

The Mayflower Sails to Herrnhut

The Relevance of Schleiermacher's Ecclesiology to Congregational Polity

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I. Prolegomena

At the outset, let it be recognized that Puritanism or Congregationalism in their nascent forms have not been defined by a theological system. As the Moderator of the National Council of Congregational Churches, Dr. Alonzo H. Quint, put it:

Congregationalism is almost ashamed to be distinctive, and gladly it would be merged in the undivided Church, if it found the undivided catholic Church in which to lose its name.¹

Implicitly and explicitly, the early Puritans and Separatists were Calvinist in theology, but their doctrinal statements were concerned with polity and church organization, not theology. They were glad to merge with the prevailing catholicity of Protestant thought in their cultural experience. Ontological statements regarding the mechanism of salvation or divine presence in the sacraments are all implicit in their assertions concerning the means by which church members are elected, the qualification of church members to participate in the sacraments, or the means of celebrating the sacraments. Rather than working out an ecclesiology from the implications of an underlying systematic theology, Congregational polity and practice was prooftexted in the marginal notes to synodic statements like the Cambridge Platform of 1648. Eisegetically rather than exegetically, a theological system was established that simultaneously met their need for doctrinal purity and their desire for freedom of thought within that doctrine. Clearly, then, freedom of thought and action was primarily concerned with the question of

outside government of local parishes (i.e., by episcopal diocese) rather than the theological autonomy of the human individual. As the Puritans-Congregationalists became established in the New World, their doctrine became progressively more rigid.

Doctrinal rigidity produced discontent among those who did not meet the measure of the establishment, in New England no less than in Oxford or Scrooby Manor. Desire of people to belong to a freely covenanting congregation whose membership requirements few in conscience could meet resulted in crises of conscience for no few New England settlers. Their dissatisfaction with a church that would rule their spiritual and temporal lives without affording them a spiritual haven led to what became known as declension, or a decline in spiritual commitment among churchgoers. Reactions to the problem of declension were various; among them were the Half-way Covenant, whereby children could be baptized whether or not their parents met the congregations' strict membership requirements, and revival movements such as the two so-called Great Awakenings, with attendant establishment disapproval of revivalism.

A break with the Calvinist rigidity of the New England theological outlook came about in the form of a radical change in doctrinal stance. Not surprisingly, the orthodox, doctrinaire membership of the churches had become greatly outnumbered by the "parish," or those who participated in the church without being

allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper or vote in church business. This changed when the courts decided that the majority should rule, and orthodox Congregationalists found their congregations, their churches, buildings, and real estate taken over by decidedly non-Calvinist, non-orthodox, and in fact quite Arian parishioners and ministers. These Unitarians, who kept the Congregational polity of the Puritans, threw out almost all of their theology and departed from the fellowship of Congregational Christian churches in 1825. The liberalizing trend of the Nineteenth Century, of which this is merely a salient example, had led to new formulations of ontological statements about the nature of the Godhead, of grace and its mediation, and of the composition of the church. Post-Kantian philosophy recognized (or at least began to) the inability of reason alone to discover ontological truths; liberal theology abandoned unaugmented reason in favor of a theology of experience. Less rigid than Reform thought, less radical than Unitarianism, this liberalizing theology was gradually adopted as a mediating option palatable to a greater number of congregants.

With independent local polity established as an unchangeable characteristic of Congregationalism, systematic theology became a changing factor in the life of the various congregations. This led to the modern situation of theological diversity, local churches adopting but not insisting on doctrinal or credal statements.

II. Liberal Theology and the Lack of a Systematic Congregational Ecclesiology

Thus, even as early Puritan theology (Calvinism adapted to Congregational polity) gave way to radical doctrinal changes, Congregational polity was retained even when theology was not. This in turn led to Congregational tolerance of a wide theological perspective as secondary to political freedom. As a result, theology is the outcome of and not the basis for church government. Ecclesiology, not doctrine of God or revelation, is the basis of what passes for a Congregational systematic theology.

The benchmark of Congregational transition to theological tolerance is the work of Horace Bushnell. Although his theological system was highly developed, it significantly lacks a formal ecclesiology. Whether he deliberately neglected or merely assumed church composition and government, Bushnell substituted the concept of Christian nurture for a theory of the church. The divine government was, to Bushnell, implicit; Christian nurture was the church. My purpose is not to explore or to analyze the theology of Bushnell; rather, he is of interest because, as mentioned, his system marks the turning point of mainstream Congregational thought from Calvinism to liberalism, and because he is somewhat of a spokesman for and exemplar of experiential theology both for Congregationalism and for North America.

