The Reformation Covenants:

A Study Series

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

= =

Part 3: The National Covenant of Scotland, 1638.

Subscribed at first by the King's Majesty, and his Household, in the year 1580; *thereafter by persons of all ranks in the Year* 1581, etc. etc. *subscribed by Barons, Nobles, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers, and Commons, in the year* 1638: *approven by the General Assembly* 1638, etc.

(Continued)

Contents: History and Constitutional Law of Scotland cited as a precedent for new (1638) Covenant Renovation.

Note: The purpose of these paragraphs is not to oblige those who swear the covenant to commit themselves to these laws as part of the Covenant. Rather, they appeal to these national laws to justify their decision to renew their covenant in a time of disorder in Scotland. These acts of public authority in the civil realm were influenced by (1) a dedication to Biblical Christianity on the part of rulers who had renounced the authority of the Roman Pope, and (2) a need to defend the nation against active plotting and working (on the part of the Church of Rome) to remove from thrones in Europe those rulers who gave their support and protection to the Protestant cause. Consequently, language is used which sounds very strong and aggressive to us, but it should be remembered that it is not the language of the church we read below, but the provisions of the state, speaking with strong terms in a religious cause that was both positively active and necessarily defensive. These are the words of rulers resolved to protect a cause which was righteous, and a people who were hated for embracing the Protestant religion. In the mid-1600s, many developments in Scotland made it evident that new Roman-Chuch-like innovations were being brought into the Church of Scotland contrary to God's word and their own covenant obligations. Therefore they appealed to their original covenant and existing legislation against the innovations of the Roman Church, to justify a renewing of covenant in favor of revived reformation.

- - - -

LIKEAS many Acts of Parliament, not only in general do abrogate, annul, and rescind all laws, statutes, acts, constitutions, canons civil or municipal, with all other ordinances, and practique penalties whatsoever, made in prejudice of the true religion, and professors thereof; or of the true kirk [*church*], discipline, jurisdiction, and freedom thereof; or in favours of

idolatry and superstition, or of the Papistical kirk: As Act 3, Act 31, Parl. 1; Act 23, Parl. 11; Act 114, Parl. 12 of King James VI., That Papistry and superstition may be utterly suppressed, according to the intention of the Acts of Parliament, repeated in the fifth Act, Parl. 20, King James VI. And to that end they ordain all Papists and Priests to be punished with manifold civil and ecclesiastical pains, as adversaries to God's true religion, preached, and by law established, within this realm, Act 24, Parl. 11, King James VI.; as common enemies to all Christian government, Act 18, Parl. 16, King James VI.; as rebellers and gainstanders of our Sovereign Lord's authority, Act 47. Parl. 3, King James VI.; and as idolaters, Act 104, Parl. 7, King James VI. ► But also in particular, by and attour [*in addition to*] the Confession of Faith, do abolish and condemn the Pope's authority and jurisdiction out of this land, and ordains the maintainers thereof to be punished, Act 2, Parl. 1; Act 51, Parl. 3; Act 106, Parl. 7; Act 114, Parl. 12, King James VI.: do condemn the Pope's erroneous doctrine, or any other erroneous doctrine repugnant to any of the articles of the true and Christian religion, publickly preached and by law established in this realm; and ordains the spreaders and makers of books or libels, or letters or writs of that nature, to be punished, Act 46, Parl. 3; Act 106. Parl. 7; Act 24, Parl. 11, King James VI.: do condemn all baptism conform to the Pope's kirk, and the idolatry of the mass; and ordains all sayers, wilful hearers, and concealers of the mass, the maintainers and resetters of the priests, Jesuits, trafficking Papists, to be punished without any exception or restriction, Act 5, Parl. 1; Act 120, Parl. 12; Act 164, Parl. 13; Act 193, Parl. 14; Act 1, Parl. 19; Act 5, Parl. 20, King James VI.: ► do condemn all erroneous books and writs containing erroneous doctrine against the religion presently professed, or containing superstitious rites and ceremonies Papistical, whereby the people are greatly abused; and ordains the home-bringers of them to be punished, Act 25, Parl. 11, King James VI.: do condemn the monuments and dregs of bygone idolatry, as going to crosses, observing the festival days of saints, and such other superstitious and Papistical rites, to the dishonour of God, contempt of true religion, and fostering of great error among the people; and ordains the users of them to be punished for the second fault, as idolaters, Act 104, Parl. 7, King James VI.

