

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

*An Outline of the History, Beliefs, and the
Organization of Congregational Churches
in the United States*

FREDERICK L. FAGLEY

With additional chapters on:

The Christian Churches, Frank G. Coffin
The American Board, Enoch F. Bell
The Board of Home Missions, John R. Scotford
The Council for Social Action, Alfred Schmalz

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Introduction

In this new edition of *The Congregational Churches* additional chapters have been included on

The Christian Church, by Frank G. Coffin

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The Council for Social Action, by Alfred Schmalz.

The chapters on the missionary agencies trace in brief form their development and their work.

The book has been written in brief chapters to fit it for use by discussion groups and church classes and yet leave the story in connected form, which adds to its interest for the general reader.

The main purpose of the book is that we may know what we believe and why, what we seek to do and how, that we may do our fair share of building the Kingdom among men.

FREDERICK L. FAGLEY.

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whose goals are also justice and peace. Its own program of "action," whether it is in the field of legislation, the advocacy of social change, or the support of specific causes, is dependent to a considerable extent upon the social issues current at any particular time.

Part V. The Christian Churches

Chapter XXIII

**A BRIEF OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE
CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

By FRANK G. COFFIN

IT IS not easy to go back to the beginning of any social institution and find all that one would like to know. People who do great things are rarely aware of it at the time of the doing, or they are too occupied with their mission to give consideration to records. Had they a great concern to preserve the details of their doings for posterity, that very spirit would make little worth preserving. It is that self-forgetfulness betokened in scanty records which gives another aspect of greatness to movements. So, while there is no question about the vitally historic items in the beginnings of the Christian Church, there are details in its rise and progress which curiosity would find satisfaction in knowing. After all, its history is valuable only as history. Its basic principles of private interpretation, with personal character the only basis of membership and the perpetual leadership of Christ leave small place for a reverence for precedents. To look backward for guidance would be a violation of the very spirit of the organization. It was never regulated by the past, it was only instructed by it. It would dishonor those who were first in the fellowship to make their ideas and practices a measuring test of the present status. They would say: "Lo, He goeth before you, there ye shall see Him."

Moods of thinking merge into institutional expression and a type of thought in other areas will pervade current religion. Imperialism was the form of Roman government, therefore the Church of Rome inclined that way. If men are for lib-

erty and democracy in the nation, they will be for the same in their religious organizations. Autocracy, objectionable in civic life, is the same in Church life.

In this fact is to be found the first reason for the organization of the Christian Church. It is of distinctive American origin and had its rise from the same impulses as were responsible for the founding of the republic. Liberty was in the air in the last half of the eighteenth century. It dominated American thought. To obtain it in the nation was the great pursuit of the American people. For long the people had accepted the rule of kings and their restrictive regulations which invaded individual rights. For long they had likewise been submissive to the rule of dignitaries in the church and acquiescent to their regulations. Then Henry, Otis and Jefferson blazed forth against foreign rule and in behalf of the inalienable rights of the people. It was this same spirit operating in the realm of religion which was responsible for the beginning movements of our church. We say movements for they were plural. Three separate and distinct movements originated almost simultaneously, each without a knowledge of the other. This fact is another evidence that they arose from a common impulse consonant with the American spirit. When men were bent on throwing off the rule of King George with all the petty restrictions belonging to his regime, it is not to be wondered that some would have a like interest in eliminating the overlords of the church and abolishing the restrictions which were the product of imperialistic ecclesiasticism. The existing order, borrowed from the state in the beginning, had never been questioned, therefore it had gone on unchallenged with no consciousness of a submergence of the God-given rights of individuals. So while those early American patriots were engaged in the restoration of civic freedom, several like intrepid spirits were devoting themselves to the restoration of religious freedom. Within a period of a decade these three movements toward individual freedom in thought and practice of Christian duty sprang up,

beginning in North Carolina in 1793, following in New England in 1801 and in Kentucky in 1804. The three movements came out of as many different denominations and from different surface causes, but all were founded on the single basic thought of the right of every individual before and with God. In the development of this idea all three efforts broadened into practically the same statement of platform.

