

"On the Duty of Covenanting and the Permanent Obligations of Religious Covenants"

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Reformed Presbyterian Catechism
by William Roberts (1853)

Q. What is a covenant?

A. A covenant is a mutual engagement between two parties, in which certain performances are stipulated on the one hand, and certain promises on the other.

Q. Wherein does a covenant differ from a law, a vow, and an oath?

A. 1. It differs from a law in this, that it supposes mutual stipulations, while in a law there is no stipulation whatever, but simply the authority of a superior enjoining obedience on an inferior. 2. It differs from a vow, inasmuch as, while a covenant supposes engagement on both sides, a vow supposes engagement on one side only; a person who vows engaging to perform some particular service without any promise being supposed to be annexed to the performance. 3. It differs from an oath; an oath being nothing more than a solemn appeal to God for the truth of some assertion that is made, without, as in a covenant, either an engagement to duty, or promise of reward. 4. In a covenant, then, there is engagement by two parties-in a vow there is engagement by one party only-in an oath there is no engagement at all.

Q. Does a covenant, whilst it differs from each, at the same time suppose the existence of a law, and include both an oath and a vow?

A. Yes. "A covenant proceeds upon the supposition of something being obligatory, and here is the idea of law. It implies an engagement to perform what is admitted to possess the obligation; and here is the idea of a vow. It supposes the covenanter to appeal to God with regard to the sincerity of his intentions, and here is the idea of an oath."

Q. Are the terms covenant, vow, oath, used interchangeably to describe the same transaction?

A. Yes. According as one or other of these is designed to be prominently expressed, the same deed may be described by one or other of these terms.

Q. What does a covenant suppose in addition to the above definition, and as expressing a difference between a law, a vow, or an oath?

A. It supposes the promise of a reward which is not necessarily involved in any of the others.

Q. Are covenants either civil or religious?

A. Yes. 1. Civil, when entered into between men or societies of men with respect to the affairs of this life. 2. Religious, when entered into between God and men with respect to the duties men owe to God, more especially religious duties.

Q. Are religious covenants either personal or social?

A. They are both. 1. Personal, when an individual engages, on the one hand, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and takes hold by faith, on the other, of God's gracious promise. 2. Social, when a society engages with joint concurrence to perform certain duties, and to embrace with one heart the precious promises of Jehovah.

Q. Is it competent to any society, be it a family, a church, or a nation, to enter with common understanding and consent into a federal transaction?

A. Yes. And when this is done by a large corporate body, the transaction is called a public social covenant, which is the subject of consideration in this section.

Q. What is public social covenanting?

A. It is a solemn religious transaction in which men, with joint concurrence, avouch the Lord to be their God, and engage, in all the relations of life, to serve him by obedience to his law, in the performance of all civil and religious duties in the confidence of his favour and blessing in the fulfilment to them of all his gracious promises. Deut. xxix. 10-13. "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel. Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water;

that thou shouldst enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Josh. xxiv. 1,25. 2 Chr. xv. 9,12,15. Is. xix. 18. Jer. xi. 10.

Q. By what arguments can it be proved that public social covenanting is of divine authority, and so of moral obligation?

A. By numerous arguments. 1. The light of nature. The mariners of Tarshish, Jonah i. 16. "Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows." Epictetus, a heathen moralist, thus expresses himself: "To this God we ought to swear an oath, such as the soldiers swear to Caesar. They, indeed, by the inducement of their wages, swear that they will value the safety of Caesar before all things; and will you, then, honoured with so many and so great benefits, not swear to God? or having sworn, will you not continue stedfast?" 2. Scripture precepts. Ps. lxxvi. 11. "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God." Jer. iv. 6. "Thou shalt swear the Lord liveth in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness." Also, xliv. 26, and Deut. x. 20. 2. Chr. xxx. 8. "Yield (give the hand) yourselves unto the Lord-and serve the Lord your God;" and Rom. vi. 13, Mat. v. 33. "Thou shalt perform unto the Lord thy oaths." Rom. xii. 1. 3. Scripture examples. Deut. xxvi. 15-19. "Thou hast avouched the Lord to be thy God-and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people-that thou shouldst keep all his commandments." xxix. 10-13. Quoted above, Josh. xxiv. 1,25-"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day," &c. 2 Kings xi. 17. "And Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people." xxiii. 1,2; also, Neh. x. 29, &c.

