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This dissertation is a study of Covenanter and Seceder Presbyterians in Scotland, Ireland and the American South from 1637-1877. Correspondence, diaries, political pamphlets, religious tracts, and church disciplinary records are used to understand the cultural sensibility, called herein the Covenanter sensibility, of the Covenanter movement. The dissertation examines how the sensibility was maintained and transformed by experiences such as the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, the Glorious Revolution, the 1798 Irish Rebellion, the American Civil War, and Reconstruction. Critical issues involved are the nature of religious and political culture, the role of moderation and religious extremism, the nature of Protestant primitivism and church discipline, and the political nature of radical Protestant religion.

This dissertation looks at Covenanter movements broadly and eschews an organizational history in favor of examining political and religious culture. It labels the broad groups within the Covenanter movement the Presbyterian fringe. In Scotland, the study examines Covenanter ideology, society, church discipline, cell group networks of praying societies, issues of legal toleration and religious liberty, the birth of the Seceder movement and anti-slavery rhetoric. In Ireland it examines the contested legal role of Presbyterian marriages, the controversial arrival of Seceders in Ireland, as well as Covenanters' involvement in the Volunteer

movement, the United Irishmen, and the 1798 Irish Rebellion. In America it studies the life of John Hemphill, the retention of exclusive psalm singing and primitive Protestantism, the American Colonization society in South Carolina, interracial religious transfers, and Reconstruction.

IRISH RADICALS, SOUTHERN CONSERVATIVES: SLAVERY, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY,
AND THE PRESBYTERIAN FRINGE IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD, 1637-1877

By

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For Louise McKnight Moore
and
In memory of Joseph Solomon Moore

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CHAPTER I

PHANATICKS, RADICALS, MODERATES AND CONSERVATIVES: OVERVIEW AND TERMS

Events in Scotland between 1637-1643 gave the Covenanter movement its name, including the Prayer book riot in St. Giles Cathedral and the signing of the National and Solemn League and Covenants. The Covenanter cultural sensibility, however, sprang from earlier events and would live on to confront slavery in the nineteenth century American South. It had already been born in the sixteenth century Scottish Reformation, hardened in seventeenth century revolt, civil war and persecutions, and inculcated in cell-group social structures that allowed an ongoing cultural replication and re-appropriation of religious memory and identity well into the next two hundred years. In its early phases, this cultural sentiment had consisted of Calvinist religious zealotry, an emphasis on local autonomy in religion and politics, a rhetoric of liberty against government tyranny, a restriction of individual conscience to the will of the community, a primitive impulse to recreate the earliest forms of Biblical Christianity, and a small group devotional structure to imbue to all generations of members what their sense of the world should be. The movement empowered common people, who drove their ministers far more than their ministers and social betters drove them. The complicated social and ideological nature of this tradition were connected to one another in a symbiotic

evolution of practice and belief that sprang from the laity of Scottish churches who in turn sent out the types of religious leaders best made in their common image. By the end of the eighteenth century, Covenanter phanaticks had receded from public prominence, but they remained a distinctly sixteenth century voice of dissent against the state and, eventually, against slavery. This chapter will provide a short introduction to the component parts of the movement and its cultural imprint as well as critical terms used.

The social and ideological origins of the Covenanters predate the 1637-43 events that gave their movement its name; the roots lay embedded in the soil of church politics and debates between a moderate and radical nature of church government. Covenanters attempted to reclaim a purist vision of the Calvinist reformation of Scotland that began in 1560. The social revolution of that period had placed the responsibility for individual churches, called kirks, in the hands of the local worshiping community. This removed the top-down, episcopal structure of church government in which Papal, and later king-appointed officials called bishops (from the Latin *episcopas*) ran church affairs as representatives of central authority on the periphery. The Scottish reformation had turned that logic on its head, centering church power in the villages and boroughs of believers who now had responsibility to appoint elders (from the Greek *presbytos*) who participated in a series of church courts that oversaw regional affairs. This system, called presbyterianism, placed local authority at the root (from the Latin *radice*) of church power. In its sixteenth century context, the presbyterian system constituted

nothing less than a radical revolution in the sense that the Latin *radice* indicates the revolution of orbits around a centering object; the church world revolved around a different source of authority.¹ Socially and ideologically, this localism became the heart of future resistance to encroachments on community prerogatives from centralized power. The rights of community were worth fighting and dying for to many Scots.

This emphasis imbedded a tension in the movement between communal rights and individual liberties. The religious community in charge of its own affairs must be of necessity holy and righteous. Tyranny was seen as any power from without that threatened the autonomy of the kirk. However, the individual did not have the right to reject the will of God as interpreted by the kirk elders and members. The movement upheld the rights of the righteous community, both to resist tyranny from without and to enforce tyranny within.²

¹ For a similar discussion of radicalism, see Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A.A Knopf, 1992), 3-10.

² As Quentin Skinner has pointed out, there was liberty before liberalism, with variations of meaning within the Protestant tradition. Lutherans placed the right to resist in the hands of the local magistrate as stated in the Magdeburg Confession (A,1,v). Calvinist views of the right of resistance were wedded to views of the local community and the liberty of conscience. Hinted at by Calvin, it was Theodore Beza who explicated Reformed political theology most fully in *Concerning the Rights of Rulers over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects to Their Rulers*. Built upon the theological basis of covenant, specifically the analogous marriage covenant, Beza fashioned an argument based on two freely joining parties entering into mutual obligations one to the other. Beza moved beyond Aristotle, the Early Church Fathers, and medieval scholastics who saw the marriage relationship as the early antecedent of communal and civic relations. For Beza, marriage was the very model of the ruler-ruled relationship at a functional level. Mutual obligation was

The community's goal was to, as closely as possible, recreate the Christianity of the first (from the Latin *prime*) Christians. They were, in this respect, avowed primitivists. Primitive religion was not a derogatory idea for Covenanters. Rather, it was the ideal pursuit. To be primitive was to be most like the early Christians who had learned their Christianity from the Apostles and their converts. They sought to reach back over a millennium and a half of history and bring the past into their present.

The primitive impulse had another, Old Testament aspect: chosenness. This Jewish dimension identified participants with the chosen people of God and encouraged them to see themselves as God's holy nation. Central to this identity was the singing of the Psalms, the worship songs of the Old Testament. Covenanters generally refused innovations to song singing, and maintained a rigid adherence to literal translations of the Psalms in order to closely associate themselves with the chosen nation. Their ability to conflate the autonomy of local righteous community into a fight for national sanctity aided their politicization in larger affairs. They

ongoing, and a breach of the sacred contract could lead to divorce or annulment of the relationship. Although Beza rejected the idea of popular revolt, he did spell out the obligation of the ruled citizen first to be obligated to the "liberty of conscience". If the civic authority impeded on that right, or similar rights found in the natural law like the right to marry, have property, petition the government and others, then revolt was theologically justifiable. As John Witte, Jr. points out, Beza gave Reformed groups "the fundamental rights calculus that later Calvinists would refine and expand." See Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*; John Witte, Jr. "Rights, Resistance, and Revolution in the Western Tradition: Early Protestant Foundations", in *Law and History Review* (Fall 2008), 545-570.

fought for the life of Holy Scotland as God's modern equivalent to the chosen nation of Israel.

This religious zealotry was radical for its day, challenging the conservative top-down social order of church government and directly assaulting the rights of the king and nobility to control affairs of religion. Covenanters moved the concept of separate spheres of government, church and state, into a militant independence of the church from state control. The term radical, however, carries deep intellectual baggage and was complicated by the movements' interactions with the secular radicalism that exploded in the Atlantic revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The more historically accurate term for these religious zealots and their challenges to the social order is that used by their contemporary opponents: phanaticks.³

One critic portrayed Covenanters as a mythological beast from ancient lore, called by the name "PHANATICKS."⁴ Phanaticks, in its Scottish spelling, encapsulates the sixteenth and seventeenth century character of the Covenanter movement even though it was a term of disparagement in wider culture. The term was widely used and was especially employed by those self-styled moderates in civil and church government whose opposition to Covenanters was born of their own

³ For another historian who labels Covenanters "radicals", see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 32.

⁴ Janette Currie, "History, Hagiography, and Fakestory: Representations of the Scottish Covenanters in Non-fictional and Fictional Texts from 1638-1835" (Ph.D. diss., University of Stirling, 1999), 25.

entrenched social conservatism for elite social order and state control of church affairs. It is helpful both in connoting the sum total of social and ideological components of the movement as well as in differentiating the Covenanters sensibility from later secularized radicalism.

Phanaticism was kept alive in small cell group structures that met in family homes. Although the most visible and politically charged manifestations of the movement were gatherings of tens of thousands in the moors and amassed armies in the fields, the superstructure on which resistance was built was family and small gatherings in the home for prayer, song and study. These meetings were multi-generational and instilled for the young a sense of a sacred past bought by the pains of ancestors. They were lay-led, meaning clergy rarely appeared and thus the people at all social levels made the cultural investment that propelled the movement forward. Each family had its worship and various families gathered together to exhort, admonish and encourage one another. All of this gave Covenanters' religious commitment a self-policing element that increased its vitality amongst adherents. These small groups were where Covenanters learned what it meant to be phanaticks. This was where they imbibed on cultural memories, and the first place they lived out their own memory creation by being the very people they spoke about in their heroic religious past.⁵ This structure evolved slowly as the movement

⁵ Emily Moberg Robinson, "Immigrant Covenanters," Ph.D. Dissertation (University of California, Santa Cruz: 2004), 23-70.

was pushed underground, but remained an “invisible institution” within the larger kirks.⁶

Memory was thus stored in the cellular structures of the movement. Their use of this cultural legacy had the force of creating and empowering their unique social and political dissent. In these small groups Covenanters learned their phantick political theology. They reminded one another that they must stand “against the divine Right of *Archbishops, Bishops, &c.*”⁷ There, they told and retold memories of “Martyrdom on fields, scaffolds and Seas... Banishment, Imprisonment, Stigmatizing, [and] Tortures,” that they and their ancestors suffered for the cause.⁸ The telling and retellings led to living and reliving the experience of being a people of God, chosen to prophecy from the margins of society. Small groups kept phanaticks true to phanaticism.

Three central documents enshrined a peculiar political theology into their cultural memory: the Scottish National Covenant of 1638, the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, and the Westminster Confessional documents of the mid to late 1640s. These, along with various printed pamphlets and books that elucidated their

⁶ For an altogether different discussion of the same phenomenon in slave religion, see Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The ‘Invisible Institution’ in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 95-322.

⁷ Theophilus Timorcus, *The Covenanters Plea Against Absolvers, Or, a Modest Discourse Shewing Why those who in England and Scotland took the Solemn League and Covenant cannot judge their Consciences discharged from the Obligation of it* (1661), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 432, Union Theological College, Belfast, “The Epistile Declaratory,” point 25.

⁸ James Renwick, “Declaration of the Present State of our Testimony,” Special Collections, Union Theological College, Belfast, preface.

central tenants, were the living symbols of the Covenanter politico-religious struggle. They were read, preached upon and passed down through small groups and conventicles to succeeding generations. They were carried across the Irish Sea and Atlantic Ocean, and served as constant reminders of ancestors' fierce resistance to encroachments of the state onto the church's prerogative. It was with these texts they identified who was truly in and out of their fellowship, and from these documents they derived their historical moniker, Covenanter.

Historical characterizations are problematic things, and the following chapters on Scottish Covenanters attempt to carefully label people and groups in terms they would have understood themselves, either by using contemporary labels or appropriate historical constructs. However, I have studiously avoided denominational labels and divisions. I am not interested in writing an organizational history, although at times such observations are unavoidable. There is real reason to pause and consider that this approach may needlessly or falsely collapse distinct groups in ways that obscure their historical realities. I am aware of this danger, and seek to avoid its pitfalls. The approach taken here stems from the belief that the gradations within the Presbyterian fringe, the constant bickering, dividing, subdividing and re-dividing that occurred sprang from similar tendencies. The very process of constantly disagreeing and forming new organizational bodies was part of being a Covenanter.

This dissertation uses the following terminologies frequently without recourse to explanation. Covenanters are referred to as phanaticks, zealots and the

Presbyterian Fringe. After the Killing Times, they are also referred to as Society People and Cameronians. After the Erskine brothers led the Scottish Secession, this included Seceders as a branch of the Covenanter movement. Politically, Covenanters are also referred to in the period prior to 1660 as the Presbyterian party. The Scottish nobility, especially those who opposed Covenanters, are referred to variously as elites, nobles and conservatives. The most problematic term used is moderates. There were Episcopal moderates, favoring state control of church affairs, as well as Presbyterian moderates who favored cooperation with the state rather than antagonism. Later, Enlightenment moderatism became a hallmark for anti-extremism and anti-Covenanter Presbyterianism. In general, this study uses moderates as a political term denoting both those Episcopalians set against the Covenanters and those Presbyterians who occasionally were in line with zealots but were usually turned away by Phanaticism and drawn towards either toleration or disestablishmentarianism. In later chapters on America, moderation refers to the cultural adaptation of old traditions to more closely align with prevailing social norms. It was a blending of old imperatives with the new. In one of this studies' most significant findings, even phanaticks embraced certain forms of moderation as time wore on; this was especially true in the American South.

Covenanters in Scotland easily adapted their rhetoric of religious liberty, righteous community and resistance to tyranny into anti-slavery language and causes. In Scotland, this predominately took on the form of participating in abolitionist petitions, financial contributions and condemning Atlantic brethren for

the sin of slaveholding. Although their Scottish story is not dominated by the confrontation with slavery, the social and intellectual origins of later confrontations with the slave states in the American South were deeply rooted in sixteenth and seventeenth century issues of the church, the state, and the nature of religious liberty.

The Covenanter movement officially began in 1637-38 as an alliance between commoner phanaticks and more affluent Scottish moderates, both of whom sought to secure religious and political autonomy for Scotland from outside pressures from England. From its first, violent moments in the halls of Edinburgh's St. Giles Cathedral, the movement proved far more complex and uncontrollable than its instigators had anticipated. Over time, as this marriage of convenience broke down, the term Covenanter in the seventeenth century increasingly came to refer to the fringe elements in Scottish kirks. By the early eighteenth century, Covenanters had lost their moderate anchor altogether and were exclusively those Presbyterians most closely aligned with the doctrines of extremist Scottish Protestantism. They were the last phase of what historian James Turner has called the "orgy of creed making" that was the Protestant Reformation across Europe.⁹

The central argument of this work is that there was a cultural sensibility shared by all branches of the much-divided Covenanter movement and that this sensibility was sustained and transformed across three centuries. This shared

⁹ James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 23.

cultural heritage, which I label the Covenanter sensibility, was passed along in a series of small group cellular structures called praying societies. Sensibility, as Daniel Wickberg has described it, is “a pattern in which idea and emotion were bound up with one another.”¹⁰ It was a way of interpreting the world that involved all senses and that was passed along through set methods of child rearing, religious practice and civic activity.¹¹

This cultural sensibility was kept intact even as it changed through centuries of revolution, marginalization, and immigration. As it was adapted, its very plasticity gave it a renewed sense of importance, since what was actually becoming new seemed to participants to be part of something essentially timeless. The fact that these forms of belief and religious identification survived is not sufficient. How they survived and the changes and adaptations they constantly encountered is an area for fruitful study of religious culture in transition. Covenanters were a group engaged in the “complex historical processes of appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention, and revival.” These processes inform the activity of

¹⁰ Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *American Historical Review*, 112, No. 3 (June 2007), pp.661-684.

¹¹ For a helpful overview of the variety of approaches to the history of the senses and their cultural transference, see the following articles from a roundtable discussion in the *Journal of American History*. Mark M. Smith, “Still Coming to ‘Our’ Senses: An Introduction,” *Journal of American History* 95, No.2 (September 2008), 378-380; David Howes, “Can These Dry Bones Live? An Anthropological Approach to the History of the Senses,” *Journal of American History* 95, No.2 (September 2008), 442-451.

a people not living alone but “reckoning itself among the nations.”¹² As Eric Hobsbawm has elucidated, the most meaningful traditions are often invented in time and place but take on a sense of timelessness. These invented traditions hold strong meanings that will be most persistent “when such traditions are partly invented” but also “partly evolved in private groups.” Covenanting was this kind of tradition.¹³ There was a protean nature to the covenanter sensibility made all the more powerful by its malleability. It was able to flex to each national circumstance and therefore allowed adherents to believe they were being uniquely the same as previous generations while actually being quite different.

Various factors played into the ability of Covenanters to maintain a sense of cultural stability even as they changed. Certain centripetal forces, especially the lay-led small group devotionals, proved durable, emotionally motivating, intergenerational, widely shared across geographic space and gave a sense of the applicability of the Covenanter sentiment to social and political events. The loss of these central practices gradually eroded the building blocks of Covenanter sentiment and those within the movement attached tentacles to other cultural sentiments that shared parts of the old belief: revival based evangelicalism, Lockean and Jacksonian liberalisms, and for some were abandoned altogether in favor of

¹² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1988), 338-339.

¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge, 1983), 4.

racial slavery and racism. The cult of domesticity curtailed the traditional social and political spheres of women on the Presbyterian Fringe, relegating once admirable actions of female resistance into improper behavior. Such centrifugal forces pushed out from the old traditions and helped it to fall apart over time.¹⁴

Cultural anthropologists Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, leaning heavily on psychological models, have suggested that schemas the body creates through internalized data and externalized responses leads to a channeling of synaptic responses in the brain. “Meanings are based on cultural schemas,” they argue, “that have come to be shared among people who have had similar socially mediated experiences.” Schemas themselves are not meanings, but learned patterns of cultural connection. Based on the psychological rubric called “connectionism,” Strauss and Quinn have argued that cultural meaning comes from the weight the brain gives to certain connections over others in processing. What the person in a particular culture, in this case a Covenanter, believes to be true is less a propositional sentence (“Any nation without a covenant with God is invalid”) than an expectation or “disposition to react one way rather than another in a particular context.”¹⁵

Contra Clifford Geertz’s assumption that culture is primarily activities and symbols to be interpreted, they suggest that culture is not something “out there” in

¹⁴ Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* (New York: Cambridge, 1997), 85-86.

¹⁵ Strauss and Quinn, 6.

the ether, but taught and reinforced human psychological perceptions and interpretations of what is outside of the person. Cultural meaning is “the typical (frequently recurring and widely shared aspect of the) interpretation of some type of object or event evoked in people as a result of their similar life experiences.” Culture, in the case of this study a particular religious culture, is the recurring and regular patterns of religious action that constantly reinforce a sense of how the world is. Covenanter culture was, essentially, a shared experience consistently remanufactured.¹⁶

Such emphasis on culture as performative, that is to say, a sentiment that is created through doing but which also creates standardized interpretations of the world internally, attempts to walk a fine line between older functionalist models and emerging post-modern ones. It seems obvious from historical material that Covenanters did indeed act because they sensed the world in a certain way: not just at worship but socially and politically. But they also depended on the performance of such sentiments to reinforce them, and when those performances died out so too did the Covenanter sensibility. The decrease in small group praying societies and family devotionals slowed the process of performing peculiar faith and, in so doing, decreased its peculiarity. Covenanters became more like the dominant religious and

¹⁶ Strauss and Quinn, 6, 49; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-32, 87-125, 142-169.

political forms around them by the mid to late nineteenth century. In this sense, such an argument is Foucauldian.¹⁷

But it does not follow that that performance alone created meaning in a postmodernist sense. Rather, meanings were learned through performance and reinforced by them. As Bourdieu argued, durable cultural systems, which he called the habitus, can be “regulated and regular without in any way being the product of obedience to rules.”¹⁸ To see the powerful rhythms built into Covenanter culture is not to deny the agency of the individual actors. Indeed, in different national, ideological and social contexts this work will show how many varieties of responses they found. But agency, often simply a catchword for the admirable struggle of the free will against the oppressive powers of hegemonic social structures, is too simple a concept to understand the larger movement of the Covenanters.¹⁹

Historian David Miller perhaps came closest to identifying the unifying thread in Covenanter and Seceder history. Miller identified “the haggling tradition,” as the central feature of fringe Presbyterianism. This tradition of haggling over minutia of orthodoxy as defined by the Westminster Confession was the product of lay control over ministerial appointments. The laity, especially lay elders, saw it as their God-given task to oversee the church’s doctrinal purity. This tradition, Miller argues, has translated over the centuries into various on the spot social applications

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 31-122.

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a theory of practice* (New York: Cambridge, 1977), 82-83.

¹⁹ Strauss and Quinn, 259 fn. 11.

and emphases of the confessional tradition. The confessional tradition has harnessed lay Presbyterian orthodoxy in each generation tied to specific social issues seen as the pressing dangers to right order. These include Catholicism and the state (seventeenth century), national independence and traditionalism (eighteenth century), slavery and worship music (nineteenth century) and Bible literalism and sexuality (twentieth century).²⁰

When Gilbert Tennent, the famous Presbyterian “Son of Thunder,” lamented the religious divisions and debates in America he had been so instrumental in creating, Covenanter Alexander Craighead accused him of losing the very principles that made him a good Presbyterian. “Divisions, Separation and Quarreling” were regrettable, but not nearly as much as failing to engage in just such religious bickering. Hagglng kept away the dangerous toleration that “would open the Church Door too wide,” and required, “That all would adhere unto all the Principles of the Presbyterian Religion.” Being right meant never saying you were sorry for being so.²¹

The hagglng tradition comes close to the mark of Covenanter sensibility but fails to account for the broad spectrum of Covenanter’s historical experiences across

²⁰ David W. Miller, “Religious commotions in the Scottish Diaspora: a transatlantic perspective on ‘evangelicalism’ in mainline denominations” in Wilson, David A. and Mark G. Spencer, eds., *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World: Religion, Politics and Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 25.

²¹ Alexander Craighead, *The Reasons of Mr. Alexander Craighead’s receding from the present Judicatures of this Church, together with its Constitution*. (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin for the Author, 1743), 37.

politics, religion and society. It is a phenomenological term that captures an action not always associated with ideas. On the other hand, what made Covenanters peculiar was something more than an ideology, in its Hegelian sense of being a pure reflection of the mental map. Such a narrow intellectual approach falls short for its obvious inability to account for the communal nature of actions and those reactions which go beyond the contemplative and to the culturally instinctive.²²

George Rude has suggested the term popular ideology, by which he means a confluence of peasant cultural myths and a superimposed order from another, higher class that fuse to create a volatile mixture. This, too, falls short because Covenanter ministers, the very leaders who would speak into the group this class ideal, were chosen from amongst the people and were often chosen in conscious rejection of refined society. It might be possible, considering the relatively high literacy rates amongst Scottish and Irish Presbyterians, to see the religious polemic literature in a Marxist light, indoctrinating the lower caste in the jingoistic rituals of protest language. But this seems overly reductionist as well, since it was only after King Charles I and Archbishop William Laud threatened Presbyterian polity that resistance rose up. The Confession was not built to form.²³

²² For the most famous attempts to formulate a movement's mental map, or "mind," see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: American Book Company, 1938). See also Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind, from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

²³ George Rude, *Ideology and Popular Protest*. With a new forward and an updated Bibliography by Harvey J. Kaye (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1995), 22.

Pierre Bourdieu eviscerated the old ideological paradigm that interpreted cultural systems as causal to action. Bourdieu argued that historians, like anthropologists, should not treat “‘thought objects’ as ‘reasons’ or ‘motives,’” thus making them determinative to the decisions people make. Instead, Bourdieu insisted that the real work of understanding culture was to investigate “the mechanisms through which the relationship is established between structures and practices.” What people do and what people believe are interlinked in complexities that do not always flow from belief to action.²⁴

These mechanisms of relationship between structure and action Bourdieu labeled *habitus*. This habitual state of being in culture represents the predispositions and cultural tendencies for certain types of externalizations and internalizations. Culture is the learned inclination to express the world in a certain way and to comprehend new experiences with certain meanings. Those modified meanings in turn are externalized in ways that are informed by the *habitus*, though not dictated by them. Culture, then, is the process of interpreting the world and explaining the world formed and reinforcing certain expectations. For Bourdieu this was “the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality.” In short, people act in regular and even regulated ways not because they are being obedient to a set of rules, but because those actions make sense to the way they expect the world to react to their own actions. People do what they think will

²⁴ Bourdieu, 21.

produce the results they seek. When the world reacts as expected, it reinforces the tendency to act that way in the future. When the world reacts differently than expected, that information is processed and given a definition that both conforms to older beliefs and allows adaptation to them. The *habitus* is the process of cultural expectations, actions and adjustments.²⁵

The idea of *habitus* returns history to culture. Time, the essence of historical inquiry, is at the heart of cultural schemes. They are temporally formed and changing rather than timeless and objective external realities imposed on a given time. The concept of cultural dispositions gets closer to the heart of what made Covenanters unique for so long in so many places. Elders, then, were representatives of “the aggregate of the individuals endowed with the same dispositions.” Rather than the enforcers of power, elite *orthodoxy* on top of lay *heterodoxy*, the Presbyterian system of the Covenanters was the skillful manipulation by the people themselves of their own cultural *doxa*: the acted out systems of unspoken assumptions of local order, righteousness and expectation.²⁶

Robert Calhoon has suggested that groups such as Revolutionary Loyalists shared a “perception,” which accurately captures the cultural lens of the Covenanter sensibility.²⁷ The Covenanter sensibility was a way of seeing the world and

²⁵ Bourdieu, 72.

²⁶ Bourdieu, 15, 17, 159-171.

²⁷ Robert M. Calhoon, *The Loyalist Perception and Other Essays* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1989), 3-13. This essay first appeared in the mid-

interpreting it that was peculiar to this sect. William Fisk has suggested that Covenanters might best be characterized as a tribe in the aboriginal sense, possessing distinctive cultural meanings, tightly knit kin networks and established hierarchies of order and power; this might not be a poor description, either. There are certainly times when the history of Covenanters feels very much like a study of “the tribal and the modern.”²⁸

Both perception and tribalism convey an inward dynamic, a retreating from the world. This occurred at times. But even while they reinforced their dynamics internally, the Covenanter worldview was focused outwards at politics. Andrew Holmes has labeled this politico-religious dogma “Covenanter Politics.” The staying power of Covenanter ideology was its adaptability to historical circumstances. Holmes has defined Covenanter Politics as a collection of Pan-Presbyterian impulses including ant-Catholicism, anti-prelacy, the protection of civil liberties and the promotion of prosperity. Covenanter Politics was based first and foremost in the conviction that the Presbyterian system of church government was the established Biblical precedent and that the early doctrines of Covenanters were the closest approximations of Biblical truth applied to the contemporary world. These principles were straightforward, even if their application was at times messy. True

1970s and was an attempt to push back subtly against the wave of psychological historiography then in vogue. See footnote 1 of “The Loyalist Perception.”

²⁸ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1988), 189-214. Clifford’s references to affinity for pieces of tribal art placed abrasively out of context seems an interesting analogy to the lifting of Covenanter stories and dogma into a modern study.

religion had political implications. Christ was supreme over all nations, and therefore state churches must have Christ, not a Bishop, as head of the church and vicariously over the nation's spiritual realm. They also maintained a millennial spirit, a belief that the reign of Jesus was progressively making the world more and more like the one Christ would reign over for a metaphorical 1000 years. Thus moral reforms were important aspects of social impulse and political policy. At the high point of this religio-political structure sat the most sacred achievement of Covenanter Politics, the rights of the individual's conscience. Covenanters must be free from state interference. If the system of Presbyterianism protected one thing above all, it was God's design to place a hedge of protection around individual conscience. They might not be free from one another. The church could always censure, rebuke and admonish. But the personal convictions that were the hallmark of Covenanter lore were always to be protected. This gave Covenanter Politics a peculiarly flexible quality for a staunchly moralistic religion. Covenanter Politics proved an effective language of opposition in almost any circumstance, and liberals and conservatives alike displayed a deft ability to apply Covenanter principles and history to their various causes.²⁹

As Holmes makes clear, there was "no necessary relationship between certain types of religious outlook and certain types of political ideology." Indeed,

²⁹ Andrew R. Holmes, "Covenanter Politics: Evangelicalism, Political Liberalism and Ulster Presbyterians, 1798-1914", *The English Historical Review* CXXV, No. 513 (April, 2010), 345, 367-68.

throughout the nineteenth century, Covenanters were political supporters across the spectrum, from Home Rule to Unionist and from Conservatives like Henry Cooke to Liberal Reformers like Nathaniel McAuley Brown, coiner of the reform-minded “three F’s” of liberal land reform, and James McKnight, who opposed Roman Catholicism but supported home rule.³⁰

The move of Covenanters into moderate positions on slavery and, eventually, to conservative views on race, was not inevitable. Divisions within Irish Presbyterianism displayed the fact that many orthodox Irish Presbyterians were willing to jettison the traditionalism of past allegiances to adapt to new circumstances. Rev. Dr. Henry Cooke, the most prominent defender of Presbyterian orthodoxy in Ulster after he led the expulsion of the denomination’s liberal Arians in 1829, proved willing to forget the Covenanter past and make common cause with Anglicans in the Home Rule crisis. “Let us thank God,” he said, “that these days [of persecution by Covenanters] are gone by; and let us not stand, like moody magicians, conjuring up the ghosts of departed jealousies or injuries; but let our common faith and our common dangers, unite us for common protection.” For Cooke, moderation consisted of jettisoning the sacredness of ties to past persecutions and spiritual heroism. Covenanters in the American South could easily have made common cause with pro-slavery radicals for the defense of the South against Northern political agitation. That they did not, and clung to their

³⁰ Holmes, see especially 353, 361, 367-369.

distinctiveness while forging an awkward moderation on the principle social and political issues of the day until war came, requires a careful reading of their loyalties, experiences and beliefs.³¹

This dissertation attempts to employ all of these insights in a study of what I have termed the Covenanter sensibility. Covenanters shared a cultural sensibility composed of at least three parts. First, they lived in the long shadow of Holy Scotland's memory. For them the Knoxian Reformation had been Protestantism in its purest form, and the seventeenth-century Covenants and their martyrs provided the heroic reclamation of that virtuous time. Second, they grounded their nationalism (whatever nation that might be) in a sense of Protestant protest against their generation's (whatever generation that might be) moral corruption and religious declension. The seventeenth century Covenants sounded the clarion call for each country to return to God, and for the godly to reject or resist any nation that failed that test. Third, they inculcated these politically charged religious sentiments amongst the common people. Being part of this heroic tradition was empowering to the laity, and their leaders were as much representatives of that empowerment as the providers of it. In cell groups like religious societies, family devotionals and other associations they told and retold the stories of the Covenanter past, sure that these mythologies held very real meaning for their own lives.

³¹ Henry Cooke as quoted in Holmes, "Covenanter Politics," 348.

In short, a Covenanter sensibility was the sense of religious purpose infused to political resistance for people who believed what they were doing took them as much backwards in time to as it did forward. It was a sense of common bonds in present agitations to what they believed was an unchanging tradition of pursuing the religiously pure nation. That each generation changed that tradition substantially, adding new layers of meaning and application, should not cloud the fact that they believed very much that they were part of 1560, 1638, and 1643 regardless of their own location or time.

Whereas a Geertzian interpretation of religious culture would stress the way a symbol like the Covenants held primarily public meaning within the community, it is important to note that these meanings were stored in the minds of people. These meanings were communal, but also personal. Regular patterns of devotion, psalm singing, communion festivals and holy fairs, and political protests such as refusal to pay cess, vote or swear allegiance reinforced the personal attachment to the community. The more one said it, prayed it, sang it and taught it the more one believed it. The powerful symbol of the Covenants was not just in the covenants themselves, but in the ability of what they had come to mean for certain people to evoke a sentimental attachment.³²

³² Strauss and Quinn, 12-22. For a slightly dated statement of speech-act theory, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1962), 1-12.

As such, this work is perhaps best understood, in the words of Andrew Holmes, as “a chastened social history of ideas.”³³ I have sought to integrate a traditional study of religious history, dominated by ministers and theologians, with a social history of people who live their lives under those teachings. They did not always agree with their leaders’ ideas, and oftentimes interpreted and applied them in ways unforeseen by their ordained leaders. Still more, they often shaped the ideas themselves by requiring conformity and concession, traditionalism and adaptation as culture and society changed at a sometimes unsettling pace. It is no surprise in Chapter VII to find laity disavowing their Seceder ministers or in Chapter IX to find that whites and blacks interpreted the Covenanter message differently. But historians are only now becoming aware of the degree to which both laity and clergy, whites and blacks shaped messages of religious mutuality. Inasmuch as I am attempting to understand those relationships that are evident in product but often not in production, this entire dissertation is a chastening experience in intellectual humility. It is also an initial foray into understanding what made the Presbyterian fringe so unique, how it endured, when and how it changed, and where it went.³⁴

³³ Crawford Bribben and Andrew R. Holmes, *Protestant Millennialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790-2005* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 228.

³⁴ In quotations, I have taken the liberty to modernize language and punctuation throughout.

CHAPTER II

SCOTTISH PHANATICKS: SOCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF THE COVENANTERS, 1560-1637

Edinburgh, Scotland, 1637: The event that began the Covenanter movement was planned but took even organizers completely by surprise. Local elites recruited commoners from Edinburgh to stage a mass walk out at the Sunday worship service to make a point - a point they intended to discuss and resolve with other elite leaders afterwards. Someone forgot that house servants arrived at worship early to get things comfortable for their mistresses, including bringing footstools for rich feet. When the Dean of Edinburgh began the service, the crowd began an uproar and poor women hurled the stools at the pulpit screaming, "You'll say no mass in me lug!" Urging each other on, the crowd became increasingly unruly. This was not part of the plan.

The commoners not only walked out of St. Giles Cathedral, they ruffed up any crown or church official they could find. Local leaders of all social ranks moved quickly to reestablish order and convince the masses that their interests would be advocated. Within a year people everywhere had signed a National Covenant, a sacred agreement between Scotland and Heaven, "to maintain the true religion."¹ Nearly all of southern Scotland, regardless of class, turned out to sign their nation over to God.

¹ "The National Covenant or Confession of Faith of the Kirk of Scotland," in *Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1887), 79-83.

Unity abounded. Again, someone forgot that common folk defined “true religion” in their own way, and some people took this covenant far more seriously than others. This was also not part of the plan.

The social and intellectual origins of the Covenanter sensibility were rooted in the religious revolution that occurred across sixteenth and early seventeenth century Scotland. Those events empowered local people as never before and enabled a fierce protection of local prerogatives in kirk affairs and a challenge to the Scottish and English crowns in national church government. The experience of righteous community and formation of primitive societies of faith through discipline and worship were the hallmarks of this social experience. The language of civil and religious liberty, tyranny, and the separation of the two kingdoms spiritual and civic were the ideological outgrowth of this social change. Phanatick ideological paradigms emphasized the division of civil and religious kingdoms of authority, in which God ruled the physical and spiritual worlds through two different agents, church and state. While the king had authority over the physical, he was himself subject to the spiritual authority of the church. The “prerogative of King Jesus,”² was placed in the righteous community, through kirk and national church, above the

² *A proper project for Scotland· To startle fools, and frighten knaves, but to make wise-men happy. Being a safe and easy remedy to cure our fears, and ease our minds. With the undoubted causes of God’s wrath, and of the present national calamities. By a person neither unreasonably Cameronian, nor excessively Laodicean, ad idolizer of moderation; but, entre deus, avoiding extremes, on either hand: that is, a good, honest, sound Presbyterian, a throw-pac’d, true-blue Loyalist; for God, King and countrey: and why not for Co----t too* (1699), Manuscript Collection, British Library, London, 14.

prerogative and outside the authority of the civil magistrate. This was a political theology of two kingdoms that built on Calvinist frameworks but advanced them in a Scottish context. Both shifts took shape well before the Covenanter movement began in 1637.

Social Origins

The origins of Scottish phanaticism were grounded in the Protestant Reformation. This movement embedded phanaticism in the autonomy of two fundamental and intertwined institutions: the local church and the national one. Participating in the local church's self-policing structure gave generations of common folk in Scotland a personal investment in the autonomy of their congregations. The national corollary to that religious independence was the segregation of the national church from the authority of the state. Not all Scottish Protestants were phanaticks. Moderate and conservative forces vied to wrest control from the most dyed in the wool Protestants, often with great success. But militant Protestants were never snuffed out in early modern Scotland, and they became the core of what would one day be called the Covenanter movement.

The Reformation in Scotland officially began in 1560 when, on the heels of an English funded victory over pro-French factions, a reform parliament denied the authority of the Pope and established a Protestant national church. This church was created by legislation but condemned by Mary Queen of Scots, and thus, theoretically, from its birth constituted rebellion against the crown. In 1559 one Protestant element had written to the monarch that she must understand herself as

“a servant and no queen” once she entered the realm of Church business.³ John Knox went even further in 1564 when he proclaimed that “the prince may be resisted and yet the ordinance of God not violated.”⁴ Things were soon smoothed over out of political necessity, but the question of where the church stood in relation to the state, and the threat each posed to the other, remained unanswered in an awkward *détente*.⁵

There were actually two *détentes*. The first was between Protestants and the crown, the second between the Protestants and themselves, specifically the noble landholders in Parliament and the kirk ministers. When the ministers produced *The First Book of Discipline* in 1560, a strategy of church organization that would require massive payments by rich laymen to the Protestant church, it became apparent to landholders that the zeal of religious reformers like John Knox could be turned on themselves as easily as it was on the monarchy. The kirk, in the wrong hands, could be a threat to established leadership. The proposed document never made it through Parliament, and thus began long interplay between the four contending parties for political power and popular loyalties: the monarchy, landholders and moderate ministers, and the more phanatick clergy intent on the purest

³ Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk, and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1981), 122-125.

⁴ John Knox, “The Debate in the General Assembly,” (June 1564) in Roger A. Mason, ed. *On Liberty* (New York: Cambridge, 1994), 192.

⁵ For the underlying issues at work in the Scottish Reformation, see Alec Ryrie, *The Origins of the Scottish Reformation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 72-126; on Phanaticks, see 126-135.

Protestantism possible. Over time, the political skill of King James VI/I and the danger zealots posed to landed laity served to create a more moderate Protestantism than many clergy would have liked.⁶

Moderates were willing, even eager, to accept Catholic models like an episcopal church structure overseen by king-appointed bishops. Such a model would retain control of the church in the hands of the king or at least the landholders, who because they funded the local kirks, as patrons retained the right to appoint ministers. Zealots rejected these older forms in favor of a church founded on the teachings of John Calvin in Geneva. Calvin had argued for a church government closely following the instructions of the Bible and early church. This Genevan model was commonly called presbyterianism.⁷

Presbyterianism was almost a bottom up religion. It used a series of church courts to oversee religious affairs that were responsive to local voices. In this structure, the common people in good standing would elect their local elders, a

⁶ Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation: Church and Society in sixteenth century Scotland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 124-138. James VI/I also sought to create a pan-British union. His early, sometimes abortive attempts to unify the two kingdoms started with his attempt to flatten out the religious differences in the two realms. See Maurice Lee, Jr. *Government by Pen: Scotland under James VI and I*, 155-189.

⁷ Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 183-185. Donaldson points out that the first attacks were not on the office of Bishop itself, but the image of corrupt bishops. By the mid-1570s, however, what he labels "the presbyterian party" were against bishops in principle. James VI would later use that office as a buttress against presbyterian gains. Presbyterians had no problem with the office of bishop as such, but the title became something of a political football in their debates, representing larger issues of church-state division.

word translated from the Greek word *presbytos* from which the system derived its name. The elders (*presbytos*) would meet in local sessions that oversaw kirk affairs along with the minister. Each session sent representatives to a presbytery, where regional issues were resolved. Each presbytery, in turn, sent representatives to a larger regional meeting called a synod. The various synods sent representatives to a national meeting called the General Assembly. That Assembly would be the national church, a church of the people's Biblical, anti-Catholic faith.⁸

The support for these models was about more than ideas. It involved political calculus that was rooted in the nature of Scottish society itself. There were two Scotlands in the early modern period. The Highlands in the northwest, dominated by Gaelic speaking peoples with close ties to northern Ireland, were a haven for pro-Catholic clans and their chieftains. This feudal area proved a tough nut to crack for Reformation advocates and remained the least zealously Protestant area of Scotland.⁹ The Lowlands, on the other hand, was closer to England geographically, politically and culturally. Higher English literacy rates and economic

⁸ Zealots were not against bishops per se. In fact, most recognized that the office appeared in the ancient Biblical texts. What became the bone of contention between moderates and phanaticks regarding bishops was their political role, in which the bishops represented de facto control of the church by the monarch, who appointed them.

⁹ Cowan, *The Scottish Reformation*, 139-158. Catholic traditions such as Corpus Christi celebrations died hard everywhere, and any strict geographic division will miss pockets of both Catholic and Protestant experience on the other side of false petitions. As a general rule, however, Catholic sentiments were most apparent in the Highlands.

ties to the booming food markets in and around London allowed Puritanism to penetrate into these areas and gave the movement staying power.¹⁰

Within the more Protestant lowlands, further divisions manifested themselves. Areas south of the River Tay were characterized by political alliances between landholding elites and the proto-middle class townsmen who dominated local church leadership. To the southwest existed a stronger peasant culture and smaller farming that lent itself to resentment against encroachments on customary arrangements by elites anxious to adopt more English models such as land enclosure. In an era when James VI, King of Scotland became James I of England, resentment against encroaching Anglicanization of politics, culture and religion provided a serious point of contention in national affairs. The southwest area of the Lowlands, then, was rife with antagonism against the English and those in Scotland most closely aligned to them. Scotland in the 1500s was more Puritan than England, the Lowlands were the most Protestant areas in Scotland, and the southwest was the most fiercely localist area in this Protestant stronghold. This area became the bedrock of phanatic support amongst the laity.¹¹

¹⁰ Walter Makey, *The Church of the Covenant, 1637-1651* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 5-6. Makey argues that parts of Scotland underwent a silent revolution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Slowly feudal society was being eroded in southwest Scotland by the transfer of wealth from superior to vassal, and though "it would be absurd to suggest a causal relationship between inflation and Calvinism," he points out that "the one nourished the triumph of the other."

¹¹ Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 175-176.

On the ground, Protestant phanaticism began with attempts to create and maintain righteous communities. Strongest in Scotland's southwest lowlands, with pockets elsewhere, these communities elected their elders from amongst themselves. The elders, in turn, exercised a rigorous moral discipline over the community. Elders were elected for their social status and perceived holiness and then became the localities' self-policing mechanisms of piety precisely because they held respectable positions in local affairs.

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, prominent lairds and other lesser nobles constituted as high as 75 percent of kirk eldership. Over time this changed and local sessions were filled less with gentlemen than with tenant farmers and feuars of a middling sort. By the turn of the seventeenth century, elders tended to be middling tenant farmers and merchants as well as skilled craftsmen. In the more heavily populated burghs these men were more well to do, but in the countryside they ran the gamut of social and economic roles. Nowhere were elders poor servants. They generally represented the best of the yeomen class. These men carried formidable weight in local affairs, but that weight was not always tied to social status. Elders were oftentimes on par with, or even below, the economic status of the very people on whom they enforced discipline. Their presence on the

session said less about their financial status than their perceived piety amongst the people.¹²

The localism of the Presbyterian system was crucial. As late as 1745 less than 3,000 Scots could vote in national elections. In contrast, from 1560 forward most common people in good standing voted for their church leaders. This added additional local and democratic elements. Most people's lives never left their parish boundaries. Their primary experience was not with the theological debates between divines or the political conflicts of nations, but on the local concerns that dominated kirk and community life. An examination of 123 parish records revealed that elections for elder happened on average every two to four years.¹³ Parliament was distant, occasional and unrepresentative. The kirk session was close, regular and, for its time, highly representative. They made important decisions in the everyday lives of people. This religious involvement was itself highly political. Any perceived encroachment from outside forces on community autonomy was an attack at multiple levels on religious and political life.¹⁴

The session of elders wielded great influence and power in their communities.¹⁵ They were in charge of naming the fencible men from each

¹² Walter Makey, *The Church of the Covenant, 1637-1651*. (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 20-23, 87, 146, 152.

¹³ Makey, *The Church of the Covenant*, 126-127.

¹⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. Second Edition (New Haven: Yale, 2005), 51.

¹⁵ Makey, *The Church of the Covenant*, 137.

community, that is, those eligible for conscription into military service.¹⁶ They were, however, only one element of lay control over the kirk. Many people from the pews fiercely guarded against attacks on lay control. The most public examples often involved the choice of a minister. Bad enough that many local patrons still claimed the right to appoint a pastor for church's on their family lands, the appointment of ministers by bishops caused even more resentment and resistance. Parishioners inundated church courts with accusations against insufficiently reformed pastors. In Ayr in 1636 an entire congregation walked out of the service when the minister insisted on kneeling at communion, leaving the pastor alone in the kirk building.¹⁷ Despite including a diversity of common voices, the kirk could speak with remarkable clarity. The elders remained the primary interface of the kirk between the people and the state as well as between the people and themselves.

The session's central role regarded discipline. Discipline was a term with two meanings, with each understanding reinforcing the other. Discipline was, according to the *Second Book of Discipline*, "appointed, and practiced."¹⁸ It was first the appointed doctrine of the church. In this regard it echoed the word "disciple,"

¹⁶ Edward M. Furgol, "Scotland turned Sweden: The Scottish Covenanters and the Military Revolution, 1638-1651" in *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1990), 139-140.

¹⁷ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), 368-369. Readers interested in knowing more about religious society of early Presbyterians should consult Margo Todd's magisterial study of early modern Scottish religion.

¹⁸ *The First and Second Book of Discipline. Together with some Acts of the General Assemblies Clearing and Confirming the Same: and an Act of Parliament* (1621), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 211, Union Theological College, Belfast, A4.

meaning the follower of a particular teaching. Anyone who followed the Presbyterian way was a disciple, or follower, of that religious path. The way the kirk organized itself, dictated its teachings and established its theological boundaries was the discipline of the church. Discipline in this regard was an adjectival noun, descriptive of what the church believed and was.

Discipline was also a verb. It was what the church did on a weekly basis to maintain its phanatick commitment to righteous community. This was the elders' primary task and took up most of their time together. Once elected, they had the unenviable role of enforcing moral rigor on a community that often resisted its own elected leaders. They accomplished this through what one historian has called a "Taliban-like police force."¹⁹ Presbyterian kirk sessions were religious courts; they were the enforcement arms of religious law. Elders spent many Sundays not at worship but on the streets looking for those violating the mandatory attendance in each parish. Elders entered homes, searched rooms, visited taverns, and surveyed fields to catch those playing "nineholes" (golf) rather than worshiping. They were highly successful, but their very diligence suggests prominent elements of lay resistance.

Discipline was not only enforced, then, it was also resisted. Not everyone in the community was equally invested in religious phanaticism , and not all accepted

¹⁹ Miller, "Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?," James H. Murphey, ed., *Evangelicals and Catholics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 41.

the elders' authority. The poor of Edinburgh, in some cases the same who would one day be involved in religious riots, had a reputation for convening on the streets "every night and pass[ed] the time in all kind of riot and fitly and beastly lechery and whoredom."²⁰ Resisting their enforcements was not uncommon, including barring the door and hiding. Some groups set lookouts to warn of approaching elders.²¹ On the whole, though, elders reflected their communities more than ruled over them. Most cases before the kirk court were not brought by the elders but by the people themselves. People turned themselves in for moral failures. Others tattled on their neighbors by conveying rumors of immorality. Many directly appealed to the session to resolve a grievance with an enemy. As literacy increased, it became common to receive written accusations against a party.²²

Beyond playing their role as religious sheriffs, elders also guarded the door of membership into the righteous community. Sessions investigated new applicants for membership by asking them doctrinal questions, for which the right answers were required. Membership meant the ability to participate in communion, and anyone taking the Sacrament unworthily would, according to the Bible, "eat and drink their own damnation."²³ Right answers, then, were crucial for both sides, and

²⁰ *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* as quoted in Maurice Lee, Jr. *Government By Pen: Scotland under James VI and I* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1980), 155.

²¹ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 32-33, 41.

²² For an Irish instance of this, Drumboig Session book, January 17, 1816, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast.

²³ 1 Corinthians 11.29.

the wrong answers would require more time spent in family or communal prayer for further study. The very process of coming of age in a Scottish kirk was the process of learning how to appropriately conform to the social norms that led to inclusion rather than exclusion. This was discipline as a noun. It kept the kirk true to what it was by inculcating that insight into each generation of worshipers.

Nothing more dramatically illustrated discipline as a verb than the discipline of moral offenders, especially sexual sinners. Elders vigorously policed sexual purity and readily handed out punishment to the wayward. This was both a theological issue and a social one. Children out of wedlock posed more than a social stigma, but would add to the community's already significant poverty problems. Not all actions were after the fact. The session of Perth took proactive measures when it ordered a widower to move his female servant out of the house because "of her beauty and of her being delicately clad and none being in household with them but they two, which are great allurements to him to be enamored with her." Similar actions removed male servants from single female homes. Punishment for rape, abandonment and abuse were regular occurrences, though the all-male sessions' punishments were rarely aimed at just one party and, tragically, could be as harsh on the victims as the perpetrators.²⁴

Elders had a complicated relationship with social norms. They were both highly representative of late sixteenth century assumptions about class and gender

²⁴ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 291-295.

and simultaneously surprisingly egalitarian. Wealthier members could occasionally buy their way out of humiliation, but fines were leveled proportionally to status and oftentimes the poor were relieved of extraneous burdens more so than the rich. Men and women in Scotland were punished for sexual sins with roughly equal amounts of penitence. Men and women were punished for the same crimes in much the same ways, and men often were forced to bear higher financial penalties in line with their ability to pay. “Tyrannical husbands” were upbraided for their abuse of wives, and daughters right to dissent to a marriage was generally protected.²⁵ Alcoholism, child and parental abuse, failure to support a family and various social problems were all addressed with little reference to gender. The testimony of men and women seems to have been weighted equally, though children’s testimony’s were generally taken with greater suspicion.²⁶ This mutuality of the sessional court and the elective manner in which they were given the keys to the Kingdom in local affairs suggests that class and gender alone may not be adequate tools for parsing the meanings of their experiences. They were both enforcers of tradition and challengers to the abuse of power. Their actions were certainly not derived from a forward-looking view of gender. The laity vested what leveling functions they

²⁵ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 174-179.

²⁶ Evidence regarding children here comes from a later Irish example. Cahans Session Book, March 27, 1768. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast. A ten-year-old girl was brought in as witness for one case but “no stress was laid on her evidence.”

exerted into the hands of elected representatives of the people. The community enforced ethical expectations on itself, and the session was the means to that end.

Ultimately, the session sought to create unity. For most zealots, unity meant conformity. The majority of sessions strictly enforced moral conformity on a host of issues, especially attendance at worship. Religious attendance was seen as a remedy to other social sins, and the linchpin for maintaining corporate purity. Sickness was an allowable excuse, but honesty was enforced and the sick could expect investigations into their veracity. Selling ale on the Sabbath to the gathered crowd and showing up to worship drunk were not uncommon offenses to this holiness, as were multiple distractions from the pews during worship. Many people fell asleep, prompting the Perth session to empower an elder with a “red staff” with which to awaken the slumbering. Children sometimes threw rocks in church, though only after age eight, when they were deemed old enough to not be a nuisance in the service. Some men insisted on bringing their dogs inside, to untold disruption.²⁷

Another disruption that sessions regulated was interpersonal conflict. In a paradoxical way, the most contentious Protestants, perhaps in the world, used their local courts to resolve conflict and bring about community harmony. Sessions used their power to resolve squabbles ranging from the personal to the economic. In 1567 the Canongate session postponed communion until “dissention and public

²⁷ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 34-41

discord between the crafts and maltmen” could be resolved, appointing a commission of elders for the task of peacemaking.²⁸

No matter the nature of offence, once guilt was established the first step towards resolution was repentance. Repentance remained, as it had in Catholic parishes before the Reformation, a ritual of great significance. Sessions asked questions about repentance and sought “a credible profession of repentance.”²⁹ Once they believed that the individual had “discovered sorrow” for their sin, punishment could begin. In Scotland, those who repented of small, unknown or first time offences were often given the “privy censure,” a punishment of private admonishment in front of the elders.³⁰ When the sin was egregious, well known, or recurrent repentance was a public affair. Standing on a penitent stool or sitting on the penitent bench in front of the pulpit and in front of the entire community, sinners were required to wear linen or sackcloth to display the varying degrees of severity of their mistakes. Women were not allowed to cover their heads, and men were not allowed to wear large bonnets to hide their faces. Public parades through the streets, such as that of a Perth woman forced to carry above her head the tongs she had used to strike her husband, were also used. In between preaching times an

²⁸ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 93.

²⁹ Cahans Session Book, July 29, 1753.

³⁰ Greaves, *God's Other Children: Protestant nonconformists and the emergence of denominational churches in Ireland, 1660-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1997), 167.

iron cage around the head, called a brank, was sometimes worn while standing beside the church door as the congregation entered and exited the building.³¹

These dramatizations of piety were replete with meaning. No one sat closer to the pulpit than the penitent. On display before the entire community, sometimes several Sundays in a row, fornicators, adulterers, Sabbath breakers and even killers were shamed and then in stages brought back into the fold. Shaming was not the object of this choreographed repentance; it served as the means towards communal reconciliation. Critical to this pageantry was the Calvinist language of humility. On display for passing entrants, sinners begged for the prayers of the brethren as they entered the kirk. Before the pulpit, penitents were given admonition by the preacher. They must then respond, and respond with the right words, to continue on the road to restoration. The right answers had a formula: an admitting of guilt, a plea for forgiveness, and a pledge to reform. At times, penitents balked and used their public stage to berate their accusers or deny their crimes. At other times they failed to play the sorrowful role, as when William Gillies of Perth got a case of the giggles while standing on the penitent stool in 1631.³²

Generally people played their part in the drama because the consequences against not doing so were severe. In communities in which church elders often doubled as local constables and business leaders, and in which excommunication from communion could mean estrangement from rights of family and economic life

³¹ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 127-149.

³² Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 155-164.

in community, the incentives for compliance were strong. Shaming may have been the core concept of Presbyterian discipline, but the worst consequence of incalcitrance was the refusal to baptize a child. This was, at least in part, because most Scots retained a connection between infant baptism and salvation. Infant mortality rates for sixteenth century Scotland were roughly equivalent to those in France, where 28 percent died in the first twelve month, and 43 percent by the age of four.³³ Under such circumstances, families had deeply personal reasons to keep their kinship ties unblemished by the taint of separation from kirk and community.³⁴

Session books are dominated by these cases of sin, punishment and restoration because church discipline was a place where the communal and the theological met in physical ways. Reintegration to the body of Christ, communion privileges, and right standing was also a healing of civic wounds. When William Thompson, an elder in Aberlady confessed to shooting and wounding George Perth in 1639, it was the victim who finished the repentance ceremony by taking Thompson by the hand, lifting him off of bended knees, and walking with him back into the congregation.³⁵ The end goal of discipline was twofold: to purify the body corporate, but also to reinstate the individual to it. Restoration was always the goal, and elders seem to have mixed their high moral standards with a general acceptance

³³ Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland* (St. Andrews, Scotland: Ashgate, 2010), 143.

³⁴ Greaves, *God's Other Children*, 236.

³⁵ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 167.

that ethical failings were part of living together in religious community. The role of discipline was restoration as well as deterrent.³⁶

The process of investigation by the session reinforced “the notion that the way to salvation was primarily a matter of having the right answers.”³⁷ Questions and responses came with expectations that both sides knew the game being played, and both took it seriously enough not to treat it as a game at all. This was serious business in the life of the local kirk. Life and death, for one as well as for all, might hang in the balance of how belief, practice, repentance and restoration were understood. The gravity of the situation came from a general agreement on one thing, sin.

Any study of discipline in early modern Scottish Presbyterianism requires an appreciation for the role and nature of sin in the early modern Protestant mind. Sin, believed to be a state of separation from God, was lived out in activities condemned by God or the godly community. Adultery was a sin by God’s explicit Biblical command. Breaking a communal covenant was a sin by virtue of the community’s commitment to God. Many things were sinful, and sins had consequences.

³⁶ The presence of a restoration process in agrarian community was very different from the process of moral abstinence (sex, alcohol, violence) that came to dominate reform movements, even Covenanters, from the nineteenth century forward.

³⁷ Miller, “Religious commotions in the Scottish diaspora,” in David Wilson and Mark G. Spencer, eds., *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World: Religion, Politics and Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 25.

Specifically, individual sins had communal consequences. Earthquakes, plagues, and poor harvests could be attributed to the individual sins that had corrupted the entire community. Sin operated as social cancer. To leave it unchecked was to invite destruction on the church, the town, and the nation. A process to stop evil and restore or excise the backslidden was of the utmost importance to Protestantism in Scotland.

People in Scotland and Ireland believed in sin, hell, heaven, and kirk. Many reported sins out of overwhelming guilt that would never and could never have been otherwise discovered. Some begged for harsher punishments. Others were so anxious to confess they forgot to come first to the session and went directly to the congregation gathered on Sunday.³⁸

The session was important not because it wielded undue power, but because it reflected the desires of the community writ large to exert religious authority and keep the kirk, community and nation morally pure. They enforced Biblical phanaticism on communities that, while often resisting, accepted the basic validity of that concept because they believed in the consequences of not doing so. Operating as a nexus of social welfare agencies, marriage counselors, and police against domestic crimes, the elders were what their fellow kirk members expected them to be. They kept sin at bay in any way possible.³⁹

³⁸ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 170-171.

³⁹ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 266.

Church discipline, for pastors, elders, sinners, and onlookers, was many things. For all, it connected belief to practice. People heard, repeated, took part in and acted out faith in godly judgment, forgiveness, and restoration. By taking part physically in the ethereal, they claimed these beliefs as their own. They felt the weight of sin, they shuddered at the thought of separation from God in hell and the community in kirk. They experienced the joy of forgiveness and forgiving. At times, they experienced the cathartic freedom of challenging their betters by not sticking to the script. Most did as they were supposed to do, and in so doing the faith became their own. They did not simply believe, they acted out their beliefs. A belief acted out is owned, connected with, and internalized by externalization. Doubting the validity of kirk doctrine was more difficult once one had participated in kirk discipline. In this way, righteous community could be self-enforcing and self-reproducing with little help from the outside.

Discipline was going somewhere, and that somewhere was the fair. Communion was the highest ritual of Christian piety for Scottish churches. Only the pure could enter into it, and the several days before the sacrament were spent using discipline to ready the corporate body morally for the event. This nearly weeklong festival was called a holy fair.⁴⁰

Though there was some variation, the most common progression for the communion festivities began with a fasting day on Thursday to prepare spiritually

⁴⁰ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 3-68.

for the event.⁴¹ On Saturday meetings were held with the elders of the church. In these meetings families and individuals were examined for holy living, corrected if found to be in errors, repentance required, and discipline handled most often by denying of the sacrament. To take communion members must be in good moral standing. They must also be able to recite the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and all Ten Commandments. Anyone suspected of Catholic leanings would be quizzed as to the meanings of various doctrinal statements. Rightly speaking the words of doctrinal purity was crucial to moving towards approval, specifically the ability to explain justification. A clear renunciation of works righteousness and an acknowledgement that one was justified "by faith in Christ only" was required to receive entrance.⁴²

Those found upright, or those who submitted to reproach and repented quickly, were given a token to present at the communion service. Because the numbers often grew so large, the ministers handling the communion service were often borrowed from other areas and could not know the personal character of every communicant. The token method provided a means to ensure no one slipped through the cracks and brought damnation on themselves and sin on the kirk. The communion token, in a religion bereft of its icons, holy water, and incense was a

⁴¹ The pre-communion fast day tradition dates back at least as far as 1570. See Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 98.

⁴² Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 79.

physical marker of inclusion (or exclusion) from the highest sacred festival of the year.⁴³

After discipline was handled, the daylong Sabbath service included more preaching, the sacrament itself, and psalm singing. The excursion concluded on Monday with a service of thanksgiving, more psalm singing, and then the journey home. This process might be repeated seasonally, and attempts were made no less than yearly to hold a holy fair in most areas of southern Scotland.⁴⁴

The event was lived drama. Festal communion seasons provided rhythmic, seasonal experiences of religious guilt, doubt, forgiveness and ecstasy. People did not build up to and live in the long shadow of one salvation experience but experienced salvation as a “recurring annual experience” in communion.⁴⁵ Despite its iconoclast reputation, Calvinist communion touched every sense: the sight was struck by the plainness of style, emphasizing the closeness of Christ to the commoner; the listener heard the sound of the preachers’ exhortations of unworthiness, sometimes right up to the moment of partaking; fingers on the bread and wooden cup brought the long awaited and fasted-for moment, literally, at hand; tongues tasted the wine, often spiced to remind the participant of the bitterness of Christ’s suffering. The entire experience acted on the gathered crowd even as they acted out the ritual in participation.

⁴³ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 97-98.

⁴⁴ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 61.

⁴⁵ Miller, “Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?,” 43.

Nothing was more clearly staged than who was in and who was out. The tokens were visible evidence of inclusion. Failure to obtain one was proof of exclusion. This meant more to some than to others, but everyone saw. Many traveled several days, and at times groups went back and forth from Scotland and Ireland, to participate and observe these holy fairs.⁴⁶ They were social events; parents took great pains to dress marriage eligible children well and hawkers of wares knew to be where the buyers congregated. Holy fairs were often accused of being places of drunken debauchery, crude festivity, religious zealotry, and teeming sexuality. In the famous words of Robert Burns, "The lads an' lasses, blithely bent; To mind baith *saul* an' *body*."⁴⁷ In these gatherings of the thousands and tens of thousands, the spiritual and the earthly existed cheek by jowl.

The communion service empowered common people with a religiously charged experience that was tangibly a divine event in the temporal world. In it, the sheep were separated from the goats and sinners moved through a process of repentance and restoration that brought powerful emotions of guilt and forgiveness into socially acceptable parameters. The cathartic release of forgiveness and hope for the future were grounded in the present realities of Scottish life. It was hard to leave a communion service not feeling chosen of God, or at least convinced that God had a chosen people in Scotland.

⁴⁶ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 32.

⁴⁷ Robert Burns, "The Holy Fair," *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley, 3 Vols (Oxford, 1968), Volume 1, 128-137.

God's chosen people in the Bible were the Jews, and the songs of the chosen people were the Psalms. The Scottish people, now sure they were chosen of God themselves, adopted these as their own. They adopted them with some quirks, to be sure. Since Hebrew rhyming patterns were impossible to insert into English, the most effective means of this was arrangements of the Psalms into certain rhythms and organization that more closely fit well-known tunes and grammar. Such books were called Psalters.⁴⁸

Phanaticks felt especially connected to the songs of the Israelites, as singing them reinforced their vision of themselves as God's chosen people, a holy remnant in a forsaken but once-promised land. Helpful in this experience was the particular Psalter they used. Early psalters were unabridged, making no attempt to work out the awkward elements of singing songs thousands of years after their contexts. But for zealots this proved helpful in reinforcing their peculiar sensibility. The seeming antiquarian nature of some of the Psalms became a tool in reinforcing the connection with ancient Israel and seeing themselves as the modern version of this Biblical experience.

Psalm 83 was a telling example:

Against thy chosen people they do crafty counsel take;
and they against thy hidden ones do consultation make.
Come, let us cut them off, they say, from being a nation,

⁴⁸ Rouse's Psalter, otherwise known with some changes as the *Scottish Metrical Psalms*, was approved in 1650 by the Scottish Presbyterians and remained the standard worship music of the Covenanters well into the nineteenth century.

that of the Name of Isr'el may no more be mention.
For with joint heart they plot, in league against thee they combine.
The tents of Edom, Ish'elites, Moab's and Hagar's line;
Gebal, and Ammon, Amalek, Philistines, those of Tyre;
And Assur joined with them, to help Lot's children conspire

For each ancient foe “in league against thee” believers were encouraged to find relevant contemporary connections. Political and religious opponents were given powerful, Biblical, substitute identities to strengthen the sense that society peoples’ mission was canonical. The “tents of Edom, Ish’elites, Moab’s and Hagar’s line” could be anyone who seemed to pitch their tent against the Protestant cause. Sung to simplified tunes, they were easily learned and readily committed to memory over years of repetition. All of this combined for a powerful tool of cultural self-definition.⁴⁹

This emphasis on holiness, community, and a chosen people transferred easily to a sense of national identity. In 1580 Presbyterian minister John Craig penned the King’s Confession, or Negative Confession. Written as a disavowal (a negating) of Catholicism, it reaffirmed Knoxian religion. “The true Christian faith” had been “defended by many and sundry notable kirks and realms but chiefly by the kirk of Scotland.”⁵⁰ The task of protecting this vision of society was peculiarly Scottish.

⁴⁹ *Scottish Metrical Psalms*, Psalm 83.

⁵⁰ *The King’s Confession* in John C. Johnson, *Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* (Edinburgh: Andrew Ellition, 1887), 48-49.

In the seventy years after Protestantism was established in Scotland, the lowlands were steeped in a religious experience very different from older modes of Catholicism. Church discipline, local church decision-making, and religious experience were placed in the hands of small communities of churches. Ministers preached, but they preached a doctrine largely in line with the expectations of the laity themselves. Meanwhile elders met regularly in presbyteries across Scotland to handle the church's local affairs. Those courts climbed up to the General Assembly, a body of elders and ministers making decisions on national church affairs. It looked very much like a parliament ruling the kingdom. It was not. But there were two kingdoms, and the common folk had a louder voice in one than they did in the other.

Ideological Origins

The ideological origins of Covenanter faith and practice were tied to the European Reformation, especially that of Calvin's Geneva. It was also informed by the writings of French Huguenot divines. Yet, in its Scottish context, the ideological origins were also the outgrowth of two generations of experience living out the righteous community model in local kirks. The stress put on the two kingdoms model by Scottish thinkers was very much the product of the experience of autonomous kirk life by the people. As pressures against the Reformation model pushed for new innovations that sounded to the laity very much like returns to Catholic worship practices, leaders rode the wave of popular discontent and produced an intellectual defense of the new Scottish religious tradition. This

intellectual contribution in turn informed common cultural sensibilities as to the right expressions of the way the world should be. Presbyterians' sense of the world created theological statements that steeled the laity for revolt.

In 1578 the Scottish Kirk's *Second Book of Discipline*, which unlike its predecessor survived a parliamentary vote, laid out the distinct roles for Scottish monarchs and ministers. There were two kingdoms, one with the "power of the Sword," the other the "power of the keys." Though different, "these two kinds of power have both one authority, one ground, one final cause" and they "tend to one end." Where there were two powers, there must be two power structures, and the document was specific that "only Christ, the only spiritual King and governor of his Kirk" was to be called the head of the church. This ecclesiology meant that the king, assumed at all times to be a member of the church itself, must submit to its spiritual oversight and not set himself over the church as Henry VIII of England had done. There must be, in a sense, a separation of the church of the realm and the person of the king. "The exercise of both these jurisdictions cannot stand in one person," the church insisted. Above all, the magistrate was to have no role in the appointments of the church's leadership.⁵¹

This significant curtailing of civil power was, on the surface, about mutually supporting institutions. "The Magistrate ought to assist their Princes in all things

⁵¹ *The First and Second Book of Discipline, as it was formerly set forth in Scotland by publicke authoritie, anno 1560 And is at present commanded there to be practiced, anno 1641. Together with some acts of the general assemblies, clearing and confirming the same: and an act of Parliament* (London: 1641), 78-79.

agreeable to the word” while the ruler should assist the church to “punish the transgressors by Civil means.” However, the line between mutuality and the submission of the king to the church was razor thin. “Notwithstanding, as the Ministers and others of the Ecclesiastical estate are subject to the Magistrate,” in things civil, “so ought the person of the Magistrate be subject to the Kirk spiritually, and in Ecclesiastical government.”⁵² These attempts to wrest spiritual authority away from the state would have far reaching ramifications in both theory and practice.

Sixteenth-century Calvinists had evolved their thinking into what has been broadly termed “federalist theology.” This conceptualization post-dated and modified John Calvin’s teachings on God’s Covenant with humanity over time. Hardened in the Westminster Confession, federalist theology held that God had established a covenant with Adam called the Covenant of Works, conditional on his complete obedience, for everlasting life and perfect peace. Sin had erased that covenant, but God’s other covenant, the Covenant of Grace, then was made with the new Adam (Christ) who fulfilled it completely and thus brought grace to the old Adam and all his children. The basic obligations of the Covenant of Works, that of moral obedience, was still in effect and primarily in the realm of the civil magistrate. Thus cheating, stealing, lying, fornicating and Sabbath breaking were still in effect and the long arm of the law could rightly pursue their implementation. The

⁵² *Second Book of Discipline*, 78-79.

Covenant of Grace, however, since it was fulfilled by Jesus, was a spiritual matter and therefore the concern of the church. These realms overlapped, especially regarding morality, but the governing bodies of the church could implement their own discipline over things of grace, namely the sacraments. The implication of this teaching was that the state and the church, while dealing simultaneously with similar issues and the same population, were in separate cosmological spheres and should not be intermingled.⁵³

The phanatick implications of this theology in practice became quickly apparent. A year after the publication of the *Second Book of Discipline*, Scottish divine George Buchanan published *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos* (1579), a dialogue on government in Scotland. Dedicated to the king, it acknowledged that of “the punishment of *Caligula*, *Nero* or *Domitian*, I think there will be none that will not confess they were justly punished.” The issue at hand was to understand how to tell a tyrant you could rightly kill from a “lawful King” you could not. This could only be discovered from an understanding of contractual government in a state of nature, nature being “that LIGHT infused by GOD into our minds.” According to Buchanan, the Scottish line of kings was an unbroken chain dating back to King Fergus who had been made king by contract with the chieftains of ancient Scotland. Popularizing and Presbyterianizing the contractual aspects of renaissance statecraft, he argued that “Kings are not ordained for themselves, but for the People.” Placing justice at

⁵³ David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 4-6.

the heart of the social contract and binding the magistrate to serve the people, Buchanan argued that “the people have the power to confer the Government on whom they please.” Buchanan’s tract became influential on the thinking of phanatick Covenanters in the decades ahead. Such sentiments did not escape the ire of the crown.⁵⁴

Later Covenanter tradition held dearly to legends that their political theology was an affront to tyrannical power over the Scottish church, specifically to the Stuart monarchs personally. David Calderwood supposedly denied the judgment of the king in relation to the church because, “Your sentence is not the sentence of the Kirk.”⁵⁵ More brazenly, another minister proclaimed to the king, “Sire, I must tell you, that there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of the Commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ George Buchanan, *De jure regni apud Scotos, or, A dialogue, concerning the due privilege of government in the kingdom of Scotland, betwixt George Buchanan and Thomas Maitland by the said George Buchanan; and translated out of the original Latin into English by Philalethes* (1680), 8-9, 13, 14, 19. Hobbes, of course, made exactly the opposite point with his contractual argument. It should be noted that Buchanan did not create an explicit justification of rebellion by the masses. His theory leans heavily on the political prominence of the Scottish nobility. More phanatick treatise from Continental traditions existed, such as the Huguenot tract *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos*, written in the wake of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. The King Fergus stories were complete myth, as detailed below.

⁵⁵ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (1775; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 203.

⁵⁶ Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, 96.

This Buchananite tradition was the political manifestation of patriotic religious phanaticism. Zealots believed they were better Scots than the Scottish kings.⁵⁷

The two kingdoms theology, and the ways in which its adherents sought to promote it, was the most easily identifiable intellectual issue for phanaticks. This “high church tradition” was complex and sometimes contradictory in principle and practice. In theory it placed the church and state as co-arms of God’s authority in the world, mutually supportive of the other with neither side interfering in the role of its counterpart. In practice it placed the church slightly above the state. The regent became the long arm of church law but was prevented from interfering in the issues of religious dogma and debate. The monarch’s role was to uplift the church by providing for it financially, protecting it defensively, and prosecuting for it judicially. No Scottish monarch took this view for granted, and two kingdoms theology was resisted fiercely throughout the sixteenth century.⁵⁸

Almost from the beginning moderates and conservatives backed away from these teachings and their revolutionary implications. By 1572 the office of Bishop was reinstated to oversee church business, though with little influence over individual kirks. George Buchanan had been King James VI’s boyhood tutor. James detested him. Throughout his life James used his political genius to move diehard

⁵⁷ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity, 1689- c. 1830* (New York: Cambridge University, 1993), 40.

⁵⁸ William L. Fisk, *The Scottish High-Church Tradition in America* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), ix.

Protestants farther and farther from their pure vision of a Scottish church in the image of a Calvinist model. In 1587 he expanded his control over former church lands, placing new lords loyal to him over those lands and, consequently, over the patronage of individual churches. This had the effect of expanding patronage appointment of ministers, always a sore spot for congregations who jealously guarded their own rights to call ministers of their choosing.

The erosion of church power did not go unnoticed or uncontested. The preface to the *Second Book of Discipline* had already blamed Scotland's growing economic problems on "The Course of Conformity," the tendency to find unity at the expense of purity. Phanatics felt that the pursuit of "perpetual moderation" and an overall tendency to find unity at the expense of purity was the error of the day.⁵⁹ Andrew Melville fought against the growth of episcopacy in 1582, accusing moderates of intending to "pull the crown from Christ's head."⁶⁰ The same year, James called a feast in honor of the Roman Catholic French Ambassadors. In response, the fiercely Presbyterian General Assembly called a fast for the same day.⁶¹ The kirk, however, was no match for James' political skill. In 1596 anti-Catholic riots in the streets of Edinburgh gave the king political cover to remove hardliners and put political pressure on moderates to grant him stronger influence

⁵⁹ *Second Book of Discipline*, Preface to the Reader, i.

⁶⁰ Howie, *The Scots Worthies*, 92.

⁶¹ Jane Lane, *The Reign of King Covenant* (London: Robert Hale, 1956), 26.

in church affairs. Phanatick ministers were marginalized and a sense of balance was restored to Scottish affairs of church and state.

By the early seventeenth century, zealots remembered the Reformation as the moment in Scotland's past when "the people that sat in darkness saw a great light, and where the power of Satan had prevailed, the Throne of Christ was set up."⁶² They came to believe that achievement had now passed them by. Zealots in the Scottish church, known as the Presbyterian party, understood that while they had strong support amongst many laity, they lacked the institutional power to implement their reforms. "Pastors of Conformity," charged one phanatick, had hidden the church beneath a "cloak of indifference."⁶³ The Phanaticks' "adversaries, who now cry nothing but peace, peace" had labeled the Presbyterian party "contentious sprits, and troublers of the peace of the Kirk."⁶⁴ This division, between calls for peace and calls for doctrinal purity, was at the heart of the Covenanter story that would unfold in the following centuries.

Moderates believed in *adiophora*, the theological term for things indifferent on which the church might disagree but remain unified. For moderates, there were "many things indifferent in Religion, because they neither bring good nor evil to

⁶² *The First and Second Book of Discipline. Together with some Acts of the General Assemblies Clearing and Confirming the Same: and an Act of Parliament* (1621), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 211, Union Theological College, Belfast, A1-2.

⁶³ *The Pastor and the Prelate, or Reformation and Conformitie shortly compared* (1628), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 211, Union Theological College, Belfast, 10-11, 32.

⁶⁴ *The Pastor and the Prelate*, 7, 32.

[the] worldly estate.”⁶⁵ Endless doctrinal squabbles would lead to a constant fissuring of Protestant churches. Without some means to bring about conformity, even in the midst of disagreement, the church could make no claims to stability, order or peace. Theological disputes, they felt, were very often theoretical, and in theory they should be left.

For Presbyterian zealots, the distinction between theory and practice was false. Theoretical disagreements could only be played out in action just as the theology of discipline was played out in the action of discipline. “All our actions in particular ... are either good or evil, and not one of them all indifferent.”⁶⁶ Actions were either inside God’s pleasure, or outside of it. There could be no in between. There could be no compromise. What people believed doctrinally was intimately tied into how their communities lived socially. This was what their own communal piety had taught them for generations. The local struggle to curtail sin and sin’s disastrous consequences was played out in sessions across southern Scotland. Now the national community saw the erosion of such Calvinist orthodoxy. Behind the cloak of indifference, actions were taken that would displease God and invite disaster. The evidence of this, zealots felt, was growing.

When James’ Catholic leaning son, King Charles I, visited Scotland in 1633 he brought with him many offenses. He insisted on kneeling at communion, a practice the Presbyterian party resisted as too Catholic. To zealots, kneeling was an act of

⁶⁵ *The Pastor and the Prelate*, 33.

⁶⁶ *The Pastor and the Prelate*, 35.

“subjection and inferiority” that was unworthy of the individual Christian, who was a “coheir with Christ.” Kneeling placed man too low. It was “repugnant to the person we bear.”⁶⁷ He also replaced the wooden communion platters with fine silver. Presbyterians had become accustomed to a plainness of style in the plates that held the bread and cups that served the communion wine, some of which were donations from lay cupboards with family names still carved in the wood. These were symbols of inclusion in a ritual of exclusion, earthly tangibles in a liminal moment.⁶⁸ Any challenges to these cultural markers struck deeply at the heart of lay Presbyterian society.