The first movement in North Carolina had as its central human figure, James O'Kelly. His nationality is divulged in his name. Both Virginia and North Carolina claim his birthplace, but it is quite probable that this distinction belongs to Ireland. He doubtless brought to his new task of a reformer a recognized national impetuosity with little natural aversion to a good scrap. Tradition has linked his name as an associate with Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson which is not an improbability. It is known that he preached in the House of Representatives, presumably at Jefferson's invitation. He fell into the hands of the British during the revolution and because he refused to swear allegiance to the King of England he was imprisoned and fed starvation rations, but he escaped, enlisted and served through two campaigns of the Revolutionary War.

His religious experience and convictions were of a definite dominating sort. He was whole-souled in every undertaking. Upon his conversion he concluded his violin was a tie to worldliness and immediately burned it. He was ambitious to redeem the two score years of wasted opportunity prior to his conversion, so immediately began preaching and exhorting in the Methodist churches of his vicinity. His eloquence and power were recognized by all. He first became pastor then presiding elder. He had but scant reverence for the authority of the church, contending for the right of churches and conferences to govern themselves free from the dictation of officials higher up. He contended that the clergy should have the right of appeal to the conference from the

appointment of the bishop. But the power of the Bishop, against which he was contending, was brought down upon his agitation without mercy, through Bishop Francis Asbury, who penalized him by dividing his territory, leaving for his supervision but a meager group of churches over which to preside, though previously his presiding eldership had extended over some of the most important work of the South. The whole struggle came to issue in Baltimore, Maryland, November 1, 1792, when under the direction of the bishop the pronouncement was made "the government of this church is autocratical". The right of appeal to any conference or other body was also denied. As a result of this decision, Mr. O'Kelly and nineteen other ministers withdrew from the conference, but not from the church. These twenty presented a further memorial to the bishop requesting a review of the case, to which the bishop replied, "If five hundred preachers should come on their knees before me I would not do it." This arbitrary attitude left no alternative except submission or separation. The little group chose the latter. They included about one thousand members. For a year they existed under the name of Republican Methodists. At a meeting about one year later they voted with unanimity and enthusiasm to take the Bible only as a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and, since in it the disciples were called Christians, this should be the designation of the new group. Thus began the first movement of the Christian Church.

There was no thought of starting another denomination and in the beginning all were opposed to the idea, hoping that some change in the granting of liberties in government might permit a re-entrance into the church out of which they had come. The new organization was not planned nor even wanted. It evolved in spite of them.

O'Kelly continued to travel and preach with vigor for thirty-three years after the cleavage. Near his home in Chatham County, North Carolina, he organized his first Christian

church, now known as O'Kelly's Chapel, near Chapel Hill, the location of the University of North Carolina. He was not an outstanding organizer and therefore left but little of his work institutionalized. He was a great preacher and devoted advocate of the truth. He was also a writer of considerable volume, some ten works having issued from his pen, a part of them being controversial and all of them breathing the spirit and appeal of Christian liberty.

Space forbids more than the mention of Rice Haggard, a stabilizer of the new movement, and many others fully entitled to recognition. With the stalwart and well balanced leadership of this group and the temper of the times there might have been a movement sweeping like wild fire and gathering its forces with startling rapidity. Instead it went on rather unaggressively because there were no desires for a great organization. The leaders feared it lest the power which came with it might induce a recurrence of what they were trying to escape. They were content to be mere leaven, hoping to change the whole lump instead of creating an independent organization. For this reason they did not rush into strategic centers to create organizations and mass new strength. They became but another voice crying in the wilderness.

