

RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES OF THE SCOTTISH MARTYRS

by

Andrew Syminton

They (the Martyrs of the seventeenth century) held the grand Protestant doctrine of the perfection and supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures, and claimed a right to read, and think, and believe, for themselves. They embraced the system of doctrine usually known in this country by the name Calvinistic; but which we would rather call apostolical, or evangelical, for they called no man master, and would submit their consciences in this matter to no authority, excepting that of God speaking in the Scriptures. The doctrines of human guilt and depravity, salvation by the cross of Christ, and by the grace of God and influences of the Holy Spirit, formed their creed, and were the basis of that pious and holy character by which they were distinguished.

They claimed a right to worship God in the institutions which he has ordained, without the interference or authority of a man. They contended for true liberty of conscience, and would not bow to receive from any human authority, ecclesiastical or civil, rites that had no sanction in the word of God. And when they had no alternative but to wrong their consciences or sacrifice their lives, they loved not their lives unto the death.

They held the exclusive supremacy of Jesus Christ in the church, and contended for the blood-chartered liberty of the church, and her independence of human authority in the early establishment of the Reformation this was a prominent feature. The Pope had assumed and exercised an authority over the church; Henry VIII in his contentions with Rome, transferred this authority to himself; and in all the contentions with the house of Stuart, this was a main point. The independence of the church was boldly asserted by Henderson in the Assembly in Glasgow, 1638. The reformers and sufferers contended for the liberty of the ministers, the courts, and the members of the church; and would not bow to prelatie more than to popish authority, nor to a civil ecclesiastic supremacy. They were persuaded of the scriptural authority of the Presbyterian polity, but held it in its unfettered freedom and independence; and viewed with jealousy every encroachment of human authority, as not only opposed to their liberty, but as reflecting dishonour upon their Saviour. Fidelity to this truth, as interfering with the taking of oaths, in which a supremacy over the church was recognized, formed one chief ground of the sufferings of those troublous times.

The martyrs held the divine institution of magistracy, and of the scripture precepts in the erection of civil government and in the appointment of governors. They held that persons invested with authority should not only be persons of ability and moral character, but fearers of God, and professors of the true religion. No class of men were more jealous of the liberty of the church than they were; yet they

held that an obligation lay upon a nation, by their rulers, to favour and support religion; viewing this as due, in the first place, to the Prince of the Kings of the earth, whom all nations are to serve, and as, in the second place, forming the only sure basis of national virtue, union, peace, and prosperity. They would not submit to an Erastian supremacy, placing the church in the subjection to the State; nor did they assume an authority over the State, requiring its subjection to the church. They drew the distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority, with judicious exactness; and, without confounding these two things, required their co-operation, each in its own sphere, as co-ordinate powers under one Supreme Divine authority. They did not confound the constitutional exercise of civil authority, in giving facilities and protection to true religion, with the base prostitution of it to State or personal purposes. They found things civil and religious recognized in the same divine law, connected in the complex nature and relations of man, related also in the necessary connections of things, and combined in the corruptions against which they testified; and be it right or wrong, such is the fact, that the reformers did not exclude religion from national concern. But it is due to them to say, that nothing was more remote from their minds than the idea of propagating religion with the sword. Called, as they were, in their perilous circumstances, to assume the attitude of defence, they disavowed and abhorred the propagation of religion by other than the weapons of scripture, argument, prayer, and example. In language as strong as could be employed by those who accuse them of sanguinary principles, they declared, "We positively disavow, as horrid murder, the killing of any, because of a different persuasion and opinion from us, albeit some have invidiously cast this odious calumny upon us."

Besides, the martyrs held the great desirableness of union and uniformity in the profession of religion. They testified against sectarianism, or the violation of the unity of the church, by cutting or dividing it into insulated sections. God is one; religion, as a principle in the heart, is one; the word of God is one; Christ is one; and his law is one. The law of Christ is not an undeterminate thing; it is definite, and is distinguished by a universality and simplicity adapted to the situation of the church in every circumstance, and providing for its visible unity. The reformers were unionist upon principle, and on the largest scale too. They sought union upon the basis of truth. They held the doctrine of the unity of the church, and endeavoured its exemplification. They wished, also, by good laws and scripturally qualified rulers, the union and prosperity of the kingdom. And it is not to be denied that, without making any compromise of the authority and freedom of either, they sought a harmonious co-operation and reciprocation between Church and State, in subserviency to godliness and honesty. Nor were their pious wishes confined to their own loved country. They looked abroad. They sought the enlargement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and the peace and tranquillity of all Christian kingdoms and commonwealths; the Christianization and union of all the nations of the earth. But they would not sacrifice truth for union; nor did they stumble at the impossibility of obtaining uniformity in the profession of religion. The event showed that they were premature in their expectations. Their aim, however, was excellent; and predictions assure us that the evil of division will be healed in the arrival of a day in which "there shall be one Lord and his name One."

