

CERTAIN QUERIES

**Tending to Accommodation
and of Communion
Presbyterian &
Congregational Churches.**

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John Cotton

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BY

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Teacher of the Church at
Boston in New-England.

Published by a Friend to whom
the Author himself sent them
over not long before his Death.

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**Certain Queries tend-
ing to the mutual Accommo-
dation & Communion of Presbyte-
rian and Congregational Churches;
delivered in 11 Propositions, & hum-
bly presented both to the Consi-
deration and Examination of
them according to God;**

BY Mr John Cotton.

The 1. Query.

Whether may it not be safely acknowledged, that the Congregations of Christians subject to Presbyterial Government, preaching and professing the truth of the Gospel, and not over-grown with ignorant and scandalous Persons, are true and holy Churches of Christ?

Because, such Churches, (for the Matter of them) consist of visible Saints, (at least a principal part of them) especially when they present themselves to sit down before the Lord at his Ta-

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ble. And for the Form; they do agree together in choosing their own Minister, in attending duly to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, and in submitting to the Doctrine of the Gospel: which implieth a real and visible (though implicit) profession of

the Covenant of grace requisite to Church-estate.

Object. The Parish-Churches in England were Antichristian, if not in their first Institution, yet at least for these many hundred years; and were never since unchurched, nor new moulded out of their Anchristian Apostacy.

Answ. 1. The Gospel of Christ was preached and received in England ten years before it was in Rome (as may appear by *Gildas*, and may be inferred from *Baronius* also, *Annal. Anno Christi 35:5. & 45:1.*) and that by the Ministry of Apostles and Apostolic men, who doubtless did at first institute Churches, not after the Pattern of Rome (which then was not a Church) but according to the Pattern of the Apostles.

2. Neither were they unchurched by the Antichristian Apostacy which after-

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wards grew upon them (as a Leprosy) but were only corrupted and polluted, even in many fundamentals, both in Doctrine, Worship, & Government, which made them like unto the *Israelites* under the Apostacy of *Jezabel*, the generality being carried away by the Corruption of the times, but a Remnant reserved (through grace) which bowed not the knee to *Baal*.

3. Since the Beginning of the Reformation, many of the Church-members (by the power of the Gospel) reformed to a new estate of visible Saints, and the fundamental corruptions in Doctrine and worship were purged away, and

both of them so renewed as that the presence and power of Christ was discerned in the face of the Ordinances. And for the Government, though it give not being (but well-being to Churches, yet) it hath also been growing more and more into better order unto this day. In so much that Protestant Churches have renounced fellowship with Anti-christ and his Churches, and have separated from them in Doctrine, Worship, and Government: which if it reach not to a new-churching, yet it is a renewal

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of their Church estate, and a new moulding of them into a more holy way of Administration of Church-Ordinances; so that now they stand as Churches gathered out of the world both of Antichristians and of Pagans, The *Israelites* after their Return from under the Apostacy of *Jezabel*, neither solemnly unchurch themselves of their former corrupt estate, nor In-church themselves into a better new estate; but being called to Repentance by the King's Proclamation, and their hearts being bored of God to submit themselves there to, though they fell short of a full Purifications yet they were received to the Lord's Supper (the Passover) together with their Brethren of the purer Church of *Judah*. 2 Chro. 30:18, 19, 20.

The 2d. Query.

Presupposing then the Presbyterian Congregations to be true Churches,

Whether hence It will not clearly follow,
that the Ministers called by them (being o-
therwise men of Ministerial gifts) are true
Ministers; and the Sacraments administered

s
by them are true Seals of the Covenant of
Grace?

The 3d. Query.

Nevertheless, Whether may it not be
justly doubted, that the estate of both Chur-
ches is sinfully defective; The Presbyterian,
partly in their Materials, in case the Mem-
bers, diverse of them, be (not professed
Saints, but) either ignorant or scandalous,
and apparently carnal and worldly: partly
in their Government, by the Presbyters of
other Churches; which way of Government,
though it had place (in sundry Cases) in the
National Church of the old Testament yea,
and in the New Testament, might be practi-
sed for a time by the Apostles themselves
(who were Oecumenical Governors of all
Christian Churches:) yet the same was ne-
ver delegated nor commended to the Pastors
and Teachers of particular Congregations?
The Congregational likewise how can they
be excused, in case there be any such as do
admit all manner of Sects into their Cove-
nant and Communion; and will not allow the
Civil Magistrates to proceed to the Censure
of seducing Heretics and profane Blas-
phemers?

The 4. Query.