Q. 1. What is the first kind of law to which the Covenanters appeal in justifying their present reforming measures?

Q. 2. Does the Bible give direction for the punishment of idolatry as a crime?

Q. 3 When the superstitions of the Roman Church were condemned, what was seen as the harm or fault necessitating this condemnation?

Likeas many Acts of Parliament are conceived for maintenance of God's true and Christian religion, and the purity thereof, in doctrine and sacraments of the true church of God, the liberty and freedom thereof, in her national, synodal assemblies, presbyteries, sessions, policy, discipline, and jurisdiction thereof; as that purity of religion, and liberty of the church was used, professed, exercised, preached, and confessed, according to the reformation of religion in this realm: As for instance, the 99th Act, Parl. 7; Act 25, Parl. 11; Act 114, Parl. 12; Act 160, Parl. 13 of King James VI. ratified by the 4th Act of King Charles. ► So that the 6th Act, Parl. 1, and 68th Act, Parl. 6 of King James VI. in the year of God 1579, declare the ministers of the blessed evangel [*gospel*], whom God of his mercy had raised up, or hereafter should raise, agreeing with them that then lived, in doctrine and administration of the sacraments; and the people that professed Christ, as he was then offered in the evangel, and doth communicate with the holy sacraments (as in the reformed kirks of this realm they were presently adminstrate) according to the Confession of Faith, to be the true and holy kirk of Christ Jesus within this realm. ► And decerns [*pronounces decision*] and declares all and sundry, who either gainsay the word of the evangel received and approved as the heads of the Confession of Faith, professed in Parliament in the year of God 1560, specified also in the first Parliament of King James VI., and ratified in this present Parliament, more particularly do express; or that refuse the administration of the holy sacraments, as they were then ministrated; to be no members of the said kirk within this realm, and true religion presently professed, so long as they keep themselves so divided from the society of Christ's body. ► And the subsequent Act 69, Parl. 6 of King James VI. declares, that there is no other face of kirk, nor other face of religion, than was presently at that time, by the favour of God, established within this realm: Which therefore is ever styled "God's true religion, Christ's true religion, the true and Christian religion, and a perfect religion;" which, by manifold Acts of Parliament, all within this realm are bound to profess, to subscribe the articles thereof, the Confession of Faith, to recant all doctrine and errors repugnant to any of the said articles, Act 4 and 9, Parl. 1; Acts 45, 46, 47, Parl. 3; Act 71, Parl. 6; Act 106, Parl. 7; Act 24, Parl. 11; Act 123, Parl. 12; Act 194 and 197, Parl. 14 of King James VI. ► And all magistrates, sheriffs, &c. on the one part, are ordained to

Q. 4. Did the oppressed Covenanters of 1638 see the old reforming acts of parliament as conflicting with the Church's liberty?

