

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

Articles from the Congregationalist, 1958-1996

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

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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

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INTRODUCTION

THE "CHURCH"

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

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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
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Steece, Arvel. "What Do you Mean, 'Free Church'?" June '70

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

- Bohman, George. "The Place of Associations in Modern Congregationalism." May '65
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Bellingham, Richard. "Regional Fellowship: A National Concern." February '89

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

Davis, Royal. "The Saybrook Platform: A Warning." October '58
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 Rouser, Arthur Jr. "I Saw Them in the Flesh: Hotel Fort Shelby Recollection." July '95
 Alexander, John. "Forward Through the Ages ... At the Call Divine." July '95
 Bailey, Steven. "Reclaiming the Puritans." July '95

THE MINISTRY

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

Barrus, Alvan. "The Growth of the Lay Ministry." March '65
 Abercrombie, A. Vaughn. "The National Program of Pastoral Supply." March '65
 Buchman, Richard. "Pastor, People, and God." May, '65.
 Butman, Harry. "Moderator's Statement at the Ordination of John K. Tremaine." February '66
 Britton, Erwin. "A Congregationalist Ponders the Matter of Ordination and the Ministry," 2 parts. October, November '75
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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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

"Pioneering in Theological Education." November '62
 Steece, Arvel. "Continuing the Tradition of an Educated Ministry." January '65
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 Shultz, Leslie. "Exciting Opportunity: Lay Ministry Training Program Announced." October '93

SOCIAL REFORM

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

HISTORICAL ROOTS

From Yesterday Into Tomorrow

(An Address Given by the Rev. Dr. Henry David Gray, pastor of the South Congregational Church, Hartford, Conn., at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, October, 1957.)

There are few places in all the world better calculated to stir the imagination of a Congregational Christian than the city of Hartford. To this spot at the confluence of the Connecticut River and the "Little River" came Thomas Hooker and his intrepid band of followers in 1635. Here they founded the town, the Connecticut Colony, and transplanted the church which had already been organized in Newtowne (now Cambridge), Massachusetts.

A statue of Thomas Hooker, bearing round its base some quotations from his remarkable utterance on government by the consent of the people for the benefit of the people, stands in front of the Bulfinch designed "Old State House" located at the center of our city on "Thomas Hooker Square". His remains lie buried in the churchyard alongside the Center Church meeting house.

Thomas Hooker's Influence

Thomas Hooker was a remarkable person, for scholarship, for preaching power, for statesmanship, and for the ability to unite in action a community of extremely able and independent individuals. His voice out of yesterday says to us with urgent clarity (1) that the government must be by consent of the governed; (2) that the Church is complete under Christ in its own right; (3) that the Church must influence the affairs of the community by the power of its proclamation of the gospel; and (4) that the way ahead for the colonies was a cooperative federation in which each counselled and helped the others.

These principles out of yesteryear are a firm foundation for a free church future. That future is secure, not because we are few or many, but because we are building on adequate foundations. The New Testament gives strong support to Hooker's emphasis on the self-completeness under Christ of the local church. It gives the lie to all man-made pretensions of powerfully organized national bodies with imposing bureaucracies and high-powered and highly paid public relations experts to do their bidding. The future is *not* in the hands of might and power. It is in the hands of God, in the hands of His truth, His righteousness, and His love. Hooker rightly understood the need for democratic government under the guidance of God. He rightly understood the need for freedom, and moved from the "Cotton orbit" of Boston chiefly, it would appear, to find room for thought and action more than room for cattle and for crops.

A Second Voice

A second great voice from yesterday which speaks with high value for tomorrow is that of John Whiting. John Whiting was for ten years pastor of the First Church, and in the winter of 1669-70, he and a large body of Hartford Christians founded the Second Church — South Church. John Whiting and Elder Goodwin founded this church in order to continue in the Congregational Way. In the legislature and in the church councils of the years following Hooker's death, there were vigorous (and sometimes violent) discussions, chiefly as to whether or not it was right to baptize chil-

dren when only one of the parents belonged to the church. But this was not the real difficulty. The real problem was the presbyterianism of Samuel Stone, who did not trust the judgment of the common Christian and who wanted power centered in the small, select body, and who wished to presbyterianize the colony. The conflict was, as Dr. Leonard Bacon has said, "between opposite principles of ecclesiastical order." The strong minority insisted upon rights and liberties in the church. When Joseph Haynes came to the Hartford church with John Whiting, this presbyterian-congregational controversy broke out anew, for Haynes favored presbyterianism. On a lecture day in June 1666 the whole controversy broke out into flame, and a few years later, on February 22, 1670, John Whiting and 31 members of the Hartford church founded the Second Church in order to hold fast to the principles and practices of the Congregational Way. They declared immediately that for them, "the Congregational Way is the Way of Christ", that a local body of Christian people united by a particular covenant "are a true, distinct, and entire church of Christ", that "such a particular church . . . hath all power and privileges of a church belonging to it," and that counsel and communion is to be sought from sister churches as equals under Christ. The statement which these Congregationalists issued has been called "as complete and flawless a statement of the distinctive principles of Congregationalism as can anywhere be found."

The voice of John Whiting of yesteryear has something else to say to us as free churches facing the future. It calls us to put *principles* first; above *property* (they left their interest in the Hartford church behind, above *position* (they ventured forth not knowing what position in the colony might be theirs); and above *peace* (they gained the right to found this church through two decades and more of strife). The future belongs to men of faith and not to men of present power, and present compromise with a world of power. The future belongs to people of principle and not to men of entrenched position. Fear not, little flock, long before 1957 the few have stood — 32 strong — here in this very place — holding principle first . . . and history has fully vindicated their free church loyalty. God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform. . . .

Eternal Vigilance

The third incident from yesterday, which has much to say to tomorrow, relates to the famous Charter Oak tree which stood a few yards to the east of the portico of the Second or South Church. Through the good offices of able, energetic, and tactful Governor Winthrop, there was secured from the king a royal charter for Connecticut which gave to the colony a very large measure of freedom. This charter was a source of great joy. In due time the king died and there came to the throne a successor. The successor appointed in 1689 Governor Edmund Andros to represent him in New England. Andros came to Hartford in order to secure the royal charter, to rescind it and establish here an autocratic rule. As our local legend has it, the occasion occurred in the Old State House. The charter was on the table,

candles lit, when suddenly the candles were all blown out and a certain Captain Wadsworth stole the charter, which was subsequently hid in the heart of a great oak tree, which used to stand a few yards from the façade of this South Church building. The charter can be seen today in the State Library in Hartford. It was never rescinded.

The message of the Charter Oak tree and of the charter which it hid, is that liberty once gained has to be kept at the price of vigilance. You can't take it for granted that a free church constitution *will* be written by the United Church. You can't take it for granted that liberty anywhere in the world will automatically be upheld. Freedom needs to be cherished by a vigilant, alert people, in State or in Church.

The Saybrook Platform

In the year 1708 there was drawn up the Saybrook Platform, a statement of Congregational polity, and a further statement of semi-presbyterianism. With the establishment of the consociation, semi-presbyterian, system, favored by some in Saybrook and condemned by others who attended the meeting, and contrary to the clearly expressed principles of the platform as a whole, and defied by a whole group of Congregational churches, there was initiated a long and controversial period of Congregational history in Connecticut. As many as 32 churches were dubbed *Separatists* because they would not even submit to even the measure of control set forth at Saybrook. At no time did the consociation attempt to take over complete presbyterian control of the local church. The churches still retained the right to own and control their property. They still retained the right to determine their own modes of worship, statements of faith, and were able within certain bounds to call and dismiss their own ministers. Here in Hartford the power of the consociation was never great, as was true in many parts of the state. In one county, Fairfield, the consociation became exceedingly powerful. Here in Hartford took place some of the key events which pushed the consociation into its grave. Those events occurred anent the activities of a Hartford pastor, as we shall see.

Meantime, as we face the future, the prime principles of Saybrook as used here in Hartford are a firm faith in God, a free local church, and a long struggle to keep that freedom in affairs beyond the local church. The idea, just now being broached again, that associations, state bodies, national bodies and so forth, are free in their own spheres was actually carried out here in Connecticut between 1710 and 1850, and was found to be the source of unending debate, political fights, and acrimonious actions. It proved, as clearly as history can prove anything, that presbyterianism and congregationalism cannot be unequally yoked together with happy, wholesome, and holy results. This we should never forget as we churches face the future.

Here in Hartford, in the years 1812 to 1831, there were repeated movements of great religious awakening, in which this church played a considerable role. At the same time, there was a tremendous upsurge of missionary interest, a great dedication of young men to the ministry, and a rising tide of theological debate. In this climate, Yale took a position which was felt by some to be contrary to the best interests of the Congregational Way, so, to preserve and further the Congregational Way, to train leaders for it, and to be center of dynamic concern, there was founded, with Bennett Tyler as its first president, what is today the Hartford

Seminary. Later, the first school for the training of lay workers in the United States joined it, and still later, the first and foremost school of missions in the United States was founded by it. The great library is one of the finest collections of theological works in the nation. On exhibit at the present are many historical documents relating to the 325th Anniversary of the First Church of Hartford, just being celebrated.

From these events in Hartford, I take it that the free churches, as they face the future, can learn three things.

First, religious awakening is the solid and right foundation for any and every advance of the Church of Christ into the future.

Second, a religiously alert people will be a mission-minded people . . . eager to found new churches, eager to help folk across the seas. Here we have a really *great* challenge to our free churches — are we religiously alert enough to do these mission tasks? Do we face this call?

Third, a thinking people and a trained ministry are essential for a church of the future and must be had, *at whatever cost*. Yale would not do under the shadow of Taylor, so Hartford Seminary was founded. Harvard would not do under the Unitarian influence so Andover was founded. We must find at once the right place to train *free church leaders*. This is imperative, as is clearly seen in the lesson of the first half of the 19th Century here in Hartford.

Horace Bushnell

We come now to Horace Bushnell. "Here is one for the books," as the saying goes. There is not time to tell the whole dramatic life story of this educator, preacher, apostle of civic righteousness, and brilliant free churchman.

In 1849 this great soul published "God In Christ", a book that started a controversy which makes "the merger" sound like child's play. Certain leaders in the General Association, in February, 1852, blasted the book to the skies, but immediately the noble and saintly Joel Lindsay, then pastor of this church, wrote a defense of Bushnell with which others joined. Nevertheless, meetings, pamphlets, sermons and all possible pressure was exerted on the Hartford Central Association to "try" Horace Bushnell as a heretic and to throw him out of the Congregational ministry. His church stood by him, and in 1852, "annoyed and disturbed by the efforts of outside busybodies," thought it best to withdraw from the "North Consociation of Hartford County" and become one with the 29 other non-consociated Congregational churches in Connecticut.

The controversy dragged on, but the unanimous action of Dr. Bushnell's church actually tolled the death-knell of the whole quasi-presbyterian structure. It went into the discard in practice, and well it might, for actually the constitution of 1818, modelled on an earlier (1784) charter meant the end of enforcement of ecclesiastical rules by civil authority.

Here then is a most important message for the free churches as they face the future. The free mind flourishes in a free church. The fettered mind is the ultimate product of a centralized church. Bushnell would have been tried and expelled had it not been for the freedom of the North Church of Hartford to stand behind him. Surely, he was a progressive soul, but he was equally surely as saintly and as powerful a person as has yet graced the life of any Christian church known by any name in these United States.

COVENANT THEOLOGY AND AMERICAN THOUGHT

Rev. Irving E. Howard, New York, N. Y.

The *Mayflower Compact*, signed by forty-one adult males in the cabin of the *Mayflower* on November 11, 1620, is important not only because it was the first written constitution in the New World, but because it furnishes us with a window into the Pilgrim mind confronted by the problem of government.

After weeks of weary tacking across the stormy North Atlantic, that first *Mayflower* dropped anchor off the tip end of Cape Cod. The Pilgrims found themselves outside the area in which their land grant was authoritative. Discontented members of the party who did not share the Pilgrims' religious commitment seized upon the location of the *Mayflower* to threaten rebellion as soon as they were ashore.

Faced with this threat of anarchy, the Pilgrims drew up the *Mayflower Compact* in order to "covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick". This language reflects the Covenant Theology which the Pilgrims had brought with them from the Netherlands. The Covenant Theology had developed as a response to the challenge of the new theology of Jacobus Arminius, professor in the University of Leyden, which, known as Arminianism, was a reaction away from Calvinism toward an emphasis on human responsibility. The Dutch Calvinists condemned it at the Synod of Dort in 1619, but the Anglo-Saxon Calvinists tried to meet it by refining Calvinism in order to make room for human responsibility without denying the sovereignty of God or the five points of Calvinism.

Theology and Politics

Dr. William Ames, one of the most important of the Covenant Theologians, was forced to flee from England to Holland in 1610, to escape his less tolerant brethren who suspected him of Separatism. In Holland, he became professor of Theology in the University of Franeker, and his book, *Medulla Sacrae Theologiae* became the textbook of theology for the New England Puritans. Covenant Theology was one thing the Pilgrims and Puritans had in common. In fact, practically all American Calvinists of the 17th century came to accept this variety of Calvinism.

Ames sharply distinguished between a "Covenant of Works" and a "Covenant of Grace", and these theologians used the word *covenant* in the sense of a contract, a document binding upon both signatories. They insisted that God's dealing with mankind has always been in terms of some covenant.

The Pilgrims and Puritans were unique in that they derived a political philosophy from this Covenant Theology. For the Pilgrims, Covenant Theology implied that local groups of believers could be trusted to govern themselves. Ames had said as much in his famous textbook. At first, the Covenant theologians of Boston and New Haven were suspicious of this Congregationalism. Later, however, Congregationalism became the polity of all New England churches as the implications of the covenant theology became explicit. Roger Williams had sojourned in Plymouth long enough to become infected with the Pilgrims' belief in local autonomy and their spirit of independence. Consequently he later revolted against the theocracy of Massachusetts Bay when he was at the church in Salem. His exile and the founding of Providence Plantations is a well-known story. It is important to note that he was a link by

which the *Mayflower* group exerted a wider influence upon the political thinking of the nation. This was partly through the Baptists, of whom Williams became a leader. They carried the stubborn belief that churches should be self-governing wherever they went.

A Natural Development

While the early Puritans of Massachusetts Bay, and later of New Haven, had no intention of establishing either ecclesiastical, political, or economic freedom, and they bluntly warned that anyone who did not wish to conform to their regulations was free to depart, nevertheless by the 18th century they had become the champions of freedom in all three areas. R. H. Tawney in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* tries to explain this as a consequence of forces from without, such as "the democratic agitation of the Independents". It seems rather to have been the natural development of what was implicit in their own Covenant Theology, which the Pilgrims were clear-eyed enough to appreciate.

Samuel Willard of Boston described this implicit voluntarism in the Covenant Theology when he said, "Natural necessity destroys the very nature of the Covenant, for it must be a voluntary obligation between persons about things wherein they enjoy a freedom of will, and have power to choose or refuse. It must be a deliberate thing wherein is a Counsel and Consent between a rational and free Agent". The idea of *consent* which is expressed here was inherent in the Covenant Theology and became basic in American political thought. The Presbyterians, who had accepted the Covenant Theology but had not applied it to government, could see where their New England brethren were going in their political thought. Perry Miller reports their criticism of the Puritans in *The New England Mind* (p. 450, quoted by permission), "If the church were founded on covenant, they asked, and all ecclesiastical power was attributed to the consent of the people, would not the people rule within each church? The result, it seemed to English and Scotch Presbyterians, was bound to be 'democracy', which all the world abhorred." The Presbyterians were not alone in abhorring the word *democracy*. They were typical of their time. *Democracy* was a smear word until the 18th Century. It would be easy to credit the Covenant Theology with too much, but there are two things in American political thought which can be clearly linked to this theology: the idea of contract and the belief in written constitutions.

