Puritan movements toward centralization in church government 1630-1730: Tensions and contentions between Presbyterians and Congregationalists

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PURITAN MOVEMENTS TOWARD CENTRALIZATION IN CHURCH GOVERNMENT, 1630-1730: TENSIONS AND CONTENTIONS BETWEEN PRESBYTERIANS AND CONGREGATIONALISTS

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PREFACE

The decade between 1630 and 1640 witnessed the exodus of thousands of Puritans out of England and "into a vast and Howling wilderness"--New England. It was the desire to preserve Christ's Church free of corruptions that gave impetus to this human wave known as the Great Migration. These Puritans believed that the time was imminent for the coming of the kingdom, when Christ would return to earth and establish the true church. It was in preparation for His coming that these colonists urgently began to build churches according to that polity which they believed Christ had prescribed in the Gospels.

1The expression "Howling wilderness" is a much used phrase in the Puritan literature of the seventeenth century. The phrase as quoted here was used by the English Puritan John Owen in his work entitled Of Communion with God (1657). As quoted in Geoffrey F. Nuttal, Visible Saints: The Congregational Way, 1640-1660 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 68. (Hereafter cited as Nuttal, Visible Saints.)

The Puritans of the Great Migration, however, did not journey to the New World fully provided with an elaborate blueprint of church polity. What they did bring with them were certain fundamental notions about the form of worship they believed God wished them to erect in the wilderness. The details of this polity were worked out as necessity arose to satisfy their religious needs. By 1648 the particulars of their ecclesiastical organization, which they called Congregational, had been completed and were given written expression in the Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline.

The essence of Congregationalism was the autonomous congregation of saints. God, the New England Puritans believed, had placed all church power in the individual congregation, making it a self-governing unit. A congregation owed allegiance to no higher ecclesiastical jurisdiction except that which resided within itself. There was no need for a hierarchy of bishops as in the Episcopalian system or a hierarchy of ministerial assemblies as in the Presbyterian system.

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3 See Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1933) for the story of non-separating Congregationalism.


5 Since reference will be made hereafter to certain features of Congregational and Presbyterian polity, a brief look at their salient features may be useful at the outset of this study, although succeeding chapters will more
Each congregation of saints managed its own affairs, recognizing Christ as its only Head. Representatives of the various congregations could meet in an occasional synod to discuss matters of common concern. Such an assembly could not impose its decisions upon the individual churches by way of a superior jurisdiction as its determinations were meant only as counsel and advice and therefore did not carry the weight of case law. Accordingly, if a particular congregation were to err in a matter of practice or doctrine, no group of churches or higher assembly could censure, control, or direct that church, but could only hope that the errant church would willingly accept its counsel. At best, the individual congregation only had a moral obligation to accept the synod's decision.

thoroughly define the two polities. Congregationalism comprises the following: 1) church membership limited to the regenerate or spiritually pure who voluntarily gather into a church community; 2) a form of internal church government which gives the lay members control of the keys; and 3) emphasis on the integrity and independence of the local congregation with a concomitant distrust of any church organization higher than the individual congregation which might dictate to it in any way other than an advisory capacity. Presbyterian polity differs in the following way: 1) church membership is comprehensive or national; 2) the power of the keys is given to the ministers of each congregation; and 3) though the integrity of the local congregation is respected, it is circumscribed by the belief that the individual churches should be amenable to the dictates of higher church assemblies. On this particular point, however, it is necessary to distinguish between English Presbyterianism, which believed that the local churches only had a moral obligation to abide by the decisions of higher church assemblies, and Scottish Presbyterianism, which gave such assemblies a compulsory jurisdiction.

Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, pp. 57-58.
English critics of New England's Congregationalism were soon asserting that the Congregational dedication to the autonomy of the particular congregation would only lead to anarchy. They could not see any possible way of concord among churches where there was no central organ of control which could dictate to the individual congregations. What was to prevent a particular Congregational church from defining truth, be it a matter of doctrine or practice, to mean something quite different from its neighboring congregations? Such a church could persist in that "truth" by hiding behind the recognized principle of Congregational independence. How, indeed, asserted the critics, could the age-old belief in uniformity be maintained? And there was no doubt concerning the Congregationalists' belief in the principle of uniformity. After all, they reminded their critics, a proper reading of the Epistles would prove that the Congregational polity, and only the Congregational, was prescribed by Christ and followed by the Apostles. No other way would be tolerated in New England.

Belief, then, in uniformity of doctrine and practice was just as central to Congregational theory as was their cherished belief in the autonomy of the individual congregation. What the enemies of the Congregational way perceived as an inlet

7For English criticism of New England church polity see Henry Martyn Dexter, Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in Its Literature (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880), p. 422ff. (Hereafter cited as Dexter, Congregationalism as Seen in Its Literature.)
for anarchy was actually a conflict between two of the basic principles of Congregational ecclesiastical polity--i.e., Congregational independence versus uniformity. In their efforts to define the true Church of Christ, the Congregationalists had created a polarized religious ideology. According to the Congregationalists, however, there was, at least in theory, no opposition between these two principles. After all, they were all saints, and as such believed that a proper reading and study of the Scriptures would lead them all to the same conclusion. They believed that a saint who erred could be persuaded by his fellow saints to see his error and reform his beliefs, unlike the unregenerate person who might remain obdurate even in face of the clearest exposition of the truth.

The critics of the New England Way did not share the Congregationalists' confidence in the ability to keep independent congregations all pointing in the same direction. They doubted the feasibility of reconciling the principle of uniformity with the principle of Congregational independence. Indeed, the Congregationalists had created, in their efforts to build a church according to apostolic prescription, an apparent conflict in values. In their insistence on the independence of the individual congregation the New England Puritans bid deference to the concept of freedom or liberty. In their insistence on the necessity of uniformity and their encouragement of some form of consociation or inter-church organization, they also bid deference to the concept of order.
The problem for the New England Puritans was to find and maintain the proper balance between these two values. But in order to fully understand the dimensions of the liberty versus order problem, it is first essential to understand the ecclesiology that supported the institutional framework.

The cornerstone of the New England churches was the idea of the covenant. The New Englanders' concept of covenant or federal theology had been developed by the English Puritans William Ames, William Perkins, and John Preston.\(^8\) The word "covenant" was used by these divines to indicate a contract or mutual agreement, much like the commercial contract of their day, binding both parties to mutual obligations. According to covenant theology, God had first made a covenant or contract with Adam, the terms of which required Adam to obey the moral law in return for eternal life. This covenant was called the covenant or works because it specified good deeds and obedience. Adam broke this covenant, however, and thus incurred damnation. God, seeing that fallen man could not fulfill the duties required in the covenant or works, condescended to bargain with man as an equal and entered a second covenant with Abraham. Since fallen man cannot obey the moral law, God does not require good deeds in this new covenant, but faith in Christ, who would take upon Himself

\(^8\) For a thorough definition of covenantal or federal theology see Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953) and Errand into the Wilderness (New York: Harper & Row, 1956). (Hereafter cited as Miller, New England Mind; Miller, Errand.)
the suffering man had merited for the sins he had committed. Thus freed from his sins, man needed only faith in Christ and he would stand worthy of God's saving grace. This, then, was the covenant of grace. The voluntary and contractual element of this covenant was stressed and helped to some extent in relieving the strict determinism of Calvinism.

In offering this second covenant of forgiveness, God did not eliminate the covenant of works. God's stipulation in the covenant of grace was that if man will believe, he will receive sufficient grace to fulfill the moral law. The covenant of grace superceded the covenant of works, nevertheless, the believer felt bound to follow the moral law for the glory of God. Good works could not be discarded for although they did not merit our salvation in any part, they were a sign of sanctification; he who failed to perform good works declared that he had not received God's saving grace.

The Congregational church was also founded upon another covenant, the church covenant, which constituted an externalization of the covenant of grace. The saints (as those were called who could give some evidence that they were under the covenant of grace) felt obligated to

formally agree to carry out in ecclesiastical life the obligations to which they stand individually bound by their covenant with God. The duties and requirements are those determined in the covenant of grace. The church compact is the agreement of the people in a body to constitute an institution which will
facilitate the achievement of these ends.9

The creation of a church by way of voluntary covenant among the saints and together with God was necessary, furthermore, because it supplied the apparatus or means by which grace could be dispensed.10 William Perkins admonished all men to join a church as there was no salvation outside the Church militant.11

Perkins defined the church as "a peculiar company of men predestined to life everlasting, and made one in Christ."12 The church stands directly under Christ's authority and no other. Perkins states that "Christ needes no vicar or deputy; for he is all-sufficient in himself and alwais present in the Church. . . ."13 Thus we can see how the idea of a voluntary covenant sworn among the saints and with Christ, their only Head, contributed to the idea of the autonomous congregation.

Voluntarism was a central characteristic of the Congregational church. Compulsion could not be used in the formation of these bodies since the church consisted of men of faith, and faith could not be coerced.14 This aversion to compulsion

9Miller, Errand, p. 91.
10Ibid..
12Ibid., p. 110.
13Ibid., p. 112.
14Ibid., p. 114. The English Congregationalist William Bartlet expressed the Puritan's aversion to compulsion in
can be seen in the Congregational belief that the decisions rendered by synods could not be coerced upon the individual churches.

Once gathered, Christ's authority over the church was to be implemented by ministers. It was acknowledged that since all members were saints, there might be some men in every congregation with talents nearly equal to those of the minister. It was emphasized, however, that these men were not "transmitters of the Word." The Puritans believed that there were certain prerequisites for the ministry. The ministers had to show some sign that they were specially called by God to the ministry. They had to have the necessary education and, of course, the approval of the congregation. Ministers were looked upon as "Ambassadours... sent from the high God," and one Puritan divine described them as "Christ's mouth." "Christ is either received or rejected in his Ministers."  


The value of the ministerial function was constantly emphasized. The church, however, as a self-created entity, "preceded the ministry by right and time." The members of the congregation elected the minister and ordained him. A minister lost his status as one of Christ's ambassadors when he ceased to have a congregation. The minister did not enjoy an independent status apart from the congregation. His position was contractual, as he depended for his authority on the congregation that elected him. Henry Jacob, an early Congregational minister, asserted that a minister's authority consisted of "nothing more, then what the Congregation doth commit unto them, and which they may . . . again take away from them." 

The right of the members of the congregation to choose in matters of church government naturally introduced an egalitarian element into the church order. Robert Browne, who has been called the father of Congregationalism, was clear that church government was a monarchy of Christ over each congregation. However, he opened the door for democracy (although probably not intentionally) when he expressed his view that every member of a congregation "is made a Kinge, a Priest, and a Prophet under Christ." This close and immediate relationship between


19Ibid.

20Dexter, Congregationalism as Seen in Its Literature, p. 172.
Christ and the church member, along with Browne's belief that matters of rule should be determined by the entire body of the church, relegated the offices of pastor, teacher, and lay elders to no more than teaching and guiding.

Such democratic conclusions were not popular in an age that feared the excesses of individualism and democracy. Critics of Brownism, as this form of Congregationalism came to be called, questioned how any semblance of uniformity could be maintained. They realized that if the whole brotherhood were to rule, such rule might be irresponsible, popular frenzies might break out, divergences and schisms might appear. One critic expressed this view well, "so many Church-members so many Bishops . . . how can any now deny this to be Anarchie and confusion?" William Haller has pointed out that this stress on individualism and democracy contributed to the proliferation of sects. He asserted that whenever two leaders of equal charisma arose in a congregation, there eventually would be a "clash of opinion and then a split, some of the brothers adhering to one leader and the rest to the other." Indeed, Brownism was considered so insidious that the majority

21 Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 172.


of Congregationalists attempted to control its democratic tendencies by upholding the authority of the minister and lay elders.

The egalitarianism of Congregationalism, however, was merely an obvious result of the freedom that began with the saints. It was an expression of the same freedom by which the saints withdrew themselves from the corruptions of the world into voluntary, covenanted congregations. It was the freedom they enjoyed in having the power of the keys and the power to elect their own minister. It was the same freedom which expressed itself in lay prophecy, voluntary maintenance for the clergy, and the independence of each Congregational church. The problem of controlling the egalitarian impulse was actually one of finding the right balance between freedom and order within the congregation: between the power of the members and the authority of the minister. Hence, the classic problem of liberty versus order existed within each congregation just as it existed between the several churches in the form of Congregational autonomy versus uniformity. The New England churches would be faced throughout the seventeenth century with the dilemma of reconciling liberty and order.

This paper is about the way in which the churches of New England responded to the liberty versus order dilemma. It is concerned with the dimensions of this dilemma in rela-
tions to church government. As such, one dimension involves the internal power structure of the congregation. Where does the balance of power lie? Does it rest with the brethren, thus showing deference to the principle of liberty? Or does it reside in the authority of the minister, out of deference to the principle of order? The main task of this paper, however, concerns itself with that aspect of the liberty versus order problem which involves the principle of Congregational independence and the need for some sort of consociation or extracongregational activity between the churches to insure uniformity. This paper is primarily concerned, then, with the formation and development of these intercongregational instruments of control and the assessment of their institutional strengths and weaknesses measured in terms of their ability to find and maintain a proper balance between liberty and order in the New England church way.
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CHAPTER I

NEW ENGLAND'S CONGREGATIONAL ORIGINS

In order to fully appreciate the origins of New England's ecclesiastical organization it is necessary to determine its English lineage. This pedigree is found in the English non-conformist movement which began when Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558. With her accession the Protestant divines who had fled the country during Queen Mary's reign began their return to England. The history of English nonconformity between the years of Elizabeth's accession and 1640 can be viewed largely as an attempt to change the religious settlement of 1559.¹ The Protestant divines who had fled to the Continent during Mary's reign to escape Catholic persecution had grown very sympathetic to the reformed church polity of John Calvin's Geneva. When they returned to England at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, they formed a coterie of preachers whose fervor for further reform earned for themselves the epithet "puritans." These early English nonconformists were not concerned with reforms in church government. They were content

with merely demanding the abolition of certain vestments and ceremonies which they felt were offensive to a truly reformed church.  

Eventually, however, a number of Puritans began to emerge from among the Elizabethan nonconformists who did champion ecclesiastical reform. These divines' ambitions for reform were motivated out of a desire to erect a form of church organization based on scriptural warrant, which they considered the sole authority for such matters. Every detail of church government had to be found within the pages of the Bible. They saw Presbyterianism, church government by elders or presbyters, as the polity of the apostolic church. Thomas Cartwright, Walter Travers, John Field and Thomas Wilcox were the leading advocates of this Presbyterian discipline or rule by presbytery. Cartwright, the theorist of the movement, was elected as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge and his subsequent lectures brought many Puritans to advocate the Presbyterian polity. He was quite possibly the co-author of the "Disciplina Ecclesiae," a scheme for a Presbyterian discipline which circulated throughout England in 1584. 

The principle organizers of the early Presbyterian movement were John Field and Thomas Wilcox, authors of the anonymous Admonition to the Parliament (1572), "the first manifesto

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2 Ibid., pp. 14, 60-61.
3 Ibid., pp. 86, 107, 112, 295.
of English Presbyterianism."⁴ These men were also responsible for the organization of a brotherhood of London Presbyterians and were the prime movers behind the creation of ministerial conferences which met monthly to organize and regulate church affairs. In 1584 Field and his followers distributed copies of a new plan for church government, Travers' "Disciplina Ecclesiae," among the conferences. Field was again the organizer of this plan for a national Presbyterian system.⁵

The "Disciplina Ecclesiae" or The Book of Discipline, as it was called, was divided into two parts. The first part began with a statement of ecclesiastical authority asserting that Christ had determined the form of government for the church for all time, which form was defined in the Bible. The book then went on to give scriptural warrant for the parity of ministers who should be called to a particular congregation by the vote of its entire membership. After his call, the minister then is to receive ordination to the ministry. The "Disciplina Ecclesiae" claimed scriptural warrant for four offices in the church: minister, teacher, elder and deacon. The congregation was to be governed by a presbytery consisting of minister, teacher, and lay elders who had the right to


⁵Ibid., p. 155ff.
excommunicate for the congregation when such action was indicated.  

The second part of the book, the "Synodical Discipline," outlined the order of business for the consistory meetings, the functions of a presbytery or conference and the duties of the provincial and national synods. The second book pointed out that the first book involving the government of each congregation by its own presbytery was considered inalterable since it was none other than God's Word. The second part, however, concerning the synodical discipline, could be altered as it was not expressly stated in the Scriptures.

The historical significance of the Book of Discipline lies in its claim as the first complete exposition of the essence of English Presbyterianism. It should be noted that the Presbyterianism of the Book of Discipline is not identical to its Scottish counterpart, which advocated a hierarchy of "presbyteries" to which the individual church was thoroughly subordinated. Cartwright and Travers stood for a decentralized form of Presbyterianism which upheld the integrity of the local congregation to direct and control its own affairs. It

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7 Ibid., pp. 103-104.

8 Ibid.
is true that they wished to erect a hierarchy of classes or conferences (consisting of ministers and lay elders from each church), and of regional and national synods over the particular church. The relation of the individual congregation to this hierarchy was guided, however, by the principle of voluntarism. Every particular church, it was stated, "ought to obey the opinion of more churches" with whom they communicated.\(^9\) The "ought" suggests that the particular church only had a moral obligation to accept the opinion of a higher church conference, and therefore could not be coerced to do so as the book affirmed that no particular church was to have authority over another.\(^10\) Consociational activities were dependent upon the willingness of the individual churches to join together and submit to the determinations of a conference. There was subordination of the particular churches to a hierarchical superstructure, but this subordination was entirely voluntary. English Presbyterianism was in marked contrast to its Scottish brother in that a classis or synod was considered a purely consultative and advisory organ of church government which paid homage to the sovereignty of the individual congregation.

To equate this English brand of Presbyterianism with Scottish Presbyterianism would be to hide the vast amount of autonomy that the English model conferred upon the individual

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\(^10\) Ibid.
congregation. Scottish Presbyterianism is best characterized as a system of reform from the top down in which matters of doctrine and practice are dictated to the individual churches. The English Puritans of James I and Elizabeth's reigns wished to decentralize this hierarchy and opted for reform that began at the parochial level. They wished to reduce the power of the hierarchy in disciplinary matters and place this power, instead, in the hands of the local clergy. One of the major Puritan complaints was that the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Church of England was not active enough in enforcing discipline. Furthermore, if discipline was to be made more rigorous, the Puritans believed it should not belong to bishops who had to supervise hundreds of parishes and consequently could not be expected to know personally all persons presented to them for disciplinary action. Instead, the Puritans believed that discipline should be enforced at the parish level by the minister and his lay assistants who knew their congregation and could dispense a more intimate and informed discipline.11 This emphasis on the need for discipline at the parish level reinforced the idea of Congregational autonomy.

The decentralized Presbyterianism of the Book of Discipline was driven underground by persecution. Nevertheless, the conference movement continued to flourish on into Jacobean Eng-

land. The same Presbyterianism of the Book of Discipline made a second debut in 1644 when, during the sitting of the Westminster Assembly, it was published and circulated under the title, *A Directory of Church Government*. One recent student of the period has suggested that this brand of Presbyterianism be designated "Presbyterianism independent" to distinguish it from the Scottish variety. Viewed in this context, the ecclesiastical theories of the Book of Discipline do not appear so far removed from those of the Ames-Baynes-Jacob-Bradshaw pantheon of divines who were so influential as architects of the New England church way.

Bradshaw's English Puritanism largely embodied the same principles laid down in the Book of Discipline. Bradshaw put more stress, however, on the autonomy of the individual congregation. He defined a congregation as "a True visible church of Christ" and added that "the same title is improperly attributed to any other Convocations, Synods, Societies, combinations, or assemblie whatsoever." He asserted that no church could be subjected to "any superior Ecclesiasticall

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Juresdiction, then unto that which is within itself." Therefore, "if a wholl churche or Congregation shall erre, in any matters of faith or religion, noe other Churches or Spirituall Churche officers have ... power to censure, punish, or controule the same, but are onely to counsell and advise the same." Bradshaw's particularism may have been, at least to some extent, inspired out of a fear that the accession of King James I might open the door for the influx of Scottish Presbyterianism into England. Whatever the reason, he stated his opposition to classical forms of church organization in very forceful and detailed terms. Bradshaw's defense of the autonomy of the individual church is also seen in Henry Jacob's definition of the church as "a particular Congregation being a spirituall perfect Corporation of Believers, & having power in it selfe immediatly from Christ to administer all Religious meanes of faith to the members therof." He attacked Scottish Presbyterianism affirming "that No Synod vnder ye Gospell hath power by Gods ordinance to prescribe & rule Ecclesiastically sundry whole Churches if they severally consent not." Paul Bayne's The Diocesans Trial was a virulent attack on all forms of ecclesiastical hierarchy. All congregations, he contended, were to be "equal, independent each of other, in regard of

16 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 165.
Bradshaw, Jacob, and Baynes' particularism was tempered to some degree by William Ames in his Medulla Theologia. Individual churches, according to Ames, "may and oftentimes also ought to enter into a mutuall confederation and fellowship among themselves in Classes, and Synods, that they may use their common consent and mutuall helpe to resolve matters of greater moment." Ames' "ought to" is identical to that of Cartwright and Travers' definition of consociation in the Book of Discipline. Voluntarism is the controlling principle behind both Cartwright and Ames' definitions of consociation. Indeed, voluntary consent is the key to an understanding of the eccesiology of the Ames-Bradshaw group. Although Ames stressed the importance of the necessity and utility of consociation, he did not compromise his belief in the autonomy of the individual congregation. He was careful to point out that any type of clerical combination above the particular church did not create "a new forme of a Church," nor did it in any way diminish "that liberty and power Christ hath left to his Churches."
A good Cartwrightian Presbyterian such as John Field would have balked at such a strong defense of the primacy of the individual congregation, believing that a matrix of conferences, although only consultative, was essential to maintaining a semblance of uniformity among the churches. The champions of Congregational autonomy, however, compensated for their defense of the integrity of the individual congregation by allowing the magistrate to confirm by civil sanction matters determined by councils to be part of the true discipline. Bradshaw saw church officers as inferior to magistrates "who alone upon Earth hath power to punish a whol Church or Congregation."  

Similarly, Jacob argued that magistrates should ensure the religious peace of the churches.

It is obvious by comparison that Cartwright and Travers' Presbyterianism, as expressed in the Book of Discipline, is nearly the same in principle as the Congregational polity formulated by William Ames and his colleagues. The voluntaristic ethic, the defense of the integrity of the individual congregation, and a belief in a decentralized, non-dictatorial church hierarchy are common to both. A comparison also suggests that the Congregationalism of the Ames-Bradshaw coterie is not as innovative as Professor Perry Miller would have us believe. By contrasting their Congregational polity with the

later Presbyterianism agreed upon at the Westminster Assembly, Miller obscures the influence of the earlier Presbyterianism of Cartwright and the conference movement on the thought of Ames, Bradshaw, Baynes, and Jacob. 24

Even if the church polity of Ames and his colleagues was not as innovative as we have been led to believe, it was still sufficiently unique in its notion of the "gathered church" of true believers who were bound mutually together by a covenant. And although Cartwright's Presbyterianism attached greater importance to the independence of each congregation than did Scottish Presbyterianism, Ames' Puritanism stands out in the defense it made of the sovereign integrity of the particular congregation against classical pretensions. The belief in a restrictive membership and the justification it made for the autonomy of the individual congregation was sufficient to earn for Ames and Bradshaw's Puritanism the name Congregational. Furthermore, Ames approved of consociation of churches only "as their Communion doth require." 25 Rather than advocating a hierarchy of interchurch assemblies which would meet periodically at stated times, as outlined in the Book of Discipline, Ames' fear of the superintending power of classical forms of combination led him to favor a form of consociation

24 Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, pp. 73-83.
that convened on an ad hoc basis.

Another source of influence on the New England church way was the consociational activities of a number of Puritan divines in Jacobean England and the Dutch Netherlands. Although the conference movement was largely aborted by Archbishop Whitgift in the late 1580's, groups of ministers continued to meet clandestinely on into the reign of James I. These underground conferences were attended by a number of Cartwright's old associates and a number of future Massachusetts Bay Puritans. 26

Arthur Hildersham, one of the most active classicists, organized over half-a-dozen of these conferences. John Cotton and Richard Mather, both future Bay ministers, participated in these meetings. 27 Thomas Hooker of Connecticut fame organized his own conference at Chelmsford, 28 which was attended by Thomas Weld, Thomas Shepard, and John Eliot, all future Bay divines. 29

The most famous of these Puritan conferences, the English Classis in the Netherlands, was formed by dissenting clergymen

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26 Ibid., pp. 400-401.
27 Ibid., p. 401.
29 Alexander Young, ed., Chronicles of the First Planters of Massachusetts Bay (Boston, 1846), pp. 522ff. (Hereafter cited as Young, Chronicles.)
who had left England for the more congenial religious atmosphere of the Dutchland. The Classis came to include Thomas Hooker, Hugh Peter, and John Davenport, all of whom had a penchant for Congregational views. Their Congregational proclivities led them to "condemne the Decisive & Judging power of all Classes & Synods; & that they have only a power of Counsailing & advising, because every particular Congrega-
tion is a church." This placed them in direct contradistinction to the Dutch, who held to the superintending power of the Classis. When Hooker and others eventually ventured to New England, they brought with them this decentralized viewpoint of synodical or interchurch activity, with its emphasis on the integrity of the individual church.

By 1635 the New England Way numbered a dozen churches. Properly speaking, a "New England Way" did not exist as yet. The churches had still to be molded into a systematic church polity. The churches were Reformed or Calvinist in outlook and looked to the apostolic church as found in Scripture as their model. Yet, as William Hubbard observed, during these formative years each church "walked something in an untrodden

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30For a complete history of the English Classis see Raymond P. Stearns, Congregationalism in the Dutch Netherlands: The Rise and Fall of the English Congregational Classis, 1621-1635 (Chicago, 1940). (Hereafter cited as Stearns, Congregationalism.)

path." Each church tended to reflect the ideas of its minister rather than the views of a collective clergy. As a result there was no ecclesiastical uniformity. Samuel Skelton of Salem, for instance, displayed a separatist outlook, while John Cotton of Boston was more moderate and identified his church more with the community. Phillips, minister of the Watertown congregation held to a strict definition of Congregational autonomy.

