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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE IDEA OF THE COVENANT IN SCOTLAND

The words " Covenant " and " Covenanter " are so prominent in Scots Church History that it seems justifiable to bring together some information as to the history of the idea of the Covenant in Scotland. There has been a natural tendency to let imagination and sentiment influence the interpretation of events and documents, so that we have such volumes as John Lumsden's *The Covenants of Scotland* (1914), where the title with its implications is bestowed upon a whole series of bands, confederacies, contracts, obligations, protests, leagues, pledges and promises from the year 1556. Some of these were at least in part of spiritual import, involved solemn oaths, and were formally subscribed as in the presence of God; but it does not appear that the word " Covenant " was explicitly used before the beginning of 1596, and the reading back of the conception into an earlier period of our national religious history must be considered misleading.

One of the most interesting of the early historic agreements was the " common band " of December 3, 1557, by which some leading laymen promised before God that they would " with all diligence continually apply our whole power, substance, and our very bodies, to maintain, set forward and establish the most blessed Word of God and his Congregation, and shall labour to our possibility to have faithful ministers purely and truly to minister Christ's evangel and sacraments to his people ". Upon such a declaration Scotland may justly look back with pride. The Lords of the Congregation in 1559 in seeking " amity " with England distinguished their designs from " the pactions made by worldly men for worldly profit ", insisting that " as we require it for God's cause, so we will incall His name for the observation of the same "; and even the " contract and band " made at Leith on April 27, 1560, which led to the entry of the English troops and the final expulsion of the French, began with a reference to " the reformation of religion according to God's Word ".

But at the General Assembly of March, 1596 (1595) a new note appeared. John Davidson of Prestonpans called the attention of the Fathers and Brethren to " defections of the ministry " and they agreed to " make solemn promise before the Majesty of God and make a new Covenant with Him for a more reverent and careful discharging of their ministry ". A

few days later Davidson addressed a special meeting at which four hundred persons, mostly ministers, are said to have been present. Chapters xv and xxxiv of Ezekiel were read, and according to James Melville the sermon was based on Luke xii. 41 ff. At the close the brethren were desired to hold up their hands to testify their " entering into a new league with God ", and thereafter the General Assembly referred to this " new Covenant " and commanded all Synods to take similar action. James Melville records what happened at the Synod of Fife in May, 1596, his phrase " the action of renewing the Covenant " referring back to the " bond of maintaining religion and confession " noted in the Assembly minute of March, 1590 (1589), where John Davidson's name already occurs, and to the anti-Roman protest of 1581 sometimes called the Negative Confession or the King's Confession, which the King, " desiring to stop all starting holes ", caused John Craig to draw up, and which the King signed and " ordained to go through the whole land ".

The Synod entered " of new again in Covenant with their God in Jesus Christ, the great pastor of the souls and mediator of the Covenant ". David Black, the outspoken minister of St. Andrews, preached appropriately on Ezekiel xiii and the last verse of Psalm v, and the covenanting narrative in the final chapter of Joshua was read. John Davidson by direction of the Assembly was present and spoke. Andrew Melville, then at the height of his influence, " mightily exhorted " the brethren. And the people " by lifting up of the hand " made their Covenant. In July the Presbytery of St. Andrews called the faithful together for similar proceedings. The covenanting passages in Ezra and Nehemiah were read and expounded, and the Covenant was explained as " the contract, security and warrant of all our welfare, made with Adam after his fall, renewed with Noah after the flood, then Abraham, etc. ", and it was indicated that the Covenant was renewed whenever the Word was proclaimed and the Sacrament of the Supper dispensed, but specially in time of crisis.

Renewing of the Covenant, it was taught, involved self-examination, confession and repentance, faith in God, earnest resolve to reform, and sustained faithful endeavour thereafter. Very practical requirements were stated as to private and family and congregational religious life, and even as to the regulation of begging and repair of bridges. In this spirit the annual

celebration of Communion in September was approached. This renewing of the Covenant was a comparatively local matter, but though the problem of Church and State was very present to the minds of the leaders, it clearly involved a real campaign of spiritual revival, and though the basic document, the Negative Confession, was so sadly narrow and violent, the religious fervour aroused at this time must be fully recognized when we seek to understand the Covenanters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. David Calderwood in *Juramentum Scoticanae Ecclesiae* (1620) speaks of the 1581, 1590 and 1596 utterances as *tria foedera universalia*, comparing the situation with what is described in 2 Kings xxiii and 2 Chronicles xv; and one has an impression of spiritual renewal, humiliation, confession, surrender, resolve and dedication, with the jubilant feelings of Isaiah xlii. 10 and xliv. 23.

