. Additionally, it should be noted that their letter did not specify a form for a minister to declare their faith. It would still be consistent with the Advices to give a declaration in one's own words and so they were not insisting on adherence to a specific formula.

The Non-Subscribers met on 10 March to continue discussion of the 4th clause, which they altered, and inserted three additional Advices.³²⁷ The first two paragraphs are essentially the same as those sent by the Subscribers, that is there are some errors that would justify and oblige people to withdraw from someone's ministry, and it is the right of

326. Powicke, 'Salters' Hall Assembly and Advices for Peace', p. 220.

327. *ibid*, p. 218.

the people to judge those errors. The Advices they offer'd for doing so was very different.³²⁸

1. That all Christians, especially ministers of the gospel of peace, should on the one hand carefully avoid giving any just occasion of offence; and on the other, avoid and discountenance all unreasonable jealousy concerning the sentiments and opinions of others, particularly of ministers ...

2. If either ministers or other Christians, should be charged with not holding the Christian Faith ... we apprehend that no such accusations should be received by any ... unless the accusation be reduced to a certainty, and two or more credible persons shall declare themselves ready to support and justify it ...

3. That when such an accusation is brought, the person accused be first privately admonished, before the matter come under the examination of any publick assembly, or he be obliged to a publick defence.

4. If after all, a publick hearing be insisted on, we think the Protestant principle, that the Bible is the only and the perfect Rule of Faith, obliges those who have the case before them, not to condemn any man upon the authority of humane decisions, or because he consents not to humane forms or phrases: But then only is he to be censured, as not holding the Faith necessary to Salvation, when it appears that he contradicts, or refuses to own, the plain and express declarations of Holy Scripture, in what is there made necessary to be believed, and in matters there solely revealed ...

5. We further advise, that Catechisms and other summaries of Christianity, and expositions of Scripture by wise and learned, tho' fallible men, should be regarded as great helps to understand the mind of God in the Scriptures: And that all be allowed by common consent, to support their own sense of Scripture upon proper occasions ... provided it be with sobriety and charity to those who differ from them. We also desire to secure the evidence arising from Scripture consequences; tho' no man should be charged with holding those consequences of his opinion, which he expressly disclaims.

6. That where any ... think themselves bound in conscience, to declare against such a sense of Scripture, as the body of that Christian society to which they belong apprehend to be the truth of great importance, they should ... rather quietly withdraw from it, and seek communion, or service, in some other Christian society, than disturb the peace of that congregation: and that there be no censuring of the person who withdraw, or of the congregation that receives him.

7. That ministers, and people, both endeavour to know, maintain and propagate the truth in love; insisting most on those things wherein Christians are generally agreed ...

8. If any minister or congregation shall differ as to the expediency of these methods, or shall think any other more proper, we hope they will, as intending the same good end, still preserve charity and communion with those ministers and congregations that shall think fit to pursue these advices.

These were accompanied by a letter dated 17 March giving their 'Reasons for not subscribing the paper offer'd at Salters-Hall, March the Third, 1718-19'.³²⁹ Among the twelve reasons given was that it would be a 'breach of order' having been called to consider the Advices for peace, that to declare in words other than Scripture would cause 'greater confusions and disorders', that it would go beyond the burden placed on them by legisla-

328.[Grosvenor], *An Authentick Account*, pp. 5-11, quoted in Powicke, 'Salters' Hall Assembly and Advices for Peace', pp. 218-20.

329.[Grosvenor], *An Authentick Account*, pp. 13-29.

tion, and knowing that several of their ministers were opposed to it, subscribing would become a ‘mark of distinction’ rather than a sign of unity.³³⁰

Almost immediately after the divided meetings, accounts began to be published which ignited a tract war which only exacerbated the differences between the two groups. It began on 12 March when a brief, vague pamphlet, *The Synod*, was published.³³¹ It did not rouse a response since, as Thomas explains, ‘it sheds less light than it requires for its own elucidation’.³³² Two days later the *Whitehall Evening Post* ran an account, anonymous but most likely from Barrington, of the Non-Subscribers’ Meeting of 10 March, presented as though it was the decision of the the Dissenting ministers without noting the large division that had taken place.³³³ ‘We hear that the Dissenting Ministers in, and about London, after several Meetings at Salter’s-Hall did on the 10th ... come to the Resolution, that as the Scriptures are the only and perfect rule of faith and practice, so they should be the only standard of truth and orthodoxy’.³³⁴

The Subscribers viewed the article as misleading, presenting the Non-Subscribers’ decision as the opinion of the majority of Dissenters.³³⁵ They presented their account of events in the 21 March edition of the *Flying Post*.³³⁶ Here they gave an account of the division and voluntary subscription of the meeting of 3 March and claimed to represent the majority of Dissenting ministers. For lack of space, the Subscribers account was to have been completed in the next issue, but due to Barrington’s intervention the sequel was never published.³³⁷ Instead an apology for ‘several misrepresentations of fact’ was printed with an assurance ‘that the farther remarks promised to be made, shall not be published in this paper’.³³⁸ Barrington also responded to the Subscriber’s *Flying Post* article, challenging their claim to be the majority, in an anonymous pamphlet *An Account of the Late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers*.³³⁹ The *Account* also presented some staple arguments

330. *ibid.*, pp. 17-8, 25

331. Thomas, p. 175.

332. *ibid.*

333. The 14 March 1719 *Whitehall-Evening Post* article is transcribed in [Daniel Wilcox], *The Noble Stand, Second Part* (Lodong, 1719), pp. 5-7.

334. [Wilcox], *Noble Stand, Second Part*, p. 5.

335. *ibid.*, p. 3.

336. Thomas, p. 176; transcribed in [Wilcox], *Noble Stand, Second Part*, pp. 7-19.

337. Thomas, p. 176.

338. *Flying Post*, 26 March 1718/19; quoted in [Wilcox], *Noble Stand, Second Part*, p. 20.

339. Thomas, p. 176; *An Account of the late Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers at Salters-Hall.*

Occasioned by the differences amongst their brethren in the country: with some thoughts concerning the

against subscription such as that it was assuming legislative authority, inconsistent with the justification of Dissent and is a form of enthusiasm, by claiming direct inspiration, and thus infallibility.³⁴⁰ He also praised the ‘noble defences, and explanations of the doctrine of liberty’ by Bishop Hoadly whom he imagines future historians will one day praise, saying that he had ‘entirely vanquished the remains of papacy, and brought christian liberty, and a reasonable religion, into the greatest esteem’.³⁴¹

The Subscribers moved to the *Weekly Journal and Saturday Post* on 5 April publishing a list of those who subscribed, the Non-Subscribers followed with a list of those who did not in the 18 April *Whitehall Evening Post*.³⁴² On 11 April, Daniel Wilcox anonymously published *The Noble Stand*.³⁴³ The title was a satirical reference to Barrington’s phrase for those who refused to impose creeds as tests by making a ‘noble stand against the root and cause of all errors and quarrels’.³⁴⁴ Wilcox welcomed the debate in the press for he feared that Barrington had represented the decision as a unified position of all the London ministers.³⁴⁵

In arguing for subscription, Wilcox says that Scripture can be understood in two ways. Either it is ‘the mind of God’, that is the meaning God ‘design’d to signify in and by the words’ of the Bible or else they are ‘the written words without any certain meaning; or signifying just what every reader pleases’.³⁴⁶ To demand subscription to the explicit words of Scripture without having to explain their understanding would mean that there would be no error as all heresies have appealed to the express words of Scripture.³⁴⁷ He further argues, as most Subscribers following him would, that creeds and confessions are summaries of the meaning Scripture itself, that is that they ‘express the mind of God’ and as such are authoritative and may be used to ‘distinguish truth from error’.³⁴⁸ Moreover, through the means of Scripture, the Church can know the ‘doctrine which God hath re-

imposition of humane forms for Articles of Faith. In a letter to the Revd. Dr. Gale (London, 1719), pp. 35-6.
340. *An Account of the Late Proceedings*, pp. 13, 17, 20-21.

341. *ibid.*, pp. 29, 31.

342. Thomas, p. 122.

343. Thomas, p. 177; [Daniel Wilcox], *The Noble Stand Or, a Just Vindication of Those Brave Spirits Who in the Late Memorable Actions at Salters-Hall Distinguished Themselves, and Got so Much Honour in Appearing for That Important Principle of Religious Liberty, ... In a Letter to a Friend* (London, 1719)

344. *ibid.*, p. 4; quoting the *Whitehall Evening Post*, Saturday March 14, 1719.

345. *ibid.*, p. 5

346. *ibid.*, p. 10.

347. *ibid.*

348. *ibid.*, p. 11.

vealed there' and therefore can declare 'fundamental and necessary' doctrines 'with certainty'.³⁴⁹

This argument, that the truth of confessions is simply a restatement of the truths of Scripture and therefore have an equivalent authority represents a major shift in Reformed thinking about the authority of confessions. The same line of thought, as will be seen, will be taken up in Scotland, Ireland and America, in reaction to the arguments of Non-Subscribers; but it is a significant change from previous attitudes toward confessional statements. One of the marks of early Reformed confessions was their provisional nature. That is that they are always open to correction from further insight of the Holy Scriptures.³⁵⁰ This is explicit in, for example the Scots Confession, the preface of which states that if:

onie man will note in this our confessioun onie Artickle or sentence repugnant to Gods halie word, that it wald pleis him of his gentlenss and for christian charities sake to admonish us of the same in writing; and we upon our honoures and fidelitie, be Gods grace do promise unto him satisfioun fra the mouth of God, that is, fra his haly scriptures, or else reformation of tha quihilk he sal prove to be amisse.³⁵¹

This is a marked difference from Lutheran views of the Augsburg Confession which is 'drawn from and accord with the Word of God' and given a perpetual authority, 'for all posterity'.³⁵² To argue, as many of the Subscribers did that the justification for subscription is to be based on the authority of the Biblical truths *in* the Confession is, as Barth wrote, to move 'fundamentally into remarkable proximity to the Holy Scriptures'.³⁵³

The Non-Subscribers responded to the *Noble Stand*, and the *Weekly Journal and Saturday Post* article in an 18 April *Whitehall Evening Post* article.³⁵⁴ This had been preceded shortly by *An Authentick Account*, which presented the Non-Subscribers Advices and the reasons for not subscribing they had sent to Exeter.³⁵⁵ The *Authentick Account* was

349. *ibid.*

350. Rohls, p. 267; Karl Barth, 'The Desirability and Possibility of a Universal Reformed Creed', in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-28*, trans. by L.P. Smith, (New York, 1962, orig. 1925), p. 112; Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. by Darrel L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology, (Louisville, 2002) originally *Die Theologie der Reformierten Bekenntnisschriften* (Zürich, 1923).

351. *The Creeds of Christendom, III*, p. 348; W. Ian P. Hazlett, 'The Scots Confession 1560: Context, Complexion and Critique', *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte*, 78, (1987), 287-320, (p. 296).

352. The Formula of Concord in *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. by Robert Kolb, *et. al.*, (Minneapolis, 200), p. 527; Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, pp. 2-6.

353. Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, p. 4.

354. Thomas, p. 177; transcribed in [Wilcox], *Noble Stand, Second Part*, pp. 28-29.

355. Thomas, p. 177; [Benjamin Grosvenor], *An Authentick Account of Several Things Done and Agreed*

met by the *True Relation* which contained Subscribers declaration of faith, their Advices and a letter of response from some ‘Gentlemen of Exon’.³⁵⁶ Another response to the *Authentick Account* was *A Vindication of the Subscribing Minister* published 2 May.³⁵⁷ Again pointing to the influence of the laity, it gave the ‘great uneasiness to the minds of many serious people’ concerning the orthodoxy of the Dissenting ministers as a primary reason for their voluntary subscription.³⁵⁸ In supporting the appropriateness of using an article of faith the author argued similarly to Wilcox’s *Noble Stand*, claiming that ‘if [articles] truly express his [*scil.* God’s] sense, tho’ the Words are not of Divine inspiration ... the doctrine contained in them is, and the contrary to it must be accounted dangerous error’.³⁵⁹

On 9 May, Peirce, who had by this time been ejected, entered the London debates with his *Animadversions upon a Pamphlet Entitled, A True Relation*, accusing the ‘Seven’ of only appealing to like-minded ministers and claiming that the Subscriber’s Advices were simply support for actions already taken.³⁶⁰ This began a new series of exchanges between Peirce and Josiah Eveleigh, one of the ‘Seven’. For the most part the debate came to an end with Isaac Watt’s republication of a sermon by Matthew Henry (1662-1714) *Disputes Review’d*.³⁶¹

This thesis will show how the Salters’ Hall debate and subsequent publication impacted communions from the Church of Scotland to the remote Presbytery of Charleston. The issues would be discussed in all Presbyterian bodies and the lines of argument would be followed and repeated elsewhere. Salters’ Hall helped to spread the subscription controversies in the English speaking Churches. The General Synod of Ulster wrote to leaders among the English Dissenters in response to the divisions.³⁶² Ministers in New England

upon by the Dissenting Ministers Lately Assembled at Salters-Hall (London, 1719).

356. *A True Relation of Some Proceedings at Salters-Hall: by those ministers who sign’d the First Article of the Church of England, and the answers to the fifth and sixth questions in the Assemblies Shorter Catechism, March 3, 1719: viz. I. The declaration of their faith in the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, as reveal’d in the Holy Scriptures, II. Advices for peace, with the letter accompanying, III. The letter from Exon in answer to those advices* (London, [1719]).

357. Thomas, 178; *A Vindication of the Subscribing Ministers, in Answer to a late Paper entituled, An Authentick Account, &c.* (London, 1719). *A Vindication* was answered by a *Reply to the Subscribing Ministers Reasons, in their Vindication* and *The Second Part of a Reply to the Vindication*.

358. *A Vindication of the Subscribing Ministers*, p. 4.

359. *ibid.*, p. 7.

360. see above, p. 50; James Peirce, *Animadversions upon a pamphlet entituled, A True Relation* (London, 1719), p. 5.

361. Thomas, p. 179; Matthew Henry, *Disputes Review’d* (London, 1719)

362. see below, p. 138.

also took notice and sent letters to attempt to calm the uproar. Although written in 1719 and 1720, *Three Letters from New England* was published in London in 1721.³⁶³ This publication is particularly helpful in showing not only the connection of Churches, but also for revealing the views of leading New England Congregationalist ministers.

The first letter, dated September 1719, was from Cotton Mather (1663–1728) to Thomas Bradbury. Mather clearly saw the dispute as one over Arianism.³⁶⁴ He did not believe those who refused to subscribe were Arian, but does ‘wonder why they who subscribed the first of the XXXIX Articles, to qualify themselves for the publick exercise of their Ministry, should refuse to do it, when the great ends of their Ministry call’d for it’.³⁶⁵ Mather agrees that the terms of communion should be limited to Fundamental Articles, but believed the doctrine of Christ’s nature to be so:

[The New Englanders] are at a loss how they shall suppose the terms of salvation duly complied withal, where one God in three persons is not prayed unto; and where a baptism into the name of one God, and of two creatures, is made a badge of Christianity: or how they shall suppose, that men come up to that piety, which will oblige us to acknowledge them as our brethren in Christ, while they do not acknowledge any Christ, but a Son of God who is not one in essence with his Father: but one infinitely inferiour to the most High God.³⁶⁶

The second letter, dated July 1720, was also by Cotton Mather, this time to Tong and other Subscribers.³⁶⁷ It recognizes the two issues that the Dissenters must deal with are the right to toleration, ‘that no man is to be forced with civil penalties to profess and perform any thing in religion, whereof he is not convinced in his conscience, that God requires’, and the terms of communion, ‘that there are certain maxims of piety, which all who truly live unto God are united in’ and that Christians should ‘receive one another to communion upon a visible adherence to’ those maxims.³⁶⁸ Mather sees the debate at Salters’ Hall as a confusion of these two principles, ‘why should indulgence and communion be confounded? Certainly forbearance is one thing, and fellowship another’.³⁶⁹ He goes on to repeat the Subscribers’ persistent complaint that people who believe any error will subscribe the ‘express words of Scripture’ so long as they can interpret it how they

363. *Three Letters from New-England, Relating to the Controversy of the Present Time* (London, 1721)

364. *ibid.*, p. 3; Michael G. Hall, ‘Mather, Cotton (1663–1728)’, *ODNB*, 18321.

365. *ibid.*, p. 4.

366. *ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

367. *ibid.*, p. 7.

368. *ibid.*, p. 9.

369. *ibid.*, p. 11.

wish.³⁷⁰ The final letter from Cotton's father, Increase Mather (1639–1723) was written on 1 July 1720 and addressed to Reynolds (c.1667–1727), a Presbyterian Subscriber.³⁷¹ It is simply a brief note encouraging the Dissenters to come to an agreement. Increase Mather had previously been in London and involved with negotiating of the *Heads of Agreement*. He expresses his sadness in seeing the divisions over 'methods and measures to be taken' in preserving doctrine.³⁷²

These letters are helpful not only in showing how the New England ministers were actively mediating for peace, they also show the views of important and influential ministers toward subscription. A stream of American historians have framed the controversy in Philadelphia as an ethnic division between Scots and Scots-Irish in favour of subscriptions and the native New England ministers 'whose attitudes were shaped by the English Puritan backgrounds and ideals as embodied in ... combinations of Congregationalism and Presbyterianism' led them to oppose subscription.³⁷³ The fact that the Subscribers generally tended to be the Independents and that these letters show influential New England Congregationalists supporting subscription seriously undermines this argument. To be sure contexts and backgrounds affected views of subscription, but the overly simplistic view equating ethnicity and denominational affiliation with adherence to the Confession should be dismissed.

Since the English ministers were not united to begin with, there was no institutional division. The debates were carried out through publication for some time, but by 1724 an English minister reported to Wodrow that 'our differences at London' were 'quite dead & things continue quiet'.³⁷⁴ However, even as things calmed down in England the debate spread to Ireland and America. News of the Salters' Hall debate and the publications also went north to Scotland. Although the Church of Scotland did not have an open controversy comparable to Salters' Hall or the debates in the Synod Ulster, 'There are some whis-

370. *ibid.*, p. 11–19.

371. *ibid.*, p. 28; Francis J. Bremer, 'Mather, Increase (1639–1723)', *ODNB*, 18322; David L. Wykes, 'Reynolds, Thomas (c.1667–1727)', *ODNB*, 23440.

372. *ibid.*, p. 29.

373. Leonard Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition, a Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia, 1949), p. 43–47; see also Cornman, p. 50.

374. *Wod.Lett.Qu XXI*, no. 30.

pers going among the NonSubscribers of their having friends even in the Church of Scotland'.³⁷⁵

Conclusion

The foundation for Non-Subscription came from several sources. These held in common an undermining of the doctrines of original sin and total depravity. With this higher view of human ability came the concurrent belief in the universality of the revelation and therefore theoretically salvation. In addition a shift in an understanding of faith as a reasonable assent to propositions rather than a grace bestowed by the Holy Spirit on the elect had ramifications in understandings of Church authority in terms of both governmental power and traditional Scriptural interpretation especially as encapsulated in confessional statements. Likewise, the understanding of Fundamental Articles, as the terms of communion, had narrowed to be those propositions to which faith assented. These foundational elements would recur in the debates over subscription and Church power elsewhere.

Not only was the foundation for Non-Subscription laid in the events in England, the basis for a defence of subscription can be seen in the response to Wilcox. It was his *Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words* that enumerated uses of a confession that would be expanded by Dunlop's *Preface*, as will be seen in the following chapter. Additionally, two aspects of the support for subscription can be seen elsewhere as well. First, the laity's influence in pushing for subscription requirements can be seen in Exeter, and conversely in their absence in the meeting at Salters' Hall. This will be repeated wherever they have an influence. Finally, the tactic of voluntary subscription used at Salters' Hall proved powerful and it was imitated, not only at Exeter, but also in the General Synod of Ulster and in American Presbyteries.

375.Wod.Lett.Qu XXI, no. 38.

Chapter 2: Confessional Subscription in the Church of Scotland

Due to the legal status of the Confession, the issue of subscription was neither as vigorously nor as openly debated in the Church of Scotland as in Ireland, England or America. As Colin Kidd has stated, the eighteenth-century Kirk ‘did not witness a sustained assault on the authority of the Westminster Confession of Faith’.¹ While there was no ‘sustained assault’ there were persistent sorties. Rather than waging a paper war as in neighbouring countries, however, the conflict was mostly fought through more clandestine and oblique methods. This chapter will review some of these points of conflict within the Church of Scotland and ways ministers in Scotland participated in the wider debate over confessional subscription. After reviewing the legal position of the Westminster Confession in the Church of Scotland some early objections to subscription will be observed before looking at the role of subscription in another early eighteenth-century debate – the ‘Marrow Controversy’. The Church of Scotland’s dialogue with English Non-Subscribers is seen in the publication of a preface to a compendium of confessional statements and her interaction with the Irish controversy will be examined in the different responses to appeals for support for the factions in the General Synod of Ulster. The impact of fears of a Non-Subscription movement on the procedures of the General Assembly, through tightening of Forms of Commission will be presented. Finally, evidence of discontent with the Confession, particularly among university students will show that the lack of debate over subscription in Scotland was not due to the Confession’s unanimous approval.

The Status of the Westminster Confession

The Westminster Confession of Faith had been approved by the General Assembly in 1647 and ratified by the Scottish Parliament in 1649; however neither body required subscription to it at this time.² An earlier Act of the 1638 Glasgow Assembly requiring subscription to

1. Colin Kidd, ‘Scotland’s Invisible Enlightenment: Subscription and Heterodoxy in the Eighteenth-Century Kirk’, *RSCHS*, 30 (2000), pp. 28-59. (p. 32).

2. James Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas of Subscription in the Reformed Churches of Great Britain and Ireland Especially in the Church of Scotland: Being a Series of Lectures Delivered to Students of Church History in the Opening Days of Session 1906-7* (Glasgow, 1907), pp. 36-8; A. Taylor Innes, *The Laws of the Creeds of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1902), pp. 61-65; and J.D. Douglas, ‘National Covenant’ in *DSCH&T*, ed. by Cameron and others, (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 620.

the National Covenant was still in force.³ From the Restoration until the Revolution the Westminster Confession had no authority in civil law. In 1660, under Charles II all Acts of the Scottish Parliament from 1640 through 1648 were annulled.⁴ This left the Scots Confession (1560) in force as it had not been rescinded with the adoption of the Westminster Confession and it was to this document that verbal assent was required by the 1681 Test Act.⁵ In 1690 the Parliament passed an Act ratifying the Confession of Faith, and settling Presbyterian Church Government that established the Westminster Confession as ‘the publick and avowed Confession of this Church, containing the summe and substance of the doctrine of the Reformed Churches’.⁶ That same year, the General Assembly passed an Act requiring that elders, ministers, and candidates ‘subscribe their approbation’ to the Confession for the purpose of ‘retaining soundness and unity of doctrine’.⁷ Three years later Parliament passed an Act for settling the Quiet and Peace of the Church declaring that:

no person be admitted, or continued for hereafter, to be a minister or preacher within this Church, unless that he ... do also subscribe the Confession of Faith ... declaring the same to be the confession of his faith, and that he ownes the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine which he will constantly adhere to.⁸

This was approved by the General Assembly of 1694 which also composed the formula of subscription:

I ...do sincerely own and declare, the above Confession of Faith, approved by former General Assemblies of this Church, and ratified by law in 1690, to be the confession of my faith; and that I own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine which I will constantly adhere to.⁹

In connection with the Union of Parliaments, the Scottish Parliament passed the Act for Securing the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government so that ‘the true Protestant religion, as presently professed within this kingdom... should be effectually and unalterably secured’.¹⁰ This included the assurance that Queen Anne ‘ratifies, ap-

3. Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas*, pp. 34-5, 37.

4. Innes, *The Laws of the Creeds*, p. 67.

5. W.I.P. Hazlett, ‘Scots Confession’, in *DSCH&T*, pp. 751-2; Innes, *The Laws of the Creeds*, p. 67.

6. Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas*, p. 44; [RPS, 1690/4/43 <<http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1690/4/43>>]

7. Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas*, p. 49.

8. Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas*, pp. 52-5; [*The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2009), 1693/4/89. <<http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1693/4/89>> Date accessed: 30 April 2009.]

9. Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas*, p. 55.

10. *ibid*, p. 59.

proves, and for ever confirms' the Act of 1690 requiring subscription.¹¹ Furthermore, this requirement was extended to university professors and school masters.¹² With growing fears of Episcopal incursion, the General Assembly passed an Act in 1711, requiring that all probationers at licensing and ministers at ordination and admission to their parishes sign the following, stricter formula:

I ... do hereby declare, that I do sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith approved by the General Assemblies of this National Church, and ratified by law ... to be the truths of God; and I do own the same as the Confession of my faith: As likewise, I do own the purity of worship presently authorised and practiced in this Church, and also the Presbyterian government and discipline now so happily established therein; which doctrine, worship and Church government, I am persuaded, are founded upon the Word of God, and agreeable thereto: and I promise, that, through the grace of God, I shall firmly and constantly adhere to the same, and ... maintain and defend the said doctrine, worship, discipline and government of this Church by kirk-session, presbyteries, provincial synods and General Assemblies; and that I shall in my practice conform myself to the said worship, and submit to the said discipline and government, ... And I promise, that I shall follow no divisive course from the present establishment in this Church: Renouncing all doctrines, tenets, and opinions whatsoever, contrary to or inconsistent with the said doctrine, worship, discipline, or government of this Church.¹³

By the time the that subscription came under attack in Ireland and England, the establishment of Presbyterianism in Scotland was inextricably connected with legislation requiring subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. As Robert Wodrow explained to a minister in America, 'Subscription to our Confession of Faith, its being required by our Revolution Parliament, keeps us free from these flames'.¹⁴ That is, any tampering with the Westminster Confession or subscription to it would risk forfeiting the protections of the Presbyterian establishment provided in the Acts of 1690 and 1706-7. This would have been especially conspicuous during the early eighteenth century after the Tories gained power and the Presbyterian settlement seemed threatened. In 1711 the House of Lords upheld an appeal from James Greenshields (fl. 1700), an Episcopal minister who had been imprisoned for leading services according to the Book of Common Prayer in Edinburgh.¹⁵ The next year Parliament granted toleration to Episcopalians in Scotland and reintroduced patronage.¹⁶ Patronage gave the right of appointing a minister

11. *ibid.*

12. *ibid.*

13. *ibid.*, pp. 66-9.

14. Robert Wodrow, *The Correspondence of Robert Wodrow*, ed. by Thomas McCrie, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1842), III, p. 466.

15. K.R. Ross, 'Patron, Patronage, Patronage Acts', in *DSCH&T*, pp. 649-50; and D.F. Wright, 'Greenshields, James', in *ibid.*, p. 379.

16. Andrew L. Drummond, and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 18.

to landowners, or patrons, rather than to the Presbytery or Kirk Session, who, with the consent of the people, were to call a minister according to Presbyterian polity. The Church felt that it was in a precarious position following the Union; as Wodrow wrote in 1709, ‘I am so far from thinking either our doctrine, or any thing of the kind to be secured’.¹⁷

It should be noted that until 1718, the intent of the Acts dealing with subscription was the exclusion of Episcopalians. While William sought to include loyal Episcopalians in the government of the Church of Scotland, the formulas authorized by the Assembly were worded with increasingly narrow limits. As James Cooper has observed, ‘the *prime motive* of the Assembly’s legislation anent the Confession and the Formula from 1694 to 1711 ... was not so much the preservation of the Faith, as the *protection of the party into whose hands the Revolution had placed the ecclesiastical power in Scotland*’.¹⁸ While I would hesitate to draw such a strong distinction between doctrine and polity, it is significant that the context behind these formulas of subscription seemed to be more of a defence of ecclesiology rather than Christology or soteriology.

Although the position of the Confession in legislation protected it from open attack, it did not protect it from being subverted by conditional subscription, lax enforcement or undermined by attitudes towards the doctrines it contained. C. G. McCrie in his *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland, Their Evolution in History* claimed that ‘the Presbyterian Churches in Scotland have sought to remove difficulties and scruples in reference to the acceptance of the Westminster symbol ... not by legislation, but by granting a certain measure of liberty to depart from the Confession standard.’¹⁹ As evidence, he points to James Wardlaw’s 1718 translation to the Dunfermline second charge and Thomas Gillespie’s (1708-74) 1738 ordination, also in Dunfermline Presbytery.²⁰ McCrie states that James Wardlaw requested that he be allowed to renew his subscription ‘with an explanation regarding the extent of the Atonement’, and that Gillespie objected to views concerning the authority of the magistrate.²¹ Ian Hamilton has questioned these claims, point-

17. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, I, p. 64.

18. Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas*, pp. 66-7, emphasis his.

19. C.G. McCrie, *The Confessions of the Church of Scotland, Their Evolution in History, Chalmer’s Lectures* (Edinburgh, 1907), p. 232.

20. McCrie, *The Confessions*, pp. 233-4; for Gillespie see D.C. Lachman, ‘Gillespie, Thomas’ in *DSCH&T*, pp. 360-1, and *FES*, V, pp. 10-12.

21. McCrie, *The Confessions*, pp. 233-4.

ing to the fact that McCrie based his views only on secondary sources which were based on ‘personal reminiscence’ and that the records of Dunfermline make no reference to these objections.²² While it is true that the Presbyterial records show no evidence of qualified subscription, McCrie’s claim should not be too quickly dismissed. John Simson (1667-1740), Professor of Theology at Glasgow who faced two major heresy trials during this period, publicly stated that he had subscribed with scruples concerning ‘the Covenant of Works and some other things in the Confession’.²³ According to Skoczylas, Simson and his brother Patrick (1628-1715) both had scruples, and their father, ‘guided them in stating their reservations about the wording of the Westminster Confession of Faith to the Presbytery of Paisley when they were seeking their licences as probationers.’²⁴ Presbyterial records showed that Simson passed his trials and subscribed but make no mention of any qualifications to his subscription.²⁵ This was not unnoticed by Simson’s prosecutor, James Webster (1658-1720), who refers to this conditional subscription in his libel, but only insofar as to condemn the view that Simson presented to the Presbytery of Paisley.²⁶ Webster has no criticism of this subscription with reservation, nor does he show any disbelief that conditional subscription was allowed. Simson’s case shows that, in some presbyteries at least, oral reservations were allowed and in these cases the minutes of the Presbytery would not have necessarily recorded the exceptions. Additionally, it was not unheard of for someone to be ordained without having subscribed. In a meeting with the Commission of the Assembly dealing with his call to Kirkaldy, it was charged, among other things, that Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) had not signed the Confession, although he bore a form of commission from his Presbytery stating that he had. According to Wodrow who was serving on the Commission, he did not deny this but was willing to sign it.²⁷ Erskine had been ordained in 1703, and every indication is that this was merely an oversight. Other

22. Ian W.F. Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy: Seceders and Subscription in Scottish Presbyterianism*, Rutherford Studies, (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 5-8.

23. *The Case of Mr. John Simson Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow*, (Glasgow, 1715), p. 45.

24. Anne Skoczylas, *Mr. Simson’s Knotty Case: Divinity, Politics, and Due Process in Early Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, McGill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Ideas, 31 (Montreal, 2001); p. 31, D.C. Lachman, ‘Simson, John’ in *DSCH&T*, p. 775; *FES*, VII, p. 400; D.F. Lachman, ‘Simson Patrick’ in *DSCH&T*, p. 776; *FES*, III, p. 186.

25. Minutes of the Presbytery of Paisley, NAS, CH2/294/4/272, 273, 275, 279.

26. *The Case of Mr. John Simson*, p. 45.

27. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 205. For more on Erskine see D.C. Lachman, ‘Erskine, Ebenezer’, in *DSCH&T*, pp. 298-300.

Acts dealing with forms of commissions that will be examined later indicate a fear that some presbyteries were negligent in their enforcement of the Assembly's requirements.

There is evidence from later in the century that ministers signed the formula disingenuously or with a reinterpretation of the meaning of subscribing. In 1753, John Witherspoon (1723-94) published *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, accusing the Moderates of disparaging the Confession of Faith and subscribing insincerely.²⁸ Witherspoon's accusations are substantiated by an unpublished note by Robert Wallace (1697-1771). Wallace, who was a student at Edinburgh during the controversies, and held Non-Subscribing views, discussed the Church of England ministry, 'Perhaps they have much the same opinion of many of the Scotch Church,' but 'the Scotch Clergy do not contradict, at least do not contradict their subscription so openly so there are only suspicions against them'.²⁹

Although some did subscribe without holding to the doctrine of the Confession, it would be overly cynical to think that signing the formula was meaningless for all probationers. There were cases where men did not enter the ministry due to scruples with the Confession; for example the anatomist, William Hunter (1718–1783) chose to leave his study of divinity in 1736 knowing that he could not, in good conscience, sign the Westminster Confession.³⁰

Early Protests

It is ironic, given the lack of public debate within the Church of Scotland that the controversies in England and Ireland were actually foreshadowed by ministers in the Church of Scotland. In 1707, a minister who had been disciplined by the Synod of Morray published *A Letter to the Moderator of the Next General Assembly*.³¹ Later, in 1717, *Reasons Against Imposing the Westminster Confession of Faith*, by Robert Meldrum (d. 1699) was published posthumously in England.³²

28. John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics: or, the Arcana of Church Policy. Being an humble attempt to open up the mystery of moderation*, (Glasgow, 1753), pp. 13-4.

29. Robert Wallace, 'Some Reflections on the expulsion of the six students out of the University of Oxford in the year 1768', EUL, La II 620/34, f. 7.

30. Fenwick Beekman, 'William Hunter's Education at Glasgow 1731-1736', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XV, no. 3, (1944), 284-96, p. 284

31. [James Allan], *A Letter to the Moderator of the Next General Assembly: offering some considerations against the imposing of the Westminster Confession of Faith, as terms of ministerial communion; and giving an account of the process carried on by the Synod of Morray, against Mr. James Allan*, (1707).

32. Robert Meldrum, *Reasons Against the Imposing of the Westminster-Confession of Faith; Also Remarks on Several Articles of It; to Which is Added an Appendix Containing a Short Account of the Westminster-*

James Allan (d. c.1737), had received his M.A. from King's College, Aberdeen in 1688, was minister of the Rothies Church in the Presbytery of Aberlour. He had been deposed by the Synod of Moray in 1706 for not 'owning' the Confession of Faith.³³ He had come under suspicion for his apparent adoption of Bourignonist beliefs. In response to his deposition, he offered arguments against imposing the Confession as well as his account of the Synod's trial.

Bourignonism, named after the seventeenth century Flemish mystic, Antoinette Bourignon (1616-80), was a 'quasi-pantheistic conception of religion, in which Modalistic, Pelagian and Socinian elements all found a place'.³⁴ In addition to her eccentric teachings on the nature of Christ, Bourignon's writings were condemned as blasphemous in teaching 'That the will of man is unlimited', denying 'the decrees of election and reprobation' and asserting that one may obtain 'a state of perfection in this Life'.³⁵ Bourignon's works were translated, beginning in 1670, and became especially popular in Scotland among Jacobite Episcopalians. One of these Episcopal ministers was George Garden (1649-1733) minister at St. Nicholas, Aberdeen from 1683 until he was deprived in 1692 for his refusal to pray for William and Mary.³⁶ Garden had published *An Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon* in 1699.³⁷ This work was condemned and Garden was deposed by the 1701 General Assembly.³⁸ Garden's brother James (1647-1726), Professor of Divinity at King's College, who also held Bourignon beliefs refused to subscribe the Westminster Confession and was deprived in 1697.³⁹

To prevent the further spread of Bourignonism, the Assembly 'seriously' recommended to the synods and presbyteries, 'and particularly to the Synods of Aberdeen and

Assembly, (London, 1717)

33. Scott, *FES* (Edinburgh: Paterson, 1866), VI, p. 349.

34. N.R.Needham, 'Bourignianism' in *DSC&T*, p. 90-1. see also MacEwen, Alexander Robertson, *Antoinette Bourignon, Quietist* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910).

35. *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly*, (Edinburgh, 1701), p. 18.

36. N.R. Needham, 'Garden, George', in *DSC&T*, p. 351 and Stuart Handley, 'Garden, George (1649-1733)', *ODNB*, 10351.

37. Garden, George, *An Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon: in four parts. I. An abstract of her sentiments, and a character of her writings. II. An answer to the prejudices raised against them. III. The evidences she brings of her being led by the spirit of God; with her answers to the prejudices opposed thereunto. To which is added, A dissertation of Dr. De Heyde, on the same subject. IV. An abstract of her life. To which are added, two letters from different hands, containing remarks on the preface to The snake in the grass and Bourignianism detected. As also, some of her own letters, whereby her true Christian spirit and sentiments are farther justified and vindicated; particularly as to the doctrine of the merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ*, (London, 1699)

38. *Acts of the Assembly*, (1701), p. 16-19.

39. Needham, 'George Garden', p. 351.

Perth' that they conduct investigations within their bounds and 'use all effectual means' to stop these teachings.⁴⁰ In 1703, Allan began to be suspected of heresy when copies of Bourignon's books were reportedly seen in his home, some of his family 'had spoken too favourably of them, and because he ceased his normal times of prayer and 'went out to the hills all the day.'⁴¹ At the spring meeting of the Synod of Moray, concerns were voiced that some of the ministers were 'tainted with Bourignonism'.⁴² In compliance with the Assembly's recommendation, the Moderator questioned every minister about their views on Bourignon's writings. While most condemned her Arminianism and other beliefs, Allan refused to pass judgment, claiming that while he agreed those were erroneous opinions, he could not be sure that Bourignon held them. The Synod went on to require its members to sign a statement renouncing Bourignon's errors. Allan protested that it was irresponsible for the Synod to ask for members to pass judgment on works that most had never read; indeed most had not even seen the condemnations of the Assembly. He stated that this was 'contrary to the Principles of Reformation and natural equity'.⁴³

In the process of his investigation, Allan was asked to re-subscribe the Confession.⁴⁴ He had already done so when licensed and again when ordained and was willing to again 'so far as ...[it was] agreeable to the Word of God'.⁴⁵ The case against him was reinforced when it was revealed that instead of vowing to uphold the doctrines of the Confession at his child's baptism, he answered saying, 'I will bring up my child according to the Word of God'.⁴⁶

The *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* directs that before a minister baptizes an infant, they are to instruct the parent 'to bring up the child in the knowledge of the grounds of the Christian religion'.⁴⁷ Although the Directory provides nothing beyond these directions, ministers at this time customarily instructed the parents to use the Westminster

40. *Acts of the Assembly*, (1701), p. 16.

41. Allan, *Letter to the Moderator*, p. 14.

42. *ibid.*

43. *ibid.*, p. 15.

44. *ibid.*, p. 22.

45. *ibid.*, p. 22.

46. *ibid.*, p. 23.

47. Thomas Leishman, ed., *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland, Commonly Known as, John Knox's Liturgy ; and, The Directory for the Public Worship of God, Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Edinburgh, 1901), p. 43.

Confession as an exposition of these ‘grounds’. While explicitly recommending the Confession of Faith was not an official requirement, the practice was considered normative enough that its absence would be noted with concern.⁴⁸ Sensitivity to this practice seemed to heighten later on as perceived threats to the Confession grew.

The Synod suspended Allan ‘for evidencing unsoundness in the faith, and principles of the true Christian religion, professed in this Church, by his not mentioning the Confession of Faith publicly in his Church, at the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism; and declining to own the same as the Confession of his Faith, both before the Presbyt[e]ry and Committee.’⁴⁹

Allan appealed to the General Assembly who appointed a committee to meet with him. He privately told some of the members of that committee that he objected to three Articles of the Westminster Confession of Faith: 1.9, which denies multiple meanings to any Scriptural passage; 10.4 which proclaims the damnation of anyone who is not a professing Christian; and the whole doctrine of reprobation as taught in chapter ten.⁵⁰ These scruples were communicated by the committee to the Assembly which remitted the case back to the Synod of Moray.

Allan defended his views before the Synod. In doing so he argued that if he were to be deposed for not accepting every Article in the Confession then ‘the most eminent Divines of the Christian Church in all ages’ deserved to be deposed on the same grounds, as an example he quoted Richard Baxter against the idea that only those explicitly professing the Christian faith will be saved.⁵¹ The Synod was not convinced and Allan was deposed. He appealed again to the General Assembly, but his request was ruled ‘deserted’ in 1707.⁵² Allan went on to write a short apocalyptic piece denouncing the divisions among Chris-

48. Wodrow, *Analecta*, II, p. 351; Allan, *Letter to the Moderator*, p. 173; and Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 140.

49. *ibid.*, p. 24.

50. Allan, *Letter to the Moderator*, p. 29.

51. *ibid.*, pp. 33 and 36 quoting from Richard Baxter *Christian Directory*, Part 3, Quest 157, ‘Those overdoing Divines who pretend to be certain, that all the World are Damned that are not Christians, do add to God’s Word, and are great agents for Satan, to tempt men to infidelity, and to atheism itself’.

52. *Acts of the Assembly*, (1707), p. 56.

tians and predicting the overthrow of the present ‘Babylon’ of party warfare within the Church.⁵³ He also joined the Episcopal Church, serving at Huntly until his death.⁵⁴

Attached to Allan’s account of his trials was a brief letter to the Assembly Moderator arguing against the imposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the basis of three points, each of which would be used by later Non-Subscribers. First, the Confession contains overly complicated speculations and opinions about matters not necessary for salvation. This ‘drieness and barrenness’ hinders the pursuit of true piety.⁵⁵ Allan argued that having to agree to articles on ‘doubtful disputations’ was like having to explain how muscles moved legs before being allowed to join others on a journey.⁵⁶

The next argument is that using subscription as the ‘only test of orthodoxy, and the terms of ministerial communion’ overturns the apostolic requirement of a virtuous life and true piety.⁵⁷ Quoting phrases from Scripture, Allan argues that Biblical terms of communion for ministers are that they be, ‘not a novice but one that ruled well his own house, not self willed, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, or covetous, but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate, &c’.⁵⁸ To require subscription is to replace this Biblical mandate with an extensive confession that has no divine authority. Furthermore, subscription is simply not an effective means of guarding orthodoxy; an immoral man may adhere to the doctrines presented in the Westminster Confession and be admitted to the ministry, while another who is a truly devoted Christian would be excluded on the basis of having doubts about any Article contained in it.

Finally, the Church’s ‘Corruption and Degeneracy ...with respect to the Essentials of Christianity’ should make it hesitant to impose extraneous and contested doctrines on others.⁵⁹ Allan states that the essential tenets of the Christian faith are ‘That there is a God, the Father Almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth’ and ‘that Christ was Crucified, Dead and Buried, that he is arisen and ascended into Heaven, and is coming to Judge Us’.⁶⁰ He con-

53. [James Allan], *A Discourse Concerning the Great and Wonderful Events Which Shall Come to Pass in the Last Days* (J.S.L.), 1708).

54. *FES*, VI, p. 349.

55. Allan, *Letter to the Moderator*, p. 2.

56. *ibid*, pp. 2-3.

57. *ibid*, pp. 3-6.

58. *ibid*, pp. 4-5. This list is derived from phrases taken from 1 Tim. 3:3-6 and Titus 1:7-8.

59. *ibid*, p. 7.

60. *ibid*, pp. 7-8.

tends that people's knowledge of these dogmas and personal piety is too shallow to require further, non-Fundamental Articles. To impose additional doctrines would divert attention from what is essential.⁶¹ Additionally, he says that it is arrogant to believe that they can have certain knowledge of the more obscure doctrines in the Confession, when they 'are in such a corrupt degenerate state as to the essentials' and to impose these others would risk persecuting the innocent.⁶²

As mentioned above, the Synod's initial reason for suspension was based upon his omitting the Confession of Faith in his Church, not vowing to adhere to it in the baptism of his child and refusing to own it before the Presbytery. While the last of these charges might be a valid, though still questionable, reason for suspension, the previous two charges are remarkable. These charges had no substantial legal basis and reveal the level of suspicion of Allan's opponents in the Synod. The explicit wording of the Directory for Public Worship itself makes no reference to the Westminster Confession. Allan's prosecution was finally not on the basis of proven heretical views, but for failure to follow custom and lack of zeal in his attachment to the Confession.

Allan's Letter was not the only publication against subscription by a minister in the Church of Scotland. In 1717, Robert Meldrum's *Reasons Against the Imposing of the Westminster-Confession of Faith* was published in London. The only Robert Meldrum listed in the *Fasti* as dying before 1717 served in the Presbytery of Haddington, first at Garvald from 1690 until 1681 when he was deprived for not taking the Test Oath; and then at Yester from 1682 until his death in 1684.⁶³ This could not have been the author since he died six years before subscription to the Westminster Confession was required in 1690.⁶⁴ The lack of biographical reference in the book makes identifying the author difficult, but he was apparently Episcopalian. He refers to the Presbyterians in third person, the title page states he was a 'presbyter of the Church of Scotland' and his description of the requirement for subscription most closely resembles the 1711 formula.⁶⁵

61. *ibid*, pp. 8-9.

62. *ibid*, pp. 9-11.

63. *FES*, II, pp. 363, 400; see also, H. R. Sefton, 'Test Act', *DSCH&T*, p. 817.

64. I. Hamilton, 'Subscription, Confessional', in *DSCH&T*, p. 805.

65. Meldrum, *ibid*, pp. 2-3.

He shares many of the same arguments as Allan. The primary point of contention he had was with the wording of the formula of subscription, which would require him ‘to give an assent unto, and acknowledge the truth of all the doctrines and opinions contain’d in’ the Confession.⁶⁶ This requires more than a vow to not contradict the teaching of the Confession, but to requires personal belief in those doctrines. ‘This is not to obey the lawful orders and constitution of the Church, but to yield to the most tyrannical impositions, and to betray the authority and dominion that God hath over the consciences of men.’⁶⁷ In light of this it would be plausible that this piece was written shortly after the formula was passed. Like Allan, and the later Non-Subscribers proper he appeals to Baxter and argues that such a subscription is inconsistent with the principles of personal judgment that are foundational to Reformed thinking.⁶⁸

Meldrum’s arguments are familiar. Following Baxter, he calls for a minimal creed that expresses Fundamental Articles, ‘It’s more for the interest of religion that people be well instructed anent the first articles of our faith, and helped to a clear and distinct knowledge of them, than to have a large and extensive Confession imposed on them’.⁶⁹ Subscription elevates works of human composition to the same level of authority that should be reserved for the divinely inspired Scriptures and removes the basis of separation from Rome.⁷⁰ In defence of liberty of conscience he quotes the Confession itself, as many who followed did as well, ‘to believe the doctrines or obey the commandments of men, which are contrary to, or besides the Word of God, is to betray true liberty of conscience’.⁷¹

In addition to arguing against subscription itself, he specifically lists Articles of the Confession from which he dissents. These are the claim of a single sense of Scripture and the doctrines of predestination and limited atonement in chapters 1.9, 8.1, 10 and especially 10.4.⁷² He shared his opposition to these Articles with Allan, and with the Irish Non-Subscribers.

66. *ibid.*

67. *ibid.*, p. 3

68. *ibid.*, pp. 16; 11-12.

69. *ibid.*, p. 16.

70. *ibid.*, pp. 9-12.

71. *ibid.*, p. 26, quoting Ch. 20. Art.2

72. *ibid.*, pp. 31, 33-36, 37, 38-40.

For all of the difficulties Meldrum had with the Westminster Confession of Faith, he did not simply call for its removal, but calls for a distinction to be made in the official confessional statement of the Church and the individual's personal confession. That is, it is within the right of the Church to corporately adopt a confession as a bond of peace, it would further be within the Church's right to insist that officers not teach doctrines in opposition to articles within a confession, but to demand that the officer accept it as a personal confession goes beyond Reformed use of a confession.⁷³ The uses of the confession 'can be no other than to inform people of the doctrines of the Church, wherof they are members, and which all their pastors have received as the standard of communion among them: as also, to give a short system of the chief articles of faith, to warn people of the errors and heresies they should fly from, to provide for the peace of the Church'.⁷⁴

Both Allan and Meldrum present the basic arguments that would be used by later Non-Subscribers: the error of requiring assent to extra-Biblical or non-Fundamental Articles, the demeaning of the Scriptures by making a human document of equal authority and its ineffectiveness because it puts assent to articles above moral life. These arguments, combined with those against Church power being made in England would provide the basis of opposition to the use of any confessional statement.

Another aspect worth noting is that the disagreement Allan and Meldrum had with the Westminster Confession were primarily with doctrines dealing with reprobation and the extent of the atonement. Although Allan had probably been influenced by Bourignonism, it is significant that they both quote Richard Baxter, who also strongly influenced English and Dublin area Irish Presbyterians, especially in respect to these doctrines.

The 'Auchterarder Creed'

Another incident not directly related to the subscription controversy but dealing with similar issues was the so-called 'Auchterarder Creed'. In 1717 William Craig appealed the Presbytery of Auchterarder's refusal to give him a certificate of his license to preach.⁷⁵ Although he had been approved for licensure, the Presbytery was withholding

73. *ibid*, pp. 18-9.

74. *ibid*, p. 19.

