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
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
Stoudt, John. “Are We Still Protestants?” October ‘61
Commission on the Ministry. “What is a Congregational Church?” November ‘69
Wilson, Robert. “Local Autonomy in a Time of Centralization.” August ‘78
Moe, Ronald. “Congregationalism in the March of History.” August ‘88
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
Buchelder, Horace. “Whither the Ecumenical Movement?” April ‘60
Bradshaw, Marion. “Essentially Congregationalist.” January ‘61
Conn, Howard. “Congregationalism’s Contribution to Christian Unity.” October ‘63
Conn, Howard. “Congregationalists and the Ecumenical Movement.” September ‘65
Gwatney, 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
Swanson Jr., Neil. “Report from Uppsula.” 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 Indepedency.” 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 regions.

Bohman, George. “The Place of Associations in Modern Congregationalism.” May ’65
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

ASPECTS OF CHURCH LIFE

Butman, Harry. “The Vicinage Council.” March ’65
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 efforts 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
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
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.

Butman, Harry. “Moderator’s Statement at the Ordination of John K. Tremaine.” February ‘66
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
Steele, 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

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?

Clinch, Russell. “Comment and Reflection.” October ‘65
Ream, Norman. “A Relevant Religion.” June ‘66
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
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 worshiping 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

ECUMENISM
Congregated 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 those needs “have no local character.”

Congregationalism Pilloried

The speaker then called upon Congregationalists to fulfill their mission in the world by carrying into ecumenical unities “whatever we have that is valuable.” Denominations, said he, have a “spurious 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 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, or 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 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 principles 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 Nanjing the Gining Union Seminary for training secret service agents to operate against the Christians. One group infiltrated 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 ecumenism 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 those 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 journeys, 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 generated 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 bosom, 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 Sea. 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.

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

AMission 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 start by saying 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. Glynnor 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 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 anachrony to them), that ponderous ecclesiastical machine would crush us as a steam roller crushes an apple.

IV

Congregationalism Militant

So much for the ironic 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 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 idioi; 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 every 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, captured 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 sins are many and be forgiven 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 beleaguered 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," toil in honesty of mind and with warmth of heart, to the glory of God and to the comfort and joy of men. Amen.

This significant and controversial book by the associate director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State would make an excellent study book for free churchmen who wish to become informed about the current religious situation.

Recognizing that "Ecumenism is an indubitable religious fact of our time" the author seriously questions the ecumenical assumption that bringing together all Christian bodies in one ecclesiastical organization would be the best thing that could happen to them. The connectional managers of the Protestant denominations are finding ecumenism one of the most durable and popular gimmicks. The arguments are phrased largely in sociological and institutional terms.

Ecumenism has produced sterility rather than liberation. Ecumenism erodes the strength of the church in beliefs and programs of action. The end of missions is the practical consequence of ecumenism.

Proliferation is a sign of spiritual health. The life in the church today is found in groups that are on the march while main-line denominations are pre-occupied with management of endowments and boards. The logical end of Christian unity is the state church with everything well ordered.

The new approach of Rome to Protestants is occasioned by the failure of persecution, segregation, and individual conversions as means to win Protestants to the one true church. The success of the World Council of Churches, the low estate of the Vatican's own fortunes and its need for allies, the expansion of atheism, communism, and secularism, account in part for the strategy "of dialogue and friendly appeal aimed at the eventual absorption of all major Protestant groups within the body of Roman Catholicism."

There remains decisive differences between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in the areas of priesthood, religious liberty and church-state relations, the fact of Mariology, and papal infallibility. The formal impossibility of reconciling these differences has stimulated ecumenists in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant groups.

Serious values in the dialogue between Protestants and Roman Catholics can be achieved only if complete reciprocity is the rule. There may be some value in authentic two-way dialogue. Surrender of distinctives and convictions is not genuine dialogue. The obsession for sameness, for unity corrupts the dialogue just as it corrupts Christianity itself. Protestant ecumenists should learn that dialogue is not an occasion for surrendering basic tenets of their faith but for understanding and articulating them more clearly.

References to the Congregationalists are limited, repetitive and superficial (e.g., p. 34 and p. 62). The author has indicated to this reviewer that he was vaguely aware of the situation within recent Congregationalism and in a future revision he might take greater note of the fact that some Congregationalists were unwilling to surrender their basic principles. Be that as it may, Congregationalists who read this book will learn much about the ecumenical movement in a larger perspective.

Lowell does not consider protestant ecumenism an authentic manifestation of the Holy Spirit, but merely the cultural drift among nominal Christians who are without real convictions.

"Protestants need a new approach to inter-creedal relations. Ecumenism is the wrong road, leading by the wrong route to the wrong destination. Protestants need to get on the right road leading to the right destination. Instead of picking up a new gadget called ecumenism, they must turn again to the fountain head of their faith. They must seek renewal not in grandiose schemes of ecclesiastical power structure but in Jesus Christ in whom lies the secret of perennial renewal." (p. 195)

Lowell believes that the ecumenical obsession of our time is leading Protestantism to a dead end. He is hopeful that the impatience of the Protestant rank and file with ecumenism and with a leadership that is eager to surrender their heritage to Rome will change the situation. He maintains that Protestants are looking with eager longing for an authentic renewal of the Spirit that can bring new life to the church.
REPORT FROM UPPSALA
by Neil H. Swanson, Jr.

The Assembly of the World Council of Churches meets every six or seven years to review policies and programs. At the Fourth Assembly I was a self-paying “guest,” joining 700 voting delegates and 600 other participants for 17 days of intensive meetings. It has seemed to me that members of free Churches should keep in contact with Christians of other persuasions, and I had the additional motivation of seeing for myself how the World Council functions.

Actually, so much happened at this Assembly that it is impossible to report it adequately. There were “ten tons of talk”—a reference to the ten tons of paper on which speeches and reports were mimeographed. I would like first to record a number of favorable impressions. There was tremendous variety among the participants—polity, theology, nationality, language, dress. The Assembly was a “working” conference in which delegates made decisions on a wide range of subjects. There was an obvious respect for different points of view. The Bible study conducted in the general sessions was amazingly effective.

