

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland (Beginnings: the Revolution Settlement of 1690)*

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to explain the reasons behind the formation of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Partly because of her size, and her descent into obscurity and near oblivion, her reasons for separate existence are less well known and understood than those of other churches. For example, it has become fairly common, in recent years, to assert that the refusal of many covenanters to enter the renewed Church of Scotland in 1690 had to do with the covenants and with the covenants alone. This, as we shall see, was decidedly not the case. In fact, if anything, this focus on the covenants has led to a complete failure to see the more glaring defects of the Revolution Settlement – defects which should have led all faithful Presbyterians in Scotland to reject it outright.

When the facts are examined fully, it should become plain that it is far easier, on Biblical and Confessional grounds, to justify those covenanters who dissented from the Revolution Settlement of 1690 than it is to justify any other group of dissenters in the history of Scottish Presbyterianism – with the possible exception of the founding fathers of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Certainly, the issues at stake in the Disruption of 1843 – which led to the formation of the Free Church – were relatively minor in comparison with those involved in 1690. And it is utterly impossible, with consistency, to defend the Disruption of 1843 while simultaneously condemning as schismatic those who refused the terms of the Revolution Settlement of 1690. This will become plain as we proceed.

Origins (Summary)

Perhaps we should begin with a point which is all too easily overlooked: the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland *is the only Presbyterian Church in Scotland which didn't begin her existence by separating from the Church of Scotland* – or indeed by separating from any another church *claiming* to be the Church of Scotland!

Her origins, as a distinct grouping, go way back to 1690 and to the decision of the King to re-establish the national Church of Scotland as a *Presbyterian* church again. The Church of Scotland had already been established (that is, recognised as the official church of the land) in 1560 by an Act of the

Scottish Parliament. At that time, significantly, it was established as a *Presbyterian* church – that is, a church governed by Ministers and Elders.

However, the Stewart Kings were not favourable to this kind of church government: they believed that the King should be sovereign over the church and, accordingly, their preference was for another form of church government which would make it easier to exert their Kingly influence. Accordingly, the King used (abused) his power and, after some years, the established church became *Episcopalian* in character – that is, she was governed by bishops.

While many Presbyterian ministers simply conformed to this arrangement, others – around 400 in number – refused to conform, resigned their charges and began to hold worship services in open air gatherings. In these gatherings, known as ‘Conventicles’, they would preach to those who chose to continue under their ministry rather than hear their new Episcopalian pastors.

However, after years of suffering and persecution during which those who preached at these gatherings and those who worshipped with them were put to death, the last Stewart King was deposed by a nation which had endured enough. In this so called ‘Glorious Revolution’, the new King (King William) recognised that, in order to attain peace in Scotland, the church would need to be re-established along Presbyterian lines again. However, he was determined that it would only be done on his terms. The result was that a ‘Settlement’ was presented to the church for her acceptance: if the Presbyterian Ministers and Elders accepted this ‘Settlement’, she would once again become the established church – with all the power and prestige which that involved. If she did not, then her trial would continue, although not as severely as before.

This way of arranging establishment should not have been acceptable to the Presbyterian Ministers – especially, as we shall see, on the particular terms offered in the arrangement – but, sadly, the Ministers of the day, just over 60 in number, found the terms acceptable and were willing to accept establishment on the King’s terms. Accordingly, in 1690, the State recognised them, and the people who followed them, as being the established Church of Scotland and authorised them to meet later that year in what was (supposedly at any rate) the first Church of Scotland General Assembly to meet freely for many years.

However, a significant number of Scottish Presbyterians – numbering around 7,000 men and their families – refused to accept the terms of the re-establishment imposed by the State and decided to continue meeting in their conventicles.

Note, however, that these people did not *leave* the Church of Scotland. They didn’t walk out of an Assembly or secede. *They were simply a significant number within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland at the time which didn’t want to enter into a certain kind of relationship with the State on terms dictated by the State.* Understandably, they were aggrieved that the Ministers of the Church were willing to enter into this relationship – because they believed that, in doing so, they were compromising their Biblical and Presbyterian beliefs and that they were in clear breach of their solemn vows.

It is easy to see how, under those circumstances, the 7000 men and their families would feel they had the right to continue as the Church of Scotland themselves. However, they were reluctant to do so for two reasons.

First, they had no ordained ministers at their head. The three Ministers who were most identified with their outlook and principles had agreed, rather reluctantly, to enter the new relationship with the State – which was something of a shock to their people in the United Societies and, it was said, a matter of later regret to one of the Ministers too.

Second, although these men and women in the Societies were used to years of persecution during which they were unable to worship in their former churches (mostly now filled with Episcopalian curates), they longed earnestly for *a single re-established Presbyterian Church faithful to the oaths it had made previously to God*. Accordingly, they made the most earnest pleas to their former brethren to reconsider their position and make the necessary modifications to the terms of the new Presbyterian re-settlement which would allow everyone to continue together.

