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French Huguenots and Scottish Covenanters: Similarities and Dissimilarities during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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The Protestants of France have long been called “Huguenots”. Before even the word “Protestant” was coined around 1529, French followers of Martin Luther (1483-1546) were called “*évangéliques*” or “*bibliens*”.¹ French Protestants came under the sway of Jean (or John) Calvin (1509-1564)² in the late 1530s and the 1540s, identifying increasingly as reformed in theology and presbyterian in polity. The name which these reformed Protestants eventually came to prefer over all other alternatives was “Huguenots”, of uncertain derivation.

Many of the Protestants of Scotland, who became overwhelmingly reformed in theology and presbyterian in polity, were called “Covenanters”. This name refers to their practice of signing a public commitment to King Jesus, called a “covenant” in the style of Josiah’s covenant with God on behalf of the people of Israel.

Then the king [Josiah] stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all *his* heart and all *his* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took their stand for the covenant (2 Kings 23:3 NKJV).

The first such covenant was signed by five Scottish noblemen in 1557, and a first National Covenant was issued in 1580. The practice of covenanting reached its apex in two widely-subscribed covenants, the National Covenant of Scotland of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, between England, Scotland, and Ireland.³

Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters were sorely persecuted over many decades, in the case of the Huguenots, over several centuries. Can a comparison of their similarities and dissimilarities offer guidance to the church in today’s world, as God’s people face unprecedented, widespread, and growing persecution? To do so, the histories of these two movements during the sixteenth

¹ “Evangelicals” or “Biblians”. Their opponents later called them “*religionnaires*”, from the Roman Catholic appellation for the movement, the RPR, “*religion prétendue réformée*”, or “alleged reformed religion”. Pierre Janton, *Les Protestants Français* (Belgium: Brepols, c1995), [9]. All translations from the French in the article are by the author.

² Calvin was born in Noyon, in the Picardy region of Northern France. Following his education in several French cities, he was converted to Protestant beliefs and fled his native land for the relative safety of the independent city-state of Geneva, now part of Switzerland.

³ In fact, the Irish had almost nothing to do with preparation of this document, and most of the Irish refused to sign it.

and seventeenth centuries will be considered, leaving aside subsequent developments, since the stories of the movements diverged dramatically towards the end of the latter century, as the modern world order emerged from the crucible of the Protestant Reformation and the misnamed Enlightenment.

First, consider the following nine major similarities.⁴

Similarities Between the Huguenots and the Covenanters

1. *Four decades proved key in the development of both the Huguenots and the Covenanters.*

First, the Protestant Reformation took root in both France and Scotland in the decade of the **1520s**, following the pioneering work of Martin Luther from 1517 onwards, as reforming literature was distributed more and more widely.

At first, the Huguenot movement was largely underground and limited to the cities, where people were better educated and could read the pamphlets advocating the reforming principles. The historian of French Protestantism, Raoul Stéphan, claims: “From 1519 onwards, the ideas of Luther and Zwingli were diffused in France.”⁵ Persecution was intense at times. The first French Protestant martyr was burned at the stake in 1523.

In Scotland, the writings of Luther reached the educated classes, including the nobility, in the same decade, despite Scotland’s greater geographic distance from the center of the early Reformation in the German states. The powerful Romanist church-state conglomeration in Scotland persecuted the early followers of Luther; the first Scottish Protestant martyr was burned at the stake in 1528.⁶

Second, the Protestant Reformation expanded considerably in the decade of the **1560s** in both France and Scotland.

The National Synod of the Reformed Churches of France met in 1559 in La Rochelle, a port city in the southwest, and adopted the French Confession.⁷ Standards for church organization, discipline, and worship were adopted. In the next few years, the number of organized congregations, with their own session of elders, increased from fewer than fifty to over 2,050, and the Huguenots founded over 2,000 Christian day schools.⁸ This dramatic increase stemmed not only from the work of Jesus, the Master Church Builder, but, humanly speaking, from the devoted work of Calvin and his associates in Geneva, Switzerland, training young French ministers and sending them back into France to minister and organize churches which were theologically reformed and governed by ordained elders.

In Scotland, a mass movement of reform in the Church of Scotland occurred during the 1560s, led by John Knox (1514?-1572), who returned to his homeland in 1559, having survived serving in the galley ships of the French king before, after escaping, studying in Geneva under Calvin. The

⁴ Under the discussion of certain of these nine similarities, the dissimilarities within those similarities will be discussed in this section of the article.

⁵ Raoul Stéphan, *L'épopée huguenote* (Paris: La Colombe, c1945), 36.

⁶ The English Reformation of the following decade brought some relief from persecution for Scottish Protestants.

⁷ Also called the Gallican Confession or the Confession of La Rochelle. Jean Calvin wrote the original draft of this Confession.

⁸ Stéphan, *L'épopée huguenote*, 81.

General Assembly of the (presbyterian) Church of Scotland met for the first time in 1560, adopting the Scots Confession one year after the French Huguenots had adopted their Gallican Confession. The Book of Common Order, codifying presbyterian church government, was approved in 1565, and the (First) Book of Discipline followed in 1567. The organization of the Church of Scotland along presbyterian and reformed lines had thus advanced considerably in the space of a single decade.

Third, the Huguenots and the Covenanters defined their beliefs against both interior and exterior opposition in the decade from **1638-1648**.

