

Observations on  
“The Two Sons of Oil”

# Observations on “The Two Sons of Oil”

Containing a Vindication of the American Constitutions,  
and Defending the Blessings of Religious Liberty and Toleration,  
against the Illiberal Strictures of the

Rev. Samuel B. Wylie

WILLIAM FINDLEY

*Edited and with an Introduction by John Caldwell*



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# INTRODUCTION

by John Caldwell

## I

It was during the summer and fall of 1811 that William Findley wrote his third book, *Observations on "The Two Sons of Oil": containing a Vindication of the American Constitutions, and Defending the Blessings of Religious Liberty and Toleration, against the Illiberal Strictures of the Rev. Samuel B. Wylie*.<sup>1</sup> Wylie had published his *Two Sons of Oil* in 1803.<sup>2</sup> In this work of radical Presbyterian theology Wylie pointed out what he considered to be deficiencies in the constitutions of both Pennsylvania and the United States. *Observations* is a typical Findley response. He first lays a very thorough historical background for what he wants to discuss and then proceeds to give it a detailed, point by point, examination.

Presbyterians had begun to arrive in America before the end of the seventeenth century. By 1705 the Presbytery of Philadelphia had been organized and was providing general supervision of congregations in a wide area centering on that city. As immigration increased, especially of Scotch-Irish from Ulster, the divisions that the Scots brought with

1. The book was published by Patterson and Hopkins in 1812. Findley had previously published *A Review of the Revenue System Adopted by the First Congress under the Federal Constitution . . . In thirteen Letters to a Friend* (Philadelphia: T. Dobson, 1794) and *History of the Insurrection in the Four Western Counties of Pennsylvania in the Year 1794* (Philadelphia: Samuel Harrison Smith, 1796).

2. Samuel B. Wylie, *The Two Sons of Oil; or, The Faithful Witness for Magistracy & Ministry upon a Scriptural Basis; also, A Sermon on Covenanting: Being the Substance of Two Discourses* (Greensburg: Snowden & M'Corkle, 1803).

them to Ulster were carried across the Atlantic, chiefly to Pennsylvania.<sup>3</sup> In America the two principal dissenting groups, the Associate Presbytery (the Seceders) and the Reformed Presbytery (the Covenanters), found their major difference in their attitudes toward government. Seceders saw government as a law of nature given by God the Creator for the common benefit of mankind. It was not, they believed, connected with Jesus Christ as Savior and thus had no religious responsibilities. Covenanters maintained that government was an ordinance provided by God through Christ as mediator, that the scriptures provided the principles and qualifications for rulers, and that the only legitimate government was one that recognized Christ as the source of its authority.<sup>4</sup>

## II

William Findley, the son and grandson of Covenanters, was born in Antrim County, Northern Ireland, probably in January of either 1741 or 1742; he himself was not quite sure which. His family belonged to a Reformed Presbyterian society.

Because the Reformed Presbytery had no regular minister, services were usually conducted by laymen, and the worshipers referred to themselves as a society.<sup>5</sup> Much of his religious education he received at home. "My father had a larger library of church history and divinity than many of his neighbors," Findley writes in his *Observations*, "to these means I am under great obligations for any early religious knowledge that I possessed, or impressions that I experienced."<sup>6</sup>

When he immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1763, Findley first settled in the Covenanter community at Octoraro, in Lancaster County, where

3. Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1895), 14–21.

4. David Melville Carson, "A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America to 1871" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1964), 51–52.

5. *Ibid.*, 6.

6. *Observations*, 307 (see p. 210, below).

some friends of his father resided and where he was accepted as being in full communion with the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland. It was probably here that he first became acquainted with John Cuthbertson, the only Reformed Presbyterian clergyman in Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup> After several months he moved westward to settle in another Covenanter community in the southeastern corner of Cumberland County, near present-day Waynesboro. Here he met Mary Cochran, the daughter of a Covenanter family. He purchased a farm in 1768, and he and Mary were married on March 21, 1769. The following year, on November 11, 1770, John Cuthbertson ordained him and his father-in-law, John Cochran, to be ruling elders in their local Reformed society.<sup>8</sup> The delegates from the various societies met in an annual or semiannual general meeting, usually at Middle Octoraro, Cuthbertson's home base. Findley was for many years the clerk at these meetings. In 1773 Matthew Linn and Alexander Dobbin arrived in Pennsylvania to share Cuthbertson's ministerial responsibilities and with him organized the Reformed Presbytery of America.<sup>9</sup>

