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An
Exposition
of
The Church Covenant,
Or Articles of Association

Adopted by the Church in the United Society called Shakers.

Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual
Covenant that shall not be forgotten. Jeremiah.

A variety of considerations have induced us to give a brief and candid exposition of the articles of agreement or written Covenant by which the temporal interest of the Church in the United Society has been constituted and supported, to the present day.

Altho the real bond of union & agreement among true believers, is invisible and unknown to the rest of mankind, yet as there is an outward

and visible form and order in their association as a Church, and as this visible form is founded on certain civil and religious rights established & maintained by the civil institutions of our country, and intelligible to all; it becomes necessary that all such articles of association as are in any manner connected with their civil rights, should be known and properly understood by all concerned: hence the necessity of a written Church Covenant.

Since the general principles of the faith and order of the Church have become publicly known, few believers, of any rank, are much at a loss to understand the principles of the Church Covenant, even tho they had never seen its written form.

Yet, from an apprehension that it may be a mere religious affair, not cognizable in law, both believers and civil politicians sometimes labor under more or less difficulty in ascertaining its true import and proper merits in certain cases.

To remove any obscurity that may remain on any part of this reputedly sacred instrument, its principal articles are here examined in such a manner as to afford sufficient instruction and necessary caution to any who may wish to enter into its sacred bonds, and, at the same time, to guard any who may be interested, from any mistakes relative to its authenticity and legal force.

An Exposition of the Church Covenant.

Question 1.st What is the object and intention of a united and consecrated interest in this Society? and what are its peculiar benefits and advantages to the members?

Answer. When God created the natural world and all things therein, he pronounced them "all very good." The fruits and productions of the earth were good, and were designed for the united support of mankind in their terrestrial state. Hence it is evident that the beneficent Father of rational beings could never have intended that the fruits & good things of the world, which he had created for their use, should be partially distributed; that one part should riot in luxury, and the other suffer for the want of those things which render life comfortable. Nay; God created man to be a social being, a fellow helper to his fellow beings.

Whatever talents any man may possess, they are given

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not merely for his own benefit, but also for the benefit of his fellow men within his sphere of action; and thus they become mutually helpful to and dependent upon each other. It was the duty of man, from the beginning, to honor his Creator, and do His will in all things, and to do good to his fellow men according to his abilities. In this his interest was one with that of his heavenly Father and all his fellow creatures.

But when man, by transgression lost his relation to God, he then lost the unity of his true interest, both to God and his fellow creatures. Hence he became selfish & partial in all his views and pursuits. Instead of feeling it his interest to honor and build up the cause of God, and benefit his fellow creatures, he turned his feelings to exalt and build up himself, at the expense of the peace & happiness of his own species, and the loss of his union to his Creator. Hence he was no longer a social but a selfish & partial being, acting under the influence of that evil genius which is always opposed to the union and harmony of the creation, and of course the cause of all its miseries & disorders.

The object and design of the consecrated and united

interest of the Church, and the covenant relation of believers, is to regain the unity of that social order and relation to God which mankind lost at the beginning, and to place it upon that solid foundation which cannot be overthrown; so that its blessings and effects may be felt and enjoyed by all who are willing to build upon that foundation.

We find that where the providence of God has been most signally displayed in favor of his people, his peculiar manifestatio^{ns} have tended to show that this social & equal relation is agreeable to his will. When God fed the Israelites with manna, it was equally distributed to all. In the institution of the primitive Church, they were all of one heart and one mind, and made a sacrifice of whatever they possessed to the needs of the whole; so that all fared alike, according to their needs. In this united order, the strength, gifts and talents of each individual, together with all their temporal property, become a benefit to all who are united in that relation. In this way the wants of all may be well supplied; and all who are reconciled to this order and relation, may enjoy the double satisfaction of being made comfortable themselves, and of contributing to make others comfortable also; a satisfaction

which mankind cannot enjoy in the selfish & partial order of the world.

The talents and faculties created in mankind are abundantly sufficient to effect every thing needful for their support, and to supply all their wants, if rightly and properly applied. Yet the wants of the greatest portion of mankind are by no means supplied. The reason is, their talents and faculties are not exercised agreeable to the social order of their creation. Those therefore who have a surplus, often riot in luxury at the expense of the hard earned labors of the poor & unfortunate, who scarcely enjoy the scanty means of life.

