

The Relationship Of The Reformed Churches Of Scotland, England, Western & Eastern Europe

from the 1500's To The 1700's.

Our purpose is to make some observations on the relationship of the various Reformed Churches of Continental Europe and Britain during the 1500's to the 1700's.

I believe that these observations have great relevance for us today. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ does not exist simply as a contemporary organization. It is made up of all tribes, nations and people of all ages as gathered and kept by Christ Jesus. There is an organic link then between those fathers and mothers in the faith who have gone before us and we who profess the faith today. The truth is, we are to "Walk in the footsteps of the flock" (Song of Solomon 1:8) and "Stand in the way and look for the old paths and walk therein..." (Jeremiah 6:16).

One application of the truth of the organic link and unity of Christ's Church in all ages is that I believe lessons can be learnt for us today from the way our fathers of the Reformed Churches of the 1500's-1700's dealt with one another in their similarities and differences. The principles of their dealings with one another can be transposed, I am persuaded, into our contemporary situation to help us in our dealings with one another as Churches in the age in which we live.

We must remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, as the head of His Church, providentially and historically raised up true Churches, Reformed Churches, in various nations of Europe in the 1500's to the 1700's. Now while these Churches had a like common and precious faith, they also differed in various ways in their doctrine, government and worship. The Reformed Churches of Jesus Christ of Europe, with their various similarities and differences, was like a large family with different members or branches.

I think that a good case could be made for saying that historically there were four major branches of the one family of the Reformed Church and Faith. They were:

- The French/Swiss branch
- The Dutch/German branch
- The Eastern European and British Episcopal branch
- The British Presbyterian branch

Though they had differences with one another, let us note these two things about their relationships to one another, and draw the following two lessons from them.

- There Was a Mutual Respect, Care & Help of One Another In Spite of Differences
- The Principles That Undergirded The Managing Of Differences and Similarities I. There Was A Mutual Respect, Care And Help Of One Another In Spite Of Differences

We can observe that there was a real care and help of one another in that the courts of the various Reformed Churches and their leaders, with their various backgrounds, kept in contact by a constant and large flow of correspondence, seeking and offering in a respectful way advice and support. For example, there still exist copies of a large body of correspondence between the various Reformers to one another, which illustrates this type of contact very well.[1] An example of this is Henry Bullinger, the pupil, friend and successor of Zwingli. Schaff writes of him, "He was in friendly correspondence with Calvin, Bucer, Melancthon, Laski, Beza, Cranmer, Hooper, Lady Jane Grey, and the leading Protestant divines and dignitaries of England... This correspondence is an interesting testimony not only to his personal worth, but also to the fraternal communion which then existed between the Anglican and the Swiss Reformed Churches." [2]

We may also note that the various Reformed Churches had, and showed, a brotherly esteem and regard for one another for what they held in common, and of their desire for contact and unity in the essentials, in spite of the differences they had. You recall how Thomas Cranmer wrote to John Calvin and spoke of the need of mutual care and help in the faith, and how Calvin replied and said he would cross many seas to promote greater unity in the faith.[3]

Cranmer wrote among other things to Calvin, "...nothing tends to more effectually to unite the Churches of God, and more powerfully to defend the fold of Christ, than the pure teaching of the Gospel and harmony of doctrine. Wherefore I have often wished, and still continue to do so, that learned and godly men, who are eminent for erudition and judgment, might meet together, and, comparing their respective opinions, might handle all the heads of ecclesiastical doctrine, and hand down to posterity, under the weight of their authority, some work not only upon the subjects themselves, but upon the forms of expressing them. Our adversaries are now holding their councils ...shall we neglect to call together a godly synod, for the refutation of error, and for restoring and propagating the truth? ...Farewell. Your very dear brother in Christ, Thomas Canterbury."

