

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

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

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

Articles from the Congregationalist, 1958-1996

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE "CHURCH"

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

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

ECUMENISM

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

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

FREE CHURCHES

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

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

ASSOCIATIONS

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

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

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

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

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

ASPECTS OF CHURCH LIFE

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

HISTORICAL ROOTS

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

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

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

THE MINISTRY

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

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

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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

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

SOCIAL REFORM

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

Congregationalists on Churches and the Church

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Pioneering in Theological Education

Ten men from seven states gathered about an elliptical conference table in a Detroit university. A young man standing among the falling leaves—red, brown, gold—on the campus of a New England graduate school. A young woman seated amid a pile of books in the library of a graduate school of missions. The chairman and secretary of the “pulpit committee” of a Congregational Church in consultation with the minister of a nearby Congregational Church. A letter from Greece describing the great need of the Churches for Congregational Co-workers. To understand the meaning of all these would be to grasp the profound significance of ministering to others in the name of Christ; for the ten at the table were the Board of Directors of a pioneer-venture in theological education.

The aim of the *Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies* is an old and honored goal “to advance the Congregational tradition of a learned and devout ministry . . . with regard for standards of excellence recognized by fine graduate schools and seminaries.” But this is only the beginning. Theological education, as conceived by the Congregational Foundation, presents a personalized program of intensive training in which *course-study* is one portion of a program continuing for four calendar years.

The Congregational Foundation for Theological Education projects class work under the finest scholars in graduate institutions in the United States and abroad, with the *Plan of Work* of each student worked out in advance by the student, his adviser, the Foundation faculty and the Foundation Board of Directors. It will therefore be possible for students to study under the top scholars of the world in their chosen field, in whatever graduate schools these scholars are teaching.

Internship is an integral part of the program, but from a fresh angle. Students of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies will grapple with administration alongside a pastor who has notable skills in Church administration. Their internship in preaching will be in association with *another* minister outstanding in communicating the gospel. For understanding of youth, they will learn by doing, coached by a minister of unusual competence in this field. So too with Christian Education, Worship, Counselling and Community Service. By the end of four years, each student will have *actually shared* in all the varied tasks of the ministry under the guidance of a whole group of talented and dedicated ministers.

Tutorial study, so very successful in the finest British graduate schools offers special opportunities to those students who evidence special aptitude in one or more subjects. This gives a student the option of working intensively with specially qualified scholars.

Not by any means least in importance is face-to-face experience on the mission field. Every minister-in-the-making is expected to spend an absolute minimum of three months as a Congregational Co-worker overseas, learning first hand the needs of our sister Churches in lands other than our own, and coming into personal relationship with Congregational leaders, Church members *and* the unchurched multitude as well.

Included in the overseas experience is approximately three months study in the Holy Land. Grateful Churches frequently reward a retiring minister with a trip to the Holy Land, and this is a gracious thing to do. The Congregational Foundation proposes to put this experience at the beginning of a man's ministry so that the Bible may gain meaning from actual experience in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Jericho, Bethel and the rest. The whole ministry of a man will be enriched by personal residence in Palestine.

The Congregational Foundation is a unique venture in training for Christian leadership by direct sponsorship and financial support of well qualified students.

At this point the ten men at the Detroit table enter the picture; for any pioneer venture of this scope would be a will-of-the-wisp without the direction of laymen and ministers chosen for their variety of competencies. Dr. Dwight Rich, just retired as superintendent of schools for the city of Lansing, Michigan, is chairman of the board. His scholastic record includes four degrees from Columbia University, Kalamazoo College, and Central Michigan State College, with an additional academic record at University of Chicago and Michigan State University. Members of the board include the chairman of the department of speech at Wayne State University, Dr. George Bohman, who has also served as head of graduate studies at Wayne. Graduate degrees in theology, counselling, law, Bible, and economics have been conferred upon members of the board residing in California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

The “Programs of Work” submitted by two students were approved. These students are already enrolled in graduate classes in their respective fields. Each has an advisor. The advisor is an academic counsellor—*plus*. The *plus* might be described by the time honored phrase *Spiritual Director*; for the Foundation Board believes that training in Christian discipline, in prayer, devotional reading, and in personal life is one of the neglected fields of ministerial training. At this point, annual sharing with spiritual leaders in quiet conferences financed by the Foundation is one proposed procedure.