In 1635 a famine swept over most of Scotland, followed shortly after by two years of plague from 1636-1637.⁶⁹ In 1636 under Charles’ insistence Scotland passed new church legislation that transformed the church of John Knox away from the hallowed *Second Book of Discipline*. Most startling was not what was added but what was missing: presbyteries, ruling elders and Presbyterian deacons disappeared from the new church order in conformity to a more English model. Whereas before the church had functioned in two layers, the local and regional layer

⁶⁷ *A Dispute Upon the Question of Kneeling, in the Act of Receiving, &c.* (undated, seventeenth century), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 211, Union Theological College, Belfast, 9.

⁶⁸ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 100-102.

⁶⁹ Maurice Lee, Jr., *The Road to Revolution: Scotland under Charles I, 1625-1637* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1985), 184.

of Presbyterian polity beneath a superimposed regional and national layer of episcopacy, now the local kirks were to conform to a more fully episcopal model.⁷⁰

In the sixteenth-century Scottish world, religious shifts and pestilence went hand in hand. Holy Scotland was crumbling. Catholic encroachments on worship and Anglicanization of Scottish politics were viewed as threats to local autonomy. The judgment of God was seen in the food shortages and sickness across the land. Scotland was ripe for revolution. The only question remaining was what kind it would be. Resentment grew against the invasion of “false brethren, who were craftily sent in, and crept in privately amongst the faithful, to spy out their liberty which they had in Christ Jesus.”⁷¹ When Archbishop William Laud’s English-styled prayer book arrived from London in the worship service of Edinburgh in 1637, it brought with it what many believed was the death knell of Scotland’s reformation. By then, all of southern Scotland was ready to rebel. For some, the rebellion would also be a religious revival. For religious phanaticks in Scotland, the events of the 1630s and 1640s would be a defense of the two bodies they held most dear, their autonomous local and national religious institutions.

The social fabric of presbyterianism, with its structures of local control and the ideological defense of the local and national kirks’ authority over and against

⁷⁰ Hugh Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), 4.

⁷¹ *The First and Second Book of Discipline. Together with some Acts of the General Assemblies Clearing and Confirming the Same: and an Act of Parliament* (1621), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 211, Union Theological College, Belfast, A3.

outside civil powers, were products of two generations of experience for Scottish laity. The implications of these innovations were born out in violent revolutions over the rest of the seventeenth century. The revolution that had occurred gave the emerging phanatics a strong impetus to retain past gains and protect against future affronts to what was perceived as a peculiarly Biblical way of life. Primitive Christianity, embedded in righteous community and bringing a sense of timeless importance to the stakes of social institutions, was at the heart of the cultural sensibility that had evolved. That sense of how the world should be, and what should be done when it was not, would spurn common people into revolt and revolution.

CHAPTER III

SCOTTISH PHANATICKS: THE COVENANTER ALLIANCE, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, AND THE *RADICE* OF RULE, 1637-1662

Between 1637 and 1662, Covenanter political, social, and ideological experiences created a cultural image of Scotland as God's peculiarly chosen nation in the model of a righteous community. The Covenanter movement began as an alliance between key factions in Scottish society, including conservative nobles, moderate churchmen and merchants, and phanatick ministers and laity. There were no clearly demarcated boundaries. Not all laity in Scotland were zealots, and not all nobles were against religious zealotry. Despite all their internal diversity these groups found in the 1630s-1660s reasons to forge an alliance that made a Covenant between Scotland and God and secured the place of Scotland as God's peculiarly chosen nation. They successfully defeated King Charles and, for a moment, recreated their memory of Holy Scotland in the present. Most simply referred to all within this coalition as "the Covenanters" or, in its practical reality, "the Covenanter Army." The outward simplicity of the partnership hid deeply felt divisions and fault lines within the internal movement. For the various factions within the alliance, the period witnessed a burst of intellectual creativity. For zealots specifically, they grounded their revolutionary framework in the experience of the righteous community and

began to work out what relationship phanaticism had with issues of liberty, tyranny and conscience.

The Covenanter Revolution

The crisis of 1637 was a moment of opportunity for zealots and moderates alike. A triangulation occurred when Charles I's administration, woefully ignorant of the difficulty of exerting the effective control of an absentee monarch, pitted both nobles, with their moderate churchmen, and religious enthusiasts against the encroachments of England on Scotland's political, economic and religious ways of life. What became known as the Covenanter movement was, in its early stages, the combination of these two factions in Scotland and a far cry from the religious zealotry with which it would one day be known. As historian David Stevenson points out, there was more to the early Covenanters than the "dreary and irrational antics of backward and fanatical Scots obsessed by dark religion."¹

The Scottish lairds, lesser nobility, were reaching for power against a new monarch they were convinced did not know what he was doing. Lairds had long

¹ David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637-1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 14. Stevenson places the emphasis on the crisis of the 1630s on Charles I's political incompetence. Maurice Lee, Jr. differs from Stevenson significantly. Lee's analysis posits the early Covenanter movement as a top-down event, organized, led and executed by the nobility. Lee believes historians have interpreted the constitutional changes of the 1640s and the later religious phanaticism of Cameronians backwards on to the 1630s. My analysis differs sharply with Lee's, though I agree strongly that the early movement would never have occurred without the alliance between the politically empowered nobility and the extremist ministers. See Maurice Lee, Jr., *The Road to Revolution: Scotland under Charles I, 1625-1637* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1985), 223-248.

been powerful in local affairs, but now they exerted themselves in national politics as well. Charles inflamed this class when, in 1625, he rashly attempted to consolidate land granted to them prior to his accession to the throne. This action, and a host of governmental alignments aimed at emasculating the nobility's social and political power and making them more thoroughly dependent on the crown, mobilized the upper classes in political opposition. Meanwhile the king also meddled in the political autonomy of local burgh elections in 1634 and in a series of economic moves alienated Scottish merchants. As the 1630s progressed the Presbyterian party changed in the eyes of the nobility from a political liability into a potentially powerful political ally against the power grabs of the crown.²

Only around a third of Presbyterian ministers were zealots. In the southwest they possessed a proportionally larger following amongst the laity. This was especially true of the lowlands.³ The ministers' ability to rouse the masses was at the heart of their political power, and in the late 1630s the nobles had cause to use

² Helen and Keith Kelsall, *Scottish Lifestyle 300 Years Ago: New Light on Edinburgh and Border Families* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986), 80; David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637-1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 14-42. The lesser lords were under social pressures that saw an erosion of their social power. Fued farms, a product of Reformation era changes, limited their financial control of land leases. Kirk sessions limited their authority over churches. The rise of Laudian bishops intent on widening their sphere of influence brought further interference into their political territory from outsiders.

³ Makey, *The Church of the Covenant, 1637-1651* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1979), 91.

and direct that power if only Charles I would give them the right moment. In 1637 he did just that.

Charles I, often accused of being a Catholic, was more concerned with uniformity than with religious doctrine. With the help of his top religious advisor, Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud, he sought to institute a new religious worship service that would bring the Churches of England and Scotland on to the same page, literally. The new prayer book would be used in all churches and affirmed such worship practices as kneeling at communion and private baptism.⁴ It did not mention such Presbyterian establishments as presbyteries or a national General Assembly. Its authority was derived from royal fiat, not through existing church bodies' approval. Such exclusions and methods constituted a direct assault on the compromises made in the wake of the Five Articles of Perth in 1621, which imposed an Episcopal system on top of Presbyterianism but did so without doing away with either. Now, the Scottish church would conform to the English model.⁵

For most Scots, that was all that mattered. For months before the release of the book, rumors swirled through Scotland as to what would be included. Some believed it would bring Roman Catholicism back full force, and everyone believed the king and his advisors could not be trusted to protect Scotland's customs from

⁴ In this, the book was affirming the Five Articles of Perth, issued in 1618 and approved in Scotland in 1621 over Presbyterian protest.

⁵ Some concessions were made to the Scots, such as replacing the word "priest" and cutting down use of the Apocrypha in readings. See Lee, *Road to Revolution*, 202.

Anglicanization. When it finally arrived, the book was “misunderstood by a nation utterly determined to misunderstand it.”⁶ Charles meant to bring religious uniformity to the two realms. Instead he inflamed a rebellion. The Prayer book, as interpreted by the riled up masses in the southwest, constituted an attack on their way of life. Before 1637 Charles had succeeded in unifying a remarkably divided nation. The prayer book took that unity and gave it zeal.⁷

Zeal took the form of a riot on July 23, 1637 at St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh. It had been announced that this would be the day the new liturgy would be implemented. The week before “The whole body of the Town murmur[ed]” and was filled with “discourses, declamations, pamphlets” and an entire campaign designed at mobilizing the people.⁸ The moment the dean began reading from the new text, the people caused a stir, tellingly calling the dean a traitor. The protest moved outside, where mobs formed and followed the dean home in a shower of hurled stones. The most violent attacks came from women.⁹

This entire reaction, except the overflowing violence, had been part of a larger plan worked out between nobles and the zealous wing of clergy in the days

⁶ Walter Makey, *The Church of the Covenant*, 16.

⁷ Maurice Lee, Jr., *The Road to Revolution*, 193.

⁸ Bailie, as quoted in Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 60.

⁹ Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 61. The famed story of Jenny Geddes was part truth and part mythology. The first mention of Geddes occurred a generation later in 1670 and collapses two separate incidents reported by contemporaries. Geddes, then, is a composite character representing what later Covenanters believed the 1637 had been about, and the ways religious enthusiasm, Protestant doctrine, class divisions and gendered challenges to authority were prominent in later Covenanter lore.

leading up to the riot. All that seems to have been planned was a mass walkout until the common people recruited to initiate the uproar went further than expected. The violence of the commoners seems to have caught the leading nobles by surprise. The common people were not simply pawns in a game. They were, for the most part, genuinely inflamed against religious innovations and intrusions on Scottish religion. The most insightful incident happened not in St. Giles, but in the nearby Grayfriars kirk. There, a crowd had gathered ready as ordered to start their uproar. Seeing this, the minister there, hesitated. He started his service several minutes late, waiting for word on how things were going across town. When he heard reports of the tumult, he prudently laid aside the new book and started the service in the traditional way. The crowd did nothing.¹⁰

The different reactions were strong indications that the common people knew their theology well. The overwhelming majority of those who rioted that day and went on to rebel against the king had never read the Prayer Book and never would. For those who waited for the Grayfriars' minister to deviate from tradition, they were disappointed but informed. They knew orthodoxy when they heard it.

It came as no surprise, then, when the new rebellion produced an orthodox statement of its intentions. After months of political wrangling with London, elite leaders appointed a well-connected lawyer named Johnston of Wariston to write up a document that would band the various factions together. Like revolutionaries of

¹⁰ Lee, *The Road to Revolution*, 208-214, 242. Also Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 62-63.

many other generations, they knew they were involved in a dangerous game, and must ensure that they hung together lest some hang in the more literal sense. Banding, or swearing a covenant before God together, was a tradition that went well back into Scottish history. As historian James B. Torrance points out, the language of covenant, or banding together for common social and political cause, was as well understood amongst the laity of early modern Scotland as the language of trade unions and rights of free speech are in contemporary western political dialogue. The most natural thing to do, when a community felt its rights were being threatened, was to band together. Covenant was to Scotland what civil rights are to modern Americans, a powerful phrase everyone agrees upon even if not everyone agrees on what it means.¹¹

The most important band to date had been the King's Covenant, also known as the Negative covenant, that Charles' father James VI had signed in 1581. It had declared the Church of Scotland against (negated) Catholic religious practices and papal authority. Wariston began the new band with the old one, simply copying the King's covenant as the preamble and then adding impositions against various grievances that had sparked the turmoil of the past year. Representatives from the nobility, lairds, burghs and ministers all raised objections and had those rejections resolved. Of the four, the moderate ministers were by far the loudest voices for a

¹¹ Private banding had been outlawed as seditious by Parliament in 1585. James B. Torrance, "The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics" in Elazar, Daniel J. and John Kincaid, eds., *The Covenant Connection: From Federal Theology to Modern Federalism* (New York: Lexington Books, 2000), 146.

more conservative document. Once the covenant was agreed upon, the four groups signed it in February 1638.¹²

There was a fifth group. The document claimed to unite all of Scotland, from the elite to the poor. “We Noblemen, Barons, Gentleman, Burgesses, Ministers, and Commons under-subscribing . . . resolve all the days of our life constantly to adhere unto and to defend the foresaid true religion.”¹³ The commons did subscribe. They did so by the tens of thousands.

The first signatories banded together in Edinburgh, but soon general signings occurred in nearly every kirk across Scotland. Document copies were made and distributed to each kirk throughout March and April. Even the most optimistic supporters were overwhelmed by the turnout. What one historian called the “latent religious sentiment” of the past seventy years had been unleashed.¹⁴ Many parishes celebrated the way the congregation at Perth did, by combining a covenant signing ceremony with a communion service.¹⁵ Phanatick ministers now had the nation’s ear, and they capitalized on it in every way. Moderate minister James Gordon of Rothiemay remembered disapprovingly that the zealots “were heard so passionately and with such frequency, that churches could not contain their hearers

¹² Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 84.

¹³ *The national covenant, or, The confession of faith, of the Kirk of Scotland...* (Edinburgh: 1678), 13.

¹⁴ Hugh Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), 13, 22.

¹⁵ Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 119.

in the cities.”¹⁶ The same was true in rural areas. The Archbishops and Bishops, with Charles’ support, declared the 1638 meetings “most unlawful and disorderly.”¹⁷ Indeed, they were unlawful. What remained to be seen was if there was enough national unanimity for them to become revolutionary.

The unifying thread of the 1638 National Covenant was its stance against religious “innovation” and in favor of “God’s true religion.”¹⁸ Although the document made constant references backward in history to the Scots Confession and acts of Parliament upholding Presbyterianism, it made no clear statement against episcopalian government. What exactly “God’s true religion” was remained in the eye of the beholder, a key element in any compromise document.¹⁹

Tied to the religious imperative, the National Covenant included more dangerous language regarding Scotland, the king, loyalty and conscience. The

¹⁶ James Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs, from MCDXXXVII to MDCXLI*, Vol. 1. (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1841), 45. Gordon’s manuscript dates to the 1650s-60s.

¹⁷ *The Declinator and Protestation of the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of Scotland, and the others their adherents within that Kingdome, Against the pretended general Assembly holden at Glasgow, November 21, 1638* (1638), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 211, Union Theological College, Belfast, 2.

¹⁸ *The National Covenant*, 6.

¹⁹ The bishop issue in the National Covenant has been interpreted several ways. Stevenson argues that most Covenanters opposed bishops and believed the document did as well. Restating the obvious was not necessary. Lee, Jr. argues that the document was “the nobility’s covenant,” and that its primary goals were to align political power against the king’s interests. For Makey, the omission is a telling example of the factions within the early Covenanters. All seem to agree that “a clear attack on episcopacy would therefore have divided the country instead of uniting it” and that the move to a direct attack on bishops per se was a later development. Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 85; Lee, Jr., *The Road to Revolution*, 223-241; Makey, *The Church of the Covenant*, 31.

Covenanters were “persuaded in our Consciences” that the “quietness and stability of our Religion and Kirk, doth depend on the safety & good behavior of the King’s Majesty.” The King held his authority “for the maintenance of the Kirk, and the ministration of Justice amongst us.” On the basis of these preconditions, the signers declared themselves willing to “defend his Person and Authority, with our goods, bodies and lives.”²⁰ This statement of loyalty was highly conditional and spoke to the heart of their agitations. Left unspoken in the pregnant silence of the pages was what Scotland would do if a monarch ceased to be on good behavior. As more Scots turned out to sign the document the answer became clear. Covenanters were the king’s rebels, so devoted to godly monarchy they now rebelled against the crown.²¹

The document was concerned explicitly with keeping Scotland a nation both holy to God and wholly separate from England’s influence. Such corruption threatened that “this Realm could be no more a free Monarchy” with its own “laws, ancient privileges, offices and liberties.” The security of people’s “lands, livings, rights, offices, liberties and dignities” must be preserved.²² As the Covenanter movement began, it linked issues of liberties, resistance, and kirk autonomy. Multitudes of Scots turned out to sign the document, often led by their elders. They were nationalizing the sentiments that were on display every week in local

²⁰ *National Covenant*, 7.

²¹ For a similar argument in a different context, see David Miller, *Queen’s Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in Historic Perspective*, (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007).

²² *The National Covenant*, 11-12.

congregations. Many did so in tears, and there were scattered accounts of signing in blood.²³

Royalist clergyman Walter Balcanquhal published reports in 1638 that a Covenanter woman known simply as “Maid Michelson” who “was well skilled in the phrases of the Scripture and had a good memory” and was noted for her “blind zeal” had convinced laity to sign onto the 1638 National Covenant. Evidently, many people believed her to speak with a prophetic voice and “Noblemen, Gentlemen, Ministers, women of all ranks and qualities ... did admire her raptures and inspirations, as coming from Heaven.” Balcanquhal accused the Covenanters of using her as a religious and political prop, “a very fit instrument to abuse the people.”²⁴ The 1638 Covenant was driven by the nobility, but owned by the common folk. Some, of course, owned it more than others.

Just as with issues of morality in local churches, some were coerced into signing. As one moderate later remembered it, “The greater that the number of subscribers grew, the more imperious they were in exacting subscriptions from others who refused.” The covenants very success now widened the implications of getting all of Scotland to actively covenant themselves to God. “By degrees,” the pressure built as Covenanters used threats and violence, “and some were threatened and beaten who durst refuse.”²⁵ The rising heat of popular pressure

²³ Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs*, Vol. 1, 47.

²⁴ Currie, “History, Hagiography, and Fakestory,” 6.

²⁵ Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs*, Vol. 1, 45.

was intense. Some Covenanters carried around copies of the document in their pockets. Anyone could force a passerby to swear allegiance. The Covenant itself specified that “All magistrates, sheriffs, etc.” were “ordained to search, apprehend, and punish all contraveners.”²⁶ Its adherents did not intend the National Covenant as a document that freed the individual to follow their conscience. It was a document that demanded the individual to submit oneself to the conscience of holy Scotland.

The years following 1638 were tumultuous ones. Armed conflict with the king was inevitable. The First Bishops’ War became the first of many clashes between Scottish and English forces and just one part of the political and social convulsions that struck the British Isles in the mid-sixteenth century. Charles’ forces were inadequate to the task of putting down the rebellion. A temporary peace in 1639 was followed by the Second Bishops’ War. This time the Covenanter army successfully invaded England and forced a humiliating peace on the crown.

By the early 1640s the Covenanter alliance had a new problem on its hands. Alliance members had to run a country together. The factionalism within the movement threatened it nearly from the beginning. Fierce parliamentary debates erupted in 1640 and 1641 over worship. Moderates feared the zealot’s practice of holding conventicles in the fields and private worship services in the homes, a practice carried over from the zealots’ days on the political fringe. The fault lines

²⁶ *The National Covenant in Treasury of the Scottish Covenant*, 80-82.

remained fairly clear within the movement, but again the presence of England served as a unifying force. The eruption of civil war to the south between Parliament and Charles meant that both of those sides now jockeyed for Scotland's favor or, at the least, neutrality. When the English parliamentary forces sent negotiators to form a civil alliance, they found that the Scots wanted a religious covenant. Chief among Scottish demands was a clear statement not just for Protestantism, but for "true religion." English Protestants, even the Puritan zealots, tended to organize congregations independent of either bishop or presbytery. The two sides now encountered a dilemma. Both were Protestant, most were anti-bishop, and all had a strong religious zealot wing to appease. But the two groups of zealots, Puritans and Presbyterians, were not on the same page.²⁷

The English invited the Scots to send some of their most respected Presbyterian ministers to Westminster, where an assembly of divines was currently hammering out what an English reformed Protestant church would look like. The Scots complied, sending a delegation that included future Covenanter notables Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie. The product of this convention, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its accompanying catechisms and worship and disciplinary directories, would become the touchstone document of phanatic Covenanters. Those documents did not appear, however, until 1646.

²⁷ Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution* 282-286.

While war raged, a more immediate document was needed. The answer was the *Solemn League and Covenant*, signed by the officials in both nations in 1643. The document met the needs of both sides. For the English, it was a civil pact aligning the Scots army with the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War. For the Scots, it bound all the kingdoms of the British isles to “the nearest conjunction and Uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, Directory of Worship and Catechizing” possible. The document went further than the *National Covenant* had gone. Bishops, quietly overlooked in the older list of sins, were now placed on par with the pope as a specific moral evil to be removed. Both sides agreed to the “extirpation of Popery” and “Prelacy,” defined specifically as “Church government by Arch-bishops, Bishops, their Chancellors, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and all other Ecclesiastical officers depending on that Hierarchy.” Presbyterianism for Scotland had now become presbyterianism for all of Britain.²⁸

In that regard, the *Solemn League and Covenant* was a surprising reversal for the Scots. The 1638 zealots were incensed at Charles’ attempts to make Scotland more like the Church of England. Now, roles reversed, they demanded that the Church of England be more like the Church of Scotland. Just as the Presbyterian party had leveraged their popularity amongst the people of southern Scotland to bring the moderates along, they were using military necessity to force the English

²⁸ *Solemn League and Covenant*, 1, 2. Stevenson has argued, “the king’s refusal to make concessions- or to make sincere ones- drove moderates to accept phanatick arguments.” Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution*, 300.

into accepting Presbyterianism for England, Wales and Ireland as well. The Covenanters were, in an ironic sense, very much like Charles I. They believed that a stable nation required a unified, government sponsored church to keep the sinews of public morality in order. This “common cause of Religion, Liberty and Peace of the Kingdoms” led them to what one historian perceptively labeled “the pan Britannic presbyterian imperialism of the Solemn League and Covenant.” They were fighting for the soul of more than Scotland now. Once again, the Covenant was signed in mass ceremonies across Scotland.²⁹

One of the document’s least noticed aspects, destined to linger on amongst the Presbyterian fringe for the next three hundred years, was the *Solemn League and*

²⁹ *Solemn League and Covenant*, 6; Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (New York: Cambridge, 1999), 136. As Kidd has demonstrated, Scottish nationalism and unionism were parts of a whole in Presbyterian thought. As early as George Buchanan, Presbyterian thought had embodied an ideal relationship in which the king’s power existed in a Covenanted relationship with the people in the mythical account of the election of Fergus I of Scotland. The Scottish Reformation was, in turn, a unifying event both for the Scottish nation and for the British Isles. As English became the language of Scot Protestantism through the Geneva Bible (1560), King James Bible (1611) and a host of literacy campaigns, the connections of Scots to themselves and to the English grew stronger. The Covenant of 1643 between Scot Presbyterians and the English Long Parliament solidified a tie between the two to be united in one godly realm, one that would uphold the best of Presbyterian religious traditions. Though not political, this religious unionism was supportive of Scottish nationalism and a pan-British identity simultaneously. The Union of the Crown in James VI and I in 1603 gave political hope to this unionist sentiment, but at its heart the driving force of Covenanter understandings of Britishness was religion. See Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 41, 50-51.

Covenant's inclusion of a key phrase that bound "we and our posterity after us."³⁰ The doctrine of perpetual obligation of a Covenant with God, meaning that such agreements were binding on the oath taker and on their future generations, was rooted in Biblical passages that passed on both blessings and curses to the children and grandchildren of biblical characters. A common reference was to the Jews punished by a famine under Saul, despite none having personally sworn a vow with the Gibeonites.³¹ This belief was standard fare for phanatick Biblicists in the seventeenth century, and became one of the most telling features of Covenanter phanaticism in the decades and centuries ahead.

Phanatick Political Theology

For the time being the political implications of such documents were still to be worked out. At no point had the *National Covenant* or the *Solemn League and Covenant* rejected the divine right of the king. Rather, they both sought to establish God's religious arm in the nation apart from the king's authority to corrupt it. Both documents promised to "defend the King Majesties Person and Authority," though they pledged this in the context of "the preservation and defense of the true Religion, and the Liberties of the Kingdoms."³² In theory, it was clear that they

³⁰ *Solemn League and Covenant*, 1.

³¹ Theophilus Timorcus, *The Covenanters Plea Against Absolvers, Or, a Modest Discourse Shewing Why those who in England and Scotland took the Solemn League and Covenant cannot judge their Consciences discharged from the Obligation of it* (1661), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 432, Union Theological College, Belfast, "The Epistile Declaratory," point 19.

³² *Solemn League and Covenant*, 3.

would support the king so long as the king supported them. What that looked like in practice was not altogether clear.

Scottish divine Samuel Rutherford attempted to answer that question in his 1644 treatise *Lex, Rex*. Rutherford's title was a tellingly heavy wordplay. Translated simply, "the Law, the King," Rutherford directly challenged the king's claim that authority flowed from himself. Rather, the king's authority flowed from the law, a law to which he was bound and could never stand above. The king, in short, could be punished as a lawbreaker. Another, more subtle, translation might read "the law and the king." Rutherford set out to define for the revolutionary generation what the relationship between those two entities was. He did so from a Covenanter framework steeped in the autonomy of the righteous community.³³

Everything Rutherford said was based on one presumption, that "all civil power is immediately from God in its root." This root, or *radice*, meant that all Covenanter logic would flow from God outward. "Reduce all that I am to speak of the power of Kings," Rutherford explained, "to the Author or efficient." He sought to explain that all society flowed from God, and that the king flowed secondarily from society. Thus, contracts existed at multiple levels. All of humanity had a covenant with God, from whom they derived peace and prosperity in return for holiness and

³³ Samuel Rutherford, *Lex Rex: The Law and the Prince, A Dispute for the just PEROGATIVE of King and People* (London: John Field, 1644), Union Theological College Special Collections, Belfast.

worship. In turn, the king had a contract with the people of a given society, in which he received power and authority in return for stability and order.

In this regard, Rutherford built on George Buchanan's thought from a generation before in *De Jure Regni Apud Scotos*. He was also contradicting Charles I's father, James VI/I. James, superior to his son as both a politician and an intellectual, had responded to his former tutor Buchanan's contractual theories with a treatise of his own, *The True Law of free Monarchies* in 1598. A powerful and popular assertion of the king's divine right, James had argued that a monarchy was the form of government that most resembled the relationship of God to his people. Authority flowed downwards from a supreme ruler to the ruled. The Bible had instituted the monarch to be a viceregent on the earth in God's stead, and like God, the King became a "natural Father to all his Lieges at his Coronation." The coronation argument was key, and James used it to move headlong into the jaws of his opponent's arguments.³⁴

Contractualists like Buchanan had made much of the sins of the Biblical King Saul, abandoned by God and replaced upon his death by the righteous King David. James turned the story on its head, pointing out that at Saul's coronation God's prophet Samuel had commanded the people to bear patiently "the intolerable qualities, that might fall in some of their Kings." The Bible specifically ordered the Israelites "not to resist God's ordinances" by resisting the king's authority. To incite

³⁴ James VI/I, *The True Lawe of free Monarchies: or, THE RECIPROCK AND MUTUAL DUTIE betwixt a free King, and his mutual Subjects* (Edinburgh: 1598), 6, 2.

rebellion against the king constituted “an error in the shaking of God’s yoke.” James went on to characterize the Presbyterian party’s theories as those “seduced opinions of the multitude” who had been “blinded by them, who think themselves able to teach and instruct the ignorant.”³⁵ Although the king was himself bound to God to be faithful and fair, even when the monarch went astray as Saul had done, the godly should never resist his authority. From a strictly literalistic interpretation of the Bible, James had made a powerful argument for the king’s authority and the call to civilian passivity.

In *Lex, Rex* Rutherford set out to reverse the King’s logic. James, Rutherford argued, had made a critical error. He had forgotten the righteous community. True, all authority flowed from God, but where had God placed it? The “power of Government, by the light of nature must be *phanatically* and *originally*, in a Community,” he argued. Put another way, “God ordained the power; it is from the people only by a virtual emanation... .”³⁶ The flow of God’s authority did not go from God to king to people, but from God to people to king. The king had gotten the root right but the order wrong.³⁷

Rutherford argued that civil society was grounded “in the root of reasonable nature,” or in Latin, “*in radice*.” This *radice* view of Government was “voluntary, *in modo*.” At its *radice* society was the natural way that “men be combined in society”

³⁵ James VI/I, *The True Lawe of free Monarchies*, 9-15.

³⁶ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 9.

³⁷ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 413.

once a society overflowed the banks of family authority. When the family could no longer order civil life, “it is natural, that they join in a civil society.” This argument that government was natural in its *radice* was important, because it undermined the Royalist argument that God had first created the world, and *then* created society. Rather, there was only one Biblical creation, and the nature God created included the ordered means of social interaction. When people banded together to form the body politic, they did so “without any new action of the will [of God].” God did not need to reinstitute authority he had given once and for all at the beginning of time.³⁸

That idea held an important consequence. Government was natural without being necessary. No one, especially a king, necessarily held power. Rather “all jurisdiction of Man over Man” was “as it were Artificial and Positive.” Rutherford believed “all Men be born equally free” and, therefore, when constituting their government they did so by a voluntary “resignation of our liberty.” No ruler of any kind held power given directly from God to the ruler. Rather, all people were given the power of freedom from God at creation. The people then, with God’s power, established rulers. It was only natural. This was the *radice* of rule.³⁹

“If the people as God’s instruments, bestow the benefit of a Crown on their King,” Rutherford continued, “then is the *King* made *King* by the people conditionally” to his ability to rule in a fit manner. The people had not given up all

³⁸ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 1-2. See also 413, “the Civil powers are from God, by the natural mediation of men and Civil Societies.”

³⁹ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 3. As noted previously, *radice* is the Latin or root.

power. Authority was measured out, “by ounce weights, so much Royal power, and no more, and no less” so that the people “may limit, moderate, and set banks and marches to the exercise” or government power. The king, then, had no special access to the throne, “no right to the crown, but only by the suffrages of the people.”⁴⁰ Coronation was not God anointing; it was the people agreeing.

By 1644 Scotland and England had been in open rebellion against Charles I intermittently for seven years. In context, *Lex, Rex* was primarily concerned with justifying a defensive war against Charles I’s religious tyranny over the kirk. Rutherford was insistent that the righteous community did not forfeit all of its power in the exchange between rulers and ruled. They still retained “power to guard themselves against Tyranny.” A defensive war, against tyrannical encroachments, required offensive actions.⁴¹

Anyone justifying a rebellion in the name of Jesus was obligated to address the troubled relationship between violence and the command to turn the other cheek. Rutherford reasoned that “Christ’s non-resistance” was in many ways rare and extraordinary, and “so is no leading rule to us.” He cast the New Testament as a cast of revolutionaries. “Christ, the Prophets and Apostles or our Lord, went to Heaven with the note of Traitors, Seditious men, and such *as turned the world upside*

⁴⁰ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 105, 10, 14, 7-9. Rutherford also built on Buchanan’s argument from the mythical King Fergus, whom legend told was appointed by a council of Scottish nobles. He stated that “*Fergus* the first King of Scotland” was “no Conqueror, but a freely elected Prince,” and “frequently convened the *Parliament*.” See 449.

⁴¹ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, i.

down.” Returning to the argument from family, he maintained that no one was required by God to subject themselves to tyranny. “The wife is obliged to bed and board with her husband, but not if she fears he will kill her in the bed,” Rutherford asserted. “Natures law of self-preservation,” trumped the king’s laws, as did “ God’s Law, or defending Religion against Papists in Arms.”⁴²

It would be a mistake to conflate Covenanter political ideology with the more individualist position later written by John Locke. Rutherford pointed out that, as with Saul and David, the king’s authority did come from God. Procedurally, however, he attained his role through the community of the godly. The covenant between the king and the people, like those found in I Samuel 10 and II Samuel 5, placed the relationship of ruler to ruled in a covenantal context. It was a prescriptive scriptural mandate that the king be given civil power under religious conditionality. Should he cease to be a godly monarch, for instance, if he replaced the “biblical” Presbyterianism with episcopacy, he had violated that covenant and should be resisted.⁴³

⁴² Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 315, i, 363. Most of the Covenanter treatises included nearly obsessive attempts to explain the relationship of the apostles Peter and Paul to the Roman Empire. Peter had seemingly preached submissiveness to in 2 Peter 2.17 “Fear God. Honor the king.” The same was true of Paul in Romans 13.7. Rutherford insisted that Paul had never taught absolute subjection to the Emperor-as-tyrant since “the Roman Emperors were but Princes of the Common-wealth” whereas “the Sovereignty remained still in the Senate and the people.” See 361.

⁴³ Locke, on the other hand, happily placed the civil authority above the church in large part to protect against religious enthusiasts like Rutherford. The twentieth-century fundamentalist writer Francis A. Schaeffer mistakenly gave credit

What set Rutherford apart from the later arguments of Hobbes and Locke was his view of the church and state. Unlike those writers, Rutherford vested God's authority to rule in the creation of a righteous community. The social contract was not about 'the people,' but 'God's people.' As every good zealot knew, those people were found only in the kirk, God's kingdom known by its right teaching and effective discipline. The phanatick root of authority was God through the church over the state. "*Kings* are under the coercive power of *Christ's* keys of discipline," Rutherford explained, and "*Prophets* and *Pastors*, as Ambassadors of *Christ*, have the *keys of the kingdom of God*." The church had the power "to open and let in believing Princes," and, more important, "also to shut them out, if they rebel against *Christ*; the law of *Christ* excepts none." In practice, Rutherford's two kingdoms theology placed one kingdom squarely on top of the other.⁴⁴

to Rutherford for influencing John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, a view which has persisted amongst American conservatives ever since. There is no evidence to support this conclusion, and Schaeffer failed to note any supporting evidence in his work. Locke was entirely off put by religious fanaticism. If he thought about Rutherford at all, he probably saw him as the other extreme of Robert Filmer's divine right of King's treatise *Patriarcha*. See Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), 31-33. For Locke's treatises as documents hailing from the 1670s, not as a post facto defense of 1689, see John Locke, *Two Treatise on Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (London: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 45-66; For ancillary references on Rutherford which are neither causal nor related to *Lex, Rex* see Ian Harris, *The mind of John Locke: A study in political theory in its intellectual setting* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1994), 59, 72; See especially Greg Forster, *John Locke's Politics of Moral Consensus* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2005), 1-39. Also Richard Ashcraft, *Revolutionary Politics & Locke's Two Treatises on Government* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986).

⁴⁴ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, iii. In theory, Rutherford maintained the dual mutuality of the church and state as co-equal branches of God's authority on earth.

Rutherford codified Covenanter phanaticism for his own and future generations. The king was beneath the law, and the law sprang forth from the godly kirk. Covenanters were not called to passivity but to defend the righteous community against tyranny from without. Only a king who was morally just and who both submitted to and, in light of the *Solemn League and Covenant*, agreed to set up “true religion” could authentically be the people’s representative king. A nation under contract with God could expect no less of itself.⁴⁵

Lex, Rex was written as much for Presbyterian moderates as it was supporters of the Divine Right of Kings. In the tense, triangulated political scene of 1644, *Lex, Rex* was meant to remind Covenanters what victory looked like at the very time moderates were most inclined to sue for peace with Charles I. Rutherford

The magistrates retained the right to punish evil doers, even if members of the kirk. But this equality remained ethereal and in every way the state was beholden to the religious authorities in Rutherford’s model.

⁴⁵ Rutherford’s Biblical interpretation was typical of Presbyterian extremists complex approach to the role of the Biblical law. The Old Testament functioned for Covenanters in much the same way as a case law book. That is, it must be judiciously decided which laws created precedent in current context, rather than seeing the Mosaic scriptures as completely normative principles eternally applied. God’s command of genocide in Canaan was rarely interpreted as normative, although both Cromwell and the New England Puritans would find it informative for explaining their respective genocides against Catholics and Indians at Drogheda and Mystic. Penalties of death for adultery and Sabbath breaking were normative in their abrogation (against the sin) but not in their punishment (as a method). Thus adulterers were shunned from communion or humiliated rather than killed, all with Biblical sanction. However Covenanters diverged from this rubric when understanding the role of the nation. As Israel was God’s chosen and holy nation, so Scotland in 1638 and Britain in 1643 were God’s anointed land. Thus God’s commands to be covenanted with him, and revolts against ungodly kings, were prescriptive rather than descriptive. See Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, 156-157.

worried that the moderates in the Covenanter alliance were not “heart-covenanters.” If they prevailed over the religious enthusiasts then all the gains of the Presbyterian party could be lost. The autonomy of the kirk was imperiled if any vision other than a phanatick one prevailed.⁴⁶

This phanatick goal could very quickly become a theocracy, a vision espoused by Rutherford’s fellow divine George Gillespie in 1646. Gillespie took the argument further, arguing not only that the magistrate was obligated to submit to the kirk but was in turn required to support it with the power of the state. The king was not only the appointee of the righteous community, but he was also in some ways the kirk’s servant. “We teach,” he argued in *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming* (1646), that magistrates were given their civil authority “for maintenance of the true Religion, and for suppressing of Idolatry and superstition whatsoever.”⁴⁷ He argued that “The Jewish Church” was a pattern for use in the present “in such things as were not typical or temporal.” The priests in the Old Testament were given great authority over the church, and politicians were not placed over the interpretation of Scripture. This led Gillespie to argue “That the Jewish Church was formally distinct from the Jewish State or Common-wealth.” This Old Testament separation of church and state did not preclude interaction, but rather, maintained separate spheres. Critically, it was the church that had the power of excommunication. “Jewish

⁴⁶ John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (New York: Cambridge University, 1997), 148-151, 166.

⁴⁷George Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming, or the Divine Ordinance of Church Government Vindicated* (1646), “To the Reader.”

excommunication was an Ecclesiastical censure, and not a *civil excommunication*.” This, of course, gave the church significant power over a Christian magistrate, a check and balance against domestic tyranny.⁴⁸

Gillespie’s Covenanter world operated as a kind of national military state, with Jesus the supreme head of both the (spiritually) militant and civil arenas. Each area had its own head, the church assemblies and the king, respectively. Each reported to Jesus. However, the only way for the king to get to the spiritual leader was to go through the church assembly. They were closer to God in things spiritual and the monarch was, by virtue of his Christianity, beneath them. The kirk, in turn, would need the magistrate’s power to enforce the discipline needed to maintain a righteous community. All those sinners playing nine-holes on Sunday could face the wrath of both session and state in a covenanted nation.⁴⁹

None of this theory was in the least democratic. Covenanters held democracy to be either “ridiculous nonsense” or “absolute untruth.” It was “not Monarchy, but degenerate Monarchy that God threatens to throw down.” Put another way, “A wise man will not refuse a precious stone, because it sticks in a Dunghill.”⁵⁰ For Covenanters, their striving was for a political arrangement that would bind crown and kirk to the two kingdoms theological system.

⁴⁸ Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming*, 1-38, 51.

⁴⁹ Gillespie, *Aaron’s Rod Blossoming*, 224.

⁵⁰ *Pamphlet against Dr. Homes* (October 8, 1650), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Belfast, YP 56, 4.

Along with the two Covenants, Rutherford and Gillespie had spelled out the new political theology of Holy Scotland. What remained was a thoroughgoing statement of the joint discipline, in both belief and action, which would define the new covenanted British state. Both Rutherford and Gillespie were sent as Scottish delegates to the Westminster Assembly of Divines, a meeting already underway of England's Puritan leadership to establish clear doctrinal standards for a reformed Protestant church in Britain.

By the summer of 1643, when the Westminster assembly met, all of Britain was in full-blown civil war. By decade's end there would be a Scottish army in Ireland, rumors of an Irish army in England, and almost always two opposing forces in England, one of which invaded Scotland. Even the Welsh rose up. The political nightmare of the mid-seventeenth century had a strong religious component, though it was not simply a conflict of religion. The Puritan divines were appointed by the Long Parliament in order to establish the religious foundations of a new, more militantly Protestant realm.⁵¹

That did not mean, however, that the Assembly's goal was Presbyterianism. As Austin Woolrych wryly noted, "it is fascinating to speculate on what the Westminster Assembly would have prescribed for the Church of England if the Scots

⁵¹ The military conflicts are comprehensively studied in Trevor Royle, *The British Civil War: The War of the Three Kingdoms, 1638-1660* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

had not been involved.”⁵² But the Scots were involved, less because they sent eight non-voting representatives than because the English Puritans desperately needed the Covenanter army to remain on its side.

The documents that were produced over the decade or so that the assembly met had a short life in English religion but cast a long shadow over Presbyterianism in Scotland. They produced six documents in all, *The Confession of Faith*, a large catechism for adults and a shorter one for children, *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, a form of government based on the Presbyterian model, and a Psalter for singing in worship. The documents were sweeping in scope, covering birth to death in the life of the believer, local to national in the organization of the church, and clarifying doctrinal statements from the Trinitarian nature of God to the break down of the salvation process into five stages. These documents became the touchstones of Presbyterian congregational life well into the nineteenth century.

Modern interest in the documents in theological studies, as well as their continued use in twenty and twenty-first century churches, has centered on the documents for their codification of Calvinist orthodoxy. For contemporaries, however, it was the contentious political aspects of the works that gave them such impact. When the document was completed in 1648, the English Parliament printed

⁵² Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 270. Woolrych’s opinion on the Covenanters is quite strong. He notes they were “no more troubled about imposing an alien religious system on an unwilling nation than a group of Soviet commissaries would be when delivering the pure milk of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy to a satellite country” The analogy may be in poor taste, but it is not a poor analogy, see 272.

it without chapters 30 on the church's right to censure individuals, and 31 on the calling of Presbyterian synods, or the section of chapter 20 that specified that resisting constituted authority, even in printed form, constituted rebellion against God. In Scotland, meanwhile, the Parliament refused to publish the document without clarifying that the right of the state to call religious meetings in Chapter 31 only applied to areas where the church lacked its own organizational structure. For most in the sixteenth century, it was the political rather than the religious aspects of the document that mattered.⁵³

The *Confession of Faith* clearly circumscribed the church's area of autonomy from the state. The magistrate could not meddle in the preaching of the Bible nor the sacraments of baptism or communion. Still, as Rutherford and Gillespie had insisted, they were bound to put the state in the church's service in order "that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented and reformed" as well as all worship be observed.⁵⁴ The church retained the right to censure any offender for any sin as a separate entity from the state in order to prevent "the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his covenant" to be profaned.⁵⁵

The liberty of conscience remained firmly embedded in its communal context. Although the document's twentieth chapter included powerfully loaded

⁵³ A good instance of this is John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972), 62-63.

⁵⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 23.3.

⁵⁵ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 30.3.

language affirming that “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men,” that freedom went only so far as to deny “any thing contrary to his Word.” The liberty to resist was simply the liberty not to violate the teachings of the Bible. The individual did not have the right “upon the pretense of Christian liberty,” to “practice any sin, or cherish any lust.” Liberty was the freedom of the church to be free from an oppressive state, free from binding oaths and worship practices with Catholic origins, and free from individuals who might go too far with their freedom.⁵⁶

The day after Christmas, 1647, the king used the toleration issue to split the Covenanter alliance. In what became known as the Engagement controversy, Charles I informed the Covenanters that as soon as he could “with freedom, honor and safety” meet with the rebellious parliaments of Scotland and England, he would “confirm the said League and Covenant.” This looked very much like total victory for the Scots. The king himself would now enter into the pact to make all the kingdoms of Britain Presbyterian. There was only one catch. Charles would only agree to sign the covenant “provided that none who is unwilling shall be constrained to take it.”⁵⁷ Dissenters, Catholics and anyone else in the national communities who

⁵⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 20.

⁵⁷ Charles Rex, December 26, 1647 in *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution, 1625-1660*, 3rd Edition, Samuel Rawson Gardiner, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1906), 347. Charles’ offer was complex. He desired to send 20 Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, and required a three year waiting period before all reforms were implemented. Charles had made concessions

did not wish to be Presbyterian, need not be forced into it. The move was no faith and all politics on Charles' part, but it struck to the heart of the divisions between zealots and moderates in Scotland.⁵⁸

Many Presbyterian moderates, who became known as Engagers, took the deal, causing uproar amongst the fanatic wing that such concessions did not go far enough. To covenant the nation to 'true religion' with room for people to take exceptions was not to covenant at all, as far as the Presbyterian party was concerned. "Covenanters cannot pass to the Engagers without perjury," an anonymous pamphleteer explained, "and the Engagers cannot pass to Covenanters without forfeiting their allegiance to their acknowledged Masters."⁵⁹ Over the 1640s and 1650s the Covenanting movement began to fragment, and contentions on all sides increasingly revealed that the constitutional arguments in Covenanter rhetoric were subsumed by the arguments for enforcing a Presbyterian form of government. The issue at hand was liberty of conscience, or toleration.⁶⁰

In the short term the Engagement controversy was a victory for the zealots in large part because of the response of leading phanatick writers and their popularity

before, at the end of the First and Second Bishops' Wars, and his good faith was in question from the very beginning.

⁵⁸ Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution*, 399-401. Woolrych considers this one of Charles' all time worst political miscalculations, which, considering Charles' long career of ineptitude is noteworthy. From the Scottish perspective, however, the move did create internal chaos in a nation aligned with the Parliamentary forces.

⁵⁹ *Pamphlet against Dr. Homes*, 79.

⁶⁰ John Morrill, ed. *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1990), 13-21.

amongst commoners in the south. The Engagement put common people in a position where they may be conscripted into an army to fight for a cause they believed to be evil. Some 2,000 anti-Engagers from the Presbyterian party rose up in arms, and though they were defeated easily at Mauchline Muir, the issues at hand threatened to place Scotland into its own civil war. These dangers led to the most prolific outpouring of anti-toleration phanaticism thought in Covenanter history.⁶¹

As always, Rutherford had his pen at the ready. His 1649 *A Free Disputation Against pretended Liberty of Conscience* was one of the seventeenth century's remarkable statements on the intersection of church, state and individual conscience. It began with a telling Scriptural inscription from Psalm 119.45. "And I will walk at Liberty, for I seek thy precepts." Covenanter views of liberty were tied directly to the life one chose to lead.

Freedom to the Puritan mind broadly, and the Covenanter phanaticks' specifically, was complexly tied to tyranny. Religious tyranny was the product of systems like Catholicism and Episcopal "prelacy" which refused people the right to worship in the plain "Biblical" ways. "Papists here have exceeded in boundless domination and tyranny over the consciences of men," Rutherford pointed out. "This tyranny over conscience we disclaim." The Protestant Reformation set the nations free to live in the Biblically mandated way. Tyranny had been overthrown,

⁶¹ David Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Scotland, 1644-1651*. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 97, 102, 107-111.

“yet for that ought not the other extremity of wild toleration to be embraced.”⁶²

There was a wrong way to understand freedom of conscience.

Liberty of conscience was wrong if it came from a spirit of Libertinism and Atheism, “as if our conscience had a Prerogative Royal beside a rule,” which was “the revealed will of God.” Such an approach would make every individual’s conscience their own “Rule, Umpire, Judge, Bible, and his *God*.” Such a person was nothing more than a “godly, pious, holy Heretic, who fears his conscience more than his *Creator*.” Liberty in this regard was idolatry. It gave the individual God’s job of determining what was right and what was wrong. John Brown defined toleration as “legal license, - openly and obstinately to pervert, contradict and revile the declarations of God contained in his word” and to commit any outrage against the Divine so long as one did not “disturb the eternal peace of the nation.” For Covenanters, such freedom would undermine the heart of national stability.⁶³

Where would it end? The proliferation of religious sects “infers necessarily many Religions, many faiths, many sundry Gospels in one Christian society.” A godly community could not be one and many. It must be unified. “But the toleration of all ways, and many Religions” would lead to just such an outcome. “*Ergo*, this

⁶² Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London: 1649), Belfast Central Library Special Collections, Belfast, preface.

⁶³ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against pretended Liberty*, preface; John Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy of all authoritative Toleration of Gross Heresy, Blasphemy, Idolatry, Popery, in Britain. In Two Letters to a Friend* (originally 1680s, Glasgow: 1780), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, YP78, 5, 15.

toleration is not of God... because there is but one old way.” Covenanter logic was rigidly consistent in this regard. Such diversity would undermine the holy nation. Attempts at blending or placing on an equal level, “*true and false religion*” put the entire nation at risk for civil divisions, political turmoil and the judgment of God.⁶⁴

Since toleration was a national security issue, Covenanters sought to clarify how the individual conscience could be regulated by the church and state. The Bible gave no warrant to tolerate wrongness, in the Covenanter interpretation. “Liberty to sin” was “fleshly license not liberty.” The Bible did give plenty of instruction on how to handle sin. It was first regulated through the church, whose ministers were empowered to “*command, exhort, rebuke*” and even order anyone speaking religious errors to “stop their mouths.” Synods could compel people’s consciences, by “fear either of shame, reproach or censures” or through “mere teaching and instructing.” As they had instructed the civil magistrate, God was the Lord of conscience, and the righteous community was God’s voice about that conscience to everyone.⁶⁵

The church could only go so far in its coercion and denying of sacraments and extricating persons from the community. A stronger arm was needed to ensure malignant teachers did not corrupt the community. The king was a “political shepherd,” who did not compel beliefs, “but rather forbids their contradictories as disservice to Christian societies.” Seducers of the people and false teachers could be

⁶⁴ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 146; Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 14.

⁶⁵ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 24, 145, 26. Rutherford was referencing 2 Timothy 4.1-2.

rightly executed, not to compel them to believe the truth, but to protect the Christian society from them. Ministering the “true religion” required intolerance: intolerance of sin, error, and backsliding. The king was the arm of God to support the church. Therefore, neither could afford to be tolerant. The Covenanter vision enforced intolerance through both arms of God’s kingdom in the world, his church and his state.⁶⁶

There were subtle limits to this enforcement. Rutherford and the Covenanters were concerned with religious conformity externally far more than they were with religious conviction internally.

Religion is taken for the external profession and acting and performances of true Religion within the Church or by such as profess the truth, that are obvious to the eyes of *Magistrates* and *Pastors*, and thus the sword is no means of God to force men *positively* to external worship or performances. But the sword is a means negatively to punish act of false worship in those that are under the Christian *Magistrate* and profess Christian Religion, in so far as these acts come out to the eyes of men and are destructive to the souls, of these in a Christian society.⁶⁷

Rutherford did not deny that people were imperfect, and in people’s mistakes and failings there should be “brotherly indulgence and reciprocation of the debt of compassion, forbearance of the infirmities one of another.” But charity of spirit and indulgence were not the same. Charity was individual. Tolerance was national and would “suffer millions to perish, through silence and merciless condolence with

⁶⁶ Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 14; Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 52, 182-88, 177.

⁶⁷ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 51.

them in their sinful depraving of the Truth.” Rutherford urged charity while demanding intolerance.⁶⁸

It was in that way that the seemingly intractable problem of individual conscience versus belief was resolved. The two ideas were separated. According to Rutherford, conscience was not a simple habit or act, it was an external power internally known. It was understanding compelling action. God had put this in every human being so that they would have “the power to know things our self, and actions in order to obey God and serve him.” For Rutherford, “Conscience is but knowledge with a witness,” and that witness was God through the Bible and church. It was clear what the conscience demanded because the righteous community, local and national, had made it so. Violating the conscience, then, constituted a kind of religious deicide. “Punishment of men for what is plainly contrary to the word of God is no persecution for conscience sake,” said Brown, “but a proper correction of them for trampling on and murdering their conscience.” Toleration would not be forthcoming.⁶⁹

Belief was different and was not the concern of the state. Any magistrate attempting to force belief of even the most fundamental Christian doctrines on Jews, pagans and even Protestants was bound to fail. No one could compel belief, which Rutherford called “the speculative understanding.” Men could speculate, indeed did

⁶⁸ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, preface. “There can be no conflict of grace against grace.”

⁶⁹ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 1-5; Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 89.

speculate, endlessly. But the tinkering of the individual mind did not obligate action. Personal ideas were not compulsory, since they were based simply on the internal workings of the mind. It must be protected from the force of tyranny. The conscience, on the other hand, was based in God's nature (creation), informed by the Bible (revelation), and enforced by the church (community). People might speculate in heresies, but they could not be bound to act upon them. Anyone who would "deny such truths," as the church taught did "violence to their conscience." The conscience could never compel disobedience to God, because it was God himself revealed in many ways. As Covenanter divine John Brown explained, "No magistrate can compel me to love my neighbor as my self... but he may lawfully punish me for calumniating or robbing him." This was the fine but clearly demarcated line between belief and conscience.⁷⁰

Rutherford and others aimed their attacks at the Engagers who would accept something less than a unified British Protestantism as well as the English Puritan independents who remained unconvinced that a Presbyterian system most accurately reflected the Bible. Those, like Oliver Cromwell, who wanted to leave some window open for well meaning Protestant dissenters, especially incensed

⁷⁰ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 51, 5-7; Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 13-14; Brown, for instance, was adamant that Men ought to be *persuaded*, not *forced* into faith and holiness." However, that should "not infer, that no man ought to be restrained from, or even *suitably* and *seasonably* punished for, open and gross heresy, blasphemy or idolatry..." Brown, 48. Also, Brown's distinction between faith and conscience was less clear than Rutherford's. "The law of God, not men's conscience, is their *supreme and only infallible rule*, which bind even conscience itself." The effect of the argument remained the same, 40.

them. "Such liberty, is inconsistent with, and repugnant to the word of God," Rutherford claimed. Brown scoffed that the very idea of letting individuals pursue their own holiness apart from the righteous community was like leaving children to raise themselves. The list of detractors against Puritan England because it was overly tolerant has few names. Rutherford and the Covenanters were among them. Ultimately tolerance struck at the heart of the Covenanter phanatics' religious and political sense of the world. As Rutherford put it plainly, "the pretended Liberty of Conscience is against the National League and Covenant." Few could argue with that.⁷¹

Few did. The Engagement Controversy gave the zealots focus in their writings and renewed political life in the Scottish nation. From his deathbed, George Gillespie warned fellow zealots against any scheme uniting with non-Covenanters, "under whatsoever prudential considerations it might be varnished over." For him, "Compliance with any who have been active in that Engagement" would be "most sinful and unlawful."⁷² The Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland announced that "no where can we find in the Scripture of Truth either

⁷¹ Rutherford, *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty*, 267, 265; Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 89. The contrast for modern readers between *Lex, Rex* and *A Free Disputation* is stark. Rutherford, however, did not see his arguments binding the king to obedience to the law and binding the nation to obedience to the church as being at odds. His Scriptural inscription on the title page of *Lex, Rex* is telling. 1 Samuel 12.25: "But if you shall do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your King." The nation and the king stood to lose if the righteous community went astray.

⁷² George Gillespie as quoted in Crawford Gribben, "Samuel Rutherford and Liberty of Conscience," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 363.

precept or precedent allowed of God for toleration of error.”⁷³ The moderation of the Engagers had breathed new life into the Presbyterian party.

Zealot minister John Brown attempted to appeal to moderates to remain in alliance with the Presbyterian party. In an ironic twist, he argued that intolerance was the most moderate of courses. On the one hand, the Erastian view in England placed the king over the church. On the other hand, the European Anabaptists divorced government from the church altogether. “The Church of Scotland has renounced, and in her solemn covenants has abjured both these extremes.” In the Covenanter framework the magistrates were made into the *lieutenants of God*.⁷⁴ Call that view what one might, phanatick or moderate, Brown’s believed the Covenanters had found the right relationship of the two for a holy nation.

A holy nation was what the alliance claimed their revolution was all about. “Religion [was] the great basis of civil happiness” and “God himself” had “connected religion, and the civil welfare of nations.” That was why the reforming kings of Old Testament Judah, when they purged the Jewish nation of idolatry, had used the arm of the state to promote and protect “true religion.” True religion did not need to be

⁷³ George Gillespie, *An Useful Case of Conscience Discussed and Resolved, Concerning Associations and Confederacies with Idolaters, Infidels, Heriticks, or any other known enemy of Truth and Godliness* (Edinburgh: 1649), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 432, Union Theological College, Belfast, 24.

⁷⁴ Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 5-7.

tolerated. It should be established, because establishing true religion for the nation was the same thing as establishing civic peace for the people.⁷⁵

Such was religious liberty for Covenanter extremists. Right and obligation were one and the same thing. Liberty was the freedom from wrong worship and, conversely, the right to worship God correctly. It was never the freedom to worship the wrong way, the wrong God, or no God at all. As historian Thomas Macaulay perceptively noted, they wanted two things: “freedom of conscience for themselves, but *absolute domination over the consciences* of others.” Covenanters used the rhetoric of religious liberty and the people’s rights in almost every document they ever produced. Yet their definitions made all the difference. This key sameness of language and distinction of meaning would lay at the heart of the Covenanters’ relationships with other radical groups in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁶

The Engagement controversy produced both voluminous writings on the perils of moderation and the high tide of politics for the religious zealots.⁷⁷ The moderates’ unpopular engagement with the king pushed them temporarily to the outside. Phanaticks promised that “the Quarrel of the Covenant shall pursue them,” and it did when the 1649 Scottish Parliament was the most left-leaning ever. They

⁷⁵ Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 3, 14. Also mentioned for Biblical examples were Abraham, Jacob, the Judges, Moses, Joshua, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Josiah, Nehemiah and Jehu.

⁷⁶ Thomas Macaulay, *History of England*, 419.

⁷⁷ Quentin Skinner, “Conquest and consent: Hobbes and the engagement controversy,” in *Visions of Politics, Volume 3: Hobbes and Civil Science* (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 287-307.

pushed through the 1649 Act of Classes, which expelled non-Covenanter ministers from their pulpits and tightened phanatick control over local kirks. They also took away the nobles' right to patronage over the appointment of kirk pastors. This power was placed back in the local kirks and presbyteries. Moderates became Scotland's scapegoat, those who took the Covenants "not in a holy and spiritual way" but in a "carnal politic way abusing God's Interest for [their] interest and ends." Phanaticks began to feel they were ushering in the apocalypse. For the moment, they were clearly winning back Holy Scotland.⁷⁸

Things quickly became murky when in that same year, Charles I was executed. The Scottish reaction to regicide was interesting, as Covenanter phanaticks were never as enthusiastic as their English Protestant allies about the prospect of a British commonwealth. Scotland then took the surprising step of acknowledging the right of Charles' son to the throne of Scotland, despite the fact that the move drew the ire of Cromwell and English Parliamentary forces. When the king's son agreed, albeit haltingly, to swear the Covenants he was proclaimed Charles II, rightful King of the Scots. The next few years were a blur of political

⁷⁸ *A Declaration by the Presbytery at Bangor, 7 July 1649* (1649), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 265, Union Theological College, Belfast, 30; *Causes of the LORD's wrath against Scotland, Manifested in his sad late dispensations, Whereunto is added a paper, particularly holding forth the Sins of the Ministry* (1653), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 432, Union Theological College, Belfast, 44-45; On the apocalypse, one writer suggested that the restoration of Scotland was the second of three steps needed for Christ's return. The last would be the restoration of the tribes of Israel, "when God shall turn this bright side toward the Jews." Untitled Pamphlet, circa 1650, Scotland, Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Belfast, YP 56, ii.

infighting. Cromwell turned on the Covenanter alliance, defeating their army at Dunbar in 1650. This turned Scottish popular opinion heavily against the English. To Scottish minds, the English had “the honor of imprisoning, arraigining, condemning, and beheading the only Protestant King in the world,” as well as the “removing of the Covenanted Reformation, and the invading of *Scotland*.”⁷⁹

Late that year another controversy occurred known as the Remonstrance. Zealots, called the Remonstrance party, demanded a more thoroughgoing commitment from Charles II than he was prepared to give. After his coronation in 1651 these zealots began to lose favor in Scottish politics as the nation wearied of war and grew suspicious of phanatick politics. Their relationship to the king was made temporarily mute later that year when Charles’ forces joined the long list of armies that lost to Cromwell. Charles retreated to the continent, and the Scots were in a quandary. Charles II, on paper at least, was a covenanted King. Cromwell was a Puritan independent, the very kind of Protestant Rutherford and others had written against. Scottish politics in the 1650s were hectic and confusing, but the general trend was one of disenchantment with the religious fanaticism of the 1630s.

Beneath the surface of the Covenanter alliance lay deep divisions on the issues and definitions of religious liberty, tyranny and freedom of conscience as well as to the right relationship of the church to the state. As long as conservative and moderate elements needed their more zealous co-revolutionaries, these remained

⁷⁹ *Pamphlet against Dr. Homes*, 1.

submerged. When opportunities for other alliances arose, as in the Engagement controversy, those divisions manifested. As the 1660s began, the reign of king covenant came to a close and zealots were quickly detached from their moderate anchor. The next decades would be a trial by fire in which Covenanters increasingly moved out of the mainstream. They took with them the peculiar political theology forged in the Covenanter Revolution.

CHAPTER IV

SCOTTISH PHANATICKS: SOCIETY, CELL GROUPS AND MARTYRS, 1660-1688

In the nearly three decades between the restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the Covenanter movement changed from an alliance of political factions to a religious movement on the fringe of Presbyterianism.¹ From its inception, the covenanter movement had possessed two faces: the Moderate Elites (Nobles, Remonstrance party, Moderate clergy) and the Presbyterian Party (Protestors, Resolutioners, Phanaticks).² From the 1660s forward, the Covenanter movement quickly ceased to be populated by complicated alliances of political and class factions. It would henceforth consist of religious

¹ For a detailed overview of this period and the role of Covenanter political theology in it, see J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: religion, ideology and politics during the ancien regime* (New York: Cambridge, 2000) and *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (New York: Cambridge, 1994), 218-224.

² Contra Allan Macinnes, who has argued that the moderate/extremist divisions that arose later in Scotland were a product of the Restoration era and not part of the original covenanting movement. This divide, he argues, “obscures the basic continuity of the phanatick mainstream dominating the covenanting movement between 1638 and 1651.” The 1638 National Covenant’s failure to single out the Episcopal form of government for specific condemnation he takes to be subsumed beneath the heading in the National Covenant that all innovations be done away with. Mentioning bishops was redundant. All Scottish Covenanters were anti-English, anti-bishop, and pro-Presbyterian regardless of their internal class divisions. See Allan I. Macinnes, “The Scottish Constitution, 1638-51: The rise and fall of oligarchic centralism” in Morrill, John ed. *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1990), 106-107, 121.

malcontents and enemies of the state, determined to recover the lost age of a holy Scotland. Although many Presbyterian laity continued to hold fond views of the Covenants, Covenanters became detached from mainstream Presbyterians in centers of power. This process of clear demarcation would increase over the course of the 1670s and 1680s known as the Killing Times, and hardened by the 1680s when Presbyterians sought actively to distance themselves from the Covenanter legacy forever. By that time, Covenanters had completed their move from the heart of Scottish politics to their identity as the Presbyterian fringe.³

When the English Commonwealth finally fell in 1660, Charles II was officially restored to both thrones. The Resolutioners' fears that the king was lukewarm in his Covenanter sympathies were quickly proven correct. The ground had slowly shifted beneath their feet across the 1650s, but in the early 1660s change came in a dramatic shift of political fortunes. Zealot ministers like John Brown were pushed out of their pulpits beginning in 1661 just as they had done to their opponents a decade earlier. Episcopacy was restored in both kingdoms in 1662, as was the rights of patrons to appoint ministers. Private worship in homes and fields, called conventicles, were outlawed. Swearing the Covenants was banned. Owning a copy of them was forbidden.

³ Ian Borthwick Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters, 1660-1688* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1976), 17-49. Cowan argues that this is definitely the case by the Bothwell Bridge fiasco in 1679.

With startling alacrity, phanaticks were politically cut off at the knees. Conservatives and moderates decoupled from the Presbyterian party because it was no longer a vital political asset. Ecclesiastical courts had proved useful in policing the land and pulpits were powerful propaganda platforms. Once the political terrain shifted and there was no further need for a revolutionary state, religious zealotry was again more a problem for elites than a benefit. Samuel Rutherford later recognized that this had been the case. He went to his grave believing that the kirk had allowed itself to be “used as the state’s police force, suppressing and punishing opposition, instead of concentrating on spiritual functions.”⁴

The measure of this change can be seen in the shifting usage of the term “Covenanter” itself in the early 1660s. Quickly, elites and moderates disassociated themselves from such words and the term acquired a universally extremist implication. Moderate Robert Ramsey pointed out that the role of the clergy in politics was the worst parts of the Covenanter days by saying, “Whereas we should have been peace-makers we have been fomenters of divisions, and dividers of the people of God.” Accusations of covenanter leanings became a political tool. Archbishop James Sharp, later the most notable victim of a Covenanter sword, conveyed to the highly ironic rumors that he was tarred by enemies as “an apostate covenanter, sure the next will be that I am turned phanatick & enemy to the King.”

⁴ David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637-1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974), 304. Stevenson has argued the elites in the covenanter alliance had “used the kirk because they were not afraid of it.”

By the mid 1660s, to be a Covenanter was to be a traitor and terrorist rather than a revolutionary.⁵

By the 1660s Covenanter phanaticks possessed an ideological bedrock sufficiently broad to address the intellectual needs of a group sensibility. A century of practiced family and small group devotional networks and local kirk discipline gave the most committed enthusiasts regular experience of disseminating, absorbing, proclaiming, and reaffirming their beliefs in effective ways. For some, there was an investment of blood and battle. 24,000 men, mostly commoners and almost one quarter of those eligible, served in the wars between 1638-1651 for the Covenanter armies. The decision of which men to send to war was made by local kirk sessions.⁶ Religious phanaticks in 1660 possessed the ideology, mechanisms and personal investments to understand what it meant to be the Presbyterian party. The period between 1660 and 1689, however, would be the period of political and social pressure that would refine those beliefs into an enduring cultural sensibility. Pressure from moderates, persecution from conservative crown officials and the increasing marginalization of zealots all combined to harden their dissent into a small but persistent voice that fit more in the past than in any particular present.

⁵ Robert Ramsey as quoted in Jane Lane, *The Reign of King Covenant* (London: Robert Hale, 1956), 248; James Sharp to Patrick Drummond, Edinburgh, January 31, 1661, Lauderdale Papers, Volume 1.

⁶ Edward M. Furgol, "Scotland turned Sweden: The Scottish Covenanters and the Military Revolution, 1638-1651" in *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 1990), 139-140.

How serious were Covenanters about the Covenants? This was the question many faced as the political alliance disintegrated in the wake of Charles II's restoration to the throne. With the covenants outlawed, what were people to do with their sworn allegiance to God for "we and our posterity after us."⁷ For those who had been forced to sign against their will, or for those who felt the aims of political peace sought by the Covenant would best be realized by working within the new political system, the decision was to absolve themselves of any perpetual obligation. The Covenants were documents of a heated era some twenty years past. What was past was best left in the past.

Not everyone could so easily remove themselves from the Covenants. For a people who took literal interpretations of Biblical texts seriously, it was hard to escape the implications that a covenant with God was once and for all. Esau's oath to give over his birthright to his brother Jacob for some soup was made in a moment of haste. Still, even after the brothers' deaths the descendents of both sides were bound by their covenant.⁸ Rahab the harlot, not even a Jew, had saved herself and her family with a perpetually binding covenant. Zealots were incensed that Scots could turn their back on the dream of Holy Scotland. They felt betrayed by the English Puritans, who showed little interest in securing a Presbyterian Britain. One Covenanter wrote that "I have no more doubt about the obligation of a religious or church-covenant upon posterity, than I have upon the lawfulness" of having

⁷ *Solemn League and Covenant*, 1.

⁸ Brown, *The Absurdity and Perfidy*, 126.

covenants in the first place.⁹ “We are,” wrote one phanatick, “those (we confess) who cannot think our consciences discharged from the *Covenant*.” Such opinions were increasingly politically unpopular.¹⁰

Covenanters who demanded, perhaps more than any other, religious uniformity now refused to participate in anything but their own version of the national church. Covenanters were aware that all their opponents labeled them as schismatic. They challenged this, since one could not break apart a church that was not truly a church. Certainly causing “a *Rent* or Breach” would be “very sinful,” but only if that breach came from “the Communion of a Church walking according to the Divine Rule.”¹¹ Since those who repudiated the Covenants made with God could not possibly be part of a true church, it was their opponents who were schismatic. No church headed by the king, a blatant violation of two kingdoms theology, could be legitimate. Therefore, they could not participate in it.

For those who took the Covenants as perpetually binding obligations, the next issue was what to do with an uncovenanted state. The government, to their minds, was in rebellion against God. It must be resisted. At the very least, it must

⁹ *Three Letters Concerning the Testimony and Obligation of the Covenants Upon Posterity* (undated), un-indexed pamphlet collection, Union Theological College, Belfast, 12. The author cites Deut. 29: 20-; John 23.26-26; 2 Kings 17:15-18 and Jeremiah 31:32.

¹⁰ Theophilus Timorcus, *The Covenanters Plea Against Absolvers, Or, a Modest Discourse Shewing Why those who in England and Scotland took the Solemn League and Covenant cannot judge their Consciences discharged from the Obligation of it* (1661), 51-57.

¹¹ Timorcus, *The Covenanters Plea Against Absolvers*, 32.

not be supported. Therein lay the issue of money. Any money paid in cess (land taxes) and tithes was money paid to an unholy government oppressing a holy land. Contributing to cess made one guilty of one's own oppression, since "it looks equally upon all the givers, as wiling followers of the command."¹² To honor the covenants then was no longer a proactive pursuit of the Covenanted nations of Britain through politics. It was defensive resistance against an occupying force.

The perpetual obligation of the Covenants meant that neither church nor state could be supported. "If there be a false magistracy, as well as a false and pretended ministry," one phanatick argued, "then it is evident, that obedience and subjection (I mean in point of conscience) is as little due to the one, as reverence and honor is, unto the other." The very peace of the kingdom demanded active unrest because there could "be no lasting solid peace" unless a government was founded "in nothing else but righteousness."¹³ The old alliances were undone forever. Henceforth, Covenanters would accept no moderates.

Phanatick Society and Cell Groups

Their indefatigable commitment to what became known as "the good old cause" was popular amongst the common folk in the Scottish lowlands, especially in the southwest. Try as they might, nobles and moderates proved unsuccessful in putting the phanatick genie back in the bottle. In large part this was because the

¹² Robert McWard, *A Testimony against Paying of Ces to an unjust and unlawful Government or wicked Rulers* (circa 1680), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, YP 52, 221.

¹³ *The Mystery of Magistracy Unveiled* (Edinburgh: 1708), v-vi.

phanaticism of the zealot element in the old politics, for all its ideological production, was rooted first and foremost in local religious communities. It gained its political strength and ideological heft from its popular appeal. True, many if not most in Scotland had taken the oath either in the heat of the moment or under significant and even violent pressures. But those pressures had come from somewhere, and someone. For many common Scots, the heat of the moment sprang passionately from an assault on their two most viable spiritual and political institutions: the local and national kirks. This resolve to maintain tradition did not easily disappear.

To understand the Covenanter movement is to understand the phanatick laity in the Scottish nation.¹⁴ The people, not the ministers, were the keepers of orthodoxy. The laity created the Second Scottish Reformation as much as their ministers by forcing Protestantism to come to them by addressing their needs. What they found useful, they used and expanded, what they found wanting, they resisted or simply ignored. Everything in Protestantism was changed by the way the laity responded, and they shaped the very message they heard over and over again every Sunday. The literacy reforms of the first Reformation, including the founding of parish schools that was most successful in the southwest, had

¹⁴ Almost every history of the Covenanters interprets them through their ministers. To start with ministers to understand the workings of the laity is to reverse the actual order of the historical experience. The laity drove the ministers far more than the ministers drove the people. Histories written from the perspective of presbytery and synod minutes risk missing this vital aspect of Presbyterianism.

empowered the laity with a basic theological knowledge and Biblical aptitude. They proved the least likely to recede from the perceived gains of reformation for “true religion” and the most likely to whip up support for its success.¹⁵ In these areas their defense of the faith became the most militant. As one occupying soldier noted, “The country people show themselves our enemies on all occasion.”¹⁶ As others quickly learned, the laity carried both arms and arguments.

One visiting Anglican bishop was shocked by the laity’s surprisingly adept theological acumen on issues of church and state. “We were indeed amazed to see a poor commonalty so capable to argue upon points of Government and on the bounds to be set to the power of princes in matters of religion,” he remarked. He noticed that on every issue “they had texts of Scripture at hand,” even “the meanest of them, their cottagers and their servants.”¹⁷ The heart of the phanatick movement had been inculcated in the basics of Biblicist Calvinism for several generations by the time of the Covenants, and in the time since added another generation tried by the fire of war. Far from being an elite establishment, the Covenanter core was of the people. The laity knew their Calvinism so well in part because they knew how to read.

¹⁵ Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), 20. Marilyn Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University, 1988), 74-105.

¹⁶ As quoted in Jane Lane, *The Reign of King Covenant* (London: Robert Hale, 1956), 249.

¹⁷ Bishop Gilbert Burnet as quoted in Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*, 23.

Doctrinal knowledge was piety to Covenanters. The emphasis on family worship, Bible reading, catechizing, and increasingly on a working knowledge of the Westminster Confession and the sacred Covenants was all built on the significant assumption that Covenanters were a disproportionately literate people. As Marilyn Westerkamp has noted, “They had ritualized plainness because they valued universal understanding and spontaneity.” Understanding needed means. As they saw it, literacy was that means to knowledge of true doctrine, knowledge of true doctrine equaled piety, and Covenanter piety was the only true means to citizenship.¹⁸

Reading at the lay level was always important for the Presbyterian Party. The Scotch Confession stated “That the whole congregation may join herein, everyone that can read is to have a psalm-book; all others not disabled by age or otherwise are to be exhorted to learn to read.” The general expectation that everyone not “disabled by age or otherwise,” meaning the young and mentally handicapped, must become literate.¹⁹

The Scottish Reformation that Covenanters sacralized in their cultural memory was a reformation based in literacy. According to John Knox, “God hath determined that His Church here on earth shall be taught not by angels but by men; and seeing that men are born ignorant of all godliness; and seeing, also, how God ceases to illuminate men miraculously . . . it is necessary that your honors be most

¹⁸ Westerkamp, 122.

¹⁹ Scotch Confession, as quoted in Lathan 222.

careful for the virtuous education and godly upbringing of the youth of this realm.” This occurred via legislative fiat. In 1616, 1633, 1646, and 1696 the Scottish Parliament approved funding for expanding education. Scotland had one of the earliest and most expansive state educational systems in the western world, largely driven by religious ties between Presbyterian church and state. The civic magistrate took on the same obligations as did the godly parent, “to teach the children . . . to read and write.” This approach wrought significant changes. When the two Covenants were signed by laymen in the 1630s and 40s, rural parish literacy rates were rarely above 20 percent. In the towns they hovered below 50 percent, based on the signatures and marks used to ascribe assent in the Covenanting ritual. However surviving copies of the original Scottish covenants do show that 68 percent of those who signed were literate enough to sign their name. By 1700-1740 in Edinburgh and Glasgow over 90 percent of available samples could read, over 75 percent in towns, and over 60 percent in the villages. In the 1748 story, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, Tobias’ Smollett’s Scottish protagonists proclaim “learning was so cheap in my country, that every peasant was a scholar.”²⁰

²⁰ Literacy rates in Scotland varied in the early sixteenth century and are hard to pin down accurately. Roughly 50 percent of urban and 20 percent of rural males were literate in the 1630s. Women’s literacy was far lower, hovering at 10 percent. 68 percent of those who signed the 1638 National Covenant were literate, but that left a substantial minority who signed with a mark. Some rural parishes claimed only one literate individual, the minister. R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-19, 90-91, 256-258. Also Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 25.

Recent debates have challenged the veracity of widespread Scottish literacy being as strong as previously claimed. Yet, for Covenanters, who took the most literalistic approach to the Reformation and played out Reformation logic to each extreme conclusion, literacy was a mandated aspect of religious participation. Still, it should be noted that parts of Scotland were highly illiterate, especially the highlands, and that Northern England shared high literacy rates with the lowland Scots. Rates for women, especially amongst the lower class, remained low across Scotland.²¹

As early as the *First Book of Discipline* each kirk was required to have a local school for children to learn English, though this occurred with varying degrees of success. In 1633 these schools became compulsory by act of the Scottish Parliament. Local kirk sessions punished parents of both girls and boys who did not attend, regardless of class. Catechisms and Bibles were the order of the day, and though many never learned to write or even sign their name, it is probable that many could still read their devotional literatures or at least orally recite them.²²

Literacy was one way in which religious change was a process by which laity and clergy interacted. A central if unwritten legacy of the Scottish reformation was the empowering burden the laity felt for enforcing doctrinal purity. They were the kirk's protectors as much as its followers. Covenanters took the burden to know

²¹ Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity*, 1-19, 90-91, 256-258.

²² Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 59-63.

their religion seriously, and literacy was both a product of that ethic and a promotion of it.²³

As the gatekeepers of “true religion,” lay people policed both themselves and their ministers. Grilling the minister with questions regarding his orthodoxy was much akin to the mainland European tradition of commoners called carnival, in which authority was turned on its head and made to be subject to the common folk.²⁴ The ministers themselves were the product of these kirks. They were neither landed nor titled and owed their constituency to the people of the church. This was a new event on the political scene of Scotland. They were not feudal even as they interacted with the feudal power structure of Scottish politics.²⁵ This did not come without its consequences, as any minister reduced to begging discovered. Marie Stewart’s account book noted 2 pounds 16 shillings (Scots) given to “a poor distressed preacher who had a great family.”²⁶ Living outside of the sanctioned state and at the whim of the people carried its own peculiar consequences.

Ministers of the more rigidly Calvinistic Presbyterians came increasingly from the people themselves. Covenanter Thomas Hog was a fluent speaker of

²³ Miller, “Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?,” 39-41.

²⁴ Miller, “Religious commotions in the Scottish diaspora,” 27.

²⁵ Makey, *The Church of the Covenant*, 23.

²⁶ Helen and Keith Kelsall, *Scottish Lifestyle 300 Years Ago: New Light on Edinburgh and Border Families* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986), 100-101.

“Irish.”²⁷ James Renwick was the son of a weaver.²⁸ These common origins drew the ire of more respectable clergy. As a later poet described a Covenanter minister:

so pig-like is he found of ev’ry lung
You’d swear that grunting was his mother tongue²⁹

Similar dispersions abounded. Zealot ministers were outlaws politically and socially, often called “hill preachers.”³⁰ They were said to “put themselves in disguises so as when they preach they are in gray clothes.... And it is alleged some of them preach in masks.”³¹ These were powerful assertions in a period when beliefs in magic and witches were exceedingly common. Coincidentally or not, a significant spike in relations of encounters with the devil as a man dressed in black or dark clothing coincided directly with the years Covenanter ministers were being ejected from parishes, 1661-1662. Presbyterian preachers often donned black garb. Whether overly distraught Scots were confusing emotive field preachers with Satan

²⁷ Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland*, 109.

²⁸ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (1775; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 538.

²⁹ Mary Helen Thuente, “The Belfast laugh: the context and significance of United Irish satires” in Jim Smyth, ed. *Revolution, Counter-Revolution and Union: Ireland in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000), 73.

³⁰ The Committee of the Privy Council for Conventicles to the Duke of Lauderdale, July 6, 1676, Lauderdale Papers, Vol. 3.

³¹ Earl of Rothes to Lauderdale, Undated, circa 1665, Vol. 1.

is conjecture, but stimulatingly suggestive of Covenanter preacher's power to arouse latent emotions.³²

Feelings ran increasingly wild in the countryside, where Covenanters were being forced to hold open air services in the old conventicle style. Worship was emotional. In some cases reaffirming the Covenants was required before taking Communion. Covenanters celebrated communion more often than other Presbyterians, sometimes up to ten times per year.³³

Preaching at such events connected the sacred to the secular. Sermons regularly condemned Anglican Bishops and the Stuart monarchy. Covenanter Thomas Houston's public invectives were aimed at the moderate ministers who accepted forgiveness, indulgence and salaries from the crown.³⁴ Condemnation of politics was built into the very fabric of the sermons. Covenanter preachers followed a preaching pattern that bounced between biblical text and contemporary commentary without virtue of segue. The two were, in some sense, indivisible. Thus the Covenanter minister Alexander Henderson could preach on Ephesians 6:10-18 and discuss standing firm while wearing God's armor and move seamlessly

³² Joyce Miller, "Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse," in Goodare, Julian, Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller, eds., *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 152.

³³ Greaves, *God's Other Children*, 224-226.

³⁴ Smyth, *Making of the United Kingdom*, 48.

to the present confrontations with the uncovenanted state.³⁵ These themes were often millennial. One minister pointed out that the “Beast in *Daniel* subdues three Kings,” and in Revelation saws off of the ten-horned woman “three of her horns, *England, Scotland and Ireland.*”³⁶ This was all part of the three-fold preaching pattern. First the preacher walked the listeners through the text. Then he expounded the texts’ meaning. He concluded with an application, preferably to the present realities of the community. Insufficient ability to make popular applications could lead to ministerial candidates being denied ordination.³⁷ The people drove the message as much as the text did.

They also drove the worship rhythms. Most sermons were regulated by an hourglass, with presbytery or session fines on the most long-winded of preachers. But exceptions were made. While visiting Antrim Robert Blair was noted to have continued preaching an extra hour past the hourglass time, which was allowed and encouraged due in part to power of his oratory.³⁸ Sermons invited participation, and questions were not generally rhetorical. People swooned, passed out and had to be carried from the congregation. Some became emotional in response to both hell and forgiveness. Sometimes the responses went farther than the minister would have

³⁵ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 5, Moderatism, Pietism and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 441.

³⁶ Pamphlet against Dr. Homes (October 8, 1650), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Belfast, YP 56, 20.

³⁷ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 49-50.

³⁸ Todd, *The Culture of Early Modern Protestantism*, 48-49.

liked. Members responded angrily if pastors overstepped perceived bounds of appropriateness or if generic accusations of immorality seemed overly poignant, as when a man in Mertoun interrupted a sermon to defend his daughter after a harangue on whoredom.³⁹

Women were the face of the Covenanter movement in many ways that offended their contemporaries and would have been strange to their own adherents centuries later. The popular image of Covenanters amongst detractors was that of a disloyal band of angry women who listened to emotive preachers. When a group of royalists made toasts to the King and Queen in 1662, they celebrated their libations beside “the statue in for an old hag having a covenant in her hand.” According to the Earl of Rothes “these rogues stir up the women so they are worse than devils.” He speculated that “if it were not for the women we should have little trouble with the conventicles or such kind of stuff.”⁴⁰ One opponent rejoiced that “There were hanged at Edinburgh two women of ordinary rank, for their uttering treasonable words and other principles and opinions contrary to all our government . . . They were of Cameron’s faction.” On the scaffold one woman proclaimed that she had once been “a swearer, sabbath-breaker, and with much aversion read the

³⁹ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 51-54.

⁴⁰ Earl of Rothes to Lauderdale ,Undated, circa 1665, Vol. 1.

Scriptures” but now that she was a Covenanter “found much joy upon her spirit.”⁴¹

The Covenanter spirit was of a decidedly female persuasion.

In large part this sprang from the nature of Covenanter religious practice rooted in the sixteenth-century devotional and literacy reforms. Each family within the society was required to have nightly prayers and, preferably, Scripture readings. This placed an emphasis on female piety, but also female literacy. Literacy rates in Scotland and Ulster were particularly high, though generally women were only half as likely as men to read. However, both rates were proportionally higher than the rest of Britain.⁴²

Women’s roles within the weekly devotional meetings had a complex nature. The sexes were not to be segregated, though at early points this was experimented with. On the one hand, women were not only included but given the right of chastise other male members. “Some of [the women] have also been found particularly serviceable in a social way, as succoring even the strongest believers of the [male] sex.” However this inter-gendered participation was seen primarily in terms of the protection of the “weaker sex” who particularly needed “instruction, direction, counsel, comfort, and encouragement in the ways of the Lord.” Inclusion was not always parity. Covenanters taught that “Female members ought not to be

⁴¹ Robinson, *Immigrant Covenanters*, 148-9; Lord Fountainhall, “Observes,” as quoted in *Treasury of Scottish Covenant*, 609.

⁴² R.A. Houston, *Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity: Illiteracy and Society in Scotland and Northern England, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-19, 90-91, 256-258.

placed on a par, or equal footing with the other” sex. The role of president, which transferred to all the men on a rotating, week-to-week basis, was forbidden for women. Females were also forbidden from opening or concluding the meeting with prayer, though this admonition apparently occurred because just such a thing had been occurring. Women were allowed, however, to read aloud and certainly were encouraged to comment on the popular devotional readings made aloud in the group meetings.⁴³

Covenanter women used literacy as a means of action against the state, especially in petitions. Lord Lauderdale noted that there was a “Petition offered in a tumultuous way by some Women” who then refused “to give their Oaths as to the Points interrogated upon.” He had them imprisoned.⁴⁴ In 1674 “Mrs. John Livingstone” and fourteen other women presented Parliament with a petition for the right to hear Covenanter preachers. Observers noted that they “filled the whole Parliament Close” and caused quite a disruption. They were declared “guilty of a tumultuary convocation” and of “presenting a most insolent and seditious petition to the Council.” The punishment was banishment from Edinburgh.⁴⁵

Women used even more forceful means of resistance. When Covenanter Michael Bruce was imprisoned, it was a group of women who plotted his attempted

⁴³ *A Short Directory for Religious Societies* (1772), Section III.

⁴⁴ Lauderdale to the King, 2 July 1674 as quoted in Wodrow, 369.

⁴⁵ Kirkton, as quoted in *Treasury of the Scottish Covenant*, 608.

escape.⁴⁶ As Covenanter minister Donald Cargill was fleeing authorities in Queensferry, it was “the Women of the Town got together at the Gate, and conveyed him out of Town,” probably dressed as one of them. Margaret Wauchop was imprisoned for assisting in the escape.⁴⁷ Womens’ roles were not simply in assisting men. They actively and violently resisted. In Irongay in the mid-seventeenth century a group of women planned ahead to receive the new moderate minister appointed by a bishop. They gathered a wealth of stones and hurled them with such accuracy and consistency that the new minister’s installation service had to be held away from his new church. ⁴⁸

For the most part, however, it was the Covenanters who had to flee their own churches to worship. These house churches and field services were called conventicles. Conventicles had a long tradition in Scottish Presbyterianism. The first conventicles were a reaction against the Five Articles of Perth under James VI and remained a steady bone of contention between moderates and zealots for most of Scotland’s Protestant history. Ministers held services in fields where preaching was more visceral and anti-government. Even after the National Covenant was signed in 1638, the Covenanter alliance was deeply divided over the legality of these

⁴⁶ Jim Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom 1660-1800*, 44.

⁴⁷ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2:13-36.

⁴⁸ David George Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 56.

meetings, with phanaticks typically in favor of them and moderates believing them to be disorderly and dangerous.⁴⁹

Conventicle activity surged in direct relation to the success of moderate measures. In 1662 when the Restoration government reinstated the much resented practice of patronage appointments of local ministers, conventiclers voted with their feet, removing themselves from traditional worship and taking to the fields. Popular ministers, either ousted by the establishment moderates or refused positions within the state kirk, led flocks that existed without traditional geographic boundaries. Ministers were accused of “pitching tent against tent,” which was to say establishing their own non-legal parish within the boundaries of existing ones.⁵⁰ The government took action, instituting fines for non-attendance at regular worship and putting military units to work hunting down conventicle meetings. By 1665 rogue ministers were ousted from their homes, but the conventicle fervor increased. The Earl of Rothes worried that these “seminaries of separation and rebellion” so influenced the people with their “fanatic ways as I think will bring ruin upon them.”⁵¹ War with the Netherlands in 1666 and rumors of a new Covenanter uprising led to the quartering of troops in Scottish homes and an increase in fines

⁴⁹ Stewart, *The Scottish Revolution*, 56, 201-202.

⁵⁰ Jim Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom 1660-1800*, 44.

⁵¹ Earl of Rothes to Lauderdale, Undated, circa 1665, Vol. 1.

for the offending field-meeters. Confrontations between common folk and soldiers only increased the tensions and ensured more government enmity.⁵²

Conventicles were dangerous because they were politically, religiously and socially powerful events that kept alive the memory of a now-lost revolution. To the government in an age of constant uprisings, coups, and plots, conventicles and prayer meetings were political liabilities. Covenanters were a group who challenged the king's authority to rule his kingdom through the unifying force of the church. Meetings occurring behind closed doors in homes and in far away fields had very much the look of rebellion and treason. Even their defenders admitted conventicle preachers could "carry to a little Excess sometimes."⁵³ Charles II decried those who kept conventicles and had their children baptized by outlaw ministers. He declared that such activity "not only foments and nourishes Separation and Schism, but tends to Seditious and Disturbance of the public Peace."⁵⁴ The movement represented the most sustained opposition to the religious and political establishments anywhere in Restoration Britain.⁵⁵

⁵² Wodrow manuscripts, August 23, 1671 as quoted in Smyth, *Making of the United Kingdom*, 43-52. Many Covenanter ministers did their divinity training in the Netherlands, strengthening the tie between the Scottish lowlands and the Dutch and giving the government very real reasons to be fearful of a rebellion.

⁵³ *A Letter in Defense of Field-meetings* (June, 1678), in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 1: Appendix 96.

⁵⁴ *Proclamation anent Conventicles* (Feb. 3, 1670) in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 1: Appendix 37

⁵⁵ Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, 42.

Part of the problem was that conventiclers showed up armed with more than Bibles and Rutherford's political tracts. Anxious British officials noted that Scotland was "filled with Conventicles" of armed commoners.⁵⁶ A government overture noted that "sometimes besides conventicling, there being a Concurrence of other Crimes and Circumstances, of a high Nature, as coming to their Meetings in Arms, and by way of Convocation, the hearing and not revealing of seditious Expressions against his Majesty and the Government."⁵⁷ An act passed by the Council in 1665 explicitly tied conventicles to political unrest. The punishment for conventicling was to be the same "inflicted upon seditious Persons."⁵⁸ Covenanters sought some government protection for their meetings but admitted "that our Ministers speak insuperably against Authority."⁵⁹ For Covenanters, rebellion and revival were wound closely together.

Some "Field-meeters" sought protection from government crackdowns. They petitioned for "full and free Toleration and Protection" and assured the government that they were "in many Places so naked and defenseless, that two or Three idle Fellows, without any Warrant," had "now and again fallen upon Meetings of seven or eight Hundred, and scattered them without Resistance." Their harmlessness could

⁵⁶ Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restauration to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1721), 1:366.

⁵⁷ Lauderdale to King, as quoted in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 1:370.

⁵⁸ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 228.

⁵⁹ *A Letter in Defense of Field-meetings* (June, 1678), in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 1:Appendix 96.

be seen when “three or four Redcoats have and may still dissipate Thousands of these Meeters most securely.”⁶⁰ Therein lay the problem and the reason tolerance of Covenanters would never be forthcoming. Meetings, especially those out of doors, drew Scots by the thousands and tens of thousands.

The conventicle was the largest element of a superstructure of devotional piety built from the ground up. The structure itself, more than any one point of it particularly, was the framework for Covenanter phanaticism and the seedbed of the Covenanter sensibility. The most dramatic moments politically happened in hillsides spilling over with thousands of zealots. The most elemental moments were less dramatic and almost always indoors. It all started with the family.

Family devotions were long a required part of the Scottish Presbyterian Reformation enforced by elders on regular visits and punished by the session if not enforced. In 1639, in the heightened years of Covenanter fervor, a publication aimed at the common folk was issued to assist in these endeavors. The book, called *Familie Exercise* prescribed thrice-daily prayers in simple language, regular psalm singing and Scripture reading, and basic instructions about how to fast and worship correctly. As one minister put it, “every family should be a little church unto the Lord.”⁶¹ Family devotions became times for heads of household to quiz family

⁶⁰ A *Letter in Defense of Field-meetings* (June, 1678), in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 1:Appendix 96.

⁶¹ As quoted in Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland*, 160.

members on the contents of the day's sermons (usually two, sometimes three) and to catechize children and adults.⁶²

Family worship entrenched everything in the Protestant system. For all the emphasis the Reformation (and subsequent histories) put on the sermon, the sermon did not occur in a vacuum. It was attached to its reinforcements: Bible reading, singing the Psalter, discipline, catechism, and family devotionals that recreated the sermon message.⁶³ The cornerstone of these was the daily family devotional. Over the course of the century this practice, pulled from events in the first and second Scottish Reformations, became increasingly codified and ritualized.

In 1647 Covenanters had published the tract *Directions of the General Assembly Concerning Secret and Private Worship*. Though ostensibly concerning both individual and family acts of devotion, only one of the fourteen points addressed "secret worship." Families were warned that though preaching was the role of the pastor, "in every family where there is any that can read, the holy scriptures should be read ordinarily to the family; and it is commendable, that thereafter they confer." This act of family discussion on the Scripture served as a viable, daily substitute for preaching. It was sermon by committee. They could "by way of conference make some good use of what hath been read and heard." Although the "master of the family" was to have "the chief hand," it was made clear

⁶² Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 42.

⁶³ *Familie Exercise, or, The service of God in Families* (Edinburgh: 1639). Accessed through Early English Books Online.

that “any member of the family may propone a question or doubt for resolution.” These dialogues on doctrinal issues, including the “doubt” that could be resolved offered individual involvement in the act of mental assent to the teachings of Protestantism.⁶⁴

Family worship was to remain sacred time. “A special care is to be had that each family keep by themselves.” They were neither to be found “requiring, inviting, nor admitting persons from diverse families.” Exceptions were made for boarders and planned neighborly meals. Such boundaries were most important during times of peace. Allowances could be made during times of persecution, but when there appeared to be few outside oppressors, Covenanters should be more diligent to keep to themselves, since mixing with less devout moderate Presbyterians tended “to the hindrance of the religious exercise of each family” and the “prejudice of the public ministry.” They feared the entire kirk would find itself corrupted by more accommodationist beliefs.⁶⁵

Sunday evenings were to be spent with the family in prayer contemplating the day’s worship. Prayer together was especially crucial. When issues of moral delinquency were found, they should be confronted. When people struggled with such issues of “wearied or distressed conscience,” that “all ordinary means, private and publick” were of no avail, then they should call upon “their own pastor, or some

⁶⁴ *Directions of the General Assembly Concerning Secret and Private Worship* (1647), II, III.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, VI, VII.

experienced Christian.” If the person was a woman, and the issue of “discretion, modest, or fear of scandal” was involved, a third person could be present.

Significantly, in this lay-run community, the pastor’s presence was only required in cases of unusual moral struggle. Most issues, it was believed, could be resolved at home.⁶⁶

By early the following century, Covenanter ministers were regularly asked by their peers, “Do you observe family worship morning and evening?”⁶⁷ Traveling was no excuse for failing such requirements, as indicated in the question “When occasionally abroad all night, do you keep family worship where you lodge?” The generally accepted practice had become twice daily devotional Bible reading, psalm singing, and prayer. This was kept separate from “secret prayer at least morning and evening.” Lay people were no less responsible for these practices. Elders traveled house-to-house asking, “Had you family worship here last night and this morning?” Catechisms happened each week before Sunday worship. Sabbath observance was especially important, and every elder was admonished to have “your house swept every Saturday night and the ashes removed so that the family goes to rest before it is too late.” Families should be constrained from “idle jesting, giving by-names, and quarreling with each other” and especially not allow the children to play games on the Sabbath. Covenanters were barred from participating

⁶⁶ Ibid., VIII-XIV.

⁶⁷ The distinctions between Covenanters and Seceders will be discussed in detail below, where I argue that Seceders are a subcategory of Covenanters and thus should be treated together.

in religious ceremonies like Christmas and were not allowed to “attend bonfires or Midsummer’s Eve.”⁶⁸ This strict regulation of family religious life would be recreated when families came together to police one another in the weekly society meetings.

Covenanter families came together in small groups that, over time, became known as praying societies, also called society meetings. If family worship was the cellular block of the Covenanter movement, its connective tissues were the society meetings where Covenanter families came together to form and maintain a distinct sensibility through religious practice. Praying societies antedating the more organized movement of the late sixteenth century had been a point of disagreement between the factions of the Covenanter alliance. Seen by their supporters as the exercises of vital piety, moderates and elites accused saw them as places where “men and women... groping one another filthily” took part in orgies of excess.⁶⁹ Both sides agreed that they were events that employed the rhetoric of outsider disempowerment, martyrologies, and a sense of being the suffering remnant of a holy people. As with propaganda from all ages, Covenanter rhetoric ensured that “the external world [was] portrayed as an intractable reality and an ideology [was] created and perpetuated sustaining this portrayal and demanding a specific

⁶⁸ “Questions put to Ministers at the Meeting of the Privy Censures” and “Questions to be put by a Visiting Elder.” In *The Seceders in Ireland*, 422-3.

⁶⁹ Walter Makey, *The Church of the Covenant*, 61-74.

response.”⁷⁰ In small groups, they reminded one another that the nation had once been holy, and must be holy again before they could accept it.

Covenanter stories spoke most forcefully to those already predisposed to believe them.⁷¹ But it also served the purpose of reinforcing and creating buy-in for current adherents. By teaching others, Covenanters more firmly entrenched themselves into their own camp. The very process of speaking doctrine, stories, psalms and prayers out loud publically identified Covenanter men and women with the sacred past. Once publically proclaimed, individuals would have a hard time questioning such identities out loud.

The societies also enforced group action against the government. They pledged to “do nothing that may Justly be Interpreted to be an owning” the king’s “Title, or Supporting their Authority.” Using the courts, paying taxes, and enlisting in the military were strictly forbidden. Paying taxes through a friend or proxy was also taboo. One member, Gavin Witherspoon, learned this lesson the hard way when he was excommunicated for the “paying of Fines and Locality.”⁷²

In 1772 the Reformed Presbytery issued *A Short Directory for Religious Societies*, which codified the received wisdom of a century’s worth of experience in managing their small group connectivity and community discipline. All people were

⁷⁰ J.A. Mangan, “The Grit of Our Forefathers’: Invented Traditions, Propaganda, and Imperialism,” in John W. Mackenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University, 1986), 123.

⁷¹ Mangan, “The Grit of Our Forefathers,” 113.

⁷² Robinson, “Immigrant Covenanters,” 125.

created with “the moral obligation to society,” since God had created humans as social creatures. The fulfillment of this obligation was realized in the meetings in what were called “*social or fellowship meetings.*” The faithful were to meet together “for the exercises of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, spiritual conference, and all the duties of Christian love and friendship” as well as for “the mutual benefiting, comforting, and encouraging one another” to their Christian duties and obligations.” Emphatically, these were closed off from non-Covenanters. “They are not public meetings.” Groups were to avoid worldly conversations, since “They are not disputing societies, as some are called, but praying societies.” Such teaching probably reflected the tendency of groups that invested so heavily in lay leadership to devolve into arguing matches between disagreeing people. This underscored the most important aspect of the fellowship meeting. There was no ministerial oversight.⁷³

For Covenanters, admission into the society meetings was predicated on a reading knowledge of doctrine. A series of eleven questions could be put to potential converts to the Covenanter cause. They included the ability to personally expound upon the doctrines of Protestant belief: the Scriptural nature of the Trinity; the “natural and eternal” aspects of the “internal divine relations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;” the specific nature of Christ as the “son of *the Father;*” the nature of

⁷³ *A Short Directory for Religious Societies*, (1772), Preface. Although published in the late eighteenth century, this document codified the wisdom of the past century of small cell group practice.

human creation and the sinful nature; the covenant of works between Adam and God before the fall; the nature of the post-fall “sinful, dead, and condemned state;” the means of salvation; the predestination of the elect; the nature of Christ’s death for the elect only; and the nature of perseverance of the saints. Until a person could intelligently speak with other Covenanters on these topics, he or she was not allowed entrance into a society. Those who espoused questionable answers were given extra instruction to satisfy their questions or handle their misconceptions. This occurred *after* correctly answering a series of sixteen questions regarding Covenanter political theology.⁷⁴

The Westminster Confession, the two sacred Covenants, and the Scottish church’s *Act, Declaration, and Testimony for the whole of our Covenanted Reformation in Britain and Ireland* became foundational texts for the laity to read and know. The *Short Directory for Religious Societies* instructed that every member of the societies “ought not only to provide himself with one of these, but diligently to peruse it, esteeming it a singular advantage” to understand Covenanter doctrines. The very nature of a religious obligation to texts passed on generation after generation necessitated literacy as a devotional tool. This literacy was turned not just to Protestant, but also Biblical texts. The most important book in the Bible for Covenanting practice and piety was the book of Psalms.⁷⁵ These zealots sang the

⁷⁴ *A Short Directory for Religious Societies* 3.7

⁷⁵ *A Short Directory for Religious Societies*, Section 3.6.

Psalms constantly to remind themselves that they were God's chosen people from a once-chosen nation.

These small group meetings were explicitly involved in keeping the Covenanter sensibility in tact. The seventy-two Biblical instances of the phrase "one another" were inculcated into the rituals of meeting, discipline, shaming, comfort, and encouragement. Regular Sunday worship services were, in their own way, observational events. Though the people sang, the ministers preached and lay leaders prayed the worship service centered on being in rather than engaging in fellowship. Such "public gospel ordinances" as occurred on Sunday gave Christians no "access to instruct, admonish, counsel and comfort one another; and by a communication of their knowledge, observations and experiences, mutually to establish and *built up themselves*" in the Christian faith. Society meetings fulfilled the need to encourage lay-investment in the faith, something Sunday worship could not do as well.⁷⁶

The group protected against "backsliding" and second-guessing one's association with such a fringe group. "Stragglers, such as go alone, are often *snared and taken*," they had discovered, but those within the group setting were continuously recommitting themselves to the way of the remnant. With each passing week, reevaluating one's faith became more unthinkable, as it would invalidate the time spent, the people bonded with, and the cause the person

⁷⁶ Ibid., Section II.

associated their name with in public. This reinforcement was called “instruction of the ignorant - supporting the weak - comforting the feeble minded - preventing and withstanding error and seduction - and the discharge of all the other duties of Christian brotherly love and good works... .” The small groups kept Covenanters from entering more mainstream religious elements of society.⁷⁷

The group also shared in sin and shared its sufferings. “Any particular instance of sin, dishonoring to God, and wounding to religion fallen into by any of their members” was cause for admonishment, humiliation, and reconciliation. This ritualized process of reentry into good terms ensured that all actions outside the group had a life inside the group. Similarly, any “afflicting dispensation under which any of them, or their families, may be laid” or area where “they desire sympathy and prayers of their brethren” could be heard in the group and addressed through prayer. Thus everyone’s personal sufferings were shared by their weekly co-religionists, and probably increased the likelihood of encouragement and assistance outside the meeting time itself. This fostered a sense of unity, being “compactly joined together in the same and judgment.” Those who broke with doctrinal or communal unity were to be first counseled by the elder or leading society member and gently corrected. Further problems were handled by the entire group.⁷⁸

The small group was to meet in one place each week and avoid bouncing from home to home. Though the group were to fellowship together on the Lord’s

⁷⁷ Ibid., Section II.

⁷⁸ Ibid., Section III.

Day worship, there would be an additional weekday meeting that clearly separated public worship and private fellowship. Optimal times were around five to six o'clock in the evenings. Attendance was strictly regulated. "None of the members of such societies have any right to absent themselves at their pleasure, or on account of a slight inconvenience from worldly business, or otherwise." When no pastor was available, which was the norm, the group would meet twice, once for Sunday service and the other for the more informal meeting.⁷⁹

The meetings had rhythmical regularity and created a ceremony without pomp, despite Protestant pretense of doing away with ritual. Each meeting opened with a short thanksgiving prayer "acknowledging God's mercy and goodness in granting another opportunity for meeting." The group then proceeded to sing the Psalms, and then to reading the Bible out loud. Prayer followed. Someone whose reading voice was "distinct" and "grave" could then read from "some sound approved author on practical divinity." This was "for the entertainment and edification of the whole, continuing for the space of half an hour or three-quarters of an hour" on Sundays, though during the week meetings were shorter. Sunday meetings should last "five hours, and in the winter four hours." Weekly meetings were between one to two hours. At the conclusion of the reading everyone was encouraged to give their succinct thoughts on the matter. Much instruction was spent encouraging brevity, since more long-winded members tended to eat up the

⁷⁹ Ibid., Section III, IV.

time than the more reserved. The role of president rotated to a different male each week, and it was this person's role to ensure everyone's opportunity to speak on "such practical questions" as the reading raised. These questions were "put round by him that all the members may speak their minds upon it." Another psalm, a closing prayer, and the night was finished. Everyone sang, everyone prayed, everyone commented. This was the lay empowerment built into the Covenanter system.⁸⁰

The brilliance of the method involved its cell-structured reproduction of righteous community without the need for a state-sanctioned church. These groups were not built to grow the ranks of the church, but they could easily assimilate growth. The house "should not be crowded or too numerous," and "twelve or fourteen has been ever thought to be the greatest number answerable for the purpose of social edification in this way." When the group grew to beyond this number, the people should "divide themselves into two." This was done by appointing a new meeting time and place for half the people. New groups without experienced members could borrow elders from other meetings for a time until they felt competent to lead the proceedings themselves. In this way groups never grew so large as to leave anyone out, personal lives remained intimately connected, and

⁸⁰ Ibid., Section III, IV

religious devotional piety and practice were shared by all people in groups small enough for each to participate.⁸¹

Covenanter sensibility was honed in such cultures, as children grew up in daily and weekly re-indoctrination. The stories of Covenanter heroes were told and became part of group and family self-definition. “The early initiation of children in these exercises,” the *Directory* stated, “will natively tend to attach their minds to this duty.” Regular visits by the traveling minister and the visiting lay elder reinforced such discipline, as husbands were required to give accounting for their family’s behavior. This communal piety gave strong incentive for other aspects of religious life, like reading, and created a strong foundation for seasonal events, like communion.

Society meetings were small groups that built internal communities within society at large. Group members publicly shamed one another, visited one another, prayed over one another’s deathbeds, rejoiced at one another’s childbirths, and knelt with one another to petition the throne of heaven for the stuff of daily life. The key phrase, of course, was “one another.” This small group, inward-focused reality built up a sense of difference from the world and connection to the Covenanter way of life. With each passing week the person became more closely connected to their peculiar dissenting faith and less likely to embrace “the world.” This became the perfect environment to inculcate their dissent from the political powers of their day.

⁸¹ Ibid., IV.

Each meeting should include prayers bewailing “the case of these guilty covenant breaking lands of Britain and Ireland.” Like the Psalms they sang, their weekly time together reinforced a sense of being God’s chosen remnant in a pagan land.⁸²

Societies were interposal. They established cultural meanings through social interactions at highly intimate levels. They were also emotionally arousing. Despite later auras of austerity, Covenanter worship both in communion festivals and smaller devotionals tapped into emotional experiences that strengthened the connections between the individual and the group. The shared nature of the experience, and the infinite repeatability of the general patterns, hardened the sense for Covenanters that they shared a distinct place in the world.⁸³

Societies were the place where external act created and affirmed internal sensibilities. Lay reading, praying with no cues, singing the songs of a chosen people, reciting sentences of dogma, and arguing their rightness to others who already believed - in all of this faith was preformed. In its performance it was internalized. Taking the Covenants as a vow, be it in a large ceremony or through repeating their significance to others in a small group, was a powerful tool of communal solidification. By saying the Covenants still applied to the kingdoms of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ See Strauss and Quinn, *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning*, 89-93. “durability across generations is sometimes also promoted by people’s deliberate efforts to preserve cherished practices; by the representations of heretofore private matters in public forms, which then preserved and propagate these understandings; or by the storage of cultural understandings in books and like repositories where they may lie dormant over long periods of time before becoming retrieved and accorded new life.” 111.

England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland, people who never traveled beyond their own borough could make such a statement of faith a statement of firmly held fact. The society, in short, by having the common man or woman state a phanatick faith from childhood, created an environment in which the person could not easily recant what they had said so many times. The more times it was done, the truer it became.⁸⁴

Historians Margo Todd and David Miller have called the most rigidly orthodox Presbyterians a “logocentric” people. This is true, but not sufficient. All Protestants centered on the textual word of the Bible. Many British Puritans honed in on the Westminster Confession of Faith as a powerful devotional text. Only Covenanters, however, blended this peculiar blend of words (*logos*) together in regular rhythms of social piety with such militancy and longevity. The Bible, the devotional Confession, and the political Covenants all came together in powerful and enduring cultural experience in the society meeting. Beneath the visibly threatening, anti-statist meetings of the masses that flared up in the fields was a powerful and self-perpetuating system of smaller meetings on which the more visible threat was built.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Externalization creates internal convictions. This aligns with Strauss and Quinn’s arguments that cultural conditioning involves psychological processes of reinforcement and that ritual as external symbol in a Geertzian sense is also accompanied by internal meanings that take in and then send out synaptic responses that create meaning. Strauss and Quinn, 12-22.

⁸⁵ Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), 1-24-126; David W. Miller, “Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?” in Murphey, James H. *Evangelicals and Catholics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 40.

The Killing Times

By the 1660s-1670s, a generation had passed since the signing of the covenants of 1638 and 1643. Maintaining that identity had produced the singular manner of Covenanter societies. That uniqueness was further driven by the most extended period of persecution the group ever faced. The Covenanters found themselves as, and made themselves to be, a persecuted people in the model of the nation of Israel. The longstanding tensions between field-meeters, private worshipers and other zealots with the government came to a head in the decades of the late 1660s-1680s. What became known as “the Killing Times” were both the most intense periods of government-covenanter antagonism and the refining fire in which their fringe sensibility congealed and became firmly entrenched as the fringe of Scottish society. By 1688 Covenanters would be the hard-boiled heart of Scottish religious phanaticism .

The Killing Times began when the Stuart government’s fears about a Covenanter rebellion in Scotland became reality. The event was sparked in March 1666 and became known as the Pentland Uprising. It began as a confrontation between crown soldiers and townspeople in Dalry, southwest of Glasgow. Three soldiers impounded the corn of a farmer named Grier, who they then arrested and, according to rumor, threatened to strip naked and roast alive. Four conventicler outlaws rescued Grier, tied up the soldiers and made their escape.

Local resentments had reached the boiling point, and around one hundred and fifty insurgents organized further south at Dumfries. There the rebels drank to

the King's health. At Dalmellington they prayed for the King and the restoration of the Covenants. The issue at hand was not loyalty to the Stuarts, but the overwhelming resentment of fines, Bishops, and attacks on the local autonomy of Scotland. The economic climate was worsening as well. As a result the over one thousand-man, ill-fed and under-armed force that marched on Edinburgh was as much a group of militant petitioners as they were a general rebellion. Still, they were forced to retreat to the Pentland hills, where they were soundly defeated at Rullian Green. Troops captured the "stragglers Whigs" and transported them back to Edinburgh for trial.⁸⁶

The incident highlighted the complex nature of Covenanter resistance. Participants had interwoven motives that collapsed economic, class, nationalistic and religious concerns into one grievance that took the Covenants as their public marker. The death and execution of thirty-six participants, many of them commoners, established for zealots a martyrology of the Covenanted cause. Hugh McKell, a "proper youth, learned, traveled, and extraordinarily pious" was hanged. Mourning laity mercifully grabbed his feet and pulled down as hard as they could, to keep the suffering to a minimum.⁸⁷ Eighty others who refused to disavow the Covenants were sentenced to a slower death: exile to Barbados, Virginia and Tangier. Such stories abounded. What had been a complex resistance was

⁸⁶ Chalres Maitland of Haltown to the Earl of Lauderdale, December 3, 1666, Lauderdale papers, Vol. 1.

⁸⁷ Mullan, *Narratives of the Religious Self in Early-Modern Scotland*, 61.

sanctified with a simple memory. At Pentland, the pious had been sacrificed on the alter of Holy Scotland.

So began what one crown official called “those pains & distempers that hang about this little crazy turf of earth.”⁸⁸ The Killing Times would last until the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The early Scottish historian Robert Wodrow estimated the number of Protestants who suffered during the Killing Times at 60,000 and the deaths upwards of five thousand.⁸⁹ These intense social pressures were the product of the policies of the Lauderdale’s administration in Scotland. Beginning in 1667, the Earl of Lauderdale took on a policy at once more lenient and more prosecutorial than that of the early 1660s. He offered indulgences to ministers who acquiesced to the Stuart’s authority in religious affairs and simultaneously upped military pressure on zealots to make the truce seem more appealing. In 1669 only forty-two ministers accepted the king’s indulgence and returned to the fold of the state church. By 1672 when the deal was offered again, ninety returned. These indulgences had the effect of dividing the Covenanter laity amongst themselves and forcing the question of how eternally binding the Covenants of 1638 and 1643 were. Phanatick ministers slowly traded the intense pressure of life on the run as government outlaws for the far more palatable indulgences. The laity, on the other hand, proved more reticent. Six moderate ministers sent by the government on a

⁸⁸ Archbishop of Glasgow to the Duke of Lauderdale, 17 December 1674, Lauderdale Papers, Vol. 3.

⁸⁹ Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restauration to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1721), 1:3.

preaching tour to push the compromise were shocked at the ability of commoners to debate them on the nature of church government.⁹⁰ Despite fretting that the indulgences would lead to the “cooling of zeal, the declining into lukewarmness, the ensnaring of consciences,”⁹¹ laity continued to turn out by the thousands to support the few ministers left who traveled with armed guards to preach to the field-meeters.⁹²

The Pentland executions and the offer of indulgences created an important shift in Covenanter political rhetoric. Whereas even the Pentland rebels had toasted the King’s health and marched to the capital for a redress of grievances, now phanatick zealots leaned more directly on Rutherford’s *radice* of rule; God’s authority was in the people. This *Ius Populi Vindicatum* was primarily a statement about the righteous community. The people had the right to elect their own pastors, rather than the hated practice of having them appointed by bishops or patrons.⁹³ It was a by-product of this argument for religious autonomy that opened Covenanters to later radical secular arguments regarding the people and the state. In both cases, resistance to tyranny, religious and civil, was the sacred right and obligation of the people.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 77-78.

⁹¹ McWard, *The Case of Accommodation*, 94.

⁹² Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, 44.

⁹³ John Currie, *Jus Populi Vindicatum: or, the People’s divine Right To chuse their own PASTORS Asserted, confirm’d and vindicated. In a LETTER to a Member of the ensuing General Assembly.* (Edinburgh: 1720), British Library, London.

⁹⁴ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 78-80.

In 1667 Sir Robert Moray complained that “There is a Damned book come hither from beyond the sea called Naphtali.” It had “all the Traitors’ speeches on the scaffold here, & in a word all that a Tongue set on fire by hell can say of things & persons hereaway.”⁹⁵ That book was James Stewart’s *Naphtali, or The Wrestling of the Church of Scotland for the Kingdom of Christ*, and it was a clear statement on where the Covenanter movement was heading in the next decades. Just as God had been “also always rebuilding to Himself a Temple” in the days of Israel, and had sealed that rebuilding by “frequently renewing Oaths and Covenants” with his people, so too God was at work in their own day. People “of whatever degree” and social class had made “public profession of the true Reformed Religion,” voluntarily putting themselves beneath Presbyterian forms of government, and had sworn and subscribed “with the hand unto the Lord, in the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant.” Stewart’s argument was anti-elitist. He lashed out against the “military violence and cruelty” carried about by “some Ranks” of people who were completely against “the Cause and Covenant of God.” Stewart argued that Scotland’s only hope lay in the “manifestation of these lowly men’s zeal for God’s truth and glory.” In language that would appear again and again in Covenanter documents, he believed the common people held the “right and Privilege of Self-defense.” Always, he opined, the people should be on guard against the encroachment of civil liberties. One such encroachment was “popery” itself, with

⁹⁵ Sir Robert Moray to Lauderdale, 10 December 1667, Vol. 2.

the “same superstitious & fool-like Vestments” and “Altars, Books, Candles, Candlesticks, Basins, Images, and Crucifixes on windows” that singled Catholic devotion. To Covenanters, Tyranny, based in superstitious ideas of a king’s divine right, and Episcopacy, which subsumed human reason and attachment to the Bible by submission to the divine right of bishops, were one and the same thing. By upping the ante on the common people’s commitment to defending the covenant into a “right and Privilege,” Stewart had moved Covenanter rhetoric into a new phase of militant self-defense in the name of the Covenants that could move seamlessly between anti-statist and anti-Catholic/episcopal rhetoric. Like the Biblical tribe of Naphtali, Covenanters were to have a special zeal for their own freedom.⁹⁶

The indulgences, seen by the more strenuous laity as a compromise of religious zealotry, highlighted the increasingly recalcitrant nature of religious phanaticism that fueled the conventicles. Covenanters believed in “withdrawing from all that follow” the wrong course as it was “folly to talk and reason with Men” who would “go to the Kirk, and so bow down to the Golden Image, the King hath made?”⁹⁷ The very idea of contact with the corrupted Church of Scotland was anathema. Accepting the indulgence meant an “acknowledgment of the supremacy”

⁹⁶ *Naphtali or The Wrestling of the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND FOR THE KINGDOM of CHRIST* (1667), 1-25.

⁹⁷ James Frazer, *Prelacy an Idol and Prelates Idolaters* (1713), Magee Pamphlet Series 234, Union Theological College, Belfast, 1, 10, 15. This sermon was preached in the pre-Revolutionary period.

of the King over Jesus Christ's church, a violation of conscience and a contact with things unclean."⁹⁸ As one minister raged, "I fear all the Bairns [children], that are baptized by the Curates, GOD reckons them, as Children of Whoredom; we feel some of the sad Effects of our Idolatry already; but when the *Sword, Famine or Pestilence* will rage in this Land, then shall ye say, "Whoa to Idols, Whoa is me that ever I heard a Curate."⁹⁹ Many laity worshiped in both worlds, complying to the Kirk of Scotland while participating in the conventicler movement. But the movement fed a sense that such decisions were forced upon them from a corrupt and tyrannical force both religious and political.

By the 1670s what Archbishop James Sharp called the "mad conventicaling humor" was everywhere but support was strongest in the southwest around Glasgow and Ayr, Dumries, and to the east around Lothian and Tweeddale. The majority of southern laity were Presbyterian in sentiment and incensed at the growing encroachments on Scottish prerogatives. The government recognized the latent power of this popular ill will and passed new laws against conventicles in 1670, a second indulgence in 1672, and periods of targeted suppression in 1672-73.

⁹⁸ Robert McWard, *The Case of Accommodation*, Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, 10, 14.

⁹⁹ James Frazer, *Prelacy an Idol and Prelates Idolaters* (1713), Magee Pamphlet Series 234, Union Theological College, Belfast, 1, 10, 15. This sermon was preached in the pre-Revolutionary period.

The issue was increasingly one of how committed Covenanters would remain in the face of extreme hardships.¹⁰⁰

Repression came first in the form of laws. The Scottish Parliament labeled “all Petitioning, Writing, Printing, or Remonstrating, Praying or Preaching shewing any dislike of the King’s absolute Prerogative” as seditious. All non-conforming ministers were to be punished for sedition. Nobles supporting them were required to forfeit one-fourth of their rent payments. Burgesses were to lose their freedom and a quarter of their property, the same proportion of possessions taken from yeomen. House meetings, interpreted as treasonous secret meetings, were lead to imprisonment and a five thousand Mark fine. Out of door meetings were given the death penalty. The Parliament made provision that men were to be fined if their wives and children were caught in meetings.¹⁰¹

These laws were enforced, as John Inglis of Cramond discovered in 1674. He was fined one thousand thirty-six Pounds Scots for attending conventicles and put in prison until he had paid his fine.¹⁰² That same year, the Scottish Privy Council passed a *Proclamation obliging Heritors for their Tenants, and Masters for their Servants*. All heritors were required to have their Tenants sign the Bond against

¹⁰⁰ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 55, 82.

¹⁰¹ John MacBride, *Animadversions on the Defence of the Answer to a Paper entitled The case of the Dissenting Protestants of Ireland in reference to a Bill of Indulgence vindicated from the exceptions made against it* (1697) Belfast Pamphlet Collection 266, Union Theological College, Belfast, 40-42.

¹⁰² Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restauration to the Revolution*, 2 Vols. Edinburgh, 1721, 367.

conventicles at the bottom of the proclamation, and if they refused they were to “be put to the Horn, and their Escheat is given to their Masters.” Each person was to publically declare that they abstained from conventicles and the town officials could imprison anyone suspected of being a conventicler. Fines ranged from one hundred pounds Scots to well over one thousand.¹⁰³

Some people refused the oaths, but most simply refused to abide by them. Officials had always complained that “the secret convening renders it most difficult to discover till they be over, and then they do immediately disperse to all corners of the country.” Even when discovered the terrain made capture difficult since “their meeting places are most commonly at the side of a moss or the side of a river,” and guards were posted “who give warning if any party appear, which makes them run, were the party never so small.”¹⁰⁴ Their running away, however, was the least of the government’s worries.

For the crown, the worst conventicles were on par with “an insolent riot.”¹⁰⁵ Scottish government outlawed “the bearing of, and shooting with fire-arms, such as Hagbuts, Culverings, and Pistols, without License.” They specifically pointed to “rebellious and disorderly Persons, who go in Arms to Field-conventicles, these Rendezvous of Rebellion, and presume to make Resistance to our Forces when they

¹⁰³ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, Vol. 1, Appendix 61.

¹⁰⁴ Earl of Rothes to Lauderdale, Undated, circa 1665, Vol. 1.

¹⁰⁵ The Committee of the Privy Council for Conventicles to the Duke of Lauderdale, July 6, 1676, Lauderdale Papers, Vol. 3.

offer to dissipate them.” Sheriffs and local magistrates were empowered to detain anyone carrying firearms or “Swords, Durks, Whingers, Halbards, Poll-axes, or any other Weapons invasive.”¹⁰⁶ Further legislation promised that those caught with weapons should be “declared and abjudged Traitors, and should suffer Forfeiture of Life, Honor, Land and Goods, as in Cases of high Treason.”¹⁰⁷ These actions proved warranted. At one conventicle meeting in 1678 “there were so many Horsemen in Arms so as the Militia company there dare not attack them.”¹⁰⁸ Conventicles combined religious prerogative with fierce resistance to the state’s authority in the Scottish lowlands.

Covenanter violence escalated. In 1664 a group of women accosted members of Parliament to demand Presbyterian worship. They were declared seditious and banished from Edinburgh. Across the 1670s local fairs reported an increase in the purchase of arms, and conventicles were defended with increasing diligence.¹⁰⁹ In 1677 a group of zealots broke into the home of a prelate minister in Tarbolton and searched his home. He being absent, they informed the servants to tell him that “if ever he preached there again he should die the next day.”¹¹⁰ By 1678 the government was forced to declare martial law in Scotland. Clashes between armed

¹⁰⁶ *Proclamation against Arms* (May 8 1679) in Wodrow, *History of the Sufferings*, 2: Appendix 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 2: Appendix 14.

¹⁰⁸ The Earl of Murray to the Duke of Lauderdale, Lauderdale Papers, May 7, 1678, Vol. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 81-83.

¹¹⁰ Lord Dundonald to the Duke of Lauderdale, October 27, 1677, Lauderdale Vol. 3.

conventicles and military units increased. Both sides caused casualties; both sides took prisoners.¹¹¹

The violence went both ways. Near Bathgate a group of returning conventickers took refuge from soldiers by hiding in marshland to slow pursuing horses but returned when some less fortunate fellow worshipers were run down. Being told to surrender, the conventickers opened fire with “some pistols and other fire locks.” In the ensuing melee one conventicker was killed and fifteen taken prisoner.¹¹² Covenanters bemoaned the “long continued tract of violence and oppression upon us in our lives, liberties, fortunes and consciences, and without all hope of remedy.”¹¹³ Over one thousand were sent to prison, hundreds were killed, and the group’s religious identity continued to harden at the core group level. The presence of a clear antagonist party, violent physical and social persecution, along with a growing sense of separation from those accommodating Protestants who sought peace above purity, made the most resolute of Covenanters incapable of reabsorption into the mainstream. Whereas all Presbyterians had held claim to the covenants, now “Covenanter” began to refer specifically to this more rigid, anti-government minority.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 93.

¹¹² Lord Rose to the Duke of Lauderdale, March 13, 1675, Lauderdale Papers, Vol. 3.

¹¹³ Petition of the Covenanters to the Duke of Monmouth, June 1679, Lauderdale Papers, Volume 3 Appendix XII.

¹¹⁴ Not everyone who attended conventicles did so for the same reasons. Charles Oliphant came before the Council and admitted to attendance, but “merely

Zealots found purpose in the persecution. Satan's method, declared minister Robert McWard, was "to make souls first lukewarm, by stealing away the fuel, whereby that holy fire is fed."¹¹⁵ The indulgences had seduced the faithful away with temptations of toleration, but the laity were urged to be wary of wolves in sheep's clothing. Persecution was proof of authenticity. That authenticity was attractive. Ministers willing to risk the government's wrath drew huge crowds. Fourteen thousand gathered in Irongay in 1678.¹¹⁶ The movement stirred emotions at every level. A spike in accusations of witchcraft meetings may actually have been related to conventicals.¹¹⁷ All of southern Scotland was infected with the movement.

On May 3, 1679, events accelerated beyond anyone's control. Archbishop Sharp was murdered by two lairds, six tenant farmers and a weaver, at least one of whom fled to Ireland. The event further divided moderates and extremists and sparked what at first appeared to be a general uprising.¹¹⁸ Later that month a group of around eighty Covenanters surprised nearly everyone when they beat back royal troops at Drumclog. These Covenanters made a declaration at Rutherglen that they

out of Curiosity" and believed them to be unlawful assemblies. He took the oath of allegiance on his knees and was dismissed without fine. Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restauration to the Revolution*, 2 Vols. Edinburgh, 1721, 367.

¹¹⁵ Robert McWard, *The Poor Man's Cup of Cold Water* (seventeenth century, reprint 1805), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, YP 52, 178.

¹¹⁶ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 93.

¹¹⁷ Joyce Miller, "Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse," in Goodare, Julian, Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller, eds., *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 152.

¹¹⁸ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 94.

were “owning the Interest of Christ, according to his Word, and the national and *solemn League and Covenants.*” They stood against prelacy, forcing people to renounce the Covenants, and the persecutions of Presbyterians. For good measure, they also declared themselves against celebrating the King’s birthday.¹¹⁹ The slow shift from monarchy was beginning.

That summer the final Covenanter rebellion congealed resentment against rising cess payments, royal soldiers quartered in their homes and eating off their farms, (including “giving their Horses a great deal more than was needful”) and religious encroachment. In the summer Covenanter forces gathered at Bothwell Bridge, where the ministers proceeded to debate for three weeks the exact doctrinal positions the revolutionaries should take. Commoners grew weary of waiting, and their force shrank from 8,000 to 4,000 by the time the Earl of Monmouth brought 10,000 troops to oppose them. The debate was a telling foreshadowing of the theological bickering that was to come in the movement. Covenanters had failed to press their advantage in combat because their ministers could not cease to be combative amongst themselves. Theological bickering over minutia would become part and parcel of the Covenanter legacy, and the disaster at Bothwell Bridge was the metaphor for the phenomenon.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ *Rutherglen Declaration* (May 29, 1679), in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2:44.

¹²⁰ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 98-104. Alexander Shields placed his later theological dialogue against tyranny in the context of laws “oppressing poor people.” See Alexander Shields, *A True and Faithful Relation*, 60.

Thoroughly defeated, with two hundred killed and twelve hundred captured, the movement fragmented. Monmouth, a surprisingly merciful victor, urged a third indulgence for prisoners. Small allowances for society meetings in the home were opened up, though not for the cities of Edinburgh, Sterling, Glasgow and St. Andrews. Most prisoners were released, and only the leaders were exiled to Barbados. Bothwell Bridge killed the spirit of Covenanter political fervor for all but the most recalcitrant zealots.¹²¹ After the battle, the Duke of York noted that he found “field conventicles increase which generally have been the forerunners of a rebellion.”¹²² But no rebellion was forthcoming.

After Bothwell Bridge, Covenanters were on the run. What was left of its leadership consisted of Richard Cameron and Donald Cargill. Cameron was a young newly ordained minister who had been in Holland for the battle and was determined to die gloriously for the cause. He rode with an armed contingent through Scotland preaching to thousands against the Indulgence. At one point he had twenty-three horsemen and forty foot soldiers in his caravan.¹²³ Cargill was far older and had been severely wounded at the battle. He was released on assumption he would die. Both continued to preach against the government until Cameron got his wish at Airds Moss in 1680 and Cargill was executed the following year.

¹²¹ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 100-104. The exiles died in a shipwreck.

¹²² The Duke of York to the Duke of Lauderdale, April 24, 1680, Lauderdale Papers, Vol. 3.

¹²³ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (1775; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 428.

In 1680 two political papers moved Covenanter rhetoric into its most phanatically anti-statist posture. The *Queensferry Paper*, captured on a Covenanter covering for Donald Cargill's escape from capture, was the fiercest anti-Stuart tract produced in the Exclusion Controversy. As fears increased that the Catholic Duke of York would ascend to the throne, and as the more politically savvy John Locke penned his two treatises on government, Cargill and a handful of Covenanters disavowed the Stuarts altogether. They abjured the king and his councilors and bound themselves to the overthrow of the Stuart line.

The Declaration itself was a kind of re-covenanting, "resolv[ing] to covenant with and before God, so to declare before the world" their avowal of the Covenanted legacy. The document gave evidence of the narrowing process that had separated covenanter zealots from moderates, referring to "associate backsliders" who were "sometime professed friends" and whose lack of zeal caused them to look on the devoted "with foul and odious aspersions." Submitting themselves to God and "His grace," they covenanted to "free the Church of God from the tyranny and corruption of Prelacy on the one hand" as well as the "thralldom and encroachments of Erastianism upon the other." Their fight was against "oppression" that had been thrust "upon their consciences, civil rights and liberties" and that enforced such evil laws that no one could "possess their civil rights peaceably without disturbance."¹²⁴

¹²⁴ *Queensferry Paper* (1680) in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2: Appendix 46, 135-136.

Again, civil rights and liberties were defined as the ability to chose “the doctrine of the Reformed Churches, especially that of Scotland.” Prelacy, be it through the Pope or the King of England, was from “the kingdom of darkness.” Though it had been nearly four decades since the Covenants, Covenanters believed they, their nation, and their children were “bound in our Solemn League and Covenant” to earnestly “endeavor the overthrow of that power” that established prelacy over the church, namely the king. The monarch “hath been of a long time against the throne of the Lord,” and God had therefore “commanded His people utterly to root them out.” The government’s legitimacy had been revoked. “This being the end of government, to maintain everyone in their rights and liberties against wrongs and injuries,” it was clear the king had inflicted “wrongs and injuries” against “Christian and reasonable men.” Perhaps worst of all, the government had stopped rooting out idolatry. It had “stopped the course of law and justice against blasphemers, idolaters, atheists, sorcerers, murders, incestuous and adulterous persons, and other malefactors.” The declaration stated that “the deed and obligation of our ancestors can bind us.” Thus, the obligations of old still held with all of their complex interweaving of liberties, religion, and nationalism. “We do declare that we shall set up over ourselves,” they stated, “government and governors according to the word of God.” Part of this meant “that we shall no more commit the government of ourselves and the making of laws for us to any one single person, this kind of government being most liable to inconveniences, and aptest to degenerate into tyranny.” Later generations of Covenanters would use these words

to claim the Queensferry Declaration as a kind of proto-Declaration of Independence. However, the themes that were more central than self-government in these pages were anti-Catholicism, Scottish nationalism, and the ideal of a Reformed nation-state that protected the church in ways that made the state an arm of the church as much or more than the other way around.¹²⁵

The *Sanquhar Declaration* also clearly rejected the authority of the Stuart kings. Signed by “the representatives of the true Presbyterian kirk and the covenanted Nation of Scotland,” it was the product of Cameron and his small band of bodyguards. They rejected the king for his “Usurpation in Church Matters, and Tyranny in Matters civil.” The King, “by his Perjury and Breach of Covenant both to God and his Kirk,” had forfeited the right to the Scottish crown. Covenanters now marshaled their forces, all 20 of them, under “Jesus Christ, Captain of Salvation,” and declared “War with such a Tyrant and Usurper, and all the Men of his Practices, as Enemies to our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Cause and Covenants.” Knowing he would lose, Cameron included a clause for future generations of phanaticks. “We will leave a Remnant in whom [Jesus] will be glorious,” he assured Scotland, “if they, through his grace, keep themselves clean still, and walk in his Way and Method.”¹²⁶ One month later, he was killed in battle. Thirteen of his followers, including two women,

¹²⁵ Ibid., 136. For such claims see W. Melancthon Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America* (Baltimore: Hill and Harvey Publishers, 1888), 67 and Robert Lathan, *History of the ARP Synod* (Harrisburg, PA: 1882).

¹²⁶ *Sanquhar Declaration* (1680) in Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2: Appendix 47.

were executed. Because of documents like the one nailed to the Sanquhar market cross, their ideas did not die with them.

“The Remnant,” as Cameron had called them, entered the 1680s leaderless and defeated. These lay people now organized the latent structure of their praying societies into a cell group structure with more organization. The first general meeting on December 15, 1681 occurred in a house in the parish of Lismahagow. The group, probably elders and respected members from each society, confirmed their hatred of the Test Act, and affirmed the Rutherglen and Sanquhar declarations as giving the “reasons of their revolt.”¹²⁷ For the laity, their religious societies were the seedbed of their resistance. They called their new organization The United Societies.

It was in their society organization that they grounded their reticence to be reabsorbed into Scotland’s mainstream. The indulgence, a “bastard brat of that blasphemous supremacy” the king claimed over the church, was to be resisted together in an environment that was mutually supportive and understanding of what it meant to make sacrifices that flew in the face of conventional political wisdom. They would not sell out the truth for a “preposterous prudence and respect to peace.” Such stands required some strongly rooted social network of

¹²⁷ John Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed* (1780), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, YP 55, 10-27.

mutual support and encouragement given the immense weight of their repercussions.¹²⁸ The praying societies formed that network.

In a letter to Irish zealots explaining their religio-political motives, these laymen clarified that they were not democratic or anti-monarchical but against religious and civil tyranny.

In things civil, though we do not say that every tyrannical act makes a tyrant, yet we hold, that habitual, obstinate and declared opposition to, and overturning of religion, laws and liberties, and making void all contracts with the subjects, intercepting and interdicting all redress by supplications or otherwise, does sufficiently invalidate his right and relation to magistracy, and warrant subjects, especially in covenanted lands, to revolt from under, and disown allegiance to such a power.¹²⁹

Civil and religious liberties, with their peculiarly Covenanter definitions, were deeply embedded in the most orthodox Scottish laity. Scottish officials noted warily that “there are Two Books, the one entitled *Lex Rex*, and the other, *The Causes of God’s Wrath*, &c. printed and dispersed by some rebellious and seditious Persons within this Kingdom” that were “laying the Foundation and Seeds of Rebellion, for the present and future Generations.”¹³⁰ The praying societies now, networked together served as committees of correspondence and reading groups, kept alive the old phanaticism.

¹²⁸ Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, 291.

¹²⁹ “Friends in Ireland,” March 2nd 1687, as quoted in Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, 302.

¹³⁰ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 1:Appendix 7.

The group sought to establish a quasi-church order. A General Meeting was scheduled every quarter. The societies would relegate each other's behavior, restricting political action to that approved by the group as a whole. Like kirk sessions, they held the power to punish and restore sinners. The sin most carefully mentioned was the taking of loyalty oaths. Such moments were common, especially for those who, like Alexander Shields, found the usefulness of "Ambiguous Propositions capable of different senses," when speaking with authorities.¹³¹ Many Covenanters simply took such oaths and then became "sensible of their sin" to effect restoration.¹³² The United Societies called for fast days, arranged for social control and generally became an invisible institution beneath the surface of the Scottish kirk: a church within the church.

A controversy arose at the June 15, 1682 meeting. Each meeting began with the representatives being questioned in regard to the sanctity of their societies, generally a series of questions aimed at ensuring holiness and political loyalty of each group and its chosen envoy. However "James Russel, a man of a hot and fiery spirit" added a new question spontaneously to the inquiry, asking "if they or their Society were free of paying customs at Ports and Bridges?" Russel and others continued to make the issue a bone of contention, although they were voted down.

¹³¹ Shields, *A True and Faithful Relation of the Sufferings of the Reverend and Learned Mr. Alexander Shields, Minister of the Gospel* (1715), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 234, Union Theological College, Belfast, 48-49.

¹³² Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, 13-27.

However one young man, found to be from a society that included cess payers, was debarred from voting.¹³³

Another division arose on August 11, 1682, over the tone of a paper written to defend the societies positions to other Dissenters. One paper put forward was of a “meek and tender spirit” attempting to gain adherents. A second option was full of “bitterness, untenderness and reflections.” A debate raged in successive meetings as to which reply best suited the Covenanter spirit and, not atypically, caused temporary division, name calling, and accusations of unrighteousness from both sides. Even the United Societies’ members recognized that, like Bothwell Bridge, zealots shared a tendency that “*Judah* should fight against *Judah* even at Jeruslaem.”¹³⁴

By 1683 the United Societies finally secured a trained minister from the seminaries of Holland, a weaver’s son named James Renwick. He began leading a conventicle revival upon his return from the Continent and was promptly declared a traitor by Scottish officials. Government repression continued. One group of captured Covenanters was shipped to the Carolinas, where they were later wiped out in a Spanish attack. Tensions ran high, and then overran their borders in 1684.¹³⁵

¹³³ Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, 21-22.

¹³⁴ Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, 26-27, 288-89.

¹³⁵ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 118.

1684 saw a sudden shift in the fortunes of Presbyterian moderates. Despite loudly condemning Renwick and his followers, indulged ministers whose former Covenanter activities made them suspect were ousted from their parishes late that year. Hundreds of lay people were thrown into overcrowded prisons under suspicion of anti-government leanings. In 1685 everyone south of the Tay was gathered by town and required to renounce the covenants in the oath of abjuration. Those who refused were to be shot on the spot. Some received a fate worse than death, banishment to New Jersey. As far as the crown was concerned, where the Remant left off and the moderates began was a discussion more theoretical than real. The old Presbyterian party was still the overall enemy of the Stuart monarchy.¹³⁶

This purge of the moderates had the effect of bringing hidden Covenanter sentiment out of hiding. People content to keep their convictions private were forced into the open, leading to the most dramatic martyr stories of the Killing Times. Interrogations went beyond the ability to swear allegiance to the king or disavowing Bothwell Bridge. A layperson could be backed into a corner simply by being asked if they “owned the Covenant as his Oath of Allegiance.”¹³⁷ Examples abounded. John Semple, who “never carried Arms, nor gave the least Disturbance to the Government” but whose conscience would not allow him to attend the state

¹³⁶ Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 118-126. James II’s Act of Indemnity had little effect on the Killing Times.

¹³⁷ Shields, *A True and Faithful Relation*, 26-27.

church was shot while climbing out his window. A local woman accosted the soldiers afterwards for killing a man “who left a Wife and Four or Five small shirtless Children behind him.” The Earl of Claverhouse shot John Brown in front of wife and children. All told around a hundred executions occurred. The last death of Killing Times happened in July 1688; he was a sixteen-year-old named George Wood.¹³⁸

The Killing Times left Covenanters with a firm conviction that they were the suffering remnant of God’s people, the new Israel. Alexander Shields spoke for this “wrestling tribe of Israel, the persecuted witness of Christ now everywhere preyed upon” in his 1687 tract *A Hind Let Loose*.¹³⁹ Shields was a classic Covenanter minister, admittedly “rude and unready in *Extemporary Answers*.”¹⁴⁰ But, he urged, his co-religionists, he and they were “free born, and are not contented slaves, emancipated to a stupid subjection to tyrants absoluteness.” Like a wild deer, they were free, but hunted.¹⁴¹

Hind Let Loose made explicit in theory what had to date been implicit in action. When the state failed to be just, the state’s authority fell to the kirk, which had an obligation to resist. It was unlawful for any godly person to recognize the

¹³⁸ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2:503.

¹³⁹ Alexander Shields, *A Hind Let Loose; or, An Historical Representation of the Testimonies of the Church of Scotland for the Interest of Christ*, Glasgow (1687, reprint 1797), iv.

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Shields, *A True and Faithful Relation of the Sufferings of the Reverend and Learned Mr. Alexander Shields, Minister of the Gospel* (1715), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 234, Union Theological College, Belfast, 1.

¹⁴¹ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, iv.

jurisdiction of an ungodly monarch. Because Scotland had been under “complete and habitual tyranny,” the crown had no more authority “than robbery can be acknowledged to be a rightful possession.” The case was now one “of necessity for the preservation of our lives, religion, laws, and liberties.”¹⁴² The struggle was defensive. Resistance, or “this truth of self preservation,” was a fundamental right and obligation of anyone who had a “zeal for the interest of Christ.”¹⁴³ In good Rutherfordian logic, they “must obey God rather than man” and thus “conscience regulates us what and whom to obey.” For zealot Presbyterians the bound conscience was key. “Without conscience,” Shields insisted, “there is little hope for government to prove beneficial or permanent.”¹⁴⁴ They were rebels because they did not have the liberty not to be.

Shields was keen to insulate his sect from accusations they were “pleading for anarchy” and to ward off the powerful Biblical argument for subjection to rightful authority.¹⁴⁵ After all, St. Paul had subjected himself to a pagan Roman empire and St. Peter had commanded the earliest Christians to “Honor the King.”¹⁴⁶ Shields carefully parsed the difference between the rightful rulers of Rome in the

¹⁴² Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 665.

¹⁴³ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 652.

¹⁴⁴ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 318-19.

¹⁴⁵ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 325.

¹⁴⁶ 1 Peter 2.17.

Senate and the tyrants like Julius Caesar who subverted representative government. Augustus did not validate Nero.¹⁴⁷

Shields preferred to point to Biblical passages condemning tyrants, such as Jeremiah 22.13-19, or Ezekiel 20.25-27, which called Zedekiah “thou worthy to be killed.”¹⁴⁸ Israel rebelled against evil kings like Rehoboam and Sennacherib and this “was a good rebellion, and clear duty.”¹⁴⁹ The Jews then, like the Scots now, were bound in covenant to God. These covenants were “perpetually binding,” and “inviolably obliging.”¹⁵⁰ Like the Biblical Naphtali, Scotland must be free to be bound to right religion.

This tie between the Scots and Jews was important to the Covenanters’ extreme Whig view of history. Shields believed that Christianity had been embraced in Scotland “a few years after the ascension of our Savior” when those fleeing the persecution of the Emperor Domitian fled to Scotland. Soon after the “idolatry of the Druids” and their “heathen priests” was erased and Scotland began a long period in which it “did wrestle strenuously” for Christ.¹⁵¹ Covenanters believed the tie to the earliest, purest Christians before their corruption by Rome was strong in Scotland. They held a particular historical path that tied them to the early church. Like the Jews, they were bound to be a peculiar people in the world. Their very

¹⁴⁷ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 342-345.

¹⁴⁸ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 515.

¹⁴⁹ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 652.

¹⁵⁰ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 573.

¹⁵¹ Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 25.

presence in the nation was a testimony. Persecution became proof of importance. Of course they were the people of God. The “injustice, illegality, and inhumanity of the persecutors” and the “innocence, zeal and ingenuity of the persecuted” proved this for them.¹⁵²

Shield’s message of “the Excellency of the Blessing of *Liberty*” typified the complicated relationship Covenanters had come to embody with anti-statist rhetoric. They were as much concerned with “the Extent of *Christian Liberty*,” meaning its boundaries and obligations, as they were the individuality of it. Shields was also keen to emphasize “The Preferableness of *Spiritual Liberty* beyond temporal Freedom,” that placed the heart of liberty in the righteous communities now organizing in praying societies throughout Scotland.¹⁵³ The government in 1688 took notice that religious and temporal liberty looked remarkably the same when “an Attack [was] made upon a Party of his Majesty’s Forces who were conveying one Houston, a declared Rebel, Prisoner to the Tollbooth of Edinburg.” Several soldiers were killed, and others “desperately wounded” as the Society people rescued one of their own.¹⁵⁴ But by 1688 the prospect for overall phanatick victory seemed slim.

Covenanters turned by necessity inward. They created not a holy nation, but the remnant of that nation in their system of small groups that called prophetically

¹⁵² Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, 23.

¹⁵³ Shields, *A True and Faithful*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ “Proclamation Against Mr. David Houston” (June 22, 1688) in Wodrow, *History of the Sufferings*, 2: Appendix; Smyth, *Making of the United Kingdom*, 48.

into a world increasingly deaf to their message. Covenanters grew increasingly weary of the struggle to create a Christian utopian state in this world. They were more hopeful about the next. A new world arrived sooner than anyone expected.

CHAPTER V

SCOTTISH PHANATICKS: TOLERATION, SECEDERS AND SLAVERY, 1689-1800

As the tumultuous seventeenth century came mercifully to a close, Covenanters faced a new threat for which they were not altogether prepared: toleration.¹ Toleration marginalized the movement more powerfully than persecution had, and made its cultural sensibility less attractive to the wider population. The process of making Covenanters religious outliers, begun during the Killing Times, was forever solidified by the very opposite experience of state benevolence. Presbyterianism took on a more moderate hue and Covenanters became the symbols of extremism, leaving orthodox laity with a difficult set of options to express religious enthusiasm. In response to the emerging attraction of Enlightenment ideas, a group of orthodox Calvinists called Seceders reappropriated the Covenanter legacy as a response of the common people to modernism's moderate, refined impulses. As the eighteenth century commenced, the Covenanter movement in Scotland lost much of its social momentum, and the period saw the last substantive innovations in the Scottish Covenanter tradition. This cultural sensibility, socially and intellectually, had been well established by the end of the 1770s. It would be one of Scotland's most unique cultural exports.

¹ As Emily Moberg Robinson has pointed out, this happened both inside and outside of a Scottish context. See Robinson, "Immigrant Covenanters."

In late 1688 William of Orange landed in Britain to usurp the throne of England in what became to the Whig telling of history the Glorious Revolution. Covenanters had every reason to believe their longed-for day had arrived. William, a Calvinist Protestant, ruled the Netherlands where Covenanter ministers like Richard Cameron and James Renwick had been trained in Dutch seminaries. Always the church militant, they organized a three hundred man force known as “the Cameronian Regiment” and many Covenanters fought for William against the Jacobite army at Dunkeld.

The Glorious Revolution presented the General Meeting of the Societies with the troubling dilemma of how to fight for Protestant glory with bad Protestants. The General Meeting on April 29, 1689, expecting a Catholic invasion from Ireland, witnessed a protracted debate about whether or not joining the army with un-covenanted Protestants would constitute “sinful association.” Finally it was agreed that yes, it would be so. In May, however, they sought terms in which they could constitute their own holy force. These conditions included that everyone in their unit be sound in religion, that they be allowed to elect their own officers, and that the regiment have “a minister chosen by all of us, and an elder in every company... who may with authority reprove offences, without respect of persons.” A Covenanter army would be, in every sense, a church militant.²

² Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, 399-400.

In 1689 William signed the Toleration Act and in 1690 Presbyterianism was restored in Scotland as the church by law established. Most southern Scots were thrilled. The Society People were not. The General Assembly, Synods and Presbyteries remained subject to the King and Parliament. William's solution was far from the Melvillian model of the two kingdoms. But the compromise was good enough for almost everyone. Every single ousted Presbyterian minister came back into the fold. By December the three remaining Covenanter clerics entered the official church. Even Alexander Shields came in out of the cold. The United Societies, however, remained outside the bounds of state religion.

Religious toleration within a Presbyterian state was an enigma to the Covenanters. It simultaneously protected them from persecution and won none of their desired ends. The Toleration Act of 1689 was a practical political concession. It acknowledged no innate right to religious tolerance, but granted peaceful existence as a concession of the state to groups who would not conform.³ Those Presbyterians who had been ousted by their opponents and tarred with the brush of extremism were anxious both to embrace the tolerant William and to distance themselves from their zealous heritage. Simultaneously, the Society People became invested in maintaining their phanatick tradition.

The movement in 1688 was distinctly different from what it had been. The process that began in 1660 had fully matured. Covenanters were a "party of the

³ Hugh Trevor Roper, *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 279-280.

dispossessed with little aristocratic support.”⁴ In the words of historian Hugh Trevor Roper, they represented the worst of a long seventeenth century in which successions of Catholics, Calvinists, and everyone in between were “successively hoisting and submerging each other in the same turbid stream.”⁵ The national mood on the elevation of William and Mary to the throne shifted against religious extremists at both ends. Peace was the order of the day. Religious phanaticism was relegated further to the fringe.

Under a tolerant regime, however, the fractious nature of Protestant zealotry was made easily manifest. Without the threat of imminent danger to bond internal divisions, and as many rigidly orthodox Calvinists accepted the new Williamite compromise, the internal fault lines within the extremists began to emerge. The ensuing and seemingly continuous process of debate, division, reorganization, further debate and further division became the nearly humorous face of Covenanter Presbyterianism. It became all too tempting for many to believe that as the zealots raged over the meaning of theological minutia, they argued themselves into meaninglessness.

Covenanters went by and acquired many names in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. They called themselves “The Remannt,” the “Society People,” or simply, “Covenanters.” After their official organization of the Societies into a Presbytery in 1743 they went by the more official denominational title of “Reformed

⁴ Fisk, *The Scottish high church tradition in America*, 15.

⁵ Hugh Trevor Roper, *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution*, 213.

Presbyterians.” Their detractors chose more popular names. They were the “antigovernment party,” to many. Others called them “mountain men,” or “the old dissenters.” Each term was telling to how they were seen in the public square. Some associated them with resistance to established government. Others saw them as uninformed, backwater religionists with little education. More respectfully, many orthodox Presbyterians saw them as the vestige of a bygone age. They were the radicals of another generation, old dissenters to a different regime.

The most common identifiers were the names of prominent leaders. The Society People were most commonly called “Cameronians,” for the reckless young preacher killed at Airds Moss. Before 1737 when the Seceders added even more complexity to the fringe, there were at least nine identifiable subgroups of Covenanters in Scotland. Prominent among these were the Adamites, Hebronites, MacMillanites, Harlites, Russelites, and Wilsonites. Some divisions were of personality, but most had to do with the rigor of Covenanter piety and anti-government stances. The Russelites were the most ardently opposed to the paying of any kinds of government tax or levy. The Howdenites were led in 1739 by an upholsterer named John Howden who declared war on the state, the Pope and, ironically, other Covenanters whom he accused of being too ineffective and squabble-prone to bring about a covenanted state. Perhaps the most extreme example, Howdenites were anti-Jacobite, anti-Hanoverian, anti-Cameronian

Covenanters for whom everyone else had failed to bring about the renewal of Holy Scotland.⁶

Divisiveness was the public face of the Presbyterian fringe. One of Sir Walter Scott's characters explained to a religious extremist that he must be "a Cameronian, or MacMillanite, one of the society people, in short, who think it inconsistent to take oaths under a government where the Covenant is not ratified." The controversialist replied angrily "you cannot fickle me sae easily as you do opine. I am *not* a MacMillanite, or a Russelite, or a Hamiltonian, or a Harleyite, or a Howdenite." Rather, he claimed his own "principles and practice to answer for, and am an humble pleader for the gude auld cause in a legal way." Followers of the good old cause were so driven by their zealotry that they could hoist one another on their own petards.⁷

All of these divisions occurred amongst a people who never accrued more than 10,000 followers in the Scottish lowlands and almost none in the highlands. Yet in all these divisions they shared many things. They were all anti-statist. They were all anti-disestablishmentarian. They were all inspired by and themselves preserved the dream of a holy Scotland. They also shared a complicated

⁶ Kidd, "Conditional Britons," 1156-57, 1165-66.

⁷ Sir Walter Scott, *The Waverly Novels*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: 1839), 233. Scott also noted scathingly that Richard Cameron "was slain in a skirmish at Airdsmoss, bequeathing his name to the fanatics still called Cameronians." Such aspersions served political and cultural purposes for Scotsmen keen to clean up their nation's image in the new British Union.

relationship with the language of civil and religious liberties and the role of individuals within the righteous community.⁸

Understanding the similarities within these divisions is crucial to understanding the Covenanter movement and its sensibility. Divisiveness was not a debilitating weakness of the fringe, a cause with the effect of keeping them irrelevant. To the contrary, the fissile nature of the phanaticism was an effect of the kind of cultural energy that empowered laity to remain intimately engaged in the culture wars of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The many manifestations of the movement were part and parcel of the drive to find and maintain “true religion.” The fissuring process of fringe Presbyterianism reinforced the vigor of the institution. The more pure the community sought to be, the more likely it was to confront and expel the ‘sinners’ within. The more religious groups separated from those less pure than themselves, the more they were assured of their own commitment to the pure, covenanted relationship with God. No one would have said it this way, but the historical reality was that the less united the movement was, the more energy it had. Division was proof of authenticity.⁹

Covenanters, once the heart of a complicated religious revolution, were now out of step with Scotland’s prevailing social and political winds. The Enlightenment period not only saw the internal fracturing of Protestant zealotry, but the distancing

⁸ Kidd, “Conditional Britons,” 1156.

⁹ See also E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 23-26.

of many Presbyterians from the phanatick heritage. The Killing Times had effected all Presbyterians, not just the phanaticks. Many common people, caught in a vice between general sympathy for the movement and the dangers of fierce retribution, had found themselves the unwitting collateral damage of their more zealous neighbors contending for 'true religion.' The peace of the 1690s was fiercely protected by many elements of Scottish society. Disturbers of that peace became increasingly difficult to countenance. For mainstream Presbyterian ministers and laity, the Covenanter legacy was a political and cultural liability.