The theme of Christian unity has been at the center of World Council concerns. It was a pleasant surprise to discover an emphasis on the validity of diversity. In his superb speech on “The Mandate of the Ecumenical Movement,” Dr. W. A. Visser ’t Hooft acknowledged the need for “the people of God to live as one reconciled and therefore united family.” But he went on immediately to say, “I wonder at the same time whether it is not largely our own fault that so many conceive of unity in terms of uniformity and centralization and are therefore afraid of it. Should we not have learned after these decades of common life in the ecumenical movement that the Holy Spirit has used very many different forms of church-order for His work of inspiration, conversion and prophecy? And have we given sufficient attention to the indisputable fact that the earliest church knew several quite distinct types of church order? My point is simply that there seems to be no really urgent reason to identify unity with acceptance of one and the same church order. Do we not discover in our increasingly pluralistic cultural situation that what is good for one continent or region is not necessarily good for another? And must we not draw the conclusion that there can be real fellowship in faith and in sacrament even when structurally we differ?”

This was not an isolated viewpoint. In the report of the section on “The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church,” there is an excellent statement on the quest for diversity. In the report of the Assembly Committee on Faith and Order, the New Delhi statement on the nature of unity was reaffirmed. It is of interest to note that this statement includes the comment: “We are clear that unity does not imply simple uniformity of organization, rite or expression.”

Of course there are those within the World Council whose desire for visible unity takes the form of one organically united church. But it should be emphasized that this is only one point of view. The sheer fact of diversity within the World Council, which will be increased by the fuller participation of the Roman Catholic Church, may lead to the acceptance of the position formulated by Dr. Visser ’t Hooft. A number of critical comments were made, often by Eastern Orthodox representatives.
A statement of ecumenical intentions

As part of the universal company of the Lord's Free People, we of the Congregational Christian Churches send warm greetings to all our brothers and sisters in other communions which recognize the autonomy and freedom of local churches. Together with you we share the concept of the gathered church, in which persons living in a locality and responsive to the Lordship of Jesus Christ voluntarily unite themselves into a congregation for purposes of worship, fellowship and service. We believe that such a church receives full interest and power by all ordinances of Christ so given through the promise that where two or three are gathered together in His name, that He is also present in their midst. (Matthew 18:20) We are free from the administration, supervision or control of any outside ecclesiastical bodies or powers; ourselves answering only to the righteousness and love made known in Jesus Christ through the Holy Scriptures.

Yet because we are not ourselves alone but the Lord's Free People, we recognize that we are part of a larger fellowship that extends around the globe wherever others respond, as do we, to the redeeming love of our Lord. We believe that in the present hour there is need for the free churches of whatever name or grouping to reach out to one another in mutuality and affection, that together we witness that the Congregational Way not be lost in the worldwide councils and structures of Christendom, and that we may share on equal grounds with our fellow Christians who are organized according to Presbyterian or Episcopal polities.

We question efforts to forged Christian unity out of creedal tests, doctrinal purity, historical benchmarks, and organizational structure. We believe that the unity of Christendom is to be found in the celebration of God's great gift to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and in the hope we share of the glory to come through the gracious and redeeming love of a universal and caring God. We adhere to the covenantal relationship between the human and divine, in which we mortals accept the covenant of grace so wondrously offered by the magnanimity of the Eternal One; and we bind ourselves beyond all differences to a mutual helpfulness as we seek to walk in the ways in which the Divine Truth, Beauty and Goodness are revealed to us. We see ourselves as a part of the historic continuity of the Christian Church through a common strand of devotion, yet ever expressing itself in freshness, creativity and wonder inspired by the outpouring of the Spirit.

True ecumenism comes in the shared love and mutual respect manifested when we share the tasks of Christian discipleship and show to the world the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer that they might all be one. It is the spirit and mutuality of shared love among those who claim to follow the Christ which has always served to be the attitudinal and relational foundation of ecumenism and not the mere constructs of human invention which forge an institutional unity among the followers of Jesus.

We in the free church movement appreciate the heritage of saints and martyrs who through the ages have rejoiced in the fellowship of the living Christ, and have witnessed to the same amidst alien cultures. We aspire to be of this company. We rejoice in its diversity, through which the Spirit may speak uniquely to differing pilgrims. We recognize that the majesty of the Divine transcends all human limitations, and thus we seek not only to be responsive in our ways but appreciative of companions who respond through varying theological beliefs and liturgical forms.

We do not wish to judge amongst them, but to love and appreciate all. We consider this to be the rich abundance of Christian fellowship and the essence of true ecumenism. We ask that this fellowship be broad enough to include amongst the many forms ours of the Congregational Way. We, too, are in the ecumenical spirit, and we reach out hearts and hands to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ.

We of the Congregational Christian Churches extend an invitation to all individuals, churches and associations of whatever name to join with us in the effort to keep alive the right of private judgment, the integrity of public worship, and the freedom of autonomous churches; and to labor for the inclusion of these rights within the ecumenical movement. We stand ready to unite with others of similar commitment in the formation of any larger fellowship of free Christian spirits who would be an identifiable part of the universal company of Christ's people.

Members of the World Christian Relations Commission participating in the formation of this message: Rev. Howard J. Conn, Rev. Duane Arnold, Dr. Robert Cabeen, Rev. Paul N. Ray, Mr. John Erdahl, Rev. Lowell Linden and Rev. Douglas Lobb.
concerning the ambiguity of "consensus" documents which give the appearance of agreement that does not truly exist. I have been encouraged by all of this to recommend to the World Council a depth study on the possibility of unity within diversity—both in terms of the unity of the church and in terms of the contribution Christians can make to the unity of mankind in a pluralistic world. I strongly feel that this is an area in which members of free Churches should be involved.

There was a major emphasis in this Fourth Assembly concerning the problems of the world—poverty, war, racial tensions. This was due in part to the impact of the 1966 "World Conference on Church and Society" which had a strong representation of laity and a relatively large representation from the non-western world. It is not possible to describe all that was discussed in the area of "social concerns". There was evidence of tension between those who define the Christian priority as "salvation" and those who describe it as "revolution". In the justifiable eagerness to share the higher living standards of technology with the "developing" nations, there was a lack of criticism of the negative aspects of modern industrial society. Such a critique was expressed in some of the speeches, notably in the profound comments of André Dumas, but it was not included in the report on "World Economic and Social Development." The mood of a majority of the World Council participants was expressed by Dr. Visser 't Hooft when he said, "It must become clear that church members who deny in fact their responsibility for the needy in any part of the world are just as much guilty of heresy as those who deny this or that article of faith."

I was impressed by the modifications which were successfully made by the delegates in almost all of the documents which were presented for evaluation. The most notable example of this was in regard to the section report on "mission". The preliminary draft was for many too great a departure from traditional terminology and principles. The final result was an interesting compromise.