For the second of these movements we turn to New England. At Royalton, Massachusetts, on April 28, 1772, was born Abner Jones. His father's family migrated to Vermont which was then primeval forest full of both danger and opportunity. Their humble home was built entirely out of what was afforded by the surrounding forest. From boyhood Mr. Jones was given to thinking of religion and religious subjects. He was converted at eight years of age, an event which was accompanied by all the soul racking experiences common to that time. The motive behind conversion was to flee from the wrath to come. Though young, he was goaded with the thought that he was elected to be eternally lost and

that for him there was no hope. Even after "experiencing religion" he was for several years shifting between contradictory religious sensations. Until twenty years of age he lived in a torment of mind. He went away from home in the hope of securing relief, but all to no avail. He took up school-teaching though he had had but six weeks of schooling in his whole life. He was, however, self-educated and had applied himself diligently to his studies. Because of his fluency he was asked to exhort at the religious gatherings of his community, which he did. But the question of *what* to preach was a pungent one. His study had led him to a dissent of the Calvinist Baptist views and had also assured his unpopularity with those of that faith. By his renunciation of these ideas he was forced to define a belief to substitute for that from which he turned aside. Somewhat as a method of relief from these perplexing questions he took up the study and later the practice of medicine. However, all of the time he was quite as devoted to the study of the Bible. Finally, in 1801, he gave up all other pursuits to preach the gospel. Even in this decision which proved to be final, he based his continuance upon the fruits of his ministry as the proof of his call to it. He made a vow that he would preach not to exceed one year unless such proof was forthcoming from his labors. His financial accumulations from his medical practice eliminated the concern for the pecuniary welfare of his family.

Feeling the need of a church which would give liberty in matters of faith and practice, he organized what he termed the "First Free Christian Church in New England." There were three restrictions in his mother church which were directly responsible for his desire to found a church of sufficient breadth to accommodate all Christians in all things. These were: (1) the insistence upon the acceptance of Calvinism as a condition of church membership, (2) the requirement of baptism by immersion as an entrance to church fellowship, and (3) the exclusion from the communion table of all who did not fulfill these requirements.

His effort was not an opposition to the Baptist Church and there seems to have been no bitterness accompanying his withdrawal. In November, 1802, a group of Free Will Baptist preachers ordained him with the understanding that he would not be a Baptist minister, but only a Christian. When James O'Kelly had gone out from the Methodists only the individual rights in church government were involved; when Jones went out from the Baptists the individual rights in matters of doctrine were the consideration.

His first church was organized at Lyndon, Vermont, in the fall of 1801. "From this time forth his gospel labors were almost incessant in traveling and preaching. Single services were six to nine hours." He went to Portsmouth where he was joined by Rev. Elias Smith, who assisted in the organization of a Christian church in that city. He moved to Boston in 1804 and on July 1 organized another church in that city. But here persecution came to him because of his so-called heterodoxy. He afterward removed successively to Haverhill and Salem, Massachusetts, continuing his work of organization. Later, while a resident of Hopkinton, New Hampshire, an epidemic of spotted fever broke out in that territory. In this Mr. Jones' medical knowledge served him to useful purpose. He was tireless and unselfish in his ministrations which further endeared him to the hearts of a great constituency. A decline of health came to him in May, 1841, and he quickly passed away, having done a much larger work than he ever realized.

Effectively associated with Mr. Jones was Rev. Elias Smith who passed through many of the same youthful religious experiences as Jones. His ministerial career for fifteen years was tempestuous and sometimes even dangerous. He was in almost constant itinerary, traveling incredible distances on his preaching tours. He was disinclined to the settled pastorate, preferring the role of a traveling propagandist. His chief distinction is the fact that on September 1, 1808, he began

the publication of a periodical to express the genius of the new movement. It was called "*The Herald of Gospel Liberty*," the first religious newspaper to be published in the world. Copies of this first issue are still preserved. After continuous publication for a century and a quarter it is now merged into "*Advance*." In the beginning there were 274 subscribers. Three years before he had issued the Christian Magazine which was wrecked on the rocks of financial difficulty. He was also the author of a number of publications, nearly all of limited size. He died at the age of 77.