Calvin responded, (quoting in part), "Your opinion, most distinguished Sir, is indeed just and wise" no remedy can be

devised more suitable than if a general meeting were held of the devout and the prudent, of those properly exercised in the school of God, and of those who are confessedly at one on the doctrine of holiness. ... And then I am aware that English matters are not so all-important in your eyes, but that you, at the same time, regard the interests of the whole world. ... This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute amongst us ... Thus it is that the members of the Church being severed, the body lies bleeding. So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were on account of it. ... Now, seeing ... Churches, though divided on other questions, might be made to unite, I think it right for me, at whatever cost of toil and trouble, to seek to attain this object. ... Adieu, very distinguished Archbishop, deserving of my hearty reverence. May the Lord continue to guide you by His Spirit, and to bless your holy labours."

Recall too how the various Reformers from the different Reformed Churches visited one another & often served in one another's Churches. There was a flow of men and ideas between the various branches of the Reformed Churches. There are various outstanding examples of this care and support of one another. Think, for example, of the Italian Reformer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, who served in the Genevan Reformed Church and in the Reformed Church of England where he also was Regius professor at Oxford. He also contributed to the compilation of the 2nd Helvetic Confession, and was respected in Scotland, where his teaching was also appreciated.[4] What a shame that fathers in the faith such as this Reformer and his works are not better known and appreciated.[5]

Consider also how Martin Bucer, the Strasbourg Reformer, served not only the Swiss Churches, but also the English Church in days of Cranmer and Edward VI & had an influence upon the Scots with regard to their worship.[6]

John Knox served not only the Reformed Church of Scotland but also the Church of England, and served for a time in Geneva & in France.[7]

The academic Scot George Buchanan, an early leader of the Reformed Church there, was widely respected and honoured on the continent. He was professor of various Universities on the continent and 1st Moderator of the Church of Scotland & tutor of James VI.[8]

The most influential Scot reformer after Knox was Andrew Melville. He served not only the Scottish Reformed Church, but was a professor in Geneva academy with Reformer Beza and had strong ties with the French Reformed Church.[9] What a flow of communication and mutual service there was between the various branches of the Reformed Churches, in spite of their differences.

Let us note too, how the different branches of the Reformed Church, for all of their differences, consulted with one another on their actions and problems, such as advice on the acceptance and approval of their particular Confessional Standards. There was extensive correspondence between the Reformed Church of the Lowlands and other Reformed Churches, including those of England, Scotland, France and the German States, re the Arminian Controversy, the Synod of Dort and the acceptance of the Canons of Dort.[10]

This care, consultation and help of one another in the formulation of various Churches' Confessional Standards was also seen when the different Reformed Churches of the three kingdoms of Scotland, England & Ireland sought to gather, in one assembly, godly and learned divines to draw up a Confession of Faith to bring a closer union of faith and practice between them.[11]

Note too how the Presbyterians of England and Scotland made use of the Irish Articles of the Episcopalian Archbishop James Ussher of Armagh, as the basis for the Westminster Confession of Faith.[12] The noted historian Schaff, writing on the Irish Articles, which were the work of Ussher, (who was a close friend of the noted academic divine, Vossius[13] of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands), notes: "In all these particulars they prepared the way for the doctrinal standards of the Westminster Assembly. They were the chief basis of the Westminster Confession, as is evident from the general order, the headings of chapters and subdivisions, and the almost literal agreement of language in the statements of several of the most important doctrines".[14]

Another example of this consultation and co-operation between the different branches of the Reformed Churches, is seen when the Swiss Churches wrote to various other Reformed Churches regarding their 2nd Helvetic Confession, seeking their opinions upon it. Various other Reformed Churches, such as the German, French, Hungarian, Polish, Scottish, Dutch and English, then in various ways, approved of it.[15]

The respect, care and desire for Biblical unity of the different branches of the Reformed Churches, also expressed itself in those different branches and their leaders desiring a universal council above that of national General Assemblies or Synods. They desired a Council or Synod where all branches could meet to deal with matters of mutual concern and agreement, and how to manage their differences. We have already referred to the correspondence of Calvin and Cranmer on this matter, but other fathers of a later date also desired such a council. For example, the Reformed Church of Scotland's Church Order lays down precedents and directions for such an Assembly.[16]