How to handle the complicated and bloody legacy of the past half-century remained an open question early into the Revolution period. In 1689 curates were driven out in a wave of violence led by society people as retribution for similar actions against Presbyterians under James II. Presbyterian leaders now inherited a church, as historian Colin Kidd has noted, whose public face was of an embarrassingly uncivil civil religion. As factions in Scotland and England vied for the ear of the new regime, Presbyterian opponents were quick to capitalize on this public relations problem and advocate that William remain highly wary of trusting the Scots to run their own church affairs. The power play between Episcopal and Presbyterian factions in church politics led to three contested versions of Covenanter history. In the first telling, the previous years were the convulsions of fanatical religion gone amuck and crying out for the state's calming and peace-inducing hand. This was the Episcopal, old establishment argument. In the second telling, prelatric tyranny over the people had led to a just revolt for liberties that at

times led to unfortunate excess. This was the Presbyterian story. Finally, the religious fringe themselves cast the period in terms of historical martyrdom for true religion against the corrupt collusion between an uncovenanted state and a sinfully compromising church. Over the 1690s and early eighteenth century, Covenanter history was a political football wrestled over as a tool for the politics of the present.

Anti-Covenanters had always clothed themselves in the language of moderation, balance and charity. Archbishop Sharp, towards the end of his own reign of persecutions and just before his assassination, insisted that “all Moderation Consistent with the public safety is used towards them.”¹⁰ Now opponents used a sustained propaganda campaign aimed at English sympathizers to influence the new co-regent William. The purpose was to tar all Presbyterians as political phanaticks and religious zealots. The argument hinged on tying together popular conceptions of Covenanters, already seen as religious extremists, to the popular conception of Presbyterians as a whole. This smear campaign had two lines of attack, the theological and the political. Those lines were connected with a strong thread: anti-Catholicism.

Theologically, Episcopalians pointed out with cutting accuracy, Cameronians were the product of Presbyterianism taken to its logical conclusion. Covenanters were better Presbyterians than moderates were. Presbyterians were simply Covenanters in sheep’s clothing. At heart, every Presbyterian longed to enforce the

¹⁰ December 11, 1660, James Sharp to Patrick Drummond, Lauderdale Papers, Vol. 1.

Covenants on all the realms. They would secretly strive to place sessions over all the churches and place the unlearned masses over the better sort of people. They would do so by point of a sword if necessary. As the Episcopalian Rev. Robert Calder put it, all Presbyterians at heart were “the gun disciplines of Christ.”¹¹ They couldn’t avoid the implications of their own religion. As John Milton put it

Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword
To force our conscience that Christ set free,
And ride us with a classic hierarchy
Taught ye by mere A.S. and Rutherford?¹²

This theological issue was tied to the political by the issue of tyranny. While Covenanters decried state power, they themselves sought to be tyrants over mens’ souls. It was here that the theological and political came together.¹³

Nothing was so tyrannical in the minds of moderate Tories and all Whigs as the fear of popery. The two groups most displeased with the Revolution Settlement were the most ideologically opposed sects of Britons, Jacobite Tories who supported the exiled Catholic King James II and phanatick Covenanters who desired a powerful church protected by but powerful over the state. Both sides shared two

¹¹ Robert Calder, “Mr. Robert Calder’s Vindication of his Sermon Preach’d January 30, 1703” as quoted in Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past*, 55.

¹² John Milton, as quoted in Currie, “History, Hagiography and Fakestory,” 19.

¹³ Covenanters were similar to English Whigs in that they were not pro-democracy, but anti-Catholic and highly concerned with the church’s local prerogative. See JCD Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (New York: Cambridge, 1994), 235.

commonalities. They were both advocates of a strong church that ruled over the monarch, and they were both known for militant and bloody uprisings.¹⁴

Covenanters, ironically, were the most popish-looking Protestants on the islands. Their theories of church authority ran surprisingly close to Roman Catholic teachings. Although vesting authority with the local church's and synods, their demands for a Covenanted state subservient to church discipline were remarkably close to the demands of Rome regarding the supremacy of the church from the encroachments of state. For many in England, Covenanter zeal held its own type of religious oligarchy with its aim to force foreign Scottish religious institutions on the English people.

These similarities were not fictitious. Covenanters had forged alliances with Charles I and been the first to crown Charles II. Their one-time Stuart leanings were well known. Covenanters' provided a very real national security threat even after William defeated Jacobite forces at the Boyne in 1690. Rumors of Catholic French invasions in 1692 and 1696 added earnestness to these concerns. As late as 1725 Jacobite George Lockhart wrote hopefully of "a fair probability of a conjunction in measure betwixt the Highlands and the Cameronians."¹⁵ To make matters worse, Cameronians refused to take a loyalty oath to William's government because it would violate their conscience and support a non-Covenanted state. Accusations

¹⁴ Colin Kidd, "Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Tradition and the Eighteenth Century British State," *English Historical Review* 117 (2002) no. 474, 1147-1148.

¹⁵ George Lockhart as quoted in Kidd, "Conditional Britons," 1151.

that Covenanters were actually refusing to protest “the Great and Crying Injustice of setting aside the *Popish Line*” were common fair for establishment churchmen to make against all Presbyterians, even the most loyal.¹⁶

Anti-Covenanters had long used satire and irony to discredit Covenanters, focusing especially on discontinuities and dangerous levels of extremism.¹⁷ Now they played to very real public fears of tyranny and social destabilization. Because of Covenanters, one nobleman worried, the people “are almost all, daily and hourly, alarmed *against* the *Right* of their present *Governors*.” In this they joined with the Jacobite Catholics. Both were “*Religion*, which leaves nothing to *Variety of Tempers*, or *Principles*.”¹⁸ Tyranny, then, was the Presbyterian way. Covenanters were simply the examples writ small of a larger religious danger to political peace.

This line of attack required moderate Presbyterians to drastically distance themselves from anything like the covenanter legacy and emphasize their own reasonableness, calmness of temper and essential ties to English institutions like contractual government. As early as 1689 some noted that a common “Objection

¹⁶ Lord Bishop of Bangor, *A Preservative Against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors both in Church and State, or an Appeal to the Conscience and Common Sense of the Laity*, Second Edition (1716), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Belfast, YP 67, 13.

¹⁷ Janette Currie, “History, Hagiography, and Fakestory: Representations of the Scottish Covenanters in Non-fictional and Fictional Texts from 1638-1835,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Stirling, 1999), iii.

¹⁸ Lord Bishop of Bangor, *A Preservative Against the Principles and Practices of the Nonjurors both in Church and State, or an Appeal to the Conscience and Common Sense of the Laity*, Second Edition (1716), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, Belfast, YP 67, 26.

made against Presbyterian Ministers is, That they transgress in meddling beyond their Line in *State Affairs* to the disturbance both of the Government and public Peace.”¹⁹ They insisted Presbyterians were not, like Cameronians, “Enemies both of Church and State.”²⁰ To clear their name, Presbyterian divines and lay thinkers reformulated both their ethical sentiments and the story of their past to align with Enlightenment era norms.

The Scottish Enlightenment was spurred on in the Scottish Universities as a sense of common sense reasonableness that decried the religious extremism of the past in favor of religious rationality. Francis Hutcheson, the greatest of the Scottish Presbyterian moderates, openly condemned “warm zealots of both sides.”²¹ Presbyterians now claimed the mantle of moderation their ancestors often actively opposed. They claimed they found themselves “on the one hand accused of too much severity [by Episcopalians], and by [Cameronians], for want of Zeal.”²² The most moderate people in Revolutionary Scotland, Presbyterians argued, were Presbyterians.

In discussing the religious moderation opposed by Covenanters, Hughes Oliphant Old has characterized moderation as a sensibility also. It was “not so much

¹⁹ *An Apologie for Presbyterie, for Removing Prejudices* (1689), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 432, Union Theological College, Belfast, 10.

²⁰ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 20.

²¹ Francis Hutcheson as quoted in E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 16.

²² *A Seasonable Admonition*, 13.

a movement as a refusal to go to extremes.” Old lists five characteristics of the moderate impulse in Protestant religion. Moderates shared concepts of religious rationality, a growing sense of toleration, disillusionment with state religion, emphasis on practical morality, and an affinity for elite language.²³ Moderates were concerned with morality in a modern sense, that is to say, in its effects of civility and against extremism. Moderatism, amongst clergy and elite laity alike, served as “the intellectual arm of the lay patrons in the politics of the Kirk.” It kept religion from going too far into the arms of the phanatical wing of the Kirk by making that wing seem irrational and far behind the times.²⁴ The very title of “moderate” now took on a life of its own in Presbyterianism, meaning someone “neither unreasonably Cameronian, nor excessively Laodicean, an idolizer of moderation; but, *entre deus*, avoiding extremes, on either hand: that is, a good, honest, sound Presbyterian.”²⁵

In this language of civility and rationality Presbyterians reached out to Cameronians in a move calculated to win support amongst the laity and publically

²³ Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: Volume 5, Moderatism, Pietism and Awakening* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 1-5.

²⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, “Political Thought in the English-speaking Atlantic, 1760-1790” in J.G.A. Pocock, *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993), 249.

²⁵ *A proper project for Scotland: To startle fools, and frighten knaves, but to make wise-men happy. Being a safe and easy remedy to cure our fears, and ease our minds. With the undoubted causes of God’s wrath, and of the present national calamities. By a person neither unreasonably Cameronian, nor excessively Laodicean, ad idolizer of moderation; but, entre deus, avoiding extremes, on either hand: that is, a good, honest, sound Presbyterian, a throw-pac’d, true-blue Loyalist; for God, King and countrey: and why not for Co----t too?* (undated), Manuscript Collection, The British Library, London.

clear their names of false association. In 1698 the General Assembly styled itself the party of “*Love and Unity, Peace and Concord*” while decrying the Cameronians as representatives of “*Discord, and Division, and Schism...*”²⁶ They applauded the Covenanter goal that “Zeal may be universal against all Evil,” but Presbyterians believed evil required “Prudence and tenderness to be used” against it.²⁷ This the Society People lacked. “Imprudence and indiscretion under the name of Zeal...” would lead to Christians “Separat[ing] from all the Churches and Ministers on Earth.”²⁸ Such a sentiment as would refuse fellowship to any who “is not of your Judgment” was the difference in extremist Covenanters and moderate Presbyterians.²⁹

Presbyterian ministers remained mindful of the powerful sway Covenanters held over the laity. They assured the Cameronians that they agreed “We are a Land in Covenant with God.”³⁰ They asked doubtful laity to “acknowledge Our Confession to be sound.” They reasoned and assured all readers that their own ministers subscribed to the Westminster Confession of faith.³¹ Acknowledging that, as to the Indulgence and Toleration, “there were different sentiments and practices [about]

²⁶ *A Seasonable Admonition and Exhortation to Some who separate themselves from the Communion of the Church of Scotland, wherein is also discovered that the things they complain of, are either false on the Matter, or not sufficient to warrant a Separation* (1698), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 432, Union Theological College, Belfast, 3.

²⁷ *A Seasonable Admonition*

²⁸ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 17, 27.

²⁹ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 18.

³⁰ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 7.

³¹ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 6.

these things, among them that were Reputed, Learned, and Pious,” the Assembly believed it time to “lay aside prejudices” and heal the wounds between Presbyterians.³²

Continued extremism was nothing short of sinful. “Charity obliges us,” they argued, to a general sentiment of forgiveness and tolerance.³³ When disagreements occurred, Christians should “give not way to bitter Zeal with proud wrath or passionate reviling of persons, but with Prudence and Patience, Love and Meekness,” and the goal of inclusion should be preferable to exclusion.³⁴ Covenanters failed the Biblical test by being too rigidly Biblicist. They missed the all-important humility necessary to one’s own ability to apply the gospel to a messy world. “We know but in part, and are liable to many Temptations and Failings, and would not refuse to confess the Sins We are convinced of; but can you say you are Pure, might there not be Recriminations against you?” Pride in the face of fallacy, a failure of humility, was the most immoderate of sins.

These rhetorical moves to the irenic center were matched by a new, sanitized historiography used to tell the story of the tumultuous seventeenth century. Far less phanatick than previous versions of cultural memory, this history put less emphasis on the religious phanaticism and more emphasis on the contractualism of

³² *A Seasonable Admonition*, 7, 15.

³³ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 18.

³⁴ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 26.

government in order to appeal to English mainstream. There would be no more of the 1640's drive to excess.³⁵

The Buchananite historiography, with its cleaned-up version of the story of mythically elected King Fergus Mac Erc, was overturned in 1729 by Thomas Inne's *Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain, or Scotland*. The Enlightenment writers, including David Hume in his *History of England*, shattered the old basis of Contractualism and the legend of an early, pre-modern, lay-driven Christianity in the realm. In the words of Enlightenment era Whig Malcolm Laing, the Covenants and their benighted story of holy Scotland became "a misfortune peculiar to the age."³⁶

Scottish Whig historiography continued amongst zealots, however, well into the nineteenth century. In this telling, Scottish Presbyterianism was the root from which British civil liberties sprang, and Covenanters (known as "men who knew how to die") were its central martyrs. These new mythologies of Covenanter phanaticism, cleansed of their persecuting tendencies, were the dominant popular memory of Scottish nationalism prior to the secular historiographies of the early twentieth century. The central writers of this tradition were Anti-Burgher Seceders Archibald Bruce and Thomas M'Crie. According to Bruce, "civil and religious liberty

³⁵ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689-1830* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 51.

³⁶ Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, 20-24; J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion, Volume Two: Narratives of Civil Government* (New York: Cambridge, 1999), 264-265.

are but two great branches of the same expanded tree.” Bruce’s Covenanter view of toleration, which did not extend to Roman Catholicism, was a continuation of the Rutherfordian Whig tradition. Religious liberty sprang forth so as to ensure the civil liberty of a godly nation.³⁷

This new realism movement in Scottish Presbyterianism sought to secure the protection of kirk polity from Episcopal overthrow by emphasizing the shared Scottish-English heritage of constitutionalism. It also stressed the preaching of the moral law, seen as the inculcator of civic virtue, over against a grace dominated gospel emphasizing sin and salvation for the next life. Prominent in this movement were Rev. Gilbert Rule of the University of Edinburgh, George Ridpath, and ecclesiastical historian Rev. Robert Wodrow.³⁸

Wodrow’s *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* sanitized Covenanter history by retelling it as a story of resistance to tyranny over the people. His was an emollient version of Covenanter history that softened their image and glossed over the Solemn League and Covenant as not *requiring* Scottish Presbyterians to enforce Presbyterianism on England unless done with English parliamentary consent. In Wodrow’s telling the Pentland uprising became a civil affair about starving peasants, and it emphasized how far from the mainstream were documents like the Rutherglen Declaration of 1679 and the Sanquhar Declaration of 1680. He resented that the Queensferry paper had ever been

³⁷ Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past*, 1-18, 59-61.

³⁸ Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past*, 67-69.

considered a Presbyterian document at all. Wodrow and others argued that the Scottish Whig tradition, that is its constitutionalism, was what made Presbyterian Scotland distinct.³⁹

In discussing the Cameronians, Wodrow noted that “some of the warmer Sort of these People” had harsh things to say about Presbyterians.⁴⁰ But Wodrow emphasized that the Covenanter alliance had always been complicated, and included “among these People a good many of a moderate and healing [temper] who did neither approve of their Extremities, nor countenance them;” and that “vast Numbers of more common Sort knew Nothing of their Heights, but were with them, and owned some of their Principles, out of a sincere Regard to the *Reformation Rights*, and *solemn Covenants* of this Church, without being capable of knowing the Consequences.”⁴¹

Again, historical lines between these groups obscure the basic appeals of the Covenanter message to the more rigorously orthodox sets of Presbyterians not ready to embrace the political extremism of the United Societies. Not all Presbyterians were idolizers of moderation, and many held strong affinity for phanatick doctrine if not phanatick politics. Fringe Presbyterians rejected Enlightenment teachings at any point they threatened Calvinist orthodoxy. One folk legend amongst traditionalist Presbyterians held that a young Francis Huthceson,

³⁹ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2: Appendix 46.

⁴⁰ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2:133.

⁴¹ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2:133.

future intellectual star of the Scottish Common Sense school, filled in for his father in the pulpit. When his father asked a laymen how the sermon was received, the news was not good. “Your silly son, Frank, has fashed a’ the congregation with his idle cackle; for he has been babblin’ this here about a good and benevolent God and that the souls o’ the heathen themselves will go to heaven if they follow the licht o’ their own consciences.” Even worse, the “daft boy” had uttered not one word “about the good old comfortable doctrines of election, reprobation, original sin and faith.” More instructive in this story than the disparaging of Hutcheson’s enlightenment message is the expectations and knowledge of Calvinist orthodoxy by lay people. They knew orthodoxy when they heard it, because it sounded like the Confession and Catechisms. This message was not from Westminster.⁴²

The clearest and most popular articulation against moderation in Scottish Presbyterianism came not from a Covenanter, but a leading orthodox Presbyterian minister, John Witherspoon. In 1753 Witherspoon anonymously published a scathing satire on moderation called *Ecclesiastical Characteristics, or, The Arcana of Church Policy, being an Humble Attempt to Open up the Mystery of Moderation. Wherein is Shewn A plan and easy way of attaining to the character of a moderate man, as at present in repute in the Church of Scotland*. It was his best selling writing in Scotland and went through at least ten editions. In America, Covenanter

⁴² Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 39.

ministers were fond of this work and, when Witherspoon himself turned to moderation later in life, they used his own satire against him.⁴³

By the mid-eighteenth century, Witherspoon noted wryly, both Episcopal and Presbyterian leaders claimed competing moderations. Presbyterians were “acting upon constitutional principles, as lovers of order, and enemies of confusion, etc.; while at the very same time, the opposite party have taken up the title of *moderation*, and pretend to be acting upon *moderate principles*.” Perhaps the times, he opined, “require a different phraseology.”⁴⁴ The only thing left for Presbyterians to be vigorous for was the lack of vigor itself. They were “*fierce for moderation!*”⁴⁵ In their zeal against zealotry they had scolded the laity for their love of orthodoxy and hatred of heresy. Such idolization of peacemaking made the contrast between Covenanters and Presbyterians glaring and, for many laity, made the Cameronians more appealing. They may be constantly dividing, but therein lay their claim to authentic contending for ‘true religion.’ By the mid-eighteenth century

⁴³ John Hemphill to J. Lind, April 28, 1817, Rare Books and Manuscript Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University. For Witherspoon’s turn to moderation in America see Mark A. Noll, *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: the search for a Christian Enlightenment in the era of Samuel Stanhope Smith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ John Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics, or, The Arcana of Church Policy, being an Humble Attempt to Open up the Mystery of Moderation. Wherein is Shewn A plan and easy way of attaining to the character of a moderate man, as at present in repute in the Church of Scotland*, 4th Edition (Glasgow, 1760), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 303, Union Theological College, Belfast, viii.

⁴⁵ Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, vii-viii. Emphasis in original.

Presbyterians had so successfully distanced themselves from their dangerous past that they now were in danger of losing their followers.

Witherspoon believed that zeal and moderation were the product of sentiments. Since “every properly prejudiced mind is furnished with a complete system, upon which to form his sentiments,” it was only natural that the most tempered minds would be attracted to ideas of balance and wholeness.⁴⁶ It was also an educated, elite religion that lost touch with the common people. Moderation was only fit for “persons duly qualified” to understand it. Moderate men who read moderate words would receive a moderate system, while others lacking such a temperament would believe the same words to be approbation. “When we shall have brought moderation to perfection,” Witherspoon’s satire concluded, “when we shall have driven away the whole common people” to the fringe.⁴⁷

If Presbyterians had succeeded only too well in distancing themselves from the fringe, they had also forever moved Covenanters beyond the pale of mainstream politics. After the Revolution settlement, Covenanters were increasingly labeled “fanatics,” “republicans,” “Fifth Monarchists,” “mountaineers,” “malignant,” a “headless mob,” “anti-government men” and “men of bloody principles.”⁴⁸ Covenanter theology was made one dimensional, “as if they minded nothing else but Magistracy, &c. or as if to have civil government and governors established,

⁴⁶ Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, 71.

⁴⁷ Witherspoon, *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, 69.

⁴⁸ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, (1761), Magee Pamphlet Collection 84, Union Theological College, Belfast, 3. Smyth, *The Making of the United Kingdom*, 53.

according to the rule of God' word, was all the religion they intended."⁴⁹ The very term "Covenanter" became a catchall for extremist dissent in England.⁵⁰

"Cameronian Whig" garnered a popular use in British political rhetoric for those "notoriously imprudent and unnatural" politicians, especially from Scotland, who had "an ardent Zeal to promote the interest of the *Good Old Cause*." They made the "loudest Exclamations against Tyranny," but were, "in reality, the most insupportable Tyrants, when clothed with Authority."⁵¹

Covenanter laity rejected moderation in all its forms. They despised the Episcopal forms which used the state as a moderator over the church. They rejected the enlightenment moderation of Scottish Moderatism which moderated Calvinist orthodoxy by demanding morality with a sense of intellectual humility and charity that struck Covenanters as dangerously latitudinarian. "The false Notion of commendable *Circumspection, Wisdom, and prudence,*" was "that Conscience-cheating Quirk, whereby many in our days wears out and wards off all Checks and Challenges of Conscience whatsoever." Presbyterian cries of "*Prudence* (and most falsely so called) that leads any to shift the duty of the Day," were "an *Enemy to True*

⁴⁹ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 4.

⁵⁰ J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political discourse and social dynamics in the Anglo-American world* (New York: Cambridge, 1994), 234.

⁵¹ *Cameronian Whigs no patriots: Or, some remarkable exploits of Bob Hush, and his fairylanders, set in a true light. In a letter to an elector of Lynn regis. Publish'd as a cave at against all those who delight in war, plunder, confusion, and generals for life, and are for enriching themselves, and aggrandizing an exotick state, at the expence of the liberties, blood, and treasure, of their brother Britains* (undated), Manuscript Collection, British Library, London, 7, 11, 13.

Zeal ... and Prudence or Moderation, (call it what you will) without the necessary Concomitant of *Tenderness* (have it who please) will be found, before GOD, to be but *Carnal Craft*, and *Subtleness*." The "Work of *Reformation* might have been, ere now, pretty far *Advanced*" had not it been sacrificed on the alter of compromise.⁵² Such appeals had the advantage of playing on class tensions within Scotland and appealed to lay people less keen for Enlightenment learning.

The friendlier that Scottish Presbyterianism became towards the Enlightenment, the more earthy Covenanter appeals became. Cameronians complained that Presbyterian ministers used language that was "Light and Frothy."⁵³ The rise of Enlightenment refinement reified the populist elements of Covenanter rhetoric. The Scottish Synod became worried about an influx of liberal education and the increasing attraction of polite society in its midst. Especially vexing was the tendency of younger ministers to lose their Scottish brogue. By mid-eighteenth century one segments of Covenanters issued a "caution" to those considering their ministerial calling "against an affected pedantry of style and pronunciation, and politeness of expression in delivering the truths of the Gospel, as being an using the enticing words of man's wisdom and inconsistent with the gravity that the weight of the matter of the Gospel requires." The danger, they argued, was that in conforming the Gospel presentation to high style, "attempts to

⁵² *A proper project for Scotland*, 26.

⁵³ *A Seasonable Admonition*, 11.

accommodate it also in point of matter, to the corrupted taste of a carnal generation” were sure to follow.⁵⁴

The real issue was popular lay antagonism towards an encroaching Englishness and its connotations of cosmopolitan enlightenment. In the Walter Scott *Waverly* novels, Scott introduced a Covenanter character named Balmawhapple who curses moderate Whigs and stands against “the rats of Hanover.” A nobleman angrily confronts the fanatic, who has “no respect for the laws of urbanity,” with telling words. “Ye not only show your ignorance, but disgrace your native country before a stranger and an Englishman.” As Covenanters strove to make the memory of the seventeenth century sacred, most Scots (and Scott) were keen to relegate that heritage to a bygone era best moved past.⁵⁵ Most Covenanters were not. If it sounded like London, it probably carried meanings the lay people were not attuned and trained to understand through their rigid devotionism. Many laity viewed terms with overly technical meanings and learned assumptions as dangerous inventions and divergence from the good old way.

In eighteenth-century Britain the common presupposition was that language revealed the mind. Enlightened language came from an elite mind, and vulgar language came from a common mind. The worthy intellect was expressed through

⁵⁴ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 83-84. The body in question here is the Anti-Burgher Synod of Seceders, discussed below as Covenanters.

⁵⁵ Currie, “History, Hagiography, and Fakestory,” 120; Walter Scott, *Waverly*, ed. P.D. Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2007), 52-53.

refined language whereas emotion and passion were the domain of the unrefined, common people. This cut both ways. Elites were prone to engage the protests of religious zealots as the products of unrefined mental passions. Vulgar English was often referred to as “our northern dialect,” that is, Scots varieties of English. In turn, Covenanters rejected enlightenment liberalism as failing to address the emotive response to the Gospel that was the authentication of valid lay faith.⁵⁶

Enlightenment minds like David Hume, himself not Presbyterian but rarely condemned by them, moved Scotland into a British imperial vision of the future. Meanwhile, Covenanters appealed to a sacred past, and part of their attraction was in their popular rhetoric and old worship forms that now held the authority of tradition and stability in a time of change and upheaval. Covenanters “cast our Eyes back, and Remember” those days when “the solemn renewing of our *Covenant with Him*” which was “the Dawning of that Blessed day, never to be forgotten; and now when past, *to be Remembered with sorrow*” for its passing.⁵⁷ As the British kingdom transformed itself into an Empire, Covenanters never moved into this imperial vision. Their concern remained with the godly realm of community and nation.⁵⁸

Covenanters were a small religious sect that cast a long shadow in Southern Scotland. “In short,” an anonymous author wrote, “put it to a fair Pole, give us but a free Vote, we carry the day, and ought therefore to have our Just demands

⁵⁶ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 2-3, 29.

⁵⁷ *A proper project for Scotland*, 10.

⁵⁸ Pocock, “Political Thought in the English-speaking Atlantic,” 256.

satisfied.”⁵⁹ By tolerating enemies of the true religion, the moderates undermined true long-term peace and stability. They sold the perfect peace of eternity for the imperfect peace of the present. Anyone who could not avow the Covenants was “deserving not the name of Natives” of Scotland.⁶⁰ Anti-English sentiment was strong on the fringe. Covenanter John M’Clelland so despised the English that, he said, if he possessed “the best land of all England” he would sell it for two just two shillings an acre and believe himself to have gotten the better of the deal.⁶¹

This inherent nationalism held a complicated dynamic with the Glorious Revolution. Covenanters appreciated the end of persecution, but chastised William for failing to become “a Tender Zealous Reforming Josiah,” the Old Testament King who had torn down idolatrous icons and had the Laws of God rediscovered and read aloud by the people.⁶² The Glorious Revolution had been a mixed blessing and curse. It had stopped “that barbarous cruelty that was exercised” beforehand, for which they found themselves giving thanks. However, the failure to capitalize on the moment by making the Revolution a covenanted one, they lamented, and felt that “in many respects, our national guilt is now increased.”⁶³ The Glorious Revolution was a providential event of national salvation to an undeserving people. “We were so far from deserving and expecting it,” they claimed, “that by that time we had calmly

⁵⁹ *A proper project for Scotland*, 4.

⁶⁰ *A proper project for Scotland*, 8.

⁶¹ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (1775; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 200.

⁶² *A proper project for Scotland*, 31-32.

⁶³ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 49.

consented to be their perpetual Slaves” to “our *English Pope*.”⁶⁴ But if they were no longer slaves, they were consigned away as insane. Should the Reformers of Knox’s age, or 1638 and 1643 appear alive at centuries end “they would be reckoned *Fools and Mad-men*.”⁶⁵ Toleration was too common a shibboleth, as one poet complained.

A boundless Toleration gave
to Vice and Atheism
And spiritual Courts restrained to check
Profanity and Schism⁶⁶

In the midst of such freedom, all but “the Remnant in Scotland” had strayed “from the *good old Paths*.”⁶⁷ Their powerful appeals to history and the renunciation of moderation, however, fell on deaf ears when tolerance itself was imperiled on the ascension of Queen Anne to the throne.

Queen Anne’s reign saw a last grasp for power by state churchmen. They flew banners with the words, “No Moderation!” against dissenters in parliamentary elections.⁶⁸ The possibility of losing the tentative toleration dissenters enjoyed under William made Covenanter phanaticism even more unappealing after 1702. With the 1707 Act of Union, Covenanters were again forced to wrestle with what it

⁶⁴ *A proper project for Scotland*, 25-26.

⁶⁵ *A proper project for Scotland*, 28.

⁶⁶ *The Cameronian Address to King George* (1715), Manuscript Collection, British Library, London.

⁶⁷ *A proper project for Scotland*, 37.

⁶⁸ Hugh Trevor Roper, *From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution*, 271.

meant to be the phanatick wing of nationalist Presbyterianism in an increasingly imperial world.

Covenanters of all stripes were vehemently anti-union, listing the “bitter and sinful fruits” of the 1707 compact as the institution of oaths taken by kissing the Bible, opening the door to Episcopal liturgy, and the return of such festive seasons as Christmas. The Union was the ultimate rejection of the Solemn League and Covenant, and a real and present danger to the autonomy of the Church of Scotland demanded by the Scottish National Covenant.⁶⁹ It was an assault upon the Scottish nation’s chosen status. Yet Covenanters were in some ways vehement unionists. They were simply unionists on very different terms.

For most Britons, the mental relationship to Biblical Israel served as a buttressing foundation to the status quo. Things were as they should be because of Britain’s chosen nature; British success was proof of God’s election. For Covenanters, this worked in reverse. In order to make their nation chosen, they sought to overturn the status quo. Overtly the state must covenant with God, and the soul of the body politic must be purified.⁷⁰

The failure of a British Presbyterianism to emerge was a major disappointment to Covenanters as both a religious and political issue. The clearest

⁶⁹ Ray A. King, *A History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, Revised Edition, (Greenville, SC: Board of Christian Education Ministries of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2008), 22-23.

⁷⁰ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. Second Edition (New Haven: Yale, 2005), 30-43.

doctrinal statement of the Union, the Westminster Confession, remained the dogmatic bedrock of Covenanter belief and a pan-British religious Union the shibboleth of political participation. This was one reason the actual political union of the two nations in 1707 was rejected by the most ardent Covenanters. Scottish nationalism was not under attack by the Union, but Scottish religion was imperiled by the wrong kind of union, namely any union that did not conform to the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. When 300 armed Hebronite Covenanters burned a copy of the proposed Articles of Union in Dumfries in protest, they did so because their own, older union was being overturned. As Kidd has pointed out, the Covenanters were by 1707 “more unionist than the Union itself.” They wanted a union of civil *and* religious affairs on the old model.⁷¹ They demanded a return to “the old path” in which religion and “zealous spirit” were the same and when “prince and People” were of “one perfect religion.”⁷²

This phenomenon became more pronounced at the religious fringe. Phanaticks, Kidd argues, “were anti-Unionist unionists.” They continued to agitate not for co-existing religious institutions, Anglican and Presbyterian, but for one Presbyterian system for all of Britain. When the British Parliament threatened the autonomy of the Scottish Church by legislating on the issue of lay patronage in 1712, the most extreme Covenanters felt justified in their critique of an unholy alliance

⁷¹ Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 75, 78-80.

⁷² *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 6, 9-10.

with a Parliament that would claim authority over ecclesiastical matters. In protest, the Reformed Presbyterians renewed the old Covenant publically in 1712.⁷³

The Rise of Seceders

Following the 1707 Union of the British Empire, the Covenanters continued to assert the interests of the righteous community's religious liberties over against English, and now British, encroachments. Patronage came quickly to the fore of these debates, as did the continuing theological quarrels between moderates and phanaticks over salvation. A new form of the Covenanted movement, called the Seceders, arose and adapted the old model to a post-Enlightenment world. The fringe of Presbyterianism remained active in the eighteenth century. Its old political impact was now reformed into the work of religious revivalists and traditionalists whose work was, like that of old, largely done in fields and homes in response to what the laity demanded: the good old way, "true religion."

The newest and ultimately most vibrant strand of Covenanted in the eighteenth century was the Secession movement. It succeeded in large part because it adapted the fervor and popular appeal of the Covenanters with the political realities of post-Revolution Britain and Enlightenment-era Scotland. Seceders were more open in their approach to the Covenants, religious toleration and political participation than other zealots. Still, they were lay-based religious advocates of

⁷³ Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 75, 78-80; Kidd, "Conditional Britons," 1157.

“right religion” lived out in righteous community. For all their nuances and distinctions, the overriding historical reality regarding Seceders was that they were Covenanters no less than the Cameronians were.

Seceders sprang from several ongoing controversies in early eighteenth century Scotland. The Enlightenment gave rise to increasingly heterodox opinions, which phanaticks labeled “the prejudice of a critical age.” A new generation desired to cast off all things old in favor of the new. Anything “not suited to their favorite sentiments” was cast out of young churchmen imbibed deeply on Enlightenment realism.⁷⁴ When University of Glasgow’s professor of theology, John Simson, was brought up on charges of teaching Arminian (non-Calvinistic) doctrines in 1714, his case became just one flash point among many tensions between the orthodox and moderate wings of Presbyterianism. When the case was nominally resolved in 1717 by a simple reprimand for indiscretion rather than heresy, it was a powerful sign that moderates controlled the engines of church government.

Further tensions began, tellingly, in the home of a layperson. The Rev. Thomas Boston, an orthodox churchman of evangelical leanings, visited a parishioner and war veteran of the long and bloody conflicts of the seventeenth century. While awaiting refreshments, he amused himself by leafing through volumes of books in the layman’s home. One title, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, grabbed his attention. The book was a once popular tract on the doctrine of grace

⁷⁴ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 5.

printed in London and picked up by the layman in his soldiering days in England.

The author of *Marrow*, Edward Fischer, was an autodidact and member of the Guild of Barber-Surgeons in London. He was not a minister or trained theologian.⁷⁵

The little book took on a large life in Scotland after being reprinted in 1718. The 1645 monograph was a conversation between Evangelista and a young Christian named Neophytus. Evangelista, who is largely a composite of quotes from Calvin, Thomas Hooker and other notable Calvinists, answers a series of questions for Neophytus, or young learner. She additionally refutes the arguments of two other characters, Nomista (from the Latin for law, or legalist) and Antinomista (similarly meaning against the law, or one who lives without a law). These characters represent the extremes of Protestant religion: legalism and moral laxity. Evangelista's role was to steer Neophytus away from these two extremes and into a balance in which grace made obedience to the law possible. Evangel was the Greek word meaning Gospel. Zeal for the Gospel provided Covenanters a sense of balance and order that was anti-moderate.⁷⁶

After being widely disparaged by moderates for its Antinomian tendencies, leaning too heavily on grace and failing to emphasize obedience to the moral law, the book became a point of controversy with more orthodox, evangelical-leaning Calvinists who had reentered the kirk fold after 1688. A group of ministers came

⁷⁵ David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988), 5. Marylin Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1720* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 113.

⁷⁶ Fischer, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645).

under fire for defending the book, most notably the brothers Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. They became the center of a group of evangelical Scots known as “the Marrow Men.” These men became the core of an orthodox movement within Scottish Presbyterianism. However, neither the Enlightenment nor grace alone could spark a new division within the state church. Only an assault on the righteous community could do that.

The truly volatile issue was patronage and the protection of the local pulpit by the local community. Lay patronage was the perpetual problem of seventeenth and eighteenth century Scottish Presbyterianism; it was the essence of the conflict between the local community’s ability to protect its local pulpit to be filled by a minister of its own choice against government control and restraint on popular religion. In 1712 a resurgent Tory British administration reinstated lay patronage after a period of salutary neglect on the issue. Riding committees, so called for riding in on horses from out of town, could forcibly fill any pulpit that was vacant longer than six months.

This ecclesiastical gambit was seen by orthodox Presbyterians as the first visible sign that the 1707 union had indeed backfired. Despite promises to the contrary, the Church of Scotland was under the authority of the British Parliament in which the Scottish delegation could be easily outvoted and was, besides, heavily in the nobility’s camp. The situation had shades of Charles I, James II and Charles II painted all over it. In protest, the United Societies renewed the Solemn League and Covenant in 1712 at Auchensaugh as a protest against encroachments and a

reminder of a much different plan of union in which the kirk's prerogative would never be lost. In their published *Engagement of Duties* they pledged to stand against the evils of toleration (especially of Quakers) and pursue pure worship and church government free from prelatic encroachments. They would also seek a purer union of Britain, one free from "the Erastianism, Prelacy and Sectarianism, now so prevalent and confirmed by this late union with England."⁷⁷

In retrospect, the threat to Covenanters posed by the Tory party was a minimal flair up of political tensions reaching its apex in 1715. Tories were already receding from power and in severe decline by 1734. From their Queen Anne days high of a 158-person majority in parliament (358 to 200 Whigs) the Tories had, by 1761, less than 113 members altogether. By the 1780s they had functionally ceased to be represented. British Politics in the eighteenth century would function as a competition of various types of Whigs against Whigs, of whom Covenanters represented one strange religious strand.⁷⁸

From the perspective of the early eighteenth century, however, a direct assault was now being leveled against the autonomy of Scottish congregations. The

⁷⁷ Reformed Presbytery, *The active testimony of the true Presbyterians of Scotland, being a brief abstract of acknowledgment of sins, and engagement to duties, &c. As also a first and second declaration of war against all the enemies of Christ at home and abroad. And likewise a postscript, containing a declaration and testimony against the late unjust invasion of Scotland by Charles pretended Prince of Wales, and William pretended Duke of Cumberland and their malignant emissaries* (1749), Manuscript Collection, British Library, London, 1-4.

⁷⁸ John Brewer, *Party ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III* (New York: Cambridge University, 1976), 41.

not-distant memories of patronage disputes from the religious wars and Killing Times became powerful motivators for lay resistance. The Marrow Men became the leaders of that resistance and rode the wave of lay discontent headlong into a clash with Scottish religious leaders.

In 1732 the General Assembly passed legislation clarifying the call system for pastors to congregations, including the patrons' role in that process should local kirks not agree on a candidate. In October 1732 Ebenezer Erskine gave his most notable sermon before the Synod of Perth. With it he issued a strongly worded reminder that God "was no respecter of persons," a Biblical phrase denying class distinctions within the church. By year's end his sermon was declared heretical, he and his supporters were put under church censure, and the Marrow Men began a movement of resistance styled on orthodox Presbyterianism.

This new movement was also old. As Erskine pointed out in his message, any orthodox Presbyterian must "generally approve of the practices of Mr. Samuel Rutherford." There was no Scriptural warrant for removing the righteous community's prerogative, for to do so was to remove the prerogative of Christ over his own church. Patronage was both anti-scriptural and an incitement to class warfare. "The man with the gold ring and gay clothing is preferred unto the man

with vile raiment,” and the reformation “we are bound by sacred covenant to maintain” was rejected. Seceders were the new Covenanters.⁷⁹

Meeting on December 6, 1733, in a public house at Gairney Bridge near Kinross, the Marrow Men formed the Associate Presbytery and officially announced their secession from the General Assembly. The group published *A Publick Testimony* in which they claimed to be victims of “Ecclesiastic Tyranny” and champions of the people. “The call of the church lies in the free call and election of the Christian people”, they argued. The authority to decide on the character and choice of ministers “is not made to patrons, heritors, or any other set of men, but to the church, the body of Christ, to whom apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are given.” They tied their arguments directly to earlier disputes about the nature of religious liberty from the state.⁸⁰ According to Erskine, the local “church is the freest society on the earth.”⁸¹ Within ten years there were thirty-six congregations and twenty ministers in this new organization, called officially the Associate Presbytery. The Secession church’s stand against the ministers of the General Assembly became popular amongst some groups of lay people, especially in

⁷⁹ Ebenezer Erskine, *A Sermon: the STONE Rejected by the BUILDERS exalted as the Head-stone of the Corner* (Printed at Henry Hoskins, 1800), 26-27. Accessed on Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800.

⁸⁰ *A publick testimony; being the Representation and Petition of a considerable Number of Christian people within the Bounds of several Synods in this Church, In their own Name, and in Name of all adhering thereunto, presented and given in to the General Assembly met at Edinburgh, May 4th 1732, anent grievances. A scheme for seceders. By a layman in the country.* (1734), Manuscript Collection, The British Library, London.

⁸¹ Erskine, *A Sermon*.

rural areas. Though censured as extremists, their fundamentally traditionalist Calvinist piety coupled with enthusiastic preaching gained a wide following amongst the people of Scotland.⁸²

Covenanters had laid claim to the mantle of the arch-orthodox in Scottish Presbyterianism. By the early to mid-eighteenth century, however, the combat for that orthodoxy was no longer in field and forest. The rise of the enlightenment, Deism, and empiricism in general had placed received Protestant orthodoxy in a defensive position. Zealots argued that Scotland had been drawn into moderation because people began to love “our Worldly accommodation more than his Truth, Cause and Covenant.”⁸³ Calls for toleration and moderation by Presbyterian advocates of enlightenment principles were not simply political, by the eighteenth century they were also doctrinal. In many ways the Seceders were a Covenanter response to a new theological threat. They were Covenanters adapted to the battles of their own days, specifically the battle with theological moderatism advocating a live and let live policy to religious belief.

Covenanters and Seceders were in a complex relationship with the emerging movement of revival oriented evangelicalism. Both claimed to be of ‘evangelical sentiment,’ but both rejected the larger evangelical works of men like George Whitfield and the Methodists Charles and John Wesley. The Seceders once invited

⁸² Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*.

⁸³ *A Short Survey of a Pamphlet, Entitled, A Friendly Conference betwixt a Country-Man and his Nephew* (1712), preface.

Whitfield on a preaching tour, only to reject him after he insisted on preaching to other groups besides themselves. Covenanters concluded a list of Scotland's national sins, which included the Union with England and Erastianism, with "their joining in religious communion with Mr. Whitefield."⁸⁴ Covenanters and Seceders were not anti-conversion. Their problem was that evangelicals converted the soul spiritual without converting the body politic. Coming to Christ meant engaging his Covenants for a holy life and a holy nation.

Like evangelicalism, however, the Covenanter and Seceder phenomena were populist movements of religious emotion that evoked a sense of powerful resistance to modernization. Revival was not a new work of God's spirit, but a returning to the religion of ancestors, noble martyrs, and the first Christians. Covenanters had long condemned "any Practice of Religion, not warranted by Scripture, by primitive Churches."⁸⁵ Into the field conventicles and holy fairs of old, both fringe groups now infused a new spirit of Revival that brought back the old. In this regard Covenanters and Seceders were firmly of the evangelical persuasion.

Populist preachers argued that the fabric of holy Scotland was eroding. New teachings, like the ideas of David Hume, had destroyed "all distinction between virtue and vice" and taught "that there is no moral evil in the world" were more evidence of its faultiness.⁸⁶ The Westminster Confession of Faith had become a dead

⁸⁴ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 91.

⁸⁵ *Reading no Preaching*, 26.

⁸⁶ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 90.

letter in the Church of Scotland.⁸⁷ New was the problem. Old was the answer. Covenanters and Seceders preached this message in a popular parlance starkly contrasted to the genteel preachers who had studied under Francis Hutcheson. Part of this appeal lay in its resistance to Enlightenment elitism. Moderates were so off-put by Seceder evangelicals that one even suggested, rather than censuring them, they be made de facto missionaries to the remote Orkney and Zetland islands. "I should therefore think," he wrote, "that their further labors may be dispensed with here, and a trial made of their spiritual husbandry in somewhat colder a soil."⁸⁸ Seceders' popular appeal was both an affront and a threat to establishment moderates.

Seceder minister Isaac Patton was said to have preached in a populist style. "His manner in the pulpit was ardent and excited- sometimes almost wild." He was accused of using "quaint and striking, though often homely and vulgar [in] phraseology," and being "remarkably bitter in his preaching."⁸⁹ In the 1752 Seceder tract, *Reading no Preaching*, the author expressed his "present Sentiments regarding" preaching and reading. He could not recall a single example in the entire Bible of reading learned manuscripts in the pulpit. Neither Moses, nor Isaiah, nor Jeremiah, nor the minor Prophets was known to have read a sermon. Jesus himself,

⁸⁷ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 89.

⁸⁸ *A scheme for seceders. By a layman in the country* (1734), Bodleian Library, Oxford University, 2.

⁸⁹ Irish United Magazine, II, 230 as quoted in Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 61.

in Luke 4.20-22, read the Scriptures and then “closed the book” before preaching. “The Primitive Christian Clergy did follow the paperless Method of Preaching,” as well, he insisted.⁹⁰

Reading learned discourses corrupted prayer in both minister and congregation. The reader was “under a strong and almost unavoidable Temptation” to use words that carried “an air of Importance, Irony, or both.” This led to the decline in comfort of spontaneous, vulgar prayers amongst the laity and, in turn, to religious decline in the congregations. Thus the “present religious Face of the Nation” was in danger of becoming like the English, a prospect the writer dreaded.⁹¹ The author attributed the rise of reading to “Fear, Vanity, and Self-Praise, Laziness, and Distrust of God.” That the practice was “such a universally polite *Think*, such a fashionable *Slight of Hand*” was proof the practice had its origins in “Masters of Universities, indulging Students to read their philosophical Lectures in Public.”⁹² It looked forward to a new age of learning.

The populists were looking backwards. Seceders tapped into the populist zeal for the covenants. They required subscription to the binding authority of 1638 and 1643 for communion.⁹³ In 1742 groups of Seceders renewed the covenants in a public ceremony. Ebenezer Erskine refused to take the oath of Abjuration on the

⁹⁰ *Reading no Preaching: or, a Letter to a Clergyman, from a Friend in London, concerning the unwarrantable Practice of Reading the Gospel, instead of Preaching it* (Edinburgh: 1752), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, YP 81, 1-9.

⁹¹ *Reading no Preaching*, 15.

⁹² *Reading no Preaching*, 12.

⁹³ Fisk, *The Scottish High-Church Tradition*, 27.

grounds that it violated the Solemn League and Covenant.⁹⁴ One orthodox writer, probably a Seceder, begged the Church of Scotland to return to the the model of the church “in her purest periods.” He called himself, simply, “A Lover of the good old Way.”⁹⁵ In this regard, the Secession was a Covenanter movement.

In another respect, Seceders had significantly modified the political nature of Covenanter religion. From 1743 the most stalwart traditionalists in the group explicitly stated that they were not bound by the civil parts of the old Covenants. It was difficult, they said, to “blend civil and ecclesiastical matters in the oath of God, in renewing the Covenants.” The Seceder’s religious denomination, the Associate Presbytery, condemned “the *dangerous extreme*, that some have gone into,” of condemning the present government when they failed the Covenant test. What most concerned them, however, was that such condemnations happened “even though they allow us the free exercise of our religion, and are not manifestly unhinging the Liberties of the Kingdom.” Seceder ministers were far more content with the Revolution settlement than other Covenanters. They still believed that magistrates *should* “have by the Word of God and our Covenants” a professedly Presbyterian stance, but they were not willing to kick the hornet nest if the test was failed. “We shall not give up ourselves to a detestable Indifferency and Neutrality

⁹⁴ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 44.

⁹⁵ “A Lover of the Good Old Way,” *Observations on A Wolf in a Sheep-skin* (1753), i.

in the Cause of God,” but neither would they take for granted the active toleration of the state.⁹⁶

Seceders did not approve of toleration, but were largely thankful for it, thrived under it, and were nominally loyal to the tolerant Hanoverians even when espousing antigovernment rhetoric. Yet Seceders themselves contained gradations of antigovernment and anti-toleration sentiment, inviting a purge in 1737 of extremists committed to the literal applications of the Solemn League and Covenant. One Seceder, Archibald Bruce of Whitburn, argued that what the papacy had once been, the state now was in its spiritual autocracy and tyranny.⁹⁷ Internal debates on the validity and literalism of the covenants continued, arising in 1766, 1769, 1788 and 1794.⁹⁸

Seceders attempted, as Colin Kidd has argued, “valiantly to square the circle of Covenanting Whiggism.”⁹⁹ They did this by swearing allegiance to the Covenants, as some did in November 1783, “in a way and manner agreeable to our present situation and circumstances in this period.”¹⁰⁰ This flexible adaptation of tradition made them a more viable outlet for orthodox Presbyterians who had Covenanted

⁹⁶ Watt, *Recalling the Scottish Covenants*, 80-83.

⁹⁷ Archibald Bruce, *Historico-politic-ecclesiastical dissertation on the supremacy of the civil powers in matters of religion* (1802), 87-88, 148-150. Bruce was the Anti-burgher professor of divinity.

⁹⁸ Kidd, “Conditional Britons,” 1164-1173.

⁹⁹ Kidd, “Conditional Britons,” 1163.

¹⁰⁰ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 98.

leanings but were less than eager to accept the social fallout from partaking in ongoing resistance to the state.

Seceders were equally possessed of the divisive character of phanatick Protestant sectarianism as other Covenanters. In 1747, shortly after their own break with the Church of Scotland, they experienced what became known as “the Breach.” The dispute revolved around the burgess oath taken by newly installed local officials called burgess. They were required to “profess the true religion presently professed within this realm and authorized by the law thereof.”¹⁰¹ Because the oath went on to foreswear any allegiance to “the Roman papistry,” many Seceders believed they could take the oath in good conscience. In essence, they gave the words a meaning akin to an avowal against Catholicism and for the Presbyterian church as it should be. This group became known as the Burghers. The more literal minded among them believed the oath swore allegiance to the very church from which they just seceded, and could not be sworn in good faith. These became known as the Antiburghers. The dispute highlighted other internal fault lines in the group, including those ministers prone to toleration and those of more anti-statist sentiments. The more phanatick Antiburghers went so far as to excommunicate the less zealous Ebenezer Erskine, the founder of their own movement.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Fisk, *The Scottish High-Church Tradition*, 27.

¹⁰² Ray A. King, *History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, 39.

More divisions would follow. Yet another secession from the church over the issue of patronage, this time in 1752, meant that some 20 percent of Scottish laity worshiped outside of the Scottish church by the late eighteenth century. This final exit, called the Relief Church, cast a disestablishmentarian hue to the religious fringe, and gradually many Covenanter laity drifted away from the belief that the state church needed to reform. Instead, many began to argue that a state church was the problem. The Covenants of 1638 and 1643 were important not because they needed to be achieved, but because their achievement was now impossible. To cut ties and move towards a voluntary religious disestablishment was the wisest and truest course to follow. New Lights, who favored disestablishment, and Old Lights, who did not, continued to debate the best courses of action, but the reforming zeal of the fringe on the whole took on a more voluntary rhetoric as it moved into the nineteenth century. By that time, the Seceder movement was itself fragmented into all manner of representations: New Licht Burghers, Auld Licht Burghers, New Licht Anti-Burghers, and Auld Licht Anti-Burghers.¹⁰³ Like all Covenanters, division was part of the process of life on the Presbyterian fringe.

Other zealots were astonished at the Seceders numerical success. Whereas Cameronians were outliers in society, there were over one hundred thousand Seceders in Scotland by 1765.¹⁰⁴ This immediately set off a set of angry public

¹⁰³ Kidd, *Union and Unionisms*, 226-232.

¹⁰⁴ Douglas Sloan, Douglas. *Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Columbia University, 1971), 110.

debates about which was the more authentic heir of Holy Scotland. At one point Seceder attacks on Cameronians became so extreme that one Covenanter defended his people with an atypically irenic language. Seceder attacks were “influenced by an unnatural zeal, exceeding the due bounds of Christian moderation and charity.”¹⁰⁵ From a Cameronian Whig, such accusations were intriguingly ironic.

Seceders and Covenanters had very real differences in their views of government, though those differences were often of degree and significant overlap occurred within camps. Seceder John Goodlet and Covenanter John Fairly engaged in a debate about the right basis of civil government in the late 1760s. When Goodlet used John Locke as an authority for grounding civil government in the people, Fairly lashed out at the perceived move towards Enlightenment thinking and away from Biblicism. “Cicero, I’m of opinion, was both as good a *lawyer* and as good a *divine* as Mr. Locke,” the Covenanter sarcastically commented. Seceders’ “sentiments about the law of nature,” inflated nature into the role of God. It was “*That law of nature* which he makes the great foundation of all.”¹⁰⁶ Goodlet had made, Fairly believed, the mistake of grounding civil government in the law of nature only.¹⁰⁷ Seceders denied that they had removed the role of righteous

¹⁰⁵ Fairly, *An Humble Attempt in Defense of Reformation Principles; Particularly on the Head of the Civil Magistrate* (Edinburgh: 1770), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Fairly, *An Humble Attempt*, 11.

¹⁰⁷ Fairly, *An Humble Attempt*, 13. According to Fairly, there were four possible ways to understand the law of nature. The first, the Covenanter way, was as “that law or revelation of God and his will which was from the beginning given to man.” This had its beginning in God, and knowing God is its goal and purpose. The

community from the civil basis of Scotland. Rather, they argued that legitimate governments existed that were not exclusively Christian, such as the Roman Empire. Not all governments need be resisted openly.

While Seceders claimed it was possible to honor the Covenants while engaging the world politically, Covenanter Andrew Newton accused the Seceders of trying to debase the holy heritage of dissent. Seceders were trying to “rob the martyrs of their crown of martyrdom” by emphasizing resistance only to overt “civil tyranny” instead of the Covenanter insistence on a godly monarch. Newton believed the “seceding logic” wrong” as it would require believers, “under pain of wrath and damnation, to be subject to *Nero* the *Roman* emperor.” There was “as great a difference betwixt Seceders principles upon civil government, and the principles of our reformers and martyrs,” as there was “between the North and South poles.”¹⁰⁸

In 1761 the Covenanters, now organized as the Reformed Presbytery, published an *Act, Declaration and Testimony* in part to clarify the boundaries between their older cause and the newer one. Seceders, they argued, got their gospel right but their politics wrong. Seceder logic would lead to “inculcate a stupid

second was a kind of common law understanding, or “those natural principles of self-preservation which are common to all animals.” Thirdly, Fairly noted there was the law of nations, a kind of grand scale version of the common law understanding. Fourthly, there was the current fascination with natural law as “the dictates of right reason.” This was the domain of Cicero, Locke, and the deists, who overestimated man’s senses, underestimated man’s fall, over estimated human freedom, and underestimated God’s omnipresent place in the world. 14-46.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Newton, *A Voice to Seceders* 1-3, 46; See also Robinson, “Immigrant Covenanters,” 167-169.

subjection and obedience to every possessor of regal dignity, at the expense of trampling upon all the laws of God... .”¹⁰⁹ This “loose and immoral doctrine about civil society and government” did not pass the strict test of literal obedience to the 1638 and 1643 covenants.¹¹⁰ For older zealots, it was absurd that “They profess the moral obligation of the covenants, and yet at the same time maintain the lawfulness of every providential government, whether Popish or Prelatic, if set up by the body politic.”¹¹¹ This was not the good old cause for right religion.

Despite Seceder rejection of much of the Enlightenment’s social refinement, Covenanters accused Seceders of drinking too deeply from the well of new learning. “They maintain the people to be the ultimate fountain of magistracy,” Cameronians complained, rather than God’s people in righteous community. This broader view of society meant they were necessarily not dogmatic in applying “the law of God in the Scripture” to the “institution of civil government.” How could Seceders be trusted to support the old Rutherfordian belief that “wickedness and mal-administration can forfeit the [king’s] right to the people’s subjection[?]”¹¹² Seceders responded with claims they were being misrepresented and argued that strict Covenanter logic would lead to the absurdity that no government in history other than Israel and Scotland ever wielded legitimate power.

¹⁰⁹ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 97.

¹¹⁰ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 94.

¹¹¹ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 121.

¹¹² *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 97.

The constant internal struggles between the groups sharpened their understandings of their positions by producing voluminous debates attempting to explain how groups so fundamentally similar differed so violently. This, in turn, made each group of religious zealots all the more fanatical for their particular interpretation. As one Covenanter put it in retrospect, Covenanter sensibility was honed by the interactions of the two groups. "This acuteness of sensibility with regard to civil government" was "considerably whetted by their collisions, and for many years continual controversies with that respectable body of Christians, denominated SECESSION."¹¹³

The Covenanter Sensibility and Slavery

These ongoing disputes about how to apply the covenants should not obscure the general agreement over their centrality and importance in religious communities. There was a nearly universal rule of the Scottish evangelical fringe. When zealous Presbyterians proclaimed their identity, they did so as Covenanters. What all Covenanters and Seceders shared in common, ministers and laity, Burgher and Antiburgher, Old Licht and New Licht, Cameronian and Howdenite, was their phanatick commitment to the independence of the church from state control. The degrees by which the state should be independent from the church was an area of some ambiguity and not a little change over time, but they never waived in their commitment to the Kingdom of Christ as a separate, autonomous realm.

¹¹³ Wylie, *Memoirs of Alexander McLeod*, 128.

The Presbyterian fringe shared a common sensibility composed of religious liberty in its Rutherfordian context and an anti-statist sentiment that sought the pure nation through pure religion, and pure religion through a pure nation. They labeled these their shared “orthodox sentiments.”¹¹⁴ Some, like the Seceders, changed course in the eighteenth century and began to emphasize conversion as a means to that end, but all fringe groups believed their “sentiments” could be judged “very agreeable both to reason and to Scripture.”¹¹⁵ A Covenanter sensibility underlay the Presbyterian fringe in eighteenth-century Scotland.

This shared sentiment was evident when Covenanters attacked the state Church of Scotland. They claimed that the church’s “error in doctrine further appears from their condemnation of a book, entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*,” the very book Seceders took as central to their movement.¹¹⁶ The state church, Covenanters declared, had been “arbitrary and tyrannical” in its conduct, nowhere more so than in how it had treated Ebenezer Erskine. He and his brethren, “designed by the name of the *Associate Presbytery*, because of their remonstrating against and endeavoring to rectify” the “devils in the Church” had been ill-treated. Covenanters freely admitted that many Seceder ministers and laity were very close to Covenanter principles.¹¹⁷ The Society People opposed Seceders only with “grief

¹¹⁴ Fairly, *An Humble Attempt*, 24.

¹¹⁵ Fairly, *An Humble Attempt*, 26.

¹¹⁶ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 86.

¹¹⁷ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 146.

and lamentation,” while admiring them for having “much zeal” for purity and believed that they had been “instrumental of turning many to righteousness.”¹¹⁸

Most Covenanters held the Seceders in high regard, and visa versa. The vehemence of their ministers to keep the two apart sprang mostly from the very real experience of cross fertilization between the two bodies. In 1741 the Reformed Presbytery noted that “some members of the community still go off to hear the Associate Presbytery and yet continue in Society.”¹¹⁹ Most Covenanters agreed with John Fairly, who even in his virulent arguments with Seceder John Goodlet maintained that he was actually quite fond of the Seceders as a whole. Seceder laity, he insisted, “still affirm the goodness of that constitution,” meaning the Covenants. These were worthy of “honors and privileges” belonging to that good name “Seceders.”¹²⁰ A critical New Testament metaphor was used when Covenanters discussed Seceders. Just as “Paul withstood Peter to the face, and testified against his dissimulation,” even though “both of them [were] apostles,” so Covenanters chastised their near-brethren in order to urge them to be more “*earnest contenders for the faith once delivered to the saints.*”¹²¹ God had left a testimony “unto his Israel, in all ages.”¹²² In the eighteenth century, Covenanters of all stripes believed that Israel was them.

¹¹⁸ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 95.

¹¹⁹ Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism*.

¹²⁰ Fairly, *An Humble Attempt*, 229.

¹²¹ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 95.

¹²² *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 4.

Covenanter political theology carried the complicated legacy of freedom for the righteous community, anti-toleration for individual belief, zeal for religious orthodoxy, and anti-statist militancy into the eighteenth century with only slight modifications. Though Seceders adapted the Covenanter message into a more palatable package of religious traditionalism, Covenanter laity found in the movement's branches the power to reach back into the past to interpret their present. They considered themselves the "zealous contenders for the Church's liberties" in Scotland's long battle between good and evil, freedom and tyranny.¹²³

By the early nineteenth century Covenanter zealotry in Scotland became increasingly apolitical. Socially supportive of reform movements like the abolition of slavery, their anti-statism waned to a symbolic and somewhat comical personal exclusion from the mainstream. Still respected for their convictions and always the most publicly popular representatives of orthodox Presbyterianism, they were relegated to the role of strange prophetic outsiders calling into the dominant culture with a warning of God's displeasure. Their last politically viable issue, anti-Catholicism, displayed their own inability to move public policy.

As the penal laws in England and Ireland were repealed throughout the 1770s-1780s, Scotland's Covenanters specifically warned against "that toleration

¹²³ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 13.

granted by the legislature.”¹²⁴ Since the Protestant Reformation, penal laws had restricted Catholics from public office, voting and a host of civil privileges, including practicing their religion openly. The movement to overturn these laws began with the 1774 Quebec Act, which they styled “the establishment of Popery in Canada.”¹²⁵ As the decades progressed, toleration for Catholics was expanded within the kingdoms. Zealots in Scotland believed this was an affront to the God-ordained role of government in their holy land.

Covenanters continued to maintain that the Civil government was established by God for the “suppression of open iniquity and unrighteousness.”¹²⁶ Those who were “acquainted with the sentiments of the deservedly famous *John Knox* and *S. Rutherford* – and with our confessions of faith” would “Remember you are under the most solemn Christian, national and personal vows to ... maintain the GLORIOUS light of truth wherewith he has blessed us, and the *liberty wherewith he has made us free.*” That freedom was, as in generations past, the liberty to be in a Protestant Christian land. It included the obligation to “Remember and acknowledge the obligation of our national covenant.”¹²⁷ It did not include the freedom to be Catholic.

¹²⁴ *Testimony and Warning Against the Blasphemies and Idolatry of Popery* (Edinburgh, 1779), Magee Pamphlet Collection 39, Union Theological College, Belfast, title page.

¹²⁵ *Testimony and Warning*, 3-4.

¹²⁶ *Testimony and Warning*, 32.

¹²⁷ *Testimony and Warning*, 48.

Repealing the penal laws, then, was “utterly unconstitutional” and “destructive of the reformed Protestant religions, and of the civil society, in the liberties, and very foundations of it.”¹²⁸ It was proof of the ongoing immorality of the Scottish and British states that refused to acknowledge the covenant obligations upon them. “We have openly testified against all the many instances of encroachment upon the church,” Covenanters continued, and they bemoaned the continued “exertion of that unjust, antisciptural power, claimed by the civil rulers in these lands.”¹²⁹

According to the statement issued by the Cameronian Reformed Presbytery, the penal laws, when compared with treatment of Protestants in Catholic nations, were “most *mild and gentle*.”¹³⁰ They were “not to be esteemed as *persecution*- nor are they to be looked upon as retaliation, or *rendering evil for evil*; but are founded entirely upon the principle of *self-preservation* and the preservation of God’s true worship.”¹³¹ Any Catholic citizen “should have a restraint laid on him- rather than be allowed to practice his idolatries, [he] should have his outward man confined.”¹³² Restraint on evil was the role of the state. The civil government could never rightly indulge in the “toleration of idolatry.”¹³³

¹²⁸ *Testimony and Warning*, 31.

¹²⁹ *Testimony and Warning*, 4.

¹³⁰ *Testimony and Warning*, 35.

¹³¹ *Testimony and Warning*, 38.

¹³² *Testimony and Warning*, 39.

¹³³ *Testimony and Warning*, 40.

“We freely allow that every individual has a private right to change his mind, from a worse to a better sentiment,” they maintained.¹³⁴ One did not have the right, however, to regress from right religion to worse opinions. Right toleration was not the indulgence of sin, but of weakness. The individual could live with wrong opinion, but they had no right to take their private error into the public domain. Covenanters instead proposed an alternate “excellent plan of toleration.”¹³⁵ A private citizen in religious error would not have “his tongue cut out, his ears slit or cut off, or other members amputated,” nor “entirely lose his right to his just property, or have his life taken away, merely on account of his being a Papist in principle, in habit and repute.” Instead, Catholics would not be allowed to “utter and publish [their] blasphemies” and “should have a restraint laid on” them that would not allow them “to practice [their] idolatries.” In this regard, they generously observed, “We freely grant and allow all toleration which the scripture allows.”¹³⁶

This final bold restatement of traditional Covenanter political theology had little to no effect on Scottish politics. By the late eighteenth century populist anti-Catholic rage was no longer the domain of religious zealots, as London’s Gordon Riots amply displayed. Even in the midst of this widespread popular resentment of Catholicism, Covenanters made no significant headway politically or in membership in the period, suggesting they were no longer capable of mobilizing mass lay

¹³⁴ *Testimony and Warning*, 43.

¹³⁵ *Testimony and Warning*, 71.

¹³⁶ *Testimony and Warning*, 39.

movements in Scotland in the way of their ancestors. All that was left in Scotland of the movement, besides the ongoing machinations of denominational politics, was the memory of the good old cause. In 1821 one group of Seceders renewed the Covenant publically. The next year, the Reformed Presbyterians, theoretically the most dogmatic entity on the Presbyterian fringe, ceased to require swearing the covenants to gain membership.¹³⁷

Contrary to their restrictive view of the rights of Catholics, Covenanters took an expansive vision of the rights of slaves. Covenanters and Seceders were a moralistic people, and looming on the moral horizon were the two great issues of the eighteenth and nineteenth century: liberty and slavery. Despite the groups' Biblical primitivism, which might have made it open to slavery because of the Bible's inclusion of it, Covenanters were determinedly anti-slavery.¹³⁸ In part this was an outgrowth of all of their political and religious principles in favor of the religious freedom of the righteous community from tyranny, and the anti-elite, anti-statist sensibility of the religious fringe. Rutherford had taught that "Slavery of servants to Lords or Masters, such as were of old amongst the Jews, is not natural, but against

¹³⁷ Wright, David F., David C. Lachman and Donald E. Meek, eds., "Covenanters," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 220.

¹³⁸ For a discussion of this basic typology, see David Bryon Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1966), 62-222.

nature.” For Rutherford, slavery was a “*malum natura*, a penal evil, and contrary to nature” that was only valid as a punishment for sin.”¹³⁹

The nature of slavery was evil, just as the nature of humanity was God’s image. This made slavery repugnant to Covenanters who followed Rutherford’s teachings. The “buying and selling of men; which is a miserable consequence of sin,” was “a sort of death, when men are put the toiling pains of the *hireling*, who *longs for the shadow*, *And to hew wood, and draw water continually.*”¹⁴⁰ This was contrary to the nature of humanity, which was made in God’s image and therefore a “*res sacra*, a sacred thing, and can no more by nature’s law be sold and bought than a religious and sacred thing dedicated to God.” Tying slavery to the tyranny he discussed in *Lex, Rex*, Rutherford was sure that “Every man by nature is a freeman born, that is, by nature no man comes out of the womb under any civil subjection to King, Prince, or Judge to master, captain, conqueror, teacher.” The only exception to this was “subjection to Parents.”¹⁴¹ Covenanters used their Rutherfordian logic to be simultaneously anti-Catholic and pro-emancipation for blacks. Catholics were wrong, they argued, by denying the true religion. Slaves were being wronged by being denied the true religion. The two problems in their mental framework were fundamentally different issues of liberty and tyranny.

¹³⁹ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 91.

¹⁴⁰ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 91.

¹⁴¹ Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*, 91-92.

Covenanters of all stripes remained anti-slavery throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the issue of race slavery lay dormant in Scotland because so few Scots ever saw slavery in action or saw a person of African descent in the flesh.¹⁴² After Olaudah Equiano's 1792 visit to Scotland, Scot abolitionists had no contact with a black person on Scottish soil for another forty-four years. In Scotland, slaves were a powerful intellectual idea rather than a present social reality. They represented the worst of governmental and social tyranny and the failing of the social contract to ensure civil liberties. Furthermore, slavery infringed on the rights of conscience, as stories of slaves denied the gospel served as further proof of the depravity of the institution. It is not surprising, then, that when the abolitionist cause in Scotland grew, Covenanters and Seceders were disproportionately represented.¹⁴³

Anti-Burgher minister James Alice of Paisley was one of the most active rural abolitionists in Scotland. Seceder congregations and presbyteries were early on the most ardent abolitionists in Scotland. The majority of congregations in Scotland that petitioned Parliament to abolish the slave trade were Seceders, and Covenanters

¹⁴² For a helpful overview of this period and issue, see Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006); Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University, 2009).

¹⁴³ Nini Rodgers has shown that Irish imaginations of race and slavery that fueled abolitionism was often the work of novels written by those, like Mayne Reid, who had experience with it in fact. Nini Rodgers, "Green Presbyterians, Black Irish and Some Literary Consequences" in Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd, eds., *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 33-46.

appeared in greater numbers than their overall percentage of the population. As early as 1792 the Seceder's Associate Presbytery of Edinburgh held a special prayer for the end of the slave trade.¹⁴⁴ Seven of the eight ministers in the Edinburgh Emancipation Society were Covenanters or Seceders. Specifically, two were Cameronian, four United Secession clergyman, and one was a Seceder. They far outpaced the established church in support of immediate abolition.¹⁴⁵

Covenanters tied their anti-slavery sentiments to "The steadfast and bold defense their forefathers made in this country for liberty has had the happiest effect in teaching them to give the same to others, irrespective of color." The Covenanter legacy was easily malleable into language of liberty and freedom for many causes, for which the next century would provide ample evidence beyond Scotland in Ireland and America. Their memory of Holy Scotland, and their constant contending to be like the holy remnant of old, was a driving force in their cultural sense of the world.¹⁴⁶

As with Old Testament Israel, all groups of Covenanters passed along the oral story of their people's closeness and suffering. The martyrologies from this period fueled Protestant resentment of civil and religious intrusion. Stories reminded tellers and listeners that their own lives were a verdict on the authenticity of their

¹⁴⁴ Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 77-81, 180-188, 202-203.

¹⁴⁵ C. Duncan Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists, 1833-1861* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1981), 48-49.

¹⁴⁶ *The Reformed Presbyterians, Generally Named 'Cameronians'* (Circa 1860), Magee Pamphlet Collection, Union Theological College, Belfast, 104.

ancestors. By living out their distinctive lives in the present, they validated the struggles of past generations. The scaffold scene of one martyr laid out the purpose of the cause as understood by common people. Covenanters died for “disowning the usurpation and tyranny of James Duke of York,” and “for teaching that it was lawful for people to carry arms for defending themselves in their meeting for the persecuted Gospel ordinances.”¹⁴⁷ These proud stories of faithful resistance were retold in small group devotionals week in and week out for generations. The Covenant documents, the martyr stories and the use of the memory of the Reformation and the Killing times used “history as a legitimator of action and cement[ed] group cohesion,” while in the process becoming “the actual symbol[s] of the struggle.”¹⁴⁸ They reached back into the past to give meaning to the troubled present.

No story became more a cause célèbre of Covenanter martyrdom than the apocryphal narrative of the two Margarets of Wigtown. According to the story, sixty-three-year-old Margaret Maclauchlan and eighteen-year-old Margaret Wilson were executed in dramatic fashion by being tied to stakes in the ocean and allowed to slowly drown with the incoming tide. Pulled out at the last minute, the younger Margaret refused to repent her Covenanter faith. Proclaiming, “I am one of Christ’s

¹⁴⁷ John Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (1775; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 538-539, 547.

¹⁴⁸ Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” 12.

children, let me go,” she was dropped back into the water to drown as a “virgin martyr.”¹⁴⁹ This occurred after the Glorious Revolution secured a Protestant realm.

The events themselves were of doubtful historicity. The earliest account did not appear until 1711, and various arguments were advanced that no such women had lived in the area.¹⁵⁰ Still, history was irrelevant to history’s meaning. Plenty of Covenanters had died for their cause, and the very nature of the oral history of the two Margarets showed clearly how that memory had coalesced around a story of faith, community, civic oppression and resistance even to a Protestant king.

According to the story, Margaret Wilson’s parents were Episcopal conformers, and her father was regularly fined for Margaret’s actions. Highland Host troops, visible signs of Catholic terror and state power, were regularly quartered in their home against the family’s will. Wilson had absconded from the law and was on the run with her brother, a political rebel who went on to fight with King William’s forces at the Revolution. On an ill-advised trip home it was a refusal to toast the the new Protestant King William’s health that led to her capture.

The elderly Margaret McLaughclan was known as “a Country Woman of more than ordinary Knowledge, Discretion and Prudence.” She had been arrested for holding conventicle meetings in her home. As the tide slowly moved in, the women sange the twenty-fifth Pslam “from verse 7 downward.” The final words of the

¹⁴⁹ Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, 2:505-507.

¹⁵⁰ For attacks on the veracity of these stories see Napier, *History Rescued*, xviii and Robinson, 174-176. For the role of Covenanter memory and martyrs see Robinson, 144-178. Also Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters*, 126-127.

Psalm beg for “Redemption, Lord, to Israel.” Covenanters were God’s chosen nation, male and female, tormented by a heavy-handed and uncovenanted state, unrelenting in their fervor for the cause, willing to fight for Scotland’s religious and political redemption but unwilling to accept less than total victory, and mourned and remembered by the entire righteous community.

Their sense of the world was that any state not wholly right was wholly wrong, and that their own suffering Remnant served a prophetic function. They spoke phanatick truth into a world now doggedly determined not to hear them. Their very suffering was proof of their rightness. Covenanters of all stripes maintained the phanaticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries well into the eighteenth. The radice of rule, as it had been for Rutherford, was the righteous community; tyranny against it was always, everywhere, to be resisted. Their ideas would combine and collide with the emerging revolutionary movements of the Atlantic World.

CHAPTER VI

IRISH RADICALS: PRESBYTERIANS AND PHANATICKS IN IRELAND, 1641-1763

Northern Ireland, 1798: Daniel English was Irish with a Scottish faith. He was a radical of mixed origins: a Samuel Rutherford Covenanter in religion and a Thomas Paine liberal in politics. He was executed for his role in one of the most eclectic revolutions in British history, the 1798 Irish Rebellion that brought together Deists, Catholics and Covenanters attempting to recreate the American and French Revolutions in Ireland. On the cold morning that the young weaver woke up to be executed as a modern radical, he emerged from his Ulster jail to the sound of his ancient "People of Israel." They sang out the Psalms amidst wailing and tears. Perhaps because the march to the execution site was so long, someone chose to lead the mourning congregation in the longest single section of the Bible, Psalm 119. They sang it from memory. Near the end, their political and religious dissent came together in words of anguish:

*Princes have persecuted me,
Although no cause they saw:
But still of thy most holy word
My heart doth stand in awe¹*

¹ "119th Psalm" *The Psalms of David in Metre*, 1650.

They were crying for Daniel, crying for Ireland, and crying out to God. Though officially Daniel English was executed for a secular rebellion, to his people he died as one more martyr for the "true Reformed Religion." Covenanter rebellion had failed yet again.²

For most eighteenth and nineteenth century Britons, Scottish Phanaticism was the radicalism of a different age. It related poorly to the rise of newer, rationalized, Enlightenment visions of the world. Yet in Ireland, this older sixteenth-century form of agitation mixed and mingled with newer Enlightenment-era radicalism in an age of revolution. Despite efforts by all sides to keep the two sensibilities distinct, Covenanters were drawn into the age of revolutions precisely because their view of the world shared so many commonalities with the democratic movements sweeping across the Atlantic World. At the lay level, Irish Presbyterians, Covenanters, and Seceders shared an outsider sensibility that enabled them to merge contrary religious doctrines into agrarian violence and revolutionary activity.³

² James Seaton Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, Volume 3, A New Edition (Belfast: William Mullon, 1867), 392-393.

³ Several of the vital studies of Irish Presbyterianism are Reid, *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*; Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism: the historical perspective, 1610-1970* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); I.R. McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish radicalism in the late eighteenth century* (New York: Oxford, 1989); Andrew Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770-1840* (New York: Oxford, 2006).

Although Covenanters and Seceders are most commonly interpreted as a Scottish phenomenon, it was in Ireland that their peculiar form of phanaticism became most unique in transition across the Atlantic world. Here, more than in Scotland, seventeenth-century Biblicist phanaticism and eighteenth-century Enlightenment radicalism mixed, matched and found points of connection amongst the people. Extreme orthodoxy found ways to coexist, albeit awkwardly and intermittently, with secular critiques of the social order. In Ireland, the elasticity of Phanaticks' language of protest and the plasticity of the movement's activism became most clearly evident.