The Covenant idea thus coming into evidence was of course Biblical. Professor G. Ch. Aalders of the Free University of Amsterdam made a careful scrutiny of the facts in this regard in his *Het Verbond Gods* (1939). The word occurs about 300 times in the Scriptures (*berith* and *diatheke*). " Covenant " was known to Chaucer and Caxton, and appeared in 1549 in the English marriage service where it still remains. Richard Hooker used " covenants " for the *pactiones* he found in Isidore. English translations of the Bible early employed it. In the Latin, *foedus*, *pactum*, *pactio*, *testamentum* were used indiscriminately. In English, " testament " was preferred in some passages by the Authorized Version though by no means to the same extent by the Revised Version, and it is interesting to find Luther using *Testament* in Hebrews xiii. 20, the only one of the eleven passages in that Epistle where the Geneva Bible prefers " covenant ". Augustine had spoken of " testaments or covenants of God ". John Knox in his *Appellation* (1558) and his *Brief Exhortation* (1559) applies Old Testament " covenant " teaching to contemporary events.

The contrivance of the National Covenant of February 28, 1638 is described by Robert Baillie. In essence the plan was to repeat what had taken place in 1590 and 1596. " The noblemen with Mr. Alexander Hendersone and Mr. D. Dickson resolves the renewing of the old Covenant for religion." The document devised consisted of the Negative Confession (as formerly) with the addition of a list of Acts of Parliament directed against Popery and an application to the immediate situation created

by the activities of King Charles and Archbishop Laud. This National Covenant succeeded admirably in its purpose, because it purported to be a mere confirmation of what Royalty had itself ordained in 1581, and maintained a shrewd vagueness, avoiding explicit detailed reference to recent events with regard to which there might be differences of opinion. It was so worded as to be difficult to decline, while the association with former covenantings, the Biblical terms, the anti-popish bias, the loyal and patriotic phraseology stirred enthusiasm, and carefully organized propaganda carried the document into every parish with authoritative backing. The word " Covenanter " quickly came into use. The King attempted to counter the move by himself re-issuing the Negative Confession: this was called the King's Covenant, but failed to prevent or check a political and ecclesiastical landslide. More effective was the opposition developed by the celebrated Aberdeen Doctors, though this did not hinder the most prominent of these, John Forbes of Corse, from displaying in his *Spiritual Exercises* a love of Scriptural covenant expressions. The history of Scotland for the next half-century centred on the Covenant.

The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 was equally momentous, politically, ecclesiastically and spiritually, but it was as a document very different indeed from the National Covenant although later both friends and enemies came to treat the two Covenants as but one fact. The Solemn League and Covenant was a treaty between the Scots Estates (under Assembly pressure) and the English Parliament. English representatives came north in August 1643 mainly to negotiate for military support against the royalists. Baillie says: " The English were for a civill League, we for a religious Covenant." Ecclesiastical possibilities were certainly uppermost in the Scots mind. The political philosophy regulative was that of Buchanan, Knox, Andrew Melville and Samuel Rutherfurd, definitely not republican and of course far from absolutist, concerned for spiritual independence and tending to theocracy rather than to erastianism. The desire of the Scots leaders to safeguard religious liberties in their own case, did not inspire them with sympathy for a corresponding attitude elsewhere, and Clarendon considered that Sir Henry Vane cozened them with dexterity, securing what proved to be invaluable assistance in return for expressions " doubtful enough to bear many interpretations ". Later Cromwell was to recall the Old Testament warning that

" there may be a Covenant made with death and hell ", and it cannot be maintained that apart from the Westminster documents the Solemn League and Covenant brought benefit to Scotland, while the persecuting element in these was presently to trouble Secession consciences and Calvinistic scholasticism unfortunately settled down on the Church.

The Covenants were not mentioned in connection with the Revolution Settlement (1690) and are not included amongst the standards of the present Church of Scotland (1929); but Biblical associations roused fanatical devotion in such Covenanters as the authors of *Naphtali* (1667), who declared " that never King and people under the sun became so expressly and strictly obliged both unto God, one to another, and amongst themselves, as we were and are by these most sacred oaths of the Holy Covenants, most indissolubly engaged ". Cameronians and later Seceders were convinced that the Covenants were perpetually binding and feared the indignation of God at the national breach of covenant.

