

## Bible and sword: The Cameronian contribution to freedom of religion

### ABSTRACT

*Only one sector of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish Presbyterian Covenanters, the Cameronians, steadfastly resisted Erastian interference in their doctrine, worship, church government, and discipline. From 1679 to 1688 they were severely persecuted by the Stewart monarchy. In 1689, at the Glorious Revolution, the Cameronian Guard enabled the Scottish Parliament to declare that James VII (Stewart) had forfeited the throne, and later that year, the Cameronian Regiment secured Scotland against a Jacobite rebellion, thereby allowing Parliament to annul Episcopalianism and establish Presbyterianism as the form of church government. In 1690, the reconciliation of the Cameronian clergy with the Kirk, led to a virtually united Presbyterian front in Scotland.*

### 1. BACKGROUND

The Cameronians were the most heavily persecuted of the Scottish Presbyterian Covenanters, and were active from 1679 to 1690. After James VI of Scotland (1567-1625) succeeded to the throne of England, (on the death of Elizabeth I in 1603<sup>1</sup>), the Stewart dynasty tried to enforce Royal Absolutism upon Scotland, endeavouring to force Episcopalianism upon the Church of Scotland, (the Kirk).<sup>2</sup> After Charles I was executed in 1649, England and Scotland were ruled as a Commonwealth under the direction of Oliver Cromwell, until his death in 1658, and in 1660 the Stewart monarchy was restored in the person of Charles II (1660-1685), amidst hope that the lot of Presbyterians might improve. This hope was short lived, and by the *Act Rescissory* of 1661, all Scottish legislation between 1633 and 1660 was annulled. Several more counter-Presbyterian Acts were passed, culminating in the *Act of Supremacy* of 1669, which recognised the authority of the King in all matters ecclesiastical.

Soon some Presbyterian ministers began to speak out against such Erastian behaviour, resulting in a number being imprisoned or exiled, their vacant parishes being filled by appointed Episcopalian curates, frequently of low moral and academic stature. But, 'the congregations ... preferred the ministrations of the deprived clergy to their successors ... (and) conventicles<sup>3</sup> became common' (Dickinson & Donaldson 1954:164/5). Ejected ministers began to preach at these Conventicles, and many worshippers started attending them in defiance of the Government. In 1670, an *Act against Conventicles* made such gatherings treasonable and preaching at them a capital offence.

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1 It should be noted that Scotland continued to be an independent kingdom until the Union of the Parliaments of England and Scotland in 1707.

2 '*Ecclesia Scoticana* – the Kirk of Scotland ... The Church of Scotland to most readers today is one denomination among others. Yet the name expresses an idea, prevalent before denominations were thought of, which has always had a fascination for the Scottish mind.... Possibly a Presbyterian *Volkskirche* sufficiently satisfies the requirement for the *Gemeinde* principle' (Burleigh 1960:v-vi).

3 Conventicles are proscribed religious meetings. They might be indoors or out of doors, but the expression is generally taken to mean secret gatherings on the moors.

Despite a broad policy of conciliation being periodically in place, Conventicles continued to be excluded from any reconciliatory measures up to 1688. As repression became more extreme, more preachers and their followers took to the moors. The most radical Covenanters became known as “Hillmen”, and in due course “Cameronians.” They refused to accept any compromise with their freedom to worship according to the dictates of their conscience, and strenuously resisted all *Acts of Indulgence* offered from 1669 onwards, the last being the *Toleration Act* of 1687. However most moderate Presbyterians did accept the *Toleration Act* and returned to their parish churches. Indeed, many moderates ‘were alienated by the excesses of the remnant of the extremists’ (Dickinson & Donaldson 1954:174), and the Cameronians became very isolated from the rest of the Kirk.

## 2. THE PROBLEM

Scottish Covenanters in general and Cameronians in particular, have suffered from a lack of objectivity by both contemporary and modern commentators. Ian Cowan (1976: Preface) writes; ‘Views about the Covenanters have oscillated between adulation and outright condemnation ... They have been seen on the one hand as political extremists and as martyrs of the cause of religious freedom on the other. Such judgments in the past frequently reflected the

ecclesiastical controversies of the age in which they were written, and it is only now possible to view the covenanting struggle in a more dispassionate manner.’ Eveline Cruickshanks (1989:v) considers that most modern ‘historians ... have been content to follow the well-worn paths of Whig interpretation, whilst Rosalind Mitchison (1982:285) goes so far as to make the accusation, that the Cameronian clergy’s reconciliation with the Kirk, ‘enabled the Church to start the long process of fabricating seventeenth-century history in an attempt to sanctify the Covenanting past and weld it on to the Church.’