To find the third of these movements we turn to Kentucky from whence came the influence which produced the greatest portion of our present denominational numerical strength. This one was also more aggressive, less desultory and better organized than either of the others. It was more of the mass type and centered less about a single personality. Perhaps Barton W. Stone has more title to distinction than any other one individual in it. He came of revolutionary stock, having had two brothers in the Revolutionary War. The Battle of Guilford's Court House was fought within a short distance of the Stone home. With the close of the war there was a renunciation of those forms and representatives of religion which were imports from England. This repudiation very naturally led to an examination of all religion to discover substitutes for that which they were discarding. In this investigation young Stone was a leader. He had become thoroughly converted and was a conscientious seeker after truth. He was a candidate for licensure in Orange Presbytery in 1793. His thesis for the occasion was to be on the subject of the Trinity, but inasmuch as he failed to sound the shibboleths expected he was not received. This experience for a time dissuaded him from the ministry and in reacting to a restless conscience young Stone tried several things and places with unsatisfactory results. At last from the necessities of conscience he entered the ministry. He was by some means licensed to preach and the next ray started on

horseback to Tennessee. He preached en route as opportunity offered, finally by easy stages reaching his destination at Nashville. Later he proceeded with a co-worker on into Kentucky in the vicinity of Concord and Cane Ridge.

In the autumn of 1798, after opportunity had been given Mr. Stone for ample study of the doctrines of the Presbyterian church, the time was fixed for his ordination. He had stumbled unsympathetically through the doctrines of election, reprobation, foreordination and other items of the confession of faith until he had determined to forego ordination. Through friends he was persuaded to proceed with it as far as he could and to turn back only when his conscience placed a barrier in the way during his examination. When asked if he accepted the confession of faith he replied that he accepted it only so far as it seemed consistent with the word of God. No objection was raised to his answer so the ordination proceeded.

About this time a great revival of religion broke out in southwestern Kentucky. It was accompanied by strange physical manifestations. Young Stone went to investigate the phenomena and was much impressed. He returned to a series of meetings which he had previously appointed at Cane Ridge. These became the occasion of a great revival. Places were cleared among the trees for camping and the erection of several preaching stands. Attendants journeyed from long distances, even from the neighboring state of Ohio. The number present was variously estimated at from twenty to thirty thousand. Seven ministers, including Stone, who had the general direction of the campaign, preached night and day. All preached a salvation open to everybody through Jesus Christ, regardless of election. Thousands were converted and strange physical manifestations accompanied their change. Spiritual impulse ran strong. The preachers of the new idea largely repudiated much of Calvinism and thereby came into disfavor. When all is taken into account a remarkably good feeling prevailed. Only the Washington Presbytery tried one

of the ministers, Richard McNemar, for heresy. Lest such heresy trials might spread with no profit to either party, the whole group of ministers sharing the new ideas of religious liberty withdrew and organized a new Presbytery. This was later dissolved by its now famous "Last Will and Testament" which bore as witnesses the names of Robert Marshall, John Dunlevy, Richard McNemar, B.W. Stone and David Purviance. The group then accepted the name Christian as their only designation, the Bible as their sole guide, the right to follow the teachings of the Bible, the privilege of each individual and Christian character alone, as the basis of the church's fellowship.

Mr. Stone traveled among the then frontier settlements carrying the new message the farthest West it had yet been borne. He preached in Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. He was ably assisted in his endeavors by David Purviance who was the first to be ordained to the gospel ministry by this new church in the west.

Stone built wisely, guaranteeing the continuance of his efforts and the conservation of results by better organization than had followed either of the other attempts. In his work and that of his followers there was also less of controversy than had accompanied the activities of O'Kelly and Jones.