Financial gifts for the support of the Foundation have already been received. Among the gifts is a Memorial Fund established by Mrs. Margaret L. Scharf, widow of Mr. Robert A. Scharf. Mr. Scharf was chairman of the board of trustees of Plymouth Congregational Church of Minneapolis; and an officer of Cargill, Inc. He died of cancer in 1961. Mr. Scharf was ardently devoted to the cause of independent Congregationalism and it is therefore, most fitting that the first Memorial Fund for Theological Education should be established in his name. Many more such gifts are needed; and dedicated men and women in the Congregational Christian Churches will respond.

It may well be that the pioneer program of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies will mark a new advance in the great Congregational tradition of a learned and devout ministry.

CONTINUING THE TRADITION OF AN EDUCATED MINISTRY

The Rev. Arvel M. Steece, Ph.D.
Minister, Highland Park Congregational Church, Detroit

While the Congregational Churches have prided themselves upon being a "lay fellowship", they have always rejoiced in an educated ministry and have recognized the importance of dedicated and talented ministers. The events of the last quarter century emphasize this truth. The ministry is essential to the healthy life of the fellowship of the Churches. Where are the future ministers to be found who will serve the free Churches? There are a number of answers to this question. Some attempts to supply answers are already under way, others need to be considered.

A Spiritual Haven For Great Souls

A number of men who have received their formal ministerial training in other denominations are for a variety of reasons concerned to seek free Church pulpits. Many are emigres from authoritarianism who come into our fellowship with talents which will mature in the atmosphere of freedom and enrich our common life. This has always been so in Congregationalism. One of our most important functions is to provide a spiritual haven for great souls who believe in disciplined freedom. In a conformist world this function should be increasingly necessary. Contact should be made with the major seminaries to insure opportunity to graduating seniors in those institutions to become aware of the ministry to the free Churches. Important as recruitment from these sources is, it will never meet more than a fraction of our needs.

The Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies is a creative personalized venture in theological education. It is concerned to take selected students and send them to study with the great teachers in a variety of institutions according to an individualized plan which is designed to help each person develop his potentialities for the Christian ministry. This is an exciting contribution to emerging patterns of theological education. However, it will never furnish us our full complement of ministers. For a number of reasons many men will seek more conventional methods of preparation for the ministry.

Ultimately, we will need one or more theological seminaries. Again in keeping with our Congregational heritage we cannot be satisfied with second-rate institutions, but must strive for excellence. If, as a fellowship of Churches, we cannot at this time see a way clear to establish a full-fledged theological seminary, we ought to consider seriously the advisability of establishing several theological halls or houses in major American centers of theological education, such as Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles and the San Francisco area.

The Theological 'Hall' or 'House'

If we were to establish such a Congregational theological center on Beacon Hill in Boston with dormitory and study facilities for fifteen to twenty-five students and a chaplain-director who would have the requisite ministerial and theological education to counsel our students, teach them our heritage and polity,

and guide them in the devotional disciplines, we would be rendering a real service to the ministry of our Churches. Such a location would be within easy walking distance of the Congregational Library, the General Theological Library, and the main subway terminal from which one may travel to Harvard in fifteen minutes, Boston University in twenty minutes, Andover-Newton in forty minutes. Gordon Divinity School in Beverly Farms is farther away but may be reached conveniently. These institutions offer a variety of viewpoints and traditions. Arrangements might be made whereby a student enrolled in any one of these institutions might live at the Congregational center. Eventually it might come to pass that the chaplain-director of the center would have faculty status at one or more of the schools. Similar ventures in the Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco areas might be possibilities. If we could only afford one such hall or center, it ought to be located in Boston. The practicality of such a plan has been tested for several decades by the Disciples of Christ whose Disciples House at the University of Chicago is a notable example of its effectiveness. Such houses might also provide opportunities for lay schools of theology, ministers institutes and other in-service training programs.

A Theological Seminary

The history of Congregationalism indicates that whenever a viewpoint has needed emphasis, concerned

Continued on next page.

Continued from page 11.

