

HM 4.1 - PURITAN PERSPECTIVES ON MINISTRY

The Westminster Assembly

Further Reading:

see “1993 Westminster Assembly Commemoration: An Introductory Bibliography” by *J. Ligon Duncan, III and David W. Hall* at <http://capo.org/premise/96/mj/p960508.html>

- William Barker – *Puritan Profiles*,
- S W Carruthers - *The Every Day Work of the Westminster Assembly*, 1943
- William Hetherington – *History Of The Westminster Assembly Of Divine*, 1843 – online at http://www.reformed.org/books/hetherington/west_assembly/
- A.F. Mitchell and John Struthers (eds) - *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, 1874
- John Murray – Various 1943 anniversary pieces available online
- R S Paul – *The Assembly of the Lord*, 1985
- James Reid - *The Memoirs of the Westminster Assembly Divines*, 1811
- William Symington – “The Westminster Assembly of Divines” online – excerpts from *Historical Sketch of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, 1843
- B B Warfield – *The Westminster Assembly and its Work in Works*, (OUP, vol VI, pp.3-72)

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**Richard Baxter:** “The Divines there Congregate were Men of Eminent Learning and Godliness, and Ministerial Abilities and Fidelity .... the Christian World, since the days of the Apostles, had never a Synod of more Excellent Divines (taking one thing with another) than this Synod and the Synod of Dort were.”

**B B Warfield:** [on Confession of Faith] - “the ripest fruit of Reformed creed-making, the simple transcript of Reformed thought as it was everywhere expounded by its best representatives in the middle of the seventeenth century.”

**John Murray:** “mature fruit of the whole movement of creed formation .. the crown of the greatest age of confessional exposition, the Protestant Reformation.”

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1. Background

Convocation of 1640 – went with Short Parl but carried on after Short Parl dissolved

Convocation required the ‘*et cetera oath*’ – every clergyman was to bind himself never to give his consent ‘to alter the government of this Church by archbishops, bishops, deans, and archdeacons etc., as it stands now established and as by right it ought to stand.’

Root and Branch Petition – 15,000 sigs incl 1500 gentlemen. Presented to Parl that “the government of this Church by archbishops, bishops, deans, and archdeacons etc., with all its dependencies, roots and branches, may be abolished and all laws made in their behalf made void, and the government according to God’s word may be rightly placed amongst us.”

Nov 3, 1640 – Long Parl-t

1640-1 – Parl knew it didn’t want full-blooded prelacy but really not v sure what it wanted – vast maj-y pres-n but what form exactly and whether jus divinum or pragmatic ?

So not sure whether to abolish episc-y or not.

And certainly thought it, Parl, wd retain control of whatever Church Govt set up.

Prelacy not fully, finally abolished till Jan 43.

Nov-Dec 1641 - Grand Remonstrance – intend to “reduce within bounds that exorbitant power which the prelates had assumed unto themselves” and to set up more just “discipline and government in the Church” – so want to call

a Synod – “a general Synod of the most grave, pious, learned and judicious divines of this island, assisted by some from foreign parts professing the same religion with us, to consider all things necessary for the peace and good government of the church.”

In early 1642 a declaration of the Parliament of England was sent to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. This declaration contained a plea for the prevention of civil war. The answer of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland deplored the tardiness with which the reformation of religion progressed, and contended that religion is not only the means of the service of God and the saving of souls but also "the base and foundation of kingdomes and estates". It also reiterated the plea "that in all his Majestie's dominions there might be one Confession of Faith, one Directory of Worship, one publick Catechisme, and one form of Kirk Government".

First half 1642 - working out details. Then King doesn't assent. So do it by ordinance – dated June 12 1643

"Whereas, amongst the infinite blessings of Almighty God upon this nation, none is or can be more dear unto us than the purity of our religion; and for that, as yet, many things remain in the Liturgy, Discipline, and Government of the Church, which do necessarily require *a further and more perfect reformation than as yet hath been attained*; and whereas it hath been declared and resolved by the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, that the present Church-government by archbishops, bishops, their chancellors, commissaries, deans, dean and chapters, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical officers depending upon the hierarchy, is evil, and justly offensive and burdensome to the kingdom, a great impediment to reformation and growth of religion, and very prejudicial to the state and government of this kingdom; and that therefore they are resolved that the same shall be taken away, and that such a government shall be settled in the Church as may be most agreeable to God's holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other Reformed Churches abroad; and, for the better effecting hereof, and for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the Church of England from all false calumnies and aspersions, it is thought fit and necessary to call an Assembly of learned, godly, and judicious Divines, who, together with some members of both the Houses of Parliament, are *to consult and advise of such matters and things, touching the premises, as shall be proposed unto them by both or either of the Houses of Parliament, and to give their advice and counsel therein to both or either of the said Houses, when, and as often as they shall be thereunto required.*"

July 1, 1643 – 69 turn up: Henry VII Chapel - sermon by Twisse to assembly + Parl

Oct 2, 1643 – Jerusalem Chamber (cos cold)

July 22, 1649 – last numbered session

1649-52 – mostly working in examining ministerial candidates

Mar 25, 1652 – dissolved with Long Parliament

1163 numbered sessions (1333 plenaries in total ?)