In contrast to the tumultuous nature of eighteenth-century Ireland, Scotland remained relatively stable politically through the late 1700s. As Covenanters and Seceders were prominent, not numerically but rhetorically, in both nations, it seems unreasonable to attribute any differences to their presence. What was different was Ireland itself. While the Scottish economy slowly reaped the benefits of Empire and absorbed British unionist pride, economic resentment of England grew in Ireland. Even as the linen trade took off in Ulster, real wages were half that of peers in Scotland. Scottish society also differed. Despite its own internal divisions highlighted by Jacobite agitations in the Highlands, Scotland was a model of homogeneity compared to fissured Ireland. In Ulster, Irish Catholics, English Anglicans, English Congregationalists, and at least four divisions of Scottish Presbyterians lived cheek by jowl. Beyond this, varying waves of immigration meant that previous waves of immigrants, called the Old English and New English,

dwelt and intermarried with native Irish, and first generation Scots immigrants often differed substantially from those who immigrated in the 1740s and 1780s.⁴

Politics were far different as well. Ulster was one of the most vocal supporters of the colonial cause during the American War for Independence. Scotland, meanwhile, remained strongly royal in its leanings. This stemmed from a more active political agitation in Ireland. In 1788, 2,662 Scottish Freeholders chose the thirty county members elected to Parliament. Meanwhile in Ireland, Dublin alone had nearly 4,000 voters. Ireland was poorer, more diverse, and more politically active at lower social levels than Scotland. All this, when combined with the fact that Irish political power remained annoyingly subservient to the whims of Westminster, created a potent atmosphere of tension and resentment the Scots did not experience. Thus religious zeal and political radicalism had more chances to intertwine.⁵

There was something else unique in Ireland when compared with Scotland. Presbyterians, all of them, were on the outside looking in. Whereas for the Scots after the Glorious Revolution Presbyterianism was the church by law established, in Ireland Presbyterians were dissenters from the state church; they were a tolerated religious minority who had more aggregate numbers than the Church of Ireland did.

⁴ E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 31-57. A.T.Q. Stuart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster, 1609-1969* (London: Faber and Faber, 1777), 13-110.

⁵ E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 31-57.

In the northern counties of Ulster especially, Presbyterians were functionally a tolerated majority. As dissenters, Presbyterians could not vote. This political reality restricted direct political action to elites with English rather than Scottish origins. It placed the two main sects of Protestants in Ireland, Anglicans and Presbyterians, in direct opposition to one another. The most critical point of contest between the two was the legitimacy of Presbyterian marriages under the law. The political situation also meant that the loyalties of the majority Catholic population were a potentially disruptive element in the status quo. Should Catholics and Presbyterians ever subsume their historic differences and unite against the establishment, dramatic social upheaval would likely ensue. This occurred in the late 1790s and culminated in the 1798 Irish Rebellion.

By the late eighteenth century there were two forms of Presbyterian radicalism. The first was Rutherfordian in its politics and orthodox in its theology; it was the Covenanter tradition of seventeenth-century Scottish Phanaticism. It pushed for an established church along traditionalist, hard-line Calvinist principles; Phanaticism was atypical of eighteenth-century revolutionary radicalisms in the Atlantic World. The second was Lockean in its politics and rational rather than traditional in its theology; it was typical of late eighteenth century Atlantic Revolutions. These new, Enlightenment-era radicals were largely disestablishmentarian, favored religious toleration even for Catholics, and tended towards theological innovations.

What made Ireland unique for Phanaticks, then, was not the experience of Covenanters or Seceders. It was the experience of Irish Presbyterians who were marginalized in ways their Scottish relatives never were. Their marriages were of questionable legality. Their children were theoretical bastards. Their right to pass along property to the next generation had to be held loosely. The fear of a Tory or Anglican persecution lay always just around the historical corner.

This outsider experience radicalized many Irish Presbyterians. In so doing, Covenanters and Presbyterians found more points of contact in post-Revolution Ireland than post-Revolution Scotland, where Presbyterian moderation caused the two sensibilities to diverge sharply in theory as well as in practice. In Ireland, Presbyterians became nationalist Whigs, loyal to William and the Hanoverians but constantly frustrated by their political inferiority. Their status as outsiders also made them great fans of Lockean toleration, since they lived only by such toleration's benevolent hand. During the Age of Revolutions, elite Presbyterians deeply imbibed upon Enlightenment teachings disseminated through Scottish universities. The process was complete and many Presbyterians turned into ardent nationalists. That radicalization of Presbyterians meant that the relationship between Presbyterians and the Presbyterian fringe would mimic Scottish relationships in theology only. In practice, the two sides were closer together in their grievances in Ireland than anywhere else in the world. They marched to the beat of different doctrinal drummers, but Covenanters, Seceders, and Presbyterians all ended up in the same political rhythm.

Common enemies brought the Presbyterians and the fringe together and began the process by which the Covenanter and Seceder encounters with Atlantic slavery would move them in simultaneously radical and moderate directions. In Ireland Phanaticism became intertwined with radicalism in ways that would die harder for the fringe than for the moderates. This process began with legal disputes over marriage and ended in revolution.

Marriage and the Test Act

The 1560 Act of Supremacy and Uniformity had placed all subjects of the English crown under obligation to attend the established church for worship, marriages and funerals rites in order to remain citizens in good standing. In 1672 Irish Presbyterian ministers first received the *Regium Donum*, a state-funded allotment given to the Irish Synod to support them as an officially tolerated dissenting minority. In 1688-89 Presbyterians overwhelmingly sided with William, including their storied participation in the Siege of Derry. At Derry, a largely Presbyterian force held off Jacobite forces for over four months before Williamite elements relieved them by sea. The siege took on an iconic role in Irish Presbyterianism and was the linchpin of their pleas for full enfranchisement from William once he assumed the English throne.

Presbyterian hopes to that end were only partially realized. In 1691 William approved the abrogation of the Act of Supremacy in favor of oaths of loyalty less odious to dissenters in Ireland. However, the aspects of the Act of Uniformity relating to marriage, baptism of children and funeral rites remained in place. The

Test Clause of that act, requiring as a political test the participation in established church communion, still applied to these social functions. From the Glorious Revolution forward, Irish Presbyterians were tolerated and funded by the government, but marriages, baptisms and funerals taking place outside of the state church were deemed extra-legal. These issues had widespread implications for social life. Marriages done under Presbyterian clergy did not exist for legal purposes, causing children of such marriages to be legal bastards. Legal bastards receiving baptism by Presbyterian clergy, in the eyes of the state, might as well not be baptized at all. They possessed no official Christian status. Unbaptized bastards had no rights to community burial grounds. More importantly than what happened in death, in life such bastards could not inherit property. Although it rarely happened in reality, in legal theory Presbyterians' status before the law would always be suspect and depend on the lenient enforcement of such provisions. No matter the current regimes' generosity, future magistrates of less accommodating practice could upend the entire social world of Presbyterian communities. This dissenting status also precluded participation in Parliamentary elections. Though Presbyterians were rarely of sufficient economic status to qualify for such roles anyway, they were without a political voice of protection in Irish politics beyond those friendly Anglican Whigs willing to offer support. Regardless of class status, the basic indignity of justifying longstanding marriages and families as legitimate

was the offensive social side of what was a very real political problem.⁶ One Presbyterian called the test clause a “Badge of Slavery.”⁷

Presbyterian Synods decided that they should continue to officiate weddings in violation of the law. In 1699 the Bishops appealed to the government in London for help on this issue, and in 1702 one appropriately named Bishop King was still complaining of the practice.⁸ One Presbyterian minister was wanted for marrying a couple at a local Public House in 1700, and was still at large in 1701. Such matrimonial vigilantes were points of testiness between the two sides but often posed little more than local annoyances prior to 1707.⁹

In 1707 the government briefly flirted with removing this burden from Presbyterians but rejected the plan. Irish Whigs were themselves members of the Church of Ireland and, though supportive of Presbyterians, were not anxious to bring them into political power. They refused to push such a measure through the

⁶ J.C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, 13-19, 22, 67, 117, 139-144. Beckett has argued against partisan accounts of Presbyterian persecution. He states that the persecution of the Irish Presbyterians was functionally minimal and chiefly the focus of the clergy of the establishment Church of Ireland through their power in the Irish House of Lords. The clerics feared Presbyterian political power if ever a full enfranchisement of dissenters were realized. This antagonism was retarded by the English government, which rarely overturned criminalizing statutes but ensured they were rarely enforced with vigor. In essence, Beckett argues Irish Presbyterians were a persecuted minority in theory more than in fact. Persecution, against Presbyterian marriages, Beckett describes as “local and spasmodic.”

⁷ John Abernathy, *Reasons for the Repeal of the Sacramental Test* (Dublin: 1733), 66. McBride also notes this, “When Ulster Joined Ireland,” 73.

⁸ J.C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, 41, 71.

⁹ J.C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, 119.

Irish Parliament.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, a wave of enforcement on the Test Clause hit Irish Presbyterians.

Between 1707-1714, the last half of Queen Anne's rule, Irish Presbyterians learned just how precarious their practical toleration was.¹¹ Marriages could lead to excommunication, which often led to jail. Targeted pushes were made by state clergymen to enforce the law in 1707, 1712, and 1716. In 1714 the *Regium Donum* was suspended, though it was reinstated by the incoming George I the following year. By 1716, well into the Hanoverian reign, Irish Presbyterians were still serving jail time for marriages outside of the established church.¹²

Attacks on Presbyterian marriages were viewed by Presbyterians as an assault on "our Reputation, Property, and Liberty; as Men and Christians."¹³ One Presbyterian asked, "what Husband or Wife will endure to have either of themselves declared Bastards by the Clergy?" These attacks were on one's children but also one's heritage, for the "Clergy's declaring them Sons of Whores" was a statement about mothers as well as children. Presbyterians directed their anger at the power structures of the Church of Ireland for their plight. "We do not, nor cannot blame the Civil Governors; for we bless God, they have been and continue to be just and

¹⁰ SJ Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 79-80.

¹¹ J.C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, 53-63.

¹² J.C. Beckett, *Protestant Dissent in Ireland 1687-1780*, 121.

¹³ John MacBride, *A Vindication of Marriage as Solemnized by Presbyterians in the North of Ireland* (1702), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 266, Union Theological College, iii.

kind to us; nor can we charge the conforming Laity, with whom we have a substantial Agreement, and charitable Conversation, though differing in some things; yea, by Inter-marriages, there is such a mixture, that it will be hardly possible, to do Injury to either Party, without hurting the near and dear Relations of the other.”¹⁴ The conflict was not even with all established clergy, but rather, supposedly moderate state churchmen “whose intemperate Zeal” led them to persecute Presbyterian marriages.¹⁵

Phanaticks and Presbyterians alike resisted these measures in sometimes violent ways. Dissenters were known to disrupt funeral processions of the established church in protest. “The frequent Disturbances given to the Established Ministers of this Kingdom in their Burial of the Dead,” one moderate state churchman noted, “is so well known, that I presume it may pass for a received Truth.” The “Insults” were generally led by Presbyterian ministers during the burial service itself as a form of anti-statist protest. Such events often led to angry tempers by families with hurt feelings and communities in conflict, as in the case of one servant who was “struck at by a Dissenter with a Shovel shot with Iron, and had he not avoided the Blow, it would probably have killed him.”¹⁶

Many families refused to utilize the service of the state ministers or even other pastors for such vital functions as baptisms, weddings, and funerals. In the

¹⁴ MacBride, *A Vindication of Marriage*, iii.

¹⁵ MacBride, *A Vindication of Marriage*, iv.

¹⁶ Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters*, 65.

absence of an available minister, Covenanters Ninian Oliphant and Mary Hall reverted to the tradition of handfasting. With seeming spontaneity to those gathered around, they stood up and clasped hands, “and Ninian Oliphant saying: I take this woman to be my married wife, whereof ye are witnesses.” The small group, stunned by the unusualness of this approach, protested “against this disorderly proceeding.”¹⁷

The social chaos of the attack on marriages led to a protracted public debate. Establishment clergymen and Tories attacked Presbyterians in ways similar to arguments used in Scotland. Tories believed Presbyterianism represented a very real threat to the established order. As one advisor to the archbishop of Canterbury counseled in 1716, “they make laws for themselves and allow not that the civil magistrate has any right to control them and will be just as far the king’s subjects as their lay elders and presbyteries will allow them.”¹⁸ Irish Establishmentarians argued that all Presbyterians were Covenanters and forced their opponents to defend themselves against charges of disloyalty. To defend against such accusations Presbyterians invoked the Siege of Derry, their growing Enlightenment moderatism, and distanced themselves from their phanatick heritage.

Established churchmen and government officials in Ireland capitalized on the most effective of moderate attacks on Presbyterianism that all Presbyterians were Covenanters. Moderate clergyman William Tisdall believed that all Presbyterian

¹⁷ As quoted in Robinson, “Immigrant Covenanters,” 68, 123.

¹⁸ William King as quoted in Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 168.

ministers and probably all lay elders personally took the Solemn League and Covenant before admittance to office.¹⁹ For Presbyterians, Tisdall wrote in 1709, “all Crown’d Heads are rather Vassals and Subjects” to the Presbyterians’ righteous community. The kirk would be able to “exert Her Inert Power” over all of the kingdom, including the power to excommunicate the Civil Magistrates. Not only was the person of the prince in jeopardy, but “all the Laws of the Nation, which they shall judge any way relating to the kirk (and what Law can they not, and in a manner have they not reduced to that Head)?” The kirk could null and void civil legislation without the consent of a legislature. It needed only the people and their elders. The kirk would be “Superior to, and independent of all Authority of the Civil Magistrate, even by a Commission from CHRIST.” Presbyterianism in Ireland was tarred with the accusations of religious tyranny. If Presbyterians were enfranchised in Irish society, popish power of the church over the state would return in the form of phanatick Presbyterianism.²⁰ “By the Fundamental Principles of both Presbyterian and Popish Policy, there is no Allegiance due to any Christian Prince who does not profess, and will not maintain what either call the true Religion,” Tisdall reasoned.²¹

¹⁹ Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters*, 91-94.

²⁰ William Tisdall, *A Sample of True-Blew Presbyterian Loyalty in all Changes and Turns of Government, Taken chiefly out of their most Authentick Records* (1709), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 265, Union Theological College, Belfast, 5.

²¹ William Tisdall, *A Seasonable Enquiry into that Most Dangerous Political Principle of the Kirk in Power* (1713), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 265, Union Theological College, Belfast, 7.

The twin tyrannies of popery and presbyterianism for moderates “proved the Source of all our national Calamities.”²²

Tisdall repeated his accusations in 1712, furthering accusations of phanatick radicalism. Ruling elders were “a kind of Ecclesiastical Volunteers of the *Kirk Militant*” who adapted “themselves to the Failings of the Common-People, sigh and groan, to seduce the Melancholy.”²³ Phanaticism was about class warfare, and elders were the leaders of this upending of social caste. “Their discipline seems to prefer the *Poor* rather than the *Rich*,” he argued.²⁴ Tinsall called *Hind Let Loose* “without all Question . . . the most dangerous Book that ever was Printed,” as it “infuse[d] Principles of violent Reformation into the Minds of the People.”²⁵ Building on that delusion, once elected elders were heavy handed leaders who “command not only the Minds and Bodies, but the very Substance of the Poor People, whom I take to be actually in a state of Persecution, whenever their Elders please to be Tyrannical.”²⁶ Presbyterians were everywhere and always tyrannical, as one Irish pamphleteer noted of their past in Scotland. There, “during the *Usurpation of Fourty One*, as soon as they gained the Power,” Covenanters, “*Rabl’d*

²² Tisdall, *A Seasonable Enquiry*, 11.

²³ William Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters, of Ireland with Respect both to church and state* (Dublin: 1712), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 265, Union Theological College, Belfast, 51, 54.

²⁴ Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters*, 53.

²⁵ Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters*, 67.

²⁶ Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters*, 53.

the *Episcopal Clergy* in a more Savage Manner than can be equaled in History.”²⁷

This question of religious authority, in which the people could tyrannize themselves and others unless the state protected religious society from itself, was for Tisdall the essence of “the Conflict betwixt the *Church* and the *Kirk*.”²⁸

Covenanters in Scotland and Ireland had been fighting such accusations since 1689. They responded in varying ways. Moderate Presbyterians challenged the bishops who “profess[ed] so great a Zeal for Peace and Unity, which you pretend to plead for.”²⁹ Presbyterian moderate John MacBride responded that zealotry and moderation were in part a process of youth and age. Moderation in England and Scotland was in part the natural outgrowth of the “young Gentlemen growing Elder” and becoming “more cool and moderate toward Dissenting Protestants, more suspicious of Popery, and the more Resolute they grew [toward] maintaining Property, and the Protestant Religion, [to] break the legs and arms of growing Popery, the more temperate they grew toward Nonconformists.”³⁰ True moderation from both sides would look very much like sharing common enemies, Catholicism and state encroachments on the power of property, than it would the constant Protestant infighting so characteristic of Irish political factions. MacBride’s cover

²⁷ “A True-Church-Man,” *The New Association of those Called Moderate Church-Men, with the Modern-Whigs & Fanaticks, to Under-mine and Blow up the Present Constitution in Church and State* (1714), Linenhall Library, Belfast, 3.

²⁸ Tisdall, *The Conduct of the Dissenters*, 54.

²⁹ John MacBride, *An Answer to A Peaceable & Friendly address to the Non-Conformists* (1698), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 266, Union Theological College, Belfast, 117.

³⁰ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 25.

page included an inscription far different from Rutherford's *Lex, Rex* or other works against toleration. He quoted Philippians 4.5: "Let your moderation be known unto all men."

Even moderate Presbyterians in Ireland, however, still carried on parts of the Rutherfordian tension between anti-tyranny and anti-toleration. "We justify no unlimited Toleration," MacBride stated, and any "Opinions and Practices inconsistent with the light of Nature and known Principles of Christianity either in Faith, Worship, or Conversation, or destructive of the external Order by Christ Established in his Church" were "deserving no Toleration."³¹ However, toleration could be a powerful tool for the elimination of the very zealotry moderates from both sides sought to put down. As an example, he cited the case of Thomas Houston, the most popular Irish Covenanter minister during the 1690s. Houston had been deposed by Irish Presbyterians for being overly phanatical and was rumored to have "only a few silly ignorant people to adhere to him." Houston had only "about 200 men, his compliment, without Arms, Ammunition, or Order."³² MacBride believed that the policy of ignoring the Covenanter zealots was most effective in relegating them to the sidelines. Toleration of Protestants broadly eliminated narrow sectarianism, he argued. "By a Prudent neglect of that man, and his silly Followers, we have lived to see them vanish into Smoke."³³ Houston's message "had little

³¹ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 26.

³² MacBride, *Animadversions*, 21.

³³ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 21.

formidable in it, except the Motto of his Banner.”³⁴ The more Presbyterian laity felt persecuted by the state, the more attractive that motto for Christ’s crown and covenant would be. Advocating such tolerant policies were the heart of moderate Presbyterian arguments in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

MacBride denied any influx of Cameronians from Scotland had occurred and accused the Bishops of being wantonly ignorant of the divisions within Presbyterian religion. “These considerable Numbers of *Cameronians* lately landed must have come from *Utopia*, for there be no considerable Numbers of them now in *Scotland*, and other Nations bring forth no such fruit,” he argued.³⁵ Presbyterian ministers attempted to honor the covenants without enforcing them, claiming they were no more applicable than the “Leagues formerly made with *France* oblige *England* since the *French* have violated them.”³⁶ The anti-Presbyterian accusations of Presbyterian tyranny were misplaced, MacBride assured readers. In fact, it was the state church, with its constant calls for unity beneath bishops, that most resembled Rome. “Whither will ye go for Truth, if ye will allow no truth but where there is no Division? To *Rome* perhaps, famous for Unity, famous for Peace.” Of course, MacBride acknowledged, religious conflict was universal, and Catholics were “no more peaceable, but more subtle, they fight more closely, within doors.”

³⁴ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 25.

³⁵ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 35.

³⁶ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 35.

Presbyterians might suffer from constant infighting but at least “our frays are in the Field.”³⁷

Those internal fights could be quite harsh affairs. Indulged Presbyterian ministers resented the Covenanters as “*Contenders* and Lovers of Contention.” According to one Presbyterian, “Their Hand is against every Man; for they do what they can to set every Man’s Hand against them.” Covenanters falsely claimed to be “*the Remnant of the true Covenanted Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland*; as if there were no Remnant of the true Presbyterians but they; or that own and adhere to the Covenants National and Solemn League.” Covenanters’ very inability to work with other Presbyterians was proof they were not Presbyterian at all. “True Presbyterians they are not, who disown Subjection to Presbyterian Government, and set up as independent.” Instead of the vanguard of the Covenanted Reformation, phanaticks were “Covenant Breakers, both by Reason of their rejecting and condemning of Presbyterian Government and Discipline and by Reason of Schism, and Separation from a true Church.” That commentator wryly noted that the National Covenant had bound signers to the national kirk of Scotland, the very church they had left and whose authority they denied.³⁸

For Presbyterians like the anonymous pamphleteer of *Just Reflections Upon a Pamphlet*, Cameronians were “Fierce, killing or threatening to execute Judgment

³⁷ MacBride, *Animadversions*, 18-19.

³⁸ *Just Reflections Upon a Pamphlet, entitled A modest Reply to a Letter from a Friend to Mr. John McMillan* (1712), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 250, Union Theological College, Belfast, 5.

upon others, though they have not received the Power of the Sword from God: Despisers of those that are good; because they do not follow their pernicious Ways." Covenanters were "Traitors," who were "rash and headstrong . . . not following after the Things that make for Peace."³⁹ The central moderate critique of the fringe was one of self-righteousness. They were willed with "Self-love, undue and immoderate Respect of our selves." Their failings, then, were "sad, but not strange, for Men that trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others."⁴⁰ This lack of humility included their approach to history. Covenanters, went the complaint, had white washed the church's complicated past. Phanaticks mourned the loss of Scotland's "ancient Glory and Beauty" from the heady early days of Reformation, but their overly simplistic interpretation of Scotland's Reformation led to a loss of touch with historical realities. The church in all times possessed imperfections. "Scotland's covenanting Days began before the Year 1638," and her glory was a process of weeding out imperfections over the course of generations. "What? Think you, there is no Glory in the Church, while there is Corruption to discover and purge out? Then there would be no Glory in any Church militant on Earth, but only in the Church triumphant in Heaven."⁴¹ Lack of humility was the key fault of Phanatical religion.

³⁹ *Just Reflections Upon a Pamphlet*, 6-7.

⁴⁰ *Just Reflections Upon a Pamphlet*, 46.

⁴¹ *Just Reflections Upon a Pamphlet*, 9-10.

Irish Presbyterian clergy were keen to distance themselves from the Cameronian image just as their Scottish brethren were, but with a twist. The case in Ireland was much more virulent because on it rested the critical issue of loyalty in a divided state. As disenfranchised outsiders to the establishment despite their numerical superiority in the northern counties, Presbyterians vied for the critical protections the tolerant state could offer. Presbyterian loyalty was a critical issue for the Irish clergy, and it came with a corresponding attack on the establishment clergy. Presbyterians were frustrated by the presence of Covenanters to spoil their image, but they were most incensed by the Church of Ireland minority elite who used Presbyterians in times of Protestant peril but attacked them in years of peace.

John McBride, whose name had now noticeably shortened from its more Scottish spelling of MacBride, responded to Tisdall's *Sample of True-Blew Presbyterian Loyalty* with his own pamphlet in 1713, entitled *A Sample of Jet-Black Prelatic Calumny*. McBride's pamphlet was a Presbyterian retelling of British, and especially Irish, history. In McBride's story, tyranny was always the problem whatever its source. "The *Lust* after *Dominion* over Men's *Consciencs*," he stated, "has been, and is, a Chief Cause of all *Ecclesiastical Tyranny*, *Persecutions* and unhappy *Divisions* in the *Church*."⁴² True, Covenanters had been guilty of just such sins, but Presbyterians were no longer Covenanters. To McBride's understanding,

⁴² McBride, *A Sample of Jet-Black Prelatic Calumny, in Answer to a Pamphlet, Called, A Sample of True-Bleu Presbyterian Loyalty* (Glasgow: 1713), Irish Collection, Linenhall Library, Belfast, 3.

“Men may be of the same Principles in *Church Discipline and Government*, and yet differ very much in their *Loyalty*.”⁴³ Squabbling over the Covenants was futile and missed the greater point of relevance to religious debate. The true questions revolved around loyalty and tyranny. Which religious group had maintained greatest loyalty to the Protestant throne, and which had most abused the power it possessed from that throne? The answer McBride gave to the first question regarding loyalty was Presbyterians. The answer to the second, regarding abuse of power, was the established churchmen of Ireland. The struggle over marriage was, in a way, proof of Presbyterian loyalty to the good tenets of Whig ideology. The battle for marriage was the “just Defense of our Reputation, Property, and Liberty; as Men and Christians.”⁴⁴

By the end of the 1720s marriage persecutions were functionally over.⁴⁵ However, the memories of this outsider consciousness lived on in lore. A sensibility of being the persecuted remnant, hyper-aware of encroachment to civil liberties and all too ready to assign them spiritual significance, continued. In 1737 the Relief of Marriage Act allowed for the acknowledgement of marriages by any minister willing to swear an oath of allegiance to the crown, which every Presbyterian minister eagerly did. No Covenanter ministers did so.

⁴³ McBride, *A Sample of Jet-Black Prelatic Calumny*, 22, see also 213.

⁴⁴ MacBride, *A Vindication of Marriage as Solemnized by Presbyterians*, iii.

⁴⁵ Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 164.

In the years that followed, Presbyterian ministers quickly gravitated to the theological and political moderatism prevalent in Scotland. Most received their ministerial training there, many under the tutelage of the controversial Professor Simson, and others later under Francis Hutcheson, the star of the Scottish Enlightenment and himself a student of Simson's. Simson underwent two trials for heresy in 1714-1717 and 1726-29. The accusations against Simson regarded his elevation of human reason to heights that undermined the orthodox Calvinist teachings of the total depravity of the sinner. Simson toyed with the idea that human beings could, of their own natural ability and power, understand God and respond to him. This teaching outraged traditionalists, who taught that humanity was completely dependent on the work of God for salvation. Such an emphasis on reason, however, appealed to the growing Enlightenment wing of Presbyterianism. The generally affluent and well-educated Presbyterian ministers and laypeople who supported such moderatism in Ireland came to be called New Lights.⁴⁶

In Ireland, New Lights opposed orthodox Old Lights in the Subscription Controversy. Old Lights sought to require strict subscription to the Westminster

⁴⁶ The New Light, Old Light labels that were prominent in eighteenth and nineteenth century Atlantic Presbyterianism are rife with interpretive hazards. Not the least of the problems is that the terms very ubiquity, which sprung from a common theological and social lexicon, masks their elasticity. New Lights (or New Lichts) variously describes Enlightenment liberals like Hutcheson, disestablishmentarian radicals like Henry Joe McCracken, and American orthodox evangelicals like Jonathan Edwards. The last is especially instructive. In America, the Old Lights who opposed Edwards were far more like Irish New Lights in their emphasis on respectability, yet were themselves highly orthodox in their Calvinism. The terms obscure as much as they clarify in a broad Atlantic discussion.

Confession of Faith as a term for ordination. They deemed such a requirement necessary to root out growing New Light liberalism. New Lights, meanwhile, refused such tests as unbiblical burdens not required by Scripture. They pleaded that such non-Biblical tests were an attack on the liberty of conscience, and that the slippery slope to Covenanter Phanaticism was paved with such steps. In turn, Old Lights accused New Lights of hiding behind the Bible to protect their increasingly heterodox views of it. New Lights insisted that Old Lights were being religious tyrants.⁴⁷

The underside of the Subscription controversy was lay power in the church. Educated New Light ministers knew their primary challenge was not from peers but from the Presbyterian laity fiercely devoted to the Westminster Confession of Faith as the doctrinal litmus test for orthodoxy. As early as 1702 laity pushed for trials that ousted ministers from positions of power in the church. The 1712 publication of *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*, a tract that challenged Trinitarian Christianity, by Enlightenment thinker Thomas Clark, ramped up lay discontent. From early on in the eighteenth century, many Irish Presbyterian laity were sensitive to indications of heterodoxy from their ministers.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ W. McMillan, "The Subscription Controversy in Irish Presbyterianism from the Plantation of Ulster to the Present Day," (M.A. Thesis, The University of Manchester, 1959), 3.

⁴⁸ For a full overview of the Subscription Controversy in Scotland, England and Ireland see Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 74-104.

Meanwhile, Presbyterian ministers and congregations, especially around commercial centers like Belfast, attempted to secure both their status with the state and their rising status as an educated elite. In 1705 a group of Simson's former students led by John Abernathy and James Kirkpatrick formed the Belfast Society. The group functioned as a private reading and debating society, and was the hub of New Light leadership in Ulster Presbyterianism. In 1719 Abernathy preached a sermon entitled "Religious Obedience founded on Personal Persuasion." He stated that there were areas that "human reason and Christian sincerity permitted me to differ," from orthodox Calvinism.⁴⁹ With the die thus cast, a permanent division was temporarily averted by redrawing the lines of Presbyteries. Rather than the usual geographic divisions, the Presbytery of Antrim now became home to all non-subscribing ministers and their churches. The other Presbyteries in the Synod of Ulster were free to use subscription tests.

The central, still unresolved internal tensions in Irish Presbyterianism were the orthodoxy of the clergy, tolerance of theological innovation, and the power of the laity to enforce orthodoxy on their ministers. All of these debates were built on the superstructure of foundational issues like Presbyterian loyalty, Covenanter Phanaticism and the righteous community. The theological stakes of these debates were huge for the laity. Attacks on the Trinity amounted to attacks at times on the very deity of Christ and the basic understandings of Christianity itself. By creating

⁴⁹ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 35.

peace on such issues the Synod of Ulster was seen as sacrificing purity to peace. Orthodox Presbyterian leaders now came under fire from two directions. Avoiding establishment accusations of guilt by association with Covenanters could lead to the same dilemma from a restless laity; associating with heretics looked much like heresy. To traditionalists, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland had become “a synagogue for Libertines, a club of Socinians, Arians, Pelagians, &c. banded together... ”⁵⁰ At that moment the Secession movement caught Presbyterianism in Ireland at its most vulnerable place, its relationship with the good old cause.

Oaths and Seceders

Seceders continued in Ireland to be a distinct but avowed group of Covenanters. Their Phanaticism was firmly rooted in the good old way and sought to protect the autonomy of the righteous community. Their presence incensed Presbyterians, who saw them as interlopers who fed off of discontent and divided religious communities rather than fostering spiritual unity. Despite accusations of moral laxity, Seceders clearly avoided antinomianism, as evidenced by their disciplinary records. But they were highly opportunistic schismatics who reveled in disrupting, or capitalizing on existing disruptions within, other churches. The conflict between Seceders and Presbyterians was ostensibly theological but had its roots in the political loyalties and debates of the mid-eighteenth century. Presbyterians accused Seceders of being opportunistic malcontents. Seceders

⁵⁰ *Act, Declaration and Testimony*, 93.

accused Presbyterians of insufficient orthodoxy. Both sides claimed loyalty to the Protestant monarch, but their ongoing debates about the legitimacy of the other sect included dispersions about the relationship between church and state. Seceders went on to play a contested role in the revolutionary sentiment of the 1780s-1790s. That role was rooted in their tensions with the state and other Presbyterians in the mid-eighteenth century.

Seceders maintained a Covenanter sensibility in Ireland. Although they did establish traditional congregations with church buildings, the outsider practices of conventicling continued. Seceder minister Thomas Clark's ordination on July 23, 1751, was in "William McKinley's field."⁵¹ Seceders established small group networks akin to the Covenanter United Societies. They appealed to the laity with language of being an older, truer form of Presbyterianism. Even the way they spoke exuded a movement from below. One Seceder preacher confessed to an inadequacy with the English language and was probably more familiar with Scots Gaelic. "I never have been able to get a full acquaintance with English Grammar," he said. "Contending daily for the faith" had made him highly aware that "My spelling's bad and grammar scant."⁵² Good grammar or bad, they upheld their loyalty to the Covenants of 1638 and 1643. In short, Seceders appealed to the masses in ways quintessentially of the Presbyterian fringe.

⁵¹ Cahans Session Book, pg. 3.

⁵² *The Tale of the Butter-Horn* (undated), "Pamphlets and Tracts by Covenanter Ministers," Union Theological College, Belfast, iv.

Rapid growth made Seceders the objects of ire for establishment and Presbyterian leaders alike. Seceders continued to make their appeals for legitimacy directly to the common laity of Presbyterian churches. They quickly became what historian David Miller has called “the growth sector” of Presbyterianism in eighteenth century Ireland. Disgruntled Presbyterians of all stripes, especially the ultra-orthodox who longed for the good old way, could find a home there that did not require the strict political resistance in all things of the Cameronian tradition. Adherents could exude the piety of Phanaticism without its far reaching political implications. Seceders largely cornered the market on religious dynamism for lay adherents in the northern counties of Ulster.⁵³ They built larger congregations than more traditional Covenanters.⁵⁴ As a result of their populist appeal, Seceders in Ireland grew at roughly a rate of one congregation per year from 1740-1780, making them the fastest growing religious sect in Ireland.⁵⁵

Seceders explained their growth as the natural result of Presbyterianism gone astray, leaving countless orthodox souls yearning for righteous community and the good old way. The first appeals from Ireland to the Seceders came from a local church controversy in the Presbyterian congregation of Lisburn, Ireland after the

⁵³ Miller, “Religious commotions in the Scottish diaspora,” 26; McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 66.

⁵⁴ Cahans, January 8, 1766. The call to new minister John Rogers was signed by 193 male and female Seceders despite the fact that two waves of immigrants had left in previous years under the leadership of previous minister Thomas Clark.

⁵⁵ David Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism in Ulster Society, 1740-1890* (London: Routledge, 1992), 17.

death of their pastor in 1730. The church laity were divided into New Light and Old Light factions. After years of infighting and several rejected candidates, in 1732 the New Light faction won appointment of its ministerial candidate largely through the imposition of the ministers of the Presbytery. Old Lights appealed to the General Synod of Ulster to be made an autonomous congregations rather than have an unorthodox pastor, but were rebuffed. In 1734 the Lisburn Old Lights erected their own meetinghouse anyway, sans pastor, and appealed again to be an autonomous congregation. Again they were denied. In 1735 the groups were still fighting. It was on the heels of this controversy that “fourscore families” from Lisburn appealed to the Scottish Seceders for a “supply of sermon” in 1736. They desired someone who would “preach the Gospel, not in the wisdom of men’s words but in the simplicity thereof.” Short on ministers themselves the Seceders could only send an encouraging letter from Ebenezer Erskine.⁵⁶ The Lisburn Old Lights tried again in 1741 and 1742 to acquire a Seceder minister. After their fourth attempt, late in 1742, the Seceders sent probationer Thomas Ballantyne to preach to them.⁵⁷

Shortly thereafter, another dispute in the Markethill Presbyterian congregation led to a breakaway group appealing to the Seceders.⁵⁸ Thomas Clark later attributed the Irish call to Scottish Seceders as the product of fear amongst orthodox Presbyterian elders that students from Glasgow were “poisoned in their

⁵⁶ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 54-58.

⁵⁷ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 58.

⁵⁸ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 63.

sentiments” by the teachings of Professor Simson, the paragon of New Light Enlightenment liberalism.⁵⁹ Encouraged by the early results of these preaching tours, Seceders sent more probationers to Ireland. Within a few years missionary efforts in Ireland were paying off. The Antiburghers encouraged disaffected Presbyterians to form private societies in like manner to the United Societies. These small groups were to “maintain the worship of God in their families, morning and evening, and in all parts.” In the 1740s thirteen such societies were formed.⁶⁰ Mostly these lay people were rural farmers, day laborers, and artisans who resented the growing elitism of educated Scottish moderates. Seceders interpreted these events as God’s protection of The Remnant against the onslaught of Enlightenment assaults on the good old way.⁶¹ Seceders styled themselves “the *old Presbyterians*.”⁶²

The real old Presbyterians were not so enamored of the Seceders’ presence nor so sure of their motives as were the laity flocking to the new banner. The issue at the root of the Lisburn split, Presbyterians claimed, had been a dispute over land leases. The lay New Lights were not motivated by theology at all, but by the fact that Rev. Livingstone, an Old Light minister vying for the appointment, received a lease for land originally belonging to a church member that incited agrarian resentment over the always volatile issue of land rights. The church member felt he had the

⁵⁹ Thomas Clarke, “Farewell Letter,” March 15, 1791 as printed in *Evangelical Guardian*, Vol. 1, Nos. 7-10, 319.

⁶⁰ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 75-76. Also Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 9. “any of your own small societies.”

⁶¹ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 71.

⁶² Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 15.

right to obtain a renewed lease on his family lands, but Livingstone had outbid him.⁶³ The congregational split at Markethill, meanwhile, was based in a dispute over seven pounds an elder had given to build the Presbyterian Meetinghouse for which he now desired reimbursement.⁶⁴ When Markethill's pastor John Semple left his congregation for a Sunday in August 1750 to assist another minister in a communion service, the Seceders sent in a preacher who spoke "a great many groundless calumnies, and bitter Invectives, against the General Synod" of Irish Presbyterians.⁶⁵ Irish Seceder minister Thomas Clark, often at the center of such controversies, challenged Semple to a public debate over which group was the most orthodox, "like Prize-fighters, upon a Stage, before a Multitude." Semple declined because the people who would gather would make "very incompetent judges."⁶⁶

Presbyterians resented the Seceder appeal to the disaffected and saw them as opportunistic, even violent, agitators. Seceders were accused of "carry[ing] their meeting-houses by assault" as happened at "Drumbanagher, near Newry. Where during divine worship, the minister was dragged out of the pulpit, and one of your brethren set up." Some had left to become Seceders because they had pledged money for new meetinghouses but now did not want to pay, as had happened in the

⁶³ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 54-62.

⁶⁴ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 84.

⁶⁵ John Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined by sacred Scripture and sound Reason: Being an Answer to a late Pamphlet Entitled A Survey &c. Wrote by Mr. Thomas Clark, Seceding Minister at Ballybay (1754)*, Magee Pamphlet Collection 70, Union Theological College, Belfast, iii.

⁶⁶ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, iii.

Saintfield congregation. Others were offended because they were not given seats closer to the front of the congregation. Some left in arrears for paying their portion of the pastor's salary. Others left under censure for immoral actions. Thomas Ledlie Birch accused the instigator of the local Secession church in his town as being a man "suspended by his session, from Christian privileges, for his debaucheries," who had had his and "his lady's pride" mortified and therefore sought to strike off on their own rather than submit to the session's discipline. Seceders always seemed to appear in congregations whose pastors were away, in one case while gone to bury his mother-in-law.⁶⁷

Seceders were seen as capitalizing on otherwise resolvable disputes. They created opportunity to disavow the discipline of righteous community. The ability to "erect a congregation wherever you can procure twenty disaffected families" meant that factions within the church could effectively mobilize against the kirk discipline at the heart of Presbyterian religious life.⁶⁸ Irish Seceders tended to build on a core of "a few *restless spirits*, (all of whom were irregular persons, and some of them under church censure)."⁶⁹ They permitted "mere Hearsay, and Fireside Reports" to be made "the Ground for the heaviest Accusations." Seceders jumped on "every lying Story, and give false Accusations, Slander and Calumny, instead of

⁶⁷ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 5-8, 23.

⁶⁸ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 6.

⁶⁹ Thomas Ledlie Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease. An Address to the Seceding, or Associate Synod of Ireland Upon Certain Tenets and Practices, Alleged to be in Enmity with all Religious Reformation*, 8th Edition (1796), Magee Pamphlet Collection 270, Union Theological College, Belfast, 4.

Evidence, against Ministers; and wherein yourselves become the chief Slanderers, and without any Shame; so that if the Seceder can have a Prospect of gaining our People.”⁷⁰ Seceder ministers then were known to “entertain your audience with speaking of corrupt *bodies*, and *soul butchers*,” meaning the General Synod of Ulster and New Licht ministers.⁷¹

The most damning accusations came from Thomas Ledlie Birch, an Old Light so orthodox he would later seek to join the Seceders in America. For Birch the name Seceder in Ireland was synonymous with “Cheat! Hypocrite! Defamer! Reviler! Disturber of the church’s peace! Destroyer of the happiness of families!” He wished that “*enthusiasts*, and *imposters*, may be shown in their *proper colors*” as lacking a “*Christian spirit and behavior*.”⁷² Seceders were privateers who stole souls, “*oratorical demagogues*” whose “*mad career of popularity*” were driven by outsized egos rather than a zeal for the truth.⁷³ As another Presbyterian rhetorically queried Seceders, “*why came you into Ireland as ravenous Wolves?*”⁷⁴

The issue of orthodoxy versus opportunism struck at the heart of Presbyterian complaints. Old Light Presbyterians could not fathom how the reasons for the Seceder division in Scotland translated to Ireland, since the Seceder raison

⁷⁰ James Fisher, *A View of Seceders in Some Instances of their Usage of the General Synod of Ulster* (Belfast: 1748), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 303, Union Theological College, Belfast, 25.

⁷¹ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 14.

⁷² Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 47.

⁷³ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 44, 24, 10, 27. See also McMillan, “The Subscription Controversy in Irish Presbyterianism,” 288-293.

⁷⁴ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 90.

d'être, patronage, did not exist in Ireland. "It seems," wrote Presbyterian James Fisher, that a Secession "must take Place here as well as in *Scotland*, though you are far from showing that we have the same Reasons for it here," since "we have no Patronages &c."⁷⁵ There was no patronage in Irish Presbyterianism. There was no Burgher oath in Ireland. And, unlike Scotland, Irish New Lights were a tolerated minority instead of a powerful majority within the church. And yet the Seceders brought in their division, including the Burgher-Antiburgher division amongst themselves, into Ireland. The Seceders had no valid reason to maintain a separation from the Presbyterians of Ireland, but they made them anyway.⁷⁶ For Birch, Irish Seceders supported the "gratifying of pride" and possessed a different "humor" than traditional Presbyterians.⁷⁷ Their preaching had misled "some pious well-Meaning Christians, who, in the Simplicity of their Hearts have hitherto followed them."⁷⁸

These disputes over sheep stealing amongst the shepherds of souls cut deeper than territorial jealousies. They went to the heart of the most controversial issue of Irish Presbyterianism: loyalty. Of course Seceders were divisive, Fisher wrote, "considering their common Obligations, especially as expressed in the *Solemn League*, they reckoned it their Duty to take Care of this Part of the Church."⁷⁹ Seceders were obsessed with "antichristian tyranny" to bind the "consciences of the

⁷⁵ Fisher, *A View of Seceders*, 25.

⁷⁶ Fisher, *A View of Seceders*, 11-25.

⁷⁷ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 19.

⁷⁸ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, iv.

⁷⁹ Fisher, *A View of Seceders*, 23.

people by a *Solemn League and Covenant*.”⁸⁰ They would have this anti-statist religion “pressed upon the Consciences, and crammed down the Throats of all men and women in the nation, under most unchristian pains and penalties.”⁸¹ The Seceder claim to be the true Covenanters in Ireland was exacerbated when a Seceder minister interrupted a sermon by Rev. William Stavely, the most popular Cameronian minister in Ireland. The two spontaneously debated in front of the crowd, and Stavely was reported to have “gained the approbation of the large audience.”⁸² Seceders were directly challenging for the old Covenanter mantle. As Presbyterian Alexander Colvill pointed out, a “strict Covenanter cannot be a good Subject of King *George*.”⁸³ They may “disown disloyalty; yet it cannot be denied that” Seceders had “embraced some *Antigovernment Principles*.”⁸⁴

The problematic nature of “persecuting principles”⁸⁵ went to the core of the tensions with which Presbyterians attempted to live. Presbyterians aspired to the moderate Whig tradition, ensuring their religious autonomy while assuring the state of their basic loyalty. This mirrored their struggle on the marriage issue.

Presbyterians sought to position themselves as the champions of both loyalty and

⁸⁰ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 6.

⁸¹ Alexander Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets of Those who affect to call themselves Seceders Laid Open and Refuted* (Belfast: 1749), Belfast Printed Books, Linenhall Library, Belfast, 6.

⁸² Samuel Ferguson, *Brief Biographical Sketches of some Irish Covenanting ministers: who laboured during the latter half of the eighteenth century* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1897), 33.

⁸³ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 11.

⁸⁴ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 11.

⁸⁵ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 14.

liberty. Seceders, meanwhile, represented Rutherfordian Phanaticism and its attempts to conform all people in their outward and inward person. It was impossible “to know that all Men have the same Sentiment or the same Ideas excited in their Minds,” wrote Semple.⁸⁶ It was a sinful drive to enforce conformity to non-Biblical standards that gave the Seceders their fire, he believed. Presbyterians, on the other hand, assiduously avoided such entanglements while maintaining a traditional faith. “I assure you, we have no *Doctrines* in *our Religion* but what are contained in the revealed Will of God, no Duties but what his Word enjoins the Performance of,” he maintained. Seceders required more than God did, “*viz.* the Oath of Abjuration, or to abjure the Pretender as a national sin, the Union of *Scotland* and *England* is a national sin, or many others of the like Sort, which are contained in your *Act, Declaration and Testimony*.”⁸⁷ Like other Covenanters, political articles of faith doubled as theological doors of entry to the righteous community. Seceders would “have the common People debarred from using their Liberty.”⁸⁸ In a classic anti-Covenanter argument, Semple accused Seceders doctrinally of joining “your Friends in the Church of *Rome*...”⁸⁹

The political and theological were, as always, intimately interwoven. The theological controversy with Seceders revolved around a debate over the nature of grace. The constant emphasis on grace by Seceder ministers, and the downplaying

⁸⁶ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 8.

⁸⁷ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 11.

⁸⁸ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 13.

⁸⁹ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 14.

of the role of good living for salvation, was potentially socially disruptive.

Presbyterians accused Seceders of preaching that people “ought to perform no duty in hope of reward, nor abstain from any crime for fear of punishment; that the law of the ten commandments is not now a law binding believers to obedience . . . nor ought they to repent of or ask pardon for such offense as a transgression of the law, and that to do so is a mark of a legal spirit.”⁹⁰ The effect this had on the “unlearned” could be subversive and dangerous. “I know very well many grave and learned men have defended several of these points maintained by the *Seceders*, because they did not see the consequences that naturally flow from them” for society writ large.⁹¹

Part of these issues went back to Seceders’ irregular arrival in Ireland. They could not possibly be “better acquainted with the moral Characters of many of these two Congregations [that appealed for a supply of sermon]” than their local ministers and elders. Seceders were “mere Strangers in *Ireland*” who “knew little or nothing” of local issues.⁹² Such a message of personal freedom through grace, preached to those already socially disruptive, was a dangerous doctrine.

Presbyterians believed that Seceders confused the Biblical Covenant of Grace with the Covenant of Redemption. The Covenant of Redemption was the agreement between God the Father and God the Son that the Son (Jesus) would humble himself as a suffering human for the redemption of lost souls. For Seceders, this was the

⁹⁰ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 21.

⁹¹ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 22.

⁹² Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 87.

Covenant of Grace. To Presbyterians, the Covenant of Grace was something else altogether. It was the agreement between the individual human and God, based on the Covenant of Redemption, that the human would repent of sin and believe in the Redemption accomplished by Christ.⁹³

This relatively minute point of theology was actually a major attack on Seceders. By conflating the two Covenants, indeed by superimposing the Father's covenant with his Son onto the relationship between God and man, Seceders had removed any sense of obligation to humanity. If the sum total of salvation was already handled in the actions of Jesus, there was nothing for humans to accomplish. To Semple and other Calvinists, "this is what all the *Antinomians* constantly do, in order to exempt Men from having any Conditions to perform, because Christ has undoubtedly fully performed all the Conditions that he engaged with the Father for, in the Covenant of our Redemption." Presbyterians insisted "Faith to be a Condition, without which we cannot be saved."⁹⁴

Conflating the two Covenants had led Seceders to preach the kind of errors that took on a life of their own amongst the laity. If there were no conditions of salvation other than what Christ had already done, why not worship in drunken debauchery. There was nothing to fear. Drinking was especially rampant, critics claimed, at Seceder meetings. Birch complained that "a number of [worshippers] afterwards, *with nimble pace, ply their steps*, alternately between the [Presbyterian]

⁹³ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 97-101.

⁹⁴ Semple, *The Survey impartially Examined*, 101-102.

meeting-house, [Seceder] *tent*, and the whisky cask.”⁹⁵ One Seceder congregation planned to pay for its minister by making the meetinghouse into a tavern during the week. “Some of the judicious Seceding counselors have recommended, to have the intended meeting-house adapted, so as to serve for the purposes of a *public-house*, provided they could not collect a congregation.”⁹⁶ Moral laxity was the natural outgrowth of phanaticks preaching, they argued. Thomas Birch’s tract, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, which went through at least eight editions, began with the Scriptural text Luke 4:23: “Physician, heal thyself.”⁹⁷

Again, doctrine and politics were never far apart. Zeal for theological tyranny might lead to lukewarmness against political tyranny. “Is it consistent with the justice and goodness of God,” one asked, “to decree any mans damnation from eternity unconditionally, so as let a man do ever so much to obtain His favor, even all that he can, he could have no hopes?” Such a God would be a Tyrant, and tyranny and goodness were in opposition to one another. God could not be both tyrannical and good. “These and such like doctrines of the *Seceders* are a contradiction to reason and the moral perfections of the Deity; so that by their other tenets they render the laws, invitations, promises and threatenings of the Gospel utterly trifling

⁹⁵ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 36.

⁹⁶ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 33.

⁹⁷ For Birch’s later turn to the American Seceders, see Peter Gilmore, “Minister of the Devil,” David A. Wilson and Mark G. Spencer, eds., *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World: Religion, Politics and Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press), 62-86.

and of no value.”⁹⁸ Seceders held “principles destructive of Christian peace and charity, and tending to sedition in the state, whenever they may meet with a favorable opportunity of putting them in practice.”⁹⁹

For their part, Seceders accused Presbyterians of being corrupted by Enlightenment liberalism and a too-close association with the British state. They claimed that Presbyterians had lost an emphasis on piety and the righteous community. They had forfeited their right to speak with authority through corruptions of the good old cause. Presbyterians, wrote Seceder Thomas Clark, who claimed “to be the Defenders of Truth, have been the Betrayers of it.”¹⁰⁰

In 1752 Clark attacked Seceders for their doctrinal and political laxity. Part of the Seceders initial Irish success was the reluctance of Presbyterian presbyteries to divide large churches to create more local parishes to meet the needs of the people. Doing so would have divided the already meager ministerial incomes given out in the *regium donum*. Failing to do so, however, opened the door for Seceder ministers and claims that the *regium donum* had corrupted Presbyterians into lackeys of the state.¹⁰¹ Seceders were also a reaction to the corruption of the Scottish universities, where “errors of a very pernicious kind, were openly embraced and defended, by persons entrusted with the education of youth, in their

⁹⁸ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 25.

⁹⁹ Covill, *The Persecuting, Disloyal and Absurd Tenets*, 19.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light; or, A Reply &c.* (1752), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 303, Union Theological College, Belfast, 7.

¹⁰¹ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 73.

principles universities,” a “destructive poison [that] diffused its baleful influence throughout the land.”¹⁰²

Clark attacked the published sentiments of Presbyterian New Light clergy to put the contrast between Seceders and Presbyterians in stark relief.¹⁰³

Presbyterian George Cherry had made one such classic moderate formulation in 1736. Cherry summed up the irenicism that so offended traditionalists and drove them to seek Seceder ministers. “As often as ministers preach on matters of faith that are not very important, they would briefly recite the contrary opinion, and having modestly confuted it, they would inform their audience that they did not look upon their Doctrine to be essential, however useful it might be.” Seceders knew very few unessential doctrines.¹⁰⁴

In response to such ideas, Clark asked if a “heart and warm Inclination and Endeavor, to know the Will of God, and performing it when known, ALONE be true Religion?” Clark believed that Presbyterians answered “yes” while Seceders said “no.”¹⁰⁵ Presbyterians believed that “*Prudence, Discretion and a sound Judgment*” demanded that “All Things in Religion, should not be pursued with an equal Degree of Zeal.”¹⁰⁶ To Seceders, since “*Truth and Duties*” came from “a God of Truth, then

¹⁰² Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders*, 3.

¹⁰³ Thomas Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light; or, A Reply &c.* (1752), Belfast Pamphlet Collection 303, Union Theological College, Belfast, 22-23.

¹⁰⁴ George Cherry, “The Duty of a minister to be a pattern of Good Works,” as quoted in McMillan, “The Subscription Controversy in Irish Presbyterianism,” 291.

¹⁰⁵ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 22-23.

they are all important, useful and necessary in a high *Degree*, not one Jot or Tittle must be let slip or fail, but all must be fulfilled, all must be pursued zealously by every Christian.”¹⁰⁷ There was no room for charity in doctrine, only conformity. For Seceders, “None of God’s matters are trifles.”¹⁰⁸

Clark claimed that Irish Presbyterian practice was worse than its doctrine. Presbyterian laity were “ignorant of the common Principles of the reformed religion contained in the Confession, Directory for Worship, and the Form of Government.”¹⁰⁹ Presbyterians accepted “Heads of Families” who “very seldom or never worship God, together with the Families, by praying, reading and praising, according to the Directory of Family Worship.”¹¹⁰ “On his first ministerial visit to Ireland Clark claimed that “in 200 families, I found not twenty who had Confessions in their Houses.”¹¹¹ Presbyterian pastors neglected catechizing and family visitations.¹¹² Presbyteries did not do regular visits to investigate the orthodoxy of pastors and hear the complaints of the people.¹¹³

One of the most consistent points of contention was the failure to force out any New Light elements. “No doubt there are some few good old Men in the Synod who have not bowed the Knee to *Baal*, but surely their joining the New Light Party

¹⁰⁷ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Clarke, “Farewell Letter,” March 15, 1791 as printed in *Evangelical Guardian*, Vol. 1, Nos. 7-10, 324.

¹⁰⁹ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 50.

¹¹⁰ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 52.

¹¹¹ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 60.

¹¹² Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 53.

¹¹³ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 53.

in the Synod” was a sign that the whole of the Presbyterian body was “*strengthening the Hands of Evil Doers.*”¹¹⁴ By letting the cancer spread, the entire body of Presbyterianism risked being corrupted by enlightenment rationalism. Among Presbyterians “there arose a new generation of clergy, and people which knew not the Lord’s doctrine about the grounds of a sincere hope, nor the works of reformation he had done for the protestant churches...”¹¹⁵ Such New Lights were easy to spot, however. They read their sermon manuscripts rather than preaching from the zealous heart. Clark wondered whether there were “any Instances of Sinners being converted” by “read Sermons” no matter who the preacher was.¹¹⁶ He attacked the Presbyterians for teaching errors by imitating “the Heathen Philosophers in their Lectures on Heathen Morality instead of preaching Christ.”¹¹⁷

This dissatisfaction was evident in the way Seceders crafted their memory of Irish origin. The Cahans session book opens with this story.

Some hundreds of families living adjacent to Ballybay and Monaghan finding that they Synod of Ulster . . . had long continued teaching hints of the Popish Doctrine of merit and free will, Denying the Decrees of God &c. Neglecting to visit and catechize duelly & admitting ignorant and scandalous persons to the Sacraments, and being well informed that the suffering ministers in Scotland had erected judicatory & Licentiate probationers for relief of such people. They petitioned the Glass[gow] Eldership of Glasgow for supply and obtained some afterward...¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 118.

¹¹⁵ Thomas Clarke, “Farewell Letter,” 323.

¹¹⁶ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 62.

¹¹⁷ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 62-68.

¹¹⁸ Cahans session book, 1751.

The handwriting in the session book, however, is Clark's. No doubt, as their first historian rightly noted, Seceders interpreted "moderation and toleration ... as the negation of earnestness."¹¹⁹ They were genuinely theologically driven. Yet this theological bent had larger and in many cases more political undercurrents. Clark claimed Seceders were authentic relics of the Phanaticism of the Reformation in Scotland. Presbyterians did not recognize this. Such teachings "seems *new* to you, being so ill acquainted with it."¹²⁰

As with all vibrant Covenanter movements, Seceders stressed the important role of lay leadership. The necessity of strong leadership from adherents is displayed in the length of time these groups went without pastors. A sampling of Seceder congregational histories shows that most churches went at least 3 to 4 years with no ordained minister. Others went even longer. Aghadowey (later Killaig) went 15 years without a minister between 1748-1763. Ahoghill went an astonishing 20 years, while Ballyeston (5), Belfast (7 and then 9), Dublin (14) Lisburn (5 and 5) and Larne (16) had their own stretches as praying societies with no ministers. Some societies lasted even more astonishing stretches of time left to themselves. The Burgher society of Armagh waited 46 years. Seceders in Ballymoney petitioned for a supply of sermon in 1748 but had no settled minister

¹¹⁹ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 126.

¹²⁰ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 69.

until 1814, a 68 year period in which as many as three generations might have known little in the way of religion beyond the praying society.¹²¹

Seceders staked out their claim to the Covenanter cause amongst the Presbyterian laity of Ireland. The cause of Ebenezer Erskine “was the cause of God, of liberty, and of mankind,” wrote one advocate.¹²² Patronage was a sign in Scotland of tyranny everywhere. Patronage was a symbol of all that “was unfriendly to Christian liberty; was an infringement on the eternal rights of justice and equality,” and everything that was “despotic and unjust.”¹²³ The Seceder origin in Scotland cast a long rhetorical shadow into Ireland against those seeking “To lodge powers in the hands of any individual” that would “rob society of a privilege which properly belongs to it.” The righteous community must never lose its autonomy to tyrannical forces in society.¹²⁴ Those included the forces of the enlightenment, amongst whom “the truths of God was reckoned impolite.” A spiritual “DESPOTISM, the bane of all societies, religious and civil, was a radical evil” that must be confronted amongst fellow Presbyterians.¹²⁵ All such stands were baptized with the Covenanter mantra, and were part of the greater and longer struggle that went back to the times when Covenanters enemies “burnt that sacred solemn League and Covenant’ in London,” and led the Killing Times where “no less than *eighteen thousand Presbyterian*

¹²¹ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 245-281.

¹²² Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders*, 6.

¹²³ William Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders* (Strabane: 1793), Strabane Printed Books, Linenhall Library, Belfast, 2.

¹²⁴ Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders*, 2.

¹²⁵ Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders*, 2.

Noblemen, Gentlemen, Ministers and Commons” were “confined, banished, shot, hanged, quartered, drowned, and otherwise barbarously murdered.”¹²⁶

Resistance to the tyranny of religious moderation was one thing, but true Covenanters must find some way to resist the state as well. Seceders in Ireland primarily made this symbolic stand over the issue of oaths of loyalty. After the 1737 Relief of Marriage Act, Seceders often refused to take the new loyalty oaths because they infringed on their Covenanting obligation. Some attempted to assure the state of overall loyalty by proposing modified oaths that would not acknowledge the king’s spiritual supremacy over the righteous community. Clark argued that Seceders refused to take oaths because they would not kiss the Bible, not because they were regicidal or anti-monarchial.¹²⁷ This became especially problematic in the use of Bishops’ courts for handling legal wills, which required taking the oath by kissing the Bible. Unlike the United Societies, paying tithes and general submission to civil authority was deemed appropriate for Seceders. Even the strict Antiburghers declared they did “not find a relevant ground for scruple of conscience about submitting to civil authority.”¹²⁸ Seceders claimed to welcome the Revolution Settlement and, as to King George, “all faithful and true Allegiance is due unto

¹²⁶ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 76.

¹²⁷ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 72.

¹²⁸ As quoted in Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 130-145.

him.”¹²⁹ This insulated Seceders from the problems of Cameronian-leaning phanaticks.

Still, they remained “ strenuous advocates for Covenanting with God. All within the pale of their communion are warmly pressed to the observance of this duty.”¹³⁰ In 1743 many Seceders took the Covenants, and others followed in 1743. In 1767 ministerial candidate James Martin hesitated to take the Covenant oath and was censured by the Synod for his scruples.¹³¹ Seceders William Dickey proclaimed that “COVENANTING is our oath of allegiance to the immortal King who guards his people, and promises to exalt the hero who pants after never-ending glory.”¹³² Though they interpreted the documents less strictly, Clark admitted to being in substantive agreement with “the old Covenanters.”¹³³

Always a lightning rod for controversy, Clark became the face of Seceder’s complicated resistance to state tyranny and their constant antagonism with Presbyterians. When he had a run-in with establishment officials that led to jail time, Clark accused Ulster Presbyterians of conspiracy in a plot to use his Covenanter leanings to oust him from Ireland. Knowing that Seceders would take oaths only with uplifted hands, they arranged for him to be called forward to swear an oath of allegiance, which required kissing the Bible. As he later remembered it, “I

¹²⁹ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 78.

¹³⁰ Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders*, 12.

¹³¹ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 86.

¹³² Dickey, *An Essay on the Origin and Principles of Seceders*, 17.

¹³³ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 78-84.

appeared, producing to them a certificate of my character and loyalty, signed by the Lord Mayor and Alderman of Glasgow, and another by Lord Cathcar, the Duke of Cumberland's aid de camp—all in vain." He was issued a fine in May 1752, which was paid through the donations of his congregation.¹³⁴

In 1754 a magistrate with soldiers appeared at a worship service in Newbliss, south of Monaghan. After listening to Clark's sermon they arrested him as he came down from the pulpit. The sermon was premeditatively provocative. A church member had advised Clark of the planned visit. He chose to preach on Jeremiah 21.11 and forward, where the king is commanded by God to "deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire." Verse 13 was even more explicitly anti-statist, telling the Israelites, God's chosen nation turned apostate, "Behold, I am against thee." Clark was arrested for sedition. When he won his case on appeal and was set free, he immediately began to sing a Psalm with some gathered elders. Upon his return the congregation sang Psalm 59, "For thou to me a refuge was, and tower in troubled days."¹³⁵

Both elements of the Presbyterian fringe, Covenanters and Seceders, continued to wrestle with what it meant to be a self-consciously disposed people in Ireland. This sensibility was most prescient in the dominant Presbyterian issue of Irish life, marriage. An examination of church records reveals that marriage

¹³⁴ Thomas Clarke, "Farewell Letter," March 15, 1791 as printed in *Evangelical Guardian*, Vol. 1, Nos. 7-10, 324-346.

¹³⁵ Thomas Clarke, "Farewell Letter," March 15, 1791 as printed in *Evangelical Guardian*, Vol. 1, Nos. 7-10, 346.

continued to be a major issue amongst not only Presbyterians, but Phanaticks as well.¹³⁶ In Covenanter and Seceder congregations, the most commonly rebuked sin was, overwhelmingly, irregular marriage.¹³⁷ Covenanter laity were committed enough to their tradition to accept punishment and desired restoration into the body of fringe believers when they stepped out of bounds for their wedding vows. Nonetheless they begrudgingly pursued the protections necessary for their estates and their children that came from solemnizing their marriages under the Church of Ireland.

An irregular marriage was one using the services of a clergyman of the Church of Ireland. Thomas Potts, for instance, “owned his guilt of an irregular marriage after the common prayer book form with Jean Rutherford.” Potts was also interrogated regarding rumors of his foul language, but he “gave evasive answers savoring of passion against some member of session who he supposed had reported it to the eldership.” His case was put on hold “as he seemed obstinate.”¹³⁸ “James Mitchell and Elizabeth Wright owned they had their marriage celebrated by one unknown to them on a Lord’s Day lately.” They were rebuked along with several

¹³⁶ For a thorough study of Irish Presbyterian church records on all social issues including marriage, see Andrew Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). Holmes’ study focuses on the Synod of Ulster, though it does utilize Seceder and Covenanter records.

¹³⁷ Also referred to as “clandestine marriage.” Ballyblack Session minutes, June 6, 1819.

¹³⁸ Cahans, July 26, 1752.

friends who had stood as witnesses.¹³⁹ The Seceder congregation of Rathfriland chastised Isabella Gracy for “irregular marriage, by Priest.”¹⁴⁰ Among the sins that proved John Scott had backslidden from faith was his being “married by an Episcopalian Clergyman.”¹⁴¹ One of the clearest statements on irregular marriage occurred in Cahans, where the session clearly explained to William Alister why his irregular marriage was a great offence. He was “told that as marriage was an ordinance of God so the 2nd Commandment required him to keep all these ordinances of God and this among others, pure, but instead of that he had corrupted and defiled the ordinance by employing one of the abjured hierarchy to celebrate his marriage and to pollute it by crossing and cringing at an alter using a ring and profaning God’s holy name by saying in the middle of his worse that he worshipped a woman in name of the Trinity.”¹⁴² A decade later in Cahans, John Martin confessed to the “sin of being present at his daughter’s marriage with license.”¹⁴³ Covenanter Margret McCalister was chastised for sin of irregular marriage. The session “discovering her sorrow” agreed she should be “publicly rebuked one Sabbath day” after “taking into account the circumstances attending the sin.”¹⁴⁴ The offense was so common that the handling of it was almost routinized, as when Thomas

¹³⁹ Cahans, July 19, 1752.

¹⁴⁰ Rathfriland, October 24, 1810.

¹⁴¹ Cullybacky, November 2, 1818.

¹⁴² Cahans, August 11, 1754.

¹⁴³ Cahans, June 11, 1769.

¹⁴⁴ Session Book, Drumbolg Reformed Presbyterian Church, and other surrounding societies, (probably County Derry) 1809-1859, 15 December 1813.

McWhinney appeared before the court and “expressed sorrow for the sin of irregular Marriage.” He was “restored to his privileges after giving one day public satisfaction.”¹⁴⁵

Some Covenanter couples attempted to keep their upcoming nuptials secret, probably to avoid having to pretend they intended a Covenanter wedding and thus add lying to their list of offenses. Marriages were supposed to be publically proclaimed three weeks in advance, each Sunday. These were rules imported from the Church of Scotland passed in 1690 and 1699¹⁴⁶ The Covenanter session at Drumbolg agreed “that all persons purposing marriage be proclaimed within the bounds of the correspondent either after public worship or in the social meetings where they remain.”¹⁴⁷ The public proclamation of a marriage served other, more utilitarian, purposes. When Jane Sweeton was married irregularly to a Mr. Martin, it was found that the purpose had been to avoid public proclamation in advance. When an after-the-fact announcement was made in the congregation, “some girl came and said he was sworn to her.”¹⁴⁸ Walter Neuse promised Eleanor Beck he would marry her and thus she slept with him. He took her by the hand “swore by the eternal God that he would never enjoy any but her” and then asked “by the great God before whom she would be judged if any other would propose marriage to her

¹⁴⁵ Session Book, Drumbolg Reformed Presbyterian Church, September 22, 1812.

¹⁴⁶ Clark, *New Light Set in Clear Light*, 57-60.

¹⁴⁷ Session Book, Drumbolg Reformed Presbyterian Church, December 15, 1813

¹⁴⁸ Cahans, January 26, 1769.

whereby she might raise her fortune would she in such a case quit him?" She promised him that she would never seek a more prominent suitor. Neuse subsequently married another woman through irregular marriage, probably to avoid the public announcement that would give Beck notice.¹⁴⁹

At least one young couple attempted to overcome both the legal and social technicalities by performing marriage themselves. Thomas Irvine claimed to have privately married Rosanna Lister by reading through the "confession of faith" together, by which he probably meant the Directory of Public Worship. Rosanna, who went on to marry another man, agreed that it had occurred, but swore she had not uttered the phrase "lawful wife." Irvine claimed she simply "did not promise to be obedient." There was some confusion as to what sexual acts constituted consummation of the act, as well. The session, having heard their separate testimony, determined to get at the truth by requiring each one to take an oath before God, "who was now the witness and before long would be the judge to the truth." When both proved willing to take such an oath, the session was at a loss for what to do and deferred judgment.¹⁵⁰

Secrecy about marriage intentions served other purposes. It also covered gray areas of fornication, what one Seceder elder noted in the minutes was "that sin which destroys in pairs."¹⁵¹ When Benjamin Green and his wife Elizabeth Bell

¹⁴⁹ Cahans, May 17, 1772.

¹⁵⁰ Cahans, January 7, 1777.

¹⁵¹ Cahans, November 27, 1770.

confessed that, prior to marriage, they had sworn “secretly to one another that they would marry some day before actual marriage” and admitted to some level of “fornication before marriage,” they did so out of personal guilt rather than being caught in some public manner. They were “exhorted to have recourse unto the blood of Jesus for remission.”¹⁵²

Struggles with such premarital sexual issues were not uncommon affairs with which sessions dealt. Another man confessed a guilty conscience for his wooing days. He had “on some few times sat on Margaret Gray’s bedside” and once or twice “leaned on the bed when in suit of her for marriage.” All the while he had also made “proclamation with Hannah Eliot” that he would marry her. He was rebuked, his “grief of heart for all these things” seen as genuine repentance.¹⁵³ Some issues came out more publically than others, as when the Cahans elders took note that Elizabeth Morris’s child was born “6 weeks, and 2 days short of 9 months.”¹⁵⁴ At other times, struggling youths came directly to the session for advise. A young couple asked the Ballybay session’s advice on what to do. They had sworn an oath to each other with “their hands on the New Testament” that they would “marry each other and non else,” but had apparently had second thoughts on the wisdom of such a course. The session agreed that no doubt “Satan had tempted and prevailed on them rashly and sinfully to swear so,” but now also required that they not allow

¹⁵² Cahans, January 14, 1753.

¹⁵³ Cahans, December 15, 1754.

¹⁵⁴ Cahans, February 8, 1770.

Satan to “tempt and prevail on them to break and perjure themselves.” They were advised to marry quickly.¹⁵⁵

Sexual promiscuity amongst the Presbyterian fringe was not merely a problem of youthful lusts. Joseph Patterson and “Widow Elliot” had both discovered sorrow for being overly intimate, perhaps before an irregular marriage. Discovering sorrow in them both, the session rebuked them publicly and they were restored. The Widow Elliot was again charged with and acknowledged “her sorrow for the sin of fornication” eight years later, when because of her repeat offender status she was required to perform public repentance three Sabbath days.¹⁵⁶ John Holmes testified that he had found his mother, Jane Holmes Turman, copulating with George Scott in the darkened closet of a public house. “He latched Charles by the coat neck” then “pulled out his mother from under him.” Coming back later for his mother’s cloak, he was incensed that Charles Scott, far from being repentant, was most upset over the loss of his hat in the heat of love making. The session clerk claimed the elders found this a “tedious investigation.”¹⁵⁷

Tedious or not, policing marriage was an active part of the agenda for elders on the Presbyterian fringe. Such activities served not only to keep the body pure of sexual sins, it also attempted to remind people of the boundaries of the righteous community. Covenanter and Seceder families struggled with what it meant to live as

¹⁵⁵ Cahans, March 17, 1756.

¹⁵⁶ Session Book, Drumbolg Reformed Presbyterian Church, March 16, 1814; September 6, 1823; May 2, 1824.

¹⁵⁷ Drumbolg, March 9, 1835.

outsiders to the state system. Their ministers had not conformed to the 1737 marriage reform measures, and even when they did, such actions were only as good as the current regime's toleration. Seceders were not antinomians, as evidenced by their internal use of church discipline. They were guilty as charged as it regarded their schismatic tendencies that imported divisions into Ireland that served no purpose other than to allow festering wounds to find resolutions outside of Presbyterian discipline. But being schismatic was part of being the phanaticks whose mantle they claimed, and life on the Presbyterian fringe was lived with a keen awareness that even the state need not be proactively persecuting to cast a strong gravitational pull over religious life. Even the government's leniency was a sign of its power. By the time the American colonies revolted in 1775, the Presbyterian fringe was happy to join the moderate men in a new, radical movement.

CHAPTER VII

IRISH RADICALS: REVOLUTION AND REBELLION, 1763-1800

When the period R.R. Palmer labeled the “Age of Democratic Revolutions” began in the late eighteenth century, Presbyterianism in Ireland was fragmented along theological and class lines. By the time the revolutions had run their course, including Ireland’s own failed revolt, Irish Presbyterianism remained as divided as ever. By the period’s end, there were 379,161 Presbyterians in Ireland compared to 83,512 Seceders. There were 17,879 New Lights in a body called the Remonstrant Synod. Though significantly reduced by emigration, an estimated 16,000 Covenanters still remained along with nearly 3,000 Seceders “who keep aloof from all others” in several congregations.¹ Congregations of over 1,000 were not unheard of, and usually these had only one minister in attendance. The Seceder church of Dublin had over 1,700 members with just one minister in 1836.²

Seceders and Covenanters maintained only the metrical Psalter for worship music, continued to affirm the importance of the 1638 and 1643 Covenants, yet still

¹ R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolutions: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1966); George Matthews, *An Account of the Regium Donum Issued to the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, with the Number Belonging to Each Congregation of Presbyterians, Methodists, Independents, and other Dissenters* (1836), Magee Pamphlet Collection 82, Union Theological College, Belfast, 27.

² Matthews, *An Account of the Regium Donum*, 36.

refused to have fellowship with one another.³ Presbyterian New Lights remained avowed Enlightenment rationalists against strict Biblical revelation. The Synod of Ulster persisted in internecine theological and class squabbles. Presbyterianism in Ireland was, as it had ever been, a fissured mass of religious bodies claiming to best represent the authentic faith. Seemingly nothing could unify these sectarian schismatics.

For a brief moment of time within that age, however, an unwieldy and ultimately fatally flawed unity did occur. Even more incredulously, that unity centered on the acceptance of Catholics. Not all Calvinists joined the struggle. Like a horseshoe, the extremists on either end of the Presbyterian spectrum bent back towards those they least agreed with. New Lights and Covenanters became the most unlikely of allies while moderates and Old Lights teetered between activity, loyalism and passivity. The Age of Revolutions in Ireland allowed Phanticism and the new Radicalism to intermingle at multiple social levels including agitation against the state, rural social unrest, strong rhetorics of liberty, and a sense of coming millennial judgment. The revolutionary movement in Ireland was far larger than its Presbyterian components. That it brought such disparate elements together is a testimony to the malleability of Phanatick dialogue in heated political moments.

³ Matthews, *An Account of the Regium Donum*, 44.

The Phanatick Magistrate and the Volunteer Movement

The political unity of the 1780s-1790s was even more surprising in light of the Covenanters continued insistence on a Phanatick styled church-state alliance. Covenanters and Seceders alike continued to openly avow the need for an explicitly covenanted state despite internal disagreements about the centrality of such a mandate. Covenanter and Seceder university students from Scotland and Ireland held regular meetings of “A Friendly Debating Society for Scottish and Irish Covenanting” regularly in the 1770s.⁴ The Seceder congregation in Ballybay, Ireland, included a lay member prominently named Samuel Rutherford.⁵ The good old way was inculcated through society meetings and political tracts. For the fringe, debating the role of a Christian magistrate in Ireland took on renewed importance considering the nation’s complicated religious amalgam: a minority established church, a disenfranchised northern Presbyterian majority, and an island-wide Catholic majority dispossessed both politically and economically.

Phanaticks continued to maintain the vital link between a covenanted, Christian magistrate and a powerful Protestant church. In 1773, Covenanter ministers John Thornburn and William Martin published *Vindiciae Magistratus: or, the Divine Institution and Right of the Civil Magistrate Vindicated*.⁶ In classic

⁴ E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 21.

⁵ Cahans session book, 99.

⁶ John Thornburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus: or, the Divine Institution and Right of the Civil Magistrate Vindicated* (1773), iv. Martin began the work

Rutherfordian fashion, Thornburn argued that civil society did not have the “liberty to sin against God.”⁷ It was imperative to maintain a consistent witness for the good old way in a quickly liberalizing world.

One thrust of this offensive was aimed directly at Seceders. The Secession ministers continued to claim the mantle of the old Covenanted cause with greater success than the United Societies. Thornburn attempted to clarify the distinctions between the two. The central argument between Covenanters and Seceders was, he claimed, whether “All government or magistracy that has an actual being in the world, by man’s constitution, and for whatsoever ends, together with their own safety in the pursuit of them, is designed [by] God’s ordinance.”⁸ Covenanters believed that not all governments were legitimate, whereas Seceders accepted that some uncovenanted magistrates in certain kingdoms could continue to be legitimate governments. For Cameronians, only those governments which were pursuant to God’s divine commands and holiness were rightly constituted. Otherwise, they violated the Christian conscience in demanding obedience to ungodly dictates and dictators, making them illegitimate “for conscience-sake.”⁹

Thornburn argued that if the Cameronian view of a Scriptural magistrate was wrong, and if their ability to rise up and demand such a state was also wrong, then

before immigrating to America. It was finished by Thornburn who is probably the principle author.

⁷ Thornburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus*, iv.

⁸ Thornburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus*, 5.

⁹ Thornburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus*, 5.

“the whole Christian world must professedly turn Quakers.”¹⁰ Why? Because if the magistrate was not charged for the “external defense, preservation, and maintenance of the church” then the “church of Christ, have no privilege nor right to vest their civil governors with any power to protect and defend them outwardly and vilely, in the possession of their religious rights and privileges.” Christians had “not the least shadow of right nor warrant to defend themselves externally.”¹¹ Anything other than a traditionalist Phanaticism violated the autonomy of the righteous community.

