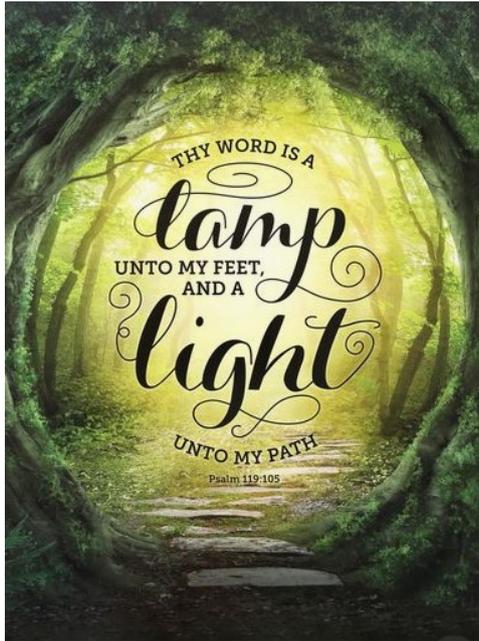




May 2019 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

On the 15th April, you may have watched videos of Notre-Dame de Paris in a blaze of fire. The cathedral is iconic as a panorama of history. Built over the course of a century from 1160, some key moments of French history are tied up with this edifice. It was here that Henry VI of England was crowned king of France and also where Napoleon was made emperor. Due to the success of Victor Hugo's novel *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, and of course the later Disney film, there is much popular interest in this landmark. In 1944, the cathedral was one of the sites used to celebrate the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation. Notre-Dame is one of the must-see sights of Paris.

Since the inferno, there have been outpourings of commiseration across the globe. World leaders have been quick to voice their support and solidarity with the French nation. Millions of euro have been pledged to restore it. French President, Emmanuel Macron vowed, "We'll rebuild Notre-Dame even more beautifully..."

But are the responses from some supposed Protestants really not quite strange? St Anne's Cathedral (Church of Ireland) in Belfast has opened a book of condolence! The Church of Scotland's ecumenical officer drafted a prayer about the loss of the cathedral, while the Moderator urged, "In sympathy and solidarity with the people of Paris, I would encourage our churches and cathedrals, where possible, to ring their bells at 7pm on Thursday for seven minutes." Even well-known Southern Baptist commentator Al Mohler stated, "Indeed, the Protestant Reformers themselves would have mourned the loss of this great cathedral—a symbol of the Christianity they sought to reform."

I don't rejoice in the destruction of a beautiful building with iconoclastic glee. There is a certain majesty in the architecture of such buildings, although inappropriately labelled churches. However, I can't help but note that Protestant sympathy in the ways expressed above is truly out of step with our confession. "Notre-Dame" means "Our Lady" – an idolatrous monument to Mary, the mother of our Lord. The cathedral contained relics which are items of blasphemous devotion, particularly what was claimed to be a piece of Christ's cross, a nail, the crown of thorns, and the tunic that Louis IX wore when he brought the so-called crown of thorns to Paris. The cathedral was a place where daily the sacraments of the Papistry were celebrated, blinding men's eyes, binding their consciences, and damning their souls.

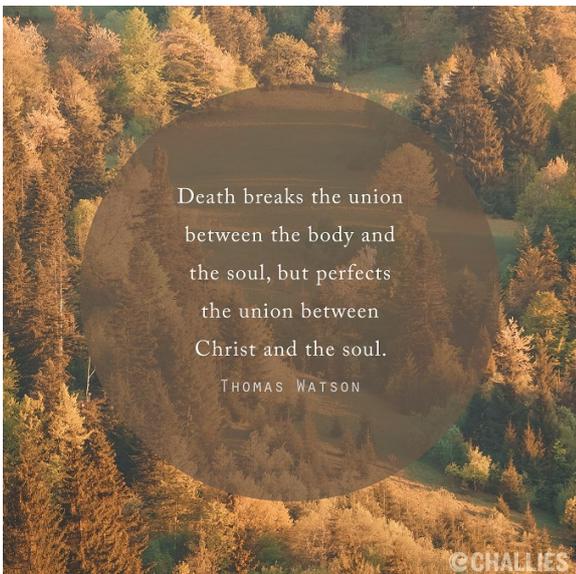
Protestantism seems to have forgotten that there is a gulf between Rome and us. There is a true church and there is a synagogue of Satan. There is the Gospel of free grace and a man-made religion of works. There is Christ the King of His Church and an imposter on the "Throne of St. Peter."

A true Protestant response to the fire of Notre-Dame must mourn the bondage of the religious people in France to an outwardly attractive religion, but whose ways are death.

