

districts where the population is very scattered, and, for the most part, very uncultivated. As a Congregationalist, I was quite free to reply that it might be expedient for the shepherds of Patterdale not to organize a separate Church for themselves, but to include in their organization all the Christian people living round Ulleswater who could conveniently meet together—not necessarily every Sunday—for purposes of Christian worship and communion. But the question admitted of no real answer, except on the ground of the supernatural qualities and endowments which are attributed in the New Testament to regenerate men. Ignore all that is involved in regeneration, refuse to acknowledge that wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, Christ Himself is present, and then nothing can be more inexpedient than to invest a dozen or a score of illiterate persons with the administration of the affairs of a Church. The most ordinary sagacity would suggest the necessity of some external control. It would be expedient that their minister should be appointed for them by a bishop, a conference, or a synod, or that at least some external ecclesiastical authority should be able to prevent them from making a foolish choice. A tribunal ought to exist for the ultimate decision of practical questions of Church administration—a tribunal where a keener sagacity and a calmer judgment might be found than would be likely to exist among a few shepherds, whatever might be the uprightness and excellence of their character. It would be impossible—so it might be argued, for such a Church—if cut off from communication with Christian men having larger intellectual resources, to maintain to any good purpose the institutions of worship.

To these objections to Congregationalism there is, so far as I can see, but one answer: Our system of government is the expression of our faith, that those who believe in Christ and enter His Church have received the very life of God, possess the direct illumination of the Holy Ghost, and have the special and supernatural presence and help of the Lord Jesus Christ whenever they meet together in His name. This is the ultimate vindication of what would otherwise be an irrational and monstrous form of polity. We believe that the presence of Christ is assured, not to a large number of persons gathered together in His name, but even to "two or three." It is not necessary that they should have among them men of great natural sagacity or of high intellectual culture; it is enough if, when they meet, they really meet in Christ's name—but "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." When Christ was visibly present with the fishermen of Galilee, it was very unnecessary that they should submit to the council of the ecclesiastical rulers at Jerusalem. Or,

to take a fairer illustration, when Christ was present with a score of obscure disciples in a Galilean village, there was no need of appealing to Peter, James, and John, who might have happened to be preaching in Capernaum. And Christ's presence with the shepherds of Patterdale would be sufficient reply to all who challenged their competency to discharge the functions of Church government.

The differences between Congregationalism on the one hand, and all modifications of the Episcopalian or Presbyterian system of Church organization on the other, are not merely formal. Our polity is indissolubly associated with a characteristic theology. We decline to surrender the independence of separate congregations to a bishop, a synod, or a general assembly; it is enough that in the obscurest and smallest of Churches we have Christ with us; it is enough that all the true members of such a Church have been made partakers of the Divine nature, and received the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. What they bind on earth is bound in heaven; what they loose on earth is loosed in heaven. For a Church to declare its incompetency to determine the form of its worship, to terminate disputes among its members, or to make a wise appointment to the ministry, is to renounce its faith in the mystery and the blessedness of that most intimate union with Christ which is realised in the communion of saints.

It does not follow that a Church should refuse to avail itself of the counsel which it may derive from other Churches, or from Christian men who may not be among its own members. The light that God gives both to individuals and communities comes to them in many ways. It comes through the authoritative teaching of apostles preserved in the New Testament. It comes through the illustration of the laws and principles of the kingdom of heaven contained in the history of the Church. It comes through the counsels of those who have had a large experience of human life, and have long dwelt in the presence of God. For a Church to avail itself of all the assistance it can obtain in arriving at a right decision on questions which may perplex it, is an obvious duty. It should receive the teaching of Christ, from whatever quarter that teaching may come. But for a Church to declare that it cannot rely on the certainty of receiving the light of God, and to remit the ultimate government of its affairs to an external authority, is an act which corresponds very closely to the blind surrender of our individual life to the control of a priest.

The temper of our times is hostile to the theology which constitutes the basis and justification of Congregationalism. There is a deep reluctance, even in the hearts of Christian men, steadily to confront the sterner aspects of the moral and spiritual condition of