

AN EXPLANATION AND DEFENCE  
OF THE TERMS OF COMMUNION,  
ADOPTED BY THE  
COMMUNITY OF DISSENTERS.

*By the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, 1801.*  
Sabbath Afternoon Studies: Part 11.

ON ARTICLE IV: THE OBLIGATION  
OF SOLEMN COVENANTS.

THE fourth article respects the perpetual obligation of our solemn Covenants; and the propriety of the Renovation at Auchensaugh, 1712.

The great and important duty of public covenanting, even in New Testament times, hath been so fully illustrated, and clearly defended in many publications, both ancient and modern, that we reckon it quite superfluous to enter into a discussion of the subject here.

While we firmly believe that the public covenants of ancient Israel comprehended great and important moral duties, equally incumbent upon men, in all periods of the church;—while we find, that the first commandment of the moral law, in the true scope of it, requires us to avouch the Lord to be our God, and to persevere in his worship and service, the very substance of all proper religious covenanting;—while we cannot refuse, that the third commandment, rightly understood, plainly teaches us to fear the Lord our God, and, when lawfully called unto it, to swear by his name;—while we read many precious predictions in the Old Testament, foretelling that, in the days of the Messias, men should subscribe with their hand unto the Lord, vow a vow unto him and perform it, and should say, Come, and let us join ourselves unto the Lord in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten; ► and while we find, that every baptized Christian, taking the Bible into his hand as the rule of his faith and practice, sitting down at the holy table of the Lord, and opening his mouth in a public profession of the Christian religion, evidently doth what is to all intents and purposes substantially the same with solemn covenanting; though we had no other arguments for it, we cannot withhold our consent to the propriety of our ancestors' conduct, in taking the burden upon them, for themselves and their posterity, That they would be for God, and not for another; in the believing improvement of his gracious promise, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee."

A very slight attention to our solemn covenants will serve to show that the matter of them is Scriptural, and that, therefore, they may be safely sworn.

As to the National Covenant of Scotland, its great object is, evidently, the renouncement of Popery; together with all superstitions of the same description. But if the church of Rome be

the mystical Babylon of the New Testament, if the Romish religion be, indeed, false, blasphemous, idolatrous, bloody, soul-ruining, and deceitful, as hath often been abundantly proved, and as the Presbytery have shown in their “Testimony and Warning against Popery,”<sup>1</sup> then the divine injunction applies, in its full force, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” [Rev. 18.4.] Our obedience to this sovereign command is very properly testified, by seriously swearing, in the name and strength of the Lord, never to touch the unclean thing.

A great many acts of parliament are introduced into this National Covenant. The reason is sufficiently obvious. Our reformers, at that time,<sup>2</sup> were considered by many as taking too much upon them, acting beyond their commission, and laying themselves open to the charge of seditious conduct. In their own vindication, they quoted these numerous acts, to prove that they were doing nothing but what was authorized by the fundamental laws of the kingdom, as well as by the Word of God. If those who approve of the Covenant have an opportunity of seeing and reading these acts, for their own satisfaction, it is well, they should certainly embrace the opportunity. At the same time, though they should never have it in their power to see one of them, yet it is practicable for them to swear the covenant itself, in truth, in righteousness, and in judgment. [Jer. 4.2.] They have the body of the solemn deed, and may, at all times, compare it with the infallible standard of right and wrong.

It is also observable, that, in describing the various abominations of Popery, the National Covenant employs many terms, which, though familiar to the church of Rome, that mystery of iniquity, yet cannot well be supposed to be fully understood by every Protestant reader, who may consent unto the covenant. This much, however, he may see at once, that these strange and antisciptural terms must be descriptive of such human inventions as are entirely beside the Word of God, being added to the things contained in that sacred book; and, therefore, ought to be rejected. An instance or two will serve to illustrate this. ► We renounce “His five bastard sacraments.” Every one, probably, does not know that these are “marriage, ordination, confirmation, penance, and extreme unction;” but Christians, in general, can very easily know that the only sacraments in the New Testament are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; and, consequently, that no institution besides can ever consistently be admitted as a proper sacrament. ► Mention is made of the Pope’s “Shavellings.” There may, possibly, be many sincere believers, in the Protestant churches, who cannot tell that these mean his “monks or friars, of different orders, who have their heads shaven in different forms, to mark their distinguished pretended holiness.” But all may know that no such orders were ever appointed by Christ, and, therefore, the doctrine respecting them can make no part of the faith delivered to the saints. The same may be said of all the other Antichristian abominations. Meanwhile, it is

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1 Published, 1779.