However, for me, the most dramatic illustration of modification occurred in the statements regarding the use of violence to change social structures. If one traces this issue from the official report of the World Conference on Church and Society through the preliminary draft for the section on World Economic and Social Development to the final report of this section, he witnesses a dramatic change. The reports move from a justification of the use of violent revolutionary methods through a recognition that Christians differ in their judgment about revolution to the statement that revolution is not to be identified with violence and that "the churches can make a special contribution towards the development of effective non-violent strategies of revolution and social change."

I would be remiss if I did not comment on "resolutions." The delegates passed resolutions on Vietnam, Nigeria, and the Middle East. There was lengthy consultation in regard to each of them. However, they constitute only a minor aspect of the total activity of the Assembly. Of far greater impact than these resolutions expressing judgments about military conflicts were resolutions relating to the impressive relief program of the World Council and to the creation of a new Office of Education which will be concerned with general education, Christian education, and theological education.

In conclusion, I cannot emphasize strongly enough that the patterns of relationship and of activity in the World Council of Churches have not jelled. I feel that our free Churches should have contact, perhaps by means of "delegated observers", with certain aspects of the World Council—to avoid isolation, to have fellowship with other Christians, and to make our contribution to the continuing discussions and evaluations.

The Rev. Neil H. Swanson, Jr., is well known as a former Executive Secretary of the National Association. At present he is living on Maui, teaching, preaching, and writing.
Congregationalism’s Contribution to Christian Unity

In his moderatorial address at our ninth annual meeting Harry Bateman made a plea that the National Association keep close to the ecumenical movement. Without the contribution of free Congregationalism, world Christianity cannot achieve its ultimate objective. With this position I am in hearty agreement, for I am concerned lest in its current status ecumenicity fall from the grandeur of a Christ-like inclusiveness to an extended parochialism.

I should like to explore the matter by asking, What is Congregationalism’s contribution? Define it this way: To serve the spiritual unity of all people in Christ as they seek life’s deepest meanings, without creational dogma, without insistence on precise organizational structure, and with gracious goodwill toward those from whom they differ.

Such a mission assumes that the basis of our religious experience is the discovery of new dimensions to life through God’s gift in Jesus Christ, and that those who have shared this discovery are on their way to becoming new creatures in Him. It assumes further that all such persons belong together in the seamless fellowship which Jesus instituted, being thus united in a manner offered by no other human relationship. This union includes not only persons of every race and nationality now living who have accepted Christ, but also brings us into kinship with those of all generations who have been part of the universal fellowship of Christ’s people.

The Congregationalist takes seriously this basic unity which includes rich diversity and wide variations. He is peculiarly fitted to lead Christendom to a realization of its unity in Christ Jesus because he will not be tripped by doctrinal and structural details that bother other denominations. He takes the widest possible view, listening to “the one sound of the heart,” to recall Archbishop Cranmer’s eloquent phrase, rather than insisting upon some detail of technical purity. He will not draw lines to exclude anyone who has found the new life in Christ.

To every class of members received into Plymouth Church I recount this vast universal company of which they are a part. I say that we do not regard persons from other denominations as becoming new converts or better Christians because now they choose to unite with us. They are merely transferring active participation from one local manifestation to another of the universal Church of our Lord. If Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and some Lutherans cannot obtain letters of transfer because their former parishes do not regard us as properly a Church, we nonetheless recognize them fully as brethren in Christ.

This is the love, goodwill and indestructible unity which Congregationalism can bring to the ecumenical movement. It has been my good fortune to travel extensively in the Near and Far East. In order to experience the reality of this ecumenical spirit, perhaps one needs the perspective of worshipping with Christians in alien lands where they are a distinct minority. I recall a world-wide Communion Sunday service in an Anglican Church in Ceylon, though the occasion was not mentioned by the officiating clergy. I shall never forget receiving communion while sitting on the porch of a village Church in India. Not a word of the service or liturgy I could understand, but the meanings were precious and clear in the radiant faces of those villagers. Numbers of times I have worshipped in Turkey in the living rooms of mission stations. One of the most amazing experiences occurred this past winter when I met for devotions and discussion with the Christian Council of a town in north India, composed of staff personnel of the Christian groups within its precincts. In nationality the participants were Australians, Americans, British and Indian. In affiliations they included an Anglican bishop, a Roman Catholic priest, a Salvation Army hospital staff, Methodists and Congregationalists. At such a time, one senses how precious is the tie that binds us together in the community of Christ, where we are learners and witnesses, not disputants or rivals. After the meeting the Roman Catholic, a native Indian, came to ask me if in the United States Christians had this kind of fellowship with one another.

Many Americans living abroad in diplomatic, military and business communities are attending union Churches in the principal cities of the world. Here they are experiencing a unity which is more vividly real to them in their worship than are the technical matters of doctrine and organization which separate the parishes they knew at home in the States. The shared life in Christ will draw people together wherever it is given the chance.

It comes as a surprise to lay people to be told that the formalized ecumenical movement is deviating from this pursuit of inclusive wholeness. The reason is that the denominations and councils are shaped largely by the clergy, and the priesthood in every religion of history is concerned with institutionalism. The clergy today are not thinking of the unity of persons in Christ but of the unity of the church as an organization. They are seeking thedoing things “decently and in order”, they are referring to the precise legalisms by which the Christian community orders itself not as a fellowship of persons but as a carefully authenticated institution. Congregationalism’s contribution is precisely at this point, for we say that what we seek is the fellowship of all people in Christ rather than the extended parochialism of a structure. We seek to embrace and to serve all people.
in their search for life’s deepest meanings, and we will not let technicalities of dogma and structure take precedence.

The astounding fact is that leaders of the World Council of Churches, by insisting on doctrinal and structural purity, have been moving steadily toward a narrowing concept of “the Church” which actually limits rather than broadens participation. At New Delhi in 1961 the credal formulation was tightened to be more explicitly trinitarian and scriptural to satisfy the Orthodox Churches whose members now constitute the majority in the World Council.

In situation after situation churchmen who are striving for organizational union have used their authority to pressure or injure Christians who are outside their structures. In Greece the Orthodox Church harasses the efforts of the Evangelicals to minister to people. In the Church of South India the clergy have refused to read marriage bands for youths who marry members of the Travencore Church Council Churches which chose not to enter the CSI. Yet the denial of opportunities to Christians from whom we differ is a denial of the essential unity we seek.

The majority of Congregationalists went into the United Church of Christ sincerely believing that this new body preserves the freedom of the local Church to conduct its internal affairs and strengthens the drawing together of Christians. We hope that this faith will be vindicated by future events. But the autonomy of the local Church was only part of the Congregational heritage, and those persons who entered the United Church have actually relinquished the possibility of making what I am defining as the Congregational contribution to the ecumenical movement. They may not have intended to do so, but this is the actuality. For by its very structure the United Church is involved in technicalities which impede openness to Christ-leadings and therefore work against Congregational inclusiveness.

