

HISTORY OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

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THE Reformed Presbyterian Church in America is the lineal descendant and true representative of the Church of Scotland in her purest days, and embraces in her Testimony the principles of the Second Reformation as exhibited between the years 1638 and 1649. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland was a Covenanting Church, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of this age is not a branch of any Presbyterian body but the remnant of the original stock. While the Synod of this Church is among the small ecclesiastical assemblies, yet for that reason she should not be regarded with reproach. Her principles are both scriptural and unpopular, and neither the paucity of her members nor the unpopularity of her principles prove that the position of the Church is unsound or impractical. She claims to be a Reformed Church, a Presbyterian Church, and a Covenanting Church; and to fully substantiate this claim a cursory review of the history of the Christian church will be necessary.

From the earliest period in the world's history the church of God has been a Covenanting Church, and a dissenter from immoral constitutions of Church and State. The antediluvians bore faithful testimony to the character and moral government of God, and by the call of Abraham this covenanting society received a more perfect organization. The patriarchs were constant witnesses to the truth of God against idolatry and immorality either national or individual. Under the Mosaic dispensation also the nation of Israel was brought into a solemn league and covenant with God, and the Church erected in the wilderness was a witnessing society for the rights of God. When the "fullness of time" had come, and the predicted Messiah came into the world as the "Messenger of the Covenant," He was a witness for the truth, and not only bore constant testimony to His Sonship before Jewish priests, but also claimed His right to the Headship over the nations before the Roman government. These two articles have formed the chief points of Christ's witnesses in all ages, and are the cardinal principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in this age. When Christ commissioned His apostles to go forth and preach the gospel, He gave them to be witnesses for Him and to His rights upon earth, even to the end of the world. The commission then implies that every minister of Christ is to bear like testimony. At the organization of the Apostolic church and in accordance with the directions of the Divine Head, members were to be received into it by an expression of their belief in the Saviour, and a confession of the scheme of grace as revealed in God's Word, with a life and conversation as becomes the same profession. In this the requirements of the Christian church should be uniform. The government and order of the primitive church were evidently Presbyterian. It was distinguished for the purity of its doctrines and the simplicity of its worship. Nothing of human invention was tolerated and it was scriptural in all its appointments. In this system of government, moreover, the Headship of Christ and the subjection of all things to Him were clearly displayed. At an early period of the life of this scriptural church and covenanting society were the fires of persecution kindled, and they raged with increased fury because many had not grown weary of purity and witness-bearing. For three hundred years were they persecuted under Jewish bigotry, until Constantine the Great wrapped the imperial robe around him, and signally overthrew the policy of the Roman power, and established pure Christianity as the religion of the empire. Under his

eventful reign Christianity spread rapidly, but coincidentally the spirit of Anti-Christ was at work. The condition of the church was such that men were not willing to return to the pure state of the primitive church, not to become witnesses for the rights of King Jesus. Preachers of the gospel were led to defection by vain philosophies and worldly ambition. Discipline was relaxed and the lives of members gradually became more corrupt. They had broken covenant with God and iniquity was being visited upon them. The union of Church and State doubtless promoted defection and corruption, and the spirituality of the church became very low. The favors of the State soon developed a hierarchical system of Prelacy, which system was directly antagonistic to the teaching of the Apostolic church. The same causes also gave rise to Papacy, and the bishop of Rome assumed the title of the Universal Bishop. Seemingly the whole world "wondered after the beast," and the unmutated Word of God was not only prohibited to be read, but the worship was conducted in an unknown tongue. During all these periods of the prevalence of Papacy, there were faithful witnesses for Jesus to be found. Before the papal power had reached the Western church, God had raised up the faithful Athanasius to contend against the Arian heresy; Vigilantius to expose the strongholds of superstition, and the learned Augustine to overthrow the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian heresies.

Away to the north and west faithful witnesses for revealed truth and scriptural church-life had been preserved, who uncompromisingly refused to hold communion with the church of Rome. In England, Scotland and Ireland the pure gospel was preached and the church conducted after the Apostolic model. Patrick and Columba, with their contemporaries and successors, multiplied witnesses for Jesus and established a church in opposition to Rome. Many of these witnesses were denominated Ceilide, or servants of God, and have been known in history as Culdees. They were Covenanters in theory, Presbyterians in government and Reformed Presbyterians in sentiment. They held firmly to the Word of God and supremacy of Christ, and maintained a separate existence until the time of the Reformation. In parts of Europe, Roman persecutors found faithful witnesses for the rights of Christ, who opposed the Anti-Christian system. The Waldenses in the valleys of Piedmont, and the Albigenses in the south of France, had continued their existence since Apostolic times. They were a covenanting society separated from, or rather never had been in connection with, the church of Rome, and propagated a truly evangelical creed and a Presbyterian form of government since the Apostolic age. This fact is admitted by nearly every historian. But these witnesses for Christ were soon discovered in vast congregations and caused to suffer most violent and terrible persecution. Many of them were banished, and, as so many sparks from the burning stake, they kindled anew their principles in other parts of Europe. They were afterward found in Germany, Bohemia, France and England. In the fourteenth century, eighty thousand of these Covenanting Presbyterians were found in Austria and maintained their principles to the death. In the fifteenth century the Reformation from Popery began, although its work is generally attributed to the sixteenth century. Wyckliffe, John Huss, the Lollards, and Jerome of Prague espoused the principles of the covenanting Waldenses, and in their maintenance of truth prepared the way for the Reformation. All those in sympathy with the cause of pure religion formulated a covenant, which was entered into by the whole Waldensian Church. Some of the reformers of this period had been reared within the pale of the Romish Church and experimentally knew the errors against which they heroically contended. God brought out such eminent witnesses as Zwinglius, Melancthon, Calvin and Farel, who in Germany, Switzerland and France were the effective instruments in God's hand for propagating the cause of the

