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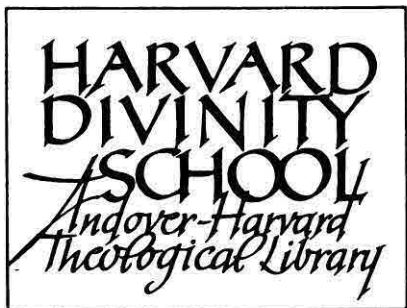
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**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**CONGREGATIONALISM,**  
**INCLUDING A**  
**MANUAL OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE,**  
**TOGETHER WITH THE**  
**CAMBRIDGE PLATFORM,**  
**ADOPTED IN 1648,**  
**AND**  
**THE CONFSSION OF FAITH,**  
**ADOPTED IN 1680.**



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**BOSTON :**  
**BENJAMIN PERKINS & CO.**  
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TO THE  
**Congregational Ministers and Churches**  
IN MASSACHUSETTS.

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REVEREND AND BELOVED,

Our having been chosen as part of a Committee of seven, and afterwards as a Sub-committee, was the occasion of our writing what we here call a Report, which in this manner we now address to you. We have been aware, that we could not, in any of the ordinary methods, make the Report to more than a small proportion of ministers, and to only a few of the great multitude of church members. We have therefore concluded, with the advice of many of our brethren, and we trust with the approbation of all, to make use of the printing press, for the purpose of presenting our Report to the whole body of Congregational ministers and churches in Massachusetts, and to those in other States, so far as they may be disposed to receive it. But in all this, we have acted with the full understanding, that we have no more authority or right in the matter, than any other individuals. The fact of our being a Committee, we regard as only the

occasion of our presenting the subject to the consideration of our brethren. Other men might have undertaken such a work, and have accomplished more than we have. But who would have been likely to do it, without some such movement as has influenced us? In this publication, it is our wish to be regarded *as individual ministers*. All the use we make of our appointment as a Committee, is, that we undertake the business without embarrassment, and proceed in it without the consciousness of any impropriety.

With fraternal love and confidence, we submit the result of our humble efforts to your disposal.

In behalf of the Sub-committee,

LEONARD WOODS, *Chairman*.

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**REPORT**

**ON**

**CONGREGATIONALISM.**

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## REPORT ON CONGREGATIONALISM.

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THE particular object of the Committee, appointed in Boston, May 29, 1844, on the subject of Congregationalism, was "*to take into consideration what measures are necessary for the re-affirmation and maintenance of the principles and spirit of Congregationalism.*"\* The subcommittee sent a copy of their Unfinished Report to each of the district associations, for the purpose of obtaining their brotherly assistance in revising and finishing the Report. Such assistance has been afforded in the returns which have been made to the committee from seventeen associations. In preparing the final copy of their Report, the committee have availed themselves of the many valuable suggestions made to them by associations and by individual ministers. And they indulge the hope that they have been able so to re-construct and improve the Report, that it will meet the views and wishes of their brethren, as expressed in their communications to the committee. Indeed there appears to us to be much more ground to believe, than was previously supposed, that Congregationalists in Massachusetts may come to a cordial agreement in regard to all the important points of ecclesiastical polity. If the measures which have been pursued have brought to view some *differences* of opinion, they have also shown how those differences may be disposed

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\* The Committee consisted of the Rev. Drs. Woods, Humphrey, Snell, Shepard, Cooley and Storrs, and Rev. Parsons Cooke. At the first meeting of the Committee, all were present, except Drs. Shepard and Cooley. Rev. Drs. Woods and Storrs and Rev. Parsons Cooke were chosen as the Subcommittee.

of, and how far Congregationalists are already of the same mind and judgment. And if a spirit of candor and a love of union shall prevail among them in a suitable degree, there is no reason to doubt, that they will come at length to a substantial agreement on all questions of real moment.

In considering "what measures are necessary for the re-affirmation and maintenance of the principles and spirit of Congregationalism," we cannot overlook the importance of clearly apprehending what those principles are, which are to be re-affirmed and maintained. And with the means of information which we possess, this cannot be a difficult task. The only Platform of church government which has ever been adopted by the ministers and churches of this Commonwealth, is the well known Cambridge Platform. This must be regarded as the basis and standard of Congregationalism. For although this Platform has been much neglected; and although certain usages, not authorized by the Platform, have worked themselves into our ecclesiastical affairs; it is still true that Congregationalists generally adhere to the *essential principles of the Platform*. And no scheme of church polity, which is essentially at variance with those principles, can meet the approbation of enlightened and judicious Congregationalists. In our statement of ecclesiastical principles and rules, we have kept our eye upon that ancient and excellent Platform, and have aimed to conform to its essential principles.

But although the principles of Congregationalism, as held by our Puritan Fathers, are plainly set forth in the Platform, which was adopted in 1648, they are not at present sufficiently understood and maintained by our churches generally. Is it not then high time to awake to a serious consideration of the subject, and to inquire what can be done to remove the evils which have come upon us in consequence of our declining, in various respects, from the ways of our Puritan Fathers.

We have turned our thoughts particularly to the following things, as being important and necessary in order that the essential principles of Congregationalism may be re-affirmed and maintained by our churches.