After two generations of violence against them, the Huguenots had won a measure of toleration in the signing of the Edict of Nantes in 1598 by King Henry IV (reigned 1589-1610).⁹ But under the influence of Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642),¹⁰ the dominant figure for decades in the French government, the freedoms of the Huguenots began to be curtailed from without. In addition, partially in response to the French Reformed Synod adopting the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) in 1620, opposition to reformed orthodoxy arose within the churches, particularly through the ministry of Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664), theology professor at one of the two French Reformed seminaries, in Saumur, in the Loire River Valley. Amyraut advocated what has been called a “hypothetical universalism”, that Jesus died for all mankind in some real sense, but for the elect in some other sense. The controversy over Amyraldianism began before this decade and continued after this decade.¹¹ But, the debate over Amyraldianism was at its height during the same decade when the Huguenots came under significantly increased pressure from the emerging absolutist French state. Since Amyraldianism was openly tolerated among the Huguenots, they were increasingly divided and weakened as they approached their greatest crisis.¹²

By the 1630s, the Scottish Covenanters were faced with increasing efforts by King Charles II (reigned 1625-1649) to re-impose Anglican worship and polity on the presbyterian Church of Scotland. Finally, most Scottish presbyterians signed the National Covenant of Scotland in 1638, in order to unify themselves in resisting the King’s usurpation of the sole authority of Jesus Christ over the church, as He speaks through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit guiding the church in understanding this authoritative Word. The great bulk of Scottish presbyterians now enjoyed and deserved the appellation of “Covenanters”.

⁹ The Edict was termed “of Nantes” because Henry was on a visit to the western city of Nantes when he signed the document. Nantes is an important port on the Loire River, not far from where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Interestingly, an Irish Covenanter mission station has existed there since the late 1980s. “Nantes” is pronounced “Nant”.

¹⁰ His real name was Armand Jean du Plessis.

¹¹ For an overview of the three phases of the Amyraldian controversy, see Thomas Reid, “The Battles of the French Reformed Tradition”, *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal* (Spring 2016): 37-40. More recently, consult Martyn McGeown, “Moïse Amyraut and the Controversy over His Hypothetical Universalism”, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 54, n. 1 (November 2020): 3-34. McGeown’s article is essentially a review of the book by François Laplanche, *Orthodoxie et Prédication: L’œuvre d’Amyraut et la querelle de la grâce universelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965), helpfully providing extensive English translations by McGeown of this important work. Also, Roger R. Nicole wrote his 1966 Th.D. dissertation at Harvard University on the first phase of the Controversy: Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace.

¹² Ironically, one of the defenses of French Amyraldianism was that, to condemn it, would be to divide the Huguenot movement, just when it needed to be unified against the growing royal tyranny. In hindsight, and as many of the reformed faithful predicted at that time, just the opposite result was produced by the toleration of this heresy.

Tragically, the British Isles quickly degenerated into a civil war. The Scottish Covenanters joined forces with the British Parliament against the King, formalizing their alliance in the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. The Westminster Assembly of Divines, with help from Scottish Covenanters, was soon convened to bring about a greater uniformity in doctrine, worship, and government between the government-established churches in England (and Wales), Scotland, and Ireland. In 1647, the Assembly produced its Confession of Faith, followed the next year by both the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism. These documents represented the high point of orthodox Reformed theology and practice. But, ironically, by 1648, the Scottish Covenanter movement was in decline, divided theologically and tactically.¹³

Obviously, the similarities between the Huguenots and the Covenanters in this third key decade should not mask significant dissimilarities. First, the Huguenots were experiencing declining civil freedoms, while the Covenanters were enjoying increased civil freedoms. Second, Covenanters were not troubled by the Amyraldian heresy,¹⁴ as were the Huguenots.

Fourth, the Huguenots and the Covenanters endured their greatest persecution during the decade of the **1680s**.

The French Huguenots gradually lost all their religious freedoms under the tyrannical rule of megalomaniac King Louis XIV (reigned 1643-1715). In 1685, Louis revoked the Edict of Nantes, making it a capital offense to be a Protestant in France. Hundreds of thousands fled the country (although the Revocation actually forbade such an act), hundreds of thousands more went over to Rome to avoid persecution, while secretly remaining Huguenot. Ministers were hung or beaten to death; men and women were imprisoned; men were condemned to be galley slaves; soldiers were housed in Huguenot homes, at the expense of the Huguenot families; women and girls were raped; children were kidnapped and raised as Roman Catholics.

The Covenanters, after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II (reigned 1660-1685), were double-crossed by the new king, who reversed everything they had accomplished, abandoned the Covenants which he was twice sworn to uphold, and persecuted the Covenanters in escalating ways. By the time Charles died and was succeeded by his younger brother, James II (reigned 1685-1688), an open Roman Catholic, most Covenanters had abandoned the fight and accepted episcopalian worship and polity. Only a remnant, not much more than 20,000, remained faithful to the cause.

Here, the similarity becomes a dissimilarity, for the Huguenots were just entering a long period of intense suffering, only ending after the Edict of Toleration of 1787 by King Louis XVI (reigned 1765-1793), on the eve of the French Revolution (1789). In contrast, the Covenanters were on the cusp of a major improvement. They had jump-started the movement that drove James II from the throne in favor of his daughter Mary (reigned 1688-1694) and her husband William (reigned

¹³ For instance, over the question of whether King Charles I (reigned 1625-1649) should be beheaded.

¹⁴ The Amyraldian heresy caught up with the Covenanters a century later, not long after the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was organized by the faithful Covenanters in 1743. A Covenanted minister, James Fraser of Brea (1638-1698), had, destructively, written an Amyraldian book, *A Treatise of Justifying Faith*, which was not published until fifty years after his death. The adoption of Fraser's heretical views by some Covenanters led to a major split in the fledgling denomination. David Lachman summarizes Fraser's viewpoint as follows: "Christ died for all, but with different intentions for the elect and reprobate. Christ removed the legal impediments so that all might be saved, but died for the elect to bring them to glory and for the reprobate to purchase benefits in this life, and, in particular, that they might be the recipients of gospel wrath." Nigel M. deS. Cameron, ed., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, c1993), 335.

