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The League to Uphold Congregational Principles

Congregational History and Polity Research Paper

Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies

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December 2009

The Congregational Christian faith is rooted in the belief that gathered Christians, bound by a covenant, have the freedom and responsibility to form community in reply to God's inspiration; "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt.18.20). All Congregationalists recognize a covenanted community of faithful people as an autonomous church, but differences exist in whether "...there can be any voice beyond the local parish"¹ to influence and shape the broader community of God's creation. Transformation of both individual and community is intrinsic to living the gospel message; the struggle to interpret and respond to that transformation marks Congregationalism. Congregational polity harbors within it this fundamental tension, which has been consistently revealed in the dynamics of social justice actions and political inclinations. At times the struggle between power of the individual and authority of the organized church to facilitate change has been broad based and difficult, occasionally turning decidedly antagonistic. A prime example of this struggle for authority can be found in the history of the League to Uphold Congregational Principles.

This account of the League to Uphold Congregational Principles (LUCP) will explore various elements, including the background of its origin, values, practices and publications. Specific attention will be given to the LUCP's political proclivities, its involvement with the Council for Social Action, and the merger of Congregational Christian Churches and Evangelical and Reformed Churches. A review of their newsletters from the late 1960s to early 1980s will show the consistency over time of the

¹ Howard Conn to Council for Social Action, July 21, 1959, Congregational Library and Archive, Boston: MA. Papers. Congregational Christian Churches: Council for Social Action Records. 1934-1956. Subgroup III: Direction of CSA – Opposition and Support. Series 12 (hereafter cited as CL&A, Papers). Minnesota Laymen: Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action; League to Uphold Congregational Principles. BR-10. Opposition correspondence. 1950-1962.

LUCP's perspective. Lastly, this paper will briefly reflect on the contemporary relevance for the Congregational church and the lessons one may draw from a study of the LUCP.

In October 1949 forty laymen from Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota gathered to discuss their concerns about the activities of the Council for Social Action (CSA), an agency established by the General Council of Congregational Churches in 1934. Their concern was prompted by a significant lobbying effort by CSA in Washington, D.C. CSA publicly advocated on behalf of Compulsory Health Insurance, Federal Aid to Education, and pro-labor and pro-union measures, all issues which the laymen believed to be of questionable merit. This initial meeting led these men in early 1950 to carry out an in-depth appraisal of CSA. Their research strengthened a desire for fundamental changes in the operation and policies of CSA and culminated in the establishment of an organization in May 1950, the Congregational Lay Group of Minnesota.

Other Congregationalists held similar concerns about CSA and drew on the experience of the Congregational Lay Group of Minnesota for organizational support. Walter Judd, Congressman from Minnesota and member of the Lay Group, gave several speeches on the topic, one to an interested group at First Congregational Church of Los Angeles in February 1951. His message stirred the creation of The Southern California Committee for Inquiry into the Council for Social Action. The chairman of the Southern California Committee, James C. Ingebretsen, directed studies similar to those of the Lay Group, though many of their conclusions were voiced in a less charitable fashion. One analysis noted that a report prepared for the Southern California Committee by professional researcher John Payne, claimed CSA's views were "leftist – liberal – pro-administration," and it "attack[ed], personally, several of the present and past staff

members of C.S.A., the present chairman of the Council, and several others connected with the Council's work in an attempt to associate them with various un-American groups."²

The Western Pennsylvania Association of the Congregational Christian Churches also formed The Committee on Christian Research and Social Action, which did little serious research on its own, but heartily supported the opinions being expressed by the Lay Group of Minnesota and the Southern California Committee. Individual Congregationalists also frequently presented some of the most thoughtful and thorough expressions of concern about CSA; the earliest was an extensive booklet prepared by Frank E. Barrows in January 1935. Ellis H. Dana, a layman and Executive Vice-President of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, produced two important and widely read booklets. The most prominent was "Congregationalism as a Social Action Pioneer"³ published in June 1951, it laid out twelve specific and constructive suggestions for the improvement of CSA and its work. As communication increased among these various groups and individuals, the perception of a substantial, widespread anti-CSA sentiment emerged across the United States, chiefly from the Lay Group of Minnesota and the Southern California Committee.

