

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

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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
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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.
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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
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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
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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.

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ECUMENISM

Congregational Catholicity and Ecumenical Exclusiveness

Rev. Henry David Gray, Hartford, Connecticut

Those gathered at the International Congregational Council meeting in Hartford in July, 1958, found themselves presented with an apparent dilemma, a choice between non-catholic Congregationalism and non-Congregational ecumenicity. Congregational leaders from outside the USA seemed to find the juxtaposition of these two views puzzling. And not a few of those from within the United States (even though all persons associated with our National Association seem to have somehow been overlooked!) found themselves puzzled by "the Hartford dilemma."

Their puzzlement was natural, for the dilemma is the figment of the minds of those who created it. One speaker presented a caricature of the local Church and then roundly declared that his self-created caricature was powerless to act in many areas of present-day life, that it did not rightly represent "the great church," and that voluntary action cannot be depended upon to meet the needs of explosive problems such as population expansion, ministry to students, and mass communication, because the local Church is "too parochial" and because these needs "have no local character!"

Congregationalism Pilloried

The speaker then called upon Congregationalists to fulfill their mission in the world by carrying into ecumenical unity "whatever we have that is valuable." Denominations, said he, have a "specious plausibility"; but actually "protestantism is . . . one of the chief divisive forces in the United States today." Congregational polity was declared obsolete and those defending it today were distortedly presented as a few misguided persons who are "neo-fundamentalist in polity," standing on "radical anti-Congregational grounds." We were told that "the great church" must be free from all traditional barriers so that it can "establish the character of the church . . . forsaking denominations if necessary." "The great church" was presented as the answer to "the needs of today's world."

Rarely has the truly catholic, inclusive, open-armed, universal Christian character of the Congregational Way been pilloried with greater effectiveness. Rarely has the hard, Machiavellian exclusiveness of the so-called "great church" been more eloquently espoused.

An Artificial Dilemma

The difficulty is that the Hartford dilemma is the creation of a type of ecumenically-oriented mentality which chooses to ignore the catholicity of the Congregational Way and finds it convenient to ignore the exclusiveness of the kind of ecumenicity dominant in our day.

Those who "came out," who separated themselves from the Church of England in the sixteenth century did so *not* to found a sect, but to complete the Reformation by applying to polity the sound principles of the New Testament. Goodwin, Nye, Owen, and Robinson, to name but a few leaders, were concerned very deeply with a truly catholic Church, in which no creeds, ceremonies, costumes, or clericalism should be permitted to exclude men from fellowship with Christ and with each other. It was precisely their belief in the catholicity of New Testament Christianity which led them to put aside anything and everything which made the Church narrower than the gospel. No more inclusive polity has yet been devised than that which we call "Congregational." It is at once the most spiritual, creative, free, and responsible type of polity, because

it trusts in God fully and purposes to walk in His ways sincerely on the basis of conviction.

Ecumenical Exclusiveness

There is a chasmal contrast between the free, open, voluntary responsibility of Congregational catholicity and that type of ecumenicity which belies its name by its exclusiveness. This ecumenical exclusiveness shuts the door in the face of those who, like the Society of Friends, cannot accept the doctrinal standard of the World Council today. To judge by two speakers at the International Council, we must expect even more precise doctrinal formulae in the future; hence, we must also expect increasing ecumenical exclusiveness. The pinch of ecumenical exclusiveness has long been felt in the organizational sphere. Now, even the National Council of Churches is assailed as an evidence of our so-called "sin" in not all belonging to one vast monolithic church. It would appear to be true that we are headed for an increasing exclusiveness in organized ecumenicity. Then, there is the harsh exclusiveness in fellowship which has become so noticeable that even the exchange of well-tempered and sensible letters between fellow Christians has become a one-sided affair — the Congregationalist writes but the ecumenist does not answer. And it is quite impossible to persuade ecumenists to so much as discuss ecumenical or Congregational matters.

Ecumenical exclusiveness has resulted in a boycott of truth in a throttling of discussion, and in the prevention of free exchange of convictions. This is true on all levels, from the prohibition of anything unfavourable to the ecumenist in the now merged ADVANCE, the unwillingness of national or conference officials to appear on the same platform with leaders of the National Association, on down to the pressure placed on local pastors not to permit meetings to be held at which the Congregational position is upheld. Most significant of all, perhaps, was the stress at Hartford upon an *additional category* of ecumenical exclusiveness. It was broadly claimed that the Word we preach is "The Word of the Church," to which men must "re-submit" themselves. And it was strongly inferred that the valid interpretation of the Bible is the province of the great church. Here is one of the ancient and long-since repudiated heresies of the centuries, the claim to exclusive interpretation of the "Word."