The martyrs also held covenanting to be a fit and divinely authorized means of consolidating union in a church and a nation, and of giving security to the interests of religion in both. They found confederation in the transactions of mankind; they viewed it to be based on the moral law; they saw it

largely exemplified in the history of the Jews; they read prophetic intimations of the practice; and they had before them the example of the reformed churches. Besides, they were, in a measure, driven into covenanting by the plottings of their enemies. At the period of the first reformation, the National Covenant of Scotland had been prepared and gone into, when the jealousy of the nation had been awakened by the interception of letters from Rome, granting a dispensation to the Roman Catholics to profess the reformed tenets for a time; with a view, no doubt, to the ultimate overthrow of the reformed cause. The covenant united the country, and proved a means of preserving the reformed religion from the peril to which it was exposed, from the machinations of enemies. At a subsequent period, this covenant was again sworn as applying to Prelacy as well as Popery; and a Solemn League and Covenant was subsequently framed to preserve the reformed religion in Scotland, and extend it in "England and Ireland." These deeds formed, in those days, the Magna Charta of civil and religious liberty; and were held in the highest veneration by those who contended against the overthrow of the reformation. The offence in which these deeds were held by the enemies of the reformation, may be learned from the public odium, attempted to be thrown upon them by their condemnation and burning. But the martyrs held fast their obligation, because of that scriptural reformation which they embraced, and which they had been the means, so seasonably and efficiently, under God, of preserving.

The martyrs also held the duty of resisting authority, when it violated divine and constitutional rights, and set at nought all attempts at reformation. No race of men regarded superiors with greater respect than they did; and this too from a conscientious principle. They were not rash to resist authority, even when it was abused. They exercise patience, remonstrated, and employed every means of reformation. But authority may be abused, and power may be turned to oppression and persecution; and abuse may reach a point when resistance becomes a duty, and if ever it reached this point in any case, it was in the days of the late martyrs. Then, after setting, with much patience and long-suffering, the example of obedience for conscience sake, they taught by their example, the awful but necessary lesson of resistance for conscience sake; giving the doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance to the winds.

Such are some of the leading principles of the martyrs. In contending for these principles, they viewed them in a threefold connection, as will appear from their writings and testimonies. They held them, first, because founded on the Bible, to which they made their appeal as the alone supreme authority. They were attached to these principles, in the second place, as entering into the ecclesiastic and civil constitutions of the country, after it had in the goodness of God obtained reformation; which will account for their frequent reference to Acts of Assembly, and of Parliament, to vindicate themselves from the charge of sedition and rebellion. And they adhered to these principles, again, as having been embraced in the covenants, of whose obligation they had a strong sense in their consciences.

-Andrew Symington

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[The Covenanted Reformation Defended Against Contemporary Schismatics: A Response and Antidote Primarily to the Neopresbyterian Malignancy and Misrepresentations, and the Manufactured "Steelite" Controversy, Found in Richard Bacon's A Defense Departed; With a Refutation of Bacon's Independency, Popery, Arminianism, Anabaptism and Various Other Heresies \(Including an Exhibition of His Opposition to Scripture and the Covenanted Reformation, in General; and His Opposition to John Calvin, John Knox, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland \[Especially 1638-1649\], Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, the Testimony of the Covenanter Martyrs, the Reformed Presbytery, the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton and a Host of Other Prominent Reformers from Past Generations, in Particular\) -- With Copious Notes on Mr. Bacon's Backsliding and His Blackening of the Blue Banner; as Well as Various Replies to Other Modern Malignants by Greg Barrow \(Greg Price, Reg Barrow, Larry Birger, *et al.*\)](#) (Though set in the context of a debate with one individual, this book addresses a number of specific problems which plague the Presbyterian and Reformed churches of our day in general. "It conclusively and irrefutably demonstrates that those churches which today call themselves Presbyterian [and even many which claim a more general Reformed heritage] have grievously departed from the Scriptural standards and principles of the previous Spirit led Reformations [of the 16th and 17th centuries]. This will become progressively [and painfully] clear as the reader witnesses evidence upon evidence of defection from biblically based Reformation attainments (Phil. 3:16) -- and the burying and/or removing of the ancient Reformation landmarks. Ultimately, when the testimony and evidence [presented in this book] is weighed in light of Scriptural verities, it is entirely safe to say that the original Reformers would not only have sought negative ecclesiastical sanctions against our modern pseudo-Reformers,