Both groups of Phanticks remained wary of the growing calls for democracy in the revolutionary Atlantic. Alexander Pirie published a Phanatick, pro-monarchy tract in 1794 as *A Discourse on the Eight Chapter of the First Book of Samuel*. Pointing to the end of times, he asked Christians “Under what form of Government do you expect to live in your future Inheritance? Under a republic? No: an abundant enterance shall be administered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.... The God of heaven everywhere in Scripture assumes the title of King.”¹² If Heaven was to be a monarchy, should not the earth reflect heaven? The growing penchant for democracy was an Enlightenment plot “hatched by Thomas Paine and his Clubs, who pretend to find a pure Democracy sanctioned in

¹⁰ Thornburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus*, 174.

¹¹ Thornburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus*, 174-175.

¹² Pirie, *A Discourse on the Eight Chapter of the First Book of Samuel*, 28.

Scripture.”¹³ Phanaticks should remember that “Politics and Divinity are two sciences very different, and suited to different capacities,” and that Paine was a very poor substitute for Rutherford.¹⁴

Theory and practice conflicted in Ireland and created strange bedfellows. In the 1770s the British Government had stretched itself too thin. The war with rebellious colonies soon became a war with France and Spain as well. The troops who normally kept Ireland’s peace were called away to fight in America. Absent a modern police force and fearful of both uprisings and a French invasion, in 1778 the crown approved the creation of Irish Protestant militias, called the Volunteers. Eventually over 80,000 Anglicans, Presbyterians, Covenanters and Seceders would join the ranks. Some Catholics served as well. For those among the peasantry and gentry, especially Covenanters, Seceders, and Presbyterians, the most active engagement they had to date with politics came in their political church lives. Now they were participating in the revolutionary politics of the nation. The growing question was which nation? This was made all the more troubling for many since they held their rebelling American cousins in high regard and looked on their cause with great sympathy. By 1782 the Volunteers had leveraged their bearing of arms and the British situation for political concessions into at least nominal Irish sovereignty from the English Parliament, though this was not to last.

¹³ Alexander Pirie, *A Discourse on the Eight Chapter of the First Book of Samuel* (1794), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, iv.

¹⁴ Pirie, *A Discourse on the Eight Chapter of the First Book of Samuel*, 1.

All manner of Presbyterian congregants and ministers became active in the Volunteer movement. The ultra-orthodox Presbyterian, and later American Seceder, Thomas Ledlie Birch, was the principle organizer of the Saintfield Light Infantry Volunteer company. He went on to be the chaplain of the United Irish forces in County Down.¹⁵ Covenanters sympathized with the Volunteer movement as well. Cameronian elements were prevalent in the Drumbracken Volunteers. The church pastor served as a Captain.¹⁶

The Volunteer movement was in retrospect the high water mark of radical success in Ireland. They succeeded in obtaining the repeal of Poyning's Law, which had made the Irish Parliament a subservient body to England. This, and gaining the right to free trade, were significant concessions by the British Parliament to Irish autonomy and displayed just how desperate the British situation was as it waged war with America, France and Spain. Many radicals remained highly skeptical that the gains had gone far enough. These frustrations germinated into the later protests of the 1790s.¹⁷ The movement had an important effect on both mainstream Presbyterians and the fringe in Ireland. All across Ulster, Covenanters, Seceders and

¹⁵ Peter Gilmore, "Minister of the Devil: Thomas Ledlie Birch, Presbyterian rebel in exile," in David A. Wilson and Mark G. Spencer, eds., *Ulster Presbyterians in the Atlantic World: Religion, Politics and Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 68-69.

¹⁶ Samuel Ferguson, *Brief Biographical Sketches of some Irish Covenanting ministers: who laboured during the latter half of the eighteenth century* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1897), 42.

¹⁷ Maurice R. O'Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1965), 168-210.

Presbyterians mobilized under arms together for the first time since their ancestors fought in the Covenanter armies in the 1640s-1660s. It remained to be seen if such unity could be sustained.

Radicalism

The political radicalism which grew out of the American and French revolutions in the 1770s-1780s owed much to the Lockean tradition, even as it went beyond it. The New Light hero Francis Hutcheson had himself advanced Lockean theory one step beyond Locke, arguing that the social contract could be broken if the utility of civil society was not actualized. If everything a society could be and was by God's calling supposed to be was not realized, the ruler had violated his calling to serve the common good. Such insights became pivotal in the formulations of Protestant resistance in Ireland in the 1780s.¹⁸

Even more foundational to the new radicalism were the works of Thomas Paine. Cheap editions of *Rights of Man* were advertised in Belfast throughout the revolutionary period.¹⁹ Like Paine, Irish revolutionary leaders were avowed disestablishmentarians. Toasts at a meeting of the Friends of the Liberty of the Press "to the Rights of the people" and "the effectual reform of all abuses" were followed up with "Religious Liberty, and No Toleration."²⁰ Toleration, that Lockean principle

¹⁸ McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution*, 16-17.

¹⁹ See for instance, *The Northern Star*, 25 April, 1792, 1.

²⁰ *The Northern Star*, 19-22 June, 1795, 2.

by which a state religion would tolerate its nearer cousins, was outdated in the Paineite radicalism that emphasized complete dichotomy between church and state.

Such radical disestablishment took on new meanings in pluralist Ireland. If no church was to be established, then all churches stood equal in the eyes of the state. The Catholic population could now be mobilized as a powerful political ally in any revolutionary movement. Irish radical and Thomas Paine disciple Theobald Wolfe Tone made the argument for Catholic-Protestant unity most famously in his 1791 pamphlet *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*. The circumstances for this unity were in many ways unique to the Irish situation, where both Presbyterians and Catholics had been long excluded from active civic participation. Fostered in the Volunteer movement, in which some Catholics served alongside Protestants for a nationalist cause, and aided by the growing Enlightenment rationalism of the Presbyterian elite, a new spirit of ecumenicism briefly flourished in late eighteenth century Ireland. Tone derided the belief “that the Catholics are ignorant, and therefore incapable of liberty.”²¹ Tone believed that Catholics were “born with capacities, pretty much like other men,” but that, like Presbyterians, “the iniquitous and cruel injustice of Protestant bigotry” had kept them from education and other advantages.²² A shared enmity for the Protestant regime in Ireland should be enough “for the wisdom and moderation of both parties to concede somewhat”

²¹ Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, 20.

²² Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, 20.

their old animosities and focus on their common enemy.²³ Tone's arguments pivoted on the unique political circumstances of Ireland. He made little attempt to discuss "the abstract right of the people to reform their Legislature; for, after PAINE, who will need, be heard on the subject?"²⁴

New Lights now proclaimed that Presbyterians, "so early in the field of toleration," might lead the new spirit of liberty in Ireland.²⁵ The Belfast Reading Society proclaimed that "Civil and religious Liberty is the birth-right of every human being" and that "doctrines of faith, and modes of worship can neither give nor take away the Rights of men; because opinion is not the object of Government." Religious opinions and worship "should be left to the judgment of God, and the decision of Conscience" because "Persecution, however it be disguised, is destructive of the equality of Men, and the most Sacred Laws of Nature." Therefore, they "rejoice with every virtuous and enlightened mind, as to the rapid progress which these principles have lately made."²⁶

Presbyterian-Catholic enmity did subside, especially in urban areas with small Catholic minorities.²⁷ Roman Catholic Father James McCary thanked the Protestants of Carrickfergus and Larne "who have contributed to the building of his Chapels of Carrickfergus and Ballygowne," and celebrated "our present peaceful"

²³ Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, 18.

²⁴ Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, 5.

²⁵ *The Northern Star*, 15-18 July 1796, 1.

²⁶ Belfast Reading Society, in *The Northern Star*, 28 January – February 1792.

²⁷ Areas of more equal demographics proved more prone to Catholic-Protestant strife and, consequently, better recruiting grounds for loyalists.

relationship.²⁸ The Saintfield Presbyterian congregation also contributed to the building of a local Catholic worship house because “they are fond of civil and religious *liberty* themselves, they would desire others to enjoy the same.”²⁹ When an anonymous letter was dropped near Kircubbin that threatened the local Catholics “with destruction,” the next day, “Protestants, Catholics, and Presbyterians, Clergy and Laity, met in the Meeting-house; heard the letters read; with indignation reprobated their author and object ...[and] entered more firmly into the bonds of brotherly affection and good neighborhood; and set the imp of hell to defiance.”³⁰ The radical newspaper, *The Northern Star* called “The Roman Catholics of Ireland” their “Friends, Countrymen, and Fellow-sufferers.”³¹

The new radicals were none-too-fond of the Covenanter emphasis on a Rutherfordian state. Covenanters were little better, they thought, than the illicit bargain between king and church against which they currently fought. In the words of one poet:

When royal rouges in cab’nets gather
And Rev. knaves connive together
A bony han’ o’ honest folk
They mak’ and think it but a joke
For lang the practice o’ the great
Was to conjoin the church and state³²

²⁸ *The Northern Star*, 21-25 January, 1792, 1.

²⁹ Birch, *Physicians Languishing Under Disease*, 43-44.

³⁰ *The Northern Star*, 8-11 February 1796, 3.

³¹ *The Northern Star*, 12-16 February, 1795, 4.

³² *The Tale of the Butter-Horn* (undated), “Pamphlets and Tracts by Covenanter Ministers,” Union Theological College, Belfast, 9.

Most radicals saw a sharp divergence between Covenanter rhetoric of the holy state and the new revolutionary rhetoric for a state of liberty, both of politics and conscience. In 1794 an eighty-year-old linen weaver and church sexton, the repetitively named Henry Henry, defended Presbyterian radicals against “the aspersions of the People Called Covenanters.”³³ Henry’s was a clear formulation of the new revolutionary radicalism on religion and state. “The religion of Jesus,” he argued, was “totally unconnected with all human policy and government, and Christ repeatedly declares, that his kingdom is not of this world.”³⁴ Nonetheless, another New Light insisted, because “the representatives derive their power from the voice of the people,”³⁵ ministers held a great public trust for the “improvement and virtue of [the] multitudes.”³⁶ They must teach the new Irish nation that “true patriotism stands on virtues as its base” and “inviolable attachment to truth and righteousness, are absolutely necessary to national prosperity; and that without them patriotism is

³³ Henry Henry, *An Address to the People of Conner Containing a Clear and Full Vindication of the Synod of Ulster from the Aspersions of the People Called Covenanters* (1794), Belfast Printed Books, Linenhall Library, Belfast.

³⁴ Henry Henry, *An Address to the People of Conner Containing a Clear and Full Vindication of the Synod of Ulster from the Aspersions of the People Called Covenanters* (1794), Belfast Printed Books, Linenhall Library, Belfast, 5-6.

³⁵ W.S. Dickinson, *Three Sermons on the Subject of Scripture Politics* (1793), Magee Pamphlet Collection 441, Union Theological College, Belfast, 19.

³⁶ W.S. Dickinson, *Three Sermons on the Subject of Scripture Politics* (1793), Magee Pamphlet Collection 441, Union Theological College, Belfast, 18.

a bubble, and religion only an empty name.”³⁷ New Lights advocated for “that liberal spirit in religion, which views the Redeemer as sole Lord in his own kingdom and all christians as *his* subjects, and accountable *to him alone in religious matters*.”³⁸ The church and state must be separate, with the ministers playing the role of intermediaries between the virtuous citizenry and their God, inculcating their public consciousness in ways that served the ends of a positive state but without actual government interference.

Such radicalism did not square easily with the Phanatick tradition. Covenanters were determined to see a holy, covenanted state. A Seceder minister proudly affirmed that his people were “from our Infancy taught the strongest Arguments against Popery.”³⁹ Yet for all the heady rhetoric of the new religious liberalism, the arguments ran precariously close to Covenanter rhetoric and illustrates the complexities and nearness of the two strains of argument. Like Covenanters, radicals believed that religion served a vital public role. Also like the Covenanters, religious disestablishmentarians were against the meddling of the civil power in the prerogatives of the church. Covenanters hated the idea of disestablishment, and disestablishmentarian radicals hated the tyrannical views of

³⁷ W.S. Dickinson, *Three Sermons on the Subject of Scripture Politics* (1793), Magee Pamphlet Collection 441, Union Theological College, Belfast, 19.

³⁸ W.S. Dickinson, *Three Sermons on the Subject of Scripture Politics* (1793), Magee Pamphlet Collection 441, Union Theological College, Belfast, 19.

³⁹ Clark, *New Light Set in A Clear Light*, 76.

Phanaticks. Both, however, shared a common enemy in the Anglican elite they resented for holding the reigns of power to church, state and society in Ireland. In the midst of such conflict, the collapsing of theological distinctions was far more likely to occur for the moment, regardless of the internal logical consistency of the two doctrines. Despite his theological animosities Seceder minister Thomas Clark admitted speaking to “several papists” who spoke to him about their souls’ states secretly. These ongoing audiences, he claimed, led them to later become “firm protestants.”⁴⁰ Regardless of the conversions, ongoing discussions were part of agrarian life in which official Presbyterian tenants and Catholic under-tenants lived and plowed in close proximity.

After the publication of Paine’s *Age of Reason* in the mid-1790s, Covenanter William Stavely lashed out against Deism and New Light rationalism that subsumed the Bible beneath the human intellect. Published in 1796, his *An Appeal to Light* was the most sustained Covenanter attack on Enlightenment rationalism in Ireland. Stavely called Paine’s new work “a book calculated to destroy all doctrines of divine revelation.”⁴¹ As Paine appealed to reason, so Stavely appealed to the light of divine revelation in an attempt to “comfort the weak in the faith that the Scriptures are a safe foundation to rest hope upon, both in life and at death, for a happy eternity.”⁴² Stavely disagreed vehemently with the trends in enlightenment deism, and believed

⁴⁰ Thomas Clark, “Farewell Letter,” 321.

⁴¹ Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, v.

⁴² Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, vi.

they had infected the larger body of moderate Presbyterianism with a tendency to replace the divine with the human. “They have set up what they call REASON (but very improperly) and it is come out to be their *golden calf*, before which they rejoice, and to which they give all their complimentary praises.”⁴³ Deists and New Lights alike believed that the “duties we owe either to God or man, that are impressed on their nature, [are] deducible therefore by their own reason.”⁴⁴ This was a new “sentiment adopted to exclude the use or benefit of divine revelation.”⁴⁵ The danger of setting up reason above revelation was that man now sat on the throne of God. “It is a sentiment that goes to advance human nature to the summit of infallibility, by allowing, whatever the mind says is right, must be so.”⁴⁶ This “deistical sentiment” was the root of Presbyterianism’s problems.⁴⁷ They had abandoned the field of revelation altogether.

Reason, Staveland argued, was not nearly so universal as its aficionados believed. “In some parts of the East Indies, the nature and reason of the inhabitants suggests to them that it is right for the living woman, voluntarily to consume herself on the same pile with the body of her dead husband,” he pointed out. In still other areas, “their nature and reason indicate to them, that it is right for the living woman

⁴³ Staveland, *An Appeal to Light*, 4.

⁴⁴ Staveland, *An Appeal to Light*, 10.

⁴⁵ Staveland, *An Appeal to Light*, 10.

⁴⁶ Staveland, *An Appeal to Light*, 10.

⁴⁷ Staveland, *An Appeal to Light*, 11.

to cohabit with the nearest kinsman to her dead husband.”⁴⁸ Stavely wondered if God had “impressed different and contrary things upon the minds of different nations? Or is reason in one nation, different from what it is in another?” Such a sentiment meant that “whole moral world would be turned into confusion, and the strong [would] devour the property of the weak without control.”⁴⁹ If God was so divided, God could not be consistent, and if inconsistent, could not be perfect.⁵⁰ In short, either reason was not reason, or God was not God.⁵¹ The underlying problem of the entire New Light experiment was that it jettisoned the lessons of the good old way. The new sensibility suffered from “the neglect of primitive scriptural, and true reformed discipline.”⁵² They had neglected the righteous community and the mechanisms that made for social order, theological purity and a just cause for resistance to the British state.

The great irony of Stavely’s rant against reason was that he was himself a disciple of Paine’s revolutionary rhetoric. As he noted of Paine himself, “Was my arm long enough, I would reach it over to the Gallic shore, and take you by the hand,

⁴⁸ Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, 12.

⁴⁹ Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, 18.

⁵⁰ Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, 12.

⁵¹ In true Rutherfordian fashion, Stavely believed that such beliefs were not protected by the liberty of conscience. “Every magistrate should, and every faithful minister ought, in their distinct spheres, endeavor to prevent, or will bring to deserved punishment, all persons who encourage deistical principles, as the same are destructive to both religious and civil society; and all printers who will publish either more openly or secretly, those tenets and principles as have a manifest tendency to destroy the true foundations of faith and hope and overturns the first principles of religious practices, ...” Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, 142.

⁵² Stavely, *An Appeal to Light*, 32.

as a friend to the liberties of men, and a pointed opposer of despots; but when you step out of your way, and attempts to destroy the foundations of faith, I must remonstrate against you.”⁵³ Stavelly was a strange ally for Paine and himself much derided by the establishment as one who was known, in the words of an antagonistic poet, to be:

A gaping, gaunting, straight-hair'd Pharisee
Who from a tent, with loud vociferation
Delivers Church and State to dire damnation.⁵⁴

Stavelly agreed with Paine's conclusions but believed he got the theological mathematics wrong.

Ideologically there was no reason for Covenanters and New Lights to unite. Yet they did . The vast theological differences between Phanaticks and New Lights in matters theological masked close ties politically. New Licht theology's emphasis on non-subscription was put forward as a case of the rights of individual conscience. Its great intellectual debt was to John Locke's theories of religious toleration. Specifically, New Lights proffered the argument that neither church nor state could couple a profession of faith, that is, they could not create faith by fiat. Pressed to a logical conclusion this doctrine undermined the union of church and state Covenanters cherished.⁵⁵ On the ground, however, the Covenanters and New Lights

⁵³ Stavelly, *An Appeal to Light*, 60n.

⁵⁴ Thuermer, "The Belfast laugh," 73.

⁵⁵ McBride, "When Ulster Joined Ireland," 69-70.

both opposed the visible signs of crown power in Ireland, and the presence of Episcopal bishops was for both a unifying point of frustration. New Lights were as avowed Protestants as were Covenanters, and the tie between Catholicism and absolutism was still very strong in the popular political rhetoric of both sides. Liberty was the foundation of both sides' political antagonism, and the presence of Anglican bishops smacked of Rome to both sides. What Tone and Staveland agreed on was anti-papery, the foundation of both forms of Presbyterian radicalism.⁵⁶

Theorist George Rude has given a model for the collision of competing ideologies to create new ones in the crucible of revolution. At the lowest levels of society, peasant protest language is met with higher forms of revolutionary dialogue. Although the amalgam of the two may be confusing or contradictory, neither group leaves quite the way it arrived. This can be said to hold true of the lower orders of Covenanter and Seceders who flirted with the Revolutionary age of the 1760s-1800. At once attracted to the revolutionary spirit and repulsed by its deism and religious latitudinarianism, Phanatics became increasingly republican and less autocratic in their view of religion and the state.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ McBride, "When Ulster Joined Ireland," 67, 85. The most important divide between the two probably had its root in urbanity vs. rural religion, as noted in Chapter VI.

⁵⁷ Rude, *Ideology and Popular Protest*, 28-31.

Presbyterianism in the late eighteenth century had an “eclectic radical tradition” that encapsulated various theological outlooks, some shared and others divergent.⁵⁸ British Protestants had always associated popery with tyranny, and Catholics with oppression. Those willing to subsume their sacred rights of conscience beneath the authority of a distant bishop, the thinking went, were surely not ready for political participation, and would be all the more tools of tyrants if they were included. But after the French Revolution the French, that most Catholic of people and the traditional enemy of Protestant Britain, had overturned both monarch and prelate. British Presbyterians might not agree with every action, but the very fact that the French people had risen up over the abuses of the elite and against tyranny challenged traditional assumptions. Agitations abroad fueled agitations at home. The Dublin Catholic Committee had issued a proclamation that the Pope could not interfere between ruler and subjects, effectively claiming an arena for Catholic inclusion into the political process. This expedient was an attempt by Catholic leaders to align with the growing nationalist spirit in Ireland. After Irish Volunteer agitation led by Henry Grattan led to concessions by the British government at the end of the American conflict, the Volunteers took on an increasingly nationalist flavor. When Prime Minister William Pitt pushed for Catholic emancipation in Ireland, it caused divisions within the Protestant militia. In 1793, with the threats of

⁵⁸ I.R. McBride, “When Ulster Joined Ireland: Anti-Popery, Presbyterian Radicalism and Irish Republicanism in the 1790s” *Past & Present*, No. 157 (Nov., 1997), 91.

a French war looming, the British disarmed the Volunteer movement. In the background of all of this was the French Revolution. With the announcement of coming regicide in Paris, the British government had joined forces with Catholic empires to restore a Catholic king to an anti-papal, anti-tyrannical state. In the minds of many Presbyterians and Phanticks, Protestant England had joined forces with anti-Christ. In such an environment, it was possible that the British state was more popish than common Catholics, who were themselves agitating at home and abroad for political independence and equality. As Stavely himself noted, "One of the most glorious, most inviting, and most encouraging characters of the true God," was "that he is no respecter of persons."⁵⁹ Class and nationalism were increasingly strong bonds and temporary counterweights to British loyalty. These points of contact between the fringe and radicalism were socially located in the agrarian violence of the 1780s and ideologically inhabited the millennial rhetoric of the revolutionary age.

The first point of contact between Phanaticks and radicals came in the form of agrarian protests. The agrarian protest movements that swept through Ireland in the late eighteenth century were responses to perceived assaults on customary privileges of land tenure.⁶⁰ Ulster tenant rights moved through a historical

⁵⁹ William Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured; or, the Lamb's Conquest Illustrated* (Belfast: 1795), Belfast Printed Books, Linenhall Library, Belfast, iii.

⁶⁰ S.J. Connolly has argued that agrarian campaigns, as violent as they were, were not attempts to upend the social ladder. They were attempts to demand from

transition in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Originally founded and supported through longstanding social relationships between landholder families and tenant families, over the eighteenth century land rights transitioned into agrarian capitalist arrangements. Because of low profit margin on lands and the need to keep ever-moving tenants in place, leases had often been offered on lands for twenty-one, thirty-one or even fifty years in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.⁶¹ Especially after the 1770s, the right to renew a lease ceased to be based on previous family tenure, leases became shorter, and were grounded in the simple ability to make the land pay. This led to inevitable tensions and demands from yeomen farmers for political representation in Parliament that would offset the loss of power they experienced in the face of an increasingly consumer driven landholding pattern.⁶²

Displaced tenants had their food supply disrupted, and many felt the wealthy were upending the moral economy that allowed free use of open lands. Irish-Protestant Anglican landholders had long maintained a paternalistic ethos about their privileged social position. One elite Anglican in County Down urged his son to “Regard your tenants as part of your own family; you live by their labour, therefore let them live comfortably by their industry. But if they become idle and dishonest,

social superiors the behaviors of traditionally expectation. Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 130.

⁶¹ R.J. Dickinson, *Ulster Emigration to Colonial America, 1718-1775*, reprint (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1996), xi.

⁶² Martin W. Dowling, *Tenant Right and Agrarian Society in Ulster* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999), 82-83.

and you can't reform them, get quit of them as soon as you can."⁶³ Now, traditional Anglican claims to paternalism fell flat in the new economic pressures and unsettled traditional relationships at the heart of the land system in Ireland, leaving tenants feeling as if custom had been jettisoned in the pursuit of profit. In a country already stratified socially, it created a situation ripe for bottom-up struggles with appeals not unlike that of the Covenanters and Seceders. Poor and middling agrarian rebels began to organize in the countryside and towns. These protests went through various phases across the island, generally concentrated regionally and with no central structure. Before the 1780s were over, Ireland had seen the rise of clandestine groups such as the Defenders, the White Boys, the Oakboys, and the Steelboys, among others.⁶⁴ Often these groups included secret oath taking, clandestine night raids, and general menacing of the elite interests in society. The Whiteboys took their name from the bleached white shirts they wore at night, so they could see one another as they tore down the fences enclosing the lands. This leveling aspect of their groups was at the heart of their social meaning. Though economic factors drove their actions, social and cultural forces shaped those actions and caused them to take the form of anti-elite, anti-modern, communal agrarian

⁶³ Michael Ward to his son (1738) as quoted in Connolly, *Religion, Law and Power*, 129.

⁶⁴ Of the various groups, most were Protestant dominated. Only the White Boys were predominately Catholic.

protests. Their anti-authoritarian appeal, ritualized protest, and secret meetings bore resemblances to Covenanters that did not go unnoticed by the laity.⁶⁵

The Oakboys, also known as the Hearts of Oak, a reference to the oak twigs worn in their hats, appeared on the Ulster scene in 1763. They arose over a dispute regarding county cess (taxation) for new roads. The Oakboys were overtly militaristic, with parades of soldiers marching through the streets. Another movement sprang up between 1769-1772, when a rise in the re-letting rates for farms prompted another outbreak, but this time involving Protestants. Across Ulster, from Belfast to Derry to Tyrone, night raids on landed Anglican estates were reported. Called the Steelboys, or Heart of Steel, Covenanters and Seceders took part in these commoner assaults on the elite. It became something of an open secret that the dissenting ministers could not restrain their congregations from taking part. The Strabane Seceder ministers were forced to publish an open letter appealing to their own people. "What species of iniquity have not these men, many of whom to our great regret, we find to be of our own religious persuasion, been guilty of?" They had, "under pretense of redressing grievances," been burning houses, destroying corn and hay, and put "harmless and inoffensive cattle to agonizing tortures." Worse than cattle torturers, some were murderers and thieves and had leveraged the fear of their cruelty to exhort "unlawful oaths which have led

⁶⁵ Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in late eighteenth century Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 33-45.

to perjury in those who were under the hard necessity of taking them.”⁶⁶ These oaths may have regarded financial transactions in the local economy, but they might also have been religious oaths reminiscent of the old Covenants.

One Episcopal eyewitness of the County Armagh troubles believed Oak and Steel boys to be at the heart of the matter, aided and abetted by “general Whiskey” and “captain Fanatic.”⁶⁷ Covenanters and Seceders were fanatics *par excellence* to any establishment mind, though which side they might have taken is complicated. Catholic Defenders chose a dissenting protestant as their captain, very likely a Covenanter or Seceder. The Presbyterian minister William Campbell wrote to the Earl of Charlemont that the violence was “perpetrated, by a low set of Fellows, who Call themselves Protestant Dissenters and who with Guns and Bayonets, and Other Weapons Break Open the House of the Roman Catholics.”⁶⁸ To any Presbyterian minister, Protestant dissenters of the lowest order may well have been a reference to the Covenanter and Seceder malcontents in groupings around south Armagh and Monaghan. Campbell certainly attempted to separate middle class Presbyterians

⁶⁶ Smyth, *Men of No Property*, 35; “A serious Address from the Presbytery of Strabane to the several congregations under their care,” *Belfast News-Letter*, March 24, 1772, Belfast Central Newspaper Library, Belfast.

⁶⁷ J. Byrne, *An impartial account of the late late disturbances in the county of Armagh* (1784), Reprinted in David W. Miller, *Peep O’ Day Boys and Defenders: selected documents on the County Armagh disturbances* (Belfast: The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1990), , 13.

⁶⁸ Rev. William Campbell to Earl of Charlemont (8 February 1788), reprinted in David W. Miller, *Peep O’ Day Boys and Defenders: selected documents on the County Armagh disturbances* (Belfast: The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1990), 49.

from being tarred with the brush. "Men of middling rank among us," he assured the government, "and the Presbyterian ministers particularly," had done all in their power to "suppress the spirit of riot."⁶⁹ Likewise, an Anglican rector in County Tyrone believed the Heart of Oak movement to be "the spawn of Scottish covenanters." Similar approbations of Covenanter loyalty were made regarding the Heart of Steel Boys, called "members of the Holy League and Covenant, commonly denominated Covenanters."⁷⁰ Such activities were reminiscent of the last major agrarian uprising in eighteenth century Scotland in 1724 where the Hebronite Covenanters had taken an active part in an anti-enclosure Leveler riots in Galloway.⁷¹

The second point of contact between Phanaticks and radicals was an ideological one. The onrushing sense of the coming millennium spurred on orthodox engagement with radicalism and gave Covenanters of all stripes a way to reconcile their phanatick sensibility with the new radicalism. The emphasis on a coming global judgment of God gave a sense of common cause to the disparate groups of Irish revolutionaries.⁷² Covenanters and Seceders had maintained a language of dissent in their confessional idiom since at least the seventeenth

⁶⁹ Rev. William Campbell to Rev. Benjamin McDowell, 18 August 1788 reprinted in David W. Miller, *Peep O' Day Boys and Defenders: selected documents on the County Armagh disturbances* (Belfast: The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1990), 65-66.

⁷⁰ As quoted in McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 79-80.

⁷¹ Kidd, "Conditional Britons," 1158.

⁷² E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 2.

century. Even as they engaged new languages of protest, like Thomas Paine's, they stuck doggedly to their older ones, like the Westminster Confession.⁷³ The language of the millennium, when Christ would come to judge the world and restore perfect order, allowed both groups to see the revolutionary age in theologically powerful terms that meshed with their own religious and cultural interpretations.

Both the Burgher Seceders and the Reformed Presbytery issued proclamations for fasting in the 1790s, believing the events on the continent were positive signs of the coming end times. The chief sign of God's coming was the overthrowing of evil oppressors by the people, who resembled the mobilized righteous community. Both groups connected the struggle between Christ and Anti-Christ that was visibly identified with struggle between liberty and despotism.⁷⁴

Fringe Presbyterians of all stripes were caught up in the millennial rhetoric. Covenanter minister William Gibson of County Antrim was said to hold six-hour services in which "his texts of scripture were always taken from the book of Revelation" and foretold "the immediate destruction of the British monarchy."⁷⁵ William Staveland believed that, in the French Revolution, "the fetters of civil and

⁷³ Olivia Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791-1819* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), vii.

⁷⁴ *Causes for a Fast and Reasons for a Fast*, Union Theological College, Belfast.

⁷⁵ Adams, *The Printed Word and the Common Man*, 89. See also Myrtle Hill, "Watchmen in Zion: Millennial Expectancy in Late eighteenth-century Ulster," in Crawford Gibbon and Andrew Holmes, *Protestant millennialism, evangelicalism, and Irish society, 1790-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 38-39.

ecclesiastical despotism are being broken asunder.”⁷⁶ The fall of the French monarchy was one in a series of events, vials of “various judgments were poured down on those combined enemies,” begun by the Reformation, foretelling the coming conquest of Christ’s kingdom over the world.⁷⁷ Other “vials” remained to be poured out before “the happy Millennium arises.”⁷⁸

For Stavely, the coming millennium was a righteous judgment on ungodly monarchies. The history of kings was the history of opposition to Christ. “See what has been the exercise and employment of almost all the potentates, in the eastern and western worlds, for these seventeen hundred years past; especially has it not been one continued round of opposition to him who is Lord of lords and King of kings.”⁷⁹ Monarchs were the “the oppressing tyrants of the world”⁸⁰ who had been “monopolizing their substance and oppressing their consciences.”⁸¹ For Stavely, this was a result of their uncovenanted state. Such ungodly rulers would “degenerate into unfeeling tyrants, and such people will grow not only discontented, but to proceed to curse their king, and their God, and look upward for new deliverance.”⁸²

⁷⁶ William Stavely in Robert Fleming, *A Discourse on the Rise and Fall of Antichrist, wherein the Revolution in France and the Downfall of the Monarchy in that Kingdom are Distinctly Pointed Out* (Belfast: 1795), Belfast Printed Books, Linenhall Library, Belfast, vi.

⁷⁷ Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 36.

⁷⁸ Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 37.

⁷⁹ Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 55.

⁸⁰ Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 56.

⁸¹ Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 56.

⁸² Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 57. Stavely mentions Hosea 8.4.

In 1795 Covenanters republished *A Discourse on the Rise and Fall of Antichrist, wherein the Revolution in France and the Downfall of the Monarchy in that Kingdom are Distinctly Pointed Out*, by Englishman Robert Fleming. According to Fleming, “The events of the present day have a strong tendency to support an opinion held by many men” that “the prophetic breathings of these holy men, who, in the early ages of the world, spoke of events that were to come as if they were already past, do in many particulars allude to the present age.”⁸³ Similarly, an anonymous contributor to the *Northern Star* newspaper asked rhetorically, “Has the present contest in which the World is about to be engaged, any of the striking features of the battle in which the beast and his party were to be totally overthrown?”⁸⁴ Across the theological spectrum, people were increasingly sure it did.

Stavely was wonderfully imprecise in his objects: be it Satan, France, or any unrighteous king who “robbed the commonwealth” of its liberties.⁸⁵ Therein lay the key to amalgamating radicalism and Phanaticism. They opposed the same enemy in the coming judgment. Stavely believed it was possible “to adapt and improve THOMAS PAINE’s word, without adverting that *freedom of speaking* peculiar to an *American*, and that *infidelity* peculiar to a *Quaker*.” Paine and Stavely could agree that, when it came to absolutist monarchies, “They shall make war with the LAMB, and the LAMB shall overcome them; for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and

⁸³ Fleming, *A Discourse on the Rise and Fall of Antichrist*, ix.

⁸⁴ Myrtle Hill, “Millennial Expectancy in Late 18th-Century Ulster,” 40.

⁸⁵ Stavely, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 64.

they that are with him are called, and chosen and faithful.”⁸⁶ In a twist of meaning, it was the Roman states of France, Spain and others who were in rebellion against the Kingdom of God. Those who ceased to support them, that is, those who rose up in rebellion against France, had in fact “laid down the weapons of their rebellion.”⁸⁷ The obligation of resistance for Phanaticks was not a principle of popular consent. It was a theory of divine will. God demanded resistance to an uncovenanted state.

Such basic agreement must be the product of the mind of God. As another commentator saw it, “That philosophy should have contributed so remarkably to diffuse a spirit of energy, and lent such an active hand for pulling down the Babel-towers of antichristian despotism, and that infidelity in the present time should by accident be combined with the spirit of liberty and reform, is an instance of the wisdom, and part of the admirable plan of Him who is so wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.” He likened New Lights and Deists to the pagan “artificers of Tyre,” artisans who were employed to build the temple of God in Jerusalem.⁸⁸ The popularity of their heterodox ideas served as axes cutting the root of tyranny down. Surely, the reasoned, God must be in control of wielding such a weapon.

The widespread popularity of millennialism allowed theological distinctions to collapse in ways otherwise impossible. Scottish Covenanter preacher Alexander Peden’s prophecies that a French army would march into Scotland because of a

⁸⁶ Staveland, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, v.

⁸⁷ Staveland, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 22.

⁸⁸ Chancellor, *A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Times*, 21.

“broken, burnt and buried covenant,” would be pressed into service for the United Irishmen and read aloud in public gatherings of Covenanters, Old Lights, New Lights, and Catholics.⁸⁹ Peden’s *Life and Prophecies* became wildly popular in 1790s Ireland, perhaps second only to Paine’s writings.⁹⁰ Thomas Ledlie Birch, the Old Light Presbyterian, was also swept up in the millennial fervor, noted apocalyptic events in “America, in Turkey, in Germany, in Great Britain and Ireland and France.”⁹¹ In Birch’s “own humble judgment” he was sure that “Antichrist, or the Beast,” by which he meant the “spiritual tyranny in the Christian and Mahometan Worlds” would fall across Europe and the millennium would begin within “*Fifty-five Years* from this date.”⁹² Birch’s 1848 date failed to usher in the millennial reign of Christ, but he was not alone in proffering dates for the end times.⁹³ Stavelly was slightly less optimistic, suggesting the end of times coming sometime near 1926.⁹⁴

Millennialism was a large platform of agreement amongst radicals and phanaticks in Ireland. For them, the French Revolution had set in motion events

⁸⁹ J.R.R. Adams, *The Printed Word and the Common Man: Popular Culture in Ulster 1700-1900* (Belfast: The Institute for Irish Studies, The Queen’s University of Belfast, 1987), 88.

⁹⁰ McBride, “When Ulster Joined Ireland,” 90.

⁹¹ Thomas Ledlie Birch, *The Obligation Upon Christians*, Union Theological College, Belfast, 29.

⁹² Birch, *The Obligation Upon Christians*, 26.

⁹³ David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), 116. By the nineteenth century Birch and most of his followers had immigrated to America. The most significant event to occur there in 1848 was the election of Zachary Taylor as President, which no one would mistake for the coming of Christ.

⁹⁴ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 11. Little of historical interest happened in Ireland in 1926, either.

that would lead to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. This was an event Covenanters had been trying to initiate since 1637. That Birch, the ultra-orthodox, Dickson, the New Light, and Stavelly the Covenanter could agree on this says much about the political adaptability of religious rhetoric in the heated climate of Ireland's 1790s.⁹⁵

Not all Phanaticks' experiences with radicalism was so straightforward. The Relief Act in 1782 began the process of bonding Seceder ministers to loyalism by allowing Seceders to take oaths according to their own peculiarities. No more would Seceders like Thomas Clark be forced into jail time for their theological squabbles regarding the definition of loyalty. As one relieved letter updating Scottish Brethren put it, "It is our unspeakable mercy that we have free exercise of our religion, without fear of imprisonment, fines or unjust impositions upon our consciences to which even some of our body were exposed a few years ago in this isle. As the Test Act is repealed, the Marriage of Dissenters valid in law, and the scriptural mode of swearing allowed to Seceders, except in criminal cases and to qualify for offices under Government."⁹⁶ The political allies who brought about that reform were of great assistance again in 1784, procuring a share of the *regium donum* for Seceder ministers.⁹⁷ However this concession came at a price. In the

⁹⁵ Myrtle Hill, "Millennial Expectancy in Late 18th-Century Ulster," 36-37.

⁹⁶ Letter to the Associate Synod of Scotland, quoted in Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 162-163.

⁹⁷ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 106. See also, Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 159-163.

1784 parliamentary election Seceder ministers came out in favor of the establishment interests of Lord Kilwarlin. Kilwarlin, vocally opposed by reform-minded Presbyterians, rewarded Seceders by pressing through a royal stipend for their ministers. This had the unintended consequence of beginning to heal the infamous Burgher-Antiburgher breach, since both sides had to meet regularly to distribute the money.⁹⁸

One critic of the *Regium Donum* for Seceders likened its effect on their zeal to “a Butter-horn” used by highwaymen. When “thrown to the watchdogs, by which they might be enticed; partly by the taste, and partly by the smell; such dogs kept silent while [the robbers] carried off their master’s goods.” Similarly, government officials had used the *Regium Donum* to “silence the watchmen of Zion.”⁹⁹ To be sure, some Seceder ministers harbored anti-revolutionary tenets before the *regium*

⁹⁸ The *regium donum* had a long and complicated history in Ireland. The state used this benefice to assure loyalty from dissenting groups, and acceptance of the stipend from the government was seen to inculcate Presbyterian clergy from the control of their laity. However, clergy often used Presbyterian loyalty as its own kind of political chess piece, especially the legacy of the Siege of Derry, to remind the crown that they were a valuable asset not to be taken lightly. The first *regium donum* of 600 pounds came in 1672. In 1691 King William renewed it in recognition of Presbyterian loyalty at 1200 pounds, roughly 15 pounds per minister. In 1714 there was a temporary stoppage under Queen Anne and the loyalists, as noted in Chapter VII, but George I reinstated it later the same year. In 1718 the allotment rose to 1600 pounds plus an extra 400 pounds to English Dissenters who swore loyalty oaths. This excluded Seceders and Covenanters. In 1784 the amount rose to 2600 pounds to the Presbyterians, 400 pounds to English Dissenters in and around Dublin, and 500 pounds to the Seceder ministers. See J.C. Beckett *Protestant Dissent in Ireland*, 15.

⁹⁹ *The Tale of the Butter-Horn* (undated), “Pamphlets and Tracts by Covenanter Ministers,” Union Theological College, Belfast, iii.

donum. Seceder minister John Rogers of Monaghan voted against the Volunteer overture to the Catholics.¹⁰⁰ However, in the popular mind the moment called into question the traditional responsiveness of Seceder ministers to their laity.

Why did the Seceder ministers pursue such a course? The answer seems to have been that they were quite simply broke. Overseeing generally poorer congregations anyway, they were having tremendous difficulty obtaining the promised compensations from their church members. Critics had long noted that “not a few Voluntary congregations, are in fact meetings of creditors.” The people who gave their money to the church expected obedience from their pastor to traditional lay understandings of the role of vital piety.¹⁰¹ This had always been an area to which Seceders had appealed rather than disparaged, and now their status as the truest representatives of the good old cause was placed in jeopardy. William Stavelly wrote to America that the “Clergy of both Seceding bodies was for years entirely supported by the people whom they served,” but they were brought to corruption by “Observing their neighbors enjoying the sweets of royal munificence they longed to reap in the same field.” He proudly noted that true Covenanters “have been and are supported by the people to whom they ministers; they live by the alter where they serve.”¹⁰² In 1792 “A Presbyterian” commented that, “Clergy of

¹⁰⁰ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 81.

¹⁰¹ Matthews, *An Account of the Regium Donum*, 54. See also Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 165-194.

¹⁰² William Stavelly, Fragment of a letter to the American Synod, 7 Nov. 1810, Correspondence with America, No. 2, 2.

every denomination, have too often been made the dupes of power and the tools of intrigue." Concerning "a late grant made to the Presbyterian ministers of this kingdom," he believed "the purity of the motives of government, in granting this augmentation of R.D. has been called in question, and there is too much reason to fear, that it will answer the purpose for which it seems to be intended."¹⁰³ The popular image of Seceder ministers as representatives of the people was an open question heading into the critical conflicts with the state that dominated Ireland in the late 1790s.

Rebellion

The political firestorms of the 1770s-1780s heated up in Ireland in the 1790s, culminating in the failed Irish Rebellion of 1798. The United Irishmen sought to unify Catholics and Protestants under a nationalistic Irish movement. With French naval and military support, it was hoped that Ireland could emulate the successes of the American and French democratic revolts. The invasion failed, thanks in no small part to the British commander Lord Cornwallis, who had surrendered to the American army at Yorktown in 1781. Though the revolution in Ireland lasted only for one fitful summer, it carried far-reaching implications to Irish society and political life. One of its many effects occurred at the Presbyterian fringe. It was in this period that the political rhetoric of religious and civil liberty, agrarian

¹⁰³ A Presbyterian, *The Northern Star*, May 26-May 30 1792, 3.

unrest and millennialism came together in the United Irish movement and conjoined two radicalisms: one new and emerging, the other old, phanatical, and changing.

America cast a large shadow over the island of Ireland.¹⁰⁴ Between 1700-1776, 250,000-400,000 Irish emigrants left for the mainland American colonies. At least three-quarters of them were Protestants, mostly Presbyterian. The push of economic factors in Ireland, combined with the pull of cheap land drove the Irish immigrant experience. Emigration picked up pace again after the American Revolution. In early April 1792 ship notices in the *Northern Star* advertised passage to America, one ship for Philadelphia and New York, and others bound to Newcastle, Wilmington and Philadelphia. The Brigantine Charlotte was advertised to set sail for Charleston and sought passengers. The Captain's "care in laying in plenty of good Provisions and Water; and his humane treatment of his Passengers is well-known." Such advertisements were typical in each edition of the paper. This was buttressed by periodic "thank you" advertisements to captains from travelers safely arrived in America. Such advertisements littered the papers of the *Belfast News-Letter*, *The Northern Star*, and every major newspaper in port towns like Belfast and Derry.¹⁰⁵ Waves of immigrants in turn created vibrant Atlantic kinship networks as increasing numbers of Irish Presbyterians corresponded with relatives in an active

¹⁰⁴ For a comprehensive look at Irish immigration to America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford, 1985).

¹⁰⁵ *The Northern Star*, 7-11 April, 1792, 1; 18-21 April 1792, 1.

transatlantic communication that lasted throughout the colonial crisis of the 1760s-1770s.

Revolutionary Ireland absorbed the American experience through letters and books. Copies of the David Ramsay's *The History of the American Revolution* were regularly advertised as printed in Belfast.¹⁰⁶ According to one editorialist, "the ties of consanguinity which exist between Ireland and America in particular are more than common anxiety here respecting the relation of our transatlantic brethren."¹⁰⁷ They shared common bonds of culture, kinship and ideology. News from America was so valued, as were updates on the Revolutions of Europe, that the names of every congressman and Senator elected in America was listed by state.¹⁰⁸ One report even included the words of toasts at a fourth of July feast in America. Tribute was made to the people and the law," "the people of France," and "the spirit of seventy-five and ninety-two." The toasts included the wish that "the tyrants and traitors of all countries be punished by the establishment of the happiness which they wish to betray or destroy" and "in complaining of the temporary evils of revolutions, may we never forget that the greater evils of monarchy and aristocracy are perpetual."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ *The Northern Star*, May 11- May 15, 1793, 3.

¹⁰⁷ *The Northern Star*, 29 September-2 October, 1794, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *The Northern Star*, 14-18 January, 1796.

¹⁰⁹ *The Northern Star*, 10-14 August, 1793, 2. The paper reads 4 June but probably means 4 July.

The United Irish agenda in the 1790s was built on top of the revolutions in America and France. One man, identifying himself as “An Old Volunteer,” from the 1770s, urged young revolutionaries to “be sure of a RADICAL PARLIAMENTARY REFORM - an EQUAL REPRESENTATION of the PEOPLE of IRELAND - and EQUAL LAWS for the rich and poor.”¹¹⁰ The United Irishmen put forth an agenda for equal representation, including dividing the nation into three hundred electorates with one representative apiece. Every twenty-one year-old male that “Actually dwelt, or maintained a family establishment in any Electorate for six months” should be given the franchise.¹¹¹ These tributes to the democratic revolutions were spelled out in the *United Irish Catechism*.

Question: What have got in your hand?

Answer: A green bough.

Question: Where did it first grow?

Answer: In America.

Question: Where did it bud?

Answer: In France.

Question: Where are you going to plant it?

Answer: In the Crown of Great Britain.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *The Northern Star*, 2-5 February, 1795, 3.

¹¹¹ *The Northern Star*, 17-20 February 1794, 3.

¹¹² *United Irish Catechism*.

Although the Irish experience resulted in complete defeat, it did succeed in temporarily joining together Phanticks and radicals in a quest for political independence and liberal democratic reform.

The merging of the two strands was not the combining of an areligious movement with a religious one. The United Irishmen leaned heavily on Presbyterian and left-leaning Anglican clergymen to popularize their views in the run up to revolution. Revolutionaries proudly noted that ministers “interrupt the repose of the pulpit, and shakes one world with the thunder of the other; the preacher’s desk becomes the throne of light.”¹¹³ Waxing eloquent, one noted of the Protestant preacher that “The curse of Swift” was upon him, “To have been born an Irishman, to have been a man of genius, and to have been made for the good of his country.”¹¹⁴

There is no doubt that, from a religious perspective, the 1798 Rebellion was dominated by New Light Presbyterians. Twenty-seven New Light ministers and students of theology were implicated in the 1798 conspiracy. In comparison, three Old Lights, one Covenanter and no Seceder preachers were proven to be involved. In light of such numbers, it may seem incredulous to argue that Covenanters and Seceders were largely sympathetic and, in many cases, actively involved in the

¹¹³ *The Northern Star*, 21-25 January, 1792, 1.

¹¹⁴ *The Northern Star*, 21-25 January, 1792, 1.

rebellion. But this is exactly what happened.¹¹⁵ Yet as much as is made of the New Light involvement with radicalism, almost half of the twenty ministers who participated in revolutionary politics writ large were Old Lights. It is doubtful there was a direct correlation between theological disputes and political loyalties.¹¹⁶

Less liberal clergy and their followers, like Thomas Ledlie Birch, were also movers in the rising revolutionary drama. Birch, who lived on “Liberty Hill,” made six attempts to become moderator of the General Synod. Despite having one of the Presbyterian’s largest congregations, he failed each time. He was too orthodox for the sentiments of most United Irishmen, and perhaps too anti-government as well. Yet Birch was intimately involved in the revolutionary movement. In 1797 eleven of his church members attacked a local government informant, and Birch showed up to support them at the trial. Himself arrested for inciting a mob to attack another informant, Birch was released on bail and his accuser was murdered days before trial, leaving the prosecution with no witness.¹¹⁷

The two poles of Presbyterianism, Enlightenment rationalism and Covenanter phanaticism, united around radicalism while many orthodox Presbyterians remained sidelined. This had been the product of decades of agrarian agitation, political rhetoric and millennial expectations built on centuries of cultural

¹¹⁵ McMillan, “The Subscription Controversy in Irish Presbyterianism,” 311, 320, 330-384.

¹¹⁶ Jim Smyth, *Men of No Property*, 91.

¹¹⁷ David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), 117.

transference through society meetings, holy fairs and worship experiences that assured members of the Presbyterian fringe of their unique place in the world and the coming judgment of an unrighteous state. Ideas so closely related, as those of Phanaticism and Enlightenment era democratic movements were, allowed the conjoining of two radicalisms. Covenanters were not immune from this process of the “popular assimilation of abstract ideas” that pervaded Irish society in the late eighteenth century.¹¹⁸ In many ways, they were driven by it.

There is little doubt that Cameronian Covenanters were active in the 1798 Irish Rebellion. Despite their small size, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Covenanter laity were disproportionately involved compared to the rest of the population.¹¹⁹ The Covenanter problem with the United Irishmen was not their anti-government goals. It was that that they had secularized liberty.¹²⁰ When 1798

¹¹⁸ Smyth, *Men of No Property*, 3, “Popular ideology has been characterized as a compound of pre-existing ‘inherent’ elements and ideas ‘derived’ from outside. The first are based on folk-memory, custom and ‘common sense’ – popular estimates of ‘just’ rents or the right to land, for example, or in Ireland the sense of dispossession. The second consists of more sophisticated notions- in the 1790s the ‘Rights of Man’- imbibed from newspapers, from pulpits, from radical and conservative elites.”

¹¹⁹ In 1796 the United Society Covenanters had just 6 ministers and probably less than 10,000 Irish followers. They had only 20 congregations in 1800, but this is misleading as most religious connection was lived through the praying societies that remained isolated from established congregations. McBride, “When Ulster Joined Ireland,” 73.

¹²⁰ Terry Brotherstone, “Rethinking the Trajectory of Modern British History: an Ireland-Scotland approach” in Terry Brotherstone, Anna Clark and Kevin Whelan, *These Fissured Isles: Ireland, Scotland and the Making of Modern Britain 1798-1848* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2005), 57.

became the moment for rebellion, Covenanters could agree with the ends, justify the means, and wait for victory to sort out the divine drama of a coming millennium.¹²¹

Despite their small numbers, the Covenanter ministers were remembered by contemporaries as some of the United Societies' biggest supporters in Counties Antrim and Down. Their "potent amalgam of democracy and sectarianism" was effective in mobilizing agrarian people for revolt. The Duke of Rutland believed that they were the most divisive Presbyterians in Ireland and "in general very factious - great levellers and republicans."¹²² Two Covenanter ministers, James McKinney and a Rev. Gibson, both fled to America because of their United Irishman association. McKinney had organized a Volunteer company in the 1770s and written a sermon declared treasonous by the British government. Before he fled the country in 1793 he published a response to the thoughts of Thomas Paine in "A View of the Rights of God and Man." In it he argued that religion and politics were interwoven in Covenanter-like ways. Agreeing with many of Paine's ends, he challenged Paine to see that "common rights which humanity has been endowed" with came "by its bountiful author." As I.R. McBride has pointed out, McKinney was wrestling "to reconcile Paineite ideas with Calvinist theology." McKinney argued that he would not "give a shilling to bring about a revolution in any nation upon earth" if it was not for his belief that "Christianity will purify and support the rights of man, fond as I

¹²¹ E.W. McFarland, *Ireland and Scotland in the Age of Revolution: Planting the Green Bough* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 9.

¹²² Duke of Rutland as quoted in McBride, "When Ulster Joined Ireland," 73.

am of liberty.” Like Stavely, McKinney he was entering the same fight with different logic.¹²³ Such thinking was not McKinney’s alone. Two Covenanter theology students, John Black and Samuel Brown Wylie, were also forced to flee across the Atlantic under suspicion of involvement.¹²⁴

Some confusion regarding the Covenanters and 1798 stems from one newspaper publication in the 7-10 October, 1796, edition of the *Northern Star*. Published under the title *A Seasonable and necessary Information*, it was a pronouncement from Covenanter ministers aimed at informing the laity about how to handle the current political agitations. On its surface, the document reads as a declaration against political involvement in the 1790s activism. Because of its interpretive problems, it is important to quote the entire advertisement.

At a critical period, such as the present is, when the public mind is so much agitated, and so many false alarms in circulation, We, the Members of the reformed Church, called Presbyterian Dissenters (reproachfully called Mountain-men) hold it our duty to step forward and from conscience publically declare, that we hold in the highest abhorrence and detestation all tumultuous or disorderly meetings, and we utterly disclaim all connection with such, whether publically or privately held, where any thing is said or done that is prejudicial to the peace, the safety, or property of any individual or civil society. Done in the name of the Reformed Church in the Counties of Antrim and Down.¹²⁵

¹²³ James McKinney, “A View of the Rights of Man,” *The Covenanter* 1 (1831), 160; I.R. McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 102-3.

¹²⁴ Loughridge, *Covenanters in Ireland* (Belfast: Cameron Press, 1984), 43-49.

¹²⁵ *The Northern Star* (7-10 October, 1796), 3; even McBride interprets this as an admonition against involvement, but argues it was ignored, McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 102.

The notice is the only one of its kind in the radical publication aimed directly at one group of dissenting Presbyterians.

It is generally assumed that this rhetoric was an attempt to distance the Covenanters from the rising spirit of rebellion. If so, the decision to publish this account in the radical *Northern Star* suggests a wide Covenanter readership amongst the laity. Another interpretation is also possible and more probable. It is unlikely the *Northern Star* would have published an anti-reform motion by a conservative religious body, given its tendency to distance itself from such statements and religious quarrels. It is possible that the resolution focused not on the rising numbers of United Irishmen, but the encroachment of the loyalist Orange movement. Weeks before the Covenanter proclamation, Orangemen were reported to “rack and burn houses, drive innumerable families from their habitats, and barbarously destroy many of their fellow creatures.” The previous July the *Star* reported under the heading “Orange-Men” on attempts to “spread these associations into the Counties of Down and Antrim.” According to these reports, Orange-men were swearing not only to “exterminate the Catholics” but to “be true to King and Government.” These were the kinds of groups no Covenanter could join without violating their religious oaths. It is more likely that such Orange Order attacks were the assaults on peace, safety and property the Covenanters had in mind.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ *The Northern Star*, 4-9 July, p.2 and 7-10 October, 1796, 2.

Any study of the Covenanters in the Irish rebellion also runs up upon the enigmatic William Stavelly. Stavelly's sentiments against the British state, his beliefs in a coming millennial judgment, and his generally pro-revolutionary stance were well known. Stavelly himself did little to hide such leanings. During one of his sermons an onlooker stood up and interrupted the message screaming, "Treason, Treason!"¹²⁷ He had served as a captain with the Volunteers, contributed to the United Irishman newspaper *Northern Star*, and was a member of the revolutionary County Committee for Down. He was arrested for several months with no trial on the charge of concealing weapons in his Knockbracken meeting house in anticipation of the revolt. A Sunday service was broken up by government forces, and Stavelly was twice arrested.¹²⁸

In his writings, Stavelly proclaimed that he was "obliged to do all I can to help forward the salvation of men."¹²⁹ As always, for Covenanters the cause of Christ was "the cause of truth and liberty."¹³⁰ Stavelly implored all citizens to end their rebellion against King Jesus and "all his new covenant relations" and seek salvation both spiritually and politically.¹³¹ The language of spiritual warfare, the church militant, bled over easily into the language of Protestant struggle against tyranny. Sinful

¹²⁷ Samuel Ferguson, *Brief Biographical Sketches of some Irish Covenanting ministers: who laboured during the latter half of the eighteenth century* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1897), 33.

¹²⁸ Stavelly, it turns out, was not only involved in 1798 he had planned a raid to acquire weapons. See McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 103.

¹²⁹ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, iv.

¹³⁰ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 48.

¹³¹ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 66.

dominions “darkened the air of civil and religious liberty.”¹³² This was a useful, but not always self-conscious utility of the language of religious and civil liberty blended together. For Stavelly and those who followed him, revolution equated to a step of national salvation.

Stavelly joined the movement with what he felt were “only scripture arguments; these are the weapons of our warfare; these are not carnal, but through the divine blessing, they are mighty to pull down the strong holds of those powers, combined against the Lord of lords, and King of kings.”¹³³ The titles “Lord of lords and King of kings” signified a double meaning: a spiritual authority over the church and a temporal authority. The title displayed God’s “ample dominion over kingdoms, and those who rule them.”¹³⁴ By partaking in the ongoing revolutionary movement, Stavelly was being a good Phanatick. His rhetoric however, easily bled over into the language of radicalism. In words that came shockingly close to the thinking of Francis Hutcheson, Stavelly argued that “Generally the cause of all just war, is an infraction of public national faith pledged, or than an invasion of territory, or usurping of property, contrary to the faith of nations, or an impeding personal or national liberty, and closing up the rights of individuals, or a whole nation in and under the hatches of cruel despotism, accompanied with persecution, and

¹³² Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 19.

¹³³ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, iv.

¹³⁴ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 28.

sanguinary measures of domination.”¹³⁵ Stavelly and other Covenanters joined the ranks for their own reasons, but took part in revolutionary radicalism in ways and words similar to their less phanatick compatriots.

In captivity Stavelly proved less bold an advocate of revolution. When accused he claimed that he could not have joined the United Irishmen “because their principles are Deistical, their practice very immoral.” Like Israel in the Promised land, his role was to remain pure from “the people of the land, nor learn their ways.” Stavelly admitted that his own society members had become involved with the United Irishmen but claimed that he was powerless to stop them. Stavelly ministered to a friend named Orr at his execution for taking part in the rebellion. As in most cases, he led his friend and followers in singing the Psalms. Orr’s final words were “I die for a persecuted country; great Jehovah receive my soul; I die in the true faith of a Presbyterian.”¹³⁶

In 1802 Staveley was censured by the Scottish Reformed Presbytery for his part in “the Union Business” and his “association with Malignants.” In words that were more nationalist pride than submission, Staveley admitted to making “solemn declaration to co-operate with virtuous Irishmen of every description to obtain redress of Grievances.” He confessed to being in a “private meeting” and speaking “in an unthinkable manner some things of lifting up arms from Loyalists.” As proof

¹³⁵ Stavelly, *War Proclaimed and Victory Ensured*, 18.

¹³⁶ Samuel Ferguson, *Brief Biographical Sketches of some Irish Covenanting ministers: who laboured during the latter half of the eighteenth century* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1897), 49-58.

that there was more than repentance at work, when it came time for his admonishment, six lay-elders and another minister rose and asked to be admonished alongside Rev. Staveley. All were Irish.¹³⁷

Staveley's actual sacrifices were small. The lay people of his and other society meetings gave far more to the cause. Two covenanter laymen were executed as part of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. Both sung the Psalms on the way to their executions accompanied by a congregation of Covenanters. Mr. Orr sang Psalm 52. The other, a young weaver named Daniel English, sang Psalm 119. The songs connected the radical revolution to the Phantick fringe of the past century and a half of Covenanter lore. The minister who led the procession in both solemn occasions was William Staveley.¹³⁸

The Seceder experience with the revolutionary 1790s was more ambiguous than for other Covenanters. The Seceder ministers, bound to the British crown by oaths of loyalty and the controversially won *regium donum*, were not anxious to upend the social order. Seceder laity, meanwhile, proved to be anything but in lockstep with their ordained leadership.¹³⁹ The Age of Revolutions set in motion a

¹³⁷ William Staveley, *An Appeal to Light; or, The Tenets of Deists Examined and Disapproved*, 1796; Robinson, "Covenanters in Diaspora," 31; Reformed Presbyterian Synod, 1810-1822, 20 OCT 1802. I say here that "all were Irish" as a reflection of their growing sense of nationalism.

¹³⁸ Samuel Ferguson, *Brief Biographical Sketches of some Irish Covenanting ministers: who laboured during the latter half of the eighteenth century* (Londonderry: James Montgomery, 1897), , 49-58.

¹³⁹ In 1796 Seceders had 46 ministers and probably around 50,000 followers. McBride, "When Ulster Joined Ireland," 73.

series of debates about the nature of the Covenant obligation for Seceders, which remained unresolved well into the next century. Like other Covenanters, however, many Seceder laity in Ireland were swept up in the radicalism of the Atlantic revolutionary movements.¹⁴⁰

Seceder ministers officially prohibited congregants from participating in the Volunteer movement, though this seems a clear indication that such activity was occurring. Only two Seceder ministers became involved in agitation during the 1790s, and none were arrested for complicity in 1798. Most Seceder ministers publically declared for the government.¹⁴¹ There is, then, sufficient evidence to suggest that Seceders were not heavily involved in the 1798 Irish Rebellion.

Other, more compelling, evidence suggests otherwise. The *regium donum* caused great frustration for Seceder laity because it “renders the clergy too independent.”¹⁴² Seceders had long held that it was “better that order be sacrificed to conscience, than conscience to order.”¹⁴³ The Age of Revolutions was a time when just such choices had to be made, as the Irish Burghers acknowledged in 1791 by

¹⁴⁰ I.R. McBride has argued that the separate experience of Seceders and Covenanters in 1798 can be explained by diverging attractions to conversionist versus prophetic styles of religion. However this needlessly defines church members by their ministers, and assumes a diversion of religious sentiment that may be more mirage than lived experience. It makes more sense to attribute Seceder minister’s loyalism to exactly what contemporary accusers said, the *regium donum*. See McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 66.

¹⁴¹ McBride, “When Ulster Joined Ireland,” 73.

¹⁴² Matthews, *An Account of the Regium Donum*, 46.

¹⁴³ “One of Themselves,” *Candid Inquiry Into Some Points of Public Religion, or Animadversions on Existing Circumstances among Antiburgher Seceders* (1794), Reformed Presbyterian Historical Library, ii.

rejoicing over the French Revolution and calling for a fast.¹⁴⁴ Even historian I.R. McBride, who is skeptical of Seceder complicity in 1798, acknowledges that “local clergymen could not always carry their flocks with them” and that Seceder laity continued to take the covenants literally.¹⁴⁵

Denominational historian David Stewart believed that the laity of Secession churches “were, for the most part, of revolutionary principles.” The evidence seems strong for that conclusion, as the political atmosphere brought tensions within Covenanter and Seceder anti-statist sentiments to the fore. In 1790 a student of theology in the Antiburgher Presbytery of Derry caused a stir when he hesitated to sign the Covenants. When it was discovered he had been licensed to preach without having taken the covenants, he was suspended despite the desperate need for preachers in Derry congregations. Only when he had taken “the Bond,” was he allowed to return to the pulpit. In 1796 Henry Hunter asked the Anti-burgher Presbytery of Belfast if the Oath of Allegiance, currently being required by government officials in the heightened political tensions of the late 1790s, was permissible for Seceders. He was particularly concerned that the oath may not be “consistent with the Secession Testimony, particularly with the oath of our Covenants and the sentiments contained in the ... *Reasons for Dissent*.” Several ministers attempted to take the oath with qualifications, one going so far as to write out extra points of clarity denying the King’s power over the church. The Anti-

¹⁴⁴ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 107.

¹⁴⁵ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 108.

burghers, after much debate, determined even this to be a sin, and issued an injunction to their membership about taking an oath of allegiance. The church members of a burgher Seceder congregation forced their minister, Francis Pringle, to resign on account of being against the 1798 spirit of nationalism.¹⁴⁶

The great anti-Seceder, Thomas Leslie Birch, noted that the Seceder ministers moved towards the government “by more rapid strides [than] their people are prepared to follow them.”¹⁴⁷ This was confirmed in 1796 when the Seceder congregation in Tyrone denied communion to anyone who took the loyalty oath.¹⁴⁸ A government informant believed that in eastern Ulster the most active United Irishmen were “mostly Roman Catholics or Seceders.”¹⁴⁹ One such activist, John Nevin, was a prominent Seceder layman in County Antrim who joined the United Irishmen in 1795. He led a volunteer unit in the 1798 rising and fled to America; at one point he was forced to hide in a barrel as he was taken across Ireland to County Derry and a ship to the sea.¹⁵⁰

A pamphlet that circulated amongst Seceders in 1790s Ireland was J.A. Chancellor’s, *A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Times: and a*

¹⁴⁶ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 98-104.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Leslie Birch, *A Letter from an Irish Immigrant*, 29 as quoted in McBride, “When Ulster Joined Ireland,” 85.

¹⁴⁸ McBride cautions against using such evidence to support the view of the Seceders as anti-government, McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 78.

¹⁴⁹ Miller, et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, 604.

¹⁵⁰ Miller, et al., *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, 604. Kerby Miller suspects that Seceder laity were at odds with their minister’s loyalism in the 1790s. See 46-47n.

Warning of the Public Sins, Dangers, and Duty of British Protestants. First read to a Seceder congregation in Scotland at the beginning of war with France in 1795, Chancellor believed that the British Empire had “wantonly cast away peace, and rushed like the horse into battle.” There was reason to fear Britons had “run upon the thick bosses of the buckler of a revenging God.”¹⁵¹ The issues at play in siding with the French monarchy and Catholic interests were at the heart of Covenanter anti-statist rhetoric. The alliance with Catholic kingdoms had made “the friends of Christian and civil liberty, so intimately connected together, to shake hands with infidelity.”¹⁵² As Stavely had noted for Irish Covenanters, to revolt against infidelity was an obligation more than a right.

The strongest argument for Seceder lay activism in 1798 comes from the records closest to the people: the disciplinary proceedings of the righteous community. The most thorough session minute book, the Ballybay Seceder congregation, made no mention whatsoever of the troubles of the 1780s or late 1790s. This absence is important. Despite the most thoroughgoing approach to lay discipline, none of the congregants were brought up on church disciplinary charges relating to the heated political rebellion of 1798. Either no one became involved, or it was generally accepted that involvement was not sinful. There were only two noticeable trends in that book during the period. The first was an increase in

¹⁵¹ Chancellor, *A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Times*, Linenhall Library, Belfast, 7.

¹⁵² Chancellor, *A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Times*, 20.

prosecutions for dancing, suggesting but not proving that increased socialization beyond Seceder communities was occurring. The second is subtler and far more telling. After the early 1790s, references to irregular marriage cease to refer to these acts as “popish,” or “the Catholic ritual.” Instead, the term became “the form of the Church of England.” There are no entries for two years after April 1798, the only time the session went more than a few months without recording their meetings. The only entry in the book, reads “God’s providence protect us. John Rogers. M.A.”¹⁵³ A similar case is found in the Boardmills Seceder session book, where no mention of church censure for political purposes occurs in the 1790s, and there is a one year gap in the records around the rebellion.¹⁵⁴

The mixing of radical rhetorics in the revolutionary age did not leave Seceder sensibilities untouched. In 1796 the Burghers ministers debated whether a declaration that “God alone, and not the magistrate, is Lord over the conscience” would deny the perpetual obligation of the Covenants. The issue arose, as it was arising in Scotland, by the hand of a young student for the ministry pressing his desire to clarify his subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Generationally, the Seceders were wrestling with the ideas birthed in the Revolutionary Age and how they related to their more ancient creeds.¹⁵⁵ “We

¹⁵³ Ballybay Session book, May 2nd, 1790, April 24, 1791, August 7, 1791, January 31, 1796, May 15, 1796, March 25, 1798. Note that the Rodgers quote is misdated as 1779 but assuredly meant 1798 by all other internal evidence.

¹⁵⁴ Boardmills session book, 1796-1799.

¹⁵⁵ Stewart, *The Seceders in Ireland*, 185-186.

cannot deny,” wrote one, “that our Testimony dwells chiefly on antiquities, and allusions to occurrences long past.”¹⁵⁶

Irish Seceders like the anonymous pamphleteer “One of Themselves” acknowledged that the time might be right to reconsider how much longer Seceders should retain the Covenanter mantle. “This imperfection of our Testimony, with respect to the present time, arises from its temporary, local and personal nature,” he argued. The Seceder rhetoric of Covenanter Phanaticism seemed “calculated only, or chiefly, for the meridian of Scotland.”¹⁵⁷ In the “approbation and homologating of a wicked junction of Church and State,” Seceders were missing the valuable insights of eighteenth century radical thought.¹⁵⁸ “Our Seceding fathers, it is confessed, had not their views of religious liberty sufficiently enlarged”¹⁵⁹ to accept the new doctrines. But it remained possible for a younger generation of Seceders to blend the two radicalisms in ways that would empower the righteous community to overcome its dependence on issues of state. The matter of embracing disestablishmentarianism lingered in Seceder dialogue well into the next century, but it sprung from the Revolutionary events of the 1770s-90s. Seceders were active in the agitations that transpired across northern Ireland even when their ministers were not. In that regard, even as they debated the continued relevance of the Covenants themselves, they were most avowedly of the Covenanter sensibility.

¹⁵⁶ “One of Themselves,” *Candid Inquiry Into Some Points of Public Religion*, 4.

¹⁵⁷ “One of Themselves,” *Candid Inquiry Into Some Points of Public Religion*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ “One of Themselves,” *Candid Inquiry Into Some Points of Public Religion*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ “One of Themselves,” *Candid Inquiry Into Some Points of Public Religion*, 8.

In all its forms, Covenanter political radicalism was vastly different from the political liberalism that fueled the movements of the late eighteenth century. Nonetheless, there were similarities. Both believed in contractual governments, emphasized the rights of communities to resist, abhorred passivity, and labeled the encroachments of the crown as tyrannical. The democratic ritual of election of elders gave Covenanters a populist sentiment easily attracted to arguments for direct representation.¹⁶⁰ This does not mean that eighteenth century radicals sprang forth from the religious enthusiasts they would greatly have despised. Paine did not come from Rutherford. But the followers of Rutherford, marginalized and without the means to effect change on the British government alone, found enough points of commonality with the new radicalism to cross the boundaries with relative ease. In short, they often participated in the eighteenth century revolutions for sixteenth century reasons.¹⁶¹

In Scotland, there were far fewer anti-statist factions with whom to join. Scottish Covenanters were almost relegated to union with Jacobite Catholics to continue any viable threat to the established regime. When it came to allies in the fight against the state, Irish Covenanters suffered only from an embarrassment of riches. Political liberalism, growing nationalism, conversion oriented

¹⁶⁰ "Political principles often cohered with and merged into theological presuppositions." McBride, "When Ulster Joined Ireland," 92.

¹⁶¹ Greaves has labeled this the "Radical Covenanter Alternative" to mainstream Presbyterianism and to the state religion status quo in Ireland. Greaves, *God's Other Children*, 205.

evangelicalism, and 'New Light' rationalism all came together with the older, sixteenth century forms of phanatical radicalism Covenanters held dear. The same ingredients existed in eighteenth century Scotland, but the mix was not nearly as volatile. Thus blended, few things came out the same. For Irish and Scottish Covenanter immigrants to America, that would certainly be the case.

Slavery

Anti-slavery rhetoric in Ireland was tied directly to the agitations for revolution. "Popery and slavery," noted one Seceder, "are like sin and death, direct consequences of one another."¹⁶² As revolutionary leader Henry Grattan had noted, "The Irish Protestant should never be free, until the Irish Catholic ceased to be a slave."¹⁶³ A town meeting at Belfast in 1792 agreed, stating that they had "long lamented the state of degradation and slavery in which the great majorities of their Countrymen, the Roman Catholics, are held, by a multitude of Laws, creating incapacities and inflicting penalties numerous and severe."¹⁶⁴ Such rhetoric blended naturally into stances against the slave trade and slavery itself. The mainline Presbyterian Synod of Ulster condemned the slave trade in 1792, and all branches of

¹⁶² Chancellor, *A Serious View of the Remarkable Providences of the Times*, 19.

¹⁶³ [Henry] Grattan's Reply to Dublin Volunteers, 1781 in *The Northern Star*, 8-11 February, 1792, 3.

¹⁶⁴ Town Meeting minutes, in *The Northern Star*, 28 January – February 1792.

Presbyterianism including the Presbyterian fringe groups were openly anti-slavery.¹⁶⁵

The slave as an idea and moral referent point in Irish Presbyterianism was always wrapped up in the theological, political and social debates in Ireland. Anti-slavery stances formed a major line of attack against the Evangelical Alliance, a proposed transatlantic network of ecumenical cooperation between orthodox Protestants. The Free Church of Scotland became a universal punching bag for Scottish and Irish Presbyterians after the early 1840s, when they solicited financial aid from Southern Presbyterian slaveholders and subsequently muted their anti-slavery rhetoric. Henceforth, Presbyterians, Covenanters and Seceders would seek to score public points with regard to who was more truly anti-slavery.¹⁶⁶ Most Presbyterians and Covenanters framed anti-slavery principles as the natural outgrowth of their orthodoxy and reforming moral impulse.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ For the most recent discussion on the Irish and anti-slavery see Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 1645-1865* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd, eds., *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

¹⁶⁶ Douglas Cameron Riach, "Ireland and the Campaign Against American Slavery, 1830-1860," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1975), 279-290. David Wilson has noted that many Presbyterians involved in revolutionary agitations and forced to flee ended up in the American South, where they subsequently pivoted to embrace slavery and eagerly sought to rise in the slave economy. On the whole, this was not the case with Covenanters and Seceders, as will be shown later. See David Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*,

¹⁶⁷ Riach, "Ireland and the Campaign Against American Slavery," 520-529.

The Scottish, Irish and American Reformed Presbyteries officially condemned slavery in 1831. This delay may be accounted for on the basis that earlier Covenanter documents had already addressed the issue. The *Declaration and Testimony* had stated that “a constitution of government, which deprives unoffending men of liberty and property is [not] a moral institution, to be recognized as God’s ordinance.” Individual Presbyteries and congregations had been making their own statements in the years and decades prior.¹⁶⁸

As the revolutionary convulsions that swept Europe and the Americas subsided in the nineteenth century, the Covenanter experience changed. In Scotland, Seceders moved towards a spiritualization of their rhetoric that avoided the political religion of the eighteenth century. In Ireland, Covenanters increasingly wrestled with life as a tolerated minority and flirted with doctrines of disestablishment. In America, disestablishment was the national order and collapsed many Covenanter internal divisions for lack of a state church against which they could agitate. In the backdrop of all these changes, the confrontation with slavery took on renewed earnestness as a moral cause for Covenanters. This would especially be true for Irish Covenanters arriving in America. The two Covenanter theology students who were forced to flee from the government in 1798, Black and Wylie, arrived in America and became outspoken advocates not for revolution, but for abolition. At almost the same time that Black and Wylie were

¹⁶⁸ *Act, Declaration, and Testimony* as quoted in Robinson, *Immigrant Covenanters*, 262.

running for their lives onto waiting ships, a Covenanter ministerial student in America named Alexander McCleod recorded events in his diary. "I heard a flying report of Bonaparte's safe arrival in Ireland," he noted hopefully. "I rejoiced for a prospect of delivery to that injured people. Oppression seems to be drawing near its grave."¹⁶⁹ Oppression in Ireland lived on, but the newest Covenanter assault on tyranny, Atlantic Slavery, was about to begin. In America, McCleod, Brown and Wylie would be the tip of the spear.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in Wylie, *Memoir of Alexander McLeod*, 35. Entry for August 20, 1798.

CHAPTER VIII

AMERICAN MODERATES: A BIOGRAPHICAL CASE STUDY, 1761-1832

Abbeville District, South Carolina, 1850: George Grier was a carpenter, a lay preacher, a Covenanter and a slave. On a humid Carolina summer evening he began preaching his message to fellow slaves in the kitchen building belonging to a Presbyterian farmer in the area of Long Cane Creek. For half of an hour he spoke about the evils of slavery, the need to trust that God would deliver a people oppressed by tyranny and the nature of singing the Psalms instead of hymns. God had delivered the people of God in Egypt. God would deliver his holy nation out of their current bondage as well. When he was overheard and tried for seditious speech, Grier's defense rested on the fact that he was preaching the same message as Covenanters in the nearby town of Due West Corner. His owner, Dr. Robert Grier, initially defended George Grier's message as perfectly orthodox. Under community pressure from neighboring residents, including the powerful family of John C. Calhoun, Dr. Grier backed away from defending his slave's radical message. Dr. Robert Grier, leader of the former phanaticks and now a moderate southerner, avoided controversy with his

*Presbyterian neighbors. George Grier was lashed thirty-nine times and, like Covenanters of old, banished.*¹

This chapter examines John Hemphill's (1761-1832) ministerial and preaching career as a case study in the ways Scot-Irish Covenanter and Seceder Presbyterians adapted to American religious life and slowly moved from phanaticism to moderation. Hemphill's religious pamphlets, public addresses and sermons reflect a life in transition from Ulster to the Southern backcountry. Hemphill's modification of traditions like communion and covenanting occurred alongside his jealous guarding of psalm singing.² In his drive for primitive purity mediated through a reliance on first principles, he articulated a peculiar kind of moderation that blended zeal and order to determine where innovation was needed and where it must be avoided. Living through and in the wake of the revolutionary era, he blended phanaticism under the exigencies of the American experience.³

¹ Joseph S. Moore, "To the Public": A Transcription of Robert Grier's 1850 Broadside with an Introduction," *The Journal of Backcountry Studies* IV, Issue 2 (August, 2009).