Hence, in order for any one to come into the sacred interest and covenant relation of the Church, it is indispensably necessary for him first to receive the one spirit of Christ, and become so far of one heart and one mind that he is willing to sacrifice all other relations for this sacred one. Before this relation can be fully attained, it is needful for believers to settle all claims, both of creditors and heirs; so that what they have, may be truly their own. When they have done this, they have a just and lawful right to dispose of it according to their own free choice. And

if they chuse to come into this sacred relation, they must consecrate themselves and all they possess, to God, to be used and improved in that relation according to his revealed will.

It requires but little discernment to see that among a body of people united in one feeling and interest in all their operations, much more can be performed with ease, and a greater portion of substantial happiness enjoyed, with a greater certainty of its permanent continuance, than in a situation where the people are all divided, and striving in their individual capacities to supply their own wants, while they are constantly thwarted in their pursuits by the clashing interests of others. Hence, where the selfish principles of the world are sacrificed, and that unity of the spirit takes place which the apostle calls, "the bond of perfectness," this social order and relation, this desire to promote the welfare of each other, must be the natural and necessary consequence. Love, union and harmony, will increase and grow, and all selfish & partial feelings will gradually die away.

And where this social and Heavenly principle is secured and maintained, and souls are properly prepared for it, and reconciled to it, the order, beauty and harmony which it produces, and the comfort,

peace and happiness it affords, are truly inestimable. Here we may enjoy a foretaste of Heaven upon earth; and herein is fulfilled the design of our beneficent Father and Creator in making man a rational, intelligent and social being, and endowing him with a capacity to glorify his Creator, and do good to his fellow beings.

Having gained this principle in our hearts, and proved its blessed effects in the United Society, all we wish is to secure the enjoyment of it against the invasions of selfish and designing men. The constitution and laws of our country, which guarantee the rights of all, must and will operate in our favor, unless they are defeated by prejudice and misrepresentation.

Question 2.nd What is the Church? and of whom is it composed?

Ans. What we generally understand by the Church, is a company or body of believers, who, having acquired a competent knowledge of the principles of the Gospel of Christ, and of the rules of christian fellowship and spiritual union, by which they are to be regulated and governed, actually enter into a voluntary association, and mutually

agree to keep and maintain those principles and rules in a united capacity.

There is a plain distinction between a society of believers in general, and that which in reality constitutes the Church, or primary institution of a body of believers in Gospel order. Among the members of society, individually considered, in their separate capacities, they may possess their separate interests, and pursue their different plans of economy. But in a church relation one faith must govern all the members; their interest must also be one; and all their plans and pursuits must be regulated by one head or leading influence, and tend to one general end and purpose, according to that unity of faith manifested in their written covenant. For as a body without a head possesses neither life nor power, so a church without a head or leading power cannot support its existence, much less maintain the life and power of the Gospel.

In a strict sense, there is but one real Church of Christ; but this one Church may be composed of different circles or orders & branches, as different degrees of travel and experience, and different situations and local circumstances of convenience may render necessary. Every family or order whose members have fully consecrated themse^{lves}

& services, with all their temporal property, to the work and service of God, and whose general covenant is to that effect, is properly considered as a branch, order or circle of the Church, and holds a relation to the Church according to its relative place and order. Such families may be distinguished by any appropriate name which is best adapted to its relative situation and order.

But to preserve a distinction of order, and maintain the first degree of church relation in its proper place, it has been found necessary that the oldest or first instituted family or order which is established upon the principles of church relation, in any society or settlement of believers, should preserve the title of the Church, as being the primary institution to which all the collateral branches and orders must look for a leading example of increase in every virtuous pursuit, whether spiritual or temporal. Into this order no member can be admitted who holds any private or separate property whatever.

All other believers, who have not entered into the covenant relation established in the Church, hold a certain relation to the Church, according to the relative practical progress which they have made in the principles and order of the Church, be it more or less.

Question 3. What is to be understood by a covenant, particularly as to its application to the Church?

Ans. A covenant is a solemn contract between two or more parties. When applied to the contract of believers in entering into that sacred and social connexion which we call Church Relation, it implies a solemn promise by which they obligate themselves as members of one united body, not only to keep and maintain all those principles of the Gospel which have been planted in their hearts by faith, but also to subject themselves, freely and faithfully, to all those rules and regulations of order to which they mutually give their assent and consent; a transcript of which is contained in the written form of the Covenant, and voluntarily signed by the parties. [If the law requires it, a seal should also be affixed.]