Although he refused election to the Pennsylvania General Assembly, William Findley was during the Revolution active in local government as a member of the Committee of Safety and the county board of finance. He also served two tours of active militia duty with the Cumberland Associators. After purchasing a farm along the Loyalhanna Creek in Westmoreland County, Findley moved his young family across the mountains in 1783. From Westmoreland County he was elected to serve on the Council of Censors that met in 1783 and 1784 to consider the revision of the state constitution. He was for four terms a member of the General Assembly and then of the Supreme Executive Council. As the Anti-Federalist leader in the Pennsylvania convention to ratify the United States Constitution, Findley fought for changes that later were adopted as the Bill of

7. *Ibid.*, 305 (see p. 208, below).

8. John Cuthbertson, *Register of Marriages and Baptisms Performed by Rev. John Cuthbertson, Covenanter Minister, 1751–1791*, ed. S. Helen Fields (Washington, D.C.: Lancaster Press, 1934), 129.

9. T. C. Evans, "Octorara United Presbyterian Church," *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 34 (1930): 74.

Rights. On January 16, 1789, he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.<sup>10</sup> Along with James Wilson, in 1789 and 1790, he led the convention that wrote a new constitution for Pennsylvania that ensured virtual manhood suffrage, freedom of worship, trial by jury, and a free press. It is this constitution that Wylie attacks in *The Two Sons of Oil*.

Findley represented the western country in the Second through the Fifth Congresses and again in the Eighth through the Fourteenth. During these years opposition to Federalism was just beginning to coalesce around James Madison and Thomas Jefferson into a party that would call itself Republican. Findley was firmly allied with this group. However, his Republicanism was often outweighed by his regionalism. "At all times the westerners' champion"<sup>11</sup> he was a consistent advocate for selling some western land in small parcels that individual farmers could buy, rather than selling all of it in large blocks that only speculators could afford. He always opposed any extension of the excise and any import tax on salt for which western farmers had no regional source. He broke with his southern and eastern colleagues by his support for keeping a standing army on the western frontier. While most Republicans opposed it, he supported a resolution expressing thanks to General Anthony Wayne on his victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794. He broke with them again over providing indemnification to those who had suffered property damage during the Whiskey Insurrection. Although he consistently voted against domestic slavery he just as consistently supported the other policies of these two presidents. Among other things, he supported Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase and the admission of Louisiana as a state. During the War of 1812 Findley was very nearly a War Hawk for he saw the conquest of Canada as a way to end British-supported Indian attacks on the western frontier.

Because he was its longest serving member, Findley was officially designated the "Father of the House" before he retired from Congress in 1817. In 1821, in his home along the Loyalhanna, he died of tuberculosis.

10. American Philosophical Society, *Year Book, 1990* (Philadelphia: American Philosophy Society, 1991), 261.

11. Elizabeth K. Henderson, "The Northwestern Lands of Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 60 (1936): 147.



Samuel B. Wylie was born in Antrim County, Ireland, May 21, 1773, and graduated from the University of Glasgow with a Master of Arts degree in 1797. That same year, because he had become associated with the independence movement, he had to leave Ireland. Immigrating to the United States, he settled in Philadelphia, where he was appointed as a tutor at the University of Pennsylvania. After studying theology under the direction of the Reverend William Gibson, he was ordained by the Reformed Presbytery at Ryegate, Vermont, where Gibson was pastor. On November 20, 1803, he became the pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Congregation in the City of Philadelphia, a Covenanter congregation. The American Philosophical Society elected him a member in 1806. When a Reformed seminary was organized in 1810, Wylie was elected its first professor. Holding this position until his resignation in 1817 he was again elected in 1823 and served until 1828. The University of Pennsylvania—where he taught Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—appointed him Professor of Humanities in 1828, in which position he served until his resignation in 1845. During this period he was Vice-Provost from 1834 until his resignation.<sup>12</sup> Wylie died on October 13, 1852.