² For a sweeping overview of Ulster Scot cultural transference to the American backcountry, see David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford, 1989, 605-782; For a nuanced discussion of Scots Irish immigration, see Patrick Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots, America's Scots Irish and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001).

³ For a similar experience for Seceders in Pennsylvania see Peter Gilmore, "The Moral Duty of Public Covenanting: Old World Response to New World Exigencies," in Jane G.V. McGaughey and Joseph S. Moore, *Holy Heritage: Covenanters in the Atlantic World*, forthcoming.

In America and especially in the South, Covenanter phanaticks slowly became moderates. Their cell group structures, communal history and sense of Holy Scotland, and psalm singing retained their uniqueness, but the search for stability in a disestablished nation with no religious wars to be fought created the need for considerable adaptation by Covenanters. As questions of American republicanism, race, slavery and lifestyle moved evermore to the fore of religious life in America, Covenanter traditionalists struggled to articulate what was unique about themselves and why they should refuse to be absorbed into the mainstream of American life.⁴ John Hemphill was just one of thousands who experienced these transitions.⁵

⁴ For a synthesis of American Christianity's transitions in the Early Republic see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford, 2002), 3-30, 53-160, 227-268.

⁵ Other studies have examined the declension of proto-radical or egalitarian evangelicals into southern conservatism. These include Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1982) and Christine Leigh Heryman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1988). Recent challenges to this narrative have emphasized the continuity of old world evangelicalism with southern racial and heirarchical norms. Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicalism in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008); Jewel Spangler, *Virginians Reborn: Anglican Monopoly, Evangelical Disent, and the Rise of the Baptists in Late Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2008).

The Covenanter Tradition in Transition to America⁶

The transition to America proved to be a remarkable series of experiments in religious adaptation for Covenanters of all denominations. Swept up in the wave of one hundred thousand Irish emigrants spawned by economic and political pressures between 1739-1775, both Covenanters and Seceders struggled with what it meant to be a dissenter from the established church of Scotland and Ireland when those churches and kingdoms were far removed from Pennsylvania and Carolina.⁷ How would groups whose religious vitality stemmed largely from their opposition to the established British church retain their distinctiveness so far removed from that church's presence? How could a message rooted in sixteenth-century Scotland apply to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America? These were questions that kept all types of Covenanters in a constant state of doctrinal and ecclesiastical agitation.⁸

In America, the basic similarities of the two traditions began to outweigh their differences.⁹ What made America unique was the blending of strands of

⁶ Because this chapter focuses on the ideology of a religious tradition and not organizational structures, I have continued to avoid technical denominational labels. For instance, members of both the Reformed Presbytery and the later Reformed Synod are simply referred to as "Reformed Presbyterians" or Covenanters, and members of various Associate Reformed Presbyterian bodies are called Covenanters or ARPs whether referring to members, presbyteries, or Synods.

⁷ Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford, 1985), 153-155.

⁸ Miller, "Religious commotions," 25-37.

⁹ I have labeled this the "Covenanter tradition," a term broad enough to encompass the various organizational factions within that cultural phenomenon.

Phanaticism: Covenanter and Seceder, Scottish and Irish, in a disestablished context. What made the southern experience further different was doing all of those things in a slave society. Both groups shared rigid adherence to traditionalist Calvinist piety, attachment to holy fair-styled communion events, an honorific, sometimes literal place for the 1638/43 Covenants, and an affinity for Psalm singing over hymns (seen as a dangerous innovation in worship practice). The majority of lay people and ministers joined together in 1782 as the Associate Reformed Presbyterians (ARP). This new American denomination of Scot-Irish heritage agreed to establish the Covenants in "affectionate remembrance." They held to the spiritual tradition that personal and communal covenants with God were vital aspects of piety, but for many lay people the question of the Covenants' role and how to retain their traditional Old World faith distinct from other Presbyterians remained unsettled at the turn of the nineteenth century. It was vital, then, for pastors in this Covenanter tradition to work out what it meant for their subculture to maintain Old World distinctions in the face of New World realities.¹⁰ The Rev. John Hemphill (1761-1832) would devote his life to that task.

That the Covenanters and Seceders were two parts of the same phenomenon is generally accepted even where it is not stated. Nearly every major work on Presbyterians in Scotland, Ireland and America treats them together even when the main focus is their disagreements, see I.R. McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 62-83. Miller labels Covenanters and Seceders as the "old leaven" in Presbyterianism, versus the mainline and deists in the "new leaven," "Religious commotions," 25-26.

¹⁰ Gilmore, "Moral Duty."

John Hemphill was born in County Derry, Ireland, in 1761 to a Covenanter family. He was the youngest and last of his brothers to leave Ireland, landing in Philadelphia in the mid-1780s. A tailor by training, he moved close to family members in North and South Carolina while he saved up the money to attend college. Graduating Dickinson College in 1792, he studied theology under former Covenanter (now ARP) ministers Alexander Dobbin and Matthew Linn (or Lind). He was ordained in 1795 to be the pastor of Hopewell, Union and Little River congregations in South Carolina's Chester District.¹¹

Chester district was located in America's southern backcountry. It was an area in between the booming slave economy of richer coastal regions and the underpopulated mountains of the Appalachians. Covenanters had first settled in the nearby wilderness of Fairfield and York Districts under the leadership of the Rev. William Martin, a Covenanter from Ballymena and an inveterate foe of the British in the American Revolution.¹² Over the course of Hemphill's life there, the area grew

¹¹ All biographical data comes from *A Centennial History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian* (Charleston, SC: 1905); Robert Lathan, *History of Hopewell Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Chester, SC., Together with Biographical Sketches of its Four Pastors* (Yorkville, SC: Steam Presses of the Yorkville Enquirer, 1879), 18-22; Typed family history in the Hemphill Family Papers, Duke University, Box 1, Folder 1. Lathan's history was taken from oral and written histories compiled while Hemphill's parishioners will still alive.

¹² Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 2-5.

substantially and Hemphill's congregations, especially Hopewell with five hundred communicants, became some of the most prominent in the district.¹³

Hemphill's lifelong concern as a pastor was to keep the Covenanter tradition of his congregations distinct from the surrounding Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist groups that dominated the southern backcountry. The counterweight to this drive for distinctiveness was the corresponding need to keep the tradition alive - to adapt their beliefs to American realities in ways that addressed the concerns his parishioners faced. In his sermons and religious tracts, he sought to make the Covenanter tradition seem both authentic and viable far from its native home.

The Balance of First Principles and Primitivism

Hemphill constantly revisited the theme that Covenanter zealotry led to spiritual, emotional and social moderation. By being extreme, they found stability. This balance was struck by an appeal to the primitivism of the Covenanter tradition, that is, the drive to emulate the first (prime) Christians of the early church period. They gave special weight to the literal text of the Bible over religious innovations. The most prominent example of this was the singing of psalms, not hymns, in

¹³ Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808*. (Williamsburg, VA: Institute for Early American History and Culture, 1990), 1-77, 238-302; Lacy K. Ford, *The Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford, 1991), 44-96; 215-278.

worship. In worship, Covenanters sought to “live ancient lives” in their modern world.¹⁴

This emphasis on worship purity, to be like the first followers of Christ, was mediated through Hemphill’s favorite phrase: “first principles.” To his mind, these principles consisted of the underlying belief “That the law of nature, and the moral law, revealed in the scriptures, are substantially the same, although the latter express the will of God more evidently and clearly than the former.”¹⁵ For Hemphill, to argue from the Bible was to argue from nature at its best. Among these first principles he included the conclusions of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Thus, whereas most primitivist groups like the Campbellites sought to attain a pure church by stripping away European traditions and confessions, ARPs like Hemphill pursued the same goal by *increasing* their dependence on such tools. The zealous drive for purity, which Hemphill believed could easily go astray, was protected against itself by the wisdom of the Westminster Confession. Principle was guarded and guided by prudence.¹⁶

The Confession itself was tethered to the Bible and provided a rough and ready way for lay people to protect against old errors in Biblical misinterpretation.

¹⁴ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988). 3-80.

¹⁵ John Hemphill, *A Discourse on the Nature of Religious Fasting; with the Seasons and the Manner in Which This Duty Ought to be Performed, Delivered in the Month of Oct. 1799* (New York: George F. Hopkins, 1801), 131.

¹⁶ Robert M. Calhoon, *Political Moderation in America’s First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University, 2009), 5-6.

“The church cannot do what is required in these (Biblical) texts ... without a confession of faith,” he cautioned.¹⁷ To keep fallible humans from chasing every spiritual whim, the Confession had been written by men who “knew that uniformity could not exist without a standard.”¹⁸ That standard protected against those who “esteem no doctrine unimportant” or “no command trifling,” and who would become members of a church that ‘says of itself, I cannot stand.’¹⁹ On the other hand, their basic enunciation of the Bible, their repeating of first principles, kept zeal intact and protected followers from slipping into doctrines “like neutrality, or worse.” All of these things, Hemphill believed, kept them from the dangers of excessive belief, like the Campbellites or emotional revivalists of the Second Great Awakening, or disbelief like that of the Deists who dominated his fears far more than did Catholicism.²⁰ All of this, he felt, brought balance.

Hemphill’s first principles produced an ordered world that, in turn, evidenced God’s control. “History confirms this,” he wrote, through “Noah- Lot- Abram- Caleb- Daniel- Paul- Luther,”²¹ that it was “very proper to turn back to first principles as often as we can.” This was especially true since these principles gave

¹⁷ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 91.

¹⁸ John Hemphill to the Associate Reformed Synod, March 16, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

¹⁹ John Hemphill to the Associate Reformed Synod, March 16, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers.

²⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 167-169, 49-66.

²¹ Hemphill, ‘sermon on 1 Timothy 4.10,’ 1831. Hemphill Family Papers.

'stability to our minds" and saved "us from being the petty to every new found idea and fashion." What was needed was a return to "primitive revelation." The danger of the day was that there was "nothing permanent in religion" as theological and worship innovations swept aside tradition and authorities of earlier generations.²²

Atheism and religious innovations like Deism were to these backcountry settlers what the established church had once been to their forefathers- the religious corruption against which their forces must be arrayed. The government intrusions their Covenanter ancestors had faced had passed, since "In our own country, court religion is not known." But his generation faced the danger that "in religion as in other things there is (still) a fashion- it is to have none."²³ Such intellectual dalliance, Hemphill warned, "is proverbially changeable. What is admired today as in good taste may be laughed at in a month as uncouth and vulgar."²⁴ A person ruled by the changes of intellectual fashion was "without settled principle. He is like a cork on a wave." Hemphill continued

The world has long been trying to make religion appear in polite dress. Philosophers have tried to modify its doctrine to suite [sic] the reason of the age. Old puritanical notions, have been changed to liberal views. They fix her forms to suite the fashion of the polite. Its morality is stretched to a wire smallness so as to license men in fashionable sins.²⁵

²² Hemphill, 'sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5," 1827. Hemphill Family Papers.

²³ Hemphill, 'sermon on John 7.48," 1827. Hemphill Family Papers.

²⁴ Hemphill, 'sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5," 1827. Hemphill Family Papers.

²⁵ Ibid.

But Calvinist Orthodoxy offered a bulwark against untethered change. “The man of true religious principles is sometimes in fashion and sometimes not- like a rock in the sea which sometimes appears to sink and again to swim- but moves not.”²⁶ The pursuit of a pure church, mediated through the Phanatick tradition, was the grounding of that rock.

The world around them was in the habit, he told his congregation, “of underrating those things which are of the first value, and overrating what is worthless.”²⁷ “Wealth is supposed to confer peculiar felicity,” he noted of society’s growing affluence, “but look at Pharaoh, Haman and Nebuchadnezzar.”²⁸ In the midst of Jacksonian era economic expansion, these words attempted to stably root a spiritual kinship network in a world of democratic and capitalist expansion.²⁹ In 1824 the church’s elders lamented “the prevailing taste is too much in unison with the infidel notions” of the day.³⁰ Among the days most “fashionable sins” Hemphill cited “(ignoring) the Sabbath- swearing- usury- advantage in trading.”³¹

²⁶ Hemphill, ‘sermon on Exodus 20.7,’ 1828. Hemphill Family Papers.

²⁷ Hemphill, ‘sermon on John 3.16’, 1827. Hemphill Family Papers.

²⁸ Hemphill, ‘sermon on 1 Peter 5.5,’ 1832. Hemphill Family Papers.

²⁹ Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 238-302.

³⁰ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 15. The quote comes from the notes of Synod.

³¹ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on John 7.48,’ 1829. Hemphill Family Papers. He went on to note, timelessly, “That which is approved and practiced by those who rank in the first circle of society is fashionable. What shall be fashionable is not determined by the voice of a majority in society; but by the great and rich and polite. Indeed to practice as the majority do is in many things to be out of fashion. The effort of fashionable people to be singular- to get as far from the majority of society as possible- to escape from the common, vulgar track and to be, appear, and act as

Religious apathy was as great a concern in the burgeoning backcountry as innovation and disbelief. The tendency for what Hemphill labeled “leaving first love” was common and became evident as religious “Duty becomes less pleasant.” He cited the neglecting of “Prayer, the ordinances, late coming to church, not (being) regular on weekday” as common vices to be guarded against.”³² These represented the first of the opposing tendencies facing his parishioners in an age when opportunities for economic and non-religious social engagements seemed to Hemphill overwhelming.

Another extreme was emotional excess. “A pious mind can judge pretty well of divine truth,” Hemphill argued in a public lecture entitled “Address on the New Testament,” but the growing obsession with the individual’s authority to interpret the Bible would not do for a general rule, because “it favors enthusiasm.”³³ In an age when revivalism on the frontier was exploding into an unseemly orgy of untutored ministers, female exhorters, and what Nathan Hatch labeled “the Democratization of American Christianity,” this enthusiasm was a real danger to a religious community priding itself in traditionalism and Calvinist orthodoxy.³⁴ Against the emotional appeals of early nineteenth-century revivalism, he posited that “no man’s feelings

the few act and appear to be.”; see also Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University, 1994), 202-236.

³² John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Revelation 2.1-7,’ 1827. Hemphill Family Papers.

³³ John Hemphill, “Address on the New Testament,” 1830. Hemphill Family Papers.

³⁴ Hatch, *Democratization*, 3-16.

are proof to me, for I can not feel or know them.”³⁵ The problem, then, was how to validate personal experience without supporting individual extremes of personal apathy and personal excess.

To resolve this conundrum Hemphill looked to his first principles, namely, the fourteenth and eighteenth chapters of the Westminster Confession. There were stated the observations that the ability to believe and know one was chosen by God was “the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts,” and the “spirit of Adoption” which was God’s witness of authenticity to the faithful.³⁶ “The influence of the Spirit (is) necessary to give a complete conviction of this truth,” Hemphill told his parishioners. A fear of enthusiasm did not contradict the fact that “the assurance of true religion is in the personal experience of it.”³⁷

Between these excessive dangers of religious emotion and religious apathy, then, Hemphill posited the “love of truth” and urged his hearers to “state and maintain it in on the most distinct and precise manner” as it had been in “the time of the reformation.”³⁸ “Being more modern,” he warned, “we know more contradictions as well as more fact.”³⁹ These contradictions could only be resolved by pursuit of pure religion, as Covenanters believed their ancestors had done from the earliest days of Scottish Reformation and dissent from the Church of Ireland.

³⁵ Hemphill, Sermon on Revelation 1.1,” 1829. Hemphill Family Papers.

³⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith* XIV.1, XVIII.2.

³⁷ Hemphill, ‘sermon on Luke 5.5,” 1831. Hemphill Family Papers.

³⁸ Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

³⁹ Hemphill, “Address on the New Testament,” 1830. Hemphill Family Papers.

Believing the Bible to contain no contradictions, the closer his followers got to it in its primitive form the closer they came to wholeness.

The Bible and Primitive Authority

For Hemphill, the Bible was the preeminent arbiter of religious dispute. “God’s appointment alone is our warrant,” he told his brother-in-law.⁴⁰ In an 1831 sermon on the nature of Biblical authority, Hemphill argued this meant the “sacred Scriptures” held qualities such as “power, control, force, obligation” on their own merits, with no preceding force such as the authority of the church or community behind them. The Bible “controls conscience, preserves belief - reaches the heart and (is) binding on the soul - the life - in time and in eternity.” In another sermon he laid out seven evidences of Scriptural authority: “The heavenliness of the (subject) matter”; “its power to arrest, strike, dumb and reform”; “the majesty of the style”; “the consent of all the parts”; “the scope of all”; “the discovery of salvation”; “it gives information in matters useful.”⁴¹ This belief in the received text of the Bible, along with an argument for its utility, meant Hemphill saw scripture as the historic anchor of intellectual and spiritual life for his backcountry congregation.

A great fan of reason, his emphasis on first principles meant he taught his people that “the Bible enlarges of knowledge by discovering to us a new order of being” that was “not impossible to reason’s eye” but “never could be proved without

⁴⁰ John Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁴¹ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on 1 Thessalonians 2.13,’ 1831. Hemphill Family Papers.

revelation.”⁴² “True religion,” he insisted was “a Revealed religion,” but one revealed both by “miracles of power,” as well as those of “wisdom.”⁴³ His connection of the text of the Bible to the order of things gave the Bible a Baconian kind of validity in interpreting the natural and supernatural worlds.⁴⁴

Hemphill followed a three-fold standard for discovering what God has warranted for people in the world. First, “There must be a “thus saith the Lord.”” Second, Christians should look for “the example of Christ or inspired men.” Finally, and crucially, there had to be “by fair and necessary inferences” a reason to apply Biblical actions to modern life.⁴⁵ “Applications which are doubtful, which depend more on refined human deductions, than with the plain and natural applications of holy Writ,” should never be part of denominational standards, he believed.⁴⁶

Alliance to the Bible on these terms thus became the necessary constraint on extremism. “By steadfastly and judiciously maintaining this ground, none shall have a right to charge us with being either too lax or too illiberal.”⁴⁷ Scripture was what allowed a man to appear as the steady rock in the waves. The Bible was his

⁴² John Hemphill, ‘sermon on John 3.16,’ 1827. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁴³ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Matthew 16.13,’ 1829. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁴⁴ Theodore D. Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1977, xi-xv.

⁴⁵ John Hemphill to unknown, May 15, 1819. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁴⁶ John Hemphill to Associate Reformed Synod, March 19, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁴⁷ John Hemphill to Associate Reformed Synod, March 19, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers.

ultimate moderator in the quest for primitive purity. That quest was, paradoxically, his basis for both innovations and recalcitrance in the Covenanter tradition.

Innovation: The End of Holy Fairs

Scottish and Irish Presbyterians had, for more than a century, celebrated the sacrament of communion in seasonal religious festivals called holy fairs. These involved bringing together dispersed groups of Protestants and an assortment of ministers into a multi-day festival that involved preparatory days of fasting, examination by church elders, preaching, and finally climaxing on Sunday with the sacramental celebration.⁴⁸ These events were steeped in social meaning, as they were tied to the rise of conventicle field meetings in which dissenting Presbyterians would meet secretly in fields for prayer, worship, preaching and sacrament. Early Covenanters in Scotland and Ireland had been forced to risk fines, imprisonment, or even their lives to attend conventicles in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They often went to these services fully armed for protection against Royal forces⁴⁹, and this tradition survived into early America where one Episcopal missionary noted Carolina's Covenanters "receive(d) their Sacrament with a gun

⁴⁸ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 21-68.

⁴⁹ Lord Rose to the Duke of Lauderdale, March 13, 1675, *Lauderdale Papers*, Vol. 3. For example, near Bathgate in Scotland a group of returning conventiclers took refuge from soldiers in marshland to avoid horses, but returned when some less fortunate fellow worshipers were run down. Being told to surrender, the conventiclers opened fire with 'some pistols and other fire locks.' In the ensuing melee one conventicler was killed and fifteen taken prisoner.

charg”d and drawn sword.”⁵⁰ This connection between conventicals and communion festivals sanctified the events even more in religious memory. Believing Presbyterians to be the purest Protestants, and their sects to be the purest of the Presbyterians, Covenanters were especially attached to the holy fair traditions.⁵¹

For several years, Hemphill had challenged this traditionalism, wondering aloud to laity and ministers about the plausibility of re-envisioning the communion process as a common, local event rather than a seasonal festival. The basis of this was the drive for primitive purity. He could find no holy fairs in the New Testament. Similarly, the practice lacked for first principles. The Westminster divines had urged frequent communion rather the seasonal events that had grown up over time.⁵² At the Associate Reformed Presbytery of the Carolinas and Georgia meeting in 1798 in Abbeville District, South Carolina several ministers discussed informally the possibilities of making communion a regular local sacrament and discarding the centuries old ceremony of the holy fair. Their general sentiment was that such a move would be more accurate to the biblical text, and that the tradition of fast days in preparation for the sacrament had no scriptural mandate. As Hemphill

⁵⁰ Richard Locke to Rev. George Craig, 1747 as quoted in Alice Baldwin, ‘sowers of Sedition: The Political Theories of Some of the New Light Presbyterian Clergy of Virginia and North Carolina,’ *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 5:1 (January 1948), 52-76.

⁵¹ James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 108.

⁵² *Directory of Public Worship*, “On the Celebration of Communion, or the Lord’s Supper.”

remembered, “we could not find scripture to support it.” However, they considered it implausible logistically as well as unpopular amongst their laity until a series of letters began to circulate on the subject sometime at the end of the 1790s.⁵³

These letters, apparently circular letters written by clergy on the topic, impressed Hemphill and other ARP ministers that what “appeared warrantable, now appeared requisite.”⁵⁴ What Hemphill called “this simple, scriptural plan” involved removing the festival surrounding communion celebrations and centering the sacramental celebration around each local congregation rather than a widely dispersed area.⁵⁵ Additionally, the traditional requirement for multiple ministers to take part would be discarded as making communion more difficult, since any one minister was sufficient to oversee his own congregation and each time a minister left home to assist someone else, his own pulpit was empty that Sunday. With a general consensus amongst themselves, the Presbytery of the Carolinas and Georgia approved the change in the late 1790s.

Another non-Scriptural communion practice that eventually drew his ire was the giving of tokens. As a logistical matter of a handful of ministers administering the sacrament to hundreds and thousands of Presbyterians unknown to them personally, local elders first examined families to validate personal piety and distributed communion tokens that served as each person’s ticket of spiritual

⁵³ Hemphill, *Discourse*, iv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Hemphill, *Discourse*, v.

legitimacy.⁵⁶ Hemphill early on acknowledged that the practice of giving tokens had no Scriptural basis. However, he first saw it as both detached from worship, since it did not occur on Sundays, and as a simply “the offspring of necessity.” Since, “The distribution of tokens is not a divine institution; therefore ought not it to be classed with them.” Plus the practice served a Biblical purpose by protecting people from eating and drinking their own damnation, as the Bible taught would happen to unworthy participants. “The design of tokens is only to preserve order, and prevent imposition.”⁵⁷ Tokens seemed as good a method as any.

Hemphill drew sharp distinctions between what was principle and what was prudence. “Our authority for such prudential measures, and for divine intuitions,” he said, “is different.” Divine institutions required a divine mandate, but for prudential measures, “we must see a real necessity,” for such expedients as “are best adapted to answer the end designed by them.”⁵⁸ Over time, however, Hemphill began to see the giving of tokens in the church becoming its own worship ritual, especially after the institution of his regular communion ideal. “The way in which tokens are dispersed in some congregations seems to combine as much of worship as of discipline.” The process involved arranging “Elders in front of the pulpit, to offer up a solemn prayer to God” which was often referred to as the “holy duty of giving out tokens.” The people were then marched through the aisle to receive their

⁵⁶ Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 108-109.

⁵⁷ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 98.

⁵⁸ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 99.

tokens and then the preacher sought “to close the whole with the Benediction.”

“This has to me,” he argued, “altogether the appearance of a religious ceremony.”⁵⁹

This caused Hemphill serious concern. “It does appear to me that instead of there being any scripture for the use of tokens, there is scripture against the custom.”⁶⁰

First principles, it seemed, spared not even Covenanter traditions from their demands.

All this assault on custom caused a severe controversy amongst some traditionalists and gave ammunition to the critics of the ARP union from both sides. Most of the controversy centered on the issue of eliminating the fast days in preparation for the holiest day of the Presbyterian year. Covenanter and Seceder critics claimed that dismissing the tradition would foster a careless and less reverent approach to the table and was indicative of an ARP willingness to submerge doctrinal purity to convenience. Some saw the move as a preparatory step to foster a joining of the ARP with mainstream Presbyterians. Against what he called “passion; prejudice, and party spirit,” from those opposed or in favor of denominational realignment, Hemphill was asked to publish his own discourse on the issue that he had presented to his congregation in 1799.⁶¹ His 160-page tract, *A Discourse on the Nature of Religious Fasting*, published in 1801, was Hemphill’s most

⁵⁹ John Hemphill to unknown, May 15, 1819. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁶⁰ Hemphill to unknown, May 15, 1819. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁶¹ Hemphill, *Discourse*, v.

important theological contribution, for which he was later in life awarded the Doctor of Divinity degree.⁶²

Hemphill's sought to prove to other Covenanter Presbyterians that in order to be rigidly biblical, fasting should be practiced as "a moral duty of an occasional and extraordinary nature," rather than as a regular religious ritual. Citing every biblical passage that mentioned, or even might be considered to mention, fasting, he walked his readers through a thoroughly primitivist argument. "We are informed that the primitive Christians" continued in the "breaking of bread and in prayers," he noted, quoting Acts 2:42. Since "frequent communion is so much recommended, both in the words of institution, and the example of the first Christians," the primitive, scriptural thing to do was to abandon the requirements for fast days because they made regular communion impractical.⁶³ He pushed his traditionalist opponents with primitive arguments. "From what have we departed?" he asked. Was it scripture, or the Westminster Confession? It came "only from a custom which has for some time prevailed in some parts of the church."⁶⁴ Hemphill's insistence on "that degree of frequency which might be conveniently and scripturally obtained," forced every tradition to come under scrutiny.⁶⁵

⁶² From Jefferson College, Canonsburg, PA. Hemphill Family Papers, Duke University.

⁶³ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 30.

⁶⁴ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 61.

⁶⁵ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 105.

Hemphill made his case not only from scripture, but from the Covenanter's own history. "The practice of regularly observing a fast previous to the Supper, cannot, I believe, be traced farther back than the time of the persecution in Scotland." "These worthies" were not wrong when they "viewed fasting as a necessary preparative to the Lord's Supper," but that was because the persecutions of their own age required a special plea to God. But these practices had been inherited generation after generation without asking if they were still applicable to new surroundings. "Many aged, sensible, and pious ministers, as well as private christians, will frankly acknowledge they never questioned the matter." The entire practice was "handed down a thing not disputed, and was taken for granted," without ever 'strictly examining what the scriptures said respecting it."⁶⁶ Even the most reformed Christians, it would seem, still needed to reform.

As a good Covenanter, he was able to accuse those who disagreed with him of being more Lutheran than Calvinist. They failed to be primitive enough and had violated the Calvinist regulative principle of worship that denied the validity of practices outside of Biblical teachings. "If we make this the rule, that whatever is not forbidden in scripture may be safely used in worship, then we must not only approve of many of those gross superstitions which we now justly condemn; but upon this principle, we might add to them without end."⁶⁷ Far from being a

⁶⁶ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 84.

⁶⁷ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 88.

tradition to be kept, the fasting requirement was a Pandora's box to be thrown away before other unbiblical practices crept in through its doors.

Nowhere could he find the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or any other sacrament, tied to a fasting requirement or even a fasting event. Although some tied this to the general concept of self-preparation, Hemphill argued that 'self-examination is a duty in which Christians ought to be frequently employed,' communion Sunday or not.⁶⁸ "However solemn the institutions of the Lord's Supper may be, let us beware of insisting upon distinctions and connections which are not to be found in the word of God," he urged.⁶⁹

Hemphill found that individuals, the family, the congregation or the nation might fast. All these built upon a foundation of the private religious experience. Indeed, he argued, the fasts found in the New Testament, "in general, are of a private nature." This privatization of religious conviction meant that it was imperative that the fast participant was responding to issues directly related between themselves and God, or in cases of families, churches and nations - the specific group and God. That one family was called to fast did not mean that all families should fast with them, nor all churches, nor all nations.⁷⁰

Rightly understood, fasting was "neither required at all times," nor was "it left to our discretion to fix the times as we please." The holy act was "to be observed

⁶⁸ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 27.

⁶⁹ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 73.

⁷⁰ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 30-34.

as the special dispensations of providence shall administer occasion.”⁷¹ This connection to Providence meant that the true arbiter of fast days was God himself, who required fasting as a response to “times of great distress,” times of “remarkable defeats,” “famine, pestilence,” and other “wasting judgments,” and every other occasion when, like in the “days of Ester” people needed God to smile and be those on whom he “wrought a wonderful deliverance.” The source of God’s displeasure was always sin, thus ‘sin ought to be the principle consideration in every fast.’⁷² There were exceptions, however, such as when “an interest in the divine favor,” made ‘some special blessing’ necessary or a “favor of importance is very much wanted.”⁷³ Such signs of the times meant that God was calling upon his people in a special way, and fasting was the means for his people to respond. For those Covenanters and Seceders with ears to hear, this sounded remarkably like another tradition they held dear - Covenanting.

Innovation: Replacing the Covenants

When the majority of American Covenanters and Seceders joined together in 1782, one issue remained dominant above all discussions: what to do with the 1638 and 1643 Covenants and their staunch advocacy of a Christian civil magistrate? Both sides held to the tradition of public covenanting in which congregations, societies and groups banded together publically to declare their fealty to God,

⁷¹ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 30.

⁷² Hemphill, *Discourse*, 35.

⁷³ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 37.

oftentimes in language directly derived from these original Covenants. But there was not widespread agreement on how strictly these documents applied to American circumstances. The 1638 National Covenant affected only Scotland, and the 1643 Solemn League and Covenant was directed at England, Ireland and Scotland. Covenanters were not bothered by the idea of the obligations of one generation falling on their children and grandchildren, but were the American colonies ever included in the intent of the Covenant? Would ARPs refuse to vote until the United States established a national Presbyterian church? If so, would this be the responsibility of the individual states or the national one? In a land where only an empty shell of the established church of England remained, could Covenanters still claim to be a persecuted minority? In short, was it time to move Covenanters past the Covenants?

The Initial ARP union of 1782 had left the issue to the side for future discussion. The true sticking point was the role of the civil magistrates. Even if the nation itself was not under a Covenant obligation, must the individual magistrates themselves be committed to enforcing the religious discipline of the church over sinners? In 1799, after seventeen years of ambiguity, the ARP General Synod met and approved compromise language that distanced the denomination from a position that the magistrate held any religious authority while maintaining that Christian magistrates should operate under the conviction of Biblical principle. Those Covenanters and Seceders who had remained outside of the union and refused to give up their respective positions on the Covenants were now using this

compromise as fodder to recruit people out of ARP churches, especially recent immigrants, and to attack the legitimacy of the denomination itself. They accused the ARP of “burying the covenants.”⁷⁴ Not incidentally, it was in the fall of that year that Hemphill published his *Discourse*. Hemphill’s address on communion was really an oblique maneuver to defend ARP innovations on the covenants.

Hemphill turned the seemingly minute debate about the technicalities of religious fasting into one of immense significance for those attempting to forge viable religious communities in a new nation. To those attuned to the sacred memory of the Covenanter legacy, as most of his hearers and readers were, Hemphill’s point became increasingly clear as he hammered home that fasting should be thought of differently: as occasional, demanded by Providence, the result of sin, a call to personal and communal repentance and rededication, and something that was given context in each unique age. What renewing the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant had been in Ulster, Scotland, and occasionally in America, fasting now was. Fasting stood in as the new covenanting. “Renewing covenant with God, is likewise a duty very proper on days of fasting,” he argued.

To lay hold of God’s covenant, by faith, Is necessary in every duty; yet Christians are authorized, on some occasions, to engage themselves to the Lord in a more particular and formal manner: nor will this duty be

⁷⁴ For an overview, see Lathan, *History of the ARP Synod of the South to which is prefixed a History of the Associate Presbyterian and Reformed Presbyterian Churches* (Harrisburg: PA, 1882), 195-203.

neglected, in some form or other, when solemn fasting is rightly performed.⁷⁵

The call of the moment was to implement something old as something new, to cast aside tradition to better honor the core of Covenanter religiosity. By replacing public covenanting with an emphasis on fasting, Hemphill not only removed fasting as an impediment to communion innovation, but gave it double duty as a vehicle for covenant innovation as well. In fasting, Covenanters could assuage their consciences that they were “consenting heartily to that covenant, the tenor of which is, *“I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”*⁷⁶ What was on the surface an argument for regular communion served in fact as an opportunity to fit Covenanters more neatly into their American circumstances.

Hemphill believed this honored the rightness of the Covenants in their time without forcing them awkwardly on the present. Covenanting had once been a Providential demand of the Scottish and Irish moments. Covenanters could not have yielded “obedience to (the British government) for conscience sake.” To do so then would have been to “partake in the general apostasy of the nation.” But this was not the case in the current day.⁷⁷

“We are now planted in a land, which as such, has never been reformed in the manner in which Britain was,” he said. America was “a land, which as a nation, was

⁷⁵ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 44.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

⁷⁷ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 51-52, 152-153, 127-129.

never under such solemn covenant engagements.” Hemphill wondered if “a plain declaration of the truth” in a “manner suited to our circumstances,” would not be ‘sufficient, without introducing all those subjects and disputes about them, which are peculiar to other countries?” Hemphill was sure this forcing of round pegs into square holes would lead to absurdity and, above all, “the church will enjoy little peace.”⁷⁸

“Let us suppose,” he asked, “what would happen if a person inquired” about joining the congregation of an American Covenanter church? Could their willingness to submit to American rulers and the local congregation be sufficient for uniting with the body? “Or must they also declare,” he challenged, “what is the duty of the people of Great Britain towards their rulers.” Put simply, a class in British politics was not necessary for American church membership.

In America, if Covenanters and Seceders who shared so much in common could not see eye-to-eye on this, “I have no hope for seeing the wounds in the body of Christ healed,” he lamented.⁷⁹ The ARP union, therefore, had been a moment of perfect moderate compromise. “The members who composed, and do compose the Associate Reformed Synod, were not so strenuously attached either to the one party or the other, as to run into extremes on either side.” As Covenanters and Seceders who refused to join the union railed about sustaining Old World distinctions, Hemphill cautioned that “under existing circumstances, great moderation and

⁷⁸ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 132.

⁷⁹ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 134.

forbearance towards those who may differ from us on this subject, is certainly warranted.”⁸⁰ He was keen to place proponents of union in the role of reasonable, balanced seekers of first principles.

Against accusations that the ARP no longer honored traditions, Hemphill responded that no one could accurately maintain that “the Synod ha(s) denied the principle of covenanting.” Indeed, the Synod insisted that “public, joint and formal covenanting is sometimes the duty of christians.”⁸¹ But that conceptual framework of covenants at all levels was obligatory in different ways at different times in different groupings, just like fasting. The covenant vows of parents at their children’s baptism was just one example of the regular rhythm of covenant congregational life. But the “peculiar season in which God is calling for this duty,” that is, of a national covenant, “is when the church is in imminent danger, from a general apostasy or persecution.”⁸²

If we are called to the duty of covenanting in this manner, let us enter into a covenant suited to our views and circumstances, as our ancestors did, but let us not call this a renewing of their covenant, for it could not be the same with theirs either in name or form, nor could it answer the same end, which was to bound the nations of England, Ireland, and Scotland in one common bond, to prosecute their duty and maintain their rights, civil and religious, each in their own place, and each in the defense support and encouragement one of another, in the maintenance of their common cause against their common enemy. However similar then, our covenant might be unto theirs, or however designed to answer a similar end, yet as their covenant would not be ours, nor our covenant theirs, neither could the one

⁸⁰ Hemphill, *Discourse*, viii.

⁸¹ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 153.

⁸² John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 154.

with propriety be considered a renewing of the other. In each case there would be a renewing of a covenant with God, but not a renewing of the same covenant.⁸³

Despite the dangers posed by living in a disestablished society, the church was in less danger now than she had ever been. When sins were more likely to be personal than communal, and more likely to be communal than national, fasting was the new covenanting demanded by Providence. Put bluntly, "A Christian renews his covenant with God daily."⁸⁴ Like so many things in American life, the state's reach was removed and Covenanting had been privatized. Covenanters were becoming thoroughly American. But could they remain distinct?

Tradition: Psalm Singing in the Eighteenth Century Worship Wars

All this religious innovation created a very real problem for Covenanters in America. What now made them unique? With their communion festivals gone and Covenant renewals absorbed into religious fasting, what was left to keep them distinct in the world? Hemphill's solution was, again, a primitive one - singing the Psalms.⁸⁵

While Covenanters from Scotland and Ireland had been wrestling with innovation, other Presbyterians had been adapting as well. For all Presbyterians of Scottish and Irish descent, the music of corporate worship was the metrical book of

⁸³ John Hemphill, *Discourse* 157.

⁸⁴ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 154, 157.

⁸⁵ On Calvinist worship music and innovations in the America, see Paul K. Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 197-210.

Psalms, popularly known as Rouse's Psalter, which had originated in Scotland in 1650. The Psalms were to be sung unaccompanied by instruments and "lined out" to the congregation by a leader in one of several awkward tunes. The congregation would sing the words back, a practice born of illiteracy amongst congregants that for all its jarring musical awkwardness had become part of Presbyterian tradition by the early eighteenth century.⁸⁶

Some, however, disliked the practice. One Scotswoman described the practice as a 'serious severe screaming' that roused dogs "to bark and babies to cry." In 1775, New Jersey native Philip Vickers Fithian noted in his diary that the sound was "the primitive, genuine Presbyterian Whine... ." Fithian's observation about the primitive nature of Psalm singing cut to the heart of both its appeal and problem. For those American Presbyterians frustrated by the antiquarianism of the practice, the newly published *Psalms of David Imitated* by English Congregationalist Isaac Watts and his later books of hymns were an attractive alternative to traditional singing that modernized language and encouraged attention to musical quality.⁸⁷ Those off put by these seemingly outdated practices pushed for and received gradual concessions to innovation. As early as 1752 the Presbyterian Synod of New York held discussions, concluding the following year that it was best for

⁸⁶ William B. Bynum, "The Genuine Presbyterian Whine": Presbyterian Worship in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Presbyterian History* Vol. 74, No. 3 (Fall 1996), 157-170.

⁸⁷ Bynum, "The Genuine Presbyterian Whine," 162-163.

congregations to “come to an agreement among themselves.”⁸⁸ By the Revolutionary period and its aftermath hymns were growing in popularity and acceptance, a trajectory hastened by the onrush of the Second Great Awakening.⁸⁹

Not everyone was pleased. The divisions within Scots-Irish Presbyterianism were significant and heated over the issue, creating a kind of worship war that divided congregations into factions vying for the old way or the new. In Concord, North Carolina, members of the Poplar Tent Presbyterian Church literally walked out of the church when their pastor introduced Watt’s psalter and went to join the Seceder and ARP congregations nearby. In nearby Charlotte, so many traditionalists left that they formed their own new congregation and joined with the Covenanters.⁹⁰ One such group, across the state border in Fairfield District, may have come under Hemphill’s pastoral supervision.⁹¹ The issue was especially acute for recent immigrants from Scotland and Ireland, who felt displaced in America and found comfort in familiar rituals no matter how they sounded. Covenanter congregations of all stripes swelled with these newcomers who saw them as the truest heirs of conservative Calvinism. Since early childhood, Presbyterians had heard the heroic Covenanter story of (the apocryphal) Jenny Geddes hurling her footstool at the Dean of Edinburgh in St. Giles cathedral for daring to introduce

⁸⁸ *Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1706-1788*, (New York: Arno Press & the New York Times, 1967), 260.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, The Synod of New York and Philadelphia was purchasing copies of Watt’s *Divine Songs for Children* in 1772.

⁹⁰ Bynum, “The Genuine Presbyterian Whine,” 164-165.

⁹¹ *History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, 504.

worship innovations in a new prayer book. The ensuing riot (which was very real) lead to the signing of the original 1638 Scottish National Covenant.⁹² By resisting worship innovations in America, Covenanters appealed to both the primitive impulse in their religion and the nationalist, Old World pride of ancestral association. They were being authentically Covenanters.

Hemphill, like other Covenanters, believed that singing the book of Psalms was the only method of musical worship ‘set forth as divine.” He presented a syllogism for exclusive psalmody. “If it be correct that God is to be worshiped with things of his own appointing along, And if the book of Psalms be of his appointing, he must be worshiped with it.” Continuing in this logic he argued, “If it alone be of his appointing with it alone he must be worshiped.”⁹³ This primitive reasoning, he believed, was self-evident to the reasonable biblical thinker.

A friend counseled that, like Hemphill, he was becoming increasingly convinced of the “danger of departing from the divine appointment in any ordinance of religious worship.”⁹⁴ Hemphill himself steered young men considering the ministry away from mainline institutions over the Psalmody issue. In 1816 he wrote that “If (prospective ministers) are attached to these peculiarities they will

⁹² Robinson, “Immigrant Covenanters,” 40.

⁹³ Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁹⁴ Unknown to John Hemphill, undated. Hemphill Family Papers.

not be happy at such a place as Princeton,” because of “the corruption of worship that pervades there.”⁹⁵

Over the course of Hemphill’s lifetime, Psalmody would increasingly take the place of public covenanting as the outward sign of Covenanter distinction. When the Associate Reformed Synod met without representatives from the Synod of the Carolinas in 1816 and approved the singing of a Dutch Psalter, the southern faction was appalled. “The use of the Dutch version gave universal offense to our churches here,” he wrote on their behalf. Their major concern was that “it is acknowledged that it is not a strict translation.”⁹⁶ The desire not to undermine God’s authorial integrity, on which all his first principles rested, made Hemphill and others like him reluctant to embrace worship innovations along non-literal as well as non-primitive lines.

Underlying this event was the influx of non-traditional Presbyterians of English dissent into the ARP Union in the early nineteenth century. Without the dogged allegiance to exclusive psalmody of Scotch-Irish worshipers, this faction began pushing the concept of looser guidelines on worship materials and, vicariously, to consider eventual union with the Dutch Reformed and mainline Presbyterians.⁹⁷ Wondering rhetorically, “On whose account is this spirit of

⁹⁵ John Hemphill to the Associate Reformed Synod, March 16, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁹⁶ John Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁹⁷ Ray A. King, *The History of the A.R.P. Church*, 2nd Edition (Greenville, SC: Board of Education of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, 2008), 76-77.

accommodation carried to such excess?" Hemphill answered that it was "in favor of the new connections who entertain different views and worship in a different manner from us."⁹⁸ It sounded, he said to the ARP Synod in a letter, like an "attempt to make terms of communion which would please all Christ's friends."⁹⁹ Hemphill, who had been so dogmatically in favor of the ARP Union, was equally wary of uniting with other denominations because of the Psalmody issue. He worried that the church was not "gaining others to her, but going over to them."¹⁰⁰ What he may have assumed thought never expressed was that to relinquish such distinctiveness not only abandoned first principles, but also resigned cultural identity. To his mind, it seems, to be a good Scots-Irishman was to be a Presbyterian, to be a good Presbyterian was to be a Covenanter, and to be a good Covenanter was to join the ARP alliance.

By maintaining exclusive Psalm singing with the old Scottish Psalter, Covenanters maintained their reputation as the most zealous and true element of Scots-Irish Presbyterianism. In Scotland Covenanters and Seceders chose to worship apart from the moderate Presbyterian Church of Scotland, and it was this outsider's zeal and prophetic contrarianism that largely accounted for their appeal. In Ireland, this was heightened by their political outsider status as dissenters not only from the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, but the established state church as

⁹⁸ John Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

⁹⁹ John Hemphill to Associate Reformed Synod, March 19, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers.

¹⁰⁰ John Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817.

well.¹⁰¹ Giving up Psalm singing, the last true marker of differentiating them from accommodating traditions, would place Covenanters at a crossroads. They must either “give up a distinct society or adopt a course more expressive of regard for those things on account of which we keep up a separation.”¹⁰² The demand of the moment, he believed, was “the propriety and utility of continuing as a distinct body” which depended on “a strict and zealous regard to these first principles.”¹⁰³ Those first principles, again, began with the authority of the Bible: this time in worship.

“If the love of truth and a care to state and maintain it on the most distinct and precise manner be the character of the church in times of reformation,” he asked a friend, “what must our times be?” Hemphill argued that his religious colleagues were “remarkable for blending and confounding things,” in such a way that “a distinct testimony is eventually lost in the confusion. Is not the spirit which now prevails intent on putting an end to her distinctive character not by gaining others to her, but by going over to them.” Looking backwards on the ARP Union, he lamented, “We have been greatly mistaken in times past if this looks like temple building.”¹⁰⁴ Those who would give up psalmody were trying to tear the temple apart.

¹⁰¹ McBride, *Scripture Politics*, 62-83.

¹⁰² John Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

¹⁰³ John Hemphill to Associate Reformed Synod, March 19, 1816. Hemphill Family Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

Near the end of his life, Hemphill acknowledged that the debate over purity in the worship of the church required a bit of historical humility. ‘so far as I can learn from the history of the church,” he confessed,” there was no serious controversy on psalmody, until some time after the Reformation.” Indeed, “For 1600 years christians were accustomed to praise God in the use of both inspired psalms and hymns composed by wise and good men.” The fact that “only some sections of the Christian world and only in late years” had experienced “any disturbance” over the issue should give Covenanters pause. “We are not to suppose that the whole world is agitated because the little neighborhood in which we live may be disturbed.”¹⁰⁵ That the debate was a large tempest in their very small teapot was a point Hemphill had earlier not been willing to make when arguing with innovations in the Psalter within the denomination. But by the late 1820s, all chance for a general Calvinist denominational union was long in the past. Exclusive psalmody had effectively placed a hedge or distinction around Covenanters in the South long before.

Death and Life in the Righteous Community

Hemphill put great thought into his pastoral visitation, sharing his organized plan for covering each family multiple times per year across the rugged Chester backcountry with a fellow pastor. His colleague responded approvingly, noting that they agreed that the purpose of pastoral visitation was to “promote an intimate

¹⁰⁵ Hemphill, ‘sermon on Colossians 3,” 1829. Hemphill Family Papers.

acquaintance betwixt a pastor and his people.”¹⁰⁶ As he traveled family to family and farm to farm, Hemphill exhorted, chastened, encouraged, comforted and prayed with people in every stage of life. Much of this time, however, was devoted to reproaching the wayward and misguided.

Church discipline represented a delicate communal balancing act. When the church kept out “those who are Christians it is wrong,” he believed, but the same was true when it kept in “those who give clear signs of being hypocrites.” “some cry too strict - some too remiss.” But if both sides were dissatisfied, it probably indicated the church was doing things as they should be done.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, it was the sinner’s “duty to reflect on former sins, acknowledge the faults for which he was cut-off from all connection with the church and seek with renewed ardor” a “restoration of his former privileges and hopes.” He urged his congregation that if anyone was “deprived the privileges of sealing ordinances,” they should “repent and be restored.”¹⁰⁸

As that fellow minister had told John Hemphill, his regular pastoral rounds brought clergy and congregation “more closely together, a mutual interest is excited, and I obtain considerable help to enable me to adapt my public addresses to their situation.”¹⁰⁹ As Hemphill attempted to give meaning to life and death, relationships and divisions, economic growth and agricultural struggles, he often related parables

¹⁰⁶ Unknown to John Hemphill, undated.

¹⁰⁷ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Revelation 2.1-7,’ 1827.

¹⁰⁸ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Revelation 2.1-7,’ 1827.

¹⁰⁹ Unknown to John Hemphill, undated.

of upcountry life to his parishioners. Then late in his life, John Hemphill experienced the ultimate connection between message and messenger.

In September 1829, John's eldest son Nathan died just shy of his twenty-eighth birthday.¹¹⁰ In the days before his death, the father likely spent hours in prayer and even fasting, which he believed appropriate in times when "some special blessing is to be sought for, at the throne of grace."¹¹¹ In the days after, Hemphill struggled to apply his religious convictions to his own emotional anguish. The entire community packed the Hopewell congregation to standing room only, grieving with and for their minister as he took upon himself the terrible task of preaching meaning into loss just days after burying his boy.

Based on Revelation 2.11, Hemphill began his life's most eloquent address by telling his congregants that "to be familiar with death is desirable."¹¹² Not "that familiarity with death and the grave which degenerated into contempt and cold insensibility," he cautioned. Not like, "the old soldier long (so) used to the carnage of war (that he) hears the groans of the wounded and beholds the agonies, the dying without a tear - and assists in burying his comrades in disorderly heaps without a single tender emotion for their fall." Rather, Hemphill meant familiarity as "a sober,

¹¹⁰ Cemetery Inscriptions, Hopewell ARP Church, Chester County, South Carolina, 1787-1982," (Richburg, SC: Chester County Genealogical Society, 1982), 14.

¹¹¹ John Hemphill, *Discourse on Religious Fasting*, 35.

¹¹² John Hemphill, 'sermon on Revelation 2.11,' 1829.

serious composed acquaintance with the reality of dying; so far as we can know it, before we experience it.”¹¹³

Perhaps wondering at those who drew away from his son’s deathbed, he urged that “instead of walking away from the bed side of the departing, we should draw near to watch the ebbing eye - the opening mouth - the half lost and long suspended breath- the quivering lips - and as far as possible making of solemn our own, inquire, What if all these sad sights were seen in me!” And, perhaps angered by those who failed to honor his son’s journey to the grave, he noted that, “Instead of absenting ourselves from the funeral of a friend we should walk in solemn thoughtfulness to the brink of his grave- look down into the narrow house- watch his slowly descending coffin.” Such melancholy, he assured, would serve a purpose.¹¹⁴

“What a change would be produced if men generally were “daily to die” in the realizing of it?” Death balanced life by offering it humility, pause, and evaluation. “It would greatly moderate the inordinate love of life and its affairs by keeping before the mind a picture of its vanity. Death might be less feared and life better lived by frequent thoughts of the grave.” Death, Hemphill believed, was the great moderator of life.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Revelation 2.11,’ 1829.

¹¹⁴ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Revelation 2.11,’ 1829.

¹¹⁵ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Revelation 2.11,’ 1829.

Education and Literacy

One of Hemphill's greatest concerns, and his most far-reaching impact, regarded religious education and literacy. This education was "an appeal to first principles in almost every department of knowledge." To Hemphill's mind, religious instruction undergirded all other forms of knowledge that pertained to citizenship. He placed his call for such learning against the backdrop of the expanding market capitalism and Jeffersonian democracy of the early nineteenth century. "There probably never was an age nor was there ever a country in which superficial knowledge and half formed opinions were more widely spread than in our own age and country. Every man appears to be ambitious of adding something to the common stock of opinions and knowledge." Unfortunately, though "the market is brisk" and "the consumption immense" it was clear to Hemphill that "the production in many cases (is) forced and of an inferior quality." He made direct analogy to the market production that was increasingly tying backcountry life, agriculture and economy to the production centers of the world. Opinions were like "the raw material(s)" that were "exported in much less time" than in previous generations. If haste was "not good in mechanical operations," he stated, "in forming opinions it leads to absurdity."¹¹⁶

Hemphill grounded his religious educational model in Calvinist orthodoxy through his primitive-confessional sensibility. "It is a sign of a barren mind to lose

¹¹⁶ John Hemphill, 'sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5,' 1827.

your interest in a truth because it is old," he insisted.¹¹⁷ But just such worries with intellectual fashion drew people to newer, less-tried teachings. Hemphill cited the French Revolution, which began the year he began his own classical education under Samuel Warnock, as an example. "They began by ridiculing the abuses of religion and ended with a barefaced renunciation of the whole." Such revolutionaries "raise objections to the truth yet do not say what they would substitute in its place," and thus turned "men adrift upon the dark ocean of skepticism."¹¹⁸

"Young friends," he warned his junior laypeople, "your age exposes you to the injurious influence of fashion." The desire to be thought of as a follower of the latest intellectual trends might lead them to "think it would make you old fashioned to be in principle and practice a pious youth." But Hemphill wondered if such fashions as Deism, French Atheism, or general economic enthusiasm that pushed religion aside was healthy for society. "Is it rational or safe to suffer fashion to influence in religion?" He demurred. "Surely this sets aside the authority of God."¹¹⁹

But the Covenanter story posed a stark contrast to that. Like the French, Covenanters had challenged the abuses and superstitions of the Church of Rome in order to establish an older, more orthodox truth rather than a newer, heretical one. In short, they had cut the middle between potential pitfalls of skepticism and

¹¹⁷ John Hemphill, 'sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5,' 1827.

¹¹⁸ John Hemphill, 'sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5,' 1827.

¹¹⁹ John Hemphill, 'sermon on Exodus 20.7,' 1828.

ecclesiastical absolutism. Thus, a Covenanter's "pious education would ground the young, give stability to our minds," and "bind society permanently together."¹²⁰

What he called a "pious education" was of inestimable value to the young since "experience shows how intimately early associations and habits are connected with the character developed in advanced life." "Those who wish well to their country and their race" should instill religious education in the young. "Others regard their scientific improvement. "This is good," he believed, but "I look at their religious (education)."¹²¹ This was especially important since there were "mental irregularities peculiar to youth. Impudence, misplaced ardor," and "vanity." The aged, by contrast, suffered from an awareness of their own sin and, consequently, were less likely to pursue either moral overextension or reform. Age, it seemed, was another great moderator.¹²²

Literacy in general and biblical literacy in particular were vital components of religious education. A religious education "implies that means are used to teach the young to read the bible." Reading was vital to lay piety in the Covenanter tradition. Even fasting should be accompanied with personal Bible reading.¹²³ Stopping short of arguing that only literate people were believers, it would

¹²⁰ John Hemphill, 'sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5,' 1827.

¹²¹ John Hemphill, "No Man Liveth Unto Himself, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5," 1827.

¹²² John Hemphill, 'sermon on 2 Timothy 2.22,' 1827.

¹²³ John Hemphill, *Discourse on the Nature of Religious Fasting*, 43.

nonetheless “be a very imperfect (knowledge) which they have who cannot read.”¹²⁴ Those who could not read were at risk for “Ignorance of God” that was “fatal to practical piety,” since “there cannot be much practical piety without true knowledge.”¹²⁵

Hemphill believed there were four stages to religious development in youth. The first was to read the “sacred scriptures” to children. The second was to begin to “have children read for themselves.” Third, adults should give “familiar explanation of application as to particular cases.” Finally, efforts should be made to have the “youth adopt the Bible,” its morals, and especially to begin to think of “God as there represented.” With this education completed, young people’s mental pictures of the divine and the world would comport with Hemphill’s beloved “first principles.”¹²⁶

Such education served valuable practical purposes in backcountry society. Since religious education was “not part of polite education,” it rested on families to instill Scriptural knowledge that was “likely to form the character of usefulness, and happiness” and act as a protective barrier against the temptations of sin.¹²⁷ It was important to use religious education to inoculate youth against the temptation to follow the moral and intellectual trends of the era, since “if a man waits for all

¹²⁴ John Hemphill, “No Man Liveth Unto Himself, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5,” 1827.

¹²⁵ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Hosea 6.3,” 1831.

¹²⁶ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5,” 1827.

¹²⁷ John Hemphill, “No Man Liveth Unto Himself, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5,” 1827.

(others) to do right, he will always go astray.”¹²⁸ Hemphill compared this backcountry vision with the intellectual trends of the early nineteenth century.

“When I look at society my heart sickens - youth so ignorant yet so conceited.”¹²⁹

To those who would argue that religious instruction “should bias [children] to no sect,” Hemphill argued that “this suppose[s] that a good education gives wrong bias.” Hemphill disagreed. Good bias did not “destroy the liberty of the mind.” “Is it found,” he asked, “to be a fact that those whose education is neglected are in a more favorable situation than others? If so he who knows least about the Bible is the best judge of religion- most likely to be religious.”¹³⁰ Among the reasons some never believed the gospel, Hemphill listed “prejudice of education.”¹³¹ This was especially important in order to indoctrinate children with right religion. “Jews, pagans, Mohammedans, and Christians - the legislators of all those have that religious education according to their respective ideas of it.” Covenanters should be no less bold.¹³²

Hemphill’s passion for literacy combined with the growth of republican motherhood in the early republic. “suffer me to urge to you the duty of attending” to your children’s education, he told the women of his congregation. He encouraged

¹²⁸ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on John 7.48,” 1829.

¹²⁹ John Hemphill, “No Man Liveth Unto Himself, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5,” 1827.

¹³⁰ John Hemphill, “No Man Liveth Unto Himself, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5,” 1827.

¹³¹ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on 1 Timothy 4,” undated.

¹³² John Hemphill, “No Man Liveth Unto Himself, Sermon on 2 Timothy 3.15 and 1.5,” 1827.

them to “think of Timothy’s mother,” a Christian married to a Jew who raised a son who became the Apostle Paul’s dearly beloved friend. The model parent was just that, the mold into which their children would grow. He pressed parents to wonder “Can you expect your children to avoid imitating you” especially since people learned morality the same way “we learn our mother tongue by imitation.” If parents cursed, for instance, surely “children early catch the habit.”¹³³ However, this emphasis on republican motherhood, common to the early nineteenth-century backcountry, was also the product of centuries of Covenanter tradition in family literacy.¹³⁴

Undergirding Hemphill’s devotion to education was his desire to balance reason and allegiance to the Bible. Even sin struck against this very balance, since when people “act inconsistent with their own reason” they sinned. “We act contrary to our reason,” he argued, “which is shamefully absurd; contrary to the benignity of our gracious creator.”¹³⁵ The purpose of education was to inoculate, as much as possible, the young from imbalance by using first principles.

When Hemphill arrived in Chester District in 1794, local Covenanters centered religious life on the weekly “society” meetings which formed the backbone of Covenanter religious infrastructure. In each society, lay people gathered to lead their own devotions and worship services in mixed groups. Adults, children, men,

¹³³ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on Exodus 20.7,’ 1828.

¹³⁴ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980), 265-288.

¹³⁵ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 47.

women, masters and servants all participated. Into the first years of his pastorate, on the Sundays Hemphill preached at another congregation, meetings would be held in groups called “quarters,” which divided the church up roughly into fourths by geographic ranges. Meetings were at 9 am in the summer and 10 am in the winter at some large home place.¹³⁶ Lathan has given a thorough overview based on his interviews with persons who grew up in the practice.

The exercises consisted in some one, whose turn it was, taking his place at the table on which lay a family Bible, a Psalm book, and some standard religious books. The first thing the leader did was to announce that a particular Psalm would be sung. He then read the Psalm over, and then it was sung by the whole company, with as much solemnity as if they had been in the most splendid church in the world. Then a chapter in the Bible was read and a fervent prayer offered up, all the company knelling down. Then some one read one of Erskine’s sermons, or a portion of some one of Boston’s works, or some of the standard theological works of the seventeenth century. The people of those days had only few books, but they were greatly blessed in that they had none of the Sabbath-school trash of the present day. They had treatises on Justification, on Adoption, on Sanctification, on Original Sin, on the Attributes of God, on Predestination; in a word, on all the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion. These were read and re-read in the societies.

When one individual became tired reading, another took his place. Not infrequently some old man would stop the reading by asking a question, to which some other old man would give an answer. This often gave rise to the most profound discussions of some important Bible doctrine. The exercises were closed by the head of the family in whose house they were assembled, asking the little boys and the little girls the Shorter Catechism, and the young men and the young women the Larger Catechism. This finished, another Psalm was sung and another prayer offered, when the assembly quietly retired to their several homes. There was no foolish or secular conversation; no fine dinners; no gallanting; but every thing was conducted in decency and order.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 13-14.

¹³⁷ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 13-14.

This Old World tradition persisted throughout much of Hemphill's tenure in Chester District, and provided platforms for lay involvement and leadership in which the minister was not needed.

Hemphill also insisted that his parishioners follow strict "family worship being performed morning and evening."¹³⁸ "We believe that we are founded on scripture and reason."¹³⁹ Leaning on the first verses of the 92nd Psalm, he argued that the obligation to 'show forth thy loving kindness' occurred "in the morning and thy faithfulness every night."¹⁴⁰ The Bible, he argued, contained many injunctions to "read, to study, to search the scriptures; to be daily thinking and talking of them, and ruled by them." Orders were "given to parents to teach them to their children diligently, and talk of them when they sit in the house; when they walk by the way; when they lie down and when they rise up." This should "sufficiently authorize families to employ part of that time which they set apart morning and evening for devotional purposes, in consulting the Scriptures."¹⁴¹ Devotional piety, individual, family, and society were moments of spiritual education and responsibility in which the laity engaged one another on issues of doctrine and faith. This small group mentality increased bonds, encouraged conflict resolution at the lowest levels of

¹³⁸ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 92.

¹³⁹ John Hemphill to the Associate Reformed Synod, March 16, 1816.

¹⁴⁰ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 92.

¹⁴¹ John Hemphill, *Discourse*, 92-93.

community, and encouraged the role of reading and praying out loud by men and women and, importantly, masters and servants.

The Political Legacy of John Hemphill and Slavery

As slavery has become the most explored aspect of Southern life in the antebellum period amongst historians, it seems out of place that Hemphill's sermons, papers, and published writings never mentioned the institution in any explicit way.¹⁴² It is possible these records were destroyed. He spoke on the issue in church visitations. One parishioner remembered that a Covenanter layman told Hemphill that "If I thought the Bible taught slavery in any form, I would burn it." Hemphill replied "Well, Denny, you may burn it right now; for it does recognize some sort of slavery."¹⁴³ But Hemphill did have strong private opinions against the slavery he saw growing up in the backcountry, even if his public writings on the subject did not survive or never existed.

In his second marriage Hemphill inherited slaves from his new wife, the widow of a prominent local businessman. Parishioners remembered that, "He was prudent, but it was known that whist he did not oppose it in such a way as to make himself notorious, he endeavored, so far as possible, to keep himself free from it."¹⁴⁴ But he did see the American Colonization Society (ACS) as a viable remedy to the

¹⁴² Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002).

¹⁴³ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 25-26.

¹⁴⁴ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 22-25.

slave question.¹⁴⁵ Hemphill recorded donations to the ACS as early as 1827. He motivated other Chester residents to give as well. When the Rev. Flenniken took over for an aging Hemphill, his church raised \$42 for the society in 1833 and \$20 in 1834. In 1835 they recorded one of the largest upcountry gifts ever given, \$59. William Moffatt, one of Hemphill's church elders was the most consistent giver. By 1841 John's son William had his Abbeville churches donating as well. William became the ACS's most vocal supporter in upstate South Carolina in the later antebellum period. Of upcountry colonization donations, 63 percent were from Covenanters. The numbers rose slightly with the Nullification Controversy, when nearly 67 percent of donations came from ARP churches, pastors, and laymen.¹⁴⁶ In 1834, a year after Hemphill's death, the church session acknowledged in a letter that, "The Colonization Society has its friends and patrons among us."¹⁴⁷

There is further evidence that Hemphill was not alone in his discomfort with slavery. Another 1834 report discussed the church's struggles with outmigration. But whereas other upstate South Carolina communities struggled with the flow of parishioners *south*, Covenanters were moving in a different direction. "We have to report that emigration to the North-west, stimulated in some cases by the increase

¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Guyatt, "The Outskirts of Our Happiness: Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 95, No. 4 (March 2009), 986-1011.

¹⁴⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, "Contributions" (1825-1849) and *African Repository*, "Contributions" (1850-1865); April 1827; Nov. 1833; Dec. 1834; Dec. 1835; Aug. 1838; Aug. 1841. Compilations are from the giving reports of the ACS published in the repository.

¹⁴⁷ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 15.

of slavery.” In the midst of the nullification debates, they acknowledged that all the outmigration had been effected “by the political disturbances which have torn many churches asunder,” and which had “already considerably diminished our numbers.”¹⁴⁸ Covenanters were not at best tacit friends of slavery, even as they were not mortal enemies of it. Caught in their own paradox, between biblical literalism (where slavery clearly was allowed) and Old World impulses against arbitrary power over personal convictions and life, they answered their dilemma in much the same way Hemphill helped resolve the legacy of covenanting. The issue became private. Safely locked into each person’s liberty of conscience lay the keys to free, or not free, the slaves of Chester communities.

As with his other reforms, Hemphill based his views of slavery through the rubric of his primitive impulse for first principles. The creation narrative of Genesis 2, Hemphill pointed out, was “a strong proof of the origin of our race from one stock.”¹⁴⁹ Hemphill’s scriptural conservatism led him, once again, to a moderate, if ambiguous, place on the great question of the Southern society in which he lived.

In 1834 the South Carolina legislature passed a law forbidding anyone to teach slaves to read under pain of severe fine for whites and whipping for free blacks. The prohibition against literacy included religious instruction. Eugene Genovese notes that after 1835 almost all advocates of mission work to slaves cut out their literacy rhetoric and became more overtly proslavery in order to appease

¹⁴⁸ Lathan, *History of Hopewell*, 15.

¹⁴⁹ John Hemphill, ‘sermon on 1 Timothy 2.5,’ 1827.

the master class and advance their cause. This created a “crisis of conscience and compromise,” according to Janet Duitsman Cornelius, in which white missionaries toed the line of proslavery rhetoric tightly.¹⁵⁰ Only two groups dared to challenge the law by sending public petitions to the state legislature and vowing to disobey the regulation. Six years after Hemphill was buried in the Hopewell ARP cemetery, the first petition was signed by a large group of the Covenanters who had sat beneath his teaching their entire lives in Chester District. Hemphill’s son, William, led the second group in Abbeville District.¹⁵¹

The petitioners to the state legislature claimed to be “seriously aggrieved” by the law. In words bordering on the civil disobedience that characterized the Covenanters of earlier generations, they informed the lawmakers that the law was “a dead letter” except in such times when local racial fears stirred slave patrols into a frenzy and empowered “malicious persons to punish better men than themselves.” Despite this, “the law for whose repeal we now petition is daily violated and ever will be, and your petitioners believe that it would be both politic and prudent to

¹⁵⁰ Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 12-13; Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1991), 34-35, 48; Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 186-187.

¹⁵¹ Both petitions are found in the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC. See also Loren Schwening, *The Southern Debate over Slavery, Volume 1: Petitions to Southern Legislatures, 1774-1864* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2001), 152-153.

repeal said law.” The mixture of the politic and the prudent would be words directly from Hemphill’s pulpit and devotional instructions.¹⁵²

The petition mentioned explicitly that “very many good citizens, in the best sense of the word, have left and are now purchasing to leave, and will continue to leave, the state because of the law in question.” The memorialists believed the law “to invade the rights of conscience, and so doing to be unconstitutional; and it is not all unusual to hear prudent men say “we are prepared to disrespect such a law.” They could not but wonder what would influence “a learned Legislature to enact such a law, except the simple law of self-defense.” Indeed, they challenged both the erudition and the manliness of the state politicians elected in the wake of the Nullification crisis. “If Imperial Rome could manage with a classic slavery,” they pointed out, “and a large part of their slaves also the best trained soldiers in the world, the Romans excepted, does chivalrous South Carolina quarrel before gangs of cowardly Africans with a Bible in their hands?” The education and honor of the legislature was in question for passing a craven law that undermined religious instruction out of fear.

Echoing Hemphill’s teachings on the role of proper education in creating piety, they pushed back on the concept that restricting literacy training checked rebellion. “Is it not very questionable,” they asked, “whether intelligence is more

¹⁵² Petition of Sundry Citizens of Chester District praying a modification of the Law in relation to teaching slaves, 1838. South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

productive of dangerous insurrection than ignorance?" Furthermore, "would not demagoguism among intelligent slaves be as comparatively harmless as among intelligent freemen?" The Covenanter community of Chester District believed that right education, that is religious education, would turn the mind towards balance and moderation rather than fostering rebellion. It was hard to mistake the hand of John Hemphill still influencing those whom he had shepherded since their infancy as they engaged in the political application of his religious instruction.

Conclusions: Ordered Zeal

Strange to modern readers, Hemphill was indeed in many ways a religious moderate. This is not to say he lay in the middle of an imaginary religious spectrum between the democratic and the hierarchical or the evangelical and the deist. But it is to say that he viewed everything he thought, said, and did as pastor in terms of finding the balance between extremes. Hemphill's most significant religious teaching was to ground religious moderation in the first principles he held to be the connectivity of the Bible to the primitive impulse of Covenanter faith.

The goal in so much of life, he taught, was "To strike the medium is that which the Spirit of God by the wise man teacheth."¹⁵³ This was difficult since, "subjects that have been hotly disputed are seldom impartially examined. Passion blinds the mind."¹⁵⁴ But this was not moderation for moderation's sake. He personally repudiated any resemblance to "Dr. Witherspoon's moderate men" who

¹⁵³ Hemphill, *Discourse*, 60.

¹⁵⁴ Hemphill, "Sermon on Colossians 3," 1829. Hemphill Family Papers.

were “Fierce for moderation.”¹⁵⁵ Even moderation, it seemed, should be moderated lest it be moderation in the extreme.

Rather, his moderation was seen as the product of rightly directed zeal. It was less a *middle* than it was an *ordered zeal*. In striking the balance between the two, Hemphill found his answers for how to blend religious innovation in America with religious traditionalism hearkening back to his County Derry home and Scottish Covenanter ancestors. For thirty-seven years, he served his Carolina congregations struggling with that same question.

America moderated Phanaticism. Hemphill’s life was writ small the experience of the larger religious Covenanter experience. Covenanters of all stripes struggled mightily to maintain some semblance of their old Phanaticism even as those beliefs looked almost comically out of sink with the world around them. In the South Carolina backcountry after his death, that moderating process continued and focused more intently on questions of race and slavery than ever before.

¹⁵⁵ John Hemphill to John Lind, April 28, 1817. Hemphill Family Papers.

CHAPTER IX

SOUTHERN CONSERVATIVES: ABBEVILLE DISTRICT COVENANTERS, 1840-1877

This chapter examines three episodes of Covenanter life in Abbeville District, South Carolina between 1840-1877. The first event was the “Address on Colonization” by Rev. William Hemphill, son of John Hemphill and minister at the Long Cane Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. The second event is the sermon and trial of George Grier, a slave carpenter from Due West whose knowledge and use of Covenanter anti-slavery rhetoric crossed racial boundaries. The third event is the falling apart of racial moderation between Abbeville’s white Covenanters and the freed people who had once been in their communion.¹

These events illustrate the process by which Covenanter Phanaticism changed in the American South. William Hemphill’s speech was a deliberate and pained attempt to reconcile a radical heritage and ends with gradualist and moderate means. George Grier’s sermon displayed the still radical possibilities inherent in the Covenanter message even in the deep heart of pro-slavery South Carolina. The falling apart of bi-racial churches in antebellum Due West, especially the dramatic battle of Wimbushville, are events that paralleled the absorption of the

¹ Abbeville District is on the edge of the South Carolina piedmont and the Savannah River border with Georgia. It is also bordered by Edgefield District, whose social history is best described in Orville Burton Burton, *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1985).

Covenanter tradition into southern racial conservatism. By 1877 the only thing that stood between Covenanters and the rest of the world was their exclusive Psalm singing. They still sang like the Holy Remnant, but they lived and voted like everyone else.

The “Address on Colonization” and moderate anti-slavery Covenanters

Northern Covenanters, though initially warm towards the idea of Colonization, began to gravitate towards abolition as the antebellum years wore on.² Rev. Samuel Taggart of Pennsylvania produced a prime example of northern Covenanter thought on the matter in a sermon in 1838. His congregation responded so forcefully in favor of his views that they practically demanded the sermon’s publication. His text was Ecclesiastes 4:1: “So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and, behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.” For Taggart, the application of Covenanter

² Covenanters in America carried with them the abolitionist arguments that sprang from the Covenanter tradition. Alexander McCleod, *Negro Slavery Unjustifiable* (New York: 1801). McCleod and Samuel Wylie participated in a visit to southern Covenanters in 1800 in which they required all members of praying societies to immediately free their slaves. However, McCleod himself took part in the earliest organizations for the American Colonization Society in New York. For further evidence of Covenanter and Seceder anti-slavery views see Randolph A. Roth, “The First Radical Abolitionists: The Reverent James Milligan and the Reformed Presbyterians of Vermont,” *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 55, No. 4 (Dec. 1982), pp. 540-563.

Biblical interpretation to the slave issue was a seamless process. The root issue was oppression. Covenanters knew how to confront oppression.³

God looked upon the children of Israel and declared, "I have also seen the oppressions wherewith the Egyptians oppress them" (Ex. 3.9). The Scriptures "strike at the root of *oppression* as well as every other sin," Taggart fumed. "Slavery then contradicts our reason in relation to justice and equity," he exhorted with a Covenanter's sense of society. "Every man has a right to employ the powers of his own mind and the members of his own body, for his own benefit, provided he does not injure his neighbor in doing so." Slavery was a clear violation of the Scriptural principle against oppression. However Taggart went beyond principle and into proof text. The one thing he shared with the Southerner James Henley Thornwell was a belief in a literal, common sense argument.⁴

"The right (to use men as property) must either be derived from God himself or else is assumed without any authority from the Creator," Taggart insisted. Look though one might, the listener would find "no such right given to the white man over the black, or to the black over the white." Addressing the Southern argument that slavery was a human institution supported by the Bible, the Pennsylvania pastor argued that "unless it can be shewn that they practised slavery in the same manner as (the Israelites), which we believe cannot be done" then the argument was invalid. If Southerners wanted to truly embrace the custom of Old Testament slavery, they

³ Samuel Taggart, "The Power for & Against Oppressors" (Aug. 2, 1838).

⁴ Taggart, "The Power for & Against Oppressors."

should start with Joseph's brother's who sold him into the institution. "*We are very guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear.*" (Gen. 42:21) Instead, their refrain was Pharaoh's: "who is the Lord that we should obey his voice?" (Ex. 5:2) Taggart was pounding slaveholders over the head with his literal interpretation of the Bible to their modern context.⁵

For Taggart, the effects of the Gospel were to eliminate the difference between Greeks and Jews. "God *hath shewed us that we should not call any man common or unclean.*" Quoting Isaiah 58.6, he noted that God had chosen "to let the oppressed go free." Why would slaveholders not do the same? The Pennsylvanian demurred from his Southern brethren's approach. "The scripture support slavery! Absurd!" Unlike the most prominent abolitionist voices, Taggart was basing his stance in a literal interpretation of Scripture.⁶

Taggart believed the Bible "condemns it in unqualified terms" and that continuing this offense to God meant a wholesale rejection of the moral law of the Decalogue. As southern ARPs did (below), Taggart took aim at anti-literacy laws in the South. Surely the people who forbid learning to read the Bible could have no regard for divine law. Here he brought to bear the full tenacity of an Irish sensibility born of the enshrinement of the right to rebel for one's civil liberties. Slaveholders' feared that literate slaves increased the risk of rebellion. "To all this I would reply,

⁵ Taggart, "The Power for & Against Oppressors."

⁶ Taggart, "The Power for & Against Oppressors."

that it is full time that any institution, which requires brutish ignorance for its support, should fall to rise no more.” In case the audience missed his point, he emphasized “surely this is doing *evil that good may come.*” As with most Covenanter ministers, he pulled no punches.⁷

Taggart’s condemnation of slavery was multifaceted. The institution ran “the plowshare of destruction” through the Ten Commandments. It encouraged ignorance of God and thus idolatry. It replaced regard of parents with deference to masters. Marriages were restricted and torn asunder when joined. The culmination of all of this was that it degraded the teachings of God’s creation of humanity, full of the *Imago Dei*. “It slanders the character of colored men, for it declares that they are unfit for liberty, the natural right of all men.” Like all good Covenanters, Taggart collapsed republican concepts of natural rights and Reformed belief in the moral law into one concept of human nature that was simultaneously ideologically liberal and Biblically literalistic.

Proslavery advocates, Taggart continued, were supported by “the *power of prejudice.*” Southerners and Northerners were misled to believe that blacks were not capable of self-control, much less self-government. But this racism was in opposition to God himself. “For their complexion and form they are indebted to God, and to reproach them on this account is to reproach the Creator.”⁸

⁷ Taggart, “The Power for & Against Oppressors.”

⁸ Taggart, “The Power for & Against Oppressors.”

