

**An Introduction to**

**The Reformed Presbyterian**

**Church of Scotland**

(Origin and Mission)



## Introductory Note

Writing as a Reformed Presbyterian minister, it is worth stressing at the outset that the purpose of this booklet is not to exalt our church above all other churches: indeed, since 2011, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland has been actively pursuing the reunification of similar Presbyterian churches in Scotland around the original standards of union: Covenant and Confession (see further below). Our only purpose in writing is to make plain why the church came to exist, why her message is still relevant and why it urgently needs to be heard today.

It's not easy to explain to 21<sup>st</sup> century Scottish readers how and why a church that is over 270 years old came into being. This is especially true in connection with the Reformed Presbyterian Church: because of her gradual descent over recent years into obscurity and near extinction, the reasons why she came into being are not as well-known or understood as those of some other churches.

Perhaps we should begin with a surprising and important fact: *the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland is the only Presbyterian Church in Scotland which didn't begin its existence separating from the Church of Scotland—or indeed by separating from any other Presbyterian church.*

To understand her origins, we need to go back to the international movement known as The Reformation and to the Scottish Reformation in particular.

## A Glorious Reformation

The Reformation was an international movement to reform the church of Christ from the unbiblical form into which it had lapsed under Roman Catholicism throughout the Middle Ages. This reformation involved reformation in what was taught (doctrine), how the church was run (government) and how it approached God (worship).

However, the Reformation was more thorough in some countries than in others. In Scotland, those at the heart of the movement, most notably John Knox, were determined that the shape of reform in all these areas should be determined *exclusively* by the Bible—not by church tradition.

The Scottish Reformation has long been recognised by Presbyterians as falling into two distinct periods known as the First and Second Reformations.

### *The First Scottish Reformation (1560 onwards)*

As the message of the Reformation was proclaimed in Scotland, it was greatly blessed by God with the result that many people embraced the new system of teaching.

In the realm of doctrine, they embraced the core message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone and, in doing so, rejected the Roman Catholic system of salvation with its works-based method of salvation.

In relation to government, a new and biblical system was adopted in which the old hierarchical priestly system—devoid of warrant in the New Testament—was replaced with rule on the part of a plurality of elders having equal authority.

In the area of worship, forms of worship having no authority under the New Testament were purged out and the simplicity of biblical and apostolic worship was restored in the church.

Although the Reformation was a popular movement, in the sense of being a movement of the people, it is important to recognise that with the relevant 1560 Act of Parliament, this new system of religion became the *established* faith in Scotland and, from that point onwards, Scotland was officially a *Protestant country*.

Shortly afterwards, the newly Reformed and Presbyterian Church was itself established by law and became *the established Church of Scotland* – Presbyterian in government and Calvinistic in doctrine and worship.

#### *The Second Scottish Reformation (1638-1649)*

This Second Reformation is less well known than the first one - partly because it was a reformation which occurred within Protestant Scotland itself.

It happened because, in the years prior to 1638, the recently established Reformed Church of Scotland had moved away from its *Presbyterian* system of church government (rule by ministers and elders all on an equal footing) towards an *Episcopalian* government (rule by bishops who were overseers of the ministers and who were appointed by the state).

This new system was promoted and pushed onto the church by the King but it was deeply unpopular with the majority of the people and was contrary to the system of government originally established in the Reformed church.

Four events, however, were destined to first of all rescue and then

to further the movement for reform in Scotland—so as to advance the church beyond where the First Reformation had left her.

1. *The National Covenant, 1638*

The first of these events was the National Covenant of 1638. In that year, a crisis developed when the form of worship of the church was altered by the authority of the King. With the support of his bishops, he introduced a prayer book, with obvious Roman Catholic tendencies, into the worship of the church. The fuse for resistance was lit—particularly by Jenny Geddes who threw her famous stool when the new book was first read in St Giles' Cathedral—with the result that a popular revolt took place culminating shortly afterwards in the signing of the National Covenant of 1638.

By this Covenant, the government, the nobles, the churchmen—and, indeed, the majority of the Scottish people—swore to commit themselves to the restoration of the Scottish church to her former Reformation purity.

2. *The General Assembly in Glasgow, 1638*

The second event used by God to further the work of reformation was the General Assembly of 1638 which was held in Glasgow. As a result of the signing of the National Covenant and the accompanying groundswell of reforming zeal—evidently connected with an outpouring of the Spirit of God—the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland rediscovered its liberty. In its famous meeting in Glasgow in 1638—its first free meeting for many years—it ignored the order of the King's Commissioner that the Assembly be dissolved in the name of the King and, by continuing its deliberations, asserted its spiritual independence.

It also proceeded to outlaw all the innovations in government and worship which had been introduced since the Reformation.

### 3. *The Solemn League and Covenant, 1643*

The third event furthering reform was the signing of the *Solemn League and Covenant*. In 1643, five years after the Glasgow General Assembly, and at the initiative of the Scottish Church, a Covenant was drawn up and adopted by Scotland, England and Ireland. The purpose of this Covenant was to *preserve* the Reformation in Scotland and to *further* the Reformation in England and Ireland so as to bring it more into line with that in Scotland and other European countries.

This Covenant was entered into with a solemn oath by the Scottish Parliament and by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland—and, indeed, by the English Parliament, which ruled over the Church of England and which was dominated by Puritans at the time. In this way, the Solemn League and Covenant became a constitutional document of church and state in the three countries named.

### 4. *The Westminster Assembly, 1643-49*

The fourth reforming event was the work produced by the Westminster Assembly from 1643 to 1649. Significantly, in the good providence of God, a process of reform had already begun in England where the English Parliament had recently abolished bishops and appointed an assembly of theologians to meet at Westminster in order to reform the church.