*Now therefore, listen to me, my children; pay attention to the words of my mouth:
Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths;
For she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men.
Her house is the way to hell, descending to the chambers of death. (Proverbs 7:24-27)*

In Christ,

Stephen



WHAT IS THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH—PART 3

Previously, we saw that both church and government in Scotland had covenanted with God. During the First Reformation, James I had broken his covenant commitments and introduced the Articles of Perth in an attempt to enforce Episcopacy on the church. Should the covenanted Presbyterian church accept these compromises? No, many maintained their stand for Biblical principles. After the second period of Reformation, Charles II signed the Covenants but later passed the Recissory Act, declaring the Covenants and other reforms illegal. Should the covenanted Presbyterian church acquiesce to the King's authority over the Church? No, the Reformed Church preferred to suffer terrible persecution upholding their Covenants, obeying God and not men.



In this third article we come to the Revolution Settlement. By some, it is seen as a moment of glory. By the faithful Covenanters, and thus by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Revolution Settlement was seen as one further test – would they “esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt”?

“THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION”

In 1688, William of Orange, a Dutch prince, invaded England. William was a nephew by marriage of King James II and had been invited by certain parliamentarians to take the throne and prevent a national crisis. William's reign ended the bloodthirsty persecution and a new era of tolerance was ushered in. The Revolution secured England and Scotland from the danger of a Roman Catholic monarch. In Scotland, the Church was reorganised as a Presbyterian church again. For many this was greeted favourably as it terminated the years of violence and turmoil. People were ready for settlement and in many ways that is understandable. Nevertheless, this Revolution Settlement was highly flawed and once more challenged the church and state as to how faithful they would be to their covenants. Although there were many deficiencies in the Settlement, we will focus particularly on issues with the covenants.

First, it should be noted that William was crowned King without any thought to him signing the covenants. Scotland had required Charles II to swear allegiance to the covenants to rule over them, yet did not require William to do the same. The Solemn League and Covenant explicitly required the three kingdoms to labour for close uniformity in the religion of England and Ireland with that of Presbyterian Scotland. William, however, felt free to become Supreme Governor of an Episcopal church in England and establish a Presbyterian church in Scotland. There was to be no uniformity of religion and no further reformation according to the Word of God.

Second, while William's policy was notably different from the Stewart kings as did not consider himself supreme over the church in Scotland, he did not revoke the Recissory Act which had abolished the covenants as unlawful oaths. Thus, the covenants were not restored to their rightful place in the newly resettled church. Prior to the persecution, adherence to the covenants was essential to holding office in the church. But in the new church they were ignored, indeed broken. The resettled church was legally established as the Church of Scotland but not on the principles achieved at the Second Reformation. For example, while ministers were to subscribe to Presbyterian government, they need not declare Episcopal government as unscriptural. This left room for curates who had favoured the undermining of the Reformation to join the Church of Scotland as Presbyterian ministers, without change of convictions.

By accepting the Revolutionary Settlement, the Church of Scotland and the State failed to reform the church to its position at the Second Reformation. They consented to the continued validity of the Recissory Act - in other words, denying their covenant obligations towards God. Since Charles II did not have the authority to erase the covenant obligations before God by any royal decree, so the Church of Scotland should not have received establishment without a recognition of these continuing obligations.

In 1690, the Covenanters had only three ministers for somewhere between 7,000-10,000 souls, many of their ministers having been martyred. This group of Covenanters had become known as the United Societies. They had refused all compromise and had been persecuted for it. The United Societies petitioned the General Assembly to consider the matters that they had contended for during the persecution. The General Assembly would not, and despite this travesty, the three Covenanter ministers compromised by joining the Revolution Church, leaving the United Societies without minister, yet resolute in their principles. In later years, one of these ministers, Alexander Shields, deeply regretted his decision to enter the Revolution Church.

The United Societies were occasionally supplied with preaching from Rev. David Houston, an Irish Covenanter minister, but the bulk of his efforts were among the Covenanters across the Irish Sea. This meant that when the Scottish Societies met for services they were usually led by elders. In 1706, John Macmillan, a minister in the Church of Scotland, left the Revolution Church for the United Societies, having come to share their convictions. Once again, the Covenanters had a minister of their own to preach and administer the sacraments. A licentiate, John MacNeill, also joined the United Societies, but as there was only one minister and no Presbytery, he was not ordained. MacNeill continued preaching to the Covenanters until his death in 1732. In 1743, another minister, Thomas Nairn, applied to the United Societies. Now with two ministers, the Reformed Presbytery was constituted.

It is worth stressing that the Reformed Presbyterian Church did not separate from the Revolution Church of Scotland (as the other Scottish Presbyterian denominations have done), rather the United Societies refused to compromise in 1690 by joining an organisation that failed to recognise their vows before God. As they stated in 1692, "Oh! how astonishing! The like not to be heard among the heathen, that these solemn vows and covenants should not only be scorned, derided, openly burnt, and made a capital crime to own them, by open and avowed adversaries, but also cast by and buried by the ministers of the church of Scotland, called Presbyterians." The Reformed Presbyterian Church continues today bearing witness to our covenantal obligations, praying that they would no longer be buried away and forgotten.

In our next article we will begin to look at the theology of covenanting to see whether the RP position can be Biblically justified.

Rev. Stephen McCollum