The most glaring evidence, clear for all to see, is the rejection of the National Association from membership in the International Congregational Council. Our Association, composed of Churches clearly Congregational, some with one to three hundred years of leadership in the American fellowship, was denied membership on a technicality. United Church leaders claimed (this was explained with candor privately behind the scenes but was never publicly stated to the delegates at the Rotterdam Assembly in 1962) that the National Association Churches were represented, even against their will, by the United Church delegates because the General Council had passed all fellowship functions to the United Church. This theory frankly avows that the autonomy of a local Church does not include the right to determine its own fellowship relations, but that this right belongs to the larger bodies in which the local Church has membership. This limitation on autonomy was never acknowledged during debates on the constitution, but as a technicality it was used in punitive fashion to penalize the Congregational Churches which had not gone along with the union. If the purpose of the ecumenical movement is to draw together all in Christ, how can one justify the rejection of a group of fellow Christians who ask only that they too may share in that fellowship?

Recently I listened to a discussion in which a young seminary graduate who had been brought up an American Baptist was being urged to seek ordination in the United Church. His preference was to be ordained a Baptist. He said that later he might transfer in the tradition of many Baptists who have become Congregationalists. A United Church minister reminded that in the future it will be more difficult to make this shift. I recalled to mind the many pages of the constitution concerning the ministry, and could see that in the mind of this minister these pages are intended to make more difficult the free movement of Christians one amongst the other. This new body will insist on technicalities that Congregationalists never have. In the guise of unity it is setting up structural differences to impede the free flow of persons within the fellowship. It is thus counter to the mission of Congregationalism.

Now that a more precisely structured organization has been established within the outlines of the United Church, representatives of that body are meeting officially with those of three other major denominations to consider a larger merger. From the outside one cannot presume to say precisely what lines this development will take, but the terms of the Blake-Pike proposal imply a recognition of the orders of the ministry that preserves apostolic succession. If the development follows trends taken by the Church of South India, so often hailed as a model, this will mean that the church of the future will have no place for those who will not submit to a technical order that violates their concepts of the open fellowship of Christ’s people. Can I in conscience subscribe to a requirement of the church which fifty years from now may prevent a young man from entering the ministry on the same terms of sincerity and conviction that have made possible the joys of my pastorate? Congregationalism has a responsibility to keep open free response to Christian discipleship, without dogma and structure, but with goodwill toward all.

Jesus Christ is the great liberating and uniting force in the religious life. It is indeed tragic that in his name so many barriers and hostilities have arisen. Many of us welcomed the ecumenical movement because it promised to recognize our essential unity in Christ, and to draw us together for the witness we could make in his name and in his spirit. We thought that the vision of Whittier was being given substance in the twentieth century, as he sang of one great temple for all humanity:

A sweeter song shall then be heard,
Confessing, in a world’s accord
The inward Christ, the living Word.
That song shall swell from shore to shore,
One hope, one faith, one love restore
The seamless robe that Jesus wore.

Present plans of ecclesiastical leaders threaten this vision. Free, independent, cooperative Congregationalism has a vital contribution to make to true ecumenicity, by insisting that where the Spirit will draw us together in Christ our Lord, no man, council or institution ought dare to hold us apart.
Rapid developments are taking place within the ecumenical movement. Two significant steps have occurred last winter. In February Cardinal Bea, head of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, went to Geneva, headquarters of the World Council of Churches, to say that the Roman Church accepts the invitation of the World Council to establish a joint committee to study possibilities of closer ties. Only a few years ago such a step would not have been conceivable. In April representatives of six major denominations met for the annual Consultation on Church Union, apparently agreed on the ticklish problem of the Ministry and Ordination, and announced the hope to draw up plans for a union.

Where does this leave Congregationalists? Our friends say to us, "Don't you want to be in this marvelous development?"

First, there seem to me two aspects in which we can join in the rejoicing. One, we can be grateful for the warming cordiality between Catholics and Protestants. We have always stood for goodwill and Mutuality among Christians, and are pleased at the trend to recognize the worth in all positions. Two, we are glad for our friends who desire organic church union, because they have reason to be encouraged.

Nonetheless, we are in no way swerved from our traditional open, free approach to religion. Congregational principles cannot possibly enter into an organic union of Christendom. We believe that the contribution to true spiritual ecumenicity is to witness to the freedom and fellowship of the man of Christ outside organic structure, while maintaining goodwill toward those who want to build up the body.

We therefore have to demur from the popular enthusiasm, and ask the same questions we have asked from the beginning.

What Is the Nature of the Church?

We believe it to be a fellowship of people drawn together by the Holy Spirit and empowered to be disciples of Jesus Christ. It has ever been thus since Jesus gathered his followers by Galilee. The Universal Church is neither an organization nor a body of doctrine but a living dynamic fellowship impelled to worship, to love and to serve because God has made them one in Him by the power of His Spirit animating their lives.

This universal company has countless manifestations in the thousands of parishes throughout the globe. Christ is the head of each. Christ quickens the people to establish relations of cooperation whereby to do His will. Mutual respect, goodwill and cooperation ought to be cultivated beyond all lines of denominationalism, dogma, or nationality. This we encourage through the cooperative movement in councils of churches.

Is there any super Church beyond the local congregations? We say, No. Men have created such structure through the centuries, but these impose a hierarchical clergy between God and man. Such a Church would be removed from the people, and act independently of them.

Can we imagine the Roman Church assenting to this interpretation? Of course not. In current dialogues Rome makes clear that it is not compromising on matters of doctrine—such as the authority of the Church, the Trinity, veneration for Sacred Scriptures and for Mary. No matter how liberal the Roman Church might become, it could not maintain itself and allow the freedoms which Congregationalists cherish. Thus any consideration of union is utterly inconceivable.

Wherein Does Religious Vitality Lie?

My own answer is that of George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. It is the presence of Christ speaking in our hearts. Our unity is to be found in responding to Him. The delegates who work for union through trying to reconcile historic positions on ordination, on doctrine, or on structure, are to a Congregationalist looking in the wrong place. They may build a united ecclesiastical structure, but it will not be one in which we have much interest or for which we feel any loyalty. For us, it cannot be a church of the Spirit, but a man-made organization designed to exercise power amongst the sociological institutions of society, and to protect orthodoxy in belief.