Sanctity of Contract

When John Wise arose to oppose Cotton Mather's attempt to presbyterianize the congregationally organized churches of the Boston area, he wrote a book, *A Vindication of the Government of the New England Churches* (1710) which was a tract on civil government as well as church polity. In this book Wise made a secular application of covenant thinking which led straight to a contract theory of government. Wise acknowledged himself indebted to Baron Samuel Pufendorf. What is more important, John Wise's reasoning illustrates the fact that Covenant Theology had prepared the soil for John Locke, the political philosopher of the American Revolution. Wise himself gave no indication of having read Locke.

Furthermore, the belief that God's relationship to man can be reduced to a contract instilled in Americans an almost fanatical respect for contracts, so that "the sanctity of contracts" became a part of American character at its best. While the Puritan was a sharp trader, he could usually be depended upon to keep his contract.

Moreover, as we have already noted in Samuel Willard's observation, imbedded in the idea of contract was the idea of consent which is at the foundation of American political institutions. When the Declaration of Independence stated that "governments derive their

just powers from the consent of the governed" it was repeating something which had been implicit in the theology of the Calvinistic settlers since the Pilgrims landed.

In view of this heritage, the Congregationalists' demand for self-government, insistence upon seeing any written constitution that is to govern them before they agree to a union, and a deep respect for any contract that has been made, is hardly surprising. These are characteristics that have made America. To destroy them is treason against a sacred trust.

The Savoy Declaration of 1658

Henry David Gray, Ph.D., Hartford, Connecticut

On June 15, 1658 Henry Scobell, England's Clerk of the Council of State under Oliver Cromwell, wrote to the ministers of London as follows:—

"Sir, the meeting of elders of the congregational churches in and about London, is appointed at Mr. Griffith's on Monday next, at two of the clocke in the afternoone, where you are desired to be present. I am sir, yours to love and serve you in the Lord."

The meeting was held. By its instruction The Reverend George Griffith (minister at the Charter House in London) sent letters "in the name . . . of the congregational elders in and about London" calling together pastors and delegates of the Congregational Churches in England.

On September 29, 1658 about 120 representatives met in London at the Chapel of The Old Savoy Palace. Many were laymen, but there were present ministers of great learning and high competency like John Owen, Dean of Christ Church in Oxford, and Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1652 to 1658, Thomas Goodwin, President of Magdalen College, Oxford, and Philip Nye, a Lecturer at Westminster Abbey.

The meeting opened with a day of fasting and prayer during which the Assembly sought the guidance of God as to "what to pitch upon," as reported by Neal. There ensued days of discussion marked by brilliant speaking, in which there was, as described by a member (Reverend James Forbes), "a most sweet harmony of both hearts and judgments."

On the succeeding days of the Council a Committee of six which included Owen, Goodwin, and Nye reported each morning to the whole Assembly. Discussion followed, but so great was the general accord that much time was given each day for devotional exercises. And when the entire report was complete it received unanimous approval, on October 12, 1658, to the surprise and gratification of the entire Assembly.

Two Great Statements

The English *Savoy Declaration* of 1658 stands with the New England *Cambridge Platform* of 1648 as one of the two great seventeenth century statements of the Congregational way which were prepared by consultation among representatives of the Churches, and issued as the findings of a called Assembly.

Theologically, Savoy and Cambridge, for the most part, followed the *Westminster Confession*, in the preparation of which some of the Savoy divines had shared.

The thirty terse sections on church-order are the original and important contributions of the *Savoy Declaration*. Here, in brief, compact, clear form are presented the fundamental principles of Congregationalism, viz., the sole headship of Christ, the gathering of a Church by covenant of believers, the complete autonomy of the local Church, including its right to choose its leaders and ordain its Pastors, the necessity of a call to confer ministerial standing, the consent of the members as essential to all admissions and censures, communion of Churches as a spiritual fellowship to increase peace, love and mutual edification, and Councils of Churches to give advice but without "Church Power" or "any Jurisdiction over the Churches themselves."

To make the strict limitations of a Council even more explicit, the *Declaration* added "Besides these occasional Synods or Councils, there are not instituted

by Christ any stated Synods in a fixed Combination of Churches, or their Officers in lesser or greater Assemblies; nor are there any Synods appointed by Christ in a way of Subordination to one another."

To emphasize the religious and theological bases of the Congregational Way the Savoy divines wrote "These particular Churches thus appointed by the Authority of Christ, and intrusted with power from him . . . are each of them . . . the seat of that Power which he is pleased to communicate to his Saints or Subjects in this world, so that as such they receive it immediately from himself. Besides these particular Churches, there is not instituted by Christ any Church more extensive or Catholique intrusted with power for the administration of his Ordinances, or the execution of any authority in his name."

A Dividing Line

It is worthy of note that Goodwin, Owen and Nye, who helped to frame the *Savoy Declaration*, were Barrowist rather than Brownist in their sympathies; they were not, strictly speaking, complete Independents. Hence, the *Declaration* represents those points at which they felt it necessary to draw a dividing line, on theological grounds, between the Presbyterian and Congregational polities.

The influence of the *Savoy Declaration* in England was blunted by the political events subsequent to the death of Oliver Cromwell, September 3, 1658. But its *Confession* was adopted widely in New England (Massachusetts, 1680, Connecticut, 1708) and in 1865 it was declared by a National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States to embody substantially the faith of those Churches. The Savoy polity section was so similar to the *Cambridge Platform* of 1648 that the American Churches continued to use the earlier and ampler statement of church order. Savoy and Cambridge are twin trumpets of Congregational Church order.

The Savoy Tercentenary on October 12, 1958 is worthy of wide recognition. Savoy sets forth the fundamental principles which characterize Congregational Churches. The Declaration proclaims the centrality of Christian religious experience, the scriptural basis of Church freedom and authority, the responsibility of sisterly concern for other Churches, the virtue of tolerance, and the validity of the covenant relation of members within the Church. These are characteristics of a Church of Christ, without which it cannot properly be called "Congregational."

News Notes

Pastoral Change

The South Congregational Church, Amherst, Ohio, has called to its pastorate Mr. Donald Nichols, a licentiate formerly at Vermontville, Michigan.

The First Congregational Church of Wauwatosa announces that Rev. Norman Ream, now serving the Methodist church of Neenah, Wisconsin, has been called to succeed Mr. Swanson.

Who says of him: "He is a person about my age, who shares our basic point of view with regard to the drive toward an organically united church. He will add considerable strength to our cause."

A MESSAGE FROM SAVOY

Rev. Arthur A. Rouner Jr., Williamsburg, Massachusetts

(Parts from an address given at the National Association Annual Meeting, July 1959, by the winner of the Savoy Tercentenary Award.)

My discovery of Savoy and the whole tradition of Congregational faith which surrounds it dates back to the year 1953, and the beautiful North Sea city of St. Andrews in Scotland. It was that year and in that place that the International Congregational Council was meeting. My wife and I had been studying at the University of Edinburgh that year, so it was perhaps natural that we should go as delegates to St. Andrews. As I look back upon it, I feel morally certain that it was the Lord Himself who took me in hand that week.

My first inkling that something strange and wonderful was afoot came the night we attended one of the large evening sessions of the Council. We were told it was to be conducted as a Congregational Church Meeting. I'm afraid we Americans didn't get the point. Certainly the Moderator did not. This well-known Congregationalist, as probably any of us would have done, promptly pulled out his pocket watch, placed it on the desk, and informed the multitude that everyone was to speak as the Spirit moved, but that we would have exactly two minutes in which to do it!

It was a vital question the Council was discussing, and yet somehow nothing happened. Words fell flat. A pall seemed to settle over the meeting. And gradually, we began to realize that the British delegates were almost literally "sitting on their hands." They were refusing to speak — because this meeting was not a Church Meeting. Somehow, it had become a blasphemy against something that was very precious to them.

Then a most amazing thing happened. Firmly, but with Christian grace and tactfulness, Principal Duthie of the theological college in Edinburgh went to the platform, was given the gavel, put away the stopwatch and said: "Let us pray." We did pray, and while our heads were bowed, we felt that great load of tension lift. When we raised our heads, the whole climate of the meeting had changed. Many, many people — young and old — spoke movingly and with passion. There came gradually an amazing oneness of mind among all those people. We could not help but know as we went out into the night that the Spirit of the Lord had been with us.

"Success" — or The Spirit?

That night marked the beginning of a spiritual quest for me. I recognized then that these British Congregationalists had something: that there was a quality of life, and a depth of spirit in them as individuals and as a group which certainly was not true of us Americans.

These British cousins did not even care about great, booming, successful Churches and ministers, which were such an ideal among us. They couldn't hold a candle success-wise to most of the Americans there. But they had something better: a humble heart, a concern for God, and an amazingly genuine interest in people. I resolved that night to know them better; to learn, if I could, their secret.

Those next days were full of long conversations and new friendships. But whenever I asked: "Why are you like this? Whence this spirit among you?" they never said, "Oh, we pray regularly," or "We read the Bible." Invariably they began to talk about something called the "Church Meeting;" and about "waiting on the Spirit."

What I was learning was that they had a tradition that most Americans had never even heard of! That

there was something they did together — something they believed together, which had made them what they were.

In the years since that week of discovery at St. Andrews, I have been gathering bits and snatches of information — from a pamphlet here or a conversation there — trying to discover from whence their tradition had come and why it was not ours as well. But it was not until last Fall, at the announcement of a book contest having to do with the Tercentenary of something called Savoy, that I finally realized that this was the source!

Three hundred years ago at the Savoy Palace in London, a group of English Congregational ministers and laymen wrote down for the first time the great principles of their "Way." At Savoy, for the first time in England, the form of a humble, Spirit-filled Congregationalism was enunciated.

Savoy: the Background.

The men who gathered at London's Savoy Palace that September afternoon three hundred years ago, were meeting there to put in writing what they conceived to be the Congregational Way which they had been living and evolving for more than a century. The political and religious crises of mid-17th century England had become so acute that men of independent persuasion felt they just had to meet and take their stand on what they believed to be the great principles of Christian life and faith.

I should like to trace, if I could, the events which led up to Savoy. Our awareness of an emerging Congregational Way goes back for most of us to the little congregation that gathered at Scrooby Manor under the ministry of their pastor, John Robinson. The romantic story of their courage under persecution, their defiance of Anglican pressures to conform, and their escape to Leyden and eventual pilgrimage to America is familiar to all of us. This was just at the turn of the 16th century into the first two decades of the 17th.

But what happened in England after our Separatist forebears set sail for America? What happened in the next 40 years to the forbidden way of church life which was eventually to be called Congregationalism?

The King and The Puritans

The Anglican Church was the King's Church and had the full support of parliament and the state. In the settlement which had been made under Elizabeth, the bishops had remained as had many of the trappings of the hated popery. This was the issue. The Puritans, who were Presbyterian in sympathy, and the Separatists, stood in solid opposition to these practices. The Puritans wanted the Anglican Church purified, while the Separatists were willing to "tarry for none," and had already broken with Anglicanism to set up churches of their own. Church and government were both against them and they were subject to continual harassment and persecution.

But things changed. The wheels of history turned until Anglicanism was not the only religious sympathy of the English Parliament. Puritanism was growing as a political force. And curiously, James I seemed to lose no opportunity to offend their scruples. Even his treatment of Parliament itself became unlawful and arbitrary. And very soon the political sympathies of parliament began to lean more and more toward the Puritans.

A MESSAGE FROM SAVOY

Continued from Page 4

After the death of James in 1625, the rift between King and Parliament grew even more serious. King Charles increased resentment by imposing taxes without Parliament's consent. It was also under Charles that William Laud was made Archbishop of Canterbury and ruthlessly enforced his high-church demand for conformity. In 1629 Charles made the mistake of deciding to rule without Parliament!

But it was in Scotland that the storm clouds which had been gathering all over Britain finally broke and poured down their wrath on Charles' head. At the instigation of Archbishop Laud, King Charles, in 1637, ordered all the Scottish churches to use a liturgy practically identical with the English liturgy. This was too much. On the 23rd of July, Edinburgh rioted. All of Scotland flamed into open rebellion. A national covenant was drawn up, and in December of 1638 the Scottish General Assembly deposed the bishops and rejected the whole ecclesiastical system that had been chafing them since 1597. This was war and thus began the romantic chapter in Scotland's religious history known as the age of the "Covenanters."

In order to raise money to fight the Scots, Charles had to call Parliament back into session. But this time Presbyterian Puritanism was in control. Archbishop Laud was imprisoned, the High Commission was abolished, and soon Parliament and its Puritan army had risen up in civil war against the King.

It was in 1643, in the early stages of this war, that Parliament determined that a new creed and government for the church would have to be enacted. The result was the famous Westminster Assembly. Although the Assembly was dominated by the Presbyterians, it did include a few Congregationalists. From it came both the Westminster Confession, and longer and shorter catechisms in 1646 and 1648.

Presbyterianism vs. Congregationalism

But, oddly enough, a significant change was taking place in the status of Congregationalism. Normally, the 10 or 11 Congregational members of the Westminster Assembly would have had very little influence. But the interesting thing was that the fortunes of the war itself were causing a spread of Independency all over England. In 1644 at Marston Moor, the royal army had been beaten badly by Oliver Cromwell's new model army. When later, King Charles himself had become a captive of Parliament, the prestige of Cromwell and his army soared.

The thing that had happened was that this army had become largely Independent in its religious sympathies. Its soldiers were religious enthusiasts who were as much opposed to rigid Presbyterianism in Parliament as they were to the authority of bishops. Cromwell himself seemed to have leaned toward Independency.

The Presbyterian majority at Westminster knew this. They knew this handful of Congregationalists represented a growing power in England. Finally, when the army rose to real control in England, and the Scots fell away and were defeated in a second Civil War, Presbyterians were increasingly expelled from Parliament, the King was executed, the Commonwealth under the Protectorate of Cromwell was established, and Congregationalism found itself standing in the sun of a new day not only of toleration but also of great influence.

And yet, up to this point, there had been no Congregational denomination in England as such. There had been no fellowship of Churches and ministers with a common viewpoint, common concerns or a common

Continued in Column 2

Continued from Column 1

position on faith and polity. They had rejected both Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism; and yet they wanted to give testimony to the great convictions they did share.

It was out of this pressing sense of need that the Savoy Declaration of Faith came to be written. And it was this gathering of the saints which was to mark the actual beginning of a defined Congregational Way in England and to lay the foundations of a pure Congregationalism for which all of us may be grateful.

(To Be Continued)

A MESSAGE FROM SAVOY

Rev. Arthur A. Rouner, Jr., Newton, Massachusetts

(Continued from the November Issue)

What was it that these saints at Savoy were concerned to say to themselves and to the world? What was the cause for which they pled?

Not the cause of freedom. I am convinced as I read the Savoy Platform that it was not freedom that stirred the hearts and roused the passions of those men. Their concern was for Christ. It was He to whom they were dedicated; He who had demanded and won their devotion and their loyalty.

They couldn't say enough about Him, those men at Savoy. They marvelled at how His Spirit had dwelt among them in their meetings. They stood amazed at how He had led them deeper and deeper into a oneness of spirit and a unanimity of conviction which they had never experienced before.

