THE COVENANT IN THE BIBLE AND IN HISTORY

THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL COVENANT, 1638

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It is exactly three and a half centuries since the Scots drew up and signed the National Covenant in which they vowed to defend their national and religious inheritance against English encroachments. Later in the same year the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland abolished the episcopal system of church government and established the Presbyterian system. Five years later, in 1643, the Scots entered into a Solemn League and Covenant with the English Parliament. In return for Scottish military assistance in the struggles against King Charles and his policies in Church and state, the English Parliament undertook to reform the Church of England and bring it into line with the Church of Scotland and thus ensure a common form of government in accord with what was prescribed in the Bible. The Scots were sure that this was the presbyterian form.

These Covenants made a deep impression upon church life in both Britain and Ireland and their influence was felt for many generations. Among the Churches in Ireland claiming the presbyterian name, there was one Church, and its members are still commonly known as Covenanters.

The covenant pattern did not originate in the seventeeth century. Covenants involving mutual trust and assistance between rulers and between peoples have been a feature of all periods of human history. Covenants were also woven into the history of redemption set forth in the Bible and this was the source from which the seventeenth century Covenanters drew their programme.

I

In the biblical record the most important covenants were those between God and his people. To all these covenants God brought his unchanging character and purpose. In the early chapters of Genesis which form a preface to the story beginning with Abraham there are many pointers

to the steadfastness of God. This is seen in the reliability of the created order and the regularity of the seasons. All this points to 'the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth' (Gen.9:16).

In the Old Testament there is a special place for the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, and, within that, for special covenants with their leaders. In the story of Abraham God promised to establish a covenant between himself and Abraham and his descendants forever (Gen.17:7). The covenant would be renewed with Isaac and his descendants (17:19). King David had a special place in the memory of the Jewish people. Under him, the nation had gained a respected place among the nations and the hand of God was seen in his reign: 'God has made with me an everlasting covenant' (2 Sam. 23:5).

The covenant theme had an even fuller place in the story of Moses. As the records of the Jewish people were brought together Moses was accorded a position of special honour; 'there was no prophet since in Israel like Moses' (Deut.34:10). Yet even in his case the covenant was not one drawn up between equals who fully agreed upon his terms. God made the approach and led down the terms and in the end decided if the terms had been kept. Nevertheless, the covenant was the gracious offer of the one true and good God who knew that the welfare of his chosen people lay in their willing obedience to his will.

The core of this covenant with Moses and, through Moses, with the people of Israel is in Exodus 19, verses 4 to 6. God has called them to be his people. He has shown his plans in leading them out of Egypt. He has chosen them out of all the people of the earth and he demands obedience. These terms are repeated again and again in the Old Testament. The moral demands arising from this covenant are set forth in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deut.5:6-21). The consequences of obedience and disobedience are spelt out with stark

clarity in passages such as Leviticus 26; obedience will bring a great reward and temporal blessings while disobedience will incur 'plagues, sevenfold as many as your sins'.

The Old Testament has also ample evidence of the flouting of the covenant by the disobedient people. The Book of Deuteronomy anticipates this perversity. Even after God fulfills his promise and brings the people to the promised land they will 'despise God and break his covenant' (Deut.31:20). Jeremiah denounced the deplorable breach of the covenant, 'my covenant which they broke' (31:32). Indeed, so blatant was the breach that Jeremiah was forbidden to pray for the people; they would be dispersed and their city devastated 'because they forsook the covenant of the Lord' (11:9, 14; 22:8-9).

Nevertheless, God remains faithful and cannot go back on his covenant; this is stressed in the second part of Isaiah. 'The mountains may depart and the hills be removed but my steadfast love shall not depart from you; my covenant of peace shall not be removed' (Isa.54:10).