Despite his influence and the regard in which he is even today held, however, Bushnell failed to provide a systematic theological basis for Congregational polity. His Christian nurture took the place of ecclesiology and instead of a basis in the divine government of the world for church formation, government, and membership, he left a basis of Christian experience for children in a church whose nature was assumed and not defined.

Bushnell wrote his Nature and the Supernatural at a time when the intelligentsia in America were turning away from Christianity.² He was influenced in his writing by his contact with the Moravian brethren and their example of personal piety in the faith community.³ He based his doctrine of revelation in a theory of media, all knowledge of God being mediated through various human agencies. The most efficacious of these media was language,⁴ and so Christian education became paramount to Bushnell as a converting ordinance. As we learn of God, he felt, we take up elements in our own consciousness and impute them to God.⁵ Through our emotional contact with God, then, the world is supernaturally governed, and because our knowledge of God constitutes contact with God, Christianity supersedes all philosophies.⁶

Two hundred years after the English beginnings of the Congregational Way, six years after the Unitarian departure, ten years before Bushnell wrote "God in Christ" (the treatise that put forth a distinctly docetic Christology and resulted in his heresy

trial?), a German theologian was formulating his own theology of experience. Like Bushnell, he formulated the basis of his systematic approach at a time when the intelligentsia were turning away from the church. Like Bushnell, he was influenced by contact with the Moravian brethren. Like Bushnell, he believed that knowledge of God is mediated through human experience and that the world is supernaturally governed through our awareness of God. Like Bushnell, he believed that what we ultimately know of God is rooted in our emotional experience. Unlike Bushnell, his Christology was not docetic-- in fact, it was somewhat too humanistic for the orthodox. And unlike Bushnell, his system included a highly developed ecclesiology, a fellowship-oriented doctrine of the church that denied the clergy both ultimate authority in administrative matters and infallibility in matters of faith.

Ernst Friedrich Schleiermacher, like his friends of the German intelligentsia and like the Congregationalists dissatisfied with the rigidity of the New England approach to theology, rejected traditional orthodoxy's approach to theological conclusions. Rather than basing his theory of revelation in ontological claims to God's nature and Scriptural authority, he began his system with apologetics in the fundamental observation that all peoples, all times and all places, have some concept of religion. This, he felt, was a discrete datum that ought to answer the scientific objection to religious belief as nonrational, and the scientific

explanation of religion in terms of its function in human society. Religion, to Schleiermacher, is an inherent God-consciousness, natural to humanity, and pan-cultural. It is a direct sensing of the divine, the infinite, the good.⁸ This foundation led him to a doctrine of God that consists of epistemological or emotional rather than ontological claims, a doctrine of salvation that is remarkably Calvinistic,⁹ and a Christology that does not seek to explain the mechanism of the Incarnation, but describes the union of God and Christ in terms of Christ's total awareness of God's presence and his own utter dependence on God.¹⁰ It is this last that most deeply affected Schleiermacher's ecclesiology, and which has the most profound implications for Congregational theology.

I have already mentioned how the Congregational departure from the Church of England was not over doctrine, but authority in the administration of the church. The Scrooby Manor congregation, reluctant to acknowledge the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury, retreated to a single Scriptural text (Matthew 18:20) to derive the precept that Christ's authority rests in the congregation and not in any hierarchy, clergy, or tradition. In this manner, they "carried the principles of the Reformation to their logical outcome."¹¹ The pietistic tendency and insistence on a personal relationship with God that became a part of American Congregationalism has affinity for both Schleiermacher's Moravian upbringing and his emotional basis for divine revela-

tion. Moreover, the ecclesiology developed by Schleiermacher as the logical outcome of his formulations of God-consciousness as the basis of religion have affinity for the Congregational insistence on the assembled congregation with Christ in its midst as the sole source of ecclesial authority. Let us explore that affinity by comparing key formulations concerning the origin and nature of the church in Schleiermacher's treatise On the Christian Faith with the seminal Congregational statements of faith contained in the Cambridge Platform of 1646, the Savoy Declaration of 1655 and the Result of 1679, (the outcome of a general reforming synod in 1679 and 1680).