For the Healing of which defects; were it not much to be wished that the Members of Presbyterian Churches, did once publicly profess their faith and Repentance before their partaking of the Lord's Table? (as John Baptist's Disciples did before their Baptism, and as Members of Congregational Churches do before their Admission:) that so None such as were ignorant or scandalous might be admitted to the Lord's Table till they were duly approved to be Men of knowledge, sound in the Faith, and blameless in conversation? And further also, whether would it not much conduce to a more full and clear acceptance of their Administrations, If their Elders in the Classis did put forth no Authoritative Act, touching the Members of other Churches, but consultative only; nor touching their own, but (upon hearing the advice of fellow Elders in difficult cases) to proceed each one with the Cognizance and Consent of his own Church at home respectively?

The 5. Query.

For want or Neglect hereof, Though the Members of Presbyterian Churches should

discern some Defects in the Order and Government of their Churches; yet whether may they suddenly break off Communion with them till they have convinced them of

their Defects, and duly and patiently waited for their Reformation?

It may seem No; For if we must take a more delatory course for the healing of a private Brother, in a way of brotherly love, with much meekness and patience; how much more ought we so to walk towards an whole Church?

The 6. Query.

Such a Brother, though as yet remaining a Member of a Presbyterian Church yet sensible of the Defects of his own Church, and being otherwise known to be fit, why may be not lawfully and without scruple be received to partake at the Lord's Table (as occasion serveth) in a Congregational Church?

For such an one is both a Member of a true Church, and cleansed from the defects of his own Church.

The 7. Query.

Yea, suppose a godly Christian do continue

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Presbyterian in his Judgement, and yet do approve of a Congregational way and is desirous to join in Covenant with a Congregational Church, whether may be not in due order be lawfully admitted and continued a Member of a Congregational Church? Yea further, Notwithstanding the different state and way of Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, and the Defects which the one or the other may observe or surmize

either in other; yet (even whilst they so stand and walk) whether may not the Members of either without just offence, mutually Communicate one with another (as occasion shall he offered) at the Lord's Table?

The Affirmative seemeth probable; For as Error in Judgement about Discipline is not an Heresy against the Foundation of Christian Religion. And the Apostie instructeth Christian Churches to receive the Christian Jews into their Church-fellowship, who yet dissented from them about the observation of Levitical Rites, which were as much discrepant from the Truth of the Gospel in the Order of worship, as these other be in Order of Government.

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Besides, God accepteth cleanliness of heart in his faithful servants in their approaches to his Table, though there be defects in full cleansing, according to the Order of the Sanctuary. 2 Chron. 30:18, 19, 20.

The 8. Query.

If a godly Minister called to Office by a People professing Godliness (whether under Episcopacy, or Presbytery) and afterward repenting of any known sin in his way, shall be desirous of a more pure Reformation; whether may not his godly people acknowledge his Ministerial Calling without sin?

Why not? For be had the Essence of a lawful Calling before, in the free

choice of bit godly People, and in his own free acceptance of them and of their Call. Nevertheless, if any of his godly People should stumble at his former Callings whether may not a more select Company and body of the People renew their Gall of him, and there to accept the Concurrence and Consent of the rest of the Congregation? And whether may not he also do well

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(instead of stiff standing upon the validity of his former Calling) to descend to renew his Acceptance of them, yea, and to receive a New Ordination from them, with express designation to the Office, either of a Pastor or Teacher; and that without prejudice or dishonour to his former Calling? For a renewed Act doth not invalidate (much less evacuate) the old, but clear it and confirm it (so far as there is any thing of God in it) as in Scripture? all Ingeminations do. Saul was thrice Ordained King over Israel, 1 Sam. 10:1. & ver. 24. & 11:14, 15. thrice to the same Calling, and with several solemnities. Neither is Ordination of the Essence of a Ministerial Calling, but a solemn Adjunct of it; which may be renewed upon occasion of any New spiritual Employment, or Function, Place or People, Acts 13: 2, 3.

The 9. Query.

If the godly Members of a Congregation formerly subject to Episcopacy, but repenting of their sinful subordination thereunto,

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and (being studious of Reformation) have solemnly Covenanted to endeavour the same, and have chosen their former godly Ministers (one or more) into the Pastors or Teachers Office; Whether may not those Ministers withhold their Ignorant and carnal Hearers from the Lord's Table (though they had their consent to their Election) until they be able to discern the Lord's Body, and be fit to receive it without profaning it? But yet, in the mean time, whether may they not dispense some other Ministerial Acts unto them, as to Preach the Word, and also to Catechize them and their Families? And if hereby they shall attain unto so much knowledge of the principles of the Doctrine of the Gospel, as to profess before the Church both their need of Christ and his Covenant to themselves, and the Seal thereof unto their Seed, and also their own Duty of submission unto Christ in his Ordinances; and shall likewise be found free from any open scandal, or else openly judge themselves for the same; Whether may it not be lawful for the Minister to admit them to the Lord's Table, and their Children to Baptism?