The idea of the Covenant was not one that had specially impressed churchmen or theologians during many centuries. It does occur in Irenaeus, and Augustine makes some slight use of it; but even the Reformers concerned themselves with little beyond the obvious distinction of Old and New Testaments, the Law and the Gospel, and incidental comments on Scripture passages where covenants are mentioned. Calvin has indeed many passing references to covenants. He does not admit the complete disappearance of the image of God in man in connection with the Fall; and, as he will not hand over nature to the devil but insists on finding the redemptive purpose even in creation, he ultimately recognizes only one Covenant, perpetual though modified from time to time as in the days of Abraham and Moses and especially at the coming of Christ. In his Commentary on Galatians he points out that while the law and the promise are at variance in that the law justifies by the merit of works and the promise bestows righteousness freely, yet except by a Covenant with God no reward is actually due to works. In connection with the Covenant he admits a " mutual obligation ", while recognizing that this is simply by the grace of God who is sovereign and need not bind Himself. Bohatec thinks the Covenant idea an integral part of the theology of Calvin; its later popularity amongst Calvinists supports this opinion, but it never assumed a formal position

in his system such as was assigned to it by the Federalists. It was bound to interest a Reformer who was stressing the place of the individual's faith in connection with personal redemption as against the pre-Reformation over-emphasis on merit through works and external obediences under the authority of the Church; but its full appeal only came when the Reformation showed signs of hardening into a new scholasticism, so that Federal Theology must be classed with Arminianism and Amyraldism as an attempt to escape the rigidities, not of Luther and Calvin, but of the Lutheranism and Calvinism that quicky developed, though it must be admitted that after a time the Federal Theology itself stiffened into similar petrifaction.

Already in 1534 Bullinger called attention to the idea of the Covenant in his *De Testamento sive Foedere Dei*, and in one of his *Decades* sermons (1550), dedicated to Edward VI, there is an interesting passage where it is pointed out that God " did not first begin the league with Abraham but did renew to him the Covenant . . . for He did first of all make it with Adam ". Budaeus in France (1467–1540) also made use of the expression *foedus et pactum admirabile* in discussing God's relations with man, and distinguished the parts played by Father and Son in the scheme. Musculus from Germany when teaching at Bern followed a similar line of thought and in his *Loci Communes* (1560) devoted a section to " the Covenant and Testament of God ". His book appeared in English in 1563 and exerted influence in England. Ursinus (1534–1583), one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, a document well known in Scotland, also taught Covenant doctrine. A volume of Explications of the Catechism included a chapter *De Foedere;* this work was translated into English in 1587 and a copy of it was by 1590 in the possession of David Rait of Aberdeen University. John Forbes of Corse, Professor of Divinity at Aberdeen from 1620, was an admiring pupil of David Pareus of Heidelberg, a disciple of Ursinus; and later we find Pareus's notes on the Catechism prescribed by the Scots General Assembly for all Divinity students.

Musculus had declared that the Law itself is " a parcell of God's Covenant "; and according to Ursinus " foedus unum est substantia et re; duplex circumstantiis, vel administratione ". The same holds of *De Substantia Foederis Gratuiti inter Deum et Electos* by Olevianus (1585). This work, however, goes further than earlier writers had done, for it makes the

Covenant central to the whole theological system, the treatise following the clauses of the Apostles' Creed. Olevianus was joint-author of the Heidelberg Catechism, and in 1581 he had published a Commentary on Galatians which dealt very clearly, as Beza noted in a Preface, with *foedus legale* and *foedus gratiae*, showing what they have in common and wherein they differ. In Olevianus we also find discussion of *testamentum* and some emphasis upon the death of the testator, an idea which appeared in Communion sermons in Scotland such as those of James Webster and John Willison in the eighteenth century. Olevianus had from an early date influenced Scotland, for Robert Howie studied under him at Herborn and in 1591 published Theses at Basel *De Reconciliatione Hominis cum Deo*, mentioning Olevianus in respectful terms and closely following his teaching. The old Covenant and the new, Howie regarded as fundamentally one since their common cause is the mercy of God. He quoted Augustine's words: "By the law of works God says, Do what I command; by the law of faith we say to God, Give what Thou commandest." The reconciliation between God and man, he explains, is given in the form of a Covenant merely so that men may be made certain of the good-will of God towards them. Howie became Principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and later succeeded Andrew Melville as Principal of New College (St. Mary's), St. Andrews. Melville himself was interested in this same line of theological instruction. He was concerned in the renewing of the Covenant by the Synod of Fife in 1596, and must share the responsibility for *The Sum of the Doctrine of the Covenant* recorded by his nephew as presented to the people in that year, expounding "the contract, band and obligation whereby God binds and obliges Himself to be my loving God and Father in Christ, so that I am sure to want no good thing and to be kept from all evil". Further in the student's notes which survive of Andrew Melville's *Lectures on Romans*, dated 1601 but no doubt witnessing to what had for some years been the burden of the teaching at St. Andrews, we find references to the Covenant made with Adam and frequently renewed in a kind of gradation leading to the Christian salvation, and more than once there occurs such a phrase as *de foedere non solum operum sed etiam gratiae*.