1688-1702), a nephew of James.¹⁵ However, the misnamed Glorious Revolution of 1688-1690 failed to reinstate the historic Covenants, or at the very least their principles, and to bring about the desired uniformity among the churches of the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland. But the Covenanters were at least tolerated, while they maintained a separate existence from the Church of Scotland.¹⁶

2. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters were confessionally reformed movements.*

As described above, the Huguenots adopted their own confession of faith in 1559, one of the earliest of the reformed confessions. Although the Huguenots never adopted a catechism as such, they often used, in preaching and teaching, the Heidelberg Catechism (first published in 1563), the catechism so popular among the Dutch Reformed churches. As well, although the king refused to permit any Huguenots to attend the Synod of Dort, the Huguenots adopted the Canons prepared by the Synod as an additional statement of their beliefs. The subsequent inability of the National Synod of the French Reformed Churches to condemn the Amyraldian heresy suggests that this adoption was not wholehearted on the part of many Huguenots ministers and elders. In general, the seventeenth century was a time of decline from the Reformed Orthodoxy of the previous century, in particular, in the Arminian heresy which prompted the meeting of the Synod of Dort, as well as the Amyraldian heresy which tried to find a middle way between Calvinism and Arminianism. The decline of French Reformed Orthodoxy was not unusual, but it was pretty complete. In the *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, an anonymous writer observes in 1932: "Though it seems strange and humiliating, in the home country of Calvin, purely Calvinistic theology has had no representative for a long time, I would say, since Pierre du Moulin."¹⁷ Du Moulin lived until 1658.¹⁸

The Covenanters lived (and died) for the Covenants, brief statements of reformed belief as applied to the contemporary situation. The Covenanters certainly also embraced the Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the other documents produced by the Westminster Assembly, such as the Directory for the Public Worship of God and The Sum of Saving Knowledge.¹⁹ While their commitment to these standards was not altogether different from other Scottish presbyterians, the Covenanters alone followed all of them.

However, again, the similarity of reformed belief should not be used to mask the dissimilarities between the confessional documents which the Huguenots and Covenanters embraced. The Huguenots held to the continental reformed documents, and the Covenanters held to the British reformed documents.

3. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters sang the psalms.*

At the time of the Reformation, the question of song in worship emerged immediately. Congregational singing in worship was quickly accepted as the standard in reformed churches in

¹⁵ William and Mary, who ruled jointly until her death, were, indeed, first cousins.

¹⁶ A separation which continues to this day, in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland, a presbytery of five congregations, in Airdrie, Glasgow, North Edinburgh, Stornoway, and Stranraer.

¹⁷ *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* (1932): 430. The author believed that a worthy successor to Calvin and Du Moulin had appeared in the person of Auguste Lecerf (1872-1943), a pastor, Bible translator, seminary professor, and writer.

¹⁸ Du Moulin, theology professor in the other Reformed Seminary, in Sedan, near the Belgian border, was one of the most prominent critics of Amyraut.

¹⁹ All of the documents produced by the Westminster Assembly are available in one volume (with proof texts from the KJV), published by Free Presbyterian Publications in Glasgow, Scotland, under the limiting title of *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

various countries, including France and Scotland. But what were Protestant believers to sing? Calvin early on committed the church to singing the canonical 150 Psalms in worship and arranged for metrical versions to be prepared in the French language for use by the French reformed churches, in France, Switzerland, Belgium, and beyond. Many of the French Psalms were prepared by Clément Marot (1496?-1544), a gifted Huguenot poet. A complete French Psalter was finally published in 1562, while Calvin was still alive.

Through Calvin's influence on John Knox, the practice of Psalm singing in worship was extended to the Scottish presbyterians, in both English and Scottish Gaelic, and, eventually to the Covenanters who emerged from them. The first complete English psalter, by Robert Crowley (1517?-1588), was printed in 1549. The Scottish presbyterians themselves produced psalters in 1564, 1615, and 1650. The last was the psalter authorized by the Westminster Assembly, proving that the Assembly intended the Psalms, and only the Psalms, to be sung in worship.²⁰

Obviously, the Psalms were being sung in two different languages and, thus, were dissimilar in that sense. But the contrast goes deeper, as the Huguenots accepted what can rightly be described as paraphrases of the Psalms, while the Scottish opted for more literal versions of the Psalms. Moreover, the Huguenots used a wide variety of meters in their Psalm versions, while the Scots sang in just three, the Common Meter (CM), the Long Meter (LM), and the Short Meter (SM). But both Huguenots and Covenanters could be, and sometimes were, dismissed as mere "Psalm-singers", by those who opposed them, as if this appellation were anything but positive.

4. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters sang the psalms without musical instruments.*

Once again, the influence of Calvin on the reformed churches in France and Scotland was crucial in their practice. To Calvin, singing with musical instruments represented a return to the ceremonies of the Old Testament, which had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.²¹ The Huguenots sang their Psalms without musical accompaniment, and so did the Covenanters.

And how beneficial this practice became when intense persecution befell both movements! God's people were familiar with singing without the crutch of a musical instrument and so they could more easily sing in the open air, whether in the "wilderness" areas of France or on the moors of Scotland.²²

Both movements developed a special affinity for certain Psalms in their times of persecution, whether in a worship service held in an isolated valley or in public on the scaffold. With their constant description of evildoers and persecutors in contrast to the righteous, the Psalms were ideal comfort for the people of God in difficult circumstances.²³ For instance, a favorite Psalm for the Huguenots was the 68th, "le psaume des batailles", or "the Psalm of battles". It opens:

Que Dieu se montre seulement

May God alone show Himself

²⁰ According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, among the "parts of the ordinary religious worship of God" is the "singing of psalms with grace in the heart", the latter phrase suggesting a problem with mindless singing among the people of God, still common today. The Assembly's Directory for Worship advocates the singing of two Psalms in each worship service.

²¹ See particularly his comments on Psalms 71:22; 81:3; and 92:1.

²² See Section 7 below for a description of these locations.

²³ Only in the nineteenth century did Scottish Presbyterians and French Huguenots widely accept musical instruments in their worship. The Scottish Covenanters, and their direct descendants in other countries, have never permitted musical instruments in their worship.

