

THE
Presbyterian Magazine.

VOL. 1.

MARCH, 1843.

No. 3.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

IN the original language of the New Testament the word—*Ecclesia*—translated Church, literally signifies any kind of Assembly, political, or religious, confused or regular. In the states of ancient Greece, the name, *Ecclesia*, was given to any assembly of people, called by a public herald, to meet at a certain time, in a place, either named in the proclamation, or generally understood,—to consult together respecting some business of general interest to the community. The historian of the Acts of the Apostles, in accommodation to Grecian custom, gives the same name to the riotous concourse of the idolatrous Ephesians in the theatre, occasioned by the diminution of the votaries of Diana, through the instrumentality of Paul and his co-adjutors: “For the assembly—*ecclesia*—was confused”—(ch. 19. 32). He also gives the same name to the ordinary meeting of the civil court, to which the town-clerk referred, when he said, “It shall be determined by a lawful assembly”—*ecclesia*—(ch. 19. 39). We cannot, therefore, from the literal import and common use of the word, *ecclesia*, amongst the Greeks, derive much assistance in solving the question, What is the Church?

The name, *Ecclesia*, is, however, given by the Greek Translators of the Old Testament Scriptures, to the assembly of the Israelites, called to meet in one place, at certain seasons of the year, to celebrate the solemn festivals of their national religion. With this translation of the Scriptures, our Lord and his Apostles were intimately acquainted; and from it they borrowed *Ecclesia*, to designate the religious society which they founded. We are not told, why they did not prefer *synagoga*, which literally signifies, gathered together, and which among the Jews designated their religious societies. It may be, they preferred *Ecclesia*, because it was a term much more extensively known, and, at least, much more popular beyond the limits of Judea, than *synagoga*: moreover, it served to distinguish the societies of Christians from the synagogues of the Jews. But whatever may have been the reason of their preferring *Ecclesia* to *Synagoga*, we have no difficulty in ascertaining, that they meant it to designate the singular religious society which they founded and organized, and which we, in our own language call—*The Church*. But we have not yet, answered the question, What is the Church?

The meaning of the word Church, is more limited and precise in the English language, than the corresponding word in the Greek: it being always used to designate a religious society, or the house in which the