As a result of the new Covenant with Scotland, however, it was decided to augment the assembly with Scottish Commissioners

and, after over a thousand sittings from 1643-1649, the Westminster Assembly produced the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Form of Church Government*, the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, and the *Directory of Public Worship*.

As the Westminster Assembly produced these documents, they were adopted by the Church of Scotland as the new constitutional documents of the Church of Scotland and it was hoped that, as part of their covenanted obligation, the English church would follow suit. Sadly, it did not—but these documents became the covenanted standards of the Church of Scotland and, with this process, the Reformation of the Scottish church and her restoration to apostolic doctrine, government and worship was complete.

By means of the Second Reformation, then, the church entered into solemn covenant obligations before God; vigorously asserted her independent jurisdiction from the state; abolished prelacy (church rule by bishops); abolished patronage (the right of the landlord to appoint the minister); and adopted measures for promoting pastoral instruction and scriptural education throughout the land.

It was a new beginning—one which was secured by covenant and oath. It signalled the commencement of a period sometimes referred to as the 'high-water mark' of the Reformed Church in Scotland when her doctrine, worship and government were settled by her own courts and ratified by the state, both working together in a harmonious manner not seen before. However, the fabric of this glorious edifice soon began to be dismantled with the restoration of the monarchy under the new King, Charles II, in 1660.

## A Brutal Persecution

Although the new King had sworn the Covenant himself, his reign was to signal a vicious assault on the attainments of the Second Reformation. The assault was fourfold.

*First*, he purged Presbyterianism out of the established church. He rescinded all the Acts of Scottish Parliament passed in the year 1649, declaring them officially to be null and void. Significantly, it was the Parliament of 1649 which had ratified the Westminster Confession of Faith and abolished church patronage (the right of the landlord to appoint the minister).

Another Act went even further and proceeded to annul all the Parliaments which had been held since 1640 – in other words, all the Acts Parliament had passed in support of the Second Reformation church were as though they had never been.

These two Acts were the infamous ‘Rescissory Acts’. What is not widely known is that these Acts were deliberately left on the statute book under the terms of the Revolution Settlement in 1690 which re-established the Presbyterian Church of Scotland (see below). In other words, astonishingly, the Presbyterian ministers and elders who accepted the Revolution Settlement chose to enter into an established relationship with a state which was refusing to repeal such iniquitous legislation – although they were bound, under the terms of the National Covenants, to repeal it. Is it any wonder, as we will see later, that the more faithful covenanters refused to join?

*Second*, the government interfered with the constitution and government of the Presbyterian Church. This was altogether more serious than disestablishing the Presbyterian Church. After all, to sever the state connection is one thing – but to invade the

internal government of the church is quite another. However, King Charles had declared himself, as King, to have supremacy ‘over all persons, and in all causes’—ecclesiastical as well as civil.

Therefore, he had no difficulty in officially declaring the Glasgow Assembly of 1638 to be an ‘unlawful and seditious meeting’ and that all the acts done by it, and arising from its power, to be considered void.

Furthermore, legislation was passed declaring the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant—which the church had sworn in her courts and adopted into her constitution—to be unlawful. Indeed, these solemn documents—containing oaths sworn to God—were publicly burned.

These measures, declaring the 1638 Assembly and the Covenants to be unlawful, also held their place in the so-called ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1690. Again, as we will see later, is it any wonder that the more faithful covenanters refused to accept establishment on these terms?

*Third*, he evicted the more faithful Presbyterian ministers, who refused to accept the new arrangements, from their charges.

When these ministers refused to acknowledge the office and authority of the bishops, an order was passed to the effect that all ministers who had entered into their charges since 1649—when patronage was abolished—were to be deprived of their stipends and were to leave their dwellings with their families and reside outside the bounds of their current presbyteries.

Thankfully, nearly four hundred ministers chose to obey God rather than King and, in a severe winter, left their homes to endure reproach for the sake of Christ. Part of their grief lay in the knowledge that their charges would be filled quickly with less

worthy men. However, they knew that the worst example they could give their flock would be to stay over them while being unfaithful to God and so they left their charges. Not surprisingly, those of their hearers who valued their faithful ministries went out to the fields to hear them preach rather than stay to hear the curates who had filled their pulpits.

*Fourth*, the King began a programme of sustained and severe persecution: an initial policy of fines and harassment developed into imprisonment, torture and banishment, culminating in the notorious ‘Killing Times’ and the sufferings of thousands of men, women and children and the martyrdom of many—often under the cruellest of circumstances.

With this fourfold assault, the edifice of the Second Reformation came under serious attack. However, the church of Christ can be expected to withstand the assaults of the adversary if she remains faithful to her Lord. Sadly, however, that was not to be the case.

### **A Lamentable Declension**

With our knowledge of church history as well as human nature, it is perhaps not surprising that there were ministers and people who yielded all too easily to the civil power by conforming to rule by bishops. Sadly, however, even many of those who began well by resisting the dictates of the state and the tyranny of the King, and who went so far as to leave their charges bearing the reproach of Christ, finally succumbed and breached their vows.

As has so often been the case, cunning and inducement succeeded where fines, imprisonment and persecution had failed. The *indulgences* of King Charles II, and the later *toleration* of James II, allowed the return of ministers to their charges *under strict conditions imposed by the King* and succeeded in bringing many

ministers to bow before their sovereign who had previously sworn wholehearted allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only King and Head of the church. This policy of increasing the punishment of those who wouldn't conform while, simultaneously, making the process of conforming easier, proved to be a highly effect 'divide and rule' policy in that it set the less faithful covenanters against the more faithful ones. As a result, towards the end of the bloody Killing Times, there were few ministers bold enough to preach openly. Not surprisingly, they were martyred and, equally unsurprisingly, their names (particularly those of Renwick, Cameron and Cargill) have endured.