Q. Is not covenanting a duty confined to ancient times, and not obligatory under the present dispensation?

A. As it is of moral obligation, it is consequently a duty incumbent upon present times; for things which are moral do not diminish in their obligation by the lapse of time.

Q. By what arguments can its obligation in New Testament times, be solidly proved?

A. By the following. 1. It was obviously a duty under the Old Testament dispensation, and being nowhere repealed, and being moral and not typical, it is of present obligation. Ps. lxxvi. 11, "Vow and pay unto the Lord your God." 2. Scripture prophecies, evidently referring to New Testament times, and even yet to be fulfilled. Is. xix. 18,21,23,24,25, "In that day (the latter day) shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of

Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts," &c., &c. Jer. iv. 4,5. "In those days (Millennial), and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to

the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." 3. The New Testament

recognises the obligation. Rom. vi. 13. Compare 2 Chr. xxx. 8, 2 Cor. viii. 5. The Macedonian churches, says Paul, "Not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Not in the Lord's supper, which Paul certainly hoped they would do, but to his surprise, in a public social covenant. Rom. i. 31.

"Covenant breakers" have a place in the catalogue of sinners, whose conduct is denounced as displeasing to the Almighty; which could not be the case, unless on the supposition of the continued obligation of covenanting. 4. It was one of the distinguishing privileges of the Jews to be in covenant with God. "I am married unto you, saith the

Lord." The privileges of the New Testament dispensation are increased and not diminished. Heb. xii. 18,22. 5. This duty is involved in the church's relation to God, as a married relation. Hos. ii. 19,20; Eph. v. 30, iv. 25. Covenanting is only a solemn recognition of this relation, and engagement to evidence this by a life and conversation becoming the Gospel. Is. lxii. 4, evidently alludes to New Testament times, and celebrates not only an ecclesiastical, but national marriage. By the marriage of a land unto God, we

are not to understand that the trees of the forest, the mountains or plains come under engagements. Surely it must be the nation inhabiting the land. National marriage implies a national deed whereby the inhabitants, in their national capacity, solemnly covenant unto God. 6. The duty, when performed in its true spirit, is a source of unspeakable benefit to a

people; and, as nations seek the blessing, they should perform the duty. Ps. cxliv. 15,

"Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." Bound to God and he to them in "an everlasting covenant, not to be forgotten."

Q. Have covenants a distinct intrinsic obligation peculiar to themselves?

A. Yes. Covenants possess an obligation distinct from God's law. The covenanter is brought under an additional obligation to do the will of God. He is bound not merely by the naked authority of the divine word, but by his own voluntary act. "The covenant does not bind to anything additional to what the law of God contains, but it additionally binds-it superinduces a new and different obligation. As in the case of an oath. The obligation to tell the truth, is universal and perpetual; but an oath brings the person who swears, under an additional obligation. Before he took the oath, if he deviated from the truth, he was guilty simply of lying; now he is guilty of perjury. Before, he violated only the authority of God; now he violates both the authority of God and the obligation of his oath."

Q. What constitutes the formal reason of covenant obligation?

A. It is the personal act of the covenanter which constitutes the formal reason why a duty, when sworn to, is binding as a covenant duty, and not the obligation of the divine law, or morality of the act. "Were the morality of the duty the reason of covenant obligation, then all mankind would be formally covenanters, because the reason extends unto all, inasmuch as the moral law binds every man. Thus covenanting would be a mere cypher, and carry no obligation in it at all; for it does not affect the morality of the duty, that being the same before as after covenanting."

Q. Are public social covenants of continuous obligation? or, are they binding upon the posterity of the original covenanters, as long as the corporate body exists; or, until such time as the object for which they were framed has been accomplished?