III. The Origin of the Church

To Schleiermacher, the Church began its life on earth with the public appearance of Christ.¹² Prior to the Incarnation, humans experienced a collective need for redemption, but this led only to several fellowships of God-consciousness and not anything that could compare to the church as known now or in the New Testament. The church consists entirely of regenerate individuals beginning with those who saw, heard, and touched Jesus in the flesh and therefore experienced vicariously His perfect God-consciousness. It takes shape continually through the coming together of such individuals "to form a system of mutual interaction and cooperation."¹³ The fact that some individuals come into the church and others do not is explained by the basic and unavoid-

able inequality of humanity. Human inequality is the basis of the doctrine of election, whereby all "are in a common state of sinfulness" and "thus absolutely equal,"¹⁴ but owing to differences between them due to factors they cannot control (physical, social, cultural, economic, as well as the "partial success and partial failure of preaching"¹⁵), some are called into Christian fellowship and others are not. The divine government is evidenced in this preference of some to others.¹⁶ The early Puritans would have agreed, emphasizing in their own experience the primacy of the preached Word as a converting ordinance.¹⁷

Schleiermacher further explains the origin of the church not merely historically through the doctrine of election, but ontologically in the doctrine of communication of the Holy Spirit. The church consists of individuals called into co-operation and interaction, but for an individual so called, the basis of his or her continued co-operation and interaction is nothing less than the action of the Holy Spirit in their life and being. The Holy Spirit, *insofar as we are conscious of it*, is the common spirit of corporate life in Christ.¹⁸ Note that this is not an ontological claim about the nature of the Spirit, but an epistemological statement about our spiritual perception. Only in the fellowship of corporate life in Christ are we able to perceive or comprehend the presence and action of the Spirit.¹⁹ Hence the Holy Spirit is given to the church, and only to the church.

This formulation is incomplete for various reasons. The first is Schleiermacher's failure to adequately address the issue of continuity between Israel and the church as the people of God. Clearly, Schleiermacher thinks there is no continuity, if the church began with the public appearance of Christ. In fact, he takes special pains to deny the Reform doctrine of the church's existence in the Old Testament and its origin with the beginning of humanity.²⁰ This seems self-contradictory, as he says that "the church exists wherever there is faith," but he qualifies that statement by defining faith as "the complete appropriation of Christ" and adds that it is, "in addition, of an essentially fellowship-forming character."²¹ There are several things wrong with this. First, it denies instances of fellowship among the faithful in the Old Testament (Exodus 12:16, II Chronicles 30:23, Psalms 22:22, 42:4, 55:4). Second, it implies a distinction between Christ and God-- a division of labor, if you will, in the Trinity. Jesus does not appear explicitly in the Old Testament, but the Word of God is clearly active, as is the Spirit (Genesis 1:2-3, Exodus 31:3, II Kings 2:9, Isaiah 61:1). Third, he avoids New Testament texts that compare or identify the church with the nation of Israel (Matthew 21:43, Romans 9:6-11, 11:17-21, Galatians 6:16, Ephesians 3:6).

Further, Schleiermacher's insistence that the church cannot be older than Christ is inconsistent with his proposition that the

ontological nature of the church rests in the activity of the Holy Spirit. For purposes of illustrating this point, he has defined the Spirit in rather narrow terms and ignored the Old Testament instances of the Spirit's activity. While it may be true that the *mode* of activity of the Holy Spirit differs in Old Testament and Christian times, to deny the presence of the Spirit in the Old Testament is either to divide the Trinity or to imply that God was unitarian prior to A.D. One.

All of this notwithstanding, there is much in Schleiermacher's formulation that is of value to the Congregational Way. Schleiermacher's insistence on fellowship as a necessary part of faith and his idea of the public appearance of Jesus calling the church into being out of humanity's collective need for redemption echoes the Savoy Declaration:

In the execution of this Power wherewith he is so entrusted, The Lord Jesus calleth out of the World unto Communion with himself, those that are given unto him by his Father, that they may walk before him in all the ways of Obedience, which he prescribeth to them in his Word.²²

although the Declaration appears to be speaking more of the eternal nature of Christ's call. The concept of a collective need for redemption as the basis of ecclesial fellowship can be found in the Result of 1679, wherein societal evils are perceived as arising from the ongoing need for reformation within the church. Interestingly, the Result does not claim an origin of the church that predates Christ, but does draw explicit parallels between the nation of Israel and the church in referring to Asa,

Jehoiada, Hezekiah, and so on as "reformers."²³ It would seem, then, that while the early Congregationalists would not have agreed ontologically or historically with Schleiermacher's concept of the origin of the church, they would have agreed with his guiding principle that only in fellowship or community can both the need for redemption and the consciousness of Christ be felt.