Question 4.th Who are considered the parties in a Church Covenant?

Ans. Every individual who voluntarily covenants, and

signs the written form of the Covenant, and thereby becomes a member of the Church, is considered as a party. From the distinction between the order of a society of Believers in general, and that of the Church in particular, as given in the answer to the second question, it must be clearly understood that every individual of a body of Believers desiring to enter into the covenant relation of a church, must be divested of all separate & private interest, before a body can be formed whose interest is one. And for this purpose trustees are chosen and appointed, who are legally invested with a responsible trust, to whom the lawful conveyance and release of property can be made, and held in tenure for the temporal benefit and support of the Church so constituted, and for such other religious and charitable uses as the said Covenant shall authorize, and circumstances require of the said trustees.

It is presupposed and implied that those who constitute the Church, have previously been under a Gospel ministration, by which they have been sufficiently taught every thing necessary to prepare them for admission into church relation. This preparatory work is essentially necessary, especially for persons of mature age, to fit them for the more perfect order of the Church,

nor can they become members of the Church without this previous preparation in a family connexion or order.

Question 5.th Why cannot any person become a member of the Church, directly, without this previous preparation? Why cannot a man bring his property with him, and give it up to the Deacons or Trustees, and be received at once as a good church member?

Ans. If this were admissible, there might be some room for a plea of ignorance, and of course some pretext for blaming the Church for refusing to divide the consecrated property with those who withdraw. But the principles of the Covenant do not admit of any such thing. Hence it is that all who receive faith in the Gospel, are first admitted into a preparatory state of trial in the society; and, if they chuse, they may join their property to that of others, and form a joint interest, which they may again divide, and each take his own. In this social order each holds his personal claim to his property, according to agreement. And if the joint property is committed to the charge of an agent, each may, according to the previous contract, recover from the said

agent whatever was committed to his care, and withdraw with his property. But such transactions have no connexion with the temporal affairs of the Church: the interest of the Church stands upon a very different foundation.

It is a matter of importance that those who are received into the Church, should not be ignorant of the nature of such an undertaking; that they should know for themselves the principles and practice of the Church, and learn by their own experience what are the requirements of the Gospel; what it is to live the life of Christ, and whether it is in reality their faith and determination to deny themselves of all ungodliness and every worldly lust, and take up a full and final cross against all sin, and follow Christ in the regeneration. Hence the necessity of a previous preparation.

Question 6.th Is not the interest of the Church properly called a joint interest?

Ans. It may, in a certain sense be called a joint interest; but there is an evident distinction between a joint interest and a consecrated and united interest. Two or

more persons may join their interest together, and hold it jointly for their own special use. This may be called a joint interest, but not a consecrated and united interest. But in case the individuals holding such an interest, should agree to consecrate and devote it to some sacred use or purpose, in a united capacity, and with that view each should make the necessary conveyance of his personal right and title to the same, it then becomes a united and consecrated interest. Such is the temporal interest of the Church.

In the first associations of Believers in America, their first object was to locate themselves near together, for the benefit of religious worship and protection. And having determined to devote themselves to the service of God, they found it most convenient for their purpose, and more conformable to the example of the primitive christians, to bring their property together, and unite it in a common interest, and have all things common. Agreeable to this plan, the idea of a joint interest was introduced, and the property was entrusted to managers in whom they had full confidence, and who were considered faithful, trusty and capable.

Here it may be proper to remark that while the

term joint interest is understood to imply that the property joined may again be divided, it seems to excite no serious objection in the minds of those who are opposed to a full and final dedication of person or property to the use and benefit of the Gospel. But to suppose it will apply, in this sense, to the consecrated interest of the Church, is a great mistake. When individuals join their property together in a common stock, each party has an inventory of his part or share; so that such a joint interest is made up of shares, and may afterwards be divided accordingly. But no person can be admitted to Church membership with his inventory or schedule in his hand, or any account whatever, of property deposited there, to which he holds any private claim whatever. This is a fact that ought to be well understood by all. It is a principle by which every candid and upright believer delights to be governed.

