

CONFESSION OF FAITH.

CHAPTER 25.-Of the Church.

IV. This Catholique Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible¹. And particular Churches, which are Members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the Doctrine of the Gospel is taught and imbraced, Ordinances administred, and Publique Worship performed more or less purely in them².

Question 1.—*Has not this catholic church been sometimes more, sometimes less visible?*

Answer.—Yes. Rom. 11:3, 4; Rev. 12:6, 14. Therefore the Papists do err, affirming, that the church has been, is and shall be most gloriously visible to all the whole world, far and nigh. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the church of God in the prophet Elijah's time, was brought to that pass, that he thought none remained but himself, 1 Kings 19:10; Rom. 11:2-4. 2.) Because for a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without the law, 2 Chron. 15:3. 3.) Because the Lord often complains, that his church and people have forsaken him, have not known him; that the faithful city has become a harlot, that scarce a man could be found to do justice, and follow truth; all which is inconsistent with that glorious condition of the visible church, which the Papists dream of, Isa. 1:3, 4; Jer. 2:29; 5:1. 4.) Because in the time of the ten persecutions, the visible church was much obscured, and darkened. And after those storms were over, arose the Arians, who did so much trouble the church of Christ, as is clear from history. 5.) Because two wings were given to the woman, that is, to the church of God, two wings, I say, of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, to hide herself, Rev. 12:14. 6.) Because the apostle Paul did foretell that general defection and apostasy of the visible church, mentioned, 2 Thess. 2:3. 7.) Because Christ has foretold, that before his second coming, he shall scarce find faith on the earth, Luke 18:8. 8.) Because the church of God is always liable to trouble and persecutions, while it sojourns in this world. But troubles and persecutions do much obscure the brightness and splendor of a visible church, Luke 21:17; John 16:2; Ps. 129:1-3.

Question 2.—*What is meant here by the term particular Churches?*

Answer.—By *particular Churches* is meant those divisions of the Catholic Church into national, provincial or, even, linguistic expressions of the visible Catholic Church, Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 1 Thess. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; Acts 6:1. These particular churches are all characterized by the profession of the true religion, 2 Cor. 1:1; 9:13; since profession of a false religion is contrary to the election of grace, Matt. 24:24. Since we believe the Reformed faith to be the correct expression (*i.e.*, “form of sound words”, Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:13) of the Christian faith, we ought to understand that by *particular Churches* is meant those adhering to the Reformed religion (all others expressing particularity only in so far as they reflect this profession).

¹ Rom. 11:3, 4; Rev. 12:6, 14.

² Rev. 2, 3 chapters. 1 Cor. 5:6, 7.

Question 3.—*Are particular churches members thereof, more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them?*

Answer.—Yes. Rev. 2, 3 chapters. 1 Cor. 5:6, 7. Since the catholic or universal visible Church consists of all the professors of the true religion in the world, and of all the particular ecclesiastical organizations which continue loyal to the Head, and maintain doctrines essentially sound, it must necessarily follow that the Church as a whole is in any age more or less visible, and any particular constituent church more or less pure in proportion—1.) To the purity of the doctrine they profess and the worship they maintain, Rev. 2:14. 2.) To their zeal and spiritual character and energy, Rev. 2:4, 6; 3:16. And, 3.) To the purity of their membership maintained by discipline, Rev. 2:20. In proportion as these are all advanced in perfection, and prevail generally throughout the whole body, in the same degree will the entire Church appear more visibly discriminated from the world and manifest in her entire outline, Eph. 4:13-16; Heb. 8:11, 1 Cor. 13:12. In the same measure, also, will every individual ecclesiastical organization be pure—that is, free from heterogeneous elements—and consecrated to the accomplishment of the ends for which it is designed, Matt. 7:20.