

The Congregational Genius of Our Churches

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This Institute is opening with a consideration of the Congregational Genius of Our Churches. The rise, development and the implications of the Congregational Polity take us into the very heart of that process of the modern world in the unfolding of which we see a democratic order of society emerging from the feudal order of the Middle Ages. In the midst of that process we now find ourselves faced with problems of almost overpowering magnitude. No more illuminating rewards to an understanding of the past five hundred years of religious thought and practice can one get than by regarding the whole process as an evolution from the authoritarian Middle Ages with its assumption of revelation, authority, and obedience, to a still emerging world whose basic assumptions are freedom, discovery, and persuasion. Freedom, discovery, and persuasion are the characteristic assumptions of the Congregational Polity as they have been working themselves out in this long historic process. Even the most autocratic of dictators in Church and State are compelled to pay lip-service to these principles, however devious and disingenuous that tribute may be.

This study will suggest to you that not only in the face of our immediate problems, but also as we turn our minds to those questions which loom on the horizon of tomorrow, we have in the Congregational Genius of Our Churches the most promising and dependable principles of guidance for an age of profound and revolutionary change. Even if the immediate future brings a period of pseudo-authoritarian reaction in society as a whole, the need will be greater for a minority to bear witness to the principles of freedom, discovery,

¹ I have yet to identify when this Unitarian Ministers Institute, where Earl Davis gave this paper, took place. It is clear from a handwritten note on the back of the pages that it took place in Petersham.

and persuasion, rooted in the Congregational Genius that we have inherited.

In developing this report, the group as a whole has not been able to meet together at any one time. We have conferred one with another as opportunity offered. The contribution of each has been made with the idea that the particular topic assigned to him should be treated in such a manner as to serve a two-fold purpose: first, to be an adequate treatment in itself of the phase assigned, and, second, to be also a contribution to the topic as a whole. The chairman has had the task of weaving these parts into a whole, and adding such material as seemed to make a framework and fill in the gaps. Perchance, many of the statements in this paper may not meet with the complete approval of the entire group, but in the main they represent the substance of the contributions as a whole.

Any attempt to trace the development and the implications of the Congregational Polity demands the recognition of two dangers. First of all, it is important to emphasize the distinction between the development of the Congregational Polity as to its fundamental principles, and the thought forms and doctrinal beliefs in and through which at any particular period these principles were working themselves out. The early New Englanders were Calvinistic as to their beliefs and their theological systems. We are prone to overlook the fact that, important as those doctrinal systems were to them, the process of history has shown that they were of less permanent significance than the Congregational Polity within **the framework of which they were held. The evolution of the Congregational Polity is the underlying value that gives continuity to the past three hundred years.**

The second danger to be guarded against is that of failing² to distinguish between the concrete events, situations, and problems that had to be faced as grim realities, on the one hand, and the general trend of an evolutionary process towards a possible end, on the other hand. The basic principles of the Congregational Polity at work may be discovered in operation in this history of any New England Church of the Congregational

² The words here in **blue** were covered over by a taped insert—words in **green**—that was added to the text.

order. The limitations, as well as the positive and immeasurable values of this polity are also to be found in the records of each individual church. All of this means that the working out of the Congregational Polity is still in process—indeed, we have but made a beginning of making explicit the profound implications of that polity.

Without raising the questions as to the beginnings of this polity, we may assume that it came over in the Mayflower and in the ships that brought the Puritan settlers. They found their sanction for it in the little communities of believers that laid the foundations of the Early Christianity and in the teachings of the early Christian church.

In the beginning, their problem was rather simple. The Church at Plymouth had already "joined themselves (by a Covenant of the Lord) into a Church estate, in the fellowship of the Gospel, to walk in all his ways, made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavors, whatever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them."³ Then Salem followed suit, framed its Covenant and became a Church.