### III

As clerk and elder, William Findley was active in the formation of the Reformed Presbytery in 1774. However, along with many others, he had become increasingly unhappy with the requirement that the covenants made in the seventeenth century between Scots Presbyterians and the British government were binding on their descendents who had emigrated to America. He was, therefore, also an active participant in the further union that brought Seceders and Covenanters together, in 1782, as the Associate Reformed Church. This merger took the position that “Magistracy is derived from God as the Almighty Creator and Governor

12. Reformed Presbyterian Church (Covenanted), “Samuel Brown Wylie: Biographical Sketch,” <http://www.covenanter.org/Wylie/samuelbrownwylie.htm> (accessed November 6, 2006); American Philosophical Society, *Year Book 1990*, 282; and University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center, “Penn Biographies,” [http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/people/1700s/wylie\\_saml\\_brown.html](http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/people/1700s/wylie_saml_brown.html) (accessed December 15, 2006).

of the world, and not from Christ as Mediator.” From this statement the Associate Reformed Church drew the conclusion that as government derives directly from God it is not essential that it be overtly Christian. Therefore as long as the government of the United States did not impose anything sinful on the church, it was its “duty to acknowledge the government of these states in all lawful commands.” The merged organization further agreed that the matter of adhering to the covenants be “referred to the councils and deliberations of the whole body.”<sup>13</sup>

Not all of the Covenanters accepted this union. Various local societies, chiefly in Pennsylvania and South Carolina, repeatedly requested a minister from the Reformed Presbytery in Scotland and for instructions on what they should do in the meantime. They were advised by the Scots to avoid participation in the American governments. Between 1790 and 1797 several Covenanter ministers from Scotland served for varying periods in America. It was not until the arrival of James McKinney in 1793 and William Gibson in 1797, both Covenanters from Ulster, that permanent pastoral leadership was obtained. On February 21, 1798, in Philadelphia, McKinney and Gibson reestablished the Reformed Presbytery in America.<sup>14</sup>

#### IV

In *The Two Sons of Oil*, Wylie denied the authority of both state and national government in America and declared them to be immoral because they did not recognize the necessary bond between the ministry and the civil magistracy. Basing his argument on Zechariah 4:1–14, concerning the restoration of the Hebrew nation under Zerubbabel and Joshua,<sup>15</sup> Wylie contended that the Law of Moses thus established was

13. “The Basis of Union of 1782, on which the Associate Reformed Church Was Formed,” in *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States*, ed. Robert Ellis Thompson (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1895), 347.

14. Carson, “A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church,” 53–59, 64.

15. The Babylonian exile of the Jewish nation ended when Cyrus of Persia, having conquered Babylon in 538 B.C., proclaimed that the exiles were free to return to their homeland, and that they should, with Persian assistance, rebuild the temple in Jerusalem that the Babylonians had destroyed. The chronicle of the return and rebuilding is told in

still applicable and that any government that did not honor it was immoral and not to be obeyed.

Wylie concedes that the American government is “the best now existing in the Christian world,” but he insists that Covenanters, that is, members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, cannot, for conscience’s sake, yield obedience to it. He sums up, in the form of nine objections, his reasons for rejecting government as it exists in the United States.

1. The federal constitution “does not even recognize the existence of God.”

“Ought not men, in the formation of their deeds, to consider their responsibility to the moral Governor, and this obligation to acknowledge his authority? . . . That a national deed, employed about the fundamental stipulations of magistrates, as his ministers, should nowhere recognize the existence of the Governor of the universe, is, to say nothing worse of it, truly lamentable. . . . Did not the framers of this instrument act, not only as if there had been no divine revelation for the supreme standard of their conduct; but also as if there had been no God?”<sup>16</sup>

Even worse, Wylie says, the American government recognizes the wrong god. In a treaty made with the Bey of Tripoli in 1797, it was specifically declared that “the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.” This is to deny Christ’s holy religion and “to count kindred, or at least deny enmity against Mahomet, the vile impostor.”<sup>17</sup>

