

# Permanence of Covenant Obligation

Our fourth term of ecclesiastical communion recognizes and asserts the binding force of the National Covenant of Scotland and of the Solemn League and Covenant of Scotland, England and Ireland; subject to the restriction of moral duties-duties not peculiar to the British Isles, but applicable in all lands. [It reads as follows: "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; and in consistency with this- that the Renovation of these Covenants at Auchenshugh, 1712, was agreeable to the word of God."] These well known documents are referred to as furnishing a special exemplification of a general truth: and the recognition of their obligations more than any other fact, marks our identity with the church of Scotland during the halcyon period of the Second Reformation. Forming, as they do, an essential part of the attainments reached at that time, as the issue of an active, earnest and long continued struggle with despotism in the state, and lordly supremacy coupled with the foulest corruption in the church, the disowning of her covenants stands connected with a practical rejection of her standards of doctrine, government and worship. They who offend in one point here, are guilty of all. There is a principle, however, involved which cannot be surrendered without opening the way for pernicious consequences, and the deeds in question cannot be repudiated otherwise than by ignoring this principle or proving its falsity. It is the principle that posterity may be, and in many cases are, rightfully and inviolably bound by the engagements of ancestors. Let us look at the question in this general aspect and bearing of it. Are the obligations assumed by the church in covenanting with God, imperative on succeeding generations till the object contemplated in the covenant has been secured and all its conditions fulfilled?

The doctrine that covenant obligation binds posterity is entirely consonant with some of those natural relations that exist among men. It is founded in the natural and unquestionable right of parents to represent their children in various forms of social transaction. Parents, in almost countless instances and ways, act in the name and on behalf of their children; children are bound by the promises and engagements of parents, and to this arrangement, human laws, equally with divine, give their sanction and approval. The principle is illustrated and exemplified in the institution of Christian baptism, in which parents assume vows and make engagements for their children. The exercise of this right is seen to be eminently reasonable, when it is considered that the interests of parents and children are so connected and identified that they cannot in any case be absolutely disjoined. When men choose representatives in the persons of civil or ecclesiastical functionaries, the basis of representation is their own choice; but, in the case of parents, the right of representation rests upon a higher, more solid and enduring ground; it is a prerogative of the parental relation-a God-given right-and has for its basis, a divinely authorized constitution. Levi paid tithes in Abraham, because he was in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. Here the constitution established by God, and on the ground of which children are identified with their parents in certain social transactions, is recognized with a

distinctness that puts its existence beyond the reach of doubt. It seems, therefore, to be a just and obvious inference from these views, that no objection can be brought against the permanently binding force of religious covenants entered into by the Church, that does not lie ultimately against that appointment of God by which parents are constituted the representatives of their children. And this fact, of itself, ought to be held as an ample vindication of the doctrine against the charges of unreasonableness and injustice.

The principle that covenant obligation binds posterity, is as ancient as human society, and has been constantly recognized by men and by communities in transactions of a civil kind. Scripture history furnishes several apt illustrations. The case of Joseph and his brethren is in point. Shortly before his death he exacted from them a sworn promise and engagement that, on leaving Egypt, they would carry with them his bones for the purpose of interment in land covenanted to his fathers. "And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence." Gen 50:25. What is the subsequent history of this transaction? Did the children of Israel in their haste to leave Egypt forget or dishonor the promise of their ancestors? The religious observance of the oath is a subject of distinct record by the sacred historian. "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." Ex. 13:19. The ground upon which the transportation of the patriarch's bones is distinctly put, is the oath taken by the representatives of the nation generations prior to their actual removal. Besides, as Joseph certainly knew that all his brethren and all that generation would die [before] God would visit his people with deliverance, it is evident that he must have regarded those immediately addressed by him as the representatives of their successors and have considered the oath exacted of them as binding on their posterity. The covenant made with the Gibeonites shortly after the entrance of Israel into Canaan, supplies another apposite illustration. The history of the transaction is recorded in the 9th chapter of the book of Joshua, and is familiar in its detail to Bible readers. That wily people, by pretences and false representations, imposed upon the elders of Israel, and induced them to become parties to a league stipulating the safety of the Gibeonites, engaging to preserve them alive. The Hebrews, on discovering the fraud, expressed dissatisfaction with the conduct of their rulers, in that they had acted with culpable incautiousness; at the same time as the treaty has been ratified by the proper representatives of the nation, the people held themselves bound by its stipulations. "And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel." There is unquestionable significance, too, in the fact that near four hundred years subsequent to the conclusion of this treaty, the violation of it by the bloody house of Saul, was visited with the severe and manifest judgments of heaven; God thus attesting in a manner unequivocal and awful, that He holds posterity sacredly bound by the covenanted engagements of their ancestors, remote as well as immediate. Analogous to these inspired facts, at least in its bearing on the present argument, is the statement in Amos 1:9. "Thus saith the Lord, for three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant." The brotherly covenant, with the violation of which the Tyrians were charged, there is reason to suppose, was no other than the league that existed between David and Solomon, kings of Judah, and Hiram, king of Tyre, and in this view a disregard of the principle that covenants bind posterity is expressly adduced as a reason justifying, and a crime calling for the