First Reformation, and shook Papal Europe to her very foundations. As might be expected the Reformation met with a great deal of opposition. The hands of the reformers were held up by the Lutheran Church, which, in 1534, solemnly swore the famous League of Smalkalde. In 1537, a similar covenant was sworn by the followers at Geneva. Unhappily the Lutherans and Reformed differed in some points, and especially in regard to sacraments, but with reference to the pure Word of God and the errors of the Romish church they were agreed. The Reformed churches of France and Hungary also swore similar covenants and all were known as Protestants against the corruptions of the church of Rome. The cause of the Reformation did not find such rich soil in England. The despotic Henry the Eighth was King. He was a most irreligious man, and, in order to gratify his own lusts, established the Church of England, and arrogated to himself the power of a Pope at London. Although this church was separated from that of Rome, yet it retained much of the doctrine and order of the Papacy. The Reformation made some progress under the brief reign of Edward the Sixth, but its friends were caused to pass through fiery persecution under the reign of bloody Mary. Upon the accession of Queen Elizabeth the protestant faith was again restored, but through the Erastian measures of the Queen the cause did not flourish. The chief hindrance was from the fact that the anti-Christian hierarchy of the Romish church was retained almost unaltered in the Established Church of England. For all intents and purposes it was Romish, and the bitter enemy of the Reformation. There were some again in England who contended for purity in doctrine and government, who were called Puritans, and because they would not take the communion of the corrupt English church, entered the role of Dissenters. The Reformation began to spread rapidly in Scotland in the early part of the sixteenth century, and owed little or nothing to the favor of the state. God raised up several eminent witnesses for the truth who suffered martyrdom, and, notwithstanding the fact that they sealed their testimony with their own blood, the truth continued to progress. Among these faithful witnesses were Patrick Hamilton, George Wishart and John Knox. The latter returned from the Continent in 1555, when the cause of the Reformation was languishing, and he was the means of awakening the multitude by his powerful preaching, and caused the Queen to fear his prayers more than an army of soldiers. Through his indomitable courage and consecrated devotion to the cause of the Reformation the people entered into several solemn covenants for the purpose of uniting the friends of the cause. Various covenants adapted to the times were sworn at Edinburgh in 1557; at Perth in 1559; at Stirling in 1560; and at Leith in 1562, in which they pledged their lives and their substance to maintain the cause of Christ.

In 1560, the Parliament abolished Popery, and the first General Assembly emitted the First Book of Discipline, fixing and defining the government and order of the church after a scriptural and Presbyterian plan. In 1578, a Second Book of Discipline was prepared and adopted and the Presbyterian Reformation was fully established. The most memorable step in the progress of the Reformation was the adoption of the NATIONAL COVENANT OF SCOTLAND. It was drawn up by Rev. John Craig of Edinburgh, and was the nation's solemn protest against Popery and the bond for the maintenance of the Reformed faith. It was sworn and subscribed by the King and most of the nobility with their households, in 1581. In all these covenants it is expressly agreed that the "Bible should be the supreme law, and that nations should frame their laws according to the Divine standard; that there is a conscience toward God paramount to human control, and the Word of God is the rule for the government of the conscience, that there is no lord of conscience but the Lord Jesus Christ who alone is the Head of the Church and the

lawful Governor among the Nations, that it is the duty of every nation, as well as the individual, to incorporate these principles in its constitution and live a life in conformity to this profession.”

In 1590, the National Covenant was again subscribed. In 1592, the Presbyterian form of church government was ratified by the King and parliament, and this has been denominated the GREAT CHARTER. In 1596, the General Assembly renewed the National Covenant again, at which time over four hundred ministers and elders with uplifted hands to God solemnly engaged in His name to purge the church of all corruption. This was a reviving time from the presence of the Lord, and the Reformation was in the meridian of its life.