Their concern was not only to tell the world that Christ had been there at Savoy with them, and that they believed in Him, but also that they were determined to live for Him in a unique and radical way. This was the real burden of their message: a Way of life — a life in Christ, as new as their own generation, and as old as the Church itself.

To Be the Christian Church

These men had hardly even begun to call their way "Congregational." This way of Church life which they had found themselves to be living, and which they had come to Savoy to write down and describe, was the Christian Way! They were not trying to be a denomination, or a sect, or a splinter group, or anything else! They were trying to be what they felt the Church of England and the Church of Rome before it had failed to be. They were trying to be the Christian Church. The Congregational Way in the minds and hearts of those Savoy divines was simply an attempt to recover the essential life of the New Testament Church.

"What we have laid down," they said, "and asserted about Churches and their government, we humbly conceive to be the order which Christ Himself hath ordered to be observed . . ."

These were the principles which the polity section of the Savoy Platform was trying to lay down. It is in this section that the Savoy Declaration is most unique, and from which its real message to modern Congregationalism comes.

The Sovereignty of Christ

The first great principle proclaimed at Savoy was the sovereignty of Christ. It was Christ, and no king or bishop who was the head of the Church. His was the only authority they recognized for their Churches, and for themselves as Christians.

"By the appointment of the Father," they said, "all power — of the church — is invested in a Supreme and Sovereign manner in the Lord Jesus Christ, as King and Head thereof."

The second great principle at Savoy was the idea that the Christian Church in its truest and most concrete form is the Gathered Church: the Church in a given geographical area, made up of particular people living as neighbors and friends, and coming together simply by their common love for Christ to serve and live for Him. This is what made them a Church, and

the only thing they believed could make any body a Church. The presence of Christ, calling His people together, not the ecclesiastical fiat of a pope or bishop: this, they believed, is what makes the Church a Church.

A third principle of Savoy was that the only authority the church needed for the testing of its faith and the common discipline of its life was the Bible. The Anglicans could have their "Book of Common Prayer," and the Presbyterians their "Book of Order." But as for the Congregationalists, the Bible would be their book!

"To each of these Churches thus gathered," they wrote, "according unto His minde declared in His Word, He hath given all that Power and Authority which is in any way needful for their carrying on that Order in Worship and Discipline, which He hath instituted for them to observe."

The historic biblical idea of organization by a free covenant relation rather than by ecclesiastical hierarchy was another precious principle of Savoy Congregationalism.

"The members of these Churches . . ." they said, "do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves unto the Lord, and to one another . . ."

Furthermore, it was believed by those men that the people are the Church, and that therefore it was the people's privilege to elect other members to the Church, to elect their own minister, and indeed to ordain and install him by themselves.

"In the Midst of Them"

This principle, and all the others set forth at Savoy, were based on the one greatest principle of all. At the heart of their whole understanding of the Christian Church and at the very root of their conception of Congregationalism was this final belief: that Jesus Christ, by the power of His Holy Spirit, would be with them if they met faithfully in His name, and that He would Himself be their guide. Their assumption was that Christ would make His will known through the gathered people. They could imagine no way of Church life more direct, more authoritative, and more Christian than this.

The way of Church Life which these saints at Savoy had evolved was the way of the Spirit. It was utterly free, and yet disciplined by an obedience to the most powerful authority any man ever had — the authority of Christ Himself.

They called their way Congregational, and yet they believed in their hearts it was Christian — the Christian Way: the way Christ had always intended His people to live. To them it was utterly a people's Church, as the name "Congregational" implies, and yet for this very reason, most fully Christ's Church. For here, in direct relation to ordinary men, gathered together in churches, Christ could most perfectly make His will known and use the lives of men to His purposes.

Here then, in this rare combination of freedom within the higher discipline of obedience to the Holy Spirit, the men at Savoy rediscovered and offered to the world, a way in which all Christians could walk.

(To Be Concluded)

A MESSAGE FROM SAVOY

Rev. Arthur A. Rouner Jr., Newton, Massachusetts

(The Final Instalment of Mr. Rouner's Address at the National Association Annual Meeting, July, 1959)

The Savoy meeting was a long time ago — three hundred years ago. Can the message of those men at Savoy for their day, be in any sense a message to Congregational people in our day?

I can only say it has had a message to speak to me. What Savoy says to me is that somewhere in our three hundred years of history, we Congregationalists of America have forgotten the heart of our heritage. It says to me that we have cut loose from the great anchors of our faith which could make our witness as Christians of the Congregational Way a great witness.

What our fathers at Savoy really intended the life of our churches to be like I only began to discover among the Congregationalists of Britain in the city of St. Andrews in 1953. In a quiet, simple way they have been living out the principles of Savoy until today there lives in their churches and in their personal lives a quality of Christian power that I have not found in any other group of Christians I have ever met.

Their Concern for the Spirit

For one thing, they believe in the Spirit. He is real to them. They have met Him.

Their discovery of the Holy Spirit has been in an institution implied all through the Savoy Platform — The Church Meeting. I do not mean an annual meeting full of deadly business as in most of our churches; but a monthly meeting in which the whole Church comes together literally as a "gathered" church; gathered by Christ to do His business. It is a meeting for worship as well as for business. It is a meeting in which business becomes strangely part of the worship. It is prayed over. It is held up to Christ for the guidance of His Spirit. And it is passed unanimously or not at all.

Congregationalists in Great Britain, because of the Church Meeting, have become people not the slightest bit interested in so-called "successful" church life. Their concern is for Christ, and for His people. It is for doing what God's Spirit wills and for "railroading" nothing. It is for being quiet and for waiting. That is why being Congregationalists has made saints of more than a few of those Englishmen.

The Spirit and Church Attendance

Their concern for the Spirit has done something also to their Sunday worship. I shall never forget the little woman minister who turned to me after a meeting of the 1958 International Congregational Council in a large Hartford Church and asked, "How many people would you guess this church holds?"

I suggested 600, and she pointed to the figure of 2500 members listed in the church calendar and exclaimed, "But how do they all get in for worship?" I explained that naturally they couldn't all worship at once and that probably — even with two services — fewer than half of them come to church on a given Sunday anyway.

"Could that be?" she said. Then she spoke of her Church of 300 being one of the larger Congregational Churches in Britain. I asked, "Well, how many of your people come to worship?" "Oh, about 300," was her reply.

One hundred per cent of their people at worship on the Lord's Day! This is something else that the vision of Savoy had done for the British Churches. And when you are that kind of Church, may I say, you can afford to be independent — in the best sense of the word. You can talk about freedom then: freedom to follow Christ, and be His instruments in the world.

Belief in the Spirit, power in worship, and the best kind of Christian independence — these only begin to tell what the insights of Savoy have meant for some Congregational Churches. It is a whole new life that Savoy promises for Churches of the Congregational Way in the year of our Lord, 1959.

The Message of Savoy

Please do not misunderstand. Her message is not to us: "You're doing fine!" and to those whose view of Congregationalism is different from ours: "You're wrong; you do not understand at all!"

The message from Savoy is a message of judgment and of hope to both houses of American Congregationalism. To the one side her word is "Freedom is not enough! Freedom is only part of the Congregational Way!" And to the other, it is: "You love the wrong kind of authority. Authority, yes! But that of God and not man!"

Our fathers at Scrooby and at Savoy were ready to give their lives to be free. But the only reason they wanted that freedom was to submit themselves in utter obedience to the One who, alone in all the earth, was their Lord, and their Saviour, and their King.

The way of church life which the saints of our faith once fashioned for us is the most daring, the most precarious, and the most wonderful way there is. It is the way of complete freedom and complete obedience to the will and the leading of the Spirit of Christ.

This, I believe, is the exciting news which the saints at Savoy are crying out for us to hear across the 300 years of our history. As one who loves the Congregational Way, I have found no message more hopeful than this. For it proclaims a new life in Christ which we can live, if we dare.

THE SAYBROOK PLATFORM: A WARNING

Rev. Royal G. Davis, Los Angeles, California

The Saybrook Platform of 1708/09 should be recalled and re-examined as a crucial act in the history of Congregationalism. Now two hundred and fifty years old, it throws light on the chief temptation to which free churches may succumb. It reveals what happens when Congregationalism puts restrictions upon local church autonomy in the name of greater efficiency and for the cause of Christian unity.

Twelve ministers and four laymen meeting at Yale College proposed that all Congregational ministers be organized into associations and that all churches form consociations with power to denounce heresy and excommunicate schismatics. Their plan to limit the freedom of local churches they claimed provided "a blessed means of our better Unanimity and success in our Lord's Work for the Gathering and Edifying of the Body of Christ."

While the Saybrook scheme was adopted in Connecticut by order of the colonial General Court, it originated in Massachusetts. The Mather family of Boston had been engaged in a power struggle over control at Harvard and direction of the Boston churches. The Brattle Street Church had been gathered against their most strenuous objections but with the friendly support of Old South.

Harvard had begun to assert its independence, and by 1701 Increase Mather had been forced out of the presidency. To counteract these humiliations the Mathers and their friends threw support to the founders of a new college, Yale at Saybrook. They also proposed that associations be given the power of standing church councils to supervise the religious life of Massachusetts.

Rev. John Wise and a lukewarm legislature destroyed this attack upon local church freedoms in the Bay Colony. The situation in Connecticut proved different. Gov. Gurdon Saltonstall had encountered trouble enforcing his will over the New Haven church which he had served as pastor. He was convinced that Congregational freedoms needed to be disciplined. One can easily see his influence behind the sessions at Yale and his support of the plan in the General Court is obvious. The Saybrook Platform became the first book published in the colony and copies were distributed at government expense.

An Ecumenical Theology

What is now called an ecumenical theology dominated the Saybrook men as a few brief quotations from their preface to the Platform will show. "The Church hath suffered most from the wounds which she hath received in the house of her friends. . . . She is bleeding with the Wounds of Schism and Contention, offensive and hurtful to her Sacred Head and members, for the undivided head rejoiceth in an undivided body. . . . As She becomes divided, She becomes defiled. . . ."

The Saybrook Platform was endorsed by the clergy and made part of the common law of the colony. But the various consociations interpreted it differently, one making it look almost congregational, another thoroughly presbyterian. The Platform was prepared by clever diplomats. They accepted "The Heads of Agreement assented to by the United Ministers formerly called Presbyterian and Congregational," a document written with the help of Increase Mather and approved by the London pastors in 1691. This followed Congregational procedure by giving councils only advisory

power. To this were added the Saybrook interpretations which gave consociations actual Supervisory authority. The combination quieted Congregational fears and made centralization seem less dangerous.

While the full meaning of this departure from Congregationalism was unknown at first, it became clearer as the years passed. By 1766 the Presbyterian Synods of New York and Philadelphia were meeting in joint session with the Connecticut General Association. In 1799 Hartford North Association claimed that the constitution of their churches "is not Congregational but contains the essentials of the Church of Scotland or Presbyterian Church in America." And in 1805 the Connecticut General Association officially described the Saybrook Platform as "the ecclesiastical constitution of the Presbyterian Church."

Congregationalism Undermined

From the outset several churches defied the Saybrook Plan of consociation. Rev. John Woodward, the Saybrook scribe, tried to force the platform on his Norwich congregation. The church voted him out of office and remained free. During the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield the consociations tried to curb religious enthusiasm so that a strong movement of Congregational Separates appeared in its defense. Many laymen facing persecution left the consociated churches for Baptist congregations where local freedoms were treasured. In 1799 at least a dozen churches were outside the consociations. By the middle of the nineteenth century 35 of 246 churches were Congregational in fact as well as name. About the same time Horace Bushnell's Hartford church broke its ties with the consociation and resumed its original independence. Against all kinds of pressure, a minority stood firm and awaited the turning of the tide.

The Saybrook Platform led to the Plan of Union with the Presbyterians in 1801. As a result of this, Congregational monies were used by Congregational missionary agencies to establish up to two thousand Presbyterian churches in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa and the Far West. For nearly a century denominational officials tried to restrict Congregationalism to New England. Only a few plain speaking ministers and laymen resisted the denominational drive for centralization.

Saybrook failed to guarantee theological orthodoxy, its chief excuse for being. Yale was founded to correct the unorthodoxy of Harvard but East Windsor Seminary had to be organized to counteract the heresy of Yale. Yale Divinity School and Hartford Seminary engaged in a war of bitter words over Taylor and Tyler interpretations of Calvinism. Horace Bushnell's GOD IN CHRIST, a liberal manifesto, broke the supposed unity of the Connecticut General Association, whose actions disgusted evangelicals and liberals alike. Synodical control has never and can never guarantee theological uniformity.

Saybrook provoked church dissension rather than cooperation. The consociated churches set their face against a movement which brought up to 50,000 New Englanders into Christian service.

In 1740 the Guilford meeting of the General Association denounced the Great Awakening. Yale College expelled students for attending Congregational Sepa-

Saybrook Platform (Cont.)

rate churches. Ministers were excommunicated against the majority decision of their parishes. The future president of Princeton was deported from Connecticut because he favored Whitefield. Saybrook thwarted the godly zeal it was designed to promote.

The Lesson of History

Nor could it provide a balanced combination of divergent church polities. In the name of unity it sacrificed congregationalism to presbyterianism. Saybrook was a bad combination of mutually exclusive positions. No one could agree on the meaning of the Platform as a whole because all could find something in it to their liking. Yale had provided a paper agreement which could not be practiced without painful contradictions. In fact it nullified traditional freedoms in the name of greater orderliness.

The saddest lesson of history is that men do not profit from the lessons of history. The Saybrook spirit has been resurrected in the Basis of Union with the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Its defenders are equally capable, equally dedicated and equally mistaken. And the results are already similar: dissension within local churches, confusion among laymen and ministers, the painful severing of fellowship ties and an immense waste of misdirected energy which should be used for the greater glory of God. Remember Saybrook, because if we do not heed its warning we must repeat its evils.



THE UNDYING FIRE

by Maynard Shelly

Martin Luther, much to his surprise, unleashed the Protestant Reformation when in October of 1517 he proposed a debate on the doctrines and practices of the church of his day. That was four hundred and fifty years ago. And the end is not yet.

The second Vatican Council called by Pope John XXIII in 1962 was the Protestant Reformation breaking out in the Roman Catholic Church. The Spirit that moves through the churches will not be stilled.

And the Spirit is breaking out again and again even in this year. A small sign of the undying fire of the Reformation is the new interest in the concept of the believers' church.

Luther called for a debate by posting ninety-five theses on the church door of Wittenberg. This year the call for dialogue came from the doorway of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

The discussion began with the Conference on the Concept of the Believers' Church which may well be the first blow of a hammer driving today's church back to the radical nature of what the church is meant to be—a believers' church.

But what is the believers' church? Here we begin that promised dialogue. One hundred and fifty pastors, scholars, and students came to Louisville, June 26 to 30. Many of them tried to define the believers' church, but they settled on no one definition. This does not mean disagreement. Agreement on the ideal church was rather general. The specific words to express it have not yet been found, but out of the discussions at Louisville, a picture begins to emerge.

A good description of the believers' church came from T. Canby Jones, professor of religion at Wil-

mington College. The church is a believing people and he describes them thus: "A believing people hears the voice of its living Lord, obeys Him in all things, and witnesses unapologetically to His power in every phase of the life of the world."

Not an unusual description of a church, is it? Yes, it is. Jones is looking at the church in a way different than the one so often used.

