

Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

Readings in the History and Polity of the National
Association of Congregational Christian Churches

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

PREFACE

Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modern Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, *of Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors' style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be wakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the "Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Savior," which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God's working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists' focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of "f" for "s" and "v" for "u" (and vice versa), the "thee's" and "thou's" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward's "angry God." William Ellery Channing's debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong's celebration of (and challenge to) the "Anglo-Saxon" race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebearers and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.

Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion In New-England.

A Treatise in five Parts

By Charles Chauncy. D. D.

Pastor of the first Church of Christ in Boston

Boston, Printed by Rogers and Fowle, for Samuel Eliot in Cornhill, 1743.

- I. Faithfully pointing out the Things of a bad and dangerous tendency, in the late, and present, religious Appearance, in the Land.
- II. Representing the Obligations which lie upon the Pastors of These Churches in particular, and upon All in general, to use their Endeavours to suppress prevailing Disorders; with the Great Danger of a Neglect in so important a Matter.
- III. Opening, in many Instances, wherein the Discouragers of Irregularities have Injuriouly treated.
- IV. Shewing what ought to be Corrected, or Avoided, in testifying against the evil Things of the present Day.
- V. Directing our Thoughts, more positively, to what may be judged the Best Expedients, to promote pure and undefiled Religion in these Times.

With a Preface

Giving an Account of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines, who infected these Churches, above an hundred Years ago: Very needful for these Days; the Like Spirit and Errors, prevailing now as did then.

The whole being intended, and calculated, to serve the Interest of Christ's Kingdom.

The Preface

If the following Treatise is, in any tolerable Measure, adapted to serve the Ends of Religion, by guarding People against the Errors in Doctrine, and Disorders in Practice, which have, of late, obtained in many Parts of the Land, there can be no need of an Apology for its Publication: If it is not, the usual Excuses upon such an Occasion are well known; and I may claim the Benefit of them, in common with others.

Inftead of faying any Thing upon this Head. I fhall look back to the firft Times of this Country, when there was the Prevalence of an erroneous, enthufiaftic Spirit, beyond what has been known from the Day 'till the late Appearance, in fome Places, in New England: And I the rather chufe to infert here fome brief Account of the religious State of Affairs in thofe Days, because of its fuprifing Agreement, in many Inftances, with what has happened in thefe Times; which, if duly attended to, will not only prepare the Reader for what he may meet with in the following Sheets, but powerfully tend to undeceive him, if he has entertain'd a good Opinion of fuch Things as have, once already, raifed Difurbances in the Country, to the Grief of our firft Fathers, who may fafely be rank'd among the moft pious and valuable Men, who have yet lived in it.

Not many Years after the Settlement of our Progenitors in this Land, fome, who, through an Excefs of Heat in their Imaginations, had been betrayed into various unfound and dangerous Opinions, came over to them from England. They had not been here long, before they freely vented their Notions among the People, Multitudes of whom, both Men and Women, Church members and others, were foon led afide, to the Hindrance of the Gofpel, and throwing thofe Churches into great Confufion.

My purpofe is to fhew definitely, through briefly,

What thofe Opinions were,

How they fpread fo faft, and prevailed fo fuddenly.

How they did rage and reign, when they had once gotten Head.

How they fell and were ruined, when they were at higheft. §

As for the Opinions:----They were fuch as thefe, viz.

1. He that hath the Seal of the Spirit may certainly judge of any Perfon, where he be elected or no.

2. Such as see any Grace of God in themselves, before they have the Assurance of God's Love sealed to them, are not to be received Members of Churches.
3. The due Search and Knowledge of the Holy Scripture, is not a safe and sure Way of finding Christ.
4. There is a Testimony of the SPIRIT, and Voice to the soul, merely immediate, without any Respect to, or Concurrence with the Word.
5. The Seal of the Spirit is limited only to the immediate Witnesses of the Spirit; and doth never witness to any Work of Grace, or to any Conclusion by a Syllogism.
6. No Minister can teach one that is anointed by the Spirit of Christ, more than he knows already unless it be in some Circumstances.
7. No Minister can be an Instrument to convey more of Christ unto another, than he by his own Experience hath come up to.
8. A Man is not effectually converted, 'till he hath full Assurance.
9. A Man cannot evidence his Justification by his Sanctification, but he must needs build upon his Sanctification, and trust to it.
10. The immediate Revelation of my good Estate, without any Respect to the Scriptures, is as clear to me as the Voice of GOD from Heaven to Paul.
11. It is a Fundamental and Soul-damning Error, to make Sanctification an Evidence of Justification.
12. The Spirit giveth such full and clear Evidence of my good Estate, that I have no Need to be tried by the Fruits of Sanctification: This were to light a Candle to the Sun.
13. Sanctification is so far from evidencing a good Estate, that it darkens it rather; and a man may more clearly see CHRIST when he seeth no Sanctification, than when he doth: The darker my Sanctification is, the brighter is my Justification.
14. If a Member of a Church be unsatisfied with any Thing in the Church, if he expresses his Offence, whether he hath used all Means to convince the Church or no, he may depart.

