

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

Articles from the Congregationalist, 1958-1996

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

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE "CHURCH"

Congregationalism is founded on the idea that Christ called his followers into churches, particular communities of believers gathering regularly for worship and service, not into a Church, a national or international organization superior to local congregations and mediating their relationship with their Lord. The very name of the movement, Congregationalism, derives from this conviction.

- Clinchy, Russell. "Why the Congregational Churches Should Live." November '58
Gray, Henry David. "The Constitutional Question." June '59
Stoudt, John, "Are We Still Protestants?" October '61
Commission on the Ministry. "What is a Congregational Church?" November '69
Bohman, George. "What Congregationalism Means to Me." July '77
Wilson, Robert. "Local Autonomy in a Time of Centralization." August, '78
Moe, Ronald. "Congregationalism in the March of History." August '88
Alexander, John, et al. "A Message to the Churches." April '85
Rouner Jr., Arthur. "The Congregational Way as a Call to Pilgrimage for the American Church," 2 parts.
October, December 1989
Larson, Arlin. "Portland as Seen from the Wilderness." August '93
Hall, Lloyd. "Denomination or Association? What Matter is How We Serve Society." June '94
Bailey, Steven. "To Be or not to Be? Religious Mainstream is Denominational." February '95

ECUMENISM

The NACCC was founded in 1955 just as the wider ecumenical movement gained full force. While "ecumenical" in the sense of openness to a wide variety of beliefs and practices, "Continuing Congregationalism" defined itself in opposition to all centralization and bureaucratization. How then can the NACCC be part of the wider Christian community?

- Gray, Henry David. "Congregational Catholicity and Ecumenical Exclusiveness." December '58
Bailey, Harold. "The World-wide Campaign Against Religious Freedom." January '60
Bachelder, Horace. "Whither the Ecumenical Movement?" April '60
Bradshaw, Marion. "Essentially Congregationist." January '61
Butman, Harry. "The Brave Music of Mission." September '63
Conn, Howard. "Congregationalism's Contribution to Christian Unity." October '63
Conn, Howard. "Congregationalists and the Ecumenical Movement." September '65
Hanko, Charles. "The New Protestant Church?" January '66
Couch, Walter. "Who Speaks for the Church?" June '66
Gwaltney, W. Malcomb. "Faith is the Source of Freedom." June '66
Conn, Howard. "Independency in an Ecumenical Age." February '67
Butman, Harry. "A Candle in COCU's Darkness." January '68
Steece, Arvel. Review of *The Ecumenical Mirage* by C. Stanley Lowell. October '68
Swanson Jr., Neil. "Report from Uppsala." October '68
World Christian Relations Commission. "A Statement of Ecumenical Intentions."
June '87

FREE CHURCHES

Churches of the NACCC are not the only "congregational" churches. Kindred spirits are found among Unitarians, Baptists, Disciples, the Community Churches, and others stressing the autonomy of local congregations.

- Pavy, Roy. "A Free Church Movement." April '65
Bellingham, Richard. "Creative Independency." February '69
Steece, Arvel. "What Do you Mean, 'Free Church'?" June '70

ASSOCIATIONS

A Congregational church is not merely independent. Active fellowship with other churches is fundamental. The small size and geographical dispersion of the churches of the NACCC rendered the traditional local and regional fellowships problematic. Tensions also arose between churches continuing to identify with a regional association and those identifying most closely with the National Association, which has no formal connection with the regionals.

- Bohman, George. "The Place of Associations in Modern Congregationalism." May '65
Steece, Arvel. "Polity Evolution and the Future of Congregationalism." March '75
Bellingham, Richard. "Regional Fellowship: A National Concern." February '89

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Early Congregational churches were distinctive in being made up of self-conscious believers, "visible saints," not merely residents of the parish or community, and furthermore, not only believers but believers who could demonstrate proof of their conversion. Membership requirements no longer set Congregationalists apart, but new concerns have arisen.

- Bohman, George. "Safe-guarding Individual Freedom With Congregationalism." November '74
Beinke, James. "Church Members: How One Church Has Dealt with the Problem of Removing Inactive Members from Their Roles." October '88
Vanek, Noel. "Resident Aliens: Find New Direction for Christian Witness." December '96

ASPECTS OF CHURCH LIFE

- Butman, Harry. "How It [*The Congregationalist*] Started." August '62
Butman, Harry. "The Vicinage Council." March '65
Steece, Arvel. "Deacons, Dodos, Dynamics." March '73
Gerhart, Louis. "The Executive Committee and its Chairmen." June '74
Gray, Henry. "Town Meeting, Church Meeting, National Meeting." November '74
Gray, Henry. "American Youth and the Christian Church: Including the Background and Development of Pilgrim Fellowship and Hope." January '76
Ream, Norman. "Ordination Services: Caricature or Holy Event?" April '86
McKendrick, Mary. "Ambassadors: Becoming a part of the CCC/NA's Effort to Serve Churches Proved a Challenge Many Were Proud to Assume." April '88

HISTORICAL ROOTS

Where do we come from? Contemporary Congregationalism finds its roots in three places. One is Jesus' promise to be present "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name." The second is symbolized by the ship Mayflower, which bridged English Separatism and colonial New England Congregationalism. Third are the struggles within the Congregational family resulting in the formation of the United Church of Christ on the one hand and the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches on the other.