75. *Acts of the Assembly*, (1717), p. 18.

the certification until he signed list of Articles they had developed in addition to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which Craig refused to do. Although Lachman claims that the Presbytery had developed a ‘series of propositions’ that the Presbytery ‘required all candidates for licence or ordination to sign’, it appears from the Presbyterial minutes and contemporary reports that this list was in fact applied only to William Craig.⁷⁶ The minutes from the Presbytery of Auchterarder record that he passed his trials and subscribed the Westminster Confession, but in 2 December 1716 was questioned deeper about his beliefs and on 15 January 1717 was asked to put his answers to the previous questions in writing and sign these as a statement of his beliefs which he agreed to do.⁷⁷ He later scrupled to sign this list and was denied a copy of his license. Robert Wodrow, in a letter from the Assembly wrote that the Presbytery ‘put many questions anent Mr Simson’s opinions, and set down his answers in writing, and drew them up in six Articles, under form of a subscription, formula, or creed’.⁷⁸ The Assembly not only upheld Craig’s appeal, but also forbade presbyteries from requiring subscription to any formula in addition to the Assembly’s requirement.⁷⁹ Moreover, the Assembly pressed the point by strenuously denouncing specifically the Article ‘that I believe it is not sound and orthodox to teach, that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in a covenant with God’.⁸⁰ Although the statement was intended to counter hyper-Calvinistic understandings of justification, the Assembly took it to encourage Antinomianism.

The ‘Auchterarder Creed’ reveals a Presbytery establishing ordination standards independent of a Synod or the General Assembly. Although this was overturned, it is significant, in light of later developments in Ireland and Philadelphia, that the understanding of the power of the presbytery at this time even in Scotland allowed the Presbytery of Auchterarder to attempt to enforce regulations related to licensing and subscription over and beyond the higher court’s standards. Moreover, the use of additional terms in itself was a challenge to the Westminster Confession and the constitutional practice of subscrip-

76. D. C. Lachman, ‘Auchterarder Creed’, in *DSCH&T*, p. 45. Lachman also presents the Auchterarder Creed as an additional list of Articles required of all candidates in his *The Marrow Controversy*, (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 6.

77. NÁS, CH 2/619/27 pp. 97-99.

78. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 269.

79. *Acts of the Assembly*, (1717), p. 19.

80. *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

tion. In attempting to enforce an interpretation of the Confession rather than the document itself, the Presbytery of Auchterarder was attempting to narrow the boundaries provided by the Confession, which was no less a threat than attempts to relax them.

According to Wodrow's description, the six Articles were proposed due to suspicions concerning the teachings of John Simson.⁸¹ Simson was charged with Arminianism and Socinianism in 1714.⁸² The case eventually came to the same Assembly that dealt with William Craig's case. The 1717 Assembly ruled that he had 'vented some opinions not necessary to be taught in divinity' and had 'adopted some hypotheses different from what are commonly used among orthodox divines, that are not evidently founded on Scripture, and tend to attribute too much to natural reason and the power of corrupt nature'.⁸³ However, the ruling also upheld that Simson adhered to the Confession of Faith, conceded that his intent was to answer 'more satisfyingly ...the cavils and objections of adversaries' and imposed no punishments other than a prohibition from using the objectionable 'expressions'.⁸⁴ To Simson's opponents this seemed an overly lenient treatment of someone who seemed to them so blatantly heretical. This leniency was highlighted by the harshness of the Assembly in stating its 'Abhorrence' of the proposition of the Presbytery of Auchterarder, which it declared 'unsound and most detestable'.⁸⁵ This discrepancy, along with doctrinal divisions would lead to what became known as the 'Marrow Controversy'.⁸⁶ This debate formed so much of the backdrop to the period that it is worth summarizing, especially since it has become confused with the subscription controversy among some later American historians.⁸⁷

During the debate over William Craig's appeal, Thomas Boston (1676-1732) recommended that another minister read Edward Fisher's (fl. 1626-1648) *The Marrow of*

81. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 269.

82. *FES*, I, pp. 123-4; D.C. Lachman, 'John Simson', in *DSCH&T* and D.C. Lachman, 'Webster, James' in *ibid*, p. 858.

83. *Acts of the Assembly* (1717), p. 17.

84. *ibid*.

85. *ibid*, p. 19.

86. D.C. Lachman, 'Marrow Controversy', in *DSCH&T*, pp. 546-8.

87. for example, Gaius Jackson Slosser, *They Seek a Country: the American Presbyterians, Some Aspects*, (New York, 1955), p. 17; Leonard J. Trinterud, *The forming of an American Tradition: a Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism*, (Philadelphia, 1949) p. 40; Marilyn Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760*, (Oxford, 1988), pp. 80-6.

Modern Divinity (London, 1645) to help him understand the issues.⁸⁸ One of the consequences of this conversation was the republication of the Marrow in 1718.

The Marrow had been written during the time of the Westminster Assembly in response to threats of the first antinomian controversy.⁸⁹ Since the work was presented in the form of a conversation between different parties, the statements in it could easily be misunderstood when taken out of context. Such was the case among some in Scotland when it was republished so that ironically in 1720 the General Assembly condemned the work as antinomian.⁹⁰ Additionally, the Assembly saw the book as teaching universal redemption and ‘assurance’ as the essence of faith.⁹¹ In response, twelve ministers presented a Representation and Petition to the next Assembly, protesting the Marrow’s condemnation.⁹² The 1722 Assembly upheld their previous ruling while the ‘Marrow Brethren’ ignored the Assembly’s prohibition of the book’s teachings. This conflict would eventually lead to a secession through the formation of the Associate Presbytery in 1733.⁹³

Dunlop’s Preface

In 1719, Edinburgh’s Professor of Ecclesiastical History, William Dunlop (1692-1720), entered the debate over confessions with the publication of a preface to *A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, etc., of Public Authority in the Church of Scotland*. Dunlop was the son of the Principal of Glasgow University, also William (1653-1700) and the nephew of the Principal of Edinburgh William Carstares (1649-1715).⁹⁴ Born in Glasgow, Dunlop received his M.A. there, studying theology under Simson. He later studied theology at Edinburgh, under William Hamilton (1669-1732), and civil law at Utrecht.⁹⁵ Incidentally, Carstares had studied at Utrecht also and Simson had spent two years there serving as a tutor.⁹⁶ The Presbytery of

88. D. C. Lachman, ‘Boston, Thomas’, in *DSCH&T*, pp. 88-9.

89. R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, pp. 189-91.

90. *Acts of the Assembly*, (1720), pp. 10-11.

91. *ibid*, pp. 9-10.

92. D.C. Lachman, ‘Marrow Controversy’, p. 547.

93. D.C. Lachman, ‘Associate Presbytery’, in *DSCH&T*, pp. 35-6.

94. W. G. Blaikie, ‘Dunlop, William (1692-1720)’, rev. by Campbell F. Lloyd, *ODNB*, 8279; D. F. Wright, ‘Dunlop, William’, in *DSCH&T*, pp. 264-5.

95. H. R. Sefton, ‘Hamilton, William’, in *DSCH&T*, p. 391.

96. Anne Skoczylas, ‘Simson, John (1667-1740)’, *ODNB*, 25604; A.I. Dunlop ‘Carstares, William’, in *DSCH&T*, p. 140.

Edinburgh licensed him to preach in 1714 and, not surprisingly given his family connections, he was appointed to the chair of Church History in March of the following year.⁹⁷

The *Collection* was planned as a multi-volume compilation of documents ‘of greater authority and more universal use with us, than any other humane writings’.⁹⁸ Only two volumes were completed before Dunlop’s early death in the autumn of 1720, the first included the Westminster Confession, and the Larger and Shorter Catechism as well as legislation dealing with these standards. The second volume contained an assortment of other works such as the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, Calvin’s Catechism, the National Covenant and the First and Second Book of Discipline. The proposed third volume was to have contained the Directory for the Publick Worship of God and Acts of the Assembly related to the Directory as well as Church polity.⁹⁹

Since the *Preface* was a rebuttal of different arguments against the use of confessions, a review of the various anti-confessional arguments he engages is necessary in order to understand Dunlop’s points. Dunlop identified several sources of protest against the use of confessions such as the heterodox, which are opposed to the doctrines presented in such creeds. ‘Seldom any are against confessions but when confessions are against them’.¹⁰⁰ Among these, Dunlop counted the Arminians, especially Episcopius. While in exile Episcopius wrote the *Remonstrants’ Confession*, which was published first as a Dutch translation by Uytenbogaert (Antwerp, 1621) and subsequently in Episcopius’ original Latin (Antwerp, 1622) and in English (London, 1676). In 1629 he defended this work against attacks from some of the professors at Leiden in *Apologia pro Confessione*.

Episcopius states that a confession of faith is solely a public statement of belief, ‘they are nothing but clear and manifest expositions of our faith propounded and laid down in a certain method’.¹⁰¹ He also acknowledges that a confession is not essential, and that they often have been abused when given equal authority with the Bible. At times however

97. *FES*, VIII, p. 389.

98. William Dunlop, *A Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, etc., of Public Authority in the Church of Scotland*. (Edinburgh, 1719) I, p. clvii.

99. Dunlop, *Collection*, II, unnumbered page ‘Advertisement’.

100. Dunlop, *A Preface to an Addition of the Westminster Confession*, (Edinburgh, 1720), p. 47.

101. Simon Episcopius, *The Confession or Declaration of the Ministers or Pastors which in the United Provinces are Called Remonstrants, Concerning the Chief Points of Christian Religion*, (London, 1676), pp. 10-11.

they are helpful, as in his case for example, to show the true beliefs of those who have been misrepresented. Since the abuse of confessions is always a possibility, Episcopius gives three rules to keep them in check. First, a confession should not serve as a guide to interpreting Scripture:

None will flee to the said forms, to draw and take from them, as from fountains with a faith void of doubting, those things that are to be believed: and further he will not run unto them in doubtful senses of Scripture, as the indices of what is straight and crooked: nor try and examine dark and controverted senses by them, as by a touch-stone.¹⁰²

Second, no one's conscience can be bound by it. Finally, they cannot be given authority to judge debates. 'In disputations, conferences, examinations or tryals men will never appeal to them, neither will controversies of faith be brought to the anvil thereof; but they will all wholly without fear or danger be brought to and examined by the word of God alone'.¹⁰³ The Arminians' experience is evident in the arguments against imposing creeds. Their views are presented in a public way, using a method from within the Reformed tradition. At the same time, the authority of the public declaration is restrained, safeguarding Scripture as the sole standard and the individual's freedom of conscience intact. To do otherwise would have nullified the legitimacy of their cause.

After describing the heterodox enemies to confessional authority, Dunlop goes on to the second source of challenge, those who are opposed to independent ecclesiastical authority. Within this category is *The Rights of the Christian Church Asserted Against the Romish, and All Other Priests, Who Claim an Independent Power over It* (London, 1706) by Matthew Tindal (1655-1733). Tindal later wrote *Christianity as Old as Creation: or, the Gospel, a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (London, 1730), one of the most important statements of Deist beliefs.

The *Rights of the Christian Church* was a vehement attack on the Episcopal High Church belief in independent ecclesiastical authority. The opening chapter of *The Rights of the Christian Church* argues that there must necessarily be one sovereign power, and that this power is the state.¹⁰⁴ This line of reasoning leads to the assertion that a minister is nothing more than a person chosen by people to serve them and therefore the laity, through

102. *ibid.*, p. 23.

103. *ibid.*, p. 24.

104. *ibid.*, pp. 33-64.

the civil magistrate, can select or depose of a minister.¹⁰⁵ The clergy therefore have no powers other than that which is delegated to them from the civil government. He blames the doctrine of independent authority for corrupting and dividing the Church as well as impeding the spread of Christianity.¹⁰⁶ His argument is based on a Lockean, contractual theory of government.¹⁰⁷ We each have the right to pursue happiness and defend ourselves from attacks or impediments to that pursuit. The authority of civil government is derived from people having conceded their natural rights to another for greater protection and adjudication, in Tindal's word as an 'umpire'.¹⁰⁸ But we can only delegate to another those rights which we rightfully possess. Each individual has an obligation to worship God according to their own conscience. This obligation, by its nature, cannot be delegated to another. And if one cannot relinquish their own freedom of conscience, they certainly have no natural right to impose belief on another. Therefore the magistrate has no authority, since none can be given by the people, to impose religious doctrines.

These first two sources of oppositions – 'heretics' and opponents of independent Church power – Dunlop dismisses as 'enemies of Christianity' but not as serious a threat as those within the Church that have mistaken understanding of 'the truly noble Protestant principles of liberty and private judgement' and 'have received a very different notion of confessions'.¹⁰⁹ In this category Dunlop counts the 'Swiss Triumvirate' and the English Non-Subscribers.

'Of Orthodoxy', the article from *The Occasional Paper* particularly drew Dunlop's attention. This was a short summary of arguments against confessional subscription published in response to Bourne's *Duty of Holding Fast the Form of Sound Words*, and set the outline for much of Dunlop's defence. The essential thesis is that the Scriptures are alone a sufficient judge of orthodoxy, 'We need go no further than the Book of God'.¹¹⁰ Following a quote from the patristic apologist, Arnobius (fl. 297-303), the author defines Chris-

105. *ibid.*, pp. 237-8.

106. Tindal, *Rights of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn., (London, 1707), p. 259.

107. *ibid.*, pp. 14-15; Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought*, (Newark, 1993), pp. 26-7.

108. *ibid.*, p. 10-11.

109. Dunlop, Preface, pp. 69-73.

110. 'Of Orthodoxy', in *A Collection of the Occasional Paper for the Year 1717*, no. 1, pp. 1-23, (London, 1718), p. 65; James attributes this essay to Lowman, which is consistent with Wodrow. *Presbyterian Chapels*, p. 116; *Analecta*, II, p. 391.

tians as those who follow Christ as their teacher and states that orthodoxy originally meant believing the Scriptures.¹¹¹ However this meaning was changed to become the defence of a particular interpretation of the Bible rather than the Bible itself, and the imposition of that interpretation on others. ‘Men fell into the humour of creed making. People took it strongly into their heads, they were not so much to believe for themselves, as to make a faith for others’.¹¹² Like Tindal, the author argues that this has ‘no foundation for it in nature’.¹¹³ He goes on to assert that creeds have no Scriptural warrant, denies the perfection of Scripture, replaces infallible Scripture with statements of fallible people, is persecution ‘and the grand Source of every other kind of it’, causes hypocrisy, and prevents the search for truth.¹¹⁴

A final named opponent of subscription and confessions was Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736). Le Clerc, a professor at the Remonstrant seminary in Amsterdam, had converted to Arminianism, influenced in part by the works of Episcopius.¹¹⁵ He published a series entitled *Bibliothèque Choisie, pour Servir de Suite a la Bibliothèque Universelle* (Amsterdam, 1703-1708). Tome 7 of this series contained, ‘De pace ecclesiae restituenda, consilium’ which Dunlop cites.¹¹⁶ The article is in line with Turretin, Osterwald and Werenfels’ contention that extra-Biblical creeds cause division and unity can be found in holding to the Bible as the sole test of faith. It was later translated into English and appended to Tindal’s *A Defence of the Rights of the Christian Church* (London, 1709). Incidentally, Le Clerc also commended Tindal’s *The Rights of the Christian Church* in Tome 10.

Dunlop’s *Preface* is a rebuttal of the arguments against confessions, and a positive statement of their purpose. His strategy is to refute his opponents within the framework of their own arguments. Rather than listing Scriptures to prove the truth of the Articles contained in the confessions, he builds his argument on the same basis as anti-confessionalists: freedom of conscience, examples from Church history and contractual theory of govern-

111. *ibid*, p. 6.

112. *ibid*, pp. 6-7.

113. *ibid*, p. 9.

114. *ibid*, pp. 9-14.

115. H. C. Rogge, ‘Clericus, Johannes’ in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 3, p. 145.

116. *Bibliothèque Choisie*, (1705), Tome 7, pp. 401-413; Dunlop, *Preface*, p. 157.

ment. This strategy of using ‘natural reason’ brought criticism from supporters of the Confession, but made an effective strategy.

In defending subscription against the charge that it is an imposition upon personal liberty, Dunlop takes the claim that we have a natural freedom of conscience beyond the level of personal belief. He writes that while individuals certainly have freedom to hold to personal convictions, a Church as a collection of people should have no less freedom in governing itself and setting requirements for its ministers.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, those who have the authority to select and depose ministers certainly also have the right to demand they teach in accordance with the doctrines the people have approved and published in a confession of faith.¹¹⁸ While this society of people may be fallible and publish a doctrine that contains errors, to demand that they not require a standard of belief is to bind their consciences to individuals ‘just as fallible as themselves’.¹¹⁹ Similarly, he states that to ask others to abandon a confession because it imposes upon their freedom of conscience is to be guilty of imposing a view on those who conscientiously uphold the use of confessions.¹²⁰

Additionally, he counters the charge that the use of confessions undermines the authority of Scripture, Dunlop shows the *reductio ad absurdum* of such a view. If people were not allowed to profess their faith in any but Scriptural words, it would rule out not only creeds but preaching and use of vernacular translations.¹²¹ He explains that two can sign the same Biblical texts but have contradictory interpretations.¹²² People can hide behind Scriptural statement, but using a confessional statement assigns meaning to the Biblical text to reveal someone’s interpretation.¹²³ In this section, Dunlop discusses the declaration of the Non-Subscribing party at the Salters’ Hall debate.¹²⁴ Against the charge that the use of confessions is opposed to the perfection of Scripture, he states that it is not due to the imperfection of the Bible, but a recognition that heretics contort the meaning of Scrip-

117. *ibid.*, p. 69-70.

118. *ibid.*, p. 71.

119. *ibid.*, p. 74.

120. *ibid.*, p. 99.

121. *ibid.*, pp. 114-23.

122. *ibid.*, p. 107.

123. *ibid.*, pp. 106-14.

124. *ibid.*, p. 120.

tures.¹²⁵ While the Bible is a universal rule of faith and practice, confessions are limited and particular to a specific location and the dominant errors of that time.¹²⁶ A final recurring argument is that different confessions and creeds cause divisions. To this Dunlop replies that they are indeed abused, but men's passions are to blame rather than the tool that is misused, so that even without them the same evils will continue.¹²⁷

In arguing for the use of confessions, Dunlop states that there are three overall ends: to publicly proclaim a Church's true doctrine to all people, to offer a standard of orthodoxy for ministers and to serve as summary of belief for the Church itself.

As a public proclamation, Dunlop follows Episcopius' view that a confession offers a chance for a Church to state what it truly believes against the misrepresentation of those beliefs from opponents.¹²⁸ Against the proposition found in 'Of Orthodoxy' that the Church developed creeds to serve as means of imposing beliefs on others, Dunlop showed that they were used historically to show the Church's true faith against the false accusations of the Roman Empire, Gnostics who 'usurped the name of Christians' and the Roman Catholic misrepresentation of Protestantism.¹²⁹ Dunlop further says that this general publication of the Church's doctrine, rather than cause division as Turrentini and Le Clerc charge, actually fosters union as they 'might contribute to the mutual comfort and edification of one another, maintain a good correspondence and encrease brotherly love, by showing how far, and in how momentous things they agreed together'.¹³⁰ In viewing them in this light he says that they actually reveal a great amount of agreement among Protestants.¹³¹ As an example of this, and perhaps as a reminder to the English Dissenters, he shows that more Protestant confessions support a Presbyterian polity.¹³²

The second role confessions play is to guard against heresy by having ministers declare their adherence to them through subscription.¹³³ He is cautious in his description of this, saying that subscription serves to 'distinguish' between error and truth and 'discover'

125. *ibid.*, pp. 130-3.

126. *ibid.*, pp. 136-7.

127. *ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

128. *ibid.*, p. 5.

129. *ibid.*, pp. 6-12.

130. *ibid.*, p. 38.

131. *ibid.*, p. 41.

132. *ibid.*, p. 44.

133. *ibid.*, p. 44-5.

who is to be allowed in the ministry. Confessions are more of a heuristic device than a set of doctrines imposed on ministers, or tools of oppression. Dunlop agrees with Episcopus that they have at times been abused, but again argues that they have served this purpose historically, even by the reformers who believed that the Scriptures were the only rule of faith.¹³⁴

The final purpose of confessions is that they serve as a summary of the Church's teachings. This helps people to learn the teachings of the Church, helps protect them from error and assists them in insuring that the same set of beliefs is passed to subsequent generations.¹³⁵ In this portion, Dunlop takes considerable time to criticize the *Marrow of Modern Divinity*.¹³⁶ He states that had more people been attentive to the Westminster Confession of Faith, they would not have been led astray by the errors in the *Marrow*; 'those ignorant schismatics, who rove about the country, would not find so many blind enough to follow them'.¹³⁷

Since Dunlop based his argument on 'natural reason' rather than the Scriptures, he ironically drew more criticism from Pro-Confessionalists than opponents of subscription. His argument for subscription based on the authority of a society to freely choose its doctrine does in fact subvert the authority of any confession, since it attributes the ultimate authority to the body that adopts the statement. The society that has the power to publish its beliefs also would have the right to change those beliefs. The fact that the publication was a collection of several confessional statements itself implies that the Church of Scotland's standards have evolved and can continue to progress. This understanding was not unique to Dunlop; as Colin Kidd has shown the progressive, or stadial view of history as a deterrent to creedal revision among those who would later be called Moderates.¹³⁸ Simson wrote earlier:

That some things new and useful may be found out, and lawfully propos'd by me ... I hope, will be thought reasonable by all, who consider that several things new, whereby the knowledge of the truth was promoted, have been advanc'd since our first reformation from popery, and the framing of the Reformed Confessions;

134. *ibid*, p. 45.

135. *ibid*, pp. 175-92.

136. *ibid*, pp. 184 ff.

137. *ibid*, pp. 184-5.

138. Colin Kidd, 'Subscription, the Scottish Enlightenment and the Moderate Interpretation of History', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55, no. 3 (2004): 502-19.

which their compilers designed as a mean to encrease, but not to restrain peoples growth in grace and in the knowledge of God.¹³⁹

While fully supporting subscription, Dunlop does so in a way that gives full authority to the Church to determine and use the Confession of Faith.

In 1722, two criticisms against the *Preface* were published – *A Letter ... Containing Some Remarks on an Anonymous Preface* and *Plain reasons against the adding of Mr. Dunlop's preface unto the Westminster Confession of faith*.¹⁴⁰ Both works use the same arguments and in fact are so similar that one nearly quotes the other. Their disapproval is that in defending the use of confessions, Dunlop does so by arguing for the right of the Church to demand subscription rather than on the basis of the truth of the Westminster Confession; the Confession 'is not good and useful, because the People or the Parliament establishes it, but because it is built and founded upon the Word of God, and agreeable thereto, as may easily be proven.'¹⁴¹ Like Wilcox before him, and some Irish Subscribers to follow, they claim that the Confession's authority is derived, not from human sources, but in that it is the truth of the Word of God.¹⁴² They further condemn Dunlop's toleration, use of natural reason and lack of Scriptural arguments.

A Defence of the Scripture as the Only Standard of Faith. In Answer to a Preface, First Publish'd at Edinburgh, before a Collection of Confessions was published in London in 1721, the author was one of the *Occasional Paper* writers but his identity is uncertain. This amicable rebuttal restated the arguments found in 'Of Orthodoxy' but added nothing new to the debate. Dunlop's early death in October of 1720 squelched too harsh of a counterattack. *A Defence* was never answered. Wodrow reported rumours that John Cumming (d.1749), minister at Founders' Hall, London and Subscriber at Salters' Hall, was working on one and encouraged him in the task, but nothing came of it.¹⁴³ This lack of rebuttal coming from Scotland caused some concern among the Irish subscribing party.¹⁴⁴

139. Libel Mr James Webster, *Against Mr John Simson, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, Given in to the Very Reverend the Presbytery of Glasgow* ([Edinburgh], 1715), p. 63.

140. [James Kid], *Plain Reasons against the Adding of Mr. Dunlop's Preface unto the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1719; in a Letter to a Minister*, ([Edinburgh?], 1722).

141. *ibid*, p.12.

142. see below, p. 158.

143. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 185.

144. NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu, XX, no. 155, XXI, no. 63.

While a large movement attacking the Westminster Confession never surfaced in Scotland, it did manage to play a role in the controversy elsewhere through the spread of Dunlop's *Preface* which became almost a 'textbook' for defending the use of confessions and confessional subscription. It was republished in London in the heat of the controversy there.¹⁴⁵ It was also used by the Irish Subscribers and, in 1720 a copy was sent to Benjamin Colman (1673-1747) a leading Congregationalist minister in Boston.¹⁴⁶

Reactions to the External Controversies

Dunlop's *Preface* was not the only way Scotland was involved with the subscription controversies. Scotland was appealed to for assistance in the Irish controversy and the response from ministers there show not only the attitudes toward subscription, but also show the impact of these debates in Scotland.

In 1722 in connection with an unofficial visitor from the subscribing party in Ulster, an overture was presented to the Committee of Instructions that would have required ministers to renew their subscription according to the 1711 formula. In addition, the overture would contain 'a declaration, by way of introduction, as to the usefulness of signing Confessions of Faith, in favour of the Subscribers in Ireland'.¹⁴⁷ Wodrow reports that it was opposed by the president of the Committee and lack of time to debate the matter kept it from reaching the floor of the Assembly.¹⁴⁸

A representative of Irish Subscribers, Robert McBride (1716-1759) minister at Ballymoney, was given the opportunity to meet with some members of the Assembly's Commission. McBride was hoping to secure an official letter on behalf of subscription from the Assembly.¹⁴⁹ While McBride did not meet with the Commission officially, he did obtain a letter from some members who sent the following advice to the ministers in Ireland:

This consideration engaged some ministers of the Church of Scotland, at the desire of the R[ev]. Mr Robert McBride minister of the gospel at Ballimorie, who was at Ed[in]burgh in May last, to give their humble opinion upon what they understood

145. William Dunlop, *A Preface to an Edition of the Westminster Confession, &c. Lately Publish'd at Edinburgh. Being a full and particular account of all the ends and uses of creeds and confessions of faith. A defence of their justice, reasonableness and necessity, as a publick standard of orthodoxy, and an examination of the principal objections brought by different authors, against them, especially such as are to be found in the works of Episcopius and LeClerk, in the Rights of the Christian Church, and in the occasional Papers*, Second edn. (London, 1720).

146. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 497, III, p. 10.

147. *ibid.*, II, p. 652.

148. *ibid.*, II, p. 633.

149. *ibid.*, pp. 631-3, 647-8.

to be at present in question among the R[ev]. and worthy members of the General Presbyterian Synod in the North of Ireland.

It was represented to them that of the Dissenting ministers in that Countrey there are upwards of a hundred who agree to the subscribing of the Westminster Confession of Faith, so long received and made a term of ministerial communion, by authority of Church and state in Scotland, as an evidence of soundness in ye faith amongst ministers of their communion, and that there are but fourteen or fifteen ministers of that Synod who are against this measure and that not because of any different sentiments in the doctrines themselves, but because of their great zeal against whatever has the least appearances of imposition upon their consciences by humane authority.

The R[ev]. Mr. McBride informed these whom he had occasion to converse with that these 14 or 15 R[everend] B[rethren] who are against subscribing are not in the least suspected as to their orthodoxy ...[but] believe them to be sound in the faith, as they are known to be of eminent gifts in ministerial abilities.

After reminding the recipients that ministers in Ireland took the initiative to request their advice, the Scottish ministers ‘without pretending to the least authority of jurisdiction’ offer the following advice:

It is the humble opinion of the fores’d ministers of the Church of Scotland that for preserving purity of doctrine, for satisfying the minds of Christian people, whose edification so much depends upon the soundness of the doctrine of their pastors, and for maintaining of peace and order in Church judicatories acting upon a Presbyterian footing, it is fit that every intrant into the ministry at his ordination give evidence of the soundness of his faith by subscribing to the confession of some Protestant Church and they know of none better than that compos’d by the Assembly at Westminster which has been so long received and universally subscrib’d in the Church with good effect as to the purity of doctrine and the peace and order thereof, and considering that the practice of subscribing has been for some time in use among the Protestant Dissenters in the North of Ireland with the like good effects, they cannot but think that it would be a prejudice to that valuable interest to depart from it now when it is become rather more necessary than formerly.

It is evidently essential to a Presbyterian establishment that the several members of Church judicatories should submit to the judgement of the majority of their number, and therefore the above mention’d ministers cannot without departing from their known principles, but think that this rule ought to be observed especially in a society which has so visibly increas’d upon a Presbyterian footing and if this cannot be maintain’d without some inconvenienc to a few particular members it seems to them just upon the common principles of societie that the credit convenience of those few ought to give way to the general interests and good order of the whole societie, so that if they shall continue positive in refusing to submit to what seems so necessary for the common good they ought to claim no voice in the judicatories but content themselves to manage the affairs of their own congregations apart, leaving the Church judicatories in their several bounds to act as hitherto they have done upon Presbyterian principles, but in such a case it is judged the duty of their Brethren to preserve the usefulness of such refusers among their own flocks by keeping up both Christian and ministerial communion w[i]t[h] them as so long as they teach nothing contrary to ye receiv’d Protestant doctrine.¹⁵⁰

This letter reveals their understanding of subscription as not only a means to preserve the purity of doctrine, but also as a way to assure the people of their ministers’ orthodoxy. More importantly, they saw the central issue as the need to preserve order within the Church courts, stressing the need for submission to the authority of the court as ‘essential’

150.NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu XIX, no. 159.

to Presbyterian principles. It will be shown more clearly in later discussion on the controversy in Ireland that the challenge to the Irish Presbyterian's constitution was a crucial point of contention. Rather than a fear of heresy, the letter expresses concern over the threat to Church order. This view anticipates the demand for order as the platform of the Moderate party that would arise in the next few decades over the issue of patronage.

It is also noteworthy that while respecting the Westminster Confession of Faith as a sound document, and the one traditionally used by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, true to Reformed tradition they express no concept that it is the only possible confession. The subscription should only be to 'the Confession of some Protestant Church'. The Westminster Confession is simply seen as the most appropriate and useful.

Two years later, two additional overtures were presented to the Assembly dealing with subscription. One sought to establish a prescribed, uniform license for probationers upon completion of their trials, as per the requirements of that position the license was to state that the probationer, 'did judicially subscribe the Formula' of 1711.¹⁵¹ The second would require:

That all the ministers of this Church, and probationers for the holy ministry, who have not yet subscribed the Formula, prescribed by the 10th Act of Assembly held anno 1711; and all ruling elders and deacons, that shall be hereafter ordained to these offices, within this Church, shall, at their admission, and before they begin to act or vote in Church judicatories, in their foresaid capacities, subscribe the said Formula.¹⁵²

The first would not alter any legal requirements for licensure, but it would add an assurance of subscription to the form of license that had not been there previously. The second Act would change the formula used for Ruling Elders and Deacons to the stricter 1711 version, previously only signed by ministers. Moreover, it would also require that any officer who had not previously signed this formula would have to do so. This indicates the fear that some presbyteries had been lax in enforcing the requirements for subscription. These overtures were sent to presbyteries that were to return their opinions for the next Assembly.

151. *Acts of Assembly* (1724), p. 19.

152. *Acts of Assembly* (1722), p. 20.

There was optimism on the part of proponents of subscription that the Act requiring all officers to sign the 1711 formula was ‘like to [i.e. expected to] carry in the Assembly’ of 1725 since it had been approved by most of the Presbyteries except Haddington and Edinburgh.¹⁵³ However, both Acts were postponed until the next year, ostensibly since the Assembly did not have time to discuss them. Neither overture was adopted. This lack of action shows that the Assembly was unwilling to alter the requirements for subscription or to make an official statement that would commit them to either party in Ireland or England. In part there was a strong concern that any appearance of exercising ecclesiastical authority over Dissenters in Ireland could be interpreted as interfering with the established Church of Ireland.

While hesitant to interfere in Irish matters, the Records of the General Assembly show that the Church of Scotland was discussing subscription in response to a perceived threat of Non-Subscription. This materialized primarily in Acts dealing with forms of commission. Commissioners sent to the annual General Assembly were required to have certification that they were legitimate representatives of their presbytery. The 1695 Assembly had created a formula in order ‘to keep an uniform method, as near as may be in granting Commissions to the Members of the General Assembly’.¹⁵⁴ This formula simply stated that the presbytery had appointed the named ministers and ruling elder as their commissioners and authorized them to ‘consult, vote and determine in all matters that come before them, to the Glory of God, and good of His Church: according to the Word of God, the Confession of Faith, and agreeable to the constitutions of this Church’.¹⁵⁵ Part of the rationale for this Act was that presbyteries were including instructions to their commissioners, presumably on how they were to vote on particular matters. The emphasis is that they would vote in accordance to the Church’s accepted standards rather than the explicit instructions of the presbytery giving the commission. While it was certainly presumed, the Act makes no mention of the bearers having subscribed.

153. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 212.

154. *Acts of the Assembly* (1695), p. 3.

155. *ibid.*, pp. 11-2.

In 1704 the ‘Act, anent Commissioners to the General Assembly, and their subscribing the Confession of Faith’ required that this formula also included assurance that the bearer had signed the Confession as required by an Act in 1700 and that they were normally resident within the bounds of the presbytery they represented.¹⁵⁶ From 1718 until 1726, that is from the year following Hoadly’s *Nature of the Kingdom* until the expulsion of the Presbytery of Antrim, the General Assembly edited this formula and strengthened its enforcement each year except for 1721. That these Acts reiterating the requirement of subscription were passed during these years is not coincidence; Non-Subscription was being discussed among commissioners and visitors throughout this period.¹⁵⁷ While legislation dealing with these commissions appeared before the conflict in the Synod of Ulster, the Acts during the years of the subscription controversy, emphasized the requirement for subscription. Furthermore, a review of the Acts of the General Assembly from 1727 through 1750 shows only two other Acts dealing with the form of commission. Indicative of how closely the forms became connected with subscription, in 1737 an Act directed presbyteries to take care that their ruling elder representatives be qualified according to all previous Acts and ‘not only by subscribing the Formula’.¹⁵⁸ In 1744 the Assembly reminded presbyteries to strictly follow the prescribed forms; no mention was made of subscribing the Confession.¹⁵⁹

In contrast, from 1718 until 1725, these Acts seemed intent on making a commission serve as proof that the commissioner had subscribed the Westminster Confession. The 1718 Act directed that a form of commission for ruling elders would not be acceptable unless it explicitly stated that the elder had signed the 1694 formula of subscription ‘unless the said elders do either instantly subscribe it in Presence of the Assembly, or a Committee appointed by them, or do instruct, that they have already subscribed the same’.¹⁶⁰ In 1719 the Assembly directed that the previous regulations be proven before an elder was allowed to serve on the Commission of General Assembly, a committee that handled affairs for the

156. *ibid* (1704), p. 10.

157. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 652, III, pp. 161, 194, 430-1.

158. *Acts of Assembly* (1737), p. 20.

159. *ibid* (1744), p. 10.

160. *ibid* (1718), p. 15.

Assembly between meetings of the full body.¹⁶¹ Amendments to the forms of commission were approved in 1720, revising it to conform to the 1711 requirements. These additions created a uniform statement attesting to the bearers having subscribed the Confession using the appropriate formula or, if there is uncertainty to having subscribed, explain that the commissioner will sign the formula ‘in the presence of the Assembly’ or testify that they had previously done so.¹⁶² In 1722 the requirement was extended to include commissioners from universities; representatives of burghs were included the following year.¹⁶³

In 1725 the Assembly gave specific wording of the forms of commission and attestations that were to be used and stated that any variation from these prescribed forms would be rejected by subsequent Assemblies.¹⁶⁴ This Act was prompted by improper forms presented by two of the ‘Marrow brethren’. In addition to the proper wording, their commission had an additional clause stating that they had also subscribed, and adhered to, the National Covenant and the Scots Confession.¹⁶⁵ This was erroneously reported to Ireland as refusal to subscribe the Confession of Faith.¹⁶⁶ Additional Acts editing the forms were passed in 1721 and 1726, both dealt with alterations that were unrelated to subscription. In response to the threats to the Confession seen among their neighbours, the Pro-Subscriptionists in Scotland took the offensive by makes the requirement as explicit and extensive as possible. It should be noted however, that just as the Assembly would not allow a presbytery to impose additional subscription requirements, as in the Auchterarder Creed, neither would it tolerate these forms of commission to extend beyond the approved requirements.

While the Assembly shied away from any partisan actions, some subordinate judicatories were bolder in supporting the Irish Subscribers. In 1725, the Commission of the General Assembly authorized a fast on its own authority. The Act noted the ‘lamentable state of many of the Protestant Churches abroad’ and directed prayers be offered that God would ‘preserve us in this land from the danger of Deism & ye Arian Heresy’.¹⁶⁷ One of

161. *ibid* (1719), p. 12.

162. *ibid* (1720), p. 7.

163. *ibid* (1722), p. 33; 1723, p. 12.

164. *ibid* (1725), p. 19.

165. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 211-12.

166. *ibid*, p. 211.

167. NAS, CH 1/2/51, no. 257 Act of the Commission of the General Assembly for a Fast.

the clauses, ‘and likewise keep us from the subtle arts of those who undermine and lead off from *the form of sound words* received in this and other reformed Churches’, as Wodrow wrote, ‘directly points at Non-Subscription’.¹⁶⁸

As will be seen in a later chapter, the General Synod of Ulster approved the erection of a new congregation of Subscribers in Belfast in 1722 for members who wanted to separate from the existing congregations which were under the pastorate of two leading Non-Subscribing ministers in Ireland, Samuel Haliday (1685-1739) and James Kirkpatrick (1676-1743).¹⁶⁹ On behalf of the third congregation Samuel Smith, a Belfast merchant, appealed to the Synod of Ayr and Glasgow, as well as the Glasgow town council for financial assistance. The reasons presented to the Synod was first, the minister they had called was a Scot and second, ‘that they desyre to adhere firmly to the doctrine worship and government of the Church of Scotland according to the Confession of Faith and Acts of Assembly there’.¹⁷⁰ Collections were taken up throughout the Synod but faced criticism both from the Non-Subscribers in Ireland, and from sympathizers in Scotland.

Thomas Hervie, an elder in Glasgow opposed the collection and was refused a communion token for speaking against it.¹⁷¹ More significantly, a student of John Simson from Ireland, James Arbuckle (d.1742) printed a broadside in Glasgow on 24 September 1772 charging Smith of misrepresenting the Non-Subscribers.¹⁷²

James Arbuckle grew up in Belfast and received his M.A. from the University of Glasgow in 1720, probably studying under Gershom Carmichael (c. 1672-1729).¹⁷³ He seems to have had a penchant for independent thought and agitation. He led protests against Principle Stirling’s policies.¹⁷⁴ On 30 December 1720 he was involved with the production of a play *Tamerlaine* that was taken by Stirling as a personal attack against him.¹⁷⁵ Stirling attempted to have him expelled, but did not succeed and Arbuckle began studying Divinity in February 1721. The next year, Arbuckle published *A Short Account*,

168.Wodrow, *Correspondence*, p. 212, emphasis mine.

169.see below, p. 152

170.NAS, Minutes of Synod of Ayr and Glasgow, Ch2/546/88, f. 6r.

171.Skoczylas, p. 195.

172.NLS, Wodrow Collection, Pamphlets, 1.7, f. 48.

173.M.A. Stewart, ‘Arbuckle, James (d. 1742)’, *ODNB*, 604.

174.Iain M. Bishop, ‘The Education of Ulster Students at Glasgow University During the Eighteenth Century’, (unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen’s University, Belfast, 1987), pp. 36.

175.Bishop, ‘Education of Ulster Students’, p. 60 and Stewart.

of the *Late Treatment of the Students of G...W* protesting the expulsion of a friend.¹⁷⁶ He also led an unsuccessful attempt to elect the ‘true Whig’ Robert Molesworth (1656–1725) as Rector. In 1724, Arbuckle moved to Dublin where he was introduced to Molesworth who gave support to his literary career.¹⁷⁷

Arbuckle wrote that Smith’s petition to the town council contained ‘allegations ...derogatory to the Reverend Ministers now in Belfast and their hearers that do not concur in the intended erection, as if they were not zealous for the Doctrine, Worship and Discipline of the Church of Scotland, as those who are now separating from them’.¹⁷⁸ He further defended the Non-Subscriber’s orthodoxy and states that they are under no charges. An anonymous *Representation* was published denying Arbuckle’s accusations. The *Representation* also stated that Arbuckle had delivered copies of his broadside at the town chambers and ‘escaped being put into prison for thus insulting the Authority of the Magistrates’.¹⁷⁹ It reminded readers that the Synod of Ulster and Presbytery of Belfast had authorised the third congregation and included a copy of his petition to the council, attested to by the provost and council members.¹⁸⁰ The reasons given in the request for aid was that the Dissenters in Belfast were ‘so populous, that there is an absolute necessity for a third Meeting-House’.¹⁸¹ Arbuckle responded with *Remarks on an Advertisement*.¹⁸² In this sheet Arbuckle stated he merely desired to prevent anyone from understanding the clause about the Confession as an ‘insinuation to the prejudice of the two other Congregations’.¹⁸³ He also accused the collection agents of exaggerating the threat of Non-Subscription, ‘several of the collectors of this contribution, have improved the Affair of Non-Subscription into an Argument among the inhabitants of Glasgow, for them to contribute the more largely to this new Congregation’.

176. Arbuckle, *A Short Account* (Dublin, 1722); Bishop, ‘Education of Ulster Students’, pp. 61-2.

177. W.R. Scott, ‘James Arbuckle and his Relation to the Molesworth-Shaftesbury School’, *Mind*, 8, no. 2, (1899), 194-215, (p. 198); Stewart, ‘Rational Dissent in early 18th-century Ireland’, in *Enlightenment and Religion*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, (Cambridge, 1996), p. 49.

178. NLS, Wodrow Collection, Pamphlets, 1.7, fol. 48.

179. (Glasgow, 28 September 1722), Pamphlets 1.7, fol. 49r.

180. *ibid*, fol. 50.

181. *ibid*.

182. (Glasgow, 29 September 1722), *ibid*, fol. 51.

183. *ibid*, f.51.

The Synod of Ayr and Glasgow, were more explicit in stating the motive for their support of the third congregation. The minutes of their October meeting of that year reads:

There was a petition given in by Samuel Smith in Belfast to the Synod and transmitted to them by the Comitee for Bills bearing that there is a 3rd congregation of Dissenters of the Presbyterian persuasion erected at that place by authority of the Presb[ytyery] of Belfast and of the Generall Synod of Ulster ... this 3rd meeting house is almost finished, and that Mr. Charles Mastertown our countrey man is under a call to it and that many in the said congregation are in low circumstances to contribute to the expenses of the said Meeting House, which makes it a very heavy burden on those that are joyned with them. And that they desyre to adhere firmly to the doctrine worship and government of the Church of Scotland according to the Confession of Faith and Acts of Assembly ... [we] therefore earnestly intreat yt this Rev: Synod would recommend the case of the said congregation to the severall presb and sessions within their bounds for such charitable assistance as they shall think fitt to allow.¹⁸⁴

In February of the next year, Robert Wodrow expressed his surprise to Smith that this Act did not draw criticism from the Non-Subscribers as his petitions elsewhere had.¹⁸⁵ He described the ‘vast noise’ that was ‘raised at Glasgow’ due to Smith’s visit and encouraged him to write something to vindicate the ‘most undue liberty taken with [his] character’.¹⁸⁶

Glasgow University

Arbuckle, the student who wrote against the collections on behalf of the new Meeting House, demonstrates the close connection between Ireland and the University of Glasgow.¹⁸⁷ Glasgow had had a traditional relationship and sizable percentage of Irish Students – at least 10% throughout the eighteenth century and at times comprising one third of the graduates.¹⁸⁸ During the years of the subscription controversy in Ireland, Glasgow students were discussing the issues and questioning the requirements of the Church of Scotland. Robert Wodrow writes, ‘When in Glasgow, I hear no good accounts of the students of Divinity in that place. Mr Gray tells me, that very openly they oppose the Confession of Faith; and this spreads extremely through the young merchants and others’.¹⁸⁹ He also takes note of student clubs that were meeting and taking to the Non-Subscribing principle. In a discussion of one of the meetings they were told that ‘they were not to regulat them-

184.NAS, CH2/546/88, fol. 6r.

185.Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 17.

186.*ibid.*

187.On the importance of Arbuckle and Irish students in general at Glasgow University see M.A. Stewart, ‘Rational Dissent in Early Eighteenth-Century Ireland’, in *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen, (Cambridge, 1996) .

188.Bishop, ‘Education of Ulster Students’, p. 31; Ian Hazlett, ‘Students at Glasgow University from 1747 to 1768 connected with Ireland: an analytical probe’, in *Ebb and Flow: essays in Church History in honour of R. Finlay G. Holmes*, ed. by Donald W. Patton, (Belfast, 2002)

189.Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, p. 170.

selves by human composures’ but rather ‘by Scripture and reason’.¹⁹⁰ He notes in January of 1725 that opposition to the Confession was spreading among students ‘under pretence of search after truth’, notably since they were also rethinking the traditional Calvinist view of the corruption of human nature, believing that ‘the understanding and will are pretty much free of corruption’.¹⁹¹ Further, the young men preparing for ministry were ‘openly saying, in a feu years, when some more of their set are got into the Ministry, ther [will] be appearances made of them in our Generall Assembly for throuing off fetters of human liberty, freedom of thought and enquiry’.¹⁹²

Wodrow blamed the Professor of Divinity – John Simson.¹⁹³ Simson, who was mentioned earlier as an example of qualified subscription, was reprimanded by the General Assembly in 1717 having ‘vented some Opinions not necessary to be taught in Divinity’ and ‘tending to attribute too much to natural reason and the power of corrupt nature’.¹⁹⁴ He was born in the summer of 1667 to the minister of Renfrew, Patrick (1628-1715).¹⁹⁵ He received his M.A. from Edinburgh in 1692 and studied divinity at Glasgow until 1696 when he left to study in Leyden under Jan Marck (1656-1731). He was licensed by the Presbytery of Paisley in 1697 and then returned to the Netherlands the next year to spend two years in Utrecht serving as a tutor. He became Professor of Divinity at Glasgow in 1709, marrying the niece of the Principal, John Stirling (1654-1727) a year later. This relationship might partially explain Stirling’s defence of Simson during the procedures against him. As mentioned earlier, Simson was accused of teaching Arminianism in 1714. He was later accused of Arianism; leading to a second trial that resulted in suspension from teaching, though not a deposition, in 1728. The Act of the Assembly suspending him affirmed that his expressed views on the Trinity were ‘sound and Orthodox’, but his teaching continued, in spite of previous admonishment, to subvert truths and ‘shake the Belief of them’.¹⁹⁶

190.*ibid*, p. 171.

191.*ibid*, pp. 178-9.

192.*ibid*, p. 352.

193.*ibid*, pp. 179, 383.

194.*Acts of Assembly* (1717), pp. 16-18.

195. Anne Skoczylas, ‘Simson, John (1667-1740)’, *ODNB*, 25604; *FES*, VII, p. 400 and D. C. Lachman, ‘Simson, John’, in *DSCH&T*, p. 775.

196.*Acts of Assembly* (1728), p. 26.

Simson played a crucial role given that so many of the ministers in Ireland and America had studied under him. Although he has been considered by many as heretical and a main source behind the views of the Irish Non-Subscribers, his position is not that clear. He continually protested his orthodoxy and explained his thoughts as within the bounds of the Confession of Faith, which he never overtly challenged. Anne Skoczylas, in the most in-depth study of the Simson trials, defends his essential orthodoxy, arguing that none of his students were condemned as heretical and that he seemed to be concerned with what he perceived to be a dangerous tendency in his contemporaries towards Modalism, which overemphasised the unity of the Godhead to the point of undermining the Trinity.¹⁹⁷ Skoczylas' claim is supported by the fact that the Subscribers visited and consulted with him, thought fondly of him and sent copies of their writings in support of subscription to him for his advice.¹⁹⁸ Even American Subscriber George Gillespie (1683-1760) sent warm greetings to Simson in his 1723 letter to Stirling.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, Simson joined Stirling in condemning Arbuckle's production of *Tamerlaine*.²⁰⁰

Many contemporaries of Simson suspected him of holding Non-Subscribing principles and assisting the Belfast ministers in their opposition to the Confession. The Irish Non-Subscribers viewed his trial as connected with the subscription issue and claimed that he had supported them. Rumours were spread that he had written a letter to Ireland claiming that he, with other Scottish ministers, would soon 'declare himself in favour of non-declaring in matters of opinion and faith'.²⁰¹ In November of 1726, the minister of the subscribing congregation in Belfast, Charles Masterton wrote to Stirling:

our Non Subscribers here triumph much in his [Simson's] conduct, alledging he is making his defense upon the foot of their Nonsubscribing or Nondeclaring principles, it is likeways supposed that he has been privately corresponding with the Non Subscribers her to ye disadvantage of the cause of the Subsribers or of ye Genll Synod here, as appears by Mr McBride's in answer to Mr Higginbotham where the letter from a learned minr of ye Church of Scotland to Mr Boyse of Dublin, upon the overtures of ye Genll Synod, it is generally supposed here that the Rev Professor is the author of that letter.²⁰²

197. Anne Skoczylas, *Mr. Simson's Knotty Case*, pp. 244-6.

198. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 15, 60; NLS, *Wod.Lett.Qu*, XX, no. 167, XXI, no. 77.

199. *ibid.*, no. 120.

200. M. A. Stewart, 'Arbuckle, James (d. 1742)', *ODNB*, 604.

201. Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, p. 384.