Jeremiah takes the teaching a step further. An abiding covenant requires more than a divine demand and a submissive people. If obedience is no more than submission to a divine fiat or submission in expectation of temporal and spiritual benefits this incentive will not be sufficient to keep people within the covenant. The wicked often seem to flourish and even if the results of disobedience are ultimately destructive the time-span is too great to compel obedience. If the consequences of disobedience were immediate and automatic people would be forced to obey, but that is not the way the world is made. The riotous living of the prodigal has its attractions. Jeremiah announces the need of a greater grasp of God's glory and of the blessedness which will flow from the free acknowledgement that the doing of his will is the way people were intended to live; they were meant to be of 'one heart and one way' with God (Jer.32:39). Nothing less than new covenant will suffice; the terms will not be an externally imposed law but a law written in human hearts,

a law willingly accepted by people who know God and have received his forgiveness (31:31-33).

The New Testament is the record of the foundation of this new covenant which in the Letter to the Hebrews is called not only a new covenant but the eternal covenant. The writer does not mean simply a covenant which will endure but it is the covenant which has been in the purpose of God from all eternity. The old covenant was needed as a preparation for the new and the same God has been at work revealing himself in the whole sweep of biblical history. The wonders of the new covenant have been opened up in the life, death and victory of Jesus. He is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb.9:15; 13:20).

This theme of the new covenant guaranteed by all the life and work of Jesus has been at the heart of Christian thought across the ages. It recurs in the surviving writings of the Fathers and of the medieval theologians

II

When the Reformation erupted in Europe in the sixteenth century it took some time for the Church of Rome to rally its forces in an attempt to crush the reform but the leaders of the reform should felt the need of plans for mutual help, and various Leagues such as the Schmalkald League of Lutheran princes were formed. These leagues had echoes of the biblical idea of a people bound together in covenant under the faithful God who has pledged himself to protect his people.

The covenant theme had a place in the thought of the leading reformers. Zwingli of Zurich was so convinced of the unchanging purposes of God that he saw little need for a distinction between the Old and New Covenants as set forth in the two Testaments in the Bible. The sweep of the Bible story came within one Covenant which guaranteed God's merciful care for the faithful from Abraham, Mose and David to Peter, Paul and Stephen.[1] The Covenant

even spilled over to include some outside the biblical record.[2] It also extended to children and children's children and particularly to the children of Christian parents. Relying upon this gracious coverage Zwingli had no qualms about accepting the outward confession of faith by parents presenting their children for baptism even if it was impossible to guarantee that they were true believers. Moreover, the faith which the Church holds compensates for the feeble faith of each member.[3]

Calvin, with customary clarity, began from the Covenant of God with his 'peculiar people' and stressed that God's eternal purpose as seen in Christ was at work in all ages and was effective for those in Old Testament times before the coming of Christ. He dismissed as madmen those who think of the people of Israel as 'a herd of swine' without hope of immortality: 'Who then will presume to represent the Jews as destitute of Christ when we know they were parties to the Gospel Covenant which has its only foundation in Christ?'[4]

Under the influence of Calvin, John Knox wrote to the Scottish nobles in 1557 urging them to hasten the movement for the reform of the Church in Scotland. Five of them drew up a covenant to renounce their obedience to the papal authority and to 'apply their whole power, substance and very lives to maintain and forward and establish the most blessed Word of God and his congregation'.[5] The reformation proper began in Scotland in 1560 and its doctrinal manifesto was the Scots Confession. Though this did not specifically use the word 'Covenant', the idea is present in its definition of the Church as the people whom God preserved in all ages from Adam up to the time of Christ and from then to the present and to whom he gave promises, especially to David, of protection and continuity, and even though he had to punish his people for their infidelity he fulfilled his promise to keep them in Jerusalem.[6]

The Church of Scotland passed through difficult times in the early years of reform. There were swings towards

and away from both episcopal and presbyterian government and there were lapses in the conduct of both ministers and people. In the General Assembly of 1596 the ministers 'acknowledged their sins this day and negligence in their conscience before God and have entered in a new covenant in their charges'.[7]