The various Reformed Churches prayed for, and had a concern for, one another in their trials and life as Churches. They gave aid, refuge and support to persecuted brethren from other Reformed Churches. In these practical ways they showed their unity and care of one another. There are some very moving incidents of this care and showing the mercies of Christ to one another. It is simply a matter of historical record that the Reformed Church of the Netherlands showed its brotherly care for the Eastern European Reformed Churches, by ransoming from slavery and captivity brethren who had been captured by Muslims in Eastern Europe. Monuments to this remarkable care may still be seen in Eastern Europe.[17]

Another example of such care, is seen by the reference in The Westminster Directory for Public Worship, where there is a section calling on the Reformed Churches of England, Ireland and Scotland to pray for the reformed Queen of Bohemia and the Reformed Churches there, as they faced severe persecution from both Muslims and Roman Catholics. In part they were, "To pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations ... for the deliverance of the distressed churches abroad from the tyranny of the antichristian faction, and from the cruel oppressions and blasphemies of the Turk; for the blessing of God upon the reformed churches, ... for the comforting of the afflicted Queen of Bohemia, ... and for the restitution and establishment of the ... Elector Palatine of the Rhine,..."[18]

The care of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands to their brethren of the Reformed Church of Scotland and England in times of severe persecution, is well documented. They sheltered them, gave them respect by allowing them to have their own worship and congregations. Some Scottish and English Presbyterians at times also became ministers in the Dutch Churches, and one, William Ames, after attending the Synod of Dort where his theological acumen became apparent, became professor of theology at Franeker, and finally rector. He attracted students, not only from the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, but also from all over Europe.[19]

When one Reformed Church was not able to train its ministers, another would come to its assistance and help in the training of its ministers. This was so, even when there were serious differences on the matter of worship. A classic example of this is James Renwick, the Covenanter, and a stalwart not only for the doctrines of the Reformed Church of Scotland, but also of its worship and government, who was trained in Holland. He was sent to the University of Groningen with the support of equally staunch Scottish Reformed men, Donald Cargill and Richard Cameron. He was also examined and ordained by a Classis of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.[20]

Let us not underestimate the close ties that existed between the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands and of Scotland during the 1600's. Many Scottish students made their way to the different Dutch Universities. Dutch theologians, such as Gisbert Voetius and Hermann Witsius, among others, attracted Scottish students. Their writings were also held in repute in England and Scotland. In the period of the "Killing Times", a considerable number, including John Livingstone, Richard Cameron, and James Renwick were trained and ordained by men in the Dutch Reformed Church. Others such as Scot worthies as John Brown of Wamphray, Robert MacWard and William Carstares, also spent many years in the Netherlands.[21]

Various Reformed Churches, with real differences in their ecclesiology, (both Episcopalians - some Erastian - and Independents), and worship, met together in a general assembly to seek to compose symbols that would more closely unite them and Christ's cause. Note that there were three National Reformed Churches who met at the Westminster Assembly - the Scots, Irish and English with such differences. See how they cared for one another in that they also gave assistance to one another with their Church Order. A perusal of the Scots Reformed Church's Order, as found in A Copious and Comprehensive Summary of the Laws and Regulations of the Church of Scotland From A.D. 1560 to A.D. 1850 shows, from the often quoting of the French Order, the Scots' indebtedness to the French Reformed Church for their Church Order.

There were exchanges of pulpits between men of the different Reformed Churches, even when there were deeply held differences of worship and government. One delightful anecdote that illustrates this occurred when Samuel Rutherford, one of the great Scottish Reformers of the 2nd Reformation in Scotland was pastor at Anworth. The Episcopalian Archbishop of Armagh, James Ussher, Primate of the Church of Ireland, preached from Rutherford's pulpit. The circumstances of this quaint and yet significant incident are as follows.

A passing traveler came to Anworth, and on the eve of the Sabbath knocked at the manse and begged for rest and shelter. He was kindly received by the Rutherfords and joined in the evening family worship. During the worship he was asked in the catechism time, how many commandments were there, to which he replied, "eleven". Samuel Rutherford was surprised his visitor being a mature and educated man, did not know better.

