The Reformation Covenants:

A Study Series
On the National Covenant of Scotland, 1580/1638,
And the Solemn League and Covenant, 1643.

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Part 2: The National Covenant of Scotland, 1580.

THE NATIONAL COVENANT;
OR, THE CONFESSION OF FAITH:

Subscribed at first by the King's Majesty,[1] *and his Household, in the year* 1580; *thereafter by persons of all ranks in the Year* 1581, *by ordinance of the Lords of secret council, and acts of the General Assembly; subscribed again by all sorts of persons in the year* 1590, *by a new ordinance of council, at the desire of the General Assembly: with a general bond for the maintaining of the true Christian religion, and the King's person; and, together with a resolution and promise, for the causes after expressed, to maintain the true religion, and the King's Majesty, according to the foresaid Confession and acts of Parliament, subscribed by Barons, Nobles, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers, and Commons, in the year* 1638: *approven by the General Assembly* 1638 *and* 1639; *and subscribed again by persons of all ranks and qualities in the year* 1639, *by an ordinance of council, upon the supplication of the General Assembly, and act of the General Assembly, ratified by an act of Parliament* 1640: *and subscribed by King* Charles II. *at* Spey, June 23, 1650, *and* Scoon, January 1. 1651.

WE all and every one of us under-written, protest, That, after long and due examination of our own consciences in matters of true and false religion, we are now thoroughly resolved in the truth by the word and Spirit of God: and therefore we believe with our hearts, confess with our mouths, subscribe with our hands, and constantly affirm, before God and the whole world, that this only is the true Christian faith and religion, pleasing God, and bringing salvation to man, which now is, by the mercy of God, revealed to the world by the preaching of the blessed evangel [*gospel*]; and is received, believed, and defended by many and sundry notable kirks [*churches*] and realms, but chiefly by the kirk of Scotland, the King's Majesty, and three estates of this realm, as God's eternal truth, and only ground of our salvation; as more particularly is expressed in the Confession of our Faith, established and publickly confirmed by sundry acts of Parliaments, and now of a long time hath been openly professed by the King's Majesty, and whole body of this realm both in burgh and land. ► To the which Confession and Form of Religion we willingly agree in our conscience in all points, as unto God's undoubted

1 That is, King James VI, who became King James I of England in 1603. In our day, he is familiar to most people from his part leading to the "King James" Bible translation of 1611. He commissioned this effort in 1604.—JTK.

truth and verity, grounded only upon his written word. And therefore we abhor and detest all contrary religion and doctrine; but chiefly all kind of Papistry in general and particular heads, even as they are now damned and confuted by the word of God and Kirk of Scotland. But, in special, we detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist upon the scriptures of God, upon the kirk, the civil magistrate, and consciences of men; all his tyrannous laws made upon indifferent things against our Christian liberty; his erroneous doctrine against the sufficiency of the written word, the perfection of the law, the office of Christ, and his blessed evangel; ► his corrupted doctrine concerning original sin, our natural inability and rebellion to God's law, our justification by faith only, our imperfect sanctification and obedience to the law; the nature, number, and use of the holy sacraments; his five bastard sacraments, with all his rites, ceremonies, and false doctrine, added to the ministration of the true sacraments without the word of God; his cruel judgment against infants departing without the sacrament; his absolute necessity of baptism; his blasphemous opinion of transubstantiation, or real presence of Christ's body in the elements, and receiving of the same by the wicked, or bodies of men; ► his dispensations with solemn oaths, perjuries, and degrees of marriage forbidden in the word; his cruelty against the innocent divorced; his devilish mass; his blasphemous priesthood; his profane sacrifice for sins of the dead and the quick; his canonization of men; calling upon angels or saints departed, worshipping of imagery, relicks, and crosses; dedicating of kirks, altars, days; vows to creatures; his purgatory, prayers for the dead; praying or speaking in a strange language, with his processions, and blasphemous litany, and multitude of advocates or mediators; his manifold orders, auricular confession; his desperate and uncertain repentance; his general and doubtsome faith; ► his satisfaction of men for their sins; his justification by works, *opus operatum*, works of supererogation, merits, pardons, peregrinations, and stations[2]; his holy water, baptizing of bells, conjuring of spirits, crossing, sayning,[3] anointing, conjuring, hallowing of God's good creatures, with the superstitious opinion joined therewith; his worldly monarchy, and wicked hierarchy; his three solemn vows,[4] with all his shavelings of sundry sorts; his erroneous and bloody decrees made at Trent,[5] with all the subscribers or approvers of that cruel and bloody band, conjured against the kirk of God. ► And finally, we detest all his vain allegories, rites, signs, and traditions brought in the kirk, without or against the word of God, and doctrine of this true reformed kirk; to the which we join ourselves willingly, in