Don't we often judge a church by its minister? We feel we know a church if we can test the preaching from its pulpit.

Many times we have described a church by the way it is governed. A church ruled by bishops is Episcopal (a name drawn from the Greek word for bishops). If a church's leaders are elders it is called Presbyterian (from another Greek word, this time for elders.)

But Jones did not tell us about the ministers of the church or its leaders. He described the kind of people who make up the church. This simple but very radical difference in thinking about a church prepares us for a further discussion of the believers' church.

Jones drew his definition from two sources: the Anabaptist vision and the Quaker vision of the church. The second was inspired by the first. So we need to know something about the Anabaptists first of all.

The Anabaptists were people who heard the call of Luther to turn to the Bible and study the will of God for the church. We find them first in Switzerland among the followers of Ulrich Zwingli who was leading the movement to revive the church in that country in the years following 1520.

Zwingli along with Conrad Grebel and others wanted to return to New Testament patterns of church life. This, Grebel felt, meant that each member of the church should make a conscious decision to join the church. No one in Switzerland had done this for many centuries for all

citizens were automatically members of the church almost at birth. Zwingli agreed but never got around to reorganizing the church in this way.

After many debates—which were called disputations—Grebel and those of Zwingli's followers who no longer agreed with their leader acted. William R. Estep, Jr., professor of history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, described the event.

"The final break came three days after the fatal disputation on January 18, 1525, when a small band of resolute men, determined to implement believers' baptism thereby constituting a church after what they were convinced was the New Testament pattern, met to follow the Spirit's leading in defiance of Zwingli and the orders of the instituted authorities The newly-baptized covenanted together as faithful disciples of Christ to live lives separated from the world, to teach the gospel, and hold fast the faith."

Estep adds, "On this fateful night, the concept of a believers' church based upon a voluntary confession of faith confirmed by the act of public baptism found concrete realization in history. Thus from a handful of radicals in Switzerland and South Germany who preferred to call themselves simply Brothers in Christ, the free church movement sprang."

Reading about the ideas of the Anabaptists today, we do not find their vision radical. Slowly many of their concerns for voluntary membership, a covenant community, and witness in the world have been accepted by many churches in whole or part.

But these Anabaptist ideas were so shattering to the sixteenth century where the prince of a country decided the religion of his people, that these men were persecuted severely. They were called Anabaptists (re-baptizers) by their enemies for their act of adult baptism, a second bap-

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OF THE REFORMATION



tism if one counts infant baptism as valid, which the Anabaptists didn't. They knew the act of faith to be the experience of a mature will.

The Anabaptist movement gained a wide following throughout Europe in the first several decades of the Reformation because it was a people's movement. It spread rapidly and frightened Luther and the other reformers. Persecution from both Catholic and Protestant princes all but snuffed out the life of the young church. Few of its active leaders died a natural death or of old age. So its influence was scattered and diffused.

But the sparks of the Anabaptist fire survived to burn again in the Quaker and Baptist movements in England and in the Campbellite and Pentecostalist movements in America. Direct links between some of these groups may be missing but this is not the important factor. The same Spirit that broke through in Switzerland in 1525 breaks through and renews His church in other places and other times.

And when the Spirit breaks out, the signs are often the same. A believing people in a voluntary fellowship with a covenant to live the life of Christ and witness in the world. Let's examine these signs.

Voluntary. "Membership in the believers' church is voluntary and witting," says Franklin H. Littell, president of Iowa Wesleyan College. "Believers' baptism became the sign of the believers' church. There is no disagreement on the point that church membership is deliberate and voluntary."

Voluntarism, of course, may be the claim of churches other than those that practice believers' (or adult) baptism. Certainly those traditions that combine confirmation with infant baptism may also make claim to a voluntary membership.

But the believers' church is not a people's church in the sense that the church belongs to the people. "The believers' church," says Littell,

"though outwardly constituted by volunteers is Christ's church and not theirs." The church does not belong to the members. "It means that the members belong to Christ."

He added, "For the essential matter of the free church is the affirmation of the authority, the power, the sovereignty of Christ in all things religious."

The church hears Christ speaking to it through the Bible. This Word of God judges the church so that through the church, the Spirit can act.

"The Word judges, renews, and recreates the church," says Alfred T. DeGroot, professor of church history at Texas Christian University. "This Word is held in our hands for our reception and illumination today, being the continuation in time of the original focal revelation, the event of Jesus Christ. The Word is Christ, ever awaiting reception by men, who in receiving it become peculiarly and communally His people."

This community becomes, in DeGroot's term, a listening community. All the members commit themselves to listen, not just the leaders.

"The choice is clear," he says, "we believe in either a hierarchical, limited listening community, or, we accept a believing community, a people under the Word, as the divinely-intended instrument of God's disclosure of His will in every age."

Covenant. The Anabaptists after their baptism pledged to support each other in living the Christian life. For this purpose the church separates itself from the world.

Says Littell, "The principle of separation from the world is basic although it has often been misinterpreted by critics and initiates . . . The spirit of separation, however, lies between those who live the life of hope of the coming kingdom and those who have been made captive by the spirit of the times."

The community of believers sharing their life together begins at the

point where much preaching leaves off. Luther and others wanted to make it clear that salvation was by faith in Christ alone. No work of man or activity associated with men can give salvation is the way this doctrine has been interpreted through the ages.

But the believers' churches have seen the church as a part of the work of God. Recent studies of the Bible are showing that the community of faith is in God's plan of salvation. Jesus proclaimed the coming of a kingdom which must refer not to individuals in isolation, but to groups of people living under the rule of the King. When Jesus called twelve disciples together he was beginning a community.

Says John Howard Yoder, professor of theology at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, "The work of God is the calling of a people, whether in the Old Covenant or the New. The church is then not simply the bearer of the message of reconciliation in the way that a newspaper or telephone company can bear a message with which it is entrusted. Nor is the church simply the result of a message as an alumni association is the product of a school or the crowd at the theater is the product of the reputation of the film."

"That men are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God . . ."

Witness. The people of the church have been called for a purpose. Jones called it witnessing "unapologetically to His power in every phase of the life of the world."

And he adds, "Our first responsibility is *evangelism* by all means and all media and especially to mass, depersonalized, urbanized man. We witness to him that the voice of Him who is, who was and is to come can be heard and known and that through obedience to Him, life can be transformed into a colony of heaven on earth."

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THE UNDYING FIRE OF THE REFORMATION

Continued from page 13

Missionary fervor is certainly a mark of the believers' church. Says Littell, "It is no accident that today three-fourths of the Protestant missionary personnel and support come from the churches of the free church line. And if we include the works of Lutherans under pietist influence, and Anglicans affected by the evangelical awakening, the percentage is jumped even higher."

And this is a mission that belongs not exclusively to the professional leaders. Remember that the believers' church focuses on the people.

"We don't just believe in the priesthood of all believers," says Jones. "We advocate the preacherhood of all. We seek not to abolish the ministry, but to abolish the laity."

Is your church a believers' church? It can be but its demands of commitment and discipline make it difficult.

"The believers' church in the pure sense will not become a widespread phenomenon of our time," says J. Lawrence Burkholder, Harvard professor of divinity. "Very few congregations of the American establishment are likely to be transformed into congregations which incorporate all or even most of the marks of the believers' church . . . The believers' church is just too demanding for the masses. For most people today, the believers' church implies a level of commitment and sacrifice which exceeds in their minds the benefits of the church."

This gloomy, if realistic, evaluation makes the recapturing of the believers' church vision even more important. "If one observes the shallow life in the Protestant churches of North America today," asks J. K. Zeman, secretary of Canadian Baptist Missions, "is it not reasonable to suggest that the need for a distant believers' church is greater today than it has ever been?"

Watch for the fire of the believers' church. "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isa. 43:19). □

ON RECOVERING THE GENIUS OF CLASSICAL CONGREGA- TIONAL CHURCH ORDER

I.

The Setting in Our Present Problems by Rev. Harry Stubbs

How does one get to be a Congregational minister? How does a gathering get to be a Congregational church?

Let us look first at the current manifestation of the first problem in the shared life of our continuing Congregational churches: How do you get to be a Congregational minister? The National Association *Articles of Association* (Bylaw IX. Standing and Ordination) provide for "making lists of the names of those who have ministerial standing." The same Bylaw (IX. 5a) affirms that "the local church . . . has, and shall retain . . . the inalienable right to ordain its own minister. The local church may call an ecclesiastical council as an expression of the fellowship of the churches, but it shall be remembered that ordination is by the local church." Bylaw IX. 4: "The National Association has no power to ordain . . . a minister . . ." The National Association has, to my mind quite correctly, abjured the function of holding the credentials or standing of a minister. *Articles of Association*, Article II: "In case of necessity to do and perform any and all functions ordinarily and customarily performed by Congregational Christian associations." To my knowledge, the National Association has never yet recognized the existence of any such necessity in regard to the holding of ministerial standing.

However, note. While, on the one hand, providing for the listing of "those who have ministerial standing", and, on the other, affirming the legitimate function of both local church and ecclesiastical council in the ordination of ministers, the National Association in its *Articles of Association and Bylaws* provides no avenue nor procedure for the local church or the ecclesiastical council to transmit the factual information concerning ordination to the Department of Pastoral Relations for veridical listing in the Year Book.

It was due to a break-down at this very point that the Commission on the Ministry was asked at its Racine Meeting to formulate a procedure for encouraging all local associations to set up standards for standing and for supplying the Department of Pastoral Relations with complete information regarding those who have standing: licensure, ordination and installation. I was assigned the task of studying this matter and of making a report at the next meeting of the Commission. I made such a report at the meeting of the Commission in Wichita on February 12-13. It was at that juncture that the Commission requested me to write some articles for *The Congregationalist* on the substance of that report.

Next, let us look at the current manifestation of the second problem in the shared life of our continuing Congregational churches: How do you get to be a Congregational church? I think it requires only momentary analysis to see that this very question was at bottom the problem at the session of the National Association Meeting in Racine when the matter arose concerning the approval of the Minutes of the Executive Committee in reference to the procedure to be used in considering the application of new churches for membership in the National Association. Again, the *Articles of Association* say (Article III. Membership), "Any Congregational Christian Church may become a member of the Association" Quite clearly, the presumption is that the church applying for membership has, in some way, become a Congregational Christian Church before applying for membership in the National Association.

We can summarize these two points by declaring, on the basis of the evidence, here presented, that the National Association is not an ecclesiastical body. It is not in the business of making (legitimizing, authenticating) either Congregational churches or Congregational ministers. All it can do for Congregational churches in this regard is to accept them into membership upon proper action and application after they have achieved prior authentica-

tion. All it can do for Congregational ministers is to record standing that has been achieved by some prior process. Or indicate the lack of same.

It is my judgment that a sober study of historic Congregationalism will show that our forebears did not forswear ecclesiastical function in their free churches. So far from forswearing it, they said it was far too important to entrust it to any bishop or any presbytery for their possibly arbitrary manipulation and control; they would keep custody of it themselves. And they produced a Congregational Church Order that made it possible for them to do just that.

I am willing to admit that a good deal of such history is chiefly valuable for the spiritual edification and fortification of Congregationalists and for the delight of antiquarians. However, there is at least one benchmark for the understanding of classical Congregational Church Order.

That benchmark is the year 1865. By that year, Congregationalism had broken out of its New England cocoon, and a Congregational Church Order had evolved that had been wrought in the fires of the needs of the Congregational churches as they grappled with the problems of their church life on the frontier. That year is pivotal for two more, definite reasons. That was the year of the Boston Council which produced *The Boston Platform*. That was the year in which Dr. Henry Martyn Dexter published his monumental *Congregationalism: What It Is; Whence It Is; How It Works*. (His *A Hand-Book of Congregationalism*, essentially a distillation of the earlier volume, was published in 1880.) The definitions and procedures formulated in these documents I make bold to call classical Congregational Church Order. From my reading of Congregational church history, during the time that these definitions and procedures were accepted in theory and followed in practice, Congregationalism waxed strong and was a great force for good in our country. The holocaust came when they were tinkered with, tortured, abrogated or simply forgotten.

I suppose that most contempo-

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commission on the ministry *Continued from page 14*

rary Congregationalists of our persuasion would be prone to declare that Congregationalism is a mode of church life that functions without any system of government above the level of the local church. A regularized system of ecclesiastical function and institutional government defined by Constitution or Articles of Association and Bylaws in the local church, yes. Above the local church only free fellowship to the extent that we choose in meetings that are not completely devoid of the marks of the annual camp meeting of yore. At this point, our contemporary conceptions are out of joint with the understanding of the matter entertained by classical Congregational Church Order.

On the very first page of his *Congregationalism*, Henry Martyn Dexter says in a chapter on "What Congregationalism Is":

"A CHURCH is an association of the friends and followers of Christ, for the profession of Christian faith, and the performance of Christian duty.

"Every association-or union of per-

sons in a company, for an object-implies a groundwork of organization, with principles and laws; and, therefore, every Church must have such a groundwork.

"The working out of these principles and laws in shaping and controlling the life of the organization, constitutes its government; and, therefore, every Church must have some form of government

"CONGREGATIONALISM is the democratic form of Church order and government. It derives its name from the prominence which it gives to the congregation of Christian believers. It vests all ecclesiastical power (under Christ) in the associated brotherhood of each local Church, as an independent body. At the same time it recognizes a fraternal and equal fellowship between these independent churches, which invests each with the right and duty of advice (1) Herein Congregationalism, as a system, differs from Independency; which affirms the seat of ecclesiastical power to reside in the brotherhood so zealously as to ignore any check, even of advice, upon its action"

(1) Emphasis supplied.

It is transparent that here the conception of Congregationalism goes beyond that of democratic government in intramural affairs. Congregationalism essays to provide a democratic form of Church order and government for relations and activities among local congregations and at all levels of their associated life.

The form that this takes in classical Congregational Church Order I shall pursue in future articles. Here I have simply tried to place the problem in its present setting in the shared life of our continuing Congregational churches. Beyond that, I have marshalled a single point as to the conception of the scope of church order and government as that was conceived in classical Congregational Church Order. □

The Rev. Harry Stubbs, pastor of the Stewart Ridge Church of Chicago, begins a series of articles at the behest of the Commission on the Ministry, of which he is a member.

ON RECOVERING THE GENIUS OF CLASSICAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ORDER

by Harry J. Stubbs

(Ed. note: This is the second of two articles by the Rev. Harry Stubbs, a member of the Commission on the Ministry. The first appeared in the October, 1968 issue of *The Congregationalist*.)

Henry Martyn Dexter's *Congregationalism: What It Is; Whence It Is; How It Works* (1865) can be validly viewed as essentially a codification of Congregational ecclesiastical usage in regard to church government that had been regularized over a period of three hundred years (1580-1865).

He begins with the affirmation that every association, including religious associations, must have some form of government.

All government reduces itself to three pure forms.

The first, the monarchic, was the episcopal way, and the Congregationalists rejected that; that is what the founding of Congregational churches in England was all about. The third, the aristocratic, was the presbyterian way, and Congregationalists by 1865 had rejected that; certain it is that we who are continuing Congregationalists have rejected it by 1969. "Congregationalism is the democratic form of Church order and government."

What is the basis for the declaration by Dexter (and others) that

every church must have some form of government whether monarchic, aristocratic or democratic? Every church organization has some absolutely foundational functions that must be performed in addition to "shaping and controlling the life of the organization." These foundational functions are: (1) the legitimating (organizing) of a new Church, (2) the legitimating (ordaining) of a new minister, (3) the legitimating (installing) of a given minister as Pastor of a Church and (4) the termination of such office (dismissal) at the request of the Pastor. These are absolutely fundamental functions, and they must be performed in some way, whether monarchic, aristocratic or democratic.