IV. The Nature of the Church

Clearly, the church for Schleiermacher as well as for Congregational thought is grounded in community. Where Schleiermacher speaks of community in the life of the individual,²⁴ the Savoy Declaration states that "All Saints ... although they are not made one person with [Christ], have fellowship ... and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each others gifts and graces ..." ²⁵ This insistence on a union and communion in love presages Schleiermacher's idea of the church as a divinely effected union.²⁶ Schleiermacher further emphasizes the corporate life of the church as that which enables Christ's redemptive activity. Jesus' sinlessness is communicated through the fellowship of the church, and thus effects our redemption. For those that find this formulation hard to swallow, consider the statement of the Cambridge Platform that "By Saints, we understand such as have not only attained the knowledge of the Principles of Religion, and are free from gross and open scan-

dals, but also do together with the profession of their faith and repentance, walk in blameless obedience to the word, so that in charitable discretion they may be accounted Saints by calling... commonly by the holy ghost called Saints and faithfull brethren in Christ..."²⁷ In other words, the knowledge of the "principles of Religion" (what Schleiermacher would call God-consciousness) is not enough; sanctification requires a knowledge of Jesus Christ, communicated by the Holy Spirit, that is only available in the fellowship of a covenanting church. The Platform goes on to say that though some members may be inwardly unsound or hypocritical, to refuse fellowship to anyone who has been "offensive and scandalous" is itself blasphemous to the name of God, hardening the hearts of the wicked and helping them forward to damnation.²⁸ Schleiermacher, too, mitigates his position by saying that one may still be a Protestant Christian if only one agrees that *nothing apart from the influence of Christ is necessary for redemption*²⁹ (emphasis added). Thus Schleiermacher effectively trounces any possible construal of Pelagianism or Arminianism in his system. God-consciousness does not constitute or even lead to a proper relationship with God except as a direct result of the work of Christ and even then only in the Christian church through which Christ's perfection is communicated to the elect of humankind. The radical element of Schleiermacher is not his concept of grace but his assertion that it is transferred emotionally, rather than sacramentally or dogmatically. Nothing apart from the influence of Christ is necessary-- and no human

activity is sufficient. Nor is emotional awareness of Christ sufficient in itself.

Emotions notwithstanding, Schleiermacher also says that there can be no living fellowship in Christ without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. True to form, he limits the possibility of Spiritual indwelling to what takes place within the community of the church. The Cambridge Platform required a prospective member to recount his/her conversion experience, and essentially prove an indwelling of the Holy Spirit prior to being accepted as a Christian.³⁰ Rather than making the indwelling of the Spirit a precondition of fellowship, however, Schleiermacher considered fellowship to be evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit.³¹ No believer should have to claim or prove indwelling of the Spirit in order to claim fellowship. While sympathetic to modern Congregational principles, this last is the reverse of early Puritan practice and the specific requirements of the Cambridge Platform. In fact, this difference illustrates why a systematic approach to Congregational ecclesiology is needed. Had the nature of the church and its relationship to Christ been considered prior to the formulation of membership requirements, those requirements may not have been so stringent. Further, to remain faithful to the pivotal Congregational proof-text that where two or three are gathered in His name, Christ is among them, the early Congregationalists in honesty should have seen that by their lights an authentic conversion experience was not

possible outside of the gathered church community. It is possible that their concept of election precluded conversion in the missionary sense of the term. The elect were the elect and would find their way to the church. It was the duty of the members to guard against spurious claims to having received the Spirit of God. A spiritual indwelling having been established, however, the concept of an active fellowship was so important to the early Congregationalists that specific clauses were included in their statements of faith to provide for its enforcement.³²

The question of active or inactive fellowship leads to a discussion of the visible and invisible church. This is referred to by Schleiermacher as the inner and outer church, with the inner church consisting of the fellowship of the regenerate that is visible only to God.³³ This, he felt, derives from the necessity that the church coexist with the world.³⁴ If the church must interact with the unregenerate world, there will be portions of the visible (or outer) church that of necessity include those who have not truly "submit[ed] themselves to the Rule of Christ in the Censures for the Government of them," as the Savoy Declaration puts it. In fact, Schleiermacher's entire doctrine of election and the inner and outer church seems an elaboration of what the Declaration has to say:

The Catholique or Universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the Elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the Head thereof, and is the Spouse, the Body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all ... The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith

of the Gospel and obedience unto God by Christ according unto it ... are, and may be called the visible Catholique Church of Christ.³⁵

although the radical application of the church visible as the Declaration has it runs directly counter to Schleiermacher's assertion that the church cannot be older than Christ:

...Christ always hath had, and ever shall have a visible Kingdom in this world, to the end thereof, of such as believe in him, and make profession of his name."³⁶

This seems simultaneously to assert the existence of the church coterminous with the origin of humanity, and to deny the possibility of the church before the public appearance of Christ (since before the Incarnation, no one living would have been able to "make profession of his name" *per se*). It must be remembered at this point that the Savoy Declaration is not a theological system but a statement of faith and polity. It is perhaps more instructive to recall the elaborate application of Old Testament examples to problems of church reform that the Result of 1679 uses than it is to look for semantic inconsistencies in the Savoy Declaration. The early Congregationalists saw a continuity from Israel to the church that Schleiermacher did not. Schleiermacher, however, constructed his theology from what he understood of human emotion. In order to remain consistent to his own theorem of God-consciousness, he formulated his concept of the church on the God-consciousness the apostles derived from personal contact with Christ. It was their teaching and witness, then, that transmitted this God-consciousness forward through the ages. Richard Niebuhr has described this as a Christomorphic

rather than a Christocentric theology, shaped by but not built around Christ.³⁷ I would like to suggest that perhaps Schleiermacher was instead radically Christocentric, to the extent that he ignored or denied Biblical evidence of the relationship of the church to Israel and of the fellowship of the people of God throughout history. His formulation is also strongly reminiscent of the Cambridge Platform's assertion that "*Calling* unto office is either *Immediate*, by Christ himself: such was the call of the Apostles, and Prophets: this manner of calling ended with them, as hath been said: or *Mediate*, by the church."³⁸ Thus while his denial of a church-relationship with God for the people of the Old Testament is directly counter to the primordial concern of Congregationalism, his basis of religion in the pan-specific God-consciousness of humanity and his basis of the church in the Christ-centered sense of utter dependency on God is strongly sympathetic to it.

While the true body of regenerate believers is visible only to God, the professing faithful have always felt able to discern themselves in the midst of others. Schleiermacher asserts that one of the primary characteristics of the church is that it is perceptible to Christians.³⁹ One of the ways the church is identified is in its antithesis to the world,⁴⁰ although its relation to the world forces the church to undergo change.⁴¹ For this reason, the visible (or outer) church is fallible and error-prone, although the invisible (inner) church is infallible. Note

that Schleiermacher does not claim infallibility for any one elect or regenerate individual, but only for the invisible church. Schleiermacher does not even claim special authority for the ordained clergy, and in fact denies any claim of the clergy to the administration of the church.⁴² This is pure Congregationalism. To begin with, the Result of 1679 relates apostasy in the church to an "inordinate affection to the world," even as Schleiermacher would later note the fallibility of a world-related church. Further, the Savoy Declaration specifically denies a hierarchy within the church,⁴³ makes the local congregation the seat of ecclesial power,⁴⁴ and calls for an administration of the laity.⁴⁵ In fact, Schleiermacher's reservation of infallibility for the entire church invisible may be viewed as a radical application of the Congregational reservation of authority for the community that is gathered in Christ's name. For Schleiermacher, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is evidenced by the fellowship of faith generates the infallibility of the church. The Congregational formulation acknowledges the indwelling of the Spirit that calls individuals into fellowship, but insists that they be physically met in that Spirit so that Christ's promise of his own presence among them guarantees that the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts be acceptable in the sight of God.