- Gray, Henry David. "From Yesterday into Tomorrow." February '58
Howard, Irving. "Covenant Theology and American Thought." February '58
Gray, Henry. "The Savoy Declaration of 1658." September '58
Rouner, Arthur Jr. "A Message from Savoy." 3 part series, November 59 - January '60

Davis, Royal. "The Saybrook Platform: A Warning." October '58
 Shelly, Maynard. "The Undying Fire of the Reformation." October '67
 Stubbs, Harry. "On Recovering the Genius of Classical Congregational Church Order," 2 parts. October '68, June '69
 Abercrombie, A. Vaughn. "The People Behind the Founding of the NACCC." November '78
 Burton, Malcom. "Letter" in response to Abercrombie. Fall '79
 Bohman, George. "Four Centuries of Congregational Growth." April '85
 Bailey, Steven. "Most Important Document: American Congregationalism Based on Cambridge Platform of 1648." December '92
 Rouser, Arthur Jr. "I Saw Them in the Flesh: Hotel Fort Shelby Recollection." July '95
 Alexander, John. "Forward Through the Ages ... At the Call Divine." July '95
 Bailey, Steven. "Reclaiming the Puritans." July '95

THE MINISTRY

Congregationalism has a distinctive view of the clergy as ordinary believers delegated narrowly defined responsibilities for preaching and teaching, while sharing common concerns about such things as qualifications, training, placement, and the ordination of women.

Barrus, Alvan. "The Growth of the Lay Ministry." March '65
 Abercrombie, A. Vaughn. "The National Program of Pastoral Supply." March '65
 Buchman, Richard. "Pastor, People, and God." May, '65.
 Butman, Harry. "Moderator's Statement at the Ordination of John K. Tremaine." February '66
 Britton, Erwin. "A Congregationalist Ponders the Matter of Ordination and the Ministry," 2 parts. October, November '75
 Witzel, Tom. "Laity Arise." June '77
 Brown, George. "In Between Ministers," June, July '81
 Voss, B. Margaret. "Unfinished Business." October '81
 Woolsey, Mary. "A Shared Ministry--A Shared Life." October '83
 Jensen, Mark. "Looking at the Future of the Congregational Ministry." October '89

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The NACCC does not have its own theological seminary, nor, because of its small size, is it in a position to open one. Yet it maintains a commitment to "learned ministry." How can its clergy receive the proper education? How can they learn the peculiar traditions and practices of the Congregational movement?

"Pioneering in Theological Education." November '62
 Steece, Arvel. "Continuing the Tradition of an Educated Ministry." January '65
 Ream, Norman. "Do We Need a Theological Seminary?" June '70
 Currey, Cecil. "Congregational Theological Education: The Future." May '73
 "C.F.T.S Story." October '74
 Clark, Harry. "CFTS is THE Source: The CFTS Story." February '90
 Shultz, Leslie. "Exciting Opportunity: Lay Ministry Training Program Announced." October '93

SOCIAL REFORM

Congregationalists have been in the forefront of social reform, from the establishment of democracy in the New World, to Abolition, to the Social Gospel. The NACCC, however, defined itself in opposition to the type of church-related reform which became prominent in the twentieth century. How can Congregationalists maintain their prophetic consciousness and yet avoid violating local autonomy and personal freedom of conscience?

Clinchy, Russell. "Comment and Reflection." October '65
 Ream, Norman. "A Relevant Religion." June '66
 Conn, Howard. "How Express Our Social Concern?" January '67
 Butman, Harry. "Classical Congregationalism and Social Action." March '68

Tennies, Arthur. "Church Leaders as Activists: Good or Bad?" October '71

Conn, Howard. "Christian Conscience: A Plea from Some Members Within a Congregation." October '71

Lange, William. "Washington Gladden Society: A Response to the Social Justice Debate." Summer '79

INTRODUCTION

How do the churches of the National Association of Congregational Christian churches understand themselves? In many ways they are typical of other mainline Protestant churches. A person comfortable with the worship at a Presbyterian, Methodist, Christian or United church would most likely be comfortable worshipping with Congregationalists. Congregational clergy receive their training in seminaries sponsored by many denominations. When, however, it comes to polity, church organization at the national as well as local level, Congregationalists have distinctive ideas.