Congregationalists have formed a theological seminary. When the Orthodox lost Harvard, they founded Andover which became the great nursery of the Protestant ministry in the nineteenth century. When Taylor's New Haven theology was unsatisfactory to a number of Connecticut Congregationalists, they established Hartford Seminary. When abolitionist Congregationalists discovered that free Churches could survive in the West, Oberlin Seminary was planted to furnish them with ministers.

The free Congregational Churches of the twentieth century will need a seminary. Since it takes at least seven years for a seminary to become accredited, plans should be considered. Adequate library and financial resources, a minimum faculty of four and student body of twenty-five are requirements. Since the metropolitan Detroit area is the one major population center which does not have a first-rate Protestant theological seminary, this might be the place for independent Congregationalists to establish a seminary. In this area there is a sufficient number of Churches to support a field-work program. If property could be se-

cured in the country west of Detroit and northeast of Ann Arbor, a seminary so located would have access to the intellectual stimulation of the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and Oakland University. This location also provides opportunity for field study situations relating to the inner-city, the suburbs, and rural areas.

A Lay Ministry

In the membership of the Congregational Christian Churches are a number of educated and talented men and women who with the proper training might serve effectively the dozens of small free Churches which lack the adequate financial resources to secure full time pastors with professional training of advanced theological education. We should develop ways and means to prepare lay ministers to serve and to save the small Churches that so often feel they are the step-children in ecclesiastical families enamored of size in a world where big business, big Church, big government, big labor are thought necessary.

Investment In A Trained Ministry

Those who believe in the Congregational Way in this generation are

called upon to make many sacrifices. Responsible freedom is always costly. The investment we make in the ministry of the future is essential to the survival of free religious institutions. In a complex technological age our Churches cannot surrender the idea of an educated ministry. Our Churches need to encourage their finest young people to enter the ministry. Those who have made an affirmative decision for the ministry should be helped to secure the best education available.

Congregational Churches have sought able leadership and trusted that leadership. They must continue to seek and to trust that in each generation God will raise up a goodly number to swell the ranks of the pastors and prophets who are "learned, orthodox and pious." *Learned* in the sense that their minds are disciplined by and furnished with the intellectual treasure of history, philosophy, and science; *orthodox* in that they affirm the basic Christian gospel aware that each generation must appropriate the faith for itself with an openness to truth; *pious* in the attitude of heart with which they confront life as persons knowledgeable in the nourishment of the spirit. ■



DO WE NEED A THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY?

During the past decade numerous thoughtful persons in our fellowship have pondered the various means by which we may be able to continue raising up a learned ministry and one which clings with understanding and insight to the historical principles of our Congregational Christian faith.

But the serious question remains; where will we train our future leaders in the principles and guiding philosophy of freedom which we have traditionally held so dear? Can our churches remain free if our leaders are trained in institutions which emphasize a form of ecumenicity to which we have not been able to subscribe? Most of our younger men are coming to us out of such seminaries. Our older men are coming to us from other denominations in which they may indeed have chafed under the ecclesiastical restraints, but they have little background and understanding of the traditional Congregational heritage unless they are unusually curious or scholarly. For many of them freedom is enough without any deep understanding of the philosophy and history of freedom and of our Congregational heritage.

Most of those who have considered the question have concluded that it is an empirical impossibility for the National Association churches to found and maintain a traditional seminary. When we have difficulty raising our annual operating budget it is not likely that we could raise the millions necessary for seminary buildings and faculty. Nor would it be possible for us to gather a faculty and establish a curriculum which would be satisfying to a large majority of our con-

stituency. Our own seminary seems, at the moment at least, to be out of the question.

What then is the solution? Is Congregationalism (i.e. its principles, not its name) to be lost in the continuing and fruitless struggle for institutional power and prestige in which all principles are reduced to the lowest common denominator?

The Commission on the Ministry's post-Easter minister's convocation holds a minimum promise of help in this area, but it seems to us that much more is needed. It is naive to believe that we can do what is necessary in three or four days. Would it not be possible for us to set up a kind of Congregational House where periodically courses were offered in history and polity and to which every new Congregational minister was under some pressure to attend? Such courses should last a minimum of four weeks. But where would the instructors come from? Would we have to rob our pulpits as we have consistently done in acquiring executive secretaries?