When this happens, the church may be conformed to the image of Christ. For Schleiermacher, the church approaches the image of

Christ in its purity and integrity⁴⁶ as well as its unity.⁴⁷ The New England Congregationalists reversed the formulation and called the church to be the exemplar for the rest of humanity as a first step in its own regeneration.⁴⁸ This comparison points up what may be the major difference between the thought of primitive Congregationalism and that of Schleiermacher. In all things, Schleiermacher was guided by his notion that only through the emotions can humans perceive God, and therefore any statements we might make concerning God's truths are filtered through our own fallacy-prone perceptions. Thus the Biblical images of the church as body of Christ were, for Schleiermacher, images of an ideal state that can only be achieved eschatologically. If the mystical union of Christ and church are symbolized in human marriage, the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage are its highest perfections, not an ontological condition that humanity somehow has the power to defy through adultery or divorce.⁴⁹ The early Congregationalists, on the other hand, were guided by their radical understanding of human free will. We are all called into communion with Christ, but only if we heed that call and come into fellowship with others in Christ can we have hope of the kingdom of God. Thus the image of the church as the body of Christ was seen as a call for individuals to perpetually strive for perfection, not only to become worthy of the kingdom but to act as examples for other, as yet unregenerate, individuals to follow. The perfection of that which is ordained by God is ontological, but we may or may not live up to it. Thus marriage,

to the early Congregationalists, was a holy ideal that involved not marrying "with Infidels, Papists, or other Idolaters."⁵⁰

V. The Authority of the Church

Schleiermacher would have heartily endorsed the *nulla salus extra ecclesiam*, as he stated most vehemently that the church alone is the vehicle of salvation.⁵¹ Similarly, the Savoy Declaration⁵² provides for censure and excommunication as appropriate measures to take when a person fails to submit to the rule of Christ. Since the church is the vehicle for salvation, and the nature of the church is one of fellowship in the Spirit, to remove a person from the fellowship of the congregation is to deny them the hope of salvation. Both Schleiermacher's and Congregationalism's emphasis on fellowship as the mark of regenerative faith in effect denies the efficacy of sacraments except in the context of the gathered congregation. Where Schleiermacher makes the condition of efficacy the emotional status of the individual with regard to an awareness of utter dependency on God, however, the Congregational formulation traces the efficacy of the sacrament to the action of the Holy Spirit. Schleiermacher specifically states that baptism is only valid when accompanied by confirmation (which must take place before the assembled congregation) and that infant baptism is complete only when, as an adult, the individual makes a profession of faith. The Cambridge Platform allows infant baptism as the seal of God's covenant even though

not a sign of admission to full communion,⁵³ and also denies baptism as the means of admission to the church.⁵⁴ The Savoy Declaration⁵⁵ states that "the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost to such ... as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of Gods own Will in his appointed time." It would seem here that Schleiermacher is in fact more Congregational than the Congregationalists. In addition, the concept of the sacraments being effected by the Holy Spirit alone seems to run counter to the notion of fellowship as a requisite of the church of Christ. However, while the Declaration does say that baptism is not "tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered," it also states that to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a context other than the gathered congregation is "contrary to the nature of this Sacrament."⁵⁶ Although in Congregational thought the activity of the Spirit is not dependent on the gathered congregation, it is only in that context of fellowship (i.e., in the presence of Christ) that the work of the Spirit can be discerned. The Cambridge Platform states that it is the covenant between church members that is both the sign and the means of church fellowship. Without the covenant, it is impossible to gather in Christ's name and no sacrament will be efficacious.⁵⁷ This is again congruent with Schleiermacher's concept of the Holy Spirit as the commonality of fellowship in Christ.

So the authority of the church, as well as its origin and nature, is linked to the fellowship of those within. For Schleiermacher, the process of divine election calls some individuals of that fellowship to the ministry of the word, from which derives sacramental but not necessarily administrative authority.⁵⁸ For the Congregationalist, authority to call, elect or approve those who will be ministers, preachers, or administrators rests in the local congregation. For Schleiermacher, authority is correlative with spiritual gifts and discernible in the context of Christian fellowship. For the Congregationalist, authority rests in the local fellowship with Christ in their midst, and does not extend outward beyond the local fellowship. I suggest that this is a distinction without a difference.

VI. Conclusion

The nature of authority is such that to have practical existence, it must be acknowledged. Even when physical violence is used to enforce the decisions of those who claim authority, rebels are able to deny their claim. In fact, the existence of such a thing as rebellion is epistemological proof that authority is void unless acknowledged. The entire doctrine of the Fall of humanity centers on the acknowledgement or denial of God's authority. If the church bears the authority of salvation, then, it must be acknowledged in order to save. Similarly, the origin and nature of the church is such that it can only be discerned from within.