infliction of divine judgments. There is nothing hazarded in asserting that a denial of this principle in its application to civil society, would unsettle and overturn its foundations, introduce misrule and disaster under every form. Ignore the doctrine in question, and it results that national treaties--treaties of amity and peace, treaties of commerce, national debts, and every possible form of national contract negotiated by one generation, may, without any reason beyond a wish to have it so, be disowned and repudiated by the generation that follows. A doctrine so pernicious in its tendencies, so baleful in its consequences and issues, so repugnant to national justice, morality and virtue, cannot be true.

Thus far, the principle that covenant obligation is descending and permanent, has been viewed in its more general aspects and bearings. The Scriptures are not silent on the subject, nor is their testimony scant, ambiguous or obscure. Such declarations as the following occur: "They have broken the everlasting covenant." "Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant." But on the supposition that the covenants mentioned in these cases possessed obligation over one generation only, with what propriety are they designated everlasting and perpetual? In this view, the use of such descriptive terms amounts to a gross misapplication of language--a misapplication too palpable and needless to admit even an apology. That which lasts only during the period of a man's natural lifetime, is neither perpetual nor everlasting. But on what principle other than that of descending and permanent obligation, can posterity be rightfully charged with guilt in disregarding the conditions of covenants made with their ancestors? But mark what God has said on this subject. "The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers." Jer 11:10. Could the house of Israel and the house of Judah break a covenant, with the obligation of which they had nothing, either directly or indirectly, to do? The inquiry contains its own answer. If anything further is necessary to complete the chain of proof, it is found in the distinct assertion that posterity were included in the original ratification of given federal transactions. The covenant established between God and Abraham, embraced the seed of Abraham, in their generations, to the end of the dispensation of the Gospel; and if identity with Abraham in the making of the covenant, confers a claim to the privileges promised and secured in its provisions, it is reasonable, surely, to maintain that the same identity brings posterity under its obligations and duties. Had the question been one of privilege merely, there is little room to doubt that it would have met with universal favor and acceptance. Another case, still more apposite to the argument in hand, is the statement of Moses, (Deut 5:3), respecting the covenant ratified with Israel at Horeb. By this time the entire congregation that stood before the Lord at Sinai, with three exceptions, Moses, Caleb and Joshua, had been removed by death. They had perished in the wilderness, according as God had threatened. Yet, with this fact before him, does Moses say to the people, and not a voice was heard in opposition. "The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, EVEN US, who are all of us alive here this day." In the land of Moab, immediately before the tribes passed the Jordan and took possession of Canaan, this same covenant, under the auspices and direction of Moses, was solemnly renewed. Hear what he says on the occasion. "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day, before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day." Deut 29:14,15. Unless posterity is meant by "him that is not here with us this day," it would not be an easy matter to conjecture its application.

Considerations relevant to this argument, other than those adverted to, could be readily adduced. But

our single object has been to show that nature itself teaches that Scriptural covenants, scripturally entered into, bind posterity; that men, individually and socially, practice on the principle; and that, on any other hypothesis, the teachings of the Bible are unintelligible, contradictory, and calculated to mislead candid inquirers after truth. This is our reason, in part, at least, for the hope that is in us touching the permanence of covenant obligation; and acting on a full conviction of its truth and sufficiency, we hold ourselves bound by the vows of witnessing and martyred ancestors in the British Isles.

- Omicron (1856).