121 divines; 10 peers; 20 members of Commons

Lodgings in and around the Abbey - (CvD: "a giant slumber party ... like a Banner of Truth ministers' conference only more scholarly")

Fine amenities. One best libraries in country + access to sequestered libraries of Royalist pastors.

0900-1400 plenary.

Afternoons - committee work.

Advisory function – as in XXIII.III

Deliberative, consultative, advisory NOT judicial, ecclesiastical

Instructions for the conduct of the Assembly:

1. That two Assessors be joined to the Prolocutor, to supply his place in case of absence or infirmity.
2. That Scribes be appointed, to set down all proceedings, and those to be Divines, who are not of the Assembly, viz. Mr. Henry Robens and Mr. Adoniram Byfield.
3. Every member, at his first entry into the Assembly, shall make serious and solemn protestation, not to maintain any thing but what he believes to be truth in sincerity, when discovered unto him.
4. No resolution to be given upon any question the same day, wherein it is first propounded.
5. What any man undertakes to prove as necessary, he shall make good out of Scripture.
6. No man to proceed in any dispute, after the Prolocutor has enjoined him silence, unless the Assembly desire he may go on.
7. No man to be denied to enter his dissent from the Assembly, and his reasons for it, in any point, after it hath been first debated in the Assembly, and thence (if the dissenting party desire it) to be sent to

the Houses of Parliament by the Assembly, not by any particular man or men, in a private way, when either House shall require.

8. All things agreed on and prepared for the Parliament, to be openly read and allowed in the Assembly, and then offered as the judgment of the Assembly, if the major part assent. Provided that the opinion of any persons dissenting, and the reasons urged for it, be annexed thereunto, if the dissenters require it, together with the solutions, if any were given to the Assembly, to these reasons.

Summary of context (CvD)

Civil War:

- social and religious radicalism on the rise; no control over printing press, revolutionary and heterodox ideas circulating;
- insofar as religion was a cause of the Civil War, the Assembly was there as a solution
- proliferating sects - more and more the concern of the orthodox:
 - up to 1643 the big baddy is Rcism
 - from 1643 onwards, the big baddies are the sectaries
 - far more important to the work of the Assembly than often realised
 - ecclesiology not for its own sake but in face of growing sects
 - discipline an issue
 - acute need for trained, reformed ministers - pressure from Parl for Assembly to deal with this

Revision of 39 articles till Oct 12 – got up to art 16

Summer 1643 – Parl desperate to get Scots on its side – but they'd only come if something like SLC.

25 Sept 1643 - SLC

“The Parl-y Commissioners came to them seeking aid in their political struggle and with their minds set on a civil compact: they found the Scots, however, equally determined that any bond into which they entered should deal primarily with the ecclesiastical situation and should be fundamentally a religious engagement.” (Warfield)

SLC (L=civil, C=relig): both Houses Parl + WA, Scot both civil and relig bodies, - thn sent out into the two countries to be subscribed by the whole population.

This gave whole new bearing to the work of the WA

“The SLC, it must be borne in mind, was no loose agreement between two churches, but a solemnly ratified treaty between two nations.” (Warfield)

1643–44 – DPW and FPCG

1644-45 - the Eight Articles

1645-47 – Confession of Faith

1647-48 – Catechisms (though work on in background)

Scots went home at end of 1647

Conduct

Account by Robert Baillie, one of the Scottish commissioners to the Assembly. December 7, 1643:

"On Monday morning we sent to both Houses of Parliament for a warrant for our sitting in the Assemblie. This was readilie granted, and by Mr. Hendersone presented to the Proloquitor; who sent out three of their number to convoy us to the Assemblie. Here no mortal man may enter to see or hear, let be to sitt, without ane order in wryte from both Houses of Parliament. When we were brought in, Dr. Twisse had ane long harangue for our welcome, after so long and hazardous a voyage by sea and land, in so unseasonable a tyme of the year. When he had ended, we satt down in these places which since we have kepted. The like of that Assemblie I did never see, and, as we hear say, the like was never in England, nor any where is shortlie lyke to be. They did sit in Henry the 7th's Chappell, in the place of the Convocation; but since the weather grew cold, they did go to Jerusalem chamber, a fair roome in the Abbey of Westminster, about the bounds of the College fore-hall, but wyder. At the one end nearest the doore, and both sydes are stages of seats as in the new Assemblie-House at Edinburgh, but not so high; for there will be roome but for five or six score. At the upmost end there is a chair set on ane frame,