Another seminal strand in the covenant theme owed much to John Cameron, a peripatetic Scottish teacher who settled in Saumur in 1618. His position is set forth in the title of his book, De Triplici Dei cum Foedere Theses (1608) - Theses on the threefold covenant of God with man. His thought germinated in the minds of others and led to the teaching of Amyraut, his disciple, who linked the threefold covenant with the unfolding activity of the Holy Trinity. A further development was seen in the teaching of Cocceius, a German professor at Leyden; he saw in the Old Testament a long series of covenants leading to the universal covenant offered in Jesus Christ. This led to the spread of what came to be known as Federal Theology and this owed its wide influence to the way it offered a key to the understanding of the story of the people of God as set forth in the Bible.[8]

III

The covenant theme was thus part of the mental climate of the age and especially in Scotland. In 1603 James VI of Scotland acceded to the English throne. By now he had reacted against his presbyterian environment and in 1594 had managed to restore some semblance of an episcopal system in Scotland. He now resolved to introduce a full episcopal system in line with the system in the Church of England. He told the Scottish bishops that they had not the substance of episcopal authority since they had not received it from those who had it. He therefore arranged to have three Scots consecrated by English bishops in London in 1610 and through them to introduce an episcopal government in every diocese. Despite protests, most ministers submitted to the new system and this was made easier since there was no

attempt to reordain those previously ordained by presbytery, but episcopal ordinations became the pattern of future ordinations. The King also established Courts of High Commission to deal with those who did not conform to the new system. These Courts did not carry out a thorough investigation of the extent of nonconformity in the parishes and the sentences were soon revoked but their proceedings aroused great discontent. The King made a further move to secure a uniformity when he pressurised the General Assembly in Perth in 1618 to adopt Five Articles which included the requirement that all communicants should kneel to receive the elements and that the five major festivals of the Christian Year should be observed in the parishes. These Articles were not welcomed even by the bishops and were not widely enforced but they were an irritant and the harsher treatment meted out by the centralised Court of High Commission to men like Samuel Rutherford caused increasing bitterness.[9]

Under Charles I there was a policy of further Anglicization. In 1633 he visited Edinburgh and declared his approval of the form and order of the Church of Scotland as 'received in this realm' but he was crowned by a rite closely akin to that used in England. Several new bishops were eager disciples of Archbishop Laud and were ready to support further innovations. In 1636 a new Book of Canons drafted along English lines was introduced. A new Prayer Book based on the English Book of Common Prayer was prepared and its introduction into public worship on 23 July 1637 was the signal for massive popular resistance. The flinging of a stool at the Dean of Edinburgh as he began to read the service was the start of protests before which even the King had to bend and agree to withdraw the book until further counsel could be taken.

In February 1638 the Scots produced the National Covenant which was widely signed by ministers, nobles burghers and people. The Covenant began from God's firm promises,

his undoubted Truth and Verity, grounded upon his written Word'. This, they held, had been perverted by the teaching of the Church of Rome, especially by 'the decrees made at Trent'. King Charles and his advisers had embarked upon a policy which not only tended to 'corrupt and subvert secretly God's true religion, but when time may serve' would lead to a papal dispensation. They therefore 'protest and promise with all our hearts' to deliver the King from his evil counsellers and to 'defend his person and authority' against all his enemies. The Covenant then listed all the Acts of Parliament passed since 1579 when James VI gained his majority. These Acts had repudiated all allegiance to the teaching and authority of the Pope and had enacted that Kings at their coronation should promise to maintain the true religion of Christ as 'now received and preached within this realm' and Charles had given this assurance at his coronation. This firm Scottish position had been set out in 1560 and had been reiterated again and again and remained the basis of the constitution however much it had been threatened and twisted by innovations during the reigns of James and Charles, innovations which were subversive of 'the true Reformed Religion and of our Liberties, Laws and Estates'. The Scots promised and swore to defend their religion and liberties and to do so as people who have 'a life and conversation as beseemeth Christians who have renewed their Covenant with God'.[10]

The King consented to summon meetings of the General Assembly and of Parliament by which he hoped to damp down the agitation. He advised the Marquis of Hamilton, his commissioner to the Assembly, to delay its meeting as long as possible and to gain time so that the Scots might not 'commit public follies before I be ready to suppress them'.[11] The Scots, though suspicious, did not realise the extent of his insincerity. He had also declared his readiness to assent to the Scots Confession in the same terms as his father had done in 1580 but the Scots suspected this was a device to ensure that he renounced nothing introduced since 1580.