Led by F.A. Bean of Minneapolis, sixteen men founded a new organization, The Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action (COCPA), on March 1, 1952. Since this organization was the direct forerunner of the League to Uphold Congregational Principles (LUCP), its values, actions, and publications are of particular relevance in this

² Kenneth Stokes, "CSA Under Fire: A Study of the Council of Social Action and Its Critics," 1952, (CL&A, Papers, BR-2).

³ Ellis H. Dana, "Congregationalism as a Social Action Pioneer," 1951, (CL&A, Papers, BR-2, Appendix K).

study. A short article concerning the formation of COCPA printed in the New York Herald Tribune bluntly stated the viewpoint that motivated the establishment of COCPA; “F.A. Bean...said the Council of Social Action violates ‘the principles of Congregationalism and the concepts of the Constitution of the United States. We believe its approach to social, economic, and political problems is basically materialistic and immoral.’”⁴

The COCPA’s introductory pamphlet was also quite clear regarding its purpose and plan. Before proceeding to the list of grievances against CSA, the pamphlet cited COCPA’s central beliefs: “We believe that Christianity directs its message to individuals who...can save the world through their faith and good works. We believe that when...Christian churches attempt to exercise group political power, the true light of the Gospel is obscured in the struggle for temporal things.”⁵ COCPA recognized that authority properly resides with the individual and that the efforts of COCPA must reassert the role of the individual and substantially reduce the role of CSA. The three points of their program were: “eliminate all political advocacy of the C.S.A.; [work] toward a fuller understanding of Christian responsibility and Christian principle;” and foster and strengthen Congregational Christian Churches.⁶

⁴ New York Herald Tribune, “Congregationalist Action Protested: Church Group Asks Council to Avoid Politics,” March 3, 1952 (CL&A, Papers, Minnesota Laymen: Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action; League to Uphold Congregational Principles, BR-9, Opposition correspondence, 1950-1954).

⁵ Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action, “Purpose and Program of the Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action,” pamphlet, 1952 (CL&A, Papers, Minnesota Laymen: Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action; League to Uphold Congregational Principles, BR-9, Opposition correspondence, 1950-1954).

⁶ Ibid.

COCPA used a variety of means to achieve its objectives, including pamphlets, newsletters, printed analyses of CSA material, direct appeal to the General Council's Board of Review on CSA, direct mailings to individuals, magazine and newspaper articles, and investigative and smear campaigns aimed at CSA officials. Established during the Cold War, at a time when public interest in the House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator Joseph McCarthy's railings against communist subversion was running high, the COCPA mirrored many of the pressure and publicity tactics employed by these high profile government investigations. The passion of COCPA's commitment to their understanding of Congregationalism sometimes undermined their commitment to unbiased, accurate investigations and analyses, as will be shown later. COCPA's desire to prevail in their endeavor led the organization into an aggressive offensive campaign that influenced the formation of the LUCP and set an unhealthy precedent in its communications.

Several issues inflamed the men of COCPA - first and foremost was the lobbying effort of CSA on Capitol Hill in conjunction with both the impression and frequent assertions that CSA spoke for all Congregationalists. Secondly, COCPA stated CSA believed its charter made it accountable only to the General Council, divorced from any requirement to respond to the membership at large. COCPA argued that it was impossible to speak for all Congregationalists, especially when CSA disregarded the importance of surveying the membership. According to COCPA the views expressed by CSA were extremely partisan and reflected a socialist perspective. COCPA also argued that CSA believed the mission of the church included involvement in political matters, whereas COCPA interpreted the social teachings of Jesus as a purely spiritual matter

between individuals. The final two complaints were organizational in nature: CSA had sufficient voting strength on the General Council to dominate the Council, and that Congregationalists had unknowingly supported the work of CSA from the Missionary fund, an appropriation seen by COCPA as highly questionable.⁷ COCPA's assessment of these issues was generally recognized as being reasonable and valuable to the discussion. However, the informational piece developed to promote the concerns of COCPA was subsequently regarded as poorly documented and libelous.