Partly by craft and partly by arbitrary interference with ecclesiastical courts, James attempted to overthrow the Scottish Reformation and establish Episcopacy. This perfidious ruler favored Popery, interfered with the election of members to the highest judicatory of the church, and introduced prelacy in 1610. In 1618, the “Five Articles of Perth” were forcibly carried and ratified, and because some ministers refused to subscribe to these Popish requirements, they were ejected from their charges and visited with heavy penalties. At the accession of Charles the First to the throne, in March, 1625, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland witnessed a deadly foe, and his determination was to destroy every vestige of Presbyterianism and compel them to conform to the English Episcopal Liturgy. In 1636, a Liturgy and Book of Ecclesiastical Canons were introduced, and had the effect of abolishing the ecclesiastical polity of the Church of Scotland. Lamentably too many complied with these prelatial innovations and arbitrary measures. These tyrannical proceedings aroused the independent spirit of many of the Scotch, and, after earnest deliberation and fervent prayer, they resolved to flee to the strength received by their ancestors, and took steps to renew the National Covenants. The Covenants were the source of Scotland’s strength and the crown of her glory! The National Covenant had served a good purpose in consummating the First Reformation, and it was brought into service in the Second.

To now adapt it to the circumstances of the church and nation, Archibald Johnston specified several acts of former Parliaments to prove that the course taken by the Covenanters was constitutional; and Alexander Henderson applied the sacred bond to the condemnation and rejection of all prelatial innovations. They say in this bond:

We promise and swear by the great name of the Lord our God, to continue in the profession and obedience of the true religion; that we shall defend the same, and resist all those contrary errors and corruptions according to our vocation, and to the utmost of that power which God hath put in our hands all the days of our life.”

And they also declare:

“We shall, to the utmost of our power, stand to the defence of our Sovereign, the King, in the defence and preservation of the aforesaid true religion, liberties, and laws of the kingdom.”

And with regard to the original covenant that was now renewed, they said:

“The present and succeeding generations in the land are bound to keep the aforesaid national oath and subscription inviolate.”

The Covenant was now sworn and subscribed at Greyfriar’s Church in Edinburgh, March 1, 1638, by sixty thousand persons, amid scenes of joy and sorrow. They laid the precious document upon the many tombs, and many wrote their names with blood from their own veins, while others were but permitted to subscribe initials, because the document was full, and there was no more room. The renewing of the Covenant was followed by the happiest effects and manifest tokens of the Divine blessing. It was the means of awakening the people to their vows and the signal overthrow of Episcopacy. The Covenanters acted with prudence and decision in demanding the General Assembly to redress their grievances, and a meeting of Parliament to rectify disorders. This assembly met in the city of Glasgow, November 20, 1638, and was presided over by the great Alexander Henderson. This assembly condemned the “Five Articles of Perth,” the Liturgy and Canons, the Book of Ordination, the High Commission Court, and the civil places and powers of churchmen. Prelacy was rejected, bishops and prelatical leaders were deposed and excommunicated. The renovation of the Covenant was approved; the Presbyterian form of government was fully restored; the power of the church to convene in her annual assembly was granted, and the right of the church to preserve order, discipline, education and religious worship was acknowledged. These were among the purest days of the Covenanting Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and the faithful witnesses for Jesus were triumphant in their rights and liberties. Although armies were brought down to crush the success of the Covenanters and to restore prelacy, they were ineffectual in destroying the witnesses, and the work of the Scottish Reformation was fully confirmed by Parliament in 1640. The exiled ministers were recalled, the order of the church restored, and the ordinances of religion were again dispensed to the people to the utter dismay of the prelates, and Spottiswood, Archbishop of St. Andrew’s, mournfully exclaimed, “Now, all that we have been doing these thirty years by past is at once thrown down.”

While the cause was flourishing in Scotland, the Covenanters in Ireland were inhumanly massacred. Charles the First closed his ears against the cry for help, and he was justly suspected for his complicity with the Romish power.

By an application of the English Parliament, June 12, 1643, an assembly of learned and godly men was called, composed of one hundred and twenty ministers and thirty elders, the majority of which were strict Presbyterians.

This was called the WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY, and met in the Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster, London, July 1, 1643, and continued its sessions for a period of five years, six months and twenty-two days. They drew up from the Word of God the Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, a Form of Church Government and a Directory for Worship. These all received the sanction of the English Parliament and were adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. A joint application by the Parliament and Westminster Assembly was made to the Convention of Estates in Scotland and the General Assembly, August 17, 1643, to enter into a SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT, embracing the civil and religious interests of the three kingdoms. A draft was made by Alexander Henderson and cheerfully subscribed by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, by both Houses of Parliament, and by