There was vigorous lobbying to ensure that ministers and laymen appointed to attend the Assembly were Covenanters and there was a campaign to discredit the bishops who issued a strong Declinator and Protestation. When the Assembly met on 21 November 1638 it was in no mood for compromise. Hamilton, sensing its resolve, attempted to dissolve it but it defied him and continued to meet. It proceeded to abolish episcopacy and order the fresh establishment of presbyterianism. The Assembly declared that Truth is the daughter of time and in time presbyterianism would be seen to be in accord with the will of God and its establishment would be approved by 'the sound Christian affection of other reformed Kirks and by the King'. [12]

Even if the Church of Scotland had had a free hand to settle its presbyterian government it would have had difficulty in providing ministers for every parish, but it had to face a royal attempt to crush its revolt. Hamilton advised the King that the Scots would have to be crushed by 'fire and blockade' though the effort might be more than 'this miserable country is worth'. [13] However, the King was also in trouble with his English Parliament which he had not summoned for eleven years. He summoned it in 1640 in the hope that English national feeling would move it to provide the means to repress the turbulent Scots but it was insistent upon airing its own serious grievances. The sharp tensions eventually led to civil war between Parliament and the King. Parliament imprisoned the King's two leading advisers, Archbishop Laud and the Earl of Strafford, and set about dismantling the episcopal system in England and summoning an Assembly of Divines to meet at Westminster to prepare plans for the future shape of the Church of England. Parliament needed military assistance to counter the strong royalist forces and it looked to Scotland for help. The aims of Parliament had much in common with those of the Covenanters. Negotiations issued in the Solemn League and Covenant to integrate their policies. This Covenant noted 'the deplorable state of the Church and the Kingdom of Ireland, the distressed state

of the Church and Kingdom of England and the dangerous estate of the Church and Kingdom of Scotland'. The nobles, ministers and 'commons of all sorts' agreed to enter into 'a mutual and Solemn League and Covenant' to preserve the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, to reform religion in England and Ireland according to the Word of God and the example of the best reformed Churches and thus to 'bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of government, directory for worship and catechizing'.[14] The Scots agreed to send commissioners to attend the Assembly of Divines and to assist in its work. These commissioners went in the assurance that presbyterianism would be seen to be the one form of government prescribed in the Bible. They soon found that even those in the Assembly who were called presbyterians were reluctant to approve a scheme giving final authority in church matters to presbyteries where ministers would be likely to be in the majority. There were also Erastians in the Assembly who were insistent upon retaining final authority in the hands of Parliament, and there were Independents who held that in the Bible it was the local gathered congregation which had the promise of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and they resolutely refused to allow to government by presbytery more than utilitarian justification. In the end a pragmatic plan of presbyterian government was composed and presented to Parliament but by then there was less need to bow to Scottish requirements. The army of Parliament was gaining in efficiency under Oliver Cromwell who shared much of the Independent outlook. His prowess led to the defeat of the King and his influence was a major factor in leading to his execution in 1649.[15]

This trend of events had gradually alienated the Scots. Some of them had made an Engagement to rescue the King from his English captors but this was disowned by the Scottish Parliament and General Assembly. An Engagement army under Hamilton ventured into England but was defeated by Cromwell at Preston in 1648. The execution

of the King caused a sharp and universal reaction among the Scots who now invited his son, Charles II, to come to Scotland to claim his throne. They were very suspicious of his sincerity, particularly when he showed willingness to support the Covenants, but nevertheless he was a Stuart and their King. Cromwell moved swiftly to crush the royal cause in Scotland and defeated a Scottish army at Dunbar.

The Scots now saw the Cromwellian power as a threat to the survival of the nation and therefore there was a move to open the Scottish army to all Scots able and willing to bear arms in defence of their land. Supporters of this move were known as Resolutioners and they were in a majority in both Parliament and the General Assembly. There was a minority who protested against this trend. These Protestors held that the Covenants were in accord with the will of God and only a covenanted army could expect God's blessing. A Resolutioner army made a dash into England in hope of arousing support for the royalist cause but this army was also defeated, this time at Worcester in 1651 in a victory which Cromwell called 'God's crowning mercy'.