Published in May 1952, the informational piece was commonly called the "Black Book" due to its bold black cover, but its official title was "*They're Using Our Church...To Play Politics.*" John Payne, a professional researcher associated with the Southern California Committee, prepared this twenty-eight-page pamphlet report that blatantly attacked members of CSA. Working as the Assistant to the Chairman of COCPA, Payne's approach was absorbed into the ethos of the organization. In an interview with the Board of Review, Payne "...admitted that it [the Black Book] was written with a distinct bias calculated to stimulate the laity to action..."⁸ The particular complaints that COCPA had with CSA were touched on in the pamphlet but its bombastic style generated "...a tremendous amount of confusion, question, and correspondence within the denomination."⁹

Regarding the founding of CSA by the General Council, the Black Book claimed that CSA "...was actually the idea of some people who wanted to change a number of

⁷ CL&A, Papers, Minnesota Laymen: Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action; League to Uphold Congregational Principles, BR-9, Opposition correspondence, 1950-1954 and BR-10, Opposition correspondence, 1950-1962.

⁸ Kenneth Stokes, "CSA Under Fire: A Study of the Council of Social Action and Its Critics," 1952, (CL&A, Papers, BR-2).

⁹ Ibid.

things about America: ...they disliked the American way of doing business, freely as individuals. Particularly, they did not like people to make profits.”¹⁰ They then referenced an original resolution of CSA’s that disavowed the profit-making system, claiming that it stood as current policy of the General Council when, in fact, the resolution was overturned three months after the inception of CSA in 1934. The Black Book clearly characterized CSA as un-American: “...it opposes laws passed to control communist activities in America...and its two latest Directors are on record as wanting to abolish the Congressional Committee which cornered Alger Hiss...and a number of others.”¹¹ It claimed on page fifteen that the CSA Director, some staff members, and many contributors to the CSA magazine were active in “communist fronts.” One of COCPA’s major concerns, that CSA inappropriately represented all Congregationalists, was cleverly connected to CSA’s alleged communist perspective in this way: “Its leaders have said their prophetic mission allows C.S.A. to speak as a church agency regardless [their emphasis] of what most Congregationalists believe.”¹²

Sixteen significant errors in the Black Book were identified by multiple third party sources, and led to many condemnations of COCPA for such egregious distortion of the facts. An excerpt from the letter of Dr. Robert Calhoun of Yale Divinity School in response to the Black Book illustrates the anger and dismay experienced by many Congregationalists: “Certain passages in it, notably those which seek, by insinuation, and indirection to identify the Council with those who seek totalitarianism in the world of

¹⁰ Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action, “They’re Using Our Church...To Play Politics” (Minneapolis, MN: Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action, 1951), 5.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹² Ibid., 17.

today, involve a degree of either dishonesty or stupidity so extraordinary that I find myself astonished that men of probity have permitted their names to be associated with any such statement.”¹³ Nonetheless, efforts such as the Black Book brought the concerns of COCPA to the fore and incited a thorough investigation of CSA. The backlash of hostility against COCPA, however, prompted a shift in its tactics and the founding of a new organization in the hope of refurbishing its tarnished image.

The League to Uphold Congregational Principles (LUCP) was established in March 1953, one year after the formation of its parent organization COCPA. The reasoning behind this shift was a matter of perspective; individuals critical of COCPA recognized the change in name and tactic only, “...giving the appearance of a gain, shifting from the offensive ‘bad boys’ who have been bothering CSA now to the defensive ‘good boys’ protecting all that is virtuous and sacred.”¹⁴ In contrast, members of the LUCP claimed an evolutionary progression in their work from that of simply raising complaints about the practices of CSA to recognizing the problem as deeper and seeing a need to develop “...a defense of Congregationalism and of freedom.”¹⁵ From the perspective of the LUCP they now “...have something to stand for [their emphasis].”¹⁶ Although still relatively small in number, the presence of prominent individuals among its members made the LUCP an influential organization. Presumably their mailing list was much more extensive, but the various listings of the membership

¹³ Robert Calhoun to F.A. Bean, June 5, 1952 (CL&A, Papers, BR-2, Appendix N).