202. GUL, MS Murray, no. 132.

In the midst of his second trial, Simson made a trip to England for ‘his health’, and probably to make a retreat from the considerable controversy surrounding him. Reports reached Scotland that ‘he went tither to see if any opportunity offered for him to teach there; and it was talked that the Non-Subscribers offered to get him a competency of scholars, and three gineas a piece from them, and that he should set up in London’.²⁰³ Whether this was mere rumour is uncertain, regardless Simson returned to Glasgow just in time to see Stirling minutes before the Principal’s death in September of 1727.²⁰⁴

As Scokzylas rightly concludes that while Simson was not fully Arminian, he was very much in line with Amyraldianism.²⁰⁵ Simson’s soteriology had noticeable similarities to Amyraut and Baxter. He believed that God appointed the means for obtaining grace, such as the Scriptures and prayer.²⁰⁶ These means, if used earnestly, that is diligently and sincerely, ‘God hath promised to bless with success’.²⁰⁷ Moreover, these means are ‘not above the reach of our natural ability and powers’, though only the elect will make use of them.²⁰⁸ Only the elect will make effective use of these infallible means since their use does ‘not depend upon, and flow from their own free will’ but rather are controlled by God’s providence.²⁰⁹ The reprobate therefore are ‘inexcusable because they do not what is within the reach of their natural powers’.²¹⁰ By claiming that the means of salvation are within the scope of our natural, fallen ability to grasp, Simson developed his own ‘hypothetical universalism’. It is not the same system that the Amyraldians developed but it reaches a similar conclusion.

Further signs of unrest

The University of Glasgow was not the only place Professors where causing controversy or students were being attracted to the idea of Non-Subscription. At Edinburgh as well, students formed clubs that gathered and discussed the topics of the day. Sometime before 1720, while a student, Robert Wallace (1697-1771) wrote ‘A little treatise against

203. Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, p. 430.

204. *ibid.*, p. 444. Wodrow records ‘Upon Friday, September 28 or 9, about five of the clock on the afternoon, dyed Mr John Stirling’.

205. Scokzylas, p. 76; for more on Simson’s theology see Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell*, (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1996), 229-32.

206. *Libel Mr James Webster, against Mr John Simson*, p. 216.

207. *ibid.*

208. *ibid.*, pp. 216, 218-9.

209. *ibid.*, pp. 216-19.

210. *ibid.*, p. 220.

imposing creeds or confessions of faith on ministers or private Christians as a necessary term of laick or ministeriall communion'.²¹¹ He was a member of the Rankenian club, named after Ranken's tavern where they met and this unpublished essay appears to have been written and presented to one of the student clubs.²¹² Later he served as minister to a prominent Church in Edinburgh as well as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1743.²¹³ Looking back on this essay in 1767, Wallace wrote 'The writer of this little piece shows plainly how well he understood the controversy about subscription 50 years ago: in truth he and his companions att the University of Edinburgh studied all the controversies of the times'.²¹⁴ The treatise itself mimics the arguments in John Abernethy's (1680-1740) *Religious Obedience Founded on Personal Persuasion* (Belfast, 1720) and 'Of Orthodoxy'. He cites Romans 14:5, 'Let every man be persuaded in his own mind', the text on which Abernethy based his sermon.²¹⁵ He imagines an early, pure Church where Scripture and reason were sufficient guards to error.²¹⁶

Shortly after his ordination, Wallace caused a stir in Glasgow in October 1724 while preaching at a communion service.²¹⁷ He preached against implicit faith and the need to question religious ideas. His sermon 'was taken by some to be favourable to the Non-subscribing lay, and a fling at Confessions, as "imposed forms of orthodoxy"'.²¹⁸

Another member of Wallace's club, 'Neu-lights and Preachers legall' as Wodrow called them, shared in Wallace's views toward confessions. In 1724 Charles Telfer (1693-1731) 'when passing tryalls made some bustle about subscribing' but relented when he saw that he would not be licensed if he did not.²¹⁹ Notably when Wodrow discusses this club 'where creeds etc. were not much defended', he charges them with Arminianism.²²⁰

211.EUL, LA II 620/18.

212.Henry Sefton, 'The Early Development of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1962), p. 47.

213.Henry Sefton, 'Robert Wallace: An Early Moderate', *RSCHS*, (1966) 16, pp. 1-22; *FES*, I, pp. 33, 144; H. R. Sefton, 'Wallace, Robert (1696-1771)', in *DSCH&T*, p. 852.

214.EUL, LA II 62018, back cover.

215.*ibid*, f. 3r.

216.*ibid*, f.5v -9v.

217.*ibid*, p. 167.

218.*ibid*, p. 167-8.

219.Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, p. 174.

220.Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 190; *Analecta*, III, p. 360; IV, p. 165.

Eventually even the murmurings against confessions abated. The students who were preparing to oppose subscription in the General Assembly signed the formula when their presentations and stipends were jeopardized.²²¹ They took their places in the Church and did not openly challenge the Confession. On the back cover of Wallace's essay is a comment written years later giving some insight into why those who had previously opposed subscription never made a public stand, 'However things are much changed since that time and these Scotch students or some of them since that time have seen things in a much clearer light & have a more manly method of thinking'.²²² It was not until 1771 that subscription would again be publicly challenged in the Church of Scotland.²²³

The Church of Scotland was deeply involved with the international subscription controversy even with the lack of publications and the fact that no debate reached the floor of the General Assembly. This of course, is not surprising given the legal entanglement of the Westminster Confession of Faith with both the Presbyterian settlement and the legislation protecting that settlement in the union of the Parliaments. Also, being in an established Church would be a greater deterrent to challenging the Confession's status than the position of a Dissenting minister. In spite of the covert nature of the conflict in Scotland, the Church there played a vital role. Subscribers and Non-Subscribers both found support and assistance among ministers in the Church of Scotland. The universities, especially Glasgow, provided exposure to new ideas and friendships. Finally, in Dunlop's *Preface*, Scotland provided the most important defence of subscription of the period, and one of the best statements of a Reformed understanding of the purpose of confessions.

221. Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, p. 239.

222. *ibid.*

223. Kidd, 'Scotland's invisible Enlightenment', p. 40; John Graham, *The Religious Establishment in Scotland Examined upon Protestant principles*, (London, 1771).

Chapter 3: Background to the Irish Subscription Controversy: to 1720

Debates over subscribing the Westminster Confession of Faith consumed the Synod of Ulster in the early decades of the eighteenth century. The two strains of Presbyterianism discussed in the previous chapters were both imported to Ireland, and were more pronounced due to jurisdictional autonomy of distinct bodies in the north and south, the General Synod of Ulster, and the Presbyteries of Dublin and Munster, known as the Southern Association after 1726. Moreover, the absence of legal obligations, from either establishment or conditional toleration, allowed the Irish Presbyterians more freedom to debate the latest progressive ideas, including the issues of subscription and Church authority. This chapter will show how the two distinct forms of Presbyterianism — English and Scottish — came to Ireland and set the background for subscription controversy. It will also review events that led to the subscription requirements in the Synod of Ulster as well as the influences on and beliefs of the members of the Belfast Society, who would become the ‘Non-Subscribing’ or ‘New Light’ party.

The Presbytery of Dublin

Presbyterianism in the south primarily traced its origin to Elizabethan puritanism and had closer alliances with the English Dissenters.¹ Adam Loftus (1534/1605), Archbishop of Armagh and subsequently Dublin had Puritan sympathies, having appointed Thomas Cartwright, one of the leaders of early English Presbyterianism, as his chaplain in 1561.² Trinity College, Dublin was also a strong Puritan influence from its founding in 1592.³ Loftus, Trinity’s first Provost, was succeeded by four other Puritans or men sympathetic to them, including Walter Travers, the author of the English *Book of Church Discipline*.⁴ The strength of the Puritan movement in Ireland is evident in the Church of Ireland’s

1. James Armstrong, *An Account of the Presbyterian Congregations in Dublin*, in James Martineau, *et. al.*, *Ordination Service: Sermon: Discourse on Presbyterian Ordination: Address of the Young Minister: Prayer on Ordainin : and Charge Delivered by the Ministers of Dublin, at the Ordination of the Rev. James Martineau to the Co-pastoral Office Over the Congregation of Eustace-Street, Dublin* (Dublin, 1829), p. 55; Gillespie, ‘Dissenters and Nonconformists, 1661-1700’, in *The Irish Dissenting Tradition*, ed. by Kevin Herlihy, (Dublin, 1995), pp. 18-20.

2. Kilroy, p. 3, Helga Robinson-Hammerstein, ‘Loftus, Adam (1533/4–1605)’, *ODNB*, 16934.

3. Kilroy, p. 3.

4. See above, p. 20. Kilroy, p. 3; Holmes, *The Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, p. 37.

Articles (1615) which served as a basis of the Westminster Confession of Faith.⁵ These Articles were for the most part the work of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh from 1625-56 and Primate of All Ireland (1625-1656) who presented a modified Episcopal polity in His *Reduction of Episcopacy* which Baxter approved.⁶ During the Interregnum, Presbyterianism was strengthened and bodies similar to the ‘Baxterian Associations’ developed in Cork in 1656 and in Dublin and Leinster in 1658.⁷ Following the Restoration the Non-conformists were strengthened by English Dissenters moving into Dublin as well as by two Huguenot congregations that held ‘ministerial communion’ with the Presbytery of Dublin.⁸ During this time the Cooke Street and Wood Street congregations became the most prominent Dissenting congregations in Dublin.

The Presbytery of Dublin continued to work much as the English Associations.⁹ It was the body of Presbyterian and Independent ministers, though not elders, in the city that gathered as needed for consultation, ordination or discipline.¹⁰ Though an autonomous body, it had connections with the General Synod of Ulster routinely sending commissioners to meetings of Synod.¹¹ The two also shared in the *regium donum*, a grant begun by Charles II, and after suspension by James II, reinstated and increased by William.¹² Additionally, some Dublin congregations, Capel Street and Bull Alley or Plunkett Street, had a Scottish Presbyterian background and subjected themselves to the Synod of Ulster, but also participated in the Presbytery of Dublin.¹³ The two bodies worked out an arrangement between 1709 and 1711 to deal with ordinations and disciplinary matters that involved these congregations.¹⁴

5. Kilroy, p. 4; Schaff, III, p. 526; Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, p. 11; Haire, *Challenge and Conflict*, pp. 8-9.

6. Haire, *Challenge and Conflict*, pp. 8-9; Alan Ford, ‘Ussher, James (1581–1656)’, *ODNB*, 28034.

7. Holmes, *Presbyterian Heritage*, p. 38.

8. Armstrong, pp. 55-7; Raymond Pierre Hylton, ‘The Less-favoured Refuge: Ireland’s Nonconformist Huguenots at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century’, Steven ffearry-Smyrl, “‘Theatres of Worship’: Dissenting Meeting Houses in Dublin, 1650-1750’, in *The Irish Dissenting Tradition*, ed. by Kevin Herlihy, (Dublin, 1995), pp. 54-57.

9. Brooke, p. 64; Irwin, p. 38.

10. Irwin, p. 38.

11. Gillespie, p. 21; Irwin, pp. 38-9.

12. Beckett, pp. 106-15; Holmes, *Presbyterian Heritage*, pp. 44-5.

13. John Barkley, *A Short History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Belfast, 1959), pp. 25-6. Irwin, pp. 38-9; Gillespie, p. 18.

14. Irwin, pp. 38-9..

Theologically, the southern Irish Presbyterians, like the English, were more inclined to the ‘middle-way’ Calvinism of Baxter.¹⁵ Dr. Daniel Williams, who succeeded Baxter at the Merchants’ Lecture at Pinner’s Hall, was a friend and a ‘devout disciple’ of his.¹⁶ Williams served the Wood Street Congregation in Dublin from 1667 until 1687.¹⁷ From 1683 Joseph Boyse (1660–1728) served with Dr. Williams. Boyse, who would take an active role in the controversy on behalf of the Non-Subscribers, was also heavily influenced by the works of Baxter.¹⁸

Boyse was born at Leeds, the son of Matthew Boyse, who had lived at Rowley, then Boston, New England before returning to England.¹⁹ He was educated at English Dissenting Academies before beginning his ministry, first as a domestic chaplain and then, in 1682, as minister of the Brownists Church in Amsterdam before accepting the call to Wood Street.²⁰

This Baxterian influence was supplemented, as A.W.G. Brown has suggested, by the influence of Amyraldianism through the Marsh Library.²¹ The Archbishop of Dublin, Narcissus Marsh (1638–1713) built Ireland’s first public library for those without access to the library at Trinity College, of which he had once served as Provost.²² Since Nonconformists would not have access to Trinity College, Marsh’s library would have been an invaluable resource for the Presbyterian ministers, especially with the acquisition of Bishop Edward Stillingfleet’s (1635–1699) extensive collection in 1705.²³ The first librarian, Elias

15. Olive M. Griffiths, *Religion and Learning: a Study in English Presbyterian Thought from the Bartholomew Ejections (1662) to the Foundation of the Unitarian Movement* (Cambridge, 1935), pp. 94-104.

16. C. G. Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H. L. Short and Roger Thomas, *The English Presbyterians: From Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London, 1968), p. 117.

17. David L. Wykes, ‘Williams, Daniel (c.1643–1716)’, *ODNB*, 29491; Witherow, pp. 60-5. For a biography of Williams see Roger Thomas, *Daniel Williams ‘Presbyterian Bishop’*, (London, 1964). See also R. Buick Knox, *History of Congregations. A Supplement*, p. 57

18. Brown, ‘Irish Presbyterian theology’, p. 230; ‘Theological Interpretation of the First Subscription Controversy’, in *Challenge and Conflict: Essays in Irish Presbyterian History and Doctrine*, ed. by J.L.M. Haire, (Antrim, 1981), p. 31.

19. Witherow, *Historical and literary memorials*, pp. 79-87; A.W. Godfrey Brown, *The Great Mr. Boyse: A study of the Reverend Joseph Boyse Minister of Wood Street Church, Dublin* ([Belfast], 1988), p. 3; A.W. Godfrey Brown, ‘Boyse, Joseph (1660-1728)’, *ODNB*, 3151.

20. *The Great Mr. Boyse*, pp. 3-4.

21. Brown, ‘Irish Presbyterian Theology’, pp. 481-3.

22. Muriel McCarthy, ‘Marsh, Narcissus (1638–1713)’, *ODNB*, 18115; Newport John Davis White, *Four good men : Luke Challoner, fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, 1592; Jeremy Taylor, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dublin, 1660-1667; Narcissus Marsh, Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, 1678-1683; Elias Bouhéreau, first public librarian in Ireland, 1701-1719*, (Dublin, 1927), pp. 25-41. For more on Marsh’s library see *Judaeo-Christian intellectual culture in the seventeenth century : a celebration of the library of Narcissus Marsh (1638-1713)*, ed. by Allison P. Coudert, *et. al.*, (London, 1999);

23. Brown, ‘Irish Presbyterian theology’, pp. 481-2.

Bouhéreau (1643-1719), was a Huguenot refugee and former student of Moise Amyraut (1596-1664) at Saumur.²⁴ Bouhéreau brought with him a large collection of works by Amyraut, as well as his followers, Louis Cappel (1585-1658) and Josué de la Place (c.1596-1665 or 1655), both of whom Joseph Boyse cites in his writings.²⁵

Thomas Emlyn

As in Exeter, it was fears of Arianism that led to renewed interest in subscription. This time it was Boyse's associate Thomas Emlyn who aroused suspicions. Emlyn was born in Stamford in Lincolnshire, the son of a shopkeeper who had been on the municipal council for ten years before losing this position for Nonconformity in 1662.²⁶ Although they were Nonconformists, Emlyn's parents were friends of their parish minister and, on occasion, would worship at the established Church.²⁷ Emlyn began his education at a boarding school in Walcott before entering one of the first Dissenting academies run by John Shuttlewood (1632–1689) in Northhamptonshire. Shuttlewood was a minister who had been ejected and had served time in prison for violating the Act of Uniformity.²⁸ Unsatisfied with the academy's limited library, in 1682 Emlyn left to study in Doolittle's academy in Islington.

Thomas Doolittle (1630/1633?-1707) was from Kidderminster where he had been converted under Baxter's ministry.²⁹ At Doolittle's Academy, Emlyn would have studied alongside Edmund Calamy and Matthew Henry. His biographer wrote that he enjoyed the stimulation offered by the opportunities in London while also developing an aversion to 'narrow schemes of systematical divinity'.³⁰ True to Enlightenment ideals, Emlyn was 'early possess [sic] with an opinion, that in religious matters he ought to judge for himself, and be tied down by no authority, where the reasons did appear convincing'.³¹

24. *ibid*, p. 482.

25. *ibid*, pp. 482-3.

26. Alexander Gordon, 'Emlyn, Thomas (1663–1741)', rev. H. J. McLachlan, *ODNB*, 8793; Sollom Emlyn, 'Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Mr. Thomas Emlyn' in *Thomas Emlyn, The Works of Mr. Thomas Emlyn. ... To which are prefixed, memoirs of the life and writings of the author*. 3 vols. (London, 1746) vol (always a stop after vol.) I, pp. ii-ci.; William Gibson, 'The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn, 1703-1705', *Journal of Church and State*, 48 (2006), pp. 525-39.

27. Emlyn, *Works*, p. vi.

28. David L. Wykes, 'Shuttlewood, John (1632–1689)', *ODNB*, 25490.

29. J. William Black, 'Doolittle, Thomas (1630/1633?-1707)', *ODNB*, 7826; Erasmus Middleton, *Biographia Evangelica: or, an Historical Account of the Lives and Deaths of the Most Eminent and Evangelical Authors or Preachers*, 4 vols. (London, 1779-86), vol. 4, pp. 149-56.

30. Emlyn, *Memoirs*, p. vii.

31. *ibid*, p. vii.

In 1683, Emlyn was appointed chaplain to the Countess of Donegal who was living in London at the time. They moved to Belfast the following year.³² While in Belfast, Emlyn, as his parents had, attended services at the established Church and was on good terms with the local vicar. Remarkably, he was licensed by a Bishop to preach in spite of his refusal to subscribe the Thirty-Nine Articles.³³ This close relationship with Anglican Churches was maintained throughout his life. Emlyn routinely worshipped with and even preached in parish Churches in Ireland and England, he dressed in clerical clothing, and later used the Apostles' Creed with his congregation in London.³⁴ He was offered a living in England by the Countess' new husband, Sir William Franklin, but he refused to conform due to the subscription requirement. As he explained in a letter to Joseph Boyse who had questioned Emlyn about the rumours that he was planning on conforming:

As for the rumor with you of my being addicted wholly to the Church, it is so far true, that (as I wrote you before) I preached once every Lord's-day publicly; but you did very rightly understand me, that I had my license without ordination or subscription, for I had it without any condition, and I do not intend to take Episcopal ordination, unless I could escape the subscription, or be reconciled to it, which I am not yet, nor think I shall be.³⁵

His biographer is careful to point out that his opposition to subscription was not at this time based on the 'scruples, which he afterward had in relation to the articles of the Trinity'.³⁶ Emlyn came to his heterodox views after developing a close friendship with William Manning (c.1630-1711), an Independent minister in London.³⁷

Declining a call to the charge vacated by Dr. Williams at Wood Street, Emlyn returned to London in 1688 where he was introduced to Manning, with whom he frequently met to discuss theological matters. During this time, William Sherlock (1641–1707) published what was meant to be an apologetic for the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, *A Vindication of the Doctrines of the Trinity and of the Incarnation* (London, 1689). In defending the doctrine, Sherlock overemphasized God's Trinitarian nature to the point that some understood it as teaching Tritheism.³⁸ Manning and Emlyn's reading led them to closer scrutiny of the doctrine resulting in both departing from orthodoxy, although in divergent

32. Gibson, 'The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn', pp. 526-7.

33. Emlyn, *Memoirs*, p. ix.

34. *ibid*, p. viii-ix., Gibson, 'The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn', p. 527.

35. *ibid*, p. xi.

36. *ibid*, p. viii.

37. *ibid*, p. xiii.

38. Gibson, 'The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn', pp. 527-8; Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, pp. 135-7.

paths. Manning ‘took to the Socinian way’, Emlyn however ‘never could be brought to doubt either of the pre-existence of our Saviour, as the Logos, or that God created the material world by him’.³⁹ Notably this preceded the publications of Whiston and Clarke.

Upon a renewed invitation from Boyse, Emlyn accepted a call to the second charge at Wood Street in 1691.⁴⁰ While in Dublin, he avoided preaching on the topic of the Trinity, knowing his views to be controversial, an omission was noticed by one of his hearers, Dr. Duncan Cummins. In June of 1702 Cummins, along with Boyse confronted Emlyn at his home about the lack of the Trinity in his sermons.⁴¹ Emlyn was forthright about his opinions. He explained, ‘I now thought my self bound, as a Christian, to declare my faith openly in so great a point, and freely own’d my self convince’d, that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is alone the Supreme Being, and superior in excellency and authority to his Son’.⁴² Emlyn wrote that he was unwilling to cause division in the congregation and offered to leave.⁴³ Boyse however took the matter to the Presbytery.⁴⁴

After a two hour consultation with Emlyn, the Dublin ministers decided that Emlyn should be forbidden from preaching.⁴⁵ Emlyn objected to the meeting being considered a proper trial or to his case being referred to as his being ‘solemnly deposed from [his] office by a presbytery’ stating that he never knew the ministers to refer to themselves by that term before.⁴⁶ While the informal nature of the polity practiced among the Dublin ministers seems to imply greater freedom and liberty among ministers, especially considering their opposition to requiring confessional subscription, it should be noted absence of a form of discipline and hierarchical structure denied Emlyn the ability to make a proper defence and left him without any process of appeal.

Emlyn left soon after his meeting with the ministers and returned to England. Ten weeks later he returned to Dublin to make arrangements for a permanent move to London.

39. Emlyn, *Memoirs*, p. xiii., Emlyn explains his thoughts on different understandings of the Trinity in *A True Narrative of the Proceedings of the Dissenting Ministers of Dublin against Mr Thomas Emlyn; and of his Prosecution in the Secular Court, and his sufferings thereupon in Thomas Emlyn, A collection of tracts, relating to the deity, worship, and satisfaction of the Lord Jesus Christ, &c* (London, 1719), pp. 14-5.

40. Emlyn, *Memoirs*, p. xiv-xvii. R Buick Knox, *History of Congregations. A Supplement*, p. 57.

41. Gibson, ‘The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn’, p. 528.

42. Emlyn, *Works*, p. xvi.

43. *ibid*, p. xvii.

44. Kilroy, p. 47.

45. Brooke, p. 79.

46. Emlyn, *Works.*, pp. xix.

In an attempt to offer a defence of his opinions, Emlyn wrote *A Humble Inquiry into the Scripture-Account of the Lord Jesus Christ, or A Short Argument Concerning His Deity and Glory* (1702), hoping to return to England within a few days of its publication.⁴⁷ Unfortunately for Emlyn, he was not able to escape before a special warrant was obtained and he was arrested with copies of *A Humble Inquiry* and charged with blasphemy.⁴⁸

His trial was a farce.⁴⁹ Emlyn was not allowed to speak in his defence and apparently the jury was coerced with the threat of action from the Bishops should Emlyn be acquitted. He was found guilty and given a one year prison sentence as well as a fine of one thousand pounds, Emlyn was to remain in prison past the year's sentence until the fine was paid. His fine was eventually reduced and he was released in July of 1705.⁵⁰ He returned to England where he served a small congregation in London.

Reactions to Emlyn's case helped to set the stage for the controversy concerning subscription that would erupt years later. First, witnessing the persecution of Emlyn had a profound influence upon the Low Church clergy, particularly Benjamin Hoadly who was a preacher in London at the time.⁵¹ Second, his case, and the fear of heterodoxy, would lead to the Synod of Ulster enacting a requirement for subscription to the Westminster Confession.

The General Synod of Ulster

While the ministers around Dublin identified more with the English Dissenting tradition and French Reformed Amyraldism, the majority of ministers in the north looked to the Church of Scotland as the paragon of Biblical polity and doctrinal rectitude, dismissing the southern ministers and the like-minded Non-Subscribers as 'modeling themselves into another scheme'.⁵² The General Synod of Ulster had been formed primarily by Scots immigrants, and viewing itself as an auxiliary of the Church of Scotland, it was not opposed

47. *ibid*, p. xxiii.

48. Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, pp. 136-7.

49. Gibson, 'The Persecution of Thomas Emlyn', pp. 530-1; Paul O'Higgins, 'Blasphemy in Irish Law', *The Modern Law Review*, 23, no. 2 (1960) 151-166, pp. 159-60.

50. *ibid*, p. 532.

51. *ibid*, p. 526; Gibson, *Enlightenment Prelate*, p. 55.

52. Glasgow University Library, MS Murray 651 IV, no. 130, transcription of a letter from Robert McBride to John Stirling dated 7 November 1726.

to the principle of an established Church.⁵³ Similarly, they held to a stricter form of Calvinism that was hostile to anything appearing like Arminianism.

The General Synod of Ulster had its origins in Scottish soldiers sent to suppress the rebellion in 1642.⁵⁴ Five chaplains organized congregations and Sessions among the soldiers which persisted and recruited ministers from the Church of Scotland. The original Presbytery, established 1642, divided into three in 1654, and into five by 1659.⁵⁵ These eventually met in General Synod in 1690 which continued the practices of the Church of Scotland as far as circumstances would allow.⁵⁶ The practice of professing adherence to a confession, which began as early as 1672 in Laggan Presbytery, though not uniform, was generally practiced in the form of verbal assent, and that was by custom rather than from a ruling of the General Synod.⁵⁷ Francis Iredell (d. 1739), one of the older ministers during the subscription controversy recounts how he was asked to ‘own the Confession of Faith’ before the congregation as part of his ordination to Donegore, Co. Antrim in 1688.⁵⁸ He recalled this as the common practice within the Presbytery of Antrim before that date, and while hesitant to say it was the regular practice of other presbyteries, did write that the Church was ‘pretty harmonious in the manner of their ministrations, and as zealous for the form of sound words contained in the Westminster Confession’ even though no Acts of the Synod required subscription.⁵⁹

Iredell’s comment about the custom in other presbyteries indicates that latitude was given to presbyteries in their own requirements for ordination. While the presbyteries were similar in ‘their ministrations’, the exact form and wording of the question to the ordinand probably varied, even as they did in regard to the form of subscription well into the

53. Raymond Gillespie, ‘Dissenters and Nonconformists, 1661-1700’, p. 17; Phil Kilroy, *Protestant Dissent and Controversy in Ireland, 1660-1714* (Cork, 1994), pp. 35-59.

54. Holmes, *Presbyterian Heritage*, pp. 25-48; Greaves, *God’s Other Children*, (Stanford, 1997), pp. 160-176; Kilroy, p. 16.

55. Kilroy, p. 16.

56. Greaves, *God’s Other Children*, p. 175.

57. John M. Barkley, *Westminster Formularies in Irish Presbyterianism, Carey Lectures 1954-6* (Belfast, 1956), p. 9. See also: James Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas of Subscription in the Reformed Churches of Great Britain and Ireland Especially in the Church of Scotland: Being a Series of Lectures Delivered to Students of Church History in the Opening Days of Session 1906-7 (25th to 30th October, 1906)* (Glasgow, 1907), pp. 17-24; A.W. Godfrey Brown, ‘A Theological Interpretation’, p. 29.

58. Francis Iredell, *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Samuel Haliday, wherein the Remarks Upon Some Passages in His Letter to the Rev. Mr. Kennedy are Defended* (Dublin, 1727), p. 32, quoted in Thomas Witherow, *Historical and Literary Memorials of Presbyterianism in Ireland*. 2 vols. (London, 1879), vol. I, pp. 149-155; *FIPC*, pp. 68-9.

59. Witherow, p. 155.

eighteenth century.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the statement in the later Pacific Act (1720) which states ‘as has been the practice’ might refer to the allowance of scruples by the presbyteries in some matters, much as was evidently practiced in at least some of the presbyteries in the Church of Scotland.⁶¹ On the other hand, the statement might simply refer to the practice of stating adherence to the Confession.

The General Synod of Ulster in 1698 had enacted that ‘young men, when licens’d to preach, be obliged to subscribe the Confession of Faith, in all the Articles thereof, as the confession of their faith’.⁶² This was based on a decision of the previous Synod to examine the Acts of the General Assembly in order to bring their practice into conformity with the Church of Scotland.⁶³ Barkley states, without substantiation, that the 1698 requirement ‘seems to have been honoured more in the breach than in the observance’.⁶⁴ In 1705, the General Synod of Ulster was horrified that heterodox beliefs had been revealed among ministers in Dublin in the Emlyn case. While a primary concern was surely to guard the orthodox views, it should be remembered that it was not necessarily simply overzealous traditionalism that raised alarm. Opponents of Dissenters could raise questions about the leniency they were given should they be seen as a cradle of heterodoxy. In an attempt to maintain orthodox doctrine the Synod ruled:

That such as are to be licens’d to preach the gospel subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith to be the Confession of their faith, & promise to adhere to the doctrine, worship, discipline and government [sic] of this Church; as also those who are licens’d [sic] & have not subscrib’d, be oblig’d to subscribe before their being ordain’d among us: which was voted & unanimously approv’d.⁶⁵

In the same year, a group of ministers in the north, known as the Belfast Society, began meeting monthly for discussion and sharing of their readings.⁶⁶ James Kirkpatrick, one of the Society’s members, described them as a ‘Voluntary Society’ ‘originally of Protestant-Dissenting Ministers, members of different presbyteries, of students of Divinity, and candidates’.⁶⁷ Noticeably, Kirkpatrick identifies the body as Dissenters rather than as

60. Barkley notes that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century ‘no less than sixteen different formulae’ were in use, with significant variations, *Westminster Formularies*, p. 13.

61. see above, p. 70.

62. *Records of the General Synod of Ulster from 1691 to 1820*, 3 vols (Belfast, 1890), I, p. 34.

63. *Westminster Formularies*, p. 9.

64. *ibid.*, p. 9.

65. *RGSU*, I, p. 100.

66. A.T.Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence*, p. 74-81.

67. James Duchal, *A Sermon on Occasion of the Much Lamented Death of the Late Reverend Mr. John Abernethy. preached in Antrim December, 7th, 1740; with an appendix, containing some brief memoirs of the lives and characters of the late Reverend Messieurs Thomas Shaw, William Taylor, Michael Bruce, and*

Presbyterians. While by no means used exclusively, their frequent references to ‘the Northern Dissenters’ and other similar terms compared with its absence in the writings to the Subscribers reveals a fundamental difference between the two parties.⁶⁸ This identification primarily as Dissenters with the right to conscientiously object to the established religion became a central argument in the debates. Moreover, the very formation of a group other than the local presbytery probably in itself brought suspicion and gave the appearance of a clique to those who were not members.

The Society’s meetings followed a set pattern of Bible study, ‘communication of studies’, and a dissertation.⁶⁹ Two members would be appointed a portion of Scripture to study and present at the next meeting with the intent of working through the whole Bible. Any questions or doubts were encouraged to be expressed and further study and discussion was given to these matters. Kirkpatrick lists the topics of interest to the society as Christian unity, schism, ‘the rights of conscience, and of private judgment’, the ‘sole dominion of Christ in his own kingdom’, and issues of Church discipline.⁷⁰ It is clear that they were questioning traditional Presbyterian ecclesiology and polity, which was to become the root issue of the ensuing debates.⁷¹ These topics were the subjects being discussed by writers such as Locke, Hoadly, and the authors of the *Occasional Paper* that would have such a strong influence on the Society’s members. The influence of Hoadly and others was noted by contemporaries, as Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), who would soon be teaching at an academy in Dublin, reported:

I find by the conversation I have had with some ministers and comrades, that there is a perfect Hoadly mania among our younger ministers in the north; and what is really ridiculous, it does not serve them to be of his principles; but their pulpits are ringing with them, as if their hearers were all absolute princes going to impose tests and confessions in their several territories, and not a set of people entirely excluded from the smallest hand in government any where, and entirely incapable of bearing any other part in persecution but [as] the sufferers.⁷²

Samuel Haliday, Protestant-Dissenting ministers in the counties of Down and Antrim (Belfast, 1741). Kirkpatrick wrote the ‘Conclusion by the Publisher’ pp. 35-44.

68. [John Abernethy], *A Defence of the Seasonable Advice, in Answer to the Reverend, Mr. Charles Mastertoun’s Apology for the Northern Presbyterians in Ireland*, (Belfast, 1724), p. 10. Other examples are [John Abernethy], *Seasonable Advice to the Protestant Dissenters in the North of Ireland; Being a Defence of the Late General Synod’s Charitable Declarations* (Dublin, 1722), and Samuel Haliday, *Reasons Against the Imposition of Subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith; or, Any Such Human Tests for Orthodoxy; Together with Answers to the Arguments for Such Impositions* (Belfast, 1724), p. xi.

69. Duchal, p. 37.

70. *ibid.*, p. 36.

71. Brown, ‘A Theological Interpretation’, p. 31.

72. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 389.

In addition to the Bible study, the ‘communication of studies’, or presentation, was given. Every member was to report on anything noteworthy in their personal reading so that the reader might gain a deeper understanding, but also so that the full body could benefit from each other’s readings. This allowed the ministers without the resources or time to stay abreast of the latest ideas being debated in print. As these topics were being discussed in the Society they would not only be exposed to the latest ideas, but through conversation could discuss how these ideas applied to their own situation. As will be seen later, the contractual theories of Locke and Hoadly would be applied, not just to civil powers and the established Church, but to any religious ‘society’. Moreover, the conviction of the individuals right to freedom of conscience in matters of faith would be extended to Church courts in relation to their superior courts.

As for the dissertation, Kirkpatrick wrote that they chose important topics while ‘carefully avoiding too curious and unScriptural speculations, which can make no man wiser or better’.⁷³ In addition to the studies and discussions, the Society also heard sermons, one of which became the catalyst for the subscription controversy was preached by the founder and leader, John Abernethy (1680-1740).

John Abernethy

Abernethy was the son of a minister, also John (d. 1703) of Coleraine, who after having been ejected from Minterburn in 1661 was minister at Brigh, Co. Tyrone when John the younger was born in 1680 and then of Moneymore, Co. Derry in 1684.⁷⁴ While his father was in London, representing the Presbyterians to King William’s court in 1688-9, John’s mother and siblings went to Londonderry where they were caught in the siege, John who was away with relatives in Ballymena, was taken in by his mother’s family, the Walkinshaws of Renfrewshire, Scotland where he stayed until 1692. Although his mother survived, the rest of her children were lost in the siege.

73. Duchal, p. 38.

74. Thomas Witherow, *Historical and Literary Memorials of Presbyterianism in Ireland* (Mullan, 1879), I, pp.192-9; A. Godfrey Brown, ‘John Abernethy 1680-1740 Scholar and Ecclesiast’, in *Nine Ulster lives*, ed. by G. O’Brien and P. Roebuck (Belfast, 1992), pp. 125-147; R. Finlay Holmes, ‘The Reverend John Abernethy: The Challenge of New Light Theology to Traditional Irish Presbyterian Calvinism’, in *The Religion of Irish Dissent*, ed. by Kevin Herlihy (Dublin, 1996) pp.100-11; and *FIPC*, p. 89.

John attended school in Renfrewshire and then in Coleraine, Co. Londonderry, after he returned to his parents. The Walkinshaw's home was within the parish of Renfrew, which from 1690 was served by Patrick Simson (1628–1715), the father of John Simson (1667–1740), who later became Professor of Theology at the University of Glasgow.⁷⁵ Patrick Simson was known to have a broader attitude towards confessions, subscription and worship practices than most Church of Scotland ministers at the time.⁷⁶ It is not implausible that Abernethy, a refugee and son of a prominent minister in Ireland, would have been at least acquainted with John during this time before they were students together at the University of Glasgow.⁷⁷ Simson, who three years older than Abernethy, began studying Divinity at Glasgow about the same time Abernethy began work on his M.A. under his regent John Tran. If they had not known each other before their time together at the University, no doubt the common background in Renfrew helped to form the friendship that developed at this time between them. Abernethy matriculated in 1693 and received his degree about 1696, he had considered studying medicine but went to Edinburgh to study Divinity instead.⁷⁸

Abernethy was licensed by the Route Presbytery on 3 March 1702.⁷⁹ He preached at Antrim, who might have called him had he not wanted to delay his ordination on account of his age. Before accepting a call, Abernethy had an extended visit to Dublin where he preached at several meeting houses, including Wood Street during the time of Thomas Emlyn's affair.⁸⁰ Abernethy was offered Emlyn's position at the Wood Street congregation, but based on his father's advice turned it down. He also received a call from Antrim, but before his ordination his father died, leaving charge at Coleraine vacant. Coleraine offered Abernethy his father's former position and the competing calls were referred to the

75. *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland: A Survey of Scottish Topography, Statistical, Biographical and historical*, ed. Francis Hindes Groome, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1882-1885), VI, p. 244; D. F. Wright, 'Simson, Patrick (1628–1715)', *ODNB*, 67858; D.F. Wright, 'Simson, Patrick (1628-1717)', *DSCH&T*, p. 776. Simson had been ejected in 1662 but restored by royal indulgence in 1687.

76. Anne Skoczylas, *Mr. Simson's Knotty Case*, p. 31.

77. R. Finlay Holmes, 'Reverend John Abernethy', p. 102.

78. Innes, ed., *Munimenta alme Universitatis Glasguensis / Records of the University of Glasgow from its Foundation till 1727*, 3, Maitland Club, 72 (1854), 155.

79. M. A. Stewart, 'Abernethy, John (1680-1740)', *ODNB*, 48.

80. Holmes, 'Reverend John Abernethy', p. 103.

General Synod which decided that Abernethy should go to Antrim. He obeyed the Synod's ruling and was ordained 18 August 1703.⁸¹

After nine years serving the Antrim congregation, the Church at Derry issued a call, although it was not accepted.⁸² Two more calls were issued to Abernethy in 1717. The first was from the Usher's Quay congregation in Dublin which was especially impressed with Abernethy's ministry to the Irish-speaking Roman Catholics near Lough Neagh. The other call came from the First Congregation in Belfast. The Dublin congregation was made up mostly of Presbyterians from the North and had built a new Meeting House in 1707.⁸³ This was an appealing opportunity for the Synod since Usher's Quay, with a new Meeting House and being large enough to support an assistant, was not part of the Synod of Ulster but offered to join if Abernethy was installed.⁸⁴ The Synod directed him to accept the call to the congregation in Dublin and so he went to Usher's Quay for three months with the intent of testing the situation and making up his own mind; after three months he returned to Antrim in defiance of the Synod's ruling.⁸⁵ In his diary, Abernethy listed his reasons for staying at Antrim, concluding that the only arguments for going to Dublin 'depends upon servile notions of ecclesiastical power, which are attended with confusion and fear, but without light, and they destroy a rational choice'.⁸⁶ He denied that the Synod had authority to move a minister against his will. As would become the issue for him in the subscription controversy, he denied claims to raw ecclesiastical authority in favour of personal, free choice.

It was at this time that Abernethy received a copy of *The Nature of the Kingdom, or Church, of Christ*.⁸⁷ Abernethy and others in the Belfast Society eagerly read Hoadly's sermon and the literature published as part of the Bangorian Controversy. Especially influential to the society was the Bishop's *An Answer to the Representation Drawn up by the Committee of the Lower-House of Convocation Concerning Several Dangerous Positions*

81. Holmes, p. 103.

82. John Abernethy, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 4 vols (London, 1748-51), I, p. viii.

83. [D. Bailie et al.] *A History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1610-1982*, (Belfast, 1982), p. 441.

84. *RGSU*, p. 429.

85. Abernethy, *Sermons*, pp. xl-xlii.

86. *ibid*, p. xliii.

87. Barlow, p. 403; Stewart, 'Rational Dissent in Early 18th-Century Ireland', p. 54.

and Doctrines Contain'd in the Bishop of Bangor's Preservative and Sermon (London, 1718).⁸⁸ Abernethy believed that Hoadly's writings anticipated the 'glorious day ... when Christians should be joined together, not in the same opinions, but in one heart'.⁸⁹ As mentioned previously, this goal of Christian unity had been the motive for the Genevan opposition to creeds as well.⁹⁰

Abernethy's Theology

In seeking to answer the question of whether the Non-Subscribers were motivated solely by a matter of principle, or if they held theological difficulties with the Westminster Confession of Faith, Robert Allen concluded that in matters related to the Trinity and Deity of Christ such as Arianism or Socinianism, Abernethy was most likely undecided.⁹¹ In other matters however, Abernethy was definitely at odds with the Westminster Confession, rejecting for example the doctrine of total depravity.⁹² In his sermon on 'Temptations to Evil, not from God', Abernethy argues that 'to represent the nature of men as so corrupted...that they are under a fatal necessity of sinning, and that is utterly impossible for them to do any thing which is good' deprives people of responsibility for their sins and places it on God.⁹³ He argues the same point in *Of Inability to do Good arising from Vicious Habits*, 'where there is a total disability ... there can be no guilt'.⁹⁴ This sermon further shows Abernethy's understanding of sin and its remedy as very similar to the views held by Locke. While admitting that 'we are born in a very weak imperfect condition' as to the ability to make moral choices, he argues that we develop gradually in our abilities and faculties through our habitual exercise of the powers we do have. This view has more in common with Locke than with the Westminster Confession which states that:

By this [Original] sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body [and] man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.⁹⁵

88. Abernethy, *Sermons*, xlv. Hoadly's *Answer* was also printed in Dublin the same year.

89. Abernethy, *Sermons*, xlv.

90. see above, p. 29.

91. Robert Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription to Creeds and Confessions of Faith as Exemplified in the Irish Presbyterian Church' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1944), p. 335; Brookes, pp. 84-5.

92. Holmes, 'Reverend John Abernethy', p. 101.

93. Abernethy, *Sermons*, IV, pp. 19-20.

94. *ibid*, IV, p. 219.

95. WCF, VI.2, IX.3; Brown, 'John Abernethy', p. 105.

For Abernethy conversion and moral progress is not through alien grace operating on the soul of the elect but rather the gradual growth to maturity of people who ‘are furnished with ever thing which is needful’.⁹⁶ Conversion is primarily through rational argument, showing evil actions to have ‘unhappy consequences’ to the offender.⁹⁷ People’s proclivity to sin is derived not from Adam’s fall but from our own evil habits which makes it difficult to choose to do good by clouding our judgment.⁹⁸ The remedy of repentance is a rational decision by the sinner, who will be assisted by God with the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who ask it, but can only be expected to be given to those who are ‘zealous’ and ‘diligent’.⁹⁹

Abernethy argues for a synergistic view of salvation, or human cooperation in their conversion, ‘we cannot be merely passive in the conversion of the heart from sin to God, which is really a voluntary exchange of masters’.¹⁰⁰ Not only in the process of salvation, but in moral development, people exercise their will ‘every step of our progress in virtue, requireth the vigorous exertion of our own abilities’.¹⁰¹ This is in contrast to the Confession’s statement that people are ‘altogether passive’ in their calling until being enabled to respond by the Holy Spirit.¹⁰²

Another opinion that would have been questionable to his more traditional contemporaries, and which he shared with John Simson, was Abernethy’s rejection of the idea that those who have not heard the Gospel would be damned.¹⁰³ ‘The righteous judge of the whole world will not condemn men for not believing what they had not the means or capacity of knowing, and he will make merciful allowances for the disadvantageous and absurd manner in which it was set before them’.¹⁰⁴

Following in this line of thought, he emphasizes the needs for good works, stating that Christ’s atonement ‘is not intended to supersede the necessity of repentance and new

96. Abernethy, *Sermons*, IV, p. 208.

97. *ibid*, IV, p. 218.

98. *ibid*, IV, pp. 21, 218.

99. *ibid*, IV, p. 235.

100. *ibid*, IV, p. 71.

101. *ibid*, IV, pp. 71-2.

102. WCF, X.2.

103. WCF, XXV.2. states that outside the Church ‘there is no ordinary possibility of salvation’.

104. Abernethy, *Sermons*, IV, p. 202.

sincere obedience'.¹⁰⁵ In this Abernethy understands faith as obedience, to the 'new law' of Christ.¹⁰⁶ Godfrey Brown rightly labels Abernethy as 'a thorough going neonomian'.¹⁰⁷ This understanding of the gospel as a new law places Abernethy squarely in the tradition of Baxter and the 'middle-way' Calvinism of contemporary English Dissenters. Although Abernethy and the other members of the Belfast Society were suspected by some of their colleagues of Arianism, this charge is questionable. It is clear however that they were convinced of specific points, if not the entire system, of Arminianism. As one minister wrote 'however it be as to Arianism I'm pretty sure that several min[ister]s incline to the Arminian principles'.¹⁰⁸ If they did not adopt Arminianism *in toto*, the Non-Subscribers did argue from an understanding of faith as assent to propositional truths, and the ability of human reason to judge those truths similar to the 'rational Arminians', Turretin, and Locke.

The Members of the Belfast Society

This leaning toward Arminianism was shared by the other members of the Belfast Society. Besides Abernethy, the leading member of the Society was James Kirkpatrick (c.1676-1743). His father, Hugh (d. 1712) was minister of Ballymoney in Co. Antrim although he was probably born in Scotland before his father moved to Ireland.¹⁰⁹ He received his education from the University of Glasgow, from where he would later receive a D.D. and M.D., both in 1732. He matriculated in 1691, two years before Abernethy and one before Simson began his Divinity studies there. In 1697 he was licensed by the Presbytery of Route and was ordained in August 1699 to the congregation at Templepatrick in Co. Antrim. In 1706 he was translated to Belfast to work with John McBride (c.1650-1718) the father of one of the leaders of the Pro-Subscription party, Robert (1687-1759).¹¹⁰ John, refusing to take the Abjuration Oath, had moved to Scotland.¹¹¹ Af-

105. *ibid.*, III, p. 368. see also 'Of Believing in Jesus Christ', *Sermons* IV, pp. 181-205.

106. *ibid.*, IV, p. 198

107. Brown, 'John Abernethy', p. 142.

108. *Wod.Lett.Qu* XX, no. 145. f. 245r.

109. Witherow, I, pp. 156-, A. D. G. Steers, 'Kirkpatrick, James (c.1676-1743)', *ODNB*, 15674; *FIPC*, p.

110. Witherow, pp. 156-168

110. Witherow, pp. 109-125.

111. The Abjuration Oath renounced the Stuart dynasty, however, some took part of the Oath as a defence of the established Church, see Beckett, pp. 64-70.

ter two years, the growth of the congregation, and possibly some tensions over theological differences, led to the building of a second meeting house.¹¹² McBride served the original congregation, while Kirkpatrick took the second. Kirkpatrick was one of the original members of the Belfast Society. He served as Moderator of the General Synod in 1712, and the next year published *An Historical Essay upon the Loyalty of Presbyterians* (Belfast, 1713).

Two members of the Belfast Society were brothers. Michael (1686–1735) and Patrick Bruce (1692–1732) were sons of James Bruce (1660/61–1730) minister at Killyleagh in Co. Down, where he was influential in establishing an academy in 1697 that lasted for seventeen years.¹¹³ Among his students were Francis Hutcheson and a later member of the Belfast Society, John Henderson (1683–1753). Although James Bruce would side with the Subscribers by re-signing the Confession in 1721, he refused to see the issue as warranting a breach of communion.

Michael and Patrick, like their father, were both educated at Edinburgh. Michael was licensed by Down Presbytery in 1708 and ordained to the Holywood congregation in 1711.¹¹⁴ He was remembered for his powerful memory and a piety that was ‘sincere and rational, free from superstition and enthusiasm’.¹¹⁵ Patrick received his M.A. and was ordained in 1717 to serve the Drumbo congregation. A third brother, William was a bookseller in Dublin. He was also part of a circle of progressive thinkers that developed around Viscount Robert Molesworth, one of the most influential Whig leaders.¹¹⁶ Molesworth, who had served King William in Copenhagen and held seats in Irish and English Parliaments for close to thirty years, had an estate near Swords, Co. Dublin.¹¹⁷ He admired Locke who referred to Molesworth as an ‘ingenious and extarordinary’ man.¹¹⁸ He was also the centre of a group of friends who shared liberal ideals known as the ‘Old Whigs’ and included such influential men as Hoadly, Tindal, John Toland, and Francis Hutche-

112.D.W. Hayton, ‘McBride, John (c.1650–1718)’, *ODNB*, 17361; *FIPC*, p. 72.

113.*FIPC*, p. 58; and Alexander Gordon, ‘Bruce, James (1660/61–1730)’, rev. W. D. Bailie, *ODNB*, 3733; for Michael Bruce see Witherow, pp. 295–298

114.*FIPC*, p. 91.

115.Duchal, pp. 22 & 29.

116.Marianne Elliot, *Watchmen in Zion: The Protestant Idea of Liberty* (Derry, 1985), p. 11–2; Robbins, pp. 84–129.

117.*ODNB*, Robbins, p. 88; Stewart, ‘Rational Dissent in Early 18th-Century Ireland’, pp. 49–51.