John Warham and John Maverick of Dorchester, leaned toward a Presbyterian polity. Instead of a gathered church of saints, these ministers instituted a parish-like organization which made a covenant superfluous. In matters of church government they believed that the minister should rule the congregation, but favored Congregational autonomy over a hierarchy of authoritative church councils as in the Scottish model. In this respect their position is identical to the English Presbyterians. Historians, until recently, have been too prone to

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34 Lechford, Plain Dealing, pp. 17-18.

confine the definition of Presbyterism to the Scottish model. In so doing they have created a gulf between the majority of English Presbyterians and Congregationalists which, in reality, did not exist. Such a definition not only obscures nonseparating Congregationalism's origins in English Presbyterianism, but also masks the fact that many ministers, while remaining Congregationalists (such as Samuel Stone) sought greater ministerial authority and easier admissions standards for church membership. Stone's polity, for example, was nearly identical to Warham's and Maverick's Presbyterianism.

Granting a certain amount of diversity, the New England ministry did share then in a common nonconformist English heritage. Despite certain personal preferences, the ministers shared a set of common assumptions and experiences which they hoped to implement in their churches. Such diversity as existed only helped to call to the ministers' minds the need to agree upon a uniform church practice. In order to promote uniformity the churches would have to look upon themselves as a community of churches dedicated to a single church polity.

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36 The difference between English Presbyterianism and its Scottish counterpart was first brought to the author's attention by Patrick Collinson's study of the Elizabethan classical movement. (Supra, n. 1.) The author is also indebted to C. G. Bolam, et al., *The English Presbyterians from Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism* (London; 1968) for an understanding of the evolution of English Presbyterianism. Another historian who has recognized the difference between English and Scottish Presbyterianism on the issue of synodical or consociated authority is Robert F. Scholz (Supra, n. 20). Scholz suggests that New England's attitude toward consociated authority was rooted in the Elizabethan Presbyterianism of Cartwright and Travers.
Uniformity depended upon some sort of consociation or inter-congregational activity where there would be an opportunity to compare ideas and discuss mutual problems. For consociational models the colonists could look to the English conference movement as John Cotton of Boston noted when he claimed that "the form of church government wherein we walk doth not differ in substance from that which Mr. Cartwright pleaded for."37 Similarly, William Hubbard declared that the architects of the New England Way looked to the "Old nonconformists and good old puritans of queen Elizabeth and King James" reigns.38 They also could draw on the Ames-Bradshaw-Jacob theory of occasional advisory synods, more immediately, they could draw from Thomas Hooker, Hugh Peter, and John Davenport's first-hand experience in the workings of the English Congregational Classis in the Netherlands. Acting out of both experience and necessity, the New England clergy established a consociated authority over the churches out of which they defined the New England Way.

38 Hubbard, General History, pp. 117-118.
CHAPTER II

TOWARD THE CAMBRIDGE PLATFORM: THE
FORMATIVE YEARS, 1630-1648

The earliest Congregationalists in England were Separatists. They derived their name out of their belief that in the formation of a church the saints or regenerate persons should separate themselves from the unregenerate. The non-Separatists believed that the church should consist only of saints, but they believed that the unregenerate ought to at least be able to hear the preaching of the Word, while Separatists excluded them altogether. Non-Separatists allowed the unregenerate to attend church services, but reserved the Lord's Supper only for the saints.¹

The Separatist and non-Separatist also disagreed over another matter concerning separation. Both agreed that a Christian could not depart from a true church of Christ. The Separatists, however, claimed that the Church of England was not a true church. It was a descendant of the Church of Rome which had never been a true church. Accordingly, the Anglican

¹For the difference between Separatist and non-Separatist see Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, pp. 73-101. See also Burrage's classic work, Early English Dissenters, Vol. I, p. 281ff. A brief but thorough characterization of the two can be found in Edmund S. Morgan, Roger Williams: The Church and the State (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), pp. 18-24. (Hereafter cited as Morgan, Roger Williams.)
church with all its popish remnants was counterfeit and it was the duty of all saints to separate from it. Separatists had grown weary waiting for the Anglican church to reform itself and opted instead for a "reformation with out tarying for anie," disavowing all connections with the Church of England.

The non-Separatists agreed with the Separatists that the Church of England was full of corruptions. But despite its many imperfections, each church still contained a remnant of the holy. To the Separatist assertion that the parish church was not true because it was formed by an act of the state and allowed the unregenerate attendance, non-Separatists answered that there were many saints in the churches who voluntarily attended. By coming together they had formed an implicit covenant. And if the regenerate within the church approved of their minister, even though he might be installed by a bishop, they could say that in a sense they had "elected" him. In actuality there could exist a visible Congregational church within the Anglican parish church. The non-Separatists believed that this holy remnant in the Church of England preserved its authenticity. To reject the Anglican church as false, meant giving up what saints remained in it to the Antichrist.

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Therefore, the non-Separatists declared that the Anglican church remained a true church and separation from it was considered schismatical and heretical.

It is almost certain that the colonists did not arrive in New England with a detailed blueprint of the form of church polity from which they could build their churches. Nevertheless, most of the New England divines had read the works of William Ames, Robert Parker, William Bradshaw, Henry Jacob, and Paul Baynes; all non-Separatist Congregationalists. The non-Separatist nature of the enterprise undertaken by the settlers of Massachusetts Bay was reflected in a letter they addressed to the Church of England before embarking for the New World. The following passage is an obvious assertion of non-separation:

We . . . esteem it our honor to call the Church of England . . . our dear mother . . . ever acknowledging that such hope and part as we have obtained in the common salvation, we have received in her bosom and sucked it from her breasts. We leave it not, therefore, as loathing that milk wherewith we were nourished there; but blessing God for the parantage and education, as members of the same body, shall always rejoice in her good.  

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3Perry Miller argued in Orthodoxy in Massachusetts that the founders of the Bay colony had adopted the tenets of nonseparating Congregationalism while still in England. He insisted that they had sailed for Massachusetts with a complete blueprint of the church structure they hoped to erect. This theory has been challenged by such historians as Edmund S. Morgan, Darrett B. Rutman, and David D. Hall who describe New England Congregationalism as a fluid, evolving polity.

4As quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 139.
There were certain practical ramifications to be considered in the non-Separatist position. John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay, had secured a royal charter which he and his followers brought with them when they crossed the Atlantic. This charter gave them extensive powers, since the only limitation the King had placed upon it was that the corporation should make no laws repugnant to the laws of England. The extensive powers given in the charter along with their avowed non-Separatist inclination would give the Massachusetts leaders "a wide door of liberty" to erect almost whatever form of church and state they desired. In addition, by transplanting their charter they created a 3,000 mile "moat" between them and Old England which opened the door of liberty somewhat wider. This door of liberty could not be opened so far, however, as to countenance Separatists. Separatists were anathema to the King. Separation was considered heretical and was subject to persecution. Should Separatism prevail in Massachusetts the King might decide to revoke the charter and put an end to the whole religious enterprise. Because of this possibility the Massachusetts leaders had to assert that they were not "projecting the erecting of this Colony for a Nursery of Schismatics." They had to proceed cautiously in the development of "a due form

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6 *From The Planters Plea*, as quoted in *Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts*, p. 142.
of government both civil and ecclesiastical," ever keeping, "an obsequious eye" upon the English government because of the continual threat from that quarter.

The New Englanders, however, were not taking up the non-Separatist stance merely as a means of political and religious subterfuge as Perry Miller would have us believe. The colonists were not deserting England to Antichrist. They still considered England to be an elect nation; having the divine mission of leading all nations to the Kingdom of God and ending the reign of Antichrist. Although the reign of James I may have put off hopes of the reformation being completed in the near future, Englishmen did not give up their belief in England's special destiny as an elect nation. This held true for those Englishmen leaving their homeland for New England. John Cotton in his farewell sermon delivered just before departure of Winthrop's fleet stated:

Be not unmindful of our Jerusalem at home, whether you leave us or stay at home with us. . . . Forget not the wombe that bare you, and the breasts that gave you sucke.11

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8From a letter to Endicott as quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 139.

9Miller argues this point in Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, chapter V.

10For England's concept of herself as an elect nation see Haller, The Elect Nation.

11John Cotton, "God's Promise to His Plantations" (1630), Old South Leaflets, No. 53.
The colonists only wished to convince the country they were departing that they were merely carrying the truth inherent in the Church of England to America where the reformation in America could stand as a model for the continued reformation of the Church of England when that time should arise.

In coming to New England the colonists were quick to put themselves on guard against the sectarian impulses inherent in the very principles of their own Congregational polity. Fortunately, the English non-Separatist divines had already initiated the work of tightening the reins on the democratic propensities of Congregationalism. Prior to the New England adventure, they had worked out certain elementary notions of church government which they believed would aid in the maintenance of uniformity among the congregations. They did not see church government as being entirely democratic, but looked upon it as "of a mixed nature, partly aristocratical, and partly as it were democratical." But the details of church government were not of central concern to English Congregationalists. They were too busy using their non-Separatist position as a shield against persecution to have time to work out the full implications of their concept of "mixed" government. They never got more specific than emphasizing the role of the elders as necessary for the proper guidance and direction of the congregation. The elders were to propound matters

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12William Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, as quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 172.
to the congregation and the members to consent thereto. By
taking some of the initiative out of the members' hands it
was hoped that the democratic inclinations of Congregationalism
could be lessened. The ministers were to act as a check upon
the liberty of the brethren; making sure such liberty did not
become irresponsible.

Besides their concept of "mixed" government, English Con-
gregationalists had also advocated the use of another device
for the maintenance of uniformity among the churches. The con-
sociation of churches in the form of ministerial meetings and
synods were permitted as long as they remained merely delibera-
tive—and did not become ruling or coercive bodies. (The min-
isterial meeting was a conference restricted to ministers.
The synod was a church council comprised of ministers and lay
representatives from each church.) They were to lend advice
and counsel but were not to impose their decisions upon partic-
ular churches by force. Because Congregationalists at that
time were fighting the centralized systems of both Presbyter-
ianism and Anglicanism it is only natural that they would
limit synods to mere counsel and advice and that they would
devote more time to stating what they could not do than defining
what they could do. Of a synod's use, Henry Jacob, one
of the earliest Congregationalists to organize a church on
Congregational principles, was wont only to say that they
"are most expedient and wholesome always."13  Parker, another

13As quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 187.
early Congregationalist, asserted that "the use of Synods was for counsel and advice only; but had not authority to give definite sentence in the judging of causes."\(^{14}\)

But as in the case of their concept of "mixed" government, the English Congregationalists' definition of synods did not go much further than vague generalizations. It was difficult enough, in an atmosphere of persecution, to organize individual churches according to Congregational prescription; let alone perfect any kind of interchurch organization.

If the details of church government were not of major importance to the Congregational leaders in England, they became a central concern in the New World. When the devices for the maintenance of uniformity among the churches (the exaltation of the role of the elders and the use of synods) were brought to New England, they underwent a transformation. Instead of being a persecuted minority, the New England divines were now a ruling elite. They were now in a position to erect that form of church organization which they considered to be prescribed by Christ. Bent on enforcing uniformity, the Bay Puritans began to go over the rudimentary machinery for the effecting of church discipline which they had brought with them from England, stating very explicitly and emphatically that which had hitherto been stated very loosely.

New England's transformation of the loosely constructed

\(^{14}\)As quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 79.
theory of church discipline the English Congregationalists had bequeathed to them into a forceful and coherent system did not occur immediately. It was a transformation which covered the first two decades of the New England experiment and culminated in the famous statement of church polity, the Cambridge Platform. The Platform was a product of the first twenty years of the New England religious experiment. Although its title page states that it was "gathered out of the word of God," its contents clearly reflect the tensions of the times. That the New England Puritans had been struggling with the liberty vs. order problem is quite apparent from a reading of the Platform.

The question of how much liberty and how much authority thrust itself upon the New England churches during the very first years of settlement. Some of the New England leaders became alarmed at the degree to which the churches seemed to cherish their independence. These ministers began to see that some kind of interchurch assembly or consociational device was needed as a check upon the liberty of the churches. In 1633 John Winthrop noted that the ministers began very early to meet "once a fortnight, at one of their houses by course, where some question of moment was debated." Two of the Bay ministers, Samuel Skelton and Roger Williams, "took some exception" to these meetings, "as fearing it might grow in time to a presbytery of superintendency, to the prejudice of
the churches' liberties." Thomas Lechford, in his criticism of the Congregational way entitled *Plain Dealing* (1642), also noted that there were some who took exception to these meetings as they "conceived they bend towards Presbyterian rule." The ministers assured those who objected to these meetings, however, that "no church or person can have power over another church." The ground rules were to be those laid down by Ames, Bradshaw, and Jacob.

The ministers could defend these assemblies with the simple logic that since all the local churches have Christ as their Head, they all belong to the one family of the Lord and therefore owe each other sisterly affection and communion. The ministers could also point out that voluntary consociation among churches had already been used successfully to settle disputes. In 1631 the pastor of Watertown, Mr. Phillips, and a ruling elder, Richard Browne, published a letter declaring that the Church of Rome was a true church. The governor and deputy governor of Massachusetts Bay, John Winthrop and Thomas Dudley, respectively, and the ruling elder of the Boston congregation all rode to Watertown to debate the matter. First, the Watertown congregation had to decide whether Winthrop and

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his associates came as magistrates or as members of a neighboring church wishing to give advice to a sister church. The latter way was decided upon and, after a day of debate, the Watertown congregation was brought to see its error.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that it was agreed that Winthrop's group came as members of a sister congregation and not as magistrates was of importance, too, in that it illustrates that New England began very early to define the line that separated church and state.

Thereafter consociation was used on numerous occasions as a means of correcting errors and keeping the peace among the churches. In 1634 John Eliot, teacher of the church at Roxbury, questioned the propriety of the magistrates in making peace with the Pequotes without first consenting with the people. The Massachusetts Court sent three ministers--John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and Thomas Welde--to Roxbury to discuss the matter with Eliot. Eliot was brought to see his error and agreed to declare his error publicly on the next Lord's day.\textsuperscript{19} Although there was to be a definite separation of church and state in New England, the magistrates did not hesitate to use the ministers as their mouthpiece when it was to their advantage. In 1635 several ministers from various churches met in Saugus to reconcile differences between the minister there and

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., pp. 66, 71.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 142.
the brethren of the congregation. 20 A year later, the people of Saugus (now Lynn) desired to found a new church. In this instance, the ministers of the Bay met for two days in order to examine the fitness of the minister and the members of the church. 21 In the same year the people of Newtown "sent to all the neighboring churches for their elders to give their assistance" in the formation of a new church. The ministers broached the question as to how many members were necessary to constitute a church. Three was thought too few, but they agreed that seven "might be a fit number." After the church covenant was read, the ruling elder desired the other churches to approve them by giving them "the right hand of fellowship." Next, the ruling elder advised that the new church intended to elect Thomas Shepard their minister and asked the elders of the other churches that if they took exception to Shepard that they should let the Newtown church know before the day of ordination. 22

The people of Dorchester also showed deference to the consociational method when they chose Richard Mather as their minister and asked the other churches for their approbation. 23

Thus, within but a short time after the colonists had arrived

20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p. 199.
22 Ibid., p. 143.
23 Ibid., p. 177.
they began to make use of consociation to keep the peace among the churches. In so doing, they were defining certain features of the Congregational way as they proceeded, such as the custom of requiring neighboring ministers at the creation of a new church or the election of all officers of the church. The New Englanders were defining their church polity in response to the immediate needs of their congregations.

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The relation between church and state was also being discussed and defined at the various consociations of the churches. The New England theory of church and state was that which all Puritans had inherited from Calvin. According to Calvin, church and state formed two separate kingdoms. The church was the spiritual kingdom; the state was temporal. The church was restricted to the use of spiritual weapons, whereas the state could use coercion to gain its ends. Though the spiritual and temporal swords were never to cross, the ideal relation between church and state was one in which they both worked closely together as agents of God's will. The New England Puritans inherited this two-kingdom theory and even accentuated it as a result of the resentments built up from

\[24\] In this paragraph I am largely indebted to Morgan, _Roger Williams_, p. 62ff.
their experience with a state which had controlled the church. Therefore, the colonists were impelled to insist that the ministers could only command the church and the magistrates the state and there should be no confounding of the two. The thin line that would be drawn between church and state was suggested in the case of Increase Nowell. The ministers told Nowell that he could not be a civil magistrate and a ruling elder at the same time.\footnote{Winthrop's Journal, Vol. I, p. 83.}

The ministers were not the only group who sensed that the freedom each congregation enjoyed out of the principle of Congregational autonomy must be curbed for the sake of uniformity. The magistrates were also interested in the maintenance of ecclesiastical order as they realized they too had a role in advancing God's kingdom. The ministers recognized the magistrates as co-partners but were suspicious of the state, feeling that it might gain too much control. The ministers realized, however, that the principle of Congregational autonomy left the state standing as an obvious agent for the maintenance of uniformity. As dissension broke out in other churches, the ministers began to see the advantage of state intervention. Hugh Peter reflected this changing mood toward the state in 1636 when he added a special clause to the Salem church covenant requiring the church to "carry ourselves
in all lawful obedience, to those that are over us, in Church and Commonweal."  

The magistrates did not know precisely how far they could proceed as a vehicle for keeping order among the churches. Therefore, in 1635 they prompted the ministers to devise a platform of church government which would let the state know "how far the magistrates are bound to interpose for the preservation of that uniformity and peace of the churches."  

The need for such a platform was recognized by the ministers as well. Hugh Peter noted before the Boston church that it would benefit the churches if they could spare their teacher, the eminent John Cotton, "that he might go through the Bible, and raise marginal notes upon all the knotty places of the Scriptures" and that "a form of church government might be drawn according to the scriptures."  

The "Model of Church and Civil Power" that was drawn up by the churches was a sign that the clergy, as the emissaries

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26 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 118.


29 The "Model" can be found in its entirety in Roger Williams, The Bloody Tenent of Persecution (1644) wherein Williams took to refute it point by point. The Complete Writings of Roger Williams (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), Vol. III, p. 221ff. (Hereafter cited as Williams, Complete Writings.)
of uniformity, were becoming concerned with the nature of ecclesiastical authority. The "Model" defined two spheres of ecclesiastical authority--Church and State. These two spheres were independent of each other by way of jurisdiction, but were to enforce the true religion through mutual cooperation. The magistrate was called a "nursing father" to religion and was to act with the churches in correcting an aberrant congregation. 30

One of the main purposes of the "Model" was to bring the various congregations into some form of consociational structure. "In corrupt times," the "Model" stated, it was incumbent upon the magistrate to "call those who are most fit in severall Churches, to assemble together in a Synod, to discusse and declare from the Word of God." 31 The "Model" declared that in ordinary times it was sufficient that the magistrate "give liberty to the Elders of the severall churches assembling themselves together by their owne mutuall and voluntary agreement at convenient times as the means appointed of God whereby he may mediately reforme matters amisse in churches." 32 This proposal took the form of two meetings. First, there were to be monthly meetings of the "Messengers and Elders of the Churches . . . which are neerest together, and so may most

32 Ibid., pp. 390-391.
conveniently assemble together." These monthly meetings were to "consult of such things as make for the good of the Churches." This proposal translated the ministerial assembly into a standing or stated assembly. 33

Annual meetings of all the "Messengers and Elders of the Churches" were also proposed. The churches were to "send their weighty questions and cases six weeks or a month before the set time, to the Church where the Assembly is to be held." The "Model" bowed to the principle of Congregational independence, however, in stating that these monthly and annual meetings were to "doe nothing by Authoritie, but only by Councell ... leaving the determination of all things to particular Churches within themselves, who are to judge." 34 Except for this last provision the "Model" sounded quite authoritative, a document that may well have been acceptable to a Scottish Presbyterian.

The "Model" did not give scriptural warrant for its propositions or cite Ames, or indeed, any of the English nonconformists. The works of Cartwright and Ames, however, were undoubtedly influential. That these assemblies were to meet monthly and annually, rather than occasionally on an ad hoc basis, further suggests the influence of the English conference movement. The New England clergy defended their work on the basis of prac-

33 Ibid., pp. 391-392.
34 Ibid., p. 392.
ticality alone. The "Model" listed among the "grounds of these Assemblies" the "need of each others helpe, in regards of dayly emergent troubles, doubts, and controversies," and "the good Report the Elders and Brethren of Churches shall have [abroad] hereby . . . . 35

Roger Williams found this plan "a most sowre and uncomely deformed looke of a meere humane invention." 36 He attacked it because he believed it created a state church. His assertion had some merit to it, since the clergy gave the magistratethe coercive power they lacked to enforce their collective determinations. There were undoubtedly others who, adhering to the idea of the strict independence of each congregation, objected to these proposed assemblies. Nevertheless, both the ministers and the magistrates were showing greater concern by the mid-1630's over the need for greater ecclesiastical order.

These ministerial assemblies became law in 1641 when Massachusetts adopted the Body of Liberties as the fundamental law of the colony. The 7th Article of the Declaration of Liberties of the Churches, adopted with the Body of Liberties, allowed the elders of the colony "free libertie to meete monthly, quarterly, or otherwise, in convenient numbers and places, for conferences-and consultations" concerning church

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., p. 393.
matters. And the 11th Article allowed "as a lawfull libertie of the Churches," monthly meetings of the elders and any of the brethren of the churches for "publique Christian Conference about the discussing and resolving of cases of conscience concerning matter of doctrine or worship" but "onely by way of brotherly conference and cunsultations." The ministerial meetings were given additional approbation by an assembly of ministers which met in 1643 to persuade Thomas Parker and James Noyes of Newbury to give up certain features of their church polity which were Presbyterian in tenor. The Body of Liberties also paved the way for state intervention by allowing the magistrate the "power and liberty to see the peace, ordinances and Rules of Christ observed in every church according to his work so it be done in a Civil and not in an Ecclesiastical way."

The way church and state worked together to maintain uniformity can be seen in the case of Roger Williams. Williams had arrived in Boston in 1631. He had been invited to fill the office of teacher of the Boston church in place of John Wilson who had returned to England for his family. Williams surprised the Boston congregation, however, by asking the congregation to publicly repent the communion they had held with the Church of

England. Such a declaration would be the same as declaring themselves Separatists. To take a Separatist stance could lead to scrutiny by the English government, and even the possible revocation of the charter. Furthermore, to declare oneself completely separated from the Church of England as if it were no true church would be giving up the hope of salvation for those saints who remained within the church. For these reasons, the Boston congregation was no doubt relieved when Williams declined their offer because, as he said later, "I durst not officiate to an unseparated people, as, upon examination and conference, I found them to be."  

Williams proceeded to Salem where the church chose him as their teacher to replace John Higginson, recently deceased. Upon hearing of Williams' call to Salem, the Massachusetts General Court wrote John Endicott warning him of Williams' insistence upon separation from the Church of England and adding that he also held to a stricter notion of separation of church and state declaring "that the magistrate might not punish the breach of the Sabbath, nor any other offence, as it was a breach of the first table [of the ten commandments]." Williams was definitely against using the state in any way as a vehicle for the maintenance of uniformity. For these reasons the General Court

41 As quoted in Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 158.
bade Salem to "forbear to proceed" until a conference could be held. 42

The fact that a conference of the churches was suggested indicates the gravity of the matter. The Salem church had revealed Separatist leanings from the beginning and their acceptance of Williams could certainly bring the taint of Separatism on the colony. The principle of Congregational autonomy threatened to cause a schism. The New England leaders were faced with the liberty and order problem but were determined not to give Salem the liberty of going Separatist. In the midst of the turmoil, however, Williams took off for Plymouth where he apparently believed his ideas would be more readily received by an avowedly Separatist colony.

After a brief sojourn at Plymouth, Williams returned to Salem and became a teacher of the church in 1635; replacing the deceased Samuel Skelton. Back in Salem, Williams began to teach his opinion that the unregenerate should not be able to attend religious services with the regenerate and that a man should not even pray with his wife if she were unregenerate. He taught his opinion that the magistrates had no authority to punish breaches of the first four commandments, and asserted that the government should not impose an oath on an unregenerate man. 43 And to add to the discomfort of the authorities

43 Ibid., p. 54.
he questioned the validity of the charter and condoned the removal of the cross from the English ensign, asserting that the symbol was idolatrous. \(^{44}\) Williams' activities had the support of the Salem townspeople, led by John Endicott, and Williams felt he had the full support of the church announcing that it "was known to profess separation."\(^{45}\) John Winthrop observed in his journal that Williams had so far prevailed at Salem, as many there (especially of devout women) did embrace his opinions, and separated from the churches' (of Massachusetts), for this cause, that some of their members, going into England, did hear the ministers there, and when they came home, the churches here held communion with them.\(^{46}\)

Williams was propounding his opinions at a time when episcopal factions at the English court were asserting their rights to the Massachusetts soil. Furthermore, his activities lent support to the criticisms that the Bay settlers were anti-church and anti-king. Serious disciplinary action began in 1635. Endicott was declared ineligible for public office for one year due to the support he had given Williams.\(^{47}\) The authorities chastened Salem by refusing her a petition for some land in Marblehead Neck. The refusal was based on Salem's choice of

\(^{44}\) Ibid., pp. 116, 142. \\
\(^{45}\) Morgan, Roger Williams, p. 26. \\
\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 150.
"Mr. Williams their teacher, while he stood under question of authority, and so offered contempt to the magistrates." 48

John Cotton, the eminent teacher of the Boston congregation had been given the task of convincing Williams of his errors. 49 The authorities grew impatient with these academic debates, however, and called Williams before the General Court in July. Having learned that the other churches in the Bay were about to admonish Salem for selecting him as their teacher, Williams questioned the propriety of consociation of churches before the Court; contending that the practice amounted to usurpation of the churches' liberties. 50 Touching on this point, John Cotton observed later that Williams had shared some fellowship with the Bay churches "and might have had more, but that hee suspected all the Statos conventus of the Elders to bee unwarrantable, and such as might in time lead to a Presbyteriall government." 51 The magistrates, however, and those ministers present at the meeting did not fear that a dictatorial ecclesiastical court might grow out of church conferences and considered them necessary to the well-being of the churches. This point and those stemming from Williams' Separatist thinking

48 Ibid., p. 155.
51 From J. Hammond Trumbull's notes to Thomas Lechford's Plain Dealing, p. 37.
were discussed at length by the Court and Williams was given until the meeting of the next General Court to admit to the error of his opinions or face banishment. 52

Williams held fast to his views, though, and urged the Salem church to follow him in refusing to communicate with the other churches in the Bay. Should they refuse, Williams threatened to separate from them. The Salem settlers, although chafing from the General Court's refusal to grant their petition for land, perceived that Williams' threat of separation could lead to the beginnings of a splintering among the New England churches which could only end in complete chaos and outright anarchy. For this reason they accepted his banishment. 53

The New England authorities justified their banishment of Williams as the protection of Christ's true religion from the erroneous opinions of a heretic. This much the state was expected to do for the churches. Williams, however, saw his banishment only as a sign that church and state in New England were in truth not separate. As proof, Williams asserted, "was I not yet permitted to live in the world, or Common-weale (of Massachusetts), except for this reason, that the Common-weale and Church is yet but one, and hee that is banished from the one, must necessarily bee banished from the other also." 54

53 Ziff, Career of John Cotton, pp. 89-90.
54 As quoted in Morgan, Roger Williams, pp. 97-98.
Indeed, as far as Williams was concerned, the New England churches were actually, just as the Church of England, a national church. Williams contended that

whatever are the pretences, pleas and coverings to the contrary that Church estate, that religion and worship which is commanded or permitted to be but one in a country, nation or province (as was the Jews religion in that typical land of Cannan) that Church is not in the nature of the particular Churches of Christ, but in the nature of a Nationall or state Church.\textsuperscript{55}

Williams was convinced that the protective action of the state had transformed the particular churches of New England into a national church.