Before these sturdy folk had to face the difficult problem of the relationship of their Church to others similarly gathered and near at hand, and to consider differences of opinion, and variations from their commonly accepted doctrines, they had set the pattern of a Church of the Congregational Polity. By signing their Covenant, they became a Church Estate, competent to exercise all the functions of a Church, to elect officers, and to discipline members. As Thomas Hooker phrased it, "The Church as Totum essentiale is and may be before its officers."⁴

In theory also these beginners of Congregational Polity in New England held to a complete separation of the Church from the State. But it took a good two hundred years' experience and at times bitter controversy to untangle the complicated relationships that violated their assumption of a complete

³ William Bradford's (1590-1657) paraphrase of the Covenant in *Bradford's History "of Plimoth Plantation" From the Original Manuscript*, Boston: Wright and Potter, 1898, p. 13.

⁴ Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline*, London: John Bellamy, 1648, p. 90.

separation of the Church and the State. This problem is not yet settled.

Besides these two principles, first, the self-sufficiency of the Church in matters of religion and discipline, and, secondly, the separation of the Church and the State, the third important characteristic was their attitude towards the ministry. The ministry, whether teaching or preaching, was not an order, but an office. The minister became minister, not by virtue of his ordination by an ecclesiastical authority, but by virtue of his election to office. He was set apart as an officer to do a particular task and to share with the congregation in the responsibilities of the church. The oft-quoted bit from Bradford's history describing the Salem process of ordaining Higginson and Skelton is one of those gems where a fundamental principle of Congregational Polity stands out clear-cut, to me almost sublime in its forthright simplicity. Both Higginson and Skelton had been ordained by the Church of England, but after being elected to office in Salem, as the letter records, "Mr. Higginson, with three or four of the gravest members, laid their hands on Mr. Skelton, using prayer therewith. This being done there was an imposition of hands on Mr. Higginson also."⁵ At least a thousand years of ecclesiastical tradition and authority was thrust aside in this simple and forthright act.

The Chairman throws in the suggestion that a renewed emphasis upon this thought of the minister as a member and an officer of the church is worthy of serious consideration. Perchance a very simple service of signing the Covenant of the church and being accepted into the membership thereof before installation would have a very practical as well as a sentimental and ceremonial value.

This simple, straightforward arrangement—the Church, a self-sufficient congregation competent to carry on all the offices of religion; its minister, not of orders, but an officer of the Church; and the Church estate thus conceived independent of and separate from the State—this came to be known as the New England Way. Thrilling and complicated is the story, as these pioneers faced the unexpected and exasperating problems that cropped up

⁵ William Bradford's (1590-1657) paraphrase of the Covenant in *Bradford's History "of Plimoth Plantation" From the Original Manuscript*, Boston: Wright and Potter, 1898, p. 317.

at every turn. We cannot trace that history, but it is important to remember that during the Colonial period more than 80 per cent of the churches of New England were of the Congregational Polity.

By the end of the seventeenth century these unforeseen difficulties had become most apparent, and the colony was torn by terrific controversy. If we take our stand at about the year 1700, we shall discover that during the intervening years three factors in the development of the colony had brought to the front two issues upon the outcome of which much depended. First, the increase in the number of churches of Christ gathered in the colony had raised at an early date the problem of relationship between these churches. What authority had a council over an individual church? Who had the right to call a council? What was the status of associations of ministers? This matter, difficult as it was, had become tied up with the complicated relationships of the Church Estate with the town and colonial governments.

Second, the reforming zeal of early days had waned; the comparative uniformity of doctrine and practice had given way to the natural variations of thought; changes of political opinion in England registered corresponding changes in the colony. In other words, immediate problems were demanding their attention and forcing into the background matters that were of primary concern at the beginning. Third, and most important, a young generation was coming to the front, men and women born and bred in the New World, whose interest in the old Puritan conflict was remote. Something entirely new, born of the wilderness and its vicissitudes, an indigenous sense of freedom and independence, courage and self-reliance was already shaping itself in their thought and action. It was a development that was implicit in the "New England Way."