It began with English observers of the Protestant Reformation, such as Robert Browne and Henry Barrows, who believed there was another step to be taken. This was a return to the type of organization envisioned by Jesus Christ and reflected in the earliest New Testament writings, especially the book of Acts and Paul's letters. These early churches were diverse, autonomous, lacking central authority, and required a high degree of commitment. To these English Reformers the shape taken by the Roman Catholic Church was more that of Caesar's empire than of Christ's kingdom. The newly formed Church of England, while independent of Rome, seemed compromised by its retention of a similar structure.

At great risk to position, property, and life, the English reformers set about to "purify" the Church of England. The more radical reformers formed unauthorized "Independent" or "Separatist" congregations. Many fled first to Holland and then to the British colonies in North America. As founders of a new society in America the Pilgrims and Puritans entered a new phase with the authority of government behind rather than against them. This new position as the established church of the New England colonies posed new challenges regarding questions of church membership, tolerance of religious diversity, and the relationship between religious and civil authority.

With the passage of an American Constitution embodying a "separation of church and state," the expansion of the frontier, and the waning of evangelical fervor, Congregationalists gradually lost the dominance they enjoyed in colonial New England. Losses were exacerbated when one wing, the Unitarians, split off to form their own denomination. Questions of denominational identity and cooperation across regions came to the fore. By the end of the nineteenth century Congregational churches had moved away from Calvinism, embraced modern ideas about science, and, while local autonomy was still affirmed, put a national structure into place.

The founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches (1955) reacted against what they perceived as an un-Congregational centralizing trend which would deny basic Congregational convictions about the church. A proposed merger of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church into a "United Church of Christ" would result in a more centralized "presbyterian" system. Proponents saw it simply as a more efficient form of organization which would retain essential principles.

When the great majority went with the new United Church, the “Continuing Congregationalists” were left with redefining themselves and Congregationalism (a name which the majority, tellingly, did not retain). Many of their reflections on Congregationalism in the twentieth century are recorded in the NACCC’s *Congregationalist* magazine. This book contains a selection of those writings. They are arranged by topic, and within topics chronologically.

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

ASPECTS OF CHURCH LIFE

CONGREGATIONAL PERIODICALS

In the 125th Anniversary issue of *ADVANCE* (December, 1941) of which Dr. William E. Gilroy was then Editor, it is stated that the first Congregational periodical to appear in the United States was *THE BOSTON RECORDER*, founded by Nathaniel Willis in 1816. This began a stream with many branches and contributing rivulets, which has gone on through the years. It was in 1849 that a paper was first published under the present name, *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*.

It is not the purpose of this article to trace the many changes which have taken place. Suffice it to say that some years after Dr. Gilroy's retirement it became evident that *ADVANCE* had ceased to represent the various shades of opinion among Congregationalists regarding the proposed merger with the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

This issue of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* being something of a turning-point in the history of the paper, it

HOW IT STARTED

Harry R. Butman, D.D.

One day in the Fall of 1951 four men sat in the study of the parsonage in Holbrook, Massachusetts, and discussed the subject of a voice for continuing Congregationalism. These men — Rev. Malcolm K. Burton, Prof. Norman S. McKendrick, Rev. Joseph J. Russell, host, and the present writer — were under no illusions about the long struggle that lay ahead for free Congregationalists. All were convinced that pamphleteering and occasional group-sponsored mailings on merger matters were insufficient. A journal of news and opinion was needed.

These four men were busy and lacked the time necessary to do the task as it should be done. Three lacked a call, but Mr. Russell, upon whose heart the problem weighed heavily, agreed to undertake the work, although he had no journalistic training. He not only accepted the responsibility of getting out the paper, but of raising the money. Thus the voice of ecclesiastical freedom began to cry in the wilderness of conformity and organization.

THE FREE LANCE was chosen as the name. It was, incidentally, an occasion for self-mocking mirth when the editor and this writer later agreed that while the name *THE FREE LANCE* had a brave swing and evoked bright images of fearless Don Quixotes tilting with the windmills of ecumenicity, in point of historical fact, a free lance was a masterless man, owing allegiance to no feudal lord. Bluntly, he was a mercenary: his services could be bought. Rejoicing that no promoter had the knowledge, wit, or inclination to point out this pejorative implication, the name was eventually changed to *THE FREE CHURCHES*.

By this time the financial load was very burdensome to Mr. Russell. The cause of *THE FREE LANCE* was laid before the Continuation Committee in 1954 and it was voted that support be given. There is no record, however, that this offer of aid was ever utilized. With the formation of the National Association in 1955, Mr. Russell was made editor, and regular budgeted assistance began. Individual subscriptions, one in particular, made the load lighter. The circulation has increasingly mounted from the 1000 of the first mailing of *THE FREE LANCE* to the present figure of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*, 26,000.

seemed to the retiring Editor that the story of the publications which have carried on the tradition of the older Congregational papers during the past eleven years would be of interest to the readers. He has therefore asked Dr. Butman, one of the four who started the stream flowing afresh, and who was the first Chairman of the Publications Commission of the National Association, and the one largely responsible for resuming the time-honored name, to write the following account.