Question 17.th Is it generally understood by the Society that persons, on becoming covenant members of the Church, actually relinquish all right, title and claim to the property which they held as their own personal interest while

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in their family capacity in the Society?

Ans. Nothing is more plainly taught nor perhaps better understood. It is undoubtedly the faith and understanding of every sensible Believer, that all and singular the property and estate of the Church has been and is solemnly & conscientiously devoted and consecrated to sacred and charitable uses, to be under the care and management and at the disposal of the Trustees in union with the Ministry. And whatever is truly said to be devoted, cannot in any sense be reserved, neither in whole nor in part: it is a total relinquishment, a perfect & entire quitclaim, a substantial conveyance, a full and final release of title from one to another, as much as any transaction whatever, between man and man. The trusteeship of the Church never had but one species of claim to property, from whatever quarter it may have come into their hands; whether from a citizen of the world or a member of the Society; whether purchased and paid for, or yielded and given up for the use and benefit of the Church. There is no account kept in the Church for charitable donations or pious dedications, with the least expectation that the property so given will ever be refunded.

Every divine institution emanating from the God of order, is necessarily formed according to some consistent principle. The Church of Christ must therefore be established upon a foundation which cannot admit of a precarious & uncertain tenure. And if it is to consist of an association of individuals possessing equal rights and privileges in all things, how can such an association possibly be formed, and preserved in existence, without a permanent and durable foundation of support? And if this foundation of support is derived from and made up of the property, talents and services of the individual members thereof, who have religiously and conscientiously devoted and consecrated themselves and all they possess, to the service of God and the Church, and voluntarily committed their property, without reserve, to impartial stewards, who will distribute a due portion to all, as they have need, what possible plea can any one have for a recantation? And since the institution is designed for the benefit of all, and is confirmed by the express contract of every individual member, what authority can a steward have to violate his trust?

Question 8.th Is the power and control of the Trustees over the interest of the Church absolute? or is it limited?

Ans. In all cases of agency or trust, the powers of the agent are limited by law to the bounds of the agreement or instructions under which he acts. Hence, by the Church Covenant, the power and authority of the Trustees are limited to their proper extent, and their duties correctly defined. It is their business to take the first charge and oversight and to have the general superintendency of all the property and estate belonging to the Church; and this charge is to be held by them in their official capacity, and by their successors in office and trust forever. It is also their duty to make all just and equitable defence in law (so far as is consistent with the faith and principles of the Gospel) for the protection and security of the united and consecrated interest of the Church; and also to improve, use and appropriate the same for the benefit of the Church, and for such other charitable and religious purposes as the Gospel may require; but not for any personal, selfish or private interest whatever.

It must be distinctly understood, that no transaction of a trustee or agent can be sanctioned nor supported, which is not conformable to the spirit and nature of the Gospel, and the power vested in him. Hence the instructions and restrictions laid down in the Covenant are intended to prevent any undue exercise of power.

Question 9.th On what foundation does the institution of the Ministry stand? and whence do they derive their authority?

Ans. Divine providence, for wise purposes, has permitted that all earthly governments should, in some way or manner, emanate from the people. But whenever Divine wisdom has seen fit to establish a spiritual or religious government for the benefit of his covenant people, it has invariably originated from Divine appointment, and its continuance has been signally protected and blessed by Divine providence. This is clear from the records of scripture. God appointed Moses and established him as a leader of the tribes of Israel; and by Divine revelation Moses appointed Joshua as his successor.

Altho these things were done under the law, they evidently pointed to a Gospel government, and were more clearly displayed under the ministration of Jesus Christ, and confirmed by his words and works. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you. — As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." (John, XV. 16 & XX. 21.) And while the government of the Church was kept on this foundation, its purity was preserved; but when through the influence of human wisdom the rulers of the Church

were elected by the suffrages of the people, then the true union of the Church was broken and destroyed, and "The power of the holy people was scattered." But when the second manifestation of the spirit of Christ came forth for the restoration and establishment of the true nature and order of the Gospel, then the same Divine order of spiritual government was again revived.