Williams was not alone in his observation that the magistrates' coercive power underwrote the clergy's collective will, thereby giving their conciliar decisions just as much authority as those reached by a Scottish Presbyterian Classis. Thomas Lechford, who criticized New England's church government in his tract entitled \textit{Plain Dealing}, argued for greater ecclesiastical authority and favored the introduction of episcopacy. An Erastian, Lechford believed that the magistrate was the "chiefe, the best cement of government."\textsuperscript{56} He realized the truth of his words after being censured by the Bay clergy for his views. The determinations of the clergy, although only advisory, were to be reckoned with, he observed, because "the Magistrate [was] ready

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 97.

\textsuperscript{56}Lechford, \textit{Plain Dealing}, p. 142.
to assist, and in the manner ready, according to duty, to enforce peace and obedience."  

It is true that the New England authorities had dealt with a heretic just as effectively as could a national church such as the Presbyterian or Episcopal church in Scotland and England. They disagreed, however, that they had declared their churches false by accepting the temporal sword of the state. In banishing Williams, the state was only using that coercive power which was rightly hers for the protection of Christ's church. John Cotton posed a problem which most assuredly spoke the mind of most New England divines and magistrates concerning the importance of the role the state had to play in matters of religion:

> If Civill weapons be debarr'd from defending Religion, upon pretence, that Church-weapons are sufficient, and then no Churches nor Church-weapons to be found upon the face of the earth, then let all Seducers of Apostacy, Idolaters, and Hereticks, let them all rejoyce in an open doore of liberty and safety . . . .

Cotton's words suggest that the New England ministers perceived that the principle of Congregational autonomy left the churches with insufficient means within themselves of maintaining uniformity. Therefore, the ministers began to see the advantage of using the magistrate as a co-partner--especially in dealing with such dangerous personages as Roger Williams.

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57 Ibid., pp. 126-127.
58 As quoted in Morgan, Roger Williams, p. 98.
The whole Williams episode revealed certain things about the New England church way. It was apparent from what happened at Salem that the authorities feared an errant congregation far more than they feared having to call a conference of the churches—which they admitted could also err. It was clear, too, that an errant congregation was feared more than state intervention. In short, Congregational autonomy was being circumscribed. Instead of Congregational independence, Congregational interdependence was being emphasized. As various situations and crises arose, the New England leaders were hammering out a definition of how much liberty and how much order there would be in the New England churches.

It should be noted in the case of Roger Williams that neither a synod (a formal conference of the churches meeting with the approval of the General Court and consisting of both lay and clerical representatives), nor a ministerial assembly had been called to deal with his errors. A conference of the churches was suggested when Williams first appeared at Salem, but the necessity passed when he voluntarily left for Plymouth colony. When Williams appeared at Salem the second time, the authorities felt his opinions to be too dangerous to await the calling of a synod. Two of the colony's most eminent preachers, John Cotton and Thomas Hooker, were appointed to refute him, but no formal church gathering met to confound his opinions. Instead, the Massachusetts General Court, with certain of the ministers present, hastily met and pronounced his opinions
erroneous and announced the sentence of banishment. Cotton disagreed with Williams, but nevertheless he was distressed that Williams had been banished without first being dealt with by a formal conference of the churches. Cotton believed that time should be taken to persuade Williams to see his errors and an attempt made to bring him back into the fold. The General Court realized that a synod could admonish Williams, but it could take no coercive action against him. The Court, however, could use admonitory procedure and add to it the expedient threat of exile.

A formal synod was called in 1637, however, to deal with the Antinomian Controversy—the greatest crisis in the early history of New England. The Antinomian Controversy was the culmination of a religious revival that began in 1633. The revival seems to have been the result of the psychological need for an assurance of one's salvation. But the evangelical preaching during the revival of 1633 followed two different forms. The majority of New England divines preached the doctrine of preparation for conversion. Opposed to this brand of evangelical preaching was the eminent John Cotton of Boston. Cotton repudiated the doctrine of preparation, emphasizing the importance of faith and unmerited saving grace in the process of conversion.

59Ziff, Career of John Cotton, p. 91.

According to the preparationists, regeneration could be marked off into a series of stages. Conversion was considered to be a process in time. Preparation was not looked upon by its apologists, however, as a saving act of the human will but as an act that came before even the slightest tremor of faith. Preparation was merely an offer of readiness to accept the covenant of grace should the offer ever be presented by God. The power to accept the covenant, however, came from God. Preparation viewed in this respect could be argued to be no human act of salvation in the Arminian sense. The idea of preparation "met a spiritual need" in that it gave men encouragement "to seek holiness in the midst of a determined universe." The majority of New England divines believed that "the more we endeavor, the more assistance and help wee find from him." The expounders of preparation wished to hold out to unregenerate men the hope that if they would put their hopes in order God might be more inclined to visit His grace upon them. Of course, grace might not come, but at least the reprobate could feel assured that God would be more prone to give grace to a soul that was prepared for its reception than to one that was not.

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62 Ibid., p. 57.

63 Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), p. 56. (Hereafter cited as Miller, Colony to Province.)
The Congregational divines who first expounded the doctrine of preparation described the conversion experience as a series of stages in which the elect could eventually come to know of their salvation. Some outward sign of salvation was looked for as an additional assurance of having received God's grace. The sign looked for was sanctification, the external performance of a godly life. Outward behavior became a sign of justification, although not infallible.

The New England preparationists were quick to realize that their doctrine was more than just a tool for evangelical preaching. It had valuable social implications as well. A man undergoing a work of preparation will naturally be endeavoring to perfect his external behavior with the hope that salvation might ensue. It is true that, even though he was preparing, a man might never be saved, but nevertheless, he would be fulfilling the terms of the national covenant by which God promised the nation, in return for external obedience, temporal prosperity. Thus the idea of preparation became another informal method of control. Through its emphasis on external behavior, the doctrine of preparation automatically filled the terms of the national covenant which the founders had hoped would provide the necessary incentive to righteous conduct required of a community.

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64 The Puritans of New England possessed besides the covenant of grace and the church covenant, a national or societal covenant. In this covenant man promised obedience in return, not for salvation, but for temporal prosperity. See Miller, New England Mind.
covenanted with God. The apologists began to urge the doctrine on all men as a means of preserving order within the state.\footnote{Miller, "Preparation for Salvation," p. 61.}

The real impetus to the revival of 1633 does not seem to have come from the preaching of such preparationists as Hooker or Shepard, who preached the doctrine in order to incite men to reach out for salvation, but from the preaching of John Cotton of Boston. Cotton did not agree with the doctrine of preparation, as did the majority of his fellow divines, or to the belief that sanctification could be accepted as assurance of justification. Cotton pointed out that merely walking in the way of Christ could be performed by a hypocrite. He was perhaps a truer Calvinist than his fellow ministers in emphasizing man's sense of helplessness before his God. Rather than finding assurance of one's justification in outward behavior, Cotton told his listeners to look to God. The sinner was to empty his heart of everything and "to wait for Christ, and to wait for Him until He shew Mercy upon you.\footnote{As quoted in Miller, "Preparation for Salvation," p. 61.}"

For Cotton, preparation was salvation. He asserted that "A man is as passive in his Regeneration, as in his first generation.\footnote{Hall, Antinomian Controversy, p. 61.}" Cotton believed that if we are fitted for good deeds, that the first motion must be the work of God alone, and if He makes us fit to do good deeds He has shown us already His
irrevocable favor. In making us fit for good works there is a "true spiritual Union between the Lord and our souls."\textsuperscript{68} For Cotton, then, there was no chronology of conversion. Conversion was not a process in time, but a "holy rape of the surprised will"\textsuperscript{69} whereby man is instantaneously regenerated through the union between the Lord and his soul. Cotton condemned the doctrines of preparation and sanctification because he believed that they would lead men to take too much pride in good works rather than devoting all their energies to the seeking of Christ.

These differences in opinion were naturally a threat to the unity of the Bay Puritans. Cotton, however, made a concession to the preparationists at the Synod of 1637 when he asserted that "The Spirit doth Evidence our Justification in both wayes, sometime in an absolute Promise, sometime in a conditionall."\textsuperscript{70}

The real threat to the unity of the Bay lay in the teachings of Anne Hutchinson. Anne had listened carefully to Cotton's words, but when she commented on those words during her midweekly meetings, she imputed additional meaning to them. Anne was convinced of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost within the individual,

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid., p. 57.

and that only such an absolute union could bring salvation. She and her followers considered preparation to be a most baleful tenet and was only proof that the ministers of the colony were teaching a covenant of works.

Anne's emphasis on the indwelling of the Holy Ghost was too close to the concept of immediate personal revelation which ran counter to the Puritan's belief that the knowledge of God's will could be discovered only through the Bible. Furthermore, she considered that to hold sanctification as an indication of regeneration was Popery. Anne also believed that to exhort the elect to fulfill their obligations to the moral law cheapened God's saving act and that anyone concerned about their conduct was still under the obsolete covenant of works. The Bay ministers believed that such a pernicious doctrine would lead to moral anarchy. But she possessed still another more alarming belief. She contended that the justified or saved could discern, through the promptings of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost within them, who were within the covenant of grace and who were not. And she went on to hint that only her favorite teacher, John Cotton, and her brother-in-law John Wheelwright, were justified—all other

72 As quoted in Miller, "Preparation for Salvation," p. 62.
73 John Winthrop, Short Story, preface, as found in Hall, Antinomian Controversy, p. 203. See also Winthrop's Journal, Vol. II, p. 260ff.
ministers were still under a covenant of works.  

It is evident that this contentious housewife (and midwife for the colony) had created a more invidious form of separatism than had Roger Williams. What need be there of a church of saints if only by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, if only through direct revelation, could the gap that existed between the unregenerate and God be filled? Church and clerical edification would not be needed. Such views would put a quick end to Winthrop's new Zion. In addition, since such heresies were popular with the majority of the Boston church, the Bay's largest congregation, they were bound to attract the eyes of all New England's detractors back in England. So here again, as in the case of Roger Williams, the Bay Puritans were confronted with the two dangers presented by separatism—schism within the covenanted community, which would disrupt the cherished concept of one people covenanted with God to serve as a model to the rest of the world; and the external danger of interference from England, which could lead to a revocation of the charter.

For these reasons, Anne Hutchinson and her followers had to be banished, just as Roger Williams had been. Orthodoxy had to be maintained. But Antinomianism had proved a much more disruptive force than mere separatism would imply. Anne's views dealt a heavy blow to the minister's godly truth. Ministerial

74 Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma, p. 141.
75 Ibid., p. 139.
authority had been denounced when Anne contended that most of the ministers were under a covenant of works rather than a covenant of grace. The challenge to the ministers' authority can be seen in Anne's own words to her judges: "you have power over my body but the Lord Jesus hath power over my body and soul." 76

The mood of the laity at the end of the first decade of New England's religious enterprise seemed to be one of increasing opposition to clerical authority. Referring to John Wilson's trouble with his Boston congregation, John Winthrop commented in his journal that "it was strange to see, how the common people were led, by example, to condemn him . . . and that such as had known him so long . . . should fall upon him with such bitterness for justifying himself in a good cause. . . ." 77 And Thomas Shepard had the following to say about lay opposition: "An elder gives reasons strong and answerable for something to be done: a young fellow shall step up, and say, without ground or show of it. That is your light, and mine is otherwise." And Shepard also spoke out against those who "cast off the Lord's government over them, who will have no rulers or governors in churches" and would take "all for themselves." 78

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78 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 111.
There were other matters of contention besides the Antinomian Controversy which suggest that the brethren did not always easily submit to the minister's voice. There were such questions as how far did the effects of excommunication extend? When should the sacraments be offered? How should the ministers be maintained? What recourse did a church have against an ungodly elder? There was contention over such questions as the proper site for a new meetinghouse, and even discussion over the matter of proper seating arrangements. There were difficulties between different interests within the community, such as the one that arose involving the merchant Robert Keayne when his worldly interests ran counter to John Cotton's definition of "just price." In the second decade, various views arose over the questions of baptism and church membership, which were becoming pressing problems at this time.

The ministers believed that the final resolution of all of these questions should remain in their hands. The Antinomian Controversy, with its lay opposition, brought the ministers to realize that the Congregational way suffered from an institutional weakness. This weakness was reflected in the words of William

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80 For a discussion of some of the minor matters of contention between minister and congregation see Ola Winslow, Meetinghouse Hall (New York: MacMillan Company, 1952).

81 Rutman, Winthrop's Boston, p. 155.
Hubbard, the Puritan historian, who, looking back on the 1630's, noted that "in the beginning of times was occasioned much disad­vantage to the government of the church by making it too popular. . . ."\(^2\) The ministers had to find a definition of their authority which would act as a sufficient check on major­ity rule while retaining the Congregational principle of free consent. The problem was, again, the one of determining how much liberty and how much order there would be in the New Eng­land churches.

To find an answer to the problem, the New England divines turned to the concept of "mixed" government which the English Congregationalists had bequeathed to them in rather primitive form. Although they conceived church order as being partly democratic and partly aristocratic, the real question was where the balance of power was to be placed. Would the balance of power rest with the brethren or with the elders of the church? If the power rested with the brethren, church govern­ment would be more democratic; if with the elders, more aris­tocratic.

The ministers were faced with the choice of defining their office as either subordinate to the church and holding its power from the members or superior to it and standing in a direct relationship to Christ. It would appear that during

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the 1630's the more functional definition of the ministry was accepted. The office of the ministry came into being when the fellowship of saints elected someone they felt possessed the special gifts and the outward calling necessary to conduct the business of the covenanted group. During the early years the ministers seemed to share a confidence in the brethren which did not begin to erode until the Antinomian Controversy and its aftermath. The ministers' confidence in the laymen was perhaps built upon the fact that the latter had endured an ocean voyage for the sake of true religion. These same laymen underwent the test of a relation and helped to build the first churches in the colony. This pristine vigor, reinforced by the eschatology of the ministers enhanced the democratic or popular impulse of Congregationalism. Thomas Hooker asserted that "these are the times when people shall be fitted for such privileges, fit I say to obtain them, and fit to use them." 83

Church government during the 1630's rested upon the concept of free consent, at least in practice. Thomas Lechford noted that "in Boston, they rule, most an-end, by unanimous consent, if they can, both in admissions, and censures, and other things." And in Salem he observed that "They rule by the major part of the Church. You that are so minded hold up your hands: you that are otherwise minded hold up yours." 84 The brethren of

83 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 109.
84 Lechford, Plain Dealing, p. 38.
each congregation supervised the trial of a candidate for the ministry and in turn elected him to the office. The brethren's participation was necessary in all matters of discipline as the ministers, according to John Cotton, could perform "no public act, but in their presence, and with their consent." 85

Certain ministers added force to these democratic stirrings by naming the church as the source of the minister's authority. Thomas Hooker argued that the "ministry is not capable of any power, but as it adheres to the church, and so from it; as the eye in the body, etc." 86 Speaking of ministerial authority, John Davenport explained that the ministers "have their Office from the Church, and their Office-Power, by the Church originally, therefore there was power in the Church, before Office-Power, which did communicate and convey Office-power to its Officers." And Richard Mather spoke of the ministers as mere stewards or servants in the way they ruled. 87

These statements contained certain democratic stirrings and along with the church practices of the early 1630's suggested to English critics that the New England churches had gone the way of Brownism. 88 The charisma of the first generation ministers did much to advance their authority in the congregation, however, and acted as a check upon the democratic.

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85 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 46.
86 Ibid., p. 110.
87 Ibid.
88 Dexter, Congregationalism as Seen. . . p. 426ff.
impulse. Moreover, what democratic stirrings the churches may have experienced in these early years did not last long, as the confidence the ministers had in the brethren began to disappear with the Antinomian Controversy and the aftermath of antiministerial sentiment it ushered in.

The increasing lay opposition forced the ministers to make certain changes in the administration of church matters. The synod of 1637 condemned the practice of permitting members of a congregation to ask questions at the end of sermons or public lectures. Members were not allowed to refuse to assemble at the minister's request or "speak in the church, before they have leave from the elders." A change also occurred in the practice of examining offenders. The earlier practice allowed that offenders were to be examined before the entire congregation, but the ministers began to assert their right to examine an offender first in private before presenting his case before the congregation. John Cotton in one of his major treatises of the 1640's listed eleven "special acts" which were the special province of the ministers. One of the more important of these acts as far as ministerial control was concerned allowed the ministers to propound church matters beforehand "lest themselves and the church, be openly.

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90 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 111.
These matters were all administrative concerns, however, and did not alter the fact that in the early New England concept of "mixed" government the scales seemed to be tilted in favor of the democratic element rather than the aristocratic. Richard Mather found a way in the mid-1640's of countering this democratic strain. He proposed that the ministers adopt the "Negative Voice," or veto power which was then in use by the Massachusetts General Court. Mather considered the minister's veto an essential feature of "mixed" government. "Wherefore if a mixture be all that is desired," he announced, "the Elders must have at least a Negative Voice, and no matters pass Judicially without their authoritative Concurrence in the Same..." The ministers could use this veto power when the occasion arose where "the People carry matters in the Church by their greater number of Votes, though the Elders do Dissent."  

The device of the negative voice solved a practical problem...

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91 John Cotton, The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, as found in Larzer Ziff, ed., John Cotton on the Churches of New England, op. cit., p. 115. (Hereafter cited as Cotton, The Keys.) Thomas Hooker had the following to say about discussing matters before the whole congregation: "The debating matters of difference, first before the whole body of the church, will doubtless break any church in pieces, and deliver it up into loathsome contempt." (Mather, Magnalia, Vol. I, p. 349.)

faced by the ministers. The task remained, however, of defining the minister's authority in the realm of theory. In fact, the task remained of defending the entirety of New England's church polity on the basis of Scripture and theory. The nature of ministerial authority had been touched upon in a number of treatises written in the early 1640's in response to questions addressed to the New England ministry from Englishmen interested in knowing how the Congregationalists handled certain matters of church government. These treatises had been formulated more with the intent of illustrating the workability of the New England churches without defending their scriptural authority. The year 1642, however, saw the Presbyterians on the ascendency in England. In that year Thomas Hooker, John Davenport, and John Cotton were invited to attend the Westminster Assembly in England in order to compose church affairs in that country. These divines did not want to go, however, as Hooker put it, "3,000 miles to agree with three men." 93 Interest, however, in church polity was so strong at this time, that the New Englanders, in addition to furnishing accounts of the practicality of the New England Way, felt obliged to defend their churches as the authentic churches Christ had instructed the Apostles to build.

John Cotton provided New England with a scriptural justification of her churches in his treatise entitled The Keys of the

Kindgom of Heaven (1644). The main purpose of the Keys was to prove the authenticity of the Congregational churches by demonstrating that the churches found in Apostolic times were Congregational. Therefore, its chief arguments are scriptural, but the tensions of the times were clearly reflected in the Keys. The ministers' disenchantment with lay opposition was clearly reflected in the way they tried to insure their own hegemony by exalting the role of the elders in church government. Cotton accomplished this by arguing that two different forms of power existed within a congregation. Cotton began his argument by asserting that Christ had given the power of the keys to the kingdom of heaven (preaching, the sacraments, and censure) to Peter. But Peter was not to possess this power alone. He received the keys as a representative of all who were ever to share their powers--apostles, elders, or church members.  

But Peter had received two keys. The first, the key of faith, was common to all believers. The second was the key of discipline or order. The power of this key was divided between the leaders and the brethren in such a way that the former had the authority and the latter the interest. Or, to say it another way, the brethren possessed the "virtual" power of the

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95 Ibid., p. 95.
96 Ibid., p. 96.
key; whereas the elders possessed the "formal" power.\textsuperscript{97} The purpose in distinguishing between two forms of power was to deny that the congregation delegated any power to its officers. Though the congregation held the power from Christ, they could not exercise this power without electing officers. The ministers held the keys "formally" by virtue of the power inherent in their office; therefore there was nothing the congregation could delegate to them. Cotton contended, then, that even though the church members held the power of the keys and the right of electing their minister to office, they were not the actual source of his authority.

Other New England divines besides John Cotton began to define the nature of the ministerial office in a way which made it more independent of the congregation. Shepard and Allin declared that the ministerial office "is the immediate institution of Christ, the gifts and power belonging thereto are from Christ immediately, and therefore he ministers in his name...."\textsuperscript{98} The ministers would still agree that the minister owed his summons to the congregation, but they argued that the office was not the creation of the people. The office was instituted by Christ and its powers received immediately from Him.

\textsuperscript{97}Thomas Hooker, \textit{A Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline, etc.}, 1645, as quoted in Benjamin Hanbury, \textit{Historical Memorials Relating to the Independents or Congregationalists: From Their Rise to the Restoration of the Monarchy} (London, 1844), Vol. III, p. 305.

\textsuperscript{98}Hall, \textit{Faithful Shepherd}, p. 114.
Cotton went on in the Keys to clarify the powers of the brethren and the elders or presbyters. He asserted that "the church" cannot "excommunicate the whole Presbytery, because they have not received from Christ an office of rule, without their Officers. . . ."\(^99\) Furthermore, he added that "no act of the people's power or liberty doth properly bind, unless the authority of the Presbytery concurs with it."\(^100\) It is obvious that Cotton was intent on stifling the democratic tendencies within Congregationalism. In fact, he explicitly disparaged democracy. "Democracy," he said, "I do not conceive that ever God did ordain as a fit government either for church or commonwealth. If the people be governors, who shall be governed."\(^101\)

Samuel Stone, Hooker's colleague at Hartford, described church government as "a speaking Aristocracy in the face of a silent Democracy."\(^102\) In actuality, a silent revolution had occurred in the ministers' stand on "mixed" government. In The Keys they had quietly shifted the balance of the scale in favor of the "aristocratic" strain in their church order.

\(^100\) Ibid., p. 134.
\(^102\) As quoted in Mather, Magnalia, Vol. I, p. 437.
A sense of the inherent institutional weakness of Congregationalism, which a strict interpretation of the principle of Congregational independence occasioned, flowed in upon the ministry during the Antinomian Controversy. How was uniformity of practice and belief to be maintained if the largest congregation in the colony could expound its views unopposed? The episode provoked a renewed interest among the ministers in the use of the synod as a device for the maintenance of uniformity. The controversy between the Antinomians and their opponents grew to such a fervor that a synod comprised of the representatives of all the churches in Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut met in the church at Newtown on September 30, 1637, and declared the Antinomian beliefs heretical. The following spring, Anne Hutchinson was banished from the colony. John Winthrop, being pleased with the synod's effectiveness, urged the ministers to follow up its successes by establishing similar church assemblies once a year. Apparently most of the ministers saw the practical value of such meetings as Winthrop remarked that his "motion was well liked of all." Edward Johnson, writing at the time of the Antinomian Controversy, also praised the effectiveness of synodical consociation as a means of control: "Reverend and beloved in Christ could your eyes but behold the efficacy of loving caunsell in the Communion of Congregational

Churches . . . charity commands me to thinke you would never stand for Classickall injunctions any more neather Diocesan, nor Provinciall authority can possibly reach so far as this royall Law of love in communion of Churches." ¹⁰⁴  The majority of the ministers must have shared Roger Williams and Samuel Skelton's fear, however, that such regular church councils might grow in time into an ecclesiastical court, thereby infringing upon the principle of Congregational autonomy. Whatever the reason, the ministers balked at the suggestion. The success of the synod insured, nevertheless, that synodical authority had become a permanent feature of the New England church way.

No doubt there were those ministers who, fearful of too much state intervention, saw in a synod the means of filling in the void into which the magistrates were all too prone to move. The ministers also saw in the synod a means whereby they could assert and buttress their authority against the tide of increasing lay opposition. Synods could be used by the ministers to maintain control over the several churches just as the device of the negative voice allowed them control over their individual congregations.

The growing interest in the synodical device and the awareness of its potential for allowing some formal means of centralized control over the congregations is reflected in the treatises

on church government published during the 1640's. Nearly two-thirds of Cotton's *The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven* covers the power and authority given to synods. Concerning the binding power of a synod's decision, Cotton asserted that it did not bind if contrary to the peace and truth of the Gospel; however, if the elders in a synod promulgated an act in the name of Christ according to the Word of Christ it was to be accepted as a matter of conscience. Cotton's discussion of synods differed from earlier discussions in the way he clothed them with power. Earlier definitions of synods had merely asserted that they were to be consultative rather than decisive and that they were for the well-being of the churches. In order to lend them legitimacy and authority, Cotton argued that they were an ordinance of Christ. Not only could they give counsel, but they could also "command and enjoin the things to be believed and done." Once a synod reached a decision that decision, "being an ordinance of Christ, bindeth the more for the synod's sake." Similarly, Thomas Hooker, in his famous treatise on church polity, affirmed that "a synod may be said to bind the truth of God upon the churches . . . by way of authoritative counsel," although it does not bind formally. Hooker spoke of a synodical decree "as binding the conscience . . . not from the authority of him

106 Ibid., pp. 117, 119, 159.
107 Ibid., p. 119.
that speaks, but because it is Scripture that is spoken; and
may lawfully lay an absolute necessity upon all his hearers
that they must keep that charge, since it is God's charge now
published and applied by his means.\textsuperscript{108} Again he held that the
decisions of Congregational synods were "no other than Gods
Commands," and are of "a Divine Authority which is now by them
discovered, and in his Name applied to the particulars under
hand."\textsuperscript{109} All this was to lay a heavy burden upon the individ­
ual congregation to accept the decision of a synod as final.
Cotton and Hooker's intent here was to make the Congregational
synod an instrument of peace among the churches which would be
just as effective as a Presbyterian classis, even though the
former's decisions were only advisory.
Cotton was also intent upon maintaining ministerial domina­
tion of the synod. He assured this by allowing the brethren
only to ratify what the elders did in the synod although they
had liberty to "dispute their doubts modestly and Christianly
amongst the elders."\textsuperscript{110} The power and authority in promulgat­
ing the synodical decree lay clearly with the elders. The
brethren of a church present in a synod were to be the same
"speaking Aristocracy in face of a silent Democracy"\textsuperscript{111} that

\textsuperscript{108}Hooker, Survey of the Sum of Church-Discipline, p. 315.
\textsuperscript{109}As quoted in Miller, Errand into the Wilderness, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{110}Cotton, The Keys, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{111}Supra.
they were when they sat in their individual churches. The min­
isters had carried their silent revolution from their individual
churches to the synod, which they hoped to make an instrument of
their will.