A strange development about this time has confused our history and identity with the "Disciples of Christ," or "Church of Christ." Alexander Campbell appeared in Kentucky in 1824. He and Stone became acquainted and found that they had many things in common, both in faith and plan. Stone declared himself pleased with much of Campbell's doctrine, yet he says in his autobiography that "the doctrines had long been taught by the Christians, by his co-workers and himself." He and Campbell pledged cooperation to each other in their respective efforts. There was no uniting of one with the other, it was rather an amicable cooperative relationship. They had much in common and little to create hostilities. As a re-

sult of this state of comity, in two instances local congregations of both bodies may have united—Lexington, Kentucky, and Jacksonville, Illinois. There was never any union of the two general bodies, nor of any of their conferences. Neither denomination split off from, or came out of the other. The rise and progress of each was independent of the other. The Christian church antedated the Disciples of Christ in this country by three decades. Alexander Campbell himself said (Christian Harbinger 1839), "Our name—shall we be Disciples of Christ or Christians? Why not call ourselves Christians? Not because we have another leader than Christ, but we have been anticipated. The term Christian in New England and in some other sections of this land is a name chosen and appropriated by a body who disbelieve in baptism for the remission of sins, and refuse to celebrate the Lord's death as often as they celebrate His resurrection. For this reason we prefer an unappropriated name, which is indeed neither more nor less than the scriptural equivalent of Christian, for who were called Christians first at Antioch? Disciples of Christ is a more ancient title than Christian, while it fully includes the whole idea."

These three movements were entirely unrelated and none had knowledge of the other. Of their first contacts we are not informed. With a Methodist parentage in the South, a Baptist parentage in the East and a Presbyterian one in the West, and all fearful of any ecclesiastical system, progress had to be slow. They were strong in their enthusiasm and their convictions. That was all. In any planning they were a law unto themselves, for they wanted none of that of which they knew. Therefore, tardiness marked their growth institutionally. Their outreach was marvelous, but the conservation of its results was nil. For long they were the bearers of an ideal rather than the builders of an organization. They were held together by six main ideas, which they called their "Principles," viz. (1) Christ the only Head of the Church, (2) The Bible alone a sufficient rule of faith and practice, (3) Chris-

tian character the only basis of membership, (4) the right of every member to the interpretation of the scripture for his own life, (5) "Christian," to the exclusion of all sectarian designations, a sufficient name for the followers of Christ, (6) the union of all followers of Christ.

Two designations, not accepted by the group, were applied to them: "Newlights," because they followed a new light in preference to the old order; and "Christian Connection," assumed by some to have been applied when the three original groups discovered and related themselves to each other.

The new movement spread, being of and for the common people it was tremendously popular. It was zealously evangelistic. The preachers were earnest, self-sacrificing and untiring. Their preaching was unusually scriptural and appealed to both the emotions and thoughtfulness of the people. Many were itinerant, interpreting this as following the method of Christ and His Apostles. Public services were free, spontaneous and simple.

The general gatherings were mass meetings. In the early days there were no delegate bodies. They were uniquely harmonious. Ordinations of those considered worthy took place at such meetings, after candidates had preached before the assembly. The New England center was the least aggressive and the Kentucky group the most active.

In the South, Rice Haggard, E. H. Hafferty, Clement Nonce and others like them, pushed out in all directions leaving a trail of churches behind them. By 1811 there were many such organizations in Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee.

Throughout New England Abner Jones, Elias Smith, Ephriam Stinchfield, Frederick Plummer, John Rand and others went afar with the message. Samuel McNutt organized churches in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Joseph Badger was responsible for twelve new churches in Canada. Frederick Plummer pushed out into Pennsylvania, where, in

1811, twenty-six Christian ministers were accumulating hundreds of converts. Jasper Hazen went into New York in 1812, where a number of churches resulted

The Western movement went rapidly forward from 1804. Whole associations of "Separate Baptists" joined in the new movement. The campaign quickly spread into Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana and further west. Prominent among these heralds were Daniel Roberts, who organized over two hundred churches, Joseph Thomas, the famous "White Pilgrim," David and Levi Purviance, Wm. Kinkade, the last three being important factors in the early history of Ohio, in promoting education and resisting slavery. Possibly as many as 40,000 members and 450 ministers were identified with the movement by 1825.