However, by his almost unbounded arrogance, the King progressively alienated the bulk of the people and when his son, James II, came to the throne, most people realised what Richard Cameron had fearlessly demanded—that the Stewart monarchy had to be brought to an end. Consequently, the decision was taken to rid the nation of the Stewarts with the result that William, Prince of Orange (who was married to Mary Stewart) was invited to become the new King.

And so, with a bloodless, 'glorious' revolution, there was a new beginning in the land.

### **A 'Glorious' Revolution?**

High on the King's agenda was the need to settle the church in both England and Scotland. William was not a Presbyterian but he was prevailed upon by influential Presbyterian counsellors, particularly a minister called William Carstares, to re-settle the Scottish church as a Presbyterian church again—one which would be governed by ministers and elders. Although reluctant, he was prepared to do so, providing the English church would be

settled as an Episcopalian church (*contrary to the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant*).

Furthermore, because he wanted to curb the zeal of Presbyterian Scotland and to secure a 'moderate' church—which he got!—he ensured that the method of establishment would involve framing the Revolution Settlement on his own terms which would then be given to the church for her acceptance. He hoped that the weary condition of the church would incline the ministers to accept the Settlement as the best that they could hope for under the circumstances. In this, he was proved right: sadly, the majority of Scottish Presbyterians accepted in that year a settlement which secured peace—but only at the expense of principle and at the cost of a divided church which continued indeed to further divide as the evils of the Revolution Settlement worked themselves out.

In reality, the Revolution Settlement offered to the church by the state in 1690 was little more than yet another indulgence. Although it was welcomed by the majority of Presbyterians as a great deliverance and as an answer to their dire predicament, it was not merely deficient but unlawful in that it was incompatible, in many key aspects, with the covenantal commitments already sworn to by Presbyterians in Scotland. The following deficiencies should make the unlawfulness of the Revolution Settlement plain.

### 1. *The Process*

The first deficiency to notice is the process by which Presbyterian government was re-established.

The proper role of the state when establishing the church is simply to receive from the church the constitution which she has framed and enacted by her own intrinsic and independent authority, and then, after mature and serious consideration, to

grant it the civil sanction.

This was the process adopted during the First Reformation period: in 1560, the church held her first General Assembly at which she fixed her standards and constitution and presented them to the civil power which then proceeded to establish them by law.

It was also the process adopted during the Second Reformation: at the famous Glasgow Assembly of 1638, the church abolished Episcopacy as being contrary to the word of God, settled her own constitution and subordinate standards and then applied for and obtained the sanction of the state which gave civil effect to the measures which she had independently adopted.

But this simple and biblical order was inverted in the Revolution Settlement of the church: on that occasion, the church did not present her constitution to the civil power—rather, the civil power drew up the constitution (with important modifications which the church never asked for) and enacted it without consulting the church. To be specific, although the Confession of Faith was appointed to be the doctrinal standard of the church, the proof texts were not received and neither were the Catechisms, the Form of Church Government or the Directory of Public Worship—all of which had been received unalterably by the Second Reformation church in the exercise of her God given freedom and authority, *as part of her fixed and covenanted constitution.*

Significantly, although the office of bishop was abolished, the fact that the Westminster Form of Church Government was not accepted meant that this abolition was not on the ground that the office and its supposed jurisdiction was '*contrary to the Word of God*' (the ground on which it had originally been abolished) but

only on the lesser ground that it was a *'great and unsupportable grievance and trouble to the nation, and contrary to the inclinations of the generality of the people'*. This particular form of language was chosen by those who did not share the belief that Presbyterianism had a particular divine mandate and who were, in fact, Erastians—that is, they believed that the church ought to be subject to the government of the State. In the Westminster Assembly, the Erastian party was ready to admit that Presbyterianism was 'agreeable to the word of God' while it maintained that it had no higher claims in this respect than other forms.

After all, what other reason could there be for using this particular form of words in the Settlement of 1690 when it is well known that King William favoured Episcopacy and was only too happy to establish Erastianism in England?

The fact is that neither the Word of God, nor the voice of the church, were duly heard and consulted in the Revolution Settlement. It was an imposed Settlement, an Erastian Settlement and a political Settlement—which facts considered alone, apart from its content, should have made the church reject it.

Admittedly, if it was the case that the terms imposed were biblical and consistent with their covenant obligations, at least one could claim that while the Erastian method of imposing them was wrong, the terms themselves were good. However, this was not the case.

## 2. *The Imposition of Standards*

The second deficiency lay in the way in which the doctrinal standards of the Church of Scotland were adopted under the terms of the Revolution Settlement.

First, it should be clear that it is the church herself that has the authority to enact her confession. This is a purely spiritual duty, to be performed by the overseers of the church under the authority of the Lord Jesus as her Head and King. If the state imposes upon her a confession of its own, or if it alters in the slightest degree the one proposed by her for its sanction, then she cannot acquiesce without proving unfaithful to her Lord, sacrificing her spiritual independence, and degrading herself to the level of a secular institution.

In the First Reformation, the church enacted her Confessions, and Books of Government, in the exercise of her own intrinsic and spiritual powers and these were subsequently ratified by the Scottish Parliament.