Actually, prior to the meeting in 1951 with which Dr. Butman's story begins, a three-day meeting of Congregationalists had been held at Camp Cowasset, North Falmouth, Massachusetts. The building shown in our cover picture is the Camp Cowasset dining hall, overlooking Buzzards Bay, where most of the discussions were held. The idea of a regular publication stemmed from the Camp Cowasset Conference.

How the Old Name Was Resumed

Since this article, although factual, does not purport to be a formal history of the rebirth of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*, an anecdote may prove of interest.

One night, while I was dining in Los Angeles with Mr. James C. Ingebretsen, Jr., he reported that, in accordance with my request, he had consulted with one of the top patent firms on the West Coast concerning the possibility of our use of the old and honored name *THE CONGREGATIONALIST* which at that time was stored in the deep freeze of desuetude. Their opinion was that if no public use of the name had been made for five years there was a "presumption of abandonment" and the name was then in the public domain. The way to claim it was simply to issue a paper of that name. The courts would not ordinarily forbid this unless the former holders declared that they intended to resume publication.

As we talked I said, "I think we ought to take the chance and print the next issue under the title of *THE CONGREGATIONALIST*. What have we got to lose? At the worst, the courts will only tell us to knock it off." Mr. Ingebretsen said, with typical California speed of decision, "Call him up. I'll foot the bill." So the sleepy and confused editor of *THE FREE CHURCHES* was hauled out of bed by the midnight alarm of his first transcontinental phone call and peremptorily ordered to use the new name.

With commendable Yankee caution he demurred, rightly reasoning, as the fogs of sleep cleared from his mind, that this was a wild-eyed way of doing things.

But I said, "Joe, I'm both the Chairman of the Executive Committee and of the Commission on Publications." (We were desperately shorthanded in those days.) "Don't give the boss any back talk, or I'll fire you." I then turned the phone over to Mr. Ingebretsen, who soothingly convinced Mr. Russell of the legality of the move. Consultation with the printer revealed that the issue was too far advanced for change, but it was decided to go ahead the next month under the new title. So we marked time for a month, saying nothing,

Continued on page 4

CONGREGATIONAL PERIODICALS *Continued*

for the Board of Home Missions needed only to have run off and circulated a single mimeographed sheet headed THE CONGREGATIONALIST and they would have been safe for another five years.

So the March issue in 1958 came out with the fine old name shining forth to gladden the gaze of the faithful. Rev. Horace Bachelder of Oregon City sent in a heading of the original magazine, so that the present type is an exact facsimile of the denominational paper of a quieter day.

In this last issue under Mr. Russell's editorship, a word should be said concerning his distinctive contri-

bution to the free Church cause. He was reluctant to have anything said at all, and it was only by the flat statement that I would not write this article unless he promised to keep his blue pencil off it, that I am free to speak.

But not wholly free, for he has charged me with the burden of restraint. So I will say only this: in years to come THE CONGREGATIONALIST will be a greater paper: technically trained men will put out issues of improved readability and better layouts. But these men will build on another's foundation, they will enter into the labors of another. Joseph Jones Russell was the first, the pioneer. Let his memorial be that it was he who set the trumpet to his mouth when Zion was in danger.

The Vicinage Council

A vicinage council is a neighborhood gathering of Churches and concerned Christians assembled in a spirit of fellowship to offer wisdom and the support of love to those who have called it. A vicinage council is a means of expressing fellowship; it has no ecclesiastical authority.

Of recent years the old Congregational custom of the vicinage council has been revived. This revival has taken place in part because of the practical necessity for ordination and installation in these times when the local associations have largely gone into the United Church of Christ and so lost their characteristic Congregational nature. At the time of the merger, the old local associations had virtually become presbyteries, exercising ecclesiastical control over pastors and local Churches. A second reason for the rebirth of the vicinage council is the resurgence of the Congregational idea of the complete and autonomous local Church under the Headship of Christ, linked in a free relation of affection with like Churches.

The fear of "standing councils"—that is, bodies exterior to the local Church, with organizational continuity—is very old in Congregationalism. John Wise protested it as long ago as 1705. The wisdom of the protest is seen in history. Whenever men meet as a continuing group, small accretions of power will gradually constellate about the organization. But since Congregationalism is not isolationism and anarchy, some means for the practical implementation of the fellowship of the Churches had to be devised: this means was the vicinage council. In the simplest language, when a Church had a problem or wanted advice, it called a number of nearby Churches into session as a vicinage council, talked the matter over, sought the mind of Christ, came to a conclusion, and then dissolved. In

this brief paper I do not attempt to deal with the detailed mechanics of the vicinage council. These may be found in the manuals of Barton, Burton, Ross, Bacon, Quint, Punchard, and others. Persons who wish to call a vicinage council may find proper forms of procedure in these volumes.