Et on verra soudainement	And we will suddenly see,
Abandonner la place	Abandoning the[ir] place,
Le camp des ennemis épars.	The camp of enemies scattered.

No wonder that Raoul Stéphan, calls them “les chants de guerre des réformés”,²⁴ or “the war songs of the reformed”. With such words on their lips, it should be no surprise that both Huguenots and Covenanters were strengthened in their thoughts and actions by what they sang.

5. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters were very politically active.*

Roman Catholicism had degenerated into a strong ecclesiastical-civil amalgam by the time of the Protestant Reformation. As a result, it was difficult, both in France and in Scotland, for Protestants to avoid becoming politically active. Moreover, both movements embraced the political realm, since they believed that the Creating and Redeeming God held authority over everything through His Son Jesus Christ.

Faced with the explosive growth of the Huguenot movement in the 1560s, Roman Catholics responded with vigor and bloodshed. In response, Huguenots took up the sword to defend themselves. What resulted was a series of episodes of civil war, usually termed “the Religious Wars”, which devastated France at intervals for three decades, only coming to an uneasy end with the signing of the Edict of Nantes in 1598.

The Huguenots had been able to enlist supporters not only among the nobility but also within the royal family itself, including Marguerite of Navarre (1492-1549), a sister of King Francis I (reigned 1515-1547). And some nobles and royals, while remaining Roman Catholic, were more tolerant of the Huguenots than were others. As the French state grew ever more tyrannical during the seventeenth century—and not just toward the Huguenots—the inevitable response to this development kept the Huguenots firmly in the political fray, until the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 effectively ended any political influence they may have enjoyed up to that point.

The Protestants in Scotland at first went along with the mild reforms implemented by King Henry VIII (reigned 1509-1542) when he broke with the papacy in 1534, but became decidedly more dissentient—and presbyterian—through the influence of John Knox and his successor, Andrew Melville (1545-1622).²⁵ Many nobles were presbyterian in conviction or at least in sympathy. In a society in which, outside the royal family, only the nobles had real political power, such a situation was advantageous, up to a point. After all, everything was becoming political, as England like France came to have an increasingly centralized national government.

As covenanting became the preferred method of rallying the godly against the English usurper of King Jesus’s rights in church and society, the nobility became more and more crucial to the health and strength of the church in Scotland. The accession of King James VI of Scotland (reigned 1567-1625) to the joint crown of England (as James I, 1603-1625) complicated the situation, because nobles of both England and Scotland were now having to work together in a way not previously necessary.

²⁴ Stéphan, *L'épopée huguenote*, 31.

²⁵ Melville was imprisoned for some years for his faith under Elizabeth I (reigned 1558-1603), and taught at the French reformed theological seminary in Sedan, France, from 1611 until his death, an interesting direct connection between the Covenanters and the Huguenots.

The Restoration of the Stuarts in 1660 to the throne in King Charles II (reigned 1660-1685) reduced the influence of the nobles, in both England and Scotland, but most of them later worked together to bring an end to the rule of absolute monarchs in 1688. However, like most people north and south of the border, even those formerly Covenanting nobles discarded the historic Covenants in favor of the vanilla Revolution Settlement, which pleased nobody but permitted the British Isles to at last enjoy a measure of civil peace. Only one noble continued openly to identify with the Covenanting cause: Sir Robert Hamilton (1650-1701), who in effect led the continuing Covenanting movement after 1690 until his death.

6. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters developed a doctrine of resistance to political tyranny.*

The political activities of the Huguenots engendered rabid opposition from the kings of France and their Roman Catholic supporters. The French Protestants were called upon repeatedly to honor the call of Romans 13:1a—“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities”—and similar passages, such as 1 Peter 2:13. The whole matter became critical after the start of the Religious Wars and especially after the infamous St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572, when up to 20,000 Huguenots were murdered nationwide,²⁶ in a genocide planned by some in the royal family.

In response, prominent Huguenots developed a theory which permitted, in certain, limited instances, for Christians to engage in resistance to political authority, up to and including revolution. The first Huguenot to do so was François Hotman (1524-1590) in his book *Francogallia*, published in 1573.²⁷ Hotman was a distinguished legal scholar who was close both to Calvin’s Geneva and to France’s Huguenots. Hotman argues that a superior, universal legal system could be created by lessening the influence of Roman law on contemporary political thought, in favor, at least in France, of distinctively French aspects of law. This stratagem results, in Hotman’s discussion, in a concept that placed much more power in the hands of the legislature or “council”, including the appointment and removal of kings. Julian Franklin summarizes Hotman’s mature view in the third edition of *Francogallia* as follows: “The king of France does not have unlimited dominion in his kingdom[,] but is circumscribed by settled and specific law.”²⁸

Theodore Beza (1519-1605), himself from a noble family in France,²⁹ published his work *Du droit des magistrats*³⁰ in the year after Hotman published his work. Beza begins by arguing that only God is worthy of unconditional obedience, not any human authority, such as a government. Nevertheless, private persons may not overturn a government chosen by the people; that right belongs only to the lesser magistrates and the parliament. Beza discusses the situation in several nations, including France, to make further delineations of his viewpoint.

Philippe du Plessis-Mornay (1549-1623), still another thinker from a noble family, and probably with the aid of his friend Hubert Languet (1518-1581), wrote the book *Vindiciae contra*

²⁶ The two most prominent Huguenot martyrs were Admiral Gaspard de Coligny (born 1519) and philosopher Peter Ramus (born 1515).

²⁷ Printed by Iacobi Stocrij, apparently in Geneva. Expanded editions by the author were published in 1576 and 1586. Critical editions were published after the author’s death in 1599-1600 and 1665. These editions and republications indicate the importance which was early attached to Hotman’s work.

²⁸ Julian H. Franklin, editor and compiler, *Constitutionalism and Resistance in the Sixteenth Century* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, c1969), 90.