Deformation or Reformation?

There was a time in western history when the "ecumenical exclusiveness" of the Latin Church was well nigh complete. It was not a time of great faith and renewal; it was a time of great indifference and corruption. What is being called for today is a *new deformation* of the Church, comparable to the deformation which took place in the thousand years prior to the Reformation. What the Church needs is not deformation but dedication, not exclusiveness but inclusiveness, not closed doors but open minds, not bigger organizations but a better spirit, not centralization in New York but consecration in each Christian, not trust in the power of the few who believe themselves called to tell us what we ought to be and do, but confidence in the power of God's Spirit to show us the ways in which we ought to serve, and to enable us to walk in those ways.

The Churches can best serve the purposes of God in Christ, not by the way of ecumenical exclusiveness, but by the way of Congregational Catholicity.

THE WORLD-WIDE CAMPAIGN AGAINST RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Harold C. Bailey, Hartford, Connecticut

Only a few Congregational specialists seem aware that over the past third of a century Congregationalism is gradually being extinguished. First the Congregational Churches of Canada were absorbed into the United Church of Canada in 1925. Then in succession Congregational bodies were wiped out in China (1927), in Japan (1941) and in South India (1947) by similar mergers. In 1959 a like project is going on in Australia.

So far the proposal in Britain to have the Presbyterian Church take over the Congregational Churches there has not succeeded but the effort will doubtless be continued with, or without, the cooperation of Congregational leadership. Thus the current American effort to eliminate the distinctive Congregational witness is neither novel nor unique but part of a world-wide pattern.

Values Emphasized By the Free Churches

There are some 25,000,000 Christians (1,400,000 of them "Congregationalists") in the U.S.A. who follow the distinctive principle of Congregationalism, namely the independence and completeness of the local Church as a gathered group of believers under the direct headship of Christ and immediately open to the influence of the Holy Spirit.

They also believe in the importance of the individual Christian, his right of private judgment, his freedom to act in accordance with conscience.

These believers revolted in England, even before America's first beginnings, from the central control of hierarchies and synods out of resentment against external earthly domination. At the cost of privation, exile, even of life itself, they finally succeeded in escaping ecclesiastical tyranny and founding here a number of free Churches beholden only to God Himself.

Congregationalism As An Example

The Pilgrims and Puritans gave America its distinctive character. Men free of overhead *religious* control insisted on the same freedom in their *political* affairs and established in 1648 under Thomas Hooker's Fundamental Orders the first true democracy in the world since the days of ancient Greece. They gave Europe and South America an example of a free self-governing society that was contagious. For 300 years the American experiment in freedom — religious and political — began to transform the world itself.

Now the Free World Is Shrinking

In the past quarter-century a reverse trend has made rapid progress. Large segments of the globe have sunk back into a new type of slavery, different from that from which they had partially extricated themselves. More peoples are sinking yearly.

In each case political leaders have betrayed by false representations the popular aspirations toward a yet fuller life. The Churches, too, are being used to effect the betrayal.

The Russian Orthodox Church has been captured by the state, its true bishops and priests murdered or exiled and their places filled with agents of the state's secret police given enough seminary training to pass themselves off as legitimate clergy. (a) Thus the grip upon the citizens has been strengthened by improper use of the confessional and in other ways.

In 1952 the Chinese Communists established at Nanking the Ginling Union Seminary for training secret service agents to operate against the Christians. One group infiltrates churches and acts as preachers, another works in the guise of missionaries and a third trains workers to brainwash Christians in the slave labor camps.

The Free World Undermined

A Soviet attempt to control Russian Orthodox Churches in America has been fought in American courts over two decades. There was also in 1953 testimony before a committee of Congress that American Communists had effected a penetration of certain theological seminaries to influence the thinking of American Protestant clergymen along lines favorable to that conspiracy. (b)

Two witnesses testified that they had known a professor of Christian Ethics in a leading seminary as a fellow-member of the Communist party. Repeated political recommendations of central bodies of several Protestant denominations since have done nothing to dispel suspicions that infiltration still exists.