For It is not with such as with Ishmael and Esau, who though they were born in the Church, and sealed under

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the Covenant of Circumcision, yet when they grew up to years, the one mocked

at the Heir of the Covenant, and the other despised the Birth-right of the Covenant; and so the one was cast out, and the other withdrew himself from the fellowship of the Church, and of them deprived their children of *Circumcision*. But such is not the Case here of these we speak of; but rather they are like the Seed of the *Israelites*, who though many of them were not sincerely godly, yet whilst they held forth the public Profession of God's People (*Deut.* 26:3. to 11.) and continued under the wing of the Covenant and subjection to the Ordinances; They were still accounted an *holy Seed* (*Ezr.* 9:2.) and so their children were Partakers of *Circumcision*. Yea further though themselves were sometimes kept from the Lord's Supper (the Passover) for some or other uncleanness, yet that debarred not their children from *Circumcision*.

Against this, may it not seem vain to stand upon a Difference between the Church of *Israel* and our Churches of the New Testament, in that theirs was

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a *National Church*, and ours *Congregational?* For the same Covenant which God made with the *National Church* of *Israel* and their Seed, It is the very same (for substance) and none other which the Lord maketh with any *Congregational Church* and our Seed. When the Jews and their children were cut off from the fatness of the Olive, we and our children were engrafted into their room and estate, *Rom.* 11:17, 19.

so that we are now become συγκληρόνομος σύσσωμοι, καὶ συμμέτοχος τῆσ ἐπαγγελίας, co-heirs, concorporate, and compartners with them of the same promise in Jesus Christ, *Eph.* 3:6.

The 10. Query.

When any Christians desire to be admitted into the Church, & the Covenant thereof, whether is it regular that the Elders should take all the Trial of them in a private Consistory alone? unless it be in way of preparation, that so they may more fitly and safely commend them to the public Trial of the whole Church? But were it not meat, that the last Trial of Members, upon which they (being approved) are received either

¹⁴ *into the Church in a Congregational way, of to the Lord's Supper in a Presbyterian way, should be transacted before the Church?*

For as no Members are to be cast out of the Church-Communion, but by the Judgement and Consent of the Church (as well the Brethren as the Elders) so none should be received into the Communion of the Church, but with the approbation and Consent of the Church.

The 11. Query.

Whether is it just matter of Offence, If a Member of any Church, which lieth under the Leaven of Corruption, after the use of all good means for the healing of the corruptions of his own Church (be it Pres-

byterial or Congregational) and after long waiting for the same in vain, shall at the length (for the peace and Comfort of his own Conscience, and out of conscientiable Desire to walk before the Lord in all purity) quickly and orderly remove his Relation, and adjoin himself to a Church more reformed, yet not condemning the Church (as no Church) from which he removeth?

For if a man may remove his habita-

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tion for outward easments and conveniences, and then the removal of bit Relation is easily granted without of-fence: Then why may he not, for the ease of his Conference, remove his Relation, though not his Habitation? unless his Habitation were *Jure divino*, an inseparable Adjunct to his Relation, or his relation to his Habitation? Chri-stians (as Brethren) are called of God to bear one anothers Burdens, *Gal.* 6:2. If it be a Burden to stay in Communi-on, let his Brethren ease his Burden with a Dismission.

Glory be to God in Christ Jesus, and peace to all his Israel.

UNTO the aforesaid Queries of the Reverend Author, this also may briefly be added, to make up the number round.

The 12. Qiery.

Whether it be unlawful, or may be truly accounted a necessary cause of Disorder, or Confusion for godly Christians, living in se-

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veral *Precincts* or *Parishes* (*not* *far* *distant,*
 but *so* *they* *may* *ordinarily* *meet* *together*
in *one* *place*) *to* *join* *in* *Church-fellowship*
together for mutual spiritual edification?

That 'tis a very convenient and desirable thing for the Members of a particular Congregation, to inhabit and dwell as near together as they may, in regard of their meeting together upon all occasions, and of mutual watchfullness over each other, and of spiritual helpfulness unto one another, is easily granted by all: yet it will not therefore follow, that 'tis an unlawful and disorderly thing for them to have their Abiding and Residence in divers Precincts and Parishes.