The strength of their desire to remain united with the rest of the Presbyterians, and their utter lack of schismatic spirit, can be clearly seen from the passionate manner in which they addressed them in a letter sent to the first General Assembly of the new Revolution Church of Scotland in 1690:

'We must cry for the removing of these stumbling blocks and for condemning these courses that have done our Lord Jesus Christ so much hurt, in their standing in the way of their comfortable communion with the church. Let the famishing case of our souls and our hungering to hear it preached by you prevail with you to consider our complaints, and let the wounds of our bleeding mother, panting to be healed by the hand of the tender physician, have weight with you not to slight or despise our desires. But, if you shall shut your eyes and ears at them, then we know no other remedy left us, but to complain and protest unto judicatories, and cry and sigh and groan to the father of mercies, who is tender to all his little ones and is the hearer of prayer, that he may see to it and heal our breaches in his own time and way'.

Consequently, they were waiting and hoping that their former brethren in the cause would come to see the error of their ways and renounce their new found connection with the state – and remain in the societies with them until the conditions of that state connection would be more honourable to Christ and to their obligations to God under their vows (see further below).

Eventually, separated by a period of a few years, two of the Ministers who had accepted the Revolution Settlement came to the conviction that the majority had been wrong to enter the relationship with the state on the terms in which they did in 1690. These two men tried, without success, to get their fellow Ministers to change their position and, when this course of action failed, they then applied to the Presbyterians still meeting in Conventicles – or 'United Societies' as they were then called – with a view to being received as their Ministers. Their application was on the basis that the people of these United Societies were just as much the children of the Reformation as their former colleagues were. Indeed, because they adhered absolutely to the position of the Scottish Reformation without compromising – as the majority had failed to do when they agreed to the terms of re-establishment as imposed by the State – the two Ministers felt that these Societies were very much the more faithful part of the Church of Scotland.

After application, the two Ministers were received by the Societies and so in 1743, 53 years after the re-establishment of the Presbyterian Church in 1690, a Presbytery was formed and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was set up.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, then, became the first organised Presbyterian Church in Scotland to exist alongside the Church of Scotland –but, because of the circumstances of its birth, it was not, and still is not, a Secession Church and, in this respect, it is quite unique as a Presbyterian church in Scotland.

Also, and again because of the circumstances of its origin, in which it never broke off from an organised constituted church, its claim to be the true heir of the Reformed Church of Scotland has always been considered to be very strong.

Of course, many have tended to dismiss this claim merely on the ground of the size of the church. However, aside from the fact that the size of a church is really irrelevant to its spiritual identity, it is worth noting that the established church itself was not particularly large then either. Indeed, the entire population of Scotland barely exceeded one million and, of these, a good number were either Roman Catholic or Episcopalian and so the proportion of Presbyterians represented by the Societies was far from small.

Most Presbyterians have dismissed the claim, however, on the ground that those brethren who chose to remain outside the newly re-established Church of Scotland were wrong to do so. And they have held this position even while acknowledging that the Revolution Settlement was a defective settlement and one which was responsible for the Secessions of 1733 and 1761 as well as the Disruption of 1843. (Incidentally, for a supposedly acceptable Revolution Settlement, this is a fairly lamentable legacy!)

In opposition to this, the Reformed Presbyterian Church has constantly asserted that the Revolution Settlement of 1690, by which the Presbyterian Church was re-established on the State's terms, was not only a *defective settlement* producing centuries of strife but a *fundamentally flawed settlement* – to the extent that it *was sinful for the Presbyterian Ministers involved to accept its terms*.

Their reasons for coming to this conclusion need to be heard again – especially in the light of the current ecclesiastical confusions as well as the constitutional conversation around the issue of Scottish independence.

To understand these reasons, a little more background needs to be sketched in first.

Historical Context

a) *The Reformation*

The Reformation was an international movement to 're-form' the church of Christ from the unbiblical form into which it had lapsed under Roman Catholicism. This Reformation was thorough: it involved reformation in what was taught (doctrine), how the church was run (government) and how it approached God (worship).

Scotland was one of the many European nations which embraced such a Reformation and those at the heart of the movement were resolved that the shape of the reform should be determined by the Bible – not by Church Tradition.

The Reformation in Scotland has long been recognised by Presbyterians as falling into two distinct periods.

The First Scottish Reformation (1560 onwards)

The message of the Reformation was blessed by God and many people embraced the new system of teaching – with its core message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone – and, in doing so, they rejected the Roman Catholic system of salvation with its works-based method of salvation.

Many of those who were powerfully influenced by the Reformation also embraced a new system of government – in which rule by Elders having equal authority replaced the hierarchical priestly system – and they purged away forms of worship not found under the New Testament.

Although the Reformation was a popular movement, in the sense of being a movement of the people, it is important to recognise that with the 1560 Act of Parliament, this new system of religion became the *established* faith in Scotland and, from that point onwards, Scotland was officially a Protestant country.

Shortly afterwards, the newly Reformed and Presbyterian Church was itself established by law and became *the established Church of Scotland* – Presbyterian in government and Calvinistic in doctrine and worship.