²⁹ His last name in French was de Bèze, the “de” being the normal French way of indicating a noble family in its name. In some French surnames, “du” functions similarly, as it is created by the combination of the preposition “de” and the masculine definite article “le”.

³⁰ Probably published in Heidelberg. The title translates as, *Of the Right of the Magistrates*.

tyrannos,³¹ which had to be published outside France, for the safety of both author and publisher. Mornay maintains that subjects are not bound to obey their princes if their orders contradict the law of God, for we are to render to God what is God's, as Jesus says in Matthew 22:21. Since a king is created by the citizens of his realm, they are permitted to resist him when he becomes a tyrant. Intriguingly, Mornay uses the word "covenant" to describe the relationship existing between a sovereign and his people. Both must respect their responsibilities to the other. Mornay marshals many Biblical references to defend his ideas.

Thus, by 1580, the Huguenots had developed, in the space of a few years, a conceptual framework which permitted them to break with the tyranny of medieval political thought, in favor of a more supple, more practical approach to authority within a commonwealth, one that avoided mere proof texting.

The Covenanters also were doing something very similar, since the difficulties and sufferings of God's people often lead them to a deeper understanding of God's way than they have hitherto enjoyed. The Huguenot thought of the 1570s had been permeating the orthodox reformed world ever since, so Covenanter thinking must have been influenced by it. The Covenanter thinker, Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), moved towards the Huguenot conception with his celebrated work *Lex Rex: or, The Law and the Prince*.³² Covenanters James Stirling (1631-1682?) and Sir James Stewart (1635-1713) published their book *Naphtali* in 1667.³³ This work contains not only stories of early Covenanting martyrs, for which it is justifiably famous, but also advocates for the right of self-defense and even of tyrannicide. The Sanquhar Declaration,³⁴ prepared by Covenanter pastor Richard Cameron (1648?-1680), renounces the authority of King Charles II, due to his civil and religious tyranny.³⁵ The Lanark Declaration was posted on January 12, 1682,³⁶ calling for the convening of a convention of godly men to reconstitute lawful government in the land, which had been forfeited by the King's and the Church's twinned tyranny. This Declaration considers all the acts of Charles II and the persecuting acts of the Scottish Parliament of July 28, 1681, as null and void. The faithful Covenanters, now called Cameronians after Richard Cameron, issued the Apologetical Declaration in 1684, written by young Covenanting pastor James Renwick (1662-1688).³⁷ After recording the sufferings of the Covenanters, Renwick describes the principles held by the Covenanters (which did not include killing their enemies, simply protecting themselves) and the willingness of the Cameronians to deal with their and God's enemies appropriately.

The development of Covenanter resistance theory came to mature expression in 1685, when Cameronian pastor Alexander Shields (1660-1700) published his book, *A Hind Let Loose*.³⁸ Shields provides a justification for resistance to royal absolutism and to "the divine right of kings", increasingly popular among the megalomaniacs ruling many European kingdoms. Shields requires "the consent of the governed" to be recognized before a people submits to the rule of a

³¹ "Vindication against a Tyrant". Edinburgh: No publisher, 1579.

³² London: John Field, 1644.

³³ The book was published in Edinburgh by an unspecified publisher, likely fearful of the repercussions from bringing such a book onto the market during Charles II's persecutions.

³⁴ So-called because of the location of its public unveiling, the village of Sanquhar in the northwest of the county of Dumfriesshire, along the English border.

³⁵ Cameron was killed a month later, at the Battle of Ayrsmoss.

³⁶ In the town of Lanark, in the county of Lanarkshire southeast of Glasgow.

³⁷ These three Covenanter documents, along with many others, can be consulted easily at truecovenanter.com.

³⁸ No location: No publisher, 1687. Its subtitle is revealing: *An Historical Representation of the Testimonies of the Church of Scotland for the Interest of Christ*. The Covenanters were always focused on the Kingship of Jesus Christ.

human prince, and this Covenanter thinker did so before John Locke more prominently advocated the same position in his *Two Treatises on Government* three years later.³⁹

What the Huguenots accomplished in the 1570s did not occur until the 1680s among the Scottish Covenanters: they developed a thoughtful, careful, measured, controlled doctrine of resistance to any governmental authority which had degenerated into tyranny, especially tyranny against the godly. Key to this doctrine among the Covenanters was the new idea of the consent of the governed, which was to transform political thinking in Europe and beyond in the succeeding centuries.

7. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters survived mostly in rural areas.*

As the persecutions by the royal and ecclesiastical tyranny raged, both Huguenots and Covenanters were relegated more and more to rural areas. It was not that their presence was no longer real in the cities, but it was the case that it was more difficult to openly practice the true faith in urban settings, where the government and its military forces were more numerous and more active.

Some parts of France had relatively few Huguenots in rural areas, particularly in the north and the east of the county. Strong Huguenot movements tended to remain in other regions, often where local nobles were favorable to the Huguenots, though not Huguenots themselves. Four areas were particularly important. In northeastern France, Alsace, along the border with the Germanic duchies, enjoyed a significant Protestant presence. In west central France, the Poitou area also remained relatively Huguenot. In the foothills of the Pyrénées Mountains of southern France, Protestants were numerous in the Ariège department. Most significantly, the department of the Gard, centered on Nîmes, a Roman city, was majority Huguenot, especially in the Cévennes Mountains in its north.⁴⁰ As church historian Henry Baird writes: “They were ... so massed in certain parts of the country as to exert an influence which could not be overlooked or misunderstood.”⁴¹ This concentration of Huguenots may well have created the impression, both to the Huguenots and their opponents, that French Protestants were more numerous and stronger than they actually were.

