

## CONGREGATIONALISM.

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Congregationalism denotes a particular form of church organization and government, as distinct from Presbyterianism, Methodism, Episcopacy, etc. Of course, it implies the existence of a church. What, then, is a church, as the term is commonly used in the New Testament, and among ourselves?

## THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DESCRIBED.

The Greek word commonly rendered *church* in the New Testament literally signifies a *congregation*, an *assembly*. Thus the congregation of Israel in the wilderness is called a church. Acts vii. 38. And to the riotous assembly at Ephesus, the same original word is applied. Acts xix. 32, 39. With reference to Christians, we find the word used in the three following senses:—

1. To denote the *general, invisible* Church, comprising the whole body of true believers on earth and in heaven. Heb. xii. 23; Col. i. 18, 24.

2. To denote particular *visible* churches, or those bodies of professed believers which were accustomed to assemble for divine worship, and other religious purposes, in one place; as the church at Jerusalem, the church at Antioch, the churches in Galatia and Macedonia.

3. The word is also used, though not frequently, to denote the *general, visible* Church, considered as embodying all the particular visible churches. Rom. xvi. 23; 1 Cor. xii. 28. The second of these senses is much the more common in the New Testament, and is that to which our attention is now to be directed.

It is evident from the sacred writings that Christ intended to embody his professed followers on earth, not in one *national, universal* Church, but in *particular, congregational* churches.\* He prepared the materials for such a church during his public ministry, and soon after his ascension, a church was fully organized at Jerusalem. Acts i. 26; ii. 41, 42; vi. 5, 6. It was a principal labour of the apostles to form such churches in the cities and villages where they preached and where disciples were multiplied.

That these churches were not of a national or provincial character, appears from the fact, that when the churches of a particular country or province are mentioned, they are always spoken of in the plural number. Thus we read, not of the church, but the *churches* of Judea, of Syria, of Galatia, of Asia, and of Macedonia. Acts ix. 31; xv. 41; 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 19; 2 Cor. viii. 1. And when there were converts in a place adjoining a large city, it was not the custom of the apostles to gather them into the church of the city, but to form them into a separate church. Thus at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, there was a church distinct from the larger church in the city. Rom. xvi. 1. There was also a church at Ostia, the port of Rome.

These particular churches were not loose, indeterminate bodies, embracing all who resided in a given locality, but each was a distinct and well-defined organization, having its own officers and members. To be a member of one church did not constitute membership in another; nor did the holding of office in one church constitute the incumbent an officer of any other church.

The churches of the apostles were composed, each of them, of Christians, who were expected to come together, *in one place*, for public worship, and for celebrating the ordinances of the gospel. Perhaps all of them did not assemble uniformly in one place. The distresses of the times and the want of suitable accommodations may have prevented this. But that, on all occasions of common interest and concernment, the members of a church, and even of the largest churches, were accustomed to come together, is certain. On the day of Pentecost, the church at Jerusalem were assembled "with one accord, in one place." And many years after, when messengers from the church at Antioch went up to Jerusalem with the question of circumcision, "the apostles and elders and

the whole church" came together, to deliberate and advise in relation to the matter. Acts ii. 1; xv. 22. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first mission to the heathen, "they gathered the church at Antioch together, and rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." Acts xiv. 27. "Upon the first day of the week," the church at Troas "came together to break bread." Acts xx. 7. It is repeatedly said of the church at Corinth, that they "came together *in one place*," to attend upon divine worship and administer the discipline of the church. 1 Cor. v. 4; xi. 18; xiv. 23.

It thus appears from the sacred writings that Christians, under the ministry of the apostles, were collected into distinct and separate organizations, called churches, each having its own members and officers, and each consisting of such as were accustomed to assemble in one place for religious worship, and for transacting the affairs of the church. I will only add, that if the plan of the apostles in this respect had been carried out in the succeeding ages; if, when Christians in the large cities and their suburbs became too numerous to assemble conveniently in one place, instead of attempting to continue together, they had amicably separated into distinct organizations, one of the stepping-stones to Romanism had never been laid, and a principal source of ambition and corruption had been excluded from the Church. In this case, the sees of Rome and Antioch and Alexandria and Constantinople would never have been converted into princely thrones, and aspirants would not have waded into them through scenes of turmoil and blood.

## THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS.

The churches in the days of the apostles were all of them *voluntary associations*. The apostles had no compulsory power to bring persons into churches, and they desired none. All who joined themselves to any of the churches did it freely and of their own accord. The three thousand who were baptized on the day of Pentecost acted freely; so did the Ethiopian eunuch, and Saul of Tarsus, and the Philippian jailor, and the family of Cornelius, and every other individual who, in those days, was added to a Christian church. There was no compulsion or involuntary action, or anything approaching to it, in any case.