Hence, the ministerial institution must be considered as originating from Divine authority; of course the appointment of the Ministry is, in reality, a Divine appointment given through the preceding Ministry. Yet the spiritual heads and leaders of families in the Church, who, for their wisdom and virtue, have been appointed and called to the eldership by the preceding Ministry, are, from their office and calling, properly authorized to announce the appointment to the people; and when so announced, the authority of the Ministry is confirmed and established by a spontaneous spirit of union, which flows in the soul of every true Believer, and freely circulates through the body. And when duly established, the necessary powers of government are confided to them, with authority to appoint Elders, Trustees and Deacons, with other needful assistants in the care, management and direction of the affairs of the Church, both spiritual and temporal.

Question 10.th Whence arises the necessity of different orders and families in church relation, under the superintendency of different elders and deacons?

Ans. From the multiplicity of members, and their local situation, and the consequent necessity of local leaders to direct and manage the spiritual and temporal concerns in the various departments of each family. When so great a number comes into church relation as to render it necessary for them to be divided and distributed into different families, it becomes equally necessary that the interest or property of the Church should also be duly apportioned, as well as every thing else necessary for their mutual benefit and support, both in things temporal and spiritual. Accordingly, the eldership of each family partakes of the ministerial gift for the lead and protection of the family; while the deaconship is intrusted with the general care and superintendency of the temporal concerns of that branch of the Church included in such family.

Question 11.th How far does the power and authority of the eldership extend towards the family under their care?

Ans. It is their right and duty to teach and instruct; to counsel, admonish and reprove; to lead the worship, and see that the order and regulations of the family are kept. They have in short the general oversight and control of the domestic affairs of the family; but have no authority to admit nor remove members without the union of the Ministry. And in the discharge of all their duties they are accountable to the Ministry by whom they are appointed and authorized to act.

Question 12.th How far does the authority and duty of the deaconship of a family extend?

Ans. It is parallel with that of the eldership. The deacons have the care, as stewards, to provide for the family; to support good order and make proper arrangements in temporal things; to watch over, counsel and direct the members in their various occupations; to make application to the Trustees for whatever supplies are needed in their respective families; and to make report to the eldership of the state of matters which fall under their cognizance and observation. But all their power is domestic, and is restricted to the family concerns,

nor does it extend even to the adding nor diminishing of the interest of the family by any immediate or direct correspondence with those without the bounds of the Church. They have no immediate concern with trade and commerce; it is not their business to buy and sell; nor can they even vend the articles of sale produced in their own families, without the consent & approbation of the Trustees.

Question 13.th What are the official duties of the Trustees?

Ans. The Trustees are the constitutional repositories of the temporal property which forms the consecrated and united interest of the Church, and are the proper agents for the transaction of business with those without; and the appointed place of deposit is in the building or buildings connected with their office. Hence all property brought into the Church or carried out, must pass under the cognizance of the Trustees. Nothing can be admitted in nor carried out through any other channel without producing disorder and confusion, which is entirely inconsistent with the principles

of order and regularity pertaining to the Church.

Therefore, it becomes the duty of the Trustees, in union, to examine and inspect all articles intended for market; that nothing of inferior quality or defective in workmanship, nor any thing superfluous, or improper in its nature, should be exposed for sale or imposed upon the buyer. And it is also their duty to see that no article is brought into the Church which cannot be sanctioned by the Ministry and Elders, and be justly appropriated to the use of a consecrated people, or to the purposes of christian charity and benevolence.

As good order and regulation is the strength and support of every civil institution, so they are essentially necessary in all the concerns of the Church, and much depends on a strict and careful attention to these things. And as the governing power is vested in the Ministry, and supported by the eldership, it is essentially necessary that the Trustees, in all their concerns, should maintain a proper union and good understanding with the Ministry and Elders.

Question 14.th Is there no provision made in the Church for members, particularly, to exercise their own judgment

and economy in acquiring property for their own private use? and may they not reserve a little portion of their time for that purpose?

Ans. Among the first followers of Christ there was but one bag to contain the means of supplying their wants. This is a sufficient example for all self-denying souls, who having food and raiment, are therewith content. But where selfish nature has any ascendancy, and the wants of the individual are dictated by a vain fancy, it would doubtless be very pleasing and gratifying for each to have a little bag of his own, and a little time to himself to work at some little business, in order to make a little money to put into his little bag, to purchase his little notions; and then go on to buy and sell a little among his little-minded associates. But such little deviations from good Gospel order, if indulged, would lead to much evil, and eventually convert the whole consecrated interest of the Church into private property. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

The articles which are most likely to be sought after in this way, are such as perhaps would be prohibited from church members, if submitted to the proper judges; such as could not in reason

be procured for all; articles which only serve to feed the vanity of an empty mind, without supplying any real want, and which, if admitted as necessities, and equally procured for all, would soon deprive the Church not only of the necessary means of affording comfortable support to the members, but also of answering the important calls of benevolence and charity.