1. First it is important and necessary *that the funda-*

*mental principles of Congregationalism, and the rules of church government resulting from them, should be well defined and firmly established.* The Congregational system is contained in the Platform. But the Platform is an ancient document; and though it was the product of men of powerful intellects, after much thought and experience, and though the Puritan Fathers deemed it well suited to the wants of the churches in their day; it evidently needs revising, in order to fit it for general use at the present time. It is agreed on all hands, that it contains some principles which cannot now be adopted. It is clear too that it has some obscurities which ought to be removed, and some deficiencies which ought to be supplied. A revised edition of the Platform, freed from all ambiguities, and fully adapted to present use, or a *manual of discipline* derived from it, would be of great use to ministers, especially to young ministers, as a guide and help to them in the discharge of their various duties. It is important also for every Congregational church. For how can any church, or its individual members, avoid mistakes and irregularities in matters of discipline, unless they have a system of principles and rules, which has been derived from Scripture and experience, and which they can regard as a safe directory in ecclesiastical proceedings? And how can the churches act harmoniously together, and enjoy the benefits of Christian fellowship, unless they have a Platform which clearly points out the duties they owe to each other, and the manner in which those duties are to be performed.

Our Puritan Fathers, whom we delight to honor, felt the necessity of such principles and rules, and in the year 1648, embodied them in a Platform. And from time to time they re-affirmed that Platform, as their Directory. Now such a Directory is as necessary for us, as it was for them. Indeed the necessity of it is the more urgent, in proportion to the increased number and extent of our churches and the prevalence of other systems. We do indeed hold that Christ is our Lawgiver, and that no man and no number of men can properly undertake to legislate for the churches. But it is important for us to have a clear understanding of the laws which Christ has given us. And if, in any thing, he has left it to us to proceed

according to our own judgment; it is certainly important that we should take pains to use our judgment right.

2. In order that ministers and churches may re-affirm and maintain to any good purpose the principles and spirit of Congregationalism, it is *important that they should come to a substantial agreement, and should in all material points, adopt the same system of ecclesiastical principles and rules.* Without this, how can they maintain a proper fellowship with one another? If some churches proceed in one way, and some in another, they will not only lose the benefit of co-operation, but will be likely to clash with each other; and instead of affording mutual aid and support, as they ought, they will often occasion embarrassment and trouble to each other.

“Such looseness, neglect and disagreement,” as now exist among us, “are neither seemly nor profitable; nor would they in other communities be tolerated. Every human society, that is permanent in its nature and great design, should, as far as practicable, be governed by definite, settled, and well known rules. And where communities, like our churches, are associated, and members of them are frequently transferred from one to another, inconvenience, dissatisfaction and offence are likely to result from the application of principles and rules, about which there is ignorance, or in respect to which there are different views and habits of feeling. Where wholesome laws are definite and known, they are more apt to be approved, and are more readily obeyed; and when broken, the offender is more easily made sensible of his fault, and is therefore more likely to forsake it.” \*

There is, at present, among Congregationalists, a want of entire harmony in sentiment and action respecting the principles of ecclesiastical polity. And it is well said in the valuable communication just quoted, that “a restoration of such harmony cannot reasonably be expected, except by *a convention of pastors and other delegates from the churches.* Such a convention or synod, wisely called, and not over-tasking itself with reforms, might reasonably be expected to agree on principles and rules

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\* A quotation from the communication of Worcester Central Association to the Committee.

of discipline, that would receive a cordial welcome in the bosom of the churches generally; and if such a work should be done, it would add not a little to their credit, order, strength, comfort and usefulness."\*

We have referred to the want of the necessary harmony among Congregationalists. They do indeed profess, in some sort, to receive the Cambridge Platform as their standard. But the Platform is, in several respects, understood differently by different ministers and churches; and none of them conform to all its provisions. Various writers, particularly Upham, Mitchell, Punchard and some others, have published books of great value, setting forth what they understood to be the principles of Congregationalism. In most cases, these writers agree, in some they differ. But Congregationalists have not adopted the views of either. Is it not then important that we should make it our object to come to an agreement as to the principles and rules of church government? If there are passages in the Platform, which all regard as inadmissible at the present day, let us say what those passages are, and let the Platform be so revised and modified that we can unitedly adopt it as our directory, and can govern our ecclesiastical proceedings in accordance with it. It would be found that a judicious revision of the Platform and a convenient arrangement of the rules of our ecclesiastical polity would as truly promote the order and welfare of our churches, as the late revision and arrangement of our civil laws has promoted the order and prosperity of civil society. There is no more reason to think that Congregational churches can have order and prosperity without a system of definite and written rules in which they agree, than that the different parts of the Commonwealth can have order and prosperity without a code of well defined civil laws, written and published for common use. Is it not then the manifest duty of Congregational ministers and churches to determine, delib-

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\* Such a convention as that above named, has been spoken of with favor by many Congregationalists, both ministers and laymen. And it has been often suggested that, with proper attention, the way might be prepared for such a convention to meet in 1848, the second centennial from the time when the *Cambridge Platform* was adopted. The idea of a convention or synod of Congregational ministers and churches at that time, has struck the minds of all, so far as we know, with peculiar satisfaction.

erately and unitedly, what the principles of Congregationalism are, and then publicly to re-affirm them, and in all their ecclesiastical proceedings to carry them into practice? But if it is judged best, as it may be, that the Platform should remain as it is; then it is thought that a digest of rules, drawn from the Platform and from approved usages, presented in the form of a *Manual of Discipline*, would be of essential benefit to the churches. The want of agreement in church polity has been very disadvantageous to the cause of Congregationalism, and, if suffered to remain, will doubtless be more and more disadvantageous.

Particular churches have been sensible of the evil just mentioned, and have framed a set of rules for themselves. But the rules, adopted by a single church, however just and proper they may be, cannot have the salutary influence which they would have, if they should be adopted by other churches generally, and if the benefits of co-operation and mutual support should be realized, according to the provisions of our Platform, ch. 15.

