

## CONFESSION OF FAITH.

### CHAPTER 31.-Of Synods and Councils.

V. Synods or Councils are to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is Ecclesiastical: and are not to intermeddle with Civil Affairs which concern the Commonwealth; unless by way of humble Petition, in cases extraordinary; or, by way of Advice, for satisfaction of Conscience, if they be thereunto required by the Civil Magistrate<sup>1</sup>.

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Question 1.—*Are Synods and Councils to handle, or conclude nothing, but that which is ecclesiastical and not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth?*

*Answer.*—Yes. John 18:36. Thus does the Popish church err maintaining that synods and councils are to intermeddle themselves with the civil affairs of the commonwealth. They are confuted for the following reasons: 1.) Because the matters to be handled by the synods and councils are most properly those of ecclesiastical concern—belonging to the church, not affairs without, 1 Cor. 5:12. 2.) Because, the jurisdiction of the ancient church was nothing else than a practical declaration of what Paul teaches concerning the spiritual power of pastors, 2 Cor. 10:4–6. 3.) Because, the political affairs of nations, the decision of lawsuits, and the direction of men's lawful ordinary business belongs not to the church, Luke 12:13,14. 4.) Because, the church does not have the authority to annul or suspend civil laws, or decisions, that are sinful; she can only oppose them ecclesiastically, testify against them, and censure her members who are guilty of them, Matt. 20:25,26; Acts 4:19; 5:29. 5.) The power of church government is not despotal but ministerial, 1 Pet. 5:3. 6.) The power of church government has for the object of it, not the outward man, but the inward man, Heb. 13:17. Therefore, it is not exercised by any compulsive, coercive, corporal or civil punishments, but through church censures, 1 Tim. 1:20. 7.) Civil governments rule by the sword, Rom. 13:4. The church, however, rules by means of the keys of God's kingdom; that is, by proclaiming the gospel, administering the sacraments, forgiving or not forgiving sin, disciplining those who give offense, rebuking, refusing admittance to the sacraments, refusing church fellowship, reinstating those who repent, and commissioning and calling the elders of the church, Matt. 16:19. These things are all interrelated, and the church which does the one, does the others also, Matt. 18:17, 18. Any person who is not devoid of intelligence, or who is not deliberately wicked and ungodly, but yields to reason and the Word of God will have to conclude by all this that civil government has nothing in common with the manner in which the church must be governed, Matt. 20:25-28. The weapons to be used by the church are very different from those authorized for the civil magistrate, 2 Cor. 10:4.

Question 2.—*May Synods and Councils, by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the Civil Magistrate handle civil matters which concern the commonwealth?*

*Answer.*—Yes. Neh. 2:5,7; Est. 1:19; Matt. 2:4. Thus do many Independents, the Libertines and other sectaries err maintaining that Synods and Councils are in no way concerned with matters which affect the commonwealth. They are confuted for the

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<sup>1</sup>Luke 12:13,14; John 18:36.

following reasons: 1.) It belongs to the civil magistrate to call ecclesiastical assemblies when the times do so require, for the good of the commonwealth, 2 Chron. 19:8-11; but in determinations, deliberations or decisions, the magistrate may take no part, Deut. 17:8-12. 2.) From the example of the ecclesiastical Sanhedrim which had such power to judge of matters, but not to execute the civil penalties, Jer. 26:8-11; John 18:31. 3.) From the example of Esther, who, on behalf of the church, made humble petition to the king for justice to be executed upon the enemies of the church, Est. 9:13. 4.) From the example of the unrighteous ecclesiastical rulers who petitioned the princes for their perverted justice in the case of Jeremiah, Jer. 26:11.