

Lecture 16 – “For Christ’s Crown & Covenant”: The Scottish Presbyterians

“The first year [of the curriculum in church history in Scottish schools] was for the Early Church; the second, the Reformation; the third, Scotland—after all, what else is there?” Andrew F. Walls, as he planned to teach his first course in church history in Africa

“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.” 1 Peter 3:21

Prayer

From Psalm 103

“O my soul, bless God, the Father; all within me bless his name;
 Bless the Father, and forget not all his mercies to proclaim.
 As it was without beginning, so it lasts without an end;
 To their children’s children ever shall his righteousness extend:
 Unto such as keep his covenant and are steadfast in his way,
 Unto those who still remember his commandments and obey.
 Bless the Father, all his creatures, ever under his control;
 All throughout his vast dominion bless the Father, O my soul. Amen.”

“For Christ’s Crown & Covenant”: The Scottish Presbyterians

The Second Reformation—for the independence of the church (against Erastianism) and for Presbyterian church government (against prelacy)

I. From the Death of John Knox (1572) to the Restoration (1660)—“the Second Reformation”

A. Andrew Melville (1545-1622)

Melville to King James VI in 1596: “...Sir, as divers times I have told you, so now again I must tell you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the lord of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose Kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member.”

B. Robert Bruce (1554-1631)

C. The Sermon at the Kirk o’ Shotts, June 21, 1630

John Livingston preached on Ezekiel 36:25-26: “Earnest faith and prayer, a single aim at the glory of God, and good of people, a sanctified heart and carriage [behavior], shall avail much for right preaching. There is sometimes somewhat in preaching that cannot be ascribed either to the matter or expression, and cannot be described what it is, or from whence it cometh, but with a sweet violence, it pierceth into the heart and affections, and comes immediately from the Lord.”

D. Alexander Henderson (1583-1646)

E. Samuel Rutherford (1600-61)

1. *Letters*

J. W. Alexander: “Read [Rutherford’s] *Letters*; they will prove to you that great study need not quench the flame of devotion.”

2. *Lex Rex*

Samuel Rutherford to Alexander Henderson: “The wind is now on Christ’s face in this land, and seeing ye are with Him ye cannot expect the leese, or the sunny side of the brae.” To the Earl of Cassillis: “Your noble fathers, at the hazards of their lives, brought Christ to this nation, and it shall be cruelty to posterity if ye lose Him to them.”

F. The National Covenant, Kirk of Greyfriars, Edinburgh, 1638

1. The service at the National Kirk on July 23, 1637 (“The serving maids [“Jennie Geddes”]

began such a tumult as was never heard of since the Reformation in our nation” [Robert Baillie]).

2. The Glasgow Assembly, 1638

G. The Solemn League and Covenant, 1643 (For “the preservation of the Reformed religion in Scotland” and “the reformation of religion in England and Ireland”)

H. The Westminster Assembly (1643-49) and the Commonwealth (1649-60)

II. From the Restoration (1660) to the Glorious Revolution (1688)

A. Episcopalians

1. “Deformation” of the Church

2. Some men of devotion and compassion like Robert Leighton (1611-84) and Henry Scougal (1650-78)—*The Life of God in the Soul of Man*

B. Presbyterians

1. Division into Resolutioners and Protesters (“Covenanters”)

2. “Outed ministers” and secret conventicles

The narrator in Robert Louis Stevenson’s story, “Thrawn Janet,” looks longingly back at the “outed” ministers who preached in secret during the days of the persecution “wi a Bible under their oxter [arm] an’ a speerit o’ prayer in their heart.”

On one occasion, the Covenanter preacher Alexander Peden was leading a conventicle service when the sentries posted to warn of the approach of soldiers gave the signal they were coming. Peden stopped preaching and prayed simply, “Lord, cast the lap of thy cloak over us and we will keep it in remembrance what thou didst do for us at such a time as this.” The mist came down in silence and enveloped the gathered company in its folds, and the troops left frustrated in their plans.

a. Bass Rock

From “The Tale of Tod Lapraik” by Robert Louis Stevenson: “There were nights of it when [Tam Dale] was here on sentry, the place a’ wheest [quiet], the frosts o’ winter maybe riving [forcing into] the wa’s, and he would hear ane o’ the prisoners strike up a psalm, and the rest join in, and the blessed sounds rising from the different chalmers—or dungeons, I would rather say—so that this auld craig in the sea was like a pairt of Heev’n.”