Robert Rollock of the University of Edinburgh follows the same path in his *Quaestiones* (1596) and *Tractatus de Vocatione Efficaci* (1597) which appeared in English in 1603 at London.

That he was influenced like Howie by Olevianus is suggested by the fact that the copy of that writer's *De Substantia Foederis* now in Aberdeen University Library bears the signature of "Carolus Lumisden 19 Oct. 1590", and this Lumsden was at that time a colleague and friend of Rollock in Edinburgh. Besides Ursinus already mentioned, Piscator (1546–1625), who was with Olevianus at Herborn, was known in Scotland and England for his writings on the Covenant. In Scotland it would seem that Rollock was the first to print the precise phrase *foedus operum*, "covenant of works", and also the first to enlarge upon the contrast between the Covenants, thus foreshadowing later federalist doctrine. Piscator had dealt with this in his *Analysis Epistolae Pauli ad Galatas* in 1591, making much of the contrast between Hagar and Sara, and similarly in a corresponding work on *Romans* treating the case of Jacob and Esau.

Other Scots in the early seventeenth century showed interest in Covenant doctrine. John Forbes of Alford and Middelburg, who studied at St. Andrews when his relative Andrew Melville was dominant there, compared the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace in his *Justification* (1616): "Of the Covenant of Works or of the Law, Jesus is nowise mediator, neither hath he died and shed his blood to confirm it. Therefore by the Covenant of Works no flesh shall ever be justified and have access unto God". The Covenant of Grace is made effectual by God through faith, for by faith we are made the seed: we must become sons before we can be justified. Robert Boyd, who studied at Edinburgh when Rollock was Principal and who afterwards taught in France and was Principal successively in Glasgow and Edinburgh and who died in 1627, contrasts *illud operum foedus cujus formula in lege exstat* with the new Covenant in the Gospel. More curious is it to find *foedus operum* and *foedus gratiae* in Robert Baron's *Disputatio* of 1639 when he was one of the celebrated Aberdeen Doctors in trouble for refusing the National Covenant; but he had studied and taught at St. Andrews in Howie's time.

It might also be noted at this point that Scots political philosophy was already giving prominence to the idea of social contract. George Buchanan quotes Morton as declaring in 1578 that the kingdom in Scotland is a matter of mutual compact between king and people; and in his *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579) he puts forward the same view. The anonymous

Huguenot *Vindiciae* (1579) became familiar in Scotland and it uses *foedus* and *pactum* indiscriminately of the arrangement between ruler and nation. The idea naturally found a place in Samuel Rutherfurd's *Lex, Rex* in 1644, and we find it plainly stated in Robert Douglas's sermon at the Coronation of Charles II at Scone in 1651.

The references given must have made it clear that not only the idea of the Covenant but a developing Covenant Theology met with approval in Scotland before the Westminster Assembly. There is in fact nothing in chapter vii and chapter xix of the *Westminster Confession* which may not be found in Scots writers. Similar teaching had come to be well-known amongst English Puritans and their New England cousins, and the position may be judged if we look at Edward Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645 and 1649) which acknowledges dependence upon Bullinger, Musculus and Ursinus, but includes also amongst its authorities the Scots Rollock, David Dickson and John Forbes of Alford. Amongst the chief English sources were books by Ainsworth, Ball, Bolton, Pemble, Perkins, Preston and not least William Ames (Amesius). The work of the Westminster Assembly must have confirmed and strengthened the hold of Federal Theology on Scotland; but *The Sum of Saving Knowledge* (1650) which came to be familiar in the North was not one of the Westminster documents though it sometimes appeared in print along with these, and it did not emanate from England but was understood to be the work of the Scots David Dickson and James Durham. One point which it brought to the front was the distinction between the Covenant of Redemption (a legal contract between Father and Son) and the Covenant of Grace (a bond between God and man). Such a notion had appeared in Musculus and Budaeus, and in 1623 the Scot, William Cowper, had written that the three persons of the Trinity " concur together to work the great work of our redemption ". In 1637 Dickson in his *Therapeutica Sacra* (not published till 1656) treated of three Covenants, that of Redemption, that of Works and that of Grace. Perhaps it was William Ames who had popularized this way of avoiding extreme predestinarian doctrine, remembering, as did Calvin, God the Creator and admitting a law of nature written in the heart. James Durham in some of his sermons and especially in his *Revelation* (1658) took this line, referring to the Covenant of Redemption as " this good and