Vicinage councils fall into two major divisions: those which involve controversy, and those which do not. The second class is much more common, as it deals with such matters as advice and assistance in the ordination, installation, and dismissal of a pastor, and the gathering of a Church. The rarer first class—that which deals with a controversial matter—is again subdivided into two parts: mutual councils, and *ex parte* councils. A mutual council is called by both parties to the dispute: an *ex parte* council is called by one party only. An *ex parte* council ought not to be called until all efforts to call a mutual council have been exhausted. When an *ex parte* council has assembled, the first effort of the moderator should be to attempt to make it a mutual council.

It is the custom for parties to the council to agree in advance that they sometimes will be bound by the findings (technically "the result") of the council, but this is not necessary. A Church or an individual is not bound by the findings of a council unless there has been the previous agreement to accept the result. *The basic principle to remember is the completeness and autonomy of the local Church under Christ; the local Church, and no other place or person, is the focus of power.* If a Church or an individual refuses to accept the findings of a vicinage council, no ecclesiastical penalty or forfeiture may be imposed upon them. A vicinage council is without power; its influence is moral, spiritual, suasive.

It is not generally realized, even by Congregational ministers, that in the important matter of ordination, the function of the vicinage council is merely to advise and assist. The power to ordain lies with the local Church. This is not only historic Congregationalism, but it has been formally stated by the Annual Meet-



Rev. Harry R. Butman, D.D.

ings in Los Angeles and Cheyenne. A pastor is ordained by an inner act of God which is socially ratified by the local Church, with sister Churches offering affectionate assistance. A pastor has "standing" because a local Church accepts him as its pastor; his name on the rolls of the National Association is a mere record of the fact, and has no ecclesiastical force.

It should also be borne in mind that a vicinage council is *pro re nata*, which simply means "for the thing as it is born", "for the occasion as it arises." A vicinage council keeps no permanent records; it is forever dissolved at the conclusion of its business. The result can be kept in the records of the local Churches involved, or with the secretary of pastoral relations for the National Association. Here a strong word of warning should be spoken. It was from the apparently harmless wish for orderly procedure and continuity of records that the power of the association over pastors and Churches was developed prior to the merger. It should be clearly understood that the findings of a vicinage council, even though transmitted to a national office, have no touch of ecclesiastical authority.

The purposes of this brief statement are to offer a definition of the vicinage council, and to hail its value as a means of fellowship without loss of local autonomy. It is a wise, flexible, ancient yet contemporary means of implementing the great Congregational principles of autonomy and fellowship. ■

DEACONS, Dodos, DYNAMOS

Aryel M. Steece

With temerity do I address myself to this subject, I am an s.o.d. (son of a deaconess), son-in-law of a deacon, son-in-law of a deaconess, brother-in-law of a deacon, brother-in-law of a deaconess, uncle of a junior deacon, and time has yet to disclose whether I shall ever be the father of a deacon. Be that as it may, let us turn to some definitions.

In Greek "diakonos" is a servant, a minister. Thus deacon may be defined, "In Christian churches, a cleric or layman who assists a priest or minister, his duties varying in different communions; also a cleric in orders next below a priest." Deaconess is defined as "a woman chosen or assigned to church work."

A dodo is a "large, heavy flightless bird (didus ineptus) now extinct, related to the pigeons but larger than a turkey, formerly found in Mauritius."

A dynamo is "a machine for converting mechanical energy into electrical energy especially into direct current by magneto-electric induction. A dynamo may be used as a motor."

What about the diaconate (deacons and deaconesses) in the free churches? Are our deacons and deaconesses dodos or dynamos? Among us deacons and deaconesses are lay officers, not minor orders of the

clergy. They are the spiritual advisors to the ministry, the coaching staff for the covenanted community.

In English Congregationalism no distinction between men and women was made in the diaconate. Women were chosen deacons. In the interest of women's liberation and equality and for ease of discussion when we speak of deacons let us be understood as having in mind deaconesses also. In another contemporary denomination there are now committees of lay life and work. From the literature it appears that their sphere of action is that in which deacons are concerned. Sometimes deacons are spiritually dead. Where there are dead deacons there are lethargic disciples. In many churches facing such a situation the solution seems to be to appoint another committee. Perhaps the better course would be to revive the diaconate. Let us look at the characteristics of deacons and deaconesses who would be dynamos rather than dodos. In acrostic form we find:

- D—Devotional spirit should be a factor in their lives. To be effective they are to be dedicated men and women of prayer.
- E—Evangelical enthusiasm characterizes their desire to serve the Church. Here we understand evangelical to mean concern for the Good News of the Gospel and the sharing of that Good News within the covenant community and within the geographical community.
- A—Authentic persons are wanted in the diaconate, those who know

who they are as people and disciples. Out of their knowledge and experience in the faith, their authority is earned, not pre-empted. They are not autocrats.

