

# CALVINISM, COVENANTS, AND POLITICAL HISTORY



## **Rejected authority of bishops in the church**

Calvinists rejected the authority of the bishops (installed by Roman Catholics and Anglicans), and insisted on covenants between the people and the leaders of their churches. They found precedence for this in the Bible, in such examples as the Israelites assembling and affirming that they would adhere to the Ten Commandments; or asking the prophet Samuel to give them a king; or in affirming a new king's rule.

## **Rejected royal authority, in favor of constitutions**

Built on this foundation, they rejected the power of absolutist kings, as well as the theory of Divine Right of Kings, in favor of a covenant between the rulers and the ruled. Examples of these covenants would be documents such as the English Bill of Rights (1689), the Mayflower Compact (1620); Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (1639), Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), and the US Constitution (1787).

## **Insisted on right to rebel**

Calvinists also insisted that kings could be disobeyed, and even rebelled from, if their rule became tyrannical (because by doing so, the kings would have violated the terms of the covenant, therefore making it null and void). Examples of early Calvinist writings in this vein would be Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex* ("Law is King," 1644); the Huguenot document *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* ("Defense against Tyrants," 1579). An example of this in action would be the rebellion by the British Parliament against their King Charles I, which was accompanied by the Calvinist document Westminster Confession of Faith, first published in 1646 (Charles was executed in 1649).