persons of all ranks in England. It was then carried over into Ireland and signed generally by the congregations in the province of Ulster. This famous document bound the United Kingdoms to the preservation of the Reformed religion, to its doctrines, discipline and government according to the Word of God. It simply brought the Church back to its Scriptural basis and its allegiance to King Jesus and His Law in all transactions, civil and ecclesiastical. Had it not been for the Solemn League and Covenant, the three Kingdoms would have been cast into absolute despotism, and the liberty and civilization of the world would have received an irrecoverable shock. The great principles of this sacred bond are those of God's Word, and nothing more not kept. While England was not quite ready, but should have been to fully adopt them as her principles of national government, yet they are none the less Scriptural, and there will a time come when all the Kingdoms of the earth will be united under a similar and one grand Solemn League and Covenant; when God's Anointed shall be practically acknowledged King of Nations; and when these Scriptural principles of the heavenly-minded Covenanters of Scotland shall gloriously triumph. It cannot be otherwise, for the nations that neglect or refuse to enter into such a covenant with the King of Kings shall perish. No international document has ever been so much misrepresented as the Solemn League and Covenant. Statesmen should pause and read it carefully, compare it to the demands of God's Law, and fully digest what is in it, before they vent their eloquence in undue criticism. A sacred principle was then, and by this document infused, into the heart of that nation, which has never perished; and, having taken root in the new empire of America, may be regarded as the dawn of a better day for the cause of King Jesus. The Covenanters never attempted to force Presbyterianism upon England or any other nation, for they entered into the Covenant without any such stipulations, and it has always been contrary to their principles to force Christians to the acceptance of any position. But they do feel it their duty to teach men and nations their allegiance to Christ and to use every legitimate means to bring them to an acceptance and acknowledgement of the same.

James the First had signed the first National Covenant, and Charles the Second, on being crowned at Scone, January 1, 1651, solemnly swore to keep both the National and Solemn League and Covenant. And when the oath to defend the Church of Scotland was administered to him, kneeling and holding up his right hand, he uttered the following solemn vow: "By the Eternal and Almighty God, who liveth and reigneth forever, I shall observe and keep all that is contained in this oath."

A blessing followed the course of the Church at this time, and many of the breaches in Church and State were healed. The Solemn League and Covenant was a necessity, and not until all nations are bound together and to God by a holy Covenant, and true liberty flowing from Bible principles recognized, will universal peace prevail. The attainments of the Second Reformation are worthy of record. The supreme Headship of Christ over the Church was exhibited; the Church was privileged to call her own assemblies; the policy of the government was brought into conformity with God's Word; the nation owned its allegiance to King Jesus; and rulers were to be set up who should be God's ministers for good and a terror to evil doers. This was the church's purest period and the nation's happiest hour. The object of the Covenanter Church in America as true witnesses for the royal prerogatives of King Jesus, is to bring this nation to the enjoyment of the blessings and duty of this period in the life of the British nation. It is the required attitude of every church and nation to its Divine Head.

The period in which the nation continued to avow and practically apply the principles of the Reformation, was too brief to fully test the blessings of the nation whose God is the Lord. The beauty of the Covenanted Reformation was soon marred by the duplicity of an unprincipled king and his followers. England was the first to make defection, because the danger which threatened her civil liberty was past, and she imagined that she no longer needed the help of the King of Heaven. Scotland soon also broke her solemn covenant engagements and departed from her attainments. The invasion of England, in 1648, by the Duke of Hamilton's army, was a willful breach of the Solemn League and Covenant, and was afterwards condemned by both the Parliament and General Assembly. Charles the Second was totally unworthy of the homage of a loyal people, and happy would they have been had they never placed the crown upon him. The people had committed their trusts into the hands of a treacherous man. There was undue attachment to the house of Stuart, which ultimately led to untold calamities. The King was forced to exile, and Oliver Cromwell invaded Scotland with an English army, and gained a victory at Dunbar. Under Cromwell's usurped authority, and by intrigue, plans were formed to overthrow the Constitution. The faithful Presbyterians considered that they were bound to adhere to the Constitution; and, because they opposed the malignants and their policy, were called protesters. Cromwell died in September, 1658, and his son Richard succeeded him. He was wanting in capacity and ambition, and Charles the Second was restored to the throne in May, 1660. From this date to that of the Revolution Settlement in 1688, the period is denominated the "killing times." Now begin the sufferings of the Church of Scotland; and the history of this period may well be written in characters of blood. In 1661, the Parliament required an oath of unlimited allegiance from all members instead of a subscription to the Covenants. The order and government of the Church were reversed; bishops were restored; all proceedings of the Church and State on behalf of Reformation from 1638 to 1649 were pronounced treasonable; the Covenants, National and Solemn League, were pronounced unlawful oaths; and all civil and ecclesiastical acts were rendered null and void. The covenants were ordered to be burned in public at Edinburgh, as they had been done in London; and all those who owned the covenants were subjected to the penalties of treason. Nearly four hundred ministers of the Presbyterian Church were driven from their congregations by an act of the Privy Council. The whole work of the Reformation was overturned, and the Act of Supremacy, making the King judge in all matters civil and ecclesiastical, paved the way for the terrible persecution which immediately followed. Amid these bloody persecutions the Covenanter Church came into prominence as the faithful witnesses of the great principles of the Reformation. They bore constant testimony for the divine authority of the Presbyterian Church as contrasted with Prelacy; for the exclusive Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ over the Church; for the supreme authority of the Mediator and His Law over the rulers of the nation; for the perpetual obligation of the Covenants; together with the rights and duties of subjects owning the authority of Christ to resist those wicked rulers who had usurped their authority and trampled under their feet the rights and liberties of a religious and covenanting people. Such was the testimony which the Covenanters bore, and sealed it with their blood. Among the first victims of this irresponsible power were the Marquis of Argyle and Rev. James Guthrie, staunch Presbyterians and resolute defenders of the cause of the Redeemer. No less than twenty thousand Presbyterian and Covenanting witnesses suffered martyrdom in various ways, and many were banished to America and Jamaica; and upwards of two thousand godly ministers were banished from their congregations in one day. Some renounced the Covenanted cause, but those who continued faithful were driven and chased like partridges on the mountains. The persecutions were