A. They are; and this position is sustained by forcible arguments. 1. We find posterity recognised in the transaction between God and Jacob, at Bethel. Gen. xxviii. 13; compared with Hosea xii. 4. "He found him (Jacob) in Bethel, and there he spake with us." 2. We have another remarkable instance of the transmission of covenant obligation to posterity in Deut. v. 2,3. "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers (only) but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." 3. Another example occurs in Deut. xxix. 10-15; the covenant is here made with three descriptions of persons. 1. With those addressed adults. "Neither with you only." 2. Minors. "Him that standeth here with us." 3. Posterity. "Him that is not here with us this day"-for this could have no reference to any of the Israelites then in existence, as they were all present. It must, therefore, include posterity, together with all future accessions to the community. With them, Moses informs us, the covenant was made, as well as with those who actually entered into it, in the plains of Moab. 4. Another instance in which posterity is recognised in covenant obligation is found in Joshua ix. 15. This covenant was made between the children of Israel and the Gibeonites. Between four and five hundred years after that time, the children of Israel are visited with a very severe famine, in the days of David. 2 Sam. xxi. 1. And it is expressly declared by the Lord that, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." And at the same time, v. 2, that very covenant is recognised, and the breach of it is stated, as being the formal reason of the divine displeasure. Now, had it not been for this covenant, the extirpation of the Gibeonites would not have been imputed to Israel as a thing criminal; for they were comprehended in Caananitish nations, which God had commanded them to root out. 5. Posterity are charged with the sin of violating the covenant of their ancestors. Jer. xi. 10. "The house of Israel, and the house of Judah, have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers"-by which they are evidently considered as bound. 6. The principle of federal representation confirms this doctrine. Thus when Joseph made a covenant with his brethren, that they should carry up his bones from Egypt to the land of promise, he assumed that those whom he addressed, were the representatives of their successors, as he knew well that the whole of that generation should die before the

deliverance of Israel by Moses. Posterity recognised the obligation. Ex. xiii. 19. A similar case of federal representation, is that of the Gibeonites quoted above. 6. Infant baptism is a forcible illustration of the continuous obligation of covenants. 7. The principle of the transmissibility of the obligations of covenants to posterity, is recognised by civilians in civil matters. In the obligations, for example, of the heir of an estate, for the engagements of his predecessor in the possession of it. All national treaties and other engagements of the corporate body, descend with all their weight upon succeeding generations."

Q. Upon what is the principle in question founded?

A. "The principle in question is founded in the right which parents have to represent their posterity in certain social transactions. It is supposed in the continued identity of society throughout successive generations. And it naturally enough follows from the common interest which children have, along with their parents, in those objects for which federal deeds are framed. In this case representations springs, not from choice, as when men appoint their civil and ecclesiastical functionaries, but from the appointment of God, from a divinely authorized constitution-a constitution the existence of which is distinctly recognised when it is said, 'Levi paid tithes in Abraham, for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him.' Here the principle is clearly admitted by God himself."

Q. What is the reason of this continuous obligation of covenants?

A. 1. God will have it so. 2. The permanency of the subject coming under the obligation. The church and nations are corporations existing and perpetuated in the succession of generations-one generation passeth away and another cometh-the succeeding coming into the obligations of the preceding-and God as a party to such deeds always exists. 3. The sameness of the relation to the moral Governor of the universe. The corporation and all its members are related to God as moral subjects to a rightful sovereign. The duties being moral to which the covenant binds, by virtue of the moral relation of the corporate society to the Divine Sovereign in its successive generations, it is bound by the deed. 4. Obedience to God, according to his law, is a debt which not one generation can fully pay, and remains to each successive generation the same-hence the covenant obligation must be continuous. 5. Covenanting is a means of holiness-each successive generation needs to be sanctified, and consequently each successively needs this instrumentality-hence covenant obligation is transmitted with the stream of succeeding generations.

Q. Is not the principle of the transmissible nature of the obligation of public social covenants founded in reason and equity?

A. Yes. "The principle is this, That, when the matter of a covenant is lawful, and the parties continue to exist, the covenant itself retains its obligation until the object it contemplates has been gained. Thus a covenant between God and the church, or between God and a nation, continues obligatory long after the original framers of it have been gathered to their fathers. The object contemplated may be a degree of Reformation hitherto unattained. The parties, too, must be held as continuing to exist, God the one party being the eternal God, and the church, or the nation, the other party, continuing in virtue of that identity which a corporate body possesses. This identity is not affected by the constant changes society may undergo as regards its individual members, just as the incessant changes which take place in the particles of the human body have no effect in destroying the personal identity of the individual."