The Second Reformation (1638-1649)

This Second Reformation is less well known than the first one - partly because it occurred within Protestant Scotland itself.

It happened because, in the years prior to 1638, the recently established Reformed Church of Scotland had moved away from its *Presbyterian* system of church government (rule by Ministers and Elders all on an equal footing) towards an *Episcopalian* government (rule by Bishops who were overseers of the Ministers and who were appointed by the State).

As we saw earlier on, this new system was promoted and pushed onto the Church by the King but it was deeply unpopular with the majority of the people and was contrary to the system of government originally established in the Reformed church.

Four events, however, were destined to first of all rescue and then further the movement for Reform in Scotland – and to advance the church even in beyond where the First Reformation had left her.

b) The National Covenant of 1638

In 1638, a crisis developed when the *form of worship* was altered by the authority of the King. With the support of his Bishops, he introduced a prayer book, with obvious Roman Catholic tendencies,

into the worship of the church. The fuse was lit – particularly by Jenny Geddes who threw her famous stool when the new book was first read in St Giles' cathedral! – with the result that a popular revolt took place culminating shortly afterwards in the signing of the National Covenant of 1638.

By this covenant, the government, the nobles, the churchmen – and, indeed, the majority of the Scottish people – swore to commit themselves to the restoration of the Scottish church to her Reformation purity.

c) *The General Assembly in Glasgow, 1638*

This covenant and the groundswell of reforming zeal, evidently connected with an outpouring of the Spirit of God, led to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland rediscovering its liberty. In its famous meeting in Glasgow in 1638 – *its first free meeting for many years* – it ignored the King's Commissioner, who ordered it to be dissolved in the name of the King, and by continuing its deliberations, asserted its spiritual independence. It also proceeded to outlaw all the innovations in government and worship which had been introduced since the Reformation.

d) *The Solemn League and Covenant*

Five years later, in 1643, at the initiative of the Scottish Church, a covenant was drawn up and entered into with England and Ireland. This purpose of this covenant was to preserve the Reformation in Scotland and to further the Reformation in England and Ireland so as to bring it more into line with that in Scotland.

This Covenant, called the *Solemn League and Covenant*, was sworn by the Scottish Parliament, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland – and, indeed, the English Parliament, which had power over the Church of England and which was dominated by Puritans at the time.

e) *The Westminster Assembly*

Significantly, in the good providence of God, this process of reform had already begun in England where the Parliament had recently abolished bishops and appointed an Assembly of theologians to meet at Westminster in order to reform the church.

As a result of the new covenant with Scotland, however, it was decided to augment the Assembly with Scottish Commissioners and, after over a thousand sittings from 1643-1649, the Westminster Assembly produced *The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Form of Church Government, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Directory of Public Worship*.

As the Assembly produced these documents, they were adopted by the Church of Scotland as the *new constitutional documents of the Church of Scotland* and it was hoped that, as part of their covenanted obligation, the English church would follow suit. Sadly, it did not – but these documents became the covenanted standards for the Church of Scotland and, with this process, the Reformation of the Scottish church and her restoration to apostolic doctrine, government and worship was complete.

By means of the Second Reformation, then, the church had entered into solemn covenant obligations before God; vigorously asserted her independent jurisdiction from the state; abolished Prelacy (church rule by bishops); abolished Patronage (the right of the Landlord to appoint the

minister) and adopted measures for promoting pastoral instruction and scriptural education throughout the land.

It was a new beginning, *significantly secured by covenant and oath*, and this period – when her doctrine, worship and government were settled by church and state, working in a harmonious manner not seen before or since – was the ‘high-water mark’ of the Reformed church in Scotland.

However, the fabric of this glorious edifice began to be dismantled with the restoration of the monarchy under the new King, Charles II, in 1660.

Persecution and Declension

Although the King had sworn the covenant himself, his reign was to signal a vicious assault on the attainments of the Second Reformation.

First, he purged Presbyterianism out of the established church. That is, he rescinded all the Acts which had been passed in favour of Presbyterian government and, instead, formally established Episcopalianism as the official form of the Protestant religion in the land. So, for the second time since the Reformation, the Church of Scotland reverted to Episcopalianism.

In order to accomplish this, his Parliament passed two Acts:

The first of these rescinded the 1649 meeting of Parliament and declared all the Acts of that Parliament null and void. *Significantly, it was this Parliament of 1649 which had ratified the Westminster Confession of Faith and abolished Church Patronage (the right of the Landlord to appoint the minister)!*

The second Act went further and proceeded to annul all the Parliaments which had been held since 1640 – *in other words, all the Acts which Parliament had passed in support of the Second Reformation church were as though they had never been!*

These two Acts were the infamous ‘Rescissory Acts’. What is not widely known is that these Acts were deliberately left on the Statute book under the terms of the Revolution Settlement in 1690 which re-established the Presbyterian Church of Scotland – indeed, they remain there to this day.

In other words, astonishingly, the Presbyterian Ministers and Elders who accepted the Revolution Settlement and chose to enter into an established relationship with the state *did so on these terms*.

Is it any wonder that the more faithful covenanters refused to join?