a foot from the earth, for the Mr. Proloquator Dr. Twisse. Before it on the ground stands two chairs for the two Mr. Assessors, Dr. Burgess and Mr. Whyte. Before these two chairs, through the length of the room, stands a table, at which sits the two scribes, Mr. Byfield and Mr. Roborough. The house is all well hung, and has a good fire, which is some dainties at London. Foranent the table, upon the Proloquator's right hand, there are three or four ranks of formes. On the lowest we five doe sit. Upon the other, at our backs, the members of Parliament deputed to the Assemblie. On the formes foranent us, on the Proloquator's left hand, going from the upper end of the house to the chimney, and at the other end of the house, and backsyde of the table, till it come about to our seats, are four or five stages of formes, whereupon their divines sits as they please; albeit commonlie they keep the same place. From the chimney to the door there is no seats, but a void for passage. The Lords of the Parliament uses to sit on chaires, in the void, about the fire. *We meet every day of the week, but Saturday. We sitt commonlie from nine to one or two afternoon. The Proloquator at the beginning and end has a short prayer.* The man, as the world knows, is very learned in the questions he has studied, and very good, beloved of all and highlie esteemed; but merelie bookish, and not much, as it seems, acquaint with conceived prayer, [and] among the unfittest of all the company for any action; so after the prayer he sits mute. It was the canny convoyance of these who guides most matters for their own interest to plant such a man of purpose in the chaire. The one assessour, our good friend, Dr. Whyte, has kept in of the gout since our coming; the other, Dr. Burgess, a very active and sharpe man, supplies, so far as is decent, the Proloquator's place. Ordinarlie there will be present above three-score of their divines. *These are divided in three Committees; in one whereof every man is a member. No man is excluded who pleases to come to any of the three. Every Committee, as the Parliament gives order in wryte to take any purpose to consideration, takes a portion, and in their afternoon meeting prepares matters for the Assemblie, setts doune their minde in distinct propositions, backs their propositions with texts of Scripture. After the prayer, Mr. Byfield the scribe, reads the proposition and Scriptures, whereupon the Assemblie debates in a most grave and orderlie way. No man is called up to speak; bot who stands up of his own accord, he speaks so long as he will without interruption. If two or three stand up at once, then the divines confusedlie calls on his name whom they desyre to hear first: On whom the loudest and manifest voices calls, he speaks. No man speaks to any bot to the Proloquator. They harangue long and very learnedlie. They studie the questions well before hand, and prepares their speeches; but withall the men are exceeding prompt, and well spoken. I doe marvell at the very accurate and extemporall replyes that many of them usuallie doe make. When, upon every proposition by itself, and on everie text of Scripture that is brought to confirme it, every man who will has said his whole minde, and the replyes, and duplies, and triplies, are heard; then the most part calls, To the question. Byfield the scribe rises from the table, and comes to the Proloquator's chair, who, from the scribe's book, reads the proposition, and says, as many as are in opinion that the question is well stated in the proposition, let them say I; when I is heard, he says, as many as think otherwise, say No. If the difference of I's and No's be cleare, as usuallie it is, then the question is ordered by the scribes, and they go on to debate the first Scripture alleadged for proof of the proposition. If the sound of I and No be near equall, then says the Proloquator, as many as say I, stand up; while they stand, the scribe and others number them in their minde; when they sitt down, the No's are bidden stand, and they likewise are numbered. This way is clear enough, and saves a great deal of time, which we spend in reading our catalogue. When a question is once ordered, there is no more debate of that matter; but if a man will vaige, he is quicklie taken up by Mr. Assessor, or many others, confusedlie crying, Speak to order, to order. No man contradicts another expresslie by name, bot most discreetlie speaks to the Proloquator, and at most holds on the generall, The Reverend brother, who latelie or last spoke, on this hand, on that syde, above, or below. I thought meet once for all to give yow a taste of the outward form of their Assemblie. They follow the way of their Parliament. Much of their way is good, and worthie of our imitation: only their longsomenesse is wofull at this time, when their Church and Kingdome lyes under a most lamentable anarchy and confusion. They see the hurt of their being to establish a new Plattforme of worship and discipline to their Nation for all time to come, they think they cannot be answerable, if solidlie and at leisure, they doe not examine every point thereof."*

Parties

Caution - these titles self-applied and it is true that matters of ecclesiology were important but for much of the time these party labels were an irrelevance. Other theological disputes too - such as beginnings of anti-credalism; debates over active obedience of Christ etc

Presbyterians – overwhelming majority but tried to carry everyone with them

Independents – “the Dissenting Brethren”: Thomas Goodwin, Jeremiah Burroughs, Philip Nye (on set forms/extempore: “I plead for neither but for studied prayers”); William Bridge, Sidrach Simpson

Erastians – few, learned, awkward, supported by Parliament which was largely Erastian. John Lightfoot, John Selden, Thomas Coleman (St Peter's, Cornhill).