The Covenanters never penetrated into the Western Isles and northern Highlands of Scotland, which remained predominantly Roman Catholic until a major movement of the Holy Spirit in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the Covenanters were weak in the northeast, around Aberdeen. The Covenanting movement was, thus, a phenomenon of the Scottish Lowlands in the south of the country. As the persecutions raged, Covenanters were openly found in more and more rural areas, particularly in the southwest, in the counties of Galloway, Ayrshire, and Dumfries. Most of the Covenanting monuments which have been erected in honor of Covenanter martyrs and events and which can be viewed today were built in these relatively remote areas. It is in the moors of these counties that the famous Covenanter “conventicles” (worship services in the open air) were held and from which the occasional Covenanter forays towards the cities to check the persecuting advance of the King’s troops emerged.

³⁹ London: Awnshon Churchill, 1690.

⁴⁰ To this day, these four regions are distinctly more Protestant than the rest of the country. The Gard proved to be the center of the Camisard Resistance (1702-1704), when 2,000 rural hicks held off 60,000 soldiers of the then-greatest power in Europe, but this fascinating and stirring story lies outside the time parameters of this study.

⁴¹ Henry M. Baird, *The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 5.

8. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters developed some concept of religious toleration.*

As the Reformation developed under persecution in France in the sixteenth century, Protestants were requesting religious toleration from the predominant Roman Catholic society more and more explicitly.⁴² Protestants certainly hoped to become the dominant religious presence in what was then by far the most populous country in Europe.⁴³ Whether they would have turned around and granted tolerance to Roman Catholics once they had achieved hegemony is not clear.

The Huguenot pleas for toleration became more incessant during the Wars of Religion and were finally acknowledged by King Henry IV in the Edict of Nantes in 1598. Roman Catholics never accepted this state of affairs, and, beginning with the rise of Cardinal Richelieu as the real power behind the throne and then the rule of Louis XIV, toleration was gradually reduced until it was ended by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. But, in the meantime, Protestants had developed an expectation of religious toleration which was later to bear fruit, both in France and elsewhere.

As the Reformation developed in Scotland in the sixteenth century, Protestants so rapidly became the dominant religious force in the country that they were being called upon to exercise toleration towards the minority Anglican, Roman Catholic, and other dissenting Scots. While apparently no religious minority was ever executed by Scottish Presbyterians, they permitted underground religious movements only with a fair measure of concern and with some real limitations. The Solemn League and Covenant notably commits its signers to “*the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy ... superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness.*”⁴⁴ But the means of accomplishing this “extirpation” are left rather vague.

The situation changed dramatically when, after 1660, Scottish presbyterians or Covenanters were suddenly treated as if they were a religious minority by King Charles II. Now they were keen on religious toleration, although they were not afforded much of it. However, by the time James II was driven from the throne in 1688, it had become clear to the Covenanters, as well as many others in the British Isles, that there was no future for a truly United Kingdom unless the religious differences which existed were tolerated, more or less gracefully. As a result, it is fair for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America to publish an introduction to themselves, Covenanters transported across the Atlantic Ocean, claiming that “Their struggle for religious liberty laid the foundations for the religious and political freedom which we now enjoy.”⁴⁵

9. *Both the Huguenots and the Covenanters were willing to suffer and even die for their beliefs and practices.*

The Huguenots suffered as other Protestants did from religious persecution by Roman Catholics, both officially and unofficially, across Europe. In a country which fancied itself as “the eldest

⁴² “The sufferings of its [the Reformation’s] followers, as intolerant as Calvin at its inception, gave birth to the idea that the conscience of the human person is a sacred thing, that it is unworthy of man to employ the stake [for burning] or the block [for beheading] to limit it, and the first duty [of man] is to obey it.” Stéphan, *L’épopée huguenote*, 128.

⁴³ At the time of the Reformation, it has been estimated that France had about 16,250,000 inhabitants. In comparison, England had 2,750,000, Scotland 500,000, Wales 400,000, and Ireland 250,000; only 3,900,000 lived in the British Isles, less than a fourth of the population of France.

⁴⁴ Section 2. Italics added.

⁴⁵ *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America: The Covenanters* (Pittsburgh: Board of Christian Education, ca. 1962), 1.

daughter of the Papacy”, there was probably even greater zeal to eliminate this challenge to the false gospel of Roman Catholicism than in most other countries. Thousands upon thousands of Huguenots died during the thirty years of religious wars towards the end of the sixteenth century.

After 1685, while hundreds of thousands of Huguenots pretended to return to Rome in order to survive, hundreds of thousands of others fled France for the relative safety of the German states, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the British Isles, and North America.⁴⁶ Horrendous persecutions became almost universal, as mentioned before. All but a few Protestant church buildings were torn down or adapted to other uses, and yet many Huguenots held firm to their faith, to their Bibles in French, to their singing of the Psalms, and to family worship in secret. The Huguenots truly were experiencing a time in “the wilderness”, as they referred to it.⁴⁷

Protestants in Scotland suffered less than most Protestants did, but still significantly in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Covenanters of the mature period of their development did not suffer much until after 1660. Their ministers were ejected from their pulpits in 1662, to be replaced by theological lackeys of the bishops appointed by the King and/or the local nobles. In order to hear true preaching, Covenanters had to depend increasingly upon itinerant preachers holding forth in remote areas or in private homes and barns, in the famous Conventicles. By the time of the Revolution of 1688, about two thousand Covenanters had been killed, and about 18,000 had suffered banishment, imprisonment, and/or heavy fines. And yet many Covenanters held firm to their faith, to their Bibles in English, to their singing of the Psalms, and to family worship in secret.

Such were nine major similarities between the French Huguenots and the Scottish Covenanters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some of the dissimilarities between the Huguenots and the Covenanters have been pointed out even in the midst of several of these similarities. However, four major dissimilarities between these two movements during those two centuries must also now be delineated.