Q. Is not this principle of the continuously transmissible obligation of covenants highly advantageous in its tendency?

A. Yes. 1. "It strengthens that sense of gratitude to God by which men are stimulated to obedience, by leading the children to reflect on his goodness, in having regard to their welfare in the covenant made with their fathers, and comprehending them in the same federal transaction. Thus Peter reminds the Jews, Acts iii. 28, 'Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers.' 2. It inspires confidence in the promised mercies of God, and affords ground to hope that he who has been gracious, in times that are past, to the fathers, will be gracious still to their children. Thus Moses encouraged the people of Israel. Deut. iv. 32: 'He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which he sware unto them.' 3. It furnishes a powerful argument in pleading with God at a throne of grace, as we find exemplified and confirmed in Jeremiah's expostulation with God concerning the state of his nation; xiv. 22, 'Do not abhor us for thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, break not thy covenant with us.' 4. It throws a shield over a people by which the wrath of God is averted. Lev. xxvi. 44,45: 'Yet for all that,' says the Lord, 'when they lie in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. But I will, for their sakes, remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.' 5. It is not less fitted to keep up a remembrance of the wonderful things done by God on behalf of a people, by forming a record of them, and furnishing a medium for their transmission from generation to generation. Accordingly we find the command, 1 Chron. xvi. 12-15, 'Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,' connected with the injunction, 'Be ye mindful always of his covenant, the word which he commended to a thousand generations.' 6. Above all, it is eminently fitted, by begetting a delightful mutual interest between fathers and children, to promote and display the UNITY of the church. The fathers, by being required to transact for the children, and the children, by being required

to recognise the deeds of the fathers, must be inspired with a double and most salutary interest in each other. All selfish and exclusive feeling is in this way rebuked. The present generation are taught to look back to the past, as the past are supposed to have looked forward to the future. Distant periods are united, and the interests of different generations concentrated.' Jonh xvii. 11: 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.'"

Q. Is covenanting a stated and ordinary, or occasional and extraordinary duty?

A. It is occasional and extraordinary.

Q. What are some of the times and seasons in which the church, or a nation, is called on to engage in this extraordinary yet important duty?

A. They are many and various. 1. Times of public humiliation for apostasy from God. Jer. 1. 4,5. 2. Times of affliction. Neh. ix. 1,38; 2 Chr. xxxiv. 29-32. 3. Times of public reformation. 2 Kings xxiii. 1-3. 4. Times of public thanksgiving for special deliverances. 2 Kings xi. 17-20; Ps. lxxvi. 11. 5. When there is great lukewarmness and a tendency to backsliding. Deut. xxix. 10-15. 6. In view of severe conflict with the enemies of the truth, to consolidate and strengthen the Lord's host. For example-Israel before crossing the Jordan. Ps. xlv. 3; Heb. xi. 32-35. So our Fathers-and now against the combined "armies of the aliens." Rev. xix. 11. 7. Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Is. xlv. 3-5. 8. When jealousies and contentions prevail, and there is a tendency to schism, covenanting will be a happy mode of "binding up the testimony"-which is in danger of being rent by schism.

Q. Are there not reasons forcibly urging the present performance of this duty?

A. Yes. There are many and forcible reasons. 1. The present is a time when reformation is demanded both in church and state. 2. A time of peculiar temptations to draw back. 3. A time of misunderstanding and misapprehension among professors. 4. A time when the faithful performance of the duty may operate as a means of conviction upon the enemies of truth. 5. A time of suffering. Neh. ix. 38; 2 Chr. xxxiv. 21,31,32. 6. A time in which it is necessary to revive the sense of covenant obligation, which has lamentably declined, and is very feeble in the hearts of professors.

Q. Has not God, in his providence, given us, in modern times, several interesting illustrations of this divine ordinance of covenanting?

A. Yes. 1. The existence of such federal deeds can be distinctly traced in the writings of

Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and others of the early Christian fathers. 2. During the dark ages, the testimony of the Waldenses and of the Bohemian brethren to the practice can be easily adduced. 3. In more modern times it is well ascertained to have prevailed in all the Reformed churches of the continent-in Germany, France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (The league of Smalcalde, for example). 4. "The Pilgrim Fathers" employed this divine ordinance as a means of preserving the privileges of true religion among themselves, and of conveying them to their posterity. 5. But the examples in which we take the deepest interest, and in which we have the fullest embodiment of the principle in question, are those given in the British Isles; viz. The National Covenant of Scotland, and The solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms.