§ This is the method of Mr. T. Welde (One of the first Preachers in our Roxberry) in his Preface to the Story of the Antinomians &c in New England; whose Language also I have thought fit chiefly to use. The Words distinguished by inverted Commas are always his; unless where I give Notice to the contrary.

15. If a Man think he may edify better in another Congregation, than in his own, that is ground enough to depart ordinarily from Word, Seals, Fastings, Feastings, and all Administrations in his own Church, notwithstanding the Offence of the Church often manifested to him for so doing.
16. Where Faith is held forth by the Ministry, as the Condition of the Covenant of Grace on Man's Part, as also evidencing Justification by Sanctification, and the Activity of Faith, in that Church there is not sufficient Bread.*

These are a few of the Errors, with which many began to be infected; I say a few, because their whole Number amounted to upwards of fourcore. I should willingly have presented the Reader, with a List of them all; but, not having Room, choose to confine myself to those only which might be thought to bear a Resemblance to the unsafe Tenets of the present Day. The rest may be seen in the Book, entitled, *The Story of the Rise, &c, of Antinomianism, &c, in New-England.* And let me add, the Account there given of these Errors may be depended on; for having had Opportunity to compare it with an ancient Manuscript Copy of the Proceedings of the Synod, in 1637, I find it to be a very exact Catalogue of the Opinions condemned by that Assembly of Churches.†

*These Opinions, however absurd, were yet, many of them, strongly pleaded for, as of vast Importance: Hence, among the Reasons given for the meeting of the Synod, in 1637, to consider of these Matters; this is one, because the Opinionists “pretended such a New-Light as condemned all the Churches, as in a way of Damnation; and the Difference to be in Fundamental Points, even as wide as between Heaven and Hell: And hence it was conceived, that all the Churches should consider of this Matter, that if it were a Truth, it should be universally embraced; but if it were an Error or Heresy it might be universally suppressed, so far as such a Meeting could reach.” *Manuscript Copy of the Proceedings of the Synod, in 1637, Page 3.*

Part I.

Particularly pointing out the Things of a bad and dangerous Tendency, in the late religious Appearance in New-England.

There is not a Man, in the Country, in the sober Exercise of his Understanding, but will acknowledge, that the late religious Stir has been attended with many Irregularities and Disorders. These, some are pleas'd to call, Imprudencies, human Frailties, accidental Effects only, such as much be expected, considering the Remains of Corruption in good Men, even among those in whom a remarkable Work of Grace is carrying on: Others are in the Opinion, they make a main Part of the Appearance that has been so much talk'd of, and have arisen unavoidably, in the natural Course of Things, from the Means and Instruments of this Appearance; and that it could not reasonably be suppos'd, it should have been otherwise.

I shall particularly show what these bad and dangerous Things are; making such Remarks (as I go along) as may be thought needful to set Matters in a just and true Light.

Among the bad Things attending this Work, I shall first mention Itinerant Preaching.