gracious bargain that 's past betwixt the Father and the Son, which is wholly mercy, is brought to the market and exposed to sale on exceeding easy and condescending terms and that to corrupt sinners ", and describing this Covenant as " the fruit of the ancient counsel of the blessed and glorious Trinity ". Samuel Rutherfurd who attended the Westminster Assembly as a Scots representative frequently used the word " Covenant " in his early *Letters* from 1631, speaking for instance of this " easy market "; and in 1655 he published an elaborate work entitled *The Covenant of Life Opened*, in which he dealt with the three Covenants, remaining true at the same time to the belief in the one ultimate Covenant as did the early Reformers. For Rutherfurd " in all pactions between the Lord and Man, even in a law-covenant, there is some outbreakings of Grace "; in the Covenant of Works " Law is honeyed with Love ". Rutherfurd refers to " our sound and eminent Rollock ", mentions Boyd and Cameron, and was in close touch with Dickson, while of the Continentals David Pareus and of course Calvin are quoted, but he was for some years in England at the time of the Westminster Assembly and became familiar with Puritan writings where the Covenant idea appeared, especially those of Ball, Black, Cobbet, Cotton, Thomas Hooker, Preston and Sibbes.

In spite of the obviously widespread nature of the Covenant interest, federal theology is sometimes supposed to be essentially Dutch. Thus a Moderate writer in 1880 declared that " that latest development of theological scholasticism, the Dutch Covenant theology, with its solemn bargainings between God and Adam, between God the Father and God the Son ", was " a fashion as quaint and artificial as the Dutch landscape-gardening which along with it came into vogue in the British Islands ". Such a statement may be due to the reputation of Cocceijus (1603–1669) who is indeed by some regarded as the inventor of the system. Of Dutch influence there can be no doubt. As early as 1602 and 1603 Arminius was discussing the Covenant of grace and faith as contrasted with that of righteousness and works, recognizing the pact between the Father and the Mediator. Episcopius wrote of three Covenants, associated respectively with Abraham, Moses and Christ. Rutherfurd refers to these utterances, but as a supralapsarian Calvinist who had received two invitations to academic chairs in Holland on the strength of his anti-Remonstrant ardour, he is mainly

critical. A contemporary Scot, Patrick Gillespie (brother of George), in his voluminous *Ark of the Testament Opened* (1661–1677) depends chiefly on Rutherfurd, Amesius and Cocceijus. Although Amesius was English most of his work was done in Holland, but his *Medulla* (1623), translated into English in 1642, was used as a text-book in Scotland well into the nineteenth century. Not to be overlooked is the influence of the Franeker teacher, Cloppenburgius, a clear exponent of Federal Theology, whose works were esteemed in Scotland. Many of them found their way into University Libraries and in 1645 Robert Baillie expressed thanks for a volume of Cloppenburgius just received. But Cocceijus, of German birth and a disciple of Amesius and like him a professor at Franeker, certainly gave the federal teaching the most systematic statement it had received, especially in his *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Explicata* (1648). Dutch theologians for a time divided into Voetians and Cocceijans. The bitter controversies which took place did not, however, centre on the covenant idea, but rather on the Cartesian tendencies of Cocceijus and such disciples as Heidanus and Burmannus, on his method of Scripture interpretation, and on such details as the place of the Sabbath in the Covenant story. Voetius was not opposed to the Covenant teaching, nor were others of the rigid party like Trelcatius and Essenius. The name of Voetius is very often mentioned by Baillie in his *Letters and Journals*, but already in 1649 he had received from Holland a copy of Cocceijus's classical volume. The strict Covenanters were, however, decidedly hostile to the trend of Cocceijan doctrine generally. This is clear from Michael Shields's account of the Society Meetings, while letters from Scots students at Leyden in the early eighteenth century indicate that though the Cocceijan party was then dominant in Holland, it had no attractions for them. It is therefore doubtful whether Cocceijus's Covenant system as such was at all popular in Scotland, though Gillespie in particular quotes him with hearty approval. Later, however, this system was to some extent freed from entanglements and as expounded by Herman Witsius in his *Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus* (1677) was for long very familiar to Scots Divinity students, and commanded wide acceptance.