118.Robbins, pp. 89, 96.

son.¹¹⁹ In the years after the subscription controversy, William co-authored with Abernethy *Plain Reasons Against the Repeal of the Test-Act*.¹²⁰

While Abernethy, Kirkpatrick, Michael Bruce contributed to the debates through publication, three other members would become the subjects of most of the conflict actually dealt with in the Synod: Samuel Haliday (1685–1739), Thomas Nevin (1686–1745) and Alexander Colville (1700–1777).¹²¹

Samuel Haliday's father was the minister of the Omagh congregation in Co. Tyrone. His father had previously ministered in Scotland at Dryfesdale, near Lockerbie and then Edinburgh, before returning to Ireland in 1692 to serve the Ardstaw congregation in Co. Londonderry.¹²² Samuel the younger studied at Glasgow and Edinburgh before receiving his M.A. from the University of Leiden in 1706. He was licensed in Rotterdam by the Presbytery of Convoy and ordained in Geneva in 1708 'because', as he later wrote, 'the terms of Church-communion there, are not narrowed by any human impositions', that is the imposing of extra-Biblical, or merely human works, such as confessions.¹²³ After his ordination he served as chaplain to a Cameronian regiment in Flanders.¹²⁴ In 1712, Haliday returned to Ireland and was accepted as a member of the Synod as a minister without charge in 1712.¹²⁵ The Plunket Street congregation in Dublin sought permission to issue him a call in 1713, which he did not accept. He spent some time in Dublin in 1718 before moving to London where he served as an informal liaison between the Church of Scotland, the English Dissenters and the Irish Presbyterians at the time of the Salter's Hall debates which he attended.¹²⁶

119. Robbins, pp. 84, 92; A.D.G. Steers, "'New Light' Thinking', p. 45, 147, 253; M.A. Stewart and James Moore, 'William Smith (1698-1741) and the Dissenters' Book Trade', *The Bulletin of the Presbyterian Historical Society of Ireland* 22 (1993): 20-27; M.A. Stewart, 'John Smith and the Molesworth Circle', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 2, (1987), 89-102.

120. (Dublin, 1733)

121. *FIPC*, pp. 103 (Haliday), 119 (Nevin), 93 (Colville).

122. Witherow, pp. 266-279

123. Samuel Haliday, *Reasons Against the Imposition of Subscription to the Westminster-Confession of Faith; or, Any Such Human Tests of Orthodoxy, Together with Answers to the Arguments for Such Impositions* (Belfast, 1724), p. iv.

124. A.D.G. Steers, 'Haliday, Samuel (1685–1739)', *ODNB*, 11930; *FIPC*, p. 103.

125. Stewart, *Deeper Silence*, p. 77; Haliday, *Reasons*, p. v.

126. Samuel Haliday, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Gilbert Kennedy; Occasioned by Some Personal Reflections, contained in His Answer to Mr. Haliday's Reasons Against the Imposition of Subscription to the Westminster-Confession, or Any Such Human Tests of Orthodoxy* (Belfast, 1725), p. 46. Steers, 'New Light', p. 160; *RGSU*, I, p. 536.

Two other incidents over which the Subscribers and Non-Subscribers divided involved Thomas Nevin and Alexander Colville. Nevin was born in Ayrshire, though his grandfather was a vicar in Ireland 1634-1652.¹²⁷ He matriculated at Glasgow in 1703 and was licensed in 1709 by the Presbytery of Down and, following a year in Dublin, ordained to the Downpatrick congregation in 1711. In 1724 he was charged with blasphemy in the civil courts. Alexander Colville was most likely born at Newtownards, Co. Down, where his father, also Alexander (d. 1719), was ordained minister in 1696; he later moved to Dromore in 1700. The elder Colville had been a member of the Belfast Society while his son was studying at the University of Edinburgh during the early years of the controversy. Colville received his M.A. in 1715, and studied under William Dunlop. Colville was named after his father, the previous minister of Dromore and member of the Belfast Society.¹²⁸ After studying Theology under William Dunlop, and receiving a M.A. from Edinburgh in 1715, he was licensed by the Presbytery of Cupar of the Church of Scotland, at which time he subscribed the Westminster Confession.¹²⁹ His father died shockingly in the Dromore pulpit on 1st December 1719. Dromore sought to issue a call to the younger Colville and waited for him to complete his educational requirements. It was Colville's call to serve Dromore congregation that became the final stage in the first Irish subscription controversy.

Other members of the Society included Samuel Harper (d. 1731), John Mears (1695–1767), William Taylor (d. 1727), Thomas Wilson (d. 1767) and James Ducal (d. 1761) all of whom were educated in Scotland. John Henderson who received an M.A. from Edinburgh in 1701 after studying at the Killyleagh Academy and Thomas Shaw (d. 1731) who had studied at Leiden were also members.

The members of the Belfast Society had studied at universities rather than local academies exposing them to new ideas from England and the Continent.¹³⁰ While some have noted the connection many had with John Simson, it was the cross-pollination of ideas among students from different backgrounds in an environment that encouraged test-

127. Alexander Gordon, 'Nevin, Thomas (1686–1745)', rev. S. J. Skedd, *ODNB*, 19969; *FIPC*, p. 119; Witherow, pp. 286-294

128. *FIPC*, p. 135.

129. *ibid.*

130. Brown, in Haire, p. 30.

ing of tradition that allowed the Belfast Society's 'New Light' theology to develop.¹³¹ Just as influential as studies in Scotland was the connection between the Belfast Society and the ministers in Dublin.¹³² Many of the preeminent members of the Society had lived in Dublin, or had strong ties there. As will be seen, Society members adopted ideas of Church polity similar to the model of Dublin Presbytery, the ministers of which would side with the Non-Subscribers in the ensuing debates.

Bid for Toleration

The Toleration granted to English Dissenters in 1689 did not extend to Ireland. As early as 1714, Irish Dissenters began meeting to discuss how to best obtain similar liberties.¹³³ There was a 'General Meeting of Ministers and Gentlemen' in Antrim, on 10 November 1714, to discuss their proposal. These talks dragged on until the 1716 Synod when, at the prompting of a letter from the Presbytery of Dublin, it was brought to the floor to be discussed by the whole body.¹³⁴ The joint work to propose terms of toleration gave an opportunity for members of the Synod of Ulster and the Presbytery of Dublin to openly discuss the necessity and legitimacy of creedal subscription. While no list of committee members exists, it seems very unlikely that a meeting at Antrim would not have at least included Abernethy and Kirkpatrick.

In the end the committee suggested seeking toleration on the basis of subscribing the Westminster Confession of Faith. It was significant that they proposed subscription to the legal Confession of the Church of Scotland, rather than the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, which had replaced the Church of Ireland's 'Irish Articles' in 1635.¹³⁵ The union of 1707 meant that the Kingdom now had two constitutionally established confessional statements in force. For the Irish Presbyterians, the Scottish Kirk and her Confession had as much authority as the Anglican Church of Ireland. Moreover, this subtly reveals the different bases of appeal for religious toleration. While the Southern ministers and the Belfast Society called for the right to Dissent based on the rights of individual con-

131.Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, I, p. 114; Allen, p. 61; Steers, "'New Light' Thinking", especially pp. 161-85.

132.Reid, I, pp. 114-5.

133.Beckett, p. 74.

134.*RGSU*, p. 395.

135.Schaff, I, p. 663.

viction and liberty of conscience; the Synod of Ulster was implicitly arguing that they were due toleration as an extension of one of Britain's legitimately established Churches.¹³⁶

In addition to this resolution, which passed unanimously, the Antrim Meeting also proposed an alternative formula should the Westminster Confession be refused:

I profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God, the true God, and in God the Holy Ghost, and that these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. I believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by divine inspiration, and that they are a perfect rule of Christian faith and practice. And pursuant to this belief, I agree to all the doctrines common to the Protestant Churches at home and abroad.¹³⁷

It appears as though the Presbytery of Dublin would rather have had this formula, however, the mere mention of a substitute statement of belief raised fears of 'quitting' the Confession.¹³⁸ This minimalist statement upholds the basic Trinitarian faith that was sought in the terms of subscribing the Thirty-Nine Articles, but does not include the more controversial points that were objectionable to the members of the Belfast Society or the Southern ministers. It also upheld the Scriptures as the primary authority for faith and practice, which would be one of the strongest arguments that the opponents of confessional subscription would muster in the later debate. The final sentence is vague enough to include a diverse set of beliefs. If 'all the doctrines common to the Protestant Churches at home and abroad' means agreement to only the common doctrines there would be little more than the Trinitarian statement left; these Churches were not in agreement on the details of polity, the sacraments, soteriology or the place of the Church within the state, which of course is why there were those who argued that union of these diverse bodies would demand sparser confessional documents. While this would appeal to those who believed union among all Protestant Churches could be obtained through a minimal creed that only listed the fundamental beliefs common to Protestant Churches it horrified more traditional Presbyterians who saw their polity and convictions of the Church's relation to the state as still in a precarious position.

136. American Presbyterians reasoned this way as well; one minister wrote to Stirling in 1716, 'the Church of Scotland is established in Great Britain as well as y[a]t of England, & no doubt have liberty of sending Scotch missionaries ... to thos[e] places especially within the dominion of Great Britain'. Wod.Lett.Qu XXII, f. 169v.

137. *RGSU*, I, p. 395-7.

138. Allen, 'The Principle of Nonsubscription', p. 102, Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 212.

Those who offered the proposed statement argued that it was not intended to abrogate the Westminster Confession of Faith, however, whether intentional or not, subscribing two separate documents would probably not have lasted for long. In this case the document insuring civil liberties would undoubtedly have been preferred.

In order to reassure those who feared the petition for toleration would be a renunciation of the Westminster Confession, the Synod recorded that the proposal was in no way a ‘relinquishing of our Confession of Faith’.¹³⁹ Even though the Synod accepted that the proposed alternative formula would only be offered if the initial terms of subscription to the Westminster Confession was not accepted, there was lingering suspicion that, ‘In Ireland matters are not as were to be wished ... they have quit our Confession of Faith, and come in [to] a loose uncertain formula, any body almost may subscribe, as the terms of their legal toleration they are seeking’.¹⁴⁰

Toleration was granted in 1719.¹⁴¹ This was especially a victory for the ministers who opposed subscription, as the Act granted toleration without any requirements of subscription. It is not surprising that toleration was granted without a demand to subscribe any formula or confession; the Crown was not in favour of confessionalism. George I personally struck the clause requiring subscription from the Bill.¹⁴² In a letter to Swiss Protestants in 1722, King George I wrote against subscription to the Helvetic Consensus Formula, stating that it was against their usual moderation. Like the Non-Subscribers he objected to a confessional document making definitive statements on ‘disputes about matters too sublime or obscure and on which (in the Judgement of very many) eternal salvation has not much dependance’.¹⁴³ George’s stance on subscription is not surprising considering that he had also shown strong support for Bishop Hoadly in the Bangorian controversy.

Personal Persuasion

Events in late 1719 and early 1720 raised serious concerns that the Westminster Confession was in a uncertain position among Presbyterians in the North. The debate

139.RGSU, I, p. 397.

140.Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 212.

141.Allan, ‘The Principle of Nonsubscription’, pp. 105-7.

142.Steers, ‘“New Light” Thinking’, p. 56.

143.‘The Royal Peace-Maker – or King George’s letter to the Protestant Cantons of Swisserland for the Unity of the Protestants from the St. James’s Evening Post of May 17, 1722’, printed on broadside ‘Query’s’, NLS Wod.Lett.Qu XX, no. 161r.

among English Dissenters at Salters' Hall, and suspicions of the Belfast Society caused 'a reverend aged minister' to propose a discussion at the January 1720 meeting of the Sub-Synod of Belfast.¹⁴⁴ The intent of this 'free conference among the ministers' was to avoid the type of rupture that took place among the English Dissenters. In the discussion the members of the Belfast Society were candid in their opinions about subscription and, according to Abernethy, the body agreed that it was an issue debated among orthodox men of good will on both sides and should be left open for discussion. Notably, this discussion, which ended congenially was among ministers only. The discussion would become a more heated debate after the lay elders became involved. This happened, in part, due to the publication of a sermon preached before the Belfast Society a few months earlier.

Emboldened by the terms of toleration given to the Irish Dissenters, John Abernethy had preached a sermon entitled *Religious Obedience Founded on Personal Persuasion* within a month of the passing of the Toleration Act.¹⁴⁵ Taking his text from Romans 14:5, 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind', Abernethy argued, like Turretin and Locke, that one's faith must be based on free, rational decisions and therefore cannot be imposed by an external authority. He begins by stating that the diversity of human understandings is based on our imperfect and insufficient knowledge 'since our capacities [sic], means of information, and diligence, besides many other things which have an influence on the understanding, are so unequal'.¹⁴⁶ However, it is not necessary that Christians share an agreement on all points of doctrine for there to be a union. Rather true unity is based in the practice of charity.¹⁴⁷ Since Christ and the Apostle's allowed divergent opinions, the Church is not allowed to make 'arbitrary enclosures' nor to 'exclude ... by the rigid Test of an exact Agreement in Doubtful and Disputable Points'.¹⁴⁸

Along the lines of the essay 'Of Orthodoxy' Abernethy argues that human fallibility should prevent us from imposing the works of imperfect men on the consciences of others, 'the decisions of men are not infallible declarations of his [i.e. God's] mind, and we

144. Abernethy, *A Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, pp. 24-5.

145. John Abernethy, *Religious Obedience Founded on Personal Persuasion. A sermon preach'd at Belfast the 9th of December. 1719.* (Belfast, 1720).

146. *Personal Persuasion*, pp. 3-4.

147. *ibid*, p. 4.

148. *ibid*, pp. 6-7.

cannot be safe in submitting to them absolutely'.¹⁴⁹ Further he states that one's 'freedom of following the light of his conscience' should be upheld since 'acting sincerely according to the inward conviction of our minds' is nothing less than 'the essential condition of our title to God's favour'.¹⁵⁰

For Abernethy persuasion is a deliberate, unprejudiced assent to a belief or practice based on evidence and reason.¹⁵¹ He writes that if we should be fully persuaded in lesser matters such as the ceremonial observance of holy days and Jewish dietary restrictions that Paul in Romans was discussing, then how much more so in essentials of the faith, 'in matters of the highest importance we cannot possibly be accepted without persuasion'.¹⁵² Otherwise faith would be simply fideism. To make the acceptance of doctrine anything other than internal conviction based on rational judgment is to say that we are not saved by faith but 'by a meer profession and a course of external actions, that is, by hypocrisy'.¹⁵³ Remarkably, Abernethy claims that sufficient evidence for the necessity of personal persuasion and conviction exists in each one's own conscience, which he claims to be infallible. He writes, 'This argument founded on experience, which can never fail, because it necessarily arises even from the make of humane nature, is also confirm'd by express texts of Scripture'.¹⁵⁴ While Abernethy cites passages of Scripture as confirmation, it is the individual's conscience, experience and human nature that is the authoritative guide.

It follows then, if true obedience to God is based on a free, conscientious decision rather than unquestioning obedience, then all matters of conscience are subject to God alone, and exempt from human authority. Abernethy writes:

For indeed conscience has a supremacy in it self, I mean so far as not to be subject to any tribunal upon earth; it acknowledges no superior but God, and to him alone it is accountable: if it were otherwise, our obedience wou'd not be to God but to men.¹⁵⁵

Civil authorities have the right to mandate external actions, but not internal convictions. Ecclesiastical bodies have no power over matters of conscience, whether of faith or

149. *ibid*, p. 9..

150. *ibid*, p. 10.

151. *ibid*, pp. 12-13.

152. *ibid*, p. 20.

153. *ibid*, p. 20.

154. *ibid*, p. 26.

155. *ibid*, p. 29.

practice, since the apostles themselves ‘had no dominion over the faith of Christians, and consequently *none* over their consciences’.¹⁵⁶ Churches do, however possess the right to discipline immoral actions.¹⁵⁷ Abernethy has taken Locke and Hoadly’s understanding of authority and applied it to the Dissenting Church.

What was most shocking to his opponents was that even the ability to decide what is a matter of conscience or not lies with the individual, ‘every man must judge for himself what is properly a matter of conscience, and is not accountable to, nor can be restrain’d in so judging, by any power on earth’.¹⁵⁸ Like Hoadly, Abernethy made the individual autonomous in matters of belief. No government, civil or ecclesiastical, can impose upon inward convictions, else the entire meaning of faith is destroyed. Moreover, Abernethy, like Turretin and Locke, understands faith as a rational assent to propositions. This understanding of faith diverges from the Calvinism expressed in the Westminster Confession. Faith, according to Chapter XIV section I is a ‘grace...whereby the elect are enabled to believe’, and rather than a free, rational decision it is ‘the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts’.¹⁵⁹ It is by this faith as a grace of the Holy Spirit on God’s elect whereby ‘a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word’.¹⁶⁰

The understanding of a person freely and rationally making a judgment to become a Christian, or to choose to accept or reject doctrines seriously undermines the traditional Calvinist understanding of total depravity. While Abernethy recognizes human imperfection, he sees people as essentially rational and free moral agents. In arguing that people cannot believe contrary to evidence presented to them and deliberate reasoning, he states ‘in that wherein by the very constitution of our nature we have no liberty, [i.e. to believe against facts and reason] there can be neither moral good nor evil’.¹⁶¹ One of the standard arguments for freedom of the will is that moral judgment requires moral ability. Abernethy explicitly states that ‘we are free Agents’ and that any truly human action is ‘done with freedom and understanding’.¹⁶² Moreover, this rationality and freedom extends to all

156.*ibid*, p. 35, emphasis Abernethy's.

157.*ibid*, p. 36.

158.*ibid*, p. 27.

159.WCF, XIV.1.

160.*ibid*, XIV.2.

161.*Personal Persuasion*, p. 12.

162.*ibid*, p. 22.

people, not only the ‘regenerate’ since even the presentation of the Gospel is seen not as a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit upon God’s elect, but rather as a rational decision of a free agent.¹⁶³

‘New Light’

In May 1720 John Malcome responded to Abernethy’s sermon with *Personal Persuasion No Foundation for Religious Obedience*.¹⁶⁴ John Malcome (c.1656–1729) had received his M.A. from Glasgow in 1674 and was serving the Dunmurry congregation in Co. Antrim at the time.¹⁶⁵ Malcome accused the Non-Subscribers with introducing novel notions and famously labeled the members of the Belfast Society as ‘a set of men, by preaching and printing, pretend to give new light to the world, by putting personal persuasion in the room of Church government and discipline’.¹⁶⁶ Malcome’s response was not argued with detail or closely reasoned logic. He admitted as much, hoping only to ‘give some caution to our Christian congregations’ and to ‘awaken’ someone to give a ‘more full and learned answer’.¹⁶⁷ Malcome stated the basic position that the Subscribers would take throughout the controversy and set the terms of debate. He charges them with overturning tradition, ‘do no condemn your pious and learned fathers’ and with undoing Church government – the core issue of the subscription debates.¹⁶⁸

Malcome had a more traditional Calvinist view of human ability, arguing that the unregenerate cannot trust their conscience as a ‘safe guide’ and therefore the only sure guide is ‘conscience, being enlightened by the word of God’.¹⁶⁹ For Abernethy freedom of conscience is necessary to understand the Scriptures while for Malcome the conscience is bound until freed by revelation.

Although it is better argued elsewhere Malcome brings up two points against Non-Subscription that are similar to those used by Dunlop in his *Preface*.¹⁷⁰ First, based on

163. *ibid*, p. 23.

164. John Malcome, *Personal persuasion no foundation for religious obedience: or, some friendly reflections on a sermon preach'd at Belfast Dec. 9. 1719. by John Abernethy* (Belfast, 1720).

165. Alexander Gordon, ‘Malcome, John (c.1656–1729)’, rev. A. D. G. Steers, *ODNB*, 17869; *FIPC*, p. 78; Witherow, pp. 217–20; *Munimenta*, vol. 3, p. 40, 175.

166. Malcome, p. 4.

167. *ibid*, p. 4.

168. *ibid*, p. 5; Brooke, p. 86.

169. Malcome, pp. 10, 14, 16.

170. see above, pp. 81–90.

their own rationale, the Non-Subscribers must allow Malcome the right to not be persuaded that Abernethy's position is true. Second, it sets individuals over corporate giving personal understanding supremacy over 'any tribunal on earth'.¹⁷¹

Malcome's style probably had a better effect on his intended lay audience than if it had been presented as a more academic refutation. As the Synod drew near there were fears of division and suspicion of heresy among many in Ulster, especially among the laity. He issued a call to the Non-Subscribers to declare their principles 'I wish our Brethren who so suddenly have separated from us, would let us know what they would be at, by giving us a scheme of their new doctrine, that we may understand whether they be for any government in the Church or none'.¹⁷²

Conclusion

While the Belfast Society certainly had disagreements with the Westminster Confession, it was not over the nature of Christ or the Trinity but rather a fundamental difference in the understanding of human nature and faith that caused subscription to be questioned in the Synod of Ulster. That is, rather than challenge specific Articles in the Confession, by adopting a more optimistic view of human reason and the concurrent definition of faith as rational assent the authority of the Church to require assent to anything beyond Scripture was challenged. This challenge to Church power would be joined with an understanding of Presbyterian polity influenced by English Presbyterian tradition of the Dublin ministers. As will be seen in the following chapter it was this challenge to Church authority and Scottish Presbyterian polity that was at the heart of the first subscription controversy.

171. Malcome, p. 11.

172. *ibid*, p. 5.

Chapter 4: Ireland: From the Pacificum to the Expulsion of the Presbytery of Antrim (1720-1726)

The debate over subscription that raged throughout the General Synod of Ulster in the 1720s was the most intense and destructive of all of the subscription controversies. Between 1720 and 1726 congregations, presbyteries and the Synod were in continual conflict. Congregations divided as members left ministers they suspected of hiding erroneous beliefs. A ‘tract war’ generated over fifty publications. In 1725 the Synod reorganized the presbyteries – corralling all Non-Subscribers into the Presbytery of Antrim. Finally, in 1726 the newly formed Presbytery was temporarily expelled from ‘ministerial’, though not ‘Christian’, communion with the Synod.¹

Rather than review the entire conflict and every publication, this chapter will examine selective events that illustrate the intimate connection between Irish Presbyterians with ministers in the Church of Scotland and English Dissenters, establish part of the context for understanding the debate in the Synod of Philadelphia, and show the importance of different views of Church power and structure in the controversy. To do so, the compromise formed in 1720, the Pacific Act or *Pacificum*, will be analyzed; the installation of Samuel Haliday to Belfast’s First Charge, which began the conflict in earnest and eventually led to the division of the congregation and a formal breach of communion will be reviewed; a series of publications showing the influence of ministers in the Church of Scotland as well as the crucial differences in views on polity will be examined along with two events that led many in the Synod to believe that the Non-Subscribers were secretly heretical and intent on altering the constitution of the Synod of Ulster.

As Ian McBride has observed, the first histories of Irish Presbyterianism were written by those who took part in the second subscription controversy of the 1820s which ‘inevitably coloured their perceptions of the contest which had begun a hundred years be-

1. Finlay Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, (Belfast, 1985), p. 66.

fore'.² Indeed many have looked at the question of the Non-Subscriber's orthodoxy.³ While the laity certainly held them in suspicion, judging from the issues in the vast majority of contemporary publications, the question of Arianism, for the most part was simply not a point of debate. Only a few minor pieces insinuate that the Non-Subscribers were secretly Arians, remarkable considering that many publications arising from the Salters' Hall debate deal with the fine points of Christology.⁴ Much more prevalent was a discussion over polity. Questions over the authority of the Church as a whole and of the individual courts were discussed throughout the pamphlets and books. A.W. Godfrey Brown recognized that 'their disagreement about the power of Church courts to require subscription was in itself a challenge to the Presbyterian view of Church polity'.⁵ Similarly, McBride has noted that the Non-Subscribers were leaning towards Independency and that 'denying the right of the Synod to inquire into the beliefs of its members, the Non-Subscribers were challenging the very basis of the Presbyterian system'.⁶ However, the issue of polity has not been given the full significance that the continual explicit references in the primary literature demands. This is not to say that polity was *the* only issue; but it was the fundamental question behind that of subscription.

The 1720 Synod and the Pacific Act

When the Synod met in 1720 tensions were high. Belief that the Belfast Society following Whiston and Clarke had become 'unfixed in their old principles' and intent on removing the Westminster Confession were widespread.⁷ News of the Salters' Hall debate had alarmed many, and the flames of a tract war had already been kindled; a rupture seemed inevitable.⁸ While Robert Allen takes a statement in a letter from Abernethy to indicate that the English 'were not directly concerned' with the debates in Ireland to mean that the members of the Belfast Society were influenced by 'tendencies towards the liberal

2. Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 42; for a brief overview of the later controversy see R. Finlay Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage* ([Belfast], 1985), pp. 100-3.

3. See, for example, Robert Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription to Creeds and Confessions of Faith as Exemplified in the Irish Presbyterian Church' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1944) and A.W.G. Brown, 'Irish Presbyterian Theology in the Early Eighteenth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1977).

4. Most notably Samuel Dunlop's, *An Account of the Mind of the Synod of Belfast*, ([Belfast], 1721).

5. Brown, 'A Theological Interpretation', p. 29; Steers, p. 275.

6. McBride, *Scripture Politics*, p. 51.

7. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 389.

8. Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, III, p. 117; [John Abernethy], *Defence of Seasonable Advice*, (Belfast, 1724) pp. 24-6

theology' at Glasgow, especially in Simson. In fact, considering the evidence of English influence, Abernethy surely meant that the English ministers were not instigating or directing debates in Ireland.⁹ The 1720 Synod was a reaction to the Salters' Hall debate.¹⁰ Three actions related to the controversy were brought to the floor of the Synod. First, the Committee of Overtures presented two overtures intended to stop the debates over subscription before they intensified into a situation like the one that divided the English ministers. Second, an accusation of heresy stemming from the Salters' Hall meeting was brought before the Synod. Finally, the Synod wrote a letter to some of the leading English ministers urging peace and cooperation.

The fear of a rupture was shown by the retiring Moderator's sermon. Robert Craighead (1684-1738) preached from I Corinthians 1.10, 'Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you'. The sermon was later published as *A Plea for Peace*.¹¹ Craighead, who had studied in Glasgow and Edinburgh before receiving his M.A. from Leiden in 1702, was the minister at Capel Street, Dublin.¹²

While irenic in tone, *A Plea for Peace* followed a line of reasoning that corresponded to the arguments of the Non-Subscribers. It warned against 'unwarrantable impositions' that were without Scriptural basis.¹³ Much like Robert Wallace, John Abernethy, and the anonymous author of 'Of Orthodoxy', Craighead saw subscription and the demand for doctrinal hegemony as an corruption of the simplicity and concern for morality of the early Church, 'This imposing spirit began very early, and it has more or less broken the peace of the Church ever since'.¹⁴

After the opening sermon, Gilbert Kennedy (1678-1745) was elected Moderator. Kennedy, who would become one of the leaders of the Subscriber party, was born in Dundonald, Co. Down. He was the son of a minister who had served in Ayrshire as well as in

9. Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription', p. 59-60.

10. *Defence of Seasonable Advice*, pp. 24-6, *Account of the Mind of the Synod of Belfast*, p. 2.

11. Robert Craighead, *A Plea for Peace, or, the Nature, Causes, Mischief, and Remedy of Church-divisions. A sermon preach'd at Belfast, June the 22d, 1720. at a General Synod*, (Dublin, 1720).

12. *FIPC*, p. 94.

13. *ibid*, p. 13.

14. *ibid*.

Ireland.¹⁵ After studying at the University of Glasgow, he was ordained in 1703 by the Presbytery of Armagh to serve the Tullylish congregation.

The Synod moved quickly to cement a peace between the Belfast Society and the vocal group of Subscribers. The task was given to the Committee of Overtures to propose a resolution. This body included leading members from both sides of the debate such as Dunlop, Masterton, Livingston, Stirling and John Hutcheson, the father of Francis Hutcheson, (Subscribers); Abernethy, James Bruce, Kirkpatrick and the commissioners from the Presbytery of Dublin (Non-Subscribers).¹⁶ The previous Moderator Robert Craighead was also on this Committee. Craighead's older brother Thomas (d. 1739) was also a minister who served the Donegal congregation before sailing to New England where he joined the Synod of Philadelphia.¹⁷ Thomas Craighead would play a part in drafting the 1729 Adopting Act, the American equivalent of the *Pacificum*. The Committee returned with two overtures. The first, known as the *Pacificum* or the Pacific Act, was both a reaffirmation of the Synod's adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the requirement for subscription as well as a modification of that requirement. The second recommendation was a prohibition of publishing works that would continue the controversy.¹⁸

The *Pacificum* as approved unanimously by the Synod reads:

That whereas there has been a surmize of a design to lay aside the Westminster Confession of Faith, and our Larger and Shorter Catechisms – We of this Synod to unanimously declare that none of us have or had such a design, but on the contrary, as we still adhere to the said Confession and Catechisms, so we do earnestly recom[m]end to all under our care to have in their custody, and carefully peruse them, and train up their children in the knowledg of them, and if any have spoken disrespectfully, or tending to disparage them, we strictly forbid any such thing to be done for the future, and that our people should be assur'd of this as the unanimous judgment of this Synod for removing all jealousies they have had of any person that account; and we heartily recom[m]end and enjoyn the said Confession (as being a very good abridgment of the Christain [sic] doctrines contain'd in the Sacred Scriptures) to be observ'd according to an Act of the General Synod, in the year 1705, which Act is as follows:

That such who are to be licens'd to preach the Gospel of Christ, subscribe the Westm[inste]r Confession of Faith to be the Confession of their Faith, and promise to adhere to the doctrine, worship, discipline, and govern[en]t of this Church, as also these who are licens'd and have not subscrib'd, be oblig'd to subscribe before their being ordain'd among us; which was voted, and unanimously approv'd: which is thus to be understood as now is practis'd by the Presbytries, that if any

15. *FIPC*, p. 107; Thomas Hamilton, 'Kennedy, Gilbert (1678-1745)', rev. Raymond Gillespie, *ODNB*, 15370; Witherow, pp. 230-238; S. Shannon Millin, *History of the Second Congregation of Protestant Dissenters in Belfast* (Belfast: W & G Baird, 1900), pp. 27-30

16. For Masterton see, Witherow pp. 256-265; Livingston, pp. 205-208.

17. R. Buick Knox and M. Kyritsis, *A History of Congregations in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1610-1982*, (Belfast, 1982), p. 388; *FAPC*, p. 7; *FIPC*, p. 94.

18. *RGSU*, I, pp. 521-2.

person call'd upon to subscribe shall scruple any phrase or phrases in the Confession, he shall have leave to use his own expressions, which the Presbytry shall accept of, providing they judge such a person sound in the faith, and that such expressions are consistent with the substance of the doctrine; and that such explications shall be inserted in the Presbytry books; and that this be a rule not only in relation to candidats licen'd by ourselvs, but to all intrants into the ministry among us, though they have been licens'd or ordain'd elsewhere. This was voted and approve'd by the Synod, and appointed to be read by every minister to his congregation on the Lord's day.¹⁹

There have been different understandings of the significance of the the Pacific Act. Reid saw it as condoning 'the unauthorised practice, which had recently grown up in one or two presbyteries' and therefore a betrayal of the 'constitutional law of the church' which he understood as 'requiring simple subscription'.²⁰ A.T.Q. Stewart understood the resolution as specifically written to 'meet the case of Haliday', a Non-Subscribing minister recently called to serve the First Belfast Congregation. Haliday himself claimed that the clause referring to those 'licens'd or ordain'd elsewhere' was inserted with the intent of excluding him.²¹ Allen saw it as a compromise that extended the requirement while also allowing latitude to those who scrupled the phrasing, though not the doctrine of the Articles.²²

Among contemporary interpreters the Act was initially received positively. Two days after it's approval, Samuel Henry (1695-1727), who served on the Committee for Overtures and is described in McConnell's *Fasti* as 'an extreme Subscriber', sent a copy of the *Pacificum* to John Stirling from the meeting of Synod optimistically declaring that the hopes of their enemies that the Synod would be divided were 'happily defeated' and that 'we have secured a due regard to the Westminster Confession of Faith'.²³ He also asked for it to be forwarded to William Hamilton (1669-1732), Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh, where Henry had received his M.A. in 1692.²⁴ Abernethy, describing his work on the Committee, wrote that in the Pacific Act, the Synod 'was declaring their adherence to the ... Confession' and 'renewing and enforcing' the 1705 Act.²⁵ However, he also shows

19. *RGSU*, I, pp. 521-2.

20. Reid, *History*, p. 126.

21. A.T.Q. Stewart, *A Deeper Silence: The Hidden Roots of the United Irish Movement*, (London, 1993), p. 77; Steers, "'New Light' Thinking", p. 164; Samuel Haliday, *Reasons*, p. 10.

22. Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription', pp. 115-6.

23. For Henry see *FIPC*, p. 105; GUL Spcl Collections, MS Murray 204 no. 122.

24. For Professor Hamilton see *FES*, I, p. 146 and H. R. Sefton, 'William Hamilton' in *DSCH&T*, p. 391.

25. *A Narrative of the Proceedings of Seven General Synods of the Northern Presbyterians in Ireland, with Relation to Their Differences in Judgment*, (Belfast, 1727), p. 3.

that the phrasing was ambiguous even while it was discussed at Synod. In private conversation two questions about the wording of the Act were presented to the Committee. The first was ‘Whether by our adhering to the Westminster-Confession, asserted in the first part of the Pacific Act, any more was to be understood than our adhering to the essential Doctrines of the Christian Religion?’. The Committee, though not the Synod, answered that ‘nothing more was understood’.²⁶ Second, someone asked ‘Whether they intended to bind Intrants into the Ministry to subscribe the Westminster-Confession in a stricter sense’ than previously’.²⁷ The only contemporary criticism of the Act came after later incidents revealed the weaknesses of the *Pacificum*. Robert Wodrow for example called it ‘a larger door than we allow in this Church’.²⁸ However this was only after the controversy was well under way.

The *Pacificum* did several things. First, it reaffirmed the status of the Westminster Confession and the requirement for subscription. Second, in reaffirming the 1705 requirement it gave an authoritative interpretation allowing an intransigent ‘leave to use his own expressions’ in the case he conscientiously scruples ‘any phrase or phrases in the Confession’ provided that ‘such expressions are consistent with the substance of the doctrine’. Moreover, the Synod was not introducing a new practice, but rather formalizing the method ‘as is now practis’d by the presbyteries’. The Non-Subscribers stated that there was continuing debate over whether this allowed variations in wording only or dissent from minor points of doctrine.²⁹ The Subscribers argued that ‘the substance of the doctrine’ would refer to the specific Article scrupled and therefore allowed only alternate wordings consistent with the doctrine expressed in a particular Article. Alternatively, Non-Subscribers interpreted ‘substance’ to refer to the substance of the Confession, allowing for dissent from points that did not affect the system as a whole.³⁰ In what became a central issue to the course of debate, the Act explicitly authorized the presbyteries to judge the substitute expressions of-

26. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 4-5.

27. *ibid*, p. 5.

28. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 635. The metaphor of Non-Subscription as a door to error would later be an issue with the trial of Col. Upton.

29. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, pp. 3-4.

30. *ibid*, pp. 4-5.

ferred by Subscribers. Finally, it also extended the requirement for subscription to include even ministers who had previously subscribed elsewhere.

In addition to the Pacific Act the Synod attempted to restrain further public debate by forbidding members from publishing on the subject for a year and instructed that any publications were to be reviewed by ‘the most judicious of their brethren’ before printing any works related to the controversy.³¹ The ban was soon ignored by members on both sides.

The *Pacificum* did not conclude the matter. As mentioned previously, Samuel Haliday had been accused of Arianism. Samuel Dunlop (d. 1741), minister at Athlone was also in London during the meeting of London ministers and had taken the fact that Haliday sided with neither party as evidence that Haliday had ‘joyn’d the Arian party’ that is the Non-Subscribers who Dunlop alleged ‘to be generally suspected of Arianism’.³² He also claimed that in private conversation Haliday ‘did ...strenuously militate against all Church Government’.³³ Haliday was being considered for a call to serve the First congregation of Belfast when Samuel Dunlop sent a letter to a member of the Presbytery of Belfast accusing Haliday of being an ‘Arian and an enemy to all Church Government’.³⁴

The Presbytery of Belfast sent a warning to Haliday, who travelled from London to be at the Synod in order to appeal to it for ‘the great injury done to him by public fame, industriously propagated to the blackening of his character, and endangering his usefulness in the work of the ministry’.³⁵ Haliday presented a letter attesting to his orthodoxy signed by eight of the London Ministers, both Subscriber and Non-Subscriber: Calamy, Reynolds, Robinson, Evans, Smith, Tong, Hunt and Wright.³⁶ In addition, Colonel Upton, himself a strong supporter of the subscriptionist party and ‘the chief lay Dissenter in Ireland’, offered testimony to Haliday’s account.³⁷ Haliday also presented a resolution of the Subscribers at London as evidence that even they did not consider their Non-Subscribing brothers to be

31. *RGSU*, p. 522.

32. *ibid.*

33. *ibid.*

34. *ibid.*, p. 535.

35. *ibid.*

36. *ibid.*, p. 536; Steers, ‘New Light’, p. 162.

37. *RGSU*, I, p. 537; D. W. Hayton, ‘Upton, Clotworthy (1665-1725)’, *ODNB*, 63670.

necessarily heretical.³⁸ The Synod ruled that Haliday ‘sufficiently clear’d his innocence, and fully vindicated himself from the aspersions of Arianism, and militating against all Church Goverment [sic]’.³⁹ Dunlop, on the other hand, was ‘rebukt for his rash and imprudent behaviour in this affair’.⁴⁰

Finally, the Synod wrote a letter urging unity and charity to some of the leading Dissenting ministers in London of both parties.⁴¹ In response to a letter from the Presbytery of Dublin ‘representing the doleful effects of division among minist[e]rs in a neighbour Kingdom, and recom[m]ending peace to us’, the Synod ordered that a letter be written to express the Synod’s deep concern and to encourage them to seek mutual understanding.⁴² Notably, Kirkpatrick, Abernethy and Choppin were three of the four authors of this letter strongly urging union and mutual charity. Overly optimistic that matters had been resolved with the *Pacificum*, the Synod wrote:

Indeed the same spirit of jealousy and division which has so lately prevail’d in other Churches had begun to move among ourselvs ... but by the good hand of God on us, our fears are hitherto prevented, and we have fall’n into such peaceful measures as we hope will strengthen and perpetuate our good agreement.⁴³

It continued to encourage that the recipients work for unity:

Our hearts’ desire is that you may be encourag’d to an unweary’d diligence in using the great interest which we are persuaded you have with the contending parties, at length to lay aside their animosities and return to brotherly love and peace.⁴⁴

The letter closes by informing the ministers, six of whom had written on behalf of Haliday, of the results of his case, which they refer to as ‘a particular instance of the evil of jealousies and spreading false reports’.⁴⁵

Although the Pacific Act, the vindication of the charges against Haliday and the letter urging union among the London ministers closed the Synod very favorably for the Non-Subscribers; in just over a month the entire tenor of the Synod would change with the installation of Haliday to the first congregation of Belfast.

38. *RGSU*, I, p. 537.

39. *ibid.*

40. *ibid.*

41. *ibid.*, p. 538.

42. *ibid.*

43. *ibid.*, p. 539.

44. *ibid.*

45. *ibid.*, I, p. 540.

Haliday's Installation at Belfast

On 28 July 1720 Haliday was to be installed as minister of the prominent First Congregation at Belfast. Rather than subscribe the Westminster Confession according to the newly adopted requirement, Haliday offering the following statement:

I sincerely believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the only rule of revealed religion, a sufficient test of orthodoxy or soundness in the faith, and to settle all the terms of ministerial and Christian communion, to which nothing may be added by any synod, assembly, or council whatsoever: And I find all the essential Articles of the Christian doctrine to be contained in the Westminster-Confession of Faith; which Articles I receive upon the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures.⁴⁶

The Presbytery of Belfast, accepted the statement as consistent with the Pacific Act. Abernethy argued that they accepted it was a 'fair grammatical interpretation' of the *Pacificum*.⁴⁷ They reasoned that there was no limit to the number of phrases one could scruple, 'this [the Presbytery] thought might be fairly constru'd in such a latitude as to admit intrants' who should scruple and invariable form of words, provided they by their own expressions, confess'd the same doctrines'.⁴⁸ Moreover, the phrase in the Pacific Act 'as now is practis'd by the presbyteries' was included with full knowledge that some admitted that favourable interpretation of the substance of the doctrine'.⁴⁹ They therefore 'understood not the substance of every particular proposition (to take it in that sense, would make the indulgence given by the clause very small and unsatisfying) but the substance of the doctrine of the Confession considered as a system'.⁵⁰

While the Presbytery offered these reasons for their interpretation, more substantially, and what was an underlying issue throughout the controversy was the question of the authority of the presbytery in relation to the higher Church courts. Their third reason was that it was the presbyteries that were given the authority to judge whether candidates were 'sound in the Faith, and that his expressions are consistent with the substance of the doctrine'.⁵¹ Since the Synod had given no clear definition of the 'substance of the doctrine' the Presbytery of Belfast argued that the right of this judgement had been retained by the

46. Haliday, *Reasons*, p. v.

47. Abernethy, *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, p. 32

48. *ibid.*, p. 30.

49. *ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

50. *ibid.*

51. *ibid.*

Presbytery.⁵² The issue was rooted in the traditions of Presbyterian polity that were more strongly influenced by the English Dissenting experience and would later be expressed in the debates in the Synod of Philadelphia as well.

Five ministers entered a protest. Immediately there was concern that schism was inevitable. Robert McBride, the son of Haliday's predecessor described events to Principal Stirling:

When Mr Halliday was install'd in my father's congregation the Presby[te]ry admitted of a subscribing to the Confession of Faith w[hi]ch some imagine was not a sufficient discovery of his orthodoxy nor such as o[u]r late Synod's Act required - this gave great offence ... so much that five min[iste]rs of the Presbytery protested... I dread the five will break out.⁵³

The Subscribers took the acceptance of Haliday's substitute statement as a violation of the Pacific Act and of the assurance that had been given to the Synod that the Belfast Society was not opposed to the Confession.⁵⁴ The Subscribers were convinced that the Non-Subscribers were simply against all confessions due to heterodox views and that the English Non-Subscribers were behind their opposition.⁵⁵ Alexander McCracken (1673-1743), minister at Badoney, explained to Principal Stirling that the division was the work of Haliday bringing in ideas from England.⁵⁶ As the debate developed, the Subscribers and many laity became increasingly convinced that there was an effort to move the Synod towards a polity more in line with Dublin and English Presbyterianism. Wodrow wrote, 'The spring of all this ... is either, ... some change of opinion in doctrine ..., or a fond inclination to be, in every thing, on the same foot with the Dissenters in England, who, I fear ... are against national established Churches, and Church judicatories, except for advice and consultation, and really for Independency'.⁵⁷ By October of 1721, Kennedy was convinced that 'the great thing they have in view is to come as near the English Dissenters as may be'.⁵⁸ This was not merely on the issue of subscription. The Non-Subscribers deviated from the worship customs and 'practice of all Presbyterian Ministers in the North of Ireland' in the manner of observing the sacraments.⁵⁹ Kirkpatrick, like Boyse

52. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 5.

53. GUL MS Murray 204, no. 121.2; for Robert McBride see, *FIPC*, p. 114; Witherow, pp. 209-16.

54. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 11; Wod.Lett.Qu, XX, no. 143.

55. Wod.Lett.Qu, XX, no. 145.

56. MS Murray 204, no. 122.2.

57. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 637.

58. Wodrow, *Analecta*, II, p. 351.

59. *ibid.*

in Dublin, defended the use of the Lord's Prayer.⁶⁰ They omitted the Confession and Catechisms from their baptisms, in which they also omitted the consecration of the water since they saw no Biblical warrant for the practice.⁶¹ Further, they followed the style of Independent congregations in only inviting 'persons that have Scripture evidences to come to the Lord's Table' while at the same time denying any ecclesiastical authority to debar anyone from the table.⁶² This shows part of differences in understandings of ecclesiology between Independents and Presbyterians.⁶³

There was certainly suspicion that the members of the Belfast Society were leaning toward Arianism, or Arminianism. Moreover, as shown previously, the views of the Non-Subscribers did conflict with the Westminster Confession at points. It was the collision of traditions of Presbyterianism, however, that demarcated the debate. It was the Church of Scotland versus English Dissenters:

Those who are for a strict adherence to the principles of the Church of Scotland both as to doctrine worship & government think they have good reason to complain that the brethren who have gone into some modern notions advanc'd of late in England concerning Christian liberty have been the blame worthy occasion of the disorder that is among them.⁶⁴

The 1721 Synod

With Haliday's installation the controversy was renewed. Abernethy and Kennedy debated the issue from 5 October 1720 until 22 March 1721 through personal correspondence. In these letters Kennedy showed that he was familiar with Dunlop's *Preface* and followed a similar line of argument.⁶⁵ Abernethy agrees that entrants should be required to make an adequate declaration of faith, but judicatories only have the right to demand agreement with the Scriptures, not works of human composure.⁶⁶ Abernethy writes, 'I am heartily willing that the Westminster Confession be used as a directory, but not otherwise.'⁶⁷

Following Haliday's installation the Subscribers wanted to have a called meeting of Synod. The Dublin ministers sought to temper reactions, a meeting of a 'joint committee

60. *ibid*, p. 352.

61. *ibid*, p. 369.

62. *ibid* p. 351.

63. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 291.

64. Wod.Lett.Qu.XX, no. 142. See also no 140.

65. Wod.Oct.XXX, no. 236.

66. Wod.Oct.XXX, nos. 237, 238.

67. Wod.Oct.XXX, no. 238.

of deputies from the presbyteries both in the North and the South' met in September.⁶⁸

Some 'Dissenting gentlemen in the city of Dublin' addressed a letter to this body encouraging them to maintain peace and unity by reminding them of their recently gained of toleration and pointing out the hypocrisy of divisions in light of the Synod's letter to the London ministers.⁶⁹ The letter shows again the tight connections between the different bodies and the understanding that actions taken by one group were not without consequence among another.

You have just got a legal toleration, and on terms scarce hop'd for by yourselves; and the first appearing effect it has on you, is to spirit you into unnatural animosities against each other, to destroy the peace and security granted you by that valuable law ... We beseech you to consider the reproach that your divisions will bring upon religion and how greatly they must expose you and the whole body of Dissenters thro' the Kingdom ... Some of us have seen the healing letter you wrote to your brethren in London, and we have heard of some good effects it has produc'd ... what an opinion must these gentlemen have of you, when they hear, that notwithstanding all the good advice you have given them, you are no less divided among yourselves, than they are!⁷⁰

In an attempt to assuage fears, the members of the Belfast Society distributed a letter giving an explanation of the Society and attempting to answer some criticisms they had received.⁷¹ Against the accusation that they held heterodox views they insisted that 'there have not been any opinions vented or received in our society inconsistent with the important articles of religion, or such as have been hitherto reputed important amongst the Dissenting ministers of this Kingdom'.⁷² They recognized that they were charged with 'a design of subverting the constitution, and destroying the peace of this Church'.⁷³ To which they responded by contending that

we have asserted the parity of all gospel-ministers by the laws of Christ ... we believe it to be very profitable for advancing true piety, and christian concord, and sufficiently warranted by the Word of God, for the Pastors and Elders of the People of different Churches to meet in associated bodies, in greater or lesser numbers as their conveniency and affairs will permit ... and therefore we cheerfully associate with our reverend brethren in presbyteries and synods ... [for consultation, yet] seeing their decisions are the decisions of faillible men, we cannot allow them to be the rule fo faith or christian practice; and do believe it to be the unalienable right of every Christian to examine them all according to the infallible Word of God, and either to reject or receive them.⁷⁴

68. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 12.

69. *ibid*, p. 12-7.

70. *ibid*, p. 13-4.

71. *ibid*, pp. 18-33.

72. *ibid*, p. 21.

73. *ibid*, p. 22.

74. *ibid*, pp. 22-3.

This they believed ‘is the true Protestant principle’, that is, holding everything and everyone under the scrutiny of the Scriptures versus ‘implicit faith, or blind obedience’.⁷⁵ ‘If the Churches with whom we associat shall at any time set up a constitution which cannot stand upon the foot of Protestantism ... we shall look upon every design of overthrowing it to be as justifiable, as the practice of our glorious Reformers in departing from Popery.’⁷⁶

It would be difficult to imagine that the circular letter did anything but increase the fears of those who were ‘for a strict adherence’. It claimed adherence only to the important Articles in the Confession. It presented an understanding of Presbyterianism that was merely the parity of ministers while allowing consultive associations as ‘sufficiently warranted by the word of God’ – a far cry from *jus divinum*. Finally, the letter announced their intention, not simply to disassociate from these voluntary associations, but of ‘overthrowing’ them should they attempt to claim and impose ecclesiastical authority.

In spite of, or perhaps due to, the efforts of the Southern ministers and the Belfast Society’s circular letter, the subscriptionist party was not eager to make compromises when the Synod met in 1721. The laity were increasingly suspicious of the Society and any minister who would not sign the Westminster Confession. This was apparently due in part to the circulation of Clarke and Whiston’s books.⁷⁷ As early as December 1720, Robert Boyse, again in the role of peacemaker, was writing to Scotland to refute the rumours that ‘those that plead for greater liberty are any way dipp’d into ... the Clarkian scheme as the other side are prone to suspect’.⁷⁸ In presbytery meetings leading up to the Synod ministers voluntarily signed the Confession to satisfy nervous congregations.⁷⁹

Prior to the the meeting both parties also began appealing for help from other Churches. In a letter written a month before the meeting, William McKnight, minister at Irvine in Scotland, wrote to Wodrow that the Non-Subscribers had resolved ‘not to submitt to the

75. *ibid*, p. 23.

76. *ibid*, p. 23.

77. Gilbert Kennedy, *A Defence of the Principles and Conduct of the General Synod of Ulster. Being an answer to a pamphlet by Samuel Haliday, containing his reasons against the imposition of subscription unto the Westminster Confession* (Belfast, 1724), p. iv-v.

78. Wod.Lett.Qu., XX, no. 136.

79. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 34.