The want of uniform and definite rules is manifest in regard to *the treatment of church members who are chargeable with offences*. Suppose an offender is excommunicated. In present circumstances he has it in his power to give great trouble to the church, and frequently to evade the force of its most solemn acts. The church claims, and that justly, the right to discipline its own members. At the same time, any one who is under censure has, by common consent, the right of appeal to an ecclesiastical council. Now this right of appeal, and the inherent right of the church, may be so defined and adjusted, as not to clash with one another. But at present we have no effectual provision to sustain a church in the exercise of its right, and to bring the discipline of an offender to a final and peaceful issue. The church may, at the request of one under censure, consent to a mutual council, and that mutual council may approve the doings of the church. But in present circumstances has not the excommunicant a right to say, that the result of the council is mere advice, and that he will not accept it? And what rule or usage is there to prevent his demanding a *second* mutual council, and a *third*? And in case of a

refusal on the part of the church, what can hinder him from calling an *ex parte* council? And it is well known that even after a church has consented to one, or more than one mutual council, an *ex parte* council may come in, and, instead of sustaining the church in the exercise of its rights, may nullify its most righteous acts; and by receiving an offender who is under the highest ecclesiastical censure, to their fellowship, may give countenance to the commission of offences in other members, and trample under foot the honor and authority of the church. How important and how easy it is for the churches to agree upon a rule, which shall shut the door against these disorders, and shall effectually sustain every church in the exercise of its rights, and at the same time provide a remedy for the injustice of any of its acts towards its members. Congregational churches pretend not to be infallible; and they are willing to grant to any member who complains of injustice, the right of appeal to an ecclesiastical council. All that seems necessary is, that they should determine, by a united act, how the appeal shall be made, and how the case of discipline shall be terminated. Let it be settled by common agreement, whether an excommunicated member, if he requests it, shall be entitled to appeal to a mutual council; and then what shall be the influence of that council's result. If the council sustains the act of the church, shall the excommunicant be entitled to a second and third appeal, or shall the act of the church, thus supported by a mutual council, be regarded as final? On the contrary, if the council *disapproves* the act of the church, and judges that the member who makes complaint, has been injured, and ought to be restored; shall *such* a decision of the council be final? Or shall it still lie with the church to determine by its own act, how the case shall be treated? And shall this act of the *church* be final, leaving no room for the excommunicated person to make any further appeal? Or, in such circumstances, shall he have the right of a second appeal, and a third? And if the church say they have done enough, and will not consent to any farther appeal, shall the excommunicant have a right to an *ex parte* council, and shall it be deemed regular and proper for ministers and churches to form such

a council? The great thing wanted is, that the churches should come to a definite agreement on this point, so that they may support each other in the exercise of their inherent right to discipline their own members, and may scrupulously avoid whatever would in any way interfere with that right. If this matter is left unsettled, what prospect is there of efficient discipline and mutual harmony and love among the churches? And how can the fundamental principle of Congregationalism be maintained, if the power of discipline is wrested from the church, and wielded by others who choose to act in concert with an offender? And who can think it right that any church, in its endeavors to discharge its most difficult and painful duties, should be hindered or discouraged by those sister churches, who ought always to afford the most friendly countenance and aid?

Again. The want of uniform and definite rules is manifest in regard to *the discipline of ministers chargeable with immorality or heresy.*

A Christian minister, whose character and conduct are so inseparably connected with the interests of Christ's kingdom, should certainly be subject to the inspection of his brethren, and, in some proper way, should be admonished by them, and deposed from the ministry when the case requires it; and, when unjustly accused, should be able to avail himself of their protection and support. It would be a great evil for private members of the church to be free from responsibility to their brethren. But if ministers of the gospel should be thus free from responsibility, the evil would be still greater. According to the general practice at the present time, a church may complain of their pastor for any offence, and bring him for trial before a mutual council. But they may neglect their duty in this respect. And in that case, how shall the offender be called to account? Suppose him guilty of gross immorality or heresy. And suppose that notwithstanding this, he is still sustained by his church. His brethren in the ministry, and in the neighboring churches, may be grieved at his conduct. But what ecclesiastical rule or usage is there, which would authorize them to bring him before a council for trial, or in any way to deal with him for his offence? Take another case,—that of a

regularly ordained minister, not connected as a pastor with any church, though still active in the work of the ministry; and suppose him guilty of flagrant immorality. Is it not a manifest defect in the present condition of Congregationalists, that there is no way agreed upon among them, in which such a minister can be subjected to ecclesiastical discipline? It is indeed true, that individuals may withdraw fellowship from him. But ought they to do this without giving him a hearing? Does not truth and justice require, that he should have a fair trial? And is it not important to the interests of the churches, that they should agree upon some definite method in which such a trial may be instituted?

There is also a manifest defect in our present ecclesiastical state in regard to the fellowship of the churches, and the manner in which they are to treat one another when offences occur.

Congregational churches have always professed to hold fellowship with each other. And the Platform (ch. 15.) points out several ways in which that fellowship is to be maintained. And in various respects it has actually been maintained; and the benefits of such fellowship have been experienced. But do we carry out fully into practice the provisions of the Platform and the principles of the New Testament in regard to the fellowship and the mutual responsibility of the churches? The Platform provides, that if any public offence is found in a church, other churches are to deal with it in the way of admonition, and finally, if the case so requires, in the way of withdrawing fellowship. Is it not important that the churches should determine whether they will hold to this provision of the Platform?—and if they do, that they should agree upon the method in which they will maintain this inspection over one another?