World Council Intervenes

The principles of Congregationalism are naturally repugnant to everyone (for whatever reason) intent upon forging a single great Protestant Church or otherwise inclined toward the building up of a central authority over church members. Congregationalists find themselves now engaged in a vast power struggle into which even that august body, the World Council of Churches, has been moved to intervene. (c)

There is ample evidence that the new denomination (United Church of Christ) has large ambitions for the future. The next step under consideration is to extinguish the Disciples of Christ (another congregationally organized fellowship) probably with the acquiescence, if not the active collaboration, of the Disciples' top officials. This step only awaits the completion (or failure) of the present attempt to capture the Congregational Churches. Where the United Church of Christ will turn next in the huge organization buildup remains undisclosed but it would be imprudent to underestimate the aspirations of any ecumenical leader.

No less a figure than Dr. McGiffert (then President, Chicago Theological Seminary) noted in 1947, "Many ecumenically-minded leaders . . . throw themselves with magnificent but misguided earnestness and enthusiasm into projects for the organic union of Protestant denominations. But suppose they succeeded in effecting the legal union of American Protestantism, what kind of spiritual and institutional monster will they have foisted upon us?" (d)

Dr. McGiffert's query needs an answer — a forthright and adequate answer from every serious Congregationalist.

Such is the ultimate scale of this first modest American attempt at Church organic union across denominational lines as viewed by our ecumenists and others. (e) Congregationalists are fortunately still free to refuse to have anything whatever to do with gargantuan

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combinations, to choose new leaders dedicated to Congregational values and to move forward as free Churches in their present fellowship.

FOOTNOTES

(a) May 1, 1959, testimony of Petr Deriabin before Senate Judiciary Committee.

(b) Copy of testimony available from the author, see also *Collectivism in the Churches*, pp. 126-130.

(c) The WCC "played a tremendous part in the consummation of the union of the C.C. Churches with the E. & R. Church" Dr. Douglas Horton is reported to have said (Christian Century August 14, 1957.) The C.C. Churches are NOT yet in the union despite this assertion.

(d) The Congregational magazine *Advance*, refused to print a condensation of the McGiffert article in May, 1947. It has been similarly reluctant to print any articles in support of Congregationalism — a strange attitude for a paper supported by Congregational funds to assume!

(e) See Knox *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church*.

WHITHER THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT?

Rev. Horace L. Bachelder, Oregon City, Oregon

During the earlier period of controversy over the merger with the E. and R. Church the suggestion was made by many opponents that if those pushing the merger really were as ecumenically minded as they said they were they logically should press for reunion with the Roman Catholic Church. Our Congregational ecumenists retorted that this was just a silly idea and they insisted that there would be no chance of going back to Rome. While they stressed Jesus' statement "that all may be one" as the scriptural basis for the merger they insisted that this unity they sought had a limit.

But has it a limit? This spring the famed Taylor lectures at Yale University Divinity School are to be given by none other than a Jesuit priest. His subject is contemporary Christian theology. Apparently those in charge feel that the next crop of ministers for the ecumenical churches, especially the United Church of Christ which has captured Yale from the Congregationalists, needs to be indoctrinated in true Christian theology by one who knows of what he speaks, since he will be representing the "true" faith and the ultimate goal in the ecumenical movement. Surely the Yale faculty knows that this Jesuit has been sworn to an oath to do all in his power to destroy Protestantism. But having achieved partial ecumenicity they now are admitting their true goal.

How Rome Views Mergers

It is quite revealing to read in the Catholic press how the Roman Church views the United Church of Christ and other Protestant mergers. Priests are instructing their lay people to do all within their power to win over to the "true" faith these Protestants who are ecumenically minded. Ecumenicity to the Catholic means real ecumenicity, without the barrier of "this far and not a step farther" which some Protestant leaders claim they have erected. Small groups of Catholic laymen and priests are meeting in cities all over America with groups of Protestant ministers and laymen and the groundwork is being laid for breaking down the illogical barrier set up by Protestant ecumenists. At these meetings to discuss "mutual problems" the Protestants are treated with exceptional finesse and it is easy to ascertain that the Catholic priests and laymen who are in attendance have been especially picked both for their ardor and their amiability. Protestants attending are impressed first of all with the sincerity of the Catholics and secondly with their apparent willingness to compromise differences.