A recent dissertation by the author, with the same title as this article, has endeavoured to correct this lack of objectivity. The central research problem emerged as: *What contribution did the Cameronians make to freedom of religion in Scotland?* The following hypothesis was reached, and is discussed below: *The development and actions of the Cameronians made a significant contribution to Freedom of Religion in Scotland.*

## 3. DEVELOPMENT OF CAMERONIANISM.

Cameronianism emerged from an orthodox Scottish Presbyterian *milieu*, and may be considered as a *sub-géné* of Calvinism, since its roots may be traced back to John Calvin’s influence upon John Knox, the generally accepted leader of the Scottish Reformation movement.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.1 Proto-Cameronians

Rev Samuel Rutherford (c1600 –1661) may lay claim to be the “forefather” of Cameronianism. In 1638 he was Professor of Divinity at St Mary’s College, St Andrews, which chair was occupied in 1580 by Andrew Melville, successor to Knox himself. His orthodox credentials are therefore impeccable. From 1643 to 1647 he was one of the eight Scottish Commissioners

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<sup>4</sup> Because Scotland was an independent kingdom, the Scots reformers were in a stronger position than any others in Europe, even Calvin himself ‘Only after a struggle of fourteen years did Calvin attain the power which the Scottish Reformed Church possessed from the beginning – that of refusing sacraments to unworthy members’ (Hume Brown 1895:124).

at the Westminster Assembly, and therefore influential in the production of the *Westminster Confession*, which became the confession of the Kirk in 1648. Rutherford's standpoint was that 'the advocacy of toleration puts conscience in the place of God and the Bible' (Cross & Livingstone 1978:213). 'Conscience is hereby made every man's Rule, Umpire, Judge, Bible and *his* God' (Rutherford 1649:ii). He was concerned with the principle of toleration as Erastian interference, rather than merely undermining Presbyterian doctrine. Rutherford's influence upon later Cameronian thinkers was to be significant.

Two such thinkers were the Revs Robert M'Ward (1628–1681), and John Brown of Wamphray (1610-1679), the "fathers" of Cameronianism. Soon after the Restoration of 1660, both spoke out against the Prelatic pressure being brought to bear on Scots Presbyterians. This resulted in their arrest and exile to Holland, where they adopted a resolute stance against the Indulgences offered by the Stewart regime.

### **3.2 The Development of Cameronianism**

On 3 May 1679 Archbishop Sharp of St Andrews was murdered by a group of Cameronian zealots, followers of (Sir) Robert Hamilton (of Preston), (c1650-1701), who 'by 1677 ... sought to stiffen the pattern of resistance' (Grant M 1997:76). Hamilton was not present at the murder, but on 29 May 1679 he led a party into the town of Rutherglen, and there published the *Rutherglen Declaration*, the first exclusively Cameronian document. This repudiated the anti-Covenanting Acts, as well as the authority of the Crown, which spurred the authorities to offensive action. But on 1 June 1679 some Covenanters, under the command of Hamilton, won a small but decisive victory at Drumclog, where a Conventicle was attacked by government troops under Col John Graham of Claverhouse. This gave the Covenanters a false sense of their military ability, and many flocked to join the Drumclog group. Ultimately a Covenanting "army" faced a properly equipped Royal army, across the River Clyde at Bothwell Brig (bridge). But the Covenanter camp was raven by squabbling between moderate and extreme Presbyterians, and was soundly defeated on 22 June 1679. A rift resulted between moderates, (who now mostly accepted government Indulgences), and extremists, (who became a small and hunted splinter-group). Most Covenanter leaders fled to Holland.

### **3.3 Rev Richard Cameron (c1647-1680)**

Richard Cameron, (from whom the Cameronians derive their name), arrived in Holland in May 1679. His firm stance against the Indulgences had attracted the ire of moderate Presbyterians. On 7 October 1678 John Brown had written from Holland to encourage him. 'Stand fast, my dear brother, and speak freely and boldly; fear not' (Grant M 1997:107). Such outspoken intervention brought both Brown, and his co-exile M'Ward, into disfavour amongst those Presbyterian clerics who were trying to muzzle, or at least tone down, Cameron's preaching against the Indulgences in Scotland. 'M'Ward seems to have become convinced that the witness to the truth in Scotland was in danger of becoming completely extinct unless ... an instrument was raised up which would carry forward the testimony ... The conviction grew on him that Cameron, ... must be sent back to Scotland invested with the authority to undertake the task' (Grant M 1997:160). The only acceptable stamp of authority that would permit Cameron to fulfil such a task was ordination. Therefore, in July or August 1679, Brown and M'Ward, assisted by a Dutch minister, Rev Jacob Koelman, proceeded to ordain Cameron to an "indefinite ministry" in the Scottish Church of Rotterdam. M'Ward's charge to Cameron was indeed a challenge: 'Richard, the public standard of the gospel is fallen in Scotland; and ... you are called to ... go home and lift the fallen standard, ... But before you put your hand

to it, you shall go to as many of the field ministers as you can find, and give them your hearty invitation to go with you; and if they will not go, go you alone, and the Lord will go with you' (Howie 1781: 404). Cameron returned to Scotland about August 1679 to find that although field preaching had almost fallen by the wayside, his own preaching was so effective that he frequently had several thousand at his Conventicles.