Question 15.th But is it not necessary at least to indulge ^{Some} ~~young people~~ in such things until they come to riper understanding?

Ans. If there were any real necessity of blending youth and children with adults in the Church, such indulgences might answer. Altho children may be brought up in, and under the care and government of the Church, yet it is adults only that can in reality be admitted as church members. Youth and children ought to be kept in their proper place and order, as under parental authority and guardianship, till they come to the age of maturity. But let such a childish spirit once get a seat in the Church, its first effort would be to get an independent right to the property vested in family elders and deacons, and then subject

them to the necessity of complying with those petitions to which considerate persons must turn a deaf ear, and of procuring such things as a childish fancy would dictate. And eventually, if family leaders should fail of rendering satisfaction, the next step of an individual led by such a sense, would most probably be, to reject at once all authority & good order, and place himself where he could give full scope to the cravings of his own mind and will, without restraint from any quarter.

Answer ~~Therefore~~, to maintain the very existence of a true Gospel Church, the articles of agreement must extend to a plain, unequivocal and solemn relinquishment of all personal claim to any part of the consecrated interest, and of all charges or accounts for property or service devoted or rendered to the support of the same; and a total and final acquittance of the Church from debt, damage or blame, or any consideration whatever, relating to their membership in the Church, or any transaction whatever with their fellow members. It is necessary that the agreement be explicit and well understood; that in the original compact, the leading character or characters in the Ministry, and the principal Trustees, be designated by name; that their power and authority should descend to their successors in office and trust; and that the rights and privileges of the members,

in the use and enjoyment of the fruits of their labors, be plainly and understandingly expressed, as the consideration or inducement to the member to devote and consecrate his time and talents in that way. And it is also necessary that the members express and confirm their assent and consent to the terms.

The foregoing are the most essential matters contained in the written Covenant of a Gospel Church, possessing a Gospel interest, and supported by a consecrated and united people; and such are the matters which call for a due consideration & correct understanding from the Church in particular, the Society in general, & from all others who feel interested in the subject.

The general doctrines of the Society, and the requirements of the Gospel on all who desire to know the way of salvation, have been published to the world; so that there is no need of recapitulating our common faith, to show the way into the Church. The Society of Believers is known to exist; but what is the way into the sanctuary or most holy place? This is opened by the Church Covenant, which recognizes a living Ministry, the object of a direct faith, and living members, whose love and confidence embrace each other in the closest bonds of charity. It defines the various lots and offices in the Church,

unfolds the order and relation of members to each other, and confirms the mutual dedication of their persons, property and services, to the sacred and charitable purpose of supporting the institution.

Many less important matters are expressed or implied in the Covenant; but these are the sum and substance, the principles and life of a Gospel Church, which if not preserved in proper order, will expose the body to all the plagues and maladies incident to churches and saved communities of past ages. Hence it becomes an important object, to guard the fundamental principles of church order with the most sacred scrupulosity. Therefore, let the number of those who are united in the Church be great or small, it is necessary to see that all are sound in faith and principle.

It is really painful to find unqualified persons who have enrolled themselves, unpurified, into the bonds of the Covenant: into the true nature and spirit of the Covenant they cannot enter. Indeed it often becomes a cause of excessive tribulation to the faithful, to see men possessing property or useful talents, enter into those covenant engagements which they are not properly prepared to fulfil, with a view of gaining an honorable standing among Believers. But seeing that such evils have sometimes happened, instead of being solicitous to multiply church members,

or fearful of debaring truly qualified souls from that privilege, our watchfulness should be directed to guard against the danger of admitting corrupters.

We should consider it better for the Church, for society and for mankind, to have ten kept out who might safely be admitted in, than to have one admitted in who ought to be kept out, and who will eventually get out, and perhaps do more injury in one month than ten could repair in a year: we do not mean in personal abuse, or the ruin of property; but in disseminating false reports and accusations, dishonoring the Gospel, sowing discord among neighbors, and disturbing the peace and happiness of society.