Another means of breaking down this ecumenical barrier is the sending of Catholic newspapers and magazines to Protestants—both laymen and ministers. Practically every issue of these publications has articles stressing means of cooperation between Catholics and Protestants and numerous letters to the editor from Protestant ministers are reprinted, some showing disagreement but most of them complimenting the editor on the fine articles on Christian unity and the like. THE LONE STAR CATHOLIC recently added 12,000 Protestant ministers to its free subscription list and its editor, Dale Francis, who is one of Rome's best modern apologists, is doing a magnificent job of softening up his Protestant readers.

"Desire for Reunion" (?)

On the front page of the January 31st issue of this official publication of the Diocese of Austin, Texas, is

an article headlined "Non-Catholic Desire for Reunion Noted." It states that "today's non-Catholics have an intense desire to bridge the spiritual gap between themselves and Rome." For this reason nine days of prayer for Christian reunion have started in the "nation's Marian shrine" in the newly dedicated National Cathedral in Washington, D. C. Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington is quoted as saying in his address at the beginning of this nine days of prayer, that "a startling and relatively sudden change has taken place in non-Catholic circles both here and in Europe. There has emerged an intense and genuine desire for healing the breach between themselves and Rome."

"From this desire," continued the archbishop, "has grown the so-called ecumenical movement." This he calls "a world ferment to bring about the healing of the divisions among Christians through prayer, study and work." He urges that an honest effort be made "to give the fullest value possible to every element of truth already possessed by our separated brethren. In so doing we shall gradually bring them to a realization that the truth which they now possess is only fragmentary and that its fullness is to be found in that Church from which their forefathers cut themselves off."

The archbishop's admonition, "We must be patient in listening to them . . . and show a profound respect for the consciences of those who disagree with us" is certainly apparent in those Catholics who are chosen for group sessions with Protestants. Especially vulnerable to this new approach by the Church of Rome are those Protestants who have been active in recent church mergers. This time, however, the leadership is reversed for the laymen are leading the ministers. The dominant question among those who have worked for the United Church of Christ or the United Presbyterian Church, when they meet in a friendly little group is "Why do we stop here if REAL church unity is possible?" Certainly there is every indication that concessions will be made to mend the torn garment of Christ "that all may be one."

The "Grass Roots" Slogan

This appears to be a "grass roots" movement, too. And it will be claimed to be such, just like the one originating in the minds of a few ardent ecumenists which has resulted in the United Church of Christ. We heard much about "grass roots" in the decade of the forties when this merger was being ardently promoted. The Catholic press is now talking about "grass roots" in this new campaign in which a surprising number of Protestant churchmen are joining.

Several years ago one of Simeon Stylites' columns in THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY was titled "Grass Roots." Simeon wrote: "This phrase is supposed to be a clincher to any argument, no matter how silly . . . Worse still this pontifical deliverance on grass frequently comes from men who have seen no grass in ten years outside of Central Park, New York, or a few blades on the Outer Drive, Chicago." He goes on to say, "There may be a popular prejudice to the effect that two and two make four. But if a person can dash in with a hot tip that 'at the grass roots level' it is overwhelmingly felt that two and two make five, that ends the matter."

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In this great age of ecumenicity some of us may live to see the "grass roots" campaign that emanated from 287 Fourth Avenue swallowed by the "grass roots" campaign emanating from Cardinal Spellman's office. And is not the Cardinal high enough up in the Empire State Building that he can actually see Central Park? Meanwhile those who have adhered to the faith of their freedom-seeking forefathers and who are aware of the dangers of any hierarchy—Protestant or Catholic—will carry on. Perhaps there will be enough dissenters so that our republic will still stand. And of course there is always the hope that some of those who have been duped into participation in the ecumenical movement may decide themselves to see how grass really grows and secede again like the Pilgrim Fathers of old. But what a price to pay for this modern-day revelation!

"ESSENTIALLY CONGREGATIONALIST"

Professor Marion J. Bradshaw, Ph.D.,
Bangor, Maine

In his debate at the Maywood meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, President Howard Schomer said, "The Constitution of the World Council of Churches itself is essentially Congregationalist, in its unlimited respect for the autonomy of the member churches." He might profitably have supported his bare assertion by quotations from that Constitution and from the accompanying Rules.