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two Old Testament books written by the contemporaries Haggai and Zechariah. There was no immediate great surge of return, and the serious rebuilding of the temple did not begin for eighteen years, when Joshua was High Priest and Zerubbabel, as the governor appointed by the Persians, exercised civil authority in Jerusalem. Both prophets make the civil and religious leaders of coordinate importance. Haggai (2:20–23) had, in veiled language, announced that Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last pre-exilic king of Judah, was Yahweh’s Anointed One, the Davidic Messiah. Zechariah, in a series of visions, reinforced the hope for restoration of the Jewish state under the coleadership of the High Priest and the Davidic prince. In one of his visions Zechariah (4:1–14) sees a large golden candlestick topped by a golden bowl, from which seven lamps are fed. On either side of the candlestick stand two olive trees that represent Zerubbabel and Joshua—the civil and religious leaders in Jerusalem—who are identified as “the two anointed ones.”

16. Wylie, *The Two Sons of Oil*, 39–40 (see note 2, above).

17. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

2. Most of the state constitutions contain “positive immorality” in recognizing the rights of conscience in worship.

American ideas about freedom of worship, Wylie contends, are immoral: “Witness their recognition of such rights of conscience as sanction every blasphemy which a depraved heart may believe to be true. . . . The recognition of such rights of conscience is insulting to the Majesty of Heaven, and repugnant to the express letter of God’s word.”<sup>18</sup>

“Civil government does not, as some modern politicians affirm, originate either in the people, as its fountain, or in the vices consequent upon the fall. . . . Magistracy flows immediately from God Creator, and is predicated upon his universal dominion over all nations.”<sup>19</sup>

3. The government gives a legal security and establishment to gross heresy, blasphemy, and idolatry, under the notion of liberty of conscience.

Wylie points out that the Pennsylvania constitution “recognizes and unalterably establishes the indefeasible right of worshipping Almighty God, whatever way a man’s conscience may dictate; and declares that this shall, for ever, remain inviolable. We believe that no man has a right to worship God any other way than he himself hath prescribed in his law.” This sanction of any kind of worship, he asserts, amounts to the establishment of a religion. The question then is “Whether the religion of Jesus alone, should be countenanced by civil authority? Or every blasphemous, heretical, and idolatrous abomination, which the subtle malignity of the old serpent, and a heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, can frame and devise, should be put on an equal footing therewith?”<sup>20</sup>

4. Civil officers are sworn to support the constitutions, which sanction gross immorality.

The Pennsylvania constitution, Wylie points out, requires that “Members of the general assembly, and all other officers, executive and judicial, shall be bound by oath or affirmation, to support the constitution of the commonwealth. If, therefore, the constitution of Pennsylvania . . .

18. *Ibid.*, 40.

19. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

20. *Ibid.*, 40–41, 43.

supports, and legally establishes gross heresy, blasphemy and idolatry, it necessarily follows, that those who swear to support it, are bound by solemn oath to support the above principles and practices.”<sup>21</sup>

5. The governments make no provision for the interest of true religion. “The civil magistrate,” Wylie asserts, “ought to defend and protect the church of Christ.” Citing Isaiah 49:23, “Kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers,” he concludes that civil magistrates “are bound to exercise all the influence, which in the providence of God is conferred upon them, in promoting the religion of Jesus.”<sup>22</sup> He goes on at great length to demonstrate from Scripture and history that as the civil magistrates have no authority in ecclesiastical matters they “ought to use every lawful endeavour to promote purity, unity, and reformation, in the church.”<sup>23</sup>

6. The governments are in a state of national rebellion against God. “God, in mercy, has been pleased to send us a written transcript of his will. . . . If we refuse to receive it, and obstinately prefer the obscure shattered fragments, revealed by nature’s light, to the rejection of divine revelation, do we not pour contempt upon the Legislator, and hoist the signal of rebellion?”<sup>24</sup>

7. Deists and even atheists may be chief magistrates. “A belief . . . in the existence of a Deity, is not, by the Federal constitution, either directly or by implication, made a necessary qualification of the first magistrate.”

8. Most of the states recognize the principle of slavery. “Is it not strangely inconsistent, that the constitution, the paramount law of the land, should declare all men to be free, and the laws pretended to be constitutional, doom a certain portion of them to hopeless bondage, and subject them to the wanton barbarity of savage and

21. *Ibid.*, 44.