But blacks were indebted to someone else, too. “But for their ignorant and degraded condition they are indebted to white christians and infidels.” This was a social problem, but, he declared, “*they can be elevated.*” The social characteristics slaveholders used to justify black inferiority were a false correlation of circumstance and character. “We look at him in a state of slavery and degradation, but we have not seen him raised up from his present condition, and therefore cannot tell what degree of eminence and elevation he may attain.” Such were the sins of the system.⁹

The object for his listeners was a political one, to “refrain from saying or doing anything which would tend to increase prejudice, lest we be found strengthening the hands of oppressors, and so become partakers in other men’s sins.” To accomplish the end of slavery, “we ought to pay regard to the civil authority, and not seek by any unlawful means, to have even iniquitous laws repealed.” This decidedly un-Covenanter-like patience saw time as a friend, because it gave others a chance to see the errors of their ways. This proved to be Taggart’s own concession to political realities, the very thing he later accused Southern ARPs of making.¹⁰

These errors, as such, Taggart believed must be confronted now. Yet these pleas should be made in the bonds of Christian civility. “To use harsh and opprobrious epithets cannot be productive of good,” but rather “plain truth should be exhibited in plain language.” Taggart realized that his audience might desire

⁹ Taggart, “The Power for & Against Oppressors.”

¹⁰ Taggart, “The Power for & Against Oppressors.”

bolder action. "Yet we should speak the *truth in love*." More effective, he believed, was to "in the spirit of love and meekness *rebuke our neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him*." In the end, Christian humility needed to be mixed with boldness.

"Repentance should commence with ourselves, for our apathy and indifference in relation to this evil." This confrontational style, moderated by the bonds of Christian fellowship, was one possible avenue of Covenanter thought available to South Carolina ARPs. It was certainly welcomed by their Pennsylvania brothers. The sermon was favorably received. Several in the audience requested permission to submit the sermon for publication, and Taggart "cheerfully submitted" to their request.¹¹

The views on slavery of Southern ARP leaders can best be displayed in a dispute between two college friends and Covenanter ministers: the northerner Samuel Taggart and South Carolinian William Hemphill, the son of Rev. John Hemphill. In January 1840 Taggart responded to a letter from Hemphill with a shorter version of the points of his sermon. Taking his own advice, he strongly attacked Hemphill's arguments, but attempted maintain a spirit of charity.¹²

¹¹ Taggart, "The Power for & Against Oppressors."

¹² Samuel Taggart to William Hemphill, January 1840, Hemphill Family Papers. Both attended Jefferson College in Canonsburg, PA. For the religious and Irish ethnic background of the school see Helen Turnbull Waite Coleman, *Banners in the Wilderness: Early Years of Washington and Jefferson College* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1956), 1-142. Hemphill's other son, also named John, went on to reject his parents religious tradition and was a highly influential lawyer, state supreme court chief justice and US and Confederate Senator from Texas. As with other issues, he rejected much of his father's old world beliefs and was decidedly

The hinge point of these different approaches to slavery was the concept of “slavery in itself.” Both Covenanters, and probably both of their supportive congregations, agreed that oppression was a moral evil, that slavery was mentioned in the Bible, and that the South’s slavery was not modeled on Abraham but Pharaoh. The point of departure for Taggart and Hemphill was not goal but method. For Taggart, “the truth in love” moderated Christian charity with Christian exhortation. His was a *principled* stand. For Hemphill and southern ARPs, they were forced not by belief but by different social circumstance into a *prudential* moderation. From the view of Pennsylvania Covenanters, “Slavery in itself,” that is, a purely Biblical model of slavery, could not be achieved. By contrast, for those in Chester and Abbeville County, SC, “slavery in itself” was the last best hope for Southern redemption *out* of the slave system. In other words, by leveraging the Southern argument that slavery was Biblical into radically Biblical reforms on issues like marriage, religion, and civil liberties, Southern slavery in the process of *actually becoming* Biblical would undermine the institution. “Slavery in itself” as a Biblical model could, paradoxically, cut away the ideological underpinnings of slavery in the

pro-slavery. See Timothy S. Huebner, *The Southern Judicial Tradition: State Judges and Sectional Distinctiveness, 1790-1860* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1999), 99-129.

South because such a model assumed positively un-Southern ideals. Hemphill had pressed this argument to Taggart.¹³

Taggart caught his southern friend's argument but misread his intent. The Pennsylvanian thought Hemphill saw "slavery in itself" to be a capitulation to the omnipresence of slavery in the Bible and a means of disavowing the ends of abolition. But Hemphill needed the capability to elevate slavery as a means to advocate for the slow extinction of its poor American reflection. It was a paradoxical way of turning the discussion on its head. ARPs could use the leverage of slavery's social failures to create space for workable manumission projects. Taggart saw this failure of a valid Biblical parallel as a reason to jettison the entire thing. Hemphill might have liked to do so. However this baby and bathwater approach was, in his view, simply unrealistic given the South's vehemence. It also gave no consideration to the economic and political needs of slaves once freed.¹⁴

Samuel referred to His southern friends' frustration with such misunderstandings in the North. "But you will perhaps say that all the fruit produced is evil, and you will perhaps repeat what you said before, that the rash measures of the abolitionists have caused the Legislature of this state to throw a

¹³ Samuel Taggart to William Hemphill.; Robert M. Calhoon, *Political Moderation in America's First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University, 2009),

¹⁴ Samuel Taggart to William Hemphill.

serious obstacle in the way of teaching the blacks.” Samuel doubted this very much.¹⁵

“Dear Friend, were you serious when you attributed such an effect to such a cause?” Hemphill, of course, could not be any more serious. Taggart nonetheless believed he understood all too well the motivations of Southern legislators for restricting slaves rights to read. “Has not slavery always fattened on ignorance and did not the evil legislators of your state know that knowledge is power.”¹⁶

“As you believe that slavery in itself, or the relation which exists between a master and slave is not wrong in its nature you will of course not be very zealous in seeking the termination of such a relation.” Zealousness, if by that was meant a hurried approach to social reform, was not something Hemphill or the South Carolina ARPs displayed. But they were *active* in their peculiar reform quest. Their moderation was different, but it was no less engaged. They needed time for a different reason: to create the social space necessary to reform slavery out of existence.

To that moderate end, Hemphill began to network in the community, tossing around the possibility of organizing the elusive South Carolina Auxiliary of the American Colonization Society.¹⁷ In the spirit of the coming Fourth of July

¹⁵ Samuel Taggart to William Hemphill.

¹⁶ Samuel Taggart to William Hemphill.

¹⁷ The proslavery ideology of Abbeville District was particularly acute. It was the family home of John C. Calhoun and the first place in South Carolina to vote for secession in 1860. For an overview of southern proslavery ideology see Elizabeth

celebration, a public forum was organized for Hemphill to speak on the topic. On Wednesday, July 1, 1840 Hemphill took the podium in front of various Abbeville neighbors and delivered a speech on which he had worked tirelessly. Scraps exist of at least two versions of the lecture. Hemphill never kept his old sermon drafts; he was anxious to get this right.¹⁸

He began by applauding colonization as a “benevolent undertaking” and a “Heaven born enterprise.” Why, then, were there so few followers within their own region? Undoubtedly, it was because “some of those in the South who are opposed to Colonization pretend to believe that it is the same as Abolitionism.” Nothing, he tried to convince his listeners, could be further from the truth.¹⁹

The essence of Abolition, he emphasized, was its conception of slavery as a “moral evil or sin under any and every circumstances” and, of great importance for his distinction, “that sin of any kind ought not to be indulged even for a moment, consequently slavery ought to be abandoned immediately, and the slaves turned loose into society.” Abolition’s emphasis, then, was on *immediacy* rather than wisdom. Abolitionists wanted slavery gone now, and slaves freed “to do anything

Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders Worldview* (New York: Cambridge, 2005); Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1987).

¹⁸ “Address on Colonization” (July 1, 1840), Hemphill Family Papers.

¹⁹ “Address on Colonization.”

and everything that ignorance and hunger and depraved nature might prompt them to perform.” He insisted that this was not colonization at all.²⁰

Colonization’s aim was “to journey to Africa such free coloured persons as are willing to go, and settle them down comfortably on the soil of their ancestors.” Here Hemphill turned the paternalistic argument against abolitionism, stating that the ACS plan “does not propose to transport any coloured person to Africa who is not willing to go.” In other words, colonization took into consideration the desires of the black men and women. Abolitionism, he continued, did not. The Abolitionists’ aim was “to liberate all the slaves at once without the consent either of master or servants.”²¹

Tellingly, he pointed out that the Colonization Society would never liberate a slave “against the will of his master,” but failed to address any statement of slavery’s perpetuity. He attempted to gloss over this by appealing to phrases like “our interests,” and “to advance the welfare of the South,” but he was careful to never explicitly state what that welfare entailed. Not forcing emancipation and being pro-slavery were not the same thing. Hemphill knew this, and side stepped the issue. His audience knew this too, and did not.²²

Hemphill did not always pull punches. He stepped in for a verbal jab directly at his own state politicians, something ARPs were notoriously good at doing. Proof

²⁰ “Address on Colonization.”

²¹ “Address on Colonization.”

²² “Address on Colonization.”

that the ACS should be more popular in the South was that “it has from its origin received the support of the greatest and best men in the slave holding states.” However, “It is true that not one of the great men of South Carolina” (he meant prominent state politicians John C. Calhoun and Whitemarsh Seabrook) “to my knowledge has disclaimed himself favorable.” Why? They must “either have discovered dangers connected with this society that other great men of the South never discovered,” or perhaps more likely, “they are less anxious to promote the welfare of the coloured race.” Hemphill seemed persuaded that accusing notable Southern politicians of racism would gain traction with his largely Thornwellian audience.²³

He contrasted the radical, fear mongering, conspiracy theory driven leadership of South Carolina with “the most distinguished men” of other states. “Presidents Madison + Munroe [sic] (and Jefferson too).” Maryland’s legislature, he pointed out, appropriated \$200,000 annually to the Colonization effort. Even “Mississippi and Louisiana are advancing hand in hand with Maryland in the work of Colonization!” References to Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina all closed a verbal noose around the political leadership of South Carolina. Every state in the shaky Union seemed to hold favorable views towards colonization. Every state, that is, except one.²⁴

²³ “Address on Colonization.”

²⁴ “Address on Colonization.”

Hemphill then turned to counter the argument that Liberia was a squalid, unlivable place with high mortality rates. Reading from an article in the *African Repository*, Hemphill argued that Liberian morbidity could not compare to the initial loss of life in the Jamestown colony. Considering the fact that the death toll in Jamestown climbed well over fifty (and at one point ninety) percent, this was not a particularly ringing endorsement. But, to Hemphill's credit, he did not attempt to deny the suffering that existed there, as many agents and speakers had done before. The numbers were in immigrants favor, he said. Of 3,123 immigrants 207 had died (6.9 percent). To the statistics he knew, Hemphill was being accurate.²⁵

However, accuracy and truth were two different things. Although Jamestown had been a viral massacre, this had little bearing on the chaos in Liberia. In reality, as Thomas Shick has shown and Antonio McDaniel confirmed, Liberian immigrants experienced in the first year some of the highest morbidity rates ever recorded for an immigrant population and were far more likely to die an untimely death than those who chose to stay in the United States. A child born to immigrant Liberian parents had a life expectancy of just three years. Hemphill was relying on figures printed in the *African Repository*. But anyone relying on those figures was displaying a distinct lack of critical judgment, or perhaps, a generally willingness to believe what an idealist desperately wanted to believe. In reality, of 4,571 immigrants between 1820-1843, 2,223 (48 percent) died, the vast majority far

²⁵ "Address on Colonization"; Eric Burin, *The Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, University of Florida, 2008), 57-58.

younger than their friends and family in America. In Shick's words, Liberia "came closer to being a death sentence than a new life."²⁶

The focus went from morbidity to morality. What benefit could such an American colony have? First and foremost, it would be "the good instrumentality in suppressing the slave trade." That "nefarious, infernal traffic" would have a formidable, American enemy on the coast of Africa with which to contend. In backing up this already sticky point with his audience, Hemphill referenced Englishman and "brooding abolitionist" Thomas Buxton, who acknowledged the usefulness of colonies in combating the trade. Hemphill was here placing colonization squarely between the rabid pro-slavery of his surroundings and the abolitionism squared off against it. Here, he felt, was a sensible, slow going, widely beneficial answer to an intractable problem. If other Southerners could see it, holier-than-thou abolitionists could too. Everyone ought to be able to agree to "extend civilization + religion into the interior of that benighted continent," or so he hoped.²⁷

Hemphill forgot, or neglected, to point out that "the traffic in human souls" which he condemned was going on beneath his nose. Between 1820-1860, some two million slaves were sold on the domestic slave market. In South Carolina during

²⁶ Tom W. Shick, "A Quantitative Analysis of Liberian Colonization from 1820-1843 with Special Reference to Mortality," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 12, No.1 (1971), 45-59; Antonio McDaniel, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: The Mortality Cost of Colonizing Liberia in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 104, 150-152.

²⁷ Hemphill, "Address on Colonization."

the previous 10 years, over 70,000 had been sold to local or out-of-state buyers out of a total slave population of 321,000. Abbeville itself was a hot spot for slave traders. The *Abbeville Banner* carried this advertisement sometime later concerning human souls. "100 Negroes Wanted! . . . young men and women, boys and girls."²⁸

If Hemphill was off put by the moral indignity of the foreign slave trade, he miscalculated a similar ethical imperative to be at work in his audience. South Carolinians actively debated reopening what he called "this cruel traffic." Those who opposed the move often did so for the same historic reasons that closed the trade in 1808: a decrease in inventory increased the price of existing commodities. \$5,000 worth of slaves in 1840 could increase to \$20,000 of net worth by 1855, without counting the profit of their labor-produced goods. Selling a slave was one of the most common forms of debt settlement. Southerners protested to the outside world that such sells were rare, simultaneously fighting tenaciously for the right to do so. Interesting, then, that Hemphill spent over three pages of a nineteen-page speech on that topic alone.²⁹

²⁸ Ibid; Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 291-295; Fredric Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore: J.H. Furst Company, 1931), 403-406 argues that 720 slaves were imported into South Carolina annually by the Civil War, and that the intra-state trade was associated with planter debt. For newspaper advertisements see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989).

²⁹ Bancroft, 80, 89, 6-18; Deyle, 8. Estimates range from 0.85% to as high as 3.28% of the slave population sold annually. Deyle has argued that the South Carolina's rate was 1.94%.

Hemphill was on a firmer footing when he appealed to economic opportunism. Appealing to paternalistic planters, he reminded them that a black American colony would “be very reluctant” to turn against American financial interests. “The commercial advantages then that would flow from civilizing Africa ought to be a reason with such persons for aiding in offsetting the work.” To those who thought that African trade had little to offer he chided, “We must also have sugar and coffee.” But who would grow it?³⁰

Again on this measure he danced close to the line. In the increasingly cotton-producing south, labor roles for slaves were in the process of moving from skilled to unskilled labor. This was a major advantage to slaveholders, as Ira Berlin has shown, since skilled labor gave slaves more social leverage and highlighted white dependence on black knowledge. But for Hemphill, it was the very skill of slaves that was a financial asset. “Some servants have been liberated and sent from Mississippi and Louisiana who were acquainted with the process of making sugar, and by aiding in leading others we may expect before many years to obtain this necessity of life at a reduced price.” Indigo, oils, nuts, fruits and timber were other potential staples that could be profitable. This was not an altogether bad place to end an unpopular speech.³¹

³⁰ Hemphill, “Address on Colonization.”

³¹ Hemphill, “Address on Colonization.”; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2000).

Had he stopped there he would already have lost his audience, but to embrace white guilt over slavery - out loud - was to ensure failure. And to his audience's ears, that is what he did.

If any nation on earth ought to feel interested in any scheme that would better the condition of Africa, it is the people of this nation. We have long had in possession her sons + her daughters + have grown rich as a people by the process of the proceeds of their industry, and a few dollars every year to restore to her soil, those of her children who are free + willing to go, is not only a benevolent contribution but a just and righteous act.³²

The minister had finally arrived at his his sermon. If all this was for naught, all christians should "desire the universal spread of the Gospel" and that "the Kingdom may extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth." Pointing to the millennial expectations of the times, he argued that Africa "must be enlightened and Christianized, as well as other portions of the globe before the millennium can be fully introduced." But who would go? Surely not whites, who had lost their moral authority.³³

"Shall we send them the bible and Missionaries," Hemphill queried, "by the slave ships that sail from Boston and the free states?" Surely not, he reasoned, as whites would be viewed only with the kind of suspicion one would expect from a people used to seeing them as harbingers of enslavement. Black men, however, could "open to the Christian world a wide and effectual door for the spread of the

³² Hemphill, "Address on Colonization."

³³ Hemphill, "Address on Colonization."

Gospel in that vast empire of degraded mind(s).” What he sought were indigenous missionaries, if only their masters would let them go. But the masters could not help but notice that Hemphill was co-opting the arguments of the free black man David Walker, whose *Appeal to the Coloured People of the World* made the exact same point. If Hemphill thought it sounded better coming out of his own mouth, he was mistaken.³⁴

“Every dollar then that is contributed to the cause of colonization is a dollar to the foreign missionary fund,” he argued. There the gospel would spread, along with “*the principle of civil liberty.*” It was the best of both worlds: a civil and religious exercise that joined the two aspects that made their own nation great: the will of heaven with the best interests of earth.³⁵

Just before it was over, he appealed again to the audiences’ self-interest. In words that would appear prophetic ten years later in George Grier’s life, he pointed to the common belief that free and “nominally free” slaves were likely to “exert more or less an injurious influence over the slave population.” The southern states would benefit, then, from transporting them and “as many servants as might from time to time be liberated by their masters for that purpose, and in that way prevent the slave population from increasing too rapidly an endangering the safety of the

³⁴ Hemphill, “Address on Colonization.”; David Walker, *Appeal to the Coloured People of the World*.

³⁵ Hemphill, “Address on Colonization.”

community” As shown below, these may be the only words Hemphill spoke that day that Abbeville residents took to heart.³⁶

As he ended Hemphill tipped his hand completely. Colonization gave “men who are conscientious on the subject of holding slaves” a way out. Many ARPs (mostly Covenanters) had left the South rather than “perpetuate the evil in their families.” Because of South Carolina’s strict laws forbidding emancipation except in the rarest of circumstances, colonization was the only way men who believed slavery “to be a moral evil” could provide their slaves what they believed was their due, “the benefits of civil and religious liberty.” Whether he noticed or not, and he probably did, Hemphill had turned a statement of observation into a proclamation of moral truth: slavery was a moral evil, corrupting generation upon generation that touched it.³⁷

The argument that such views flirted with the radical fringes of moderation may seem preposterous. But relative to the contexts of constraining social forces in upcountry South Carolina and the extreme dissenting religious heritage of the Covenanters and Seceders, this proposition made sense. The modern reader is appalled at Hemphill’s racism, paternalism, and not least his unwillingness to wrestle with the reality that Liberia was a death trap. His hearers were also appalled, but for a very different reason.

³⁶ Hemphill, “Address on Colonization.”

³⁷ Hemphill, “Address on Colonization.”

Every time Hemphill came close to saying exactly what would appease his listeners - that slavery was good in and of itself, that it need never be done away with, and that the benevolence of slavery outweighed the benevolence of other labor arrangements - he stopped short. It was, indeed, what he did not say to his audience that caused their bristling reactions. Abbeville County residents knew how to smell racial heterodoxy, and no amount of smoothing over would do. Even Hemphill's moderate, Biblical slavery model could not hide his hope that the institution (and free blacks) would, slowly, go away one boatload at a time.

The very idea of the plan struck at the radical pro-slavery core of Abbeville County and South Carolina. Fire-eaters believed that slaves were brutish people, incapable of self-government or capital enterprise, whose natural place was as property to be bought and sold. No one, they believed, got that truth more than South Carolinians. Thornwellian moderates believed that slaves were human souls whose lot was God's decision, not theirs. Social control was necessary for the salvation of souls. Hemphill proposed a colony of civil liberties for former slaves, made profitable by blacks, challenged the right to trade in slaves, and all with the blatant suggestion that South Carolina politicians didn't know which way was up. What appears moderate, cautious, and even pro-slavery rhetoric was borderline treasonous in the context of South Carolina and Abbeville District.

In the end, Hemphill had accomplished nothing more than to ruin everyone's 4th of July holiday. Even he realized he had failed. Within days the public outcry at Hemphill's speech was causing social tensions to heat. The Auxiliary Society he

proposed to create to support the society never materialized. Indeed, things regressed. Hemphill had been donating a copy of the ACS newspaper, the *African Repository* to Erskine Seminary in Due West. A friend noted that receiving the *Repository* was “beginning to work mischief through the gentleman of the Post office.” Things were too hot now for such political tensions in the life of the school. “For the sake of peace, and this alone, I have concluded with much reluctance to suggest to you the propriety of discontinuing the paper for the present.” Hemphill succeeded only in making things worse.³⁸

Hemphill constantly repeated the theme that abolitionism and “colonizationism” were not the same thing, why didn’t his audience believe him? Probably it was because Hemphill didn’t believe it himself. In his first draft of the speech, where he eventually stated that the two were fundamental opposites, he originally wrote that the two concepts “do not share the same tendencies.” Hemphill believed, as did everyone else, that Colonization was, to Covenanter thinking at least, the camel’s nose under the tent. They might not share the same tendencies, but they did have the same aim.³⁹

The only evidence that Hemphill might have made any headway came almost twenty years later in a perhaps unwelcome fashion. Two nearly identical petitions arrived at the General Assembly in 1859. Both decried the “deplorable condition of free blacks.” These public nuisances and constant evidence of slavery’s

³⁸ E.E Pressly to William Hemphill, July 6, 1840.

³⁹ Notes, Hemphill Family Papers.

contradictions should be, if possible re-enslaved, both petitions agreed. And, of course, both petitions came from Chester and Abbeville Districts from opponents of ARPs. However the author of the Abbeville petition inserted a line not found in the Chester petition. If re-enslavement proved politically unfeasible, the free blacks could be sent to Liberia. Twenty years later, it is still possible that such outspoken advocacy in 1840 had the effect of pushing colonization dialogue further into the front porch discussions that formed much political discourse in the antebellum backcountry.⁴⁰

Knowing he had failed to win over his Southern neighbors, Hemphill tried a new tact. He proposed to Judge Samuel Wilkeson of Florida that the ACS sponsor a prize essay competition, with a \$300-500 prize, for the writing of a 150-200 page length treatment of the cause of Colonization. Specifically, the essay should be aimed at winning over Southern slaveholders. His speech having utterly failed to do the trick, Hemphill was hopeful someone else's words might prove more persuasive than his own.⁴¹

The purpose of such an essay was the same as his failed address, to be presented "in order that the Southern men may have their prejudices removed, and their hearts enlisted in the cause of Colonization." The *Repository* itself, Hemphill

⁴⁰ Digital Library on American History Race and Slavery Petitions Project, PAR 11385909, 1859, Abbeville, SC, 113 residents; PAR 11385908, 1859, Chester, SC, 87

⁴¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal* (May, 1842). Hemphill appears as W.R.H.

realized, had become anathema-reading, at least in South Carolina. Now he couldn't even get a copy into Due West. The contents of the *Repository* itself often contained frank, even *too* frank discussions on abolition to ever get past the trigger-finger anti-abolitionism of Southern slaveholders. The writer should draw distinct and strong contrasts "between Colonization and Abolition principles." A strong argument could be found, he knew, if the conclusion ended "by pointing out the benefits resulting to this country by having the free colored population removed, and as many of the slave population (of which there is now a large surplus,) as masters might choose to manumit." Freed slaves could be transported then to "the land of the free and the home of the brave', as Liberia may well be called." Hemphill believed that, if distributed widely at no cost, "such an essay would certainly exert a very happy and extensive influence over the people of the South." He knew firsthand how hard a happy influence was to effect.⁴²

Hemphill urged that the only demonizing in such a work should focus not on slave owners, who after all, the essay targeted, but on the slave trade. "A whole chapter, perhaps, ought to be taken up in presenting to an indignant, but sympathizing world, the origin, progress, cruelties, &c., of that most horrible and detestable of all trades - the slave trade - and in showing what measures have been

⁴² "W.R.H.," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, (May, 1842).

taken by different Governments to suppress (it).” His views had not changed at all, simply his hope that someone else might more persuasively engage his audience.⁴³

He could be freer among his own congregation. In a sermon delivered the next year Hemphill laid out a host of similar points to the ones from the “Address” a year earlier. Here, however, he tied issues of civil liberty and religion even more closely together. Colonization was the cause “of the Christian, but also of every patriot + friend of the human family.” Twice he referred to the human family, in both instances refusing to make racial distinctions. Unable or unwilling to believe that the human family could find happiness together, he nonetheless clung to a hope that in Liberia blacks could be “free + equal.” “They plant + build and improve + they print and preach and write and educate + legislate.” Hemphill did believe that free blacks were “a class of people who are a nuisance and a detriment,” but he attributed that, obliquely, to their inability to find anything like equality in America. In Liberia a “transformation” took place, one that was the *result*, not the cause, of individual freedom.⁴⁴

Five years later Hemphill, aligned with other Colonization supporters from the South Carolina backcountry, took their case to the denomination. They first put out a call in the denomination’s newspaper, *The Christian Magazine of the South*, that any ARP churchmen who desired to free their slaves should notify church leaders. Freed slaves could be trained as missionaries and sent to Liberia. By the September

⁴³ “W.R.H.,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, (May, 1842).

⁴⁴ Sermon, Ecclesiastes 9:10, Hemphill Family Papers.

1846 meeting of the Synod of the South reception was positive enough to advance a resolution to begin a school for educating potential black missionaries, preferably away from rabid South Carolina. A motion was passed to form an exploratory committee and to begin training at least one of the freed blacks right away in Africa under the tutelage of “Thomas Ware, a colored man.” The effort for “an African College” foundered, however, and no real progress was ever made.⁴⁵

Did his congregation share his views on colonization and slavery? It seems highly likely that many of them did. What can be known is that when mainline Presbyterian ministers said *less* about slavery in the backcountry, they lost their congregations. Hemphill flew recklessly in the face of social norms and never once put his position at risk. The record is empty of meetings or votes to consider his removal from the parish. That Hemphill’s position was never in jeopardy suggests a general assent from other ARPs on colonization as a solution, and thus slavery as a problem, in a Southern context. When he resigned his charge in 1848 to teach at Erskine College full-time, the church noted that it parted with him with great reluctance.⁴⁶

What separated the Covenanters of the backcountry from their neighbors was the belief that slavery was, in the end, an immoral system in desperate need of reform. What separated them from their fellow ARPs in the North, however, was something Covenanters were simply not used to: moderation. As ARPs in the north,

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South (September 1846).

⁴⁶ *History of the ARP Church*, 440.

especially in Pennsylvania gravitated farther and farther towards abolitionism, the exchanges between the Southern Synod and the Synods of Pennsylvania and Scioto on slavery became increasingly tense.

Covenanters in the North need not jettison Biblical slavery to be abolitionist. They could simply say that what the South had and what the Bible taught were two different institutions altogether. Southern Covenanters simply did not have that kind of social space in which to work. They were forced through local circumstance to *first* conform slavery to the Bible and *second* attempt to edge it out of Christian favor.

At the heart of the issue for William Hemphill and others was the immediacy or *immoderation* of the abolitionist cause; he called this the idea “that slavery ought to be abandoned forthwith,” and accused abolitionists of no concern for “whatever depredations, poverty, and hunger” might result. He attacked, in short, their lack of wisdom. Unlike his old college friends and fellow ministers from the North, Hemphill understood what slavery meant to the residents of Abbeville County. Such a plan would never survive politically in the South; Hemphill knew that whites would not willfully embrace the land reforms needed to stabilize black economic life in freedom, and Reconstruction proved him right. Hemphill genuinely believed that blacks would never have civil liberties in the racist South, and it took the next century to prove him wrong. What was needed was an alternative, a plan that took into account the realities of the South with the imperatives of human freedom. In this he echoed the rhetoric of colonizationists, who were wont to refer to

Abolitionists as “Immediatists.” In Colonization he believed he had found a workable plan. As he said to his congregation, in his most open admission of this belief, “this emancipation would be far different.”⁴⁷

Slavery itself should be far different, too, he felt. Covenanters in Abbeville were also active in calls to reform laws that would protect married slaves from forcible separation through sale. A few months into the Civil War, local Covenanter ministers John P. Pressly and Hemphill both lashed out with Jeremiads on the marriage issue to the *Due West Telescope*. They wrote to an audience that still interpreted such tragedies as the recent battlefield losses at Antietam as barometers of God’s displeasure. But what was the Lord’s point?

Pressly argued that while slavery was in the Bible, “much of the treatment” of Southern slaves “is far from being Scriptural.” He saw all around him “by many white people, the disparagement of the marriage relation and awful neglect of moral instruction.” Hemphill pointed to the failure to protect slave marriages and the restriction of slave’s literacy as subjects of God’s wrath. “We have not a doubt, that this state of things is one reason why the terrible judgments of heaven are upon us, and these judgments will continue until the evils complained of are remedied.” Hemphill insisted that the blessings of marriage were of “divine appointment.” The violation of marriage was a violation of the sinews of Covenant within humanity, and endangered the Covenant with God. Marriage was for “the whole human

⁴⁷ William Hemphill to “Mr. Editor,” undated; *African Repository*, Oct. 1835; Sermon, Ecclesiastes 9:10.

family.” The failure of the state, indeed, all southern states, to guarantee these rights was a blot on the South now being played out in the cornfields of Maryland.⁴⁸

“There is no law,” they continued, “as far as known to us, in any of the slaveholding states to protect the marriage relation of slaves, and any master through the promptings of interest, may separate his servants who claim to be husbands and wives and sunder the marriage connection.” Black members of ARP churches were admitted to fellowship despite having, according to white standards, two, three or even more spouses. This was not because they so desired, Hemphill intoned, but because the slaveholders themselves had forced this curse upon them. “The sooner it is repealed, the better for us,” he concluded.⁴⁹

Hemphill, supported by another Pressley, Erskine’s first president E.E. Pressly, had made a similar resolution at a meeting of the ARP Synod of the South in 1844. In almost verbatim language to that he used in the *Telescope* eighteen years later, Hemphill reminded his “fathers and brothers” that marriage was a divine institution. His resolution required all slaves of ARP families to enter marriage “according to those formalities which are usual among servants, and which are reckoned as rendering the relation valid.” He demanded further that no married parties be separated “for any reason or considerations that would not be a valid cause of dissolving the marriage contract among the white population.” The motion was deferred for consideration for one year: death by committee. It is likely this

⁴⁸ *Due West Telescope*, June 13, 1862; November 28, 1862.

⁴⁹ *Due West Telescope*, June 13, 1862; November 28, 1862.

reflected the votes of non-South Carolina ARPs. Hemphill's Covenanter moral reforms largely reflected the South Carolina Presbytery's views.⁵⁰

This decision may reflect the narrowing of Southern political dialogue on slave issues after the Nullification crisis. In part, this might be attributed to the fear of angry laymen, or angry communities, upon the passage of such a resolution. But Hemphill, the Pressley's, and the Grier's were becoming used to community conflict, especially with other Presbyterians. If they could not convince everyone else, they could at least practice their beliefs in their own families, protecting marriages and family cohesion. The determination to practice these ethics privately, even if they could not gain wider followings, put Covenanters on a collision course with Abbeville residents by 1850.

Years later a (perhaps embellished) story was recounted in the *Press and Banner*. When prominent ARP James Lindsay died in 1852, thirty of his slaves were sold to settle his accounts. The remaining slaves discovered that Peter, a carpenter and perhaps a family man, had been sold in the deal. Their protests were made to the family, and another ARP, J.I. Bonner, rushed to Abbeville to purchase Peter again. The slave trader, sensing the situation, made a \$500 profit. Even decades after slavery, Covenanters were fond of pointing out their propensity to kindness and

⁵⁰ *Minutes of Synod, the Associate Reformed Synod of the South* (1844), pp.364-365.

emphasis on family cohesion. No mention was made in the story of the other twenty-nine slaves.⁵¹

George Grier and the black Covenanter message

As moderation slowly became conservatism, perhaps the last radical Covenanter left in South Carolina was George Grier.⁵² Grier, a slave carpenter owned somewhat nominally by Rev. Robert Grier, lived in the Covenanter town of Due West, SC. Due West was the home of the ARP seminary in the South and a hub of intellectual and religious life for the sect. Grier had undoubtedly been involved in the literacy work of Covenanters and had probably been raised in weekly or even daily devotionals in the old praying society model.⁵³ George Grier was hired out to

⁵¹ *Abbeville (SC) Press and Banner*, March 26, 1902. This story is found in Ware, *A Place Called Due West*.

⁵² Here I am emphasizing the ability of Covenanter sensibility to cross racial lines, making a Scots Irish religious tradition useful and relevant to the life of slaves as personified in the story of George Grier. This is not to deny the other powerful Old World cultural currents that remained vibrant in the slavery community. Recent works have emphasized the survival of African religious and social traditions. See James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998).

⁵³ Standard works emphasizing the importance of Christianity in slave communities include Albert J. Rabatou, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University, 1978); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: the world the slaves made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University, 1972); and Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975). Recent challenges to this narrative have come from those doubting that

an Abbeville farmer named Lemuel Reid in June of 1850. One evening Reid heard loud talking coming from his kitchen building and snuck around the back to hear what was said.⁵⁴

Reid later gave a deposition on what he heard. He stated that he had rightly suspected that Grier would be speaking “on the subject of religion,” indicating that George Grier was known for speaking on religious discussion and may have operated as a preacher within the slave community. He recorded hearing nine sentences worth of Grier’s message before breaking up the assembly.

The first thing I heard him distinctly say to my negroes, was, that they ought not to be discouraged on the account of their difficulties. There was no reason why they were in the situation they were, only that God permitted it to be so. That God was working for their deliverance. He was working by secret means, and would deliver them from their bondage as sure as the children of Israel were delivered from the Egyptian bondage. That the question had been in agitation for the last fifty years. That those who were working for them did not know exactly how long it would be before they would be set free. There was no doubt that it would be soon. That they ought to pray for, and their prayers would go up before God and be answered. That the smartest men in the United States----. At this point of his conversation I could not stand any longer to listen to any such conversation, and permit him to talk in that strain to my negroes. I did not hear him finish the sentence...

This sermon contains several interesting interpretive points. There is the obvious point of theological comparison not with the white William Hemphill, but other

Christianity made significant headway in slave communities. For a helpful overview see Daniel L. Fountain, *Slavery, Civil War and Salvation: African American Slaves and Christianity, 1830-1870* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2010).

⁵⁴ Grier and Hemphill are listed as neighbors in the 1850 Census.

slaves messages of religion and deliverance from slavery. Namely, the very different interpretations of Providentialism and slavery posed by Grier and other religious slave leaders like Nat Turner in Virginia and the freeman Denmark Vesey in Charleston, SC is insightful. Instead of urging slaves to personally live out God's power to overthrow slavery, Grier vested the deliverance of his people in God's working through "secret means." The Israelite deliverance from the Egyptian captivity made their own deliverance sure. As in that case, it was God who performed the miracles and, critically, it had been a non-violent insurrection that happened only when God intervened into human affairs. Instead of rising up, the slaves ought to pray, "and their prayers would go up before God and be answered." This deliverance they were not only right in wanting, but sure in trusting it would come. They should, in short, desire and pray.⁵⁵

After being confronted by the slaveholding Reid, George Grier repeatedly did two things. First, he insisted he had not meant to stir up an insurrection or discontent amongst Reid's slaves. Secondly, he did not go back on his message, insisting, according to the deposition, that people talked that way "about town," by which he meant the town occupied by Covenanter Presbyterians rather than mainline Presbyterians. Grier would later be tried for seditious speech, lashed

⁵⁵ Joseph S. Moore, "To the Public: A Transcription of Robert Grier's 1850 Broadside with an Introduction." *The Journal of Backcountry Studies*. Volume IV, Issue 2 (August, 2009). The trial records were lost to fire, but the broadside includes the verbatim transcripts from the trial.

thirty-nine times, and exiled from South Carolina for repeating what whites were saying in their private homes and churches “about town.”⁵⁶

These two messages, Hemphill’s on colonization and Grier’s on emancipation, represent a troubled dialectic of the Covenanter message between the white community and the black community in Abbeville District. Although one message is more self-evidently millennial, both insist on a kind of patience on God’s intervening power into human history as the lynchpin of a moderate approach to handling slavery in their own time and hoping for a solution to slavery in the future. Both insist on the importance and power of desire and prayer in cultivating a sense of humility in the face of an seemingly intractable moral and social dilemma. Both are, to be short, attempts at finding a middle ground on slavery in their own communities. The one straddles the space between the vehement pro-slavery of South Carolina politics and the radicalism of abolition held by co-religionists, the other the space between insurrection and accommodation.

Here an analysis of the two addresses should turn to what seems an antiquarian point. The Covenanter Presbyterians only sang the Psalms. During George Grier’s trial a slave in the audience was called as a witness. Abram Reid was asked what Grier had been discussing before being overheard. He stated that “George had been talking a good while- a half hour- talking about singing, praying, and churches.” It is impossible to know what side Grier took in the seemingly

⁵⁶ Moore, “To the Public.”

miniscule theological debate regarding the use of hymns and Psalms in worship. What is important is less his stance than his subject. Grier was expositing on the divisions within white churches. What divided the ARPs in his community and the Presbyterians in Abram Reid's community was precisely "singing, praying and churches," that is to say, denominations and how they worshiped. Grier had been explaining the differences in his community and theirs.⁵⁷

And this message would crescendo with the disagreements regarding slavery. Slavery was, indeed, a moral evil. This was a point Rev. Robert Grier, George Grier's owner, got in some degree of hot water for supporting to the enraged Lemuel Reid. For pro-slavery whites, slavery had ceased to be an evil institution, but rather, an amelioration of other evils of race and civilization. But for Covenanters, it was an evil requiring desire and prayer to overcome. It was not abolition, but it was a start.

And it was a division. George Grier was talking about the fault lines in white Abbeville District society. There was space, small, tight but critical space between the ideology of one white community and another. Into this space slaves could find useful room to discuss the end of slavery with emphasis on God's intervening power on a divine, mystical but sure timeline. Grier had gathered these insights from night after night of religious devotions, literacy education and catechizing. He had gathered them from the children of former phanaticks. Back and forth, discussions

⁵⁷ Moore, "To the Public."

about the old fights against tyranny and the value of the righteous community had informed white and black dialogue about the role of phanaticks tradition in a slave society.⁵⁸

Civil War, Reconstruction, and the absorption into conservatism⁵⁹

Fleeing the Union armies, Jefferson Davis convened his last Cabinet meeting in Abbeville on May 2, 1865. He was captured later that month across the border in Georgia. In June, Ben Miller, a former slave of the local medical doctor, set fire to the cotton crop and home of Andrew Hawthorne in Due West. Hawthorne was one of the area's wealthiest men and owned the town's largest house. The building was so large that the Hawthorne family, prominent members of the local ARP church, could not fill it out entirely. They rented the rooms to students of Erskine College and the Female College so that the home ran as a kind of local hotel. Elizabeth McQuerns and several of her schoolmates were forced to leap from the second story of the

⁵⁸ Works that have challenged a simple white-black dichotomy in the study of religion, slavery and southern society are Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: white and black evangelicals in colonial and antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008).

⁵⁹ Recent books to examine the religious crisis of the Civil War and its effects on the Reconstruction period include Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006); Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin, 2006); Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout and Charles Reagan Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University, 1998); George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2010); for Reconstruction see Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005).

burning structure. As they landed on the mattresses held below, it might have occurred to them that the world was about to be a far different place.

Reconstruction had come to upper Abbeville.⁶⁰

Four white men found the arsonist Ben Miller, and according to the diary of Samuel Agnew, “whipped him.” In response to their punishment, the all-black Union garrison dispatched troops to apprehend the white men responsible for whipping Ben Miller. The four - Oscar Drennan, Ted Nance, Robert Ellis, and Robert Pratt - were forced to run from black troops. William Hemphill wrote to fellow clergyman John H. Simpson in Chester that Due West had been the target of a “Yankee Negro raid.”⁶¹

The Hawthorne House burning was filled with meaning and foreshadowing for the decade ahead. The charter listed the Hawthorne house as the marker of Due West’s geographic middle - literally the center of town. Space would become an important marker of divisions between both white and black society as well as the divisions amongst African Americans. The town’s largest home, with too many rooms, a crop full of cotton, owned by one of the town’s largest slaveholders, and prominent members in *the* local church were the first targets of violent resistance to

⁶⁰ Diary of Samuel A. Agnew, July 13, 1865; Hawthorne’s pre-war net worth was \$57,800. Many of the printed sources referenced below are also found without editorial comment in Lowry Ware’s excellent compilation, *A Place Called Due West: The Home of Erskine College* (Columbia, SC: R.L. Bryan, Co., 1997). Ware’s presentation of important primary sources on Abbeville District and County is remarkable and has yet to be adequately engaged by other scholars. In most places I have utilized the original sources. Where I have not, Ware is cited.

⁶¹ Samuel Agnew Diary, August 17, 1865; John Simpson Diary, July 29, 1865.

the established order. Reconstruction was ushered in not with the kind of bi-racial moderation whites in Due West had so prized in the pre-war era, but with an act of retribution that called into question just how one-sided paternalistic white peacemaking had been.

Whites responded with force of their own. Four white men had acted on behalf of the community by chastening a worker-as-property, but were careful not to permanently damage the property. Agnew's diary betrays this exact sentiment when he noted that "A Negro of Dr. Miller's" had committed the crime. To the white mind in 1865 Abbeville, Ben Miller was still a slave.⁶² Similar punishments were meted out against African Americans across Abbeville District into the 1880s.⁶³

Equally important for the Reconstruction experience was black armed resistance. Nearly all of the Federal troops who rushed down the twelve miles of road from Abbeville to Due West were former slaves. This point was not lost on Due West's African-American inhabitants. Local whites were running scared, and they were running from black men armed with guns.

Where did bi-racial moderation go in the aftermath of emancipation? Covenanter Presbyterians, who began the 1860s opposed to slavery in principle, became increasingly like their other white neighbors. In effect, Reconstruction made them *after* the war what other whites had been *before* the war, paternalistic southern Democrats demanding a hierarchy of white control. Partially, this

⁶² Samuel Agnew Diary, August 17, 1865.

⁶³ Lowry Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 109-110.

reflected the fragility of their antebellum insulation from other communities. Partially it was the product of a host of marriages that brought in leading financial donors with no commitment to the Covenanter sensibility. This was true of William Stuart, a Bartow, FL, based millionaire and a Methodist who married into an ARP family. His financial contributions increasingly dictated the actions of denominational agencies.⁶⁴ It was also the product of military defeat combined with a sense of moralistic indignity at political corruption that cut to the heart of their religious and political identity. Accusations of fraud in Reconstruction state governments easily won over the ARPs of the upcountry as a vice worth confronting. Mostly, however, this was the product of trying to put back together their pre-war world. Some former slaves created amicable relations with whites that resembled pre-war cooperation closely enough to convince whites that the two races could live in harmony. When a group of outspoken freedmen and -women rejected this, however, ARPs reevaluated their commitments. Whites in upper Abbeville responded to black assertions of independence by mobilizing in militant Democratic politics and becoming nearly indistinguishable from other white South Carolinians.

The following pages on the African American community outside of Due West represent an anthropological excursus of the culture of a free black community. Evidence is fragmentary and conclusions are suggested only inasmuch as meaning

⁶⁴ Ray A. King, conversation with the author, March 7, 2010. King was the longtime historian of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian seminary in Due West, SC.

can be drawn speculatively from the sources. This initial foray into sketching the cultural anthropology of a free black community requires further investigation to make more definitive conclusions.⁶⁵

African Americans in upper Abbeville split in two in every way possible: spatially, socially, economically, religiously, politically, and ideologically the roughly two hundred former slaves around Due West were torn apart during Reconstruction.⁶⁶ That some African Americans remained on very positive terms with local whites was partially the product of the antebellum bi-racialism that created a moderate element amongst Due West's African Americans. As blacks and whites had broken bread, read, prayed, worshiped, and worked together in the antebellum years many African Americans genuinely embraced a spirit of Christian cooperation centered on the text of the Bible and the family devotional practices of Covenanter tradition. An economic element was also at play, since many if not most of those who continued to work and live closely with local whites were dependent on white lands, families and business for employment. But it would be a mistake to assume that this was exclusively an accommodationist, practical decision for these African Americans. The pre-war divisions within the slave communities of upper

⁶⁵ For a longer and superior treatment of black agency in reconstruction, see Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1-12, 163-316.

⁶⁶ For an overview of African American social life in Reconstruction piedmont South Carolina, see W.J. Megginson, *African American Life in South Carolina's Upper Piedmont 1780-1900* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2006), 179-274.

Abbeville also came to bear as well. Those who found meaning and purpose in their lives through religious community as well as those whose favored pre-war positions were closely tied to white families straddled a space in between local whites and other, less amicable African Americans.

These more moderate African Americans took on new arrangements for old work. They continued to worship in the ARP church with whites. Freedpeople lived more or less in the same areas of town in which they lived before, generally close to the homes of former owners. For instance, Phyllis, a freedwoman, continued to live with the Todd family in Due West. When they purchased a new home on the west side of town in the early 1880s, a cabin was built for Phyllis nearby where she lived her entire life as a domestic servant.⁶⁷

Other freedmen and –women rejected pre-war bi-racial moderation as a long suspected paternalistic means of white control. The first discernable movements in this second-side of Reconstruction in Due West revolved around labor. Samuel Agnew’s diary entry in Mississippi mentioned receiving a letter from Due West. “The Negroes there, like they are here, seem to think that freedom is only another name for idleness.”⁶⁸ Agnew went on to add that whites feared “trouble at Christmas.” Already division lines were appearing between African Americans who reentered their pre-war work roles and those who either rejected those roles,

⁶⁷ Lowry Ware, *A Place Called Due West: The Home of Erskine College* (Columbia, SC: R.L. Bryan, Co., 1997), 89.

⁶⁸ Samuel Agnew Diary, November 8, 1865.

negotiated new ones, or simply demanded a more amenable work pace. As Martin Klein has observed, “The labor issue in post-emancipation societies is that once slaves are free, it is impossible to make them work like slaves.”⁶⁹

Shortly after the war, geography became a second marker of independence. Exactly one mile due east of Due West, African Americans founded their own village. This spatial separation from both whites and moderate blacks centered on a log schoolhouse along the road to the town of Donalds. There, a handful of families began making their post-war homes at a distance close enough to town centers to be functional but far enough away to assert their own independence over their living space. The area took on the name of the most prominent African American freedmen in the area, the Wimbush family, who were also the town’s most vocal Republicans. “Wimbushville,” as the *Press and Banner* called it, became in some ways a town unto itself nearly within earshot of the edge of Due West. The *Abbeville Medium* dubbed it “this little pent up Africa.”⁷⁰

Wimbushville’s citizens were generally, though not exclusively, less dependent on jobs on white farms. The highest concentration of black men in northeast Abbeville County who listed themselves as independent “farmers,” skilled craftsmen or clergymen in the 1880 census lived outside of Due West in the area around the black settlement. The Wimbush family, around whom so much conflict

⁶⁹ Martin Klein, remarks at the American Historical Association (San Diego, CA: January 7, 2010).

⁷⁰ *Press and Banner*, April 11, 1877; *Medium*, April 11, 1877.

centered with white Due West, were some of the region's finest brick layers. Even in the crux of their bitterest disputes with whites in the area, they were hired to build and repair buildings for Erskine College. Republican bricklayer Andy Nelson may have been the highest paid black worker in the northeast area of Abbeville District and had a reputation amongst whites as "industrious, honest" and a "respectable colored man."⁷¹

This economic independence contained an assertive social corollary. Only four African American women in the town proper of Due West, out of twenty-eight, listed themselves in the 1880 census as "keeping house." All other women whose work was described were listed as "servants" or "washerwoman." Of the four exceptions, Louisa Lindsey was married to the local carpenter; CS Reese was married to the town shoemaker; Aisley Scott was married to the town blacksmith; and Louisa Hawthorne was married to clergyman E. Hawthorne. In short, each woman's family was supported by skilled labor needed by black and whites within the town, while Louisa Hawthorne's husband served an African American congregation.⁷²

Outside of town, where families tended to be poorer and more dependent on working white-owned land, men and women alike were endlessly listed as "laborer." However a mile beyond town, Wimbushville's dozen or so cottages included

⁷¹ "Report of the Treasurer of Erskine College," *Minutes of Synod*, Associate Reformed Synod of the South, 1878; *Abbeville Medium* November 15, 1876.

⁷² 1880 Census. Due West Township, Abbeville County, South Carolina. Enumeration District No. 10, Supervisor District No. 7, pages 1-9.

thirteen women who listed themselves as “keeping house.” Their husbands ran the gamut of skilled craftsmen, clergymen, and more commonly, laborers. The Wimbush family, along with at least eight and possibly as many as fifteen other Wimbush men called themselves “farmers.”⁷³

For men and women alike, the autonomous space of Wimbushville was lived out in more than geography. Men, laborers and skilled workers alike, sought economic distance from white control, even when they worked for white landholders. Religious vocations abounded, as four African-American clergymen lived in or near Wimbushville, compared to the one black minister in Due West. Two carpenters and the area's only African-American school teacher also lived in the hamlet. Peter Wimbush and his sons Cyrus and Jesse were independent farmers and bricklayers. African-American women, whenever possible, took on domestic roles within their own families. They kept their homes, not another woman's. They worked to raise their children, not white children. And they did this in what they considered to be their town, not someone else's. This domestic ideology itself tapped into the sense of independence Wimbushville exuded in the Reconstruction era. For many women raised in slavery in upper Abbeville serving (or watching their mothers serve) the needs of other families, the memory of pre-war bi-racial moderation rang hollow. One mile away, they had created their own homes. Their domestic labor was doubly important, both as an investment in their own family

⁷³ 1880 Census. Due West Township, Abbeville County, South Carolina. Enumeration District No. 10, Supervisor District No. 7, pages 10-20.

lives and as a marker of value in the southern social economy. In the same way that a handful of these families sought economic independence by gaining the status of independent farmers, women, regardless of circumstance, attempted to carve out spheres of meaning, influence, and respect by proving that their work was their family. Wimbushville's high concentration of housekeepers was a marker of home rule.

Religion was another marker of this local independence. In 1868 a handful of freedmen and -women left Due West's biracial worship services and family devotions. In 1865 the Due West ARP church included ninety white and one hundred and forty black members. Three years later, several dozen black families rejected Presbyterianism in favor of Methodism. They broke away and formed the Mt. Lebanon A.M.E. church. Like the town of Wimbushville, they began their worship one mile east of town in the log cabin school. Their worship was louder and more emotive than the reserved Psalm singing of the ARPs. They sponsored cakewalks, and their members organized the Due West Brass Band.⁷⁴ They were decidedly *not* worshiping as they had under white authority a few years back.

Another marker of freedom was lifestyle. These freedmen and -women rejected the temperance of Covenanter communities. In the late 1860s the local white leadership attempted to build up the former seminary and college to prewar levels. Their pre-war reputation for prudishness, the same boring ways that led

⁷⁴ *Abbeville Medium* December 24, 1873; January 21, 1874.

both of John C. Calhoun's sons to flee within weeks of enrolling, was now all the more important with the rise of the Female College as a revenue stream. However the post-war period was filled with incidents of drinking, carousing and cavorting, prompting numerous attempts by school officials to ban where the male students could and could not go, and what they could and could not do. To whites, the drunkenness and general scoffing at authority was blamed partially on "the looseness of manners begotten of the war." It was also laid at the doorstep of the African American settlement's residents, who were prosecuted for liquor sales to students.⁷⁵

And Wimbushville was Republican country. In 1870 the fledgling town brought in a Brass Band from Greenville and held a "grand exhibition" at their log cabin school and church. Around forty speeches were made. The newspaper of the ARP church said that the "taste of politics" and whiskey were evident at the event. The Wimbush family and the village itself were the center of Republican politics in the northeast area of Abbeville. Cyrus worked as a box manager in elections in 1874 and 1876. In both years, there were exactly 141 Republican votes in the precinct. The Abbeville papers dubbed elderly Peter Wimbush, "the father of the Radicals."⁷⁶

Evidence suggests that the Reconstruction period saw local African Americans split along multiple fault lines. Wimbushville residents moved east,

⁷⁵ William Hood, *Memoirs*, pp.47-50. For liquor, see *Press and Banner*, May 24, 1876.

⁷⁶ Lowry Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 102, 108.

joined the AME church, sought family and financial independence from white-owned work, enjoyed alcohol, brass band music, their own education with their own teachers, and political activism within the Republican party. But a sizable portion of African Americans from Due West did not reject the pre-war, biracial moderation that set northeast Abbeville District apart from the southern portions of the district. Many freedmen and women remained in Due West or continued to work with white families as domestic servants and sharecroppers. This cannot be explained simply by work roles. Despite the higher concentration of independent workers in Wimbushville, many of that hamlet's workers were laborers for white farms as well. Simply put, some laborers and sharecroppers moved away from whites into all-black areas while others remained in older residential patterns. Those who remained continued to carry on close and comparatively amicable bi-racial relationships.

One of the most prominent examples of the interactions between white-Due West and moderate African Americans was the return of George Grier. Grier had been living out of state, probably in the Mecklenburg area of North Carolina, since his expulsion in 1851. After the war, William Hemphill rode to Columbia to secure a pardon for George, which was granted. Grier was allowed to return to the area.⁷⁷

But this did not mean that things stayed the same. Possibly in a response to the founding of Mt. Lebanon AME in Wimbushville, but certainly as a result of calls

⁷⁷ Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 80-110.

for more black autonomy, ARPs founded their own all-black church in 1870. All but one black member of Due West's bi-racial congregation transferred their membership to Mt. Zion Presbyterian church after Thomas Young, a former slave, was ordained by the Second Presbytery.⁷⁸ The church grew but eventually withdrew from the ARP church and joined with the northern Presbyterian Church.⁷⁹ Members of this more moderate black citizenry were at times allied with whites and at other times joined with residents in Wimbushville.

In 1871 Ben L. Young, a member of this community and probably also a former slave of Professor Young, ran for school Commissioner. Young publicly announced his candidacy in language steeped in the pre-war moderation that had informed life amongst upcountry Abbevillians. "The power of money," he wrote, "sinks the souls of both white and black into the lowest confines of hell." He hoped that if elected, "money will not be my ruin."⁸⁰ He failed to gain the Republican nomination because he could not garner enough support amongst other African Americans, indicating that divisions amongst African Americans could turn against those too closely aligned with white interests. Young's moralistic moderation paid off the next year, however, when he gained an appointed position as trial justice for Due West. Young, like Phyllis who lived with the Todd family and the other black Presbyterians in upper Abbeville, dwelt in between the white Democrat and African

⁷⁸ Session Minutes, Due West Church, May 6, 1870; Minutes Second Presbytery, May 12, 1870.

⁷⁹ Lathan, *Centennial History of the ARP Church*, 390-418.

⁸⁰ *Abbeville Medium*, June 12, 1872.

American Republicanism of the 1870s. This was not simply political. Andy Nelson, who retained his Republican radicalism, nonetheless left Mt. Lebanon AME to rejoin the white ARP church. This may have been because his mother was the only African American left in the Due West church. He would later serve as the church sexton.⁸¹ These divided friendships and rival loyalties would come to a head by the mid-1870s.

By 1872 Wimbushville sported a larger schoolhouse, newer homes, and a brand new church building for the Mt. Lebanon AME congregation.⁸² There were now around forty to sixty residents, compared to the roughly two hundred residing in the vicinity of Due West. And the 1870s were a time of growing racial tension between the semi-autonomous African Americans and their former masters in town.

In 1875 the tensions that ushered in Reconstruction were on display. Jesse Wimbush was tried before the town's newest trial justice, Andrew Hawthorne. Hawthorne's home and cotton bails had been the object of the 1865 arson attack that began Reconstruction in upper Abbeville District. Wimbush was accused of assaulting two white men, James Kay and Samuel Cochran. The alleged weapon was Wimbush's buggy. Wimbush had been riding the road back from the Long Cane region of the district when the white man, Kay, was coming in the opposite direction. Wimbush yelled at Kay to give way, which Kay apparently refused to do,

⁸¹ Minutes Session, Due West Church, May 1872; September 22, 1872.

⁸² *Press and Banner*, May 1, 1872.

and his horse was injured when the buggy wheel struck it. Wimbush saw no reason to stop to assist Kay with his problem.⁸³

As luck would have it, Andy Nelson, the skilled and well-paid black brick mason, was drunk in the passenger seat. The collision unseated him, and he fell from the buggy. Wimbush was forced to stop and Kay and his friend Samuel Cochran confronted the buggy driver to demand an apology. An apology Wimbush refused to give, and after Kay decried one of the district's leading Republican agitators as a "black son of a bitch," Kay reached for his gun. Wimbush, also armed, declared, "if that's your game I can shoot as many times as you can." The white men, Kay and Cochran, backed down but Wimbush was later charged with assault on the horse and, vicariously, on Kay himself. It seems evident that the man's real crime was failing to give way to a white person on the road, and that he felt confident that his only means of asserting his right not to give way lay in being equally willing to employ violent means to defend that right. A black witness, Arthur Jones, substantiated Wimbush's claim that he was innocent because the harness was broken on the buggy and that it was Kay who ignored warnings to clear the path.⁸⁴

In a visible show of Reconstruction divisions, the jury included three whites and three blacks. Ben Young, the former black trial justice for Due West and the moderate Republican who failed to gain the School Commissioner nomination, was

⁸³ Ware, *A Place Called Due West*.

⁸⁴ Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 80-108.

on the jury as was the white professor William Hemphill. The result of the trial was a hung jury.⁸⁵

The following year Jesse's brother, Cyrus, also ended up on trial when he was charged and convicted for selling alcohol to college students at Erskine.⁸⁶ By the time of his trial in May, another shift was occurring in post-war Due West. Just as the families of Wimbushville were taking on new, more assertive postures towards white customs and laws, whites began to do the same.

Upper Abbeville's whites began to grope for a way to keep some semblance of white order, sobriety, and political hegemony in the backcountry. In the lead up to the 1876 election, the Democratic Club of Due West was formed and within a month had nearly one hundred members.⁸⁷ When Republican Governor Daniel Chamberlin made a campaign stop in Abbeville, the Wimbushville Republicans and other local African American leaders found themselves surrounded by the county's red shirts, including their Due West neighbors, blasting the sounds of a Silver Cornett band into the crowd to disrupt the political rally.⁸⁸

Due West's whites, formerly voices of caution in local politics, embraced the growing political frenzy around the 1876 election at all levels. Professor William Hood was nominated for the state legislature. Rev. Bonner from the Due West Church offered a prayer for the county's meeting of Red Shirts. The rally included

⁸⁵ Ware, *A Placed Called Due West*, 80-108.

⁸⁶ *Press and Banner*, May 24, 1876.

⁸⁷ *Press and Banner*, April 5, 1876.

⁸⁸ *Press and Banner*, August 30, 1876.

the marching of the Due West Rifle Club along with a wagon and a banner that read, “There is Life in the Old Land Yet.”⁸⁹

With the election one month away, the upper district’s Democrats gathered in Due West. Included in the meeting were Due West’s African-American Democrats who had publically declared support for the gubernatorial candidacy of Wade Hampton. With an African American man, Neal Richey, in the front of the column, the mostly white Democratic meeting marched on Wimbushville in a display of force and community solidarity against the Republican agitators one mile away. A crowd of nearly 3,000 people from across Abbeville District turned out to witness white and black Democrats storm the opposing camp. ARPs had always believed their church to be the righteous remnant whose Psalm singing and communal piety best reflected ancient Israel. Now, like Joshua on Jericho, they intended to bring down the walls built up due east of Due West.⁹⁰

This march on Wimbushville was carefully timed to coincide with a Republican meeting by African American leaders. Once the meeting was underway, the Republicans were shocked when, as they later testified, the Democrats marched in “with pistols, hallooing and hooping and shouting” until the Republican meeting was apparently disbanded after repeated demands by the invading Democrats that their candidates be allowed to speak in the Republican meeting. Importantly, the white Democrats had tapped into the divisions within African American society, and

⁸⁹ *Press and Banner*, September 20, 1876.

⁹⁰ Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 107.

a black member of their own party attacked a resident of Wimbushville, hitting him over the head.⁹¹

On election day, the public displays of force by whites in northeast Abbeville District did the trick. Cyrus Wimbush served as one of two black box managers and later argued he could identify forty-eight African Americans who had publically pledged their votes to Hampton but regretted it and decided to cast their ballots for the Republican Party and the reelection of Governor Chamberlin. However, threats by local whites to fire anyone who changed their pledge kept them in line. Republicans in the Due West precinct retained the exact vote they received in 1874. However Democrats in the precinct gained almost as many new votes, 135, as the Republicans had total votes, 141. The result was an overwhelming win for Hampton in the district.⁹²

Shows of force, threats of job loss to agricultural laborers, and an abandonment of pre-war moderation in favor of Reconstruction era Democratic Party unity had done the trick. Andy Nelson, Wimbush's former passenger and a Republican who the *Abbeville Medium* labeled an "unchanging radical," read the writing on the wall and made plans to resettle in the North in the wake of Republican defeat. A heart attack struck before he could move.⁹³ Participation in these efforts also shifted the political orientation of whites in the district. Unlike

⁹¹ *Press and Banner*, April 28, 1877.

⁹² Lowry Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 108.

⁹³ *Abbeville Medium*, November 15, 1876.

those whites that Lacy Ford argues became the “origins of Southern radicalism” in the pre-war period, it took the unifying experience of Reconstruction to reconstruct ARPs into mainstream southerners.⁹⁴

“Damning the Democrats to Everlasting Perdition”: The Battle of Wimbushville

With growing militancy on both sides of this racial, spatial and ideological divide, it was not surprising that things came to a head between the two villages in the months after the gubernatorial election of Wade Hampton in 1876. The Battle of Wimbushville, as the *Press and Banner* labeled the event, occurred in the first week of April 1877. Wimbushville residents were in the middle of raising a new church building for their Mt. Lebanon AME congregation. Earlier in the year a series of “robberies of meathouses and corn cribs” led local officials to suspect “an organized gang of marauders” who were probably composed of what they called “the more prominent sable citizens of Wimbushville.” When the white Todd family suggested that some corn brought to their mill by local blacks was stolen from the field of Dr. Grier’s family, a mysterious, unsigned letter appeared in the Due West post office accusing Cyrus Wimbush, Ned Wimbush, Ben Johnson, and Wilson Cowan of being the group behind these “midnight raids.” On the basis of the letter, and Todd’s intriguing ability to distinguish one crop of corn from another, local whites acted. Conveniently or otherwise, at the very time a new symbol of Wimbushville’s

⁹⁴ Lacy K. Ford, *The Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

religious independence was going up, a posse was being organized to enter the town.⁹⁵

The newest person to hold the position of Trial Justice in Due West was Henry Young. Young's father, Professor John Young, was the same man who had previously owned the ARP's only black minister, Rev. Thomas Young, who led the moderate black Presbyterians at Mt. Zion church. He issued a search warrant for Wimbushville and deputized one black man and four white men.

Newspapers accounts said that Cyrus and Jesse Wimbush, who had refused to give way to white men on the Long Cane Road, were the principle targets of the posse's investigation. The *Abbeville Medium* labeled Jesse as "one of the bitterest Radical negroes in the county." Informed of their purpose, Jesse grabbed a pistol and stood on the porch of his home. He "swore that he did not recognize Hampton's government or any of his officers." The five-man posse began arresting Wimbush when, according to the paper, "five or six negro women, armed with sticks and poles" set upon the men and "beat and bruised them up at a fearful rate."⁹⁶

A conflicting version of the story stated that Cyrus, not Jesse, had displayed two pistols and subsequently wrestled with one of the white deputies. By both accounts, within minutes of the counter assault by the African American women, a group of men, more than ten and less than forty, ran from the nearby church raising to drive off the invaders. The *Abbeville Medium's* story said that the counter assault

⁹⁵ *Press and Banner* April 11, 1877; *Abbeville Medium*, April 11, 1877.

⁹⁶ *Press and Banner* April 11, 1877; *Abbeville Medium*, April 11, 1877.

came “with the greatest shows of active violence and the most fearful imprecations.” At gun and knife point Wimbushville’s residents pushed the posse out of town with the promise that “no damned Democrats’ would search their houses.”⁹⁷ The posse retreated, and day one of the Battle of Wimbushville ended with nightfall.

Day two began with an unexpected counter assault by the residents of Wimbushville and caught white and black ARPs completely off guard.⁹⁸ Cyrus and Jesse Wimbush, and their wives Floride and Callie, marched definitely into the middle of the village “wearing a brace of pistols conspicuously displayed.” “Taking their stands at the post office,” the newspaper continued, they proceeded to “bid defiance to the laws and swore that they would shoot down any man who laid hands upon them.” Their shouts included “profane obscenity” as they “railed out against the government.” The two women were heard “damning the democrats to everlasting perdition.” This battle, now joined, was most certainly not about corn.⁹⁹

The young and impetuous Trial Justice, Mr. Young, whose search warrant had started the affair, made some attempt to arrest the four but was dissuaded by William Hood. Hood, a Democrat, had won his bid for state legislature and, along with “other discreet men of the vicinity,” counseled caution. Wimbushville’s Republican leaders, their point made, retreated back to their own hamlet.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ *Abbeville Medium*, April 11, 1877.

⁹⁸ *Press and Banner*, April 11, 1877.

⁹⁹ *Abbeville Medium*, April 11, 1877.

¹⁰⁰ *Abbeville Medium* April 11, 1877.

On day three, Due West whites regained their composure and the spirit of the Due West Rifle Company's redshirts was on display as twenty-some Confederate veterans, "completely armed and accoutered," mounted horses and rode towards Wimbushville carrying the search warrant.¹⁰¹

Before the party left, a rumor flew into town that Wimbushville was also an armed camp and had organized local African Americans to prepare a defense. As the posse proceeded cautiously, what they found was Floride Wimbush, armed and alone, swearing to shoot anyone who entered her town. After successfully subduing her, it was discovered she was buying time for the escape of Cyrus and Jesse. The men's father, Peter, Floride and Callie, Dan Pressly, and John Donald were all arrested for resisting officers of the law. They were sent to Abbeville under armed guard. A rumored rescue attempt by the residents of Wimbushville was thwarted when the posse took the prisoners by a circuitous route. The newspaper noted, "All of the party are members of the colored Methodist church and John Donald, one of the prisoners, is the local preacher of the church in" Wimbushville. The *Press and Banner* also listed Dan Pressley as a preacher.¹⁰²

But if Due West's whites had won the day, that had not yet won the war. Jesse and Cyrus had not fled into hiding, but rather, had determined that their best recourse lay in changing the battle from a violent one into a legal one. They had made it to the train station in Donalds and traveled to Columbia to plead their case

¹⁰¹ *Abbeville Medium* April 11, 1877.

¹⁰² *Abbeville Medium*, April 11, 1877.

to the ousted former Governor Chamberlin. Chamberlin informed them that he had ended his challenge to the electoral results and conceded to Hampton. Without allies, the two sought an audience with Governor Hampton, who sent word to Abbeville that the group should be given “a fair trial” and have justice “mete out” to them. Cyrus and Jesse returned and were arrested on site. At trial they were found guilty; however, they won on appeal one year later on the basis that the search warrant was too broad and constituted an “abuse of power.” The South Carolina Supreme Court overturned their convictions in 1878.¹⁰³

In the end, African Americans in Wimbushville won the battle but lost the war. Hemmed in by financial pressure from whites, a protracted legal battle, and their own personal struggles, the local Republican leadership slowly receded into an unbalanced détente. In 1880 a drunken Cyrus was arrested for shooting and grazing a white farmer in nearby Donalds. Days before the November elections, the farmer, who had very nearly been killed, dropped all charges. When the election came, Due West’s precinct voted heavily Democrat and was noted by Republican lawyers as Abbeville’s only fraud-free ballot box. That year, political peace between the two villages was as much a prisoner exchange as a restoration of amicable relations.

This social, economic, religious, political, and militant independence was too much black autonomy for Due West’s whites. Artisans and farmers with their own

¹⁰³ Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 108.

all-black town, Methodist church, Republican Party, and a willingness to defend it all in armed resistance challenged the very core of what moderate whites in upper Abbeville thought they had accomplished before the war. Their vision of peaceful white-black relationships based in devotional piety and moderation was shattered. Their inability to comprehend the position of the Wimbushville residents on all fronts accelerated the collapse of white moderation in the backcountry. For Wimbushville residents, the resort to arms was pulled naturally from southern honor culture and challenged illegality in the face of racial injustice. For both sides, the conflict over the black community's social and legal autonomy lay at the heart of the renegotiation of civic life in the twilight of Reconstruction.

Pre-war divisions within the slave community of Due West, SC were on display by the 1870s in South Carolina. The coming of electoral battles in the mid-1870s heightened rather than clouded those divisions. Black Due West fissured geographically, vocationally, religiously, and politically. The most visible means of this separation was lived out in armed resistance to white authority. Still, both sides of black Due West, radical Republican and black Democrat, participated in varieties of bi-racial political and economic dialogue with the white community.

Wimbushville was many things that Due West was not: all black, wet, Methodist, sometimes violent, with independent black farmers and proud women who kept their own homes rather than white ones. Wimbushville represented an "offensive" defensive posture, both in the sense that residents were not scared to assert themselves against white insertions into black space and that such displays

offended white moderates and tended to push whites into their own offensive-defensive posture. As the center of upper Abbeville's Republican activism, religious life, social activities, and family life, Wimbushville represented to many African Americans the place they could sit under their own vine and fig tree. But they had to be willing to fight for the right to own the land in which they were planted.

After Democratic control was reestablished in South Carolina in 1877, and especially after 1880, things gradually receded into an uneven but somewhat amicable peace. But if echoes of older bi-racial cooperation lingered, so to did memories of racial conflict. In the cold winter night of January 22, 1892, the main building at Erskine College burned nearly to the ground, taking with it the seminary's books and, interestingly, an Egyptian mummy sent to the school by a foreign missionary. The entire town turned out to contain the fire in bucket patrols. The *A.R.P.* newspaper account included this quizzical observation. The college fire was discovered by "the children of David Wimbush" who "happened to be up at 1:30 o'clock."¹⁰⁴

Alarms cascaded across Abbeville District to put out such fires. No alarm sounded, however, as Covenanter Phanaticism and its offshoot, anti-slavery radicalism, were slowly absorbed into southern Conservatism. By the end of Reconstruction there was no difference between a Covenanter and a conservative or a Seceder and a Southerner. In 1925, the son of a Covenanter minister, Robert

¹⁰⁴ Ware, *A Place Called Due West*, 142.

Lathan, won the Pulitzer Prize for an editorial in the *Charleston News and Courier*. The day after the presidential election of 1924, in which none of South Carolina's African Americans could cast a vote, Lathan asked how the Southerners would find their way back to the "zeal that made them a power in the old days."¹⁰⁵ The title of the essay was "Plight of the South."

¹⁰⁵ "Plight of the South," *Charleston News and Courier*, Nov. 5, 1924.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation describes six observational conclusions about the Covenanters in the Atlantic World. There were three significant continuities and three significant discontinuities that made the Covenanter experience unique. They are as follows.

Continuity 1: The Rutherfordian tradition of religious liberty and civil obligation lived on most powerfully in the Covenanters and Seceders and lasted all the way through the American Civil War. As for Alexander Shields and the Killing Times martyrs in Chapter IV, so resistance to the British state allied with Catholic France for Irish Covenanters discussed in Chapter VII was an obligation. The South Carolina slave literacy petitions discussed in Chapter VIII, although occurring in a southern context, were Atlantic events rooted in the obligation of the righteous community to resist any infringement on religious liberty. ARPs in Chester and Abbeville, South Carolina believed they did not have the right to obey the state legislature, and that the legislature had violated two kingdoms political theology by interfering with the prerogative of Jesus' headship over the church. ARPs were obligated to do what previous generations of Covenanters had done, namely, to resist in defense of the righteous community's autonomy from the state. This helps explain why ARPs were the only organized petitioners against literacy laws in South Carolina while other evangelicals quietly capitulated. The Atlantic roots of Scottish

Phanaticism were still strong enough in the antebellum period to keep these groups distinct. Historians of the American South should be cognizant of such ties lest this third dimension of southern religious experience be excised from interpretations.

Continuity 2: The Covenanter sensibility, or what I also label here phanaticism, was kept alive through the cell group networks of Covenanter devotionalism across at least these three nations and three centuries. Literacy, orthodoxy and lay empowerment went wherever praying societies traveled and inculcated the foundational beliefs of each generation of Covenanters: a memory of Holy Scotland, a moral mandate to bring about that once pure nation in one's current political setting (including Ireland and South Carolina), and the importance of lay action against immoral government's encroachment on the church's autonomy. Denominational labels and organizational histories, while necessary, obscure this greater continuity that included Covenanters and Seceders. There were few substantive theological differences between traditionalist Presbyterians and Covenanters. What made them different was the repetitive historical experience of the small group networks that enforced a political, not a theological, distinction on the righteous community. This sensibility, and the groups that buttressed it, are the reasons I argue in Chapter IX that George Grier understood the different white religions in Abbeville District, used them, and himself embodied a long Atlantic heritage backwards both to Africa and Holy Scotland. In many ways, Covenanters transformed from an Atlantic people into a Southern people more slowly than any

other group of South Carolinians. They were the last people emigrating to the antebellum South to become Southerners.

Continuity 3: Psalm singing was the only continuity to last past Reconstruction in America, and was the tie that bound together the various denominational strands of Covenanters and Seceders apart from other Presbyterians. By making themselves rigidly distinct in their worship, Covenanters in all generations were able to validate their outsider sense of a special history. In Scottish conventicles, Irish rebellions and the American frontier the Psalms provided the most common reminder that they were a people set apart from all other Protestants. When Daniel English sang Psalms en route to his death, John Hemphill used the Psalms to hold unity between Covenanters and Seceders, and George Grier explained the uniqueness of this singing tradition, they understood that even when the 1638 and 43 covenants had lost their immediate applicability, Covenanters could still be Covenanters.

Discontinuity 1: The role of women changed drastically during the Covenanter experience. The women who hurled stools in church in Chapter III and those hurling stones to beat off a moderate minister in Chapter IV little resembled the republican mothers such as the Hannah Lind Hemphill, wife of John Hemphill in Chapter VIII. The righteously indignant women of Scotland had far more in common with Floride and Callie Wimbush in Chapter IX, who defended their own kind of righteous community of home and church from invasions from without even if those invasions came from the sons of Covenanters.

Discontinuity 2: Moderation moved from an anathema to a mantra for Covenanters in the South. This shift happened imperceptibly at first, but was completed by the early nineteenth century and the Irish and American experiences were crucially distinct from Scotland in this regard. The Covenanters of Chapters II-VII detested the very word moderate and accused even the orthodox but reasonable John Witherspoon, who had spoken out against moderatism, of being corrupted by moderation. However the unsettling experiences not of persecution, but of toleration discussed in Chapter V, disestablishment radicalism and revolutions discussed in Chapters VII and VIII, and the overwhelming homogeneity of racial slavery in Chapters VIII and IX meant that moderation became a tool to preserve what could be saved of phanatick resistance rather than a cancer threatening to corrupt it. For William Staveland and the host of unnamed Covenanter rebels in Chapter VII, coordination with disciples of Paine and Wolfe Tone was far more obedient to their tradition than remaining out of the fight altogether, and shared millennial expectancy and agrarian unrest made for closer ties in reality than theology allowed theoretically. For John Hemphill in Chapter VIII, moderation could be discovered through adherence to Calvinist orthodoxy, and a lack of moderation would sacrifice the ability to keep Covenanters and Seceders together against a strange new disestablished world. For both William Hemphill and George Grier in Chapter IX, moderation was the only hope to preach Covenanter views of church, state and society safely with any hope of gaining either an audience or political ground. In the end they lost both, but not for lack of trying.

Discontinuity 3: The ARP ceased to be the Presbyterian fringe in any significant sense during and after Reconstruction. By the post-war period the praying societies had died from disuse. Former radicalisms born of both Rutherford's anti-slavery teachings and the revolutionary rhetoric of Ireland and America, though veiled by pained attempts at pragmatism like those of William Hemphill's and George Grier's in Chapter IX, were absorbed into southern racial conservatism. A more expansive study of the ARP in this period would probably show that such impulses began during the Market Revolution and that those Covenanter children most likely to move south and west into the cotton boom were least likely to retain anything like the old phanatick tradition in its political sense. Regardless of such speculation, in South Carolina by 1877 it would have been nearly impossible for anyone to tell the difference between an ARP and a Presbyterian except on Sundays. Even then one could only know because the air was filled with the "genuine Presbyterian Whine." As John Hemphill had predicted, all they had left were the Psalms.

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