The very opening sentence of the Council Constitution states that the World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches. It flatly declares that "The World Council shall not legislate for the churches." To be eligible for Council membership, "A Church which is to be admitted must give evidence of autonomy." Another Rule provides that "A Church which desires to resign its membership in the Council can do so at any time." There can be no question but that the World Council of Churches believes firmly in autonomy.

Out of his long service as a secretary of the World Council, Dr. Schomer not only declares that the Council's Constitution is "essentially Congregationalist, in its unlimited respect for the autonomy of the member churches," but he adds that it is "likewise close to our Congregational position in its vision of Christ's whole people, freely united, committed to voluntary and costly service all over the world." Given this insight into the "essentially Congregationalist" nature of the World Council Constitution, can not all of us go along with this distinguished Congregationalist in his ardent advocacy of the ecumenical cause?

What Kind of Autonomy?

The answer to this urgent question lies in the fact that some of Dr. Schomer's language really amounted, under the circumstances of his address, to misleading double-talk. In the ten-volume dictionary from which he gave his definition of "unit," Congregationalism is defined as "A system of ecclesiastical polity which regards all legislative, disciplinary and judicial functions as vested in the individual church or local congregation of believers." This is the autonomy which is "essentially Congregationalist." But this is not at all the autonomy for which the World Council Constitution has "unlimited respect." The fact is that Congregations, or local churches, are not members of the World Council. Its membership is reserved for general or national churches, or for whole denominations. As their Rules directly state, "Under the word churches are included such denominations as are composed of local autonomous churches." The Constitution contains not one word favoring the ecclesiastical polity which is based on the autonomy of local churches. Without this it is quite misleading to talk about the Constitution as being "essentially Congregationalist."

Dr. Schomer quoted a definition of "unit" from a 10-volume work which he called "The Dictionary of

Historic Usage." (The last word may be *uses* instead of *usage*, — the tape is not clear on that word.) Not finding such a dictionary in the University of Maine Library, or in our Seminary, or in the great Bangor Public Library, I thought it likely that the speaker merely meant to describe the work, not to give its title. This idea was confirmed when I found that Winchell's Guide to Reference Books lists no such title. I therefore turned with some confidence to the "Oxford Dictionary," titled, "A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles," where under "unit" I found the definition President Schomer had given us. I also found material which made me wish that he had quoted a bit more from his 10-volume dictionary.

Congregational or Presbyterian?

Dr. Schomer assured us that the framers of the United Church of Christ Constitution used the word "unit" in its only proper sense. He was somewhat emphatic in asserting that paragraph 7 of the Constitution is rightly and soundly Congregationalist in stating, "The basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church of Christ is the local church." The fact is that this sentence, slightly altered in being taken over from the Basis of Union, is substantially identical with what Dr. Schomer's big dictionary tells us about the Presbyterian system.

Among the many historical uses or definitions of the word *Congregational*, is this: "Congregational, of or belonging to the congregation as the lowest organized unit in the Presbyterian system."

The local church is the basic unit of organization in the United Church of Christ. It is the lowest organized unit in the Presbyterian system. That "basic unit of organization" and "lowest organized unit" are synonymous phrases hardly needs assertion. But it does need to be asserted that neither phrase is either accurate or helpful in describing what is "essentially Congregationalist."

The Brave Music of Mission

By Rev. Harry R. Butman, D.D.

This discourse was conceived and brooded on in journeyings, waitings, and walks in four foreign lands. Its opening paragraphs were penned on wave-smitten and wind-swept Shetland, an isle of midnight light. An address thus gestated ought to have spaciousness of sea and air about it, and a freedom from shadows. Yet, I hope, it will not lack roots in good earth; for in these peregrinations my heart and mind have been much with the Church of the Messiah (for the local gathered Church is the first concern and care of a Congregational pastor), as I have pondered long on the tangled problem of the relationship of the National Association to wider Christian bodies, and also on the shape of things to come as a free fellowship faces the flooding tide of the ecumenical movement.

There is a story behind the theme of the ninth Annual Meeting, "Great Expectations." It is a dramatic and significant story.

