

The Form of Government in the Kirk of Scotland (c.1639?)

Transcript

British Library, Harley MS 4931, ff. 70r–71v

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The forme of Government in the Kirke of Scotland./.

[*Left margin:1.*] The Confession of faith, & reformation of the Kirk of Scotland in Doctrine, Wor[shi]p, & Discipline, were regulated by the word of god, & grounded upon scripture, as is acknow- ledged by the Harmony of Confessions of the reformed Kirke, & by the testimony of the best Divines in the Kirk of England, & other reformed Kirks.

[*Left margin:2.*] At [tha]t time, & to this day amidst the greatest dissentions, {&} & not w[i]thstanding the ambiti- on, & usurpation of Prelates, noe other Ministers, & officers haue beene acknow- ged, or received by the authority of the reformed Kirk of Scotland, but Pastours, Do- ctors, Elders, & Deacons, these being warranted by Scripture, & being sufficient for all [th]e necessary uses of this Kirke; yet so, [tha]t [th]e civill Maigstrate had his owne emi- nent place, & civill power for [th]e conservation, & purgation of Religion.

[*Left margin:3.*] Noe man here, w[e]r he never so wise, & pious aboue others, or doth he never so much arrogate authority to himselfe, hath [th]e reines of Kirk government in his hands, to dispose, or doe what seemeth good in his owne eyes, but all matters are devised, & determined by co[m]mon consent, in the conventions, & assemblies of [th]e Kirk: The kirk Assemblies were of 4 sorts, & degrees, commonly designed by [th]e names of Kirk sessions, or consistories; Presbyteries, or Classes; Provinciall Synods; & Generall, or nationall assemblies.

[*Left margin:4.*] The Kirk session, or consistory doth consist of one Minister at least, approved for his learning, life, & skill in government; And of Elders, men of best knowledge, & holiest life in the parish, so many in number as [th]e proportion in^{of} the Congregati- on doth require, who are chosen with the consent of the people, & in the presence of [th]e people solemnly admitted to their charge. These convene weekly for orde- ring such matters of [th]e word of god, as are proper to [tha]t parish, as, What daies of the weeke are meetest for assembling to the publike wor[shi]p, or Catechising; and What houres of the Lords day before, & after noone are fittest for the exercises of [tha]t day; At what times the communion shalbe given; For censuring of Delinquents, by swearing, cursing, prophaning of the Lords day, drinking, fornication, adultery; & for delating of greate offences, such as Heresy, Superstition &c. If any be suspected, or if there be any scandall in their bounds, proceeding also w[i]th the{-} censures of the kirk against them. That all transgressours may be brought to repentance, or separated from the people of god, according to the ordinances of [Chris]t, & order of the Kirk. Heere also the Deacons (who haue the charge of the poore) are present to receiue direction in their duty.

[*Left margin:5.*] The Presbytery, or Classical meeting, doth consist of particular Kirks in such a cir- cuit, 12. 16. 20. or ^{so} many as by convenience of the place can weekly assemble. Here some one Elder of each parish (appointed by the particular kirk sessions) & the whole Ministers of these kirks do meete, where the Ministers, & others to be admitted into [th]e ministry (whom we call Expectants,) exercise their guifts by course, in inter- preting some

places of scripture appointed [the]m by the Presbytery; the exercise, or prophesying being ended, the Ministers, & Elders sitt downe w[i]th their moderatour, & after prayer, & censure of the Doctrine, they use the power of Iurisdiction, Ordination, Suspension, Deprivation, Visitation of the Kirks, Tryall of the processes of Exco[m]muni- cation diduced by the particular Eldership, And of Direction to the Minister of [th]e parish to Exco[m]municate, if need be. Heere the Scandalous faults of Ministers in doctrine, or life, are delated; And all p[er]sons of whatsoever quality disobedient to their owne ministers, & Elders, are [wi]th greate Authority censured..

[*Left margin:6.*] Provinciall synods; these consists of the whole Presbyteries in a shire, or province; so [th]at the whole kingdome is divided into shires, or provinces, in relation to these Synods. Here all the Ministers, & one Elder in every parish, doe meete twice in the Yeare, & after Preaching, & Calling upon the name of God, by the Moderatour of the

preceeding

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preceeding Moderatour, a new Moderatour being chosen, they try the Presbyteries by [the]r Records, presented by the Clarke of every Presbytery. What was obscure, or difficult for the Presbytery, or might concerne [the]m all in Common, is determined, & ordered; & if any difficulty arise, which doth not fall under some Kirke Constitution, its referred to the Nationall Assembly. All matters are with such diligence expedited, [tha]t each Minister may returne to his charge on the Lords day.

[*Left margin:7.*] In the Generall, or Nationall Assembly, the Kings Ma[jes]ty in p[er]son; or his Co[m]missioner in his place, useth to be present, who conveene once in the yeare, or oftner pro re nata. It doth consist of Ministers, & Elders from each Presbytery, & Regall bourgh. After solemne humiliation the first day of [tha]t Assembly one of the ministers is chosen by the voices of the whole Assembly, to Moderate, & Preside in that Assembly; The records of the Synods are perused, & tried; Acts, & constitutions for all the Churches are agreed upon w[i]th common consent, & all mens doubts, & scruples concerning [the]m are satisfied to the full, if they be propounded {Ammo {-}difitandi, non tentandi}. Appellations, Petitions, Grievances, & Complaints are examined, & determined by this supreme, & highest Kirk Iudicatory. And some Co[m]missioners chosen to p[re]sent grievances, or petitions agree upon in the Assem- bly, to the Parliament, the King, [th]e Councill of the Kingdome, or Convention of Estates. In this authority, & subordination of Sessions, Presbyteries, Provinciall Synods, & Nationall Assemblies, doth consist [th]e Orders, [th]e Beauty, the Strength of [th]e Kirk of Scotland, comfortable to the godly both Pastours, & Professors, & terrible (as an army w[i]th ban- ners) to papists (be their places never so high), to all Hereticks, Schismaticks, Hirelings, & all ungodly men; no scandalous fault of any p[er]son escapeth censure; no heresy, or error can sooner be hatched, but its presently crushed by some of these inferior assemblies, or if it be kept on foot, or take strength, its quite suppressed by the natio- nall Assembly, convening once in the yeare; w[hi]ch hath beene a maine cause why so few sects, or errors in doctrine, or wor[shi]p haue appeared in the Kirke of Scotland for many years. And wheresoever those Assemblies haue place, power, & liberty, the names of Heresies, & Sects haue not almost beene heard. In these Assemblies the particular kirkes are not governed by the extrinsecall power of any one, or many sett

over [the]m, as in the Monarchicall government of Prelates, but they are ruled, and iudged by [the]mselues, & [the]r owne intrinsecall power, each member by [th]e whole body, in an orderly way, none of the whole co[m]munion of the faithfull being barred from the ioynt, & co[m]mon government. By these Assemblies the Gift, the Knowledge, & Zeale of all the members (especially of the Ministers) are stirred up, quickned, encreased, & strengthned; an holy emulation is excited by acquaintance, conference, & by perceiving the gifts one of another; & the best gifts are knowne for planning of Kirks, & Colled- ges. Whence it is [tha]t ministers returne from these Assemblies ashamed, & humbled in themselues, & furnished w[i]th fresh resolutions for every pastorall duty, for the co[m]mon benefitt, & edification of all the Kirks./.

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[*Left margin:* The Scottish Kirke Go-vernment.]

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<https://mpese.ac.uk/t/FormKirkScotland.html>