2 Superstitious Pilgrimages involving journeys from one place to another to participate in rituals and hear tales about saints and lying miracles; generally in the hope of obtaining "grace" and spiritual benefits from the endeavor,—which can only truly be found in Christ himself.

3 A ritual practice of making the sign of the cross for the sake of its imaginary protection from evil or sin.

4 Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. The last is defined by canon law to be a "submission of the will to legitimate superiors, who stand in the place of God when they command according to the proper constitutions."

5 The Council of Trent was held from 1545 to 1563 in response to the Protestant Reformation. Protestant answers to its decisions include a shorter publication by John Calvin, and a very thorough analysis and refutation by Martin Chemnitz.

doctrine, faith, religion, discipline, and use of the holy sacraments, as lively members of the same in Christ our head: promising and swearing, by the great name of the LORD our GOD, that we shall continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this kirk, and shall defend the same, according to our vocation and power, all the days of our lives; under the pains contained in the law, and danger both of body and soul in the day of God's fearful judgment.

Q. 1. In what ways does the Roman Antichrist usurp authority in conflict with the Scriptures of God?

Q. 2. When should we judge laws made about indifferent matters to be tyrannical?

Q. 3. In what way does Romanist doctrine stand against the perfection of the law?

Q. 4. What defect is evident in Romanist doctrine respecting the offices of Christ?

Q. 5. How is the Romanist doctrine of original sin corrupted?

Q. 6. What are the five bastard sacraments of the Papists?

Q. 7. What do we mean by the "cruel judgment against infants departing without the sacrament"?

Q. 8. Do Protestants believe in an absolute necessity of baptism?

Q. 9. What types of "dedications" do Presbyterians renounce?

Q. 10. What are the "vows to creatures" used among the Papists?

Q. 11. What was blasphemous about the litany or litanies of the Papists?

Q. 12. Should Christians confess their sins only to God?

Q. 13. Why are we unable to say that we at least agree with Papists about Repentance and Faith?

Q. 14. What are the five aspects of religious identity with the true Church of Scotland expressed in the Covenant by all who would join that church sincerely?

And seeing that many are stirred up by Satan, and that Roman Antichrist, to promise, swear, subscribe, and for a time use the holy sacraments in the kirk deceitfully, against their own conscience;[6] minding hereby, first, under the external cloak of religion, to corrupt and subvert secretly God's true religion within the kirk; and afterward, when time may serve, to become open enemies and persecutors of the same, under vain hope of the Pope's dispensation, devised against the word of God, to his greater confusion, and their double condemnation in the day of the Lord Jesus: ► we therefore, willing to take away all suspicion of hypocrisy, and of such double dealing with God, and his kirk, protest, and call the Searcher of all hearts for witness, that our minds and hearts do fully agree with this our Confession, promise, oath, and subscription: so that we are not moved with any worldly respect, but are persuaded only in our conscience, through the knowledge and love of God's true religion imprinted in our hearts by

6 Protestant Doctrine, in opposition to Romanist and Jesuit practice, is explicitly stated in WCF 22:4: "An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation, or mental reservation. It cannot oblige to sin; but, in anything not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man's own hurt. Nor is it to be violated, although made to Hereticks or Infidels."

the Holy Spirit, as we shall answer to him in the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed.