but in many cases negative civil sanctions as well," writes Reg Barrow in the "Publisher's Preface." This book, of over 300 [8.5" X 11"] pages, is also offered as a cerlox bound photocopy [\$14.98 Canadian funds] or a hardcover photocopy [\$25.00 Canadian funds]. It is also **free** on most of the CDs in both the **REFORMATION BOOKSHELF CD set** [30 CDs, <http://www.swrb.com/Puritan/reformation-bookshelf-CDs.htm>] and the **PURITAN BOOKSHELF CD set** [32 CDs, <http://www.swrb.com/Puritan/puritan-bookshelf-CDs.htm>])

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McFEETERS, J.C.

Sketches of the Covenanters

Stirring accounts of sacrifice and martyrdom for the Reformed Faith that will bring tears to eyes of all but the backslidden. Follows the chain of events which gave Scotland two Reformations and a Revolution. Knox, the National Covenant, the Westminster Assembly, the Field Meetings, and much more is covered. The history of great battles for Christ and His royal rights are recounted in this moving history book. Sheds much light upon the warfare with the dragon for true liberty. One of our best history books, highly recommended!

ROBERTS, WILLIAM L.

The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism (1853)

A manual of instruction, drawing from such notable authors as William Symington and J.R. Willson, presenting "arguments and facts confirming and illustrating the 'Distinctive Principles'" of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Chapters deal with: "Christ's Mediatorial Dominion in general;" "Christ's exclusive Headship over the Church;" "The Supreme and Ultimate Authority of the Word of God in the Church;" "Civil Government, the Moral Ordinance of God;" "Christ's Headship over the Nations;" "The Subjection of the Nations to God and to Christ;" "The Word, or Revealed Will of God, the Supreme Law in the State;" "The Duty of Nations, in their National Capacity, to acknowledge and support the True Religion;" "The Spiritual Independence of the Church of Christ;" "The Right and Duty of Dissent from an immoral Constitution of Civil Government;" "The Duty of Covenanting, and

the Permanent Obligations of Religious Covenants;" "The Application of these Principles to the Governments, where Reformed Presbyterians reside, in the form of a Practical Testimony;" and finally "Application of the Testimony to the British Empire." A most important book, as we approach (possibly) the end of the great apostasy and will be in need of preparing for the dawning of the glorious millennial blessings to come; the days prophesied in which the church "shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings" (Isa. 60:16).

SCOTT, DAVID

Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (1841)

This book is not designed to discuss "the (many-RB) doctrines which the Reformed Presbyterian church holds in common with others," but is written to set forth RP distinctives. It tackles its subject from three major heads: "Social Covenanting;" "The Dominion of Christ;" and "The Universal Application of Scripture (civil as well as religious)." It shows that while these doctrines "are held by many, as abstract doctrines of divine truth, they are not embodied in the testimony of any other Christian denomination: nor made necessary to ministerial or Christian fellowship. Although other individuals may hold these doctrine, it is a 'distinctive' feature of the RPC to embody them in her testimony; and to make them terms of communion." It also explains how these are the same distinctives that were maintained "at the era of the reformation, (when) the covenanted church of Scotland bore a distinguished testimony for all the offices of Christ, as prophet, priest and king: and for the pure doctrines, worship, discipline, and government of the house of God." The author states that "the great object aimed at is to help forward the glorious triumph of the Messiah, so beautifully described in the 72nd Psalm. When 'all Kings shall fall down before him; and all nations shall serve him.'"