Second, the government interfered with the constitution and government of the Presbyterian Church. This was altogether more serious than disestablishing the Presbyterian Church. After all, while it may be wrong in the sight of God to rescind the civil laws by which Presbyterianism had been established, yet it is unquestionably *within the power of the state to do so*. To sever the state connection, however, is one thing – to invade the internal government of the church is quite another

but King Charles had declared himself, as King, to have supremacy '*over all persons, and in all causes*' – ecclesiastical as well as civil.

Therefore, he had no difficulty in officially declaring the Glasgow Assembly of 1638 to be an '*unlawful and seditious meeting*' and that all the acts done by it, and arising from its power, were to be considered void.

Furthermore, legislation was passed declaring the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant – *which the church had sworn in her courts and adopted into her constitution* – to be unlawful. Indeed, these solemn documents – containing oaths sworn to God – were publicly burned.

These measures, declaring the 1638 Assembly and the Covenants to be unlawful, also held their place in the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' and formed part of the compact which the Presbyterian Church shamefully agreed to accept in 1690 – and still remain on our statute-books today!

Again, we would ask, is it any wonder that the more faithful covenanters refused to accept establishment on these terms?

Third, he evicted the more faithful Presbyterian ministers, who refused to accept the new arrangements, from their charges.

When these Ministers refused to acknowledge the office and authority of the bishops, an order was passed to the effect that all ministers who had entered into their charges since 1649 - when patronage was abolished - were to be deprived of their stipends and were to leave their dwellings with their families and reside outside the bounds of their current presbyteries.

Thankfully, nearly four hundred ministers chose to obey God rather than King and, in a severe winter, left their homes to endure reproach for the sake of Christ. Part of their grief lay in the knowledge that their charges would be filled quickly with less worthy men. However, they knew that the worst example they could give their flock would be to stay over them while being unfaithful to God and so they left their charges. Not surprisingly, those of their hearers who valued their faithful ministries went out to the fields to hear them preach rather than stay to hear the curates who had filled their pulpits!

Fourth, the Presbyterian Church suffered from the gradual defection of those who were willing to compromise.

Of course, from the beginning, there were Ministers and people who yielded easily to the civil power by conforming to prelacy. Sadly, however, even many of those who began by resisting the dictates of the state, and who went out of their charges bearing the reproach of Christ, finally succumbed and breached their vows.

As has so often been the case, cunning and inducement succeeded where fines imprisonment and persecution had failed. The Indulgences of King Charles II, and the later Toleration of James II, which allowed the return of Ministers to their charges *under strict conditions imposed by the King*, succeeded in bringing many Ministers to bow before their Sovereign who had sworn previously sworn wholehearted allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only King and Head of the church.

However, by his almost unbounded arrogance, the King progressively alienated the bulk of the people and when his son, James II, came to the throne, most people realised that the Stuart Monarchy had to come to an end. Consequently, the decision was taken to rid the nation of the Stuarts and William, Prince of Orange, who was married to Mary Stuart, was invited to become the new King. And so, with a bloodless, 'glorious' revolution, there was a new beginning in the land.

Revolution Settlement

High on the King's agenda was the need to settle the church in both England and Scotland. William was not a Presbyterian but he was prevailed upon by influential counsellors to re-settle the Scottish church as a Presbyterian church – governed by Ministers and Elders. Although he was reluctant to do this, he was prepared to accept it providing the English church would be settled – *contrary to the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant* – along Episcopalian lines.

Furthermore, because he wanted to curb the zeal of Presbyterian Scotland and to secure a 'moderate' church – which he got – he ensured that the method of establishment would involve framing an Act of Settlement on his own terms which would be given to the church for her acceptance. He hoped that the weary condition of the church would incline the Ministers to accept the Settlement as the best that they could hope for under the circumstances. In this, he was proved right. Sadly, the majority of Scottish Presbyterians accepted in that year a settlement which secured peace but only at the expense of principle – and at the cost of a divided church which continued indeed to further divide as the evils of the Revolution Settlement worked themselves out.

What, then, were the deficiencies of the Revolution Settlement in 1690?

Deficiencies of the Revolution Settlement

In reality, the Revolution Settlement offered to the church by the State in 1690 was little more than yet another indulgence. Although welcomed by the majority of Presbyterians as a great deliverance and as an answer to their dire predicament, it was not merely deficient but fatally flawed in that it was incompatible, in many key aspect, with the covenantal commitments already sworn to by Presbyterians in Scotland. The following should make these fatal flaws plain.

First, the Process

The first deficiency to notice is the *process by which Presbyterian government was re-established*.

The proper role of the state when establishing the church is simply to receive from the church the constitution which she has framed and enacted by her own intrinsic and independent authority, and then, after mature and serious consideration, to grant it the civil sanction.

This was the process adopted during the First Reformation period: in 1560, the church held her first General Assembly at which she fixed her standards and constitution and presented them to the civil power which then proceeded to establish them by law.