Q. When and by whom was the National Covenant taken, and repeatedly renewed?

A. 1. At Edinburgh, on the 28th of July, 1581, the National Covenant was sworn. The National Covenant was sworn to by King James VI. and his privy council, and soon after received the sanction of the general assembly of the church. Being cheerfully taken and subscribed by persons of all ranks throughout the land, under the direction of the constituted authorities, both civil and religious, it amounted to a solemn national surrender of the kingdom to the Lord. 2. Afterwards, in 1590, when the liberties of the church were threatened by both domestic and foreign invasions, this celebrated bond was ratified anew, under the direction of two commissions, the one consisting of 96 ministers, the other of 130 of the nobility and gentry, who were authorized to obtain subscriptions; and with such success was this business executed, under the good favour of God, that in two years thereafter, an act, ratifying the liberties of the church, and settling the Presbyterian church government in Scotland, was obtained from the king and parliament. 3. This covenant, with some additional clauses, was sworn to with great unanimity and effect at the commencement of the second reformation, in 1638, "a step which was loudly called for by the insidious attempt then made to impose, by royal authority, the Book of Ecclesiastical Canons, and thus to blot out every vestige of the reformed religion and discipline from the land."

Q. What was the substance of this interesting deed?

A. This deed formally abjured all the corruptions of the Popish system; expressed unequivocal attachment to the Confession of Faith, which, indeed, it comprehended; and embodied a clause in which the covenanters called upon God to witness the sincerity of their hearts in the solemn transaction.

Q. What was the occasion of the Solemn League and Covenant?

A. It was occasioned by the struggle maintained by an arbitrary and Popishly affected court against the friends of reformation and liberty in the British Isles.

Q. When was this celebrated deed prepared and taken?

A. 1. It was prepared by Alexander Henderson, received the approbation of the general assembly and the convention of estates, and was cordially subscribed by all persons of all ranks in Scotland, in the year 1643. 2. Having been deliberately examined by the venerable assembly of divines at Westminster, it was solemnly sworn in the Church of St. Margaret's, Westminster, by both houses of parliament, by the assembly of divines, and by persons of different ranks generally throughout England. 3. In Ireland, too, it was joyfully received by many of the Protestant population in the south, and by almost the whole body in the north; although, from the distracted state of things in that country, it could not possibly obtain the same legislative sanction as in the other two kingdoms. 4. This deed was formally and repeatedly ratified by parliament especially in 1644 and '49; and solemnly taken and subscribed by Charles II., both at Spey in 1650, and at Scoon in 1651, however perfidiously dealt by afterwards on the part of that royal hypocrite and traitor.

Q. What were the main objects of this famous deed?

A. These were "the preservation of the reformed religion in Scotland, and the reformation of religion in England and Ireland, and the bringing of the churches in the three kingdoms to the nearest conformity, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government." The Covenanters bound themselves also to preserve the civil ruler's "just power and authority," in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the kingdom.

Q. Is not the second article of this instrument, in which it is said, "We shall endeavour the extirpation of Popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness," chargeable with asserting persecuting principles?

A. There is nothing here which savours of persecution. There are certainly various methods of rooting out errors besides the anti-Christian one of putting to death the persons who hold them. "The clause makes no mention of persons, but of principles, as the subjects of extirpation; and surely to use all lawful means of ridding the world of such false and abominable evils as are there enumerated was not only innocent but praiseworthy. The heresies, not the heretics, were what the Covenanters had in view in the article in question."

Q. Were not the Covenants enforced by "civil pains?"

A. This charge is founded upon the Act of Parliament, 1640, enjoining the subscription of the National Covenant. To this it is answered: 1. "This is no objection to the covenants as such, but to those who, in an imprudent manner, undertook to promote their ends. 2. There is no evidence to prove that the subscription was not voluntary; but persons who had the best opportunities of knowing have declared that 'no threatenings were used, except of the deserved judgments of God, and no force except the force of reason.' 3. Liberty to subscribe was withheld in the case of some, till there should be time to try their sincerity, and to prove that they acted from love to the cause, and not from the fear of man. 4. Besides it ought to be borne in mind that these instruments had a civil as well as religious object; and that, although the latter might not warrant the infliction of "civil pains," the same restrictions did not apply to the former, and they ought, in candour, to be judged of in this complex character in which they were framed, enacted, sworn, and promoted. 5. Moreover, there is good reason to think that all that this vexed and startling phrase in the act in question was ever intended to provide for was, that the covenants should be employed as tests of qualification for office, or proof of the candidate's attachment to the Reformation. Exclusion from places of power and trust, it is believed, is all that can be proved ever to have been inflicted under this obnoxious act. The phrase, "under all civil pains," when taken literally, and viewed by itself, may be deemed formidable looking enough, and calculated to call up, in the imaginations of the timid and weak, the frightful ideas of fines, confiscations, imprisonments, executions, and similar "chimeras dire;" but when fairly interpreted by the light of history, it dwindles very innocently into-"no seat in parliament." 6. This is perfectly in conformity with the principle and practice of Israel's best king. Ps. lxxv. 10. "All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted." The horn is the symbol of civil power. David cut off the horns, but not the heads, of the wicked. He deprived them of civil authority, and conferred office upon the righteous only; for "the wicked (was his experience) walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted?" And such is the doctrine of the Covenanter.