¹⁴ Garnett E. Phibbs, “The Council for Social Action of the Congregational Christian Churches,” (CL&A, Papers, BR-1, Outline of CSA Controversy, John Eusden, 1954), 5.

¹⁵ Robert C.C. Heaney to Fellow Congregationalists, December 26, 1953 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10 and BR-11).

¹⁶ Ibid.

including the Board of Directors and staff averaged thirty-seven individuals representing areas across the United States.

The principles of belief espoused by the LUCP exhibited an important difference from COCPA. Whereas COCPA rooted its concepts and arguments in an understanding of Christianity directed solely toward individuals, the LUCP's organizing criterion was its close adherence to Congregational polity: "We give our allegiance to the historic Congregational polity... We believe in the personal interpretation of the Scriptures... We believe in Congregational Fellowship without ecclesiastical control."¹⁷ There was also a change in their program, moving from a goal to eliminate all political advocacy of CSA to standing for the "Christian conception of freedom enunciated in the New Testament, and which found meaning for Congregational people in the historic free church polity."¹⁸ By 1960 the program of the LUCP had evolved further, seeing itself as an advocate for Congregationalism. Its program included "maintaining a reliable and accessible source of information...disseminat[ing] information as widely as possible...making clear to all the rights and privileges of those wishing to preserve Congregational polity...and support actions in courts of law...to uphold Congregational principles...."¹⁹

This in no way meant that the LUCP abandoned the CSA controversy. Of the seventeen publications on their list of available information as of November 1, 1953, thirteen are directly related to CSA, four having been produced under the LUCP's banner. One of the publications was "In Their Own Words: A Look at the Council for

¹⁷ League to Uphold Congregational Principles, "Statement of Principles and Purposes" (Minneapolis: League to Uphold Congregational Principles, 1953).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ League to Uphold Congregational Principles, "Statement of Principles and Purposes" (Hartford, CT: League to Uphold Congregational Principles, 1960).

Social Action,” which extensively quoted CSA employees and material organized around the themes of interest to the LUCP. The first section, “How Social Action Operates,” introduced a new concept in their lexicon against CSA. Rather than directly identify CSA programs and personnel as communistic; this pamphlet equates CSA positions with the Social Gospel: “Under the label ‘social gospel,’ a very small minority has, for two decades, been ceaselessly advocating the socialistic principles of the welfare state as the Christian way.”²⁰ Following a list of quotes from CSA staff this pamphlet declared them to represent “...the essence of the social gospel viewpoint,”²¹ leaving the reader to make the short intellectual leap between the social gospel, CSA, and communism.

Though there are many other interesting aspects of “In Their Own Words,” one is particularly intriguing. A note at the end of the section “The Church in Politics” indicated the CSA lobbyist had resigned in early 1952. Their intent was to replace him but as of May 1953 CSA was unable to do so due to lack of funding. The note also made mention that CSA had closed its Washington, D.C. office, but, according to the LUCP, other CSA staff would continue lobbying activity.²² This aside comment may offer evidence that the efforts of COCPA and the LUCP to disrupt the activity of CSA and alter its funding were effective, successes that certainly would have fueled their continuing endeavor.

One of the most significant ways in which the LUCP continued its attack was in its response to the General Council’s Board of Review on CSA. The Executive

²⁰ League to Uphold Congregational Principles, “In Their Own Words: A Look at the Council of Social Action” (Minneapolis: League to Uphold Congregational Principles, 1953), 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 4.