In the Second Reformation too, the church and state pursued a similar course. In the exercise of her own independent power, the church adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Church government, and the Directory for Public Worship. Then, following correct and biblical procedure, the Confession, Catechisms and Directory, after their adoption by the General Assembly, were presented to the state for its sanction, which was duly obtained.

Significantly, the Acts of Parliament approving these documents explicitly approved them *as they had been previously approved and adopted by the church, and according to the exact sense in which the church had embraced them.*

However, in the Revolution Settlement of 1690, by which the Church of Scotland came to be re-established, the Confession of Faith was the only one of these constitutional documents to be sanctioned by the state. And, of course, it had to be adopted anew, as it were, for the first time. Why? Because the Acts of church and

state adopting the Confession of Faith in the 1640s had been rescinded by the Rescissory Acts and they were left rescinded under the terms of the Revolution Settlement. This is the reason why there is no reference in the Revolution Settlement to a previous adoption of the Confession by the church in the exercise of her own spiritual, independent, and intrinsic authority. It was as though it had never been done!

Furthermore, even when ratifying the Confession of Faith, the Revolution Settlement did not ratify it precisely as it had been previously adopted by the Second Reformation Church and the Parliament of Scotland. Instead of being ratified entire, its doctrinal articles alone were sanctioned, while the scripture proofs appended to the Confession were omitted. And this in spite of the fact that the proofs were considered integral to the Confession and were adopted not only by the Westminster Assembly and by the English Parliament but by the Church of Scotland itself in 1647 as part of her covenanted constitution.

It won't do to argue that the omission is of little consequence—either because all the chapters are ratified and transferred to the Statute-book or because the proofs were not always the best that could be found in the Scriptures. Certainly, *if that had been the mind of the church* the judgement would have more weight but the fact is that the state had no right to make such an alteration at all and encroached in the most serious terms on the authority of the church.

In the light of subsequent history, it seems incredible to us now that the Presbyterian ministers were prepared to accept establishment at the price of dropping the Form of Presbyterian Government, the Directory of Public Worship and both Larger and Shorter Catechisms from her constitution – but this is what the terms of Settlement required and what they agreed.

We cannot avoid the conclusion then, that the church, by receiving from the state a mutilated constitution, without any complaint or without the exercise of her own intrinsic powers, homologated the state's usurpation of authority, dishonoured her Divine King and prostrated herself at the feet of the secular power.

### 3. *Freedom of Assembly*

The third deficiency lay in accepting terms of establishment which took away the church's ability to fully serve Christ as Lord. Under the terms of the Revolution Settlement, the church compromised her subjection to Christ's headship by accepting the power of the King to appoint the time and the place of meeting for the General Assembly as well as the power to dissolve the Assembly. And, in the first exercise of that power, the King went on to appoint the first General Assembly of the Revolution Church in 1690 and to dissolve it.

Again, had the Rescissory Acts been repealed, the independence of the church in this matter would be plain both in her own Acts and in the Acts of Parliament dating from the Second Reformation. However, the Revolution Settlement made these laws of church and State null and void and hence the Revolution Parliament revived the earlier Act of 1592 as the new Magna Carta of the established church. However, this Act of 1592—*passed before the church had attained to its full covenanted commitments*—gave the civil magistrate the authority to appoint the time and place of the meeting of the Assembly. It declared that 'the king's majesty, or his commissioners appointed by his Highness, be present at each General Assembly before the dissolving thereof, and nominate time and place when and where the next General Assembly shall be held'.

Clearly, no true Presbyterian could grant the King such power: not only does it put it within the power of the King to defer or prevent meetings of the General Assembly indefinitely; it is fundamentally quite incompatible with the headship of Christ and the independence of His church. As Knox said, 'Take from us the liberty of Assemblies, and take from us the gospel'.

And far from being an inconsequential matter, the Assemblies of the established church were frequently dissolved and interdicted by the Sovereign—the church yielding with the most humiliating submission to these repeated acts of tyranny.

How different the church of the Second Reformation! She claimed, and exercised, on this issue, the liberty bestowed upon her and demanded from her by Christ her Head. Her views on the subject are expressed in the act of 1647 which adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith—views which were far in advance of the position in 1592—hence the reason why the Revolution Settlement appealed to the Act of 1592 rather than the Acts of the Second Reformation in the 1640s.

Indeed, in 1638—the year of the National Covenant—the General Assembly in Glasgow refused to bring its deliberations to a close when it had been dissolved by the King's Commissioner when Alexander Henderson, the distinguished Moderator, exhorted them 'to be zealous toward their Lord, and to maintain the liberties and privileges of his kingdom'.

#### 4. *Freedom of Government and Discipline*

The fourth deficiency in the Revolution Settlement consisted in its insistence upon the 'right' of the state to interfere in the government and internal discipline of the church.

Previously, at the commencement of the Second Reformation, the church, again exercising her own inherent authority, determined in whose hands the keys of government should be placed, and adopted measures for inflicting merited censure on immoral living and false doctrine.

However, under the terms of the Revolution Settlement, the state took this matter under its own control and declared that the government of the church was to be established in the hands of, and exercised by, those Presbyterian ministers who were ejected for non-conformity to Episcopalianism since the first of January, 1661, and *such ministers and elders only as they were to admit or receive*.

Here, then, the state appointed the rulers of the Revolution Church, thus appointing itself as the source of ecclesiastical authority. But there is a further difficulty with this procedure: were all these persons worthy of the station to which they were suddenly elevated? Nearly thirty years had passed since these ministers were effectively ejected and these were years of temptation, trial and change. In that period, many of those ministers who were originally ejected had defected from their original positions and had forfeited their right to exercise ecclesiastical power—at least until they confessed and repented of such declension.

