

**THE TRUE CONSTITUTION**  
**OF A**  
**PARTICULAR VISIBLE CHURCH**

BY

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The True  
**CONSTITUTION**

OF

**A particular visible Church,  
proved by Scripture.**

**Wherein is briefly Demonstrated by**

QUESTIONS, AND ANSWERS WHAT OFFICERS, WOR-  
SHIP, AND GOVERNMENT CHRIST HATH ORDAINED  
IN HIS Church.

BY THAT REVEREND AND LEARNED DIVINE,  
MR John Cotton, B.D. AND PASTOR OF  
BOSTON IN NEW ENGLAND.

JEREMIAH 50:5.

*They shall aske the way to Sion, with their faces thitherward,  
saying, Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual  
Covenant that shall not be forgotten.*

LONDON:  
Printed for *Samuel Satterthwaite*, at the Sign of the black Bull  
in *Budge Rowe*, near to *Saint Antholines*  
Church. 1642.

## THE True Constitution of a Particular visible Church proved by Scripture.

*Question.* What is the Church?

*Answer.* The Church is a Mystical body (Ephesians 5:30–32; Romans 12:4,5; 1 Corinthians 12:28) whereof Christ is the Head (Ephesians 2:22 & 5:23) the members and the Saints (1 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 1:2) called out of the World (1 Corinthians 2:2.9) and united together into one Congregation (1 Corinthians 11:18 & 14:13) by an holy Covenant (Exodus 19:5 & 24:3, 7; Deuteronomy 5:2, 27 and 29:2, 9–15) to worship the Lord, and to edify one another in all his holy Ordinances. (1 Corinthians 5:4; 14:26)

*Question.* What sort of Members hath God set in his Church?

*Answer.* Some that are Ministers (1 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 4:12; Colossians 4:17; Romans 12:7) or Officers (1 Timothy 3:2, 10, 13; Romans 11:3; Psalm 109:8) in the Church, others commonly called by the general name

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that belongeth, to all members, Brethren, (Acts 15:22; Romans 16:3) and Saints. (Philippians 2:2)

*Question.* What sort of Ministers or Officers hath God set in his Throne?

*Answer.* Some extraordinary, as Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28) some are ordinary and perpetual, as Bishops and Deacons. (Philippians 2:2; 1 Timothy 3:1–3)

*Question.* What manner of men are to be called to these Offices to be Bishops, or Elders in the Church?

*Answer.* A Bishop or Elder in the Church, must be in himself a blameless man for Holiness, and Righteousness, and for freedom from passions and lusts, also a vigilant man and of good behaviour. Moreover, he must be in his Family a man of good Government, and of good Hospitality; in his Name a man of good Report even of those that are without; in

his Profession not a young Plant, but holding fast the faithful Word, apt to teach it, and able to maintain it. (1 Timothy 2:2-7; Titus 1:6-9)

*Question.* What sort of Bishops or Elders hath God ordained in his Church?

*Answer.* Of Bishops who are also called Elders, God hath ordained two sorts; Ruling Elders and such that labour in word and in Doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Romans 12:6-8; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5, 7) commonly called Pastors and Teachers (Ephesians 4:11) all of them to watch over one certain Flock, the Church of a particular Congregation. (Acts 14:23; and 20:17 with 18; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5)

*Question.* What is the Office, or work of the Pastors or Teachers?

*Answer.* The Pastor's work is to attend upon Exhortation, and therein to dispense a word of wisdom; the Teacher is to attend upon Doctrine, and therein to dispense a word of knowledge. (Romans 12:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 12:28)

*Question.* What is the Office of Ruling Elders?

*Answer.* Seeing the Kingdom of Christ is not of this World, but Heavenly and spiritual (John 18:36) and the Government of his Kingdom is not Lordly, but Stewardly, and Ministerial (Luke 12:41) and to labour in the ministry

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of Exhortation and Doctrine is the proper work of the Pastor and Teacher (1 Timothy 5:17) it remaineth therefore to be the part, and Office of the ruling Elders, to assist the Pastor and Teacher in all other Acts of Rule besides, as becommeth good Stewards of the Household of God (Romans 1:8; Numbers 8:19) as first to open, and shut the doors of God's House (Matthew 16:19) by admission of Members (Acts 10:28, 29) by ordination of Officers (1 Timothy 4:14) by excommunication of notorious and obstinate offenders. (Matthew 18:17, 18)