The conservatives, of whom the Mathers—father and son—were still the leaders, viewed with alarm the increasing power and the strange attitude of this younger generation. To them it was the decay of religion, the disintegration of all that they had cherished and in devotion to which they had staked everything. Something almost tragic, and yet so revealing, lurks in this background of the record that Cotton Mather has left to the point, "That the question most commonly considered of importance at the Annual 'Convention of Ministers' at the beginning of the eighteenth century was 'What may be further proposed for the

preserving and promoting of true piety in the land?"⁶ (How like a Monday morning report in the *New York Times* of Sunday's sermons!)

In the year 1705, the struggle, complicated and bitter, between these two parties centered about two clear-cut issues, the presidency of Harvard College, and the proposed changes in the Congregational Polity.

The election of John Leverett as President of Harvard in 1707 was a victory for the Liberal Party; henceforth, the Mathers turned their interests to the new college in Connecticut, commonly spoken of today as Yale.

In the year 1705 the conservative party, with the Mathers still struggling manfully to preserve true piety, to strengthen the waning power of the ministers, and to save the churches from innovations and heresy, brought forward for acceptance and adoption the "Sixteen Proposals of 1705."

These proposals struck at the very roots of the Congregational Polity. The first part provided for associations of ministers through which, among other provisions, said the association may cause any minister, accused of scandal or heresy to be brought before a council, "by whom such an offender is to be proceeded against."

The second part of these proposals provided for the organization of the Churches into a "Standing or stated council, which shall consult, advise, and determine all affairs that shall be proper matter for consideration of an ecclesiastical council within their respective limits." This outline of a changed polity, commonly called Consociationism, manifestly undermined the very foundation of Congregational Polity, by transferring the determining authority as to the qualifications of a minister, the fellowship of churches, and the calling of a council from the individual church, to the standing council. The proposals were approved by several associations of ministers but never became effective in Massachusetts. They were, however, adopted by, and became the prevailing polity of, Connecticut.

⁶ Cotton Mather (1663-1728) *Magnalia*, 1853, Vol. 2, p. 271,

Just what was at stake here in this controversy is well illustrated by two incidents a hundred year later in the life of the Reverend Luther Willson, first Unitarian minister in the Petersham church.

He was first settled over the church in Brooklyn, Connecticut, where this Consociation Polity was in operation. While minister in Brooklyn, Mr. Willson came to disbelieve in the Trinity, and so declared publicly. It is a complicated story, but in spite of the fact that a majority of the Church was content to have him as minister, charges of heresy were brought against him; he was tried by the standing council of Windham County, found guilty, and deposed. According to Consociation Polity, that decision was mandatory and final. The relationship between Mr. Willson and the Brooklyn Church was dissolved, not by the Church in Brooklyn directly, but by the action of the Windham County Council, whose action the Church in Brooklyn was compelled to accept as final.

Two years later he was settled over the Church in Petersham. Here the Petersham Church called a council, according to Congregational tradition, inviting such churches as it wished. It may have been a packed council; but whether packed or not, as a council it had no authority to interfere with the choice of or the installation of, a minister of the Petersham Church. Its function was purely advisory and neighborly. All but one of the churches invited to this council later became Unitarian.

It was this profound difference that was involved in the proposals of 1705.

As we look back upon these proposals from a distance of two hundred years, they command our attention for several reasons. First, they betray the alarm of the Conservative party in the face of its lost prestige and failure to understand the significance of the new forces operating about them. Again they illustrate the familiar device of substituting the authoritative control of ecclesiastical machinery for a waning intellectual and spiritual leadership. They were willing to destroy the liberties through which they had enjoyed a leadership, if perchance they could retain the control of those institutions which their leadership had helped to create, under the liberty which they proposed to destroy. It is a device rampant in our world today.