A considerable number of them had receded from their former oaths, complied with the oaths imposed by the government of Charles II and had bound themselves to abstain from preaching—at a time when the faithful preaching of the truth was so desperately needed. These men had accepted the indulgences granted by the King in order to resume preaching: in other words, they would not preach, out of fear, in obedience to the King of

Kings but they agreed to preach, on a restricted platform, for King Charles II!

Such were the people who, together with a few ministers recently returned from exile, were constituted the governors of the Revolution Church of Scotland, and composed her first General Assembly—and they all engaged in the exercise of their functions without any expression of or evidence of repentance for their sinful courses of action.

Worse still, it was made an essential principle of the Revolution Settlement that all actual incumbents of their charges under Episcopacy should be allowed to continue in their posts, on the basis of acquiescing to the Settlement and taking an oath of allegiance to the government of King William. Indeed, the Act went on to say that 'if any of the said ministers, who hath not been hitherto received into the government of the church, shall offer to qualify themselves, and to apply in the manner foresaid, *they shall have their majesty's full protection, aye and while they shall be admitted in manner foresaid.*'

These provisions are Erastian in the extreme. Who has the right to dictate to the church the terms of admission into the membership of the church or into the office of the holy ministry?

Unquestionably, it is the rulers of the church, on whom the power of the keys of the kingdom have been conferred by the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet here we have the King determining the qualifications necessary in those who apply for ordination and license in the Church of Scotland and declaring that no minister or preacher, by whom the conditions prescribed by him are not observed, shall 'be admitted, or continued for hereafter'.

At first, the church showed some reluctance to receive the

Episcopalian curates into her offices, but she was eventually persuaded into the measure by the civil power, and within a few years, could boast of it as an instance of her 'moderation' that *hundreds of them had been admitted on the easiest terms.*

Of course, many of these curates had taken possession of the charges from which other and better men had been violently ejected and had all solemnly sworn that the government of the church is an inherent right of the crown, and some of them, by acting as spies and informers, had contributed to the bloody oppression under which the land had groaned. But they were admitted into the new Revolution Church of Scotland without having been required to express any condemnation of Episcopalianism, or to avow any contrition for the part which they had acted during the preceding bloody period—and all this just because the state had prescribed the conditions on which they should be received.

It is not surprising then that these hirelings were permitted, in the chastising providence of God, to become a running sore in the church into which they were admitted so easily; for they multiplied rapidly into an overwhelming majority (called 'the Moderates') who ruled her councils with an iron grip for more than a century, progressively deadening the spirit of evangelicalism.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the first Revolution General Assembly positively refused to hear the larger paper presented to them by the three ministers who were most reluctant to enter the newly constituted Revolution Church, as well as that given by the remaining organised groups (United Societies) of covenanters, which were complaining of these serious defects in the constitution of the Church. Where defection had prevailed so

alarmingly in the Assembly, it could scarcely have been expected that such representations would be received.

But it is sad nonetheless, that these three ministers—Shields, Linning, and Boyd—who had, till that period, been faithful to the covenanted cause, were admonished by the General Assembly, at the point of being received into the communion of the Revolution Church: a fact, as was noted long ago, equally discreditable to both parties.

##### 5. *Freedom to Call and Induct Ministers*

The fifth deficiency was found in the fact that the state was to retain a measure of control over the matter of calling and inducting ministers. This may come as a surprise to people under the impression that the Revolution Settlement thoroughly abolished patronage (the right of the landlord to settle a minister of his choice).

Clearly, the freedom of the church and her responsibility to her Head was of great importance to the church of the Second Reformation and, in 1649, she secured the abolition of patronage by the Parliament. However, with the restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II, the Act Rescissory was passed which nullified the Parliament of 1649 and, so, patronage was restored.

The Revolution Settlement appeared to abolish patronage once more—but, in reality, it was not properly banished. Rather, it was declared that '*the heritors of the parish being Protestants, and the elders, are to name and propose the person to the whole congregation, to be either approven or disapproven by them, and if they disapprove, that the disapprovers give in their reasons to the effect that the affair may be cognised by the presbytery of the bounds*'. Where there was no land-ward parish, the right of

patronage was vested in the magistrates, town council and Kirk Session of the burgh. Significantly, it was ordained that 'in recompense of the said right of presentation, hereby taken away, the heritors and life renters of said parish, and the town council for the burgh, should pay to the said patrons the sum of six hundred merks'.

These provisions were unacceptable to faithful Presbyterians because, first, they demand a civil as well as a religious qualification in order to exercise of a spiritual duty—the heritors and the town council being associated with the Kirk Session in 'naming and proposing the person to the whole congregation'. This is an unacceptable infringement of the rights and privileges of the people of God.

Second, even the proviso that the heritors should be 'Protestant' is so general as to allow Episcopalians and Independents a say in the matter—not to mention people of immoral conduct who might have no interest in the church whatsoever.

Third, these provisions only gave the congregation a negative power, the power of offering objections, not a power to address a positive call to the person of their free and conscientious choice. This was depriving them of the privilege which unquestionably belonged to them as members of the church of Christ.

Fourth, the payment of compensation to the patron implied that it was not the scriptural and inalienable right of the people to elect their own ministers.

Fifth, by devising and enacting this measure—instead of acknowledging the competency of the arrangements both of church and state in 1649 in reference to this matter—the Parliament homologated the provision of the Act Rescissory and,

sadly, the church, by acquiescing to the scheme, instead of standing on the ground she had occupied in 1649 (which had never been repealed by any competent church authority), virtually acknowledged the power of the state to suspend and rescind ecclesiastical laws.