Secondly, to see that none without the Church live either inordinately without a calling or Idly in their calling (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 11, 12) thirdly to prevent and heal such offences in life, and Doctrine as might corrupt as might corrupt either their own Church (Revelation 2:14, 15, 20) or other Churches if their Counsel be required (Acts 15:2, 6) Fourthly, to prepare matters before hand for the Churches consideration (Acts 2:18) and to moderate the carriage of all matters in the Church assembled (Acts 6:2) as to propound matters to the Church (Acts 6:2, 3) and to order the season of speech and silence in the Church (Acts 15:13) Fifthly,

to feed the flock of God with a word of admonition (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Acts 20:31) and as they shall be called for to visit & pray over their sick brethren (James 5:14)

*Question.* What manner of men hath God appointed to be called to the Deacons Office?

*Answer.* Men of gravity and good report not given to dissembling, nor to Wine, nor to covetousness, full of the holy Ghost and wisdom holding forth the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, keeping their household in good Rule and enjoying such wives as may neither dishonour nor corrupt their office, not slanderers (but) brave and sober and faithful in all things. (1 Timothy 3:8, 10, 12; Acts 6:3)

*Question.* What is the office of the Deacons?

*Answer.* To receive the offerings of the Church brought unto them and laid down before them (Acts 4:34, 35) and therewith to serve Tables (Acts 6:2) distributing with simplicity (Romans 12:8) not only to the Ministers of the Church (Galatians 6:6) but to any other of the brethren as they shall have need (Acts 4:35)

*Question.* But is it not the Office of the Deacons to show mercy with cheerfulness?

*Answer.* Yes verily, to their Brethren in misery (Romans 12:8) but that part of their office they do chiefly perform by the hand of the widows, chosen into their number, who are therefore called the Deacons or servants of the church (Romans 16:1)

*Question.* What manner of widows hath God allowed to be taken into this number?

*Answer.* Ancient women, well reported of for good works, for nursing her children, for lodging of Strangers, for washing the Saints feet, for relieving the afflicted, for following diligently every good work. (1 Timothy 5:5, 10)

*Question.* What manner of men hath God appointed, to be received as Brethren and members of his Church:

*Answer.* Such as are called of God out of this world to the fellowship of Christ (Romans 1:6, 7; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Acts 2:38-40; Matthew 33(13?):11, 12) and do willingly offer and join themselves, first to the Lord (Acts 2:41; Psalm 110:3; Isaiah 56:6, 7) and then to the Church (Acts 24:47, 48; 6, 27, 28) by confession of their sins (Matthew 6; Acts

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19:18) by profession of their faith (Acts 8:36, 37) and by taking or laying hold of his Covenant (Isaiah 56:6, 7)

*Question.* What is the Office or duty which God calleth the Brethren unto the members of the Church?

*Answer.* To brotherly love (1 Peter 2:17 & 3:8; Colossians 3:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 13:1) and the fruits of brotherly unity (Ephesians 4:3; Psalm 1:31; Colossians 3:15; Acts 7:16) brotherly equality (1 Corinthians 8:14; Matthew 23:8; Deuteronomy 17:20) & brotherly communion (Acts 2:42 & 4:32; 1 Corinthians 1:10)

*Question.* Wherein standeth brotherly unity which we are to hold with one another?

*Answer.* To be perfectly joined together in one mind and one judgement in truth (Philippians 4:1, 2; Ephesians 4:15) and where we cannot be of one judgement yet still be of one heart (Philippians 4:2; Acts 4:32) not provoking nor envying one another (Galatians 5:26) but forbearing and forgiving (Ephesians 4:2, 32) not judging nor despising one another in matters of weakness (Romans 14:1, 3) but so far as we are come to walk together by the same Rule (Philippians 3:16) To teach and learn one of another the way of God more perfectly (Acts 18:16) Till we all grow up in the unity of

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the faith, unto a perfect man in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:3)

*Question.* Where standeth brotherly equality which we are to hold one with another?

*Answer.* In committing a like unto all God's Ordinances, and enjoying alike all Christian Liberties (Galatians 3:28; Lamentations 1:9, 10; Deuteronomy 17:20; Ezekiel 46:10) In preferring others before our selves (Philippians 2:3; Romans 12:10) and seeking one another's welfare (1 Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4; Galatians 5:13) and feeling their estates, as our own (Hebrews 1:3; Romans 12:15) in bearing the burdens one of another imposing no burdens (Galatians 6:2); but in equal proportion (2 Corinthians 8:13, 14)

*Question.* Wherein standeth brotherly communion, which we are to hold one with another?