It seems that Rutherford was walking outdoors early on the Sabbath morning and heard a man praying in the garden. It was the stranger. By his lofty spirit of devotion, Rutherford guessed he was no ordinary man, and as soon as possible asked him his name. The stranger confessed he was the scholar and Episcopalian divine, James Ussher, who had to pass by Anworth on his way back to Ireland, and who wished to spend the Sabbath with Rutherford, but was not sure of his reception, Rutherford being a Presbyterian and Ussher an Episcopalian. Rutherford however, warmly welcomed Ussher and asked him to preach that day. It is recorded that when Ussher gave out the text of the sermon, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another", Rutherford exclaimed from the midst of the congregation, "the

eleventh commandment!".[22]

Observe also how the different Reformed Churches embraced one another's Confessional Standards as their own - thus witnessing to the inherent unity of the Reformed faith among the different Churches. It is striking to note how the earlier Continental Catechisms, such as Calvin's was adopted by various other Reformed Churches, including the Reformed Church of Scotland. Not only the Reformed Churches of Germany, the Netherlands and Eastern Europe, but also the Scottish Reformed Church also adopted the German Reformed Church's Heidelberg Catechism. Both Calvin's Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism remain to this day official Catechisms of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia.

Truly, the Reformed Churches had a common unity in their understanding of the fundamental great truths of the Word of Almighty God. They strove for this unity as expressing their belief in the Catholicity of the faith and of Christ's true Church on earth. This unity can truly be seen in the basic solidarity of the Reformed Symbols.

Now, what should be particularly noted is this. This co-operation, contact, respect and care of one another was not at a time of compromise and weakness of the Reformed Churches. Rather, this sort of relationship existed at a time in history when the Reformed Churches were at the time of their greatest strength and influence - the classical period of the 16th and 17th centuries.

So the first point and lesson I believe we can draw from our fathers in the faith of old for ourselves today is this. We should seek to have contact and co-operation in those things in which we agree. We should have a respect and care for one another, in as much as we hold to a like confession of the faith as found in our historic Reformed Symbols. We need that catholic view of the Church and faith. II. The Principles That Under-Girded The Managing Of Their Differences & Similarities

We can learn a valuable lesson, I believe, in how we ought to relate to one another from the understanding the various branches of the Reformed Churches had in how to manage their differences.

It is striking that the various branches of the Reformed Churches did not major on the differences they had at the cost of the broad faith they had in common. The truths they particularly held in common, were their view of revelation & authority, God, Christ's Person and work, the nature of man and salvation.

However, this does not mean they did not think their differences unimportant. They saw all truth as sacred and important, and any differences were treated seriously and with care and respect. There was none of that modern notion around today of sacrificing differences under the guise of a mere formal unity of the Churches.

Now let us carefully note this! There is something else of significance we should note further about their differences. They basically had to do with matters of worship and of the government of the Church.

In the area of worship, various branches differed quite sharply in the application of the principle of Biblically regulated worship. Some returned to the use of instrumental accompaniment in worship. Some continued to hold to the observance of "holy days". Some persisted in the use of formal liturgies in worship. Some still maintained an Episcopal form of government of the Church.

Well, how did they manage their differences? How did they view them?

The attitude of the Scottish Reformed Church & the Presbyterians of England, is really that of all branches of the Reformed Church. The crucial point was this! They distinguished between the marks or essence (the being) of the True Church and its well being![23]

For example, the three marks or "notes" of the True Church are spelt out in the First Scotch Confession, Chapter XVIII. There we read in part: "...The notes, signs, and assured tokens whereby the immaculate spouse of Christ Jesus is known ... we believe, confess, and avow to be, first, the true preaching of the Word of God ... Secondly, the right administration of the Sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed to the Word and promise of God, ... Lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God's Word prescribes ... Wheresoever then these former notes are seen, be the number so few above two or three, there without all doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ..."[24]

This confessional statement very clearly spells out what is of the being or essence of the Church.

We ought to be struck by the fact that neither worship nor government is placed among the marks or essence of the True Church. The reason was such matters were seen as of the well being of the Church.