#### *The Sanquhar Declaration*

Cameron is probably most famous as the author of the *Sanquhar Declaration*, published on 22 June 1680, in the town of that name. This declared war upon the Crown. '*We, being under the standard of our Lord Jesus Christ, Captain of Salvation, do declare a war with such a tyrant and usurper* [Charles Stuart]'. This was open rebellion, and Cameron was hunted down and killed on 22 July 1680. His head and hands were cut off, taken to Edinburgh and exhibited above one of the city gates. Commentators are divided about whether Cameron was calling his followers to spiritual or temporal warfare, but the evidence strongly indicates that it was spiritual. 'Let us fight against these wicked rulers with the weapons of the spiritual warfare, the arms of secret prayer' (Cameron quoted by Howie 1880:417). Grant's conclusion is unequivocal: 'It was, then, a spiritual warfare to which Cameron was calling his hearers – a warfare by prayer and witness-bearing, leaving the issue to God' (Grant M 1997:215). If this is correct, then Cameron, the "Lion of the Covenant", has been largely misjudged by history for, despite his death, the spiritual war he declared at Sanquhar, was decisively won at the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9.

### **3.4 Rev Donald Cargill (1627-1681)**

In 1662 Cargill had been banished for preaching against the King. He was severely wounded at Bothwell Brig in 1679, but escaped to Holland where he also fell under the influence of M'Ward and Brown. He returned to Scotland to support Cameron in field-preaching before the end of 1679.

#### *The Queensferry Paper 1680*

On 3 June 1680 a document to become known as the *Queensferry Paper* was captured in Cargill's possession. It was intended to be a statement of Cameronian doctrine, but only once it had been refined. It was immediately published by the Government under the title of *A True and Exact Copy of a Treasonable and Bloody Paper called the Fanatiks New Covenant*. How much originated from Cargill's pen is doubtful, for 'It is plain beyond doubt that Cargill ... did not intend that it should see the light of day in the form in which it was drafted' (Grant M 1988:119). Its publication was an embarrassment to the Cameronians, for it included an allusion to setting up a civil government which was never a formal Cameronian concept. The *Queensferry Paper* was intended to be a statement of Cameronian doctrine, but only once it had been refined. However it was the first Cameronian document to clearly identify the four specific religious freedoms which they sought, namely; *freedom of doctrine, worship, (church) discipline and government*.

#### *The Torwood Excommunication*

On 12 September 1680 Cargill emitted the *Torwood Excommunication*, which was unquestionably his own work. He publicly excommunicated King Charles II, his brother James, Duke of York, and five other scourges of the Covenanters. Many, who had sided with Cargill, now felt he had overstepped the mark. 'In the clear dry light of prudence and sagacity we may decide that Cargill did a reckless thing' (Smellie [1903]1960:345), If it was reckless, then

it was quite out of character, for Cargill did nothing without earnest thought and prayer. He was convinced that he had carried out the will of God, and he never resiled from that position. As might be expected, efforts to silence him increased, and he was captured and executed in July 1681.

### **3.5 The United Societies and the Rev James Renwick (1662 –1688)**

After Cargill's execution the Cameronians had neither leader nor clergy. 'Not only were they the objects of relentless persecution ... but they were without a preacher ... but they did not despair of the cause which they firmly believed to be that of truth, righteousness and liberty' (Hutchison 1893:55). As persecution increased, a series of small fellowships 'formed little conventicles without a preacher' (Simpson 1905:98). These were then linked into Societies, and Societies within the same county became linked into a District Society or Correspondence. The District Societies then sent Commissioners to a General Meeting. The relation to Presbyterian structure is clear. The result was the formation of a formal Cameronian polity, which became known as The United Societies. 'The organisation comprised approximately 80 local societies with a total membership of perhaps 6 000 or 7 000 persons' (Greaves 1992:81). The United Societies were presbyterial in form, but not quite Presbyterian. There is little doubt that they would have wished to have been orthodoxically Presbyterian, with a structure of elders, Kirk sessions, synods and general assemblies, but the times prevented this. 'The sufferers in the cause of civil and religious liberty ... were for the most part, individuals in the lowly walks of life' (Simpson 1905:261), who 'simply claimed the ... privilege of worshipping God according to the dictates of their own conscience' (*ibid*:226). But above all they lacked an ordained minister.