The "cultured despisers" of Schleiermacher's time denied the authority not only of the church, but of all religion to be of value to humankind. His response was to work out a theology that looked not outward or upward for sources of authority, but inward for the source of human God-consciousness, which is none other than the living God. Two hundred years before, the Scrooby Congregationalists denied the authority of any but the church as *they understood it* to make decisions or demands where matters of faith were concerned. They ceased to look outward or upward for the source of that authority, but chose instead to look inward to the gathered local fellowship of faith. While theological outlooks have evolved and changed, that inward glance of faith has remained the mark of Congregationalism.

The question for modern Congregationalists is this: if Christ our God is truly in our midst as we assemble in worship or administrative groups, by what means are we able to perceive the divine presence? I would suggest that Schleiermacher's theology of emotion as God-consciousness is a model of faith from which can be derived the Congregational understanding of the relationship of God to the church. I would further suggest that Schleiermacher's doctrine of fellowship as the only setting in which the work of the Spirit can be discerned is a valid theological argument for Congregational polity. Lastly, I would suggest that despite the areas of disagreement noted above (especially in the area of the church's origin), further study of Schleiermacher and

his conclusions will bear fruit in the formulation of a theological basis for Congregational statements of doctrine and polity.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Atkins, Gaius Glenn and Fredrick Fagley, **The History of American Congregationalism** (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1942) p. 348
2. William A. Johnson, **Nature and the Supernatural in the Theology of Horace Bushnell** (Lund: CWK Gleerup 1963), p. 101
3. *Ibid.*, p. 115
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 147-150
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 99
7. John Wright Buckham, **Progressive Religious Thought in America** (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), p. 12.
8. Ernst Friedrich Schleiermacher, **On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers**, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp. 25-118.
9. cf. Schleiermacher, **Servant of the Word (Selected Sermons)**, trans. Dawn DeVries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 65 ff.
10. Schleiermacher, **On Religion**, pp. 26-118.
11. Williston Walker, **Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism** (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1960), p. 3.
12. Schleiermacher, **The Christian Faith**, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Harper and Row, New York 1963), p. 526.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 532.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 534.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 536-559.
17. Meyers, Dr. Robin R. **The View from the Pulpit: Puritan vs. Modern** (Oak Creek, Wisconsin: N.A.C.C.C., 1981) pp. 2-6
18. Schleiermacher, **The Christian Faith**, pp. 560 ff.

19. *Ibid.*, cf. p. 569, proposition 123: "The Holy Spirit is the union of the divine Essence with human nature in the form of the common Spirit animating the life in common of believers." (emphasis added)
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 692-695.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 694.
22. Savoy Declaration, Institution II, p.55, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 403.
23. The Result of 1679, sec. VIII, pp. 13-14, in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 435-436.
24. Schleiermacher, *Ibid.*, p. 525.
25. Savoy Declaration, Confession of Faith chap. XXVII, sec. I-II, pp. 45-46, in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 396-397.
26. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, vol. II p. 358.
27. The Cambridge Platform, III:2:1, in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 205-206
28. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 361
30. Cambridge Platform, Chapter XII inclusive, in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 221-224
31. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, pp. 574-576.
32. Savoy Declaration, Institutions XX. - XXX, pp. 62-63, in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 406-408.
33. Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, vol. II. p. 525.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 677 ff.
35. Savoy Declaration, Confession, Chapter XXVI sec. I-III, p. 44; in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 395-396.
36. *Ibid.*
37. B. A. Garrish, A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 53.
38. Cambridge Platform VIII:2, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 214

39. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, vol. II pp. 586 ff.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 527.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 676 ff.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 667.
43. Savoy Declaration, Institutions XXVI-XXVII, p. 63, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 407.
44. *Ibid.*, Institutions V-VI, p. 56, in Walker, *op. cit.* pp. 403-404.
45. *Ibid.*, Institutions VII, XV, XVI, pp. 57-63, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 405.
46. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* vol. II pp. 578 ff.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 683 ff.
48. Result of 1679, Question II Answers I-IV, pp. 9-10, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 433.
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51. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, vol. II p. 527.
52. Savoy Declaration, Institutions XIX-XXI, pp. 60-61, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 406.
53. Cambridge Platform XII:7, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 224
54. *Ibid.*, Chap. IV:5:4, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 209
55. Savoy Declaration, Confession, chap. XXIX sec. VI, p. 48, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 398.
56. *Ibid.*, chap. XXX sec. IV, p. 49, in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 399
57. Cambridge Platform IV:4 in Walker, *op. cit.* p. 208
58. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, vol II p. 536-560, 611-619.

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