This had its Rise (at least in these Parts) from Mr. Whitefield; though I could never see, I own, upon what Warrant, either from Scripture or Reason, he went about Preaching from one Province and Parish to another, where the Gospel was already preach'd, and by Persons as well qualified for the Work, as he can pretend to be. I charitably hope, his Design herein was good: But might it not have been leavened with some undefirable Mixture? Might he not, at first, take up this Practice from a mistaken Thought of some extraordinary Mission from GOD? Or, from the undue influence of too high an Opinion of his own Gifts and Graces? And when he had got into this Way, might he not be too much encouraged to go on in it; from the popular Applause, every where, so liberally

heaped on him? If he had not been under too strong a Bias from something or other of this Nature, why so fond of preaching always himself, to the Exclusion, not of his Brethren only, but his Fathers, in Grace and Gifts and Learning, as well as Age? And why so ostentatious and assuming as to alarm so many Towns, by proclaiming his Intentions, in the public Prints, to preach such a Day in such a Parish, the next Day in such a one, and so on, as he past through the Country; and all this, without the Knowledge, either of Pastors or People in most Places? What others may think of such a Conduct I know not; but to me, it never appeared the most indubitable Expression of that Modesty, Humility, and preferring others in Love, which the Scriptures recommend as what will adorn the Minister's, as well as the Christian's Character.

And what became of his little Flock all this while? This Gentleman (if I don't mistake) expresses a very contemptuous Thought to Non-Residents and Pluralists, when he makes that Remark in one of his Journals†, "The Towns through Connecticut, and the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay----are well-peopled.----Every five or ten Miles you have a Meeting-House, and I believe there is no such Thing as a Pluralist or Non-Resident-Minister in both Provinces." And what is the mighty Difference (so far as a particular Flock is concerned in its Pastor's Labours) between an Itinerant Preacher, absent from his Charge seven Eighths of his Time, and a Non-Resident-Minister? Or, between a Pluralist and one that acts as though all the Parishes in a Country were his proper Cure?

'Tis true, your Non-Residents and Pluralists have their worldly

Encouragements: And some are in the Opinion, it has't been to Mr. Whitefield's

†Journal of New-England, Page 94, 95.

Disadvantage, on temporal Accounts, that he has traveled about the World in the Quality of an Itinerant Preacher. He has certainly made large Collections: And if, in the doing of this, he had a Fellow-Feeling with the Orphans, 'tis no more than might be expected. No one could, I believe, besides himself, can tell the Amount of the Presents, he received in this Town, as well as in other places, for his own proper Use.

The next Gentleman that practiced upon this new Method was Mr. Gilbert Tennent, who came in the Middle of Winter, from New-Brunswick (A Journey of more than 300 Miles) to Boston, "to water the Seed sown by Mr. Whitefield;" the Ministers in the Town, though a considerable Body, being thought insufficient for that Purpose. I shall not think it amiss to insert here Part of an exhortatory Letter sent to him, after he had been preaching among us for some Time. "Pray, Sir, (says the Writer*) let me put it to your Conscience; was not the Reason of your traveling so many hundred Miles to preach the Gospel, in this Place, founded on the Insufficiency of the Ministers here for their Office? Why travel so far, in such a rigorous Season, to preach the Gospel, if the Gospel was really preached by the Ministers here? Did you not fear, "that notwithstanding they pretend to water what Mr. Whitefield, by the Spirit, had planted, had set up a Lecture, and the like, they would build with untempered Mortar, would build Wood, Hay, Stubble, &c?" Had you not some Suspicion that, either they had not a true Knowledge of the Doctrines of Grace, or if they had, that it was only a Head Knowledge, that they were not converted, and of Consequence not likely to be made Instruments of much good? If this be the natural Consequence to be put upon your coming hither, can you think, you are in

*See the Boston Post Boy, Numb. 53. †Seward's Journal

the Way of your Duty? Can you think, the bringing the standing Ministry of a Place into Contempt, the Way to promote the Interest of Religion, and the Salvation of Souls? But perhaps, you did not think, nor would have any Body else think, quite so hardly of the Ministers here? Perhaps, you only thought, that if they did a little Good, you might do a great Deal more. Is not this approaching too near to Vanity? Is it not thinking more highly of your self than you ought? Is it not contrary to the Scripture Rule of preferring others in love?" The Answer to this Letter I never look'd upon as satisfactory: And I have the more Reason to think, there was a Propriety in these Questions, as I now know what Opinion Mr. Whitefield entertain'd of the Generality of the Ministers in Town. I shall only say, I have had personal Conversation with one, who join'd in the Prayers previous to this Journey to Boston.