It was also the process adopted during the Second Reformation: At the famous Glasgow Assembly of 1638, the church abolished Episcopacy as being contrary to the word of God, settled her own constitution and subordinate standards—and then applied for and obtained the sanction of the state which gave civil effect to the measures which she had independently adopted.

But this simple and biblical order was inverted in the Revolution Settlement of the church: On that occasion, the church did not present her constitution to the civil power - rather, the civil power drew up the constitution – *with important modifications which the church never asked for* – and enacted it without consulting the church. To be specific, although the Confession of Faith was appointed to be the doctrinal standard of the church, the proof texts were not received and neither were the Catechisms, the Form of Church Government or the Directory of Public Worship – all of which had been received unalterably by the Second Reformation church in the exercise of her God given freedom and authority – *as part of her fixed and covenanted constitution!*

Significantly, although Prelacy was abolished, the fact that the Form of Church Government was not accepted meant that Prelacy was not abolished on the ground that it was ‘*contrary to the Word of God*’ – the ground on which it had originally been abolished – but only on the lesser ground that it was a ‘*great and unsupportable grievance and trouble to the nation, and contrary to the inclinations of the generality of the people*’. This particular form of language was chosen by those who did not share the belief that Presbyterianism had a particular divine mandate and who were, in fact, Erastians – that is, they believed that the church ought to be subject to the government of the State. In the Westminster Assembly, the Erastian party was ready to admit that Presbytery was ‘agreeable to the word of God’ while it maintained that it had no higher claims in this respect than other forms.

After all, what other reason could there be for using this particular form of words in the Settlement of 1690 when it is well known that King William favoured Episcopacy and was only too happy to establish Erastianism in England?

The fact is that neither the Word of God, nor the voice of the church, were duly heard and consulted in the Revolution Settlement. It was an imposed Settlement, an Erastian Settlement and a political Settlement – which facts considered alone, apart from its content, should have made the church reject it.

Admittedly, if it was the case that the terms imposed were Biblical and consistent with their Covenant obligations, at least one could claim that while the Erastian method of imposing them was wrong, at least the terms themselves were good. However, this was not the case. Consider, first, the issue of the Standards imposed by the Settlement.

Second, the Imposition of her Standards

The issue being considered here is the ratification of the doctrinal standards of the Church of Scotland by the Revolution Settlement of the Church of Scotland in 1690.

First, it should be clear that it is the Church herself that has the authority to enact her Confession. This is a purely spiritual duty, to be performed by the overseers of the church under the authority of the Lord Jesus as her Head and King. If the State imposes upon her a Confession of its own, or if it alters in the slightest degree the one proposed by her for its sanction, then she cannot acquiesce without proving unfaithful to her Lord, sacrificing her spiritual independence, and degrading herself to the level of a secular institution.

In the First Reformation, the Church enacted her Confessions, and Books of Government, in the exercise of her own intrinsic and spiritual powers and these were subsequently ratified by the Scottish Parliament.

In the Second Reformation too, the Church and State pursued a similar course. In the exercise of her own independent power, the church adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Church government, and the Directory for Public Worship. Then, following correct and biblical procedure, the Confession, Catechisms and Directory, after their adoption by the General Assembly, were presented to the State for its sanction, which was duly obtained.

Significantly, the Acts of Parliament approving these documents explicitly approved them *as they had been previously approved and adopted by the Church, and according to the exact sense in which the church had embraced it.*

However, in the Revolution Settlement of 1690, by which the Church of Scotland came to be re-established, the Confession of Faith was the only one of these constitutional documents to be sanctioned by the State. And, of course, it had to be adopted anew – as it were, for the first time. Why? Because the Acts of Church and State adopting the Confession of Faith in the 1640's had been rescinded by the Rescissory Acts – and they were left rescinded under the terms of the Revolution Settlement! This is the reason why there is no reference in the Revolution Settlement to a previous adoption of the Confession by the church in the exercise of her own spiritual, independent, and intrinsic authority. It was as though it had never been done.

Furthermore, even when ratifying the Confession of Faith, the Revolution Settlement did not ratify it *precisely as it had been previously adopted by the Second Reformation Church of Scotland and by the Parliament of Scotland.* Instead of being ratified entire, its doctrinal articles alone were sanctioned, while the Scripture proofs appended to the Confession were omitted. And this in spite of the fact that the proofs were considered integral to the confession and were adopted not only by the Westminster Assembly and by the English Parliament but by the Church of Scotland itself in 1647 – as part of her covenanted constitution!

It won't do to argue that the omission is of little consequence either because all the chapters are ratified and transferred to the Statute-book or because the proofs were not always the best that could be found in the scriptures. Certainly, *if that had been the mind of the church* the judgement would have more weight but the fact is that the State had no right to make such an alteration at all without encroaching in the most serious terms on the authority of the church.

In the light of subsequent history, it seems incredible to us now that the Presbyterian Ministers were prepared to accept establishment at the price of dropping the *Form of Presbyterian Government*, the

Directory of Public Worship and both *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* from her constitution – but this is what the terms of Settlement required and this is what they agreed.