Synods Act requiring Subscriptions'.⁸⁰ McKnight was conveying requests from A. Mackracken (d. 1730), minister at Lisburn, who had reported that the Non-Subscribers were corresponding with like-minded ministers in England.⁸¹ In response, MacCracken thought 'that the Subscribers ought no less to be in concert with their friends in Scotland', hoping for the Assembly's intervention.⁸²

The letter was received too late to make it to the Assembly, but as was seen in the chapter on the Church of Scotland, the Subscribers eventually met with some members of the Assembly's Commission. In this letter McCracken, referred to the two parties with the terms from London – 'Subscriber' and 'Non-Subscriber', revealing again the close connection contemporaries saw with the conflict in London. Reid erroneously claimed that the terms came into use as a result of a voluntary subscription that came towards the end of the 1721 meeting.⁸³

Shortly after the roll call the Presbytery of Belfast was accused of violating the Pacific Act in installing Samuel Haliday.⁸⁴ This was referred to the Committee of Overtures who reported the next day that they were unable to come to a conclusion.⁸⁵ As communications were read, supplications from seventeen different Church Sessions were presented requesting 'that all members of this Synod, & all inferior judicatories of this Church, may be obliged to subscribe the Westmin[ste]r Confession as the Confession of their faith'.⁸⁶ This was followed by an 'Overture concerning the Eternal Deity of the Son of God', which was discussed in conference for two hours before the next days meeting. The debate over the overture, which took most of the next day, resulted in the adoption of a brief statement that the doctrine of the 'Deity of the Son of God' was affirmed as an 'Essential Article'.⁸⁷ The Synod had originally proposed declaring it a 'Fundamental Article', but at the insistence of some, substituted the term 'essential' instead, as being more agreeable to the Non-Subscribers.⁸⁸ It also included a unanimous declaration that none of the members were be-

80. Wod.Lett.Qu, XX, no. 140.

81. *FIPC*, p. 77.

82. Wod.Lett.Qu, no. 140.

83. Reid, *History*, p. 140; He was apparently following *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 52.

84. *RGSU*, II, p. 7.

85. *ibid*, pp. 6-7.

86. *ibid*, p. 8.

87. *ibid*, p. 8.

88. *Review of the Presbytery of Antrim's Letter*, p. 55; and Reid, *History*, p. 137.

lieved to hold contrary opinions as well as a resolution that if anyone denies this Article they would be dismissed ‘according to the laws of the Gospell & the known practise of this Church’.⁸⁹

Haliday’s case was brought before the Synod that evening, following the discussion on the overture. Certificates from the two Belfast congregations ‘bearing testimony to the soundness of both their min[iste]rs faith’ had been presented.⁹⁰ Additionally, testimonials on his behalf had been sent from Leiden, Rotterdam, Basil, Geneva and London.⁹¹ Debate continued into the evening and was resumed the next morning when a motion was made that since Haliday had previously assented to the Westminster Confession at his licensing, he should be asked if he continues to adhere to that assent.⁹² Haliday refused, stating:

My refusal to declare my adherence to the assent I gave to the Westminster Confession of faith when I was licensed does not proceed from my disbelief of the important truth contained in it, the contrary of which I have oft by word & writing [sic] declared, ..., but my scruples are against the submitting to human tests of Divine truths, especially in a great number of extra essential points ... The reasons of [which] scruples I am now ready to lay before this Assembly’.⁹³

However, when it was moved that he should ‘lay the reasons of his scruples before the Synod’, Haliday declined, stating that he was not ‘accustomed, in so great an assembly, to make extemporary speeches’ and that he wished ‘that there may be no heat or altercation’ in the Synod over his scruples.⁹⁴ The Synod responded by disclaiming ‘all power of imposing [sic] upon the consciences of men’ and asked again to hear the reasons for Haliday’s scruples. The deadlock was ended by a suggestion by the commissioners from the Presbytery of Dublin to drop the whole matter in which the Synod concurred unanimously.⁹⁵ In order to avoid any misunderstanding with his congregation, Haliday was asked to declare his submission to the Synod. After doing so he was received into the Synod ‘overlooking any irregularities in his installment’.⁹⁶

Although the matter with Haliday was over, a greater issue still faced the Synod; the insistence from the Sessions for all members to subscribe was still before them.

89. *RGSU*, II, pp. 8-9.

90. *ibid*, p. 8.

91. *ibid*, p. 9.

92. *ibid*, pp. 9-10.

93. *ibid*, p. 10.

94. *ibid*, p. 10.

95. *ibid*, p. 11.

96. *ibid*, pp. 13-14.

While the ministers might have been ready to exercise forbearance to those whose consciences scrupled against signing the Confession, many elders demanded subscription. Ironically, given that there was no requirement for elder subscription as was the case in the Church of Scotland, it was they who insisted that their ministers subscribe. McCracken noted that several ministers who would not have subscribed did so for fear of their congregations withdrawing.⁹⁷ The Non-Subscribers tried to convince the laity to leave the matter to the ministers.⁹⁸ Abernethy described the differences:

The ministers differ in their judgments, the people are divided in their affections; the ministers left subscription free, the people will impose it; the ministers practice and recommend mutual forbearance, the people will make a schism.⁹⁹

As David Steers has noted, this was a major difference between the Irish and London controversies.¹⁰⁰ The lack of lay representatives in meetings meant less pressure to appease their fears. The influence of the laity is consistent in other bodies as well; the demand for subscription in Exeter came from lay trustees, and as will be shown in the chapter on the Presbytery of Charleston, the elders and benefactors used their influence in insuring the practice.

The day after the vote to drop the Haliday affair ‘a motion was made that all the members of this Synod who are willing to subscribe the Wes[t]min[ster] Confession of faith, according to the terms of the Pacific Act, be allowed by this Synod to do it’.¹⁰¹ After hours of debate ‘popular clamor’ finally won and a ‘great majority’ voted in the affirmative. The members of the Belfast Society and the commissioners from Dublin protested the vote.¹⁰² Joining them was Francis Iredell, (d. 1738) and William Smith (d. 1741) who although they affirmed the Confession, believed that the vote gave offense and injury to the Non-Subscribers.¹⁰³

The Non-Subscribers drew a parallel between this voluntary signing and the maneuver at Salters’ Hall, saying that by this motion ‘the famous debate amongst the London

97. Wod.Le.XX, no. 149

98. [John Abernethy], *Seasonable Advice to the Protestant Dissenters in the North of Ireland; Being a Defence of the Late General Synod’s Charitable Declarations* (Dublin, 1722), p. 35.

99. *ibid.*

100. Steers, ‘New Light’ Thinking, p. 176.

101. *RGSU*, II, p. 11; *Narrative of Seven Synods*, pp. 41-2.

102. *ibid.*, p. 11. The Dublin ministers later clarified they were not opposed to the subscription but only to taking a vote at that time. *RGSU*, II, p. 28.

103. *ibid.*, pp. 12-3, 28; *Narrative of the Seven Synods*, p. 48; for Iredell, see *FIPC*, pp. 68-9; for Smith see *ibid.*, p. 174.

ministers ... was introduced into the Synod'.¹⁰⁴ The Irish Subscribers, however, rather than leave the floor, as the English Subscribers had, set a time after the Synod's adjournment and again the following morning for the Clerk to be available in the vestry for anyone willing to sign the following formula:¹⁰⁵

Reserving to ourselves the benefit of the Pacific Act, we do believe the Westminster-Confession of Faith to be founded on the Word of God; and therefore as such by this our subscription we own the said Confession to be the Confession of our Faith.¹⁰⁶

In exchange for the removal of the protest entered by those opposed to the subscription, the Synod issued a 'charitable declaration' in which each side expressed their good will towards the other.¹⁰⁷ The declaration had been suggested by the Dublin commissioners with Boyse authoring the draft submitted to the Assembly.¹⁰⁸ The protesters declared their belief that those who called for the subscription 'acted according to the light of their consciences' and are resolved to maintain communion and preserve the government of the Presbyterian Church.¹⁰⁹ As for those who voted for the Act, they declared:

This Synod, by allowing such min[iste]rs as judge it necessary for the satisfaction of their consciences & of their people, and to give a testimony to the truth and for making a declaration of their faith, and for their own vindication to subscribe the Westminster Confession of faith at this time, do not intend to insinuate the least reflection upon such as have not a freedom to fall into that method as if they were unsound in the faith, and that different sentiments on that head do not justify uncharitable jealousies & censures of one another or breach of communion among us, and therefore we do earnestly recommend it to our people that they may entertain no jealousies or ill opinions concerning any of their min[iste]rs merely on account of their not subscribing at this time, but that they w[oul]d look upon this as a matter wherein Christians & min[iste]rs are to exercise mutual forbearance towards one another.¹¹⁰

In so doing the Synod formally declared that difference of opinion over subscription was an unjustifiable reason for a breach of communion.

While those pushing for subscription were willing to drop the matter of Haliday's installation, they did not want to see it become a precedent. Shortly after the 'charitable declaration' was passed an overture was presented for 'making the Pacific Act more effectual & securing the peace of this Church'.¹¹¹ This Act added three stipulations to the

104. *Narrative of the Seven Synods*, p. 36

105. *RGSU*, II, p. 13. A list of those who signed is on pp. 20-24.

106. *Narrative of the Seven Synods*, p. 49.

107. *RGSU*, II, p. 14.

108. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 52; Reid, *History*, p. 140.

109. *RGSU*, II, p. 14.

110. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, pp. 52-4; *RGSU*, pp. 14-5.

111. *RGSU*, II, p. 15; *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 54-5.

method of subscribing designed to enforce stricter subscription.¹¹² First, licensings, ordinations and installations would require that two-thirds of the presbytery concur in the decision. Second, if any minister protested the action of presbytery the decision would be suspended until the Synod could review the case and make a decision. Finally, if the requirement for subscription was not obeyed then the Synod reserved the right to suspend the presiding minister.¹¹³

The Non-Subscriber's Polity

In the effort to ensure their interpretation of the *Pacificum*, the Synod seized power over the presbyteries. One of the central roles of the presbytery was now excessively restrained by the Synod. Not only would a greater majority be required to do the normal work of supplying ministers, but the work could be restrained. Instead of appealing a Presbyterial decision, the Synod authorized that an action of presbytery could be suspended by a single minister until reviewed by the General Synod. Moreover, the Synod was now claiming original jurisdiction over a minister in the case of presiding over what was seen as a violation of the Pacific Act.

With these resolutions, and similar Acts in 1722 and 1723, the Synod retreated from the initial position of the Pacific Act.¹¹⁴ As they did so the Non-Subscribers protested that the resolutions were not only inconsistent with the Pacific Act, but were violating the nature of Presbyterian polity. In arguing their point they offered an explanation of their understanding of Church government that illuminates the fundamental rift between the parties as to understandings of Church authority, polity and especially the powers and relationships of the different Church courts.

Abernethy recognized that the question of ‘the liberties of inferior, and the authority of superior, ecclesiastical assemblies’ was indeed ‘a principal part of the present controversy’.¹¹⁵ The ideal of Church government presented in his *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, the Belfast Society’s ‘Circular Letter’, and in the anonymous *Narrative of Seven Synods* show an ecclesiology similar to English and Dublin models. Fears that the Non-

112. *RGSU*, II, p. 16.

113. *ibid*; *Narrative of the Seven Synods*, p. 54.

114. *RGSU*, pp. 30-2, 63-5.

115. Abernethy, *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, p. 104.

Subscribers had ‘in view ... to come as near the English Dissenters as may be’ were not unfounded.

For the Non-Subscribers, the essence of Presbyterianism was limited to ‘parity of all Gospel-Ministers’. That is, while they, like all Presbyterians, believed in the equality of all ministers, they did not uphold the *jus divinum* of the Church courts.¹¹⁶ Traditional Scottish Presbyterian polity, as expressed in *The Second Book of Discipline* and defended in Samuel Rutherford’s *The Due Rights of Presbyteries*, argued that the hierarchy of courts were evident in Scripture and therefore divinely ordained to govern the Church.¹¹⁷ For the Non-Subscribers, however, the association of ‘pastors and elders’ are merely ‘profitable for advancing true piety ...and sufficiently warranted by the Word of God’. The terms used express a sense that these associations are voluntary. They ‘associate with [their] Reverend Brethren in presbyteries and Synods’, not because they recognize the divine right of these assemblies in a particular geographical region, but because it is expedient.¹¹⁸ Michael Bruce and Samuel Haliday even argued that ‘every Christian cong[regatio]n has a right to choose what presb[yster]y they will subject to as they think most for edificacon [sic]’.¹¹⁹

They believed, as the English Presbyterians, that the authority of assemblies, is primarily advisory.¹²⁰ Church courts have no authority to make new laws, only to give counsel in interpreting Scripture and to discipline scandalous offenses.¹²¹ This was such a crucial point that the Synod’s overtures that led to the final break in communion dealt more with those that ‘maintain that Christ hath not lodged any authority in the judicatories’ but claim that they are ‘mere consultative meetings’ more than with subscription itself.¹²²

116. Narrative of Seven Synods, p. 23.

117. *The Second Book of Discipline*, ed. by James Kirk, (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 101-121, 195-206; David H. Hall and Joseph H. Hall, eds., *Paradigms in Polity*, pp. 311-21.

118. *ibid.*

119. *RGSU*, II, p. 77.

120. *ibid.*, pp. 366-7.

121. *ibid.*, pp. 207-8.

122. *ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

For the Non-Subscribers each particular congregation had the right to judge, and select, their minister according to the Scriptures.¹²³ This right is so fundamental that it can even override regular ordination in cases of necessity.¹²⁴

The presbytery is the regular body to ordain, in accordance with both Scripture and antiquity.¹²⁵ This body, which Abernethy defines as ‘such a number of [congregational Bishops], as can conveniently assemble’ has the sole authority to judge the qualifications of ordinands.¹²⁶ ‘Those who ordain men to the ministry have a right, and are obliged to judge of their qualifications for that office.’¹²⁷ Further, ‘no human authority can abridge this right, or vacate this obligation’.¹²⁸ The presbytery therefore that has the right and obligation to judge a candidate’s orthodoxy and views of particular articles.¹²⁹ Since ordination is exclusively the right of a presbytery, the Synod ‘can be under no obligation, and therefore have no right’ to judge the ‘profession of intrants’.¹³⁰

‘Superior ecclesiastical assemblies’, such as Synods, are seen as ‘larger associations of Churches’.¹³¹ These bodies ‘ought not to infringe the liberty of worshipping assemblies’ that is the right ‘of judging for themselves concerning the admission of fellow members into their society’.¹³² The conception of courts is not of a hierarchy with power descending from the Synod, but rather increasingly larger associations of particular congregations and their ministers. Moreover, the individual’s right to conscientious scruples is extended to the subordinate courts.

A synod, as a superior assembly has two kinds of power. First, it has the power ‘to declare what Scripture determines in particular cases’ concerning communion.¹³³ In doing so it must show that the basis of its decision is Scripture, as this power is to explicate the Bible rather than make declarations on its own authority. These declarations are not above scrutiny, ‘Christians must judge for themselves, whether their declarations be indeed

123. Abernethy, *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, p. 107

124. *ibid.*

125. *ibid.*, p. 108.

126. *ibid.*, p. 108.

127. *ibid.*, p. 108.

128. *ibid.*

129. *ibid.*

130. *ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

131. *ibid.*, p. 108-9.

132. *ibid.*

133. *ibid.*, p. 109.

agreeable to the Word of God, and conform to them just so far (and no farther than) as they are found to be so'.¹³⁴ The second power synods have is to 'preserve order and regularity' in particulars not determined by Scripture. This power however cannot affect a Christian's communion as it deals with issues which are 'purely a matter of conscience' rather than directly authorized by Scripture.¹³⁵

While the synod's power is limited, there is still to be a subordination of courts, which is the distinction, they argue, between Presbyterians and Independents.¹³⁶ However, subjection does not make a superior court a 'rule of faith' though; 'they are but mere helps for the discovery of truth'.¹³⁷ In this however, the Non-Subscribers fail to show how subordination could work in practice if an inferior body had the right to reject any contested decision, whether from a different understanding of Scriptures or from a denial of proper authority.

The Subscribers had argued that the restraints, such as the previously mentioned resolutions, were needed to ensure subordination. In response, the Non-Subscribers argued that 'the restraint tends to destroy the subordination, and consequently the very essence of the Presbyterian constitution, by destroying the proper power of the inferior assemblies' ...'by the same subordination, the superior-assemblies cannot take immediately into their own hands the business of the inferior, or hinder them in the exercise of their original powers: for that were to make the inferior useless; nay, to strike at their very being; and consequently at the subordination itself'.¹³⁸ The synod had no authority to intervene with the presbyteries' exercising their rightful act of ordination, or to assume original jurisdiction. Subordination did not mean that the power of higher courts was unfettered, as Abernethy wrote, 'I cannot agree to an unlimited power in synods, to bind presbyteries by their Rules'.¹³⁹

This understanding of presbyteries, rooted in the English Presbyterian tradition was consistent with 'Dissent'. It had a philosophical basis in a Lockean contractual under-

134. *ibid*; *Narrative of Seven Synods*, p. 215.

135. Abernethy, *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, p. 109.

136. *Narrative of Seven Synods*, pp. 232-3.

137. *ibid*.

138. *ibid*, p. 118.

139. Abernethy, *Defence of the Seasonable Advice*, p. 114.

standing of government and power. And would certainly resonate within the history of Irish Presbyterianism which was formed with the gradual formation of presbyteries that later associated as a Synod.¹⁴⁰

A New Meeting House in Belfast

Even if the Synod was satisfied with Haliday's previous subscription and declaration of submission, some members of the First Belfast Congregation were not. Several members of the old congregation and other 'Gent[lemen] in Belfast' petitioned the Synod for permission to erect a third Meeting House ostensibly 'on account of the numberousness of their congr[egatio]n'.¹⁴¹ The Synod instructed them to take the matter before their Presbytery according to the normal procedure.¹⁴² In 1722 the Presbytery granted permission, confirmed by the Synod later that year.¹⁴³

Charles Masterton (1679-1750) was called as their minister. He had received his M.A. from Edinburgh in 1697, and was licensed by the Presbytery of Linlithgow before accepting a call to the congregation at Connor in 1704.¹⁴⁴ Previously, he had supported Abernethy in his resistance to the Synod's attempt to transport him to Dublin.¹⁴⁵ A.W. Godfrey Brown considered him 'probably the most capable and influential proponent of orthodoxy in the synod of Ulster' during the controversy.

In order to raise funds for the new meeting house, Samuel Smith, a merchant and elder from Belfast's first charge, spent about three months in Scotland raising funds from the city of Glasgow and different courts in the Kirk, including the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr.¹⁴⁶ As discussed previously, these appeals brought accusations that Smith was defaming the Non-Subscribers and that the Church of Scotland was 'unseasonably meddling with [the] affairs in the North of Ireland'.¹⁴⁷

140.Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage*, p. 38.

141.RGSU, II, p. 16.

142. *ibid.*, p. 17.

143. *ibid.*, pp. 33-4; A. Gordon, *Historical Memorials of the First Presbyterian Church of Belfast* (Belfast, 1887), 112-115

144.A. W. Godfrey Brown, 'Masterton, Charles (1679-1750)', *ODNB*, 18318; *FIPC*, p. 117; Thomas Hamilton, *Irish Worthies: a series of original biographical sketches of eminent ministers and members of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, (Belfast, 1875), pp. 43-4.

145.RGSU, I, p. 471.

146.Reid, *History*, III, p. 157-8, 160; Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription', pp. 205-6; *Wod.Lett.Qu*, XX, no. 167.

147.A letter from a gentleman of Ireland, to a minister of the Church of Scotland, concerning a charitable contribution, which is desired, for building a new meeting-house, in Belfast, (Edinburgh, [1723]); and Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 17-8.

Smith was at the October meeting of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, which noted that the Belfast congregation had issued a call to ‘our contrey [sic] man’ and, while not explicitly mentioning their separating due to the views of Haliday, the minutes note that the new congregation ‘desyre[s] to adhere firmly to the doctrine worship and government of the Church of Scotland according to the Confession of Faith and Acts of Assembly there’.¹⁴⁸ The Synod recommended that the ministers should raise funds within their parishes. William McKnight, was appointed to collect the donations and deliver them to the Irish. The donations where continued at least until 1724.¹⁴⁹ When the Meeting House was completed three large seats were installed and reserved for visitors from Glasgow as a sign of gratitude for their support.¹⁵⁰ Collections to assist co-religionists were not unique though it is worth noting that donations were also called for to help erect a new meeting house in Carrickfergus were James Frazer (d. 1748) and ‘his people have stood firm to subscribing principles & have suffered considerably for siding’.¹⁵¹ Frazer subscribed in 1721, and in the restructuring of 1725 Carrickfergus was placed with other subscribing congregations in the Presbytery of Templepatrick.¹⁵²

The Belfast congregations would remain in dispute throughout the controversy. In 1723 members desiring to tranfer to the new Meeting House complained to the Synod that the Sessions of the other congregations refused to dismiss them as originally agreed.¹⁵³ Later, on 23 February 1724 the Third Congregation observed the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, without inviting the other ministers or congregations to participate in their communion as would be the normal custom.¹⁵⁴ On the 19th Haliday and Kirkpatrick communicated their intent to join in the sacrament.¹⁵⁵ The Session responded the night before the service that ‘those of your people that desire to partake with us, and have receiv’d tokens shall be admitted, but as to your communicating with us yourselves it is our humble advice that you should not partake with us at this time’.¹⁵⁶ The Non-Subscribing ministers sent a reply

148.NAS Mss CH2/546/88 f. 6r.

149.NAS, Mss CH2/464/3/121, 131; 2/546/88/2.

150.Wodr.Lett.Qu, XX, no. 177.

151.Wodr.Lett.Qu XXI, no. 63.

152.RGSU, II, pp. 20, 96, 113; for more on Frazer see *FIPC*, p. 102.

153.RGSU, II, p. 45; *Historical Memorials of the First Presbyterian Church of Belfast*, p. 115.

154.Reid, *History*, pp. 171-3.

155.James Kirkpatrick, *A Scripture-Plea Against a Fatal Rupture, and Breach of Christian Communion, Amongst the Presbyterians in the North of Ireland* (Belfast, 1724), p. iii.

156.*ibid*, p. vi.

insisting on their right to communicate unless explicitly told not to, ‘yet if your Session signify to us by a line this night that they are determined to exclude us, in that case we will desist at this time (and in that case only) and then the blame will not be chargeable on us’.¹⁵⁷ The following morning, the day of the sacrament, the Session wrote back ‘we are still of the same opinion with our first letter and do insist upon it, and intreat your forbearance for this time’.¹⁵⁸ While the Session of Masterton’s congregation said that their letter was meant to advise Haliday and Kirkpatrick for a temporary arrangement, the Non-Subscribing congregations construed the letter a formal exclusion and breach of communion.¹⁵⁹ Wodrow noted in his *Analecta* ‘the flame is rising higher and higher, particularly in Belfast’.¹⁶⁰

Publications

Appeals for funds were not the only way the Presbyterians in Ireland sought aid from others. Both sides sought counsel, assistance in their publications and the influence of leading figures in the Church of Scotland and among the English Dissenters.

An example of the extensive cooperation by the members of different Churches can be seen in a series of exchanges that culminated in two of the most important publications on each side — Masterton’s *Apology* and Abernethy’s *Seasonable Advice*. Both of these were assisted by ministers beyond the boundaries of the Synod of Ulster. An overview of the publications leading up to this particular exchange shows the similarity of arguments with those in England.¹⁶¹

Following the 1721 Synod, William Dugud published *Some Remarks on the Declaration of the Synod Assembled at Belfast*.¹⁶² Dugud was an Episcopal minister in Fife who had been excommunicated from the Church of Scotland. He had previously published a tirade against the Church of Scotland entitled *Plain Dealing with Presbyterians*.¹⁶³ In *Some Remarks* Dugud pointed out that the point of dispute between orthodoxy and Arian-

157. *ibid.*, p. vii.

158. *ibid.*

159. *ibid.*, pp. vi-viii.

160. Wodrow, *Analecta*, III, p. 151.

161. Robert Allen’s doctoral thesis has the most exhaustive treatment of the publications throughout the debate.

162. This broadside contains no publication information but is available at the National Library of Scotland, Pamphlets 2.81(6a)

163. (n.l., 1719)

ism was not whether Christ was divine, but whether the Son was of the same essence as the Father. The Synod's statement therefore was an insufficient declaration against subordinationism, 'for my own part if I were the greatest Arian that ever lived, I could subscribe safely the Belfast declaration'.

This was too much for Samuel Dunlop, who rashly responded anonymously in *An Account of the Mind of the Synod of Belfast*.¹⁶⁴ He protested that 'The Presbyterians of the North of Ireland ... still are the same with the reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland' as shown by their adherence to the Westminster Confession which is 'constantly own'd by all Presbyterians'.¹⁶⁵ The *Pacificum*, Dunlop claimed, was an Act to have subscription 'more particularly injoin'd by the Synod' in response to 'the appearing of errors in England'.¹⁶⁶ While it might have represented the opinion of some of the members, the *Account* did not accurately reflect the Synod's reasonings, and in fact disobeyed the rulings of the Synod by completely repudiating the Non-Subscribing ministers, and accusing them of laying aside 'the Doctrine of the Trinity'.¹⁶⁷ As with other publications, Dunlop explicitly connects the events in Ireland to both the Bangorian Controversy and the Salters' Hall debate.¹⁶⁸

Dunlop's *Account* was answered anonymously by James Kirkpatrick in *A Vindication of the Presbyterian Ministers in the North of Ireland*.¹⁶⁹ The *Vindication* takes Dunlop to task for not defending the Synod but bringing accusations against the Non-Subscribers and 'exciting their congregations to reject them'.¹⁷⁰ After exposing the errors about the points of debate with Arianism, the *Vindication* goes on to offer a defence of the Non-Subscribers by showing that subscription had not been formally required prior to 1705, and that others, such as England and Dublin ministers, did not require it still.¹⁷¹ It continues by defending Non-Subscription as consistent with the 'essential principles of Non-Conformi-

164.[Samuel Dunlop], *An Account of the Mind of the Synod of Belfast. In a short reply to Mr. Dugud's Remarks upon their declaration* ([Belfast], 1721).

165. *Account of the Mind*, p. 1

166. *ibid*, p. 2.

167. *ibid*, p. 11.

168. *ibid*, pp. 11, 14.

169. *A Vindication of the Presbyterian Ministers in the North of Ireland; Subscribers and Non-Subscribers: from Many Aspersion in a Late Scandalous Libel, Entitled, An Account of the Mind of the Synod at Belfast. 1721. In a short reply to Mr. Dugud's Remarks upon their declaration*, (Belfast, 1721).

170. *ibid*, p. 6.

171. *ibid*, pp. 18-9.

ty' and arguing that creeds and confessions create unnecessary divisions.¹⁷² In support of his argument he quotes Samuel Werenfels, whom he refers to as 'that learned, judicious, and truly pious Divine'.¹⁷³ Against Dunlop's claim that the requirement for subscription was in response to the growth of Arianism, Kirkpatrick, shows that the *Pacificum* was passed in order to prevent the division that took place at Salter's Hall.¹⁷⁴ It closes with a letter decrying the 'willful and gross misrepresentation' of the Synod presented in the *Account* signed by Weld, Boyse and Choppin.¹⁷⁵

Ferguson's *Vindication* drew three responses: *New-Lights Sett in a Clear Light*, *More Light*, and *Some General Remarks, Argumentative & Historical*.¹⁷⁶ Like the previous publications, an understanding of the debates in Ireland as an extension of the Bangorian Controversy and the Salters' Hall division is prevalent.¹⁷⁷ They objected that the *Vindication* was not a defence of the Synod but of Non-Subscription.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, they question why anyone would refuse to sign something they truly believed, and argued that a personal statement of belief, as advocated by the Non-Subscribers, was just as arbitrary as a Church approved confession.¹⁷⁹ Hemphill also accuses the Non-Subscribers of hypocrisy in demanding liberty to refuse subscription while protesting the voluntary subscription, 'How will men ever dare to talk of imposition, or the rights of conscience, when in the face of the world they acted contrary to their principles?'.¹⁸⁰

In the midst of this series, Abernethy published, anonymously, *Seasonable Advice* as a 'defence of the ... Charitable declarations' against Dunlop's comments in his *Account*. The preface was by Weld, Boyse and Choppin, who recommended Abernethy's proposals.¹⁸¹ The Dublin ministers condemned 'some congregations in the North' for their lack of

172. *ibid.*, p. 20, 22, 32.

173. *ibid.*, p. 30.

174. *ibid.*, p. 40.

175. *ibid.*, p. 66.

176. [Gilbert Kennedy], *New-Lights sett in a Clear Light*, ([Belfast], 1722); [John Malcom], *More Light; Being Some Remarks upon the Late Vindication, &c. printed at Belfast*, (1722), Samuel Hemphill, *Some General Remarks Argumentative & Historical, on the Vindication, publish'd by Dr. Ferguson, with the Consistency of Subscribing the Westminster Confession of Faith, with the Abjuration Oath. With a Preface to the Doctor* (n.l., 1722)

177. *New-Lights*, p. 21; *Some Remarks*, pp. 17, 20, 24.

178. *More Light*, p. 3; *Some Remarks*, p. 2.

179. *New-Lights*, pp. 9, 12; *Remarks*, pp. 28, 36.

180. *Remarks*, p. 28.

181. [John Abernethy], *Seasonable Advice to the Protestant Dissenters in the North of Ireland; Being a Defence of the Late General Synod's Charitable Declarations*, (Dublin, 1722), p. iv.

regard for the Synod's 'Charitable Declaration' and for attempts to break communion over matters of expediency.¹⁸² They suggested a new method of 'allowing the intrant his choice, either to subscribe according to the Pacifick Act or to make a declaration of his Faith in his own words'.¹⁸³

In the main body of the *Seasonable Advice*, Abernethy argues that the demand for subscription is inconsistent with Nonconformity:

The main principle, if I mistake not, of Non-Conformity is this, that no humane power ought to make any thing necessary to Christians, as a term of communion which Christ has not made necessary. Take away this, and the Dissenters are dis-united, at least I don't know one principle wherein they will agree, I mean as Non-Conformists. The points in difference between the Establish'd Church and them, are many of them agreed by the wisest on the one side, to be not commanded, and on the other to be not forbidden in Scripture. Whence comes the division?'¹⁸⁴

Abernethy pleads against a breach in communion, reminding his readers that the Subscribers and Non-Subscribers are in agreement as to their orthodoxy and belief in the right of presbyteries to judge the qualifications of candidates.¹⁸⁵ He closes by defending their orthodoxy and pointing out that their beliefs were not suspect until after they abstained from the voluntary subscription at the 1721 Synod.¹⁸⁶

Charles Masterton responded to *The Seasonable Advice with An Apology for the Northern Presbyterians in Ireland*.¹⁸⁷ This Glasgow published tract received considerable assistance from ministers in the Church of Scotland anxious to guard the status of the Confession and the structure of the General Synod of Ulster. It had been circulated in manuscript form among Stirling, Wodrow, Hamilton and Simson for their critique and opinions, showing yet another way Scottish ministers were involved with the debates in Ireland.¹⁸⁸

Masterton wrote that the *Seasonable Advice* betrayed 'a criminal inclination to one side' and rather than seek a compromise aimed to move away from the Pacific Act.¹⁸⁹ He also accused the Dublin ministers of partisanship in favour of the Non-Subscribers and

182. *ibid.*, pp. vii, xiii.

183. *ibid.*, p. xvii.

184. *ibid.*, p. 46, emphasis Abernethy's.

185. *ibid.*, pp. 16-8.

186. *ibid.*, p. 30.

187. Charles Masterton, *An Apology for the Northern Presbyterians in Ireland: wherein requiring a subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith, as a condition of ministerial communion among them is justify'd. In answer to the Seasonable Advice from Dublin, and other late performances, publish'd in opposition to the practice of the best reform'd Churches* (Glasgow, 1723)

188. Wod.Lett.Qu XX, no. 182, Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 77-79.

189. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

called on them to either remain neutral in the matter or stay out of the debate.¹⁹⁰ Against the accusation that the Subscribers were spreading rumours about heresy among the Belfast Society, he claims that the laity had begun to notice the omission of the Westminster Confession from baptisms among its members and that this ‘filled their minds with uneasy speculations’.¹⁹¹

The main thrust of Masterton’s defence of subscription is threefold; each point relates directly to Church power and the different understandings of polity. First, he asserts that the insistence on subscription is not the imposition of human compositions but words that are consistent with Scriptural doctrines.¹⁹² The *Pacificum* allows for scruples with the phrasing of the Confession, but not the doctrines themselves, as this would be a rejection of Biblical teaching.¹⁹³ This is not a rejection of the perfection and perspicuity of Scriptures, as the Non-Subscribers maintain, but rather a recognition that sin and human weakness leads to misunderstanding.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, the clarity of the Bible is such that deductions and consequences, which by definition cannot be expressed solely in Scriptural language, can be determined with certainty.¹⁹⁵ The perfection of Scripture therefore allows the Church to demand assent to the necessary consequences of Scripture.

When they [the Subscribers] call the Westminster Confession, a form of sound words, they mean a form of Scripture doctrines, and that the humane words duely expressive of the doctrine contained in a plain Scripture consequence, are materially tho’ not formally the words of Christ.¹⁹⁶

Second, Masterton defends subscription as a practice within the proper sphere of Church authority. The rejection of error is part of the Churches duty according to Titus 1:11 and 3:10.¹⁹⁷ Requiring subscription to a ‘form of sound words’ is to fulfill this command. While agreeing that Church power should be limited, Masterton sees the Non-Subscribers as reducing it to nothing. The Church has been given the authority to hand on what Christ delivered, and as long as it acts within the limits of his commission they are not ‘making new laws, or new terms of communion’.¹⁹⁸

190. *ibid*, pp. 2, 27.

191. *ibid*, p. 7.

192. *ibid*, p. 15.

193. *ibid*, p. 15.

194. *ibid*, p. 14.

195. *ibid*, p. 15.

196. *ibid*, p. 15.

197. *ibid*, p. 16.

198. *ibid*, p. 15.

Revealing the central difference in the understanding of polity between the two sides, Masterton argues that Church governance is exercised collegially under divine right:

[Ministerial authority belongs] not only in a separate but incorporated capacity, in synods and presbyteries, and these incorporations being of divine institution, their assembling themselves into such united bodies, is not matter of meer arbitrary choice, but of indispensable duty when divine providence permits them so to assemble.¹⁹⁹

The right ‘to determine what are their own religious principles, and publishe them to the World’ is central to the Church’s power.²⁰⁰ ‘If a Reformed Church, hath not power to do all this, and to make this use of her common confession, then these Words, viz. the just authority of ecclesiastical assemblies are (to me) unintelligible words, and a Church cannot do any thing authoritatively’.²⁰¹

Masterton criticizes the ‘unworthy sentiments of Church Government’ held by the English Non-Subscribers’ which, he claims, have their origin in the Seventeenth Century Sectarians.²⁰² This criticism is extended to Dublin as well:

While every presbyrie, after the model of the Presbytrie of Dublin, is to be the supreme judicature within their own bounds, and so farewell the good old way of Presbyterian government, of issuing (as need requireth) all affairs by a subordination of ecclesiastical judicatures. Indeed some Northern Presbyterians do not know, what to make of the Presbytrie of Dublin, and are positive it is not a Presbyterian Presbytrie, (pardon the expression) but some strange model of an independent one, seeing there lyeth no appeal from that Presbytrie.²⁰³

Masterton charged the Non-Subscribers with trying to force this type of independence, or Presbyterianism modelled after Dublin and England, onto the Synod of Ulster.²⁰⁴ Against this, and the assertion that the presbytery has sole authority in judging a candidate’s qualifications, he maintained that a presbytery, as a subordinate court, is obligated to follow the rulings of a superior body.²⁰⁵

Throughout the *Apology* Masterton shows that he is conversant with publications in the English debates, as well as with Dunlop’s *Preface*, which he gives strong, though qualified praise.²⁰⁶ He is also familiar with other controversies in the Church of Scotland; one

199. *ibid.*, p. 19.

200. *ibid.*, p. 19.

201. *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

202. *ibid.*, p. 20; This was also the thesis of John Malcome, *The Dangerous Principles of the Sectarians of The Last Age, Revived Again by Our Modern New-Lights* (Belfast, 1726).

203. *ibid.*, p. 29.

204. *ibid.*, p. 54.

205. *ibid.*, p. 29.

206. *ibid.*, pp. 13-4, 19-20, 32, 33.

defence offered for subscription is based on ‘the right vested, by divine Authority in Christian Congregations, to choose their own Ministers’.²⁰⁷ This point was probably influenced by the controversies over patronage within the Church of Scotland. Masterton applies it to the debate over subscription, arguing that a congregation’s right to choose a minister would include the right to elect one who is willing to give assent to the Westminster Confession. If congregations have this right individually ‘they have the same Power, when used by their representatives in a synod’.²⁰⁸

Abernethy replied in a much larger piece entitled *A Defence of the Seasonable Advice*.²⁰⁹ It expanded his arguments and strengthened his position on the rights of presbytery, but added little new to the debates. Masterton, following Wodrow’s advice, responded with a brief work entitled *A Short Reply to the Postscript* which was addressed to Weld, Choppin and Boyse who had written the postscript.²¹⁰ A letter from Wodrow to Masterton dated 14 October 1724 shows his influence on the Subscriber’s strategy.²¹¹ He suggested that Masterton answer the *Defence of the Seasonable Advice* ‘as short as possibly you can form it’.²¹² Wodrow found Abernethy’s style muddled, his ‘reasonings ... pretty magisterial, and his turns irritating’; he counseled Masterton that if he tried to ‘follow his large paper’ point by point ‘your answer will swell terribly’.²¹³ In the same letter, he also recommended that Masterton not publish a reply to Kirkpatrick’s *Scripture Plea*, an account of the exclusion from the Lord’s Supper published in 1724; Masterton followed Wodrow’s advice.²¹⁴ Even Wodrow, whose collection shows an extensive interest in news and publications throughout the Reformed Churches, was weary of the flood of tracts pouring from Ireland by this time.

207. *ibid.*, p. 21.

208. *ibid.*, p. 21.

209. [John Abernethy], *A Defence of the Seasonable Advice: In Answer to the Reverend, Mr. Charles Mastertoun’s Apology for the Northern Presbyterians in Ireland* ([Belfast], 1724)

210. Charles Masterton, *A Short Reply to the Postscript to Mr. Abernethy’s Defence of the Seasonable Advice, by the Three Reverend Dublin ministers: wherein is considered what they offer against the Westminster Confession of faith, and the use of it in reference to candidates for the Holy Ministry, as is practised in the North, according to Synodical Resolutions, And likewise what they propose for having ministerial communion allowed among the northern Presbyterians, without subscription to the said Confession, or Declaration of Assent to the Doctrines of it, is shewed to be inexpedient, and as of dangerous consequence*, (Dublin, 1726)

211. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, pp. 159-60.

212. *ibid.*

213. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 160.

214. *ibid.*, p. 161.

Masterton's *Short Reply* closed the most important series of publications. There were certainly more works, the total numbering over fifty, however these extended through the duration of the conflict. They reference events and publications in England, Scotland and on the Continent and show the influence of ministers beyond the Synod of Ulster. They also show the focal point of contention – the Irish Presbyterians were self-consciously in a debate over the role of Church courts and the form of their polity.

In 1722 and 1723 the Subscribers passed resolutions in Synod that moved further from the compromise of the *Pacificum* by enforcing a strict interpretation of the Act and restraining presbyteries from straying from it.²¹⁵ While the Non-Subscribers argued their points better in the tract war, they failed to convince the majority that they were against signing the Confession on principle rather than for hidden disagreements with its doctrines. As much as the Synod was divided, there had been no chargeable offense committed; all of the Non-Subscribers had in fact signed the Confession at one point, none of them had preached unorthodox views, and for all of the rhetoric of liberty of conscience, none had disobeyed the rulings of a Church court since the conflict had begun. Likewise, while the Subscribing faction insisted on submission to the Synod's ruling and following the discipline of the Church of Scotland, they consistently dropped matters that could conceivably be charged. Prior to the the conflict Abernethy had disobeyed the Synod's directive for him to accept a call in Dublin, yet no charge was brought against him. Several ignored the ruling banning publications on the subject of subscription; the Synod was silent on this. The Subscribers could have brought charges against Haliday for not properly subscribing at his installation, yet they were willing to drop the matter and issue a warning. In 1724, however, this stalemate changed. Two events convinced the Subscribing faction that the Non-Subscribers were hiding heresy and intent on remolding the polity in the shape of English Presbyterianism. The first was the charge of Arianism brought against Thomas Nevin (1686-1745), the second was the irregular ordination of Alexander Colville (1699-1777).

215.RGSU, II, pp. 30-2, 63-5.

Nevin's Trial

As mentioned previously, the Subscribers had appealed to the Church of Scotland in part because the Non-Subscribers had begun meeting with like-minded ministers in England.²¹⁶ It is uncertain who made these initial trips but prior to the 1722 Synod, Thomas Nevin went to London to meet with Calamy and others, probably to discuss arrangements for the *regium donum*.²¹⁷

According to Masterton, following Nevin's visit the Synod received 'menacing letters' from Calamy and Boyse threatening to withhold a portion of the *regium donum* if the Synod was not more cautious in its dealings with the Non-Subscribers.²¹⁸ Rumour spread that the ministers had received 'a message from the King threatening the removal of the royal gratuity for the Dissenters'.²¹⁹ While Calamy might have been high handed, as Beckett has noted there is nothing to suggest the government ever used the *regium donum* to intervene in the Synod's business.²²⁰

In 1724 charges were brought against Nevin in civil court by a Church of Ireland layman. He had been heard to say 'that it is no blasphemy to say Christ is not God'.²²¹ As the witnesses' affidavit explained this was said in the context of a discussion on the power of the magistrate to punish religious offenses.²²² Nevin explained he was speaking in terms of civil law, particularly in relation to Jews, who should not be subject to punishment for their beliefs about Christ.²²³

Although Nevin's charge was dismissed as 'without meaning, senseless, and undefined', the Synod met at Dungannon while his trial was pending.²²⁴ The week before the meeting of Synod, Nevin had published some comments on his charges and circulated it

216. Wod. Lett. Qu XX, nos. 140, 187; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, pp. 62-3.

217. Alexander Gordon, 'Nevin, Thomas (1686-1745)', rev. S. J. Skedd, *ODNB*, 19969; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 62; Reid, *History*, pp. 165-6.

218. Reid, *History*, p. 165; Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription', pp. 228-9.

219. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 85.

220. J. C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland, 1687-1780*, (London, 1948), p. 112.

221. Gordon, *Historical Memorials of the First Presbyterian Church of Belfast*, pp. 30-31; Thomas Nevin, *The Tryal of Thomas Nevin. M.A. Pastor of a Church, of the Presbyterian Denomination, in Down-Patrick, Before the General Synod, Which Met at Dungannon, June 16. 1724. Faithfully Collected From the Minutes* (Belfast, 1725), p. 3.

222. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

223. *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

224. Alexander Gordon, 'Nevin, Thomas (1686-1745)'.

among the members of the Synod.²²⁵ As the Synod began, Samuel Henry, having read the quote from Nevin contained in the affidavit, stated that ‘he had not freedom to sitt in Synod with Mr. Nivin [sic] till he give satisfacon as to the matter charged upon him’.²²⁶ This began a lengthy trial, with charges drawn up by Henry, Gilbert Kennedy, Robert McBride and others.²²⁷ The Non-Subscribers defended Nevin and protested the trial, or as the Subscribers understood it, ‘espoused his cause’.²²⁸ It ended with a vote by the Synod to demand that he, ‘for the glory of God, the edification of this Church, and Mr. Nivin’s own vindication’, ‘make a declareation [sic] of his belief in the supreme Diety of our Lord Jesus Christ’.²²⁹

Nevin refused, later explaining ‘it was not for want of orthodoxy I did not comply with their demand; but only that I wou’d not betray the rights of men and Christians, and by a cowardly submission countenance their claim of an unrighteous power’.²³⁰

The Synod, ‘not by a great majority’ voted to exclude him from ministerial communion. Although excluded he was neither defrocked nor removed from his congregation. His sentence was essentially that which was passed on the entire body of Non-Subscribers in 1726 when the Presbytery of Antrim was expelled from the Synod. Indeed the Subscribers meant for Nevin’s trial to serve as a warning to the other Non-Subscribers.²³¹

Nevin later published an account of the trial in which he criticized, among other things, the Subscribers claim to represent *the* form of Presbyterianism:

while they deny us this distinguishing character [i.e. of begin Presbyterians], for not acknowledging their new claim of power, all who disown such a power in themselvs and all others, must equally cease to be Presbyterians: and so this little party, with their inquisitory claim, shall not only be the sole, but the first Presbyterians that ever were known; and whoever won’t associate with ’em upon their new devised model, must no longer bear that honorable name.²³²

225.Wodrow, *Correspondence*, II, p. 146.

226.*RGSU*, II, p. 69.

227.*ibid*, p. 70.

228.*ibid*, pp. 80-1; *A Seasonable Warning Offered by Severall Ministers Who Adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith & to Their Solemn Promise of Subjection in the Lord to the Severall Judicatorys in this Church of Presbyterian Dissenters in Ireland, Whereof They are Members; Directed to the Congregations under Their Care*, transcription in Wod.Fol.XLIX, no. 30 (1726): fols. 128-133., fol. 129r.

229.*ibid*, II, p. 80.

230.Nevin, *Tryal*, p. vi-vii.

231.*A Seasonable Warning*, fol. 129r.

232.p. xiv.

He criticized the Synod for taking his case immediately without it going through the normal process of bringing a charge before his Presbytery which could then be appealed to the Synod:

If I had vented, what no one cou'd doubt to be really Arianism, such a motion ought not to be made in this place to exclude me from communion without regular process: for this were to destroy the just subordination of our ecclesiastical assemblies, and if such methods were follow'd then all discipline wou'd be taken immediately into the hands of the Synod, and consequently there wou'd be no use nor occasion for other inferior judicatories.²³³

Though he was not presenting an alternative polity, indeed he noted the irregularity with the established practice of the Church of Scotland, it is significant that Nevin was protesting the Synod's overriding of the authority of the Presbytery.²³⁴

While Nevin's case seemed for many to substantiate their suspicions of heresy among the Non-Subscribers, the ordination of Alexander Colville, Jr. confirmed for many that the Non-Subscribers were a threat to the form of government

Colville's Ordination

In 1724, the Dromore congregation called Alexander Colville.²³⁵ A large faction within the congregation was opposed to his call as he was 'yet a more violent Non-Subscriber than his father'.²³⁶ The Presbytery of Armagh sided with his opponents, refusing to ordain him. Upon appeal the sub-Synod of Armagh ruled that he would have to re-subscribe before he would be eligible for ordination.²³⁷ The matter was appealed to the General Synod, but rather than wait for a ruling, Colville went to London, at the suggestion of and with letters of reference from the Non-Subscribing ministers.²³⁸

A group of London ministers met in Dr. Calamy's vestry and, following what Wodrow considered a perfunctory trial, ordained Colville without a charge.²³⁹ Although this was seen as a partisan act by the Irish Subscribers, the ordaining body included both Subscribers, including Jabez Earle and Non-Subscribers such as Oldfield, Grosvener, Evans and Denham.²⁴⁰ The location of the ordination was unusual, but the fact that the or-

233.Nevin, *Tryal*, pp. 15-6.

234.*ibid.*, pp. 16, 226.

235.Reid, *History*, p. 191.

236.*Analecta*, III, p. 175.

237.*ibid.*; Reid, *History*, III, pp. 175, 192.

238.*Analecta*, III, p. 175; Wod.Lett.Qu XXI, no.39.

239.*Analecta*, III, pp. 175, 231; Wod.Lett.Qu XXI, no.39.

240.*ibid.*

dainers included strong Subscribers such as Earl shows Reid's claim that they met in Calamy's vestry because they 'wished to avoid drawing the attention of their Subscribing brethren in London' to be completely unfounded.²⁴¹

Upon Colville's return to Ireland, the Presbytery of Armagh refused to recognize his ordination or to install him. When the matter came before the 1725 meeting of Synod, that body questioned the commissioners from the Dromore congregation 'whether they will subject themselves to the judgment of this Synod' before they agreed to hear the case, a move from which Abernethy, Kirkpatrick and several other Non-Subscribers dissented.²⁴²

The commissioners presented a written statement in response:

All subjection from [scil.: by virtue of] an implicit faith to any assemblie or Church judicatorie being contrary to the Holy Scriptures, to the rights of Christians and Protestants to our excellent Confession of Faith which saith that no synods or councillis sho'd be made the rule of faith or practice but to be used as an help in both that God alone is the Lord of conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his word or beside it in matters of faith or worship and that the requiring an implicit faith and an absolute blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also we can by no means promise it without counteracting all these ... all therefore we can comply with is that as far as we are concerned we will pay all due regard to the determinations of the Judicatoires of Jesus Christ and will with all impartiality and seriousness consider the arguments offered by you to enlighten our judgments in this affair, will be subject to you in all things lawful, that is in all things consistent with the rights of Christian people to elect their own pastors and we will do all we can for the preservation of the peace order and just authority of this Church.²⁴³

The statement presented shows the congregation had adopted the ecclesiology that the Non-Subscribers had been arguing for. They allowed the Synod to present arguments which they as a congregation would judge according to the Scriptures and adopt if they were convinced, while also maintaining their right to select their own minister. As the issue progressed they requested to be dismissed from the Synod and the Presbytery of Armagh, which the Synod rejected.²⁴⁴

The congregation, however, was not unanimous; the next day the minority commission requested that the Synod refuse to install Colville.²⁴⁵ Colville himself was not present at the Synod that voted to suspend, but not depose, him stating that his actions were 'contrary to his promise of subjection to that [Armagh] Preby[tery]' and had been ministering

241. Reid, *History*, p. 192.

242. *RGSU*, II, pp. 88-9.