Mr. Tennant tarried in Town a great Part of the Winter; in all which Time, he never express'd a Desire (so far as I can learn) of being assisted by any one of the Ministers: But seem'd as fond, as Mr. Whitefield before him, of preaching every Day himself; and did so, willingly taking from the other Ministers even their own Turns in the stated Lectures: And if, by their Submission to him herein, they fell in the Opinion of the People, who can wonder at it? It would indeed have been a Wonder, if they had not. For either the Circumstances of the Town were such as to require Preaching every Day in the Week, or if they were not: If they were not, why did they encourage such a Practice? If they were, I don't see how they answer it to GOD, their own Consciences, or their People, to sit still, and let one Man have the sole Trouble of that which was the proper Business of their Office. Such a Conduct as this naturally taught people to look upon them as idle

Shepherds: And if this was the Reflection, some cast upon them, it was no other than might be expected.

Mr. Tennent went from Boston to Piscataqua in the Path of Mr. Whitefield; and, in some Places, appear'd very forward in tending his Service to preach, though he knew it was not (as to Time) agreeable to the Ministers. Upon his Return home, he preach'd in most, if not all the Towns as he pass'd along: And if, in all the Parishes, he had the Consent of the Pastors, it was, I am ready to think, by Constraint. They might give into it to prevent Difficulties among their People; not that they approved this Manner of Conduct, the Construction of which seem'd to be, that upon him lay the Care of all the Churches. From this Time, the Method of Itinerant Preaching became common. Many, in various Parts of the Land, took upon them to visit the Churches' preaching from Place to Place, wherever they went: Sometimes, contrary to the known Judgment of the settled Ministers; and in Opposition to them; and sometimes, where their Consent was only a Matter of Necessity to keep Peace among their People. Sometimes, they have come into Parishes of their own Accord; and sometimes, by Application made to them from a few dissatisfied Persons. Sometimes, in order to get the Liberty of the Meeting-House, they have us'd mean and indirect Arts; and sometimes, when they not get into it, they have gone into private Houses or gathered Assemblies in the Fields. Nay, Lay-Exhorters, Men of no Capacity, nor Learning; yea, some of them of a suspicious Character for their Virtue,) (not to say any Thing worse **[two pages of text missing]**

It was his, not their's: This is the Conduct the Apostle points out: And he has an ill Opinion of it. or he would not have rank'd it with some of the greatest Crimes.

It was, in my Opinion, far from being exemplary in Mr. Whitefield, his taking so little Care of his own Flock. When he went from these Parts to Georgia, notwithstanding his frequent Prayers for them, and Expressions of a more than ordinary Love to them, and longing after their Salvation, he was no longer than Part of two Days at Savannah; nor did he preach there more than two Sermons, if we may believe his own Account.† It appears strange, he should allow his own Charge so small a Share of his Labours, as he was so lavish of them elsewhere! And 'tis observable, as soon as he had left Georgia, and arrived at Charles-Town in Carolina, his Journal again appears with pompous Accounts of his Preachings. He writes, Sunday, Jan. 4. "Preach'd twice this Day, and expounded to large Auditories." And, Saturday, Jan 10. "Preach'd twice every Day this week, and expounded frequently in the Evening."* If this is watching for Souls, I mean, the Souls of our particular Charge, as those that must give an Account; it is not a Matter of so much Difficulty as I always imagined.

And as to others, who are so forward in going into other Parishes, to preach there perpetually, I can't learn that they do more among their own People, than those who make no such Excursions? Nay, they have, some of them, greatly neglected their own, from a Zeal to take Care of other Ministers's People: And they have been complained of on this Head, and fallen under publick Censure.

One of the Charges exhibited by Mr. D-----'s People against him, and laid before a Council of Ministers, Oct. 7. 1742, was, "His leaving his Congregation, at several Times, for a great while together, at his Will and Pleasure, without Leave or Consent of

†See his Journal from his leaving New-England, Oct 1740. P. 34, 35. *See P. 3? Of his journal.

the Church, or Society:” Upon which, the Council gave it as their Judgment. “We think that his Congregation have juft Caufe to complain of his leaving them, at feveral Times, for fo long a Space as he had done, without their Confent: Whereby he has not only left them deftitute of Gofpel Ordinances; but has been too unmindful of the Obligation he lies under, by his paftoral Relation, to them who are his peculiar Charge.”

