

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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- Pavy, Roy. "A Free Church Movement." April '65
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- 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.

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 Buchman, Richard. "Pastor, People, and God." May, '65.
 Butman, Harry. "Moderator's Statement at the Ordination of John K. Tremaine." February '66
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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
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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)