It is also desirable and important that the Congregational churches should be agreed in the adoption of a *Confession of Faith*. This was a main point with those who framed the Platform. In 1648, they unanimously adopted the following vote, namely; “The Synod, having perused and considered with much gladness of heart and thankfulness to God, the Confession of Faith published of late by the Reverend Assembly in England,

do judge it to be very holy, orthodox and judicious in all matters of faith, and do therefore freely and fully consent thereto, for the substance thereof." And they afterwards expressed their approval of the same confession of faith at different times and in various ways. If the ministers and churches of Massachusetts are united, as we trust they are, in receiving the great principles of religion which are contained in the word of God, and which are distinctly stated in the above named confession of faith; why should they not, for the honor of their religion, publicly express their union?

Again. It is important that Congregationalists should be agreed in regard *to the character of those ministers and churches that shall be chosen to constitute mutual councils.*

It is important also that they should settle the question, whether a *minister* or a *church*, censured by a council, shall have the right of appeal to another council; and if such a right is allowed, in what manner the second council shall be constituted and the appeal be made; and also whether any appeal from the decision of the second council shall be deemed proper.

The *ex parte* council that is deemed exceptionable in principle and of bad tendency in practice, is one that is called by a person who has been regularly tried for an offence by the church to which he belongs, and cut off from their fellowship. Now all occasion for such a council may be effectually prevented by a definite provision, agreed upon and adhered to by the churches, that an excommunicated person shall have the right of appeal to a mutual council, and that the case shall be terminated by the result of that council, or else by the act of the church after receiving that result.

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After the foregoing remarks, we proceed to state what in our opinion are the chief principles of church polity which are contained or implied in the Cambridge Platform, and in other well known writings of our Puritan Fathers. And we would here say, what we wish may be fully understood, that whatever statement we make, we do it merely that it may be considered and acted upon by those to whom it belongs, that is, the ministers and churches of Massachusetts. *They* are to determine what are the essential principles of Congregationalism which they will affirm and maintain. And if the part which we, as a committee, have been called to perform, may be the means of turning their attention more particularly to what the Scriptures reveal and what our fathers taught relative to church government, and of inducing them to act unitedly and efficiently on the subject; the great object of our efforts will be accomplished.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CONGREGATIONALISM.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Supreme Lawgiver and Ruler of the church. And no one has any rightful power or authority in the church, except what the Lord Jesus has given him in his word. Neither the church at large, nor any branch of it, can properly be held under obligation to submit or yield obedience to any ruler, civil or ecclesiastical, except in conformity with the instructions of the New Testament.

2. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is our only infallible rule in regard to the general constitution and government of the church, as well as in regard to all other subjects. By this rule we are to examine the opinions and practices of uninspired men, ancient and modern. So far as any writings of human origin coincide with Scripture, or help us to understand its instructions, they are to be gratefully received. But whoever and whatever differs from the Bible, is to be rejected. In this respect, we differ from all those, who regard the writings

of the early Christian Fathers, the decisions of Councils or the judgment of any uninspired men, as constituting, in whole or in part, the rule of our faith, or as possessing any ultimate authority over our conscience, either as to the doctrines of religion, the worship of God, or the government of his church.

3. *Cambridge Platform*, together with other writings and public acts of our Puritan Fathers explanatory of the Platform, is to be recognized as exhibiting the essential principles of Congregationalists in regard to ecclesiastical polity.

4. There is, according to the Scriptures, only one order in the gospel ministry. Ministers may indeed differ from each other as to knowledge, piety, and usefulness: and some of them may be intrusted with business of preëminent importance. But they are all equal in office. No one is invested with authority over others; and no one is subjected to the control of others.

5. While the leading principles of Church Government are clearly made known in the word of God, and are to be received as the unalterable constitution of the church; the business of applying these general principles to different cases, and framing by-laws for the regulation of public worship and church discipline, belongs to the churches, and is to be executed according to their sober judgment and discretion, provided that they take care not to violate or neglect anything settled by the word of God. (See Platform, ch. 1.)

6. A congregation or society of Christians, bound together by solemn covenant, maintaining the great truths of Christianity, and attending together to the public worship of God and the administration of gospel ordinances by its regularly authorized officers, is a true and complete church of Christ, and has power within itself to conduct its own concerns; and is under no subjection or responsibility to any other church, except that which is mutual, and which is enjoined by the word of God;—(1 Peter, v. 5.) “*Yea, all of you be subject one to another.*”

7. It belongs, of right, to the individual members of every church to choose their own Pastor, to discipline offenders, and to transact all other business appertaining to them as a particular church. When regularly assem-

bled, they are to deliberate and act, and by a majority of votes to decide every question which properly comes before them.

8. Congregational churches, though they are "*distinct*, and therefore may not be confounded one with another, and *equal*, and therefore have no dominion one over another,"\* yet are not *separate* bodies, but sustain a mutual relation, as servants of the same Lord, and branches of the same spiritual kingdom, and are bound to maintain Christian fellowship with each other, to watch over each other in love and faithfulness, and to do all in their power to protect each other's rights, to encourage each other in the discharge of duty, and in all proper ways to promote each other's peace and prosperity.

9. In order that the fellowship existing among the churches may effectually accomplish its objects, it is important that the churches should agree upon a definite plan of intercourse, and should determine in what manner they are to watch over each other, in what respects they are responsible to each other, and in what ways they are to protect each other's rights, and promote each other's welfare;—and also what shall be the conditions of their fellowship, and when and how it shall be ended.

10. As the community of churches is interested in the character and influence of gospel ministers; every Congregational minister, whether he is a pastor or not, is to be considered as having a real and responsible connection with Congregational churches and pastors. Accordingly, either the members or the pastors of Congregational churches, after properly dealing with him in private, may, in a regular manner, prefer charges against him before an ecclesiastical council, convened according to rule, for his trial.