The early Congregationalists were faced with the task of developing a system of ecclesiastical government that would, on the one hand, provide for the autonomy of the local Congregation and yet, on the other hand, bind those churches together in a shared Order for their common life. One may say that their basic problem was to provide for local autonomy without destroying fellowship and to provide for fellowship without destroying autonomy. If they developed a polity that made it possible for them to carry out the fundamental ec-

clesiastical functions in a democratic way where the Episcopalians did it in a monarchic way and the Presbyterians did it in an aristocratic way, we must ask *what their ingenious invention was*, their engine of democratic church government.

It was the *Ecclesiastical Council* and it was less an invention than it was an exfoliation. The germ idea had been there from the very beginning. Robert Browne *thoroughly elaborated his new system*. *Every such local church, while self-complete and under Christ self-governed, was bound in equal sisterhood to every other. It should give to and receive from them not only sympathy but help as need might require. Such sympathy and help, on occasion, should manifest themselves in Councils*., *'for deciding or redressing of matters which can not well be otherwise taken up.'*

The hour is very late for us to remember what we should never have forgotten: Congregationalism is a form of church government, extrinsic as well as intrinsic to the local church. As a form of church government, it has two principles—coequal and coexistent, though, perhaps, not twin-born—*autonomy and fellowship*.

If we are asked by an interested acquaintance just what a *Congregational* church is, I suppose that all of us are prone to answer that it is an independent—an autonomous—church. We construct our own covenant and adopt a creed if we wish. If we wish not, we do not. We call our own Minister and disengage him if and when we wish. We select our own benevolences and support them to the extent that we wish. When we have mentioned all of this and have explained it to the extent that seems necessary, we think we have finished our definition. Instead of being finished, we are only half finished. There "are two germ-elements" in our polity. The first is eloquently enunciated; the second one is all too often tacit. When we define Congregationalism as predicted on autonomy, we are only half right. And, being only half

right, we are at least half wrong. I suppose, in a logical sense we are all wrong.

I am afraid that time has wrought an anaemic sense of the meaning of fellowship in us. When we speak of fellowship, we think of inviting sister Congregational churches in to help us celebrate the centenary of the gathering of our Church or the dedication of a new building. Perhaps we invite them to join us for an organ recital or a choral concert. Then there are coffee, cookies and conversation following, *and we call this fellowship.*

Now I have nothing against coffee, cookies and conversation, but this is not what is referred to as *fellowship* in classical Congregationalism, although the latter does not obviate the former. In classical Congregationalism, fellowship is the doing of the foundational ecclesiastical functions in concert by sister churches. It is embodied — is it too much to say incarnated? — in the asking and the receiving of the advice and counsel of sister churches for (1) the formation of a new Congregational Church, (2) the ordination of a Minister, (3) the installation of a Minister as Pastor, (4) the dismissal of a Pastor at his request and (5) the examination of some problem internal to the local Church when that Church senses the need for such advice and counsel and asks for it.

Fellowship, the asking and the receiving of the advice and counsel of sister churches, is effectuated by the calling of an Ecclesiastical Council of the churches of either the vicinage or of the local association on the above occasions. The seeking and the giving of such advice and counsel is neither an exquisite etiquette nor a comely cosmetic applied to ecclesiastical occasions at the option of the local church. A Congregational Church has an obligation to ask for it on such occasions and the sister churches have an obligation to give it when asked. It is the very bone and sinew of classical Congregationalism, at least the part of it that is not subsumed under the first half of the principle: autonomy. ☐

The People Behind the Founding of the NACCC

A. Vaughan Abercrombie
Historian, NACCC

The churches *present by their delegates assembled* at Detroit's Fort Shelby Hotel just 23 years ago created the first truly *national* fellowship in the history of the Congregational Christian Churches of the United States.

Never before had the churches of our order met as a national body, each church electing and sending its own delegate with the privilege of one vote for each church attending each *annual* meeting.

The Boston Council (1865) was comprised of representatives of groups of churches, associations or state bodies. The first (1871) and succeeding triennial and biennial National Councils were composed of a limited number of delegates chosen by their respective local or state organizations.

So also were the biennial meetings of the General Council (1933-1957)—churches of a thousand members *nominated* a delegate, but smaller churches had to group together to the number of 1,000 members. Each group nominated one delegate. All delegates were elected by the Conference which often assigned the power of election to their Boards of Directors.

Each Church Represented

The Call to the Fort Shelby Hotel meeting epitomized the long hoped for ideal of churches "being present" in national fellowship "by their delegates assembled":

"A call is hereby issued to all Congregational Christian Churches, inviting them to a meeting for the purposes of fellowship and counsel together with the view to formation of a permanent national Association of the churches of our order . . . Each Church may be represented by either Pastor or delegate . . . Membership in this Association will be by Churches . . . The churches, in sending delegates to this Association . . . shall withhold from it all legislative and judicial power over the churches and individuals, and all right to act as a Council of reference . . . The Association will recognize the two cardinal principles of Congregationalism, viz., the exclusive right and power of the individual churches to self-government, and the fellowship of the churches one with another."

This Call expressed the primary purpose of those who had for years been the unofficial spokesmen for maintaining the Congregational Way of faith and order in the face of a plan of union which proposed to eliminate any *direct* control by local churches over their national synod.

These dedicated individuals were organized in two *ad hoc* groups: "The Committee for the Continuation of Congregational Christian Churches in the United States", and "The League to Uphold Congregational Principles".

Pictured with this article are a few of the male persons, some of them Founding Fathers of the NA, as they looked in 1954. The group photograph includes nine of the Continuation Executive Committee, five of whom are now of sainted memory.

Founders Now Gone

The late Sinclair T. Roberts of Philadelphia, then Moderator of the Continuation Committee, had been Secretary of the "Evanston Meeting", the first organization critical of the proposed church merger. Mr. Roberts was a businessman and a powerhouse of ideas, energy and action.



Rev. Malcolm K. Burton, writer



These persons, of course, are but a handful of the leaders and members of the Continuation Committee whose vision and generosity culminated in the Call to the Fort Shelby meeting.

Founding Mothers

"But," you ask, "were there no Founding Mothers?"

There most certainly were.

Standing beside each of these men, in private and public, were equally dedicated wives—Lucille Russell, the late Josephine ("Aunt Jo") Davies, Frances Crosby, Jeanette Butman, to name only four.

A list of the sainted women like Mary (Mrs. Warren S.) Archibald of Hartford, Gladys (Mrs. Claude) Kennedy of Minneapolis and the living stalwarts like Gertrude Johnston Guild of Duluth and Cary (Mrs. George J.) Mead of West Hartford would fill these pages.

The Founding Mother most responsible for the Fort Shelby meeting was Carol Burton. Her husband, the Rev. Malcolm K. Burton, executive vice chairman of the Continuation Committee, is not in the accompanying group picture because he took it.

Carol took the snapshot shown of Malcolm at his typewriter in the study at "97 Mary Day" in Pontiac. I can see Carol there, surrounded by a mountain of files and shelves loaded with pamphlets, letters, manuscripts and clippings, all of which she has kept in meticulous order from the 1940s in New London, Connecticut to this day in Agawam, Massachusetts.

I can see her also with a mountain of work. Carol addressed, stuffed and posted a quarter million pieces of mail, much of it in 10,000 lots; answered all inquiries for information and literature and kept on top of a mailing list of some 30,000 names.

In the Burton archives is every detail of the arrangements for the Fort Shelby meeting, many of which were quietly managed by Carol herself.

In recent years she has been helping Malcolm prepare bound volumes of all significant historical papers relative to the merger and to the gathering of the NA. These volumes have been or are being deposited for posterity at the NA office, the Boston Congregational Library and in the libraries of theological seminaries.

Now that Malcolm is writing and printing a detailed merger history, "Disorders in the Kingdom," Carol's records, her sustaining assistance and loyal companionship are Malcolm's greatest blessing.

"I have never thought of myself as a writer," Malcolm told me recently. Nevertheless, he has written a library of books, articles and sermons.

He had a heavy hand in composing the Call to Fort Shelby and wrote all the model Articles of Association which were the basis for the discussions out of which the final Articles were forged.

Many may forget that throughout the nearly 40 years Malcolm Burton has been serving the cause of free churches without any monetary remuneration, at the same time he has been a great pastor, preacher, teacher, counsellor, architect, builder, photographer, lithographer, book-binder, husband, father and affectionate friend. Writer, yes; but above all, a multi-talented, self-giving human being!

Who else would have come to my ordination, delivered a masterful charge to the people and then gone home and fabricated with his own hands all the attachments needed to convert our West Warwick mimeograph from a hand-fed to an automatic machine?

The Litany Has Many Names

The late Harold C. Bailey, with the help of his wife, Helen, was for many years Executive Secretary of the League to Uphold Congregational Principles. He was a layman from Old First Church in Hartford and a fine Christian gentleman, if there ever was one.

The League, too, provided countless now sainted and living Founding Fathers and Mothers like:

The Alfred H. Clarkes of St. Louis; the Russell J. Clinchys of Forest Hills and Princeton; the A. Lester Slocums of Milwaukee; the William J. Grede of Wauwatosa; the Frank A. Beans of Minneapolis; the Walter H. Judds of Washington, D.C.; the Frederic E. Abbes of Winchester, Massachusetts; the Thomas G. Longs of Detroit; the James C. Ingebretsens of Los Angeles, and the Fred C. Andersens of Bayport, Minnesota.

These, too, joined in the Call to Fort Shelby and their guidance and benevolence was unbounded.

Next June we shall have completed plans for the formal celebration of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the NA.

As Historian, I pray that we may make it a season to gratefully remember our indebtedness to all of the Founding Persons and to renew our commitment to the vital purpose, a truly national fellowship, bequeathed to all free churches through the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches in the United States. □

*Mr. Abercrombie is minister of the
Congregational Church of East Orange,
New Jersey.*



Some members of Continuation Committee Executive Committee: *Back row*, left to right, Ernest S. Crosby, Prof. Marion J. Bradshaw, Rev. Harry R. Butman, Rev. Horace L. Bachelder, Kenneth W. Greenawalt. *Front row*, Sinclair T. Roberts (Moderator), Joseph D. Fackenthal, Rev. Joseph J. Russell, and Rev. Dr. Howell D. Davies (Executive Secretary).

The late Joseph D. Fackenthal, a layman from Cadman Memorial Church in Brooklyn, was an attorney, wise and wonderful, whether he was talking about Congregationalism, the law, the quarrying of trap rock, or the novels of Anthony Trollope.

The late Rev. Joseph J. Russell was my predecessor once removed in my Providence Church so I came to know him in the early 1940s. The only negative thing my people could say about him was that once he became excited at a church meeting and let his Bible come down a bit hard on the rostrum. Their other memories of him were a joy to them and a challenging example to me.

Joe was then pastor at Holbrook, Massachusetts and he let me have a hand in getting out *The Free Lance* which ultimately became *The Congregationalist*, also under his able editorship.

The late Professor Marion J. Bradshaw of Bangor Seminary seemed always billeted with me at General Councils and Continuation meetings. What a feast for the mind and heart he had to share and what a sense of humor!

I first met him at the Claremont General Council in 1952. He emerged like a primeval giant from the shower in our assigned portable dormitory room.

"Mr. Abercrombie, I presume," he said.

Quite taken aback by his size, his sparkling eyes and his near nakedness, I said, "I'm glad to see you, sir."

"But you had not expected to see so much of me," he replied, "and should we need a text for the occasion, how about Genesis 27:11, '(and) Esau was a hairy man?'"

Thus began my fortunate acquaintance with the author of "Philosophical Foundations of Faith," "Third Class World," "The Maine Scene," and "Free Churches and Christian Unity." Dr. Bradshaw was theologian, historian, photographer-lecturer, mentor and friend of all students young and old.

The late Rev. Dr. Howell D. Davies was not great in stature but he had a voice equal to the resonance of Dr. Bradshaw's. Dr. Davies was Executive Secretary of the Continuation Committee after long years as a pastor (Wauwatosa First) and a generation as Midwest Secretary for the Missions' Council.

His spiritual wisdom and devotion to the churches was only exceeded by his graciousness. He never seemed to forget I helped him pack up the boxes of literature left over from the Claremont Council.

Among his many invaluable contributions to our cause was his farsighted work as an incorporator of the present Missionary Society in 1955, some months before the NA itself was gathered.

Founders Still Living

Space precludes more than passing mention of the living Founding Fathers in the group. Ernest S. Crosby, then of New York and now of Carmel, California, was a Great Lakes ship owner, financier and historian. His book on the Reformation, "Reformation and the Reformers" is a scholarly volume of original research and interpretive writing.

The good works of the Rev. Harry R. Butman, formerly of Dedham, Massachusetts and now of Los Angeles, are legendary in our midst and he is committing new legends every day.

The Rev. Horace L. Bachelder, then of Oregon City and now of First Congregational Church in America at Plymouth, was representative of the younger men in the movement.

Kenneth W. Greenawalt, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn, was the Committee attorney and represented the plaintiffs in all litigation. He penned some of the most cogent lines about the Congregational Way added to the literature of our order in recent history.

LETTERS



I wish to correct several misstatements contained in the letter of Henry David Gray in the March 15 issues of *The Congregationalist*.

He speaks of "The Call" for the Fort Shelby meeting as being "issued by the Continuation Committee (of the Evanston Meeting) whose chairman, Dr. John Alexander, presided over the first meeting of the NA."

Wrong on the first two statements: right only on John Alexander having been elected the temporary Moderator of the first meeting and since no permanent moderator ever was elected, John was, in fact, Moderator for the whole meeting.

But John Alexander never has been chairman of the Continuation Committee. For some years now he has been Secretary and Treasurer. He also was a member of the Interim Committee of the Committee for the Continuation of the Congregational Christian Churches in the U.S. But *this* Continuation Committee was *not* the Continuation Committee of the Evanston Meeting.

The Evanston Meeting committee disbanded in June, 1948 at the Oberlin Council. Later that year, Jim Fifield started organizing "Anti-Merger". It got out three publications under that name.

Then, in January, 1949, the group changed its name to its present name. Dr. Arthur A. Rouner, Sr., was chairman of the Committee at the time of Fort Shelby. I had been elected "director" of the Committee for the Continuation of the Congregational Christian Churches in November, 1954 (later called executive vice-chairman", the title I still hold). It was I who wrote the Call to the First Meeting, with Dr. Howell D. Davies going over all of the wording carefully, as he always did on everything we published. We worked very harmoniously together.

But I am embarrassed by one important fact. Future historians may think they can quote me against myself on this matter of the present Continuation Committee not being the same as the Evanston one.

Here is the story. While Henry David Gray was editor of *The Congregationalist*, he asked me to write up the story of the Fort Shelby Meeting. The article appears in the June, 1965 issue as part of the observance of the 10th anniversary. It carries my name as author. Unhappily for me and without consulting me so far as I can recall, Dr.

Gray inserted two paragraphs of his own. He wanted the article to include a perspective of his own going back to 1936 and to the Evanston Meeting of 1947. Unfortunately, he ran things together, referring as he does now, to the Evanston Meeting's Continuing Committee as though it were the same Committee which met in November, 1954 and later was responsible for the Fort Shelby meeting.