Dissimilarities Between the Huguenots and the Covenanters

1. *Whereas the Covenanters enjoyed widespread theological agreement, the Huguenots did not.*

The Scottish Covenanters emerged out of the Calvinistic wing of the Protestant Reformation, as did the French Huguenots. However, over time, the Covenanters enjoyed increasing theological agreement, culminating in the decisive decade, 1638 to 1648, when the two historic covenants and the Westminster Assembly documents were widely embraced among them. There were certainly Arminians in the British Isles, like John Cameron (1579-1625) and Amyraldians such as Edward Fisher (flourished 1630-1656), the likely anonymous author of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, published in two parts in 1645 and 1649,⁴⁸ a book which was to play a major role in eighteenth

⁴⁶ Since the Huguenots exemplified what Max Weber (1864-1920) called “the Protestant ethic”, they were wealthier than the average Roman Catholic in France, and so their departure devastated the French economy. French President François Mitterrand (1916-1996) admitted as much when he spoke to the 300th anniversary of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. See *Allocution de Monsieur François Mitterrand, Président de la République, aux Cérémonies du Tri-Centenaire de la Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes ... 11 Octobre 1985*. www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-6226.fr.

⁴⁷ The expression is “le désert” in French, without a connotation of lack of rain.

⁴⁸ The fact that both volumes were published anonymously demonstrates that the author considered them to be controversial, outside the Calvinistic mainstream, at a time when unprecedented publishing freedom was being enjoyed in the British Isles.

century Scottish theology and church history during the Marrow Controversy.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, through the end of the seventeenth century, these theological currents remained fairly marginal among the Scottish Covenanters.⁵⁰

In contrast, the French Huguenots experienced increasing theological diversity after the high point of the adoption of the Canons of Dort in 1620. John Cameron spent most of his ministry in France, teaching Arminian theology at both Huguenot seminaries (first in Sedan, then in Saumur) until his death in 1625. The most obvious problem arose from the Amyraldian heresy, which several national synods not only failed to condemn but actually pronounced acceptable,⁵¹ Alençon in 1637 and Loudun in 1659. Church judicatories met fewer and fewer times as governmental persecution mounted, making theological unity more difficult to attain, since discipline could not be exercised against ministers and elders wandering theologically outside the reformed confessional parameters. The National Synod of Loudun was the final such meeting until 1872! Prominent Huguenot pastors embraced the Amyraldian compromise with Arminianism, including the famous Parisian pastor, Jean Daillé (1594-1670).

2. *Whereas the Covenanters developed a theology of the mediatorial kingship of Christ, the Huguenots did not.*

The Protestant Reformation marked a rediscovery of the old theological ways, obscured by the medieval Romanist system of thought, but also represented theological advance in a number of areas. The Covenanters, in particular, sought to understand theologically the nature of the authority of Jesus Christ over both the church and the state. Gradually, the Covenanters came to espouse the doctrine of the mediatorial kingship of Jesus Christ, His universal authority, over both church and state, each an ordinance of God but distinguished from the other.

The Covenanters found this doctrine predicted by the Old Testament, in such passages as Psalm 2, Psalm 110, Psalm 8:4-9, and Daniel 7:9-14. After the resurrection, Jesus Himself affirms that: “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Thus, to His essential authority over heaven and earth, shared with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus has acquired, through a spotless life, a horrible death, and a miraculous resurrection, special dominion as Mediator of the new administration of the covenant of grace. This mediatorial kingship is also expressed clearly in such texts as 1 Corinthians 15:25-28; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9-11; and Colossians 1:15-18.⁵²

⁴⁹ For an overview of this important period in Scottish church history, consult David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988). The results of this Controversy are still felt in Scotland and far beyond it.

⁵⁰ Many of the divisions among the faithful Covenanters occurred late in the seventeenth century and early in the eighteenth century and involved only small numbers of people. See the detailed article by Dr. Douglas Somerset, based on much research in Scottish archives: “Notes on Some Scottish Covenanters and Ultra-Covenanters of the Eighteenth Century, Part 1”, *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal* 6 (2016): 87-130. It does not appear that Part 2 has yet been published.

⁵¹ The same could be said of a public dispute held in Thouars in 1649. Each of these decisions came in the midst of the three major phases of the Amyraldian Controversy within the French Reformed Churches, 1633-1641, 1644-1649, and 1655-1661.

⁵² See also Luke 9:26; John 3:35; 5:22, 27; 17:1-5; Romans 8:28; I Corinthians 15:27-28; Ephesians 1:10; Philippians 3:21b; and Hebrews 1:4; 2:8.

The Scottish Covenanters were not the first to embrace this doctrine, as it is earlier found in the little-known Confession of the Spanish Congregation of London, in its Confession of 1560.⁵³ The Westminster Confession expresses the Mediatorial Kingship in Chapter 3:

It pleased God, in [H]is eternal purpose, to choose and *ordain the Lord Jesus*, [H]is only begotten Son, to be *the Mediator between God and men*; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of [H]is church; the Heir of all things; and the Judge of the world ... The Lord Jesus ... was ... *furnished to execute the office of a Mediator and Surety ... His Father ... put all power and judgement into [H]is hand, and gave [H]im commandment to execute the same.*⁵⁴

The doctrine of the mediatorial kingship gave the Covenanters an overarching understanding of the relationship between Jesus Christ on the one hand and the church and the state on the other. This theological clarity invigorated the Covenanting Movement in its life and death struggle with the religious and political tyranny created by the Erastianism of the British government.

In contrast, the Huguenots tended to reduce their principles to “liberty of conscience”, which is more defensive and limited, creating a public position which minimized their likelihood of winning the battle, practical and spiritual, with the overbearing french state in favor of the crown rights of Jesus Christ.

3. *Whereas the Covenanters practiced public covenanting, the Huguenots did not.*

As noted above, as early as 1557, a small group of Protestant nobles in Scotland signed a public covenant, committing themselves together to the advancement of the Reformation in their country. Such covenanting should be viewed as an expression of the elect’s response to the covenant of grace, and, at its best, represents the honest commitment of citizens and government officials alike to be in submission to King Jesus. Such a covenant is not like God’s covenant of grace, in that it is not imposed by God in all its features and requirements. Moreover, the covenant of grace is made with a definite number of people, past, present, and future, known only to God. A covenant like those signed by the Covenanters does not have to be approved by the totality of the citizenry of the state or the membership of the church in order to be a valid covenant, any more than it was in the time of King Josiah of ancient Israel.