22. *Ibid.*, 22, 46.

23. *Ibid.*, 24.

24. *Ibid.*, 47.

inhuman masters, who, in many instances, treat their brutes with more tenderness?”<sup>25</sup>

9. “A last reason why we reject these constitutions is, that we are bound by the moral law, as subjects of the God of Heaven, to obey his will; and whatever is contrary thereunto we are obliged to reject.”

“This obligation necessarily flows from our relation to God, as the Moral Governor. See Exod. xx. 1, 7, where we have an epitome of his laws, and by this we hold ourselves indispensably bound.”<sup>26</sup>

In a sermon published with *The Two Sons of Oil*, Wylie argued that the Solemn League and Covenant established between the Presbyterians of Scotland and the English Parliament in 1643 should be applied to the church in America. This because the taking of the covenants by their forefathers in Scotland continued to make them binding on their posterity in America.

## V

After living in the United States for more than thirty years, Wylie modified his opinion of the American government. At the Reformed Presbyterian Eastern Subordinate Synod meeting in April 1832, Wylie led a movement to reverse the position that he had previously championed. He chaired a committee whose report to the meeting concluded that it is not immoral for Christians to support the government of the United States. “It is susceptible of demonstration,” the report asserted, “that since the commencement of Christianity, no Government on earth has had a fairer claim to recognition, as the ordinance of God, than that of these United States. . . . We do claim for our beloved country, the character of a Christian land, whose institutions are worthy of recognition, and active support.” In its published report the Synod deleted the paragraphs that included these references to the government. Wylie responded by restoring the deleted material and publishing the report as *The Original Draft of a Pastoral Address from the Eastern Subordinate Synod*

25. *Ibid.*, 49–50.

26. *Ibid.*, 50–51.

of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.<sup>27</sup> This publication was answered by a twelve-page pamphlet entitled *Sentiments of the Rev. Samuel B. Wylie, A.M. in 1803, respecting Civil Magistracy and the Government of the United States Contrasted with Sentiments of the Rev. Samuel B. Wylie, D.D. in 1832.*<sup>28</sup> This publication contrasted selections from *The Two Sons of Oil* with selections from *The Original Draft* to demonstrate how Wylie had fallen from grace. “The Doctor,” the anonymous author remarks, “has evidently lowered, in great degree, the standard by which he once thought civil government should be tested. . . . On viewing the direct contradictions . . . between Mr. Wylie and Dr. Wylie we cannot help saying, with the Patriarch Jacob, ‘Unstable as water,’ and with the Apostle James, ‘A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.’” In his history of the church, David Carson notes that, because of Wylie’s new position, “a division in the church was created and never healed, each side claiming to be the true Reformed Presbyterian Church.” The nicknames “old lights” and “new lights” developed to distinguish the two positions.<sup>29</sup>

The following work was an important contribution to the early debates about the nature of the American constitutional regime. How should people of faith relate to the national and state governments? What ought the relationship of church and government look like? What are the foundations of religious liberty in America? Given the persistent interest in this subject throughout the political history of our republic, Findley’s commentary offers an informed and salutary reminder of the early historical context that first defined our constitutional traditions.

27. *The Original Draft of a Pastoral Address from the Eastern Subordinate Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (New York: W. Applegate, 1832), 10, 29.

28. *Sentiments of the Rev. Samuel B. Wylie, A.M. in 1803, respecting Civil Magistracy and the Government of the United States Contrasted with Sentiments of the Rev. Samuel B. Wylie, D.D. in 1832* (Montgomery, N.Y.: Press of Thomas & Edwards, 1832), 4, 8.

29. Carson, “A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church,” 99–102.

## PREFACE

It appears proper to inform the reader of the occasion that called my attention to the book called "*Sons of Oil*," and why I considered it as a duty incumbent on me to offer the following Observations on that work; and also why it has been so long delayed, after it had been expected. With respect to the first, though I had seen the Sons of Oil advertised in the newspapers for sale, yet being possessed of other approved commentaries on the symbolical vision of the prophecy of Zechariah, on which it is founded, I had not curiosity enough to purchase it, and did not, for some years, hear of its singular import and effect.