horrible in their character, and one cannot read the history of this period without feeling his blood boil at the atrocious slaughter of the Covenanters by the thousands. They refused to wait upon the ministrations of curates who had been thrust upon them by the bayonet, and if they were found waiting upon any of the ejected Presbyterian ministers either in private houses or conventicles, they were heavily fined and cruelly punished. Among the principle non-conforming ministers were Richard Cameron, John Welsh, Thomas Douglas and John Kid, and a reward was offered for the heads of these faithful divines, dead or alive. Even to the death the martyrs of Jesus bore testimony against their persecutors, and when given an opportunity to speak in their courts, replied to the perjured prelates in the following manner: "Every immoral constitution is disapproved of God. No man ought to swear allegiance to a power which God does not recognize. All kings are commanded to promote the welfare of the Church, and those who own allegiance to Christ cannot consistently pray for the prosperity of the Church's enemies, or for the establishment of thrones founded upon iniquity. It is certainly the duty of Christians to be meek and peaceable members of civil society. If they are permitted to enjoy their lives, their property, and especially their religion, without being required to make any sinful compliances, it is right that they should behave peaceably and not involve society in confusion, even though the power of the empire in which they reside be in evil hands. Every burden which God in His Providence brings upon them, they must cheerfully bear. But never are Christians called upon by their God to own as His ordinance anything which is contrary to His Law. The civil powers of which He approves are a terror to them who do evil. Tyrants and persecutors, usurpers and despisers of religion may be set up in His holy and just Providence to answer valuable purposes in His hand, but He himself declares in His Word that such Kings are not set up by Him. The Pagan Roman government is described in Revelation as the empire of the dragon, and all the kings that support anti-Christ are said in the same infallible Word to have received from Satan their authority. God has declared their overthrow and destruction, and no Protestant should recognize them as the ordinance of God to which they much yield conscientious support. The present King, Charles the Second, has violated the Constitution of Scotland; he has broken the covenant which he made with God and man; he has claimed as an essential part of royal prerogative, a blasphemous supremacy in the Church; he has overturned our ecclesiastical order; banished the faithful ministry, and persecuted the most virtuous inhabitants of the land. Such a perjured usurper and profligate tyrant cannot be considered as a lawful magistrate by the Reformed Presbyterian Covenanters."

These were the sentiments of the martyrs of Jesus, and for these principles they freely gave their lives. Their position was exceedingly unpopular, but in it were the germs of future glory and greatness. Like John the Baptist, they were the forerunners of greater things, and like John the Baptists, many of them were beheaded. For over twenty years this cruel persecution lasted, and the Covenanting Church was reduced to a few ministers and members. As the faithful remnant of the Church of Scotland in her purest days, they continued to assemble for worship in such places as they could, and their courts of judicature were prevented from meeting. They made several bold declarations of their principles, and aroused the indignation of the King. At the first anniversary of the return of the King, Charles the Second, May 27, 1679, bonfires had been kindled in Rutherglen in commemoration of the restoration. The Covenanters repaired to the scene, extinguished the fires, and burned the Acts of Parliament and the Council as the Covenants had been burned. They formulated the notable "Rutherglen Declaration