The legitimacy of synods had to be put forth cautiously, as
the tyranny of the episcopacy from which they had fled still
weighed heavily upon the colonists' minds. To many, a synod
meant an ecclesiastical authority which could dictate to the
individual congregations. Such a synod had no place in the
New England churches as it clearly violated the principle of
Congregational autonomy. Therefore, Cotton had to remind his
readers that

the church of a particular congregation, fully
furnished with officers, and rightly walking
in judgement and peace, is the first subject
of all church authority, needful to be exer-
cised within their own body.112

Furthermore, he cautioned that a consociation of churches "be
not perverted, either to the oppression or diminution of the
just liberty and authority of each particular church within
itself; who being well supplied with a faithful and expert
presbytery of their own, do walk in their integrity according
to the truth and peace of the Gospel."113

By 1646 the Bay Puritans realized that the time had come
to formulate an official platform of church discipline. The

113 Ibid., p. 161.
mid-1640's witnessed demonstrations at home for a wider extension of the franchise to those not in church membership. With the new religious test of a conversion experience having become established by 1636 the problem became even more acute. Dr. Robert Child became the champion of those settlers who resented exclusion from church membership, especially since such exclusion denied them certain civil privileges. Child was in favor of an all-inclusive church order which would thereby open the franchise to all. Child and six other men appealed to the Massachusetts General Court in May, 1646, asking that the state require the churches to accept as members everyone who belonged to the Church of England.

When Child presented his petition to the General Court the magistrates met apart from the deputies and passed on a petition presented by some of the elders of the Bay for a synod to be held at the end of the summer, the purpose of which would be to draw up an official position on church polity. The deputies refused, however, to concur with the magistrates in the calling of a synod. As grounds for their refusal they voiced their conviction that such a synodical gathering to propound a uniform practice for all the churches would seem "to give power either to the synod or the court to compel the churches to

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114Morgan, Visible Saints, pp. 104-105.
115Winthrop's Journal, p. 271.
practice what should so be established."\footnote{Ibid., p. 274.} Apparently the deputies considered themselves the champions of those who held to a strict interpretation of the principle of Congregational independence. Their vote of nonconcurrence may also have been a sign of antiministerial sentiment. To vote against the punishment of Child and the call for a synod was the same as to vote against the ministers, as everyone knew where the ministers stood on these issues.

When the time came for the synod to meet, three churches—Hingham, Salem, and Boston—refused to send any delegates.\footnote{Ibid., p. 278.} Boston and Salem questioned whether the state could rightly call a synod. Furthermore, the Boston church believed that "this synod was appointed by the elders, to the intent to make ecclesiastical laws to bind the churches and to have the sanction of the civil authority put upon them."\footnote{Ibid., p. 279.} Winthrop wrote in his journal that these views were expressed by those "who came lately from England, where such a vast liberty was allowed, and sought for by all that went under the name of Independents."\footnote{Ibid.} Captain Edward Johnson suggested that the aforementioned churches were merely holding to a strict interpretation of Congregational independence, writing that there were many "inured with the broad beaten path of liberty" who feared...
"to be confined in the straight and narrow path of truth" as proclaimed by a synod. Boston and Salem's recalcitrance indicated that there was still a strong adherence to the principle of Congregational autonomy and a fear of the centralizing and authoritative power of a synod. Lengthy debate ensued within the Boston Congregation and it was only won over to the synod after John Norton of Ipswich delivered a sermon of which the object was to show "the nature and power of the synod, as only consultative, decisive, and declarative" and "the power of the civil magistrate in calling such assemblies," to which he concluded it was "the duty of the churches in yielding obedience."  

The synod which met at Cambridge on three separate occasions between 1646 and 1648 finally agreed on a platform of church discipline which had been drafted by Richard Mather. Mather drew largely on his earlier accounts of the New England church way and also from John Cotton's The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Cambridge Platform of Church Discipline stands as a culmination of an effort to exalt the power of the ministers both within their congregations and when consociated together in synods. The concept of "mixed" government was proclaimed anew and fossilized into law. The increasing authoritarian tone of the Platform was evident. In respect to Christ,

121 Winthrop's Journal, pp. 280-281.
the government of the church was defined as a monarchy; in respect to the brotherhood, a democracy; and in respect to the power of the elders or presbytery, an aristocracy. But it was the aristocratic nature of the arrangement which was emphasized at length. It was explicitly stated that:

Church-government, or Rule, is placed by Christ in the officers of the church, who are therefore called Rulers, while they rule with God: yet in case of mal-administration, they are subject to the power of the church, according as hath been said before. . . whereas the work & duty of the people is expressed in the phrase of obeying their Elders . . . so as it is manifest, that an organik or compleat church is a godly politic, consisting of some that are Governors, & some that are governed, in the Lord.

The Platform buttressed the power of the elders even more when it affirmed that the brethren could not "oppose or contradict the judgment or sentence of the Elders, without sufficient and weighty cause, because such practices are manifestly contrary to order, and government and in lets of disturbance, and tend to confusion." Mather's concept of the negative voice was written into the Platform with the words that "no church act can be consummated, or perfected without the consent of both (the elders and the brethren)." Of synods the Platform stated that, though they were not necessary to the "being," they were

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123 Ibid., p. 219.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid., p. 220.
"necessary to the wellbeing of churches, for the establishment of truth, & peace therin." It was asserted that a synod's determinations were "to be received with reverence and submission." They were to be respected as being "an ordinance of God appointed there-unto his work." The mood of the Platform on the power of synods seems to be that of theoretical qualification but practical acceptance.

The Platform was presented in October, 1649 to the General Court which in turn recommended it "to the judicious and pious consideration of the severall churches within this jurisdiction." Several points in the Platform were objected to, however, "by several persons from several churches" and a battle ensued which lasted until 1651. Much of the criticism stemmed from brethren who objected to those parts of the Platform which countenanced the procedures by which the ministers hoped to enhance their authority. The brethren protested the device of the negative voice, which required the minister's consent to church actions. They objected to the concept of "mixed" government as it made the "power of the people as good as nothing." The brethren of the churches saw in these clauses what they conceived to be an usurpation of their power.

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126 Ibid., pp. 233-234.
127 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 186.
129 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 116.
Another point objected to was the Platform's sanctioning a minister's right to "administer the sacraments unto congregations besides his own." Many brethren of the congregations rejected the clause which established that no man could "speak in the church, before they have leave from elders: nor continue so doing, when they require silence."

One of the major points of contention in the Platform was the section on the power of synods. This obviously was the major issue of disagreement at the second meeting of the Cambridge synod in 1646 and at its third and final session in 1648. Synodical authority was debated to such length at the second meeting of the synod that a committee prepared a paper on the nature of the power of a synod and the right of the magistrates to call one into existence. The Cambridge synod had to prepare the paper with caution in order to win Boston over to the Cambridge synod. The paper gave scriptural warrant for synods, and stated that the power of a synod was decisive, directive, and declarative. By the word "decisive" the paper did not mean to imply that a synod's determinations could be imposed upon the churches in a judicial and final way. To give synods such authority would make them indistinguishable from a Scottish Presbyterian classis. Rather, the ministers meant that

130 Mather, Magnalia, Vol. II, p. 239.
132 Ibid., pp. 191-192.
"by way of discussion and disputation" a synod declared decisively the truth "in weighty matters of Religion." The paper clearly ruled that the imposition of a synod's "truth" once declared, however, "belongeth to every particular Church," thus protecting the principle of Congregational autonomy. The paper declared that "the judgement of a Synod is in some respect superior, in some respect inferior to the judgement of a particular church." The synod was superior in the sense that its decision represented the opinion of the majority of the ministers. It was inferior in respect to jurisdiction, as there could be no jurisdiction higher than the individual church. But even though a synod's decision was merely a declaration of the truth and did not carry judicial weight (or bind "politically" as the paper expressed it), it did bind "formally" in the sense that it bound the conscience. On this point the assembled ministers were only following Hooker and Cotton in implying that the synod's determinations were "no other then Gods Commands" and to deny their validity would be to rebuke God's authority. The ministers sought to compensate for the synod's lack of a decisive power by making its declarations a matter of divine decree, thus enhancing its authority.

The role of synods, nevertheless, remained a ticklish sub-

133 Ibid.
134 Supra, p. 70.
ject. Boston and several persons from other churches became quite alarmed with that section of the Platform "in which they say, the Synod is an Ordinance of God."  

Apparently the laity and those ministers who held to a strict interpretation of Congregational autonomy favored a definition of synodical authority akin to that of Cartwright and Travers'. Synodical discipline was not framed directly out of the Word of God but rather inferred from the Scriptures, and therefore was of purely human derivation. Such a definition was better suited to the principle of Congregational autonomy than a definition which would dress up synods with additional authority by declaring them an ordinance of God. The section of the Platform which declared synods an ordinance of God had been so hotly contended that Cotton was forced the previous year to draw up a discourse concerning the consociation of churches which argued that "as there is a Brotherhood of members in the same Church, so there is a Brotherhood of Churches, being all Fellow members of Christ Jesus, and so bound to have a mutual Care one of another."  

All of these objections to the Platform were gathered together and Richard Mather was selected to draw up an answer to them.  

The revised Platform was printed in London in 1653, but was basically the same as that printed in 1649, no

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135 Rutman, Winthrop's Boston, p. 267.
136 Ibid.
alterations having been made in response to the objections. 138

Though features of the Ames-Bradshaw-Baynes-Jacob group were clearly discernible in the Platform, the document was something more than a mere replica of their Congregationalism. The Platform stood for a Congregationalism that evolved during the first twenty years of the New England experiment and owed as much to experience and innovation as it did to any literary or biographical pedigree. For instance, the test of a "relation" was an indigenous feature of New England Congregationalism: nothing similar to it can be found in the writings of William Ames or any other Puritan divine. Similarly, the device of the negative voice was also an original feature. The most salient feature of the Platform was its heightened authoritarianism. The Congregationalism of the 1630's had placed important powers of church government in the hands of the members, thus emphasizing the "democratical" aspect of Congregational church government. The Platform reflects the change in attitude that came over the preachers in the wake of the Antinomian crisis and the antiministerial sentiment it ushered in. The preachers sought to curtail the freedom the members had enjoyed as saints once that freedom became a threat to order. Therefore, in the Platform they favored a definition of "mixed" government which would ensure their rule within the congregation.

138 Rutman, Winthrop's Boston, p. 268.
One of the most important features of the New England Way was conspicuous by its absence in the Platform. Nowhere was there any mention of ministerial assemblies. Neither could the word "classis" be found in the pages of the document, nor the term "consociation." The much milder sounding "communion" was substituted for "consociation." The Platform approved of communion of the churches by way of brotherly admonition of one congregation to another. But there was no formal approbation of the institution of the ministerial gathering as outlined in the "Model of Church and Civil Government" of 1635. This omission was no doubt due to a suspicion that an unchecked clergy might develop into a Presbyterian-type classis which would create dominion over the now autonomous congregations. Ministerial assemblies, unlike a synod, did not have lay representatives to act as a check on an overly ambitious clergy.

The Cambridge Platform, then, did not represent a complete statement of the New England churches' consociational instruments. In that same year, somewhat ironically, the Laws and Liberties of Massachusetts reaffirmed the legality of the ministers' right to associate. The Platform can perhaps best be considered to represent a compromise between a decentralized Congregationalism which would protect the principle of Congregational autonomy and a moderately centralized Congregationalism which would place emphasis on unity through consociation. By not recognizing the validity of ministerial assemblies, the
laity need not fear clerical pretensions to a dominion over the churches. The acceptance of synodical consociation, on the other hand, provided the extracongregational instrument needed to ensure uniformity, and provide the lay representation needed to check clerical authority.
The first major problem to bring the Cambridge Platform to test as a statement of effective church discipline was the dissension that arose over the question of baptism, which came of major importance during the second, and more particularly, the third generation of Puritan settlement. The Platform stated that membership in a church and access to the Lord's Supper would rest upon a conversion experience as evidence of sainthood. Children of saints were admitted to church membership, however, on the merits of their parents' covenant. It was generally agreed that the children of Abraham were in the covenant made between him and God and were therefore entitled to baptism. Children of saints continued to be admitted to the church by baptism under the presumption that when they reached maturity they would undergo the necessary conversion experience and as adult regenerate members be given a vote and access to the Lord's Supper.

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1 For the relation of the children to their parent's covenant see Miller, The New England Mind, p. 85.

The question of church membership and baptism, however, became a vexing problem when the children of saints grew to maturity, married, and had children without having had the conversion experience. Did these grandchildren of saints possess a hereditary claim to membership? Should these children be baptized? Did the unregenerate parent forfeit the membership he had acquired as a child of a saint merely because he had not yet had a conversion experience? Could he be excommunicated for having a child before having a regenerative experience? This would seem absurd. On the other hand, to let him remain a member would entitle his child to baptism, and that child's child, and so on until church membership came to depend less on sainthood and more on whether or not one was a descendant of a saint.  

There were other important considerations to be made, too. The Puritans in the Bay had committed themselves to infant baptism as opposed to the Baptist practice of adult baptism. To limit baptism to the children of visible saints only, excluding others, would seem to lend currency to Baptist views. Furthermore, to exclude these children from membership in the church would leave no basis whereby they could be brought under church discipline, and being under church discipline was considered an essential part of becoming a saint. To deprive these children of the benefits of churchly watch and discipline would be to

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3 For questions concerning the church estate of the grandchildren of saints whose parents were baptized, unregenerate members, see Morgan, Visible Saints, p. 127.
Another consideration behind baptism lay in clerical control. By extending baptism, more individuals were brought under the minister's authority. The synod which met at Cambridge between 1646-1648 had as its main purpose the settlement of these questions concerning baptism and church membership. Because of the predominance of Presbyterianism in England (with the aid of Scottish arms) and the agitation in New England of those individuals who wished, by Presbyterian aid, to overthrow church and state, such questions were especially pertinent. Dr. Robert Child became the chief spokesman for those colonists who charged the colony with having a membership qualification which was too restrictive. They wanted admittance to full church membership and the political privileges that went along with it. In the face of these accusations, it was incumbent upon the leaders to prove their system in no way restrictive. But as the Presbyterians lost their ascendancy in England, the questions of baptism and membership were no longer so urgent as to demand special attention. The synod turned to the task of drawing up a statement of church polity instead. The synod skirted the problem of baptism merely saying that "the children of such, who are holy" are to be con-

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4 For the practical considerations surrounding the extension of baptism see Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 248-249. Also see Morgan's discussion of the same in Visible Saints, pp. 120-138.

sidered members. Of course, these children were expected to grow up to become regenerate members in full standing. But the Platform did not say anything about what happened to these children's membership when they grew to adulthood but failed to have the expected saving experience, and even more important, it failed to say what happened to these children's children.

Since the synod of 1646-1648 failed to determine the status of unconverted members and their children, the problem of determining such status was left to the individual churches. The churches themselves were rent with contention over the proper course of action in matters of baptism. Agitation over the question of baptism could prove, if not resolved, to be the undoing of religious uniformity. For this reason the Connecticut General Court, which had been petitioned to settle a dispute in the Hartford church, asked the General Court of Massachusetts for help. The result of this action was the Ministerial Convention of 1657. It was at this assembly of ministers that the half-way covenant principles, as they came to be called, were formulated. The principles themselves had already found practical application among several of the churches prior to 1657.

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7 Ibid., chap. XII, par. 7 in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 224.
8 Hubbard, General History of New England (Account written soon after 1675; Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 278; Palfrey, History of New England, pp. 487-489.)
out of their necessity to find some solution to the problem of baptism in the absence of any official declaration.\textsuperscript{9}

The seventeen divines who comprised the Ministerial Convention of 1657 concluded that the unregenerate children of saints who had grown to maturity without showing evidence of conversion were not to be expelled from church membership because of their inability to accept the covenant of grace. The assembly of divines contended that these unregenerate members continued their membership, although not in full communion. At the same time, they concluded that if unregenerate members were to marry and have children, then the children would be admitted to baptism on the strength of their parents' status. Baptism was such a considerable privilege, however, that no unregenerate member of the church could claim baptism for his offspring unless he consented to an "owning the covenant," which was no more than assenting to the main tenets of Congregational doctrine and agreeing to submit themselves to the discipline of the church of which they were a member.\textsuperscript{10}

Several of the churches believed that they were justified in baptizing the grandchildren of saints, although the children's parents were baptized, unregenerate members, on the strength of the Ministerial Convention's decision of 1657. The decision of this convention did seem to represent the majority opinion and

\textsuperscript{9}Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 250-256.

\textsuperscript{10}Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 278.
practice in the matter of baptism of the third generation of Puritan children. Nevertheless, there were those who found the convention's decision something less than official. The opponents of the Ministerial Convention's decision opprobriously branded it as the half-way convenant, and insisted that in the matter of church membership there could be no half-way position. One was either a member in full standing, or he was not. The opponents of the decision believed that only the children of regenerate saints should be the proper subjects of baptism.\footnote{Morgan, Visible Saints, p. 132.}

Thus, after 1648 the ecclesiastical situation in New England stood in considerable flux, with the Cambridge Platform furnishing one answer to baptism and the Ministerial Assembly of 1657 another.

Agitation over the question of baptism was so acute by 1660 that unanimity was imperative, particularly since Oliver Cromwell was now dead and Charles II had been restored, creating a party in England that was hostile to the Congregationalism of New England. Uniformity of practice was now more than ever desirable. Since the Ministerial Convention of 1657 had merely been a meeting of a few ministers, the General Court of Massachusetts decided, in 1661, to call a synod, composed of the ministers and lay representatives of the various churches, whose official decision the court hoped might answer in all finality the question "Who are the subjects of baptism?"
appended a second, "Whither, according to God, there ought to be a consociation of churches, & what should be ye manner of it."\(^{12}\)

After three separate sessions of the synod, the half-way covenant position was finally adopted as official by a vote of seven to one.\(^{13}\) The adoption of the principle by the synod was resisted by Charles Chauncy, president of Harvard, Increase Mather of Boston, and his brother Eleazer of Northampton. John Davenport of New Haven also sent his objections to the half-way decision to the synod by way of letter. The most forceful proponent of the decision was Jonathan Mitchel, who led in the arguments favoring the broader view of baptism.\(^{14}\)

Within a few days after the synod adjourned, the General Court received the seven propositions constituting the half-way covenant. After careful consideration "the Court, on their perusall, judged it meete to commend the same unto the consideration of all the churches & people of this jurisdiction, and for that end ordered the printing thereof."\(^{15}\) The half-way covenant now had both the church and state behind it.

While the General Court was considering the synod's proposi-


\(^{13}\)Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 302.

\(^{14}\)Ibid.

\(^{15}\)Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 269.
tions, the dissenting ministers sent the Court their objections. They told the Court "that the Determinations of the Major part of the Assembly may not be imposed on others." On this point the opponents of the synod were on sound ground. According to the Cambridge Platform Congregational synods could determine and recommend, but they could not coerce the churches to accept their decisions. The dissenting ministers also reminded the Court that they had "left the land of our fathers . . . to enjoy God, & our consciences in this wilderness." Nicholas Street, Davenport's colleague at New Haven, objected to the half-way membership in similar language:

We have suffered many things in vain, in leaving such a Country for this; our Estates, Friends, Comforts there, to enjoy God, and Christ, our Consciences in the Wilderness, for so many years together; and now we must lose those things we have wrought, and may return to our former state when we please: which the Lord preserve us from.

And the keeper of the records of the First Church at Dorchester, Massachusetts, expressed the fear of innovation with the comment

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17 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 233-234.

18 Quoted in Pope, Half-Way Covenant, p. 54.

19 John Davenport, Another Essay for the Investigation of the Truth, in Answer to Two Questions concerning (a) The subject of Baptism, (b) The Consociation of Churches (Cambridge, 1663), pp. 54, 59. (Hereafter cited as Davenport, Another Essay.)
that the new baptismal practice might "bring in time the Corruptions of Old England wch we fled."²⁰

The charge of apostasy was not all rhetoric. The fact that the half-way covenant entailed a departure from the practice of the past could not be hidden easily. Therefore, some spokesman for the half-way position tried to play down its departure from the purism of the founders. Cotton Mather condemned the baptismal practices of the first generation as a "rigid, unscriptural, uninstituted, and unwarrantable insisting upon modes, wherein some of our churches had sinned sometimes against the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."²¹ Mather also claimed that the founders "laboured much to have the principles of truth concerning 'the church state of the children born in the church declared and asserted in the platform of church discipline,' among the 'first principles of New England.'"²² Mather suggested that the half-way position would have been instituted by the founders had not "some worthy men" been slow to "make any synodical decision of those principles."²²

Increase Mather went a step beyond Cotton Mather in *The First Principles of New-England*, a collection of statements made by the first generation divines concerning baptism. In *First Principles* the elder Mather purported to show "that such

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Enlargement of Baptism" is in no way "any declension from the Congregational way." Jonathan Mitchel argued that enlarged baptism did not betray the first principles of the founders: "The Points herein which may be most scrupled by some are knowne to have beene the judgment of the generality of the Elders of the Churches for many years." By invoking the authority of the founding fathers the supporters of the half-way covenant hoped to turn the charge of apostasy around, making the dissenters the enemy of the New England Way.

Increase Mather's First Principles was the only one of numerous tracts published after the synod by both the supporters and opponents of the half-way covenant. The effect of this pamphlet warfare, by bringing debate over the half-way covenant into public view, was to undermine the official or legal strength of the synod's decision and encourage laymen to resist the half-way covenant. Jonathan Mitchel was disturbed over this public debate. Mitchel approved of further investigations of the truth if it was done "Orderly and Peaceable," but believed that publishing anti-synodical literature only "makes the People Judge of

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23 Increase Mather, The First Principles of New England, Concerning the Subject of Baptism and Communion of Churches (Cambridge, 1675), p. 78. (Hereafter cited as Mather, First Principles.)


the Case, who are incompetent." The authority of the dissenting ministers was not to be underestimated. Mitchel, writing to Increase Mather before the latter's acceptance of the half-way position, declared that those ministers who dissented "do bear a greater weight then it may be you are aware of, For the People in the Country have in a manner no Arguments to object but this, some of the Ministers are against it." The combined effort of the dissenting ministers had won over the lay representatives at the Half-Way Synod. Now it was hoped that they could defeat the half-way covenant by carrying the fight to the laymen in the churches.

Proponents of the Half-Way Synod could quote that part of the Cambridge Platform which asserted that a "Synods directions & determinations, so far as consonant to the word of God, are to be received with reverence & submission" to add legitimacy to their position. Nevertheless, despite this and the recommendation of the General Court, the principle of Congregational independence insured that, in the final analysis, the decision to accept the extension of baptism rested with the individual.

26Jonathan Mitchel and Richard Mather, A Defense of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod met at Boston in the year 1662...together with an Answer to the Apologetical Preface set before that Essay (Mitchel wrote this portion of the work) (Cambridge, 1664), pp. 1-3.

27Mather, First Principles, p. 7 of Postscript.

28Pope, Half-Way Covenant, pp. 52-53.

congregation. The question of baptism had brought the principle of Congregational autonomy into dialectical juxtaposition with the Congregational principle of synodical authority. If the laity could be convinced that the synod's propositions were indeed innovation and apostasy, the half-way covenant would be defeated in the churches. Congregational autonomy could prove to be the undoing of the Half-Way Synod's work. The pamphlet warfare that followed the synod was merely part of the battle between proponents and opponents for control of the lay mind.

Since Connecticut did not send messengers to the Half-Way Synod, the synod's decision had no official status in that colony. Nevertheless, questions concerning baptism and church membership weighed just as heavily upon the ministers' minds in that colony as they did in Massachusetts. From the very beginning of the controversy, the colony witnessed the intervention of the Connecticut General Court.  

The event that finally stirred the Connecticut Court to action was the petition it received from William Pitkin. The Pitkin petition originated in response to a letter that John Norton had brought back with him when he returned, during the summer of 1662, from a diplomatic mission to England. This letter, from Charles II, advocated changes in church membership which surpassed by far those proposed by the Half-Way Synod. The letter directed that "all persons of good and honest

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lives . . . be admitted to . . . the Lord's Supper, . . . and their children to baptism."\(^{31}\) Massachusetts ignored the recommendations. In Connecticut, however, Pitkin and six other members of the colony responded to the king's letter. Their petition was similar to the one formulated by Robert Child in the 1640's in that it decried the fact that, although being members of the Church of England, they were denied the Lord's Supper for themselves and baptism for their children. The petition was heard by the General Court with the resultant declaration that not only should the unregenerate children of saints be allowed to baptize their children, but "persons who are of honest and godly conversations, haueing a competency of knowleg in the principles of religion" should also be allowed to join in church fellowship and "haue their children baptized, and that all children of the church be adopted and acc0[un]td reall members of the church."\(^{32}\)

The Court's proposal was radical when compared to the innovations of the Half-Way Synod. If the recommendations of the Court were followed, Connecticut would, in effect, have comprehensive parish churches. The Court asked any ministers opposed to the proposal to send their views to the next General Court. The Court, however, never attempted to press its recommendations upon the churches.\(^{33}\) The indecision on the part of the Connecti-

\(^{31}\)Ibid., p. 271.

\(^{32}\)Ibid., p. 272.

\(^{33}\)Pope, Half-Way Covenant, p. 78.
but General Court led, as controversy enveloped church after church, to schism.