Henry's letter also says that "no one had asserted national leadership except as Malcolm wrote to 200 people". That makes our efforts seem minuscule indeed.

My little mailing list of only 200 people was that for the first few months, starting in October, 1945. The list, and size of publication, kept growing. By 1947, Dr. Marion J. Bradshaw and I were each sending out frequent mailings of large, four-page printed folders to all Congregational Christian ministers and church clerks and many others. Then, the Evanston Meeting took similar mailings in late 1947 and early 1948.

I was back at it after Oberlin. Then came the work of the Continuation Committee, whose mailing list grew to some 27,000. During the year prior to the Fort Shelby meeting, it sent out at least 12 four or six page folders to that large list. S. T. Roberts, who was in the 1954 picture, did not live to be with us at Fort Shelby. It was S. T. Roberts whose name appeared on the Evanston meeting mailings after the first pamphlet from the meeting itself. He was assisted by Neil Hansen of Chicago and Dr. A. C. McGiffert, who also had a large hand in the writing of the Evanston Meeting material.

Mrs. Burton and I added things up and estimated that over 200,000 pieces of mail were addressed, folded and stuffed into envelopes on our dining room table before we left New London in 1952. Some of these mailings were joint efforts with Dr. Bradshaw and contained materials from both of us at once.

The Rev. Malcolm K. Burton
Agawam, Massachusetts





Four Centuries of Congregational Growth

by Dr. George V. Bohman

As I began this brief statement of the central ideas of Congregationalism and their growth over four centuries, COCU, the plan for "one great church" proposed by the leaders of several Protestant denominations, published its latest plans. "New" is the word they used, but the plan still calls for bishops, a common creedal statement, and ultimate organic union, a massive hierarchy. As one leader put it, he is glad that most denominations will not be required to obtain the votes of individual congregations! Against the onslaught of propaganda sure to follow, each Congregationalist needs to review the glorious contrast between our heritage of autonomy, toleration, the protection of diversity, and the opportunity for seeking and for creativity in Congregationalism as against deadly conformity and institutionalism.

American Congregationalism descends most directly from the Lincolnshire area Separatists of Scrooby and its neighboring villages. Tradition says that the rector of Babworth Church, Richard Clyfton, provided a place for young ministers and some laymen, including the Rev. John Robinson, the Rev. John Smyth, and William Brewster to discuss their discontent with the Church of England. Several had attended Cambridge University's more liberal-thinking colleges. Thus, long before eighteenth century British Enlightenment, as some in southern England had earlier, they questioned conformity to the Church, the creed, and the rule of the hierarchy. In Scrooby, Gainsborough, and Ainsworth little groups formed churches, owning a covenant as a contract for Christian fellowship. The Scrooby covenant, about 1606, is unrecorded until the fragment of the Leyden Church arrived in Plymouth, New England in 1620. There the Church, now called First Parish, adopted its present covenant.

In the New England Colonies, early covenants

were brief agreements to live in Christian fellowship. Both the notable Plymouth and Salem covenants seemed to assume a common faith in God as taught by Jesus. The covenants were not tests of faith; uniformity was not demanded. The Scrooby-Leyden-Plymouth covenant reads:

"We, the Lord's free people, have joyned ourselves into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospell, to walke in all his wayes, made known, or to be made known, according to our best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost us, the Lord assisting us."

The Salem covenant of 1629 stated:

"We covenant with the Lord and one with another; and doe bynde ourselves in the presence of God, to walke together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveale himself unto us in his blessed word of truth."

Several others existed but none opened the path into unknown but broad vistas of philosophy and science or into new historical and critical evidence on the Bible, itself, as does the Plymouth covenant. Small wonder that both Plymouth and Salem covenants are used by many present-day Congregational churches.

Although the writings of John Robinson read more like the Salem covenant, he and other early Separatists clearly left the door open for the impact of John Locke (1632-1704) who, before the end of the century, espoused both toleration and reason in religion. At Cambridge, Scrooby, and Leyden, though professing Calvinism, Robinson had been exposed to the range of views which, in Holland, included participation in debates in the University as a Calvinist on a spectrum from Calvinism to Arianism so that, however much or little he modified his own theology, he could appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of each major position as educated debaters do. By the next century, such ministerial minds as Increase Mather showed their curiosity about the newly emerging sciences.

It is also true that later New England covenants added more theological content. In New England, conflict between independency of the churches and Puritan concepts from England led to several compromises on the standing of ministers and ministerial associations on one hand and the disappearance of powerful elders on

Dr. George V. Bohman was moderator of the National Association, 1957-58, chairman of the Executive Committee, and on the first Board of Trustees and later chairman of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies. He is professor emeritus of speech communication, Wayne State University.

the other. The struggle against Presbyterianism repeatedly flared. Underlying theology did not change much but elaborate creedal statements and the influence of powerful ministers tightened discipline. In the western counties of Massachusetts, Jonathan Edwards and succeeding generations of neo-Edwardians prompted strong reactions in the Boston area by Charles Chauncy, Jonathan Mayhew and others which reflected English Enlightenment, unitarianism, and related theology.

Nevertheless the formation and departure of the Unitarian churches in the early nineteenth century led, interestingly, to modified thinking among many churches which remained Congregational. First, in "Christian Nurture" Horace Bushnell of Hartford emphasized the life-long religious education of children as the way to church membership as opposed to the emotional conversion of revivalism. Second, by the mid-nineteenth century the rapid and revolutionary impact of the sciences relating to the nature of the universe and humankind, such as archeology, astronomy, geology, and biology combined with logic, reason, and the broader outlook of the eighteenth century to stimulate research on the standard Biblical texts and in the whole realm of religion. This revolutionary impact still grows.

At the same time, however, many conservative and orthodox Congregationalists, as well as other Christians, continued to support, even in the light of scientific studies, their literal interpretation of the Bible and even such encrustations as Archbishop Ussher's original marginal dating on the King James version. They have resisted evidence of multiple human authorship and editorial changes and additions to the texts of some books of the Bible. They have also refused to acknowledge dated and pagan culture-influenced doctrines in creeds of the early centuries. Such views persist and intensify in cycles in this century, notably in the 1920's and again in the '70's and '80's. Several books of the Bible with charismatic and millennialist ideas reappear in the preaching of a wide spectrum of evangelists. Elaborate rationales alleged to be "scientific" are used to justify ancient creeds, neo-Calvinism, and to refute evidence of geologic history of the earth and universe and biological mutations. All denominations in "main-line Protestantism" include minorities of very conservative to fundamentalist views and, at the other end of the spectrum, representatives of humanist and agnostic views.¹ Out of habit or due to friendships, relatives, and the enjoyment of a long church fellowship, the more extreme groups may remain in a loose affiliation. Thus, *sub rosa*, they achieve a degree of personal religious freedom. The vital difference between these persons in most other denominations and Congregationalists is that Congregationalists make their own decisions and interpretations of "right" which are then usually respected by the church fellowship. In Congregationalism, there should be no valid threat of a heresy trial or excommunication or the use of a judgmental, "You are not a Christian," on the basis of personal belief. For over two centuries, though the earlier New England churches supported persecution of the Quakers and Baptists and witchcraft trials, accusa-

tions of "heresy" lack historical justification in Congregationalism.

The two principles that flow from the autonomy of each local Congregational church are "doctrinal hospitality" in each church and the right of "private judgment."² Within a church, the process of shifting theological positions from year to year continues for many members, young and old. The process is customarily called a "pilgrimage." See, for example, the remarkable pilgrimage into maturity and further changes in his later years in Lloyd Douglas.³ Factors such as continued thinking, education, reading, discussion, and preaching encourage changes. Some members, however, set up rigid compartments between their childhood religious ideas and new learning.

Throughout its history, Congregationalism has encouraged a highly educated ministry for both preachers and laity which also envisions a lifetime of provocative study and reading. In Colonial times, a bachelor's and hopefully a master's at Harvard or Yale preceded a pastorate. Now, a bachelor's and a master's at a recognized seminary and often further study are the norm of preparation, although solid equivalents are recognized. The Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies assists students and offers supplementary study in Congregational history and polity. Unfortunately, high costs and shortages of fully-trained ministers cause some churches to resort to ministers insufficiently educated and at times mediocre in personality and leadership. The challenge to each church and the National Association is to find a fully-qualified minister dedicated to a career of seeking and proclaiming truth wherever and whenever it may be found and a compassionate love of ministry whatever it may cost. To obtain such a person, small churches need more often to yoke together.

If we are to withstand the temptation of the "one great church" and to preserve and spread Congregationalism to persons who have not found a fellowship in which they can search for liberty, truth, and a full opportunity for living as loving, realistic, and creative human beings in our complex world, we need to understand the special virtues of the Congregational Way.⁴ □

¹ In fairness, some conservative seminaries now teach the scholarship of recent decades. For the more extreme view and the shades of difference among conservatives and fundamentalists, read Bob Jones University's George W. Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism in America* (1973).

² I am well aware, as the Jay Terbush questionnaire revealed, that ministers of a few Congregational churches put doctrinal questions to new members. Some churches recite the Apostles' or Nicene creed in each worship service. The Kansas City Statement of 1913, which is much less dogmatic, is in many church By-laws. Articles in even recent issues of *The Congregationalist* repeatedly set up limitations that should be the decisions of individuals and nowise are to be enforced by churches, though they represent, in fact, legitimate personal opinions of the authors.

³ George V. Bohman, *Lloyd Douglas*, NACCC Congregational Lecture, 1978.

⁴ For much of the evidence I have used, see the major histories of Congregationalism, such as Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*; Atkins and Fagley, *History of American Congregationalism* and the major writings in the merger controversy. The earlier works need revisions, reprintings, and especially a new book of the major documents to date.

Most Important Document

American Congregationalism Based on Cambridge Platform of 1648

*by the Rev. Steven H. Ware Bailey
Division of the Ministry, CCCNA*

Modern Congregationalism arose in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a reform movement, a part of the Puritan party pressing for further reformation of the Church of England. As Congregationalism took shape within English Puritanism, two distinct branches of Congregationalism emerged. One variety of Congregationalism advocated separation from the Church of England as the only means of achieving effective reform. Persons of this persuasion were called Separatists and included the group that eventually made its way to Plymouth on board the *Mayflower*. The other branch of Congregationalism was larger and more substantial; it was also less radical in that it advocated working for reform within the Church of England without separating from it. This variety of Congregationalism was known as non-separating Congregationalism and included the Puritans who settled on Cape Ann and around the Massachusetts Bay.

However much American Congregationalists today venerate the Pilgrim separatists of the Plymouth Col-

ony, the non-separating Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony are by far the more important to the history of American Congregationalism, for it was the Massachusetts Puritans who created a flourishing commonwealth that insured the survival and extension of Congregationalism in

Puritans far more important than Pilgrims in American Congregationalism.

the New World. In fact, the fledgling Plymouth Colony was eventually absorbed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony to form the Colony of Massachusetts. The Puritans of Massachusetts established the institutions and structures that shaped and dominated the whole of New England and of Congregationalism.

Coming to the New World, however, posed problems for Congregationalists, whether of the separating

or of the non-separating variety. In England, the Puritans' calls for reform—emanating from outside the Church or from within—made Congregationalism essentially a protest movement set against an establishment. But in New England, the situation was entirely different, for Congregationalism was no longer a protest movement; it became, instead, THE establishment. As such, Congregationalism was forced to structure itself as an ecclesiastical system that came to be known as the Standing Order.

How to fashion such a system, allied as it would be with the state in an ecclesiastical establishment, while simultaneously maintaining the basic principles of church autonomy inherent in Congregationalism, was somewhat problematic, to say the least. But the New England Puritans, led by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, did indeed create such a system, which functioned quite nicely for over a century-and-a-half and still forms the essential fabric for Congregational ecclesiastical organization. The vehicle by which all of this was accomplished was the Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline of 1648.



Not many modern-day Congregationalists have heard of the Cambridge Platform, but if they are to know their roots and understand the principles of their church structure they should study it religiously, for this platform is the most important

Platform combines aristocracy, monarchy, and democracy.

document in the history of American Congregationalism. Thought doubtless few will care to devote themselves to assiduous examination of this seminal document, a brief introduction to it is certainly justified.

The Cambridge Platform of 1648 was the result of more than two years of effort on behalf of the churches and ministers of New England. Uncertain just how and under what circumstances the churches of New England

would organize themselves in the New World, where they found themselves to be in essence the established church of New England, the ministers and magistrates of the Bay Colony determined to secure, if possible, some sort of united ecclesiastical constitution for the churches of New England. The churches were united in common interests and bound together by similar views of their polity, but this essential unity had had no expression, so it was up to the churches to create a statement that would be recognized by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities as the governing principles of Congregationalism in New England.

Towards this end, some of the ministers petitioned the General Court of the Massachusetts Colony, at its May session in 1646, to summon a synod, or collective meeting of the churches, to arrive at an agreement in regard to the common polity of the churches. The magistrates complied with the petition and issued a call for a synod to assemble at Cambridge on the first day of September 1646.

When the appointed day for the opening of the Synod arrived, there were a few churches conspicuously ab-

sent in representation, most notably Boston and Salem, in which congregations there were objections to the manner in which the assembly had been summoned, contending that the elders, not the magistrates, ought to have called the Synod. Eventually these objections were overcome, and the Synod was able to begin its work with the support of 28 of the 29 churches in the Massachusetts Colony (to which the two churches of New Hampshire should be added, that province being then under the protection of Massachusetts); and the good will, together with a few representatives of the 22 churches of Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven.

Power of civil magistrates debated.

During this first session of the Cambridge Synod, there was substantial discussion of the debated problem concerning the power of the civil magistrates to interfere in ecclesiastical matters and the nature and powers of synods themselves. More importantly, the Synod appointed the Rev. Messrs. John Cotton of Boston, Richard Mather of Dorchester, and Ralph Partridge of Duxbury in Plymouth Colony, each to prepare a "model of church government" for submission to the assembly at its next session. After having deliberated but a fortnight, the Synod adjourned until the eighth of June 1647.

The Synod reassembled on the appointed June day in 1647. Though this second session included representatives as far removed as Gov. Bradford of Plymouth, and the Rev. Messrs. Stone of Hartford, and Warham of Windsor, it did not last long, for an epidemic forced it to break up before it had accomplished

much of anything. The final session of the Synod began at Cambridge on 15 August 1648, and in the next two weeks completed its work.

The Platform of Church Discipline drawn up by Richard Mather, combined with contributions from John Cotton, became the substance of the Cambridge Platform finally adopted as the Synod's ecclesiastical constitution. John Cotton wrote a lengthy preface to the Platform as a word of explanation of the general features of the New England church practices. The Synod also approved the doctrinal part of the work of the Westminster Assembly, which had just received the approval of Parliament, thus formally declaring the churches of New England at one in doctrine with the Puritan party in England, whether Presbyterian or Independent (Congregational).

The Cambridge Platform itself clearly outlines the polity of the New England churches in terms of non-separating Congregationalism as it was understood and practiced by the first generation of American Congregationalists. It is not perhaps as democratic in spirit as some twentieth-century Congregationalists might like in that the seventeenth-century Congregationalists affirmed that the government of the church, like that of the state, was a mixed government, combining elements of monarchy (Christ as head of the church), aristocracy (elders as rulers of the church), and democracy (the "brotherhood" as the generators of church power). The Platform does, however, clearly uphold Congregationalism as the polity of exclusive divine warrant and affirms the permanent principles of Congregationalism as the autonomy of local churches in association with other churches for purpose of counsel and fellowship.