Our Reformed fathers clearly emphasized a difference of importance of order in the different theological loci - or divisions in the systematic study of Biblical truth. The loci of Theology Proper (the knowledge of God's being and attributes), of Anthropology (the nature and state of man), of Christology (Christ's person and work), of Soteriology (the study and

understanding of the work of salvation), were seen as far more crucial to the faith than the locus of Ecclesiology. Ecclesiology has to do with the study and understanding of such things as polity (church government) and liturgics (worship). The earlier loci had to do with the essence of the faith and of the being of the Church, and the last locus had to do with the well being of the faith and the faithful.

There were certain practical consequences flowing from this distinction and understanding. Firstly it influenced how the Church was defined. Now particularly note how the compilers of the Westminster Confession defined the Church. And remember this is the confession of the Puritan Presbyterians of England and the Covenanters of Scotland, with their profound commitment to as pure a worship and as consistent a Biblical government as could be implemented, and who were prepared to suffer death for their convictions in these matters. For all their particularisms and keen consciences, they would not go beyond the revelation of the Word of God, and so felt constrained in all obedience to the Lord of the Church, to define it in the most broad, catholic, terms. They confessed: "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law) consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion: and of their children: ..." (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, Section II)[25]

Again we need to note that the fathers at the Westminster Assembly refused to make worship and government to be marks of the true Church. They held to, and practised a unity and co-operation on the basis of the essence or being of the faith.

Now we need to ask, did they then make their differences merely matters of indifference? Certainly not! If not, then how did they view those Churches with which they had differences? Did they unchurch them because of the differences? Did they refuse to enter into communication and fellowship with them because of the differences? Obviously not.

The way they viewed the matter was twofold. First, they acknowledged that the matter of the True Church is not black and white. Certainly there is the True Church. Certainly there is the False Church. But there can be also degrees of consistency within the True Church to the Truth. The Westminster Confession put the matter thus: "This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them." (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, Section IV)[26]

Thus, our fathers did not believe that we have to "unchurch" a Church because we may believe that in various ways they may be inconsistent or in error in their Biblical understanding. They did not sever their connection with a Church because they believed that what that Church practised to some degree was inconsistent with the truth, as they understood it. Their practice and their Confessions showed this to be so. An example of this is to be seen in the way in which the Church of Scotland viewed, (in its Church Order), the basis upon which Reformed Churches would meet in a General Council. They met because of their mutually holding to that which was of the being of the Church, and would seek to manage those differences, which related to the well being of the Church as God directed them to do so. A lesson for us. The Order stated, among other things of such a General Council, "Most of the churches being already bound and obliged to own and maintain that Confession of Faith, which they have by their canons authorized and approved; and their being an universal harmony in the doctrine contained in all the confessions of the reformed churches; the work of a general council as to matters of faith, would, in all probability, be sweet and easy: And if in what relateth to the worship, discipline, or government of the church, there should be some misunderstandings, God should even reveal this unto them. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things, Phil. iii. 15,16"[27]

Secondly, how did our fathers view themselves in their relation to those Churches in which they felt there was error in worship or government? They recognized that none should be proud and selfrighteous in their relationship with other True Churches. Thus they went on to confess: "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; ..." (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, Section V)[28]

Further, they believed that all true Churches and believers, as much as lies within them, are bound to work for a Biblical fellowship and unity. "Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing other such spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus." (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXVI, Section II)[29]

When the Scots and English Presbyterians believed that there were violations of Biblical principle in worship and government, not merely matters of indifference or simply different application of commonly held principles, they dissented, and recorded their dissent, with their brethren on those matters. But they would not break their unity with them. In this way they freed their consciences from any implication in what they considered to be a compromise of truth and Christ's cause. (Much the same thinking is behind the practice of "dissent" in our Church Order).