Sixth, again, this Act was passed without consulting the church—the whole affair having been arranged and determined *three months before the General Assembly was allowed to meet*.

Seventh, it is absolutely beyond the competency of the state to frame any regulations for the church on this subject. It is fatal to this measure, that it was a *civil decision* imposed on the church in relation to a *spiritual privilege*.

Unsurprisingly, this 'compromise' did not last long. It was repealed little more than 20 years later by the patronage law of 1712 by means of which patrons were restored to their 'ancient rights'. This resulted, eventually, in the Secessions of 1733 and 1761, as well as the Disruption of 1843, all of which responses were *too little and certainly way too late*.

In any case, there is no huge leap from the provision of 1690 to that of 1712. If we go so far as to grant that it is competent for the state to enact laws for regulating the spiritual affairs of Christ's house, we must also admit that it has the power of altering and annulling them, of making them more or less stringent, as it sees cause. The Acts of 1690 and 1712 both flow from the same Erastian source and encroach alike, even if not to the same degree, on the spiritual jurisdiction of the church of Christ.

#### 6. *Obligation to Covenantal Oaths*

Last, but by no means least, the sixth deficiency of the Revolution

Settlement lay in its failure to revive or recognise the Covenants sworn to and solemnly adopted by church and state.

The church of the Second Reformation embodied in her statutes (involving an oath) the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. *Indeed, 'taking the Covenants'—or swearing to them—was the equivalent of ordination vows in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: no-one could enter the ministry of the Church of Scotland without signing the Covenants.* These Covenants were also recognised (again, by oath and statute) in the civil constitution of the kingdom. However, these Covenants were condemned, denounced, and publically committed to the flames under the reign of Charles II—who had sworn to uphold them!

Remarkably, the Revolution government of King William left these Covenants where they found them—and there they continue to lie: violated, trampled upon, and almost forgotten, till the present day.

More remarkably, the church entered into connection with the state, as if perfectly satisfied that the recognition of these solemn vows formed no condition of the alliance. And, although efforts were made by various persons to induce the church to recognise and revive these solemn engagements, in the exercise of her own authority, she refused to comply, and even went to the length, in various instances, of inflicting censure on those who persisted in calling her attention to this important duty.

Clearly, then, the Presbyterian ministers, by agreeing to establishment by the state on the terms of the Rescissory Acts, and by refusing to acknowledge the obligations of the Covenants, trampled these very Covenants underfoot as well as all the attainments of the Second Reformation which arose out of them, with the sole exception of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Furthermore, by later becoming a party to the 1707 Treaty of Union between Scotland and England—which proceeded upon the total overthrow of the covenanted uniformity required by the Solemn League and Covenant—the Revolution Church of Scotland positively repudiated the public engagements of the Second Reformation, and helped to prolong and perpetuate their obscurity and neglect. The Treaty of Union in 1707, which perpetuated Episcopalian presence in government and monarchical headship of the Church of England for all time, was a clear betrayal of the Covenants and of the Second Reformation.

### **A Tragic Separation**

#### *Majority Response*

Such proposed terms of settlement, in order to secure establishment, should have been rejected outright by faithful Presbyterian ministers. Sadly, however, the ministers of the day, around sixty in number, accepted them.

Accordingly, in 1690, the state recognised these ministers, and the people who followed them, as the established Church of Scotland and authorised them to meet later that year in what was (supposedly) the first Church of Scotland General Assembly to meet 'freely' for many years.

#### *Minority Response*

However, a significant number of Scottish Presbyterians—numbering around 7,000 men along with their families—refused to accept the terms of the re-establishment imposed by the state and decided to continue meeting in their conventicles.

It is important to note, however, that these people did not *leave* the Church of Scotland. They did not walk out of a General Assembly and they did not secede. *They were simply a significant number within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at the time which did not want to enter into a certain kind of relationship with the state on terms dictated by the state.* Understandably, they were aggrieved that the ministers of the Church were willing to enter into this relationship—because they believed that, by doing so, these ministers were compromising their biblical and Presbyterian beliefs and that they were in clear breach of their solemn vows.

It is easy to see how, under those circumstances, the 7000 men and their families would feel that they had the right to continue as the Church of Scotland themselves. However, they were reluctant to do so for two reasons.

First, they had no ordained ministers at their head. The three ministers who were most identified with their outlook and principles had agreed, rather reluctantly, to enter the new relationship with the state—which was something of a shock to these covenanters and, it was said, a matter of later regret to one of the ministers too.

Second, although these men and women were used to years of persecution during which they were unable to worship in their former churches (mostly now filled with Episcopalian preachers), they longed earnestly for a single re-established Presbyterian church faithful to the oaths it had made previously to God. Accordingly, they made the most earnest pleas to their former brethren to reconsider their position and make the necessary modifications to the terms of the new Presbyterian re-settlement which would allow everyone to continue together.

The strength of their desire to remain united with the rest of the Presbyterians, and their utter lack of schismatic spirit, can be clearly seen from the passionate manner in which they addressed them in a letter sent to the first General Assembly of the new Revolution Church of Scotland later that year in 1690:

*'We must cry for the removing of these stumbling blocks and for condemning these courses that have done our Lord Jesus Christ so much hurt, in their standing in the way of their comfortable communion with the church. Let the famishing case of our souls and our hungering to hear it preached by you prevail with you to consider our complaints, and let the wounds of our bleeding mother, panting to be healed by the hand of the tender physician, have weight with you not to slight or despise our desires. But, if you shall shut your eyes and ears at them, then we know no other remedy left us, but to complain and protest unto judicatories, and cry and sigh and groan to the father of mercies, who is tender to all his little ones and is the hearer of prayer, that he may see to it and heal our breaches in his own time and way.'*

Evidently, then, they were waiting and hoping that their former brethren would come to see the error of their ways, renounce their new-found connection with the state and remain in the societies with them until the conditions of that state connection would be more honourable to Christ and to their obligations to God under their vows (see further below).