- C—Commitment to Christ is essential to their effectiveness. They are charged by Christ with care for the covenant community. Through Christ are they strengthened to do His work in church and community.
 - O—Open and Opportune souls are needed for service in the diaconate. Opinionated opportunists really have no place in these tasks. Deacons should be open to opportunities for spiritual growth and service.
 - N—"Nucleus of Renewal" should describe an effective board of deacons and deaconesses. The members will be men and women nourished on Scripture. Just as an unconverted ministry can hardly be expected to effect spiritual renewal in a church, neither is it to be expected among deacons who are biblically illiterate. If we take seriously the Protestant doctrine of the Priesthood of all believers deacons and deaconesses have the privilege and responsibility to articulate the theological biblical stance of the church in which they serve.
- Sometimes churches choose people to the diaconate too soon. Deacons and deaconesses should have experience and spiritual maturity. People should not be made deacons merely to remove them from another office where they have not functioned effectively. Discussing the list of qualities which deacons ought to possess, some fellow Congregationalists observed to me that it didn't apply to the deacons in their church. Be that as it may, churches will not solve many of their current problems until they do find suitable deacons and deaconesses. Men and women of devotional spirit, evangelical enthusiasm, personal authenticity, committed to Christ, open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and nourished on Scripture who are chosen to the diaconate can indeed be dynamos, channels of spiritual power lighting the way of discipleship and our churches will be the better for their presence, example and service.

Aryel M. Steece is minister of First Congregational Church, Bennington, Vermont. These remarks are from his presentation at the workshop for deacons and deaconesses sponsored by the Spiritual Resources Commission, 1972 Annual Meeting, NACCC, Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The Executive Committee And Its Chairmen

Louis B. Gerhardt

The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches was born in the historic Fort Shelby Hotel, Detroit, Michigan in 1955. The Articles of Association, so necessary to the NA's permanent development, were adopted at Wauwatosa, Wisconsin in October of 1956. It was at that time that the idea of an Executive Committee was recommended by the by-laws committee to the assembled delegates. This by-laws committee felt that a twelve member board, with limited terms of service, elected directly by the churches in Annual Meeting assembled, was the best way of giving our world-wide fellowship the stability and strength to deal effectively with the necessary day by day decision-making that is vital to the growth and development of any viable organization. This by-laws committee recommendation was unanimously adopted by the churches gathered at Wauwatosa.

The decision has proved to be a good one. From the very beginning the Executive Committee has been sensitive, strong, imaginative, patient and always faithful to the wishes of the member churches.

Ernest Crosby, now of Carmel, California, was the first Executive Committee chairman. He reflected on the 1956-57 year as follows:

"We were, of course, much concerned with organizational matters and a few growing pains: budget, committee appointments, necessary church visitations both nationally and world-wide and a host of other things.

"However, we were able to set up some excellent commissions which worked well in the first year and produced some excellent reports.

"Perhaps my happiest recollection is that of the fine spirit which prevailed. Everyone seemed happy and optimistic with the big decision taken and the opportunity before us to build a permanent Congregational structure. The numerous meetings held during the period were well attended and it seemed easy to get things done. There was some very inspirational oratory by Raymond Waser and several others and amusing interludes provided by that wittiest of raconteurs, Joe Fackenthal.

"It all seemed a bit haphazard and experimental at the time, but with the record of intervening history, it looks as if the job was pretty well done."

Since that good beginning, the Executive Commit-

tee has always conducted itself in an orderly, restrained and efficient manner.

Some of the milestones in their years of work are as follows:

In February, 1958, with the leadership of Dr. Harr Bulman, we began issuing our national publication under the ancient and honorable name, THE CONGREGATIONALIST.

In 1960, with Dr. George Bohman's leadership, the Executive Committee implemented The Special Education Effort (SEE), sponsored by the National Association, to properly study the proposed Constitution of the UCC and the Executive Committee appointed the first Associate Executive Secretary for our growing fellowship.

In 1961, with Dr. John Alexander as chairman, the Executive Committee sponsored the development and adoption of the Articles of Incorporation which completed the legal structure of the National Association. By this action it was determined that such activities as the Missionary Society, the Foundation for Theological Studies, and the Building and Loan Fund, instead of being independent entities, would be divisions of the National Association, responsible to the Churches of the National Association. This was a basic, philosophical determination by the National Association in order that we would not develop competing agencies, but rather arms of one Association reaching out into the world for Christian service. The Divisions were given considerable autonomy over their own programs, but incorporated as parts of one Corporation for the National Association.

In 1962, under Rev. Leonard Maunder's fine leadership, the Pastoral Relations office was located in the national office in Milwaukee and Dr. John Claxton was called as the first Pastoral Relations secretary.