An outstanding example of this conviction and practice is seen when the Reformed Churches of Switzerland produced

their Second Helvetic Confession, the Scottish Churches sent a brotherly letter of warm appreciation for the Swiss Church's work in drawing up such a Confession. However, at the same time, they qualified their approval and their fellowship with those Churches by making it clear the Reformed Church of Scotland would not have anything to do with the observance of so called "holy days", for which, they believed, no warrant could be found in the word of God.[30]

So, the Scots were prepared to stand firmly for their distinctives, though they accepted that they belonged to the well being and not the essence of the Church. It is simply a matter of historical record that the Reformed believers of Scotland and Presbyterians of England would rather sacrifice all of this world's goods, even one's life, rather than be required to do what the Continental and English (Episcopal) Reformed Churches required. To them matters of government and worship, though not of the essence of the church were yet vital matters of their own personal convictions and faith. Cameron writes of the Scots and quotes them, "The attitude of the Scottish reformers was made perfectly clear in 1566 in a well-known reply to the Swiss Churches in which approval was given to the Second Helvetic Confession with the exception of the passage concerning the festival of our Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension and sending the Holy Ghost upon His disciples. These festivals obtain no place among us, for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day among us than what the divine oracles have prescribed." [31]

It was not contrariness then that motivated the Scottish and English Presbyterians. They believed the introduction of such things trespassed upon the prerogatives and office of Jesus Christ as King of the Church, and His glory. This was the spirit that animated them. There is a reference in H. Merle d'Aubigne's writings of a visit he made to Scotland where he discussed with some of the Reformed Church ministers their view of worship. He was struck by the fact that the Kingship of Jesus Christ over His Church was basic to their thinking and practice in the matter. There is also an anecdote in one of the old books about the Covenanters where an Episcopalian of otherwise reformed persuasion was visiting Scotland during the "killing times". He met a staunch Covenanter, one of many who were suffering much for their conviction that only Christ could tell them how to worship and to order their Church, not the King. The Episcopalian was surprised that the Covenanter was prepared to fellowship with him when he knew that he had a credible faith and walk. The Covenanter explained that his views on worship and government did not destroy the unity of the faith. What were at stake though, he explained, were the good of the Church and the due recognition of the glory and rights of King Jesus. The Covenanter was prepared to fellowship on the basis of the true religion, but not prepared to sacrifice what he understood to be tied to the good of Christ's cause among them.

It should also be clearly noted that while the Scots saw the worship and government of the Church (and for that matter their English Presbyterian counterparts), as very important, they just would not make them a fourth mark of the true Church! They would not permit such matters stopping them from otherwise holding in esteem and care those Reformed Churches that differed from them in such matters.

To such as the Scottish Reformed Church, no truth of God was unimportant. They believed the glory of God was involved in the least truth He has given to us to understand and in which light to live - even in matters that involved the well being, not the essence of the Church. They perceived that the good of souls and the health of true Biblical Christianity were involved in such matters. If they were to let go of such things, they believed the Bible and history showed the Church could then drift spiritually and all sorts of unhealthy spiritual diseases could afflict it. The leaven would work until finally a point could be reached over time, when she finally could apostasize from even the essential marks of the true Church.

One English Presbyterian explained his concern by way of the quaint illustration of the Rooks' nests. These noisy birds build colonies of nests that are used from year to year. One could drive the pesky birds away, but unless the nests were also removed, the rooks would return. Some matters of worship and government for which the Presbyterians of Scotland and England believed there was no Scriptural warrant, were seen by some other Reformed Churches as indifferent things. Among them were such things as the surplice, government by bishops, or the use of candles or the organ in worship. True, they might not be abused as they had been by the pre-reformed Church, but if left, the "Rooks" would be likely to return one day.

Thus, the Scottish Reformed Church dissented from what some other branches of the Reformed Churches were doing in the government and worship of the Church even to the point of suffering greatly, yet for all that, they would not break the basic "unity" of those Churches. They had a holy horror of schism.