We cannot avoid the conclusion then, that the Church, by receiving from the State a mutilated constitution, without any complaint or without the exercise of her own intrinsic powers, homologated the State's usurpation of authority, dishonoured her Divine King and prostrated herself at the feet of the secular power.

Third, her Freedom of Assembly

Under the terms of the Revolution Settlement, the Church compromised her subjection to Christ's headship *by accepting the power of the King to appoint the time and the place of meeting for the General Assembly as well as the power to dissolve the Assembly*. And, in the first exercise of that power, the King went on to appoint the first General Assembly of the Revolution Church in 1690 and to dissolve it.

Again, had the Rescissory Acts been repealed, the independence of the church in this matter would be plain both in her own Acts and in the Acts of Parliament dating from the Second Reformation. However, the Revolution Settlement made these laws of church and State null and void and hence the Revolution Parliament revived the earlier Act of 1592 as the new Magna Carta of the Established Church. However, this Act of 1592 – passed before the church had attained to its full covenanted commitments – gave the civil magistrate the authority to appoint the time and place of the meeting of the Assembly. It declared that 'the king's majesty, or his commissioners appointed by his Highness, be present at each General Assembly before the dissolving thereof, and nominate time and place when and where the next General Assembly shall be held'.

Clearly, no true Presbyterian could grant the King such power: not only does it put it within the power of the King to defer or prevent meetings of the General Assembly indefinitely; it is fundamentally quite incompatible with the headship of Christ and the independence of His church. As Knox said, 'Take from us the liberty of Assemblies, and take from us the gospel'.

And far from being an inconsequential matter, the Assemblies of the Established church were frequently dissolved and interdicted by the Sovereign—the church yielding with the most humiliating submission to these repeated acts of tyranny.

How different the church of the Second Reformation! She claimed, and exercised, in this matter, the liberty bestowed on her and demanded from her by Christ her head. Her views on the subject are expressed in the act of 1647 which adopted the Westminster Confession of Faith – views which were far in advance of the position in 1592 – hence the reason why the Revolution Settlement appealed to the Act of 1592 rather than the Acts of the Second Reformation.

Indeed, in 1638 – the year of the National Covenant – the General Assembly in Glasgow refused to bring its deliberations to a close when it had been dissolved by the King's Commissioner when Alexander Henderson, the distinguished Moderator, exhorted them 'to be zealous toward their Lord, and to maintain the liberties and privileges of his kingdom'.

Fourth, her freedom of Government and Discipline

Next, the Revolution Settlement involved the interference of the State in the discipline of the Church.

At the commencement of the Second Reformation, the Church, again exercising her own inherent authority, determined in whose hands the keys of government should be placed, and adopted measures for inflicting merited censure on immoral living and false doctrine.

However, in the terms of the Revolution Settlement, the state took this matter under its own control and declared that the government of the church was to be established in the hands of, and exercised by, those Presbyterian ministers who were ejected for non-conformity to prelacy since the first of January, 1661, and *such ministers and elders only as they were to admit or receive*.

Here, then, the state appointed the rulers of the Revolution Church,—thus appointing itself as the source of ecclesiastical authority! But there is a further difficulty with this procedure: Were all these persons worthy of the station to which they were suddenly elevated? Nearly thirty years had passed since these Ministers were effectively ejected and these were years of temptation, trial and change. In that period, many of those Ministers who were originally ejected *had defected from their original positions* and had forfeited their right to exercise ecclesiastical power - at least until they confessed and repented of such declension.

A considerable number of them had receded from their former oaths and had complied with the oaths imposed by the government of Charles II and had bound themselves to abstain from preaching – at a time when the faithful preaching of the truth was much required. These men had accepted the indulgences granted by Charles in order to resume preaching – in other words, they would not preach, out of fear, in obedience to the King of Kings but they agreed to preach, on a restricted platform, for King Charles II.

Such were the people who, together with a few ministers, recently returned from exile, were constituted the governors of the Revolution Church, and composed her first General Assembly – and they all engaged in the exercise of their functions without any expression of or evidence of repentance for their sinful courses of action!

Worse still, it was made an essential principle of the Revolution Settlement that all actual incumbents of their charges under Episcopacy should be allowed to continue in their posts, on the basis of acquiescing to the Settlement and taking an oath of allegiance to the government of King William. Indeed, the Act went on to say that ‘if any of the said ministers, who hath not been hitherto received into the government of the church, shall offer to qualify themselves, and to apply in the manner foresaid, *they shall have their majesties' full protection*, aye and while they shall be admitted in manner foresaid.’

These provisions are Erastian in the extreme: Who has the right to dictate to the church the terms of admission into the membership of the church or into the office of the holy ministry?

Unquestionably, it is the rulers of the church, on whom the power of the keys of the kingdom is conferred by the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet here we have the civil magistrate determining the qualifications necessary in those who apply for ordination and license in the Church of Scotland and

declaring that no minister or preacher, by whom the conditions prescribed by him are not observed, shall 'be admitted, or continued for hereafter'.