We are perfectly willing and desirous that all persons should have a full understanding of the nature of the Church Covenant before they ever attempt to sign it. Nothing could be more inconsistent than for professed members of the Church to practice any deception, to gain either property or service which was not honestly conveyed from a consecrated heart. Such property or service could be no blessing to a consecrated people. It appears very inconsistent & improper for any one to attempt to consecrate his property, unless he has previously determined in

his own mind to consecrate himself, soul, body and spirit, to the service of God forever, and has really done it, as far as it was in his power.

Every rank and class of people, both in civil society and within the faith of the Gospel, can be locally accommodated according to their real character, state and standing. It is needless for any people to raise objections against this thing or that in the order and government of the Church: for this order is not imposed upon any one: no one is dragged into it by force, nor chained there, that they cannot get out. All who come into the Church, do it of their own free consent and choice; they enter by their own confidential agreement. If the institution does not suit them, and they chuse to run the risk of violating their own solemn covenant, they can peaceably withdraw, at any time; but as the violation in such a case is an act of their own, why should they turn about & try to destroy the institution?

An apostate from any sacred or charitable institution to which he has solemnly contracted to devote himself and services, is, of all beings, the most ungenerous, unmanly and ungrateful, in attempting to recover debt or damage from that institution, in consideration of his having been a member,

a contributor, or any thing connected therewith.

Men of property, who wish to retain their right in it, are not obliged; by any law of God or man, to surrender it to the Church. But is it not trifling with all laws, both human and divine, for any one to give, grant and convey property to the Church, or to any other sacred & charitable institution, for sacred and charitable purposes, and afterwards turn about and prosecute the institution for a recantation of his solemn contract?

If single men, possessing useful talents and faculties, wish to acquire property for themselves, have they not every chance for employment in the bounds of common society? where the accumulation of property is the general object of pursuit? Those who expect wages for their work, ought to contract with those who give wages. But if they contract with a trustee of the Church, to work on church principles, with what face can they turn about and try to compel the Trustee to violate his own trust, and pay a demand, in the name of a debt, which was never contracted?

The nature of the Covenant does not prevent

the Trustees from bestowing a gift, as an act of charity, upon any one who withdraws, no more than upon other objects of charity; but they cannot bestow it as a reward to satisfy any legal demand of debt or damage; because no such obligation has been incurred, nor has the person any right, by any law of God or man, to make any such demand.

Property and labor are the principal objects at the disposal of man; and they are his untill disposed of according to his own free consent and voluntary choice. Man, in his original and first state of manhood, is a free agent. Every individual who comes to the years of freedom, having property of any kind, has a lawful right to chuse whom he will serve, and to what use or purpose his property shall be appropriated. But after his choice is once freely made, and confirmed by a covenant promise, or written agreement, he is no longer a free man, as to the obligations of his contract, but is bound by his promise to fulfil his engagements. If he has put his property out of his hands by a solemn contract; if it is

legally conveyed to another, and the right is actually and bona fide vested in another, he cannot take back that right at pleasure, nor use that property as his own.

Any man in a free country may chuse his employment, and either set up an establishment of his own, and work for himself, or hire himself to another for wages, or volunteer his services for the benefit of his country, or devote himself to the service of the Church. It is immaterial, as to the validity of his contract, what choice he makes, if that choice be free and voluntary, and legally ratified & confirmed. His legal engagements, whatever they may be, are not to be violated.

These things ought to be well considered by all who expect to have any concern with the Church Covenant. It must be well understood that private property cannot be admitted into the Church consistently with the spirit and principles of the Covenant. The nature and obligations of the church Covenant are so plainly stated, and so well understood by every member, that we have no reason to believe that any one ever attempted to give up and consecrate his property with any expectation of receiving it again. Nor can any one who has solemnly consecrated him^{self}

and services, ever have any reason to expect wages for his work, when it is well known that all are united in one interest, and work for the common benefit, agreeable to their own faith, and according to the express stipulations of the Covenant.

These general rules are too well known to require a lengthy comment. Yet while time is rolling on, and the Church is experiencing the common vicissitudes inseparable from mortality; while some are passing out of their visible lot and relation, and others coming in to fill up their places, it becomes necessary to recognize those principles and rules which are not affected by times and seasons, and to establish them upon a permanent foundation.

