

## ORDINANCE OF COVENANTING.

(The National Covenant, Pt. 3.)

“That public, social covenanting, is an ordinance of God, obligatory on churches and nations under the New Testament; that the National Covenant and the Solemn League are an exemplification of this divine institution; and that these Deeds are of continued obligation upon the moral person.”—Fourth Term of Communion.

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In obedience to the commandment of God, conform to the practice of the godly in former times, and according to the laudable example of our worthy and religious progenitors, and of many yet living amongst us, which was warranted also by act of council, commanding a general band to be made and subscribed by his Majesty’s subjects of all ranks; for two causes: one was, For defending the true religion, as it was then reformed, and is expressed in the Confession of Faith above written, and a former large Confession established by sundry acts of lawful General Assemblies and of Parliaments, unto which it hath relation, set down in publick Catechisms; and which hath been for many years, with a blessing from heaven, preached and professed in this kirk and kingdom, as God’s undoubted truth, grounded only upon his written word.

*Question 1.—Is covenanting a duty commanded by God and conformable to the practice of the godly in former times?*

*Answer.*—Yes. 2 Kings 11:17. Covenanting is a joining ordinance whereby a sure and indissoluble knot is tied between God and his people, Jer. 50:5. It is also the great means ordained by God to put an end to distrust, and remove all doubt, Heb. 6:16.

The other cause was, For maintaining the King’s Majesty, his person and estate; the true worship of God and the King’s authority being so straitly joined, as that they had the same friends and common enemies, and did stand and fall together. And finally, being convinced in our minds, and confessing with our mouths, that the present and succeeding generations in this land are bound to keep the foresaid national oath and subscription inviolable.

*Question 2.—Is covenanting especially appropriate at times when the true religion stands in danger or the nation stands in peril?*

*Answer.*—Yes. 2 Chron. 34:29-32. In the reign of Josiah, the people of Judah, their king, the officers, the judges, the priests, the Levites and all the citizens small and great renewed their covenant with the God of their fathers, 2 Kings 23:1-3. In the preceding reign, the condition of the church had become deplorable, by the immorality, idolatry and cruelty of Manasseh, who gave himself up to work all manner of evil with greediness, 2 Kings 21:10, 16, 17. The holy scriptures had been disregarded, and banished from the court of the irreligious monarch, 2 Kings 21:1-9. So rare were the known copies, that even the young king, Josiah when he ascended the throne, appears never to have seen, nor to have heard read, the book of the law, 2 Kings 22:8-11. To consolidate the strength of the godly, by bringing them into the bond of public covenant, and stirring them up to place their reliance on the God of Israel, he and they engaged their hearts to seek the divine favor and blessing, in their good work of reformation, by an act of public covenanting, *cf.* 2 Chron. 29:10.

We Noblemen, Barons, Gentlemen, Burgesses, Ministers, and Commons under-subscribing, considering divers times before, and especially at this time, the danger of the true reformed religion, of the King’s honour, and of the publick peace of the kingdom, by the manifold innovations and evils, generally contained, and particularly mentioned in our late supplications, complaints, and protestations; do hereby profess, and before God, his angels, and the world, solemnly declare, That with our whole heart we agree, and resolve all the days of our life constantly to adhere unto and to defend the foresaid true religion, and (forbearing the practice of all innovations already introduced in the matters of the worship of God, or approbation of the corruptions of the publick government of the kirk, or civil places and power

of kirkmen, till they be tried and allowed in free Assemblies and in Parliament) to labour, by all means lawful, to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel, as it was established and professed before the foresaid novations. And because, after due examination, we plainly perceive, and undoubtedly believe, that the innovations and evils contained in our supplications, complaints, and protestations, have no warrant of the word of God, are contrary to the articles of the foresaid Confession, to the intention and meaning of the blessed reformers of religion in this land, to the above-written acts of Parliament; and do sensibly tend to the re-establishing of the Popish religion and tyranny, and to the subversion and ruin of the true reformed religion, and of our liberties, laws, and estates; we also declare, That the foresaid Confessions are to be interpreted, and ought to be understood of the foresaid novations and evils, no less than if every one of them had been expressed in the foresaid Confessions; and that we are obliged to detest and abhor them, amongst other particular heads of Papistry abjured therein.

**Question 3.—***Ought the Confession of the Church to be interpreted in such a way that extends itself even to those things, though not explicitly mentioned, yet stand condemned in the spirit of the creed?*

**Answer.—**Yes. Matt. 5:21, 22. It is a Scriptural principle to understand that where one sin or duty, is forbidden or commanded, all like sins or duties are to be contemplated, Matt. 15:4-6; 1 Thess. 5:22. So, the confession of the church, being a form of sound words, 2 Tim. 1:13; is a pattern of sound belief and practice from which the teachers and elders of the church may infer things not explicit for the further instruction of the church in right doctrine and practice, Rom. 12:6; *cf.* Acts 15:6-21. This is quite often in response to the rise of heresy, 1 Cor. 11:19; for it is the nature of heresy to be a self-choosing, or private interpretation, of Scripture, Tit. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:20; and, therefore, it will deviate from the teaching of the apostolic church, Acts 20:27-31. In contrast, the expansion of the creed, due to the contentions of heretics and heresies, has the effect of establishing those churches which receive it in the truth, Acts 16:4, 5; Heb. 13:9; whilst others, because of their unbelief, are broken off, *cf.* Rom. 11:20.