Committee of the General Council invited the LUCP to offer suggestions for a revised CSA, which the LUCP did in December 1953. Ultimately, the recommendations made by the LUCP were ignored; a frustrating development for the LUCP, but one that motivated them to prepare and distribute a version of the Board of Review's report from the LUCP's perspective. The response of the LUCP highlighted the centrality of Congregationalism in their thinking, as illustrated in a letter from Ray Gibbons, CSA Executive: "The proposal of the League to Uphold Congregational Principles...proposes the diversion of the CSA... to one which would concentrate attention upon history, polity, and principles....I note that 'Congregationalism,' 'Congregational,' and 'Congregationalist' are used at least nineteen times [in the proposal] but that the word Christian does not appear once."²³

This commitment to Congregationalism would soon be put to the test as the LUCP entered in October 1954 into the milieu of the merger of Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church (E&R); a merger that resulted in the establishment of the United Church of Christ. The LUCP expressed an uneasy openness to the potential merger, "The League has never taken any position with respect to the general questions of a merger and takes none now....The League will resolutely oppose any merger which by its terms or necessary implication involves a substantial departure from these [Congregational] principles."²⁴ By February 1955, however, the LUCP newsletter begins, "The members of the Congregational Christian Churches are now

²³ Ray Gibbons to Douglas Horton, January 4, 1954 (CL&A, Papers, BR-12).

²⁴ League to Uphold Congregational Principles, newsletter, October 1954 (CL&A, Papers, BR-11).

engaged in an historic debate regarding the nature of Congregationalism,” and urges members “Do not destroy Congregationalism.”²⁵

The following month the LUCP released to Congregational ministers and laymen a copy of their report regarding concerns about the merger, noting in the introduction that the membership of the LUCP had reviewed the report and “...voted to oppose the proposed merger with the Evangelical and Reformed Church.”²⁶ The report reflected a meticulous and thorough investigation of the Basis of Union, the polity and principles of the E&R Church, relevant court cases, and the issues of authority of the Congregational General Council and Executive Committee. It is clear in the report that the LUCP held no ill will toward the E&R Church or its representatives, “In our opinion the E & R Church has acted forthrightly in these merger discussions.”²⁷ The same cannot be said regarding their opinion of the General Council and the Executive Committee in particular, “We regret that we must report that...no voice was raised to defend Congregationalism....the action of the Executive Committee at the Cleveland October meeting was completely contrary to every Congregational principle and it was a bold and unprecedented usurpation of power.”²⁸

The defense of historic Congregationalism demanded all the efforts and experience of the LUCP. In the mind of the LUCP what this merger situation seemed to call for was the same type of turmoil, questioning, and correspondence that had been generated by the Black Book on CSA. Consequently, the LUCP produced two booklets

²⁵ LUCP, newsletter, February 1955 (CL&A, Papers, BR-11).

²⁶ LUCP, report, March 1955 (CL&A, Papers, BR-11).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

in the same vein as the Black Book, “They’re planning to take your church...” and “Congregationalists are asking: What Is This Merger All About?.” Each page featured short phrasing set in a bold type, like that of the Black Book, so that ideas were conveyed quickly and easily. Both booklets also maintained a strikingly similar appearance to the Black Book. Relatively small in size and shape, the booklets were easy to mail and could be held easily or placed in a pocket or purse. Both had bold black covers, and one sported a nearly identical graphic of a church like the one on the cover of the Black Book.

There was an important difference, however, between these publications and the Black Book beyond the nature of the specific topic. Absent from these publications was the vitriolic language laden with innuendo so prevalent in the Black Book. Moreover, the LUCP maintained the integrity of their research in these publications about the merger, foregoing a slipshod misrepresentation of the facts like the Black Book and its related material. Another publication of the LUCP, however, may have succumbed to enhancement in a report titled “The Fraser Report on E & R Church Finances.” This author was unable to review that report, but comments made by William F. Fraser, the creator of the study, during a hearing of the General Council in May 1955 indicated an intense displeasure with the way the LUCP used his material. Another minor exception, and an interesting and unusual publication of the LUCP, was a play in three acts, written by H. C. Bailey that underscored the imprudence of the merger.²⁹

The LUCP concurrently maintained activity across several fronts, consistently plying certain themes in whatever issues it was working. One of those themes, evident in the previous discussion on CSA and the merger, was communism. In 1959 the LUCP’s

²⁹ H. C. Bailey, *Compulsion Marks the Death of Fellowship: A Playlet in Three Acts* (Hartford, CT: League to Uphold Congregational Principles, 1957).