Q. Is it not a valid objection to these deeds that they improperly blend civil and religious matters?

A. "The cause in which the covenanters were embarked, the enemies by whom they were opposed, and the dangers by which they were surrounded, were of both kinds. They were necessitated, therefore, to frame their measures with a view to the removal of evils, and the accomplishment of ends, both of religious and political character; they had to have respect at once to the interests of the church, and those of the civil community."

Q. Was not the taking of the covenants a most deliberate, solemn, and sublime transaction?

A. Truly so. "Nothing could exceed the affecting solemnity with which the national covenant was renewed in 1638; the powerful and pertinent prayer of Henderson; the impressive speech of Loudon; the reading of the document 'out of a fair parchment' by Johnston; the death-like silence of the people that ensued; the sensation produced when the venerable earl of Sutherland stepped forward and appended his name first to the memorable deed; the rapidity with which it afterwards circulated round the church to receive subscriptions; the eagerness with which they crowded round it, for the same purpose, when it was spread out like a prophet's roll on flat grave-stones in the church-yard; the mingled expressions of joy and sorrow that rose from the crowd-joy at what the Lord had wrought, sorrow for personal and national sins; the shouts, the groans, the tears which succeeded; and above all the forest of right hands simultaneously uplifted in awful appeal to the searcher of hearts! These all bespeak deliberation as well as determination. Well might Henderson exclaim, 'This was the day of the Lord's power, wherein He saw his people most willingly offer themselves in multitudes like the dew-drops of the morning.' The great day of Israel, wherein the arm of the Lord was revealed; the day of the Redeemer's strength, on which the princes of the people assembled to swear allegiance to the king of kings-great, great was the day of Jezreel."

Q. Was not the influence of these covenants highly beneficial?

A. Yes. God smiled on the work, and "by the outpouring of his spirit gave the testimony of the divine approbation. Religion prospered, and the schemes of enemies were overthrown. 'Now,' said the Archbishop of St. Andrews, when he heard of the renovation of the national covenant, 'now all that we have been doing these thirty years past is thrown down at once.' 'The Lord,' says the author of the fulfilling of the scriptures, 'the Lord did let forth much of the spirit on his people when this nation did solemnly enter into covenant in the year 1638.' Many yet alive do know how their hearts were wrought on by the Lord. The ordinances were lively and longed after. Then did the nation own the Lord, and was visibly owned by him; much zeal and an enlarged heart did appear for the public cause; personal application was seriously set about; and then also was there a remarkable call of providence that did attend the actings of this people, which did astonish their adversaries, and forced many of them to feign subjection.' 'To what,' adds Paxton, 'to what must our great and lasting prosperity be owing? We believe it has been greatly owing to the covenants of our fathers, to which a faithful and gracious God has hitherto had respect. It was not the ocean that surrounds us; it was not the number and prowess of our fleets and armies, nor the wisdom of our councils (when invasion was threatened) but the sword of the Lord, and the buckler of his favour that saved us.' Thus has God conferred a moral sublimity and wondrous prosperity upon the nations that

bound themselves in these sacred bonds-'covenants not to be forgotten.'"