and Testimony,” and after fixing it to the market cross, peacefully retired. This was regarded as open rebellion against the power, and produced the fiercest indignation among the prelatic party. It was among the first fearless declarations of the principles of the Covenanters, and led to the battle of Drumclog, where Graham of Claverhouse was defeated. The Covenanters also issued the “Queensferry Paper” in June, 1680, in which they declared: “We do declare that we will set up over ourselves, and over what God shall give us power of, government and governors according to the Word of God; that we shall no more commit the government of ourselves and the making of laws for us to any one single person, this kind of government being most liable to inconveniences and aptest to degenerate into tyranny.” This is strong language, and a bold sentiment of Republicanism. This was burning the bridge behind them, and they neither asked nor received any favors from the prelatic power or ministry. The Covenanters hereafter kept themselves aloof from prelatic assemblies and worshipped among themselves. Holding fast to the Covenants and the rights of the Church which had been established by the King and all subjects, they passed just sentence upon all backsliders and defectionists from the humblest member of the once established Church. Rev. Donald Cargill excommunicated Charles the Second and six other noted profligates, September 17, 1680, in the presence of a vast congregation. They were guilty of the most atrocious crimes, and justly dealt with, but they were regarded as fit members of the Episcopacy. This again excited the blood-thirsty persecutors to frenzied madness. Richard Cameron, who was the leader of the Covenanters and a most fearless and pious man, fell at Airmoss, July 22, 1680, as a victim of the diabolical power. The blood-stained standard was not allowed to trail, and was borne aloft by Donald Cargill, until he also was apprehended and executed at Edinburgh, July 27, 1681. This left the Covenanters without a minister, but the followers were just as faithful to their King and the attainments of the Covenanting Church. They immediately organized a system of societies among themselves and met as often as they could. Correspondents from all the societies met in a general meeting, usually every three months, and determined the course of the whole body, but never assumed to dispense any official work. The minutes of these General Meetings were kept by Michael Shields and are published in the “Faithful Contendings.” While they were deprived of public ministrations and sealing ordinances, the Covenanters could not conscientiously be administered unto by any minister who had taken “the indulgence.” Mr. James Renwick, one of their worthy young men and a youth of good education, was sent to the University of Groningen, Holland, where he studied theology, and was licensed and ordained by the Classis of Groningen, May 10, 1683. The same fall he returned to Scotland, and, as the sole minister of the Covenanters, labored faithfully for the rights of Jesus and the liberties of his people. He suffered many annoyances and was frequently outlawed and persecuted. Every person was forbidden by the edict of the tyrannical King “to harbor him and his followers, or to supply them with meat or drink; but to hunt and pursue them out of all their dens, caves, and most retired deserts, and to raise the hue and cry after them.” Notwithstanding these dangers and cruelties, the Covenanters kept March 4, 1685, as “a day of thanksgiving unto the Lord for the wonderful proofs of His love and good will, manifested to a scattered and distressed remnant in this land, by His delivering them in several places from the power and rage of enemies when they were ready to swallow them up.” By the death of Charles the Second, they enjoyed a brief breathing spell, and improved the precious time by preparing the famous “Sanquhar Declaration,” and nailing it to the market cross. In 1682, Rev. Alexander Peden was called from Ireland, and assisted Mr. Renwick until his death, January 26, 1686. In December, 1686, Alexander Shields, who had been licensed by some

Presbyterian ministers in London, espoused the despised cause of the Cameronians. Mr. William Boyd, educated in the Netherlands by the Covenanters, was licensed by the Classis of Groningen in September, 1687, and all these held forth the rights of "Christ's Crown and Covenant" with fearlessness and power. Rev. James Renwick, the last martyr to the sacred cause of Scotland, was executed February 17, 1688, for his devotion to the Crown rights of King James. His charge was: "You, James Renwick, have shaken off all fear of God and respect and regard to his majesty's authority and laws; and having entered yourself into the society of some rebels of most damnable and pernicious principles and disloyal practices; you took upon you to be a preacher to those traitors and became so desperate a villain that you did openly and frequently preach in the fields, declaiming against the authority and government of our sovereign lord, the King; denying that our most gracious sovereign, King James the Seventh, is lawful King of these realms; asserting that he was a usurper, and that it was not lawful to pay cess or taxes to his majesty; but that it was lawful and the duty of subjects to rise in arms and make war against his majesty and those commissioned by him." Which is asserted was true; for the Covenanters held the principle that "the abuse of power abrogates the right to use it." With few exceptions, all Protestants accept this principle. Thomas Lining, also educated by the Covenanters, was ordained by the Classis of Embden, in August, 1688, after an examination of twenty-one days. Revs. Shields, Boys, and Lining maintained the faithful Covenanted testimony until the Revolution. Those Covenanters residing in Ireland were ministered to by the revered David Houston. The Revolution Settlement of 1688, which dethroned James the Second and placed the crown upon William, Prince of Orange, is a memorable period, and one worthy of careful consideration in the history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The two hundredth anniversary of this event was celebrated by the Covenanter Church in America, as in other lands.