Eventually, two of the ministers who had accepted the Revolution Settlement came to the conviction that the Presbyterian ministers had been wrong to enter the relationship with the state on the terms in which they did in 1690. These two men tried, without success, to get their fellow ministers to change their position and, when this course of action failed, they then applied

to the Presbyterians still meeting in conventicles (or 'United Societies' as they were then called) with a view to being received as their ministers. Their application was on the basis that the people of these United Societies were just as much the children of the Reformation as their former colleagues were. Indeed, because they had adhered absolutely to the position of the Scottish Reformation without compromising—as the majority had failed to do when they agreed to the terms of re-establishment as imposed by the state—the two ministers felt that these Societies were very much *the more faithful part of the Church of Scotland*.

After application, the two ministers were received by the Societies and so, in 1743, fifty-three years after the re-establishment of the Presbyterian Church in 1690, a Presbytery was formed and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was set up.

*The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, then, became the first organised Presbyterian Church in Scotland to exist alongside the Church of Scotland—but, because of the circumstances of its birth, it was not, and still is not, a secession church and, in this respect, it is quite unique as a Presbyterian church in Scotland.*

Also, again because of the circumstances of its origin, in which it never broke off from an organised constituted church, its claim to be the true heir of the Reformed Church of Scotland is very strong.

Unsurprisingly, many have tended to dismiss this claim merely on the ground of the size of the church. However, aside from the fact that the size of a church is really irrelevant to its spiritual identity, it is worth noting that the church established by the Revolution Settlement was not particularly large then either. Indeed, the entire population of Scotland barely exceeded one million and, of these, a good number were either Roman Catholic

or Episcopalian and so the proportion of Presbyterians represented by the Societies was far from small.

Most Presbyterians, however, have dismissed the Reformed Presbyterians' claim to being heirs of the Reformation Church of Scotland on the ground that they were wrong to remain outside the newly re-established Church of Scotland. And they have held this position even while acknowledging that the Revolution Settlement was a defective settlement and one which was responsible for the Secessions of 1733 and 1761 as well as the Disruption of 1843 (incidentally, for a supposedly *acceptable* Revolution Settlement, this is a fairly lamentable legacy).

In opposition to this, the Reformed Presbyterian Church has constantly asserted that the Revolution Settlement of 1690, by which the Presbyterian Church was re-established on the state's terms, was not only a *defective settlement* producing centuries of strife but a *fundamentally flawed settlement*—to the extent that *it was wrong for the Presbyterian ministers involved to accept its terms*.

It has sometimes been pled, by way of apology for the Revolution Settlement of the church, that the Presbyterians were at that time placed in circumstances of extreme difficulty, and that they accepted a state imposed constitution because they had little alternative.

However, the fact remains that they could have acted otherwise: they could have declined the terms devised by the state for the establishment of the church and, instead, insisted on being established according to her own terms. And, if the state were to refuse establishing her on her own biblical terms, it would be the clear duty of the church to assert and retain her liberty without

all the privileges of establishment as she had done during the persecution.

However, largely due to weariness with the struggle—and, sadly, the lucrative lure of state establishment—the spirit of compromise was abroad and the majority of Presbyterians chose to accept establishment as the state imposed it, with the result that a huge number of moderate and Episcopalian ministers were admitted into the church, ushering in the reign of the ‘Moderates’. This reign was to continue until a measure of the covenanting spirit arose in the Revolution Church, culminating in the Disruption of 1843—which, laudable as it was, had much less ground beneath it by way of justification than the covenanters had when they refused to enter the establishment in the first place: the Free Church chose liberty over establishment in 1843, but if that choice had been made by the majority in 1690, the story of the Scottish church might have been very different.

Certainly, the issues at stake in the Disruption of 1843—which led to the formation of the Free Church—were relatively minor in comparison with those involved in 1690. And it is utterly impossible, with consistency, to defend the Disruption of 1843 while simultaneously condemning as schismatic (divisive) those who refused the terms of the Revolution Settlement of 1690. Indeed, when the facts are fully and fairly examined, it should become plain that it is far easier, on biblical and confessional grounds, to justify those covenanters who dissented from the Revolution Settlement of 1690 than it is to justify any group of dissenters in the history of Scottish Presbyterianism—with the possible exception of the founding fathers of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1893.

The Disruption fathers sought freedom for the congregation to

call and induct a man of their own choice—*although the church had lived with the Act prohibiting such freedom since the Patronage Act of 1712*. It would have been far better to have stood for that liberty in 1690 and asserted the following, in no uncertain terms, before the state: first, that Presbyterian church government is of divine right; second, that the whole of the Westminster Standards were to be re-adopted as they were in the 1640s; third, that the church's assemblies were to be entirely free from state interference; fourth, that all the Acts of the free and independent assemblies during the Second Reformation were to be retained in force and, in short, that all the attainments of the Second Reformation were to be maintained.

All this they *could and should have been done*—and if the state would not have allowed her establishment on such conditions, they should have obeyed God rather than men and refused establishment and monetary endowment. Instead, the church acquiesced in the awful insult paid by the state to the church and to the attainments of the Second Reformation.