*Answer.* In our steadfast and continual fellowship in the Apostles Doctrine and worship: and in ministration (Acts 2:42; & 6:1) and for this end to dwell together (Psalm 133:1 & 122:12 3???) and to watch over one another (Hebrews 10:24; 3:12, 13) to resort together to the

public assembly (Hebrews 10:25; Psalm 110:3 & 122:1; Isaiah 60:8) and there to join in all holy duties with one accord (Acts 1:14 & 4:24; 1 Corinthians 14:16, 26) and every Lord's day to lay up in store for the supply of the Saints (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 9:12)

*Question.* How is the public worship of God be ordered, and administered in the Church?

*Answer.* All the Members of the Church being met together as one man (Ezekiel 46:10; 1 Corinthians 11:33) in the sight of God (Acts 10:33) are to join together in holy duties with one accord (Deuteronomy 4:24; 1 Corinthians 14:16) the men with their heads uncovered the women covered (1 Corinthians 11:4 to 6)

*Question.* What part of public worship is first to be administered?

*Answer.* The Apostle exhorteth that first of all: All manner of prayers be made for all men, for Kings, and all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and a peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty. (1 Timothy 2:12; Ezra 6:10)

*Question.* Whither are set forms of public worship, devised and ordained by men an acceptable worship unto the Lord?

*Answer.* If such set forms had been an ordinance of the Lord, and a worship acceptable to him, the Lord himself, or at least some of the Apostles, or Prophets,

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would not have held back that part of God's Counsel, from the Church (1) Besides, public prayer is as well a part of public Ministry, as Prophecy is (2) and the forms of one might as justly be taught, by the precepts of men as the other (3) and both of them are alike the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to whom it belongeth as well to teach us what to pray, as how to pray (4) nor will it stand with the holy gesture of Prayer, which is to lift our eyes to Heaven (5) to cast down our eyes upon a Book. (6)

*Question.* What part of public worship is next to be administered?

*Answer.* Before Propheying it will be seasonable to sing a Psalm (1) and by some of the Teachers of the Church to Read the Word, and therewith to Preach it, by giving the sense, and applying the use (2) In dispensing whereof the Minister was wont to stand above all the people in a Pulpit of wood and the Elders on both sides (3) while the people harkened unto them with Reverence and Attention (4) where there be more Prophets, as Pastors and Teachers, they may Propheesy two or three (5) and if the time permit, the Elders may call any other of the Brethren,



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whither of the same Church or any, to speak a word of Exhortation to the people (6) and for the better edifying of a man's self or others, it may be lawful for any (young or old) save only for Women to ask questions at the mouth of the Prophets (7)

*Question.* After the Ministry of the Word, what part of God's public worship is next to be administered?

*Answer.* After the Word (which is the Covenant of God) the Seals of the Covenant are next to be administered; Baptism, and the Lord's Supper (1) and as for Baptism, it is to be dispensed by a Minister of the Word (2) unto a Believer professing his Repentance, and his Faith (3) being a member of the same Church

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body (4) as also unto his seed (5) presented by the Parent to the Lord, & his Church (6) at which time the Minister in God's room calleth upon the parent to renew his Covenant with God for himself & his seed (7) and calleth upon God as the nature of the Ordinance requireth for the pardon of original sin, and for the sin of the parents and for a blessing upon the Sacrament and Infant (8) and the calling the child by the name, which the Parent hath given it, for his own edification and the Childs (9) he baptiseth it either by dipping (10) or sprinkling (11) into the name of the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

*Question.* How is the Lord's Supper to be administered?

*Answer.* The Supper of the Lord is to be dispensed by the Minister of the Word (1) unto the faithful of the same body (2) or commended to them by a like body (3) having examined and judged themselves (4) & sitting down with him at the Lord's Table (5) before whom the Minister taketh the bread and blesseth it, breaketh it, and giveth it to the brethren with this commandment once for all; to take and eat it, as the body of Christ is broken for them, and this do in remembrance of him, in like manner also he taketh the cup, and having given thanks, he poureth it fourth and giveth it to them, with a commandment to them all, to take and drink it as the blood of Christ shed for them, and this also to do in Remembrance of him (6) and after all thanksgiving is ended by singing a Psalm (7)

*Question.* After the Ministry of the Word and the Seals thereof, how is the Collection for the Saints to be administered?

