

THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

Chapter 1. Of the Holy Scripture.

1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable;^a yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation;^b therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church;^c and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing;^d which maketh the holy Scripture to be most necessary;^e those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.^f

a. Psalms 19:1-3; Romans 1:19-20; 1:32 with 2:1; 2:14-15

b. 1 Corinthians 1:21; 2:13-14 c. Hebrews 1:1.

d. Proverbs 22:19-21; Isaiah 8:19-20; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 1:3-4; Romans 15:4

e. 2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 1:19 f. Hebrews 1:1-2.

2. Under the name of holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these:

Of the Old Testament

Genesis	I Samuel	Esther	Jeremiah	Jonah
Exodus	II Samuel	Job	Lamentations	Micah
Leviticus	I Kings	Psalms	Ezekiel	Nahum
Numbers	II Kings	Proverbs	Daniel.	Habakkuk
Deuteronomy	I Chronicles	Ecclesiastes	Hosea.	Zephaniah
Joshua	II Chronicles	Song of Songs	Joel	Haggai
Judges	Ezra	Isaiah	Amos	Zechariah
Ruth	Nehemiah		Obadiah	Malachi

Of the New Testament

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
I Timothy
II Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James.
I Peter
II Peter
I John
II John
III John
Jude
Revelation

Exposition by Robert Shaw:

There are few doctrines of supernatural revelation that have not, in one period or another, been denied or controverted; and it is a peculiar excellence of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that its compilers have stated the several articles in terms the best calculated, not only to convey an accurate idea of sacred truth but to guard against contrary errors. In opposition, on the one hand, to those who deny the existence of natural religion, and, on the other hand, in opposition to Deists, who maintain the sufficiency of the light of nature to guide men to eternal happiness, this section asserts:

1. That a knowledge of the existence of God, and a number of his perfections, is attainable by the light of nature, and the world of creation and providence.
2. That the light of nature is insufficient to give fallen man that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.
3. That God has been pleased to grant to his Church a supernatural revelation of his will.
4. That this revelation has been committed to writing, and that the Holy Scripture is most necessary, the ancient modes of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.^a

a. Luke 16:29, 31; Eph 2:20; 2 Tim 3:16; Rev 22:18-19

Further exposition by Robert Shaw: The third proposition asserts, that God has been pleased to grant to his Church a supernatural revelation of his will. It cannot be considered as a thing incredible that God should make a revelation of his mind and will to men. Has he framed men so as that they should be capable of making known their mind to one another, by speech and by writing? And shall it be deemed a thing incredible that he should communicate his mind to them in a similar way? "It was, indeed, out of infinite love, mercy, and compassion, that God would at all reveal his mind and will unto sinners. He might for ever have locked up the treasures of his wisdom and prudence, wherein he abounds towards us in his Word, in his own eternal breast. He might have left all the sons of men unto that woeful darkness, whereinto by sin they had cast themselves, and kept them, with the angels who sinned before them, under the chains and power of it, unto the judgment of the great day. But from infinite love he condescended to reveal himself and his will unto us." The mind God was not revealed to the Church all at once, but by several parts and degrees, as in his infinite wisdom he saw meet. He spake unto the fathers by the prophets a at sundry times, and in divers manners."—Heb. i. 1. The "sundry times" may be understood "as referring to the matter of ancient revelation, given in different parts, and at different times, thus conveying the idea of the gradual development of truth in different ages, and by different persons;" and the "divers manners" may be understood "as indicating the various ways in which these revelations were communicated, i.e., by dreams, visions, symbols, Urim and Thummim, prophetic ecstasy, &c." Under the new dispensation, God has completed the whole revelation of his will by his Son, and no new revelation is to be expected to the end of the world

3. The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the Canon of the Scripture; and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings.^a

a. Luke 24:27, 44; Rom 3:2; 2 Pet 1:21

4. The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.^a

a. 1 Thes 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19, 21; 1 John 5:9

5. We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture;^a and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.^b

a. 1 Tim 3:15

b. Isa 59:21; John 16:13-14; 1 Cor 2:10-12; 1 John 2:20, 27

6. The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.^a Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving

understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word;^b and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.^c

a. Gal 1:8-9; 2 Thes 2:2; 2 Tim 3:15-17

b. John 6:45; 1 Cor 2:9-12

c. 1 Cor 11:13-14; 14:26, 40

7. All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all;^a yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.^b

a. 2 Pet 3:16

b. Psa 119:105, 130

8. The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic;^a so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them.^b But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them,^c therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come,^d that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner,^e and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.^f

a. Mat 5:18

b. Isa 8:20; John 5:39, 46; Acts 15:15

c. John 5:39

d. 1 Cor 14:6, 9, 11-12, 24, 27-28

e. Col 3:16

f. Rom 15:4

9. The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it (16) must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.^a

a. Acts 15:15; 2 Pet 1:20-21

10. The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.^a

a. Mat 22:29, 31; Eph 2:20 with Acts 28:25

Further exposition by Robert Shaw: That the Supreme Judge, by which all controversies in religion are to be determined, is no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture, is asserted in opposition to the Papists, who maintain that the Church is an infallible judge in religious controversies; though they do not agree among themselves whether this infallible authority resides in the Pope, or in a council, or in both together. Now, the Scripture never mentions such an infallible judge on earth. Neither Pope, nor councils, possess the properties requisite to constitute a supreme judge in controversies of religion; for they are fallible, and have often eyed, and contradicted one another. Although the Church or her ministers are the official guardians of the Scriptures, and although it belongs to them to explain and enforce the doctrines and laws contained in the Word of God, yet their authority is only ministerial, and their interpretations and decisions are binding on the conscience only in so far as they accord with the mind of the Spirit in the Scriptures. By this test, the decisions of councils, the opinions of ancient writers, and the doctrines of men at the present time, are to be tried, and by this rule all controversies in religion must be determined. Isa. viii. 20; Matt. xxii. 29.