Q. Are not these covenants still obligatory upon the British Isles?

A. Yes. "The matter of these covenants, we have seen, was lawful, scriptural, reasonable; the objects contemplated by them, all will admit, have not yet been attained, namely, the complete reformation of these lands, the extirpation of every anti-christian and false system, and uniformity in doctrine, discipline, and government throughout the three kingdoms. The parties also still continue-the eternal and unchangeable God on the one hand, and the British nation on the other. Nations having a moral and even religious character, it must be admitted, are competent to enter into such solemn engagements; and those of which we speak were in every point of view national deeds; they were framed and concluded by the representatives of the kingdom; they were taken by the call and authority of those in power; they were sworn in a public capacity; they were ratified and confirmed by public legislative acts; the public faith was plighted by all the organs through which a nation is accustomed to express its mind and will. Sanctions less sacred; pledges less numerous and formal, would have entitled another nation to demand from Britain the fulfilment of any treaty or contract; and shall not God, who was not only a witness, but a party, nay, the principal party in these transactions, and whose honour and interests were immediately concerned, be regarded as having a claim to see that the stipulations are fulfilled?" "The identity of a nation,' says the venerable biographer of two most distinguished covenanters, 'the identity of a nation, as existing through different ages, is, in all moral respects, as real as the identity of an individual through the whole period of his life. The individuals that compose it, like the particles of matter in the human body, pass away, and are succeeded by others, but the body politic continues essentially the same. IF BRITAIN CONTRACTED A MORAL OBLIGATION IN VIRTUE OF A SOLEMN NATIONAL COVENANT FOR RELIGIOUS REFORMATION, THAT OBLIGATION MUST ATTACH TO HER UNTIL IT HAS BEEN DISCHARGED. Have the pledges given by the nation been yet redeemed? Do not the principal stipulations in the covenant remain unfulfilled at this day? Are we not a people still bound by that engagement to see these things done? Has the lapse of time cancelled the bond? Or will a change of sentiments and views set us free from its tie? Is it not the duty of all the friends of the reformation to endeavour to keep alive a sense of this obligation on the public mind? But although all ranks and classes in the nation should lose impressions of it, and although there should not be a single religious denomination, nor even a single individual in the land to remind them of it, will it not be held in remembrance by ONE, with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years?"

Q. Does not great guilt rest upon the British nation for its treatment of these covenants, and for the blood of the covenanters?

A. Yes. A fearful weight of guilt. "It is matter of history, that after the restoration of Charles II., who himself had solemnly sworn these vows, acts were passed denouncing as treasonable and rebellious all the proceedings of the Second Reformation, rescinding all the public securities given during that period, stigmatizing the covenants as unlawful oaths, absolving men from their obligation, and declaring all laws passed in their favour to be null and void. It is also a well known fact, that under royal authority, the covenants were publicly burned by the hands of the common hangman, at London, in 1661, at Linlithgow the year following, and afterwards at Edinburgh. It is painful to be obliged to record, that, at the revolution in 1638, which extinguished the fires of persecution (consuming the adherents of the covenants), and put an end to the tyrannous rule of the Stuarts, nothing whatever was done, either by church or state, to make reparation for these atrocious indignities"-and the blood of the covenanters, which still stains the throne and nation. Now, when we consider that "one of the heaviest charges ever brought against the people of Israel was on this ground; they kept not the covenant of the Lord, and refused to walk in his law. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant"-and the solemn declaration of the prophet of old, "I have been very jealous for the Lord of hosts, because the children of Israel have broken thy covenant"-and God's own complaint, "The house of Israel, and the house of Judah, have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers"-how does it become the inhabitants of that covenant breaking land to ponder these words of Jehovah, If ye will not be reformed by me, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins; AND I WILL BRING A SWORD UPON YOU THAT SHALL AVENGE THE QUARREL OF MY COVENANT. Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? What meaneth the heat of this great anger? Then shall men say, BECAUSE THEY HAVE FORSAKEN THE COVENANT OF THE LORD GOD OF THEIR FATHERS. Lev. xxvi. 23-25; Deut. xxix. 24,25.

Q. May we not indulge the hope, that, in the goodness of our covenant God, and by the promised outpouring of his Holy Spirit, "the kingdoms of the world" at large, and the British empire in particular, will dedicate themselves to God in a covenant not to be forgotten-animated by the example of our covenant fathers exhibited in these memorable deeds?

A. Yes. We have the most cheering grounds for this blessed hope; for it is written, that the nations at large in the spirit of devoted loyalty, shall cry-COME AND LET US JOIN OURSELVES TO THE LORD IN A PERPETUAL COVENANT, THAT SHALL NOT BE FORGOTTEN: and it cannot be well doubted, that the death-cry of the martyred Guthrie has been heard on high, and shall be verified-THE COVENANTS, THE COVENANTS, SHALL YET BE SCOTLAND'S REVIVING.