We are pleased to read that when the new minister, Richard P. Buchman, was formally recognized as pastor of the Cadman Memorial Church of Brooklyn, the worship service was planned as one of re-dedication rather than installation. It was planned by the Deacons, and (Continued on next page)
conducted by the Deacons, "to emphasize the ministry that all of us share and to underline the relationship of mutual responsibility that exists between the pastor and the people of a free Church." Mr. Buchman wrote that he was not concerned where his technical "ministerial standing" was lodged, because "my standing is in this Church, assured by your vote to call me to serve you."

Here is a splendid contemporary reaffirmation of the basis of the pastoral relationship clearly conceived by the Pilgrims when at Salem in 1629 the people reordained the two Anglican clergymen they had brought with them; because no act of any outside group had any binding effect upon the people of God in the particular congregation.

**Does the New Testament or Christ Demand That “All May Be One?”**

Spiritually, Yes; structurally, No. Jesus shows no concern for structure. The text he gave was one of inward attitude. "By this shall men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another." (John 13:35)

The United Church of Christ has sent to every one of its ministers a booklet entitled, "Where We Are in Church Union." It contains enthusiastic articles about the developments within the "Consultation on Church Union" of the six major denominations. For our part, we do not accept the premises on which it rests. Bishop Newbigin has a paper on "The Church Catholic," which argues for "order in its life, ministry, and worship." "There has to be an agreed way of doing things." Such reasoning leads to recognition of the authority of the ecclesiastical institution as the basis for unity. To a Congregationalist this is a denial of the freedom of the Spirit.

We are a minority movement, but surely we are maintaining a witness that is needed within the fellowship of God's people. We are glad for whatever union the institutionalists may achieve, but they for their part should be grateful for the freedom to which we can bring a significant witness.
THE NEW PROTESTANT CHURCH?

The cry for "an ecumenical approach" to Christianity arises more and more each day. Church periodicals call for strength through numbers, made possible by the merger of the various denominations into one vast "Protestant" Church. This is supposed to be our answer to the vast power of the Church of Rome.

The Authority of Scripture

From the progress that has been made in the direction of "one-vest Church" it appears that this idea has been instilled into the rank and file members of many Churches by the means of control over them which claims to be the will of God. Ecumenics fail to realize that the Holy Scriptures are the sole authority on matters dealing with the Christian faith, and even many Congregationalists do not understand that our Fellowship is based on this teaching. In no place do the Scriptures state that there must be one great ecclesiastical body, but they do speak of fellowship between Churches.

Negating the Reformation

As a result of centralist actions, the works of the great reformers have gone for nought. One by one, the causes for which they sacrificed their lives are meeting extinction. John Calvin dedicated his life to the opposition of the authority of the Church of Rome and now, the so-called "Calvinists" are calling for dissolution of the branch of the Church that embodied his philosophy. John Hus gave his life at the stake and some of his "followers" are now in the ecumenical camp. John Wesley brought the wrath of the Church of England upon himself for his teachings on ecclesiastical freedom, and now his Methodists are traveling further down the road to ecclesiastical authoritarianism. The Pilgrims, who were early Congregationalists, gave up the comforts of life in England and came to the New World to brave the problems of an unconquered land in order to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

Luther's Answer

There is little remaining in the Protestant Churches of that spirit which gave strength to Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521, when he declared: "Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by clear arguments, I am bound by the Holy Scriptures, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither right nor safe to act against conscience. God help me. Amen."

This was Luther's answer to the ecclesiastical and civil leaders who called upon him to recant his belief concerning matters pertaining to the freedom of his conscience and of his soul.

Ecclesiastical Control

Americans speak out against totalitarianism in politics, but we are willing to sell our birth-right for "a bowl of porridge" to those who believe in ecclesiastical control over men's consciences, as long as it is "protestant" and "socialistic" and "social gospel." Today's unification movements seek to unite these groups. Even the "Congregationalists," enamored by certain eclectics, have left Congregationalism and have joined with others in a synodical church, and now this new body is holding discussions with five allied denominations to form a "church" with 22 million members. The next move will probably join in one organization all bodies in the National Council of Churches of Christ in America. Eventually, all the American "merged" bodies will be part of the World Council of Churches, including "churches" in Soviet Russia and its satellites. Then we will have a "World Church" based upon the doctrines established by the Declaration drawn up by the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi, India, November 18 to December 5, 1961.

"World Church" Doctrines

Here are some of the doctrines that we will be called upon to follow. The Archbishop of Canterbury, a president of the Council, in a lengthy interview in the London Daily Mail on Monday, October 2, 1961, is reported as saying:

"Heaven is not a place to which we humans go in our present bodily state, not is it a place for Christians only. Those who have led a good life on earth but found themselves unable to believe in God will not be debarred from Heaven. I expect to meet some present-day atheists there."

Such looseness and breadth of interpretation destroys the foundation of Christian faith and fellowship.

The New Delhi Declaration

Then, too, the New Delhi Declaration (in its study document on Service and through its Commission of the Churches of International Affairs) is undercutting the position of the West in its struggle against tyranny, aggression and subversion of the Communists. In moral conflict between freedom and Godless Communism, there can be no neutrality. Yet the Churches are specifically told that the new nations "must avoid alignments which would limit the sources of assistance. The powerful nations must respect these proper preoccupations and should welcome the contributions which non-aligned..."
countries can make to world affairs." Such an encouragement of neutrality gives encouragement to the Kremlin and contributes to the shifting of the balance of world power.

There is no question but that Communism is determined to dominate the world. Instead of meeting this challenge directly, peaceful coexistence and even peaceful competition (a tactic of the Kremlin) is commended by the World Council, and it is suggested that the two systems are not as "different in every respect as both sides believe." It is the absence of the direct Christian attack on Godless Communism, its entire system of inhumanity and its concept of the soul-less man, the slave of the state, that betrays the World Council's untenable position.

Authoritarianism

Thus, we are being led into an ecumenical church with these principles and others even more abominable, and with a leadership that will have to be authoritarian in order to hold together the various factions that are inevitable. In view of the above pronouncements, the new ecclesiastical body will need a system of punishments and rewards far worse than Purgatory or Indulgences!

Shall We Recant?

From our point of view, why bother with this step by step plan which will lead to the adoption of the principles as stated, when it would be so much easier to have an ecumenical church with but one stroke of the pen? All that would be necessary would be for the World Council of Churches, speaking for the "Holy Spirit," to declare its merger with the Church of Rome and recant for the action of such revolutionaries as John Hus, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther, John Wesley, George Fox and the like. Then, too, the hierarchy is already established.

But ecumenists will say, "We do not want a church under the Pope of Rome; we want one vast witness against his power. We are Protestants."