Therefore, in December 1682, the Societies sent James Renwick to Groningen University in The Netherlands, with a view to ordination. There the Classes (Presbytery) ordained him on 10 May 1683. On his return to Scotland in September 1683, he was now a fugitive with a price on his head, and Letters of Intercommuning<sup>5</sup> forbidding anyone, under severe penalty, to succour him in any way, were issued. Nevertheless, he assumed the clerical leadership of the United Societies, labouring hard and enduring great privation and danger. By this time 'the Cameronians alone were left to do battle for the principle of the Rights of Man against Absolutism; alone they scorned all compromise or accommodation with the Stewart despotism' (McPherson 1932:74/5). The United Societies were at pains to ensure that temporal weapons should be used only for defence, and reacted vigorously against any who overstepped the mark. Although the Cameronians have been accused of being 'Presbyterian Guerrillas in the Service of the Feudal Estates' (Davidson 2004:23), this is not a sustainable point of view.

All the evidence, or lack of it, tends to the conclusion that the Covenanters did not understand guerrilla warfare and had no intent to practice it. The Covenanters had no military organisation, no clandestine cells,<sup>6</sup> no weapons other than for personal defence, no political strategy. They had religious aims and aspirations but no military objectives .... In their minds

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5 Letters of Intercommuning were issued by the Government after August 1675, forbidding any contact or succour to specific fugitives, under threat of severe penalties (Dickinson & Donaldson 1954:173).

6 In this, Sixsmith is not quite correct. The United Societies consisted of a series of 'cell-type' fellowship groups, somewhat akin to the system used later by the Communist Party. However, the purpose of the Cameronian cells was for fellowship, whereas the Communist purpose was revolution.

they were fighting a spiritual war (Sixsmith M 2007:11).

One should also note the strict discipline that the United Societies applied on any who took part in indiscriminate violence. Considering the situation, their self-restraint was remarkable. But whilst the Covenanters demonstrated considerable restraint, the same did not apply to government actions. Referring to 'the extraordinary severities exercised ... with the barbarous murder of some honest country people,' Wodrow (1833 iv:147) itemises the exceptional cruelties to which the Cameronians were subjected, largely without retaliation.

*The Informatory Vindication*, written by Renwick and Alexander Shields (see below) in conjunction, and published at Utrecht in July 1687 provides an authoritative overview of Cameronian principles at an advanced stage of their development. It is a sincere attempt to present Cameronian doctrine in a reasonable and understandable manner, and may justifiably claim to be the Cameronian *Magna Charta*. 'We are firmly persuaded in our Consciences before God, that this is His Cause & Covenanted Reformation which we are owning and suffering for' (Renwick 1687:114). Renwick's greatest influence was with the 'foot soldiers' of the Cameronians, who formed the base upon which the Societies depended. 'His wisdom and skill contributed largely to the successful organisation of the Societies' (Hutchison 1893:66). He provided a badly needed spiritual focus during the hottest persecution, particularly after the accession of King James VII (1685-1688).<sup>7</sup> Renwick was captured and executed in February 1688, the last Scots martyr to be publicly executed. He was 26 years and two days old.

### 3.6 Rev Alexander Shields (c1660-1700)

In 1686 Alexander Shields, a licensed preacher who had been imprisoned, escaped and joined the United Societies. He quickly came alongside Renwick as co-leader, and after Renwick's death, his mantle fell upon Shields. There was serious concern about seeking ordination in Holland, since the Cameronians yet again had no ordained minister. But on the eve of revolution, he could not be spared.

By now, King James' Tolerations were widely accepted by Catholic, Episcopalian and moderate Presbyterian alike. Not so the Cameronians! 'In the meantime the persecution is very hot, and in many respects harder and heavier to conflict with than before the Toleration, which ... hath brought greater bondage and heavier burdens to us' (Shields M 1780:355). This was the difficult phase through which Alexander Shields had to guide the United Societies. Shields's *magnum opus*, *A Hind let Loose* 1687, contains his doctrine of the Kirk and theory of the State. The importance of *Hind* lies in the fact that it is the last apologetic written by a Cameronian clergyman prior to the Revolution and gives an insight into the thinking and condition of the United Societies at the end of the period that formed their unique character. Shields make the telling point that the Cameronians are 'now the only party that is persecuted in Scotland' (Shields A [1687] 1797:xvi).

#### 4. THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION OF 1688/9

<sup>7</sup> James was a declared Roman Catholic and espoused their cause.