At first, the church showed some reluctance to receive the Episcopalian curates into her offices, but she was eventually persuaded into the measure by the civil power, and within a few years, could boast of it as an instance of her moderation that '*hundreds of them had been admitted on the easiest terms*'.

Of course, many of these curates had taken possession of the charges from which other and better men had been violently ejected *and had all solemnly sworn that the government of the church is an inherent right of the crown*, and some of them, by acting as spies and informers, had contributed to the bloody oppression under which the land had groaned. But they were admitted without having been required to express any condemnation of Prelacy, or to avow any contrition for the guilty part which they had acted during the preceding bloody period – and all this just because the state had prescribed the conditions on which they should be received!

It is not surprising then that these hirelings should have been permitted, in the providence of God, to become a running sore in the church into which they were admitted so easily; for they multiplied rapidly into an overwhelming majority - called 'the Moderate party' – who ruled her councils with an iron grip for more than a century, progressively deadening the spirit of evangelicalism.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the first Revolution Assembly positively refused to hear the larger paper presented to them by the three covenanting Ministers, as well as that given in by the United Societies, which were complaining of these grievances in the constitution of the Church. Of course, where spiritual defection had prevailed so alarmingly in the Assembly, it could scarcely have been expected that such representations would be received.

But it is sad nonetheless, that Shields, Linning, and Boyd - who had, till about that period, been faithful to the covenanted cause – were admonished by the Assembly, on their being received in to the communion of the Revolution Church: a fact, as was noted long ago, equally discreditable to both parties.

Fifth, her Freedom to Call and Induct Ministers

Next, the State retained a measure of control over the matter of calling and inducting Ministers. This may come as a surprise to most people who are under the impression that the Revolution Settlement thoroughly abolished Patronage (the right of the Landlord to settle a Minister of his choice).

Clearly, the freedom of the church and her responsibility to her head was of great importance to the church of the Second Reformation and, in 1649, she secured the abolition of Patronage by the Parliament. However, with the Restoration of the Monarchy under Charles II, the Act Rescissory was passed which nullified the Parliament of 1649 and, so, Patronage was restored.

The Revolution Settlement appeared to abolish Patronage once more – but, in reality, it was not properly banished. Rather, it was declared that '*the heritors of the parish being protestants, and the elders, are to name and propose the person to the whole congregation, to be either approved or disapproved by them, and if they disapprove, that the disapprovers give in their reasons to the effect*

that the affair may be cognised by the presbytery of the bounds'. Where there was no land-ward parish, the right of patronage was vested in the magistrates, town council and Kirk Session of the burgh. Significantly, it was ordained that 'in recompense of the said right of presentation, hereby taken away, the heritors and life renters of said parish, and the town council for the burgh, should pay to the said patrons the sum of six hundred merks'.

These provisions were unacceptable to faithful Presbyterians because, first, they demand a civil as well as a religious qualification in order to exercise of a spiritual duty—the heritors and the town council being associated with the Kirk Session in 'naming and proposing the person to the whole congregation'. This is an unacceptable infringement of the rights and privileges of the people of God.

Second, even the proviso that the heritors should be 'protestant' is so general as to allow Episcopalians and Independents a say in the matter – not to mention people of immoral conduct who might have no interest in the church whatsoever.

Third, these provisions only gave the congregation a negative power—the power of offering objections – not a power to address a positive call to the object of their free and conscientious choice. This was depriving them of the privilege which unquestionably belonged to them as members of the church of Christ.

Fourth, the payment of compensation to the Patron implied that it was not the scriptural and inalienable right of the people to elect their own ministers.

Fifth, by devising and enacting this measure – instead of acknowledging the competency of the arrangements both of church and state in 1649 in reference to this matter – the parliament homologated the provision of the Act Rescissory and, sadly, the church, by acquiescing in the scheme, instead of standing on the ground she had occupied in 1649 (which had never been repealed by any competent church authority), virtually acknowledged the power of the state to suspend and rescind ecclesiastical laws.

Sixth, again, this Act was passed without consulting the church—the whole affair having been arranged and *determined three months before the General Assembly was allowed to meet*.

Seventh, it is absolutely beyond the competency of the state to frame any regulations for the church on this subject. It is fatal—irremediably fatal—to this measure, that it was a *civil decision* imposed on the church in relation to a *spiritual privilege*.

Unsurprisingly, this 'compromise' did not last long. It was repealed little more than 20 years later by the Patronage law of 1712 by means of which patrons were restored to their 'ancient rights' – which resulted, eventually, in the Secessions of 1733 and 1761 as well as the Disruption of 1843, all of which responses were too little and certainly way too late.

In any case, there is no huge leap from the provision of 1690 to that of 1712. If we go so far as to grant that it is competent for the state to enact laws for regulating the spiritual affairs of Christ's house, we must also admit that it has the power of altering and annulling them, of making them more or less stringent, as it sees cause. The Acts of 1690 and 1712 both flow from the same Erastian source and encroach alike, even if not to the same degree, on the spiritual jurisdiction of the church of Christ.

Sixth, her Obligation to Covenantal Oaths

Last, but by no means least, the Revolution Settlement of the Church of Scotland failed to revive or recognise the Covenants.

