

# THE COVENANTER.

---

APRIL, 1847.

---

[For the Covenanter.]

## SHOULD THE CHURCH TRAIN UP MISSIONARIES?

THIS is a question of some importance,—a question intimately connected with the great work of evangelizing the nations,—a question forced upon us by the complaints which the churches are making, on every hand, about a scarcity of ministers to go forth to proclaim the message of mercy to a perishing world,—a question which we have no hesitation to answer in the affirmative. We offer a few reasons to prove and illustrate this position. And,

1. *The duty of training missionaries follows from the fact that the church is bound to be active in the propagation of the gospel.* Men may be, and have been, brought to the knowledge and belief of the truth by means of the word read, and other religious books and tracts, but the living teacher is the great and chief instrument which Zion's King employs in bringing men "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."—He has "committed the treasure of the gospel unto earthen vessels." "Go ye into all the world and *preach* the gospel to every creature." To separate men to the Holy Ghost for the work whereunto he has called them, is a power with which Christ has invested his church. It is plain that these must be properly qualified in every thing requisite to constitute an able ministry, "set for the defence of the gospel," in whatever part of the world they may be employed, and we presume it will not be denied, that it is just as much her duty to impart those qualifications as far as her instrumentality is concerned as it is to separate them to the great work of making known "God's light and saving health" to those who are in darkness.

God, in his providence, is now in a most emphatic manner calling upon the church to put forth all her energies in this noble enterprise of Christian philanthropy. He is pointing out to her—by the various movements in the natural and moral world, by the shaking of old systems, and by all the events that are transpiring throughout the nations,—that "the fields are white unto the harvest." What, then, is her duty? Is it merely to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send forth reapers into his harvest, and then fold her arms in sloth as if God, *at this period*, would in some miraculous way send forth labourers to gather in the travail of the Redeemer's soul? Should she not rather—having prayed—to be also vigorously engaged in selecting and training up instruments for this great and important work? Experience has proved that it is a hard matter to get men who have been educated for

The views we have endeavoured to present in these lines will apply to all evangelical churches, but to none do they come with so much force as the Reformed Presbyterian. She holds principles which are not generally received. Principles which will yet leaven the lump of society in every nation. The headship of Messiah over all things to his body the church, is a doctrine which will yet be embraced by the Lord's people in every land, and the duty of nations, having the light of revelation, to frame their constitutions, and enact and administer their laws, in accordance with the principles of righteousness revealed in the Bible, will assuredly be received in every country on the face of the globe, when the truth universally prevails. Hence she has the fullest guarantee that her efforts to diffuse these great doctrines, which bring so much glory to God on earth, in conjunction with every divine principle revealed in his word, shall not be in vain: this gives her a great advantage over other sections of the church who repudiate or but lightly esteem these doctrines. It places her in a commanding position, and therefore the duty of preparing men in the very best manner to diffuse abroad the light of divine truth and the principles of a covenanted testimony, becomes doubly imperative upon her. We trust she will see its importance. There are several of her congregations who might well be engaged in this work. The expense would be but small, and scarcely could they be employed in a work more genial, more charming, or delightful. Nothing could be better calculated to excite interest, and zeal, and liberality in the church's ranks. L.

(For the Covenanter.)

#### CONSISTORY—ITS CONSTITUTION.

(BY JAMES R. WILLSON, D.D.)

Synod, at its last sessions, recognised a consistory, which has power to consult and advise *for the well ordering* of the temporal affairs of the congregation. This, in the Free Church of Scotland, is called the deacon's court. The name is very proper. In *the well ordering* of the temporalities of the church, it acts by authority derived from Christ the head. Though its jurisdiction does not extend to spiritual causes, yet as it acts in Christ's name and for him, it may very properly be called a court. It ought to be constituted in the name of the church's Head. The reasons are many and cogent.

1. *The deacon is ordained in constituted session.* After the ordination he receives the right hand of fellowship from the members of the court, not as an elder, but as a member of court, which in the very act of ordination, is a consistory, or becomes so. This imparts no power in spiritual causes, as when a ruling elder is ordained, the minister or ministers give no power to preach or baptize.