On May 31, 1792, in Nottingham, England, a man was preaching; his text was the powerful word of Isaiah: "Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes . . . for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left." (Isaiah 54:2,3). His theme was stated in balanced staccato accents of faith, "Attempt great things for God: expect great things of God." But, as usually happens, the preacher's flame and passion were quietly absorbed by the blandly passive congregation, and, the service over, the people began to file out. But this prophet's passion was a fire in his bones and he could not forebear. Leaping up on a front pew, he cried to a friend, "Call them back. We dare not let them go without doing something." The preacher was William Carey, and his cry of anguish was the birth cry of the London Missionary Society, the first great modern missionary push of Protestantism, a thrust that within a generation sent Adoniram Judson to Burma and Congregational missionaries to Hawaii and to the South Seas. You may guess my surprise and delight, when on my last visit to Westminster Abbey, at the high altar, where the established church has for centuries crowned kings and queens, I saw on the lectern, gift of the Baptist Missionary Society, the words "Attempt great things for God." These words are the theme of our ninth Annual Meeting.

I

A Matter of Mood

My interpretation of our theme does not lend itself to explicit formulation: it is too big and too intricate. It is rather a matter of mood, but the mood is clear enough. *The hour has come for the National Association, as the custodian of the Pilgrim heritage, to take the spiritual offensive. The days of ideological retreat are over: the stance of defense is no longer adequate; it is time to set the trumpet to the mouth and blow the charge.* No more for us the silver sadness of taps for a lost cause, or the falling cadences of retreat. From this day forth let ours be the brave music of mission.



Dr. Butman

Christian Relations Committee who have journeyed to other lands in the interest of Congregationalism (the other two were the Rev. Neil Swanson, Jr., and the Editor.)

The Rev. Harry R. Butman, D.D., minister of the Church of the Messiah in Los Angeles, has served the National Association in many capacities. Most recently he has been the 1962-1963 Moderator, and as such delivered his moderatorial address on June 25, 1963, to the largest and most representative gathering of our Churches on record. Dr. Butman also spoke as one of three members of the World

You might well consider these words a set of ringing rhetorical platitudes, proper in the mouth of a Moderator, but I think I shall redeem my flourishes from the taunt of truism by saying that by these military metaphors I intend to convey my conviction that the National Association should find a place and bear a witness in the ecumenical movement.

The organized ecumenical movement, with its adoration of the one-great-church, and its unadmitted lust for power, needs to be reminded of the significance and scriptural authority of the Congregational idea — the unfettered operation of the Spirit in the gathered local Church, under the sole headship of Christ, bound to other Churches in a free relation of affection. I am persuaded that it is not enough for the National Association to be a voice crying in the wilderness. We must go boldly into the market places and parliaments of ecclesiastical commerce and declare in the hearing of the Lord's brethren that the word they speak to the world is incomplete unless it includes the Congregational idea. And we must go forth inspired by the same blend of attempt and expectancy that moved William Carey. We must have a sense of mission. Our sense of mission must be both a general advance and also, a particular charge. Our general sense of mission must be like Carey's, a preaching of the gospel to those in need, such as, work already well begun by the Congregational Missionary Society, and magnificently carried on by our Churches, for example, Boston's Park Street Church.

II

A Mission to the Ecumenical

My next proposition is that the National Association has a particular mission to the ecumenical movement. This is a controversial matter. To begin with, let me flatly say that I propose no modification or diminution of our basic principles, nor do I believe that for us to leave the quiet pool of our isolation is an admission of weakness: the game fish swims upstream. We must recognize the ecumenical movement as an ecclesiastical fact of life: if we shut our eyes, it will not go away. Further, there are reasonable men of good spirit involved in that movement. We must not let our long harsh experience embitter and blind us. We can join with men of goodwill in fellowship though we cannot accept their concept of Congregational polity.

III

The International Congregational Council

One reason for my Moderator's trip abroad was to see if the cords of International Congregational fellowship, severely slashed by the Rotterdam incident, could be kept from complete severance. The second purpose was to seek out men whose views were like our own, that we might join hands for strength.

Pursuant to the first point, I met with I.C.C. leaders, the Rev. Dr. Norman Goodall, the Rev. Ralph F. G. Calder and the Rev. Glynmor John in London on May 16. These men extended me much courtesy, presented me to the assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and arranged my preaching schedule.