Q. 5. How did the Parliament distinguish between members of Christ's Church and non-members?

search, apprehend, and punish all contraveners: For instance, Act 5, Parl. 1; Act 104, Parl. 7; Act 25, Parl. 11, King James VI.; and that notwithstanding of the King's Majesty's licences on the contrary, which are discharged, and declared to be of no force, in so far as they tend in any wise to the prejudice and hinder of the execution of the Acts of Parliament against Papists and adversaries of true religion, Act 106. Parl. 7, King James VI. ► On the other part, in the 47th Act, Parl. 3, King James VI. it is declared and ordained, Seeing the cause of God's true religion and his Highness's authority are so joined, as the hurt of the one is common to both; that none shall be reputed as loyal and faithful subjects to our sovereign Lord, or his authority, but be punishable as rebellers and gainstanders of the same, who shall not give their confession, and make their profession of the said true religion: and that they who, after defection, shall give the confession of their faith of new, they shall promise to continue therein in time coming, to maintain our sovereign Lord's authority, and at the uttermost of their power to fortify, assist, and maintain the true preachers and professors of Christ's religion, against whatsoever enemies and gainstanders of the same; and namely, against all such, of whatsoever nation, estate, or degree they be of, that have joined or bound themselves, or have assisted, or assist, to set forward and execute the cruel decrees of the council of Trent, contrary to the true preachers and professors of the word of God; which is repeated, word by word, in the articles of pacification at Perth, the 23d of February 1572, ► approved by Parliament the last of April 1573, ratified in Parliament 1587, and related Act 123, Parl. 12 of King James VI.; with this addition, "That they are bound to resist all treasonable uproars and hostilities raised against the true religion, the King's Majesty, and the true professors."

Q. 6. Besides the truthfulness and Scripture-conformity of the 1560 Confession, what circumstances prompted civil rulers to prescribe confession of the protestant faith among Scottish subjects?

Likeas, all lieges [*loyal subjects*] are bound to maintain the King's Majesty's royal person and authority, the authority of Parliaments, without the which neither any laws or lawful judicatories can be established, Act 130 and 131, Parl. 8, King James VI., and the subjects' liberties, who ought only to live and be governed by the King's laws, the common laws of this realm allenarly [*solely*], Act 48, Parl. 3, King James I.; Act 79, Parl. 6, King James IV.; repeated in the Act 131, Parl. 8, King James VI.;[1] which if they be

1 Note that the first two of these acts are pre-Reformation, but ratified by the third law in the

innovated and prejudged, the commission anent the union of the two kingdoms of Scotland and England, which is the sole act of the 17th Parl. of King James VI. declares such confusion would ensue as this realm could be no more a free monarchy: because, by the fundamental laws, ancient privileges, offices, and liberties of this kingdom, not only the princely authority of his Majesty's royal descent hath been these many ages maintained, but also the people's security of their lands, livings, rights, offices, liberties, and dignities preserved. ► And therefore, for the preservation of the said true religion, laws, and liberties of this kingdom, it is statute by the 8th Act, Parl. 1, repeated in the 99th Act, Parl. 7, ratified in the 23d Act, Parl. 11, and 114th Act, Parl. 12, of King James VI. and 4th Act, Parl. 1, of King Charles I. "That all Kings and Princes at their coronation, and reception of their princely authority, shall make their faithful promise by their solemn oath, in the presence of the eternal God, that, enduring the whole time of their lives, they shall serve the same eternal God, to the uttermost of their power, according as he hath required in his most holy word, contained in the Old and New Testament; and according to the same word, shall maintain the true religion of Christ Jesus, the preaching of his holy word, the due and right ministration of the sacraments now received and preached within this realm, (according to the Confession of Faith immediately preceding,) and shall abolish and gainstand all false religion contrary to the same; and shall rule the people committed to their charge, according to the will and command of God revealed in his foresaid word, and according to the laudable laws and constitutions received in this realm, nowise repugnant to the said will of the eternal God; ► and shall procure, to the uttermost of their power, to the kirk of God, and whole Christian people, true and perfect peace in all time coming: and that they shall be careful to root out of their empire all hereticks and enemies to the true worship of God, who shall be convicted by the true kirk of God of the foresaid crimes." Which was also observed by his Majesty, at his coronation in Edinburgh 1633, as may be seen in the order of the coronation.

Q. 7. In what way was defence of the King's person important to the nation's freedom and government?

Q. 8. According to Scottish law, did the king or other rulers have authority to adjust the laws of the land in favor of Romanism or any other religion or philosophy?

Q. 9. According to the act for the Scottish coronation oath, who had authority to judge that men of unscriptural doctrine were heretics?

Reformation era.—JTK.