

## Editorial

LAST year the Moderator of the International Congregational Council, Dr. Douglas Horton, delivered some lectures at Mansfield College, Oxford, and before the Assembly of the Congregational Union in London. These he has now reproduced in a highly interesting little book, *Congregationalism: A Study in Church Polity*.<sup>1</sup> For Dr. Horton, the heart of the Church is the congregation and the true apostolic succession is the succession of congregations. While there can be a Church without Popes, Bishops or other officers, there can never be a Church without a congregation and, therefore, Congregationalism holds "an indispensable key to the ecumenical future." Even a Council (i.e. in Britain *Union* or *Association*; in the U.S.A. *Convention*, *Conference* or *Association*) is a kind of congregation for, like a local church, it is composed of believers, it is called and recognised by churches, its constitution is a form of covenant and it has a duty both to God and to man. Its power over the churches, according to Dr. Horton's theory, is not legal but moral only. Being a new body, however, and not merely an amalgam of parts of churches, it has legal power over itself. One would like to read or to hear from a Baptist scholar a statement, drawing on history and theology, on the nature and power of the Baptist Union similar to Dr. Horton's essay on councils in this little book. Incidentally, Dr. Horton informs us that before the Communion Service on the first day of meeting the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches in the U.S.A. rises and repeats the oldest of American covenants, that of Salem, 1629:—

"We covenant together with the Lord and one with an other; and doe bynd our selves in the presence of God, to walk together in all his waies, according as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his Blessed word of truth."

We cannot but wonder whether the adoption of a similar practice by the Baptist Union Assembly would not prove the means of grace which Dr. Horton claims it has been found by the General Council.

In this book, Dr. Horton has an essay, "The Unreasonableness of the Separation," which takes its title from William Bradshaw, a 17th century Congregationalist. The term "Separatist" is used not only as a general name for those Nonconformist

<sup>1</sup> Independent Press, 6s.

pioneers who first broke away from the Church of England, but in a narrower sense, to describe those who refused to recognise the Anglican Church as a church at all. Dr. Horton claims that Congregationalism springs not from the Separatists, but from the "Non-Separatist Puritanism" which desired to reform the Church of England from within (he is not explicit as to how they came to be outside it), and he therefore virtually disowns Browne, Barrowe and Francis Johnson. In his attempt to demonstrate the inherent ecumenicity of Congregationalism, Dr. Horton almost falls over backward. He quotes with approval Hooker's phrase, "the loathsome title of Independency." In America, he says, "every church, even the Roman Catholic, is a 'gathered' one," while he commits himself to the extraordinary statement that "Congregationalism may even be called a form of Anglicanism." There are Congregationalists of our acquaintance—particularly in Wales, where they still go proudly by the name which Dr. Horton, following Hooker, finds so loathsome—whose comments upon some of these statements we should like to hear. "Separatism," says Dr. Horton, "swings into a fissiparous course which leads in the end to the atomising of the Church," while "the spiritual children of Separatism in the United States in the twentieth century are the perfectionist sects, Fundamentalist in theology, which proliferate in every part of the country." These two statements we find particularly interesting because Dr. Horton regards the Baptists—whose existence he almost ignores—as of the Separation. In America, Baptists certainly proliferate (it had never occurred to us before that any apology for this was called for), but are they all fissiparous, atomistic and theologically obscurantist? The presence of both American and British Baptists in the World Council of Churches Dr. Horton must surely find rather odd? As for Baptists in this country, we do not think they are less ecumenically minded than their Congregationalist brethren. Dr. Horton gives us a wealth of valuable quotations from early Congregationalist writers, particularly American. We venture to offer him one from an early Baptist, John Smyth:—

"All penitent and faithful Christians are brethren in the communion of the outward church, wheresoever they live, by what name soever they are known, which in truth and zeal, follow repentance and faith, though compassed with never so many ignorances and infirmities: and we salute them all with a holy kiss, being heartily grieved that we which follow after one faith, and one spirit, one Lord, and one God, one body and one baptism, should be rent into so many sects, and schisms: and that only for matters of less moment."

If Dr. Horton would glance at article XXXIX of the General Baptists' confession of 1678 he would discover that the fissiparous, atomistic Baptists vested greater power in councils than he does!

Although critical of some of its features we warmly commend this stimulating, meaty, and sometimes provocative, little book to the attention of all who are concerned with questions of congregational and denominational polity and the relationships between the various communions.

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The Society for Old Testament Study is an organisation in which Baptists have been prominent from its foundation in 1917. Sharing in the discussion which led to its formation were Dr. Theodore Robinson (its secretary until 1927), and Professor Witton Davies. Its present secretary is Professor Henton Davies, while Rev. A. J. D. Farrer and Rev. L. H. Brockington have both served in the treasurership, and the list of presidents includes the names of Dr. Theodore Robinson, the late Wheeler Robinson and Professor H. H. Rowley. With the aim of promoting the study of the Old Testament, seeking to include in its membership all who in recognised institutions are concerned with instruction in Old Testament studies, and others who are properly qualified to pursue such studies, the Society—which meets twice a year—has steadily grown in strength, influence and usefulness. It has many notable achievements to its credit, not the least of which is the annual publication of a book list; that for 1952 contains authoritative brief reviews of more than 200 books in many languages dealing with the Old Testament and related studies.<sup>2</sup> If imitation be a form of flattery its members will be gratified to learn of a similar society which, so we understand, is likely to be formed in the interests of historical theology. That this learned and valuable organisation will continue to flourish will be the sincere hope of many outside the ranks of its own members.

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The late Dr. Percy Evans left a considerable collection of notes and papers on Baptism, mostly unordered, reflecting the research of a lifetime. He had, however, made a beginning with the planning and writing of a book, and some chapters exist in rough draft. Dr. Hugh Martin, who is the custodian of these papers, has edited and abbreviated one of these drafts and we are glad to include it in this issue. Dr. Martin hopes to make other sections of the late Principal's work available in later issues of this journal. They should prove most useful in preparing that serious and scholarly book on the subject which we hope will, one day soon, be written by a Baptist theologian.

<sup>2</sup> A *Short History* of the Society (price 1s.) has been written by Prof. Henton Davies. Copies of this, of the current book list (*5s.*) and particulars of membership may be obtained on application to him at Melrose, Church Street, Houghton-le-Spring, Co. Durham.