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**Excerpted from: The Original Covenanter and Contending Witness  
[magazine]**

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## **FOR FURTHER STUDY:**

**AUTHOR: CUNNINGHAM, JOHN**

**TITLE: *The Ordinance of Covenanting* (1843)**

**FORMAT: (Rare bound photocopy)**

**PRICING: \$49.95-70%=14.99 (CANADIAN FUNDS)**

This book is considered by many as the classic work on covenanting. "The theology of Covenanting is here unfolded with a richness of scriptural research and a maturity of intellectual strength which would have made the grey eye of Peden glisten with delight. The treatise is a valuable addition to that solid theological literature of which the Reformed Presbyterian Church has produced repeated and

enduring specimens, and stamps Mr. Cunningham as a distinguished disciple of the thoughtful and scriptural school of Mason and the Symingtons" (*Presby Rev.*, (1844) as cited in *The Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* by Johnston). The author himself notes that "Prayer and the offering of praise are universally admitted to be duties of religion. The Scriptures announce a place among these for the exercise of solemn Covenanting... What the word of God unfolds concerning it, is addressed to the most resolute consideration of all, and is capable of engaging the most extensive and prolonged investigation. And yet, though none have found this subject, like all God's judgements, else than a great deep, still in meditating upon it, the ignorant have been brought to true knowledge, and the wise have increased in wisdom. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant' (Ps. 25:14)... Mutual federal engagements, concerning things religious and civil, whether entered into merely by simple promise, or confirmed by the solemn oath, have been made from the highest antiquity to the present. The hostility to some such engagements, and also the proud disregard for their obligation, which have been evinced by some in all ages, demand a most careful examination into their nature and design... Furnished with the key of Scripture, approaching the subject, we are enabled to open the mysteries in which ignorance and prejudice had shut it up; and equipped with the armour of light shooting forth its heavenly radiance, in safety to ourselves we assail the darkness thrown around it, and behold the instant flight of the spirits of error which that darkness contains. Standing alone in beauteous attractions descended from heaven upon it, this service beckons us to approach it, and engages to connect extensive good with a proper attention to its claims. The observance, under various phases, is described in Scripture as an undisputed and indisputable reality." In this book Cunningham exhaustively covers the subject of covenanting in over 400 pages. He deals with the manner, duty and nature of covenanting (including personal and social covenanting), the obligation covenanting confers, how covenanting is provided for in the everlasting covenant, how it is adapted to the moral constitution of man and how it is according to the purposes of God. Numerous Divine examples are cited from Scripture and covenanting is shown to be one of the great privileges of the Christian life. An interesting chapter covers "Covenanting Enforced By the Grant of Covenant Signs and Seals;" which touches on circumcision, baptism, the Sabbath, the Priesthood, the new heart and the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this book demonstrates how God's approbation rested upon Covenanters in former ages, how covenanting is predicted in prophecy, how it is recommended by the practice of the New Testament Church and at what seasons it is appropriate. The appendices touch on the relationship of covenanting to immoral and unscriptural civil governments, the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the British constitution and the apostasy of the Revolution settlement. Additionally, Cunningham acknowledges that the true church is "bound by the obligations of the Church of God in past times" and is still obligated to **pay what it has vowed to the Lord** in those magnificent attainments of the second Reformation (the epitome of these attainments being embodied in the Solemn League and Covenant and the Westminster Standards). If you are interested in the ordinance of covenanting this is the most extensive treatment you will find in one book. It is a gold mine of Scriptural references and should be read at least once by everyone who calls upon the name of Christ.

**ROBERTS, WILLIAM L.**

### **The Duty of Covenanting, and the Permanent Obligation of Religious Covenants (1853)**

Excerpted from the Reformed Presbyterian Catechism below, this book deals with an almost forgotten ordinance of God. It explains what covenants are, while contrasting them with oaths, vows and law. Furthermore, it distinguishes between civil and religious covenants and shows how the individual, family, church or nation can (and should) enter into covenants -- especially religious covenants. Explains why, when and how covenants are binding on posterity, citing abundant Scriptural proof for each assertion made. Here is a sample argument from this book, demonstrating how even covenants made between men are viewed as binding upon posterity by God himself:

"Another instance in which posterity is recognized in covenant obligation is found in Joshua 9:15. This covenant was made between the children of Israel and the Gibeonites. Between four and five hundred years after that time, the children of Israel are visited with a very severe famine, in the days of David. 2 Sam. 21:1. And it is expressly declared by the Lord that, 'It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.' And at the same time, v. 2, that very covenant is recognized, and the breach of it is stated, as being the formal reason of the divine displeasure. Now, had it not been for this covenant, the extirpation of the Gibeonites would not have been imputed to Israel as a thing criminal; for they were comprehended in Canaanitish nations, which God had commanded them to root out" (pp. 139-140). Take the time to look these verses up. This subject has great bearing on the unity of the church, the Christian's response to godless covenant-breaking nations, hermeneutics, the family and general faithfulness to God (because many today -- individually, ecclesiastically, and nationally -- are breaking covenants which God still views as binding though they are oblivious to this obligation). Great price too!