And therefore, from the knowledge and conscience of our duty to God, to our King and country, without any worldly respect or inducement, so far as human infirmity will suffer, wishing a further measure of the grace of God for this effect; we promise and swear, by the GREAT NAME OF THE LORD OUR GOD, to continue in the profession and obedience of the foresaid religion; and that we shall defend the same, and resist all these contrary errors and corruptions, according to our vocation, and to the uttermost of that power that God hath put in our hands, all the days of our life.

**Question 4.—***Is it proper to swear in the great Name of the Lord our God?*

**Answer.—**Yes. Deut. 10:20. This is made plain when we consider the following: 1.) There is no greater or higher Name by which an oath can be confirmed, Heb. 6:13, 16. 2.) We are expressly enjoined to swear by His Name, Deut. 6:13. 3.) Although swearing falsely in the Name of God is punishable, this presumes a swearing truly which is not punishable, Lev. 19:12.

And in like manner, with the same heart, we declare before God and men, That we have no intention nor desire to attempt anything that may turn to the dishonour of God, or to the diminution of the King's greatness and authority; but, on the contrary, we promise and swear, That we shall, to the uttermost of our power, with our means and lives, stand to the defence of our dread sovereign the King's Majesty, his person and authority, in the defence and preservation of the foresaid true religion, liberties, and laws of the kingdom; as also to the mutual defence and assistance every one of us of another, in the same cause of maintaining the true religion, and his Majesty's authority, with our best counsel, our bodies, means, and whole power, against all sorts of persons whatsoever; so that whatsoever shall be done to the least of us for that cause, shall be taken as done to us all in general, and to every one of us in particular. And that we shall neither directly nor indirectly suffer ourselves to be divided or withdrawn, by whatsoever suggestion, combination, allurements, or terror, from this blessed and loyal conjunction; nor shall cast in any let or impediment that may stay or hinder any such resolution as by common consent shall be found to conduce for so good ends; but, on the contrary, shall by all lawful means labour to further and promote the same: and if any such dangerous and divisive motion be made to us by word or writ, we, and every one of us, shall either suppress it, or, if need be, shall incontinent make the

same known, that it may be timeously obviated. Neither do we fear the foul aspersions of rebellion, combination, or what else our adversaries, from their craft and malice, would put upon us; seeing what we do is so well warranted, and ariseth from an unfeigned desire to maintain the true worship of God, the majesty of our King, and the peace of the kingdom, for the common happiness of ourselves and our posterity. And because we cannot look for a blessing from God upon our proceedings, except with our profession and subscription we join such a life and conversation as beseemeth Christians who have renewed their covenant with God; we therefore faithfully promise for ourselves, our followers, and all others under us, both in publick, and in our particular families, and personal carriage, to endeavour to keep ourselves within the bounds of Christian liberty, and to be good examples to others of all godliness, soberness, and righteousness, and of every duty we owe to God and man.

**Question 5.—*Is it necessary that practical godliness accompany outward acts of covenanting?***

**Answer.**—Yes. Ezek. 20:37. The Lord is a covenant avenging God Who will not suffer those entering into covenant with Him to profane it with their graceless and careless breaking of it, Lev. 26:25. This wickedness is sometimes open contempt for the true religion, 1 Kings 19:14. Other times it is manifested in a stubborn refusal to abide in God's law, Ps. 78:10; or an unsteadfastness in maintaining the ends contemplated in the covenant, Ps. 78:37. All transgressing of God's law is accounted a matter of covenant breaking, Isa. 24:5. The true worship of God is the true service of the covenant which men are to called to in taking hold of the covenant, Isa. 56:6-8; therefore, failures in this service are accounted among the most egregious against the majesty of the covenant God, Isa. 1:13-15; Lev. 10:1-3.

And, that this our union and conjunction may be observed without violation, we call the LIVING GOD, THE SEARCHER OF OUR HEARTS, to witness, who knoweth this to be our sincere desire and unfeigned resolution, as we shall answer to JESUS CHRIST in the great day, and under the pain of God's everlasting wrath, and of infamy and loss of all honour and respect in this world:

**Question 6.—*Is it proper to call God to witness, as the great searcher of hearts?***

**Answer.**—Yes. 1 Chron. 28:9. The Lord requires those entering into covenant with Him to have their hearts set in order, 1 Chron. 29:17. It is accounted a great sin of the Israelites that they flattered God with their mouth, but left their hearts set upon sinful courses, Ps. 78:36, 37; Ezek. 33:31. The true God is not deceived by outward appearances but is careful to discern the hearts of men, their deepest inward dispositions, 1 Sam. 16:7.

most humbly beseeching the LORD to strengthen us by his HOLY SPIRIT for this end, and to bless our desires and proceedings with a happy success; that religion and righteousness may flourish in the land, to the glory of GOD, the honour of our King, and peace and comfort of us all. In witness whereof, we have subscribed with our hands all the premises.

**Question 7.—*Is it necessary to rely on the Holy Spirit working in the covenanter to strengthen him to keep the ends contemplated?***

**Answer.**—Yes. Rom. 8:26. No one is able apart from the Spirit of God working in him to do those good works contemplated in covenanting, John 15:4-6; Phil. 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:5. What is necessary to all acceptable service is a new heart, which is only found in the new creature, Ezek. 11:19; Gal. 6:15; but that cannot arise from the flesh only from the Spirit, John 3:6.