But, although every church is, and of right ought to be, a voluntary association, still, every voluntary association is not a church. It is necessary to inquire, therefore, what there was peculiar in the associations of which we speak, which went to constitute them churches of Christ.

1. These associations consisted of persons of a *peculiar character*. All who joined themselves unto the churches of the apostles were required to profess faith in Christ, and to give credible evidence of piety. It was those who "were pricked in the heart," and repented, and "gladly received the word," who were admitted to the church on the day of Pentecost. It was not till the Samaritans "believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the kingdom of Christ," that they were received by him to baptism and the church. The Holy Ghost fell on the family of Cornelius, and satisfied Peter as to their piety, before he would admit them to the church, and administer to them the ordinances of the gospel. Ananias objected to the baptism of Saul of Tarsus, till a voice from heaven assured him of the piety of this recent persecutor; "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Acts ix. 15. We here see what were the terms of admission to the apostolic churches, and what ought to be the terms of admission to all the visible churches of Christ.

2. Not only did the churches of the apostles consist of persons of a particular character, but they were formed on a *peculiar basis*; viz., that of the *Holy Scriptures*. In establishing other voluntary associations, persons are guided by the particular object which they have in view, and they so form and adjust their constitution and laws as will best tend to promote this object. But in establishing churches, all

who would follow in the steps of the apostles must build entirely on the platform of the Scriptures. They must take the Scriptures as their rule. They must profess to believe whatever the Scriptures plainly teach, and promise to obey, so far as they are able, all that the Scriptures enjoin.

3. The *object* for which churches are formed and sustained is altogether of a peculiar character. This is not to promote any merely worldly or secular end, but a spiritual end. It is to maintain the worship and ordinances of the gospel; to promote, by all proper methods, the edification one of another; and to labour more efficiently than would otherwise be possible for the advancement of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of souls. Such is, in brief, the object of all church organization. A worthy and important object truly! An object in reference to which the church is gloriously distinguished from all other associations existing among men.

## News of the Churches.

REV. E. IRELAND has accepted a call to the church at Richmond, Macomb County, Michigan.

REV. DR. WILD, of Brooklyn, New York, preached in the Listowel church a few Sundays ago.

WE understand that the Rev. Duncan McGregor, B.A., of Liverpool, Nova Scotia, is ready to do work in some western field.

MR. ATTWOOD, a student from the Western College, England, supplied the Northern Church on the 21st ult., with much acceptance.

WE were glad to receive a call from our brother Peacock on his way back to Kingston. He is greatly improved in health, but is still weak.

THE Rev. F. H. Marling, formerly pastor of the Bond street Church in this city, is announced to preach the Sunday school anniversary sermons in the Northern Church on the 5th inst.

WATFORD.—A very successful social was held in this church on the 24th ult. A most interesting feature in the programme was the presentation of a gold watch to the organist. There is substantial growth and steady progress in this part of brother Colwell's field, as well as in the associated church. One new station has been taken up.

BOND STREET, TORONTO.—On Sunday last our Bond street friends held their annual harvest festival. The pulpit and the platform were most tastefully decorated with fruits and flowers of all descriptions. The richest products of the garden and the field were represented. Mr. Handford preached morning and evening. In the morning he pointed out that all the gracious gifts of the harvest were from God's open hand of goodness, and exhorted his hearers to "praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men." In the evening the spacious church was crowded. The subject of discourse was on "gleaning" from the pastoral of Ruth. Special collections on behalf of the Building Fund were taken. The day was one of great delight.

THE Congregational Union of Wales held its annual meeting in Liverpool, beginning on the 26th of September.

NO one should be deceived by the fair professions of those who wish to devote the Sabbath to some "good" purpose, conducive to the welfare of their minds or bodies, apart from religion. A suprisingly extensive movement recently took place in Baltimore in the way of organizing "Sunday Literary Clubs." These clubs were ostensibly for mental and moral improvement, and to many this sounded as being next in goodness to religious worship. But this movement was followed up with so much zeal that suspicions were aroused, and an investigation being ordered, it was found that the "clubs" were for the purpose of enabling the members to consume beer and other liquors which they could not lawfully purchase at the ordinary places of sale on the Sabbath. This is a sample of the mental and moral improvement that comes of Sabbath-breaking.

\*I here use the word congregational in a general and not in a technical or denominational sense.