Covenanting has been practiced periodically, usually when the people of God felt particularly threatened by tyrants in church and state, whether in Biblical times or in more modern times. These covenants were considered binding until replaced by a more contemporary document, appropriate to its time.⁵⁵

The Huguenots enjoyed no such unifying and strengthening process in their battle against an even more powerful and bloodthirsty foe than the one facing the Covenanters. And their lack of public covenanting no doubt weakened them in that battle.

⁵³ James T. Dennison Jr., ed., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in English Translation: Volume 2, 1552-1566* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, c2010), 380.

⁵⁴ Sections 1 and 3. Italics added.

⁵⁵ The Scottish Covenanters included the two historic Covenants in their Aughensaugh Declaration of 1712, but added much additional material, since, already at that time, new issues had arisen over a period of seventy years which required an updated covenant, thus providing a template for their spiritual heirs to do the same until Christ returns.

4. *Whereas the Covenanters enjoyed real success, the Huguenots did not.*

As the seventeenth century came to its conclusion, the Covenanters could rejoice that their intense persecution had come to a dramatic end, although they still faced real limitations on their ministry at that time, as did other religious dissenters, especially Roman Catholics. The Covenanters could look back with some satisfaction that they had helped to drive King James II from the throne of the British Isles,⁵⁶ to be replaced by joint monarchs who were far less dictatorial. And the Revolution Settlement established the Church of Scotland as presbyterian in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline, with the Westminster Confession of Faith at its theological core.

However, the Settlement left Anglicanism triumphant in England (and Wales) and Ireland, falling far short of the desired uniformity in religion at the heart of the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant and the work of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Moreover, the presbyterianism regnant in Scotland existed on merely pragmatic grounds: the majority of Scots desired it and so they had it. Support for the historic covenants remained alive in the Revolution Church of Scotland; the three surviving Covenanter pastors all served in it, leaving the continuing Covenanter movement without pastoral care for sixteen years.⁵⁷ From the faithful remnant which remained aloof from the Church of Scotland after 1690 would spring the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and its daughters in Ireland, the USA, Canada, and well beyond.

In contrast, as the seventeenth century came to its end, the Huguenots were struggling to continue to stay alive individually and corporately, let alone minister as the faithful reformed churches of France. Functioning, French-speaking Protestant churches were only found outside France, especially in Switzerland. The Huguenot movement was dormant, awaiting the time when political changes would permit it to minister in the name of Christ openly and, as it turned out, with a measure of blessing from God in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

According to this analysis, the similarities between the Huguenots and the Covenanters are more numerous and more important than the dissimilarities. But considered together, these two movements provide a number of insights as Christians in the United States, Canada, and other historically Christian countries are openly being persecuted by the political left, with promises of much worse to come.

Both the Huguenot and the Covenanter movements were strengthened by theological unity, in particular, by being confessionally Reformed. However, both, and particularly the Huguenots, were weakened by lack of agreement on the essentials of the gospel: does Jesus die prospectively for every human being or effectively only for the elect? Furthermore, the Huguenots failed to develop a fortifying doctrine of the mediatorial kingship of Christ, buttressed by the practice of public covenanting. Not surprisingly, the seventeenth century ended with the Covenanters in a much more satisfactory position than the Huguenots.

Both movements were strengthened by the practice of exclusive psalmody, where they were united in singing the songs inspired by the Spirit of God, with their constant instruction about the battle between good and evil, elect and reprobate, righteousness and sin. The Covenanters and the

⁵⁶ A Cameronian Regiment was organized to participate in the parliamentary forces ranged against James II, which continued to serve the British monarchy until Labour Party hostility to the military led to the demise of the Cameronians in the 1960s.

⁵⁷ John McMillan (1669?-1753) served as a pastor in the Church of Scotland advocating for covenanting principles for some years before he left in order to minister among the societies of Cameronians scattered around Lowland Scotland.

Huguenots did not suffer from a saccharine hymnody which left them weak and divided, nor experience “worship wars” to divide them against the foe. Their joint practice of singing the Psalms without musical accompaniment permitted them to sing them easily on both the moors of Scotland and the hillsides of France or in the prisons of both countries.

While many Huguenots and Covenanters abandoned their commitment under intense persecution, many in both movements remained faithful, even unto death. These believers continue today to be an inspiration to their spiritual heirs, direct and indirect.⁵⁸

In order for Christians today to remain faithful against the steadily rising tide of persecution around the world, even in ostensibly Christian nations, the history of the Huguenots and the Covenanters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suggest the utility of the following practices.

First, Christians need to encourage as great theological unity among themselves as is possible, by rallying around the historic reformed confessions and catechisms as accurate summaries of Biblical truth.

Second, Christians need to practice simple, Biblical worship, centered on the preaching of the Scriptures in accord with the reformed confessions, with the singing of the 150 Psalms of the Bible unaccompanied by musical instruments.

Third, Christians need to embrace the doctrine of the mediatorial kingship of Christ, which brings the sovereignty of Jesus to bear upon individuals and nations, families and groups, without requiring the establishment of a stifling state church.

Fourth, Christians need to be politically active, coordinating with others, particularly what have been called the “lesser magistrates”, in order to protect the churches from worldly pressures and to ensure the maximum freedom for Christians to work towards the realization of the mediatorial kingship of Christ, while awaiting the Second Coming of Jesus.

Finally, Christians need to prepare updated covenants to unite Christians across each country and even around the world appropriate to current circumstances.

For, united we stand, and divided we fall.

⁵⁸ The faithful witnesses of both the Covenanters and the Huguenots have prompted the publication of an enormous number of works throughout the past four centuries, in English and in French especially, detailing this faithfulness even to death.