*Answer.* The Collection for the Saints was by the Apostles' Ordinance to be made: for the time every Lord's day (1) for the measure as God

had prospered every man (2) for the manner, not of constraint but freely, (3) brought by the givers as an offering to the Lord & laid down (4) as at first before the Apostles so afterwards

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by their appointment, before the Deacons of the Church, as into a common Treasury (5) by them to be distributed to the supply of the Ministry and of the poor Saints according to their need and of all the outward Service of the Church. (6)

*Question.* What duty of God's worship is to be performed in dismissing the assembly?

*Answer.* After all parts of God's public worship have been performed by the Minister (1) or any of the Prophets is to dismiss the Assembly with a word of blessing: offering up blessings unto the Lord (2) and putting a blessing upon the people (3)

*Question.* In what manner are all duties of God's worship to be administered?

*Answer.* In Spiritual simplicity without affectation of legal shadows (1) of worldly pomp or carnal excellency (2) decently (3) and in order (4) and to edification (5)

*Question.* What form of Government is the Government of the Church.

*Answer.* The government of the Church is in Christ our head Kingly or regal (1) but in the Church Stewardly and Ministerial (2) and in both of them Spiritual and heavenly (3)

*Question.* How doth Christ exercise his Kingly Government or power in the Church?

*Answer.* By calling the Church into holy fellowship with himself, and one with another (4) by ordaining Officers and Governors in his Church with their callings and gifts (5) by giving Laws and ordinances to his Church, for the whole government of it (6) By putting life and power, even the power of his spirit in all his Ordinances, for the edifying of his body unto perfection (7) and finally by subduing our enemies, and protecting our selves in his peace to his heavenly Kingdom (8)

*Question.* How is the Government of the Church in

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the hand of the Church Stewardly or Ministerial?

*Answer.* Because the end of the Government of the Church is spiritual and heavenly (1) as is the building of Christ's Kingdom, and saving of souls (2) it is not in the power of men to ordain, or provide means or

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helps to such ends, but only for him that can work upon the soul and conscience (3) and therefore it is not in the hand of the Church, to make Laws or ordinances, to choose Officers or Members, to administer Sacraments or Censures or any part of worship or Government of their own heads, but to receive all as from the hand of Christ, and to dispense all according to the will of Christ revealed in his Word. (4)

*Question.* How is the government of the Church Spiritual and heavenly?

*Answer.* The government of the Church though but be not altogether inward but partially outward (1) as being administered by open and known Officers (2) with audible and lively voice (3) in the open face of the brethren of the Congregation (4) yet is it in it self not of this world but Spiritual and heavenly (5) as being ordained, not by wisdom and power of this world but of Christ (6) and administered not according to the precepts of men but of his Commandments (7) not by earthly weapons, but by Word and Sacraments, and other Spiritual Ordinances (8) not working upon the bodies, or outward estates of men by fines or imprisonments, loss of limbs or lives, but upon their souls and consciences by the evidence of the Spirit (9) finally not aiming at worldly peace wealth or honour, but at the Righteousness of faith, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost (10)

*Question.* To whom hath Christ committed the Government of his Church?

*Answer.* Partly to the Body of Christ, in respect of the state or frame of it (1) but principally to the Presbytery, in respect to the Order or Administration of it. (2)

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*Question.* What power of Government is committed to the body of the Church?

*Answer.* The body of the Church hath power from Christ to choose, and call her own Officers, and members, to send forth any of them, for her service (4) to inquire and hear and assist in the Judgement of all public scandals (5)

*Question.* What power of Government is committed to the Presbytery?

*Answer.* To call the Church together (6) and to deliver the Counsel of God to them with all Authority (7) to prepare matters for the Churches hearing (8) and to propound and order them in the Assembly (9) and to administer Ordinations (10) and Censures (11) and to dismiss the Assembly, with a blessing in the Name of the Lord (12)

*Question.* But hath not Christ committed some power of Government to every private member of the Church?

*Answer.* Yes verily, there is the power of edification (1) which the Lord hath given, to any member of the Church to exercise mutually one over another (2) to save some with compassion, others with fear (3) by a word of Instruction, Admonition, Exhortation, and comfort (4)

*Question.* How is the Ordination to be administered?

*Answer.* When the Church hath chosen and called an Officer, they present him to the Elders (1) who do ordain him if he be a Deacon with Prayer, and imposition of hands (2) and with fasting also is to be an Elder (3)

*Question.* How are the Censures of the Church to be administered?