Indeed 'tis true, that it hath been accounted by the Prelates and the Prelatical party, a very disorderly and unlawful thing, and that which did expose to the greatest of their spiritual censures, for people ordinarily to go to the Assemblies of Christians out of their own *Parish*. But their Account doth not make or prove it to be so: neither doth it seem really and in truth to be so: For,

1. The Constitution of *Parochial* or

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Parish Churches, is not of Divine, but of human Institution, and that too in the very darkest times of Popery and Superstition, *viz.* about 700 years ago, as learned Mr Selden (in his Book of *Tythes*, ch. 9.) seems to intimate. So that although it may seem a disorder,

(in regard of that limitation of Parish-es) for the Parishioners of one place to join themselves unto the *Church Assemblies* in another; yet not in regard of any thing appearing to the contrary from the Scripture, which is the rule for Christians to walk by, especially in matters belonging to Church-Administration, and Government. Neither will it (I suppose) be affirmed by any intelligent Christian (who understanding in any measure the true Nature of a *particular Church*) that parish-bounds are the constituting cause of a particular Church or Congregation; for it cannot be maintained that every individual person living in such a Parish bounds, is therefore a Member of that Church there, except it can be proved, that professed Turks, or Jews, or Indians (who through providence may be brought into the

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Land, and so necessarily reside in some Parish or other, there being hardly any parcel of ground free in any part of *England*, from belonging to the bounds of some Parish or Town) are at real and true Members of the Church there, as any Christian man or woman in the *Parish*. I conceive it neither any solecism or Paradox to affirm, that there may be a Parish where there is no true Church of Christ, and a true Christian Church where there is no Parish.

2. It may seem too great a bondage and slavery, both for any *Church* (whether Presbyter: or Congregational) to be forced to receive all into fel-

lowship in all the Ordinances, who have their habitation or residence in the same Parish bounds with them: and also for particular persons to be necessitated to be of this or that particular Congregation, in fellowship with such Members, and under the Ministry of such a man, which they cannot find so suitable to their spirits, and so profitable for their spiritual edification, as some others, which may not be far off from them. And whereas it may fall out (which possibly may come in here)

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as an Objection) that the Minister, under whom a man liveth, is taken away by death, and another one called into his place and Office by the generality of the Church, who may be as unsuitable unto the Spirit of this or that Brother, at the Minister of the Parish where he dwells, or as any other, (hall not be hound to submit to the choice of the Church, or must the Church suspend their choice upon the Negative vote of any one Brother? In such a case 'tis lawful for that dissenting Brother, who cannot call such a man to be his Minister, nor own him as his Pastor or Teacher, to desire a Letter of dismission to some other Church and Officer, whom he can more freely and comfortably close in his spirit withal, and I suppose that Church, with whom he hath fellowship at the present, is bound to yield unto his equal and just desire, that so they may part in a loving and brotherly manner. We do generally allow every servant so much liberty

for his outward comfort and advantage, at to choose his own Master, in whose Family, and under whose Government and inspection he is to live,

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and why should not Christians also (being made free-men by Christ) have as much liberty for their spiritual comfort and edification, to choose the particular Church under whose teaching and inspection they are to abide: And why else hath the Lord (out of his infinite goodness and wisdom) given out diversity of gifts to divers of his Servants in the Ministry, but to suit the variety of spirits and dispositions in his people? Every lock not agreeing with every key; as our Reverend Author was wont to express himself, speaking of this very thing.

3. Experience doth also testify, *de facto*, that such a course is possible to be used and practised without making such disorder and confusion, as is conceived by some: For notwithstanding it be practised by some Churches (not only *Congregational*, but *Presbyterian* also, and *Classical*) to have their Members scattered up and down in several Precincts or *Parishes*, yet there have not any such confusion and disorder followed thereupon: as we have seen by the constant practice of our Brethren in the Congregations both of the *Dutch*

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and *French* here amongst us in *England*, as *viz.* in *London*, *Norwich*, *Canterbury*, *Colchester*, and in such other places

where they do inhabit; who although they be dispersed throughout the Ci-
tys and Towns where they live, yet are not thought, nor ever were by any (except possibly by some of the Lordly Prelates, who out of their superstitions zeal did seek to undermine and dis-
solve their Congregations) to be any occasion of disorder and confusion by their Meeting together in their holy Assemblies, from all parts of the Cities and Towns where they dwell. And why might not the like liberty be al-
lowed unto the English themselves, without any just fear of disorder thereby? There seems nothing but cu-
stom against it, for had it been but the practice and course of the English as is hath been of the other, certainly is would not be accounted more disorderly than theirs is.

Only if (while the division by Parishes do continue) men do allow and contribute, not only toward the Poor, but also toward the Preaching of the word in their several Parishes,

that the Word may be dispensed all the Land over, I should not gainsay it, as I suppose the brethren both of the French and Dutch have been wont to do, in the several Parishes where they live.

Finally, Brethren be of one mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.

FINIS.