The landing of William, Prince of Orange,<sup>8</sup> in England on 5 Nov 1688 with an invasion force, precipitated events that profoundly affected Church and State in Scotland, and produced a radical change in the Cameronian position. A power vacuum resulted, and 'mob rule ... at first prevailed' (Cowan 1989:76). A spontaneous Cameronian demonstration known as the 'Rabbling of the Curates,' occurred when about 200 Episcopalian curates who had been imposed on the parishes of the south-west were 'rabbed out of their manses' (Cunningham 1859 ii:261), but although some were manhandled, 'no life was taken, and no gross outrage committed' (Story 1874:162).

A Convention of Estates<sup>9</sup> was called in Edinburgh on 14 March 1689 and a 'watching committee,' comprising the Cameronian clergy and ten lay members arrived in Edinburgh, accompanied by several hundred armed Cameronians. The Convention met 'under circumstances of ... the utmost national importance' (Grub 1861:299), and called upon the Cameronian 'countrymen' to defend the sitting of the Estates. Thus came into being the Cameronian Guard, an irregular body numbering about 500. 'It is acknowledged by many, that what they did then was good service to the nation, for if they had not come, the meeting of Estates would not have sitten at that time, and may be not at all; and if so, that which they did in declaring K. James to have forfeited his right to the crown, and abolishing Prelacy, might not have been done yet' (Shields M 1780:388). It may be an overstatement to say that the Cameronian Guard saved Scotland from reverting to Stewart rule, but they certainly influenced Scottish politics at a most critical juncture, for 'the convention enjoyed comparative security, especially with the raising of an armed force from among the Cameronians' (Dickinson & Donaldson 1954:199).

#### **4.1 The Cameronian Regiment**

On 14 May 1689, despite much discontent in the General Meeting, a regiment was raised from the members of the United Societies. William Cleland, who had fought at Drumclog and Bothwell Brig, mustered about 1300 men for Angus's Regiment.<sup>10</sup> On 21 August 1689, the Regiment was attacked at Dunkeld where it had been posted in an isolated position. Alexander Shields (1690:55/6), the chaplain writes: 'Angus's Regiment ... was sent to Dunkeld (as would seem) on design by some to be betrayed and destroyed.' The general expectation, (including that of Mackay<sup>11</sup>), was that the regiment under 'Cleland, a sensible resolute man, though not much of a souldier' (Mackay 1833:71), would be soundly defeated and 'the Jacobite army ... would sense the possibility of an easy victory against the forces most ideologically alien to everything they stood for' (Davidson 2004:25).

The Jacobites attacked with about 5000 men, the Cameronians had approximately 800. The outcome was a resounding victory for the Cameronians after a hard-fought battle, during which they lost their young Lt-Col William Cleland. 'The image of the victorious Cameronians singing psalms ... with the burning town of Dunkeld collapsing around their

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<sup>8</sup> William was the grandson of Charles I through his mother Mary (Charles's daughter). William's consort, Mary, was the daughter of James VII.

<sup>9</sup> 'A change in the composition of the General Council in 1504, to include "the thre estatis"' probably resulted in 'the new name "Convention of Estates" ... [the body through which the king ruled] as opposed to a formal summoning to Parliament' (Dickinson & Donaldson 1954:256).

<sup>10</sup> The Regiment was named after its Col, the Earl of Angus, as was normal in those days, but was widely known as the Cameronian Regiment from inception. Cleland, as Lt-Col, was commanding officer.

<sup>11</sup> Mackay was commander of the Williamite army in Scotland, and had been defeated by Claverhouse's Jacobite force shortly before, on 27 July 1689, although Claverhouse was killed.

ears, is one of the ... moments of genuine popular heroism in the entire Revolution' (Davidson 2004:26). Opinions vary about the effect of the victory, but what can hardly be disputed is that the 'heroic defence of Dunkeld marked the effective end of the rebellion' (Cowan 1991:165).

#### **4.2 The Revolution Settlement**

The most critical outcome of this battle was a period of comparative stability, wherein it was safe for the Scots Parliament to meet without the threat of Jacobite interference. This was essential for settling the question of church government, which greatly concerned the Cameronians. On 22 July 1689 Episcopacy was annulled as the form of church government in Scotland, but not until 7 June 1690 was an *Act establishing Presbyterian Government* passed. 'In this act the Presbyterians gained all that they could desire, as Presbytery was established, and the government of the Church was placed entirely in their hands' (Cunningham 1859 ii:285/6). Of critical importance, was the fact that 'while the State had fixed the Church's faith, it had not fixed the Church's worship. The Church may adopt any form of worship she pleases without violating any act of parliament' (*ibid* :286). Since the *Act* secured Presbyterian Church government and discipline, and the reinstated *Act* of 1592 laid down that earlier legislation 'shall na wayes be prejudiciall not dirogat any thing to the privilege that God has gevin to the spirituall office beraris in the kirk concerning headis of religioun ... [or anything] groundit and havand warrand of the Word of God' (quoted by Dickinson & Donaldson 1954:49), all four freedoms the Cameronians had striven for were now assured.