11. Any member of a church, who feels himself aggrieved by any act of the church, shall have the right to appeal to a mutual council.

12. Synods, duly assembled, and rightly proceeding according to the Scriptures, are an ordinance of God. And it belongeth unto synods and councils to determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience; to clear

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\* See Platform ch. 15, and Upham's Ratio Disciplinæ, pp. 37, 43, 174-6, and 206.

from the Scriptures directions for the worship of God and the government of the church ; to bear testimony against mal-administration and corruption in *any particular church*, and to take proper measures for the reformation thereof.\* (See Platform, ch. 15, Sec. 1 and 4.)

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\* Synods, or larger councils, here spoken of nearly in the words of the Platform, are ecclesiastical bodies constituted of Pastors and Delegates of churches in a State, or some large extent of country, and assembled for the purpose of consulting the more general interests of the churches.

In present circumstances, Congregationalism must be expected to undergo a rigorous examination. We are surrounded by various denominations, whose zeal to advance themselves will prompt them to search out whatever is faulty or imperfect in our system. But the essential principles of Congregationalism have no occasion to shrink from scrutiny. Though in many respects we agree with the other branches of Protestant Christendom; in some respects we differ from them. But we are not aware of any reason why we should wish to avoid a careful comparison between them and ourselves. We have no fear that the most thorough sifting and weighing of the essential principles of Congregationalism would be otherwise than advantageous to that system. What seems to be necessary is, that the genuine principles of our denomination, together with the rules of discipline, should be definitely stated, and arranged in proper order, and that ministers and churches should unitedly adopt and maintain them. This, with the divine blessing, is what is wanted to give increasing prosperity to Congregational churches, and to recommend their peculiar principles to the approbation of intelligent and candid men.

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It is in compliance with the wishes of many, that we have taken pains to prepare the following draft of a Manual of Church Discipline. We consider it as very imperfect; and our design in laying it before our brethren is to call their attention to the subject, and to leave it with them, by additions and other alterations, to complete what we have begun. There has been a decided opinion expressed by many associations, of the desirableness and importance of such a manual. And in the present draft we have made various modifications of the one before submitted to our brethren, in conformity with their free

suggestions ; so that they will find here none of the passages which were considered as particularly exceptionable in the unfinished report. Our object has been to prepare a Manual, which, when completed, will have a prospect of being adopted by the united act of Congregationalists in Massachusetts, and if it may be, beyond Massachusetts.

# A MANUAL

OF

## CHURCH PRINCIPLES AND DISCIPLINE.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

1. The essential principles of church government are found in the word of God, and are intended to be perpetual. And it is not left in the power of man to alter them.

2. Besides these *essentials*, there are necessary *circumstantials*, as that of time, place, &c., which are left to be ordered by the sober judgment of Christians; though not in such a way, as to allow men to thrust their own inventions upon the church. They are to be guarded by general limitations, in that they must be done decently and in order, and to edification.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Acts xv. 28: Matt. xv. 9: 1 Cor. xiv. 26, 40.

### CHAPTER II.

#### NATURE OF THE CHURCH.

1. The church of Christ, taken in the large sense, embraces all those that are effectually called, and renewed in the spirit of their minds, all that have died in faith, all real Christians now living, and all who shall hereafter live upon earth.

2. The visible church embraces the whole number of those, who maintain a profession of faith in connection with the followers of Christ.

3. A single church consists of a company of visible Christians,<sup>1</sup> united into one body by a covenant, for maintaining the worship of God, the ordinances of Christ's house, and mutual Christian fellowship. And it is a distinctive feature of a *Congregational* church, that its members both claim and exercise the right of disciplining offenders, and transacting all the business pertaining to its own interests as a particular church.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 2.

### CHAPTER III.

#### CHURCH MEMBERS.

1. The members in full of a church are such, as are called to be saints—such as make a credible profession of faith and repentance, and live according to such a profession.

2. The number of persons in a church ought not ordinarily to be more than can conveniently meet for worship in one place. And in conformity with this principle, Christ and his apostles appointed no ordinary officers in the church, but those charged with the care of particular congregations.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### FORM OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH.

1. Those who are qualified to be members of a church do not constitute a church, before they are properly organized into a visible body.

2. The instrument by which individual believers are constituted one body in a church, is a *confession of faith*\* in Christ and in the principles of his gospel, together with

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\* This confession of faith should be full and explicit enough to convey the sum of the Christian doctrines, clearly distinguished from their opposites. If a more explicit formulary of faith is now required, than was required in the days of the apostles, it is because so many methods of evasion have been invented, that it now requires more words to give an intelligible and sure expression of the same thing, and because the temptations to a false profession are increased.

A Christian profession, according to the gospel, is a profession of *faith*, or of one's belief in the truths of the gospel; Heb. x. 23. It is a profession of obedience or subjection to the gospel; 2 Cor. ix. 13. It is a profession of godliness; 1 Tim. ii. 10. And it is a profession of the name of Christ; and of his bearing to us all the relations and offices which his name imports.

a *covenant*, wherein they mutually agree to give themselves up to the Lord, and unitedly to observe his ordinances.

3. When a company of believers purpose to gather into a church fellowship it is requisite for their safer proceeding and the maintaining the communion of churches, that they signify their intent unto the neighbor churches, walking according unto the order of the gospel, and desire their presence, and help, and right hand of fellowship, which they ought readily to give unto them when there is no just cause to except against their proceedings. Camb. Plat. xv. 3.

## CHAPTER V.

### CHURCH OFFICERS.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is the supreme Head and Ruler of the church, and no one has any lawful authority in the church, except that which he has received from Christ.

