

Congregationalism – Heritage & Future

Class #4 – History of Puritan Congregationalism & Presbyterianism

The Challenge

- 1) How did some of the early, though not the earliest, Congregationalists reject independency?
- 2) If (some) Congregationalists do not believe in independency then how are they different from Presbyterians?

Simple Definitions

Anglicans	Protestants who want a state church governed by the king, with very traditional/catholic views of worship.
Puritans	Protestants who want a state church but more purified in its worship.
Separatists	Protestants who reject a state church and want a completely purified church. Also called Separatists, Independents, Non-conformists or Pilgrims .
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Congregationalist	Belief in a democratic form of local government. Does NOT exclude elders, regional organizations or even a state church (not all Congregationalists were “independents”).
Presbyterian	Belief in the church governed by regional elders.

Recap of English History (remember the English Reformation was from the top down)

1527-47	Henry VIII starts the English Reformation along conservative Anglican lines.
1547-53	Edward VI moves the Reformation in a more Reformed/Puritan way.
1553-58	“Bloody” Mary I violently tries to return England to Roman Catholicism.
1558-1649	Elizabeth I returns England to a conservative Protestant (Anglican) church. James I & Charles I increasingly make the church more catholic.
1649-59	The <i>Puritan Commonwealth</i> – The Puritans take over
1660-85	Charles II & James II return England to a conservative Anglicanism with increasing catholic focus.
1689-	William III , and onward, makes England in a moderate Anglican church with religious toleration.

Geographic Chronology of Congregationalism

Geneva	Presbyterianism first created in John Calvin's Geneva.
Scotland	Presbyterianism becomes the religion of Scotland, thanks to John Knox.
England	Congregationalism is created in England and briefly tries Presbyterianism during the Commonwealth.
America	Separatist Congregationalists (i.e. Pilgrims), Puritan Congregationalists and Presbyterians migrate to the American colonies.

Timeline of English Congregationalism & Presbyterianism

Geneva

- 1527 Martin Bucer goes to Strasbourg and begins the Reformation in the city.
He believes the early church was presbyterian in polity (government).
His theology would influence John Calvin.
- 1538 Calvin moves to Strasbourg
- 1541 John Calvin is welcome back to Geneva to continue reforming the city.
- 1536-60 Various editions of John Calvin's "*Institutes of the Christian Religion*" published.
- 1539-62 Various editions of the "*Genevan Psalter*" published.
- 1557/60 Geneva Bible published.
- 1559 Geneva Academy, first Protestant University, established.
Geneva implementation the first modern form of presbyterian polity.
- 1555 The Scottish Reformer, John Knox, pastors and English congregation in Geneva.

Scotland

- 1559 Knox returns to Scotland and preaches against idolatry.
This leads to rebellion.
- 1560 A Reformation (Scottish) Parliament adopts the Reformed "Scots Confession".
- 1560 First Book of Discipline for church order created by the Church Scotland.
John Knox was part of group that created it.
It created a presbyterian system of government based on the Geneva model.
- 1578 Second Book of Discipline for church order created by the Church Scotland.
It is much more presbyterian in focus: It puts church authority fully in the hands of elected church leaders in elders, presbyteries, synods and the general assembly.
- c.1590 Scotland is organized into about 50 presbyteries, 12 synods, with the apex being the general assembly. Local churches (called "kirks") are governed by "sessions" made of up clergy and elected local elders from the "lairds" (landowners).
- 1707 The Acts of Union created the Kingdom of Great Britain, and the Presbyterian Church as the state church of Scotland, which exists to this day.

England

- 1563-69 Vestiarian Controversy – English clergy of the "Puritan" faction call for a more purified church:
Elimination of cleric vestments, kneeling during communion, emergency baptism, organs, and to reduce the number of saints days.
The movement fails but their numbers grow, while others begin to ponder if separatism is the only hope for the Church of England.