2 Our authors refer to the year 1638, and not the original swearing of the National Covenant of Scotland in the previous century. This renewal, in 1638, was associated with the beginning of the Second Reformation efforts, prompted and enlivened as a response to attempts of the English Prelatic party to corrupt the Church of Scotland with imposed steps of departure from the First Reformation of the 1500s.—JTKer.

not intended to discourage, but rather to recommend such proper researches after the knowledge of these things as may enable us to oppose them with judgment and precision.

Turning our attention to the Solemn League of the three nations, we find that in the first article we engage to preserve the true reformed religion where it is already established, and to carry forward the reformation where it is not yet completed. Say not the Scriptures that this is our duty? “Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Remember how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast. Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.” [Phil. 3.16; Rev. 3.3; Heb. 6.1; Titus 1.5.]

In the second article, we profess to use our best endeavours, without partiality, for the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness. All these have, oftentimes, been clearly proved to be gross corruptions of JEHOVAH’s worship, and open violations of his holy law; concerning which his express language is, “Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God.—What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. Purge out, therefore, the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump. Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.”<sup>3</sup>

In the third article, we undertake to preserve the rights and privileges of the civil authorities, in the preservation and defence of true religion, and liberties of the kingdoms. Nothing can be more consonant to the divine injunctions, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. He is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he is a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. — Pay ye tribute also; for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.”<sup>4</sup> In these passages the lawful authority, official character, and important duty of the magistrate, are inseparably connected with the people’s obedience, and support.

In article fourth, we solemnly resolve to employ our endeavours for discovering, and bringing seasonably to condign punishment, all such incendiaries and malignants as wickedly hinder the reformation, and foment divisions in the kingdoms. Which is nothing more than what the Lord himself requires, when he says, “Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor. Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.”<sup>5</sup>

In article fifth, we swear to do what we can in our respective places, for preserving, to all posterity, the settled peace and union of the kingdoms. The union principally intended respects

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3 Deut. 12.31,32; 1 Cor. 5.7; Matth. 15.13.

4 1 Pet. 2.13,14. Rom. 13.4,6.

5 Jerem. 21.12; Song 2.15; Phil. 3.2.

the common faith, delivered to the saints, in all its branches; and, therefore, the endeavouring to keep it exactly corresponds to the inspired recommendation, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.” [Eph. 4.3.]

In the last article of this League, we bind ourselves to assist and defend each other, and jointly to persevere in prosecuting the great ends of the covenant, without giving place to indifference or defection. God himself certainly commands so much. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel. Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”<sup>6</sup>

To covenants, the matter of which is so evidently agreeable to the unalterable precepts of the moral law, we may safely apply the inspired Apostle’s language, “Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto.” [Gal. 3.15.] Indeed, if it can once be proved, as it has often been, in the most convincing manner, that the church, as such, as well as men in other capacities, may warrantably enter into public scriptural covenants at all, their obligation must necessarily be perpetual; inasmuch as the church, collectively considered, is still the same permanent society, which can never die; though the individuals, of whom she may have been composed, in any given period, should be no more. And, if even civil deeds amongst men, when they are legally executed, bind not only the persons presently entering into them, but them, their heirs, and successors to all generations; much more must we consider these religious covenants, which are executed according to the revealed will of our heavenly Lawgiver, to be binding not only upon the generation of the church, more immediately entering into them, but also on their heirs and successors, to the end of the world.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the first matter of doctrine which is comprehended in the fourth term of communion?  
A.
2. What are some reasons from Holy Scripture establishing social covenanting as a duty of Christians?  
A.
3. What is the great object of the National Covenant of Scotland in its original form?  
A.
4. Why did the second reformation reformers add so many acts of parliament to the National Covenant?  
A. fundamental laws of the kingdom authorized.
5. What are Christians bound to by the first article of the Solemn League and Covenant?  
A.
6. Given the Biblical nature of the duties of the Solemn League and Covenant, what is the conclusion of the New Testament about its obligation?  
A.

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6 Gal. 6.2; Phil. 1.27; 1 Cor. 15.58.