District and State Conferences came slowly. It was feared they might drift into authoritative organizations. They might "discuss, admonish, advise and urge, but could not command or legislate." Some conferences publicly burned their minutes at the close of the session, lest they might become a binding precedent on subsequent meetings. As early as 1817 a general convention was held at New Bedford, Massachusetts. "The United States Convention" came into operation in 1820. This was successively "The American Christian Convention" and "The General Convention of the Christian Church," finally merging with the National Council of Congregational Churches into the now General Council of Congregational and Christian Churches.

A logical sequence of solidification and group consciousness was in the development of enterprises. Evangelism and church extension were almost altogether individual. When otherwise, they were conducted by a small group on their own initiative.

One among the first concerted efforts of the church was in the enterprise of publishing. In 1831 the "Christian General Book Association" was established to issue books, pamphlets,

and periodicals. A number of smaller publishing concerns sprang up through the West. At least sixteen regular periodicals, not including local or Sunday School publications, were issued prior to 1860. The larger number of these originated in New England, New York and Ohio. Among them, in addition to "The Herald of Gospel Liberty" were "Christian Herald," "The Gospel Luminary," "Gospel Banner," "The Morning Star," "The Living Christian," "The Christian Journal," "The Christian," "Christian Herald and Journal," "Christian Palladium," "Gospel Herald," "The Christian Union," "The Christian Church," "Bethlehem Star," "The Christian Reviewer," "Christian Messenger," "Christian Offering," "The Christian Pulpit," "Officers and Teachers Journal," "The Christian Messenger," "The Christian Missionary," "The Christian Vanguard," "The Christian Intelligencer," "Spirit and Life," "The Christian Magazine," and a number of others. "The Christian Sun," organ of the South, began publication in 1844 and still continues. Many of the others ended their career in absorption by "The Herald of Gospel Liberty," which itself at last merged into "Advance." The numerous publishing concerns were, through the years, merged into, or succeeded by "The Christian Publishing Association," which still continues to print some of the church publications. Many valuable books and uncountable pamphlets were also issued from these numerous "concerns" through the years. Elias Smith alone wrote books and booklets to the number of forty.

The second absorbing interest of the church was in education. The Christian Church was from the beginning sympathetic toward education, yet feared dogma-producing institutions. Its ministry was a student ministry. The larger number were at some time teachers of schools. Most of the theological schools they knew were of a kind they did not want, therefore, they established their own. Of these there were many. They were too small and resourceless financially to survive. As early as 1811, Stone established a school at Lex-

ington, Ky. Some of the other institutions were: Rittenhouse Academy (Ky.), Wake Forest-Pleasant Grove (N. C.), Junto (N. C.), Christian Academy (N. H.), New England Manual Labor School (Mass.), New England Christian College (Mass.), Christian College (N. Y.), Honeyoye Falls School (N. Y.), Wolfborough Christian Institute, Starkey Seminary (N. Y.), Graham Institute (N. C.), Lafayette University (Ind.) Suffolk Collegiate Institute (Va.), Elon College (N. C.), Kansas Christian College, Union Christian College (Ind.), Antioch (O.), of which Horace Mann was president, and said to be the first college of high rank in the United States opened to students of both sexes on conditions of absolute equality. LeGrand Christian Institute (Ia.), Christian Biblical Institute (N. Y.), Weaubleau College (Mo.), Palmer College (Mo.), Defiance College (O.), Franklinton (N. C.) for colored, Jireh (Wyo.), Bethlehem (Ala.), Kirton Hall (Can.). And others which gasped out their lives for want of financial support, or the need for them disappeared.