243. *ibid.*, p. 89.

244. *ibid.*, p. 92.

245. *ibid.*, p. 89.

since in Dromore without their consent.²⁴⁶ Several of the Non-Subscribers protested the Synod's actions, stating that since Colville had not been received as a member of the Synod, they had no authority over him.²⁴⁷ The Presbytery of Armagh was to determine when his suspension would be revoked. At this point the Presbytery of Dublin intervened, at Calamy's recommendation, and installed Coville and assumed jurisdiction over the Dromore congregation.²⁴⁸

After being installed Colville unsuccessfully sought membership in the Presbytery of Armagh. As *A Seasonable Warning* explained, Colville's ordination and settlement 'convinced the Subscribers that the Nons[ubscribers] were rather set for overturning our constitution than for supporting the Sy[no]d in the just exercise of Christian discipline'.²⁴⁹ Moreover, many within the Synod took this action as a blatant partisan move by the London ministers.²⁵⁰

A group withdrew from Colville, remaining loyal to the Presbytery of Armagh. The Presbytery later ordained James Allen (d. 1764), an Edinburgh graduate, and installed him to the adhering congregation in 1726.²⁵¹

Expulsion

The two sides of the issue were deadlocked. In 1725 the theological and ideological divisions became formalized in the institutional arrangement of the Church. The Synod restructured the Presbyteries so that all of the Non-Subscribers, and sympathetic moderates, were in the Presbytery of Antrim.²⁵² The following year, the Synod excluded the Presbytery of Antrim from 'ministerial communion ... in Church Judicatories', that is the Non-Subscribers were not seated as members of the Synod.²⁵³ In doing so, the party who claimed to be for 'strict adherence to the principles of the Church of Scotland both as to doctrine worship & government' had ignored that Church's discipline. The ministers who

246. *ibid*, p. 92

247. *ibid*, p. 93.

248. Allen, 'Principles of Non-Subscription', p. 291; *Wod.Lett.Qu XXI*, no. 40.

249. *A Seasonable Warning*, fol. 129r.

250. NLS, *Wod.Lett.Qu, XXI*, no. 40.

251. *RGSU*, II, p. 107, *FIPC*, p. 130.

252. *RGSU*, II, pp. 95-97.

253. *ibid*, pp. 104-5; 108.

were excluded had not been charged with any deviation from the Westminster Confession or with any improper conduct.

Although they were excluded from the ministerial communion with the Synod, that is being voting members, a form of fellowship was maintained between ministers and members on both sides. This arrangement followed the directions in the letter sent from the ministers in Edinburgh in 1722. The Scottish ministers had stated that the few ministers should submit to the majority as an essential principle of Presbyterian polity; however, if they refused 'to submit to what seems so necessary for the common good they ought to claim no voice in the judicatories'.²⁵⁴ The continued relationships between the lesser Church courts, while not allowing the Presbytery of Antrim a vote in Synod, did fulfill the other concern mentioned in the letter, namely maintaining Christian communion with the ministers in a way that allowed them to continue their ministry to their congregations. The Presbytery of Antrim joined with the Presbyteries of Dublin and Munster to form the Southern Association.²⁵⁵ The members would maintain 'Christian fellowship' with congregations in the Synod of Ulster, they recognized each others members and ministers, continued to share in the *regium donum* and eventually sat in and voted at meetings of Synod.²⁵⁶ By 1791 ministers of the Presbytery of Antrim were back on the roll of the Synod.

In the end the breach of communion was in large part a division of identities. The Non-Subscribers saw their position as Dissenters and sought a polity that was consistent with this. Subscription was opposed to the Dissenters plea for liberty of conscience against the impositions of Church power. Additionally, a polity that gave priority to more local judicatories could arguably have been seen as more practical for a Church that did not have the backing of the civil law, much like the situation to which the English Presbyterians had reconciled themselves. On the other hand, the most vocal Subscribers, if not the entire Synod, viewed themselves as an annex of the established Church of Scotland. Although they did not have the backing of civil law, they had managed to establish an extensive system of courts conforming to the structure of the established Kirk. Moreover, while they

254.NLS, Wod.Lett.Qu XX, no. 159.

255.Barkley, *Short History*, p. 29; Armstrong, 'Account of the Presbyterian Congregations in Dublin', p. 63.

256.Barkley, *Short History*, p. 29.

were certainly aware of their status as Dissenters, they continued to believe their's was the true method of government worship and discipline. Simply put, had they the choice, the Presbyterian Church would have been the the established Church of Ireland.

Chapter 5: The Synod of Philadelphia and the Adopting Act (1729)

Introduction

In 1706, seven Ministers met as the Presbytery of Philadelphia for the first time.¹ By 1717 it had grown large enough to divide into three presbyteries, and the Synod of Philadelphia was formed.² News and publications from the debates over Church power and subscription in England and Ireland spread to the Colonies and the nascent Synod that began to debate the issues as early as 1721. While the issue of subscription was one point of contention among the ministers, the debates also dealt with the question of Church power and polity, and the relationship between Church courts. Although the issue of subscription did not cause a breach in the Synod, there was a Schism in 1741 in which tensions over subscription were evidently part of a larger debate over ecclesiastical authority.

While there were certainly tensions between the different backgrounds, any attempt to reduce the debates over Church power to an ethnic conflict ignores the fact that there had been tensions within the different European bodies.³ This chapter will examine the American debates as part of the discussions taking place throughout Presbyterianism. Since the issue of the origin of American Presbyterianism has been such a contested issue this will be reviewed first. The proposals forming the constitution of the early Church will be examined, first in the adoption of four Articles that defined the basic understanding of Church government and polity and second in the Adopting Act of 1729 which formally set the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as the doctrinal standards of the Church and required subscription of ministers and candidates. The trial of Samuel Hemphill which found the Synod defending the subscription requirement and explaining the terms of subscription against none other than Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) reveals contemporary understandings of the much controverted Act. Finally, the role of 'New Light' theology in the Schism of 1741 will be explored.

1. *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788*, p. 1. The first leaf is missing from the record book but most agree that the first meeting was in 1706.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

3. Cornman, *Caterpillars*, p. 38.

Background of the initial Presbytery

While the dominant understanding of the colonial Church has assumed that the earliest Presbytery was a diverse group of ministers, a recent reevaluation has shown that the majority of ministers were of Irish and Scottish extraction.⁴ The ‘Father of American Presbyterianism’, Francis Makemie (1657?-1708) was born in Co. Donegal, licensed by Laggan Presbytery in 1681 or 1682 before arriving in Maryland in 1682.⁵ John Hampton (c.1679-c.1721) was also Irish.⁶ He was in London in 1704, when Makemie was there seeking ministers to serve with him in America.⁷ Glasgow born and educated George McNish (1684-1722) also accompanied Makemie.⁸ Fellow Scots included Nathaniel Taylor (d. 1710), John Wilson (d.1712) and John Boyd (d. 1708).⁹ The origin of Samuel Davis (d. 1725) is uncertain, though the evidence tends to point to Ireland.¹⁰ Jedidiah Andrews (1674-1747) was the only New Englander among the original members of the Presbytery, born in Hingham, Massachusetts and graduating from Harvard in 1695.¹¹ Incidentally, while Trinterud argues that the New Side was the party of those with New England Congregationalist backgrounds, Andrews remained with the Old Side Synod.¹²

Some congregations that had previously been Congregationalists later united with the Synod of Philadelphia, but they did so, not as part of a denominational merger, but as individual congregations that united with a Synod that had followed the practice of the Scottish and Scottish Irish hierarchical tradition for ten years.¹³ Of course denominational distinctions before the establishment of the Presbytery is difficult to determine, and it was common for Dissenting congregations to contain members with different convictions.

4. James T. Dennison, ‘New Light on Early Colonial Presbyterian Ministers’, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 60 (1998) 153-57; cf. Hodges, pp. 78-97; Gillett, pp. 25-34; cf. Trinterud, p. 34.

5. Dennison, ‘Colonial Presbyterian Ministers’, p. 154; *FAPC*, pp. 17-8; Webster, pp. 297-310; John M. Barkley, *Francis Makemie of Ramelton: Father of American Presbyterianism*, (Belfast, 1981); Boyd S. Schlenther, ed. *The Life and Writings of Francis Makemie*, (Philadelphia, 1971); James H. Smylie, ‘Francis Makemie: tradition and challenge’, *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61 (1983): 197-209.

6. Dennison, p. 154; Webster, pp. 322-3; W. F. Marshall, *Ulster Sails West*, (Belfast, 1943), p. 66

7. *FAPC*, p. 10.

8. Dennison, p. 155; Webster, pp. 318-322; *FES*, VII, p. 664.

9. Dennison, pp. 155-7; for Taylor see *FES*, VII, p. 665; Webster, 318; for Wilson see Church of Scotland Papers, NAS, CH 1/2/28/4, fol. 388; for Boyd see *Fasti*, VII, p. 662; Webster, p. 323.

10. Dennison, p. 155.

11. Dennison, p. 156; Webster, p. 312-8; Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, vol. 4, p. 219.

12. *Minutes*, p. 193

13. Trinterud, p. 33; William P. Finney, ‘The Period of Isolated Congregations’, *Journal of the Department of History*, XV, (1932-33) 8-17, pp. 8-17; W.A. Speck and L. Billington, ‘Calvinism in Colonial North America, 1630-1715’, in *International Calvinism 1541-1715*, ed. by Menna Prestwich (Oxford, 1987), p. 266; Clifford M. Drury, ‘Presbyterian Beginnings in New England and the Middle Colonies’, *JPHS*, 34, (1956).

While some of the congregations might have begun as Congregationalist; of the twenty-four ministers listed in attendance of the Presbytery before the formation of a Synod in 1717, only five were certainly born in New England, three were born in England or Wales, four were Irish, one was of uncertain origin, and one was from Holland, the remaining ten were from Scotland.¹⁴ Some of the American Congregationalist ministers, as Wodrow noted, inclined ‘to come nearer Presbyterian government, and to have judicatorys brought to their proper weight and influence’.¹⁵ The influence of Irish immigration supported this, as Cotton Mather wrote to Wodrow in 1718:

We are concerned with great numbers of our oppressed brethren, coming over from the north of Ireland ... but that which adds very much to our comfort, is that they find so very little differenc in the management of our Churches from ours and yours, as to count it next unto none at all. ... not a few ministers of the Scotch nation coming over hither, have heretofore been invited to settle among our Churches, and the Churches have joyfully flourished under their ministry.¹⁶

The evidence clearly shows that the Presbytery self-consciously followed the practice of the Church of Scotland. They were a Synod with subordinate presbyteries which were attended by lay elders from the beginning, distinguishing them from Congregationalists as well as the English and Dublin Presbyterians.¹⁷ Moreover they did the work of those courts in ordination, discipline, supervision of candidates and oversight over congregations.¹⁸ As James Anderson explained in a letter to Principal Stirling 1 August 1716:

There are in all, of min[isters], who meet, in a presbytry once a year, sometimes att Philadelphia, somtimes here att Newcastle, seventeen, & two probationers from the north of Irland whom we have under tryall for ordination, twelve of which, I think, have had the most & best of their education at your famous University of Glasgow ... As to our pronceedings in matter of publick worship & discipline, we make it our businesse to follow the directory of the Church of Scotland which (as well we may) we oun as our mother Church.¹⁹

The Congregationalists brought a distinct background, but they united with a Presbytery – that is they did not form a denominational union or association similar to the Bax-

14. The members listed in attendance were Makemie (Ireland); Andrews (New England); Hampton (Ireland); Taylor (Scotland); McNish (Scotland); Wilson (Scotland); Davies (Unknown); John Boyd (Scotland), *FES*, VII, p. 662; Joseph Smith (New England); James Anderson (Scotland) *FES*, VII, p. 662; Nathaniel Wade (New England), Webster pp. 333-4; John Henry (Ireland), *FAPC*, p. 11; Joseph Morgan (New England), Webster, pp. 335-8; Paul Van-Vlech (Holland), Webster, pp. 335-8; Robert Lawson (Scotland) *FES*, VII, p. 664; Dan Magill (Scotland), *FES*, VII, p. 664; Howell Powell (Wales), Webster, p. 345; Robert Wotherspoon (Scotland), *FES*, VII, p. 666; Malachi Jones (Wales), Webster, p. 346; David Evans (Wales), Webster, pp. 347-51; John Bradner (Scotland), *FES*, VII, p. 662; Samuel Pumry (New England), Webster, pp. 353-5; Robert Orr (Ireland), *FAPC*, p. 19; cf. Trinterud, pp. 34-5.

15. *Analecta*, IV, p. 1; Thompson, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, p. 14; William Thomason Hanzche, ‘New Jersey Moulders of the American Presbyterian Church’, *JPHS*, 24, (1946) 71-82, (p. 72).

16. *Wod.Lett.QU* XX, no. 15.

17. *Minutes*, p. 2.

18. *ibid*, pp. 1-30.

19. *Wod.Lett.QU*, XXII, no. 116.

terian Association.²⁰ While this does not mean that there were not tensions between groups with different understandings of polity, it does mean that the Presbytery and Synod from the beginning modeled themselves after the hierarchical polity of the Church of Scotland.

The Question of the Synod's Authority

At the 1721 meeting of Synod, George Gillespie, the Glasgow born and educated minister at White Clay Creek submitted the following overture:

As we have been for many years in the exercise of Presbyterian government & Ch[urc]h discipline, as exercised by the Presbyterians in the best Reformed Churches, as far as the nature and constitution of this country will allow, our opinion is [tha]t if any brother have any Overture to offer to be formed into an Act by the Synod for the better carrying on in the matters of our Government and Discipline, [tha]t he may bring it in against next Synod.²¹

Gillespie had been licensed by the Presbytery of Glasgow in 1712 before moving to New England and being ordained by Philadelphia Presbytery to White Clay Creek in 1713.²² He had been concerned about the lack of sufficient discipline being exercised among the presbyteries. Earlier in the same meeting he had unsuccessfully attempted to persuade the Synod to reconsider a decision to suspend Robert Cross (1689-1766) from preaching for four Sabbaths for his confession of fornication — a sentence Gillespie found to be too lax.²³ He would later write to Stirling, complaining of six ‘grossly scandalous’ ministers who were insufficiently disciplined by the Synod.²⁴ Besides Cross, these cases included Robert Laing whose deposition by the Presbytery of Newcastle for ‘violating the Lord’s Day by washing himself in a creek’ had been overturned by the Synod on appeal.²⁵ Earlier, Jonathan Clement who ‘had been [at] diverse time overtaken with drink and chargeable with very abusive language and quarreling and of stabbing a man’ was suspended for a year.²⁶ Gillespie’s overture appears to be in response to these discipline issues, and although it does not mention subscription it was obviously associated with it by some members of the Synod as shown by their response.

20. Briggs, p. 95, 139.

21. *Minutes*, p. 51; Trinterud, p. 38.

22. Webster, pp. 339-41; *Fasti*, VII, p. 663; *Minutes*, p. 18.

23. *Minutes*, pp. 46, 50; for Cross see Webster, pp. 367-71; *FAPC*, p. 8.

24. *Wod.Lett.QU*, XXII, no. 120.

25. *Minutes*, p. 60; Webster, p. 377; *FES*, VII, p. 664, however this only refers to the Minutes of the American Church. He was probably from Ireland as the *FAPC*, notes a Robert Laing who was licensed by Down Presbytery in 1704, *FAPC*, p. 13.

26. *Minutes*, pp. 49, 60.

Gillespie's overture carried; however, six ministers, all from Wales or New England, protested.²⁷ The protesters were led by Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747), the minister at Elizabeth Town. Dickinson was born near Hatfield, Massachusetts.²⁸ He graduated from Yale in 1706 and was ordained to Elizabeth Town in 1709.²⁹ He joined with the Presbytery of Philadelphia in ordaining Robert Orr in 1715, then in 1717 was listed on the roll of Synod.³⁰ Dickinson, like English and Irish Non-Subscribers was influenced by Locke and believed in the natural capacity of human reason to discern divine truth.³¹

At the 1722 meeting, Dickinson, as the retiring Moderator, preached on 2 Tim 3:17. It was later published as *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod at Philadelphia*.³² In this, Dickinson shows that he is well acquainted with the debates elsewhere. Like Non-Subscribers elsewhere he claims that 'no one thing had an equal hand in the any heresies, schisms, convulsions and confusions, which the Church of God has always laboured under, with humane inventions and institutions, in the affairs of God's house'.³³ He argued, as others, that the Scriptures, and Scriptural requirements for the ministry are sufficient to maintain discipline in the Church.³⁴ To add new Acts to what is revealed in the Bible is 'unwarrantable Legislature'.³⁵ He quotes a passage from Hoadly's *Nature of the Kingdom* as 'an excellent saying of the Bishop of Bangor, worthy to be printed in letters of gold, and transmitted to latest posterity'.³⁶

Revealing that some must have held suspicions of the former Congregationalists, Dickinson states that he did not 'design a dispute upon the controverted modes of Church-government', rather he is convinced 'that the Presbyterian government appears to [him] the

27. *Minutes*, p. 51.

28. Bryan F. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years of American Presbyterianism*, (Lexington, KY, 1997), p. 6; for more on Dickinson's involvement in the controversies see Bryan F. LeBeau, 'The Subscription Controversy and Jonathan Dickinson', *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 54, (1976), 315-35; David C. Harlan, 'The Travail of Religious Moderation: Jonathan Dickinson and the Great Awakening', *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 61, no. 4, (1983) 411-26; and Michael Bauman, 'Jonathan Dickinson and the Subscription Controversy', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 41, no. 3, (1998), 455-67.

29. Le Beau, p. 32; A.H. Freundt, 'Dickinson, Jonathan (1688-1747)', in *DPRTA*, pp. 81-2.

30. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, p. 17; *Minutes*, p. 30.

31. Keith J. Hardman, 'Jonathan Dickinson and the Course of American Presbyterianism, 1717-1747', (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), pp. 244-5, 250.

32. Jonathan Dickinson, *A Sermon Preached at the Opening of the Synod at Philadelphia, September 19. 1722. Wherein is considered the Character of the Man of God, and his Furniture for the Exercise both of Doctrine and Discipline, with the true boundaries of the Churches Power* (Boston, 1723).

33. Dickinson, *Sermon*, p. 1.

34. *ibid*, pp. 2-3, 8-11.

35. *ibid*, p. 13.

36. *ibid*, p. 16. Dickinson quotes Hoadly that Christ 'left behind him no visible humane authority'.

most conformed to the laws of Christ ... [follows] the rule, as may be hoped for in this state of imperfection'.³⁷ Notably Dickinson sees it not as divinely mandated, but the best of many imperfect options. While acknowledging the usefulness of confessions 'since the worst of heresies may take shelter under the express words of Scripture', he denies that Church has the authority to keep from communion 'any such Dissenters, as we can charitably hope Christ won't shut out of Heaven: but should open the doors of the Church as wide, as Christ opens the gates of Heaven'.³⁸

Later in the meeting the protestors brought the following four Articles of 'their sentiments & judgments concerning Church government':³⁹

1. We freely grant, th[a]t there is full executive power of Church government in presby[te]rys and synods, and th[a]t they may authoritatively[sic], in the name of Christ, use the keys of Church discipline to all proper intents and purposes, and th[a]t the keys of the Church are committed to the Church officers and them only.
2. We also grant, th[a]t the meer circumstantial of Church discipline, such as the time place and mode of carrying on in the government of the Church belong to ecclesiastical judicatories to determine as occasions occur conformable to the general rules in the word of God th[a]t require all things to be done decently and in order. And if these things are called Acts we will taken [sic] no offence at the word, provided th[a]t these Acts be not imposed upon such as conscientiously dissent from them.
3. We also grant, th[a]t synods may compose directories, and recommend them to all their members respecting all the parts of discipline, provided th[a]t all subordinate judicatories may decline from such directories when they conscientiously think they have just reason so to do.
4. We freely allow th[a]t appeals may be made from all inferiour to superiour judicatories, and th[a]t judicatories have authority to consider and determine such appeals.

These Articles were approved by the Synod, and the six withdrew their protest after which they 'unanimously joynd together in a Thanksgiving Prayer, and joyful singing the 133 Psalm'.⁴⁰ Notably, in expressing their views they expressly repudiated Congregationalist form of government, 'the keys of the Church are committed to the Church officers and them only'. While disclaiming legislative power, the Articles acknowledge that Church courts have executive power and authority to adjudicate appeals and to give direction as long as the right of conscientious dissent is maintained. The extent of this right would be

37. *ibid*, p. 14.

38. *ibid*, pp. 22-23.

39. *Minutes*, pp. 57-8; James Hastings Nichols, 'Colonial Presbyterianism Adopts its Standards', *JPHS*, 34, (1956) 53-66, pp. 53, 56.

40. *Minutes*, p. 58.

an issue in the passing of the Adopting Act as well at the centre of the formal debates that in the 1741 Schism.

The Adopting Act

In 1724 the Presbytery of New Castle records the first known subscription in the Synod. William McMillan was licensed to preach in Virginia and his signature is attached to the following formula: ‘I do own the Westminster Confession of Faith at the Confession of my faith’.⁴¹ While some have claimed that this was ‘unqualified subscription’, there is no record of an Act of the Presbytery; this was subscription according to custom as had been the case in the General Synod of Ulster.⁴²

One of the members of New Castle Presbytery, John Thomson (c.1690-753) brought an overture from the Presbytery of New Castle before the Synod in 1727 calling for subscription.⁴³ Thomson had arrived in New York from Ireland as a probationer in 1715.⁴⁴ He had graduated from Glasgow in 1710 or 1711 and was licensed by the Presbytery of Armagh in 1712 or 1713.⁴⁵ He received a call to the Lewes congregation and was ordained by the Presbytery of Philadelphia in 1717.⁴⁶

His overture ‘wherein is proposed an expedient, for preventing the ingress and spreading of dangerous errors’ began by stating that he ‘would be heartily grieved if [it] should in the event, prove an occasion of any heat or contention among us’.⁴⁷ Pointing to the duty to ‘maintain and defend the truths of the Gospel against all opposition’, not only as individual Christians and ministers but also as an ‘organiz’d body politick’ that is not subject to another ‘ecclesiastical judicature’, Thomson argues that the Synod should do two things.⁴⁸ First, since the Synod had not adopted a Confession it should formally adopt the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as the public standard of the Synod as ‘an

41. Records of the Presbytery of New Castle, pp. 86-88, unnumbered p. 178.

42. Trinterud, pp. 44-5; Nichols, p. 57.

43. *Minutes*, p. 98; Records of Presbytery of New Castle, pp. 128, 136-7; Nichols, p. 57.

44. Webster, pp. 355-7; W.H.T. Squires, ‘John Thomson: Presbyterian Pioneer’, *The Union Seminary Review*, 32, no. 2 (1921) 149-61; John G. Herndon, ‘The Reverend John Thomson’, *JPHS*, 20, 4 (1942) 116-58, 21, no. 1 (1943) 34-59.

45. Herndon, 20, p. 117-8.

46. *ibid*, pp. 118-9.

47. [John Thomson], *An Overture Presented to the Reverend Synod of Dissenting Ministers, Sitting in Philadelphia, in the Month of September, 1728 And is Now Under the Consideration of the Several Members of the Said Synod, in Order to Come to a Determination Concerning it at Next Meeting.: Together with a preface, or an epistle containing some further reasons to strengthen the overture, and an answer to some objections against it* (n.l., 1729), p. 25

48. *ibid*, pp. 25-30.

united Body-politick'.⁴⁹ Although he proposes subscription to the Westminster Confession, he added that 'it's then the necessity of a confession in general' that he desired for and was willing to accept another 'of like kind'.⁵⁰ Second, the Synod should require candidates to 'subscribe or otherwise acknowledge' the Confession 'and to promise not to preach or teach contrary to it'.⁵¹ While Thomson has been portrayed as a strict Subscriber his overture recognizes a need to deal with exceptions, 'if any minister within our bounds shall take upon him to teach or preach any thing contrary to any of the said Articles, unless first he propose the said point to the Presbytery or Synod, to be by them discussed, he shall be censured'.⁵² And as he closed the preface:

if there should be any paragraphs or clauses at which some may scruple, there are rational methods according to charity and piety, to have such scruples removed in a regular way, and it's a pity to deprive a whole Church of the benefit of such and excellent Confession, for the scruples perhaps of a few, or for a few scruples about some particular and lesser points of religion.⁵³

The overture did not make it to the floor in 1727 but was brought again in 1728 when the Synod unanimously agreed to defer the overture until the following year which it appointed to be a full Synod, having moved to delegated meetings in 1724.⁵⁴ The issue was controversial, Andrews describes events in a letter requesting advice from Colman:

We are now like to fall into a great difference about subscribing the Westminster Confession of Faith. An overture for it, drawn up by Mr. Thompson of Lewistown was offered to our Synod the year before the last, but not then read in Synod. Means were then used to stave it off, and I was in hopes we should have heard no more of it. But last Synod it was brought again, recommended by all the Scotch and Irish members present and being read among us, a proposal was made, prosecuted and agreed to that it should be deferred till our next meeting for further consideration. The proposal is, that all ministers and intrants shall sign it or else be disowned as members. Now what shall we do? They will certainly carry it by number. Our countrymen say, they are willing to joyn in a vote to make it the Confession of our Church, but to agree to the making it the test of orthodoxy and term of ministerial communion, they say they will not. I think all the Scots are on one side, and, all the English and Welsh on the other, to a man. . . . Some say the design of this motion is, to spew out our countrymen, they being scarce able to hold way with the other brethren in all the disciplinary and legislative motions. What truth there may be in this, I know not. Some deny it, whereas others say there is something in it. I am satisfied some of us are an uneasiness to them, and are thought to be too much in their way sometimes, so that I think't would be no trouble to lose some of us; yet I can't think this to be the thing ultimately designed, whatever smaller glances there may be at it. I have no tho't they have any design against me in particular. I have no reason for it. . . . If it were not for the scandal of division, I should not be much against it, for the different countrymen seem to be most delighted in one another and to do best when they are by themselves. My

49. *ibid*, p. 28, 31.

50. *ibid*, p. 23.

51. *ibid*, pp. 31-2.

52. *ibid*, p. 32.

53. *ibidi*, p. 24.

54. Webster, p. 104-5; *Minutes*, pp. 64-5, 98.

congregation being made up of diverse nations of different sentiments, this brings me under a greater difficulty.⁵⁵

This letter is the main primary source to which Trinterud appealed to argue that divisions were based on national origins. Tensions between the groups is undeniable, but it should be noted that Andrews expresses doubts concerning a Scots conspiracy. Further, as Bauman has pointed out if the Scots and Irish had been a ‘strict subscription’ party they easily had the majority of votes in 1728 and could have enacted strict subscription had they wished rather than deferring the issue until a full Synod could be present.⁵⁶

Wodrow saw the connection to the General Synod of Ulster. Responding to a report from Colman he concluded that ‘some of those that have come from Ireland ... have carried their heats ... to the Synod of Pennsylvania’.⁵⁷ As one anonymous Philadelphian reported to Ireland, ‘the Presbyterians here were like as they have lately been among you to be divided into parties and under a sad prospect of being broken to pieces about subscribing the Westminster Confession’.⁵⁸

Thomson published the *Overture* with a preface presenting the case for subscription. He stated that one of the reasons for publishing the work was so that all can judge the matter before the Synod, mentioning that it would give the members of the congregation an opportunity to judge the issue and allow ruling elders to fulfill their duty.⁵⁹ As in England and Ireland, the laity played a significant role in pressing for requiring subscription and Thomson appealed directly to them.

He argued that there was no reason not to subscribe something that one believes and considered true.⁶⁰ Following the line of argument that goes back to Wilcox’s *Duty of Holding Fast*, he stated that demanding adherence to what is founded on the Word of God cannot be tyranny, it is simply ‘to impose what Christ in and by his Word hath already imposed’.⁶¹ He went as far as to argue that while the words of the Confession are ‘composed by fallible men’ and thus ‘falling short of that perfection that the Scripture justly claims’

55. Letter from Andrews to Colman, quoted in Hodges, *Constitutional History*, I, p. 142.

56. Bauman, p. 464.

57. Wodrow, *Correspondence*, III, p. 456.

58. *A Letter from a Gentleman in Philadelphia to His Friend in Ireland about the Subscribing the Confession of Faith*, transcription in Wod.Oct.XLV, fol. 218.

59. *Overture*, pp. 4-5.

60. *ibid*, p. 13

61. *ibid*, p. 14.

nevertheless ‘so far as they are agreeable to the infallible Word, are themselves infallible, as to the truth contained in them’.⁶²

Dickinson again led the opposition by presenting the case against subscription in his *Remarks upon a Discourse*.⁶³ In it he questioned the usefulness of creeds to fulfill the duty to ‘maintain and defend the truths of the Gospel’ that Thomson was calling for.⁶⁴ He pointed to the problem of hypocritical subscription, citing as examples the ‘Arians’ in the Church of England and Marrow Men in the Church of Scotland.⁶⁵

He also contrasted the divisions over subscription in England and Ireland with peace enjoyed by the American Church:

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, subsisted some ages in peace and purity, to the honour of their profession, and envy of their malignant enemies; and thus might have probably have continued, had not the fires of subscription consumed their glory; and this engine of division broke them to pieces, disunited them in interest, in communion, and in charity; and rendered them the grief of their friends, and the scorn of their enemies. And on the other hand, the Churches of New-England have all continued from their first foundation Non-Subscribers; and yet retain their first faith and love.⁶⁶

Rather than subscription, which has no divine authority Dickinson claimed, the Church should rely on rigorous examination of candidates and strict discipline.⁶⁷ He closed by saying that he will not object to others subscribing, but he would not do so himself nor insist on others signing.⁶⁸

When the Synod met in 1729 they appointed a committee to handle the overture. It included six members with equal representation from both sides: two Non-Subscribers (Dickinson and Pierson), and two Subscribers, (Thomson and Andrews) were joined by four who were not committed to either side, one of whom was Thomas Craighead.⁶⁹ Craighead, who had been in Ireland at the time of the adoption of the Pacific Act, was the

62. *ibid*, pp. 14-5.

63. *Remarks upon a Discourse Intituled an Overture Presented to the Reverend Synod of Dissenting Ministers Sitting in Philadelphia, in the Month of September 1728* (New York, 1729)

64. Dickinson, *Remarks upon a discourse*, pp. 4-5.

65. *ibid*, pp. 11-12.

66. *ibid*, pp. 8-9.

67. *ibid*, pp. 15-8.

68. *ibid*, p. 32.

69. Whitlock, ‘The Context of the Adopting Act’ in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. by David W. Hall, second edn., (Oak Ridge, TN, 1997) , p. 99.

brother of Robert Craighead who had been on the committee that drafted the Irish Church's Pacific Act.⁷⁰

The Committee proposed the following, to which the Synod agreed to before adjourning until later in the afternoon:

Altho' the Synod do no claim or pretend to any authority of imposing our faith upon other men's consciences, but do profess our just dissatisfaction with and abhorrence of such impositions, and do utterly disclaim all legislative power and authority in the Church, being willing to receive one another, as Christ has received us to the Glory of God, and admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have grounds to believe Christ will at last admit to the Kingdom of Heaven; yet we are undoubtedly obliged to take care that the faith once delivered to the saints be pure and uncorrupt among us, and so handed down to our posterity. And do therefore agree, th[at] all minister of this Synod, or that shall hereafter be admitted into this Synod, shall declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary Articles, good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine; and do also adopt the said Confession and Catechisms as the Confession of our Faith. And we do also agree, th[at] all the presbyteries within our bounds shall always take care not to admit any candidate of the ministry into the exercise of the sacred function, but what declares his agreement in opinion with all the essential and necessary Articles of said Confession, either by subscribing the said Confession of Faith and Catechisms, or by a verbal declaration of their assent thereto, as such minister or candidate shall think best. And in case any minister of this Synod or any candidate for the ministry shall have any scruple with respect to any Article or Articles of sd. Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making sd. declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall notwithstanding admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds and to ministerial communion if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about Articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of communion with them. And the Synod do solemnly agree, that none of us will traduce or use any opprobrious terms of those th[at] differ from us in these extra-essential and not-necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such sentiments.⁷¹

The similarity to the Irish Act is apparent, and in the context, especially given Craighead's involvement, it is certain that it served as the source for the Committee's proposal. But there are noticable differences that would have responded to the difficulties in the Synod of Ulster. The American Act is a stricter form. First, it includes not only the Confession but also the Shorter and Larger Catechisms. In this they might have been inspired by Irish Subscribers who had considered trying to add the Catechisms to their subscription requirements but did not after Wodrow advised against it since it would give the Non-Subscribers opportunity to complain of 'growing impositions'.⁷² Second, a major

70. *FAPC*, p. 7; *FIPC*, p. 94; Cornman, p. 64; Whitlock, p. 99.

71. Minutes, pp. 103-4.

72. *Wod.Lett.Qu XXI*, no. 81.

contention among Irish Presbyterians had been the fact that the Pacific Act gave authority to judge the scruples only explicitly to the Presbytery.⁷³ When the Presbytery of Belfast had accepted Haliday's statement as in compliance with the the *Pacificum* they had argued a presbytery alone had the prerogative to judge according to the Act. In response, the American Synod reserved the right for the Synod to judge proposed scruples. Finally, the phrase chosen was 'essential and necessary', while not pressing the point too far, I would argue that the choice of the wording 'essential and necessary' rather than 'fundamental' was significant. That is, they were insisting on subscription, not to the Fundamental Articles of Christianity, but the doctrines essential to the system in the Westminster Confession. As shown, the Irish Synod debated the distinction between the terms in their declaration on the Trinity.⁷⁴

After the Synod reconvened the ministers proceeded to propose scruples to the standards. The issues presented were with 'some clauses in the 20. and 23. chapters', that is the Articles dealing with the power of the civil authorities.⁷⁵ They 'unanimously agreed in the solution of those scruples' and declared the Confession and Catechisms 'to be the Confession of their faith' with the exception of those clauses which:

the Synod do unanimously declare, th[a]t they do not receive those Articles in any such sense as to suppose the civil magistrate hath a controlling power over synods with respect to the exercise of their ministerial authority; or power to persecute any for their religion, or in any sense contrary to the Protestant succession to the throne of Great-Britain.⁷⁶

Later interpretations would divide these as the morning Preliminary Act and the afternoon Adopting Act.⁷⁷ This has led to the claim that they only allowed scruples related to the Articles that dealt with the magistrate.⁷⁸ However, in light of the actual overture by Thomson, which stipulated the two needs, it makes more sense to see the morning session establishing the requirement and terms of subscription and the afternoon session as the formal adoption by the Synod. In other words, the Synod's adopting of the Confession is distinguished from the requirement for subscription and later debates in the American Church

73. see below, p. 136.

74. see below, p. 144.

75. *Minutes*, p. 104.

76. *ibid.*

77. *ibid.*, p. 141; George W. Knight, III, 'Subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms', in *Practice of Confessional Subscription*, p. 120-4; cf. Hodge, p. 187.

78. Knight, *ibid.*

has been the result of not recognizing the distinction. The ‘preliminary’ or morning session is the only one to explicitly require subscription. Moreover, allowing presbyteries to judge scruples would be nonsense had the Synod intended to decide what scruples would be allowed in the afternoon session.

Subsequent pronouncements of the Synod attempted to clarify the Act have only made interpretation more difficult. The minutes of the morning session began to be circulated apart from the actual adoption.⁷⁹ A version sent to Ireland is an example of this quoting only the morning session, with a note suggesting that the Irish Presbyterians might look to it as an example.⁸⁰ The publication of only a portion of the Synod’s minutes caused confusion and concern, especially among the laity. In the back of the minute book of the Presbytery of New Castle there is the note, dated 4 September 1730:

Whereas divers persons, belonging to several of our congregations have been ... offended with a certain minute of ye proceedings [of] our last Synod contained in a printed letter because of some ambiguous words or expressions contained therein ... we being willing to remove as far as in w[hich] lies all causes and occasions of jealousies would testify that we all with one accord firmly adhere to the same sound doctrine w[hi]ch we and our forefathers were trained up in.

We the ministers of thee Presby of New Castle whose names are under written do by this our act of subscribing our Names to these presents solemnly declare and testify that we own & acknowledge the Westminster Confession and Catechisms to be the Confession of our faith being in all things agreeable to the Word of God so far as we are able to judge & discern, taking them in the true [and] genuine and obvious sense of the words.

While some have considered this an ‘unqualified’ mandatory subscription, in light of the way Subscribers in England and Ireland handled questions, this is obviously a voluntary subscription similar to those at Salters’ Hall and Exeter in 1719 and in General Synod of Ulster in 1721, primarily to quell the fears of the laity.⁸¹ There is no Act ‘demanding unqualified subscription’ in the minutes.⁸²

The Presbytery of New Castle brought the matter to the Synod, which noted in the minutes of their 17 September 1730 meeting

Whereas some persons have been dissatisfied at the manner of wording our last years agreement about the Confession &c: supposing some expressions not sufficiently obligatory upon intrants; overtured th[a]t the Synod do now declare, that they understand those clauses that respect the admission of intrants or candidates in such a sense as to oblige them to receive and adopt the Confession and Catechisms at their admission in the same manner and as fully as the members of the

79. Hodge, p. 183.

80. *A Letter from a Gentleman in Philadelphia to his friend in Ireland*, Wod.Oct.XLV, fol. 218.

81. Nichols, p. 60.

82. Trinterud, p. 50.

Synod did that were then present. which overture was unanimously agreed to by the Synod.⁸³

This has been interpreted to mean that the *only* exceptions allowed by the Adopting Act would be to the 20th and 23rd Article which were scrupled at the previous meeting.⁸⁴ Some have taken this to be a simple clarification of the original intent of the Act.⁸⁵ Others, noting the absence of Dickinson and others who had opposed subscription from that years meeting, have seen it as part of an attempt to eliminate the allowance of scruples form the Act by a strict subscription party.⁸⁶ It was seen by some contemporaries as amending the 1729 Act to take away the ‘too great latitude expressed in it’.⁸⁷ And the laity in the Presbytery of New Castle were satisfied when the Synod’s 1730 statement was presented to them later that year.⁸⁸

The difficulty is that this understanding conflicts with other statements from the Synod as will be seen in the following section. Further, there is no record of any protest by opposition. It is possible that ‘as fully as the members of the Synod did that were then present’ could be understood to be simply in all ‘essential and necessary’ articles as judged by the Presbytery or Synod. This continued to be the understanding of many in the Synod as revealed by events relating to an early heresy trial in which the method of subscribing was questioned.

The Hemphill Case

Samuel Hemphill, not to be confused with the Irish Subscribing minister of the same name, was licensed by the Presbytery of Strabane in 1730, where he would have subscribed.⁸⁹ He moved to America in 1734 where he was called as Andrews’ colleague in Philadelphia.⁹⁰ He was admitted to the Synod with recommendations from the Presbytery of Strabane on 21 September 1734 at which time he

declared for and adopted the Westminster Confession Catechisms and Directory commonly annexed, the former as the Confession of [his] faith and the latter as the

83. *Minutes*, p. 108.

84. Hodge, p. 184.

85. Knight, ‘Subscription’, p. 122.

86. Trinterud, p. 50.

87. John Thomson, *The Government of the Church of Christ, and the Authority of Church Judicatories Established on a Scripture Foundation*, (Philadelphia, 1741), p. 68.

88. Presbytery of New Castle Minutes, p. 173.

89. *FAPC*, p. 10.

90. William S. Barker, ‘The Samuel Hemphill Heresy Case (1735) and the Historic Method of Subscribing to the Westminster Standards’, in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, pp. 152-8.

guide of [his] practice in matters of discipline as far as may be agreeable to the rules of prudence &c: as in the adopting Acts of this Synod is directed.⁹¹

Soon after Hemphill began preaching, Andrews brought charges against him.⁹²

The accusations caught the attention of Benjamin Franklin who was well established in Philadelphia as publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and *Poor Richard's Almanac* at the time.⁹³ Franklin had previously attended the Church under Andrews' preaching but found his preaching 'dull, uninteresting, and unedifying'.⁹⁴ Following Hemphill's arrival he attended the Church again, this time pleased with Hemphill, who according to Franklin, 'delivered with a good voice, & apparently extempore, most excellent discourses'.⁹⁵ A week before the Synod's commission was to begin proceedings against Hemphill, Franklin published 'A Dialogue Between Two of the Presbyterians Meeting in this City' in the 10 April issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.⁹⁶

In 'A Dialogue', Franklin defended Hemphill and argued that the Synod should not silence a minister for disagreeing with a fallible confession, 'has not a synod that meets in King George the Second's reign, as much right to interpret Scripture, as one that met in Oliver's time?'.⁹⁷

Hemphill's trial began on 17 April 1735 and concluded on the 26th.⁹⁸ In May the Commission published *An Extract of the Minutes of the Commission of the Synod, Relating to the Affair of the Reverend Mr. Samuel Hemphil*, which included their decision 'that Mr. Hemphill be suspended from all the parts of his ministerial office until the next meeting of our Synod' which was to then decide to whether his sentence should continue or be removed.⁹⁹

91. *Minutes*, p. 121. Note the plural of 'adopting Acts of this Synod'.

92. *Minutes*, p. 121; Barker, p. 153.

93. Barker, p. 153.

94. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, p. 100, quoted in Merton Christensen, 'Franklin on the Hemphill Trial: Deism Versus Presbyterian Orthodoxy', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 10, no. 3, (1953) 422-40, (p. 425).

95. quoted in Barker, p. 152.

96. Barker, p. 154; Buxbaum, LeBeau 'A Dialogue' is reprinted in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. by Leonard W. Labaree, (New Have, 1960), vol. 2, pp. 27-31.

97. 'A Dialogue', in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 2, p. 32.

98. Barker, p. 155.

99. *An Extract*, p. 2.

In response to the *Extracts* Franklin published *Some Observations on the Proceedings against the Rev. Mr. Hemphill; with a Vindication of His Sermons* in July.¹⁰⁰ The Commission responded with *A Vindication of the Reverend Commission*, primarily penned by Dickinson and published 4 September.¹⁰¹ This work helps us to understand the general view of the Adopting Act in the Synod, as it was published under their authority. The *Vindication*, pointed out that Hemphill had ‘solemnly declared his assent to our doctrines, and adopted our Confession as the Confession of his Faith’ but had preached sermons that were not consistent with the ‘principles he profes’d’.¹⁰² He continued by enumerating how the charges oppose the Confession, notably including that Hemphill was teaching that faith is ‘but an assent to or perswasion [sic] of the gospel upon rational grounds’ and that he ‘opened the door of the Church wide enough to admit all honest heathen’.¹⁰³

Against Hemphill’s claim that ‘all he declared to at his admission into the Synod were the fundamental Articles of the Confession of Faith’, the Commission explained the Adopting Act:

It was agreed that all the ministers in this Synod, or that hereafter shall be admitted into this Synod, do declare their agreement in and approbation of the Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, as being in all the essential and necessary articles, good forms of sound words, and systems of Christian doctrine; and do adopt them as the Confession of their Faith, &c. And in case any minister of this Synod, or any candidate of the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of the said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration, declare his scruples to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall notwithstanding admit him to the exercise of the ministry within their bounds, and to ministerial communion; if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about Articles not essential or necessary, in doctrine, worship or government.¹⁰⁴

This shows that the Commission, which included Thomson, understood the Adopting Act, even after the 1730 explication, to allow scruples to ‘any article or articles’ and not only those specified in the 1729 Minutes.¹⁰⁵

Hemphill did not attend the September 1735 meeting of Synod, but sent a letter announcing that his *Answer to the Vindication* would soon be published and that he ‘despise[d] the Synod’s Claim of Authority’.¹⁰⁶ He added a postscript ‘I shall think you’ll do

100. Barker, p. 155.

101. Barker, pp. 155-6, LeBeau, pp. 52-6.

102. *Vindication*, p. 4.

103. *ibid*, p. 41.

104. *Vindication*, p. 23.

105. Barker, p. 161.

106. *Minutes*, p. 130.

me a deal of honour if you entirely excommunicate me'.¹⁰⁷ The Synod unanimously deposed him and authorized the Commission to publish any responses to Hemphill 'or his friends' that they find necessary.¹⁰⁸ This implies approval of the previous publication and its explanation of the Synod's method of subscribing.

As the Synod was meeting, Franklin published a *Letter to a Friend in the Country, Containing the Substance of a Sermon Preach'd at Philadelphia, in the Congregation of the Rev. Mr. Hemphill, Concerning the Terms of Christian and Ministerial Communion*.¹⁰⁹ In *A Letter*, Hemphill, rather defending himself against the charges, challenges the right of a Church to impose any other term of communion than the belief in Scripture.¹¹⁰

Dickinson replied with *Remarks upon a Pamphlet, entitled a Letter to a Friend in the Country* in November.¹¹¹ He showed that the Church had to avoid the two extremes of licentiousness and tyranny, being careful lest in the attempt to 'escape impositions, we shall open a door to infidelity, and instead of charity and mutual forbearance, we shall make shipwreck of the faith as well as peace of our Churches'.¹¹² While he denied any form of coercion or legislative power since 'Christ's Kingdom is not of this world', he nevertheless claimed, as Dunlop had, that every society has right to 'adhere to their own sentiments whatever they be'.¹¹³ He also turned the argument against confessions by their absence in the early Church into evidence for their need; creeds, rather than a cause of division, were developed in response to divisive errors that had arisen in their absence.¹¹⁴ Dickinson based his defence of confessions, not in their agreement with Scripture and derived authority, but in the claim that individuals have a right to judge for themselves and reject error, and therefore communion with those who hold those errors.¹¹⁵ Since the Synod allows differences in non-essentials, the requirement for subscription can not be an imposition.¹¹⁶

107. *ibid.*

108. *Minutes*, p. 130-1.

109. (Philadelphia, 1735); Barker, p. 156.

110. *Letter to a Friend in the Country*, p. 9.

111. published in Philadelphia

112. *Remarks upon a Pamphlet*, p. 2.

113. *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

114. *ibid.*, p. 11.

115. *ibid.*, p. 15.

116. *ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

We allow of no confession of faith, as a test of orthodoxy for others, but only as a declaration of our own sentiments, nor may this be imposed upon the members of our own society, nor their assent required to any thing as a condition of their communion with us; but what we esteem essentially necessary.¹¹⁷

In this we see how Dickinson, who had previously opposed subscription, came to terms with it as a method of ensuring an individual's right to defend their liberty to unite with others who are in agreement with them.¹¹⁸

Franklin published *A Defence of the Rev. Mr Hemphill's Observations* in October which was followed by Dickinson, under the pseudonym 'Obadiah Jenkins', publishing *Remarks upon the Defense of the Reverend Mr. Hemphill's Observations* in the 6 January 1736 edition of *Bradford's Weekly Mercury*.¹¹⁹

The publications responding to Hemphill's trial led to another explication which has been a further source of contention. At the 1736 meeting, from which Dickinson was absent, the Synod received a supplication from the 'People of Paxton and Derry'.¹²⁰ They were concerned over the official status of the Confession since the Commission's *Vindication*, quoted only the first section of the Adopting Act. In response the following declaration was unanimously approved:

Th[a]t inasmuch as we understand th[a]t many persons of our perswasion both more lately and formerly have been offended with some expressions or distinctions in the first or preliminary Act of our Synod, contained in the printed paper, relating to our receiving or adopting the Westminster Confession & Catechisms &c: That in order to remove said offence and all jealousies th[a]t have arisen or any arise in any of our people's minds on occasion of sd. distinctions and expressions, the Synod doth declare, th[a]t the Synod have adopted and still do adhere to the Westminster Confession Catechisms and Directory without the least variation or alteration, and without any regard to sd. distinctions. And we do further declare th[a]t this was our meaning and true intent in our first adopting of s[ai]d. Confession, as may particularly appear by our Adopting Act which is as followeth.¹²¹

The declaration continues by quoting the minutes from the afternoon session of 1729.

117. *ibid*, p. 26.

118. For the effect of the Hemphill trial on Dickinson's views of subscription see Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson*, pp. 45-63.

119. Barker, p. 157.

120. *Minutes*, p. 142; Hodge, p. 188. The same year the Synod refused to admit a Henry Hunter, in part, because he had 'his credentials from the Presbry of Antrim w[hi]ch has separated from the Synod of Ireland, and w[i]th whom we have no Communion', (pp. 142-3.)

121. *Minutes*, p. 141.

This was taken as repealing the allowance of exceptions, by some in the Synod.¹²² However this was contested by some contemporaries.¹²³ There was clearly disagreement over what the Adopting Act and subsequent explications meant even at the time, but the ambiguity could keep them from being challenged. As in Ireland, the Act was interpreted and applied differently.¹²⁴ But, unlike the Irish Church, there never was a ‘test case’ comparable to Haliday’s installation at Belfast that would bring these differences into open conflict. In the Hemphill case the Synod of Philadelphia was united against him, if anything his trial would have brought the two sides closer in their understanding of subscription. As Le Beau has suggested the Hemphill case convinced Dickinson of the need for limits to freedom of conscience.¹²⁵ Furthermore, the Subscribers would have to concede that subscription was not an infallible guard; Hemphill had subscribed twice. For a brief time the Church found a way to be united, even if not in complete agreement over subscription. Although the manifest issue concerning the place of the Confession was settled, the core question of Church authority was not. Other points of debate would replace the question of subscription in the subsequent years leading to a further debate over Church authority and ultimately to schism.