But as the question of baptism divided and eventually split church after church in Connecticut and spread dissension throughout nearly every church in Massachusetts, it became obvious that enlargement of baptism was not the central issue. Contention over the half-way covenant merely obscured a more fundamental conflict between Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The nature of church government and church membership

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34 Pope calls Presbyterians in Connecticut presbyterialists in order "to distinguish their views from a fully developed and integrated Presbyterian polity." (n., p. 76). True, there were ministers like Joseph Haynes of Hartford who did not advocate permanent synods or control of the keys by the elders. The majority of the ministers with Presbyterian leanings, however, seemed to favor permanent synods, but, like John Woodbridge, Jr., may have believed that the land could "hardly ever bear a classis. . . Because the plantations, in this Colony Especially, are too remote for Convenient Assembling" and because "those that can digest a classis are but sprinkled here and there." (Raymond Stearns, ed., "Correspondence of John Woodbridge, Jr., and Richard Baxter," New England Quarterly, X [1937], pp. 576-577.) The Connecticut ministers addicted to Presbyterianism also advocated transfer of the keys to the elders and a more inclusive form of church membership. About the only considerable difference in viewpoint between the Presbyterians in Connecticut and those in England lay in the former's requirement that a minister renew his ordination at each church. Since the goals sought by the Presbyterians in Connecticut were the major points wherein a Presbyterian and a Congregationalist differed; this writer chooses to use the term Presbyterian to apply to the Connecticut ministers rather than a term like presbyterialist which suggests a grouping somewhere between a Congregationalist and a full-fledged Presbyterian. Furthermore, the Presbyterians in Connecticut called themselves Presbyterians, they were called such by their contemporaries, and even the Connecticut General Court gave official recognition to their existence in Connecticut.

It should also be pointed out that, although John Woodbridge, Daniel Denison, and others referred to Presbyterians in Massachusetts, in reality no self-conscious Presbyterian party existed
were the real issues; the half-way covenant served merely as a symbol. 35

According to Daniel Denison, a layman, the fundamental point of cleavage between the Congregationalists and Presbyterians involved the proper "external Order and Regiment in the Church, and Administrations therein, . . ." Denison identified two points of church government wherein the two groups differed: "(1.) The References or Relations our particular Church hath to other Churches, as to Councils, and Communion with each other, . . . (2.) Relating to the exercise of Rule within the Church itself." 36 According to Denison the "Independents, or Congregational men," deny that they "are bound to the directive judgement of a Council, . . ." And some of the Congregationalists, Denison added, affirmed that "the Power and Rule of the Church is in the Brethren without the

in that colony. Clerical division in the Bay colony came, as Pope has observed, "from within orthodox Congregationalism." (p. 150). Although the Massachusetts laity were calling their ministers "Presbyterians," the ministers denied the charge. In truth, many of the ministers wanted virtually everything the Presbyterians sought--greater independence from the brethren and authoritative synods. But they did not openly advocate Presbyterian goals. Therefore, it would be more accurate to call these ministers revisionist Congregationalists.

35 Pope, Half-Way Covenant, pp. 75-76, 95. The half-way covenant remained more of a central issue in Massachusetts than in Connecticut, although even in the former colony it tended to obscure issues of church government.

Elders,\textsuperscript{37} although Denison identified as Presbyterian those ministers who acknowledged John Cotton's distinction in The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven between the "power of interest," the former belonging to the ministers while the latter rested with the brethren. The Presbyterians, according to Denison, also recognized the authority of councils.\textsuperscript{38}

John Woodbridge, Jr., minister at Killingworth, Connecticut, also identified the factions and the issues in his correspondence with the England Puritan, Richard Baxter. Woodbridge divided the factions into "Rigid independents, moderate ones, and those that are Presbyterianly addicted. . . ." Woodbridge noted of the first group that "Their grand Dogma is that a councell has no decisive power unlesse materially, Jejunely to propound what is (Named) truth and Errour and that Every Church-Species has more formall power than an oecumentical Council." Woodbridge added that the rigid Independents gave the brethren equal power with the minister. They also believed in restricted membership and stood opposed to the half-way covenant.\textsuperscript{39}

The "moderate" or "lax Congregationall men," as Woodbridge called them, "give some more honour, but very diminutive, unto Counceells." This group accepted the half-way covenant. They also acknowledged that the power of rule within the church belongs to the elders, but the power of liberty or privilege

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 182.  
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 181-182.  
\textsuperscript{39}Stearns, "Correspondence", p. 574.
to the laity. The perceptive Woodbridge added, however, that "Surely that potestas Libertatis is but a dry bone if 'tis any thing."  

Church government both within the congregation and among the several congregations was the real issue. "The basis for all our Controversyes in the (I may Call it an ) Howling wilderness," Woodbridge observed, "is this one Question, whether The Church of Christ upon earth is to consist in Independant and particular Species or no." Congregational autonomy was being challenged by Presbyterians of Woodbridge's stamp who would give authoritative power to church councils. Lay control of the keys was also being challenged, with the Presbyterians transferring all power into the hands of the elders. A second issue was the idea of restricted church membership. Presbyterians were in favor of a more inclusive policy whereby "so many decent Christians" would not be isolated from the churches. Woodbridge deplored the fact that many were kept from full communion and revamped admissions qualifications, creating one of the first comprehensive parishes in New England.

In the conflict between Presbyterian and Congregationalist, John Woodbridge, Jr. observed that "the gleanings of the Clergy and the body of the Laity" comprised the faction he called

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40 Ibid., p. 575.
41 Ibid., p. 565.
42 Ibid., p. 576.
rigid Independents. It is not strange to find the laity on the side of the strict Congregationalists. They feared that Presbyterian church councils and Presbyterian transfer of lay control of the keys to the elders would deprive them of their rights within the local congregation. The laity called "Presbyterian" any minister whom they believed wished to limit their privilege of consent. In his election sermon of 1673, Urian Oakes acknowledged that "there are many that are bold to Affirm, that the Ministers among us are generally revolted, or revolting to Presbyterianism." Jonathan Mitchel also considered the main issue to have been the charge of a lust for power on the part of the clergy. "We have been reflected upon by some as seeking our selves, and driving on I know not what design" although he added in defense, "I cannot readily Imagine, what Self Interest or Self End we should be led by in this matter."

In 1670 the deputies of the Massachusetts General Court, speaking the mind of the laity, drew up a report which placed the blame for New England's troublesome times on the clergy. The ministers were charged with betraying the "primitive foundation work, innovation in doctrine and worship, opinion and practice" and "an usurpation of a lordly and prelatical

43Ibid., p. 574.
44Urian Oakes, New-England Pleadced with, and Pressed to consider the things which concern her Peace, at least in this her Day....(Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1673), p. 46. (Hereafter cited as Oakes, New-England Pleadced with.)
45Quoted in Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 105.
power." The laity's charge of apostasy was aimed not only at those ministers who accepted the half-way covenant, but also at those ministers who wished to enhance their power within the congregation.

Tension was obviously developing between the ministers and the brethren. But the brethren's accusation against the clergy of a lust for power was only one aspect of this tension. The clergy believed that it was not they, but the brethren who were ambitious for power. The ministers turned the charge of apostasy around calling the brethren "Independents," and "Morellians" and charged them with revolting against the concept of mixed government as established by the Cambridge Platform. According to Urian Oakes it was not the ministers but the brethren who lusted for power. Oakes asserted "that a few Pragmatical and Loquacious Men . . . do boldly usurp and invade the Church power and Authority, and Rule their Brethren and their Rulers also."

An anticlericalism similar to that which followed the Antinomian Controversy was spreading through the churches. When asked to declare what might be the sins which provoked God's wrath, John Wilson, minister at Boston, singled out 'Corahism; "That is, when people rise up as Corah against their ministers. as if they took too much upon them, when indeed they do

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46 Thomas Hutchinson, History of Massachusetts-Bay, p. 232.

47 Stearns, "Correspondence," p. 583; Mather, First Principles, p. 39; Denison, Irenicon, p. 182.

but rule for Christ; yet it is nothing for a brother to stand up and oppose, without Scripture or reason, the word of the elder."^49 Samuel Willard invited his audience to "Look into Congregations, and there you shall see... Ministers despised, their Office questioned, their Authority cast off, and trampled upon, their persons undervalued and vilified, their comfortable Supply and Maintenance neglected."^50 And John Woodbridge, Jr., in his correspondence with Richard Baxter, placed the blame for the troubles of the 1660's squarely on the shoulders of the brethren who "are growne so rude, Insolent, and Coltish (Independency has so fatted them) that the Ministers that have most Authority have not enough to stamp a Judgement and sentence of good mettal to make it Currant with them."^51

Daniel Denison summed up succinctly the struggle that was developing between the ministry and the laity. He stated that the contention was produced by the ministers affirming that "no church Act can pass without the consent of the Elders" while the brethren contended that "the major vote of the Brethren is concussive, and makes a Church Act though the Elders consent not."^52 Denison also declared that some laymen were asserting that the ministers "have no more authority, than any particular

^49Mather, Magnalia, I, p. 313.

^50Samuel Willard, Useful Instructions for a professing People in Times of great Security and Degeneracy... (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1673), p. 75.

^51Stearns, "Correspondence," p. 576.

^52Denison, Irenicon, p. 201.
Brother" except in "Preaching and Administration of the Sacraments, calling of and Moderating in Church Meetings." 

It was obvious what was happening. The brethren were becoming restless. They were questioning Congregational authority. The Cambridge Platform had given authority to what had for a long time been considered Congregational theory as well as practice--the placing of church power in the hands of the ministers and the ruling elders. The Platform gave the right to rule to the elders, while the members enjoyed the right of consent. The brethren were now seeking to expand their church "liberties" beyond mere consent. They wanted a greater share in church government. As Daniel Denison acknowledged, some church members were asserting that a majority vote of the brethren could carry a church act without the consent of the elders. The laity were obviously opposed to the minister's "negative voice." To them the minister's veto was an instrument of usurpation, robbing the members of their rights within the congregation. Critics of Congregationalism had predicted from the beginning that the nature of Congregational polity would only lead to a struggle for power between the members and the minister. The first generation of New England divines had placed the balance of power with the aristocratic strain in Congregationalism, thus checking its democratic impulses. The members were now aggressively trying

53 Ibid., p. 182.
to tilt the scale in favor of a democratic church order. The laity were beginning to realize the truth of John Woodbridge, Jr.'s assertion that the "Congregationalists took power from the people in practice though they give it them in word."  

The members were not wrong in accusing the ministers of being addicted to "Presbyterianism." Many ministers wished to go beyond the concept of mixed government as established by the Platform. According to Woodbridge there were Congregational ministers who were "not content onely to hold the bridle but also justle for all the Roome in the saddle." To them the concept of the "negative voice" was but a beginning. They wanted to put further restrictions upon the brethren's right of consent. As long as the brethren had this right, no church act or reform such as the half-way covenant could be passed without their approval.

On the other hand, if the ministers did not openly advocate the transfer of the power of the keys from the brethren to themselves, it was at least apparent that they wished to have greater independence from the church members. At the synod of 1662 only two topics were listed for consideration--who were the subjects of baptism and the authority of church councils. But the synod went beyond the discussion of these two questions and touched upon other questions, including the power of the fraternity.

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54 Stearns, "Correspondence," p. 574.
55 Ibid.
within the congregation. Eleazer Mather, a member of the synod, wrote John Davenport of New Haven that "There was scarce any of the Congregational principles, but they were layen at by some or other of the Assembly," identifying as one the "power [of] voting of the fraternity in Admission, etc."^56 And in 1666 the Connecticut General Court drew up a list of seventeen questions for consideration by a proposed synod. Two of these questions concerned church government. One was "Whether things new and weighty may be managed in a Church without concurrence of officers and consent of the fraternity of the same Church." The other question was "Whether a Synod have a decisive power."^57 These topics suggest the direction of the second generation ministers' thinking concerning church government.

Not all the ministers participated in the drive to increase their authority both within the congregation and when assembled together in a synod. Urian Oakes, who was selected by the deputies to deliver the 1673 election sermon, sided with the brethren. Oakes invoked the authority of the first generation divines in order to remind his colleagues that the "concurrence of the Brethren" was accepted by the first generation as "necessarily required to the excercise of Church

56 Eleazar Mather to John Davenport, May, 1662, Collections, pp. 192-193.
Authority." Other ministers, including Increase and Cotton Mather, remained faithful to the concept of mixed government as established by the Cambridge Platform. Cotton Mather praised that "due balance" between "rigid Presbyterianism and levelling Brownism; so that on the one side, the liberties of the people are not oppressed and overlaid; on the other side, the authority of the elders is not rendered insignificant."

The ministers' attempt to increase their authority only led to numerous church quarrels. As the first generation divines died or went into partial retirement, one source of controversy became the problem of choosing a new minister. This event was the occasion in many churches for the outbreak of contention over different views of baptism. One minister observed that "The breath of ordination has turned many a smoking into a flaming Townes, it being so hard to find a minister such an Ambidexter as to be Able to please both sides." But again the question of the nature and scope of baptism served only to hide more fundamental issues of church government. One of these issues stemmed from the older generation ministers' insistence that they possessed the right to veto any candidate put forth by the members to assist them. A few years after the

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58 Oakes, New England Pleadeth with, pp. 46-47.
59 Mather, Magnalia, I, p. 552.
60 Stearns, "Correspondence," p. 576.
death of Thomas Hooker in 1647, Samuel Stone claimed the right to veto the brethren's choice of Michael Wigglesworth to assist him, apparently because he differed with Wigglesworth on the nature of church membership. Stone told the church members that it was their duty to "submit to every doctrine which he shall propound to them." The church members were not to invite any minister to the pulpit as a co-pastor to Stone "against his will and right reason, and without his consent and approba­tion." Stone insisted that he had the right to determine who would assist him. The brethren, he exclaimed, "are bound to follow him, when they have no reason against it." A quarrel ensued which lasted until the faction opposite Stone left for Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1659. The following year Stone chose John Whiting as his assistant.

Stone was not the only minister who threatened to use his negative. John Higginson threatened to use his veto when he learned that a majority of the Salem church members had invited Charles Nicholet to preach in their town for a third year. Higginson opposed the members' invitation, contending that Nicholet did not preach sound doctrine and created trouble in the church. Higginson made a public apology, apparently at the behest of the Connecticut General Court. Higginson denied the "false report rayers upon me & spread in Town & Countrey, vix. (that I am a Presbyterian & haue taken away the liberties of the Church)...."  

61Quoted in Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 211.
In 1697 the Third Council of Boston chose Simon Bradstreet as the pastor to assist Samuel Willard. Willard, claiming Bradstreet was of inferior ministerial gifts, declared "that he had a Negative, and was not only a Moderator."  

In these controversies the ministers were consistent with the Cambridge Platform in declaring their right to a negative voice. But to the brethren the ministers' negative served only to suppress their liberties within the congregation. In at least one church quarrel the brethren attempted to take the veto away from the minister. In 1663 Thomas Parker of Newbury hired James Noyes's nephew, John Woodbridge, Sr., who had recently returned from England where he had resided for about sixteen years, to assist him in the ministry. The church, objecting to Parker's action and believing that they should have a greater say in the call of an assistant minister, manifested their dissatisfaction by lowering Parker's salary and placing Woodbridge on a one-year contract.

The dissension in the church eventually spread to the nature of church government. In 1669 a majority of the congregation seceded, declaring that Woodbridge was an "intruder" who had been brought in "by craft and subtility." They also

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63 Diary of Samuel Sewall, Collections, 5th Ser., V, p. 448.
64 Joshua Coffin, A Sketch of Newbury (Boston, 1845), p. 68.
65 Ibid., p. 69.
accused Parker of being "an apostate and backslider from the truth, that he would set up a prelacy, and have more power than the pope. . . ." Depositions were drawn up and sent to the General Court, one of which asserted that Parker, who had strong Presbyterian leanings, had declared publicly that "I am resolved nothing shall be brought into the church, but it shall be brought first to me, and if I approve it, it shall be brought in, if I do not approve it, it shall not be brought in." In a later statement addressed to an exparte council called to heal the church feud, the anti-Parker faction suggested that the offense against them was because they stood by the principles laid down in the Cambridge Platform "and will not turn presbyterians." Although they denied charges that they were "decliners to levelism" and "Morellians," the seceders were actually going beyond the Cambridge Platform in their assertion that church matters were to be decided "by the Majority part of the Church by handy vote" with the minister's vote carrying no more weight than that of any member. Parker and Woodbridge agreed to abide by the "Articles of Accomodation" drawn up by the council which included the provision that they profess their willingness to follow the principles of church

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66 Ibid., p. 74.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 87.
69 Ibid.
70 As quoted in Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 213.
government laid down in the Cambridge Platform. The victory was theirs, however, as they fell back upon the Platform to proclaim their right to a negative voice.\(^\text{71}\)

When Stone died in 1663 the Hartford church became embroiled in another conflict—allegedly over the half-way covenant. In 1666 Stone's successor, Joseph Haynes, attempted to introduce the half-way covenant but found himself adamantly opposed by Whiting.\(^\text{72}\) The strife in the Hartford church soon went beyond the half-way covenant to include admission to full communion. William Pitkin and six men from Hartford asked Whiting to admit them to full communion. They argued that as former members of the Church of England they should not be excluded from church membership.\(^\text{73}\)

The Connecticut General Court eventually intervened and ordered a synod to be called in an attempt to restore peace.\(^\text{74}\) The Congregational faction, apparently believing that Congregational independence was threatened, insisted that the General Court change the title of the forthcoming synod to "Assembly."\(^\text{75}\) The assembly met too briefly, however, to conclude anything.

The Congregationalists, being the greater faction, proposed

\(^{71}\)Coffin, Sketch of Newbury, pp. 87-112.

\(^{72}\)George Leon Walker, History of the First Church, 1633-1833 (Hartford, 1884), pp. 184-185.

\(^{73}\)Ibid., pp. 195-196.

\(^{74}\)Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 273.

\(^{75}\)Ibid., p. 275.
the calling of another assembly with delegates from Massachu-
setts. They undoubtedly believed that their superiority in
numbers would carry their way in such an assembly. The Pres-
byterian faction, however, apparently did not wish to risk
debate in an intercolonial assembly.\textsuperscript{76} Whatever the reasons,
no assembly met and the Connecticut General Court resolved the
controversy in 1669 by countenancing both the former baptismal
practice and the enlarged baptism of the half-way covenant.\textsuperscript{77}

The Hartford church split, Whiting and his followers form-
ing the Second Church of Hartford. At its first meeting the
new church adopted the half-way covenant, after refusing to do
so while part of the First Church of Hartford. It was clear
that the half-way covenant was not the cause of the split in
the Hartford church. As Simon Bradstreet noted in his journal,
the real issue had become church government: "This winter
Hartford Chh. divided Mr. Whyting and his party, refusing to
hold communion with Mr. Haynes and his party beca[ause] of some
differences in point of chh. government. Mr. Haynes and those
with him being lookt upon as Presbyterians."\textsuperscript{78} The half-way
covenant served as an issue around which people could easily
take sides. It played a symbolic role, masking the real issues
that produced conflict between Congregational and Presbyterian

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 276.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 277.

\textsuperscript{78} As quoted in Walker, \textit{First Church in Hartford}, p. 209.
factions in the churches—church government and church membership. 79

In Windsor, as in Hartford, the church suffered from internal strife. Ostensibly the quarreling was over the half-way covenant. John Warham had been the first minister to accept the half-way covenant in Connecticut. 80 However, in 1664 he reversed his decision. 81 That same year the town chose Nathaniel Chauncy, son of Charles Chauncy, President of Harvard, to assist Warham in the ministry. This choice was opposed by a dissident minority and factionalism ensued. The struggle dragged on for several years despite the General Court's attempt to bring peace to the church. Finally, in 1668, the minority faction chose Benjamin Woodbridge, uncle of young John Woodbridge of Killingworth, as their minister. Woodbridge, being a member of the Parker-Noyes-Woodbridge family, had strong Presbyterian leanings. As a result, Windsor had in effect two congregations within the same meetinghouse, yet remaining a single church. 82

Finally, in 1668, Nathaniel Chauncy brought the half-way

79 Ibid.


81 Ibid., pp. 196-197.

82 Ibid., pp. 197-200.
covenant back into the church. Its reinstitution failed, however, to reunite the two factions. As in the Hartford church quarrel, dissension in the Windsor church obviously went beyond the half-way covenant. Dissension continued until the Woodbridge faction, in 1669, split to form their own church. Once again, as in the Hartford church, the cause of schism was not the half-way covenant, but Congregationalism versus Presbyterianism. Simon Bradstreet hinted at the real issue, writing in his journal, "My Brother Woodbridge was ordained minister of the Presbyterian Party (as they are accounted) of Windsor."

During the 1670's the two churches continued to do battle. Finally in 1677 a council of fourteen members was called in an attempt to reunite the two churches. This council advised that the two churches unite and "walk together in the same way and order" which the council understood to be "the Congregational way of Church order." This allusion to the Congregational church order taken together with the term "Presbyterian" as applied by Bradstreet to the Woodbridge faction in Windsor

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83 Ibid., p. 197.
86 Ibid., pp. 207-209.
87 Ibid., p. 206.
88 Supra, p. 108.
points to the special significance that questions of church government had in the church quarrels of the latter half of the seventeenth century.

The advice of the council was partially complied with, but when Chauncy resigned in 1679 to accept a call to Hartford, the church was faced with the problem of choosing a new minister who would meet everyone's approval. 89 John Whiting of Hartford wrote Increase Mather for information about Isaac Foster, one of the ministers Windsor was considering for the position. What Whiting wanted to know in particular about Foster was "what his judgment is in respect to church order." 90 It is significant to note that the criterion used in selecting a new minister was evidently the candidate's concept of church government, rather than his stand on the half-way covenant.

When Foster decided not to accept the call, the prospects of reunion between the two Windsor churches faded. 91 At a town-meeting it was asked of the First Church of Windsor and its pastor, Mr. Chauncy, "whether they apprehend themselves under the power of an ecclesiastical council, and whether they were willing so to remain under the said council." The First Church, apparently hiding behind the principle of Congregational independence, voted in the negative. 92

90John Whiting to Increase Mather, Feb. 1687[9]?, Collections, 4th Series, VIII, p. 463.
91Stiles, History of Windsor, p. 211.
92Ibid., p. 212.
In May, 1679, another council was called with the hope of reuniting the two churches. Again, First Church refused to heed the advice of the council. Finally, in 1680, the Connecticut General Court ordered the two churches to unite into one church and procure a minister. By this time the people of Windsor had apparently grown weary of the factionalism. Whatever the reason, the two churches agreed to unite and settled upon Samuel Mather of Branford as their new minister.

The controversy in the Windsor church is not only illustrative of the degree to which the issue of church government (Congregationalist versus revisionist Congregationalist or Presbyterian) was a divisive factor in the church quarrels after mid-century but is also indicative of how ineffectual church councils were in healing many of the church quarrels. As in many of the church controversies in Connecticut, the dissenting faction was reluctant to abide by the advice of a council, thereby forcing the General Court to intercede in order to lend sanction to the council's advice.

Factionalism in the church at Stratford also led to separate services within the same church. Eventually the minority party formed their own church. The fact that John

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93 Ibid., p. 213.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., p. 214.
Woodbridge, Jr. of Killingworth and Benjamin Woodbridge of Windsor participated in the ordination of the new minister suggests that church government, as in the other church controversies, was a central issue. Both of these ministers favored Presbyterian goals.  

The church schism which attracted the greatest amount of attention in the years following the Half-Way Synod was that of the First Church of Boston. Upon the death of John Wilson in 1667, the Boston congregation called John Davenport to officiate. The issue that provoked controversy was the right of a minority of the church to secede to form their own congregation. They had not participated in Davenport's call because they wanted a minister who would incorporate the half-way covenant into their church practice. But the controversy went beyond the question of the right of the minority to secede. The conflict posed revisionist Congregationalists against strict Congregationalists or purists--men like Davenport who were vehemently opposed to any tampering with the church practice of the first generation divines.

The First Church controversy also gave vent to the laity's hostility toward the half-way covenant. Lay opposition to extended baptism was the main obstacle to those Massachusetts

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ministers who wished to introduce the practice in their churches. As Cotton Mather acknowledged, "in many of the churches a number of brethren were so stiffly and fiercely set the other way, that the pastors did forbear to extend their practice." The laity's opposition stemmed from their conviction that the half-way covenant was an innovation. For two generations they had been taught that church membership rested upon a conversion experience. They could not accept the idea that children of the church when grown to adulthood could pass their membership on to their children without having the requisite conversion experience. The fact that a minority of the ministers were permitted to publish their opposition only tended to reinforce the laity's hostility. However, there was also an antiministerial side to the brethren's opposition. In opposing the half-way covenant they were opposing the authority of the ministers. When the First Church schism occurred, Davenport quickly rallied the laity to his cause.

As in many of the Connecticut church quarrels, church councils were called in an effort to reconcile the warring factions. And, as in Connecticut, instead of reconciliation the councils ultimately encouraged schism by recommending that the dissenting faction be allowed to separate as the only way of restoring peace. During the summer of 1668, both factions

98 Mather, Magnalia, II, pp. 311-312.
agreed that a council should be called. The council suggested that the dissenters be allowed to separate and form a new church. But when the dissenters asked First Church for dismissal, their petition was quickly rejected. In the spring of the following year the minority faction made another appeal for separation, but the church again rejected the request. The dissenters then demanded that another council be called. First Church, however, advised the dissenters that they could only seek a solution to the problem through the church. They maintained that "A Councill tends to overthrow the Congregationall way." The controversy attracted so much attention throughout Massachusetts that a council consisting of representatives from fifteen churches met in Boston, and after a few days of deliberation, recommended that the dissenting brethren be allowed to secede to form their own church. But when First Church received the dissenters' petition, they again denied the authority of a council to make such a decision. Davenport was making a strong appeal to the laity by suggesting that First Church was fighting for Congregational autonomy.

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99 "Third Church Narrative," 1691, quoted in Hamilton Hill, History of Old South Church Boston (Cambridge, 1890), I, p. 25. This narrative is an account of the First Church schism written by members of the Third Church of Boston. It is reproduced in its entirety in Hill. (Hereafter cited as "Third Church Narrative.")

100 Ibid., p. 52.

101 Ibid., pp. 57-72, 74.
In the spring of 1669, the deputies of the Massachusetts
General Court reversed their earlier support of the half-way
covenant and invited Davenport to deliver the election ser-
mon. It was at this election sermon that Davenport changed
the issue in the controversy from the half-way covenant to Cong-
gregational autonomy. The main target of Davenport's propa-
ganda became the council, not the extension of baptism. Daven-
port told his audience that "The synod in England under Prelacy
published Superstitious Ceremonies; against which many godly
learned Ministers wrote, and were silenced; who are, to this
day called, The good Old Nonconformists." Davenport asserted
that, although men might consent to certain things "by the
major part of a Topical Synod," such a council's findings should
not be imposed upon the churches. Davenport inveighed against
church councils "which under a pretence of helping the Church
with their Light, bereave them of their Power, binding them to
rest in their decisions." Davenport, as early as 1663, had written a detailed attack
against the consociation of churches in answer to the second
question addressed by the synod of 1662—viz., "Whether . . .
there ought to be a Consociation of churches, and what should


Davenport maintained that "Till they can produce a clear Rule for warrant of such a proceeding, I cannot look at this otherwise, than as a meer humane Invention." Davenport was convinced that a consociation of churches would make a participating church "a Classical or Presbyterian Church, and the Members, by consenting thereunto, become Members of a Classical Church, and under the power of it." 