**(Rare bound photocopy) \$5.95-70%=1.78**

## **ROBERTS, WILLIAM L.**

### **The Duty of Nations, in their National Capacity, to Acknowledge and Support the True Religion (1853)**

Excerpted from the Reformed Presbyterian Catechism below, this book deals with the inescapable necessity, of the demand found in the Word of God, for the Civil establishment of Christ and King and Lawgiver over every nation on earth. If you are sick of the cease-fire with humanism, set forth by the syncretistic, Satanic and pragmatic pagan politicians of our day, (those who bargain with votaries of Antichrist [the Pope], publicly tolerate all manner of false religions (e.g. Islam) and idolatry, and compose their policy and draw their pretended authority from the beast [and not the Word of God], this book is for you! For all pagan politics is summed up in the words of the Cameronian (Covenanter) political philosopher Alexander Shields, as "rotting away under the destructive distempers of detestable neutrality, loathsome lukewarmness, declining, and decaying in corruptions, defections, divisions, distractions, confusions; and so judicially infatuated with darkness and delusions, that they forget and forego the necessary testimony of the day" (A HIND LET LOOSE, 1797 edition, p. 20). Pick up this book and begin the political walk in the "footsteps of the flock," traveling the covenanting road of Reformation and Scripture (with the magisterial Reformers of the past)!

**(Rare bound photocopy) \$5.95-70%=1.78**

## **ROBERTS, WILLIAM L.**

### **The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism (1853)**

A manual of instruction, drawing from such notable authors as William Symington and J.R. Willson, presenting "arguments and facts confirming and illustrating the 'Distinctive Principles'" of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Chapters deal with: "Christ's Mediatorial Dominion in general;" "Christ's exclusive Headship over the Church;" "The Supreme and Ultimate Authority of the Word of God in the Church;" "Civil Government, the Moral Ordinance of God;" "Christ's Headship over the Nations;" "The Subjection of the Nations to God and to Christ;" "The Word, or Revealed Will of God, the Supreme Law in the State;" "The Duty of Nations, in their National Capacity, to acknowledge and support the True Religion;" "The Spiritual Independence of the Church of Christ;" "The Right and Duty of Dissent from an immoral Constitution of Civil Government;" "The Duty of Covenanting, and the Permanent Obligations of Religious Covenants;" "The Application of these Principles to the Governments, where Reformed Presbyterians reside, in the form of a Practical Testimony;" and finally "Application of the Testimony to the British Empire." A most important book, as we approach (possibly) the end of the great apostasy and will be in need of preparing for the dawning of the glorious millennial blessings to come; the days prophesied in which the church "shalt also suck the milk of the Gentiles, and shalt suck the breast of kings" (Isa. 60:16).

**(Rare bound photocopy) \$29.95-70%=8.99**

## **SCOTT, DAVID**

### **Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church (1841)**

This book is not designed to discuss "the (many-RB) doctrines which the Reformed Presbyterian church holds in common with others," but is written to set forth RP distinctives. It tackles its subject from three major heads: "Social Covenanting;" "The Dominion of Christ;" and "The Universal Application of Scripture (civil as well as religious)." It shows that while these doctrines "are held by many, as abstract doctrines of divine truth, they are not embodied in the testimony of any other Christian denomination: nor made necessary to ministerial or Christian fellowship. Although other individuals may hold these doctrine, it is a 'distinctive' feature of the RPC to embody them in her testimony; and to make them terms of communion." It also explains how these are the same distinctives that were maintained "at the era of the reformation, (when) the covenanted church of Scotland bore a distinguished testimony for all the offices of Christ, as prophet, priest and king: and for the pure doctrines, worship, discipline, and government of the house of God." The author states that "the great object aimed at is to help forward the glorious triumph of the Messiah, so beautifully described in the 72nd Psalm. When 'all Kings shall fall down before him; and all nations shall serve him.'"