b. Battles of Rullion Green (Pentland Rising) (1666) and Bothwell Bridge (1679)

Inscription on the battle field at Rullion Green: “A cloud of witnesses ly here, Who for Christ’s interest did appear.”

c. “The Killing Time”

In 1685 Margaret Wilson and Margaret Lauchlison were sentenced to death by drowning. Margaret Lauchlison was tied to a stake further out in the water, and 18-year old Margaret Wilson nearer land—so that as the tide advanced the young woman would see the older one drowning and, so the authorities hoped, recant. But as the sea swept over Margaret Lauchlison, Margaret Wilson, waiting patiently for her own death, said, “What do I see but Christ wrestling there?”

3. Judging the Covenanters

*Sir Walter Scott’s novels: *Old Mortality* and *The Heart of Midlothian*

*Josephine Tey in *The Daughter of Time*:

“But I thought they were very holy people—the Covenanters, I mean.”

“You’ve been looking at nineteenth-century pictures of conventicles. The reverent little gathering in the heather listening to the preacher; young rapt faces, and white hair blowing in the winds of God. The Covenanters were the exact equivalent of the I. R. A. in Ireland. A small irreconcilable minority, and as bloodthirsty a crowd as ever disgraced a Christian nation.”

*Robert Louis Stevenson: "...though it is the fashion of the day to jeer and to mock, to execrate and to condemn the noble band of Covenanters, though the bitter laugh at their old-world religious views, the curl of the lip at their merits, and the chilling silence on their bravery and their determination, are but too rife through all society; be charitable to what was evil, and honest to what was good about [the Covenanters] who fought for life and liberty, for country and religion...."

*John T. McNeill: Some of the Covenanters were extreme and violent but "it stands to their credit that they alone had the courage to challenge the oppressive policies of the later Stuarts long before James II so antagonized all Britain as to bring on the Great Revolution of 1688" (*History and Character of Calvinism*, 329).

C. The Glorious Revolution (1688)

1. William, Prince of Orange, and Mary, eldest daughter of James II
2. Toleration Act of 1689
 - a. Presbyterian Church established in Scotland
 - b. Reformed Presbyterian ("Covenanter") tradition

Questions from Class

What is Erastianism?

For Further Study

**Fair Sunshine: Character Studies of the Scottish Covenanters*, Jock Purves

**Light in the North: The Story of the Scottish Covenanters*, J. D. Douglas

A. Read these pages from *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford* (Banner of Truth), 559-68. After nine years in his beloved Anwoth, Samuel Rutherford was barred from preaching in Scotland and was exiled to Aberdeen. He returned briefly to Anwoth after the Covenanters' Revolution in 1638 and was soon designated by the General Assembly as professor of divinity at St. Andrews. There he remained for the rest of his life except for the four years that he spent in London as one of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly.

Most of Rutherford's *Letters* were written from exile in Aberdeen, although the two I have included here are from the period of his short return to Anwoth. Rutherford's letters are beautiful and full of spiritual gems, but they must be read slowly and thoughtfully. There are some archaic words (look them up in an old dictionary) and many unusual expressions which demand careful thought.

Letter 286 was Rutherford's response to a congregation of believers who had written to Rutherford with their concerns and questions. Letter 287 was written to a mother who had just lost a four-year old child. In letter 286 Rutherford encourages the church at Kilmalcolm and answers their questions. The sincere and earnest Christians there were concerned about what they saw as dullness and formality in their Christian profession. Rutherford's answers constitute a mini-pastoral theology.

*Give some examples of Rutherford's humility.

*Note the striking things he says about suffering and weakness.

*How does he explain those who do not persevere (those who "fall off Christ again")?

*How can Christians under "a dead ministry" be encouraged?

*How do we "slander God's grace" in our souls?

*How should we view our poor performance in the Christian life?

*How can we account for an absence of the sense of God's presence?

*How does Satan try to put Christ and the Christian at odds?

*What did Rutherford think about what the Puritans called "law-work"?

*"Many coals make a good fire." What does Rutherford illustrate with this statement?

- *Do you think that Samuel Rutherford was a “stern Calvinist theologian”?
- *Letter 287 was sent to the Viscountess of Kenmure on the death of her child. Do you think Rutherford’s letter brought comfort to her?
- *Is there still need for a pastoral and spiritual ministry of letter writing?