*Answer.* The Censures of the Church are ordained by Christ for the removal of scandals out of the Church, (Matthew 18:6–15) which if they be private, (one Brother offending another) the Offender is to go and acknowledge his

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Repentance of it unto his Brother (Matthew 5:23, 24) who is then to forgive him (Luke 17:4) but if the Offender neglect to do it the Brother offended is to go, and admonish and convince him of it between themselves privately: If thereupon the Offender be bought to Repent of his offence the Admonisher hath won his Brother: But if the Offender hear not his Brother, the Brother offended is to take with him one or two more that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established; whether the word of Admonition, if the Offender receive it, or the word of complaint to the Church if he refuse it, the offended Brother is to tell the Church, if he refuse to hear the Church, then is he to be accounted as an Heathen, and a Publican (Luke 17:2; Matthew 18:15–17)

*Question.* What if the Scandals or Offences be public, how are they to be removed?

*Answer.* By public Reproof (1 Timothy 5:20; Galatians 2:14) and if the offences be not only public but heinous, then the Church is to remove the offence, by Excommunicating the Offender out of the Church (1 Corinthians 5:1 5; 1 Timothy 1:20)

*Question.* How is Excommunication to be administered?

*Answer.* When the offence of any Brother is public, and heinous, or being private is through the Offenders obstinacy become publicly scandalous; the Church being met together, is in the Name and Power

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of the Lord Jesus, and with his Spirit, are to deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of the Flesh, and the Salvation of his Soul, in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:1, 4, 5, 11, 12; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; Matthew 18:17)

*Question.* Is there no use of Suspension in the Church?

*Answer.* Not as a Church Censure or as an Act of power, but as an Act of discretion in the Church Officers, discerning the unclean from the clean, until they be cleansed (Leviticus 10:10)

*Question.* What is Anathema Maranatha?

*Answer.* It is the utmost Censure of the Church, whereby a Brother falling from the love of Christ, into hatred against him, is cut off from fellowship with Christ, forever

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even to the coming of the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:22)

*Question.* Having seen what power of Government the Church hath received, and exerciseth within it self. Tell me now whither one Church hath power of Government over another?

*Answer.* No Church hath power of Government over another, but each of them hath chief power within it self, and all of them equal power one with another, every Church hath received alike the power of binding and loosing, opening and shutting the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:17, 18) but one to another all of them are Sisters; (Canticles 8:8) all of them *Sarabs*, all of them *Queens*, none *Hagar*, none of them *Concubines* (Galatians 4:26; Canticles 8:8) but by their own corruption or usurpation of others (Revelation 18:17) Finally, all of them, are *Candlesticks* of the same precious metal, and in the midst of them all Christ equally walketh (Revelation 1:12, 13)

*Question.* But if one Church have no power of Government over another, what course is there left to Reform such corruptions, as may arise in any Church, whether in Doctrine or practise.

*Answer.* The corruptions that are found in any Church, do either infect part of the Church, or the whole body; if part only, then the part remaining found may either convince and reform their Brethren themselves if they be able, or if they be not able they may at least prevail so far with them, as to send for light to some other Church, as they of Antioch did to the Church at Jerusalem. But if the Corruptions found in a Church do infect the whole Body, yet still there is hope in Israel concerning this, for though one Church have not power of Government over another,

subordinate to them, yet every Church hath equal power one with another, as coordinate with them: And therefore look what power one Brother hath over another in the same Church, the same power hath one Church over another in Brotherly communion; as if one Church shall hear of any

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offence to another, they may enquire the certainty of it, and thereupon send Letters and Messengers to convince and admonish them of it. If the Church offending do hear the Church admonishing, they have gained their Brethren, and their own desire: If the Church hear them not, then the Church may take one or two Churches more to assist them, in the conviction of that sin: if yet the Church hear them not, then (upon due notice given) all the Churches thereabouts may meet together, and after judicious inquiry into the Cause, may by the Word of God confute and condemn such Errors, in Doctrine or practice, as are found offensive: to prevent the spreading, either the Gangrene of Heresy, or of the Leprosy of sin, and if the Church offending shall not yet hearken to their Brethren, though the rest of the Churches have no power to deliver them to Satan, yet they have power to withdraw from them, the right hand of Fellowship, and no longer to hold them in the Communion of Saints, till they approve their Repentance (By proportion, from Matthew 18:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 3:6)

**FINIS.**



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