It is interesting to note that in 1814-15 these proposals of 1705 were dug from the archives and presented as a possible method of dealing with the Unitarian Heresy. Although no longer considered as originally presented, an effort was made to have a diluted form of them adopted. They were dropped in 1815, as they were dropped a century earlier, in large measure because of the devastating satirical examination to which they were subject by the Reverend John Wise of Ipswich in his book published in 1710 under the title: *The Churches' Quarrel Espoused: or, A Reply in Satire, to certain Proposals Made, in Answer to this Question, What Further Steps Are To Be Taken, That The Councils May Have Due Constitution and Efficacy in Supporting, Preserving, and Well-ordering the Interest of the Churches in the Country?*

The keen thrusts, the sound commonsense, and the merciless exposure of the real character of the proposals, brought forth such a response from the public that a second book under the title, *A Vindication of the Government of the New England Churches. The Constitution of New England Churches, as settled by their Platform, may be fairly justified, from Antiquity; the Light of Nature; Holy Scripture; and from the Noble and Excellent Nature of the Constitution itself. And lastly, from the Providence of God dignifying it.*

In these two books we find a thorough examination not only of the basic principles of the Congregational Polity, but such an exposition of these principles from the light of reason and the light of nature, that the books became the accepted authority on the Congregational Polity in the Courts of Massachusetts. I commend them to your careful study. Indeed, so important were they that in the year 1772 a subscription edition of the books was published as pamphlets in the growing struggle for independence. Two hundred and sixty-two subscribers, from seventy-six cities and towns, accounted for 1,153 copies. Almost all of those towns later became Unitarian. William Dawes of Boston subscribed for one-hundred copies. The Reverend Edward Emerson of Concord subscribed for twenty-four. Twenty-five of the two hundred and sixty-two subscribers were ministers.

From the point of view of the many problems that we are dealing with today, and, in particular the problem of a united Christendom which has such an emotional appeal, John Wise's analysis of the nature of government itself, and the forms of government as applied to churches, is very enlightening. Man in

his natural animal estate is freeborn. This freedom, born of his natural estate, is curtailed and in response to his social nature, he organizes himself into a government. There are three main forms of government. The first is monarchy, in which free man yields himself to one ruler; the corresponding ecclesiastical government is Prelacy—the church of Rome. The second form is aristocracy, in which the free man yields himself to the control of a limited group of rulers; in the religious world, the corresponding polity is Presbyterian. The third form is democracy, in which the free man retains his original freedom and subjects himself to such control and restraints as shall be determined by mutual consent; this corresponds to the Congregational Polity developed in New England. This Polity has the sanction, therefore, not only of nature, and right reason, but also of revelation, for it is the form of the early Christian churches; hence it has the sanction of Christ and, therefore, of God. Right reason, the laws of nature, and revelation, are to John Wise equally the will of God, and agree—properly understood. His discussion of observations of the laws of nature and conclusions drawn therefrom by right reason are about as keen a statement of what we have come to call the method of science as any statement that I know.

Thus he divides the ecclesiastical world into three great divisions, not at all on the basis of dogma, doctrine, or liturgy, but on the basis of polity: the Roman Catholic Church, which is monarch, the Presbyterian, which is aristocracy, and the New England Congregational Polity, which is democracy. "Democracy is Christ's government in church and state." This is the substance of John Wise's reply to the Proposals of 1705, and his contribution to the American Revolution.

As we follow the struggle of these two parties for mastery through the complicated and tumultuous years of the eighteenth century, we can trace the gradual process through which the New England churches became divided into two quite distinct parties, not only as to doctrinal differences, but as to polity and, in a large measure, as to geographical distribution. As important factors in this process, it is necessary to bear in mind the implications of "The Great Awakening" in the forties, the influence of Jonathan Edwards and his followers, and, most important, the growing spirit of independency which was slowly developing into the Revolution of 1775.

By the year 1805, the liberal party had become the dominating party in the eastern portion of New England. They had retained control of Harvard College and had clung tenaciously to the congregational principle of a self-sufficient and independent church, however much that was involved in the government of town and state. They had also developed some strange and disturbing doctrines quite profoundly at variance with the Calvinism of an early day.