Dr. Leslie Deinstadt, chairman in 1963, remembers the incorporation of the NACCC during his term. "It was something of an historic moment when I signed the papers," writes Les. "I remember being seated at Neil Swanson's desk for the event surrounded by staff and committee members."

The years 1964-68 were times of careful planning and the continued development of a sound structure of organization under the efficient leadership of William Stouffer, Dr. Erwin Britton, Robert Black, Paul Miller

and Edward W. Adams.

It was during Rev. Howard Bull's term in 1969 that the comprehensive use of liaison persons (Executive Committee members) working closely with each Board and Commission of the NA was developed, and the institution of a Central Fund Investment program on behalf of each Division of the Corporation was accomplished.

The hard working Long Range Planning Committee was initiated by Alexander Irvine during his term as chairman in 1970.

Dr. Louis Gerhardt's term in 1971 featured the appointment of the Executive Finance Committee which has become a vital part of our growing National Association.

The year 1972, with the dedicated leadership of Robert Morris, culminated in the delegates at Green Bay, Wisconsin, expressing their faith in the future of the NA by adopting the challenging "Forward in Freedom" campaign. And since that exciting moment, with the leadership of the Executive Committee chairmen Leland Johnson and Dr. Harry Butman, the NA has accomplished its greatest financial growth to this date.

In no small way, our success as a national fellowship has been due to the countless sacrificial hours spent by Executive Committee members who have wrestled mightily and successfully with both large and small matters that have had an important effect in developing the image of our free fellowship throughout the world.



Ernest S. Crosby



Harry R. Butman



George V. Bohman



John H. Alexander



Leonard H. Maunder



Leslie G. DeinStadt



William K. Stoufer



Erwin A. Britton



Robert B. Black



Paul A. Miller



Edward W. Adams



Howard E. Bull



A. S. Irvine



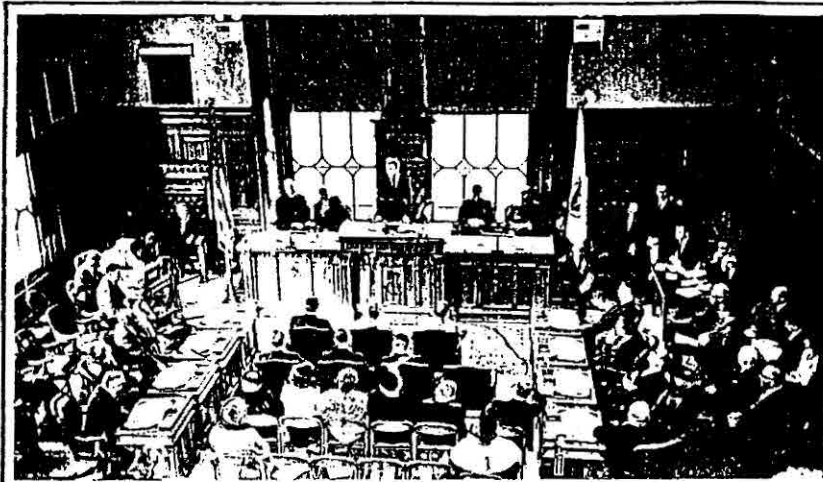
Louis B. Gerhardt



Robert G. Morris



Leland C. Johnson



Town Meeting, Church Meeting, National Meeting

by Henry David Gray

"Peyton Place" dramatizes the importance of the New England Town Meeting.

And rightly so; for the alert, and concerned citizenry of The New England Town bequeathed to America a type of democracy with great stability and unusual responsiveness to the needs of persons.

The Town Meeting is the application to civil affairs of the Congregational Church Meeting. The early record books of Windsor, Wethersfield and Hartford contain the minutes of the body politic *and* the records of the Ecclesiastical Society, sometimes on facing pages! This does not imply union of church and state, but rather a deliberate separation of civil and ecclesiastical concerns. There was one Church in each town and assessments were made for the support of the Churches as essential to the public weal. The Ecclesiastical Society which levied taxes and owned the properties used for religious purposes was not a

Church, nor were all its voters Church members. Most public gatherings customarily took place in the Meeting Houses of New England.

The key fact of civil life was government by consent of the governed. Hartford's Rev. Thomas Hooker enunciated these principles and is often called the father of The United States Constitution. His words are in The Declaration of Independence, probably through the influence of John Adams on Thomas Jefferson, and they ring true in The Constitution.

CHURCH MEETING

How then does a Church Meeting differ from a Town Meeting? A central conviction of Congregational Churches is the independence of each Church in a fellowship of Churches each equal to the other, none subject to any exterior ecclesiastical authority. The distinguishing characteristic of the Church Meeting is the solemn obligation of all covenanted members to seek and to

follow the leading of God. Even the most detailed concerns, such as, how ushers may best greet worshippers, become matters to be laid before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The objective is *not* an agreement so minimal as to be voted unanimously, but rather an insight born from "waiting on the Lord" which leads to the highest possible agreement and action.

