

# The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland and Scottish Independence

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*For a more full explanation of our position, one which sets the position of the church on this question in its broader political and historical context, please see the paper produced by Rev Kenneth Stewart entitled 'The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, British Politics and Scottish Independence' which can be accessed online at [www.glasgowrpcs.org/ministers-page](http://www.glasgowrpcs.org/ministers-page)*

*The Presbytery has approved that paper as containing an accurate statement of our political position and an accurate application of these principles to the particular issue under consideration.*

## Introduction

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September of this year (2014), all British, Commonwealth and European Union citizens aged sixteen or over and resident in Scotland or registered to vote in Scotland, will be entitled to vote on whether Scotland should become an independent country or continue as a constituent part of the United Kingdom.

This leaflet is produced by the Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in order to guide those citizens as to how to cast their vote in accordance with biblical principles – principles which can also be described as Reformed and Presbyterian.

The Presbytery considers that abstention from voting or else a spoiling of the ballot paper is the procedure most in accord with Biblical principles. It does so because it cannot endorse either the current constitution governing the United Kingdom or the proposed alternative constitution, even in its interim form, which would govern an Independent Scotland.

## The Current Constitution of the United Kingdom

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland (RPCS) has maintained throughout her history that the current constitution of the United Kingdom contains serious defects – none of which are given proper consideration by Christians in general or Scottish Presbyterians in particular.

The first of these defects is that, despite various references to God in various parts of our constitution, including the Oath of Coronation, *there is no explicit acknowledgement of the Headship of Christ over the nation and over the Monarch herself*. Such an explicit acknowledgement, as was contained in the previous constitutional documents governing Scotland, would bind the nation to the observance of the Moral Law of God under Christ.

The second of these defects is that *the British Constitution enshrines, in perpetuity, the position of the Monarch as the Head of a Church*. As such, she not only possesses the power to appoint the Bishops, or overseers, of that Church but, further, possesses the power *to appoint these Bishops to a seat in Parliament*. In this way, ecclesiastical officers, who ought not to exist according to the Word of God and our previously held constitutional documents, are authorised – in perpetuity – to exercise civil rule over the supposedly free nation of Scotland.

The third of these defects is that the existing British constitution *is in violation of previous constitutional documents adopted, under oath, before God* – the *National Covenant* (1638) and *The Solemn League and Covenant* (1643).

Both these Covenants were adopted into the Constitution of Scotland – in 1640 and 1644 respectively – while the terms of adoption made plain that they were adopted to be held in perpetuity. It should be noted also that *The Solemn League and Covenant* was also *adopted by the English Parliament into her own constitution*. Both Houses of Parliament (Lords and Commons) rose while the document was read in St Margaret's Church, London and, with raised hands, swore to preserve it. In this way, this once-famous document, now buried in oblivion, became a foundational constitutional document governing the Kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland.

A fourth defect lies in the fact that all parts of the Government – the Monarch, Parliament and all the executive officers of Government – as it is now established constitutionally, are *solemnly bound by oath to each other*. These oaths are the *Oath of Coronation* (taken by the Monarch) and the *Oath of Allegiance* (taken by her officers of state – including MP's). These two oaths belong together and each one needs to be understood in the light of the other

- The *Oath of Coronation* requires the Monarch to govern all her territories '*according to their respective laws and customs*' - some of which are non-Christian or anti-Christian – as well as to '*maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England, and the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government thereof, as by law established in England (and to) preserve unto the Bishops and Clergy of England, and to the Churches there committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges, as by law do or shall appertain to them or any of them*'. Moreover, she is vowing to continue as a member of the Church of England (Act of Settlement 1701) and to function as the Head of that Church. In other words, she is bound by oath to hinder what the *Solemn League and Covenant* bound the Monarch to promote (see page 3 below)
- The Oath of Allegiance, taken by all officers of State – including MP's – appears to be a pledge to the Monarch *in order to preserve her prerogatives as these are currently invested in her office by the existing constitution* – which include the Headship of the Church of England and all the rights and privileges, spiritual and temporal, involved in that Headship.

### The Current Constitution and the Act of Union (1707)

The forefathers of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland were resolutely opposed to the Union and, in 1707, they issued the '*Protestation and Testimony against the Incorporating Union with England*'. Indeed, they considered the proceedings of the Scottish Parliament which adopted the Act of Union to be invalid – for the following reasons.