The desire of the remaining covenanters for the return of their former brethren to covenanted faithfulness, coupled with their own lack of ministers, meant that they went for many years without receiving Baptism or the Lord's Supper—such was their respect for an ordained ministry and church order. However, with the continued and worsening defection of the majority, and the arrival into their own ranks of ministers who now desired to preach to them, they organised themselves to formally continue their witness, no longer as the United Societies, but as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland from 1743 onwards.

In light of all these facts, and on account of her long and unbroken stand for all the constitutional documents of the Second Reformation, we have good reason to conclude that the Reformed

Presbyterian Church of Scotland, although currently small, is a true heir of the Second Reformation Church of Scotland.

### **A Future Renovation?**

However, it is sad to think that the church of the Second Reformation—covenanted, free and united—should have so degenerated as to become fragmented and, largely, unfaithful to these covenanted standards.

This process began very soon after the covenanted reformation was complete. Religious leaders, who were themselves out of sympathy with the covenanted Westminster Standards, began the process of subverting and eroding them and, frequently, they used very clever methods in doing so which often divided those who were trying to hinder them.

Sadly, the church capitulated to the assaults made on the very forms of doctrine, worship and government which she had solemnly promised to uphold; in doctrine, commitment to the Westminster Confession was relaxed; in worship, the Psalms were replaced by uninspired songs; and, in government, the King, bishops and landowners began to interfere.

Thankfully, this process of declension was met with resistance and successive conflicts led to major divisions in the Scottish church which began to happen not long after the settlement of 1690; notably, the Secession of 1733; the Disruption of 1843; the Declaratory Act controversy of 1892; and the Union Controversy which culminated in 1900; as well as several other lesser ones. Sadly, those who were opposed to all those attacks lacked clarity as to how to respond to them with the result that the division did not always fall as one would have expected.

For example, as we have seen, some entered the Revolution church in 1690 with deep reservations regarding how it was constituted, leaving others behind who would later form the Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1743. In 1733, some remained in the Church of Scotland although they were deeply unhappy with patronage and with its treatment both of heretics in the church and with those who had felt compelled to leave and who went on to form the Secession Church in that year. In the Disruption of 1843, many stayed in the Church of Scotland although they were grieved at the practice of patronage and, although they were in deep sympathy with those who left to form the Free Church, they felt it was their duty to continue to fight from within. Finally, in 1893, many remained in the Free Church, refusing to leave with those who left to form the Free Presbyterian Church that year, even though they believed the Declaratory Act passed the previous year was unlawful.

Undeniably, the result of all that is that now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is an established Church of Scotland which has been markedly unfaithful to these covenanted attainments for many years *while the people who believe wholeheartedly in these attainments are found in different churches and are often prohibited from working together because of their church structures and internal discipline—and are often seen, and sadly sometimes see themselves, as one another's adversaries rather than colleagues.*

What then can be done?

First, the Reformed Presbyterian Church believes in a church and nation under covenant with God. And, because our land is covenanted, its restoration must begin with the restoration of the church. The nation will not recover from its serious moral and spiritual decline unless the church repents and reforms.

Second, it must be acknowledged that such a reformation must be executed not with the external zeal of Jehu but with the spiritual zeal and repentant spirit of Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat and Josiah. It is required of us all, in Scotland, to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and confess that, whatever degree of external faithfulness we may have maintained, we have fallen woefully short in our spiritual service to God and need to rededicate ourselves to that service in a needy and apostate land.

Third, we must be prepared to acknowledge that the current state of division amongst those who believe in preserving and promoting the covenanted attainments of the Scottish Reformation is unacceptable, and that our unwillingness to be more active in healing this division is itself a sin to be repented of—and that it is, in fact, contrary to the very standards which we are supposed to be maintaining! In other words, a significant part of our necessary repentance lies in our *willingness to participate in a corporate return on the part of Ministers and Elders to the standards which we were covenanted to hold without compromise.*

We are conscious that we already hold to Westminster doctrine, worship and government in the RP church—but we need to remind ourselves that we need to encourage all who believe the same truths to respond to God’s call to be as one and to be one with them. Ought all Ministers not to be very afraid that their insistence on remaining apart is more a contributory factor to God’s wrath than a part of the process of averting it?

As a way forward, what ought to become plainer to our vision is that the children of the Second Reformation should focus less on *denominational identity* and *lineal descent* from ecclesiastical bodies and more on *spiritual affinity* and *doctrinal alignment*. In this way, those who adhere to the Second Reformation would, again, be able to stand together. And, together—under whatever

name they would wish to gather—they could begin to rebuild Scottish Presbyterianism on the buried but solid and unifying rock of the covenanted Second Reformation, not on the shifting sand of a discredited Revolution Settlement.

When Hezekiah cleansed the temple, and restored the worship of God to its purity, in song and sacrifice, we read of those of the northern tribes who ‘humbled themselves’ and returned to worship in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:11). Naturally, in applying such passages, existing denominations lapse into equating themselves with ‘Jerusalem’—the denomination to which all others should return! It is far better, however, to view God’s truth as enshrined in our Covenants and Confession—produced in the aptly-named ‘Jerusalem Chamber’ of Westminster—as being the centre to which we should return.

This would doubtless humble us all—but we have no doubt it would gladden our forefathers who, contrary to current perceptions, were more grieved at division than we are and who would, we believe, have embraced such a return wholeheartedly irrespective of the name of the denomination. More importantly, it would also be pleasing to God who takes delight in fulfilled covenant obligation.

Until that happens—and may the Lord hasten that day!—the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland must continue, with God’s help, to witness to the Lordship of Christ and to all the attainments in teaching, worship and government of the covenanted Second Reformation.

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