2. Though a church may exist without officers, yet officers are necessary to its well being and its complete action as a church.

3. The extraordinary officers, which Christ appointed for the first planting of the church, ceased when their work was done. So that the Scripture gives no directions about the choice and duties of apostles, prophets and evangelists, as it does about those of elders, or bishops. Hence there is now but one order of ministers in the church; called in Scripture elders, or bishops.

4. The office of an *Elder*, or *Bishop*, embraces the duties of a pastor of the flock, and of a ruler in the church.

5. The duties of an elder or bishop, as a *pastor*, consist in the preaching of the word, the administration of divine ordinances, a superintendence, and, as far as may be, a personal execution of the subordinate forms of spiritual instruction, visiting the people, especially the sick and the afflicted, and extending a general watch and care over the concerns of the flock.

6. The duties of an elder or bishop, as a *ruler*, are—to preside in all the meetings of the church, and in all the affairs of discipline; in concurrence with the vote of the brotherhood to admit and exclude members;

to call meetings of the church when he judges proper, or when he is requested so to do by any three members, or by such a number as the church may have determined upon by a previous rule; to see that all matters of discipline are presented in due form, and conducted in an equitable manner, and to execute the sentence of the church, whether of admonition or excommunication.\*

7. In acts of discipline, the pastor exercises the authority of a presiding officer and overseer, and, like a judge in a court, is the official expounder of the law, the guide of the modes of procedure, and the official executor of the acts of the church.

8. No one can be regarded as a pastor, who is not regularly installed over a church; but as an evangelist or preacher he may occupy the pulpit by agreement with the church and congregation; and if an ordained minister, he may administer the ordinances; but as he sustains not the relations, so neither can he assume the rights and responsibilities nor exercise the authority of the pastoral office.

9. The other officers of the church are *Deacons*; whose duty is to receive the gifts and keep and distribute the charities of the church; to have the general superintendence of its temporal affairs; and, under the direction of the Pastor, to perform any other service, proper for laymen, which may assist or relieve the Pastor, or promote the welfare of the church.

10. It is fit and proper, whenever deemed expedient, that the church should appoint annually, or for a limited time, a committee, to co-operate with the pastor and deacons in superintending and promoting the interests of the church. And it shall be the special duty of such committee to institute processes of discipline for public offences, if the same is not seasonably done by other members.

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\* Mr. Cotton, in his "Keys," says—"In the handling of an offence before the church, the elders have authority both *jus dicere* and *sententiam ferre*. When the offence appears truly scandalous, the elders have power from God, to inform the church, what the law, or rule, and will of Christ is, for the censure of such an offence. And when the church discerns the same, and hath no just exception against it, but consenteth thereto; it is a further act of the elder's power, to give sentence against the offender."

## CHAPTER VI.

## ELECTION AND REMOVAL OF MINISTERS.

1. A call to the ministry is either immediate, as was that of the apostles; or mediate through the church, as is that of ordinary pastors.

2. Whereas it is required of us, to lay hands suddenly on no man, and to see that those introduced into the office be of good report; it is important that before any are ordained to the ministry, there should be a satisfactory probation of their gifts and qualifications.

*Licensure.*

3. It belongs to pastors or bishops, in their associated capacity, to examine young men as to their literary, theological and moral qualifications for the ministry, and to give them a regular approbation or license as candidates for the sacred office.

4. Persons to be ordained to the pastoral office, are first to be called by the major vote of the church to which they are to minister. And it is only by its own choice, that a church can be made subject to the ministry of any one, as its pastor.

5. And as it belongs to the church to elect their minister, so they may in a regular way, and for a sufficient reason, procure his removal.

## CHAPTER VII.

## ORDINATION OF MINISTERS.

1. Ministers are to be chosen by the church, and to be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. This ordination is a public consecration of a man to the work of the ministry, an admission of him into the order of elders or bishops, and a solemn putting of him into his place and office, as pastor of the church, like the installing of a magistrate.

2. It is not according to sound ecclesiastical principles, nor would it tend to promote the interests of religion, for any men, except those who are destined to the missionary service, or those who are to hold special offices in colleges

or theological seminaries, to be ordained at large, or, without a particular pastoral charge.

3. When men are to be sent forth as Christian missionaries, the church with which they are connected, or any other church at their request, or at the request of the society that send them, may properly call a council of neighboring churches; and such council, being satisfied that those, who offer themselves as candidates for the missionary service, possess the requisite qualifications, and that it is proper to send them forth, may ordain them and set them apart to the missionary work, by the laying on of hands and other appropriate services. See Acts xiii. 1-3.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### POWER OF THE CHURCH.

1. A company of believers, united in a church by a covenant, even before they have officers, have such powers, as are necessary to maintain their confederate existence, and to complete their organization by introducing proper officers.

2. Where it can be conveniently done, it would tend to order and edification, if in meetings of a church for the choice of a minister, the pastor of a neighboring church should be invited to preside.

3. A church is not a simple, unrestricted independency; inasmuch as it is subject to the authority of its king and sovereign, who has given laws which must regulate and control the acts of the brotherhood; and inasmuch as Christ commits to his ministers certain offices and duties, concurrent with the action of the church, but not to be controlled by it. And furthermore, as there is a community of interests among the churches, so that irregular conduct in one is an injury to all, there should be among them *mutual checks*, which shall modify the action of each particular church.

4. It is the duty of all Congregational churches and ministers to maintain a cordial and actual fellowship with each other; and particularly, in case any church shall, in accordance with established rules, excommunicate a member, or in case any regular Council shall depose a minister from his office, it is the duty of all Congregational

ministers and churches in their treatment of said excommunicated member or deposed minister, to carry into effect the sentence of said church or council. And in general, it is obligatory upon all Congregational ministers and churches to sustain and encourage each other in the discharge of their respective duties, and to do what in them lies, to give efficacy to each other's regular ecclesiastical acts.