The London meeting lasted more than three hours. I stated the classical Congregational position of the National Association, and our determination to maintain it. I gave statistics about us which were, I think, a cause of surprise to them, since their sources of information had (just possibly) been tinged with a smidgin of prejudice. I proposed a simple four-word framework for our conversation: "Keep the door open." Once closed it would never be knocked on again. I faithfully presented the resentment of our party at the 1962 Rotterdam rejection of our application for membership. I said that the majority of the World Christian Relations Committee was indifferent, if not opposed, to my visit with International Congregational Council officials. I was so blunt as to say that the feeling of our Rotterdam representatives could be put in a figure: the United Church of Christ had blackballed the National Association from membership in the International Congregational Council before the United Church of Christ itself was a member of the club.

The I.C.C. leaders asked a number of questions and made some comments. Was the National Association a legal entity? Would the National Association engage in litigation? It was their feeling that our 1960 Cheyenne resolution, wherein we claimed to be the official successor to the General Council, virtually excommunicated all other American Congregationalists. They insisted that those who went into the United Church of Christ did so with conscientious conviction regarding their understanding of Congregationalism.

I stated that the National Association would never reapply for membership in the International Congregational Council, but I could say (and, in the absence of any contrary action by an Annual Meeting of the National Association I could say accurately) that the first application was not withdrawn. They considered this to be of importance. I believe (and other persons confirm my belief) that the executive committee of the International Congregational Council is truly troubled about the Rotterdam rejection of the National Association. I would hope that this breach can be mended. But perhaps I should make myself crystal clear at this point. I think that we should enter the International Congregational Council, and in that forum press for our brand of Congregationalism — the 99 & 44/100% pure classical sort. And while I would go to London, I would not journey on to Geneva. I do not advocate, either now or

in the foreseeable future, any attempt to enter the World Council of Churches. In the highly improbable event of our admission (for the World Council of Churches is no longer predominantly Protestant, but Orthodox, and the Congregational idea would be both heresy and anarchy to them), that ponderous ecclesiastical machine would crush us as a steam roller crunches an apple.

IV

Congregationalism Militant

So much for the irenic aspect of our Congregational mission: the second is more militant. In years past, the defense of the Congregational Way has been made in sad necessity, in hazard and at cost. In the days to come, the propagation and extension of that Way will be no less fraught with toil, trouble and risk. We must fight this just and mournful war, but we must fight it, as Augustine advises, in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, with the enemy's welfare in mind. Despite the pull of peace, the quiet desire to tend to our knitting and let the rest of the world go by, it is our mission to strike our standard into the very earth of the enemy's camp. It is written in Psalms to the shame of Ephraim, "The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." May it not be said of us who are hardened in conflict, with quivers of sharp arrows of truth, that we were craven when the trumpet sounded. *We are the first successful rebels in the cause of modern ecclesiastical liberty! It is our spiritual duty to raise a standard about which other men in other lands may rally.*

V

Of Foes Without

Our ideological foes are strong and disciplined. I sat in something like silent horror in the annual assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales last May while Dr. John Marsh, the new chairman, delivered a brilliantly-phrased address in which bishops were nakedly advocated for English Congregationalists. He said, "I hold it as a true Congregational concern in the twentieth century that any new United Church of whatever elements it be composed, should be given an Episcopate in the richest and fullest form available." Principal Marsh is saying now precisely what Dr. Truman Douglass said over fifteen years ago. At the May meeting the reasonable and eloquent proposals of those who objected to centralization were defeated by a parliamentary barrage from officials who dominated the platform and so had instant access to the microphone. Our English brethren are going to learn, as we have bitterly learned over the years, that they will not be heard for the cogency of their arguments, nor will they prevail by reason of the purity of their Congregationalism. The periodicals of British Congregationalism have abounded in articles favoring organizational ecumenicity; not a line is now allotted to lovers and defenders of the gathered local Church. There are no denominational funds available to print and distribute views that vary from the official position. Our embattled English brethren (and there are among them knees which have not bowed to Baal, and mouths which have not kissed him) are

standing in the need of prayer and in need of a helping hand, for they face foes of conviction and of strength. We must pass on to our friends our hard-learned lesson: in union there is strength. We must make available to them (if they ask for it) the wisdom and skills we have acquired in twenty years of warfare, for they are confronted by no mean antagonists.