About 1951 The Oneonta Congregational Church Meeting was presented with a balanced budget achieved by radical reduction of benevolent giving. The chairman of the trustees reviewed the financial statement, and then reminded the people of the debt-free dedication of the new Meeting House, offices, chapel, small hall and remodelled Sunday School facilities. "With the increased costs of upkeep, and the large contributions made to the building program, we think the budget before you represents all the money we can reasonably expect to receive in this coming year." Other trustees supported him. Adoption was moved and seconded immediately. The moderator asked, "Are you ready to vote?" A business man stood up near the rear of the crowded hall. "I'm not ready to vote," he said. But I'd like a minute or two for prayer before say anything. I want to know how this budget looks in the eyes of God."

A spirited, high-minded discussion followed the quiet. Then, by an almost unanimous vote, the Church Meeting approved a budget which *increased* the benevolence giving by \$10,000.

Church Meetings are an awesome experience in the Congregational fellowship. There is no 'higher authority' to which the Meeting's decision may be appealed, such as a presbytery synod, bishop, patriarch

council or pope. The Word of the Scripture is, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." WHEN that Word is taken seriously, the Head of the Church is present in the Church Meeting, and an appeal from that kind of meeting is unthinkable.

MEETINGS OF WIDER CHURCH-BODIES

What about wider Church-bodies? Gatherings of Congregationalists in state, national or world assemblies are time-and-space-limited bodies composed of individual delegates from the Churches, "Messengers of the Churches," in New England language. All wider bodies are agents of the Churches to the extent, and only to the extent, that the Churches individually choose to utilize them as organs of co-operative action or service. Wider bodies are controlled by the Churches; the Churches are under the solemn but glorious Headship of Christ. Our only 'headquarters' is heaven! Our sole 'authority,' The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

How does God make His way known? The Holy Spirit is God's spokesman in the hearts of Christ-committed individuals. God speaks through witnessing persons and through His spiritual presence which may be real in a Church Meeting.

THERE ARE DIFFERENCES

What is the difference between the Spirit of God speaking to individual persons and Churches, and, the Spirit of God speaking in a wider church-body? There are at least three differences. *First*, and most important, is the confusion lurking behind the words 'Church Universal.' The outcrop of solid stone anywhere on earth is part of the elemental planet. The presence of the

Spirit of God in Christ anywhere in the world, is part of the elemental Body of Christ: This is the Church Universal, the unseen company of all those who in all generations and in all places have been joined to the elemental Rock which is Christ.

Second, the world fellowship is mistaken for an organized power-structure, in short a governing body. A prominent national fund-raiser once said to me, "you will break the fellowship if you give directly to the Arcadia Church. You must keep the fellowship by giving to the national fund. The equation 'fellowship' equals 'centralized organization' is a gross misconstruction of the New Testament. Congregationalists speak of the 'fellowship' in several ways.

The 'fellowship' may mean the inclusive body of those who share the Christian faith and recognize the Congregational Way as the manner in which that faith best expresses itself. The 'fellowship' may mean the totality of all the organized bodies of the Congregational Christian Churches. The 'fellowship' means, above all else, the radiant personal relationships which characterize the lives of those who recognize Jesus as Lord, who reverently seek to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, who join in common worship, whose kinship in Christian service bears fruit in mutual trust and deep friendship, and who have chosen, voluntarily, to share together in the work and worship of the Congregational Christian Churches and of wider bodies created by them. The 'fellowship' is far beyond the limits of time, place, or human organization. Its true unity is born of God; where the Spirit of Christ is, there is the 'fellowship.'

Third, the word 'unity' is distorted when equated with a

specific 'action program,' as when someone says, "this is what you must do to keep the unity of the churches." According to the Congregational Way unity breathes the free air of the *willing mind*, Congregational unity, just because it is guided of God, is open-ended, ever seeking "yet more truth and light . . . from God's Holy Word," as John Robinson put the matter to the Layden Pilgrims. When we Congregationalists say 'unity' there springs to mind the Mayflower Pilgrims giving aid and comfort to each other. Among present day followers of Christ overarching faith in God is central. Congregationalists are adventurous bands of believers bound only by their common conviction that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Their 'unity' is oneness in the Lord.

AUTHORITY FOR CONGREGATIONALISTS

What 'authority' has an elected officer in a Congregational Church, or in a wider-body of Congregationalists, or of Congregational Churches? Like our ministers, all our elected servants have "all the authority which anyone will give them" —no less and no more. No less, because we recognize that *our* election is a prayerful recognition of God's will so far as we understand it. No more, because any followership given unwillingly is something less than Christian commitment. When the Spirit of God speaks through men and women freely and faithfully chosen, they will be accorded all the 'authority' they need to do His will in His way. Congregational Churches accept the will of God made known in Christ as their sole authority. The gathered company of Christ followers rejoices when God's Spirit truly