"A Congregational-church," the Cambridge Platform declares, "Is by the institution of Christ a part of the Militant-visible-church, consisting of a company of Saints by calling, united into one body, by a holy cove-

nant, for the publick worship of God, and the mutual edification of one another, in the Fellowship of the Lord Jesus." That definition of a Congregational church is as good today as it was three and a half centuries ago. The Platform goes on in detail (but-tressed by hundreds of scriptural citations that fill the margins of its pages) to define membership in Congregational churches, identify officers in the churches, and outline the ways in which churches are to exercise fellowship with each other.

Powers of Synod ultimately only advisory.

As to the relationship of the churches to the state, the Cambridge Platform affirms that the church is not to meddle in the affairs of the state and that the state is not to interfere with the matters of the church, but the Platform clearly emphasizes that the state and the church are to work in mutual harmony and to support each other at all times. The right of magistrates to call synods is acknowledged as is the right of magistrates to compel people to contribute to the support of the churches and the maintenance of the ministers.

Of synods, the Cambridge Platform recognizes their importance as "spiritual and ecclesiastical assemblies" and allows that it belongs to synods and counsels "to debate and determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to cleare from the word holy directions for the holy worship of God, and good government of the church; to beare witness against mal-administration, and corruption in doctrine or maners in any particular Church, and to give directions for the reformation thereof ..." However, the powers of synods are

ultimately only advisory, for the Platform clearly states that synods have no compelling authority over the churches. In the words of the Platform, synods are "Not to exercise Church-censures in way of discipline, nor any other act of church-authority or jurisdiction."

The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline of 1648 was accepted by both the General Court and the churches and remained the basic governing document of Congregationalism in New England throughout the colonial period. It upheld the autonomy of the churches in a religious establishment in which the church and the state were close allies. It insisted that the churches exercise fellowship with each other and that they listen to the advice of ecclesiastical assemblies, but the fact the Platform refused to back away from affirmation of the sacrosanct authority of particular, autonomous churches makes the Cambridge Platform a document of immense historical significance and of lasting value and influence for American Congregationalism. ■

Senior Minister of the historic Bushnell Congregational Church, Detroit, Mich., the Rev. Steven H. Ware Bailey is widely recognized as a leading authority on Congregational history and polity. He lectures on Congregational history and polity at the seminar for CFTS students every year.

Hotel Fort Shelby Recollection

'I Saw Them in the Flesh'

by the Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Rouner, Jr.

I was a young minister of 25, having completed only my first year in the parish ministry. I had not yet begun to write my response to Henry David Gray's¹ challenge for a book on the Savoy Platform of Congregationalism, for which I received the Savoy Tercentenary Prize.

I did not go to Detroit as a young minister eager to be a part of an historic step in American Congregationalism. Indeed, in some ways, I feared that step. I had just taken my Union Seminary Congregational Polity course in Douglas Horton's² office at 287 4th Avenue in New York. I had seminary friends in Congregationalism. I had New York Congregational Association friends from my ordination at Cadman Church, Brooklyn. I had new Congregational friends in my own church in Williamsburg, Mass., and in the hill-towns of western Massachusetts. None of them was going the National Association way. Their siren song was all of the coming United Church of Christ.

I was in Detroit as my father's son. We would be together at the last General Council meeting, the burial of free Congregationalism, in Omaha, Nebraska, my father's hometown. I had to be with him—to stand by him. He was a man of prin-

ciple and almost foolhardy courage. He had testified to the principles of free Congregationalism in Justice Steinbrink's Brooklyn courtroom for three days. He had persuaded the judge of Congregationalism's glory and truth, and probably so won the Cadman case³. But he lost friend after friend across the Congregational ministry in America. They told him he had set back the cause of Christianity 1000 years. They likened him to Hitler, dancing his joy of triumph at the fall of Paris. I was at Hotel Fort Shelby as my father's son, to stand by him who had paid so dearly.

He was no organizer. He would write no constitutions, no by-laws. He would never be a moderator and wield a gavel. He had already done his work. He was Cadman's pastor. He had preached passionately the word of Congregationalism.

His task now was to stand in that dark hotel with the radicals, as they took their fatal, courageous step of faith to be, for a new, uncertain, day, like King Henry's army. "We few. We happy few. We band of brothers."

I knew the names of many: Burton, Butman, Bradshaw, Fifield, Gray, Swanson, and Strang. They all were there, and I saw them in the flesh.

Mostly, I knew there would be loss—for them all, perhaps even for me. As my father never allowed principle to stand in the way of love, I came to Detroit for love—of my father, and of those foolish, single-minded men and women who were more truly of the radical spirit of the Pilgrims than I realized.

They were doing what God called them to do—beyond all logic. And I, young and innocent, was unable to do anything but be there and go with them on the unknown journey that was nothing if it was not a call. ■



The Rev. Dr. Arthur Rouner, Jr., retired senior minister of The Colonial Church of Edina, Minn., now operates The Rouner Center for Missions and Ministry. His book, titled, *My Father, My Minister*, is to be published by the Congregational Press.

1 The late Rev. Dr. Henry David Gray authored many books, including the *Congregational Worship Book*, edited *The Congregationalist* and *The Congregational Journal*, and was a world renowned Congregational advocate.

2 The Rev. Douglas Horton, minister of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches and leading proponent of the Basis of Union.

3 The Cadman case tested the right of the local congregation to own its property. The Cadman Church won the case but lost in appellate court.

Congregational Lecture

Forward Through the Ages ... At the Call Divine

□ By the Rev. Dr.
John H. Alexander
First Moderator,
National
Association of
Congregational
Christian Churches

Editor's Note: This is an abridgement of Dr. Alexander's Congregational Lecture at the Fortieth Anniversary Meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches in Dearborn, Michigan, June 25, 1995. Due to space limitations, almost half has been eliminated, including several personal reminiscences. A tape of the entire lecture as presented is available for \$7 from the NACCC office, 8473 S. Howell Ave., Oak Creek, Wisconsin 53154.

This will be an unusual Congregational Lecture. Two years ago when Moderator-Elect Don Ward (the late Rev. Dr. Donald B. Ward) asked me to prepare this lecture, he said, "John, make it personal and make it entertaining."

Don Ward was a marvelous minister, and a faithful servant of the National Association, but he was also an entertainer. He spent his early professional life in radio and television. One of the most interesting nights that my wife, Donna, and I ever spent was in the Los Angeles area when Don and Vera took us to the Hollywood Magic House to which he belonged. I am sure that many of you have enjoyed his program of magic. So I knew what he meant when he said, "Make it entertaining."

In God's good time He called Don to be with Him, and Paul Ray (the Rev.) assumed the responsibilities as Moderator of the NACCC. When Paul called to reaffirm the invitation, he added one stipulation, "John, do it in 30 minutes." I thought that Paul might be kidding, but when I opened the program "bible" for the Annual Meeting and looked at the agenda, sure enough, "30 minutes." Paul, you didn't even give me one minute for each of the National Association's 40 years. I'll do my best, but I'll not promise not to take at least one minute for each year.

So join me as I seek to fulfill the request of our esteemed late Moderator-Elect. In preparation I reread part of the thesis which I completed on June 1, 1951, part of the requirement for a Master of Divinity degree from the Bangor Theological Seminary. It was on the subject, "A History of the Antimerger Movement in Contemporary Congregationalism." So you see I have been intimately involved in the events of our past since the very early days. This thesis predated the NACCC by more than four years. Even at that early stage an adequate review of the circumstances required a 139-page document plus an eight-page bibliography.

God's Holy Spirit has walked with us.

I wish each of you could experience the emotions that flood over me as I stand before you. As I look out at the hundreds of you who surround me now, I think of the scant 200 who were at Hotel Fort Shelby 40 years ago.

As I look back over the forty years of this Association, I am convinced that God's Holy Spirit has walked with us through the years, and with me as I have done my particular tasks. Just as certainly in the human dimension, my beloved wife, Donna, has always been at my side. As I have said on other occasions, she has said many times that when she married me in 1943 she married the merger issue. How fortunate I have been, and how fortunate you have been. Two nights from now we will celebrate the NA's Fortieth Anniversary. That same evening Donna and I will celebrate our 52nd

wedding anniversary. More than half of our anniversaries have been celebrated at the annual banquet of this National Association. So you can see how literally what she said was true—"She married the merger."

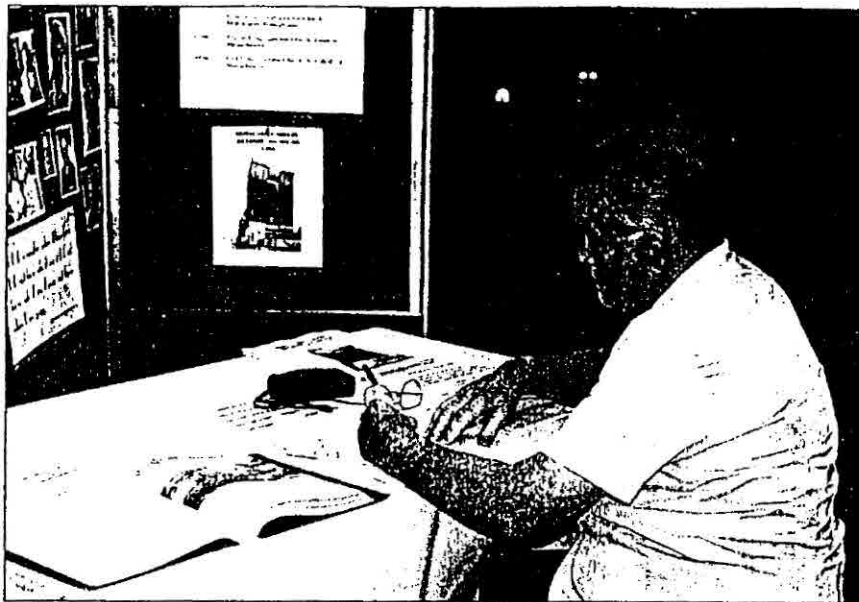
The Rev. Dr. Harry R. Butman gave the constituting prayer at our opening session yesterday. I must tell you that when I quote from National Association history, I will likely be reading Harry's words. Since the days at Hotel Fort Shelby the sense of materials was developed in give-and-take discussions by Association leaders. When discussion ended, we always asked Harry to burn the midnight oil to express our thoughts in his exquisite English. Yesterday's prayer is the most recent example of both his linguistic ability and his deep and abiding faith. Harry Butman is truly "Mr. Congregationalist."

This NACCC came into being in 1955 because the ministry and lay leadership of the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches had been led astray in the 1940s and 1950s by the emphasis on a neo-orthodox theology that sought to remedy the imagined sin of division by bringing about a unification of Protestantism. The first step in this mid-20th century crusade was the formation of the United Church of Christ, which was designed to bridge the gap between Congregational and Presbyterian polity. It was a plan which the then editor of the denominational magazine *Advance* defined as "the hope and glory of contemporary Protestantism." It was hoped to be a plan on which other denominations might move toward reunion. The plan has not come to fruition.

I cannot go into all the details of the issues which consumed those feisty decades. Suffice it to say that the Congregational Way lives today because of men and women like Malcolm and Carol Burton, Howell D. Davies, James W. Fifield, Jr., Neil E. Hansen, Norman McKendrick, Gladys Kennedy, George Bohman, and Lydamar Reese—to name a few in the great cloud of witnesses.

They believed that the spirit of Christ lived most effectively in the worship and service of creative local churches, complete in their own right under Christ. All the while they voluntarily associated with each other to carry out in national and international arenas those important aspects of Christian endeavor that none of them could accomplish alone.

There are only 14 of us still living who were at Hotel Fort Shelby in November 1955. Our testimony was then



"It [the Association] proceeded at the very first to nominate and elect a moderator for the meeting. The Rev. John H. Alexander was called the moderator pro tem, and ably conducted all the sessions."—from the Rev. Malcolm Burton's reminiscences on the first NACCC meeting.

and is today that we see more in the Gospel of Christ that speaks of voluntary fellowship than we see that counsels the value of a powerful institutional religion. We remembered and sought to give expression to the Apostle Paul's admonition to the Galatians: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). I have the abiding privilege of personally remembering the faces, personalities, and temperaments of those who have gone before us. For most of you they are only names. I would pause in a moment of silence to remember with deep gratitude their faith and dedication to a worthy cause. May God bless their memory.

*But here we are going strong after
40 years.*

The International Congregational Council in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in 1962, denied the NACCC membership but accepted the United Church of Christ. Dr. Clarence McCall, then Associate Minister of the Illinois Conference of the UCC, made a last effort to convert me, saying, "John, give up on the NACCC. It cannot survive. Come with us to save your ministry." His was not the first word of doom I had heard. In 1947, before I was ordained, Dr. Harry Trust, President of the Bangor Theological Seminary, urged Donna to influence me to go give up opposition to the Basis of Union because I would have no

future in the ministry (according to Dr. Trust). But here we are going strong after 40 years. "Clarence and Harry, if you are looking from God's eternal Kingdom tonight, see how I am surrounded by such a word of Congregationalists."

What is my most important achievement in more than 50 years in the ministry? I say without hesitation: "The founding and growth of the Congregational Church of Sun City, Arizona." I have ministered around the world in my service to the NACCC, but all else pales in contrast to the privilege of being the minister of a Congregational Church in hometown America, where the foundational activities of Christendom are fulfilled.

My most memorable experiences while in the service of the National Association are associated with common, everyday experiences in the local churches. Of course, I must include being one of the three celebrants of Communion in Westminster Abbey, London, in July 1977. But beyond that, this more common experience comes to mind.

An evening in early August 1964 when I went with Pastor Philotheos Zikas to an evening service in the village of Agnandia in Thrace. Darkness was falling on the town that had no electric lights. We sat in the dark church as the parishioners arrived, each carrying a lantern. The amount of light in the church depended on what each person brought to the service, a practical demonstration of Jesus' teaching, "let your light so shine ..." The Rev. Panos Litzikakis is with us from Greece at this meeting. He was a lad in his early teens when we were there in 1964. I attest that to talk with

I follow the footsteps of Paul with Pastor Zikas was always a biblical, spiritual, and historical experience of the first order. He was one of God's heroes in this 20th century. I honor his memory and praise God that Panos continues his ministry in Alexandroupolis and throughout Thrace.

I record what I believe are important milestones in the history of the NACCC on all of which I had some influence:

- Fort Shelby, 1955
- Adoption of the Articles of Association, Wauwatosa, 1956
- The rebirth of *The Congregationalist*, 1958
- The establishment of our corporate system, with its divisions, Cheyenne, 1961
- The meetings of Past Moderators, 1968 and 1982
- The dedication of our national office building, Oak Creek, Wisconsin, 1972
- Our part in creating the International Congregational Fellowship, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Westminster Abbey, 1977, the first and only time since the days of Cromwell

that it has been permitted there by other than Church of England ritual.

- The creation through the years of Divisions and Commissions which enable us to work effectively together in God's service..
- The dedication of the Founders Memorial Library in 1989.

Motivate the Churches and individual Congregationalists to LOOK AHEAD.

From the hazy days of continuing Congregationalism on the highways and byways of America in the 1940s and 1950s, through all our 40 years, the leadership of the Association has sought to motivate the churches and individual Congregationalists to LOOK AHEAD, giving expression to a forward thrust urged in a statement made to the churches by our Past Moderators in 1982:

"We do not worship a noble past. Congregationalism is a living and growing thing, like a tree with deep roots, a strong trunk, and branches that blossom, bud, and bear fruit. Our prayer is that Congregationalism, planted by the living waters of the Spirit, may bring forth good fruit in this season, and through all the long tomorrows."