Another of the Intinerants was complain’d of, by a confiderable Number of his People; and one of the Articles they objected to him, before an Ecclefiastical Council, convened, June 15. 1742, was, “We are uneafy with his wandering from Town to Town, to the great Difturbance of Towns and Churches, and neglecting his own Church at Home.” Upon which, the Council came into the following Refult, “It appears to us, that the Rev. Mr. ---- hath been too ready to wander from Town to Town, and invade the Bifhoprick and Office of his Brethren, and adminifter Occafion to Difturbance in feveral Places (and we fear) to the Neglect of his faithful Difcharge of his Duty, among his own Flock, and to give too much Encouragement to Lay-Perfons exhorting publicly; All of which, are fo contrary to the Laws of Christ and his Gofpel, as upon no Pretence to be countenanced.” I could mention fome other Inftances in this Kind: But thefe fhall fuffice for the prefent.

And what is the Language of this going into other Men’s Parifhes? Is it not obviously this? The fettled Paftors are Men, not qualified for their Office, or not faithful in the Execution of it; They are either unfit to take the Care of Souls, or grofly negligent in doing their Duty to them: Or, the Language may be, we are Men of greater Gifts, fuperior Holinefs, more Acceptablenefs to God: or have been in an extraordinary Manner fent by him. Some of the Itinerants, ’tis evident, have traveled about the Country

preaching, under the full Perfwaſion of an immediate Call from God: And as to moſt of them, it may be feared, the grand Excitement, at the Bottom, has been, an overfond Opinion of themſelves, and an unchriſtian one of their Brethren. It has therefore been their Practice, too commonly, not only to boaſt of their own fuperior Goodneſs, wherever they have gone; but to inſinuate ſuſpicions againſt the fixed Paſtors, if not to preach againſt them, and pray for them, as poor, carnal, unconverted Men: Nay, meer Candidates for the Miniſtry; yea, illiterate Exhorters, raw, weak young Men, or Lads, have too frequently taken upon them, openly to judge and cenſure their Miniſters; as I ſhall have Occaſion, afterwards, to ſhow at large.

Moreover, what is the Tendency of this Practice, but Confuſion and Diſorder? If one Paſtor may neglect his own People to take Care of others, who are already taken Care of; and, it may be much better than he can take care of them: I ſay, if one Paſtor may do thus, why not another, and another ſtill, and ſo on, 'till there is no ſuch Thing as Church Order in the Land? One Miniſter has the ſame Right to enter other Men's Pariſhes as another; and may vindicate his Conduct upon the ſame Principles: And if this ſhould become the general Practice, what might be expected, as the Effect, but an intire Diffolution of our Church State? This Itinerant Preaching, it is my firm Perfwaſion, naturally tends to it in the Courſe of Things; yea, and the Principles, upon which it is ſupported, will diſband all the Churches in the World; and make the Relation, between Paſtors and People, a meer Nothing, a Sound without Meaning.

It will not be thought a needleſs Digreſſion to infer here, the Sentiments of the Firſt Fathers of this Country, upon this Point of Order in the Churches. This juſtly lay with great Weight upon their Minds: For it is indeed the Strength as well as Beauty of the

Creation. Next to Faith, they esteemed Order, a Matter of Necessity to the Well-Being of these Churches. And to this it was owing, that they held a Synod at Cambridge. Anno 1648, confitting of all the Churches of the Massachusetts-Province, by their Elders and Messengers; when they agreed upon that Rule of Church Order, commonly called, our Platform of Church-Discipline. Here it is declared as their united Judgment,† “That Elders are appointed to feed, not all flocks, but the particular Flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made them Overseers; and that Flock they must attend, even the whole Flock: And one Congregation being as much as any ordinary Elder can attend, therefore there is no greater Church than a Congregation, which may ordinarily meet in one Place.”

And again,* “Church Officers are Officers to one Church, even that particular over which the Holy Ghost hath made them Overseers; inasmuch as Elders are commanded to Feed, not all Flocks, but that Flock which is committed to their Faith and Trust, and dependeth on them: Nor can constant Residence at one Congregation be necessary for a Minister, no, nor yet lawful, if he be not a Minister to one Congregation only, but to the Church universal; because he may not attend one Part only of the Church to which he is a Minister, but is called to attend unto all the Flock.”

And 'tis observable, though they allow of a Communion of Churches, yet is only in such Cases, and under such Limitations, as may consist, with the Rights both of Particular Churches and their Pastors; yea, and with the Duties too they mutually owe to each other.

†Platform. Chapter 3. Sect. 5. *Chapter 9. Sect. 6.