There is no easy answer to this dilemma but we believe it is indeed one of our major problems if we wish to preserve our heritage and if indeed we believe our heritage deserves preserving. The Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies, the executive secretaries, and our entire Association need to give this matter their best thought. □

Norman S. Peam

CONGREGATIONAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:

THE FUTURE

Cecil B. Currey

The formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957 was, for many Congregational Christians, a profound shock. The nationwide voting of 1961 brought further disillusionment as our fellowship was split asunder. As the boards and agencies of Congregationalism were reformed into integral units of the UCC, those Churches which stood adamantly upon the rock of religious freedom saw themselves stripped of financial resources, endowments, and customary outlets of expression. When the voting ended, we who remained were without the trappings of foreign and home mission societies, Sunday School outreach, associations and conferences for fellowship, ministerial supply offices. Seminaries also followed the line of the new UCC denomination, partly from sympathy with it, partly fearful of curtailed operating funds should they remain neutral or speak out for traditional ways.

Had it not been for the kingdom statesmanship of the National Association in that crucial time, free Congregationalism might have ceased to exist. Shorn of our traditional operating arms, the National Association stepped into the breach. It pointed the way toward an effective continuation of the Congregational Way: churches of independent congregations of Christians desiring to belong to Christ and His body, but not to any sect or party—claiming allegiance to Him as sole Head of the faith.

One of the problems the National Association early grappled with throughout the long night of merger was that of finding a substitute for our lost seminaries. Leaders in religious education since the founding of Harvard, not a single one of the dozens of schools we had established down the coursing years remained for our use. It was at this juncture that the concept of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies was formed and presented to the Churches for their support. Without a seminary of our own, we would tailor-make the theological education of our ministerial candidates.

Cecil B. Currey is a full Professor of Early American History and Culture at the University of South Florida in Tampa, where he has long been interested in the relationship of education and religion.

Young men accepted into the program would draw upon the best teaching talent and other facilities of many seminaries without special regard for the persuasion and denominational affiliation of the institutions. A man might study at the feet of a Hebrew scholar for a semester at one school. At a later time, he might absorb the doctrines of apologetics taught by another professor elsewhere. As he worked on his thesis, he might perform library research at a third school, and intern in an inner city or overseas mission project under still different auspices.

The CFTS idea was sound for it enabled the very best talent to be drawn upon. In the years since its instigation, several young people have walked this road to the ministry. Others are now in the process. Their training—although varied in every case—has been generally excellent. The CFTS warrants expansion as funds permit its growth. This program by nature, however, is limited in scope and, by intent, has focused upon the most promising of our young men. Great as its accomplishments have been, we should recognize that since its inception, very few have graduated and returned to our Churches as pastors.

The demands of the ministry are great. So heavy is the burden that a significant toll is taken annually through death, retirement, or a turn to other vocations. Without a much larger infusion of newly ordained men each year than CFTS has shown itself capable of producing, our movement can not long endure. Thus far, our Churches have generally been able to meet the demand for ministers sympathetic to the Congregational Way. We began with a devoted band baptized in the fire of the merger controversy. In the denominations, there are those weary of ecclesiastical control. Others are chagrined at strange and wondrous social, economic, and political nostrums urged upon them as the Voice of God to our troubled world. Thus a steady trickle of pastors from other backgrounds has come to us.

Our own youth have gone to many seminaries—famous and obscure, large and small, denominational and undenominational—to prepare themselves for the ministry. All these

approaches, whatever may be their strengths, have in common one weakness. Ministers from other denominations may bring many skills and talents, but they have no rooting in the Congregational Way. Present seminarians, whether within or without the CFTS program, receive no instruction or preparation in our heritage, save incidentally. We have become a fellowship in which, increasingly, our pastoral leadership will be untrained in our three-hundred year old heritage of recreating the faith and order of the New Testament Churches.

Many of our member Churches will continue to contribute toward the funds necessary for the CFTS. The number doing so should increase as they recall that once nearly every Church budgeted a portion of its income for Congregational seminaries. But CFTS is not a concrete organism with which people can actually or vicariously identify. Even its graduates will not have a common *alma mater* to which in unison they may point with pride. That real gains may be achieved as people become interested in a particular project may be seen in the devoted work for Piedmont College in the last few years. Thus it seems that without a particular, geographically identifiable institution for theological education which is *specifically* Congregational-Christian in orientation, our movement will be deprived of a strong ally for growth, development, and service to Christ.