On the other hand, the conservative party was dominant in the western division; it had clung to the five points of Calvinism and had centered its affections on Yale. It had modified its congregational polity into Consociationism, as in Connecticut, and was strongly disposed to consort with Presbyterians to the west. At this point we may leave our orthodox friends to their fate as they journey toward a Presbyterian polity. To the liberal party the significance of the turn towards Presbyterianism polity was pungently expressed in the words: "Associationism leads to Consociationism; Consociationism leads to Presbyterianism; Presbyterianism leads to Roman Catholicism; and Roman Catholicism is an ultimate fact."⁷

In the year 1805 the liberal party won a victory in the appointment of Henry Ware as Hollis Professor of Divinity in Harvard College. It was but the first battle in a long, bitter and complicated warfare that resulted in dividing churches, parishes and the whole congregational order into two camps whose differences were accentuated by partisan zeal. For our purpose it is important to point out the fact that in the liberal party the question of congregationalism was of some concern. We may let Channing be the spokesman.

Our fathers maintained the independence of Christian churches. This was their fundamental principle. They taught that every church or congregation of Christians is an independent community, —that it is competent to

⁷ This quotation is a slight variation from text by Nathanael Emmons (1745-1850): "Associationism leads to Consociationism; Consociationism leads to Presbyterianism; Presbyterianism leads to Episcopacy; Episcopacy leads to Roman Catholicism; and Roman Catholicism is an ultimate fact." From Edwards A. Park, ed., *Memoir of Nathanael Emmons, with Sketches of his Friends and Pupils*, Boston: Congregational Board of Publications, 1861, p. 163.

its own government, has the sole power of managing its own concerns, electing its own ministers, and deciding its own controversies, and that it is not subject to any other churches, or to bishops, or synods, or assemblies, or to any foreign ecclesiastical tribunal whatever. This great principle seemed to our fathers not only true, but infinitely important. ...

...

Congregationalism is the only effectual protection of the church from usurpation, the only effectual security of Christian freedom, of the right of private judgment. As such, let us hold it dear. Let us esteem it an invaluable legacy. Let us resist every effort to wrest it from us. Attempts have been made, and may be repeated to subject our churches to tribunals subversive of their independence. Let the voice of our fathers be heard, warning us to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made us free. The independence of our churches was the fundamental principle which they aimed to establish here, and here may it never die.⁸

By the time this critical struggle was over, several complications, which had compromised the Congregational Polity through the years, were cleared. The separation of the churches from their entablement with the towns and the state had been effected. The churches were free to go their own way as purely voluntary entities, to perish or survive without support by taxation. Also it is fair to say that the fate of pure congregationalism, as originally conceived, and as defined by Channing, was passing into the hands of the liberal or Unitarian wing of the Congregational order.

Two important and difficult problems were left for the nineteenth century to solve. The first concerns the fellowship of those churches that has so persistently cherished their independence and freedom. One can understand, in view of nearly two hundred years of struggle against Presbyterian tendencies, why the liberal churches looked with suspicion upon associations, and the possibility of organizations and councils

⁸ This text from William Ellery Channing can be found in William Henry Channing's *The Life of William Ellery Channing*, Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1896, pp. 223-224.

whose decisions would be mandatory. As we trace the process of the past hundred years, and examine the results of our fellowship from the point of view of the Congregational Polity, it seems fair to say that we are learning to work together in associations of various sorts without violating the fundamental freedom and integrity of the individual churches. It is still in process, and it is well to remind ourselves from time to time of this basic principle of our tradition. Our bond of unity amid diversity of opinions is, after all, this Congregational Polity as a valid method and guide in our journey towards a new and better day. Immediate considerations and objectives may appeal to us with almost overwhelming pressure, but never should they become so compelling as to override this ancient liberty.

Another problem which the Unitarian controversy, and its aftermath, bequeathed to the nineteenth century to contend with was that of the authority of the individual church over the beliefs of the individual members. The problem was implicit in the Covenant Churches at Salem and Plymouth. They were by assumption and common consent Calvinists, and I presume that they took it for granted that they would remain such, although there was a dynamic attitude in their midst. From time to time creeds were adopted as expressions of common belief, but also from time to time this question of the authority of a church over the beliefs of its members cropped up. By the time the Civil War was over, and the doctrine of evolution had come upon the scene, questions of belief of a much more searching character were raised. As time clarified the problem, it appeared in its true light, not as a question as to the truth of this doctrine or that, whether Calvinist or Armenian.

