

The Papal System – XXXVI. Roman Catholics Who Were Worthy Of All Honor



Continued from [XXXV. Hymns, And Those Who Composed Them](#).

Sir Walter Scott has a reputation which it would be difficult to excel, and a literary position which he honestly earned; and yet there is throughout his works a vein of rancorous malignity to the Scotch Covenanters as mean as it is unjustifiable.

“Covenanters were members of a 17th-century Scottish religious and political movement, who supported a Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the primacy of its leaders in religious affairs. It originated in disputes with James VI and his son Charles I over church organisation and doctrine, but expanded into political conflict over the limits of royal authority.” – from Wikipedia

He had political and religious prejudices unlike theirs; and they were not perfect; and he uses their faults murderously magnified, to prove them sanctified demons. After the battle of Bothwell Bridge, he describes a few of the leaders of the Presbyterians in a house brooding over their defeat in solemn grief; and Henry Morton, a man with a faith somewhat different, who had fought on their side, joining their company.

The men are all Covenanters, and there is a general desire among them to murder Morton, as a kind of sacrifice to God. The person who leads his fellows in this business is the Reverend Ephraim Macbriar, a preacher of unusual eloquence; and the point that settled his doom with Ephraim, was the repetition of some supplications from the book of Common Prayer. “There lacked but this,” said he, “to root out my carnal reluctance to see his blood shed.” So after twelve at night, Morton must die, as a victim sent by Jehovah to atone for the sins which occasioned the defeat at Bothwell Bridge. It was Sunday, they were Covenanters, and the deed of blood must not be executed till the sacred hours of the Lord’s day are gone. But it is planned on the Sabbath, and in heart committed.

This is Sir Walter Scott’s charge against an intelligent Presbyterian minister, and brethren of his, of influence. This is the spirit in which he generally speaks of these men. A greater injustice never was perpetrated. The Covenanters were not always, nor all angels, but they wielded an influence for liberty, for God, for intelligence, immensely surpassing anything ever

performed by all the noble or untitled marauders of the Scottish borders, or their descendants that ever bore the name of Scott, not excepting the sage of Abbotsford and Lord Chancellor Eldon. We admire the life, works, and saintly spirit of the gentle Archbishop Leighton, and the lives and labors of troops of his episcopal and presbyterial brothers on the other side of the Tweed; and we glory in the heroes of the Scottish covenant as presenting some of the brightest examples of faith in Christian history; and the man who paints them as demons in cruelty, and angels in professions, and lauds as a valiant hero, John Graham of Claverhouse, their merciless butcher, is not in these transactions a just man. The sun gathers crystal globules of water from the pure fountain, and he lifts it from the stagnant pool; nor does he pass by one offensive puddle; he sends it to the clouds, and it comes down in refreshing sweetness. The servants of God as children of the light, should recognize worth everywhere, in the foul pool, as well as in the sweet fountain.

The Catholic Church has produced large numbers of distinguished and good Men.

Alfred the Great was a Romanist, and though the religion of England in his day was growing very corrupt and superstitious, it is probable that Alfred was a true Christian. He is commonly regarded as the author of several of our local institutions, without which liberty in England and America would be no more real and abiding than in countries peopled by the Latin race. A larger-hearted patriot, a braver hero, a leader more worthy to rule men, never sat on a throne; and, with a few exceptions, never wielded the destinies of a republic.

Charlemagne, in the end of the eighth century, was a Roman Catholic. He abominated the worship of images, and in many things was more enlightened than the people of his age. He was a mighty man in valor, and wisdom, and not unlikely in piety. The eighth century had abundant reason to be proud of him.

Roger Bacon was a monk, and yet a man of a most ingenious and philosophical mind. He lived in the thirteenth century, and gave a glory to his name and age, which the celebrated Lord Bacon of a later day could hardly increase even by his famous "Inductive Philosophy."

The barons who signed Magna Carta, and compelled the king to grant it, were all Roman Catholics. The first charter of liberty in modern times was extorted from John, king of England, by his Roman Catholic subjects, with Stephen Langton, the Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury, at their head—a charter which has given liberty to England, and freedom to America; and which has bestowed kindred blessings on other lands. It must be added however, that Innocent III. suspended Langton for his share in procuring the charter, and nullified the deed of liberty as far as he could destroy it. But it would not die, even to please an infallible pope.

Matthew Paris, a monk of St. Albans, has left the world under lasting obligations to him. For carefulness, intelligent selection, perspicuity of style, and for the extent of time and the mass of facts of which his work treats, Paris stands without an equal for centuries. The scholar today, in every land, honors this monk.

William Tell, who kindled the fires of Swiss freedom, which have blazed and sent their light over frozen mountains and happy valleys, over sunny Italy and beautiful France, was a Roman Catholic.

Sir William Wallace, the pride of every Scottish heart, one of the noblest patriots and most valiant heroes that ever struggled for liberty, or honored the land of his birth, was a Roman Catholic.

Columbus, who gave a new world to the nations of the West, and a magnificent country to ourselves—with mighty rivers and mountain ranges, sublime scenery, and vast metallic treasures, a land which does not bear a slave and could not endure a despot— was a Roman Catholic.

John Gutenberg, the inventor of printing, was a Catholic; and through his mighty art, the Reformers sent their Bibles and religious works over states and kingdoms, until the empire of the popes was broken in pieces by the press of the printer of Maintz.

Charles Carrol, of Carrollton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, was a Catholic, a man of whom no American need be ashamed, a worthy companion of some of the greatest patriots to whom human nature ever gave birth.

We might proceed to specify other worthies, but the number is sufficient. We have known true men among Roman Catholics, and women of honor and kindness, for whom our respect was spontaneous, and our friendship real. We have met them in humble life, and we have seen them elsewhere. And we have often found them good citizens, and kind friends. Our trouble is with their religious system, not with them; and with their leaders, who would use that vast network—the Romish scheme—to destroy the Protestant religion, and the liberties of men.

The world has no greater enemies to political freedom and Bible truth than the rulers of the Catholic Church. There was not a breath of liberty in Rome, nor one Protestant church, till the soldiers of Victor Emmanuel plucked the scepter and the sword from the hands of the crowned priest.

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