**(Rare bound photocopy) \$49.95-80%=9.99**

## **PRICE, GREG**

## **The Duty and Perpetual Obligation of Social Covenanting**

The material found in this bound photocopy addresses a forgotten and neglected ordinance of God: social covenanting. God's people in times of repentance and thanksgiving, trial and blessing have been a covenanting people. In the most pure times of ecclesiastical and civil reformation throughout history, both church and state under the mediatorial rule of Christ have by the grace of God bound themselves together by covenant to promote and defend the true Christian religion. The first document adopted by the Westminster Assembly was in fact, the Solemn League and Covenant (1644). It united the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland in a covenanted reformation of both church and state in order to preserve, promote and defend the true Christian religion (as summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Directory For Public Worship, and Form of Church Government), and in order to expose and uproot all false teaching contrary to the Scripture and these standards. Furthermore, it was not only the desire of the Westminster Assembly to unite in covenant the three British kingdoms, but rather to include in this covenanted reformation all of the Reformed Churches throughout Europe. Consider the goal of the Assembly as summarized by Hetherington: "There was one great, and even sublime idea, brought somewhat indefinitely before the Westminster Assembly, which has not yet been realized, the idea of a Protestant union throughout Christendom, not merely for the purpose of counterbalancing Popery, but in order to purify, strengthen, and unite all true Christian churches, so that with combined energy and zeal they might go forth, in glad compliance with the Redeemer's commands, teaching all nations, and preaching the everlasting gospel to every creature under heaven. This truly magnificent, and also truly Christian idea, seems to have originated in the mind of that distinguished man, Alexander Henderson. It was suggested by him to the Scottish commissioners, and by them partially brought before the English Parliament, requesting them to direct the Assembly to write letters to the Protestant Churches in France, Holland, Switzerland, and other Reformed Churches. . . . and along with these letters were sent copies of the Solemn League and Covenant, a document which might itself form the basis of such a Protestant union. The deep thinking divines of the Netherlands apprehended the idea, and in their answer, not only expressed their approbation of the Covenant, but also desired to join in it with the British kingdoms. Nor did they content themselves with the mere expression of approval and willingness to join. A letter was soon afterwards sent to the Assembly from the Hague, written by Duraeus (the celebrated John Dury), offering to come to the Assembly, and containing a copy of a vow which he had prepared and tendered to the distinguished Oxenstiern, chancellor of Sweden, wherein he bound himself 'to prosecute a reconciliation between Protestants in point of religion'. . . . [O]n one occasion Henderson procured a passport to go to Holland, most probably for the purpose of prosecuting this grand idea. But the intrigues of politicians, the delays caused by the conduct of the Independents, and the narrow-minded Erastianism of the English Parliament, all conspired to prevent the Assembly from entering farther into that truly glorious Christian enterprise. Days of trouble and darkness came; persecution wore out the great men of that remarkable period; pure and vital Christianity was stricken to the earth and trampled under foot. . . ." (William Hetherington, *History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, [Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books], pp. 337-339). The material presented herein is commended to the reader with the sincere prayer and confidence that God will again restore the Church of Jesus Christ to a glorious covenanted reformation--one that will even surpass that one to which she had attained at the time of the Westminster Assembly. However, when the Lord brings that future



covenanted reformation it will not be limited to only three kingdoms of the earth, but by the grace and power of Christ our King, it will be a covenanted reformation that will encompass all of the nations of the earth (Ps. 2:6-12; Is. 2:1-4; Mt. 28:1-20) and will bring to the church a visible unity and uniformity that (unlike pleas for unity today) is firmly grounded upon the truth" (Greg Price, Preface). The material contained in this compilation was gathered together by the session of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton/Prince George. Its 210 pages contain the following items, as listed in this bibliography for social covenanting.

1. Samuel Rutherford, Due Right of Presbyteries , pp. 130-139
2. George Gillespie, The Works of George Gillespie, Vol. 2, pp. 71-88.
3. John Brown of Wamphray, An Apologetic Relation , pp. 167-175, 181-207.
4. David Scott, Distinctive Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, pp. 14-90.
5. William Roberts, The Reformed Presbyterian Catechism , pp. 134-152.
6. The Reformed Presbytery, An Explanation and Defence of the Terms of Communion , pp. 181-187.
7. The Reformed Presbytery, Act , Declaration and Testimony , pp. 11-23.
8. The Reformed Presbytery, The Auchensaugh Renovation , pp. 115-140.
9. The Church of Scotland (1639), The National Covenant of Scotland , pp. 345-354 in the Westminster Confession of Faith published by Free Presbyterian Publications.
10. The Westminster Assembly (1644), The Solemn League and Covenant , pp. 355-360 in the Westminster Confession of Faith published by Free Presbyterian Publications.
11. The Church of Scotland (1648), A Solemn Acknowledgement of Publick Sins and Breaches of the Covenant , pp. 361-368 in the Westminster Confession of Faith published by Free Presbyterian Publications.

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