Channing betrayed an attitude of mind at times that undercut the whole conception of the authority of revelation. Where is the final seat of authority for a man's religious belief? Channing said,

If after a deliberate and impartial use of our best faculties, a professed revelation seems to us plainly to disagree with itself or clash with great principles which we cannot question, we ought not to hesitate in withholding from it our belief. I am surer that my rational nature is from God than that any book is.⁹

⁹ William Ellery Channing, *The Complete Works of William Ellery Channing*, London: Routledge & Sons, 1884, p. 260.

This statement of Channing's certainly undercuts the whole idea of the authority of revelation. Certainly it expresses a point of view that has become so well established as to be considered one of the great achievements of the past hundred years in the field of religious thought. Whatever may be the religious beliefs of an individual, in the world of religion with which we are familiar, it is quite true to say that those beliefs are accepted not on the basis of authority, or even on the basis of the coercive demands of any individual church with which one may be associated, but because such beliefs by their own intrinsic worth command the assent of the believer. In other words, during the past century, we have freed the individual member of the church from the coercive control of the church body over his beliefs, thus given to the individual within the independent church the same liberty that the church of which he is member claims in its relationship to other churches.

If your faith in the validity of these congregational principles is in any degree affected by the circumstance that they constitute the polity through the operation of which we have become what we are and hope to be, you may say that they are vindicated "lastly, from the Providence of God dignifying" them. Here they are—our heritage, the distilled essence of 700 years or more of not altogether peaceful history. As the program of the Institute is outlined, it is not at all the function of this committee to answer any of the questions which the program sets before us. Rather it has been to refresh our minds as to the past out of which we have come; to describe the boundary lines, drawn by historic processes, of the domain in which we live and move and have our being. At every step in the process we have come upon incidents and tendencies that had a bearing upon many of the subjects to be considered. In the main we have refrained from "application."

We have, however, besides the historical aspects of the topic, conceived of the general applicability of these principles under three main divisions.

First, turn your attention to small-town or federated churches, where relations are intimate and very personal. The years are replete with the successful and enriching experiences of churches under the pure Congregational Polity, where the leadership of the minister as an officer of the church has had a

profound and constructive effect upon the life of a church and community. There have been failures and tragic mistakes—but such have been the result, all too frequently, of the violation of, rather than adherence to, these principles. They call for ministers of high quality and integrity, and offer a practical basis for experiment and federation.

When we turn to the city churches, large or small, we still commend the Congregational Polity in that it favors first a ministry of great freedom. Perhaps, it is true to say that the pulpit of a Unitarian Church is more broadly free than the platform of any other organization, religious or secular, in our social order. This freedom carries great responsibilities, and demands a ministry of high intellectual and ethical standards as well as of general ability.

In the third place, the Congregational Polity gives opportunity for adjustment to changing conditions of urban life. It calls for alert leadership not only on the part of the minister, but also on the part of the laity. The dangers which the minister of a city church and the church of which he is the minister face in their adjustment to changing life of the community are twofold. First, both face the danger of weakening their own institutions through which they seek to influence the community life, and, secondly, the equally insidious danger of seeking to spread their influence over too wide a territory of interests. But in spite of these dangers the Congregational Polity offers both minister and layman the opportunity of exerting a powerful influence in their community.

Again, the Congregational Polity offers the opportunity of wide and indeed original experiments in the forms and usages for public worship. Here a wise and understanding use of materials from all sources may result in influencing not alone a congregation but a community as to the meaning and place of public worship in human life.

Viewed from another angle, we raise the question of the effectiveness of the Congregational Polity in meeting the problems which the great movements of our time force upon us. Whatever may be the meaning of it, we have to recognize a fact of the widespread indifference to, even opposition to, the institution of religion. Various changes in social customs have a direct effect on attendance at public worship and its support.