In these interim years, we have continued to feel our way carefully toward reestablishing and strengthening many of those things which we have long cherished. Especially has this been true in our efforts toward ministerial education. It should be remembered, however, that while Congregationalism has traditionally demanded a highly trained ministry, much latitude has been allowed in the manner by which this excellence could be attained. We have believed that what counts is the knowledge—not how it was obtained. In the furtherance of this goal, we might well consider several approaches, and not reject out of hand any feasible method for the training of ministers.

The usual method for entering the ministry has been to spend four years in undergraduate work for the Bachelor of Arts, followed by a three year seminary course culminating in the Bachelor of Divinity degree. Yet there have been other patterns. We have, within our broad fellowship, mutually accepted and respected those ordained by the Churches even though their route to the ministry may not have been molded like our own. Esteemed ministers have done yeoman work for the kingdom who gained their education in the years of their adult lives through home courses of study supervised by state conferences. Some have been called and ordained out of recognition that God had truly touched their lives, even though they lacked formal theological training of any kind. This has been rare, but not unknown. Others have been schooled in Bible Colleges. And there are those who were ordained after undergraduate and graduate training in certain fields allied to theology taken at state or private colleges and universities. Such persons, holding a master's or doctor's degree, have given fruitful service.

Because we have respected and profited from this diversity, I feel it may be worthwhile to present a concrete and heretofore untried method for raising up ministers for our future needs. Shorn of all our seminaries, I suggest that free Congregational-Christians seriously consider the possibility of establishing a Bible College for the systematic and intensive recruitment and training of ministers, missionaries, and Christian workers. Certain immediate objections to this proposal may be raised.

For many, the very name 'Bible College' will evoke mental pictures of wretched, hole-in-the-wall, one or two-year 'quicky' schools issuing worthless diplomas based on infinitesimal amounts of work by 'students.' Schools such as these are responsible for many self-proclaimed ministers with strings of letters behind their names: Th. Dir., F. R. M.S., Dr. Meta., and so forth. They haunt the air-waves and the cult corners in our larger cities. Yet this picture is a straw-man, a warped con-

ception, and bears no more relationship to the program and curriculum of a properly structured and operated Bible College than does Santa Claus to the historical St. Nicholas. Parodies, actual or imagined, should not deter us from considering the real possibilities in a well-run Bible College.

Secondly, some might object to such a school for it could not offer the 'graduate' B. D. degree. Seminarians properly expect to receive acknowledgment for their extra years of post-college study. All thinking Christians will accord them due appreciation, recognizing the labor and devotion to study necessary to achieve the B. D. Academicians and accrediting agencies; however, have seldom accepted seminary training as of graduate quality. Certain theological schools have tried to remedy this situation by awarding a so-called master's or doctor's degree instead of the B. D., but such efforts have usually failed. W. Stitt Robinson, Graduate Advisor at the University of Kansas, sums up the attitude of accrediting agencies when he writes: "Graduate work . . . is at a higher level than seminary work and demands prerequisites that are not included for seminary courses." Delbert R. Gish, once Registrar of Nazarene Theological Seminary, a member school of the American Association of Theological Schools, has pointed out that to call seminary work 'graduate' is ambiguous. If it refers to the quality or level of work done, it may be a misnomer, because in seminaries many students are meeting the subjects studied for the first time. In college and university graduate schools, considerable previous knowledge of a subject in which one majors is presupposed." He correctly states that the primary function of a seminary is to create "effective ministers and Christian workers rather than to develop technically outstanding scholars" as is the goal in university graduate programs. Thus the B. D. degree is generally accepted as a graduate one only in the sense that one must first possess a baccalaureate degree before entering upon seminary work. An M.D. degree is in the same category and is not a true terminal doctorate. Should a physician, holding the M.D., wish to go back to school for more education, the next higher degree awarded him would be a master's in medicine. Such degrees are professional rather than technical. And professional training of quality, comparable to that given in seminaries, can be given at the Bible College level.