John Knox, addressing the matter of the differences between the Reformed Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches of the Continent, wrote concerning such differences: "...so, albeit that we did both consider them and condemn them, yet we usurp no authority above our brethren, but refer all men to their own judge, and do reverence all congregations, (i.e. Churches) who agree with us in the principals of our faith ...Albeit in all ceremonies there is not uniformity; yea, and albeit that in some heads of doctrine, also there appear repugnance, yet will we not break brotherly concord, providing that we agree in the principals." [32]

Thus our Reformed Fathers in Scotland classed ecclesiology (liturgics and polity) as not of the essence of the true Church, but of its well being. The differences that the Reformed Church of Scotland had with various other Reformed Churches was generally in the area of ecclesiology, and not theology proper, Soteriology, Christology etc. We believe that Calvin and the Reformed Fathers on the Continent also had this understanding[33]. For example, Calvin writes, "The

pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults. What is more, some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church. For not all the articles of true doctrine are of the same sort. Some are so necessary to know that they should be certain and unquestioned by all men as the proper principles of religion. Such are: God is one; Christ is God and the Son of God; our salvation rests in God's mercy; and the like. Among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith."^[34]

There is then, I believe, a lesson for us in how our fathers managed their differences. We would do well to consider the principles that under girded their thinking and how they managed this matter. We need their principles so that we do not needlessly stumble one another and weaken our witness. We need their principles so that we can truly be a help to one another, but at the same time not sacrifice our consciences and convictions. Conclusion

Of course, differences in other loci did arise in due time. The essential unity of the faith was rent by the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands in the early 1600's, the Amalrydian controversy in France and Switzerland in the mid 1600's and the promotion of species of these errors (among others), by such men as John Davenant and William Laud in the mid 1600's in England and the Marrow Controversy in Scotland in the early 1700's.

The issue of modern modified Calvinism with its slide into the issue of common grace and the related matters of a universal love and desire in Christ for the salvation of all men is one that afflicts the professing Reformed Churches today. There is a departure in many ways among different Reformed Churches from the historic Reformed Faith as expressed in our Creeds.

Yet, I think it true to say that to varying degrees faithful Churches of the four different branches of the Reformed Churches still exist throughout the world, and we ought to seek to appreciate them and to contact, encourage and help them where we are able.

Contact with such Churches of course raises the question, to what extent do the issues of Common Grace and related matters debar our contact with otherwise historic Reformed Churches? It is after all in the earlier loci and at the heart of our faith! Is it so important that we make it a mark of a true Church? I personally draw back from that, though it is a most serious error.

Perhaps one place we could start to "Walk in the footsteps of the flock" (Song of Solomon 1:8) and "Stand in the way and look for the old paths and walk therein..." (Jeremiah 6:16), is to seek a gathering or conference or "assembly" of those denominational Churches, individual congregations and particular men, who are committed to sovereign particular grace and the historic faith as expressed in our Reformed Creeds. In that way we could begin again the calling we have to care for one another in a like precious faith, and to mutually seek to uplift the Lord in all His great wonder and glory - the God of our salvation.

Thank you. Chris Coleborn, Brisbane,

July 2002 FOOTNOTES 1. See for example, The Letters of John Calvin, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1980; The Zurich Letters, 1558-159 & The Zurich Letters, Second Series, 1558-1602, The Parker Society, Cambridge University Press, 1842; Original Letters, No 1 & 2, The Parker Society, Cambridge University Press, 1847; The Works of John Knox, Ed. David Laing, Johnstone & Hunter, Edinburgh, 1844, Vol. III and especially Vol. VI

2. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Vol. 1, Page 390-391.

3. Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, The Parker Society, Cambridge Press, 1846, Page 431-432 & The Letters of John Calvin, op cit., Page 130 ff.

4. The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised Edition, J.D. Douglas, General Editor, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1978, Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire Vermigli), Page 769, et al.

5. Peter Martyr, The Common Places, Translated and gathered by Anthonie Marten, Thomas Vautrollier, 1574.

6. The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, op cit., Bucer (Butzer) Martin, Page 162-163, et al.

7. Ibid, Knox, John, Page 570-571, et al.

8. Ibid, Buchanan, George, Page 163-164, et al

9. Ibid, Melville, Andrew, Page 648, et al.

10. Ibid, Dort, Synod of, Page 309-310, et al.

11. Ibid, Westminster Assembly & Westminster Confession, Page 1035-1036; The Westminster Confessional Standards, Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Inverness, 1970, The Solemn League and Covenant, Page 355 ff, et al.