5. It is one of the principles of Congregationalists, to cultivate the spirit of Christian candor and charity, and to maintain cordial fellowship and communion with other denominations, who hold the essential truths of revelation and give evidence that they belong to Christ's spiritual kingdom, however different from *them* in regard to the mode of church government, or the particular manner of observing the ordinances of the gospel.

6. The church has, in itself, power to choose its own officers; to establish its own by-laws; to admit and dismiss members; to admonish, and excommunicate; to restore penitents; and to transact all other business, appertaining to its own peculiar interests.

7. A pastor being by office both teacher and ruler, the legitimate freedom of the church is not to be understood as interfering with his authority, any more than freedom in civil society interferes with the authority of its rulers.\*

## CHAPTER IX.

### MAINTENANCE OF THE MINISTRY.

1. A sufficient maintenance is due to those who devote themselves to the work of the ministry. And he

\* Mr. Cotton in his "Keys," thus illustrates the harmony between the authority of ministers, and the power and privilege of the brotherhood.

*Objection.* "If elders have all this power to exercise all these acts of rule, partly over the private members, and partly over the whole church; how shall they be called the *servants of the church*?"

*Answer.* "The elders are to be both servants and rulers of the church, and both of them may stand well together. For their rule is not lordly, as if they ruled of themselves, or for themselves; but stewardly and ministerial as ruling the church from Christ, and also from their call; and withal ruling the church for Christ, and for the church, even for their spiritual good. A queen may call her servants, her mariners, to pilot and conduct her over the sea to such a haven; yet, they being called by her to such an office, she must not rule them in steering their course, but must submit herself to be ruled by them, till they have brought her to her desired haven. So is the case between the church and her elders."

that is taught should communicate in all good things to those who teach.<sup>1</sup>

2. This maintenance is not a matter of gift or alms ; but the people are clearly bound in duty to render it, as a just debt, or as a matter of equity.<sup>2</sup>

3. Not only members of churches, but all who are taught, are in duty bound to contribute to the support of the teacher ; although it is more especially the duty of the church to see that such support is provided.<sup>3</sup>

4. If any member of the church refuses to contribute his proportion, according to the rule adopted by the church, for the support of the ministry, that refusal should be counted a breach of his obligation, and a just ground for complaint.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 9-14 : Matt. x. 9, 10 : 1 Tim. v. 18 : Gal. vi. 6 : Gen. xlvii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xv. 27 : 1 Cor. ix. 11-14 : Num. xviii. 21 : Deut. xii. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Gal. vi. 6 : Neh. xiii. 10-12 : 2 Cor. viii. 13, 14 : 2 Thess. iii. 1.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 2 : 2 Cor. viii. 22 : Mal. iii. 9.

## CHAPTER X.

### ADMISSION OF MEMBERS.

1. Before members are admitted to the church, satisfactory evidence should be had, by examination and other means, of their having been renewed in heart by the divine Spirit.

2. After examination, and before admission to the church, the candidate should stand propounded for a reasonable time, to give all the members an opportunity to bring objections, if they have any, to his admission.

3. Members of churches changing the place of their residence, ought to join a church in their new location as soon as the providence of God may permit ; and, unless for special reasons, it shall not be deemed proper for such persons to remain disconnected from the church over one year.

4. As the fellowship of Congregational churches implies that they shall ordinarily acknowledge the validity of each other's regular acts, it is proper that any church should ordinarily receive into fellowship members of other churches on the ground of the customary dismissal and recommendation, and after opportunity to form an acquaintance with them, provided they assent to the church's

**Confession of Faith and Covenant.** But if doubt exist in regard to their qualifications, it is the duty of the church to suspend action on the subject, till by examination, or in other ways, they obtain satisfaction.

5. It shall be the duty of a church to extend a faithful watch and care over its non-resident members. And if any church is acquainted with delinquencies in members of other churches, seasonable information of such delinquencies should be given to those churches.

6. The better to maintain the order of the churches and the watch and care due to their members, it shall be the duty of any church admitting to fellowship a member on recommendation from another church, to give immediate information of such admission to the latter.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DISMISSION OF MEMBERS.

1. Church members may not dissolve their relation to the church to which they belong, without just and weighty reasons. In case of difference of judgment between them and the church, recourse shall be had to a regular ecclesiastical council.

2. It is manifestly unlawful and sinful to separate from a church, through a contempt for the pastor or brethren, or an unwillingness to bear a just proportion of the burden of supporting the ordinances, or through a desire of greater liberties than are allowed by the church and the word of God, or through a spirit of contention and schism, or because evils exist in the church which demand meekness and forbearance that they may be healed.

2 Tim. iv. 10: Rom. xvi. 17: Jude 19: Gal. vi. 1, 2: Eph. iv. 2, 3: Col. iii. 13: Prov. vi. 16: 1 Cor. i. 10.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DISCIPLINE.

1. The object of discipline is, the benefit of offending members, the removal of scandals, and the purity and edification of the church.

2. As far as the offender is concerned, the first object

of discipline should be, to restore him to a proper spirit. The end of discipline is secured, as soon as he gives a suitable manifestation of such a spirit; and hence all the steps taken with him, should be characterized by meekness and love. But if all the efforts made for this purpose fail, he should be excommunicated.

3. In the act of excommunication, it is proper for the church particularly to set forth the offence or offences, of which the person accused has been found guilty, and to declare, that, on account of such offence or offences, the church, in obedience to the command of Christ, exclude him from their fellowship, commending him to the mercy of God, and praying that he may be brought to repentance.