All true hearted Presbyterians looked with favor upon the Prince of Orange, and regarded the circumstances which placed the crown upon his head as a good omen and the dawn of a better day for Scotland. It was regarded as a Divine interposition in behalf of a loyal people, and the course pursued fully vindicated some of the principles held by the Covenanting witnesses. The Scottish convention passed the following: "That King James, by his abuse of power, had forfeited all title to the crown, and that it be conferred upon the Prince of Orange." The English Parliament also declared "that King James the Second, having endeavored to subvert the Constitution by breaking the original contract between the King and the people, did abdicate the throne." Now it is plain that both these acts establish these two principles, "that the abuse of power destroys the right to exercise it; and that a people may depose their rulers." These same principles dissolved the union between the Colonies and Great Britain, and gave the United States their independence. The same principles now lead thousands of Covenanters to sacrifice their lives, and the principles will be admitted as sound by every intelligent reader. But the hopes of the faithful Covenanting witnesses were doomed to speedy disappointment. While the Presbyterian system was established in Scotland, the Church was left under Erastian control. The Revolution Settlement was unsatisfactory in many respects. It was characterized by several flagrant errors. The Covenants were blasphemously cast aside as worthless; the civil institutions no longer pretended to possess scriptural qualifications; and prelacy was retained in the National Church. If the Revolution of 1688, which overturned the house of Stuart, justified the course of those who rejected the authority upon the principle now accepted by all, then certainly the Covenanters were justified in

rejecting the “settlement” of King William when he openly violated the very principles which brought him to the throne. He willfully betrayed the very cause he solemnly swore to defend. Because the Covenanters regarded an oath of vast importance and binding until the ends for which it was made were accomplished; because they, and others, solemnly swore to adhere to the doctrine and order of the Church of Scotland as constituted between the years 1638 and 1649; because they were sworn to oppose Popery, Prelacy and Erastianism as all the Kings and subjects were bound; because the crown was offered to the new sovereign without the proper and required scriptural qualifications; because the evil institution, against which the whole Church of Scotland had borne constant testimony, was interwoven into the policy of King William; and because he became the acknowledged head of the Church, and exercised authority over it contrary to the Word of God and the previously avowed position of the Church of Scotland, the Reformed Covenanting Church publicly protested against the “settlement,” and remained separate from it, both in its civil and ecclesiastical relations. Their grounds of dissent are those of reason and justice. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, or because of its attachment to the Covenants, the Covenanter Church, of this day, occupies the same position as the Church of Scotland did between the years 1638 and 1649, and which was the purest and most blessed period in its history. The Covenanters hold that the Covenants were binding upon those who solemnly swore them, and who are represented in them, and they are not willing to speedily relinquish the testimony for which the life-blood of thousands of their brethren[†] was sacrificed. While they stood aloof from the government because of principle and the reasons heretofore mentioned, as peaceful and law-abiding citizens they claimed the right of the protection of their lives and property, and paid all just dues in taxes, and bearing arms in defense of their country. Those in Scotland who held these principles of Bible civil government as they had always been maintained by a true scriptural policy, hoped for a reformation and a return to former attainments. As an expression of their hopes, at the first General Assembly after the Revolution “settlement” held in 1690, the Covenanter ministers, Revs. Shields, Boyd and Lining, presented a paper asking the Assembly to carefully examine their position, to acknowledge and confess their sin of Covenant breaking, and the nation’s sin of defection from the previous attainments. This they not only refused to do, but fully embraced the policy of the government, and subsequently deposed the Rev. John McMillan, a Presbyterian minister and a member of their own court, for no other cause than pleading for the obligations of the Covenants which they had solemnly sworn, and now violated with impunity.

In 1691, Revs. Thomas Lining and William Boyd made defection, and after being admonished for their faithfulness to the Covenanters, were received into the Established Church. After having preached the Gospel and held the principles of the Covenanting Church for several years, they could not withstand the unpopularity of their cause. They even persuaded Rev. Alexander Shields, the author of “The Hind let Loose,” to leave the glorious principles he had so ably defended, and he also joined the Established Church. Rev. David Houston, in Ireland, was now the sole minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and he held her principles intact until his death. Alexander Shields continued in his course of defection and became a chaplain in an army which fought under the Pope, and he died abandoned and distressed in Jamaica. The Covenanters were without a minister for sixteen years, and continued to hold that it was inconsistent with their position to wait upon the ministrations of a minister who had been unfaithful to Jesus and his solemn vows. They scrupulously contended for the whole truth once delivered to the