Charles fled and Cromwell proceeded to subdue Scotland and to settle the Church on lines parallel to those applied in England. The main concern was to secure ministers of good character and preaching ability. Ministers were allowed to continue in their parishes, but any other preacher could hold services and minister to such as chose to resort to them. Presbyteries were allowed to meet but only to deal with matters pertaining to the life and work of congregations; they had no compulsory powers over all parishioners. Ministers no longer had the influence they once had on the national stage but they had perforce to devote themselves to their pastoral duties and this strengthened the ties between them and their people. Neither Resolutioner nor Protestor ministers were happy with this arrangement.

Resolutioners were readyto see the restoration of the monarchy. Their agent, James Sharp, minister of Crail in Fife, went to London and saw that any hope of a presbyterian reform in England was evaporating; he also visited the King at Breda and received what seemed satisfactory assurances concerning the presbyterian prospects in the Church of Scotland.

The restoration in 1660 was followed by the swift dismantling of the Cromwellian system. An Act Recissory was passed undoing all the legislation passed in and since 1640. This reversed the abolition of episcopal government in Scotland and Charles, contrary to his assurances to Sharp, proceeded to appoint new bishops. Four of these were consecrated in London according to the Anglican Ordinal and they in turn consecrated others for the Scottish dioceses. However, since these bishops did not press for the reordination of ministers already ordained by presbytery and did not seek to introduce a Prayer Book, most Resolutioner ministers were willing to conform to the new system and remain in their parishes. The Protester minority were reluctant to abandon their convenanting position and about two hundred ministers were ejected from their parishes. Some of these ministers, James Guthrie, Richard Cameron, Donald Cargil and James Renwick, were martyred for their stand, as were many of their people. On the other hand, the pressure of threats and hardships and the offer of various Indulgences enticed most of the ejected ministers to conform. Nevertheless, groups of Covenanters continued to meet together and were harassed by soldiers and their officers. Many were goaded into rebellion and the tales of their victory at Drumclog and their defeat at Bothwell Brig as well as the tales of their hazardous meetings for the worship of God became part of a tradition honoured among the Scots, even among those who did not share their Protester outlook.

When James II fled from Britain and was replaced by William and Mary in 1688 all the Scottish bishops refused to renounce their oath to James and so, on the advice of William Carstares, a learned Scot who had travelled and

taught on the Continent and had known William, William decided to restore presbyterian government in the Church of Scotland. However, he himself refused to subscribe to the Covenants and he refused to contemplate the imposition of presbyterian government on the Church of England or to make conformity to presbyterianism obligatory in Scotland. He made clear to the General Assembly where he stood and what he expected of the Church:

> A calm and peaceful procedure will be no less pleasing to us than it beseemeth you. We never could be of the mind that violence was suited to the advancement of true religion, nor do we intend that our authority shall ever be the tool of the irregular passions of any party. Moderation is what religion enjoins, neighbouring churches expect from you, and we commend to you. [16]

Most ministers were not unwilling to conform to the new system. By now the majority of them had been ordained by bishops but this ordination was not called into question and, provided they were ready to give allegiance to the new regime, they were allowed to continue in their parishes. Many did so even if they had no heart for the presbyterian system and they took little part in presbytery business. However, all future ordinations in the Church of Scotland were by presbytery and this system became firmly established.