By shifting attention to the legitimacy of church councils, Davenport hoped to gain greater lay support by bringing into his camp those laymen who were not opposed to the extension of baptism, but who insisted upon the independence of churches. Many "rigid Congregationalists" (as Woodbridge called them) opposed councils not only out of suspicion that they would infringe upon Congregational autonomy, but also because they associated councils with the ministers' attempt to increase their authority within the congregation. Authoritative church councils, they feared, might ultimately deprive them of their rights within the congregation.

Despite Davenport's efforts to prevent the dissenters from separating, twenty-nine men signed the covenant, creating the Third Church of Boston and called Samuel Willard to be their minister. In March of 1670 Davenport died, but strife within

104 Supra, p. 84.
105 Davenport, Another Essay, pp. 54, 59.
the colony did not abate upon his death. Davenport had stirred up lay discontent, and a mood of antiministerial sentiment now swept through the colony. Josiah Flint, minister of Dorchester, wrote in his diary that "A spirit of division, persecuting and oppressing God's ministers and precious saints, is the sin which is unseen . . . God's seers fear it, and their bowels and compassions are moved at it." 106

The following year the freemen of Hadley, Massachusetts, petitioned the General Court to make an inquiry into "the causes of Gods displeasure against the land." 107 The deputies responded with a report which had a decidedly antiministerial tone. According to the report, two of the causes of God's wrath were "Woeful decling from our primitive foundation work" and "Innovation threatening the ruin of our foundations, and the extirpation of those old principles of the congregational way laid by so many of the Lord's worthies who are now at rest." 108 In another related report the deputies accused the ministers with:

Declension from the primitive foundation work, innovation in doctrine and worship, opinion and practice, an invasion of the rights, liberties and privileges of churches, an usurpation of a lordly and prelatical power over God's heritage, a subversion of the gospel order, and all this with a dangerous tendency to the utter

107 Ibid., p. 234.
108 "Third Church Narrative," p. 98.
devastation of these churches . . . and total extirpation of the principles and pillars of the congregational way; these are the leaven, the corrupting gangrene . . . which hath provoked divine wrath.\textsuperscript{109}

The ministers could not allow such outspoken anticlericalism to go unrebuked. Their position and prestige in the community had not been so vehemently attacked since the Antinomian Controversy. The ministers got their chance to make a countercharge when, at the next election of deputies, the majority of those present in 1670 lost their seats. A delegation of fifteen ministers drew up a reply to the deputies' charges and presented it to the General Court. The ministers regretted how much an

antiministerial spirit had thereby strengthened and emboldened, the hearts and hands of those who laboured in the ministry weakened, the spirits of many being filled with groundless jealousies and suspicions against the ministrations of the elders.\textsuperscript{110}

The ministers asked the General Court to remove all just grounds of grievance so that their ministry might not be endangered by "that anti-ministerial spirit that too much ran through the country."\textsuperscript{111}

These charges and countercharges reflect the suspicion on the part of both the brethren and the clergy that the other was trying to acquire the balance of power within the congrega-

\textsuperscript{109}Hutchinson, \textit{History of Massachusetts-Bay}, I, p. 232.
\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 233.
\textsuperscript{111}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 234.
tion. The suspicions of both were well-founded. The controversies after mid-century had shown that there were many brethren intent on gaining a greater share of the power within the congregation. However, there was considerable truth to their charge that the ministers wanted to increase their authority at the expense of the brethren's liberties.

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Davenport's attack on councils was contrary to the prevailing trend of the times. Cotton Mather observed in his ecclesiastical history of New England that the question of "the consociation of churches" was of "no small consequence to the interests of Christianity in the Country." At the same time that the churches were debating baptism, they were also "industrious for the combination of our churches into such a bundle of arrowes as might not easily be broken."¹¹² Earlier, at the ordination of Jonathan Mitchel, John Cotton had urged that the "Ordinance of Consociation of Churches might be duly practised, greatly bewailing the defect of these Churches as to that particular . . . forseeing that without it, these Churches and the Congregational way could not stand."¹¹³ John Wilson of Boston was of a similar opinion, observing shortly before his death in 1667 that one of the major sins of the time

¹¹²Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 278.
¹¹³Increase Mather, First Principles, p. 28.
was "making light of, and not subjecting to the authority of Synods, without which not the churches cannot long subsist."\textsuperscript{114} That the ministers were not completely satisfied with the system of synods and lesser councils sanctioned by the Cambridge Platform is suggested by the second question to which the synod of 1662 addressed itself, \textit{viz.}, "Whether according to the Word of God there ought to be a Consociation of Churches, and what should be the manner of it?"\textsuperscript{115} In the "Preface" to the \textit{Propositions} propounded by the synod, Jonathan Mitchel stated that one of the reasons for calling the synod was because "Some few particulars referring to the Continuation and Combination of Churches, needed yet a more explicite stating and reducing unto practice." Mitchel added, regarding consociation, that "That there hath been a defect in practice ... is too too apparent."\textsuperscript{116} Mitchel reminded the churches that synods were an ordinance of God and quoted a passage from the \textit{Apologetical Narration} by the English Congregationalists Goodwin and Nye which asserted that "it is the most to be abhorred Maxime" that any group of Christians "should further arrogate unto themselves an exemption from giving account, or being censurable by any other, either Christian Magistrate above them,

\textsuperscript{114} Mather, \textit{Magnalia}, I, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{115} Supra, p. 84.
or Neighbour Churches about them."\(^{117}\) And the assembled divines urged consociation upon the churches as a duty "to prevent their running in vain."\(^ {118}\) The synod did not, however, take any steps to strengthen synodical authority. They merely reaffirmed what the Cambridge Platform already had sanctioned. The ministers did reveal their desire, however, for a more effectual ecclesiastical structure in their fifth proposition relating to consociation. This proposition called for "Consociation of Churches . . . which by providence are planted in a convenient vicinity."\(^ {119}\) Earlier, John Cotton had recommended similar local consociations which would "meet together, Church by Church, in Convenient numbers, at set times. . . ."\(^ {120}\)

These propositions, however, were not received any more cordially by the churches than the synod's propositions respecting baptism. Advisory councils had been condoned from the beginning as a means of settling disputes within the congregations. The councils called to heal the disputes after mid-century, however, failed to bring peace and uniformity. When a church quarrel broke out, the faction that could muster the support of the majority of the ministers naturally favored a

\(^{117}\) Ibid., pp. 310-311.  
\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 339.  
\(^{119}\) Ibid.  
\(^{120}\) Mather, First Principles, p. 33.
council. The other faction either openly denied the legitimacy of councils, as in the case of the First Church of Boston, or else insisted upon the independence of the church and its right to solve the quarrel itself. The controversies after mid-century had brought two principles of Congregationalism into dialectical opposition--Congregational autonomy and synodical authority. The fact that Congregational synods could not force their determinations upon the individual churches insured that Congregational independence would be the stronger principle. The New England divines were still struggling with the problem of how much freedom and how much order there would be in the New England Way.

The ministers considered it imperative, in view of the progressive anticlericalism of the sixties and seventies and the outright rebellion against their rule within the church, that they increase their authority not only within the congregation but when assembled together in a church council as well. Thomas Shepard, Jr. spoke the mind of the majority of ministers when he urged "blessing the order of Councils, and Synods." The controversies after 1650 undoubtedly made the ministers realize the need for a stronger ecclesiastical government.

The ministers could look back, of course, to the successes

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121 Thomas Shepard, Jr., Eye Salve, or a Watchword From Our Lord Jesus Christ to His Church (Cambridge, 1673), p. 13.
of the synod of 1646-1648 or the synod of 1637. In reality, however, the synod of 1646-1648 had maintained the semblance of uniformity by evading the issue of baptism. And the synod of 1637 was successful mainly because, once it had declared the "truth," the civil government intervened and banished the dissenters. The synod of 1662 also declared the "official" truth. This time regarding baptism. However, as its determination was only advisory, the synod could not force the churches to accept its decision. Congregational independence insured that each church would make its own decision respecting baptism. The churches did make their own decisions, and there were dissenters. To banish these dissenters, however, as had been done in 1637, would be absurd. Opposition to the half-way covenant was too widespread. Furthermore, who would dare suggest banishing such eminent divines as Charles Chauncy or John Davenport? As one historian has pointed out, "the autonomy of the individual congregation proved to be the undoing of religious uniformity." Indeed, the controversy produced by the half-way covenant, as well as the controversies over authority within the churches, had taken the Cambridge Platform to test and conclusively shown that New England's "Platform of Church Discipline" did not contain the necessary machinery to silence the opposition of a dissenting minority.

CHAPTER IV

DECLENSION AND REFORM

Chosen to give the election sermon of 1673, Urian Oakes sadly declared before the General Court that "all sides are agreed that things are in a declining posture, that there is a great degeneracy . . . that there is a defection and declension. . . ." Indeed, declension and apostasy became central themes of most of the published sermons after 1660. Second generation preachers, in a succession of fastday and election sermons, bewailed the visible decay of piety. Their sermons took the shape of jeremiads--lengthy lamentations over a degenerating society with warnings of providential judgments unless the colonists returned to the high purity of the founders.

The jeremiad was structured around the duties and obligations of the national covenant. According to covenant theology, if certain duties were met, God would reward the doer. In the case of the covenant of grace, the duty to be performed was an

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2For the role of the jeremiad in late seventeenth century New England, see Perry Miller, From Colony to Province, chap. II. Also see Miller's article entitled, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth," Nature's Nation (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967).
experience of conversion, a sign that one possessed faith, and the reward was a guarantee of salvation. The national covenant, however, applied not to just a few particular people who had become worthy of salvation, but to the whole society. Since in the nation or society a conversion experience could not be expected from everyone, faith could not be the duty nor salvation the reward of the national or societal covenant. Instead, the duty expected from society was external obedience or social rectitude, and the reward would be God's gift of temporal prosperity.\(^3\)

It was in the face of such afflictions as drought, disease, shipwreck, and massacres that the ministers in their jeremiads began to ask themselves what were the sins that were causing God to vent His wrath upon society, for such disasters were thought to be God's rebuke for failure to uphold the obligation of the national covenant. Days of humiliation were set aside in which the people would consider the sins outlined in the jeremiad and would resolve to change their ways. As the jeremiads took shape during the 1660's and 1670's the list of sins grew, but the one on which the ministers dwelt the longest was the visible decay of piety. The sin which above all others was provoking God's wrath and punishment was spiritual apathy—a decline of religious interest, a backsliding from

\(^3\)For a full explication of the national or societal covenant see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 398ff.
the ways of the first generation. In 1670 William Stoughton complained about the languishing religious spirit, observing that many were now becoming "empty outside Customborn Christians," and Uriah Oakes, in a similar jeremiad, proclaimed that "there is great reason to conceive that many Professores may be grown Sermon-proof." The New England ministers were charging their covenanted people with becoming weary, plodding Christians who had lost that religious zeal which was the badge of their grandfathers. The ministers urged their flocks to repent and live up to their covenant with God or else live in the fear of additional judgments.

Spiritual apathy, according to the ministers, manifested itself variously as Sabbath-breaking, sleeping during the sermon, and the failure of an ever-increasing number to have the necessary conversion experience to qualify for full church membership. But to Increase Mather, the principal sign of decay "in the power of Godliness amongst us" lay in the rebellion of subordinates toward superiors: "whence is all that rising up, and disobedience in Inferiors towards Superiors, in Families in Churches, and in the Commonwealth, but from the unmortified Pride which is in the hearts . . . of men?"

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4 Miller, "Declension in a Bible Commonwealth," p. 45.
7 Increase Mather, The Day of Trouble is near. . . . (Cambridge, 1674), p. 22.
The ministers never forgot the abusive language of the deputies' reports of 1670 which placed blame for declension squarely on their shoulders. In retaliation, the ministers used the jeremiad to focus upon what they considered the real cause of declension—rebellion against their rule within the church. The jeremiad became the main instrument after 1670 by which the ministers attempted to silence those brethren who challenged their authority within the congregation.

In his election sermon of 1673, Urian Oakes knew that there were many in his audience who wished to "impute all the Blastings and Draughts and Judgments of God upon the Country to the Defection and Apostacy of their Ministers." Therefore, he directed the majority of his remarks to those men who "glorified in their Rebellion against the Authority of Christ in the Churches," calling it "an asserting of their Liberties, and Defense of Priviledge of the Brethren . . ." According to Oakes, all the religion these men had was enough "too vilifie, and traduce, and low'r the reputation and Authority of the Ministers of Christ." Oakes predicted that "unlesse this Pride be snipped in the Bud" the colonists could expect another judgment. "God hath smart Rods for the back of a proud People," he reminded his audience. Two years later

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 36.
the colonists felt the smarting rod in the guise of King Philip's War.

Oakes' jeremiad made it clear that questions of church government were still a major cause of divisiveness between the clergy and the brethren. Oakes attacked those brethren who wished majority rule to prevail against the ministry and who denied any authority to councils. He accused these church members of "Brownisme": "Else what do those mean that speak of the Rule and Government of the Church rested in the Brethren, of the Governing vote of the Brethren . . . what means that disgust that some men have against Councils and Synods, and the decisive power thereof . . . ." 12

The brethren's "revolt," according to Oakes, went beyond the mere desire for a greater share of power within the congregation. Consider, he asked his audience, whether the churches are not indeed governed by "a few Pragmatical and Loquacious Men" rather than by "the Officers that the Holy Ghost hath made Overseers and Rulers," 13 "Brownisme," Oakes was convinced, was making the rule of the ministers a mere shadow; "some aspiring and domineering Brethren" ruling the church. 14 Unless this "revolt" were suppressed, Oakes told the General Court, New England would continue to experience

12 Ibid., p. 47.
13 Ibid., p. 48.
14 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
the wrath of an angry God.

The laity's challenge to the minister's authority was also the theme of Thomas Shepard, Jr.'s election sermon of 1672. There was a theocratic ring to Shepard's prescription for New England's troubles. Religion is best served, Shepard declared, "when there is an concurrence of Magistry and Ministry together to promote the true worship of God." According to Shepard, the danger to New England lay not only in the disrespect for magistrates and ministers, but in the laity's clinging too rigidly to the idea of strict Congregational independence. Such independence was contrary to the practice of the first leaders. One of God's gifts to New England, Shepard asserted, was "blessing the order of Councils, and Synods." Shepard warned the General Court, as was customary in the jeremiad, that unless this rising up against God's ambassadors ceased, the colonists could anticipate more afflictions.

In 1675, despite the warnings of a generation of ministers, God's wrath finally fell on New England. In that year the Pequot Indians, who had been at peace with the colonists since 1637, went on the warpath. Over half the towns in Plymouth and Massachusetts experienced attack, while almost a

16 Ibid., p. 15.
17 Ibid., p. 43.
dozen were completely destroyed in the wake of the Indian raids. Women and children were tortured and tomahawked. Over five hundred men of military age lost their lives. The war ended upon the death of the Indian leader, Philip, in 1676. No sooner had this terror passed than God's wrath took the form of two great fires in Boston; an outbreak of fever; a smallpox epidemic; and threats to the Puritan control of the colony.  

To a people in covenant with God, it was clear what had to be done to avert further disaster. They had to determine what their sins were and quickly set about to reform them. Therefore, largely at the behest of Increase Mather, the General Court of 1679 called for a synod. The synod was ordered to debate two questions: "What are the evils that have provoked the Lord to bring his judgments on New England?" and "What is to be done that so those evils may be reformed."  

Mather presided over the "reforming" synod and also wrote the Result of the synod, known as The Necessity of Reformation (1679), which answered the questions addressed by the synod. The call for the synod expressly stated that the ministers' objective was to "clear ourselves of the suspicion and scandal of defection." It was obvious that the ministers had grown

19 Ibid., p. 416.
20 Ibid., pp. 414-415.
21 Ibid., p. 415.
weary of being blamed for declension.

The Result of the "reforming" synod took the form of another jeremiad claiming, as had all jeremiads for the past two decades, "That God hath a Controversy with his New-England People." The synod did not extend the list of offenses committed by society, contenting itself with merely cataloguing the numerous sins which had been compiled in the scores of jeremiads that preceded it. The synod's Result did differ, however, from the usual jeremiad for it was much more methodical. Its authors obviously realized the value of a well-ordered exposition in addition to the value of listing the sins of society in the order of their importance. First on the list, therefore, was the "great and visible decay of the power of Godliness amongst many Professors in these Churches." The ministers turned next to the sin which they considered to be at the root of all the other sins--pride.

It is significant, in respect to the growing tension between the ministers and brethren, that the authors of the Result considered "a refusing to be subject to Order according to divine appointment" and "contention" to be the most serious manifestations of pride. Sabbath-breaking, swearing,

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23 Ibid., p. 427.
24 Ibid.
"inordinate passions," drunkenness, dishonesty, and "inordinate affection to the world" were all sins that could be expected from a people who were becoming "empty outside Custom-born Christians." But it was the sin of those who failed to "remember and duly observe the Rule" that the ministers found most alarming. Rebellion against God's rulers within the church could not go unrebuked. The ministers were God's "voice" within the congregation. They were "Christ's ambassadors." It was only reasonable to believe that rebellion against their authority might be one of the major causes of "the Lord's Controversy with his People."

Although the jeremiads of the previous two decades said much the same thing as the Result of the synod, the ministers hoped that "the Truth . . . coming from a synod . . . will carry more Authority with it, then if one man only, or many in their single capacities, should speak the same things." The ministers also hoped that a synod would officially lift "the suspicion & scandal of defection" from themselves and place it instead on the laity. According to the ministers,

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25 Ibid., pp. 428-432.
26 Ibid., pp. 429-430.
27 Supra., p. ix.
29 Ibid., p. 425.
30 Supra, p. 129.
it was not they, but the brethren who were responsible for declension.

The second part of the Result of the synod was in answer to the question, "What is to be done that so [sic] these Evils may be Reformed?" The ministers did not endeavor to give themselves any additional powers within the congregation as a means of quelling the rising contempt for their authority. They did agree, however, that in order for reformation to proceed, "it is necessary that the Discipline of Christ in the power of it should be upheld in the Churches," attributing much of the degeneracy of the times to "neglects in this nature."

The ministers were also careful to protect their prestige within the community and their general well-being by making it incumbent upon the magistrate to insure that their demands for a sufficient maintenance were met. Salary disputes had been one cause of "contention" between the preachers and the brethren. Party divisions within a church, such as those over the half-way covenant, often resulted in a reluctance to pay the minister's salary. For example, during the dispute over the half-way covenant in the Windsor church, the pastor received a very nominal fee from church members who disagreed with his

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31Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 433
32Ibid.
33Ibid., p. 434.
views on baptism. Inadequate maintenance was itself a sign of increasing anticlericalism.

The immediate purpose of the "reforming" synod was to clear the ministers of the charge of defection. Another purpose, however, was to find another method of reform to replace the jeremiad, which had proven insufficient to stem the tide of declension. The preachers found what they wanted in renewal of the covenant—a mass religious ceremony in which vast numbers could participate. "Solemn and explicit Renewal of Covenant is a Scripture Expedient for Reformation" they said, adding that "this is the way to prevent . . . Apostasy." According to the synod of 1662, the half-way member, upon presenting his child for baptism, was expected to "own the covenant," which entailed an understanding of the doctrine of faith and subjecting oneself to church discipline. The "reforming" synod now urged the colonists to renew their baptismal covenant. The preachers realized the value of renewal as an instrument of clerical control. Not only could they call upon their flocks to live according to the articles of the national covenant, but, more particularly, they could now call upon half-way members to walk according to their baptismal covenant. The


assembled divines realized that when one renewed his baptismal covenant, he was "hereby brought under a stronger obligation, unto better obedience." Furthermore, half-way membership eventually came to be extended beyond the limits prescribed by the synod of 1662. By the time of the "reforming" synod, some churches were extending the baptismal covenant not only to the unregenerate descendants of saints, but to all persons of good moral character. The decision of the Half-Way Synod which held that only grandchildren of professing members could be admitted to baptism was now being sacrificed in order to bring more individuals under the care of the church. The New England clergy could now shackle an ever-increasing number to the obligations of the baptismal covenant.

The mass renewal had a tendency to reinvigorate the zeal of the participants, and readily found acceptance throughout the churches. With the ministers urging renewal and presiding over the mass ceremony, it quickly became a means of countering antiministerial sentiment.

Although the jeremiads give us the picture of a declining society, in reality they tell us a different story. It was not declension, but change that confronted the second generation ministers. Thomas Hutchinson, in his history of Massachusetts Bay, observed that "we have no evidence of any extra-

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36 Ibid., p. 436.
37 Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 47.
ordinary degeneracy." Hutchinson was looking at the problems of the late seventeenth century from the more secularized viewpoint of the eighteenth century. And, too, being removed from these problems, he had the benefit of a more objective outlook. The second generation ministers, however, were making their judgments not from the standards of a Thomas Hutchinson, but from what they considered to be the standards of the first generation of divines. To them New England was still a "plantation of Religion," whereas in reality it had grown into a diversified "plantation of Trade." The jeremiads deplored the "spiritual apathy" of those children of the church who were not having the necessary conversion experience to qualify for full church membership. And Increase Mather decried those "who give out, as if saving Grace and Morality were the same." In reality, however, the second generation Puritans were no less religious than the first. They continued to attend the Sabbath and remained God-fearing Christians. But a change had taken place. As society became more secularized, the second generation found that a more simplified piety could replace the intense religious zeal of the first generation.

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40 As quoted in Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 34.
In spite of the succession of jeremiads, the efforts of the "reforming" synod, and covenant renewals, New England continued to feel the "smarting rods" of God's wrath. The majority of the ministerial community merely responded with more jeremiads. An exception, however, was Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, Massachusetts. Stoddard broke away from the jeremiad mentality which identified change with the themes of declension and decay. He could see that certain changes had to be made within the Congregational doctrine and polity in order to meet the needs of a changing society. Stoddard was ready to use change to meet change.

Stoddard came to Northampton in 1669 to fill the pulpit vacated upon the death of Eleazer Mather. Due to the charismatic quality of Stoddard's personality, he was able to acquire a position of prominence and dominance amongst the churches in western Massachusetts and the Connecticut Valley. Stoddard shared the same concern for the dangers to the churches in the closing decades of the seventeenth century as did the Mathers. He lamented the lack of conversions, the "decline in piety," the increasing "worldliness," and the lack of stricter ecclesiastical discipline. He attended the synod of 1679 and deplored, as did the other divines, the moral declension of New England. But although the majority of the clergy assembled

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41 For a biographical sketch on Stoddard, see Perry Miller, "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729," Harvard Theological Review, XXXIV (1941). (Hereafter cited as Miller, "Solomon Stoddard."
at the "reforming" synod called for a reformation, their reformation was never the success that Solomon Stoddard's was. The Mathers and their followers in eastern Massachusetts were not willing to make any radical changes in the original doctrine of the founding fathers for fear of being charged with apostasy. Stoddard had a clear-headed understanding of the problems facing the churches of New England in the latter half of the seventeenth century, and was determined to achieve his reforms, even at the cost of the Cambridge Platform.

Stoddard's doctrinal changes, which in turn influenced his views on church government, were the result of his concern over the lack of sufficient conversions. In 1679 he came to the "reforming" synod defending the admissability of the unregenerate to the Lord's Supper, and although the synod did not countenance his way, maintaining that "it is requisite that persons be not admitted unto Communion in the Lord's Supper without making a personal and publik profession of their Faith and Repentance...." Stoddard proceeded to work his own reformation. Up until 1677 Stoddard kept track of who were full communicating members, and who were half-way members. But finally, in that year, he gave up differentiating between the two types of membership and admitted everyone to the church as full communicating members.

Stoddard's reason for admitting all to full communion and full membership in the church stemmed from his belief that,

42 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 433.

43 As quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," p. 298.
contrary to the traditional Congregational view, true regeneration was beyond proof in this life. Stoddard knew, as did the other New England clergy, that the churches often made mistakes and that some of those received into covenant turned out to be hypocrites. This fact was enough to convince Stoddard that no one, except God, really knew who was a saint and who was not. An individual may personally feel inwardly that he is a saint, but there is no way to objectively measure that inner conviction and ascertain with certainty that it is authentic.  

Out of Stoddard's conviction that an individual's spiritual condition could not be discerned by mundane standards flowed his belief that the Supper should be considered a converting ordinance. He asserted that, "This ordinance hath a proper tendency to draw sinners to Christ. . . in this Ordinance there is a particular Invitation to sinners, to come to Christ for Pardon." For Stoddard the Lord's Supper became an instrument of grace. For the founding fathers of New England, the Supper was an ordinance which sealed the covenant of grace and helped the regenerate grow in grace. Stoddard acknowledged this much, but argued that the Supper was also a means by which grace could be induced in the unregenerate. "All ordinances are for the Saving good of those that they are to be administered unto," proclaimed Stoddard.


46As quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," p. 308.
Since Stoddard was convinced that faith could not be infal-
libly discerned in this life, as man had no objective standards
enabling him to determine whom God had elected to sainthood, he
decided to jettison the notion of a church covenant. According
to Stoddard, the churches could act "only upon what is visible." Churches could not be built on the basis of sainthood as only
God knew who the saints were. Since an individual's spiritual
condition was not discernible in this life, Stoddard admitted
all parishioners to church membership except the openly scan-
dalous.

By making the Lord's Supper available to all Christians of
good moral character, Stoddard insured the continuance of the
churches by providing a steady stream of communicating members. His "reforms," however, went beyond church doctrine to include
certain changes in church government. One of the principal
sources of conflict between the ministers and the brethren con-
tinued to be the nature of ecclesiastical authority. Church
government continued to be the "mixed" variety defined in the
Cambridge Platform, but the cause of contention remained the
question of where the balance of power was to lie: should the
majority vote of the brethren be allowed to prevail over the
minister's vote, should the ministers and brethren share the
power equally, or could the minister claim the right to control

48 Ibid., pp. 310-311.
and direct church affairs? Stoddard chose the latter formula. A church, he exclaimed, was similar to an army, having orderly lines of authority with some men serving God as rulers and the others as the ruled.\(^{49}\) Therefore, he believed that "The Elders are to rule over the Church, and therefore not to be over-ruled by the Brethren."\(^{50}\) Stoddard believed that the "Spiritual power of governing the church, by admitting of members, Censuring of Offenders, and taking of Censures, doth belong entirely to the elders."\(^{51}\) Stoddard, in short, denied the brethren their right to consent. Looking back on ancient Israel, he concluded "That the government of the Church of Israel, was not a popular government... The Common sort of people had no judgment in ecclesiastical causes."\(^{52}\) The minister of Northampton was very explicit in asserting that "The community are not fit to judge & rule in the church."\(^{53}\)

By denying the brethren a right to consent and transferring lay control of the keys to the elders, Stoddard had organized the congregation along lines closely approximating those of

\(^{49}\)Solomon Stoddard, The Way for a People to Live Long in the Land (Boston, 1703), p. 4.