The fact that the Revolution Settlement was seriously Erastian was of great concern to the Cameronians. 'Parliament had broken down Presbytery, and set up Episcopacy in 1662. Parliament broke down Episcopacy and set up Presbytery in 1689 and 1690, ... in neither case was the Church, whose fate was decided, a party to the procedure' (Story 1874:187). But at this juncture, the Cameronian clergy were to demonstrate greater discernment than their laity, in the realisation that 'the cause of truth and freedom [had, in fact] gained by this absolute conduct on the part of the State' (*ibid*).

#### *The General Assembly of 16 October, 1690*

The first General Assembly since July 1653, was to have a decisive impact upon the future for the Cameronians. An indication of the vital importance attached by the Kirk to reconciliation is demonstrated by the fact that the first substantive business, after a gap of 37 years, was the reception into the Kirk of the three Cameronian clergy, Alexander Shields, Thomas Lining and William Boyd. Whilst the Church Settlement may not have appealed to all Cameronians, there is little doubt that it was a just and moderate outcome for the country as a whole. 'No rigid order of worship was laid down ... The basis of the Church was essentially liberal; the policy designed for her was a policy of comprehensive tolerance' (Story 1874:200).

In fact, nearly all the people of Scotland, including the most radical Cameronians, were at last free to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Though King William's attitude was perhaps *the* decisive factor in determining the tenor of the Revolution Settlement for the Church, the decision as to whether Episcopalianism or Presbyterianism was to rule the Church of Scotland was left to the Scots themselves.

#### **4.3 The United Societies after the Revolution**

During 1689 and 1690, the Societies experienced considerable confusion. Just at the point where all they had suffered for was within their grasp, factional strife threatened to snatch

'defeat from the jaws of victory'. Their ministers saw clearly that the best way forward was reunification with the Kirk, but on 6 November 1689 Robert Hamilton, who had been in exile for 10 years, appeared at the General Meeting. 'His return ... marked the beginning of that cleavage which became final and definitive in the end of 1690' (McPherson 1932:93), for he persuaded the General Meeting that *everyone else* (i.e. the whole Kirk), must confess their defections, and that legal vengeance must be taken against their persecutors. This was a rock upon which the concept of a general reunification foundered. King William simply would not permit a climate of vengeance in the courts, and the General Assembly was not about to indulge in retrospective *mea culpa*, having achieved virtually all they desired. Cameronian intransigence was the enemy of reconciliation.

Nevertheless, the Cameronian grievances were never really listened to, and possibly of greater import, the Covenants were unceremoniously dumped. But 'it is evident that the majority in the Societies ... was not disposed rigidly to maintain the same attitude towards the new Government as towards that which had preceded it; they owned the Government of the king and the authority of Parliament' (Hutchison 1893:100). The clergy realised that the Covenants had fulfilled their essential role, and were no longer necessary to secure religious freedom. In fact, the Cameronians had achieved all they had struggled for. Cameron's *Sanquhar Declaration* had declared war on the Stewarts, and nine years later that dynasty was gone! Furthermore, the *coup de grace* had been administered by a regiment which bore Cameron's name.

With the re-entry of the Cameronian clergy into the Kirk, the Cameronians ceased to have any real influence upon the religious state of Scotland. The last General Meeting of the United Societies took place on 3 December 1690. The way had been cleared for each individual to follow his or her own conscience, about whether or not to reconcile with the Kirk. 'Many appear to have followed the example of their ministers and returned to the Presbyterian fold leaving the Societies numerically weak and with little cohesion' (Cowan 1976:144). The United Societies effectively ceased to exist, and the main body, having re-entered the Kirk, now disappeared as an identifiable entity. What still remained identifiable were two 'rumps', one of which was the Cameronian Regiment, whose members formed a congregation within the Church of Scotland, the other being the Hamiltonian faction.

It is not possible to determine what proportion of the United Societies rejoined the Kirk, and what proportion followed Hamilton, but it is clear that the majority reconciled. The general impression is that only about one-third, followed Hamilton, and went into a religious *laager*. They cut themselves off from virtually everyone. Henceforth the rump of the Societies, (now known as the Societies of the South-West), were to recognise as members only those who:

- Accepted the[ir] view of past events thus set forth.
- Were resolved to keep entirely separate from the Church.
- Refused all recognition of the Government and Constitution, and [to]
- Avoid every act that might seem in any measure fitted to countenance, encourage or sustain the existing civil authorities of the kingdom.