2. *When a session, presbytery, or Synod transacts, of course in constituted court, pecuniary business, it acts consistorially.* A minister is an elder and deacon—a ruling elder is a deacon—and the deacon, a deacon only. When ministers and elders transact officially any pecuniary business, they do so in the exercise of the diaconate with which they are invested. That they are deacons, or that they possess office—power to administer the church's temporalities, has hardly been called in question, at least as to the poor's money. It cannot be doubted, by any sensible man, who admits that the deacon is a distinct office in the church. Ministers and elders ordain deacons, which they

cannot do if they are not deacons. They cannot give what they have not. The deacons are "*helps*" to relieve them of a great part of the labour of attending to money matters, yet Christ does not ordain that after ordination their diaconate shall be a dead function. The universal practice is, for presbyteries "to consult and advise *for the well ordering*" of the temporal affairs of the Lord's congregation committed to their care. Presbyteries do this in taking the management of missionary funds, in the buying of books to record their transactions, in inquiring into the amount of money offered by congregations in making out calls, and in collecting contributions. Synods do this in raising money for missions, in printing the Testimony, in collecting money for the salaries of theological professors—for the travelling fund—and for superannuated ministers.

All these pecuniary matters are transacted in courts *constituted in the name of the church's Head*. Now, shall the deacon, ordained expressly *to help* in administering the finances, be debarred from acting with his brother deacons in the name of the church's Head? Is the diaconate more holy when vested in the minister or elder than in the deacon? Is it a profanation of Christ's name for the deacon to transact money matters in Christ's name, and a sanctifying of His name for ministers and elders to do the same thing? If pecuniary or diaconal business is not to be transacted in constituted court, then let Synod adjourn from its judicative capacity when it receives a report from its treasurer, gets the minutes printed, &c. There is no possible escape from the conclusion that if Synods do right in transacting diaconal business in constituted court, consistory should constitute in the name of the church's Head.

3. *There is the same reason for constituting consistory in the name of the church's Head as for the constitution of session.* Neither is expressly and formally commanded. For neither, have we Bible example. But the church in past ages has drawn the right inference as to sessions. What is the reason for the venerable form of sound words, "We do hereby constitute ourselves into a judicative capacity in the name of the church's Head?" In all the individual duties of the minister or elder he should engage in these singular functions with prayer, and a holy sense of the truth that he acts in the name of Christ. How does a pious elder or minister enter on these duties? He prays, "Lord, I am entering on the performance of duties in the name of the church's Head, aid me in them by thy good Spirit." When they "*come together*?" they pray together, as godly rulers do in their individual official capacity. It is presumed no good and sensible man ever called this constitution in question. But most undeniably there is identically the same reason for the elders and deacons, *when about* to act in Christ's name, to constitute in the same form. There cannot be any reason for the one, that does not apply with the same force to the other.

4. *If the meeting of the deacon's court or consistory is opened and closed with an evangelical prayer, it proceeds on this principle, and is substantially, although not formally, the constitution pleaded for.* It is presumed no one will maintain that, like a divinity school we wot of, which opened and closed all its recitations "without asking counsel at the mouth of the Lord,"\* there should be no prayer at meetings of consistory. That would indeed be "New Light." What will be the sum and substance of every opening prayer of the right kind? It

\* Josh. ix. 14,

must be to the following effect:—Lord, we “come together” to consult and advise *for the well ordering* of the temporal affairs of the congregation in the name\* of the church’s Head; give us the promised aid of the Spirit of Christ. A prayer by any good *Moderator* that would not amount to this, can hardly be thought of. At any rate, every one must see that less than this would be very defective. What is requisite to be done, should be done directly, and not by implication.

5. *We are commanded to perform every religious duty in the name of Christ.* “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”† The duty of praising God is enjoined in the preceding verse. It is religious duties the apostle here enforces. There is indeed a sense in which all duties are to be performed in the name of Jesus—by his law and in his strength. Since all the Lord’s people are to engage in Christ’s service, always, in his name, surely it is requisite that when official functionaries come together to transact important matters, *ως διακονοι*, as God’s ministers, in temporalities—they commence the business in his name. The constitution neither gives nor assumes any authority. It merely, in faith and humility, looks to Christ for grace to do for him business that He has intrusted to our care, to be done by His authority.