\(^{50}\)As quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," p. 311.


\(^{52}\)Ibid., p. 8.

\(^{53}\)Ibid., p. 10.
Presbyterianism. But Stoddard had a realistic motive in mind when he denied the brethren any role in the government of the church. He believed that the administration of church government required education, and perceived that "the Community are not men of understanding." Stoddard noted that many of the men of Northampton "have not had the advantage of Reading & Study." Furthermore, he realized that many of the men were very young and rash, and therefore was not about to give his church up to "men of very weak Abilities." Concerning the brethren's ambition for greater power in church government, Stoddard asserted that "They have a greater fondness for power than ability to use it." For these reasons, he concluded "That the government of the Church is given unto the Elders & that the Fraternity have no power in binding & loosing."

Having discarded the fundamental Congregational belief in a particular church covenant, Stoddard argued that the church should be built around the national covenant. "What is a National Church," he proclaimed, "but a Professing Nation jointly bound to keep Covenant with God?" Stoddard's opponents claimed that there was no mention of a national church in the New Testament. Stoddard admitted this much. The reason,

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54 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
55 Ibid., p. 3.
56 Ibid.
57 As quoted in Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 257.
however, was not that "National Churches are not according to the mind of God," but that no Christian nations existed in gospel times. Now that there were Christian nations it was according to God's wishes to erect national churches.

Stoddard objected to the principle of Congregational autonomy. Congregational independence, he avowed, was "too Lordly a principle:"

It is too ambitious a thing for every small Congregation to arrogate such an uncontrollable Power, and to be accountable to none on Earth; this is neither a probable way for the Peace of Churches, not for the safety of Church Members; appeals are admitted in all Kingdoms; and it is more probable that in a whole Country, persons may be found that may rectify the Miscarriages of particular Congregations, than that particular Congregations will not miscarry, this absolutness of particular Congregations is a dignity that the primitive Churches did not enjoy, this is not common Privilege of Gospel Churches.

Having jettisoned the cherished idea of Congregational independence, Stoddard organized his churches along the lines of a national church and advocated centralized control. Without a national church "every particular Congregation is absolute and independent, and not responsible to any higher Power." This seemed reprehensible to Stoddard. Therefore, he proposed a centralized system of church organization wherein the individual church would be subordinate to the supervision and discipline of

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58 As quoted in Middlekauff, The Mathers, p. 137.
59 As quoted in Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 258.
60 As quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," p. 311.
a national church: "The whole must have power over the parts, to rectify all Mal-administrations, and to see the Covenant kept."\(^6^1\) The national church would be governed by a synod of elders, but unlike the Congregational synod whose decisions were binding only on those churches who accepted them, Stoddard's synods would exercise a compulsory jurisdiction, their decisions being final for all churches. Stoddard also gave church councils the power "to oversee the calling of Persons to the ministry, and to appoint those who shall examine them." The ministers were to meet in a council and insure "that Churches Act regularly, and that none shall be set in the Ministry but such as are duly qualified."\(^6^2\) This system of licensure deprived the local congregation of a free hand in choosing its own minister. It now had to choose from a group of approved candidates. By declaring that the deliberations of church councils were to be considered decisive and by giving them the power to license candidates to the ministry, Stoddard had transferred a large share of sovereignty from the local congregation to the church council.

Stoddard's ideals were by no means altogether new to New England. At least two churches in Massachusetts had revolted against restricted church membership during the 1630's--Hingham and Newbury. The two ministers of Newbury, Thomas Parker and

\(^6^1\) As quoted in Miller, *From Colony to Province*, p. 257.

\(^6^2\) As quoted in Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," pp. 311-312.
James Noyes, had advocated transferring control of the keys to the elders. And during the latter half of the seventeenth century a Presbyterian faction in Connecticut received official recognition from the General Court. John Woodbridge, Jr. and Sr., Benjamin Woodbridge, Gershom Bulkeley and others created comprehensive parishes during the 1660's and 1670's. They advocated clerical control of the keys and a system of authoritative church councils. Indeed, Stoddard might very well have been influenced by these churches. Stoddard was successful in implementing his ecclesiastical changes and his views spread rapidly through the churches of western Massachusetts and found ready reception in a considerable number of Connecticut churches.

For the Mathers, Stoddard's innovations in church doctrine and church polity amounted to apostasy. In a prolonged pamphlet warfare, they consistently fought against Stoddard's "reforms" and succeeded in keeping his more Presbyterianized form of Congregationalism out of eastern Massachusetts. Stoddard denied the charge of apostasy, believing that he was not deserting the high minded principles of the founders. He introduced a concept of reform which could countenance change while being able to repudiate the charge of apostasy:

> Men are wont to make a great noise, that we are bringing in of Innovations, and depart from the Old Way: But it is beyond me to find wherein the iniquity does Iye. We may see cause to alter some practices of our Fathers, without despising of them, without priding ourselves in our own

63 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 137.
64 Pope, Half-Way Covenant, chapters III & IV.
wisdom, without Apostasy. . . .

Stoddard accused the Mathers of ancestor worship. "Posterity," he observed, "is very prone to espouse the principles of Ancestors, and from an inordinate Veneration of them, . . . make a transgression to call them into question." According to Stoddard, if any of the practices of the founding fathers were mistakes they should bear examination, otherwise "all hopes of Reformation" would be cut off.

For Stoddard, change was not a synonym for apostasy as it was for the Mathers. He was willing to alter New England's ecclesiastical institutions in order to meet the new realities of a changing society. He could see that the Mathers' attempts at reform were moribund from the start as long as they continued to be ancestor worshippers and tried to effect a reformation while tying themselves and everyone else to the narrow confines of federal theology and the Cambridge Platform. Stoddard perceived that "The mistakes of one Generation many times become the calamity of succeeding Generations:"

The first Planters drew up a Platform of Church Discipline before they had much time to weigh those things and when they were under prejudice,

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65 Solomon Stoddard, The Inexcusableness of Neglecting the Worship of God (Boston, 1708), Preface.


67 Stoddard, The Inexcusableness of . . . , Preface.

from the experience of their suffering in England; and some of their Posterity are mighty devoted to it, as if the Platform were the Pattern in the Mount, and all deviations from it, are looked upon as a degree of Apostasy.⁶⁹

Stoddard was not about to let the Mathers' charges of apostasy impede his plan for reform. He went ahead and organized his area into the Hampshire Association which put into practice his Presbyterian or at least semi-Presbyterian plan of church government.

Stoddard's sweeping ecclesiastical changes answered the criticisms of the New England Way then current among its clergy. By advocating a national church having a stated jurisdiction over the several churches, Stoddard was answering a trend among the clergy for a more centralized, consociated authority which had up to this time been hindered by Congregational autonomy. Similarly, by transferring lay control of the keys to the elders and denying the brethren their right to consent, Stoddard made a calculated move to stifle lay opposition and thwart lay pretensions to a greater share in the internal government of the congregation. Finally, Stoddard's changes represent a way out of the dilemma of how much freedom and how much order there should be in the New England Way. Clearly for Stoddard, there had been too much freedom. The freedom enjoyed by the brethren of a right to consent in church matters had only led to their insistence on an even greater say in the direction of the congrega-

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 2.
tion. And the freedom enjoyed by the churches through the principle of Congregational autonomy had only contributed to the breakdown of synodical authority. By giving the minister an autocratic power within the congregation and advocating a national, confederated church, Solomon Stoddard of Northampton had opted for order over freedom in the New England Way.
CHAPTER V

BEYOND THE CAMBRIDGE PLATFORM: TOWARD A MORE
PRESBYTERIANIZED CONGREGATIONALISM

During the controversies of the 1660's and 1670's ecclesiastical councils reached the nadir of their effectiveness. Indeed, the half-way covenant had put synodical authority to the test. The churches stood behind the principle of Congregational independence in their reception of the Half-Way Synod's decision; some rejecting it outright while others accepted it only after several years of intense controversy. It was out of consideration of the ineffectiveness of church councils that the ministers began to take a renewed interest in the role of the state as a vehicle for the maintenance of order. As they complained of the "anti-ministerial spirit that too much runs through the country"¹ and cried aloud for reformation, the preachers came to urge more than ever before the necessity of state intervention.

The "reforming" synod of 1679 had convened not only to consider what was necessary for a general reformation of society, but to consider what measures "may appeare necessary for the preventing schishmes, haeresies, prophaness, & the estab-

¹Supra, p. 117.
lishment of the churches in one faith & order of the gospell."\(^2\) As church councils had been advocated from the beginning as a means of settling disputes within churches and preventing heresy and schism, one might expect that the ministers at the "reforming" synod would encourage consociation as an instrument of control. On the contrary, the ministers instead turned to the magistrates and called upon them to fulfill their role as "nursing" fathers to the churches. The numerous jeremiads of the latter half of the seventeenth century also were persistent in calling upon the cooperation of the magistrates in maintaining the true religion. The position of the magistrates as "nursing" fathers quickly changed with the revocation of the Bay colony's charter in 1684.

The government of Charles I had given the colonists a charter which omitted the standard clause requiring the document to remain in England. The colonists readily availed themselves of the opportunity to take their charter to the New World. With charter in hand, they were able to acquire a considerable degree of autonomy. With the restoration of the Stuarts, however, the independence the colonists had enjoyed was threatened. When the charter was finally abrogated by Charles II in 1684 there was little the colonists could do. They were agreed, however, that the revocation was another of God's judgments for their failure to reform. Undoubtedly, some of the colonists must have felt

that God had given up on New England.

In 1686 King James II established the "Dominion of New England" and Sir Edmund Andros became the royal governor. Fortunately for New England, the "Dominion" was short-lived. In 1688 James was overthrown and a year later Andros was deposed. Increase Mather, who had journeyed to England to negotiate with James II, stayed on to work out the provisions of a new charter with William III. Although the new charter gave New England a royal governor, it must have been some relief to the colonists that the position was filled by a member of the Boston congregation, Sir William Phips. Furthermore, the colonists were given an elective legislature to offset the royal governor, something they did not have under the Andros regime.

The new charter and the Act of Toleration, passed in 1691, created a new religious situation. The Congregationalists had to bid uniformity farewell. In addition, the magistrate became an entirely secular individual. As the New Englanders eschewed coercion in matters of religion, they had relied heavily upon the coercive power of the state to give sanction to their advisory synodical decrees. Deprived of the state as an agency of authority, the churches were now thrown back upon themselves. They would have to find some way of maintaining order without the cooperation of dedicated magistrates. In face of the changing realities of the late seventeenth century the ministers began to show a renewed interest in interchurch relations. A new era of confidence in church councils was ushered in by a movement to
unite Congregationalists and Presbyterians, a movement given official recognition in the Heads of Agreement (1691). 3

The points of difference between Congregationalists and Presbyterians lost much of their importance as the political and religious situations in England changed. The debates of the 1640's rested upon the hope that either one or the other group would achieve power and erect a theocracy according to its particular ecclesiastical polity. The theocratic ideal itself, however, vanished with the proliferation of Puritan sects during the 1640's. The major event affecting both Congregationalists and Presbyterians, though, was the restoration of Charles II in 1660. In the early years of the Restoration a series of repressive acts were passed which made it almost impossible for a Puritan minister to preach or earn a living.

One effect of the Restoration was to draw Presbyterians and Congregationalists closer together. The debate between the two religious groups lost its importance as neither could hope to achieve power. Similar in respect to most points of doctrine, the main difference between the Presbyterians and Congregationalists lay in the former's insistence on the necessity of a national church. The persecution of the Restoration, however, drove the Presbyterian classical movement underground. Unable

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3The complete document is found in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 440-462. In the following paragraphs on the historical background of the Heads, I am indebted to Walker, pp. 440-452; Miller, From Colony to Province, pp. 215-222; and C. G. Bolam, et al., English Presbyterians from Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism, pp. 93-102.
to erect a hierarchy of church councils, the Presbyterian churches were forced to function very much like isolated Congregational churches. Persecution had removed in practice, although not in theory, the main difference between Congregationalists and Presbyterians. In the midst of this atmosphere the Presbyterians began to see the value of the Congregational method of offering mutual assistance and advice through the use of temporary meetings of ministers. Everything counseled a union between Presbyterians and Congregationalists which would emphasize their similarities while minimizing their differences. The Congregationalists were quick to assert that their method of temporary councils, although their decisions were not binding, were enough to maintain unanimity of practice and could maintain order just as effectively as a Presbyterian classis. Both groups would benefit by such an union too, since they would be able to present a consolidated front of religious dissent posed against the Church of England. The passage of the Act of Toleration in 1689 gave the nonconformists the right to worship as they pleased. But even in the free air of toleration the Congregationalists and Presbyterians did not anticipate any wide acceptance of their polities in England. Therefore, in 1691, Congregational and Presbyterian ministers in the vicinity of London agreed upon a union, the conditions of which were set forth in the Heads of Agreement. The Heads of Agreement was a compromise document which offered something for both the Presbyterians and the Congrega-
tionalists, while minimizing those points on which the two groups differed. For instance, it made no mention of a church covenant and did not give church councils compulsory jurisdiction. The nature of the church was defined in a manner agreeable to Congregationalists as "particular Societies of Visible Saints." Churches were given the "Right to Chuse their own Officers." An additional concession to the Congregationalists was the stipulation that no church would be subordinate to another. The apparent vagueness of the document is no doubt attributable to the fact that it was meant as a middle way between two extremes rather than a complete statement of ecclesiastical polity for either side. Both groups, having dropped the names of Congregationalist and Presbyterian for that of United Brethren, agreed that the Heads was not meant "as a Measure for any National Constitution, but for the Preservation of Order in our Congregations." The success of the Heads in England was short-lived as the United Brethren split as a result of the "Crispian" controversy which broke out in 1692.

The Heads of Agreement had more success in New England. The agreement stated that its purpose was "for the Preservation of Order in our Congregations, that cannot come up to the Common Rule by Law established," and order was of first importance in

5 For the details of this controversy see ibid., pp. 449-452; and Miller, From Colony to Province, pp. 218-222.
6 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 457.
the preachers' minds. The agreement never enjoyed official recognition in Massachusetts as a statement of ecclesiastical discipline (although in Connecticut the Saybrook synod of 1708 incorporated it into the Saybrook Platform), but it did represent the unanimity of the majority of the ministers about certain changes they had already made and certain changes they wished to make in the area of church order. The Heads, in effect, was an amendment to the Cambridge Platform and was recognized as a statement of church discipline by the ministers. In fact, it was such a satisfactory statement of Congregational church government that Cotton Mather in the Magnalia enshrined it alongside the Cambridge Platform, and declared "That I believe, 'tis not possible for me to give a truer description of our 'ecclesiastical constitution'."

Increase Mather, acting as an agent of Massachusetts Colony, saw in the Heads a possible solution to New England's ecclesiastical problem of maintaining order among the churches now that they had lost the support of the civil magistrate. All of New England was feeling the effect of various pressures at work which suggested the need for a stricter control and organization of the New England churches. Stoddard saw the need and did not waste time in encouraging his Hampshire Association to function with the powers of a Presbyterian classis. But Increase Mather, while responding to the same stimuli which pointed to the need for increased centralization as Stoddard responded to, could

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7 Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 272.
not countenance giving Congregational councils autocratic, Presbyterian powers. To do so would invite the charge of apostasy.

While Increase was busy trying to convince the Presbyterians in and around London that the Congregational idea of mutual assistance and advice was just as effective a means of stabilizing order as the Presbyterian classis, Cotton Mather was busy organizing the Cambridge-Boston area into the Cambridge Association. The validity of associations or ministerial meetings was confirmed in the Heads. "Pastors," it was stated, "ought to have frequent meetings together, that by mutual Advice, Support, Encouragement, and Brotherly intercourse, they may strengthen the hearts and hands of each other in the ways of the Lord."\(^8\) The Heads of Agreement clearly stated that these ministerial meetings were to be used as agencies of control. "We agree," the agreement read, "That in order to concord and in any other weighty and difficult cases, it is needful, and according to the mind of Christ, that the Ministers of several Churches be consulted and advised with about such matters."\(^9\) These ministerial meetings were not to exercise a compulsory authority. To give them anything more than advisory powers would have raised anew the cry of apostasy as the brethren still feared any interchurch structure which might infringe

\(^8\)Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 460.

\(^9\)Ibid., p. 461.
upon Congregational autonomy or deprive them of their liberties within the congregation. Therefore, the Heads protected Congregational independence by asserting "That none of our particular Churches shall be subordinate to one another; each being endued with equality of Power from Jesus Christ." But although the decisions of ministerial meetings were only advisory the Heads urged the churches to "have a reverential regard to their judgment so given, and not dissent therefrom, without apparent grounds from the word of God." If this latter rule were faithfully observed by the churches, the Mathers and their followers would have an answer to their ecclesiastical problem. If ministerial associations, meeting on a regular basis, could be made to function as a centralized organ of authority without actually assuming classical, dictatorial powers, then the churches could maintain order themselves without the help of dedicated, pious magistrates, who had now become employees of the Crown.

In searching for some method of centralized control, the Mathers and their followers in eastern Massachusetts were responding to much the same pressures which prompted Solomon Stoddard to operate his Hampshire Association along Presbyterian lines. The Mathers could not, however, because of their convictions about the reverence due the first principles of the founding

10 Ibid., p. 460.
11 Ibid., p. 461.
fathers, make any institutional changes which would explicitly give church councils or associations an absolute authority over all other churches. Shackled as they were to the first principles of New England, the Mathers could only hope that their ministerial meetings would be able to operate as if they possessed authoritative powers while at the same time appearing not to be anything like a Presbyterian classis which would threaten the independence of the individual churches.

That New England looked to the administrative machinery outlined in the Heads of Agreement as an additional agency of control over its churches is suggested by the fact that several associations patterned after the Cambridge Association sprang up in New England in the period after 1690. Actually, the idea of the ministerial meeting was not new to New England. Previous attempts at setting up a system of ministerial meetings, however, had failed, apparently being forced to yield to the principle of Congregational independence. Ministerial meetings earned the disapproval of Roger Williams in 1633 on the ground that they would eventually lead to the introduction of a Presbyterian church polity.\(^\text{12}\) The Ministerial Assembly of 1643 which met to criticize the Presbyterian ways of Thomas Parker and James Noyes of Newbury stated that ministerial meetings acting on a regular basis were necessary for the peace of the churches.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^\text{12}\) Supra, p. 25.
\(^\text{13}\) Supra, p. 35.
The synod of 1662 also called for the establishment of ministerial gatherings meeting on a regular basis.\textsuperscript{14} All this reflects that the ministerial meeting was not foreign to early New England. In fact, many ministers looked upon it as an additional agency of control, alongside occasional synods. The Mathers' attempts to revive these meetings came at a time immediately following the colonists' successful revolt against the tyranny of Sir Edmund Andros, governor of the Dominion of New England. The Mathers took advantage of this unanimity to revive the ministerial meeting, hoping that the old cry of apostasy would be forgotten.

Cotton Mather gives a brief history of the Cambridge Association in the \textit{Magnalia}. He presents the formation of the association as if it were the immediate answer to what he declares to have been the last words of "Mr. Hooker," that "'We must agree upon the constant meetings of ministers, and settle the consociation of churches, or else we are utterly undone'."\textsuperscript{15} It would appear that Cotton Mather was being careful to present the formation of the Cambridge Association as being within the bounds of orthodoxy by giving it the approbation of such an eminent divine as Thomas Hooker.

The Cambridge Association listed its purposes as follows:

1. To debate any matter referring to ourselves.
2. To hear and consider any cases that shall be

\textsuperscript{14}Supra, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{15}Mather, \textit{Magnalia}, II, p. 271.
proposed unto us, from churches or private persons.
3. To answer any letters directed to us, from any other associations or persons.
4. To discourse of any question proposed at the former meeting.\[16\]

The association agreed "That we shall submit unto the councils, reproofs and censures of brethren so associated and assembled, in all things of the Lord'.\[17\] The ministers realized that the success of the association depended upon the respect it could command for its decisions.

The ministers took up the question of synodical authority at the first meeting of the Cambridge Association. The ministers' definition of the role of synods reflects the urgency they felt for a stronger ecclesiastical government. Synods were said to be of "apostolic example" and therefore a "necessary ordinance." "Synods," the ministers asserted, "are to be reverenced, as determining the mind of the Holy Spirit" and therefore are to be "acknowledge as decisive, the affairs for which they are ordained. . . ."\[18\] Although the association did not explicitly give synods compulsory jurisdiction over particular churches, it is evident that the ministers believed that the individual churches should depart very little from their decisions. The preachers hoped to persuade the particular churches to accept the decision of synods as if they concluded the matter

\[16\] Ibid., p. 272.
\[17\] Ibid.
\[18\] Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 471-472.
with the same degree of authority as did a Presbyterian classis. Here was a sure sign that New England was beginning to feel a certain anxiety about the ability of her advisory, noncompulsory synods to maintain order among independent, autonomous congregations, especially now that the magistrate could not be counted upon to punish recalcitrant churches. The Mathers and their followers in eastern Massachusetts were beginning to see that there were obvious weaknesses in the original polity and were beginning to wonder, along with Solomon Stoddard, that perhaps the founders had been too naive about the problems of governing autonomous churches and that greater control over the individual churches was needed.

Besides being projected as an additional agency of control, the ministerial meeting also served to strengthen ministerial authority. As one historian has noted, "by joining together on a strictly professional basis, the members were declaring their independence of the local congregation."\(^\text{19}\) According to early Congregational usage, the ministers of covenanted congregations depended for authority on the persons who had elected them to office. From the beginning, however, the ministers had been moving toward a higher, more objective definition of their office.\(^\text{20}\) One way in which the ministers asserted their claim to a more

\[^{19}\text{Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 220.}\]

\[^{20}\text{The story of the New England ministers' attempt to acquire a higher, objective understanding of their order independent of the gathered congregation is told by David Hall in The Faithful Shepherd.}\]
objective identity, independent of their congregation, was the practice of requiring ministers of neighboring congregations to be present at the formation of a new church. But the ministers found the greatest support for a claim to a larger identity in the ceremony of ordination. For the first generation the power of ordination lay entirely within the scope of the gathered, independent congregation. Other ministers were invited to attend the ceremony, but their presence was not required to make the minister's ordination official. Moreover, the ministers in office did not necessarily always perform the laying on of hands, as that right rested with the brethren of the church. Lay ordinations were, in fact, quite common. Criticism, however, of lay ordination began about the middle of the seventeenth century. Meanwhile, the ministers began to call upon outside ministers to perform the ceremony of ordination.

By 1690 a new trend was underway in which ordination began to be lifted from the context of the gathered church and take on a new meaning. Cotton Mather describes this trend in the Magnalia, observing that "because the Scripture so expressly mentions the 'laying on of the hands of the presbytery,' very judicious men, throughout the country, were altogether averse

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21 Supra, p. 39.
23 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 221.
to 'the laying on of the hands of the fraternity'." The ministers, according to Mather, believed that ordination was the sign of their "consecration to their ministry, and by this consecration they were to be owned, as admitted into the order of pastors. . . ." The ministers of the Cambridge Association sought to curtail lay ordinations by declaring that "the rites of this order [are not] to be regularly and conveniently performed by any but such as were themselves of the same order. . . ." In asserting an exclusive right to perform the ceremony of ordination, the ministers had moved beyond the Cambridge Platform. The Heads of Agreement made ordination by ministers in office the rule, declaring it "requisite, That . . . the Pastors of Neighboring Congregations" ordain the minister chosen by a particular congregation.

The Heads also approved of another practice which strengthened the ministers' identity apart from the congregation. First generation ministers had required reordination for a pastor who left one congregation to be called by another. The Heads now ruled that ordination was "only intended for such as never before had been ordained to the Ministerial Office; . . ."  

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24 Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 243.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 459.
The members of the Cambridge Association also attempted to extend the scope of the ministerial office beyond the boundaries of the gathered church by correcting the Cambridge Platform in an additional area. The delegates of the association announced "that the pastor of a neighboring church may, upon the request of a destitute church, occasionally administer the sacraments unto them." Cotton Mather attempted to justify this practice in the Magnalia by stating as precedent the example of George Phillips, minister at Watertown, who administered the sacraments at Boston in 1631 during the absence of John Wilson. As additional justification, Mather claimed it had been a recognized practice in primitive times and had been given approval by such eminent divines as Richard Mather, Thomas Hooker, and John Norton. The degree to which the ministers believed that the scope of their office went beyond the gathered congregation is suggested by Mather's claim that few ministers would disagree with the English Congregationalist John Owen in his contention that "the pastoral office is [not] such a thing as a man must leave behind him every time he goes from home." The New England ministers were in agreement with Owen, according to Mather, that one is "bound to preach as a minister authoriz'd in all places and on all occasions."
Along with a higher definition of their office went the ministers' desire to admit only competent, orthodox candidates to their ranks. Accordingly, the Heads of Agreement suggested that candidates for the ministry be required to "give proof of their Gifts and fitness" before a group of ministers in office.  

Concerning authority within the congregation the Heads of Agreement did not attempt to go beyond the definition of "mixed" government established by the Cambridge Platform. Although many ministers favored curtailing the brethren's privilege of consent while increasing their own authority, they no doubt realized that any tampering in this area would renew the cry of apostasy. Therefore, the Heads merely reaffirmed the ministers' right to rule and the brethren's right to consent. The ministers emphasized the respect due their authority, however, by pointing out that "the Pastor and other Elders . . . are to lead, and go before the Church, and the Brotherhood to give their consent, in a way of obedience unto Christ, and unto the Elders, as over them in the Lord."  

The Heads of Agreement was readily accepted by the ministers who had been chafing under the increasing mood of rebellion against their authority. The changes incorporated in the Heads gave the ministers a broader understanding of the authority and scope of their office and insured them of a certain degree of

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33 The Heads of Agreement, p. 459.

34 Ibid., pp. 459-460.
independence from the gathered congregation. They felt this independence when they met together in their associations. And the ministerial meeting itself gave them an additional means of control alongside the ineffective council. Finally, the Heads of Agreement, by emphasizing those points upon which the Congregationalists and Presbyterians agreed, destroyed much of the rhetoric of the antiministerial faction who accused the ministers of "Presbyterianism."  