And because we perceive, that the quietness and stability of our religion and kirk doth depend upon the safety and good behaviour of the King's Majesty, as upon a comfortable instrument of God's mercy granted to this country, for the maintaining of his kirk, and ministration of justice amongst us; we protest and promise with our hearts, under the same oath, hand-writ, and pains, that we shall defend his person and authority with our goods, bodies, and lives, in the defence of Christ, his evangel, liberties of our country, ministration of justice, and punishment of iniquity, against all enemies within this realm or without, as we desire our God to be a strong and merciful defender to us in the day of our death, and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory eternally. *Amen*.

Q. 15. Why was it necessary to express in this oath an explicit dedication to its actual words and "full agreement" of mind and heart in its confession?

Q. 16. What did these Covenanters perceive that the quietness and stability of the their Church depended on at this time in Scotland?

Q. 17. What are the qualifications or conditions mentioned by the Covenanters as they oblige themselves to defend the person and authority of their King with their goods, bodies, and lives?

[This is the end of the original Oath or Covenant sworn in 1580. More follows as later Renewed.]

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Supplemental Text: "The General Band" of 1590, Appended to the above "Confession."

We under-subscribing, considering the strait link and conjunction betwixt the true & christian religion, presently professed within this our realm, & [our] sovereign Lord's estate and standing, having both the selfsame friends & common enemies, & subject to the like event of standing and decay: & weighing therewithal, the imminent danger threatened to the said religion, aswell by foreign preparations for persecution, of that detestable conspiracy against Christ and his Evangel, called the "holy league"; as by outward and intestine practices of the favorers & suppoſtis [*supporters*] thereof amongst ourselves, who now inanimat[ed] by the report of foreign powers repairing to this realm, begin more plainly to utter & profess their long concealed evil meaning to the truth, & consequently to the standing of his Majesty our sovereign Lord: whom they have found and tried to be a constant and inflexible professor of the same. The preservation whereof being dearer to us, nor [than] whatsomever we have dearest in this life: and finding in his majesty, a most honorable & christian resolution, to manifest himself to the world, that zealous and religious prince, which he has hitherto professed, and to employ the means & power that God hath put into his hands, aswell to the withstanding of whatsomever foreign force shall mean [*intend, endeavor*] within this Island for alteration of the said religion, or endangering of the present state: as to the repressing of the inward enemies thereto amongst ourselves, linked with them in

the said antichriſtian league and confederacy;—Haue thairfore in the preſence of Almichtie God, and with his Majeſties authorizing and allowance, faithfully promiſit & ſolempnly ſworne, like as heirby we faithfully & solempnely ſweare & promiſe, to take ane true eafauld and plaine part with his Majeſtie amangis our ſelffis, for diuerting of the appeirand danger threatned to the ſaid religioun, and his Majeſties eſtate and ſtanding depending thairvpon, be quhatſoeuer forein or inteſtine platts or preparations: And to that effect faithfully, & that vpon our trueths and honors, binds & obliſhis vs to vthers: To conuene & aſſemble our ſelffs publictly with our friends, in armes or in quiet maner, at ſick times and places as we ſalbe requirit be his proclamations, or be writ or meſſage direct to vs from his Majeſtie, or any hauing power from him: & being conenit and aſſemblit, To joyne and concur with the haile forceis of our friendis and fauourers againſt quhatſoeuer foreine or inteſtine powers, or papiſts & thair partakers, ſal ariue or riſe within this Ilád or any part thairof, reddie to defende or purſue, as we ſalbe authorized and conductit be his Majeſty, or any vther, hauing his power and comiſsion, to joyne and hald hand to the execution of quhatſoeuer meane or order ſalbe thocht meit be his Majeſty and his Counſaill, for the ſuppreſsing of the papiſts, promotion of the true religion, and ſetling of his highnes eſtate and obedience in all the cuntries & corners of this realme, to expone and hazard our liues, landis and gudis, and quhatſoeuer meane God hes lent vs, in the defence of the ſaid true & chriſtian religion, & his Majeſties perſon and eſtate, againſt quhatſoeuer Ieſuitis and Seminarie or Meſſe preiſts, condamnit enemies to God and his Majeſtie, to thair vtter wracke and exterminion, according to the power grantit to vs be his highnes proclamation and Acts of parliament