VI

An Inner Enemy

So much for the foes without, but I dread an inner enemy more. I fear lest we become smugly satisfied in our isolation — modern Pharisees who scorn lesser faiths. This is said of us already. It is not now true. Oliver Wendell Holmes once wrote that a man must take part in the events of his time on peril of finding at life's end that he had not lived! It is both foolish and wicked to be utterly self-absorbed. The Greek word for a private citizen is *idiotēs*; if privacy is carried too far it becomes *idiotic*. Unless we go forth among men with a sense of particular mission, a deservedly ill fate will befall us. There is a peril faced by any group, small for the sake of conscience, that the sweet wine of their first faith will age into the vinegar of self-righteousness. Of this inner danger we must unceasingly beware.

VII

Friends

We will not be dismayed by our foes if we consider the force of our friends: for we have friends and they are stout of heart. I have heard our cause eloquently pleaded in a crowded Meeting House in London; talked of on the green lanes and grimy station platforms of the English midlands, and in the red-leathered sedateness of a London club. As I sat talking on a moor in Scotland overlooking a sun-silvered loch, while the cloud shadows raced over the bare brown hills, my heart was lifted up by an unexpected accession to our fellowship of mind. In South India, in Hawaii, in Formosa, in Western Samoa and in all parts of the world, there are loyal men and women who desire to link hands with us in our excellent cause. I count it a thing of meaning that *we three who went abroad for you this year, have, without taking counsel together, come to a sudden and powerful conviction that the day of march has come*, that the winds of God are blowing. For ears that will listen, there is the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees. (2 Samuel 5:24).

VIII

The Spiritual Offensive

I have read that in each medieval castle there was a donjon-keep. This was not a prison, but a castle within a castle, the final fortress if the enemy should scale the outer wall. And it is said that a donjon-keep was never taken except when the will of the defenders failed. So long as the will to resist was unbroken, the keep, the inner fortress, was impregnable. In the National Association the Congregational idea has such a strong tower. But battles are won not by defense alone, however perfect. Only as the people of the castle went out through

the sally-port to the attack could they be victorious and hold their land in peace. *The hour has come for us to take spiritual offensive. The day of stubborn resistance in a keep is done. Our friends are true-hearted and tested. We are now strong enough to go forth and win.*

IX

Put on the Whole Armor of God

Our weapons are many. Take inventory of our armory, the weapons with which we may fight. Let us raise the Committee on World Christian Relations to full commission status, or ask the committee to make sharp definition of its plan of advance, provide it with budgetary support, and charge it with the task of planting our banner in all parts of the world.

Let us use to the fullest our greatest weapon, our most potent tool of attack, which is *the Congregational idea itself*, the bold and invigorating doctrine of the gathered Church, captained by Christ, complete under God, linked in love to like Churches, and in charity with all men of good will. Fourteen years ago, when we organized the Massachusetts Fellowship, I said that we were people of an idea, and that although numbers and wealth and strong men were arrayed against us, we would live by the power of that idea. I have no reason to alter my conviction.

There are additional weapons. We must fight with *intelligence*: for a good cause is badly served by fools. We must have *persistence*; for the battle is not for a day, nor for those soon faint. *Courage* must be ours, in the bright noon of success and in the dark moment of temporary defeat. Our sinews must be nerved by *faith*, the assurance that though both the odds against us and the battle be long, ultimately we will win under the favor of God. And in our sternest striving we must have *the love of the brethren* deep in our hearts. We must have a lack of malice and a sense of fellowship with all Christians so that even the fiercest fighting cannot turn into bitterness or hatred.

X

A Personal Witness

Let me now bear personal witness. I feel well used by life (and I am sure I do not stand alone in this) because I found in manhood a great cause in the struggle for spiritual liberty, a cause big enough to absorb my best thoughts and energies, and one worth sacrifice. That cause has not become brassy or tarnished with the passing of the years; it carries me, rather than I it. The happy warrior is a man so blessed. And my prayer for the National Association is that "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" — as a departed saint of our fellowship was wont to call the beleagured brethren of the Congregational Way — might become, by the good pleasure of God and by the leading of His Spirit, a great company with garrisons over all the globe, marching to the music of mission under freedom's flag, dedicated to the unwearied proclamation of the "liberty wherewith Christ hath set us free," toiling in honesty of mind and with warmth of heart, to the glory of God and to the comfort and joy of men. Amen.