The Covenant idea was of frequent occurrence in sermons of an evangelical type; we find it in Hugh Binning, John Brown of Wamphray, Andrew Gray, and later in the Erskines and Robert

Riccaltoun. But the most influential advocate of Federal Theology was Thomas Boston (1676—1732). His *Memoirs* show that he had read Pareus and Witsius and " had no great fondness for the doctrine of the conditionality of the Covenant of grace ", but that it was his accidental discovery of Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* about 1700 that settled his convictions and made him the inspiration of the " Marrow Men " who so sharply divided opinion within the Church of Scotland about 1720. It was a period of legal-mindedness and these preachers of the gospel of free grace belonged to their age and spoke constantly of " contracting parties ", " articles ", " sureties ", " cautioners ", " seals ", " qualified mediator ", " this federal transaction ". " Let a new bargain come and it will do the business ", wrote James Webster (1706). The tendency had earlier showed itself even in Patrick Gillespie's more touching sentence: " He leadeth our wavering hand to write our own name in the Covenant, the great Charter made with Christ ". One might here incidentally mention the custom of composing and signing private Covenants with God; Boston drew up more than one such for himself. Nor should the congregational Covenant of John Smyth (1608) and John Robinson (1610) which became normal in New England be overlooked. The Scottish General Assembly denounced the " Marrow " teaching as inclined to antinomianism and laying too much stress on conversion and surrender as against good behaviour, but Boston and his friends thought that the danger lay rather in over-emphasizing faith as against grace, response as against revelation. Adam Gib (1714–1788), a later Seceder, agreed with Boston in declining to distinguish a Covenant of Redemption and a Covenant of Grace, holding that this introduced a demand for faith and repentance which made the Covenant of Grace practically a new Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Grace, according to them, was first, and was the old Covenant made from eternity, while the Covenant of Works was only in time, or in Rutherfurd's words, " a time-dispensation, like a summer-house to be demolished again ".

There were differences amongst Evangelicals, but all were enthusiastic for the Covenant idea and for its expression in one or other of the scholastic systems that lasted well into the nineteenth century and may even in some quarters still survive. Most assumed that man had been unable by his natural powers to do God's will, but that God in accordance with an eternal

purpose had graciously intervened. A Covenant of Works had been made with Adam requiring obedience and promising eternal life, and this Covenant had been broken; but the Covenant of Grace had already been planned, involving the Atonement by the Son, and by this the possibility of oneness with God was on condition of faith restored to man. In many volumes Boston set forth his conception of the scheme of salvation under the Covenant. Actually he represented a view more liberal than the strict Voetian Calvinism, and the " Marrow Men " were the forerunners of the United Presbyterians who in 1879 were the first in Scotland to relax the theological requirements of the formula for ordination. In course of time there was a general movement away from an overstressing of the wrath of God and more room was left for the appropriate happy ending to the story, though Thomas Chalmers, while impressed by the Federal Theology with its " roll and succession of these great changes in the spiritual jurisprudence of our species ", and " the march or evolution of that great drama ", had the perspicacity to note that " there is a meagre theology that would fain resolve the entire character of God into the one attribute of kindness ", in which connection he might have approved of Karl Barth.

Moderate opinion with its ethical emphasis always remained indifferent to the Covenant theology. John Simson, the celebrated " heretic " in the early eighteenth century, was accused among other things of holding: " That there was no proper Covenant made with Adam for himself and his posterity; that Adam was not a federal head to his posterity; and that if Adam was made a federal head, it must be by divine command, which is not found in the Bible." One finds nothing of the Covenant idea in the late eighteenth-century Hugh Blair or in the *Scotch Sermons* of 1881. But even those who find little beyond ingenuity in detailed federalism, must realize the value of an ideal, social and individual, which is so prominent in the Scriptures, which gives due place alike to the Sovereignty of God and to the responsibility of man, to revelation and reason, grace and faith, power and love, and which declares that life in community of itself is not enough but requires to be hallowed by recognition of the active presence of God and of His glory as its chief end.

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