Church Power and the 1741 Schism

In 1740, Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764), preached his notorious ‘Nottingham sermon’, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*.¹²⁶ Tennent, nephew to Irish Subscriber Gilbert Kennedy, had come to America with his father and three brothers in 1718.¹²⁷ He had been educated in his father’s Academy, derisively called the ‘Log College’.¹²⁸ Tennent’s sons and other graduates of his Academy were proponents of the Great Awakening

122. *Reasons of Mr. Alexander Creaghead’s Receding from the Present Judicatures of this Church, Together with its Constitution (Philadelphia, 1743)*, p. vi.

123. *ibid.*, pp. iv-xi.

124. Hart and Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, p. 49.

125. Le Beau, *Jonathan Dickinson and the Formative Years*, pp. 45-63.

126. Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, considered in a Sermon on Mark VI.34. Preached at Nottingham, in Pennsylvania, March 8. Anno 1739,40. (Philadelphia, 1740)*.

127. FAPC, Archibald Alexander, *The Log College*, (London, 1968), p. 14; S.T. Logan, ‘Tennent, Gilbert (1703-1764)’, in *DPRTA*, pp. 257-8; for more on Tennent see M.J. Coalter, Jr., *Gilbert Tennent, Son of Thunder* (Westport, CT, 1986); C.N. Wilborn, ‘Gilbert Tennent: Pietist, Preacher, and Presbyterian’, in *Colonial Presbyterianism*, pp. 135-56.

128. For more on the Log College see David B. Calhoun, ‘The Log College’, in *Colonial Presbyterianism*, pp. 47-62; Cornman, *Caterpillars and New Fangled Religion*, pp. 67-84; James W. Fraser, ‘The Great Awakening and new patterns of Presbyterian theological education’, *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 60, (1982) pp. 189-208.

and had adopted revivalistic methods. In his sermon, Tennent referred to the traditionalists in the Synod, or 'Old Side', as 'pharisee-shepherds', 'unconverted teachers', and 'caterpillars [who] labour to devour every green thing'.¹²⁹ His opponents were not simply opposed to the innovations of the revivalists; the formal conflict leading to the 1741 break stemmed from the Presbytery of New Brunswick's refusal to comply with a series of Acts the Synod had passed in relation to more controversial aspects of the revivals: education and itineracy.

In 1726, William Tennent (1673-1746), began his pastorate at Little Neshaminy Creek, Bucks County Pennsylvania; his wife Katherine, was Gilbert Kennedy's sister.¹³⁰ The date is uncertain, but within a few years of taking the charge, he began educating his sons for the ministry and soon accepted other students as well.¹³¹ Tennent's Academy was modeled on the Irish Dissenting Academies, but unlike them served as a substitute rather than preparation for a university education.¹³² Some believed that the education received at the 'Log College' was inadequate and in 1738 the Synod enacted that any students who had not received an education from 'some of [th]e New-England or European Colleges' would be examined and approved by a Committee of the Synod before a Presbytery allowed them to enter the ministry.¹³³ That August, the Presbytery of New Brunswick violated the Act by licensing John Rowland (d.1747), a Welshman who had studied at Tennent's Academy.¹³⁴ At the next year's Synod, the Presbytery of New Brunswick was rebuked.¹³⁵

Another divisive issue was itineracy, or the practice of a minister preaching outside the bounds of their presbytery without the approval of the host congregation's presbytery.¹³⁶ In 1735, Donegal Presbytery sent a letter to New Castle Presbytery protesting the intrusion by some of the latter's probationers.¹³⁷ In 1737, Gilbert Tennent preached at

129. Tennent, *Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*, pp. 3-4.

130. Calhoun, 'The Log College', p. 48; Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 422-5; *FAPC*, pp. 22-3.

131. *ibid.*

132. Cornman, p. 68.

133. *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 157.

134. *ibid.*, p. 164; Cornman, p. 73; George Ingram, 'The Erection of the Presbytery of New Brunswick, Together with Some Account of the Beginnings of Organized Presbyterianism in the American Colonies', *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 6 (1912), pp. 229-232; Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 469-473.

135. *Minutes*, p. 164.

136. Anthony L. Blair, 'Shattered and Divided: Itineracy, Ecclesiology, and Revivalism in the Presbyterian Awakening', *Journal of Presbyterian History* 81 (2003) 18-34.

137. Cornman, p. 89.

the Maidenhead without permission from the Presbytery of Philadelphia, of which the congregation was a constituent.¹³⁸ That year the Synod approved an overture forbidding probationers and ministers from preaching in other presbyteries without consent, reminding preachers and congregations that they ‘ought to look upon themselves, as under the direction and government of their respective presby[te]rys’.¹³⁹ Tennent ignored the Synod’s prohibition preaching again at Maidenhead that October.¹⁴⁰ The issue was brought to the Synod again in 1738 and 1740.¹⁴¹ In 1740 Tennent preached his inflammatory sermon.

As will be seen, the interpretation of the Adopting Act remained an implicit point of contention, but it was the fundamental question of Church government that the public debate made explicit. As Thomson’s statement of the Old Side’s position in *The Government of the Church of Christ* made clear, the difference between the two groups was ‘the vastly different and opposite Judgment and sentiments ... in relation to Church government’.¹⁴² Moreover he recognized the origin of the New Side’s views in Irish Non-Subscription, ‘I will add one general remark upon all our brethren’s arguments, viz. that they are all borrowed from the New-Light men, or Non-Subscribers in the North of *Ireland*; they are as like them as one crow’s egg is like another’.¹⁴³ This section will show how that the ecclesiology and polity expressed by the Irish Presbyterian ‘New Light’ theologians were adopted, apart from the question of subscription, by the revivalist ministers to defend their disobedience to the Synod on the issues of itineracy and education. Rather than being ‘definitely English Puritans in spirit’, as Trinterud wrote, the Tennent’s and the other Irish ‘Log College Men’ were solidly in line with an element of Irish Presbyterianism.¹⁴⁴

In 1741, Robert Cross, minister at Philadelphia, brought a protest before the Synod.¹⁴⁵ Similar to the Subscriber’s in the General Synod of Ulster in 1726, the protest argued:

138. *ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

139. *Minutes*, p. 150.

140. Cornman, p. 94.

141. *Minutes*, pp. 153-4, 161-3.

142. John Thomson, *The Government of the Church*, (Philadelphia, 1741)

143. *ibid.*, pp. 113-4.

144. Trinterud, p. 54.

145. *Minutes*, p. 174, 186-91.

that it is the indispensable duty of this Synod, to maintain and stand by the principles of doctrine, worship and government of the Church of Christ, as the same are summed up in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms and Directory composed by the Westminster Assembly, as being agreeable to the word of God, and which this Synod have owned, acknowledged and adopted; as may appear by our Synodical Records of the years 1729, 1729[sic], 1736.¹⁴⁶

And ‘no person, minister or elder should be allowed to sit and vote in this Synod, who hath not received, adopted, or subscribed the said Confessions, Catechisms and Directory, as our presbyteries respectively do, according to our last Explication of the adopting Act’ or Acts contrary to these.¹⁴⁷ It concluded that the ‘protesting Brethren [*scil.* the Presbytery of New Brunswick] have at present no right to sit and vote as members of this Synod, having forfeited their right of being accounted members of it’.¹⁴⁸ The action is similar to that of the General Synod of Ulster in 1726, the expelled ministers were neither tried nor defrocked, they were simply declared to have forfeited their right to membership in Synod due to their ‘anti-Presbyterial practices’.

Along with the revivalistic practices, itineracy, and the education of ministers, Cross gave as the first reason for his protest:

Their heterodox and anarchical principles expressed in their Apology ... where they expressly deny that presbyteries have authority to oblige their dissenting members, and [tha]t Synod should go any further, in judging of appeals or references &c. than to give their best advice; which is plainly to divest the officers and judicatories of Christ’s Kingdom of all authority.¹⁴⁹

After the protest was signed by ‘several members’, the Synod declared the ‘New Side’ ministers ‘had no right to sit’ in Synod.¹⁵⁰ After they withdrew the Synod immediately passed the following Act:

Th[a]t every member of this Synod whether ministr. or elder do sincerely and heartily receive, own acknowledge or subscribe, the Westminster Confession of Faith and larger and shorter Catechisms as the Confession of his Faith, and the Directory as far as circumstances will allow and admit in this infant Ch[urc]h for the rule of Church order. Ordered th[a]t every session do oblige their elders at their admission to do the same.¹⁵¹

The ‘Old Side’ saw the 1730 and 1736 explications as strengthening subscription. The extension to include the Directory as ‘the rule of Church order’ shows submission to the Synod’s authority and the Presbyterial form of government as a primary concern.

146. *ibid.*, p. 187.

147. *ibid.*, p. 188.

148. *ibid.*

149. *ibid.*

150. *Minutes*, p. 174.

151. *ibid.*, p. 174.

While subscription was not explicitly debated, it was a mark of the differences between the two groups. In 1745 the Presbytery of New York, who had protested the actions of the 1741 Synod, united with the excluded ministers forming the Synod of New York.¹⁵² Part of the ‘Plan & Foundation of their Synodical Union’ was that ‘the Westminster Confession of Faith, with the larger & shorter Catechisms be the publick Confession of their faith in such manner as was agreed unto by the Synod of Philadelphia in the year 1729 ... and they declare their approbation of the directory ... as the general plan of worship & discipline’.¹⁵³ The omission of the later Acts indicates an insistence on the principle of allowing candidates to scruple portions of the Confession.

The *Apology* Cross had referred to was a paper presented by Tennent and later published with *Remarks upon a Protestation*.¹⁵⁴ In these he offers an ecclesiology similar to that of John Abernethy and the Irish Non-Subscribers. He defined a presbytery as ‘such a number of ministers, more or less, with the elders of their several Congregations, as can conveniently meet together so often as occasion may require’ stating that these ‘have full and complete power for ordering all the affairs of the Church within their Bounds’ including ‘a power from Christ to ordain’.¹⁵⁵ Lower courts are to be held accountable to the superior courts ‘for error in doctrine or wrong conduct’.¹⁵⁶ The rulings of the Synod concerning education and itineracy however encroach upon the rights of presbyteries and were based on the false idea that a majority in the Synod ‘have a power committed to them from Christ to make new rules, Acts or Canons’.¹⁵⁷

While he was willing to accept ‘all regular subordination of judicatories to one another’, he denied the ‘superior judicatory’s assuming to itself a power ... arbitrarily to examine over again, candidates’.¹⁵⁸ Against the Synod’s Act to examine candidates’ education, he claimed for presbyteries alone ‘the power of ordering the whole work of ordination’.¹⁵⁹ Tennent clearly accepted the propriety of a confession and subscription, ‘it is the

152.A.C. Guelzo, ‘New Side Presbyterians’, *DPRTA*, pp. 175-6; *Minutes*, p. 263.

153.*Minutes*, p. 263.

154.Gilbert Tennent, *Remarks upon a Protestation Presented to the Synod of Philadelphia June 1 1741* (Philadelphia, 1741).

155.*ibid*, pp. 48, 50.

156.*ibid*, p. 51.

157.*ibid*, p. 53

158.*ibid*, p. 5

159.*ibid*, p. 16.

duty of Synods to have a Confession of Faith, in which they ought to express their sentiments, concerning the essentials of doctrine, worship and discipline; which ought to be adopted by those they admit as members of their body'.¹⁶⁰ But he uses subscription to defend the right to dissent from Synodical decisions:

to suppose that a majority of that body ... are vested with a power authoritatively to make new laws or Acts ... binding the smaller number to obey them, who conscientiously scruple and oppose them ... so that they shall be excluded from Synodical communion, upon their conscientious dissent and non-conformity, is, we think, to signify, that the Confession of Faith and Directory already agreed to, is insufficient to answer its design ... as well as to open a door for continual oppressions, schisms, and convulsions.¹⁶¹

In other words, to exclude those who dissent from Acts of the Synod is to put every decision of the court on the same level as the Confession; every ruling is made a term of communion and subscription is pointless.

Thomson, who had introduced the overture calling for subscription, responded with *The Government of the Church of Christ*.¹⁶² Claiming that the 'New Side' were against the Synod and all Presbyterians, he ridiculed the notion that anyone should appeal to a body 'which they are nowise bound to submit to'.¹⁶³

He claimed that all societies have a right to rule and govern their members developing a Scriptural argument that the Church is not excluded from this general rule.¹⁶⁴ This shows his awareness of the essential arguments against Church power derived from Hoadly whose thesis is that the Church does not have this authority which is vested in Christ alone as the head. Thomson appealed to texts such as: Matthew 16.19 the giving of the keys of the kingdom 'to Peter in the name of all the apostles, and in them to the officers of the Church to succeeding ages' Matthew 15.19; Acts 20.28, arguing that the very term Bishop 'imports authority of a shepherd ... which is certainly more than merely consultative'; and the use of the word 'rule' applied to ministers in 1 Timothy 3.5 and Hebrews 8.7.¹⁶⁵ He continued to outline the traditional view of the authority of the hierarchy of Church courts and show that there were already remedies for those who dissent from the

¹⁶⁰.*ibid.*

¹⁶¹.*ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

¹⁶².John Thomson, *The Government of the Church of Christ*, (Philadelphia, 1741).

¹⁶³.*ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁴.*ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶⁵.*ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

opinion of the majority, such as in the right to enter a protest.¹⁶⁶ Finally, he pointed to the voluntary nature of the Church – if someone participates in the decision making process by voting, they are implicitly but necessarily submitting themselves to the result of the vote.¹⁶⁷ He wrote, ‘When a person joins himself as a member of any society, his so doing doth ... imply a promise to comply and submit to the laws and government of it in all things lawful, and consequently must imply a giving up of his liberty.’¹⁶⁸ Moreover, any subordinate body has no right to participate in the superior assembly unless they are willing to be regulated by it.¹⁶⁹ Thomson offered one of the best arguments for the rights of Synod to expect compliance with its decisions. He based the authority to govern on Scriptures, but did not go to the extreme that others would.

This division continued until 1758 when the two Synods united to form the Synod of New York and Philadelphia.¹⁷⁰ The terms of union included the statement that:

Both Synods having always approv’d and receiv’d the Westminster Confession of Faith, larger and shorter Catechisms, as an orthodox & excellent system of Christian doctrine ... still receive the same, as the Confession of our Faith ... strictly enjoining it on all our members, and probationers for the ministry, that they preach & teach according to the form of sound words in said Confession & Catechisms.¹⁷¹

The authority of the Synod was addressed, stating that ‘when any matter is determined by a major vote, every mem[ber] shall either actively concur with, or passively submit ... [or] peaceab[ly with]draw ... provided always, that this shall be understood to extend only to Determinations, as the body shall judge indispensable in doct[rine] or Presbyterian Gover[n]ment’.¹⁷² It was compromise that incorporated the views of the ‘New Side’ and therefore the Irish Non-Subscribers. Individuals had the right to withdraw. The Synod’s authority was affirmed, though limited to essential matters of doctrine and government, of which the Synod, not the individual, was judge. As to the issue of subscription, the re-united Synod simply stated:

no presbytery shall licence, ordain to the work of the ministry any candidate, untill he give them competent satis[fac]tion as to his learning ... and declare [his] acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, [as] the Confession

166.*ibid*, p. 62.

167.*ibid*, p. 67.

168.*ibid*, p. 81.

169.*ibid*, pp. 53-5.

170.*Minutes*, p. 339.

171.*ibid*, pp. 340-1.

172.*ibid*, p. 341.

of his Faith, and promise subjection to the [Pr]esbyterian plan of gover[n]ment in the Westminster Directory.¹⁷³

The controversy in the Synod of Philadelphia came at a crucial point in the history of the American Church. By dealing with the issues of subscription, and more importantly, of Church power in the early years of its development, these discussions influenced the formation of the Church's constitution as well as much of its later self-understanding. The Irish Church had a strong impact on the development of the Presbyterian Church in America in the modeling of the Adopting Act on the *Pacificum* as well the importation of the Non-Subscriber's views of Church government into the American Church's constitution.

173. *ibid.*

Chapter 6: Subscription in the Presbytery of Charleston: 1722-1732

Coinciding with the debates over subscription in the Synod of Philadelphia, was the inception of the Presbytery of Charleston. Although the Presbytery was independent of those in New England and the Middle Colonies, it too disagreed over the question of requiring its members to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Unlike the Synod of Philadelphia, however, the majority of Charleston Dissenters were not willing to formulate a compromise and remained divided. Their division was most evident in the split within the Independent Meeting House and the exclusion of some of the area's most prominent Dissenting ministers from the Presbytery.

This chapter will review the origins of the Presbytery of Charleston and the debate over subscription that erupted among its ministers. The Presbytery of Charleston has not been given as much attention as the Synod of Philadelphia; therefore, a thorough examination of the Presbytery of Charleston not only helps fill out the picture of the discussions going on throughout Presbyterianism, but also provides a comparison for better understanding the Synod of Philadelphia's actions. The lack of Presbyterial minutes, and the destruction of the earliest records of the Circular Church by hurricane leaves the details of the workings of the Presbytery to be pieced together from indirect sources – primarily the Circular Church Records; the Minutes of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, which supported ministers and corresponded with congregations in the Presbytery; and comments in Wodrow's *Analecta*.

The Darien Colony

Stuart's Town, a Scots colony and refuge for Covenanters, had been established on Port Royal Sound in 1683 under the leadership of Henry Erskine (Lord Cardross) who had been previously imprisoned for his support of conventicles.¹ The colony consisted of only about one hundred and fifty people but it included William Dunlop the elder (1649?-1700),

1. George Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, 1870), pp. 78-86; Alison G. Muir, 'Erskine, Henry, third Lord Cardross (1650-1693)', *ODNB*, 8855.

a licentiate at the time, who served as a major and chaplain in the militia.² Dunlop was the father of the Edinburgh professor who edited *A Collection of Confessions of Faith*.³ Stuart's Town was attacked and burned by the Spanish in 1686, prompting Dunlop and the others to return to Scotland.⁴

Some of the early Presbyterian ministers who served around Charleston include Thomas Barret 'a Dissenter, and probably a Presbyterian' who served in the area around 1685; Joseph Blake, an English Presbyterian who began ministering in South Carolina in 1683; and another minister surnamed Ferguson, who led a group of fellow Irish immigrants around 1684.⁵ Even Francis Makemie had planned on preaching at Ashley River, but harsh weather diverted him north.⁶

While earlier Presbyterian ministers had been preaching and congregations of Presbyterian persuasion evidently existed, it was not until Stobo's efforts that these were organized into a Presbytery. Although not organized beyond the local congregations, South Carolina also had an early Reformed presence from French Huguenot Churches, five of which were established prior to 1706.⁷ After the establishment of the Episcopal Church in South Carolina in 1706, most of these congregations became Anglican, although some individual members joined with the Presbyterians and Congregationalists.⁸ Though enjoying the benefits of legal establishment, Anglicans were a minority of those of European descent. Contemporary estimates put the membership of the established Church at approximately 42.5% whereas Presbyterians (including French Huguenots) made up about 45%.⁹ Even with these numbers it was not until the providential arrival of Archibald Stobo that the Presbytery of Charleston was organized.¹⁰

2. N.R. Needham, 'Dunlop, William (c1649?-1700)' in *DSCH&T*, p. 264.

3. D.F. Wright, 'Dunlop, William (c.1692-1720)', in *ibid*, pp. 264-5.

4. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3 vols (Richmond: John Knox, 1963), vol. I, p. 31.

5. Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia, 1870), pp. 70, 75-6. Howe notes that Blake's brother had served in the Short Parliament of 1640. *FIPC*, p. 61 mentions a Ferguson who served as a schoolmaster at Comber, he was 'evidently a theological student or licentiate' in 1679. This could possibly be the same Ferguson.

6. Letter from Francis Makemie to Increase Mather dated 22 July 1684, quoted in Richard Webster, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Philadelphia, 1857), p. 297.

7. Erskine Clarke, *Our Southern Zion: A History of Calvinism in the South Carolina Low Country, 1690-1990* (Tuscaloosa, 1996), p. 40.

8. *ibid*, p. 2.

9. *ibid*, p. 43.

10. The Presbytery of Charleston is also referred to as the Presbytery of South Carolina, the Presbytery of Province and the Presbytery of James Island.

On 3 September 1700 a hurricane struck the harbour at Charleston, South Carolina, destroying the two remaining ships of an expedition that was Scotland's attempt to establish a colony on the isthmus of Panama.¹¹ Scotland's intent had been to establish a settlement, Caledonia, in the Darien region of eastern Panama which was to serve as base for a transportation route between the Atlantic and the Pacific thereby eliminating the need to sail along the coast of South America.¹² This venture, begun in 1695 under the direction of the newly formed Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, of which Dunlop the elder served as director, was an enormous investment for Scotland both in terms of personnel as well as capital.¹³ It was also a complete disaster suffering from rival companies, difficult weather, and foreign attacks.

The Darien venture was not only notable for the many misfortunes, it was also the first foreign mission for the Church of Scotland as well as the first, and possibly the shortest-lived, Presbytery in the Americas.¹⁴ In 1699, the Commission of the General Assembly appointed four ministers, Francis Borland (c.1666-1722), Alexander Dalgleish (d.1698), Alexander Shields (d.1700) and Archibald Stobo (d.1741), to accompany a second expedition. They were charged with setting up parishes with Sessions and meeting together as the Presbytery of Caledonia after arriving in the settlement established by the first contingent of colonists.¹⁵ They sailed from the Clyde in August of 1699, about a year after the first group had sailed from Leith. Unknown to the second expedition the initial party had abandoned Caledonia having succumbed to disease, hostile Spanish Forces, competing English and Dutch companies, pirates and difficult weather. Only six survivors, who had been too ill for the journey back to Scotland, had remained. The second expedition arrived at Darien just days after the sole remaining ship of the previous fleet returned to Scotland.¹⁶

The second group of colonists fared little better than the first. Within three months of their arrival, news of an imminent attack by the Spanish reached the settlement. After a

11. Howe, pp. 141, 145.

12. For details on the Darien venture see: John Prebble, *The Darien Disaster* (New York, 1969) and N.C. Landsman, 'Nation, Migration, and the Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas, 1600-1800', *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999): 463-75. For its relation to the Anglo-Scottish Union see Christopher A. Whatley, *Bought and Sold for English Gold*, 2nd edn (East Linton, 2001), pp. 48-50.

13. Needham, 'Dunlop, William (c1649?-1700)', p. 264.

14. D.F. Wright, 'Darien Colony' in Cameron, *DSCH&T*, pp. 232-3.

15. Howe, p. 138.

16. Prebble, p. 268.

six-week siege, Caledonia was surrendered and the few remaining Scots, weakened by disease and malnourished from the meager diet afforded by the stand-off left for home.¹⁷ One of the ministers, Alexander Dalgleish, died at sea before reaching Darien.¹⁸ Shields died of fever at Port Royal, Jamaica on the return journey.¹⁹ Borland alone returned to Scotland, settling at Lesmahagow, and publishing his account of the adventure.²⁰

Stobo, who had been on board the *Rising Sun*, was ashore in Charleston when a hurricane struck. As he wrote to Borland:

I doubt not but you have heard how narrowly I escaped the judgement that came upon the Risin' Sun; I and my wife were scarce well gone from her, when wrath seized upon her; and after our departure the storm came so sudden, that none could find the way to her. ... Here I lost my books and all, and have only my life for a prey, with my skin as it were in my teeth.²¹

He had gone into the city when the Dissenting congregation invited him to preach for them, having lost their minister, John Cotton (1640-1699), to yellow fever the previous autumn.²²

Archibald Stobo

Before being commissioned to serve the Darien colony, Stobo received his M.A. from Edinburgh in 1697, probably overlapping the time John Abernethy was studying Divinity there.²³ From the accounts of the those who returned to Scotland, Stobo and the other ministers of the Presbytery of Caledonia were overly zealous in their ministry; leading excessively long prayer services (up to twelve hours) and destroying morale by interpreting the harsh conditions of the jungle as God's punishment.²⁴ For his part, Stobo wrote 'I believe Sodom never declared such impudence in sinning as they'.²⁵ Although not appreciated by his fellow colonists, Stobo's zealous nature did prove beneficial to Presbyterians in

17. Howe, p. 140.

18. *FES*, VII, p. 663.

19. *ibid*, p. 665.

20. *ibid*, III, p. 254; VII, p. 662 and Francis Borland, *Memoirs of Darien* (Glasgow, 1715), it was later republished as *The History of Darien. Giving a short description of that country, an account of the attempts of the Scotch nation to settle a colony in that place, a relation of the many tragical disasters which attended that design* (Glasgow, 1779).

21. Borland, *Memoirs*, pp. 63-4.

22. Howe, p. 141; and George Edwards, *A History of the Independent or Congregational Church of Charleston South Carolina: Commonly Known as the Circular Church*, (Boston, 1947), p. 12. Howe also notes that another tradition holds that an engaged couple in Charleston wanted their service conducted by a Presbyterian minister and called for Stobo upon hearing that he was in harbour.

23. *FES*, VII, p. 665.

24. Howe, pp. 138-40.

25. Borland, *Memoirs*, p. 84.

South Carolina, where he helped to establish congregations at Wilton Bluff, Pon-Pon, James Island and Cainhoy.²⁶

Stobo served the Dissenting congregation in Charleston until 1704.²⁷ The congregation, variously known as the Independent, the White or the Circular Meeting House was founded by a group of Dissenters and Huguenots sometime around 1680.²⁸ Benjamin Pierpoint (1668-1698), a Congregationalist who had graduated from Harvard in 1689 had been called as the first minister in 1691.²⁹ Pierpoint was followed by Hugh Adams in 1698 and John Cotton in 1699.³⁰ Both of these ministers had been New England Congregationalists and Harvard graduates as well, making Stobo's call a significant shift from previous leadership.

After leaving the Independent Meeting House, Stobo served briefly at Wilton Bluff where, in 1706, he had members of his congregation sign a covenant he had drawn up.³¹ Dr. Le Jeau, a missionary from the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts serving in South Carolina at the time, described the document signed by forty-six members of Stobo's congregation as his binding 'them to a Presbyterian congregation for ever in Church discipline, doctrine and government'; vowing that 'christnings, marriages and burials shall be among themselvs, that their minister shall come from Scotland, such as [Stobo] can comply with'; and that those subscribing hold 'to those premises as the revealed truths of Jesus Christ'.³² This covenant was a source of conflict within the congregation; Le Jeau writes that 'however the subscription was not 12 months old but they turned the man out to put in a young man lately come'.³³ Stobo's removal reveals tensions between differing traditions over polity well before the conflict over subscription broke out.

In 1722 the Presbyterian presence was strong enough that Stobo petitioned the South Carolina House of Representatives that 'The Established Church of Scotland should

26. Howe, p. 146 and Clarke, p. 43.

27. David Ramsay, *The History of the Independent or Congregational Church in Charleston, South Carolina, From its Origin till the Year 1814*, (Philadelphia, 1815), p. 11.

28. Edwards, pp. 1-4.

29. Edwards, pp. 4 & 8; Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates: biographical sketches of those who attended Harvard College*, (Boston, 1945), III, p. 429.

30. Edwards, pp. 9-10.

31. Charles Briggs, *American Presbyterianism* (New York, 1885), p. lxvii; Howe, p. 170.

32. Howe, p. 147 and Letter of Dr. Le Jeau to Mr. Stubbs from St. James, Goose Creek, S. C., April 15, 1707, quoted in Briggs, pp. lxvii-lxviii.

33. Letter of Dr. Le Jeau, quoted in Briggs, p. lxviii.

be on the same footing as the Established Church of England'.³⁴ This understanding of the Presbytery as an extension of the Church of Scotland was shared by ministers in the Synod of Philadelphia.³⁵ It is also implicit in the Irish Presbyterians appeal for toleration based on subscription to the Westminster Confession rather than to the Thirty-Nine Articles. In petitioning for the rights of the Presbyterians, it is conspicuous, given the discussions of the time, that Stobo does not argue for their rights as Dissenters. He did not argue for the toleration but rather for recognition of an equally established Church on the basis of the Union Agreement between Scotland and England. This identification of South Carolina Presbyterians as an extension of the established Scottish Church would influence their attitude to confessional subscription.

Beginnings of Presbytery

In addition to the four congregations Stobo established, two other Presbyterian Churches could be found on Edisto and John's Islands.³⁶ Records of the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr show that congregations in South Carolina were requesting that the Church of Scotland provide ministers at least as early as 1703.³⁷ A letter from Wando River, 12 April 1704, signed by several men, indicating an active congregation, requested that the Synod provide a minister and stating that a similar request had been made to the Presbytery of Edinburgh.³⁸ In 1705 the Charleston Church was seeking a colleague for Stobo, explicitly requesting a minister under the discipline of the Church of Scotland, writing that they were 'very desirous of having a Presbyterian minister rather from Scotland than any where else that they may be under the inspection of that Church'.³⁹ The letter reported that some of the members of Stobo's 'society' were as far as 100 miles away.⁴⁰ A 1707 letter to the Presbytery of Edinburgh reported 'three Presbyterian congregations two of which is supplied by two Irish young men of Scots Education sent from the min-rs of London'.⁴¹ In

34. Briggs, p. 233.

35. NLS, Wod.Qu XXII, no. 115.

36. Clarke, p. 43.

37. NAS CH 1/2/24/2/3

38. CH 1/2/24/1/2 fols. 110, 112.

39. CH 1/2/24/2/3 fol. 224r.

40. *ibid*, fol. 224v.

41. CH 1/2/27/3 fol. 226r.

1713, the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, with Stobo's involvement, sent John Squyre who was 'willing to undertake the care of [their] soules' to James Island.⁴²

Squyre's letters sent back illuminate something of the situation in Charleston. On 4 April 1715 he reported that he had been 'received by some of the people of James Island' and had met the three Presbyterian ministers, one of whom had 'come in from England not long before'.⁴³ He continued to report the congregational divisions in both Stobo's meeting house and his own. In 1715 attacks from Native Americans led many in Squyre's congregation to leave their settlement after which he returned to Scotland.

Cotton Mather wrote to a friend in Glasgow in 1715 praising the work of some 'worthy Scottish ministers' in the Charleston area.⁴⁴ Besides Stobo, these ministers included William Livingston (d. 1724) and William Pollock. Livingston, who had served the Independent Meeting House since 1704 graduated from Edinburgh in 1701.⁴⁵ William Pollock the minister at James Island also served at this time and apparently had his hearers sign a covenant similar to Stobo's 'by which they bound themselves never to return to the communion of the Church of England'.⁴⁶ He had received his M.A. from Edinburgh in 1699 and received financial assistance from the Presbyterian Fund in London.⁴⁷ The Presbytery of Glasgow actively recruited and ordained ministers to serve in South Carolina, which they considered a mission of the Church of Scotland, but the difficulties of serving the area and insufficient support from their congregations severely limited the work.⁴⁸

The convergence of the English and Scottish traditions in Charleston brought tensions even before a Presbytery was formed. A 1710 letter from to the Secretary of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts described conditions in Charleston at the time. William Livingston was on a trip to 'Great Britain or Ireland'.⁴⁹ Johnston wrote that Taylor, the minister supplying the pulpit during Livingston's absence, was 'a person of a

42. CH 1/2/34/3 fol. 287.

43. CH 1/2/35 fol. 189.

44. Howe, p. 175.

45. Ramsay, p. 11. William Livingston, who is referred to in a 1750 letter as Irish is listed in the *FES*, VII, p. 664, but he is not listed in the *FAPC*. George Edwards, presumably following Howe states that Livingston was Irish in *A History of the Independent or Congregational Church of Charleston South Carolina* (Boston, 1947), p. 16. Ramsay does not give an origin but does refer to him as a Presbyterian, p. 7.

46. Commissioner Johnston letter to the Secretary of the S.P.G., July 5, 1720, quoted in Briggs, lxix.

47. *FES*, VII, p. 665.

48. CH2/464/3/121, 124, 165, 171, 175, 179

49. Briggs, lxix.

very peaceable temper' who disapproved 'of that restless and factious spirit' the Scottish ministers had. Johnston further wrote that he 'greatly condemns two country preachers of the same stamp [Stobo and Pollock], who on all occasions foment and stir up the people to faction and sedition ... Mr. Taylor says that place can never be easy or quiet, where there is a Scotch Presbyterian minister'. Johnston and Taylor hoped to have English Presbyterians assert authority in Charleston:

Mr. Taylor thinks, and so do I too, that the Presbyterian ministers in London ought to be acquainted with the behaviour of these men and that they do henceforward assert their right of sending English ministers to this province, as often as there shall be occasion, it being an English colony originally before the Union Act, and it being unreasonable to subject the Presbyterian interest and cause in this province to the Presbyterain government in Scotland, which is the thing the Scotch Dissenting ministers here are driving at, with all their might.⁵⁰

That a SPG Commissioner and a Dissenter were both in agreement in their opposition to Church of Scotland ministers shows the strength of the conflict between the two partners in the Union. In Charleston at least, the subscription controversy was part of a larger conflict between nationalities and the form of polity and subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith would come to serve as a symbol of the Church of Scotland. This was not simple ethnic prejudice or sentimentality; if the colonists could claim to be a constituent of the established Church they could press a claim for rights beyond toleration granted to Dissenters. Johnston was casting the controversy as one of jurisdiction. His encouragement for the London Dissenters to send ministers to Charleston was a strategy to undermine the work of a rival established Church by attempting to keep Charleston with the Presbyterians Dissenters. This conflict can be seen in one of the letters sent to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr requesting a minister as they reported that the 'local Assembly 'commonly cal'd the Parliament' begin mett at Charelstown in Dec last did make ane Act against the Decenters to the Church of England' and that there was a move to require a Sacramental test in order to sit in the South Carolina Assembly.⁵¹

50. *ibid.*

51. CH 1/2/24/2/3 fol. 225.

Despite the tensions, in late 1722 or early 1723 the ministers in the Charleston area met together as a Presbytery.⁵² The Presbyterian congregations were soon joined by ministers from at least three Congregational Churches.

Shortly after his ordination in 1724, Nathaniel Bassett (1702-1738), who followed Livingston as minister of the Independent Meeting House, associated with the newly formed Presbytery. Bassett, who had recently received his M.A. from Harvard, had been ordained in Boston by four leading Congregationalist ministers: Cotton Mather (1663-1729), Benjamin Colman (1673-1747), Nathaniel Appleton (1693-1784) and William Cooper (1694-1743)⁵³. Bassett's certificate of ordination refers to the Meeting House in Charleston as 'the Presbyterian Church of Christ in Charleston' and states that they had written to these ministers in Boston in order to obtain a 'Presbyterian ordained pastor'. Obviously, they understood 'Presbyterian' as simply a group of presbyters instead of a formal court, as was also the practice of English and southern Irish Presbyterians. Many Congregationalist Churches at this time had adopted the method of ordination by fellow ministers as opposed to congregational elders or lay representatives appointed for the task.⁵⁴ A letter from the Independent Meeting House dated 1 March 1750 describes their situation:

Upwards of sixty years ago a Church, consisting of English and Scotch Dissenters, settled here, and had its ministers from New England. ... About fifty years since a minister [Stobo], who as born and educated in Scotland, happening (in his travels) to come into the province, was made pastor of the Church, and being strongly attached to the Presbyterian form of government, some uneasiness arose and continued in the congregation even through the whole time of his successor [Livingston], who as a minister from Ireland, and proved more moderate in respect to Church government. After the death of the latter an invitation was sent to New England, whence we had our next minister [Bassett], who being also a moderate man (though he associated with the ministers of, and sat in, Presbytery).⁵⁵

52. Clarke dates the first meeting 'Sometime before 1728 – perhaps as early as 1722'; Little sets it 'around 1727' and writes that it is 'a small mystery. Both of these works follow Howe who stated that 'it is not probably that this Presbytery ... existed much earlier than 1728'. Briggs writing after Howe, but who is not referenced by Clarke or Little dates the first meeting in 1722-3, based on several primary sources. Briggs also convincingly shows why Hewatt, who appears to be Howe's authority, was incorrect. Clarke, p. 45; Thomas J. Little, 'The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Revivalism in South Carolina, 1700-1740', *Church History*, 75, 4, (2006), 768-808, p. 792; Howe, p. 190; Briggs, pp. 222-3. Briggs cites *Letter Book S. P. G.*, Vol. XV, p. 59., Hewatt, *Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia*, Vol. II, (1779), p. 52., NLS, MS Wod.Lett.Qu, XXII, no. 124.

53. Shipton, VI, pp. 289-293 and Bassett's 'Ordination Certificate' quoted in Briggs, pp. lxxix-xc.

54. J. William T. Youngs, Jr., 'Congregational Clericalism: New England Ordinations before the Great Awakening', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 31, No. 3, (1974), pp. 481-490, (p. 483).

55. South Carolina Historical Society, *Circular Congregational Church (Charleston, S.C.). Records, 1732-Register of the Corporation*, Vol. 1 quoted in Howe, p. 189.

The appeal to New England shows the ‘uneasiness’ in the congregation and the reaction of some against the strict Presbyterianism of Stobo. Stobo had left amidst complaints of his zealous attempts at recreating an order and discipline modeled on the Church of Scotland. A September 1705 letter records that he had attempted to put the congregation on a ‘solid Presbyterian foundation’.⁵⁶ Stobo complained that none would accept Church censure and ‘every one [was] walking according to his own ways’.⁵⁷ He gave them a year to amend their ways or to find another minister; they did not comply and following a sacrament full of ‘contentions & strife’, Stobo left.⁵⁸ Conflict continued as Livingston later received members of Stobo’s congregation and Stobo intruded into Livingston’s.⁵⁹ The congregation consciously moved away from Stobo’s stringent Presbyterianism; when the congregation sought an assistant for Livingston they sent a letter to the Presbyterian Fund Board in London.⁶⁰ The Board did not respond, which was probably why they sent to Boston following Livingston’s death, but it is interesting that they do not appear to have sought a minister from Scotland or Ireland, or even from the Synod of Philadelphia

Besides the Independent Meeting House, there were two other Congregationalist groups that would be associated with the Presbytery of Charleston – Dorchester and Wapetaw.⁶¹ Dorchester had been established by Joseph Lord, who had been ordained to serve a congregation that had been gathered to go to South Carolina from New England.⁶² Wapetaw was an Independent congregation on the Wando Neck not far from Cainhoy, a congregation of Presbyterians, established by Stobo among New Englanders.⁶³

Given the mixture of traditions the terms ‘Presbytery’ and ‘Presbyterian’ was flexible and the relationships between various Presbyterian and Independent bodies were quite fluid. While some congregations might have had a clear, uniform ecclesiology, others would have been composed of Dissenters with different convictions and persuasions. Dissenters with varied opinions concerning baptism or polity would still have more in com-

56. CH 1/2/24/2/3 fol. 226r.

57. *ibid.*

58. *ibid.*, fol. 226.

59. CH 1/2/35 fol. 189.

60. Briggs, p. 249.

61. Clarke, p. 42.

62. Edwards, pp. 13-14.

63. Howe, p. 185 and Clarke, p. 43.

mon than with the established Church. Moreover, presumably due to the remote location, some would also have members of the Church attend services.⁶⁴ One Glasgow born minister, William Maxwell (ord. 1724) described his congregation in a letter to Principal Stirling as consisting not only Presbyterians, but also of Episcopalians and Baptists.⁶⁵ And, like the Independent Meeting House in Charleston, it was not at all unusual for ministers of different backgrounds and convictions to serve the same congregation. Alexander Hewat, who wrote one of the earliest histories of South Carolina explained that this Presbytery followed the doctrines, worship and polity of the Church of Scotland ‘as closely as their local circumstances would admit’.⁶⁶ The lack of ministers, the distance between congregations and the absence of backing from civil authority, both the hierarchy of courts and administration of discipline would be difficult to implement. As the Independent Church admitted, ‘the Presbyterian form of government as exercised in the Church of Scotland is neither practicable in England nor Carolina, where Episcopacy is the only Church government established by law’.⁶⁷ Due to the absence of records, it is difficult to get a clear understanding of how the Presbytery operated, though the brief references in publications show that the ministers preached in rotation and that the meetings must have been fairly frequent, possibly monthly. At the same time, considering the blend of traditions, the exact nature of the Presbytery was in the process of being negotiated. The body included ministers from the Church of Scotland, New England Congregationalism and some from an English Presbyterian background representing congregations mixed of these traditions as well as Hungenot and even Anabaptists. Of course, none of these represented a single tradition, ‘Presbyterians were drawn thither from many sources – England, Wales, Scotland, the north of Ireland, Holland, France, Switzerland, and Italy’.⁶⁸ Moreover, the causes of immigration would shape views of ecclesiology; early communities of Scots exiled to the area during the covenanters ‘Killing Times’ would presumably have a different approach to polity than those arriving after the Presbyterian Settlement, or after the Union.⁶⁹ Richard

64. One South Carolina minister reported he had members as far as twenty-two miles away in *Analecta*, IV, p. 174.

65. Wod.Oct XXII, no. 124.

66. Hewat, II, p. 53.

67. Circular Congregational Church (Charleston, S.C.) Records, quoted in Howe, p. 263.

68. E.T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, I, p. 29.

69. D. Steveson and D.C. Lachman, ‘Killing Times’, *DSCH&T*, p. 458.

Davis has rightly called the Presbytery of Charleston an ‘amalgamation, never really fusion, of Huguenot-Independent-Presbyterian elements’.⁷⁰

It was during the early years of negotiating the nature of the Presbytery that the debates about confessional subscription divided the group. As with the Synod of Philadelphia, one of the key reasons for the debate seems to have been that the different backgrounds brought different notions of what a Presbyterian authority was to be.⁷¹

Non-Subscription in Charleston

Sometime before Bassett associated with the Presbytery, probably in 1724 William Porter, the minister of the Wappetaw Church, and Hugh Fisher (d.1734), the Irish-born minister of the Dorchester congregation, began discussing the issue of subscription, evidently introduced through publications related to the Exeter and Salters’ Hall debates.⁷²

Hugh Fisher was the son of Joshua Fisher (d.1706), the minister at Donaghmore, Co. Donegal.⁷³ He had been ordained by the Presbytery of Armagh in 1715 to serve in America after being invited by Francis Makemie’s successor in Maryland, John Henry (d.1717).⁷⁴ Henry, who had been ordained by the Presbytery of Dublin, had been a member of the Presbytery of Philadelphia since 1710.⁷⁵ That a Dublin ordained minister in the Synod of Philadelphia would invite a licentiate from the Synod of Ulster to serve a Congregationalist Church in South Carolina demonstrates the connections and the porous relationships among these bodies.

Porter had loaned Fisher a book and requested his response.⁷⁶ Although the title of the book is not given it was almost certainly by an English Non-Subscriber. Fisher shows a solid knowledge of the Salters’ Hall debates especially the Trinitarian debates around the

70. Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South 1585-1763*, 3 vols. (Knoxville, 1978), II, p. 685.

71. See Cornman, *Caterpillars and Newfangled Religion* and Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*.

72. Hugh Fisher, *The Divine Right of Private Judgment, Set in a True Light. A reply, to the Reverend Mr. Josiah Smith’s answer to a postscript annex’d to a sermon, entituled, A Preservative from Damnable Errors, in the Uncion of the Holy One. Together with, remarks on the Reverend Mr. Nathan Bassett’s appendix* (Boston, 1731), p. 96.

73. *FAPC*, p. 101. Inexplicably, Erskine Clarke has claimed that he was a minister of the Church of Scotland, p.46. Both Slosser and Davis also state that he was from Scotland, neither citing an authority. G. J. Slosser, *They Seek a Country: The American Presbyterians, Some Aspects* (New York, 1955), p. 17 and Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South*, II, p. 764.

74. *FIPC*, p. 9.

75. Webster, pp. 325-6 and *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America 1706-1788*, ed. by Guy S. Klett (Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 10-11.

76. Fisher, *The Divine Right set in a True Light*, p. 23.

Exeter Assembly but makes no explicit mention of the controversy in the Synod of Ulster or the Presbytery of Philadelphia, although he does note that the controversy has bothered several Churches.⁷⁷ Fisher writes that he read Hoadly's *An answer to the representation drawn up by the Committee of the Lower-House of Convocation concerning several dangerous positions and doctrines* (London, 1718) as well as others, stating that 'he was not the only author I considered on that side'.⁷⁸ Fisher wrote a response against the book Porter had loaned him and shared it with Bassett soon after the latter had applied to be a member of the Presbytery, and 'declared himself, ready to subscribe the Westminster Confession, which [the Presbytery] then insisted on, as a term of ministerial Communion'.⁷⁹ Bassett and Porter took a stand against subscribing and, according to Fisher, 'contended earnestly, for the new principles'.⁸⁰

The Non-Subscribing party gained strength with the arrival of the Charleston born, Harvard graduate Josiah Smith (1704-1781).⁸¹ Shortly after he was born his family had moved to Bermuda. His father, also a South Carolina native, was a graduate of Edinburgh University, but family in Boston persuaded him to send his son to Harvard where Smith graduated in 1725.⁸² Upon his return to Bermuda, the congregation, desiring to call him to work as a colleague with their current pastor, sent him back to Boston for ordination. On 11 July 1726 Josiah Smith was ordained by a group of ministers including Benjamin Colman and Cotton Mather, who had also ordained Nathaniel Bassett.⁸³ After a hurricane struck Bermuda, Smith made his way back to South Carolina, where, in 1727, he began to serve the congregation at Cainho, about twelve miles from Charleston.⁸⁴ He kept correspondence with Colman and shared strong ties with his fellow Harvard alumnus Bassett, who became his brother-in-law in 1731.⁸⁵ Smith's talents quickly brought him to the forefront of the debate; Fisher accused Smith of 'managing the cause of the Non-Subscribers,

77. Fisher, *A Preservation from Damnable Errors* (N.L., 1730), p. 31.

78. Fisher, *The Divine Right Set in a True Light*, pp. 97-8.

79. *ibid.*, p. 97.

80. *ibid.*, p. 97.

81. Shipton, VII, pp. 569-585.

82. *ibid.*, p. 569.

83. Josiah Smith, *A Discourse Delivered at Boston, on July 11. 1726. Then occasion'd by the author's ordination. And now published at the request of several gentlemen, who were present at the delivery of it* (Boston, 1726), p. iv. and Davis pp. 763-4.

84. Shipton, VII, p. 570-1.

85. *ibid.*, VI, p. 292.

almost from the time of his coming among us'.⁸⁶ At one meeting of Presbytery, Fisher privately gave Smith a paper 'on the Principals of Modern Liberty' that he had written and proposed a conference to discuss the issue.⁸⁷ From Smith's description of it, the piece must have been the basis of the postscript later attached to Fisher's *Preservation from Damnable Errors*.

The discussions remained private until Bassett preached a sermon at a meeting of Presbytery that contained the following paragraph:

[Ministers] must teach with meekness & humility, as fallible men. They must not dictate or impose their own interpretations or sense of Scripture on their hearers, for the rule of faith, and practice, in controverted and disputable points. — They must so teach as to leave men to, as every man undoubtedly has the right of private judgement; — and not arrogantly impose what we advance ... as equal with the inspired writings.⁸⁸

This did not cause concern among the other ministers in the Presbytery. Fisher however, due to the private discussions he had had with Porter and Bassett, took the sermon as having 'advanc'd the new vamt right of private judgement' and met the perceived challenge with a sermon of his own.⁸⁹ Sometime in 1728, or possibly as late as February 1729, Fisher preached a sermon, *A Preservation from Damnable Error*, before the Presbytery bringing the debates into the open.⁹⁰ *A Preservation* was not published until after Smith's response in 1730, and although it had been altered from the original preached message, the basic line of argument was conserved. It is interesting that although nothing in the Charleston debates explicitly mentions the Synod of Philadelphia, Fisher and Smith's publications coincide with the debates surrounding that Synod's Adopting Act.⁹¹

A Preservation from Damnable Errors

Taking his text from I John 2.20, 'But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things', Fisher contends that those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit have been promised an assurance in fundamental doctrines and consequently the authority to demand that ministers state their adherence to these doctrines. The basis of our

86. Fisher, *The Divine Right set in a true light*, p. 9.

87. *ibid* and Smith, *The Divine Right of Private Judgement Vindicated* (Boston, 1730), p. 21.