It was, I believe, in the year 1808, that a very respectable and intelligent neighbour, who, in a public company, where the government and laws of the state, and United States, had been very rudely misrepresented; and while he was endeavouring to explain and vindicate them, he was told by some of the company, that if they should kill him that instant, we had no law to punish such murder, &c. He informed me of it, and consulted me about the propriety of taking surety of the peace of such boasters of the impunity with which they could commit wilful murder. Neither my neighbour, nor myself, having seen the Sons of Oil, from which it was said they had their authority, I was of the opinion that they had mistaken the author, and that these boasts were but an ebullition of folly and ignorance, and would have no dangerous effect. I advised, therefore, to pass it over without further notice. Not long after this, however, I heard the poison had a more extensive influence in different quarters where the book had spread—but my attention was particularly



called to the subject by an intelligent magistrate, in a distant county to the westward, who, being attacked in the same manner that my neighbour had been, endeavoured in vain to convince them of their error, by explaining the law of the state respecting murder; but he found that the doctrine of the Sons of Oil was too powerful for his statement, or explanation of the law. He procured a perusal of the book itself, and carefully took notes of it, with which he furnished me a copy, accompanied with a request, to turn my attention to the subject. This was not the first advice that was given me to that purpose; but, though astonished at the notes, without having the least doubt of their correctness, yet I could not, on the notes alone, proceed to make observations on the book itself. In the mean time, however, the intelligent farmer who took the notes, published, while on a journey, a very small pamphlet from them, called the "*Plough-Boy*," which, it afterwards appeared, had the good effect of putting a stop to the wicked boasting of the impunity with which they could commit wilful murder. Those of Mr. Wylie's church, who did, on different occasions, boast in this manner, I am persuaded, must have been the most ignorant and vicious of the society—for I am acquainted with such of them as would be very far from disturbing the peace of society; but why should such a disposition be promoted by a professed minister of the gospel, at the expense of truth?

The books having been taken away from the office at which they had been advertised for sale, I had difficulty to find a copy—and when I did procure one, I found that the half of the mischief, which it was calculated to promote, had not been told me; that it not only grossly misrepresented the government and laws of the United States in general, but more particularly that of Pennsylvania. The encouragement given to people so disposed, to kill their neighbours with expectation of impunity, and for slaves to kill their masters, are but a few, out of numerous instances, of the insidious slanders which his book contains. If teaching to resist the ordinance of legitimate civil government, to refuse to obey the magistrates, for conscience sake, from whom they receive and claim protection; if despising dominion, speaking evil of dignities, and stirring up sedition, are contrary, not only to the moral law, but also to the precepts of the gospel, the Sons of Oil is certainly

so. On a first perusal of it, I thought these, together with the numerous inconsistencies it contains, must, to every dispassionate enquirer, be so harmless, as to render an antidote unnecessary. But when I considered the artful sophistry, tinselled over with spurious religious zeal, equal at least to that practised by the most bigotted popish missionaries, set off with an unusual number of notes of astonishment, supported by the most unprincipled declamation; when I also considered, that besides the influence it has had in drawing a number of people into such gross immorality, as to think and boast of the impunity with which they could murder their neighbours, and besides being mostly aliens, as he says (p. 76) having drawn away many respectable citizens from their allegiance to the government, and from discharging the duties of citizenship, and attending on gospel ordinances as formerly, in such churches as do not promote the same excesses with themselves—I say, on considering these things, I became convinced that it was a duty to endeavour to prevent the delusion from taking such deep root as to draw many into its vortex, and disturb the peace of society, to preserve which, civil government was instituted, with the divine approbation, among men.