The attitude of large numbers of industrial workers and persons in university circles towards churches is such as to cause serious examination and apprehension. These irritants have been a factor, on the other hand, in stimulating experiments in, and modifications of, forms of worship; in the adoption of more modern methods and an increasing emphasis on religious education; and in developing a general improvement in the quality and effectiveness of preaching.

Beyond these changes going on within one fellowship, we have to take into consideration great trends discernable beyond our borders that compel our attention.

We have to note the current emphasis upon what is commonly called the Social Gospel. Important as this emphasis is and ought to be today, we are inclined to forget that from the beginning of the Reformation, the "social gospel" has been an integral part of religious evolution down to the present day. It belongs to the very nature and structure of religious thought and practice as interpreted by a long line of great leaders. There are many indications at the present time that in spots at least superficial and sentimental social gospel is being seized upon as an escape from more pressing and searching problems. It might easily become a superficial opportunism with disquieting possibilities.

Closely related to an emphasis upon the social gospel is the wider movement towards "collectivism," with the implication of a decided restraint upon our individual liberties. However far the trend towards collectivism may go, it should be remembered that mutual aid has been as strong a factor in the survival of the fit as the conflicts between individuals. From the point of view of the social development of this congregational world, it is very true to say that from the beginnings at Plymouth down to the present day our whole American civilization has been a trend in the direction of collectivism. The momentum of this process indicates a still wider adaptation of the collective principles. Possibly the Congregational Polity with its emphasis on a democratic order of society has a distinct and important contribution to make in this development.

Our attention is also called to another great trend in Protestant circles sometimes spoken of as a neo-orthodoxy. Apparently it is an attempt to discover some kind of a

supernatural revelation hidden in the background of history that shall have an authoritative status quite regardless of its appeal to our total experiences in life. Possibly it is a reflection in the world of religious thought of the tendency that expresses itself in the political world in the dictatorships of our day. It seems so much like the attitude of the Mathers of 1705 and that of Jedidiah Morse and his followers in 1805, that we should not be lured from our own trail by this trend. To speak harshly of it, it seems to be the outgrowth of a lack of courage and faith in facing the problems and responsibilities which freedom presents.

All these tendencies are in a way related to a fourth that is constantly brought to our attention, and frequently with such a very sentimental appeal as to command our sympathy. A united church of Christ sounds very fine and it gives voice to a thought that compels serious consideration. The fact remains that not since the days ...¹⁰ church. Attempts have been made by a coercive authoritarianism to control the thought and conduct of the church as a unit but the history of those attempts is too illuminating. Whatever the future may have in store for this attempt for a united Protestantism or a united church universal, it seems clear that only upon a democratic basis may we expect any lasting results. A united church on the basis of a monarch has been tried and tested by long centuries of persecution and bloodshed. Protestantism with its half-way devices of Presbyterian polity presents such an intellectual and ethical, as well as organizational, confusion that it can hardly command the respect and support of a free man.

We have left the possibility that in the face of this direct appeal to a united church of Christ, and the still further appeal that lurks in the background of a common interest for all religions, the democratic methods of the Congregational Polity may prove to be the answer.

If there is indeed any logic in the process of history it is at least a sporting proposition that the future will continue the marked trend in the direction of a democratic society. Not only has our thinking, both philosophical and practical, for the past centuries been moving in that direction, but the contributions of science, pure and practical, are contributing

¹⁰ Here about a line and a half of text are simply missing.

tremendous strength to the long-range democratic trend. In fact, strange as it may seem, it appears to your chairman that authority, conceived of as a revelation to which one must submit in unquestioning obedience, has really passed from the world's stage. The most authoritarian institutions, even the Roman Church, that once compelled obedience, now pleads for adherence by every social device that it can create or borrow from the institutions of society. The future in the field of religion is in the principles of the Congregational Polity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Some of the individual papers contributed include bibliographies pertaining to the particular sub-division. While the list of books that have a bearing upon the topic as a whole is almost limitless, there are two or three that should be mentioned in particular.

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