4. Any thing in the principles or practice of a church member, which is plainly contrary to the word of God,—any thing which is a serious injury to his example, and to the spiritual edification of others, is a just ground for discipline. But nothing should be treated as a disciplinable offence, which is not a manifest violation of some moral precept found in the Scriptures.

5. It is the duty of individual members of the church, kindly to deal with their brethren in relation to many minor faults of character which cannot properly be brought before the church.

6. None may withdraw from the communion of the church, on the ground of private prejudice or objection against any brother or sister; though all are bound, in every proper way, to seek the removal of such prejudice or objection.

7. Offences are either private or public. Private offences are those committed against an individual, or those which are known only to a few, and which are of such a nature, that satisfaction rendered to the individuals offended, or privy to the offence, would heal the scandal occasioned by it, and leave no occasion for the action of the church.

8. In the case of a *private* offence, no complaint should be made to the church, till the means prescribed, Matt. xviii., for reclaiming the offender, shall have been pursued in vain. And the spirit of the same direction of Christ

should, as far as practicable, be observed in regard to offences which are more or less public.\*

9. In case of a gross public offence, or one which has been made public by a course of discipline, the evidence of repentance should be exhibited publicly, at least before the whole church, as no private confession or satisfaction can heal the wound occasioned by it.

10. However gross an offence may be, it is not to be made a subject of discipline before the church, unless it can be proved by suitable evidence.

11. When any person is charged with an offence, by general rumor, in order to justify the action of the church, the rumor must specify some particular sin or sins; it must be widely spread, and generally credited; not transient, but of some continuance; and must be accompanied with strong evidence of its truth.

12. It may sometimes come to pass, that a church member, not otherwise scandalous, may wholly *withdraw* himself from the communion of the church to which he belongs. In which case, when all due means for reclaiming him prove insufficient, he having thereby cut himself off from that church's communion, *the church may justly withdraw fellowship from him, and esteem and declare itself discharged of any further watch and care over him.*

13. Any member of the church, who is charged with immoral conduct, shall be regarded as innocent till he is proved to be guilty. And if any one charges a church member with immorality, but is not able to support the charge by any proper and satisfactory evidence, he shall be deemed guilty of false accusation, and shall answer to the church for his offence; the church taking care to judge of the degree of the offence from all the circumstances of the case.

14. When a church member is under trial, or when the church are in doubt concerning one who has been an offender, and are waiting for evidence to satisfy them what course they ought to pursue towards him; they may, for

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\* The Cambridge Platform says, ch. 14, § 3, "If the offence be more public at first, and of a more heinous and criminal nature, to wit, such as is condemned by the light of nature; then the church, without such gradual proceedings, is to cast out the offender from their holy communion for the mortifying of his sins and the healing of his soul."

the time, properly suspend him from special ordinances, not as their final act, but as a step towards it. For example: a member has often offended, and on the profession of repentance has often been restored. He offends again, and professes to repent. But the church are in doubt as to his sincerity, and think they ought to wait for a fuller exhibition of his character, that they may know whether they should restore him, or excommunicate him. During this season of trial, they may properly suspend him.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE.

1. An offence may be brought before a church, either by the complaint of individual members, or by common fame.

2. In order that a church may enter upon the consideration of an offence, it is indispensable, that the charges should be regularly presented, and the accused have a copy of each charge, and be cited to appear, at least a fortnight before the time of the meeting.

3. In exhibiting the charges, the times, places and circumstances should as far as practicable be stated, that the accused may be better able to meet them.

4. If the accused refuse to obey the first citation, he shall be cited a second time; and if he still refuse, the church may proceed to examine and issue the case, without his presence.

5. The trial of a member should be fair and impartial; and the witnesses should be examined in presence of the accused: and he should be permitted to ask any questions tending to his own exculpation.

6. The judgment shall be regularly recorded, and a copy allowed to the accused. If the charges against him are sustained, and he refuses to confess his guilt, and to manifest a spirit satisfactory to the church, they shall then proceed to admonish, or excommunicate him, as the degree of criminality may require.

7. In case of a remarkably gross and shocking offence, which is manifest to all, and not denied by the accused, and when the character of the church would suffer by

delay of sentence; a more summary process may be used.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### WITNESSES.

1. The competence of any person to be a witness, and the weight of his testimony, must be left to the deliberate judgment of the church.

2. Either of the parties has a right to challenge witnesses for a sufficient cause; and the church should candidly consider and decide upon any exceptions taken.

3. The testimony of more than one witness is always necessary, to establish a charge against an elder or bishop. (1 Tim. v. 18.) And this rule should hold good in the case of private members, when the previous character of the accused is ground of presumption that his denial of the charge is as credible, as the witness's affirmation of it. Yet if several credible witnesses bear testimony to other similar acts, belonging to the same general charge, the crime may be considered as proved.

4. No witness, who is afterwards to be examined, shall, without the consent of both parties, be present during the examination of another witness, on the same case.

5. The church may allow oaths to be administered to the witness when in their judgment there are special and satisfactory reasons for it.

6. In examining witnesses and receiving testimony, the church shall conform, as far as circumstances will permit, to the established principles and rules respecting evidence, which are observed in courts of law and equity.

7. A member of a church, refusing to appear as a witness when called for by the church, or refusing to testify when present, should be censured for contumacy.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCILS.

1. The party or parties wishing for an ecclesiastical council, shall choose the members who are to compose it, from orthodox Congregational churches, with which they are in fellowship; and in the letter missive addressed to each of the churches invited, they shall make a definite