saints, organized themselves into praying societies, and supplicated earnestly and importunately the Good Shepherd to send them a pastor for the scattered flock. They watched with interest the contentings of the Rev. John McMillan, who, until 1703, sought recognition of the obligations of the Covenants, and had failed. Believing that he had received his commission to preach from Christ and not from men, and that he had been unjustly deposed by the Established Church, he resumed his ministrations among his former congregation, who cordially received him and embraced his views of the Covenants. After frequent conferences and serious deliberation, Mr. McMillan acceded to the Reformed Presbyterian Church in October, 1706, and began his labors among them in December, 1707. His labors were greatly blessed among scattered societies, and many were built up in their most holy faith. About this time, Mr. John McNeil, a licentiate of the Established Church, and who had been deprived of the privilege of preaching in that body because of his fidelity to Reformation principles, also joined himself to the Covenanting Church, and assisted Mr. McMillan in displaying a banner because of truth. They drew up a Protestation and Declinature, in which they clearly set forth the principles of the Covenanting Church, and their reasons of dissent. The following is the title of this notable document: *Protestation and Testimony of the United Societies of the Witnessing Remnant of the Anti-popish, Anti-prelatic, Anti-erastian, Anti-sectarian, True Presbyterian Church of Christ in Scotland, Against the sinful Incorporating Union with England and their British Parliament, Concluded and Established, May, 1707*. This famous document and many other copies of the original manuscripts of similar nature, are in the possession of the author. In 1708, another paper entitles "Protestation, Declinature and Appeal," was prepared and signed by these ministers, in which they clearly exhibit their reasons for dissent from the Revolution Church and declare their unfaltering attachment to the standards of the once pure Church of Scotland. In 1707, the union of Scotland and England was effected, and in 1711, patronage was restored. These steps gave additional evidence of apostasy in the Church and Nation, and the Covenanters felt it their duty to take another stand against the incoming tide of Prelacy and Papacy. To this end, and to strengthen their hearts, they renewed the Covenants at Auchinsough, Lanarkshire, July 23, 1712. All the societies assembled for this important transaction, and with their right hands lifted up to Heaven, solemnly pledged themselves to be for God, and not for another. This act of Covenanting was followed by a blessing. As Mr. McNeil was never ordained, Mr. McMillan was the only minister of the Covenanters for over thirty years. He was faithful in visiting the different localities where the societies assembled and preached to them with great power. While there was defection all around him and reproach cast upon him for his fidelity to a persecuted remnant of Christ's witnesses, he was unmoved in his course, and is an example of moral heroism unparalled in the history of the Christian Church. He was constantly treated with disrespect by Church and State, yet held fast the true position and the attainments to which every Church and Nation must reach, viz: allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Divine Head and King. In November, 1733, Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, who was subsequently joined by Revs. James Fisher, Alexander Moncrieff and William Wilson, seceded from the Established Church on account of the evils flowing from patronage, and other tyrannical measures, and constituted the Associate Presbytery. In 1747, they divided on the "Burgess Oath" into two Synods, and grew rapidly. It was hoped some of them might join the Covenanters so that a Presbytery could be erected, but in this there was disappointment. In the testimony emitted by these men who constituted the first Associate Presbytery, it is admitted that grievous defects existed in the Revolution "settlement," and that rulers did not possess scriptural qualifications; yet these brethren continued to acknowledge that the government as

constituted was an ordinance of God, and freely rendered it their support. They limited the Mediatorial Headship of Christ to the Church, and that as Mediator Christ does not govern the nations; that nations are not bound to acknowledge Christ or His religion; that magistrates are God's ordinance, no matter how immoral their characters may be; and that while scriptural qualifications may be desirable in rulers, yet they are not at all necessary. This view is simply placing the whole of the Reformation attainments into the grave and erecting a tombstone.

It is not at all strange that they and the Covenanters did not embrace each other. In the spring of 1743, however, one of the Associate ministers, the Rev. Thomas Nairn, did embrace the principles and joined himself to the Covenanters. He and the Rev. John McMillan now constituted the REFORMED PRESBYTERY, at Braehead, Parish of Carnwath, Scotland, August 1, 1743. Accession of ministers and increase of members soon followed, and the persecuted and despised Covenanter Church of Scotland began to exert an influence. In a popular sense, the Covenanter Church in Scotland was never very strong, because her principles were exceedingly unpopular, and not in harmony with the minds of the public. And, as Dr. Lathan, of South Carolina, truly says, "Her doctrinal standards were too high and her practical requirements too rigid to be at all palatable to the mass of the human family. Notwithstanding all this," he says, "the Reformed Presbyterian Church has been, since its organization, a mighty power in the world. It stands among all other Christian denominations like a gnarled oak in a forest of dwarfed undergrowth." They again renewed the Covenants at Crawford-John, in 1745. THE ACT, DECLARATION AND TESTIMONY was adopted at Ploughlandhead in 1761, and soon afterwards published. The societies in Ireland, which, after the death of the Rev. David Houston, in 1696, were left without a minister, and only occasionally visited by the Rev. John McMillan. The societies in Ireland were placed under the care of the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland until the Reformed Presbytery of Ireland was erected in August, 1763. The Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland was constituted at Cullybackey, May 1, 1811. The Church now regularly constituted in both Scotland and Ireland continues almost uninterruptedly to exist as a distinct denomination until the present time. The history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church is now transferred to America, and, after a brief statement of her beliefs and position, the organic history of the Church in this country will be recorded (See Chapter 3 of <https://reformedpresbyterian.org/pdf/Glasgow.pdf>).