The church of the Second Reformation embodied in her statutes – involving an oath – the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. These covenants were also recognised – again, by oath and statute – in the civil constitution of the kingdom.

However, these Covenants were condemned, denounced, and publically committed to the flames under the reign of Charles II – who had sworn to uphold them!

Remarkably, the Revolution government of King William left them where they found them – and there they continue to lie: violated, trampled down, and almost forgotten, till the present day.

More remarkably, the church entered into connexion with the state, *as if perfectly satisfied that the recognition of these solemn vows formed no condition of the alliance*. And, although efforts were made by various persons to induce the church to recognise and revive these solemn engagements, in the exercise of her own authority, she refused to comply, and even went to the length, in various instances, of inflicting censure on those who persisted in calling her attention to this important duty.

Clearly, then, the Church of Scotland, by agreeing to establishment by the State on the terms of the Rescissory Acts, trampled the covenants underfoot as well as all the attainments of the Second Reformation which arose out of them.

Furthermore, by later becoming a party to the 1707 Treaty of Union between Scotland and England – which proceeds upon the total overthrow of the covenanted uniformity guaranteed in the Solemn League and Covenant – the church positively repudiated the public engagements of the Second Reformation, and helped to prolong and perpetuate their obscurity and neglect. The Treaty of Union in 1707 was a betrayal of the Covenants and of the Second Reformation.

An Alternative Course of Action?

It has sometimes been pled, by way of apology for the Revolution Settlement of the Church, that the Presbyterians were at that time placed in circumstances of extreme difficulty, and that they accepted a state imposed constitution because they had little alternative.

However, the fact remains that they could have acted otherwise: They could have declined the terms devised by the State for the establishment of the Church and, instead, insisted on being established according to her own terms. And, if the State were to refuse establishment on her terms, it would be the clear duty of the church to assert her liberty without all the privileges of establishment.

However, largely due to weariness with the struggle – and, sadly, the lucrative lure of state establishment – the spirit of compromise was abroad and the majority of Presbyterians chose to

accept establishment as the State imposed it with the result that a huge number of moderate and Episcopalian Ministers were admitted into the church and the reign of the 'Moderates' began until the covenanting spirit arose in the Revolution Church culminating in the Disruption of 1843 – which, laudable as it was, had less ground beneath it by way of justification than the Covenanters had when they refused to enter the establishment in the first place: the Free Church chose liberty over establishment in 1843 – but if that choice had been made by the majority in 1690, the story of the Scottish church might have been very different.

The Disruption Fathers sought freedom for the congregation to call and induct a man of their own choice – *although the church had lived with the Act authorising this since the Patronage Act of 1712*. It would have been far better to have stood in 1690 and asserted the following in no uncertain terms before the State: that Presbyterian Church government is of divine right; that the whole of the Westminster Standards were to be re-adopted as they were in the 1640's; that her Assemblies were to be entirely free from State interference; that all the Acts of the Free and Independent Assemblies during the Second Reformation were to be retained in force and, in short, that all the attainments of the Second Reformation were to be maintained.

All this they could and should have done - and if the State would not have allowed her establishment on such conditions, they should have obeyed God rather than men and refused establishment and monetary endowment. Instead, the church acquiesced in the awful insult paid to the church and to the attainments of the Second Reformation.

Conclusion

All this should help us understand why the 7000 families dissented from entering into an established relationship with the State in 1690. Their desire for the return of their former brethren to covenanted faithfulness, coupled with their lack of Ministers, meant that they went for many years without receiving baptism or the Lord's Supper – such was their respect for an ordained ministry and church order. However, with the continued defection of the majority and the arrival into their ranks of Ministers who now desired to preach to them, they organised themselves to formally continue their witness, no longer as the United Societies, but as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Therefore, we have good reason to conclude that the Church of Scotland as re-established in 1690 is not the true heir of the Second Reformation Church of Scotland – and neither can any church be which insists on rooting its claim to that identity on the Revolution Settlement.

As to identity, what ought to be plain is that the children of the 18th century Secessions and the 19th century Disruption should focus less on *organic descent* and focus more on *spiritual affinity*. Accordingly, they should cease to claim *continuity* with the church of the Revolution Settlement, simply on the ground of descent, and recognise *spiritual affinity* with those who rejected the Revolution Settlement – because that is who they are *in spirit*. To yoke the church of the Disruption with that of the Revolution Settlement is to yoke the living with the dead and the children of the bondwoman with the children of the free.

In this way, instead of branding Reformed Presbyterians as 'schismatics', they would stand on common ground and, together, rebuild Scottish Presbyterianism on the unifying rock of the Second Reformation – not on the shifting sand of the Revolution Settlement.

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*The above owes much to a paper by Rev John Graham entitled 'The Revolution Settlement of the Church of Scotland' found in 'Lectures on the Principles of the Second Reformation' by Ministers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Scotland; delivered at the request of the Glasgow Society for promoting the principles of the Second Reformation, Glasgow, 1841.