interest in communism as it related to Congregationalism resulted in rancorous retort from many Congregationalists. At the heart of the conflict were the honor of 857 clergy and the veracity of Congregational Clergy in general. February 26, 1959 the LUCP sent a letter of inquiry to Congregationalists in an attempt to discern if they would be interested in purchasing a list of 857 clergy and their affiliations with communist fronts. The price of the soon to be published listing would be between \$2.00 and \$5.00; the letter stated that "...another organization plans eventually to publish these 857 names and affiliations,"³⁰ the LUCP was simply acting on their behalf. If enough people were interested, as shown by returning their reply card, the LUCP was confident that the book would be available sometime in 1959.³¹

The record is replete with the type of replies that the LUCP seemed unprepared to receive: "...this is dangerous business that may well involve you in lawsuits for the rest of your life....even if some other organization publishes the book, the fact that you are soliciting business for it, and are plainly connected with it will not keep you from being legally responsible for any slander...."³² Also, "...my heart is sick within me. The League has fallen into the depths of malignant malice....[Y]ou have attacked responsible Christian leadership in our nation with a virulent venom that is perhaps exceeded only by the Communists. By implication you have labeled the sincere, though controversial labors of Christian people, as, 'murderous,' 'tyrannical,' and 'atheistic.'"³³ These excerpts represent what seemed to be a rather large outcry from Congregationalists with

³⁰ H. C. Bailey, LUCP to Fellow Congregationalists, February 26, 1959 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Mrs. R.A. Olsen to H. C. Bailey, LUCP, April 20, 1959 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11).

³³ Ralph J. Capelunge(?) to LUCP, March 10, 1959 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11).

many different political leanings. Ray Gibbon of CSA may have encouraged some of the correspondence, “If a great many write Mr. Bailey and the LUCP it may be they will think twice before publication.”³⁴ The copy of the letter from Gibbon in the possession of this author is a draft, therefore it is uncertain whether or not it was ever mailed or how wide the distribution may have been. Nonetheless, the outcry from this solicitation of the LUCP was significant.

In a memorandum to the General Council Executive Committee Ray Gibbon shared a letter from H. C. Bailey that expressed the LUCP’s motivation for endorsing the publication of the clergy list: “The purpose is to show that CC ministers have endorsed projects engineered by Communist-fronts and how often....It may serve as an invitation to such a man to repudiate publicly Communism and all its works...”³⁵ Additionally, the LUCP prepared a two-page attachment with the letter explaining why every church would want a copy of the listing and how it might be used. In this attachment the LUCP emphasizes the importance of the laity in examining questionable clergy. The surprising characteristic exhibited by clergy at risk of being communist sympathizers, and which, according to the attachment warranted examination, was “...UNITY...a disposition to drive men toward centralization and uniformity....One good measure of the soundness of any prospective minister becomes, then, whether he believes in centralization or in decentralization of power either in the political realm or in ecclesiastical matters.”³⁶

Whether the “Affiliations of Congregational Christian Clergy” was ever printed is yet unknown to this author, but no evidence of its publication surfaced in the research.

³⁴ Ray Gibbon, draft, undated (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11).

³⁵ Ray Gibbon to General Council Executive Committee, July 4, 1959 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11),2.

³⁶ H. C. Bailey, LUCP to Fellow Congregationalists, February 26,1959 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11).

What is known is that this incident served to clarify the divide between the LUCP and many Congregationalists; “Our real differences lie in what we put first. The tone of...your general materials is that Congregationalism is first and foremost in your life, while in mine I find a desire for Oneness....I fear that you are putting Congregationalism ahead of God in that you seem to make it an object of worship...”³⁷ For an organization to overcome such perceived differences and succeed in its mission would be extremely challenging. Yet, it appears as if the LUCP remained a viable and proactive member of the Congregational community beyond this incident in 1959.