Another objection might be raised. If theological training is received at the undergraduate level, when will the students ever receive the broad liberal arts education so necessary for a successful ministry? The answer here is the same as it was for the objection raised above: at the Bible College. A carefully planned and administered Bible College combines a wide range of liberal arts instruction with a very limited number of majors in either a four or five year course of study. Graduates of such schools have a command of the necessary languages, history, Bible study, theology, and philosophy comparable to that offered by the better seminaries, while at the same time having received a solid grounding in the wider range of liberal arts instruction.

My specific proposal is as follows and is offered very tentatively, with the hope that it will spark both dialogue and discussion among interested persons. A Congregational-Christian Bible College should be established offering a course of study the whole term of which would be five years in length. The school should be centrally located near a larger city thus providing a greater employment opportunity for the student body plus for a time allowing for the possibility of sharing the library of an already established college or university. Those completing the five year course would receive the Bachelor of Theology degree and would have received professional training warranting their ordination and return to the Churches as pastors.

1. The first two years of training would consist of approximately sixty semester hours (90 quarter hours). The curriculum should follow as exactly as possible accepted junior college programs, culminating in the award of an Associate of Arts

C.F.T.S. STORY

A major portion of this issue of *The Congregationalist* is devoted to the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies. It will be apparent to you as you read these pages that the C.F.T.S. program is one of the most significant accomplishments to date of our growing national fellowship of free churches. It is the resounding response of Congregationalists to the empty pulpit. In its early years, the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches was troubled by a concern with seminary education. How would the Association, with limited resources, provide well trained ministers to meet the future requirements of its Churches? How would promising young men and women in the Fellowship be aided as they responded to a call to prepare for the pastoral and teaching ministry in the tradition of the free Churches?

In 1961 the Churches decided to act. Since that date, 56 men and women have been benefited by financial grants, professional counseling and special seminars. Since that time more than \$265,000.00 has been contributed by the Churches and Congregationalists. The Foundation maintains a modest endowment fund in the amount of \$160,000.00. Annually, gifts are added to the fund. The budget for fiscal 1974-'75 will approximate \$35,000.00.

The class of 1974-'75 will number 19, two members of the class are women. The 19 Fellows are pursuing their theological education in 16 seminaries.

The Foundation's program is ever expanding. The most exciting new venture is the Professional Ministerial Internship Program (PMIP). Congregational Churches are now offering practical "on-the-job" learning experience for Fellows willing to expand their seminary programs to include the PMIP in



George W. Brown, Jr., Ph.D.



John W. Claxton, D.D.

their educational package. Churches wanting to increase their participation in the Foundation's endeavors are encouraged to write to either the Dean of the Foundation or to the Rev. Karl D. Schimpf, Chairman of the Foundation's Board of Directors.

Since the inception, the Foundation has had only two Deans, Dr. John W. Claxton and Dr. George W. Brown, Jr. Dr. Claxton was the pioneer Dean of the Foundation and it was largely through his personal commitment and dedicated and tenacious efforts that this innovative program survived and developed a sound and permanent structure.

As Dean Brown has written "we salute Dr. John W. Claxton, God's man for an important development in the ministry of the National Association, sensitive to the ebb and flow of parish life, counselor, confidant and able administrator. We are thankful to God that He raised up this man for such an important task and are proud to continue the good work he began."

Dr. Brown first became associated with the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies when he was elected to the mem-

bership on the Board of Directors in 1962. In November, 1963 he was elected the secretary of the Board of Directors, an office he held for five years. On July 1, 1969 he joined the Executive Staff in the National office and until January 1, 1974 was responsible for the administrative affairs of the Association. On November 1, 1970 he succeeded the Rev. Dr. John W. Claxton in the office of Dean. In addition to his responsibilities as Dean of C.F.T.S., he is Executive Staff counsel to the Commissions on Christian Education and Youth.

In 1961 Dr. Brown was appointed to membership on the Commission on Christian Education. In January, 1962 he attended his first meeting of the Executive Committee as a member of that body.

Under his leadership the program of C.F.T.S. has been steadily expanding. Since 1970 the number of Fellows sponsored by the Foundation has nearly doubled. Special seminars have been developed annually, focusing primarily on the ministry in the Congregational Church. The Professional Ministerial Internship Program began with five pilot studies in the summer of 1973. The financial aid program has grown to include not only an annual grant, but fellowships, scholarships, project grants and loans for crisis situations.