This is as it must be in Congregationalism. Our Association is only as strong as it is witnessed in the worship, evangelistic outreach, and spirit of caring and fellowship in the churches that join in creating it. If your church and its ministry is as effective as humanly possible, with God's help, in your local community, and for the spiritual welfare of your members, then Congregationalism is alive and well where you live, and is strengthened in its national and international witness.

We must live:

- a **THOUGHTFUL** Faith, not just an emotional or blind faith, but one based on reason.
- a **RESPONSIBLE** Freedom, not just FROM dogmatic authority, but more importantly, freedom TO fulfill God's will as we understand it.
- a **SUPPORTIVE** Fellowship, in which we really participate and *voluntarily* do our utmost to maintain the Congregational Way.
- a **LASTING** Friendship, a tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.

As we prepare to enter the fifth decade as the NACCC, let us as Ministers, as Lay People, as Free Churches, give fruitful expression to these principles as we seek to serve our Lord Jesus Christ, and to know and to do the will of God.

*"Forward through the ages, in unbroken line
Move the faithful; spirits, at the call
divine."*

Permit just one final contemporary experience.

Wendy Sue Earle, a student in the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, is interning with our minister, the Rev. Milton E. White, in Sun City this summer. I baptized Wendy, the daughter of dear friends of ours, in 1963. Today she leads us in the worship of God each Sunday morning. The new generation is taking the reins, just as it should.

In her introduction to prayer a few weeks ago, Wendy read a poem that speaks to each of us in this new day. I close with that poem:

*Born in the light of the Bright and
Morning Star*

we are new

*Not patched, not mended ... but new
like a newborn*

like the morning ...

*The guilt blotched yesterdays are gone,
the soul stains are no more,*

*There is no looking back,
there are no regrets.*

In our newness, we are free.

In the power of God's continuing creation

new shoots from the root of Jesse,

new branches from the one true vine,

*new songs breaking through the
world's deafness.*

This then is a new day.

New shoots, new branches,

new songs, new day ...

*Bathed in the promise of God's New
Creation,*

we begin.

—Ann Weems

SO LET IT BE. ■

EPILOGUE: John Alexander's wife, Donna, was called to God's eternal kingdom July 17th from their home in Sun City, Arizona.

A tribute written by Terry O. Fackler, Mayflower Congregational Church, Flower Mound, Texas, appears on page 28.

Congregational Lecture
1994 NACCC Annual Meeting, Des Moines, Iowa

Reclaiming the Puritans

**Often
Misunderstood,
Puritans
Established
Congregationalism
in New World.**

- ☐ by the Rev. Steven H. Ware Bailey
Minister, Bushnell
Congregational Church,
Detroit, Michigan

The Rev. Steven H. Ware Bailey, who serves as chairman of the NACCC Division for Ministry, is an established authority on American colonial history and especially Congregationalism. He annually conducts the Boston seminar on Congregational history and polity for students in the CFTS program.

To introduce this lecture I wish to share two small verses about Boston. The first one, which is probably familiar to many, comments on the social stratification of Boston in the nineteenth century.

*Here's to the town of Boston,
The land of the bean and the cod,
Where Cabots speak only to Lowells,
And Lowells speak only to God.*

The second one, less familiar, deals with the Puritans of the seventeenth century and their relationship to the world.

*Here's to the town of Boston,
And the turf that the Puritans trod;
In the rest of mankind
Little virtue they find,
But they feel quite chummy with God.*

The Puritans' supposed chumminess with God is the subject of this lecture. The Puritans, after all, whether we like it or not, are our direct ecclesiastical, and in some cases biological, ancestors. And from time to time Congregationalists ought to take stock of that fact.

We especially like to talk about our Pilgrim ancestors, but we seldom speak of our Puritan ancestors. Actually, of course, the Pilgrims were Puritans too, but of a maverick sort. The Pilgrims of Plymouth were radical separatist Congregationalists. The Puritans of Boston, on the other hand, were realist non-separating Congregationalists, which meant that they were savvy enough to realize that it was in their best interest, politically and ecclesiastically, not to break entirely with the larger English Church.

The Pilgrims were a decent, dedicated, and determined people of faith, but had they not been followed to New England by the Massachusetts Bay Puritans, it is difficult to see how the New England venture could have survived, much less thrived. We Congregationalists owe our continued existence to the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay, not the Pilgrims of Plymouth.

But do we name our churches Arbella, after the flagship of Governor Winthrop's fleet? No, we name them Mayflower. I do not know many churches called Boston or Puritan, but I can name dozens of Plymouths and Pilgrims. Indeed, at times it seems that there is enough Mayflower madness within our fold to fill an insane asylum larger than all the Mayflower Homes, Plymouth Places, and Pilgrim Manors combined.

My purpose is by no means to denigrate the Pilgrims. They are much to be admired, and they did get here first. The point is that the Puritans of the

Massachusetts Bay Colony cannot be ignored. We must count among our venerable ecclesiastical forebears not only a blithe band of Pilgrims but also a considerable corpus of Puritans.

Perhaps it is time that we took a second look at the Puritans. Many contemporary scholars of history have reevaluated the Puritans, who are now being viewed in a much more favorable light. Maybe we should do the same. Indeed, as the direct heirs of the Puritans, we Congregationalists might even consider proudly reclaiming them as our own special heritage.

And yet many of us continue to think about the Puritans in rather negative terms. Puritans, you know, are supposed to be stern individuals who frown on all sorts of merrymaking and amusement. They are thought never to laugh, to prefer sexual continence, and to look down upon other people who do not share their particular values. Yet, in fact, while there may have been some Puritans who fit this caricature, the Puritans as a group were quite unlike the modern stereotype designated by the epithet *Puritan*. What most people mean when they derogatorily label someone a "Puritan" would be better described by the longer adjective *Puritanical*, which is still misleading, for the mode of behavior usually attributed to such a person is really that which is better associated with nineteenth-century Victorian mores, of which the Puritans knew nothing.

Puritanism, as I hope you know, was a movement that arose within the Church of England in the sixteenth century and reached its zenith in the seventeenth century, in England during the Commonwealth Era following the Civil Wars, and in America from the settling of New England in the 1620s and 30s until well into the eighteenth century. What the Puritans wished to do was to "purify" the English Church so that it could carry to logical conclusions the sixteenth-century movement known as the Reformation. In England Puritanism soon divided into two principal strands, one Presbyterian and the other Congregational. It was this latter, or Congregational, branch that was carried to New England, first by the Pilgrims, and then by members of the Massachusetts Bay Company. Following the pattern initially set up in Massachusetts, Congregationalism became the established religion of all the New England colonies, save Rhode Island. In carrying Congregationalism to the New World, the Puritans intended to create a model Christian society which would be regarded in England and elsewhere as the divinely inspired basis upon which to restructure the whole of Western Christendom.

Confining our attention to this New England experi-

ment, which the Puritans called their "errand into the wilderness," I wish in this lecture to examine salient features of the American Puritan vision and to suggest that aspects of it are as relevant today as they were more than three centuries ago. In particular, I wish first to consider the Puritans' general aspirations concerning the godly community they sought to establish, and second to focus on a couple of supposedly outmoded articles of their faith, namely predestination and original sin, in order to ask what, if any, meaning the Puritans' point of view may have for us today.

First, however, it is in order to utter a few general words, disclaimers you may call them, concerning the Puritans. Contrary to a myth widely current even today, the Puritans were not colorless, dour-faced people who had no appreciation for the lighter side of life. They often

wore brightly colored clothing, and they consumed prodigious quantities of rum, the principal spirit of the day, especially at the raisings of meetinghouses and at the ordinations of ministers. Nor were they a motley collection of uneducated precursors of Fundamentalism. Many of their number, including nearly all of their ministers, were graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, particularly Cambridge, which was then called "that hotbed of Puritanism." In fact, until very recent times there

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has existed nowhere in the world a community that possessed a higher percentage of university graduates than did seventeenth-century New England. Those Uxbridge men (and they were men) brought with them to the New World not only their degrees but also their love of learning, which almost immediately found expression in the founding of Harvard College, which was intended principally, but not exclusively, to provide for the continuation of a learned ministry, a tradition that has now persisted for more than three-and-one-half centuries.

Religion was for the Puritans a most serious business. They adhered to a rather strict variety of Reformed orthodoxy, similar to, but not identical with, that which was first preached in Geneva. But, as Perry Miller, the late great scholar of the New England mind, has insisted, "they would have had no use, for instance, for the camp meeting and the revivalist orgy; 'hitting the sawdust trail' would have been an action exceedingly distasteful to the most ardent among them. What we know as 'fundamentalism' would have been completely antipathetic to them, for they never for one moment dreamed that the truth of scripture was to be maintained in spite of or against evidences of reason, science, and learning."¹ Hence, they founded churches on covenants rather than on creeds that the faith might adapt

Continued on next page →

itself to changing circumstances.

So important was religion to the Puritans that their very conception of government was inextricably bound up with their sense of religious purpose, as John Winthrop made clear in his address prepared on board the *Arbella* as it sailed from Great Britain to North America. In that address, entitled, "A Modell of Christian Charity," Winthrop based his remarks on a famous passage in Deuteronomy, in which Moses says to the Israelites as they were about to enter the promised land: (30:15-18a, 19)

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his way, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.

Winthrop's counsel is a sort of extended meditation on the covenant theme, for he believed that "by a mutual consent through a speciall overruleing providence" he and his band were obligated to establish "a due forme of Government both civill and ecclesiasticall." They had "taken out a Commission," that is a covenant, for that work, which was to be regarded as a sort of beacon that would guide the Reformed world toward its intended state of near perfection. As Winthrop put it, "wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty vpon a Hill, the eies of all people are vpon vs." Should they fail in their endeavor, they would "be made a story and a by-word through the world."²

In order to accomplish their task, all the Puritans had to do was to remain faithful to their covenant, which they considered to be an extension of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. To remain thus faithful meant that the people had to obey God's basic ordinances, that is, to keep his commandments, to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, all the while being conscious that they were a specially chosen people who were to show the world how best to organize society, in both its civil and its ecclesiastical aspects.

This task was not an easy one, and yet the Puritans

were remarkably successful in meeting it. Such high-minded devotion to a single purpose meant, of course, that too much deviation from the norms of society could not be tolerated. The result of this attitude was the persecution of those, like Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, who posed serious threats to the maintenance of social order. Later there were also witchcraft trials. The Puritans were, from our point of view, too harsh in their dealings with social deviants, but, lest they be wholly condemned for that, it must be remembered that compared to situations elsewhere in the Western world, they were remarkably lenient. In the seventeenth century, it was better to be a heretic in Massachusetts than in England, to say nothing of France or Spain.

At the center of the Puritan vision of a better world, lay a steadfast devotion to faith. That way of looking at the world included many articles of belief of which most of us today shudder to think; predestination and original sin are among them.

If we were to step back and take a general look at things we would probably be forced to agree that much of the Puritan insight concerning the nature of humanity and the distribution of life's blessings remains current in this age.

As actors on the stage of life's drama, we behave as though we believe in the freedom of the will, that is, in the ability of persons to make independent decisions and at least

partially to control their own destinies. But as spectators of the drama, we can see that much lies beyond the control of individuals or even of nations, for many of the crucial facts of our lives have been set and continue to be set by forces that lie outside our ability to influence them. Indeed, it is my view that all philosophical or theological reflection will lead to some doctrine of determinism if the speculation becomes detached and abstract enough to attempt capturing an overall view. Such a conclusion does not, however, mean that we must surrender the freedom of our wills in immediate interaction in order to embrace a consistent theory in respect to the organization of the world.

The genius of the Puritan mentality is that it possessed both abstract and practical qualities. It could see, on the one hand, that the general outline of things in the world appears to be predestined and, on the other hand, that the living of a purposeful life requires that one make intentional decisions and work diligently for their realization. Some would call such an attitude an inconsistency; I prefer to call it wisdom. For while the Puritans firmly believed in the over-arching determina-

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tion of God's ordaining power, they nonetheless called for people to make decisions, to choose life, and to work for the transformation of the world.

Now we may very well, and rightly, have lost faith in the transcendent power of a God who wills things for no apparent reason. But have we lost all appreciation for a description of the world in which things do occur without reason, in which there is no perfection, in which gross inequalities remain facts of life? I daresay we have not.

Now the accuracy of the Puritans' observations concerning the nature of the world and of the human condition is, indeed, a many splendored thing to behold. But those descriptions, which stressed the reality of evil in the world and the inability of humans unaided by God to do anything about that reality, nonetheless did not prevent the Puritans from embarking upon one of the most ambitious social and religious experiments known to the history of the world. And they set about that task with a spirit of positive resolution unsurpassed by that of any other group. They set out to do nothing less than to transform the whole of society, which they hoped to make conform as nearly to the biblical model as was humanly possible.

How, one might ask, could they attempt such an enterprise when they believed that humans were by nature evil and that only some people would be granted the experience of receiving God's grace? The answer to that question is, of course, that they believed that, through their faith that God would help them if they remained loyal to their covenant, such great works could be accomplished even in the face of all evidence to the contrary. They saw everything as though it were predestined, but they acted as though everything were possible and depended largely upon their own effort and faithfulness. They were realistic enough not to underestimate the forces working against good in the world while at the same time they were visionary enough to challenge evil in the world that they might establish a holy commonwealth.

From such an attitude, which is in effect an enormous act of faith, we can yet learn much. Indeed, we must learn much, if we are to survive. For inhumanity still abounds in the world today and cries out for efforts to check it. Ultimately we may never win the battle, but the fight is worth attempting. To fail to join in the battle is to abandon ourselves to a determinism that allows for no genuinely transforming action. The Puritans, in spite of all their orthodox notions, were unwilling to negotiate terms of unconditional surrender to the evil forces that they saw so clearly, and we would do well to follow their example.

The Puritan perspective that may be of use to us today is, therefore, one that holds in a precarious but nonetheless crucial balance both a sense of hard-nosed realism and a spirit of visionary expectancy. Singlemindedly wedded to the highest purposes in life, they set out to transform society in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. They may not have succeeded in ushering in the kingdom or even in convincing Europe to mimic their efforts, but they did tame a howling wilderness and shape a dynamic culture. Those are not unimpressive accomplishments; they could not have been achieved except through faith tempered with both realistic assessment of human nature and visionary dedication to its transformation.

The Puritans were not perfect, and they knew it, but they sought nonetheless to perfect themselves and their society. We are not perfect, and we had better know it, but let us also not fail to attempt perfection, unattainable though it doubtless be. We need to pray that God will help us to see in the efforts of those who have gone before us that both realism and vision can be combined in efforts to transform the world, or at least a little corner of it, even in spite of obstacles that stand in our way. May we too "consider that wee shall be as a City vpon a Hill, the eies of all people ... vppon us" that we may strive to do our best lest we "be made a story and a by-word through the world."

I introduced this lecture with two small verses about Boston. I conclude by paraphrasing one of them:

*Here's to the town of Boston
And the turf that the Puritans trod;
In all of humankind
Fatal flaws they do find,
Yet they remain true to their God.*

And so, on the turf that we must tread, in spite of the flaws we find, may we too remain true to our God. ■

The Puritans did tame a howling wilderness and shape a dynamic culture.

NOTES

1 Miller, Perry, and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans, I*, (New York, 1963), 3-4.

2 *Ibid.*, 197-199.