12. The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, op cit., Ussher, James, Page 1005 et al.

13. See the entry, Vossius, in the Schaff-Herzog, Cyclopedia.

14. Philip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1977, Vol. 1, Page 665.

15. Ibid, page 394; David Calderwood, History of the Kirk of Scotland, Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1843, Vol. 2, Page 331.

16. A Copious and Comprehensive Summary of The Laws & Regulations of the Church of Scotland, from A.D. 1560 to

A.D. 1850, Alexander Forbes, Aberdeen, 1852, Book First, Title XVIII, Of A General Council of Protestants, Page 250-251.

17. I recall, at a meeting conducted by the Rev. B. Woudenberg in the early 1990's he gave a talk on a trip he had made to the Reformed Churches of Romania, and showed a slide of such a monument.

18. The Westminster Confessional Standards, op cit., The Directory for the Public Worship of God, Of Public Prayer before the Sermon, Page 377-378.

19. The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, op cit., Ames, William, Page 36; The Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology, Org. Ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, I.V.P. Downers Grove, Illinois, 1993, Netherlands, Page 623. William Ames also, though a Professor serving the Dutch Churches, wrote on and defended that understanding of the Reformed Faith on worship represented by the Presbyterians of England and Scotland. See for example his work, A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship, Photocopied by Still Waters Revival Books, from his 1633 edition.

20. Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology, op cit. Netherlands, Page 623 & Renwick, James, Page 709.

21. Ibid, Netherlands, Page 623.

22. Some doubt the authenticity of this anecdote, but it is widely reported as factual, see for example, Thompson, A. Samuel Rutherford, R.T.B.S.S. Edinburgh, 1884, Page 31 ff.; Bonar, A. Memoir and Remains of R. M. M'Cheyne, Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, Page 609; Loane, M. Makers of Religious Freedom, I.V.F. London, 1960, Page 63; Smellie, a. Men of the Covenant, Banner of Truth, London, 1960, Page 65. Even if the incident did not occur, we know from the way in which both Rutherford and Ussher conducted themselves it is entirely consistent with their convictions.

23. James Bannerman in his work, The Church of Christ, Banner of Truth, London, 1960, Vol. I, Page 54 ff. discusses these distinctions and something of their ramifications.

24. For this Confession in Modern English, see Knox, John, The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland, Ed. Cuthbert Lennox, Andrew Melrose, London, 1905, Knox's Confession (The First Scotch Confession), Page 353,

25. The Westminster Confessional Standards, The publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Eccieslitho, Inverness, 1970, Page 107 ff.

26. Ibid

27. A Copious and Comprehensive Summary of The Laws & Regulations of the Church of Scotland, from A.D. 1560 to A.D. 1850, Alexander Forbes, Aberdeen, 1852, Book First, Title XVIII, Of A General Council of Protestants, Page 251, No. 4.

28. The Westminster Confessional Standards, op cit. ibid.

29. Ibid

30. David Calderwood, The History of the Kirk of Scotland, op cit. Vol. 2, Page 331. In the same place, Page 332 ff. an example of a brotherly letter to the Reformed Episcopal Church of England on a matter of worship (dress of ministers for it) is to be found. The Scots vehemently opposed such things, but would not treat the English Reformers as any thing less than brethren.

31. The First Book of Discipline, Ed. J. K. Cameron, St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, Page 88 fn.10

32. See The Works of John Knox, op cit.

33. Consider for example how though Calvin was personally convinced Biblical against such things as "holy days" & his persuasion of Presbyterian Church Polity, he still felt able to labour in a Church that held to the essentials or being of the Reformed Faith, though observed "holy days"; and to encourage and appreciate other Churches that also held to the heart and substance of the Reformed Faith, though they practiced Episcopacy.

34. Calvin, John, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Trans. John T. McNeill, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975, Book IV, Ch. I, Section 12, page 1025-1026.