- 1581 Robert Browne tries to set up the first separatist congregational church in Norwich, England. He is arrested, released and moves to Middleburg in the Netherlands and organizes a congregational church. (The early Congregationalists were first called “Brownists.”)
- 1582 Browne publishes two books on polity:
“A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Anie”
 Argues a local church can effect reforms without the approval of the magistrate.
“A Booke which sheweth the life and manners of all True Christians”
 Argues for congregational independency.
- 1583 Two men are hanged in Bury St. Edmunds (England) for giving out Browne's books.
- c.1605 A congregational church was organized in Scrooby (England).
- 1608 The Scrooby Congregation migrates to Leiden (Holland) to worship in freedom, believing reforming the Church of England is impossible.
- 1640-60 The Long Parliament, made up of increasing Puritans and Separatists, governs England and increasingly challenges the power of the king.
- 1642-51 English Civil war between a puritan parliament and a crypto-catholic king.
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- 1643-53 The **Westminster Assembly of Divines** is ordered by Parliament to reform the Church of England.
 Several Scots Presbyterians and English Congregationalists attend.
 This will be the foundation for Presbyterians and Puritan (or traditional/high) Congregationalists (who will reject “Brownism”).
- 1644 The Assembly publishes several noted works . . .
- The *“Directory for Public Worship”* (1644) to replace the Anglican *“Book of Common Prayer”*
 - *“The Form of Presbyterial Church Government”* (1645)
 - *“Westminster Confession of Faith”* (1646)
 - *“Westminster Shorter & Larger Catechisms”* (1646-47)
- 1644 Five dissenting brethren publish the *“An Apologeticall Narration”*, calling for Congregationalism, or at least tolerance for it. Much debate ensues.
 This is Puritan Congregationalism that expects there should be some checks on local congregational churches.
 (Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burroughs, and William Bridge – True fathers of Congregationalism?)
- 1646? John Owen preaches *“Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government”* leaning towards Congregationalism and away from Presbyterianism.
- 1649 The Puritan Parliament executes King Charles I for treason, and begins the Puritan Commonwealth of England.
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- 1649-59 The (Puritan) Commonwealth governs England

- 1658 "Savoy Declaration of Faith" is created in London, a Congregational version of the "Westminster Confession".
- 1660 A more conservative Parliament (after the death of Cromwell) invites the Anglican Charles II to be king of England.
- 1689 The Glorious Revolution, the crypto-catholic James II is deposed in-favor of the Protestant (moderate Anglican) William III.
- 1689 The Act of Toleration is passed, granting toleration to Nonconformist Protestants.
- 1689 "Second London Baptist Confession", a Baptist version of the "Westminster Confession".

America

- 1620 William Bradford leads a group from the Scrooby Congregationalists in Leiden to the New World aboard the Mayflower and founds the Plymouth Colony.
- 1620-40 Increase Puritan migration to Massachusetts.
- 1626 Salem founded by Puritan settlers.
- 1636 Harvard University founded by Congregationalists
- 1648 "Cambridge Platform" in Massachusetts, defines Congregational polity.
 - It is of the Puritan (or "high/traditional) form of Congregationalism from the Westminster Tradition.
 - It requires local churches to be accountable to Synods.
- 1680 The "Savoy Declaration" adopted as the Congregationalist confessional statement in Massachusetts
- c.1700 Connecticut religious are distressed by the colony wide decline in piety and church discipline.
- 1701 Yale University founded by Congregationalists out of concern Harvard is too liberal.
- 1708 "Saybrook Platform", as commissioned by the Colonial Legislature, passes as a new constitution for the Congregational (state) Church in Connecticut.
 - To stem the liberal decline in Connecticut to return the Westminster Tradition.
 - It tries to bring moderation between Congregationalists and Presbyterians.
 - It rejects extreme local congregationalism and calls for a mild form of Presbyterianism.
 - The Congregational Church would be led by local ministerial associations and consociations made of up ministers and lay leaders.
 - A colony-wide General Assembly had final authority.
 - Ministers called by local church churches had to be examined by the ministerial association and would oversee the behavior of ministers.
 - Consociations could impose discipline on errant churches and handle disputes within, or between, churches.
- 1708 The "Savoy Declaration" is adopted as the Congregationalist confessional statement for Connecticut.