IV

There were still Covenanters who took seriously the claim that the Covenants expressed the will of God for both Church and State and were perpetually binding. They could not bring themselves to take the oath of allegiance to the King who refused to be bound by the Covenants and ruled within a Constitution which continued the episcopal government of the Church of England and evaded the obligation to establish one form of church government in England, Scotland and Ireland. They also held that the Constitution strayed from the principles of the Covenants

in failing to specify that the Bible was the supreme authority in civil affairs. These Covenanters were a small minority and at first they had three ministers who with them had refused to conform but these ministers soon changed their mind and became ministers in the Church of Scotland. For several years the Covenanters had no ministers but they continued to meet and hold services and in 1706 were joined by Rev. John McMillan. He had been a minister in the Church of Scotland but he had noisily advocated the abiding obligations of the Covenants and had been deposed by his presbytery. His advent brought hope to the Society of the Covenanters. Another minister joined them in 1743 and this enabled a presbytery to be formed and ordinations to take place. In 1761 they took the name of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and as such have maintained their belief in the perpetual obligation of the Covenants.

Groups of Covenanters gathered together in Ireland in the time of William and were sustained by their own fellowship and by occasional visits of a minister from Scotland. The first ordination of a Covenanter minister in Ireland took place in 1757 and the first presbytery was formed in 1763. It collapsed in 1779 but was reconstituted in 1792 and an annual synod began to meet in 1811.[17]

The Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Scotland and Ireland developed a life of their own with a firm attachment to the Bible as the supreme standard of faith and practice, to the Westminster Confession of Faith, to Sabbath observance and to the austere form of worship keeping to Bible reading and exposition and to the singing of the metrical psalms and psalms only and without the aid of any instrumental music. Though few in number they have kept to their way and have been a people respected for their seriousness, sobriety and industry. Their faith and practice has indeed been closely akin to that of other presbyterian Churches in Scotland such as the United Presbyterian Church and the Free Church which had their origins in secessions from the Church of Scotland but it is to be noted that at the times of secession the seceders did not

join the Reformed Presbyterian Church. They did not share the attitude of the Reformed Presbyterian Church to the civil power. They gave allegiance to the existing government as the power ordained by God and, like Jeremiah, were prepared to 'seek the welfare of the city and pray to God on its behalf' (29:7). The Reformed Presbyterian Churches have maintained their distinctive conviction that they cannot take the oath of allegiance to an uncovenanted sovereign who rules under a Constitution in which they see many 'evils' and 'Christ-dishonouring blemishes'; therefore, they do not vote in elections to choose the government.[18]

It is difficult for those outside the tradition to enter into this sense of the binding obligations of Covenants drawn up over three centuries ago at a time when all parties assumed the need for an enforced conformity to safeguard the stability of the State and the purity of the Church. The Covenant hopes for a covenanted sovereign and for a presbyterian reform of the Church of England are now remote possibilities. Few Churches now support an enforced conformity and the Reformed Presbyterian Churches have stood in practice for civil and religious liberty. The record of rulers who have attempted, even with high motives to enforce religious conformity does not inspire a confidence in such a policy. It was King William's policy of toleration which made possible the survival of the Covenanters' witness, and as citizens they share in such facilities as are provided by the imperfect governments in whose election they have not voted. They cannot opt out of contact with the powers that be and this has led them into some difficulties. In 1840 a few of the congregations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland separated from it and for a time remained in schism because they felt they had obligations to the existing government. There is also tension in the Testimony issued by this Church in 1938 to mark the tercentenary of the National Covenant and to restate its principles; while it says that the civil ruler has power to proceed against those who show 'wilful persistence in courses destructive of the peace and order

which Christ has established in his Church' it also says that the ruler is not entitled to 'coerce people into renouncing a false creed'.[19] The Presbyterian Church in Ireland in its Rule of Faith states that 'although civil rulers are bound to render obedience to Christ in their own province yet they ought not to attempt to constrain men's religious belief or invade the rights of conscience'. Under this definition the ruler's 'own province' would not be taken to include 'the peace and order which Christ has established in his Church'.