6. *To multiply no more reasons, it has been the practice of the church of Christ.* Let any one consult Selden, and he will find that there were consistories in the church of the Jews, and in the first centuries of the church. They were in all the Protestant churches, of the Reformation. Baillie, who was one of the commissioners of the church of Scotland to the Westminster Assembly, says in one of his letters, “We have a long time had ministers, elders, deacons, and Consistory in the church of Scotland. For sixty years they have had ministers, elders, deacons, and consistory in the church in Gaul; and this is what we call the *jus divinum*, the divine right of church government.” The form of constituting this court is not on record. But we have indirect testimony as to the church of Scotland, which is perfectly conclusive. Stuart, in his Collections, tells us, that according to the practice of the church of Scotland, the deacons were present at every meeting of session, and when any pecuniary business was to be transacted, they took their seats as members. We quote the substance. The session then became a consistory, and the deacons acted under that constitution. Some consistories proceed in this way now. It has been found in practice, that the deacons are often at a loss when to speak or vote, and that they speak sometimes in spiritual causes. It has been deemed more expedient, and is undoubtedly the better practice, to have a separate constitution for each court, and so has been the more common use in the Reformed Presbyterian church. There have been some objections to all this, and to consistory in every aspect.

1. It is said to be popish, for there is a consistory at Rome. So there is, but not the consistory of Christ, constituted in the apostolic age, and by our reforming ancestors. It is a conclave of cardinals, and an abuse of an old and appropriate name. They have deacons too. Are they popish? The deacon of the church of Rome is not the covenanter deacon. He is a spiritual officer. Shall the office, name and thing, although found in the Bible, be thrown away because papists have abused it? The papists have presbyters or elders, are our elders Popish? It has always been a successful stratagem of the devil, to abuse good works in calling *evil, good*. In this way he baptizes Laodiceanism, which

\* In the name signifies, by the authority.

† Col. iii. 17.

God will spue out of his mouth, by the name, peace. "O let us have no agitation. Never touch the jury-act, anti-slavery, temperance, or the deacon. These discussions disturb the peace of Zion." Honest men may be affected by this objection, but they were either very dishonest or very ignorant men, by whom it was first invented.

2. Obj. It is preposterous to employ more men in the management of temporal than spiritual things, as if the former were more important. Ans. (1.) On the admission that the minister is an elder and deacon, and the elder a deacon, this objection is rather against the deacon than against the consistory. (2.) Christ employed more at the ordination of the seven deacons. (3.) The session is a separate court, for spiritual causes. (4.) Men are very hard to keep right in temporal things; witness trustees; and opposition to the deacon and temperance.

3. Obj. It is a profanation of Christ's name, to constitute by it a court for the well-ordering of temporal affairs. This objection is good, if Christ has no government of temporal things, as the Seceders maintain. Indeed that doctrine is one of the lodgements of sin in the heart. It is the first lie of the United States constitution—civil government is for the management of property with which Christ has no business. That wicked sentiment is the very root of anti-deaconism, in all its parts and parcels. But Christ "is heir of all things:" he has appointed officers to administer the church property in his name. It is profane to do it in any other name, even though it should be, "We the people do ordain."

4. Obj. It is contrary to the act of Synod at its last session. Ans. (1.) The act of Synod recognises consistory. (2.) It declares consistory to have a right to consult and advise "*for the well ordering of temporal affairs.*" (3.) It says nothing as to the mode of constituting the court. (4.) Possibly there might be some stronger form of words to express what every one there knew the overwhelming deacon majority meant. Some people undertake to say, that Synod *did nothing* on the subject. To discuss four and a half days, and pass a set of resolutions that *decided nothing*, is what most people who know our ministers and elders will be slow to believe.

5. Obj. If it is constituted, consistory is a court, and there can be no appeal: not to session, for that would be to a part of itself; not to presbytery, for that would be over the next highest court, the session. One remark sets aside all this sophistry. The appeal from consistory is to presbytery acting consistorially.

6. Obj. It is contrary to the Second book of discipline. "The deacons are not members of the presbyteries or eldership." No one ever maintained that they are. Their membership is in the consistory. The Second Book says nothing on that subject. The presbyteries distributed the church revenues to the congregations, and very properly made the deacons the executive officers.

THE MEXICAN PRIESTS—THEIR MORALS.—Waddy Thompson, late minister to Mexico, thus describes the priesthood of that city and nation.

"The lower orders of the priests and friars are generally entirely uneducated, and, I regret to add, as generally licentious. There is no night in the year that the most revolting spectacles of vice and immorality, on the part of the priests and friars, are not to be seen in the streets of Mexico. I have never seen any class of men who so generally have such a 'roue' appearance as the priests and friars whom one constantly meets in the streets. Of the higher orders and more respectable members of the priesthood, I cannot speak with the same confidence; if they are vicious, they are not publicly and indecently so. Very many of them have several nephews and nieces in their houses, or, at least, those who call them uncle. The reason given for the injunction of celibacy, that those who are dedicated to the priesthood should not be encumbered with the care of a family, is, I think, in Mexico, much more theoretical than practical."