'In this way, the [rump of the] Societies were purged, and committed themselves to a position of isolation' (Hutchison 1893:111).<sup>12</sup>

Cameronianism had by this stage run its course. Henceforth it was to have no significant effect upon Church or State in Scotland.

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12 However, in 1743, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was formed from the descendants of the Hamiltonians.

## 5. THE CAMERONIAN CONTRIBUTION TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN SCOTLAND.

The specific religious freedoms which the Cameronians sought were originally designated in *The Solemn League and Covenant* of 1642, and later confirmed as Cameronian doctrine by the *Queensferry Paper*. 'To preserve the doctrine, worship, discipline, government ... from all corruptions or encroachments.' Alexander Shields demonstrated the consistency of the Cameronian point of view after the Revolution, by identifying these same freedoms as having been achieved. Cameronianism and the United Societies had developed because significant numbers preferred to risk captivity, or even death, to ensure their retention. Whilst the Cameronians might not have been single-handedly responsible for the Revolution and the Church Settlement which followed it, neither did they play any part at all. 'Their injuries, their martyrdoms, their passionate protests, their inextinguishable vitality, their armed resistance ... had been powerful agents in producing the Revolution' (Story 1874:173).

By the end of 1690, the Cameronians had made four significant contributions to Freedom of Religion<sup>13</sup> in Scotland:

**Firstly**, they made a significant contribution to their *own* freedom of religion by their struggle to protect the right to maintain their own freedom of doctrine, worship, discipline and church government, resisting every effort to remove these by force. In 1690 they decisively secured these freedoms for *all* Cameronians, whether they rejoined the Kirk, or not.

Secondly, by their new-found military effectiveness, the Cameronians secured a climate of comparative peace and stability in Scotland during the latter half of 1689 and 1690, during which both Parliament and General Assembly were able to legislate without any external threat. Parliament and the General Assembly were enabled to bring in, not only Presbyterianism as 'the government of the church established by law', but the dawn of a new era of religious freedom.<sup>14</sup>

The Cameronians might have had no say in formulating the legislation that brought this about, but had it not been for their Guard in Edinburgh, and their Regiment at Dunkeld, that legislation might well never have appeared on the statute books at all. 'Relieved in this way from the danger which threatened them, the Convention of Estates was now in a position to proceed with the consideration of the questions regarding the Church' (Story sa: 569). The Cameronian victory at Dunkeld deserves better from history than it has received. Whilst in no way comparing the outcome quantitatively, the argument is advanced that the Battle of Dunkeld in 1689 was as vital qualitatively to securing religious freedom in Scotland, as

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13 John Witte (2000: 37) identifies six modern 'Essential Rights and Liberties' of Religion: (i) Liberty [freedom] of conscience, (ii) free exercise of religion, (iii) religious pluralism, (iv) religious equality, (v) separation of church and state; and (vi) disestablishment of religion' by the state. 'Most influential writers embraced this roll of "essential rights and liberties"' (*ibid*:55). Whilst the Cameronians contributed vicariously to these modern concepts, there is insufficient space to consider this here.

14 Some readers may question why the establishment of Presbyterianism should be considered as contributory to religious freedom? The Revolution Settlement of 1690 affected religious freedom in Scotland to the extent that, whereas Presbyterianism was declared to be the Church government established (small 'e') by the State, Episcopalianism found itself still under attack, and Roman Catholicism was outlawed. Religious freedom in the modern understanding still did not exist, but a climate in which religious toleration was able to grow and ultimately flourish was established. 'The Revolution settlement brought problems which were not fully resolved until ... the final concession of spiritual independence by the state in acts of 1921 and 1925. Nevertheless, the Revolution settlement pointed firmly in that direction and was in the upshot to have more lasting consequences than the more ephemeral political concessions' (Cowan 1991:183). The critical point is that, for the first time ever, the Scots themselves decided upon their own form of church government in 1690. (See p 13).

Bannockburn in 1314 was to securing Scottish independence. Any objective assessment of the Cameronian victory at Dunkeld, must surely agree that it was highly significant for the future of both Church and State?

**Thirdly**, through the reconciliation of their clergy with the Kirk, the Cameronians were catalytic in the establishment of a [virtually] united Presbyterian front in Scotland,<sup>15</sup> thereby

ensuring that the Kirk was strong enough to accept the existence of other denominations without feeling unduly threatened. This action of the clergy, in reconciling with the Kirk, set an example of moderation from the sector which had heretofore been the most radical in the national church. It may be overstating the case to say that the behaviour of the Cameronian clergy cleared the way for the King to pursue his ideal of religious toleration for (nearly) all in Scotland, but it would certainly have proved more difficult if the established church had had to deal with a vociferous protesting minority claiming to be the *True Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland*, particularly as they now possessed a notably successful fighting regiment.