Now that Dr. Brown no longer has any responsibility for the administrative affairs of the National Association, he is able to devote more time to the growing demands of the Dean's office.

We believe that as you read the next several pages you will be very, very pleased with the marvelous accomplishments of Deans Claxton and Brown and the dedicated members of the Board of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies.



CFTS is THE Source *The CFTS Story*

by Harry W. Clark, Dean

Like their Congregational ancestors of the 17th century, those who were involved in the beginnings of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches expressed deep concern for where the churches were to find ministers sympathetic to the Congregational Way and prepared for service in the Congregational churches. Unlike the people of 17th century Massachusetts Bay, the answer was clearly not the founding of a school for ministerial training. There were, in 1961, several reasons for this response. The most obvious had to do with cost. For the fledgling Association, the cost of endowing a theological faculty and building or purchasing facilities for a seminary were prohibitive.

Not as obvious but equally important is the fact that the churches of the Association represent a very broad theological spectrum and it would be difficult to develop a seminary faculty that would meet the needs of all of the churches. In addition to these factors, in 1961 it was noted that there were several seminaries with Congregational roots. In terms of enrollment, most of them were under their capacity.

A theological education is no small undertaking.

It seemed clear that the best use of limited available funds would be to provide direct financial support to students and then enrich the program with a seminar on Congregational history and polity. Thus, the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies came into being in 1961, just five years after the National Association.

More than 120 men and women have received a seminary education with the aid and support of the Foundation. The majority of these graduates are serving churches of the Association.

Program of the Foundation

An educated ministry has always been a priority amongst Congregationalists. Consequently, the goal of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies is to provide the best education for ministry possible. Students admitted to the program must work toward the Master of Divinity degree at a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools.

Unlike the Master of Arts or Master of Science degrees which usually require one year of academic study beyond the Bachelor's, the Master of Divinity requires three full years of study in residence on a seminary campus.

To close this gap in the academic experience a special seminar was developed.

During these three years, the students are required to become thoroughly familiar with historic and contemporary theological thought, to have an intimate knowledge of the content of the Old and New Testaments, and to be able biblical interpreters, in many schools they must demonstrate competency in both the Greek and Hebrew languages, they must learn to construct and deliver sermons with clarity, and they must be familiar with the history of religion and Christianity. They must also take courses in religious education methods and church administration.

In addition, most seminaries require at least ten weeks of full time, intensive Clinical Pastoral Education in a hospital or institutional setting and church-based field education experience and/or internship. At the end of the third year, most seminaries require that each student take both oral and written examinations on the full range of subject matter covered in the curriculum and many re-



Graduating CFTS students Bob Christian, Robert Dando-Thompson, and Cathy Schuyler with the Rev. Mark P. Jensen, and Dr. Alan Argent, British Congregational Historian. They are on the steps of the Dr. Williams Library, London, the British Congregational library.

quire that a major thesis be written. A theological education is no small undertaking. "The Master of Divinity degree is," in the words of a retired seminary professor, "an awesome degree."

The Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies makes such an education possible for Congregational men and women by providing major financial aid so that the students can devote their energy to making the fullest use possible of the educational opportunity the seminary provides.

Soon after the Foundation was established, the board realized that while the students were enrolled in excellent schools, most of them do not provide much background in Congregational history or church government. To close this gap in the academic experience of the Congregational students, a special seminar was developed. Originally a three-day experience, the program has now grown into a full semester directed study in Congregational history and polity. This required program begins with a week long seminar

which takes place in late August of each year at the Congregational Library in Boston.

All second-year students are brought to Boston for the week in which mornings are devoted to a series of lectures and afternoons provide an opportunity for participants to use the unique facility to begin research for a major paper on a topic related to Congregational history. The students are housed and meals provided by the Roslindale Congregational Church. Between the seminar and the end of the fall semester, the students complete a series of reading assignments and submit their papers.

A further extension of the academic enrichment offered by the Foundation is a three-day seminar in early November of each year which all of the students are expected to attend. This seminar takes place in a different NA church each year. In November of 1989, the host church was the Central Congregational Church of Derry, New Hampshire and in 1990 the program will be hosted by the Bethany Union Church of Chicago.