Our answer to this is:

"Let us be Christian in accord with the spirit of the word of God. The Spirit calls us to witness to the teachings of Jesus Christ. He is a witness to the power of Almighty God. Our sole authority is and must be that of God Himself as expressed by the Scriptures."

New Testament Churches

As to the matter of polity, we favor the form of Church government provided in the Holy Scriptures — each Church being responsible for the spiritual preaching and teaching of the Word, with Christ as its sole head, and with a fellowship of Churches as Biblically-expressed through St. Paul's Epistles advising individual Churches.

One-Big-Organization

The polity of the ecumenical Church would be a return to the ecclesiastical lordship of the One-Big-Organization, and abuses of which the reformers were willing to sacrifice their lives to cleanse.

The authority of the national or international governing body and its executive head (whatever his title might be—pope, bishop, president, secretary-general) would have to be supreme. According to our newspapers, two things are causing heated debate among the six groups now considering merger into the 22 million member church: polity and worship. The latter even caused one spokesman, who wished to remain anonymous, to state for the press that all groups would have to con-
Who Speaks for the Church?

DR. WALTER G. COUCH, JR., Senior Minister
Plymouth Congregational Church, Wichita, Kansas

Some time ago it was my privilege to speak to the Wichita downtown Rotary Club on the topic, “Who Speaks For The Church?” The purpose of the talk was to analyze the highly controversial role of the National Council of Churches in the area of political action. The speaking invitation was accepted because of the expressed concern of laymen in Plymouth Church who are active Rotarians. But little did I realize how extensive and intensive is the concern among laymen regarding the activities of the National Council of Churches. I was amazed at the response and could only conclude that grassroots concern about the NCC and its political activities is far greater than is generally realized. The cleavage in American Protestantism is deep and bitter, and the chasm is growing in depth and width.

Importance of Cooperation

To me this is a matter of deep and sad regret. As a Congregationalist holding fast to the liberty we find in Christ, I nonetheless believe strongly in the importance of cooperation among all Christians wherever such cooperation is mutually desirable and mutually acceptable. I have been a long-time friend of NCC. Yet I have become increasingly concerned about its political activities, and I am deeply disturbed by the fact that it has been pursuing a course which is dividing Christians into hostile camps at a critical time in our national history when we all ought to be in warm and friendly fellowship. Even more regrettable is the fact that to date the NCC leadership shows no sign of recognizing this fact; or, if it is aware of it, shows no intention of changing its policies. Opposition to my stand came in the form of letters from three clergymen who charged me with irresponsibility, claiming that I relied on biased sources of information. My reply to them was that my primary sources are the published statements and reports of NCC itself, plus the careful and objective analyses of two groups of laymen: The St. Mark’s Vestry Committee report on the NCC, 908 Rutherford Street, Shreveport, Louisiana; and the Laymen’s Study Group (U.C.C.-Congregational), PO Box 483, Sierra Madre, California, 91024. Anyone who wishes to get calm and objective facts about this matter should write to both of these groups for information.

Challenging Reply

In further reply to the charge of irresponsibility, I challenged a source sent me by one minister, PRESBYTERIAN SURVEY, December, 1964, p. 35. In answer to the question, “Does the NCC claim to speak for 40 million Christians?” this document replies: “It does not, and never has. The NCC ‘speaks’ only when its General Board or its General Assembly issues ‘policy statements’ (formerly called ‘pronouncements’), and then it speaks only for itself. The General Board, which meets three times yearly, is composed of 165 clergymen and 95 laymen; the General Assembly, which meets triennially, is composed of 490 clergymen and 244 laymen. All members of the General Board and Generally Assembly are officially elected representatives of the National Council’s 31 member denominations. When the council speaks for itself, it speaks to, rather than for, the 40 million members of its denominations. Thus, an NCC policy statement is a message from denominational leaders gathered in assembly to American church members and the general public.”

I am sorry, but I can regard this as nothing less than sheer hypocrisy! If the NCC leadership is honest in its avowal that it proposes to speak only to the member Churches, then why does it send lobbyists to Washington to testify on legislative matters in the name of the NCC? And why does it issue releases to the news media giving its pronouncements to the general public? And in these activities, why does it invariably make the point that the NCC is composed of 31 Protestant denominations with a total membership of 40 million Christians? What has all this got to do with speaking to the Churches?

Attempt to Function

Nothing! The truth is that the NCC has a long record of attempting to function as a political party instead of a religious fellowship; and it is doing so with money given by millions of Christians who heartily disagree with the “pronouncements” of its General Board and General Assembly. The conclusions reached by the St. Mark’s Vestry Committee are based on thorough documentation: “The NCC has done and is doing a great number of things inconsistent with the best interest of our church and contrary to the purposes for which it was formed, among other things: (1) Speaking out, as the official voice of Protestantism in America, on such controversial issues as federal aid to education, the right-to-work laws, the seating of Red China in the United Nations, etc.; (2) Participating in lobbying activities before the
United States Congress in fields of economic and political controversy; (3) Refusing to repudiate mistakes or to correct misinterpretations in the press regarding actions taken by the NCC except in those instances where such mistakes or misinterpretations are contrary to what the professional core of the NCC believes and professes; (4) Making no attempt to determine the attitude of individual churches but at the same time allowing the public to gain the impression that it is voicing the views of 39,000,000 Protestants in the United States.”

A Significant Phrase

In this statement there is a very significant phrase: “What the professional core of the NCC believes and professes.” The NCC General Board and General Assembly are clergy-dominated about 2-to-1. The mentality of this core group is extremely significant. In it are many who speak vigorously for the organization of an ever-larger United Church. When asked why they are so obsessed with One Big Church, they frequently reply, “So we can speak to the world!” That is the slogan of the ecumenicals! But what do they want to say to the “world?”

The charge has been made that the NCC is Communist infiltrated. This charge has been refuted to the satisfaction of an investigating committee of the Protestant Episcopal Church consisting of 21 prominent bishops, priests, and laymen, headed by Bishop J. Brooke Mosley of Delaware. It reported to the general convention last October that conferences with officials of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Federal Bureau of Investigation failed to unearth “any fact or record that would support” charges that the NCC “is a Communist conspiracy or that it harbors Communist sympathizers and allies.”

Assuming that this report is honest and accurate, a persistent and troublesome question yet remains: Why is it that when the NCC “speaks,” what it has to say is almost invariably precisely what the Communists rejoice in hearing? Thorough documentation proves that the NCC, dominated by the clerical “professional core,” repeatedly echoes the Communist line on national and international issues. Why are these clergymen simply fuzzi-minded, starry-eyed sentimentalists who really believe that there is no basic difference between the thoughts and purposes of a godless party of blatant materialists and those who are called to serve God in Christ?