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AUTHOR: CUNNINGHAM, JOHN

TITLE: *The Ordinance of Covenanting* (1843)

This book is considered by many as the classic work on covenanting. "The theology of Covenanting is here unfolded with a richness of scriptural research and a maturity of intellectual strength which would have made the grey eye of Peden glisten with delight. The treatise is a valuable addition to that solid theological literature of which the Reformed Presbyterian Church has produced repeated and enduring specimens, and stamps Mr. Cunningham as a distinguished disciple of the thoughtful and scriptural school of Mason and the Symingtons" (*Presby Rev.*, (1844) as cited in *The Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* by Johnston). The author himself notes that "Prayer and the offering of praise are universally admitted to be duties of religion. The Scriptures announce a place among these for the exercise of solemn Covenanting... What the word of God unfolds concerning it, is addressed to the most resolute consideration of all, and is capable of engaging the most extensive and prolonged investigation. And yet, though none have found this subject, like all God's judgements, else than a great deep, still in meditating upon it, the ignorant have been brought to true knowledge, and the wise have increased in wisdom. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant' (Ps. 25:14)... Mutual federal engagements, concerning things religious and civil, whether entered into merely by simple promise, or confirmed by the solemn oath, have been made from the highest antiquity to the present. The hostility to some such engagements, and also the proud disregard for their obligation, which have been evinced

by some in all ages, demand a most careful examination into their nature and design... Furnished with the key of Scripture, approaching the subject, we are enabled to open the mysteries in which ignorance and prejudice had shut it up; and equipped with the armour of light shooting forth its heavenly radiance, in safety to ourselves we assail the darkness thrown around it, and behold the instant flight of the spirits of error which that darkness contains. Standing alone in beauteous attractions descended from heaven upon it, this service beckons us to approach it, and engages to connect extensive good with a proper attention to its claims. The observance, under various phases, is described in Scripture as an undisputed and indisputable reality." In this book Cunningham exhaustively covers the subject of covenanting in over 400 pages. He deals with the manner, duty and nature of covenanting (including personal and social covenanting), the obligation covenanting confers, how covenanting is provided for in the everlasting covenant, how it is adapted to the moral constitution of man and how it is according to the purposes of God. Numerous Divine examples are cited from Scripture and covenanting is shown to be one of the great privileges of the Christian life. An interesting chapter covers "Covenanting Enforced By the Grant of Covenant Signs and Seals;" which touches on circumcision, baptism, the Sabbath, the Priesthood, the new heart and the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this book demonstrates how God's approbation rested upon Covenanters in former ages, how covenanting is predicted in prophecy, how it is recommended by the practice of the New Testament Church and at what seasons it is appropriate. The appendices touch on the relationship of covenanting to immoral and unscriptural civil governments, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the British constitution and the apostasy of the Revolution settlement. Additionally, Cunningham acknowledges that the true church is "bound by the obligations of the Church of God in past times" and is still obligated to **pay what it has vowed to the Lord** in those magnificent attainments of the second Reformation (the epitome of these attainments being embodied in the Solemn League and Covenant and the Westminster Standards). If you are interested in the ordinance of covenanting this is the most extensive treatment you will find in one book. It is a gold mine of Scriptural references and should be read at least once by everyone who calls upon the name of Christ.

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.'"

ROBERTS, WILLIAM L.

The Duty of Nations, in their National Capacity, to Acknowledge and Support the True Religion (1853)

Excerpted from the Reformed Presbyterian Catechism below, this book deals with the inescapable necessity, of the demand found in the Word of God, for the Civil establishment of Christ and King and Lawgiver over every nation on earth. If you are sick of the cease-fire with humanism, set forth by the syncretistic, Satanic and pragmatic pagan politicians of our day, (those who bargain with votaries of Antichrist [the Pope], publicly tolerate all manner of false religions (e.g. Islam) and idolatry, and compose their policy and draw their pretended authority from the beast [and not the Word of God], this book is for you! For all pagan politics is summed up in the words of the Cameronian (Covenanter) political philosopher Alexander Shields, as "rotting away under the destructive distempers of detestable neutrality, loathsome lukewarmness, declining, and decaying in corruptions, defections, divisions, distractions, confusions; and so judicially infatuated with darkness and delusions, that they forget and forego the necessary testimony of the day" (A HIND LET LOOSE, 1797 edition, p. 20). Pick up this book and begin the political walk in the "footsteps of the flock," traveling the covenanting road of Reformation and Scripture (with the magisterial Reformers of the past)!

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).

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

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[Doctrinal Integrity: The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions and Adherence to Our Doctrinal Standards](#) by Samuel Miller

[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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