88. Josiah Smith, *The Divine Right of Private Judgement Vindicated*, pp. 54-5.

89. Fisher, *A Preservation from Damnable Errors* (N.L., 1730), p. 32.

90. According to the title page, Smith's response was preached 5 March 1728/9.

91. John Thomson presented his overture calling for subscription to the Synod of Philadelphia at the 1728 meeting; both the *Overture* with additional arguments and Jonathan Dickinson's *Remarks upon a Discourse intituled an Overture* were published in 1729. The Synod approved the Adopting Act at their September 1729 meeting, see *Minutes of the Presbyterian Church in America*, pp. 103-4.

judgment, he argues, should not be the sincerity of belief, but rather the truth of the opinions held since Paul teaches that doctrines, not the intent, are to be judged.⁹² The true Church can take comfort in that they have been promised certainty in knowing true doctrine. Those who are truly converted, and only they, have a promise of the ‘unction of the Spirit’ which gives unfailing knowledge to distinguish the gospel from false teaching.⁹³ As Fisher writes, ‘all truly gracious persons have the knowledge, of the whole substance of Gospel Truths, by a special work of the Spirit; tho’ they may disagree among themselves, in lesser things which are appendages to it’.⁹⁴ In contrast with the conceptions of Non-Subscribers such as John Abernethy, Fisher’s epistemology is founded on a doctrine of total depravity that requires supernatural revelation of the Holy Spirit, not only for saving faith, but also for an understanding of basic teachings. He writes that ‘all truly gracious persons, know divine truths through the Spirit’ and that this ‘is not a common, but a special work’.⁹⁵ Fisher is aware of this fundamental difference, and later makes it the corner stone of his argument against Non-Subscription.⁹⁶

In making such a bold claim, Fisher realizes that he is vulnerable to being charged with ‘enthusiasm’ on the one hand and ‘popery’ on the other. While this work is supernatural, it is not, Fisher contends, ‘enthusiasm’. He distinguishes his position from enthusiasm by arguing that the revelation a believer receives through the Holy Spirit is mediated through the Scriptures and human faculties of understanding.⁹⁷ Enthusiasm, on the other hand, is direct, unmediated revelation. This bypassing of the Bible and human reason, Fisher calls ‘delusory dreams of phanatical persons’ and contrary to Scripture.⁹⁸

Seeking to differentiate his position from Roman Catholic doctrine, Fisher argues that in calling for adherence to a confession, the Church is appealing to knowledge derived from the Spirit’s illumination of reason in understanding the Scriptures, not simply tradition.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the promise of the knowledge granted through the ‘unction of the

92. Fisher, *Preservation*, p. 5.

93. *ibid*, pp. 6-7.

94. *ibid*, p. 8.

95. *ibid*, pp. 8-9, emphasis mine.

96. *ibid*, pp. 23 ff.

97. *ibid*, p. 14.

98. *ibid*, p. 14.

99. *ibid*, p. 23.

Holy one' is limited in its extent. There is no promise of certain knowledge on all issues, only on those touching Fundamental Articles.¹⁰⁰ He enumerates these as the 'doctrine of God's grace in chusing [sic]; of Christ's merit, in redeeming, and of the Holy Spirit in sanctifying'.¹⁰¹ Fisher acknowledges that people can have a saving knowledge, or be a true believer with certainty on fundamental matters, while holding erroneous beliefs on other matters. There can be impure but true Churches, as long as they hold to the beliefs common to all true Churches and true Christians.¹⁰² While his definition of enthusiasm helps to distance him from the charge, his understanding of Church's promised guidance of the Holy Spirit is remarkably similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the *magisterium*.

In limiting the scope of certain knowledge, Fisher says that it is only to 'Fundamental Articles'. Both Subscribers and Non-Subscribers agreed, at least in principle, with the concept of Fundamental Articles even though they might disagree with which specific articles were to be considered fundamental.

Fisher asserts that all true Churches share a common creed and that it is only proper to share communion with those who hold the common faith of the true Church; to say otherwise is to 'plead for a communion between light and darkness'.¹⁰³ It is therefore legitimate for an ecclesiastical body to require proof of membership in the true Church by insisting on assent to this common creed. The creedal statement is but a 'badge of membership' of that society and 'a declaration, of the sense, wherein he understands the Scripture'.¹⁰⁴ Fisher questions how subscribing could be construed as imposition, 'what hardship can it be for a man to ... give his assent, to what he really, and firmly believes'.¹⁰⁵ Like William Dunlop, Fisher argues that, rather than it being an imposition on ministers to require assent to the beliefs held in common to the Church, it is an 'imposition on the Church' for someone to claim privileges without a suitable profession of faith.¹⁰⁶

100. *ibid*, p. 16.

101. *ibid*, p. 16.

102. *ibid*, p. 15

103. Fisher, *Preservation*, pp. 20-1.

104. *ibid*, p. 21.

105. *ibid*.

106. *ibid*, p. 21, cf. William Dunlop, *A preface to an Edition of the Westminster Confession*, p. 99.

The main opposition to confessions, Fisher believed, came from those who relied on natural reason as the source of knowledge – namely Arminians.¹⁰⁷ He claimed that the rationalism of the Arminians as well as ‘those, who pretend to be for the Doctrines of Grace, and yet fall in with the Arminians’, presumably the ‘middle-way Calvinists’ such as Baxter, denies the work of the Spirit in the role of understanding Scripture, denouncing it as ‘enthusiasm’. If believers are left with their ‘natural powers alone’ then faith can never be more than ‘assent upon probability to divine things’; every doctrine ‘may possibly be a mistake’.¹⁰⁸ If the Church cannot claim certainty of the most basic doctrines then anything may be questioned. This, he contends, is the basis of the plea for liberty of conscience. The Non-Subscriber’s call for a freedom unimaginable to Fisher, the ‘right of every man, to think as he sees cause ... about all principles of reveal’d religion’.¹⁰⁹

Fisher was correct in seeing a root cause in the attack on confessional subscription in the epistemology of ‘rational’ Arminianism.¹¹⁰ This accurately describes, for example, John Abernethy who did not appear to have a difficulty with the doctrines of election or limited atonement, but rather held a stronger belief in the capacities of human reason and freedom than traditional Calvinism would allow. He saw the ramifications this could have for Calvinist orthodoxy. If the work of the Spirit in illumination was questioned, His work in election could be as well. Fisher believed that orthodox Calvinism would ultimately be untenable for anyone who held a view of reason such as the one that underpinned the arguments against creeds. The denial of the Spirit’s supernatural work in illuminating corrupt reason is inconsistent with upholding a need for grace in other areas such as regeneration or sanctification.¹¹¹

Fisher’s analysis of the rationalism behind Non-Subscription was astute. However the positive argument for the authority of the Church presented in *A Preservation from Damnable Errors* is circular. The ‘true’ Church has infallible knowledge of Fundamental

107. Fisher, *Preservation*, p. 23.

108. *ibid.*

109. *ibid.*

110. Alan P. Sell, *Dissenting Thought and the Life of the Churches: Studies in an English Tradition* (San Francisco, 1989), p. 118-9. Sell distinguishes rationalistic Arminianism ‘the application of unfettered reason to Scripture’ from evangelical Arminianism ‘a warmly missionary stance which freely offered the gospel to all’.

111. Fisher, *Preservation*, p. 24.

Articles, but this defines the ‘true’ Church as those who have accepted those articles. He writes that ‘any who persist, in denying any of the great truths of the Gospel, relating to the way of salvation, are void of grace, and have not the Spirit of God’ and ‘by their errors, they [have] cut themselves off from the Church, and shewn, that they never were really of it’.¹¹²

Despite the weakness of his reasoning and his unconvincing effort to distinguish his understanding of the ‘unction of the Holy One’ from Roman Catholic claims, Fisher took the argument in a new direction. He was familiar with events and arguments in England and elsewhere. He references Hoadly, Locke and Peirce.¹¹³ While not explicitly mentioning writers from Ireland, Philadelphia or Switzerland, he does refer to Non-Subscription as ‘a Controversy, that has, of late years, disturb’d and inflam’d several Churches’.¹¹⁴ He alludes to the Irish debates when he quotes Romans 14.5, the textual basis of Abernethy's *Religious Obedience Founded on Personal Persuasion*.¹¹⁵ Fisher also quotes from *A Defence of the Scripture as the Only Standard of Faith* by ‘that noted Non-Subscriber, the author of the *Occasional Paper*’.¹¹⁶ Since *A Defence of the Scripture* had been published in response to Dunlop’s *Preface*, Fisher would have been familiar at least with those basic arguments even if he had not read the work itself. It would also be reasonable to assume that most, if not all of the works Fisher references were familiar to Smith, Bassett and Porter as well since they mentioned sharing books related to the issue.¹¹⁷

One of the vulnerabilities of the previous arguments presented by the Subscriptionists was their hesitation to make a strong claim to Church authority. To simply say the Church had the right to demand adherence to a creed without showing Scriptural evidence for such a requirement would destroy the justification for Dissent. Dunlop, in his *Preface*, had tried to make a claim for authority, but his view of the rights of a Church were based

112. *ibid*, p. 18.

113. *ibid*, p. 39.

114. *ibid*, p. 31.

115. *ibid*, p. 48.

116. *ibid*, p. 44, referring to *A Defence of the Scripture as the Only Standard of Faith*.

117. Fisher, *The Divine Right Set in a True Light*, p. 97.

on a contractual understanding of the rights of a society to define its own membership.

Fisher blatantly claims an authority based on a divine promise of infallible knowledge.¹¹⁸

Shortly after Fisher preached *A Preservation*, Josiah Smith returned the manuscript he had been loaned along with a letter announcing his intention of preaching on the other side of the controversy.¹¹⁹ Smith wrote:

I think you have done but little hurt to the Bishop [i.e. Hoadly], and much less have you reach'd the cause of liberty, thro' his sides ... However, as you have taken the freedom, to make your notions of private judgement, publick, ... I shall with your leave, ... use the same freedom from the same pulpit' ... still subscribing my self, tho' a Non-Subscriber, your affectionate brother.¹²⁰

The Divine Right of Private Judgement

Smith preached *Humane Impositions Proved Unscriptural, or the Divine Right of Private Judgement* before the Presbytery on 5 March 1729; it was in print soon afterwards. In the preface, he explained that his reason for publishing it was that he had been portrayed as 'preaching down' the Westminster Confession.¹²¹ Smith believed that Fisher's sermon had promoted the 'power of imposition, in matters of pure speculation' and denied 'a liberty in people to judge for themselves'.¹²² He summarized Fisher's sermon as having inferred infallibility from the unction of the Holy One and claimed a power of imposition as a necessary consequence of this infallibility. This doctrine, Smith took as 'scarcely reconcilable with Protestant and Reforming principles' and desired through his sermon 'to beget in my hearers the highest veneration for the Holy Scriptures as the only rule of decision in all debates of a religious nature'.¹²³ Preaching from Jesus' prayer in John 17.8, 'For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me', Smith argues for the sufficiency of Scripture. He writes that Jesus' instructions were both divine – 'whatever Christ revealed was given him of the Father' – as well as complete 'whatever was given Him of the Father, that He revealed'.¹²⁴ Since Jesus was charged with conveying the Gospel, then the

118. *ibid.*, p. 20.

119. Josiah Smith, *Humane Impositions Proved Unscriptural, or, The Divine Right of Private Judgment. A sermon preached at the opening of Presbytery in Charlestown in the province of South Carolina, March 5th. 1728,9. By Josiah Smith, M.A. Now Pastor of the Dissenting Church at Cainhoy* (Boston, 1729), p. 21.

120. *ibid.*, p. 21, emphasis Smith's.

121. *ibid.*, p. iii.

122. *ibid.*, p. ii.

123. *ibid.*, pp. ii-iii.

124. *ibid.*, p. 2.

message we have been given in the Scriptures is sufficient and nothing fundamental has been omitted or reserved.¹²⁵ Ministers are therefore not given authority to add anything to the plain requirement of the Bible, since nothing necessary to the Christian faith has been excluded from the revelation.¹²⁶ Furthermore, if it is claimed that all who are given the anointing of the Holy Spirit, that is all of the redeemed, have infallible knowledge, then each individual Christian would have as much right to declare truth as the greatest assembly, setting an individual equal to a Synod.¹²⁷ This, as Fisher himself admitted, was a concern shared by others at Presbytery when the sermon was first preached; they thought that he ‘made every believer infallible, and a Pope’.¹²⁸

Smith acknowledged that synods and councils are useful ‘as they preserve a mutual agreement among pastors, and are of vast service in the illustration of Scripture’.¹²⁹ He also praised the Westminster Confession as ‘an excellent composure’.¹³⁰ Yet he denies they have an authority in addition to the Bible, ‘I would ever make the Scripture my supreme rule’, Smith wrote, ‘and my reason the eye to direct me by it’.¹³¹

Like Fisher, Smith managed to avoid the weaknesses of previous controversies. One of the primary failures of the Irish Non-Subscribers was they never convinced their colleagues and especially the laity of their orthodoxy. While they maintained that Church judicatories should hold ministers to confessing agreement with Fundamental Articles, they never enumerated what they believed these Fundamental Articles to be. Conversely, Smith stated his beliefs without hesitation. In stating the first point of his argument, that Christ had been given the revelation by God the Father, he immediately avoids any allegation of Subordinationism by saying that this does not ‘imply any inferiority’ of Christ to the Father.¹³²

Smith’s argument was brief, logical and well reasoned from the Scriptures, yet it failed to persuade Fisher who responded to it by publishing *A Preservation from Damnable*

125. *ibid*, pp. 5-6.

126. *ibid*, pp. 7-8.

127. *ibid*, p. 9.

128. Fisher, *Preservation*, p. 43.

129. Smith, *Humane impositions*, p. 11.

130. *ibid*, p. 11.

131. Smith, *Divine Right of Private Judgement*, p. 11.

132. Smith, *Humane impositions*, p. 2.

Error. To this, he attached a postscript that gave a rebuttal to Smith's position. Since the work deals with several issues beyond the scope of Smith's sermon, it was probably based on the manuscript he had previously written and loaned to Smith.¹³³

The main point of Fisher's postscript is that the root of the Non-Subscription is skepticism. He correctly saw that the essential difference between the two sides was one of epistemology and perceptively traced the train of thought of what he termed 'bare fact'd scepticism, in matters of religion' to Episcopius, Locke, and Hoadly.¹³⁴

Fisher's argument is that if one cannot be certain of religious truths then the possibility of other opinions is allowed even in the most basic Christians doctrines. This leads to a demand for a 'right of private judgement'.¹³⁵ It also makes truth something 'no man can know ... beyond a possibility of mistake'.¹³⁶ Fisher argues that this would lead to a questioning of even the most fundamental dogma such as the doctrines of the inspiration of Scripture, of the Trinity and of the person and work of Christ.¹³⁷ Further, this skepticism would necessarily redefine faith. Instead of being an 'operation of God' and a fruit 'of the Spirit', faith that does not depend on certain truth must be understood as the work of the believer, that is a fallible creature which might be mistaken and lead one astray.¹³⁸

Having claimed that the root of Non-Subscription is skepticism, he argues that having certainty in fundamentals is not to claim infallible knowledge in all things. Seeing no alternative but absolute certainty or skepticism, Fisher claims that Smith, like the Arminians, would make all matters pure speculation rather than divine revelation.¹³⁹ Consequently, if the content of faith can never be certainly known, then the object of piety cannot be knowledge of indubitable truths but moral living and sincerity of belief. In other words, the basis of Christianity is no longer faith in Christ, but the good deeds of the Christian; it is no longer focused on the object of belief but the sincerity of the believer. Faith and morality become the same.¹⁴⁰

133. Fisher, *The Divine Right Set in a True Light*, p. 9.

134. Fisher, *Preservation*, p. 39.

135. *ibid.*

136. *ibid.*, p. 41.

137. *ibid.*

138. *ibid.*

139. *ibid.*, p. 44.

140. *ibid.*, pp. 45-7.

Fisher contends that this skepticism, by making the rights of one's conscience absolute, sabotages legitimate authority. The Non-Subscribers, he claims, are 'as much against the authority of God himself, speaking in Scripture ... as they are, against the ministerial authority of the Church'.¹⁴¹ While accepting that individual Christians have a right to read Scriptures and make judgements based on their understanding, 'their private judgement of discerning, is only for their private use; and is not, for declaring any thing to others'.¹⁴² This is distinguished from 'faithful ministers' who 'are capable of an authority to determine articles of faith, and to require assent to them'.¹⁴³ Ministers do not exercise 'meer humane authority' as the Non-Subscribers assume, but 'the authority of Christ himself, vested in his ambassadors; an authority fit to make the boldest sinner tremble'.¹⁴⁴ This authority, however, is not exercised by force or constraint, but rather through showing in the Scriptures what is to be believed and obeyed.¹⁴⁵ Fisher rejects the notion that it can be considered imposition to require 'any true Christian' to give assent to a 'creed, consisting of the fundamentals of Christianity'.¹⁴⁶

Fisher admits that there is no Scriptural mandate as to a method of how one should give assent to the Bible.¹⁴⁷ Subscription is simply a particular method of fulfilling a Biblically ordained command.¹⁴⁸ Signing a confessional statement forces someone to explain their understanding of the words of Scripture. The Non-Subscribers, in allowing appeal only the express words of Scripture allow those words to have different interpretations.¹⁴⁹ Fisher seems to allow other possible means of giving assent to Scripture, and consistent with Reformed views of confessions, he does not claim a single confession is authoritative.¹⁵⁰ Finally, against the persistent charge that requiring subscription to a creed undermines the authority of Scripture, he argues that it does not damage the authority of Scripture to recognize that creeds and the Bible have different purposes.¹⁵¹

141. *ibid*, p. 57.

142. *ibid*, p. 63.

143. *ibid*, emphasis mine.

144. *ibid*, p. 67.

145. *ibid*, p. 65.

146. *ibid*, p. 61.

147. *ibid*, p. 71.

148. *ibid*, p. 72.

149. *ibid*, p. 73.

150. Fisher, *Preservation*, p. 83.

151. *ibid*, p. 76.

Private Judgement Vindicated

After reading the published version of Fisher's *Preservation*, and particularly his representation of the Non-Subscriber's position, Smith was furious: 'I was hardly master of my passions'.¹⁵² He replied in *The Divine Right of Private Judgement Vindicated*. The heat of his reply brought a rebuke from Benjamin Colman.¹⁵³ In response, Smith noted that he decided to engage in the issue 'which indeed has been a Wasp's nest all over the world' in part because of the plans of 'our Scotch Brethren'.¹⁵⁴

He begins by arguing that the text published was significantly different from the sermon that was actually delivered at the meeting of Presbytery.¹⁵⁵ Since he does not go into specifics it appears that the basic line of argument was the same, although probably not as well argued and less temperate than the published sermon. Smith also stated that he takes offense to the term 'damnable error', saying he would prefer to use the term 'fundamental error' instead.¹⁵⁶ Although the word 'fundamental', strictly interpreted in the orthodox Protestant Scholastic sense, would be by definition an error which would lead to damnation, Smith's difficulty with it, and much of the basis of his argument presented in *Private Judgement Vindicated* is that what Fisher considers fundamental is not necessarily so.¹⁵⁷

While agreeing with Fisher that there are certain Fundamental Articles, he is cautious about a minister or a synod declaring what these articles are. Smith writes, 'I always allowed, that a Christian is, so far under the influence of the Holy Ghost ... certainly, and beyond a possibility of mistake, knows what is really essential to salvation. At the same time, I think, it can never be proved, that every article, which he may esteem fundamental, must be really such'.¹⁵⁸ This shows the influence of Turretin's redefinition of the concept to apply to individual understanding rather than an objective rule of faith.¹⁵⁹ So while a be-

152. Josiah Smith, *The Divine Right of Private Judgement Vindicated in Answer to the Revered Mr. Hugh Fisher's Postscript, annex'd to his Preservation from Damnable Errors, in the Uncion of the Holy One* (Boston, 1730), p. 38.

153. Howe, p. 191.

154. Josiah Smith Letter to Benjamin Colman dated Cainho, October 12th 1730 Massachusetts Historical Society, quoted in Howe, p. 191.

155. Smith, *Private Judgement Vindicated*, p. 1.

156. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

157. Smith, *Private Judgement Vindicated*, p. 9.

158. *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

159. see above, p. 30.

liever can have the assurance that they have the requisite knowledge for salvation, their certainty is not such that they can demand that other Christians hold the same opinion. To use the guidance of the Holy Spirit as an argument for demanding adherence to certain articles is to claim infallibility.¹⁶⁰ Rather than taking the assurance promised to the Church in the ‘unction of the Holy One’ as a reason for demanding subscription, Smith sees it as the very reason not to rely on creedal formulae. He reasons that a doctrine is either fundamental or not. If it is not fundamental then there is no certainty as to whether or not it is true and therefore it should not be imposed. Moreover, if it is not fundamental then it is not critical if one is mistaken on the point. However, if a doctrine is truly fundamental then the Holy Spirit, not a creed or Church council, will assure true believers of its truth.¹⁶¹

He agrees that the Church and individual Christians have a gift of ‘unction’ giving certain knowledge, but rejects that this leads consequently to a ‘power of imposing their Sentiments upon us’.¹⁶² Church power is over moral conduct, not personal convictions. He explains:

the controversy was not concerning the extent of an ecclesiastical authority in practical matters, whether the Church had power, to censure and correct the miscarriages of its members; but in matters of opinion, whether a synod of ministers had power to impose the articles of their faith upon others, before they are examined, and found to accord with the Scriptures.¹⁶³

To demand that a candidate agree completely with fallible men is to demand that they ‘pin faith upon other men’s sleeves’.¹⁶⁴ This, for Smith, is imposition regardless of the severity of the consequences. To demand that one assent to an article, not because they are convinced of the evidence for it, but to avoid a penalty is imposition and contrary to the principles of Protestantism. ‘The Papists take the Bible out of hand, and the Imposers, who leave it in our hands, pluck out our eyes, and the only recompence we have is, to see with theirs’.¹⁶⁵

The Divine Right of Private Judgement Vindicated closed with a post-script by Nathaniel Bassett. His short piece did not add anything to the debates, he simply tried to

160. Smith, *Private Judgement Vindicated*, p. 20.

161. *ibid.*, p. 11.

162. *ibid.*, p. 8.

163. *ibid.*, p. 17.

164. *ibid.*, p. 27.

165. *ibid.*, p. 31.

refute the accusation that he was ‘the author of the controversy’.¹⁶⁶ In this brief statement he shows that he is familiar with the British debates and references Hoadly, as had Smith.¹⁶⁷ He held a high view of both the Bishop and John Locke, dismissing Fisher’s criticism of them as their being so great as to need no defence.¹⁶⁸ Like English and Irish Non-Subscribers, he shows the influence of Baxter on his thoughts as well.

The Divine Right of Private Judgment, Set in True Light

Fisher answered with *The Divine Right of Private Judgment, Set in a True Light*.¹⁶⁹ In this work Fisher adds little to his previous arguments, primarily he refutes Smith’s points and gives further explanation of his own. He rejects what he sees as Smith’s contention that the debate is over the truthfulness of Scriptures; Fisher insists that the issue is whether ‘profess’d adherence to the Bible, be all that’s necessary’ for ministerial communion even if ‘the grossest hereticks, are received into the bosom of the Church’ as a result.¹⁷⁰ He refutes the claim that subscription is the novelty by pointing to the published creeds of all Reformed Churches.¹⁷¹ Furthering his claim that Non-Subscription is the fruit of Arminian skepticism, he challenges Smith to produce evidence of any Non-Subscribing thoughts before the Synod of Dort.¹⁷² Fisher shows his frustration that Smith admits the concepts of Fundamental Articles, yet refuses to define specific doctrines as fundamental.¹⁷³ ‘He [Smith] intends, that tho’ believers shall know what are really fundamentals; yet they do not know, of any fundamentals ... in particular’.¹⁷⁴

In *Divine Right set in True Light* Fisher expounds on the consequences of Smith’s skepticism that he initially laid out in the postscript to *A Preservation*. While the book does not progress cleanly along the lines of his reasoning, his logic can be summarized as follows: If there is no certainty of what matters are fundamental then the basis of removing judgement is taken away. Faith becomes a matter of speculation and personal opinion rather than assured knowledge.¹⁷⁵ The Scriptures are no longer a real rule of faith

166. *ibid*, p. 54.

167. *ibid*, p. 57.

168. *ibid*, p. 10.

169. Hugh Fisher, *The Divine Right Set in a True Light* (Boston, 1731).

170. *ibid*, pp. 4-5.

171. *ibid*, p. 6-8.

172. *ibid*, p. 9.

173. *ibid* p. 15.

174. *ibid*, p. 59.

175. *ibid*, pp. 18, 21.

since anyone can twist the meaning of a text and claim it as a basis of belief.¹⁷⁶ To ‘embrace’ ideas contrary to Scripture ‘while we examine doctrines by Scripture’ is to ‘only profess, to make Scripture our rule’. In other words, to make the Bible authoritative is to accept the doctrines, not simply the words, of Scripture.¹⁷⁷

Faith for Smith would be a matter of pure speculation: ‘a man may be Godly, whatever his opinion be, in matters of faith’.¹⁷⁸ Fisher argued earlier that without assured knowledge, sincerity of belief rather than the truthfulness of the object of belief becomes the essence of faith. As proof he refers to William Porter who told Fisher ‘I believe that Mr. Peirce was as Godly a man as any man in England in his day’.¹⁷⁹ He reinforces his point by quoting Hoadly, ‘a man must be intitled to heaven, by the perfect sincerity of his choice’.¹⁸⁰ Like John Malcome in Ireland, Fisher says that this logic compels one to believe error, making it not a sin but an obligation to choose heresy if so persuaded and sincerely held.¹⁸¹ Finally, the absence of certainty undermines the authority of ministers and of the Church. A minister cannot proclaim the truths of the gospel authoritatively but ‘must tell the people ... that everything he delivers ... possibly it is a mistake’.¹⁸² More importantly, it leads to the ‘overthrow of all Church government, and order’.¹⁸³ It is this that became the crucial question for American Presbyterians not only in the Presbytery of Charleston but in the Synod of Philadelphia as well.

Smith’s understanding of Church authority, argues Fisher, makes ‘authority depend on the acknowledgment of it by inferiors, or, on the acknowledgment of the justice of the exercise of it, in particular instances’.¹⁸⁴ Fisher likens this to rebellion:

our Sovereign, could have no authority to punish a traitorous Jacobite, more than an orthodox synod, has to judge and condemn an heretick: Thus a man’s rebellion, justify’s him from the imputation of rebellion; seeing, the magistrate’s authority ceases, whenever the man ceases to acknowledge it; because, the lawfulness of authority thus, depends on the good will of the subject.¹⁸⁵

176. *ibid.*, p. 45.

177. *ibid.*

178. *ibid.*, p. 21.

179. *ibid.*, p. 23.

180. *ibid.*, pp. 21, 36, quoting Benjamin Hoadly, *An Answer to the Representation Drawn up by the Committee* (London, 1718), p. 95.

181. p. 37, cf. John Malcome, *Personal Perswasion No Foundation for Religious Obedience: or, some friendly reflections on a sermon preach’d at Belfast Dec. 9. 1719* (Belfast, 1720), p. 9.

182. Fisher, *The Divine right set in a true light*, p. 21.

183. *ibid.*, p. 35.

184. *ibid.*, p. 75.

185. Fisher, *The Divine right set in a true light*, p. 75.

Likewise a Synod cannot be stripped of its legitimate authority, which if it is agreement with the Bible ‘acknowledges God's voice in the Synod’.¹⁸⁶ Synods cannot preserve unity if they have no authority to exclude heresy.¹⁸⁷

Fisher agrees that Synods and councils are not always right, but argues that they have an authority; Smith’s reasoning would mean that a Synod must always prove that they are acting rightly within their commission for them to have authority.¹⁸⁸ Fisher insists that lawful assemblies do not have to prove that they have acted correctly in all matters for them to have valid authority. Even if the Westminster Confession contains errors, the Assembly still had proper authority to publish it, just as a civil government does not have to act lawful in all matters to have proper authority. He seems completely unaware of the inconsistency of allowing bodies the right to err in a way he denies to an individual and in a way that would imply the obligation for someone to follow a Synod in error though not their own conscience.

Moreover, he rejects that this is imposition. To insist on adherence to truth is within the sphere of legitimate Church power. Therefore, he contends, it cannot be considered imposition since it is done with legitimate power, ‘What is done by lawful authority, can be no imposition’.¹⁸⁹ These are amazing words from one who is in a position of Dissent; he makes no attempt to resolve the inconsistency of his opinions.

Fisher’s bold claim for Church authority goes beyond simply claiming the right to demand assent to Fundamental Articles. Fisher claims a right to require assent not only to fundamentals but to other statements in a confession as well. It is legitimate he says to require more, because the Bible contains more than just Fundamental Articles and it is legitimate to require assent to anything declared in Scripture.¹⁹⁰ Likewise, creeds need not be limited to Fundamental Articles. The Westminster Confession of Faith which goes beyond

186. *ibid*, p. 86.

187. *ibid*, p. 91.

188. *ibid*, pp. 54-5.

189. *ibid*, p. 63.

190. *ibid*, p. 63, cf. Gilbert Kennedy’s refutation of the need for confessions to be limited to essential articles in, *A Defence of the Principles and Conduct of the General Synod of Ulster. Being an answer to a pamphlet. by. Samuel Haliday, containing his reasons against the imposition of subscription unto the Westminster Confession* (Belfast, 1724), pp. 4-5.

Fundamental Articles is still lawful since it is in agreement with the word of God which also contains non-fundamentals.

The legitimacy of requiring assent to more than simply Fundamental Articles is especially true in the case of ministers, ‘we ought not, to admit, at least to ministerial communion, such as can't subscribe, even the lesser points: every truth, is a trust committed to ministers, to be preserved and transmitted to posterity’.¹⁹¹ Here Fisher makes a distinction between ministerial and Christian communion, this seems to be one of the strongest points for Subscribers, yet was rarely argued.

One of the great weaknesses of the Subscribers’ argument was showing how their view of the authority of Church courts was different from the claims of the Roman Catholic position. Virtually every Non-Subscriber argued that subscription and the imposition of a theological doctrine was opposed to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. In refuting this Fisher tried to further distinguish his views on two points, submission to the Bible and not imposing because it is voluntary. Furthermore, Fisher insists that the Articles are not believed because of the authority of the Church but because of their agreement with the Scripture.¹⁹² A Church court has authority insofar as it agrees with Scripture; the difference between his view of Church power is that one trusts not in the court but the Scriptures with which the Church is in agreement. He fails to address the question of who finally judges whether the court is orthodox or heretical, in agreement with Scripture or not, and thus legitimate or not. He also undermines his own argument that an unlawful Act does not destroy validity and authority of the court. Smith himself had acknowledged that he believed ‘the doctrine of one substance in the sacred three, the proper and perfect satisfaction of Christ, and justification by his Righteousness alone thro’ faith, and the like important doctrines, are clearly and necessarily deduc’d from Scripture’ which was the reason for his preaching them, not because they were in a creed.¹⁹³ Fisher asks that if someone were asked to assent to these articles as a term of communion and refused, should their refusal not be understood as a rejection of revealed and Fundamental Articles of faith and

191. Fisher, *The Divine Right Set in a True Light*, p. 64.

192. *ibid*, p. 68.

193. *ibid*, p. 67, quoting Smith, *Private Judgement Vindicated*, pp. 38-39.

not simply refusal to assent to a creed?¹⁹⁴ He says that it is not implicit faith that is demanded but submission to God and His word as revealed in the Bible.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, there is no imposition, Fisher claims, if the society is based on voluntary association, ‘Is there any comparison, between leaving it free, to a man, to join or not to join with a society, as he finds he can agree, or not agree to their terms; and papists forcing people, whether they can agree to them, or not, to profess their doctrines, under the penalty of fire and faggot’.¹⁹⁶ A creed cannot be considered imposed if it is truly believed, ‘Thus the creed subscrib’d at Salter’s hall, ... was a true test of Christianity; that is no man can be accounted a Christian, that could not assent to the creeds’.¹⁹⁷ Since the creed simply defines what beliefs are held for membership in a voluntary society and there is no punishment other than rejecting membership then it cannot be considered imposing.

Outcome: Congregational Divisions

Smith did not publish a direct response, probably in part due to Colman’s influence. At a meeting of Presbytery Smith declared his beliefs but the Presbytery did not accept his ‘confession’.¹⁹⁸ While Presbytery minutes are no longer extant, Smith tells us that he was willing to declare his adherence to the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism with the exception of three points in the Confession:

I know not of one Article in the Assemblies Shorter Catechism, but what I freely assent to. Nor can I say, I disbelieve any thing in their Confession, unless where it appears to me, to give the magistrate too great and extend a power in the Church, where it asserts the office of ruling elders as distinct from those that preach; and where it in so many words declares ‘That a man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred, nearer in blood, than he may of his’¹⁹⁹

Smith tells that he read this declaration to the Presbytery of Charleston, however ‘the subscribing gentlemen there present, refused to pass any judgment upon it, unless [he] would further declare [his] free assent to seven or eight Articles of their own drawing up’.²⁰⁰ Unfortunately there is no record of what these additional Articles were. Considering that the debates were solely on subscription (no question of divergent views on the

194. *ibid.*, p. 69.

195. *ibid.*, p. 48.

196. *ibid.*, p. 51.

197. *ibid.*, p. 61.

198. Josiah Smith, *No New Thing to be Slander’d. A sermon preach’d at Cainhoy, in the province of South Carolin, Sept. 27, 1730. And now publish’d for the satisfaction of the author’s people, and to rectify the opinion, which some had conceiv’d of his principles, particularly relating to the errors of Arius and Arminius* (Boston, 1730), p. 22.

199. *ibid.*, p. 21. Smith quotes WCF XXIV.iv.

200. *ibid.*

Trinity or nature of Christ had arisen) they might have explicated views of Church power and the authority of Presbytery, but this is speculation. Regardless of the specifics, that they sought to impose Articles beyond the Confession is reminiscent of the Auchterarder Creed and marks deviation from the practice of the Church of Scotland.

The division in the Presbytery of Charleston was more of a failure to reach a consensus, as had the Synod of Philadelphia, than a true schism. Unlike Philadelphia and Ulster, the majority in Charleston simply insisted on strict subscription. From Smith's account, he seemed willing to profess adherence with the exclusion of the aforementioned 'scruples'. This would have been consistent with of the *Pacificum* and the Adopting Act giving the appearance that Smith was familiar with the process in these other bodies.

Interestingly his scruple with the view of magistrates was shared by the Synod of Philadelphia; concern over the possible understanding of the relationship between the Church and magistrates was similarly expressed by General Assembly of the Church of Scotland when the Confession was initially adopted in 1647.²⁰¹ It would be difficult to see how anyone would view the Article concerning consanguinity as essential. The issue with the distinctions among elders represents the differences between Independents or Congregationalists and Presbyterianism and would appear to be the major cause of concern, yet it would seem to have been an obvious difference between the congregations led by Smith and Bassett and the Scottish Presbyteriansim of Stobo and Fisher before they 'sat in presbytery' together to begin with.

Although it is impossible to determine the details without the Presbytery minutes, it is a safe presumption that Bassett and Porter were also excluded from the Presbytery at this time since it was soon after that a faction within the Independent Meeting House, where Bassett was minister, split from the congregation to establish their own. The division of the Independent Meeting House was the primary, tangible result of the subscription debate in Charleston.

201. Klett, p. 104; *Records of the Kirk of Scotland*, p. 475, quoted in James Cooper, *Confessions of Faith and Formulas of Subscription* (Glasgow, 1907) p. 37.

As noted earlier, friction within the congregation was already evident in the removal of Stobo and their seeking a minister from England and Boston. Presbyterians with Scots background eventually withdrew from the White Meeting House and established the First (Scots) Presbyterian Church.²⁰² The division was relatively amicable, they continued to worship there as a separate congregation until their new building was complete in 1734.²⁰³ They called a Scottish Subscriber, Hugh Stewart, as their minister.²⁰⁴

Smith faced division within his congregation as well. While no details remain of the results, in September 1730, Smith preached a sermon ‘for the satisfaction of the author's people, and to rectify the opinion, which some had conceiv’d of his principles’, revealing that he had faced significant disruption.²⁰⁵

In *No New Thing to be Slander’d* based on Romans 3.8, ‘as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say’, Smith examined different causes of people’s prejudices and attempted to defend his reputation and the cause of Non-Subscription to a lay audience. In doing so he argued that the reasons against Non-Subscription are based on prejudices of tradition and ignorance.²⁰⁶ He appealed to his previous sermons on the satisfaction of Christ and his Deity as proof of his own orthodoxy. Moreover, in a move that avoided the error made by the Irish Non-Subscribers, Smith was willing to profess his beliefs.²⁰⁷ He attempted to assure his hearers that his views were not unique, showing that other men of ‘conspicuous piety’ shared his beliefs.²⁰⁸ He presented himself as defending the right of private judgement and the authority of Scripture, claiming that the demand for subscription removes the Bible from the laity’s hands and places it again in the domain of the clergy.²⁰⁹

The establishment of a separate Presbyterian congregation and the loss of the Congregationalists from the Presbytery brought the debate to a close. The Presbytery of Charleston eventually united with the General Assembly in 1811. In the 1740s, the Great

202. Howe, p. 189.

203. *ibid*, p. 201.

204. Little, p. 795; Stewart is not in the record of Scottish minister who emigrated to America in *FES*, VII, probably indicating that he was ordained in Charleston.

205. Smith, *No New Thing to be Slander’d*, title page.

206. *ibid*, pp. 4-9.

207. *ibid*, pp. 20-1.

208. *ibid*, p. 14.

209. *ibid*, p. 19.

Awakening brought tensions to Charleston as well, but the Presbytery did not have the same division as did the Synod of Philadelphia. It is worth noting that Josiah Smith, who at that time had succeeded Bassett as minister in Charleston, became an active supporter of the Great Awakening, welcoming George Whitefield (1714-1770) into his pulpit when others had refused.²¹⁰ In 1740, his pro-revival piece *The Character, Preaching etc of George Whitefield* was published by Benjamin Franklin.²¹¹

Lay Pressure for Subscription

Within the Presbytery, concerns about subscription remained among the laity. The impact of the people is consistent with their influence in Exeter and Ireland. This can be seen in lay benefactors who included stipulations requiring subscription along with gifts of land and endowments to individual congregations. This would mean that in those Churches, strict subscription would be required regardless of later decisions by higher judicatories. In 1717 Henry Bower had given three hundred acres to the Edisto Island congregation, the profits made from working the land were for the upkeep of a minister. In 1732 a number of slaves were given to the Edisto Island Church:

for the perpetual maintenance, out of their yearly labor, of a Presbyterian minister who owns the holy Scriptures for his only rule of faith and practice, and who, agreeably to the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, shall own the Westminster Confession of Faith, with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as a test of his orthodoxy.²¹²

Notably, this demand went beyond the requirements of either the Church of Scotland and the General Synod of Ulster, but not the Synod of Philadelphia, by requiring the minister to own the Catechisms as well as the Confession. Similar stipulations were attached to other gifts as well in at least two other occasions as well. In 1735 Robert Ure established an endowment:

for the maintenance of a minister of the gospel, according to the Presbyterian profession ... regularly called and settled on John's Island ... who shall acknowledge and subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith as the Confession of his faith, and shall firmly believe and preach the same to the people.²¹³

Similarly, Henry Sherrif bequeathed £200 to the congregation at Wiltown to pay a minister who would subscribe the Westminster Confession and uphold Presbyterian discip-

210. Davis, pp. 763-767.

211. For more on Smith's part in supporting Whitefield and the Awakening see Kidd, Thomas, "A Faithful Watchman on the Walls of Charlestown": Josiah Smith and moderate revivalism in Colonial South Carolina', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 105, no. 2 (2004), pp. 82-106.

212. Howe, p. 202.

213. 'Will of Robert Ure' quoted in Howe, p. 207.

line and worship in the mold of the Church of Scotland.²¹⁴ These seem to be a way of ensuring ‘Presbyterian’ order. Ironically though, in attempting to harden their requirements to enforce Presbyterianism these congregations actually moved towards greater independency; they were setting standards for ministers apart from, though at this time consistent with, the Presbytery’s.

Later, in 1752 at an installation service the elders voluntarily subscribed a lengthy formula:

We, the Subscribers, members of the session of the congregation of Williamsburg, do hereby declare that we sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and ratified by law in the year sixteen hundred and ninety, and frequently confirmed by divers Acts of Parliament since that time, to be agreeable to the Scriptures of truth; and we do own the same as the Confession of our faith.²¹⁵

The formula continues with a promise to adhere to the worship and doctrine of the Church of Scotland. They also vow to ‘assert, maintain, and defend the ... government, by Church sessions, presbyteries, provincial synods, and general assemblies’, despite the fact that they were only part of a Presbytery. The formula closes with a promise to not undermine the establishment of the Church of Scotland and a renunciation of ‘all doctrines, tenets, and opinions whatsoever contrary’ to the practice of the Church of Scotland.

In signing this formula, though voluntarily, they extended the practice to elders bringing their practice in line with that of the Church of Scotland.²¹⁶ It also again shows how they were conforming themselves to the Church of Scotland and promising subjection in a way that would allow themselves to claim that they were part of *that* established Church.

The debate in Charleston was the failure to reach a consensus among different traditions as to what the nature of their Presbytery would be. The divisions in Charleston, though resulting in split within a congregation, were a failure to form a compromise such as that which the Synods of Philadelphia and New York would ultimately arrive.

The Charleston publications reveal that the primary influence in the American debates was the importation of English arguments from Hoadly and surrounding the events of

214. Howe, p. 272.

215. quoted in Howe, pp. 283-4.

216. Howe, p. 283.

Salters' Hall and the Exeter Assembly. While the Charleston ministers seemed to be cognizant of the conflict in other Churches, these are not explicitly mentioned. Surprisingly, especially given the date of the controversy and Smith's connection to Boston ministers such as Colman, there is no evidence of their connection with the concurrent controversy in the Synod of Philadelphia. Nor did the Synod of Philadelphia take note of the discussion in Charleston, despite Fisher and Smith's works being printed in Boston.²¹⁷ This absence is puzzling. Perhaps the ministers in Philadelphia were hesitant to interfere in the controversy of another, independent jurisdiction. Or perhaps, having reached a consensus they did not want to stir debates among themselves again.

Examining the situation in Charleston reveals again the strong influence of the laity on the side of subscription. The Presbytery of Charleston also confirms the close connection between the British and American bodies. Even in events not related to subscription, the web of connections made events on one side effect the other. The knowledge of events in Exeter and the recourse to London by the White Meeting House shows that there was no simple direct line of influence, but that even remote bodies such as Pon Pon and Wappetaw were part of a thick web of connections shared by Presbyterians in the American Colonies, Ireland and Britain.

217. All of the works except possibly *A Preservation from Damnable Error*, which gives no publication location, were printed in Boston.

Conclusion

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.¹

The early eighteenth-century subscription controversies were part of an international conversation on the extent of the Church's authority. While the catalyst was the fear of Arianism in Exeter, it was the doctrine of the Church rather than the nature of Christ, the Trinity or salvation that was the core point of dispute. Many Non-Subscribers expressed views related to the nature of faith and reason, and consequently to the extent of the atonement that were not consistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, these differences were part of a system of thought that questioned the propriety of demanding adherence to any document other than the Bible more than a direct attack on the doctrines of the Confession. The debates were truly a dialogue. The debates radiated from London, but instead of attempting to trace a route of influence of one body on the others it is best to understand the discussions as a mutual exchange of people, publications, and ideas. All of the Churches were well aware of the writings of Hoadly, Peirce, and Dunlop and the developments in Ireland, Philadelphia, and Geneva. Having explored these debates in the context of the trans-Atlantic connections, and with an understanding that their focus was Church authority and the implications on Presbyterian polity, I offer a few general conclusions.

First, ethnic conflict as the basic interpretive framework for understanding the controversies in the colonial American Synod does not hold up to scrutiny. This is not to deny that tradition, background and ethnicity played a role in the debates. For example co-operation with Independents had an effect on English Presbyterianism, which in turn informed the Irish Non-Subscribers, especially through their connections with Dublin Presbyterians. However, any attempt to explain the divisions in the American Church primarily on the ba-

1. WCF, XX, ii.

sis of conflict between nationalities ignores the diversity within those groups. Disagreement over subscription was found in virtually every Presbyterian body during the early eighteenth-century. The English Presbyterians were divided at Exeter and Salter's Hall; the Independents tended to support subscription. The Church of Scotland did not present a single minded Pro-Subscription stance; even those in favour were divided in their reasoning. Some defended it on the basis of the natural rights of a society, others on its conformity to the Scriptures, some simply realized a confession's usefulness in maintaining order. In the Synod of Ulster most ministers who were in favour of subscription did not initially see it as a divisive issue until pressured by the laity and tensions escalated between the factions. American Congregationalists ministers, such as Colman and Mather, wrote in favour of subscribing to England. American Presbyterians with Congregationalist backgrounds argued against subscribing, referring to the writings of Hoadly and the contentions in Ireland. Those of Irish descent took both sides in the Schism of 1741, as did native New Englanders. The categories proposed by Trinterud, even when refined, do not conform to the evidence.

Second, a goal for this study has been to see the role of context in the different responses to the question of subscription. From London to Charleston we see the full spectrum. The body of ministers at Salters' Hall had voted to not require any test beyond the Scriptures. In the Church of Scotland there is evidence that, at least in some presbyteries, the actual practice of subscribing allowed for some exceptions in subscription. This qualified subscription was made explicit in the Synods of Ulster's *Pacificum*, a practice that was limited by Synodical oversight in the Synod of Philadelphia's Adopting Act. Finally, the Presbytery of Charleston took the stance of unqualified subscription.

There were two ways context influenced the debates. First, establishment kept subscription from being openly challenged in the Church of Scotland. Dissent gave more freedom for theological inquiry and to challenge the Confession. Moreover, the absence of civil law meant that where subscription was enforced, it was by custom. It was attempts to formally introduce subscription that initiated the debates among Dissenters. The second influence of context was how much power was afforded the laity. In every instance the majority, though by no means all, of the laity supported demands for subscription. This

was especially significant for example in Charleston where the establishment of several endowments included stipulations that the minister subscribe the Confession. In part this was a way lay members could exercise control in the work of the Church; many argued it was a way the laity could be assured of their minister's orthodoxy. More importantly, adherence to the Westminster Confession was a way of conforming to the practice of an established Church. The push for subscription was not simply an attempt to recreate a Church life in the model of what they were accustomed to. As in Ulster, Presbyterians in the American colonies saw themselves in relation to the Church of Scotland. In Charleston and Philadelphia, ministers presented arguments for freedom from civil penalties on the basis of its establishment.

Those who have claimed that the laity were a decisive factor in the contests in the Colonial Church are certainly correct.² Interestingly though, while the majority of lay members consistently supported the Subscriptionist ministers, during the Great Awakening they supported the inheritors of the Non-Subscribers, namely the 'Log College Men'. The reasons for this would be worth further study, as would a fuller development of the role of Non-Subscriber thought in the Old Side / New Side Division that I have touched on.

Finally, it should be noted that while the debates were extensive and led to temporary divisions, there was on the whole a strong consensus of opinion about the Confession's role in the life of the Church. All agreed that the Presbytery should examine the doctrines of ministerial candidates. Even Non-Subscribers agreed that a confession was useful to express a Church's belief and to serve as a summary statement of their understanding of the Scriptures. Moreover, consistent with a Reformed understanding of confessions throughout the debates there was no sense of the exclusivity of the Westminster Confession. The overture calling for subscription in the Synod of Philadelphia was open to other statements of faith; this was consistent with the English and Scottish ministers. Arguments were offered that it was the most appropriate confession, but by no means the only valid one. Finally, there was a consensus that the principle of allowing exceptions to

2. Dietmar Rothermund, 'Political Factions and the Great Awakening', *Pennsylvania History*, 26, (1959) 317-331; Martin Lodge, 'The Crisis of the Churches in the Middle Colonies, 1720-1750', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 95, no. 2 (1971), 195-220; Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*.

the Confession was appropriate. Initially, both the Pacific Act in Ireland and the Adopting Act in Philadelphia were overwhelmingly approved. It was not until Haliday's installation in Belfast that a subscriptionist party began to retreat from the original position. Likewise, the stricter explications in the Synod of Philadelphia only came after the 'preliminary Act' was published apart from the minutes of the afternoon session giving the impression of greater laxity than the Synod had approved.

The debates consumed much energy of the Presbyterian Churches in the early eighteenth century and led to breaks in the communions; but the questioning of subscription and the Church's authority was a necessary and healthy discussion. It is sad to note how often those claiming to be the side of 'true Presbyterian discipline' betrayed fundamental rules of discipline and order. In the Synods of Ulster and Philadelphia ministers were excluded without charge, due process, or appeal, purportedly to ensure proper discipline and Presbyterian order. While the more radical individualism proposed by some Non-Subscribers would have made any true cooperation impossible to sustain, the challenges they made forced the Churches to articulate an understanding of the authority of both Church courts and confessions that was consistent with the principles of Protestantism, and for some, Dissent. The worst defences of subscription made claims to infallibility and tradition similar to those rejected by the Reformers. Others demanded a submission to the Church's authority that removed their own basis for not conforming to the Churches of England or Ireland. The better explanations understood the necessity of balancing an individual's liberty of conscience with the need for a society to govern its membership.

While the debates calmed, the issue was not settled. The question of the power of Church courts and the role of the Confession is a perennial one. But this is appropriate for a Church that seeks to be *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei*. The Westminster Confession states that 'the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils [and] opinions of ancient writers ... are to be examined ... can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture'.³ If this is so, then it is the Church's continual task to question councils and tradition.

3. WCF, I, x.

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A Seasonable Warning Offered by Severall Ministers Who Adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith & to Their Solemn Promise of Subjection in the Lord to the Severall Judicatorys in this Church of Presbyterian Dissenters in Ireland, Whereof They are Members; Directed to the Congregations under Their Care, transcription in Wod.Fol.XLIX, no. 30 (1726): fols. 128-133.

Letters of Robert Wodrow, Wod.Lett.Qu XX-XXI

Presbyterian Historical Society

Minutes, 1716-1731, 1759-1814 Presbytery of New Castle. microform /
1716-1814., MF 843

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- [Allan, James], *A Letter to the Moderator of the Next General Assembly: offering some considerations against the imposing of the Westminster Confession of faith, as terms of ministerial communion; and giving an account of the process carried on by the Synod of Morray, against Mr. James Allan* ([Edinburgh?], 1707)
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- [Dunlop, Samuel], *An Account of the Mind of the Synod of Belfast. In a short reply to Mr. Dugud's remarks upon their declaration* ([Belfast], 1721)
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