Another troublesome question persists: Why is it that when the defenders of NCC political activity protest charges of Communist infiltration, they accept and quote the records of the House Un-American Activities Committee and F.B.I., but when those same records clearly show that in the past quarter century many in the leadership of the NCC have belonged to—not a few, but many—unquestionably Communist front organizations, they reject these facts and scream “Character assassination! Guilt by association!”

The NCC can put these troublesome questions to rest once and for all by giving up its political activity and returning to the fine and worthy purposes for which it was originally organized. For if it is being used in any way to any degree by Communists or Communist sympathizers, these pernicious individuals will quickly lose all interest in it. An organization which cannot be manipulated is of no use to the international gangsters.

Who speaks for the Church?

What is desperately needed on the American Protestant scene is a redefinition of the nature and importance of the parish ministry. One of the best statements along this line is credited to the Rev. Jack Mendelson, Arlington Street Unitarian Church, Boston, Massachusetts. It ought to be the burdening of every graduating class from every seminary in the country.

“The Minister”

“(The Minister) is a man never completely adjusted or adjustable, who walks in two worlds—one of things as they are, the other, things as they ought to be—and loves them both. He is a man with a pin-cushion soul and an elastic heart who sits with the happy and the sad in chaotic pattern of laugh, cry, laugh, cry. And he knows deep down that the first time his laughter is false, or his tears are make-believe, his days as a real minister are over.”

“He is a man who continually runs out of time, out of wisdom, out of ability, out of courage and out of money. His tasks involve great responsibilities and little power. He must learn to accept people where they are and go from there. He must never try to exercise influence he does not possess. If he is worth his salt, he knows all this and still is thankful every day of his life for the privilege of being what he is.” (Italics mine.) Such a minister can speak the truth in love from his pulpit, and many will heed him and go forth into the everyday world to apply the commandments of Jesus to the complex and grievous problems which confront the nation and the world. He humbly understands that in the world laymen have knowledge and practical ability to cope with those problems. He provides inspiration and guidance from the Bible. They in turn depend upon him for strength and comfort in their own personal problems of pain, sorrow, and sin. Over and above that, he can trust his laymen to “speak for the Church” by witnessing to the way of Jesus in every area of human relationships. And, oh! how courageously and splendidly so many lay people are doing exactly that!”
Faith is the Source of Freedom

REV. W. MALCOLM GWALTNEY
Pilgrim Congregational Church
San Jose, California

Did you hear the astounding announcement made not long ago—that the Roman Catholic Church through its ecumenical council had voted to accept the Bible on the level of tradition? This was announced as a great new concession on the part of the Roman Church and we Protestants are supposed to be delighted. But as a matter of fact the Roman Catholic Church has treated the Bible as tradition for centuries. This was the issue of the Reformation in the early sixteenth century. Martin Luther, Zwingli, John Calvin and all the leaders of the reformation contended that the Bible was God's Word and as such was the source of all authority concerning faith, morals and immortality, and not the Church, that is, the Pope and the priesthood, as the Roman Catholic Church insisted then and insists today.

Never since their beginnings has the leadership of those Protestant Churches now engulfed in the ecumenical organizational movement been so nearly the same as that of the Roman Catholic Church in their concepts of the source of authority, philosophy and purpose. The decisions and policies of church executives are more and more taking precedence over the teachings of the Bible. The convictions and freedom of individual believers gained through repentance, faith, prayer, Bible study, worship, Christian service and fellowship with The Holy Spirit expressed individually and collectively, are more and more being over-ridden by the decisions of the power structured Protestant Churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church.

Where does this leave us as individuals and as a Church? First, let me make it crystal clear to all concerned that we as a Church and all the historical Congregational Churches with whom we are associated in The National Association believe in cooperation with other Churches and in the one spiritual ecumenical Church. But we refuse to be a part of a huge organization which denies us the freedom we now have and dearly cherish. In the second place we should praise God that through his grace and guidance we are a free Church. Our faith and our freedom come from God, the only source of genuine faith and freedom. No outside ecclesiastical body can tell us how we must worship, what we must believe, how we must conduct our business meetings or when and how we can use our property.

But along with this great and wonderful freedom is a great responsibility. That responsibility demands that we be, with God's grace and help, a genuine Christian Church fashioning all our policies and teachings according to the teachings of God's Word as recorded in the Bible.
and according to the guidance and interpretation of The Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus meant when he spoke our text: "If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." We, as a Church, must always respect the dignity and rights of individual men and women and work together cooperatively in the spirit of love and freedom. Our obligation to respect the dignity and the rights of individuals, as children of God, demands that we respect the will and decisions made by the majority of the members of any particular Church. Beyond this, we are obligated to proclaim our faith in Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. We are obligated to proclaim and share the freedom that comes to those who continue in his Word as disciples.

Four hundred forty-eight years ago the most gigantic revolution in the history of the Christian Church was launched. Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, on October 31, 1517 posted on the door of Castle Church, in Wittenberg, Germany, which served as the University bulletin board, his memorable Ninety-five Theses. These Theses intended for academic debate proved to be the spark that ignited the explosion. In many respects our day is much like the time in which Martin Luther made his great declaration of faith and freedom.

Luther had become convinced, through his reading of the Bible that salvation is new life in God, acquired not through works or merit on man’s part, but through an absolute trust in God and his promises. Furthermore, the redeemed man, while not ceasing to be a sinner, is freely and fully forgiven. And from this new relationship to God in Christ, the new life of willing conformity to God's will flows.

To Luther the Gospel of Christ was and is the forgiveness of sins and the filling of the soul of man with peace, joy, absolute trust in God and eternal life. Salvation comes through faith in God. It was this conception of salvation that Luther advocated when he opposed the selling of indulgences as a means of the individual acquiring salvation and the church raising money to construct St. Peter's Cathedral.

Salvation can be had only through faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God. It cannot be merited nor purchased. Unless men heed and obey the message of our text Freedom will vanish from the earth. Our task is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in Spirit and in truth, to persuade men and women to accept Jesus Christ in faith and to live in the spirit of his teachings and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church of Jesus Christ was never intended to be an instrument through which men could exercise power and authority over one another. Its mission is not secular but spiritual and redemptive.