Though a gap of nine years exists in the current historical record of the LUCP, sporadic newsletters from March 1968 through Spring 1984 show that it engaged in a variety of topics related to Congregationalism. Evidence from these newsletters indicates a consistency over time in the perspective of the LUCP. The Socialist platform of the UCC was the primary subject of the March 1968 newsletter, which reviewed the UCC’s support of guaranteed income legislation and the “...trend toward centralization of power for political and social purposes as well as religious ones...”³⁸ One year later the newsletter spoke about the UCC’s failure for authentic spiritual renewal, stating the UCC was “...using the church as a political lever for changing of the world to fit their ideas of what the world should be.”³⁹ In April 1970 the LUCP asserted its role as information source by publishing in its newsletter detailed instructions for “How to Withdraw from the United Church of Christ.”⁴⁰ Particular attention was given to the issue of church

³⁷ Louis G. Poppe to LUCP, July 11, 1959 (CL&A, Papers, BR-10, BR-11).

³⁸ LUCP, newsletter, March 1968, 2-4.

³⁹ Ibid., March 1969, 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., April 1970, 1-2.

property rights and related court decisions. This missive also discussed both sides of a national grape boycott, coming down on behalf of the First Congregational Church of Berkeley, CA that had withdrawn from the boycott.

The focus of its newsletter in May 1972 was the Consultation on Church Union, also known as Church of Christ Uniting, which the LUCP was soundly in opposition. Its interest in CSA had not faltered either: “Bulletin! Late word is that the CSA has dismissed its entire staff of nine professional and seven clerical employees and announced a shift toward ‘research and information!’ Reasons given are ‘budgetary.’”⁴¹ At long last one of the recommendations of the LUCP regarding CSA was achieved. A gap of six years exists in the current record between May 1972 and the next newsletter of September 1978, the lead article of which was a brief introduction to the new Editor, Dr. Harry Butman, a man well known to Congregationalists for his work in the continuing Congregational movement, the NACCC, and editor of the Congregationalist magazine. His editorial on the power of the laity declared, “Congregationalism is essentially a layman’s religion...The power of the laity is an old tradition in American Congregationalism.”⁴² Butman’s editorial in October 1980 restates the essence of purpose for the LUCP; “Well, the grim stubborn truth of the matter is that there does exist an undying warfare between centralization and local autonomy, between totalitarianism and democracy, between organization and the Spirit, and between the concepts of the one great Church and the gathered local church.”⁴³ He poignantly notes

⁴¹ Ibid., May 1972, 4.

⁴² LUCP, newsletter, September [?] 1978, 1.

⁴³ Ibid., October 1980, 1.

“...we free Congregationalists will be part of an ever-shrinking percentage of the American religious community.”⁴⁴

Four years later in the Spring 1984 newsletter, the last one known to this author, Butman’s editorial spoke of the significance of the individual Christian in the quest for social concern; “Those who complain that today’s church is not relevant are demanding that the institution set itself to accomplish what the individual ought to be doing. Only an individual can be a Christian. The more we urge an institution to be socially relevant the more we imply that the individual should transfer his personal responsibilities to an organization.”⁴⁵ These few excerpts from select newsletters of the LUCP show that its fundamental values and precepts were present throughout its known existence. Often its efforts to constructively communicate its beliefs and desires were awkward and ill conceived, but the essential truth by which the LUCP was motivated, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt.18.20), also ran clearly and deeply in their work. Therefore one must recognize that, though flawed, the motives of the LUCP were honorable.

The struggle between power of the individual and authority of the organized church to facilitate change is unlikely to ever be resolved, especially among faithful Congregational Christians, and will continue to be debated. The record of The League to Uphold Congregational Principles, and its parent organization the Committee Opposing Congregational Political Action, confirms that the issues, attitudes and events prevailing in society impact the manner in which the debate is engaged. This study of the League to Uphold Congregational Principles also reveals that conflict, though an essential element

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid, Spring 1984, 3.

in transformation, need not be combative or unhealthy. Indeed, certain tensions encourage growth, health and are necessary for survival. Hopefully, Congregationalism will benefit from new insights gained through study and experience and even new incidents of conflict. As Congregationalism moves into the future may the issues we encounter help us to transform our struggles into finer expressions of the Spirit.

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