

Political Dissent (Historical View)

"He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God". King David.

I. HISTORIC RPCNA DISTINCTIVES

(1) Mediatorial Kingship of Jesus Christ. (2) Social Covenanting. (3) Political Dissent.¹

II. ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

A. ORIGINAL (1782)

a. Preamble

- i. *"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution..."*
- ii. The preamble to the Constitution begins without acknowledging God, the source of civil government (Romans 13:1), nor Jesus Christ, who possesses power over the civil magistrate for the sake of His Church (Matthew 28:18, Ephesians 1:22).

b. Article I – 3/5th clause concerning slaves (the 13th Amendment affects this)

- i. *Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of **free Persons**, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, **three fifths of all other Persons**.*

c. Article VI

- i. *...no **religious test** shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.*

B. BILL OF RIGHTS (1791)

a. Amendment I

- i. *Congress shall make **no law respecting an establishment of religion**, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...*

C. RP Conclusion: The Constitution is an atheistic document that defies the rights of Jesus Christ (Psalm 2). The Constitution is **not illegitimate**, but it **is immoral**. Just as the colonists could defy Britain on moral grounds (8th commandment), so too can the Covenanters defy the Constitution (peaceably) on moral grounds.

III. CONFESSION OF FAITH

¹ Consider William Roberts' Reformed Presbyterian Catechism. It lists twelve distinctives of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Of the twelve, **eight** deal with Civil Government. William L. Roberts, *The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism* (New York: R. Craighead, 1853), 7.

A. Lawful Oaths (Chapter 22)

- a. *A lawful oath is a part of **religious worship**, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing solemnly **calleth God** to witness what he asserteth or promiseth; and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth.*
 - b. *The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence: therefore to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful, and to be abhorred. Yet as, in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the word of God under the New Testament, as well as under the Old; so a lawful oath being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters ought to be taken.*
 - c. *Whosoever taketh an oath, **ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to any thing but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.** Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching any thing that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority.*
 - d. *An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation. **It cannot oblige to sin**; but in any thing not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt; nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics or infidels.*
- B. RP Conclusion: One ought not swear to God to take an oath of office to uphold a document that is out of accord with His will.
- C. To serve on juries would also involve such an ungodly oath, so Reformed Presbyterians were unable to serve on juries.

IV. LARGER CATECHISM Q. 99

- A. *“That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.”*
- B. RP Conclusion: One cannot send someone to swear an oath to a document that is immoral.

V. FURTHER READING

- A. *Reformation Principles Exhibited by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of America.* New York: Hopkins and Seymour, 1807. [This is the 1807 Testimony of the RPCNA]
- B. Wylie, Samuel B. *The Two Sons of Oil.* Philadelphia: WM. S. Young, 1850. [Wylie's work codified the Covenanter response to the Constitution]
- C. *Explanatory Declaration.* A later addendum to the oath that Covenanters took to serve in the military.