In these days of greed for power, Biblical ignorance and mental confusion we must spell out the teachings of Christ clearly. We free Congregationalists must emphasize and share our basic Christian beliefs. We believe in the sovereignty of God, in the Sonship and Saviourhood of Christ, the authority of the Scriptures, the free moral agency of man and the priesthood of believers. Let us pray that God will use us as individuals and as a Church to arouse sleeping, indifferent Protestant Christians lest they carelessly vote away the freedom that was purchased by the blood of countless martyrs and bring upon the world a spiritual darkness that can only be regained through faith, sacrifice, suffering and bloodshed. Christ gives us assurance of hope and victory through these immortal words: "If you continue in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." May God use us mightily in sharing His life, love, and freedom with others.
INDEPENDENCY IN AN ECUMENICAL AGE

By Howard Conn

Continuing, Congregationalists should understand their role in the present religious scene. They may soon be the only group still giving central importance to the local congregation, a polity clearly traceable to the New Testament. They are the custodians of independence and voluntarism in religious commitment.

A recent Christian Century editorial pointed out that until the last decade roughly half of American Protestantism—Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples, and numerous small groups—adhered to a polity centering in the local congregation. But the ecumenical movement is causing a shift of center from a fragmented, loosely related association of independent congregations to a more tightly structured and representative administered body; from local autonomy to unified government, from churches to church.

The late Dr. Charles Clayton Morrison wrote years ago that "ultracongregational conceptions are totally inadequate both as a reflection of historic Christian reality and as a basis of competency in the face of the world situation." Recent decades have witnessed a determined drive on the part of theologians and church administrators to replace congregationalism with presbyterianism or the episcopacy. This shift enables the church to become a power bloc in society, and to speak with the voice of its professional experts.

Lay people should be aware of the heavy pressures exerted to eliminate the congregational concept of "churches" for the more presbyterial "church." This is more than semantics. It is a radical change in the nature and function of Christian bodies. This past May the 135-year-old Congregational Union of England and Wales voted to become the "Congregational Church in England and Wales." Two months later the International Congregational Council voted to merge with the World Presbyterian Alliance. Its moderator is quoted by the Christian Century as questioning whether Congregationalism is any longer needed, when much that it stands for is now seen in other forms of churchmanship, even in Rome itself. Douglas Horton, former executive of American Congregationalism, wrote in the spring 1965 issue of the Minister's Quarterly: "I myself would be happy to see a fixed date for reunion with Rome, say four hundred years hence, and measures taken, by dialogue and even more systematic means, to build up mutual understanding and sympathy which would lead in the direction of that high, far-off, divine event. That it will someday take place I have no doubt at all—and I believe that we are designed to have a part in it."

Though the American Baptist Convention's General Council voted not to participate in the Consultation on Church Union, pressures are strong to become involved. In September the Disciples of Christ voted to convert their traditional mass assembly into a delegated body. They heard the preliminary reading of a proposal by which in 1967 the Christian Churches will become the Christian Church.

When proposals for the United Church were under discussion, its proponents argued that it was an extension of Congregationalism, but the developments in the ten years of its existence indicate clearly the intent to go beyond this historic polity. UCC representatives are leaders in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), which looks forward to bringing eight denominations into one super United Church.

This is the climate of 1967 in which the National Association stands openly and enthusiastically committed to the independence and voluntary fellowship of churches.

We recall the scriptural affirmations that the tabernacle of God is with men, and that wherever two or three are gathered together in his name he too will be present. We open our personal lives to receive the kindling of the Holy Spirit. We believe that God calls men and women to be his disciples in Christ. We do not think that he bypasses local congregations to use the strong arms of hierarchies to do his bidding.

The history of religious liberty has been the voice of the individual raised in protest against the proud powers of great ecclesiastical institutions. Congregationalism is the bulwark of that liberty, a polity wherein men may worship God "without the mixture of men's inventions."

The National Association is ecumenical in the sense of joining all Christians in goodwill. We are ready to respect all ministries, all sacraments. We cooperate in innumerable ventures of service. Our benevolence giving is high. In Minnesota the Fellowship of Congregationalists is being accepted formally as a member group in the State Council of Churches. We thus demonstrate that Congregationalism can be effective in modern times without the surrender of local churches to the inventions of those who create "the church" as an entity between us and our Heavenly Father.

As one who was an active participant in the former General Council, it is my hope that the National Association may provide a home for those lovers of independence, goodwill, and voluntary cooperation which characterized the Congregationalism in which I grew up as a boy and to whose service I gave myself in ordination.

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A CANDLE IN COCU'S DARKNESS

COCU (for the benefit of those not acquainted with the nuances of ecclesiastical slang) is verbal shorthand for the Consultation on Church Union—the big, potent, well-publicized ad hoc committee which is working for one great Church in America. The success of this organization has been phenomenal. In the seven short years since Dr. Eugene Carson Blake preached the initiatory sermon in the cathedral of San Francisco at the invitation of Bishop James Pike, no fewer than ten denominations have agreed in principle on a platform for union. Since the super-Church which COCU is aiming at will be presbyteral or episcopal in its structure, the fast-growing colossus casts a shadow of deep darkness over the future of the autonomous Free Churches of this country.

In the main, Free Church advocates have been unfortunately defensive in their stance. Wars are not won by defense alone, however stout. We have had resonant denunciations of organizational ecumenicity, but no counterattack of positive, thoughtful alternatives which would appeal to the deep and healthy desire of Christians to live and work together. The negations of separatism and isolationism, however hallowed by usage and adorned with jewels of rhetoric, are not enough.

It is refreshing to learn, therefore, that a workable alternative to COCU has been taking form in the past three years and has now reached the stage of solid fact. On October 27, there was incorporated in Chicago the “Foundation for Free Churches.” The National Association, informally by means of interested individuals, and formally by the action of the World Christian Relations Commission, has had no small part in bringing this foundation into being. The Seminars held in Chicago on the Nature and Future of the Free Church had roots in conversations between National Association people and men from the Council of Community Churches, first in Wichita, then in Chicago.

We Congregationalists have something to say to the fellowships of autonomous Churches which are presently being troubled by “restructuring,” which is the current euphemism for stealing the liberties of the local Church. We are the first successful rebels against the drive for organizational ecumenicity. To hear our inexperienced brethren in other denominations tell of what is happening to them now is like seeing a rerun of an old movie. We know the plot; we’ve heard the tunes.

In this day when the local Church is held to be obsolete and an actual offense to Christ, the National Association ought to put itself squarely on record in favor of any efforts to help fellowships of Free Churches to find each other. Viewing with alarm from the pulpit is easy, and in a dark sort of way, fun. But what is needed is active and informed support of intelligent and concerned efforts to create viable forms and extensions of that great principle of fellowship we hold dear. It really is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.