Debates and Business

Directory of Public Worship:

- Need for new form of worship to replace BCP.
- DPW – sent up to Parl in Dec 1644, estab Feb 1645
- Not a liturgy but ‘a body of agenda and paradigms’
- Largely the work of the Scots - largely follows ‘Knox’s Liturgy’ i.e. Book of Common Order
- But quite a few compromises of Scots to Eng Puritan ways too. Scots keen on all the following:
 - read prayers
 - Lord’s prayer
 - Gloria patri
 - Apostles creed
 - habit of minister to bow in silent prayer on entering pulpit
 - office of Reader

The DPW has none of them except Lord’s Prayer (though it doesn’t proscribe them either).

- Private baptism – common in England, not used in Scot – was forbidden.
- Reception of elements – around tables as in Scot but ambiguous and not followed. Rutherford, letter 68, warns “that ye should in any sort forbear the receiving the Lord’s Supper, but after the form that I delivered it to you, according to the example of Christ our Lord, that is, that ye should sit as banquetters, at one table with our King and eat and drink and divide the elements one to another.”
- 1643 – Commons asks WA if Rous’s Psalms may be sung. Lots and lots revisions. Commanded 1647 for Eng and Wales (Lords not pass it). Scot own further revisions to 1650 edition.

Church Government debate:

Jure divino / Jus divinum both stand for – actually required positively by the law of God. “By divine right” of prudential

a) Presbyterians versus Independents:

- i) Propositions on Church Government
- ii) Dissenting Brethren’s reasons against
- iii) Answers to the Dissenting Brethren

All three published in 1652 as “The Grand Debate” (and available on vol 18 of Puritan Bookshelf)

“Parliament was in no sense averse to a Presbyterian settlement. What it was unalterably opposed to was a jus divinum settlement of any kind. It was of the strongest conviction, in even its most Puritan element, that the Church derived all its authority and jurisdiction from the State; and it identified the State with itself.” (Warfield)

Cong/Indept: “regarding each separate congregation, or church, as they choose to call it, as having the entire power of government within itself, and being fully competent to perform all the functions of ordination, discipline, and worship, without the co-operation of any other congregation or church.” (William Symington)

- i) Whether many particular congregations may be under one Presbyterian government?
- ii) Whether there be a subordination of ecclesiastical assemblies ?
- iii) Whether a single congregation may assume to itself all and sole power in ordination?

b) Erastianism:

The big qu-n was crown rights of King Jesus. Civil auth role in church govt. Parl really really pushy and West Ass v v firm on this. “That the church is identified with the state, that the power of church officers is not judicial but persuasive only, and that the right to admit or to exclude from sealing ordinances resides

with the civil magistrate are propositions which the followers of Erastus undertook to defend.”
(Symington)

Debated May-June 1646. Included first sentence of chap XXX in July 1646 (only Lightfoot against – Coleman had died) – *this chapter was not accepted by parl*

No single doct on Church Govt was accepted by both Scot and Eng.

Confession of Faith:

39 arts – regarded as sound though inadequate.

1604 – Hampton Court Conf – Puritans ask for Lambeth Articles (1595) to be added to 39 to make sure everyone understands.

Church Ireland, 1615 does just that.

Confession Faith – gt unanimity.

- Amyraldians (Calamy, Marshall, Seaman, Vines) denied – see III.6; VIII.5,8

- didn't judge b/w supra and infra

- Aug 1644 – some early work started on Confession
- July 1645 – debates on it began in the Assembly
- Finished to HofC by Dec 1646
- Proof texts added. Complete April 1647
- But not passed until June 1648 – and then without chapters xxx and xxxi and bits of chapters xx, xxiii, xiv
- Not till March 5 1660 was approved by recalled Rump Parl as ‘the public Confession of the Church of England’

Cong – Savoy Confession, 1658; Baptist Confession, 1689

Catechisms:

At least 12 members of WA had published their own cats

Work in 1644-5 then caught up with other stuff

Started again in July 1646

Another try Sept 46 – Jan 47 – decided needed two cats

Larger Cat April 47 – Oct 47

Shorter – Aug to Nov 47

Nov 47 – Apr 48 – proof texts for both