The Reformed Presbyterian Churches accord a high position to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms alongside the Covenants. The Confession has also been a subordinate standard for the testing of doctrine and practice in other presbyterian Churches but most of them have had occasion to determine the extent to which its declarations are still binding upon them. Records of General Assemblies contain declarations asserting that the Confession's definition of the doctrine of Election is not to be understood in any way which limits the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for all people or dulls the offer of salvation to all who will receive it. Other decisions clarify the understanding of the relation between Church and State. In 1986 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland declared that it did not now accept the Confession's equation of the Pope with Antichrist. The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church admits that not all that was said and done by the makers of the Covenants and the Confession was beyond criticism but it defends the Confession as 'the clearest and most comprehensive exhibition of divine truth formulated by the Church since the days of the Apostles' and claims that it is fitted to be the rallying point around which 'the scattered sections of the Protestant Church may yet be gathered into one'.[20]

This 1938 Testimony declared that the present duty of the Church and Nation is to acknowledge and retrace the steps of defection from the Covenant engagements of that great and memorable age'.[21] Now, fifty years on,

at a time when society has become more secular in outlook, when many Christian moral standards are widely set aside, and when lawless conduct is prevalent, there is a strong case for a covenanting steadfastness to truth and righteousness and for leadership in government and many other walks of life by people with firm principles of personal and social morality. In many ways rulers reflect the prevailing outlook of those who elect them, but in other ways they can shape that outlook through the media and by decisions made under pressure from powerful interests such as the brewing and tobacco industries and the supermarket chains. Clearer leadership by persons of high principle could even now do much to improve the tone of society.

However, the story since the days of the Covenants has not all been a story of defection. Churches have indeed too often presented an unacceptable face to God and to the world through their quarrels and through their accommodations with unjust systems of society and government. Moreover, Churches have to live amid situations where they see through a glass darkly and they have to walk in perplexing paths where Christians often differ as to which is the Christian way. Yet the Churches have produced pioneers of missionary endeavour, social justice, political action, prison reform, liberation of slaves, and, today, of relief work in agencies all round the world. There has also been a softening of relations between Churches of independent, presbyterian, episcopal, eastern and even papal pedigree. The Christian message now depends, as in the days of Jesus, not upon social pressure or government enactment, but upon its own convincing power and upon what the reformers called the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. Taking the world as a whole, there is evidence that the message has not lost this convincing power. Thousands join the Christian company year after year.

The constancy of the martyrs for the Covenant is an indelible witness to their response to the challenges of their day and to their faithfulness unto death to the

Gospel as they saw and followed it in their day. The seventeenth situation cannot be restored even it were desirable; it was a brutal and bitter age as much as it was "a great and memorable age". Christian todayhave to live in the world as it is, truasting that this is God's world and that he will use for his purpose whatever is done, however imperfectly,in the name of Christ. There is still at the heart of the Christian calling the declaration from Covenanting times that our "chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever" and this end is made possible through faith in and obedience to Christ as he is "freely offered in the Gospel."[22]

NOTES

1. W.P. STEPHENS, The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli, (O.U.P., 1986) 128,207,220
2. ibid., 131
3. ibid.,213,264-5.
4. J. Calvin, Institutes, II,x,1-2
5. Eustace Percy, John Knox (London 1935), 275; J.H.S. Burleigh, A Church History of Scotland (O.U.P.,1960), 134
6. The Scots Confession 1560,ed. G.D,. Henderson (Edinburgh 1937) Article V
7. The Book of the Universal Kirk, ed. A. Peterkin (Edinburgh 1839), 431; J. Spottiswood, History of the Church of Scotland (Edinburgh 1851), III 5
8. R.B.Knox, "The Seventeenth Century" in A History of Christian Doctrine,ed. H. Cunliffe-Jones (Edinburgh 1978), 436-438)
9. R.B. Knox, "The Presbyterianism of Samuel Rutherford", in Irish Biblical Studies, Vol 8 July 1986, 143-153
10. Records of the Church of Scotland, ed. A. Peterkin, (Edinburgh, 1843), 9-13
11. Ibid., 68
12. ibid.,42
13. ibid., 113
14. ibid., 362
15. R.S. Paul, The Assembly of the Lord (Edinburgh 1985)
16. Acts of the General Assembly(Edinburgh 1843), p.222
17. Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, (Belfast, 1939), Period VI, Section IV
18. Ibid., 111,116
19. Ibid., 56-57
20. Ibid., 56
21. ibid., 60
22. The Shorter Catechism, Answers 1 and 31.