- The Treaty was contrary to the fundamental constitutions, laws and liberties of the Kingdom of Scotland '*which we, as a free people, have enjoyed for the space of about two thousand years without ever being fully conquered*'.
- The terms of the Treaty of Union with England meant that the nation of Scotland became '*debased and enslaved...its ancient independency lost and gone...the parliamentary power dissolved which was the bulwark and basis of all (Scotland's) liberties*'.

- Furthermore, *'the surrender of Parliament and Sovereignty deprive the people of all security (a security which is) daily in danger of being encroached upon, altered or subverted by the said British Parliament, managed entirely by the English, who seldom have consulted our welfare...and poor people made liable to taxes, levies and unsupportable burdens, and many other imminent hazards and impositions, all which we here protest against'*.
- The kind of union agreed upon, with the loss of sovereignty entailed, was one which would inevitably yoke the nation of Scotland into ventures and wars at home and abroad which might be in the interests of England but not in the interests of Scotland.

Second, the Union was held to be contrary to the constitutional relationship already established with England under the terms of the *Solemn League and Covenant* (1643).

- The first article of the *Solemn League and Covenant* bound the nation of Scotland to the further reformation of England in doctrine, worship, discipline and government. The terms of the Union of 1707, however, *forbids this to be done*.
- The second article of the *Solemn League and Covenant* abjured prelacy (government by bishops) forever. The terms of the Union of 1707, however, as agreed in both England and Scotland, *established prelacy forever in England*.
- The third article of the *Solemn League and Covenant* bound the nation of Scotland to the preservation of the rights, liberties and privileges of Parliament; the terms of the Union of 1707 abolished the Parliament of the Kingdom of Scotland.
- The fourth article of the *Solemn League and Covenant* bound the nation to oppose all those who would hinder the work of reformation in the nation; the terms of the Union of 1707 secured the place of unbiblical officers of the church (prelates) in the government of the church and of the nation through their seats in Parliament (in the House of Lords).

It is clear, then, that the Treaty of Union only served to exacerbate the defects which had been brought into the Constitution of the Kingdom of Scotland by the Revolution of 1688. Far from improving matters constitutionally, it made them even worse.

## The Alternative

From what we have seen above, it would appear to be a straightforward duty to vote for Independence of Scotland in September 2014. However, there are two complicating factors:

First, it is arguable that the union of the three Kingdoms into one United Kingdom, over 300 years ago, effectively ended the distinct nationhood of all three ancient Kingdoms. There is something about a 300 year unified Kingdom which is difficult to unravel into its original constituent parts.

Second, and following on from the preceding point, the dissolution of the Union would not restore Scotland to the kind of nation it was in 1707. At that time, despite covenant violation, the very idea of settling a national constitution without explicit reference to God was simply unthinkable. The

Scotland of 2014 presents us with a very different picture – one that is secular, humanistic and, increasingly, anti-Christian.

Of course, at present, we do not know the nature of the *permanent* constitution which would come to be adopted in the event of independence being secured. And, while it is hard to escape the conclusion that there is something rather unjust about that - how can we vote for what we don't know? – it does present something of a problem.

On the one hand, it could be argued that the current non-existence of the constitution might be seen as an opportunity and, therefore, as a call to exercise faith. After all, both history and the Word of God provide abundant examples of sudden, dramatic and unexpected help from God in providence. For example, who could have predicted the ascent of Cyrus and his decree to allow the Jewish exiles to return ('we were as men that dreamed' Psalm 126)? Similarly, when Richard Cameron publicly rejected the Stewart monarchy at Sanquhar, he was derided by a deluded nation, furiously hunted, tortured and executed with hardly a voice of support to be heard. Astonishingly, within ten years, the whole nation agreed with him, renounced its allegiance to the Stewart dynasty and a revolution was born. Is it not just possible, then, that if we unloosen a bond we ought never to have forged that God might intervene for us and, unexpected as it seems, give us a more honourable situation than the one we have at present?

On the other hand, however, the recent publishing of the proposed interim constitution reveals a blueprint for Scotland that is determinedly, if not aggressively, secular and humanistic. The Sovereignty of Man is proudly asserted while God is conspicuous only by his absence. This constitution, let it be noted, would function as the *constitution governing Scotland* from the day independence is established, in 2016, until the adoption of a permanent constitution sometime afterwards. It should be noted that we have no right to place ourselves under a secular constitution, even on an interim basis, in the hope that a godly constitution might be forthcoming later.

## Conclusion

In that light, while it would seem wrong to perpetuate the Union, on its current terms at least, it would appear equally wrong to submit ourselves to a secular constitution. It would therefore be most consistent with our biblical principles to abstain from voting – on the ground that we are not being given a viable alternative – and to keep looking to the Lord for help.