**Fourthly**, Rev Alexander Shields stands out as catalytic in the achievement of the Second and Third significant contributions. It can be argued that his behaviour was a significant contribution to Freedom of Religion in itself. Had it not been for his personal influence (and that of William Cleland), it seems quite clear that the Cameronian Regiment would never have come into being. The General Meeting was opposed to it, and one might almost say that Shields and Cleland raised the Regiment by sleight of hand. It was Shields's words of encouragement that swung the feelings of the recruits into an acceptance mode, thus enabling the Captains to march their companies off. He was one of those rare individuals, able to understand both the military and ecclesiastical situations, without devaluing either,<sup>16</sup> and might justifiably be called the "father" of the Regiment.

By now, the reader will have realised that, had the Cameronian Regiment not won at Dunkeld, the distinct possibility exists that both political and ecclesiastical histories of Scotland might have been significantly different. Therefore, Shields's action in bringing the Regiment to birth, to 'stand in the breach' to prevent the possibility of a [nother] Stewart restoration was deeply significant.

At the General Assembly of 1690, Shields again demonstrated leadership, as well as a reconciliatory attitude. He was the initiator of the clergy's reconciliation with the Kirk, and also stood firm until he had opened the door for all United Societies members who wished to re-enter the Kirk.

That about two-thirds decided to do so, was a most significant event which has been glossed over by many historians.<sup>17</sup> It was principally due to Shields that the Cameronians, who had struggled for their religious freedom, were now able to enjoy that freedom, either within

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15 The Kirk's future problems came rather from within, with the First and Second Secessions of 1733 and 1761, which lie outside the scope of the dissertation. Most of the Reformed Presbyterian Church joined the Free Church in 1876, and there was general re-unification in 1929, when most of the United Free Church joined the Kirk (after Burleigh 1960).

16 Others that come to mind are: Ignatius of Loyola (c1495-1556); John Bunyan (1628–1688); and Charles de Foucauld (1858–1916). This ability was notable in several Cameronian chaplains, from Alexander Shields in 1689, to Rev Dr Donald MacDonald in 1968.

17 For instance DC Lachman in *The Dictionary of Christian Denominations* (Day, P [ed] 2003), defines 'Cameronians' as 'A term used to describe those who rejected the 1690 settlement of the established Church of Scotland.' Not only is this misleading, for two-thirds did accept the settlement, but this definition discounts all Cameronians prior to 1690, in other words, virtually the entire scope of the thesis under discussion.

the fold of the Kirk, or outside, whichever the individual chose.<sup>18</sup> In fact, his input was vital.

## 6. CONCLUSION

By now, it should be clear to the reader that, whilst the Cameronians were not single-handedly responsible for the Revolution, or the Church Settlement that followed it, neither did they play no part at all. The Cameronians 'had done their work. Their injuries, their martyrdoms, their passionate protests, their inextinguishable vitality, their armed resistance ... had been powerful agents in producing the Revolution' (Story 1874:173). Despite becoming necessarily enmeshed in the political situation, their aim continued to be religious. Cameronianism was never a political movement, despite efforts to make it so, even up to the present day.<sup>19</sup> The essential Cameronian stance was that they sought four specific religious freedoms for themselves: *Freedom of doctrine, worship, church discipline and government*.

It seems clear that the Cameronians contributed significantly to securing a decisive advance in religious freedom for Scotland, which has continued to unfold since 1690. 'The Church in Scotland has had a long and turbulent history ... only since the Revolution Settlement of 1690 has the course been a straightforward one. From that time the distinctive features of the Church of Scotland as it is known today are discernible, ... in a Church at once national and free, a Church and not a sect, acknowledging Christ as its only King and Head, and seeking to advance his Kingdom' (Burleigh 1960:420/1). In the achievement of this, the Cameronians bore their part, for they fought on two fronts, spiritual and temporal, a claim which cannot be made by many.

### **Key Words**

Cameronians  
Church of Scotland  
Freedom of Religion  
Erastianism  
Glorious Revolution

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<sup>18</sup> The irony was that those who stayed out also enjoyed these same freedoms, though 'enjoyed' possibly is the wrong word!

<sup>19</sup> There are some modern left-wing political organisations who claim the Cameronians as their political antecedents, including the Scottish Socialist Party, which describes 'the Cameronian Regiment [as] the Red Army of 1690' (Armstrong 2003:3). There is little doubt that Alexander Shields and some other Cameronians had republican leanings, and that subsequent political movements have, or could have, used Cameronian documents to good effect in developing their policies, but it is unsustainable to view the Cameronian movement as essentially political.