It would have been desirable that some other person, younger in life, and having more leisure than me, should have undertaken it; but it so happened, that I was pointed out for that purpose before I had seen the book, or was informed of the extent of the mischief it was likely to produce. There were, indeed, some reasons for this. I was the oldest man known to be alive, or at least in a capacity to undertake it, that was educated by the old dissenters, and under the inspection of the reformed presbytery of Scotland (there being no reformed presbytery in the north of Ireland when I left it.) I was likewise one of the oldest men living, who associated with, and was a member of the conferences of those who had, in this country, sought for and obtained a supply of ministers from that presbytery; and also one of the few survivors of those, who, more than forty years ago, promoted the revision of that testimony in this country, and with the presbytery, when such was constituted, rejected all local and traditionary terms of communion, founded on human fallible authority, and took the scriptures and the doctrines of the

Westminster Confession,<sup>1</sup> &c. agreeing with scripture, as the terms of their communion; and the only survivor of that reformed presbytery, who, a few years afterwards, assisted in bringing about the union with the associate presbyteries, which constituted the associate reformed synod, designed as a step towards a union of all the presbyterian body who professed the same faith of the gospel. My personal knowledge of these things pointed it out as my duty, to vindicate them from the doctrines contained in the Sons of Oil. Having been also engaged in the early committees, &c. which promoted the independence of the United States, and in making or ratifying the constitutions of this state and of the United States, and, for a long period, in legislating on the one or other of them, it appeared to be my duty to engage in their vindication, when they were so grossly traduced. These reasons had such weight in my own mind, as to induce me to make observations on this extraordinary work, notwithstanding that my other engagements, and time of life, might have afforded a strong apology for declining it.

The old dissenters, from whom I am descended, were a very pious people, exact in their morals, and so inoffensive in their deportment, that they were treated with great respect and sympathy by their neighbours; but when they came to have ministers, and their numbers increased, their respectability had not a proportionable increase; they began to make some deviations, seemingly inconsistent with their testimony; they began to consider paying tithes to the episcopal clergy, whom they did not acknowledge, as compounding with a robber—as Mr. Wylie does with paying road and county taxes, of which he and his people receive equal benefit with others. But though, because of the rescinding of the covenants, the establishment of episcopacy, and the king's headship over the church, the reformed presbytery of Scotland disowned the authority of the civil government; they did not like those who assume that name in this country, claim its protection; they did not apply to courts or magistrates for the recovery of debts, damages, &c. or the protection of constables to their presbytery, as those assuming that name do in this

1. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a statement, in English, of Calvinist doctrine. It is the basic statement of belief in Presbyterian and Congregational churches.

country. Doing so, was there esteemed highly censurable; they did not act so inconsistent a part as to claim protection where they refused allegiance. They, indeed, laboured under mistakes by trusting to tradition. They believed that not only the solemn league and covenant,<sup>2</sup> but even the national covenant of Scotland,<sup>3</sup> neither of which were ever taken by the kingdom of Ireland, or their representatives, were binding on that nation. They appear to have been led into this mistake by reading the title of the solemn league, affixed to it by the committees of Scotland and England, who prepared that instrument, but to which Ireland never acceded; and also by the local testimonies of the sufferers in Scotland, of those who laboured under the same mistake. They also believed that those covenants were legally taken in England, agreeable to the constitution of that nation—whereas the solemn league was only taken by authority of an ordinance of parliament, which never became a law, and for which the clergy of England, which were deprived of their livings, and persecuted under Charles II. to more than five times the number of the clergy of Scotland, who were deprived, on the same occasion, and persecuted also for not complying with prelacy, never during that persecution, nor after it ceased, claimed the legal obligation of that covenant on England. With the national covenant, England and Ireland never had any concern. Upwards of fifty of the English presbyterian ministers, many of them very eminent divines, whose works yet praise them, outlived the persecution, and afterwards enjoyed protection; but none of these ever set up a claim to the solemn league, as of legal or moral

2. “A Solemn League and Covenant for Reformation and Defence of Religion, the Honor and Happiness of the King, and the Peace and Safety of the Three Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland” was an agreement made in 1643 between the English and Scots, by which the Scots agreed to support the English Parliament in its disputes with the king, and both countries pledged to work for a civil and religious union of the three countries under a Presbyterian-parliamentary system. It was adopted by the Church of Scotland, the English Parliament, and the Westminster Assembly. The Scots considered it a guarantee of their religious system. The English regarded it as a civil agreement and disregarded it whenever it was not to their advantage.

3. The National Covenant of 1638 was based on the King’s Covenant of 1580. It was largely a rejection of Roman Catholicism and especially of episcopacy in church government. It was for the most part signed by the Scottish military powers.