Organized missionary endeavor was a belated activity in the church, not because of indifference, but for want of that much feared organization which would bring it to function. The first issues of The Herald of Gospel Liberty indicate a deep interest in missions, particularly Home Missions. The General Conference of 1825 began a fund. A New England Missionary Society was formed in 1840, Ohio in 1844, and the Southern Home Missionary Society in 1858. The women were the most efficient promoters of this phase of church activity and were very effective as far back as 1857. In 1854 the General Convention elected its first Board of Home and Foreign Missions with an Executive Secretary, Dr. J. P. Watson. He may well be called the father of our organized missionary work. The West of the home land, and Liberia of the foreign field, were the first projects. Later South America, Japan and Porto Rico were entered. By order of the Convention, "The Christian Missionary" was established in 1894.

With the increase of the work a Board was elected, and executive management employed, for separated Home and Foreign administration.

Following the Civil War conferences were organized among the colored people, who had already developed many churches. The first record of these extant is in 1867. In 1892 the Afro-Christian Convention, including the whole colored constituency was organized. Several periodicals were issued and a South American Mission supported by them. Doubtless there is a larger constituency of this group than we have known, for new detached churches have quite often been discovered.

Other unclassified efforts have been undertaken in the church, or sections of it. In 1894 the Aged Ministers' Home was established. It still continues at Lakemont, N. Y. Several efforts to care for aged, infirm and orphans have been made. For the last Carversville, Pa., and Elon College, N. C., have been best known. A Christian Correspondence School had a brief existence, as did a Ministers Insurance Company. Work among Indians, loggers, migrants and foreign population in our own country and many other enterprises were carried on.

The church had no lack of outreach, enthusiasm and industry. Few movements can show more sacrificial, energetic effort. Their emissaries went everywhere preaching the gospel, sometimes sent by conferences, but more often following their individual sense of duty. Due to lack of system and conservation much of what they built did not survive. They shunned publicity, avoided theological contentions and sought the quiet places to labor, yet, even under this neglectful plan, the movement by some representations spread into perhaps all of the states of the Union and had organizations in two-thirds of them.

The loose organization and exceedingly liberal attitude of the churches have been an inviting field for marauding religionists, parasitic in method, who, in many instances, have not failed to use the opportunity.

Perhaps the maximum of numerical strength reached was about twelve hundred ministers, a like number of churches and a hundred twenty thousand communicants. The church's principles have gone much further than its numerical strength would indicate. The tendency of the movement during the latter half of its history has been toward unification, compactness and concentration. Their plans and work were then built on a denominational consciousness and a purpose to build up the organization, that as an institution it might have an effective function in helping to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

As a gesture of this closer and better systematized contact the Forward Movement of the church was launched in 1917, which, with its several features of emphasis, gave the church its greatest solidarity and largest financial resources.

From its beginnings the Christian Church has believed that all true followers of Christ were one, regardless of differences of opinion. They inserted the idea as one of their six "Cardinal Principles," set up an active Commission to promote it, both within the body and among other denominations, set apart a period in the yearly program for emphasis and education and devoted whole issues in their publications to it. For a number of years the Commission on Christian Unity had sent fraternal greetings and fraternal delegates to other denominational conventions.

Progressing in this practice on May 3, 1924, the Commission sent a letter to the presiding officers, or heads, of twenty-four denominations most likely to be interested, soliciting: (1) a frank statement of attitude toward union, (2) a concert of prayer for the removal of prejudices, (3) a general interchange of fraternal delegates, (4) a conference to discuss the possibility of organic union. Only eleven denominations responded at all, and only three of these registered any real interest. Correspondence with the Congregationalists finally ripened into a first conference at Toledo, Ohio, June 17,

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES

1926. Subsequent conferences were held in Washington, New York and even Bournemouth, England, resulting finally in the union of the two bodies by vote of the National Council at Detroit, May 30, 1929, and by the General Convention at Piqua, October 25, 1929. Since that time the history of the two denominations has been one.

For much of the historical material of the foregoing the author is indebted to the "History of the Christian Denomination in America," by Dr. Milo T. Morrill, "The Centennial of Religious Journalism," by Dr. J. Pressley Barrett, and the "History of the Christian Church," by Dr. N. Summerbell.