PRICE, GREG

The Duty and Perpetual Obligation of Social Covenanting

The material found in this bound photocopy addresses a forgotten and neglected ordinance of God: social covenanting. God's people in times of repentance and thanksgiving, trial and blessing have been a covenanting people. In the most pure times of ecclesiastical and civil reformation throughout history, both church and state under the mediatorial rule of Christ have by the grace of God bound themselves together by covenant to promote and defend the true Christian religion. The first document adopted by the Westminster Assembly was in fact, the Solemn League and Covenant (1644). It united the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland in a covenanted reformation of both church and state in order to preserve, promote and defend the true Christian religion (as summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Directory For Public Worship, and Form of Church Government), and in order to expose and uproot all false teaching

contrary to the Scripture and these standards. Furthermore, it was not only the desire of the Westminster Assembly to unite in covenant the three British kingdoms, but rather to include in this covenanted reformation all of the Reformed Churches throughout Europe. Consider the goal of the Assembly as summarized by Hetherington: "There was one great, and even sublime idea, brought somewhat indefinitely before the Westminster Assembly, which has not yet been realized, the idea of a Protestant union throughout Christendom, not merely for the purpose of counterbalancing Popery, but in order to purify, strengthen, and unite all true Christian churches, so that with combined energy and zeal they might go forth, in glad compliance with the Redeemer's commands, teaching all nations, and preaching the everlasting gospel to every creature under heaven. This truly magnificent, and also truly Christian idea, seems to have originated in the mind of that distinguished man, Alexander Henderson. It was suggested by him to the Scottish commissioners, and by them partially brought before the English Parliament, requesting them to direct the Assembly to write letters to the Protestant Churches in France, Holland, Switzerland, and other Reformed Churches. . . . and along with these letters were sent copies of the Solemn League and Covenant, a document which might itself form the basis of such a Protestant union. The deep thinking divines of the Netherlands apprehended the idea, and in their answer, not only expressed their approbation of the Covenant, but also desired to join in it with the British kingdoms. Nor did they content themselves with the mere expression of approval and willingness to join. A letter was soon afterwards sent to the Assembly from the Hague, written by Duraeus (the celebrated John Dury), offering to come to the Assembly, and containing a copy of a vow which he had prepared and tendered to the distinguished Oxenstiern, chancellor of Sweden, wherein he bound himself 'to prosecute a reconciliation between Protestants in point of religion'. . . . [O]n one occasion Henderson procured a passport to go to Holland, most probably for the purpose of prosecuting this grand idea. But the intrigues of politicians, the delays caused by the conduct of the Independents, and the narrow-minded Erastianism of the English Parliament, all conspired to prevent the Assembly from entering farther into that truly glorious Christian enterprise. Days of trouble and darkness came; persecution wore out the great men of that remarkable period; pure and vital Christianity was stricken to the earth and trampled under foot. . . ." (William Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, [Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books], pp. 337-339). The material presented herein is commended to the reader with the sincere prayer and confidence that God will again restore the Church of Jesus Christ to a glorious covenanted reformation--one that will even surpass that one to which she had attained at the time of the Westminster Assembly. However, when the Lord brings that future covenanted reformation it will not be limited to only three kingdoms of the earth, but by the grace and power of Christ our King, it will be a covenanted reformation that will encompass all of the nations of the earth (Ps. 2:6-12; Is. 2:1-4; Mt. 28:1-20) and will bring to the church a visible unity and uniformity that (unlike pleas for unity today) is firmly grounded upon the truth" (Greg Price, Preface). The material contained in this compilation was gathered together by the session of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton/Prince George. Its 210 pages contain the following items, as listed in this bibliography for social covenanting.

1. Samuel Rutherford, *Due Right of Presbyteries*, pp. 130-139

2. George Gillespie, *The Works of George Gillespie*, Vol. 2, pp. 71-88.

3. John Brown of Wamphray, *An Apologetic Relation*, pp. 167-175, 181-207.
4. David Scott, *Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*, pp. 14-90.
5. William Roberts, *The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism*, pp. 134-152.
6. The Reformed Presbytery, *An Explanation and Defence of the Terms of Communion*, pp. 181-187.
7. The Reformed Presbytery, *Act , Declaration and Testimony*, pp. 11-23.
8. The Reformed Presbytery, *The Auchensaugh Renovation*, pp. 115-140.
9. The Church of Scotland (1639), *The National Covenant of Scotland* , pp. 345-354 in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* published by Free Presbyterian Publications.
10. The Westminster Assembly (1644), *The Solemn League and Covenant* , pp. 355-360 in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* published by Free Presbyterian Publications.
11. The Church of Scotland (1648), *A Solemn Acknowledgement of Publick Sins and Breaches of the Covenant* , pp. 361-368 in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* published by Free Presbyterian Publications.

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