The Heads of Agreement did not solve all the problems faced by the Mathers and their followers in eastern Massachusetts. Stoddardeanism was spreading in western Massachusetts and the Connecticut Valley and soon began to appear in the East. It first made its appearance in Charlestown where, in 1697, the church installed Simon Bradstreet as minister. Increase and Cotton Mather objected to Bradstreet's call because it came from the town and not from the church, as it should according to tradition. The Mathers drew up an admonition, which they had their respective churches endorse, and sent it to the Charlestown church. But it was not the town's usurpation of the church's privileges that alone annoyed the Mathers. Bradstreet was known to hold certain views that went beyond traditional ecclesiastical theory. In fact, he joined Stoddard's camp in dismissing the notion of a church covenant. The Mathers' protest availed nothing as the Charlestown church stood by their endorsement of

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35 Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 224.
Bradstreet. The Mathers admitted defeat by participating in Bradstreet's ordination. 36

Bradstreet was only one of a group of Boston ministers who, in 1698, proclaimed their intention to Anglicize New England church practice. The leaders of this faction were President Leverett of Harvard, Thomas Brattle, a Boston merchant, and his brother William Brattle, a tutor of Harvard who became minister of Cambridge in 1696. These ministers rejected the polity of the first generation, stating that the rigidity of the old ways was absurd in view of the Christian love that united all believers. Their rejection of such features of the old standards as ordination and the idea of the gathered church signalized the appearance of a "liberal" faction in New England. Leverett and the Brattles agreed that Boston was ready for another congregation. They selected Benjamin Colman, recently graduated from Harvard and then in England, as its minister. As their ecclesiastical views were at variance with ancient Congregational usage, these men decided to have Colman receive ordination by nonconformists in London, realizing that the Cambridge-Boston Association of ministers would more than likely refuse him ordination because of his liberal views. 37 Colman remarked that in England he "had the generous Principles of an

36 Middlekauff, The Mathers, p. 218; Miller, From Colony to Province, pp. 243, 262; Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 476.

Enlarged Catholic spirit instilled into and cherished in me."\(^{38}\)
This "Catholic spirit" was the mark of the liberal faction and a part of their ecumenical aspirations which they hoped would supplant the narrow sectarianism that still remained a feature of New England's religion.

Soon after Colman took his new position as minister of what became known as the Brattle Street Church, the innovators (as the Mathers chose to call them) issued a Manifesto in defense of those changes which they wished to introduce into traditional Congregational usage. In keeping with their catholicity, the Brattle Street innovators emphasized the faith, common to all Christians, which cut through sectarian rigidities. In order to add legitimacy to this new catholic spirit, the innovators announced that the Manifesto had received the approbation of the United Brethren. The Manifesto proclaimed its aversion to the first principles of the Congregational way.\(^{39}\) Like Stoddard, its authors repudiated the idea of the church covenant declaring that it "is a stranger to Scripture, and has no foundation in the Word of God."\(^{40}\) The Manifesto also gave everyone access to the Lord's Supper. It was left up to the minister to determine "visible sanctity." Candidates for membership did not have to undergo a public relation of their religious experience, but could be examined by

\(^{38}\)Hall, Faithful Shepherd, p. 273.
\(^{39}\)Walker; Creeds and Platforms, pp. 476-478.
\(^{40}\)Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 254.
the pastor alone. The Brattle Street innovators also sought to insure ministerial control of church government by declaring "That the Brethren are to have no voice in Ecclesiastical Councils." 

The Mathers wasted little time in taking up the attack against the innovators. Cotton Mather exclaimed that the *Manifesto* would "utterly subvert our Churches, and invite an ill Party thro' all the Countrey to throw all into Confusion on the first Opportunities." 

Increase Mather made a similar charge in his *Order of the Gospel*. The Mathers found Colman's ordination by Presbyterians in London, rather than by the Cambridge-Boston Association, particularly abhorrent. Mather commented that "To say that a Wandering Levite who has no Flock is a Pastor, is as good sense as to say, that he that has no children is a father." 

The Mathers were not entirely consistent here, as the year before they had participated in the ordination of Nathaniel Clap. Clap planned to do missionary work among the Rhode Island Indians. Rhode Island did not have a gathered church which could give Clap a call, nevertheless the Mathers ordained him to spread the gospel among the Indians. 

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44 Ibid.
45 Hall, *Faithful Shepherd*, p. 222.
what really bothered the Mathers about Colman's bypassing ordination by the Cambridge Association was the fact that they had looked to the formation of associations as an additional agency of control. They hoped the associations would be an effective way of screening candidates for the ministry. If the local associations could be trusted to ordain only those who were known to be faithful to the old principles of New England, then the Congregational churches would be safe. If ordination was allowed to slip from their hands, however, as in the case of Colman's foreign ordination, then it would be possible for anyone to start a church and practice principles which would subvert the old order.

The Mathers and the conservative party they led were all aware of their failure to forestall the tide of innovation. The Brattles had been permitted to establish their church and the "Catholic spirit" had found its way to Harvard College. Stoddard's poison of innovation had spread to eastern Massachusetts. Feeling the disruptive forces of Northampton, Brattle Street, and the tide of innovation and latitudinarian principles seeping into the old New England church order, an attempt was made to develop a centralized plan of church government which, it was hoped, would be able to halt the tide of innovation.

A Ministerial Convention, which convened at Boston, issued a letter to the New England churches on June 1, 1704. It was stated in this letter that:
As a Subserviency to those Good and Great Intentions it is proposed, That the Associations of the Ministers in the several Parts of [the] Country may be strengthened; And the several Associations may by Letters hold more free Communications with one another. 46

The Cambridge Association likewise sent a letter to the various churches in November of 1704 which clearly advocated strengthening church government. The letter favored the creation of additional associations in those areas which did not as yet have them. It presented them as being quite orthodox, asserting that "The most early times of New England propounded and practiced ym." The letter also proposed that a method of consociation should be established between such associations, stating that one thing which had always been desired but "never yet so fully attained" was "That ye several associations of ministers may uphold some communication & correspondence w'th one another, & yt yr would freely communicate unto each other by letters." 47 Finally, on September 11, 1705, nine delegates from the five Associations of Boston, Weymouth, Salem, Sherbourne, and Bristol, convened at Boston and issued the Proposals, a plan for a centralized form of church government. 48

That the Proposals of 1705 were meant to strengthen New England's ecclesiastical machinery is clearly revealed in the question asked by the committee: "What further Steps are to

46 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 484.
48 Ibid., pp. 485-486.
be taken, that the councils may have due Constitution and Efficacy in supporting, preserving and well ordering the Interest of the Churches in the Country?" The text of the Proposals were broken down into two parts. The first part proposed "That the Ministers of the Country form themselves into Associations, that may meet at proper times." These associations were supposed to deliberate upon any matter of local dispute. It was also proposed "That the candidates of the Ministry undergo a due Tryal by some one or the other of the Associations concerning their Qualifications" and that no one was to be employed in preaching "who has not been Recommended by a testimonial under the Heads of Some Associations." It is clear here that the delegates meant to prevent the formation of a second Brattle Street Church. Colman's foreign ordination, according to this rule, would be highly irregular and not recognized. Control of whom was to be admitted to the ministry would be in the hands of the local associations. In order to insure New England a constantly available supply of competent and trustworthy ministers who would not subvert the Congregational churches, it was proposed "That they should together be consulted by the Bereved Churches, to Recommend to them such Persons as may be fit to be employed amongst them for present

49 The Proposals of 1705 in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 486.
50 Ibid., p. 487.
51 Ibid.
Supply, from whom they may in due time proceed to chuse a Pastor."  

The second part of the Proposals went some degree further in an attempt to strengthen ecclesiastical government. As Cotton Mather stated in his Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Nov-Anglorum which gives a brief history of the Proposals of 1705: "Twas thought that Prudence called for a more effectual Provision of maintaining order among the churches. Therefore, it was proposed that the pastors of an associated area, along with lay delegates from the churches, form themselves into consociations. The consociations were then to elect a "Standing or stated Council, which shall Consult, Advise, and Determine all Affairs that shall be proper matter for the Consideration of an Ecclesiastical Council." It was agreed that the stated council should meet at least once a year, and that "The Determinations of Councils . . . are to be looked upon as final and decisive, except agrieved Churches and Pastors, have weighty Reasons to the Contrary" in which case the matter should go to a larger council. In the case that "a particular Church will not be Reclaimed by a Council from such gross Disorders as plainly hurt the common interests" the other churches are to "withdraw from

52Ibid.

53Cotton Mather, Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Nov-Anglorum (Boston, 1726), p. 183. (Hereafter cited as Mather, Ratio Disciplinae.)

54Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 488.

55Ibid., p. 489.
the Communion of the Church that would not be healed." \(^{56}\)

One of the many weaknesses which had plagued New England's church councils was the right of appeal. Cotton Mather commented on the confusion ushered in by this practice:

It was also considered, That when Councils are called by Litigant Parties in Churches, upon Emergencies, it had hitherto in the Liberty of each Party, to Chuse and Call their own Council, where they pleased; which left Room for much Partiality to operate, and One Council to succeed and oppose another, with an Endless Confusion, more proper for a Babel, than a City of God. \(^{57}\)

This appeal and counterappeal could undermine the minister's authority, as appellate councils allowed his opponents to advertise their arguments against him.

Aware of the ineffectiveness of councils in this regard, the preachers hoped that the provision in the Proposals for standing councils in each consociated area would end this confusion. Neither churches nor individuals would be allowed to select a favorable council in the future--the standing councils alone would be given the right to hear appeals.

Although the churches were to send lay delegates to the standing council, the ministers insured their control of the council by claiming a veto power. The Proposals proclaimed "That no Act of the Councils are to be reckoned as Concluded and decisive, for which there has not been the Concurrence of

\(^{56}\)Ibid.

\(^{57}\)Mather, *Ratio Discipliniae*, p. 183.
the Major part of the Pastors therein concerned." Increase Mather strongly objected to this provision asserting the following as testimony against it:

I never knew that the Concurrence of the Major part of the Delegates was Decisive: Nor was it ever declared, that one half of the Pastors in Synods should have a Negative on the whole Council; nor asserted, That Pastors have a greater Authority than Ruling Elders, which is implied in the Question under Consideration. Mather believed that "for Ministers to pretend to a Negative Voice in Synods . . . is Prelatical. . . ." But the majority of the ministers realized that it was the concept of the "negative voice" which had allowed them to maintain control of their congregations. If they did not insist on their veto when assembled together in a council, they would have to face the possibility that the authority of synodical decrees might fall into the hands of the lay delegates.

Although the Proposals went beyond the Cambridge Platform in the powers they gave ministerial associations and councils, they did not alter the concept of "mixed" government as outlined in the Platform. Many ministers wished to abolish the Congregational principle of obligatory consent, but they apparently realized that any attempt to increase their authority within the congregation at the expense of the brethren's would automatically kill the Proposals. The brethren were simply too

58 The Proposals of 1705, p. 489.
59 Increase Mather, A Disquisition Concerning Ecclesiastical Councils (Boston, 1716), p. 7.
60 Ibid., Preface, XIII.
tenacious of their rights to stand idly by and be shorn of their privileges. In fact, in many congregations the brethren were demanding an equal power with the minister or even claiming that the majority will should prevail. The Proposals would, however, if accepted, represent a substantial increase in the minister's authority. In the future a minister would be able to face an opposing faction in his church with the knowledge that he had the full support of the ministers and churches in his consociation. As long as he was in substantial agreement with the consensus on any given issue, his authority would remain indisputable. By transferring a considerable amount of sovereignty from the local congregation to the consociation and its decisive councils, where lay representation was overshadowed by the ministers' "negative voice," the clergy's authority was clearly enhanced. The requirement that candidates for the ministry undergo examination by the ministerial association and the stipulation that any church looking for a new minister need first consult the association increased the ministers' authority as a group. The ministers were also given a large measure of control over the councils through the associations. Although the Proposals suggested that the standing council of each consociated area should meet at least once a year at a stated time, they also ruled that the associations had the power to decide the occasion for the convening of the council on any emergency. 61 If the emergency were one which

61 The Proposals of 1705, p. 488.
the ministers did not wish to advertise publicly, they could overlook the need for a council.

Cotton Mather had once remarked to Solomon Stoddard that the decisions of a synod would avail nothing "except they have a civil Magistrate, that will make them cutt. . . ."62 With the Proposals of 1705 it was hoped that the Congregational churches had gone far enough in the direction of centralized control that they could subsist without the help of a dedicated magistrate.

The Proposals were supported by the most distinguished ministers in Massachusetts and were ratified by the five associations then in Massachusetts.63 Increase Mather, however, remained aloof until 1716 when he declared his opposition in A Disquisition Concerning Ecclesiastical Councils (1716). Cotton Mather, on the other hand, played a role in organizing the meeting which drew up the Proposals, but he never went all out in their support--more than likely due to his father's opposition. It might seem a bit strange at first sight to see Cotton Mather advocating the Proposals after bitterly condemning Stoddard's innovations. Mather was probably opposed to Stoddard's recommendation for synods simply because Stoddard had cast aside many of the first principles of Congregationalism. Then, too, Stoddard's synods would give approval to

61 The Proposals of 1705, p. 488.
62 Miller, From Colony to Province, p. 265.
63 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 490-491.
his changes in church polity. They would lend legitimacy to his belief in the Supper as a converting ordinance. Finally, Stoddard's synods would only help subvert the true Congregational order. But ministerial associations and standing councils dedicated to the Congregational polity of the first generation of divines could only gain God's approval.

Although the Proposals were ratified by the five Massachusetts Associations and received a strong defense from Ebenezer Pemberton in _The Divine Original and Dignity of Government Asserted_ (1710) and a less forceful endorsement by Grindal Rawson in _The Necessity of a Speedy and Thorough Reformation_ (1709), they were an utter failure in Massachusetts. Cotton Mather, in his brief history of the Proposals, gives us an indication of how they were received: "These Proposals have not yet been in all regards universally complied withal. Nevertheless, the Country is full of Associations. . . ," he observed. The fact that the first part of the Proposals, that advocating the establishment of ministerial associations, produced some results is not unusual considering the fact that five such associations already were in existence. The second part of the Proposals, that part which, if adopted, would have given New England the centralized control that she needed, never got off the ground. Concerning their failure, Cotton Mather wrote:

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64 Mather, _Ratio Disciplinæ_, p. 181.
There were some very considerable Persons among the Ministers, as well as of the Brethren, who thought the Liberties of particular Churches to be in danger of being too much limited and infringed in them. And in Deference to these Good Men, the Proposals were never prosecuted, beyond the Bounds of meer Proposals.

Mather's statement suggests what might well be the main reason why the Proposals failed--there were too many in the Bay colony who believed Congregational independence was at stake.

Earlier attempts to strengthen interchurch government had also foundered on the principle of Congregational autonomy. Cotton Mather, more than anyone, should have understood such opposition. After all, he and his father had delivered scores of jeremiads in which they admonished their audience not to accept any innovations which would not have received the approbation of the founding fathers. There was undoubtedly a number of parishioners who believed that the call for standing councils which would have decisive jurisdiction was an innovation which definitely would subvert the liberties of the particular churches. Some of the Matherian coterie unquestionably perceived that the Proposals were merely a veiled attempt to realize under a different name what Stoddard had already erected in western Massachusetts.

The brethren's opposition is understandable in view of the power struggle that had been taking place between them and their

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65 Ibid., p. 184.
ministers during the latter half of the seventeenth century. The laity no doubt saw the Proposals as a "Presbyterian" plot wherein the ministers sought to increase their authority at the expense of the members' privileges. The proposal providing for licensure of the ministry and the proposal requiring a church to choose its minister from a list approved by the associations probably struck many of the brethren as a ministerial attempt to encroach upon the right of the individual church to elect whomever it would, while at the same time suggesting that the brethren might have realized that the proposal giving the association the responsibility to convene the standing council in cases of emergency tended to buttress the ministers' authority as a group. And the brethren certainly objected to that provision of the Proposals which required the concurrence of a major part of the ministers to make a church act. On several occasions during the latter half of the seventeenth century, the brethren challenged the ministers' right to a negative; only to have the Cambridge Association (in 1690) reaffirm their privilege. The Association asserted that "To take away the negative of the elders ... is to turn the whole 'regimen of the church' into a pure 'democracy'."66 The brethren objected to the ministers' attempt to carry their veto with them from the congregation to the council. The laity were undoubtedly in agreement with Increase Mather that "for Minis-

66 Mather, Magnalia, II, p. 249.
ters to pretend to a Negative Voice in Synods... or for Ministers to pretend to be Members without any Mission from their Churches... is Prelatical... " The brethren would have the ministers sit in the council as a representative having no more power than the lay delegate. If the ministers gave up their veto in the council they would have defeated one purpose of the Proposals which, besides providing a more efficient administrative machinery, was to strengthen ministerial authority.

Another factor which goes far in explaining the failure of the Proposals in Massachusetts, is the fact that they were not supported by the legislature. With the loss of the charter and the issuance of a new one in 1692, the governor was now a royal appointee. The governor at this time, Joseph Dudley, was a widely known foe of Congregationalism. Dudley possessed a veto power over all bills presented to him. Furthermore, the upper House of the Legislature drew its membership largely from the commercial center of Boston, and many of its members were more interested in trade and in gaining favorable crown appointments than in any scheme to strengthen ecclesiastical government. There is no doubt that the legislature of 1705 was feeling the influences of secularization much more than the

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67 Mather, A Disquisition... Preface, XIII.
68 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 493.
69 On this point see Bailyn, New England Merchants.
law of 1648. That New England really was in the pro-
cess of changing from a plantation of religion into a planta-
tion of trades may account, at least in part, for the lack of
sufficient interest in the Proposals to see them adopted.

Cotton Mather remarked in his history of the Proposals
that "There was indeed a Satyr, Printed against these written
Proposals, and against the Servants of GOD that made them"^70
and Ebenezer Pemberton sadly complained in his defense of the
propositions that "they have been misrepresented, and Prophanely
descanted on."^71 Both men undoubtedly were referring to John
Wise, minister of Chebacco parish in Ipswish. His The Churches
Quarrel Espoused: or, A Reply in Satyre, to certain Proposals
(1710) and Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches
(1717) were both offered in defense of the system of church
government set forth in the Cambridge Platform. Formerly,
some historians believed that these forceful and witty attacks
were largely responsible for the defeat of the Proposals. But
Wise's satire did not appear until four years after the Proposals
were ratified by the Massachusetts Associations, by which time
the project was dead. It is more probable that lay and clerical
opposition and the lack of legislative support were responsible
for their defeat.72 Nevertheless, Wise's criticisms suggest the

^70Mather, Ratio Discipliniae, p. 185.

^71Ebenezer Pemberton, The Divine Original and Dignity of
Government Asserted (Boston, 1710), p. 103.

^72On this point see Walker, Creeds and Platforms; p. 492;
Miller, From Colony to Province, pp. 289-290.
main reasons for lay and clerical opposition to the Proposals. Wise's two works are better known, however, for the secular tenor of their arguments. In his defense of Congregational independence and a democratic church order, Wise did not describe the members in the spiritual sense of a covenanted community of saints, basing his argument instead on purely rationalistic grounds.  

Wise constructed his arguments around the rights of Englishmen, the law of nature, and the restraint of arbitrary power, the latter of which the people had experienced under the Andros regime. To him the Proposals clearly "out King'd all Kings," "out Bishop't all Bishops," and "out-Pope't the Pope himself." Wise, believing he was defending the Cambridge Platform, argued that democracy was Christ's government both in church and state. In his second treatise he concluded "That the People, or Fraternity, under the Gospel, are the first Subject of Power; . . . that a Democracy in Church or State, is a very honourable and regular Government according to the dictates of Right Reason." He continued that the churches of New England were therefore "manifestly Justified and Defended by the Law & Light of Nature." Wise attempted

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73 For the historical significance of Wise's arguments see Chapter XVIII of Miller's From Colony to Province.

74 John Wise, The Churches Quarrel Espoused: or, A Reply in Satyre, to certain Proposals (New York, 1713), pp. 122-123. (Hereafter cited as Wise, Churches Quarrel Espoused.)

to incite the brethren to an understanding of their rights within the congregation and told them that if they were to maintain their church liberties they should take care to provide their churches with ruling elders. "The nature of the Office," he told them, "is not only agreeable with your Frame, and exacted by your Principles, but indeed carries safety and Protection in it to your Liberties . . . ." Wise urged the brethren to entrust their self-preservation in the office of the ruling elder. It is according to "the Laws of nature, that what you love, they love, what you hate, they hate." They will, he advised the brethren, "like wakeful Sentinels, curiously and with Courage guard your Liberties." Wise told the brethren that the ministers' distrust and jealousy of the office of ruling elder was responsible for the fact that it had fallen into disuse.

Wise warned the laity that the provision for standing councils would rob them of their liberties. The provisions for lay representation in the council, Wise asserted, was only a sop thrown to the brethren by the ministers to lead them into thinking that the council's decisions would not be merely clerical. Their wisdom was not admired in the Proposals and if they "will but view the Proposal again, in the hindermost part of it," they "will see a Back-door very Artifically finished and left upon

76 Wise, Churches Quarrel Espoused, p. 19.
77 Ibid.
Latch, for their Exclusion. . . ."  

Wise called the proposal for ministerial associations a "Daring Article" and opposed the associations' claim to "an absolute superintending Power to Control and direct all Wooers in their Choice for the Marriage Bed. . . ." Wise also believed that the moderator of the ministerial association was given too autocratic a power. "If there chance to be an Emergence of Common Concernment, If he finds his own Favourites involved in the guilt and Danger, he then gives no notice, but stifles the business, and so cheats the Company," he objected. Wise took offense, too, to the proposal which gave the associations the right to call the standing council in emergency situations. Such a rule gave the ministers of the association too much control over the use of the council. Finally, Wise charged that the ministers' veto and the subordinate role of the laymen in the councils invested the clergy with an unjustified power. He told the clergy that the Proposals clearly defined their intentions to "set up yourselves, as the Subject or Fountain of a superintending Power." Wise concluded that the Proposals were contrary to the rights of Englishmen and, as they clearly contradicted the Cambridge Platform, also violated

78 Ibid., p. 109.  
79 Ibid., p. 64.  
80 Ibid., p. 89.  
81 Ibid., p. 65.  
82 Ibid., pp. 93-94.  
83 Ibid., p. 143.
Although the Proposals of 1705 came to nothing in Massachusetts, they were by no means an utter failure. They were utilized in Connecticut in the Saybrook Platform of 1708. Conditions were favorable in Connecticut for the adoption of a plan for a more centralized church government. John Winthrop, Jr. had obtained a charter which was quite favorable to the colony. Under this charter the colony was still permitted to choose its own governor and upper House. The governor in 1708 was Gurdon Saltonstall, a minister who was in favor of some method of strengthening church government.  
In addition to these favorable circumstances, it should be remembered that a strong Presbyterian faction already existed in Connecticut and Solomon Stoddard had already brought the churches of western Massachusetts and the Connecticut Valley into a more Presbyterianized form of church organization.

Under the direction of Governor Saltonstall, the General Court of Connecticut ordered the representatives of the several churches to meet together in various towns to draw up plans for a stricter church government and to choose delegates to a general assembly which was to meet at Saybrook. On the basis of these various plans, the delegates to this general council

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84 Ibid., pp. 47-48.
86 Ibid., pp. 499-500.
were to prepare a form of ecclesiastical government for submission to the legislature. On September 9, 1708, the proposed synod met and drew up a platform which consisted of three parts.\(^87\) It affirmed the Confession of 1680 (a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith) as its statement of doctrine; secondly, it adopted the Heads of Agreement of 1691; thirdly, it adopted fifteen Articles for the Administration of Church Discipline, which were merely a more detailed version of the Proposals of 1705 which had failed in Massachusetts. The standing or stated council was approved and given a decisive power, similar to that of a Presbyterian classis. The Platform provided for the establishment of ministerial associations which would have the right to consult and license candidates for the ministry.\(^88\)

The Saybrook Platform did not meet with the approval of all the churches, some renouncing it altogether. The Lisbon parish in Norwich stood by the Cambridge Platform and the church in Woodstock adopted it at its founding, refusing to hire a minister who favored the Saybrook Platform.\(^89\) The Harwinton church allowed dissatisfied members to call their

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\(^{87}\) Ibid., p. 500.  
\(^{88}\) Articles for the Administration of Church Discipline in Walker, Creeds and Platforms, pp. 502-506. (Hereafter cited as Saybrook Platform.)  
\(^{89}\) Bushman, From Puritan to Yankee, pp. 151-152.
own councils. In Norwich, the introduction of the system produced a bitter dispute which was reinforced when a member of the congregation travelled to Ipswich to consult with John Wise. The dispute eventually cost John Woodward his pulpit. On the other hand, a majority of the churches in Hartford and New London counties accepted the Saybrook system without modification. The Fairfield County ministers gave the Platform a more Presbyterian interpretation. Meeting in council at Stratfield on March 16 and 17, 1709, they agreed that the standing councils were to have "Authoritative, Judicial and Decisive power of Determination of affairs Ecclesiasticall." They changed the Congregational sentence of noncommunion to the Presbyterian extreme of excommunication. In New Haven County, which still felt the impress of strict Congregationalism left on it by John Davenport, an attempt was made to play down the Presbyterian tone of the Platform. The clergy of that county gave the lay representatives in the councils an equal voting power with the ministers, a majority of both groups being required to make a church act. New Haven also stipulated that there could be no sentence of noncommunion without the approval

90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Walker, Creeds and Platforms, p. 508.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., p. 509.
95 Ibid., p. 510.
of the churches in the consociation.  

The most forceful attack on the Saybrook Platform and its attempt to increase authority was penned by Roger Wolcott during the 1730's. (Wolcott was later to become governor of Connecticut.) Wolcott followed Wise in the secularism of his arguments. And like Wise, he too declared that the ministers' veto assured them of control of the council and made the laity's power as good as nothing. If the ministers possessed a negative on the judgments of the brethren, there would be no check on clerical authority.

Wise's and Wolcott's arguments more than likely added fuel to the antiministerial sentiment of the brethren. Indeed, they were the chief spokesman for the brethren's contention that the ministers were trying to usurp control of church government. They defended the brethren's claim to a greater share in church government and attacked the ministers' "negative voice." They also defended Congregational autonomy (a principle which the laity stood solidly behind), asserting that the plan for a more centralized church government with decisive councils would only subvert the liberties of the individual churches, and as Wise suggested, erect a tyranny over them as strong as any popery. Wise and Wolcott, although purportedly defending the system of church government outlined in the Cambridge Platform, were

96 Ibid., p. 513.
97 Bushman, From Puritan to Yankee, pp. 153-154.
actually calling for a shift in its concept of "mixed" government. They were presenting Congregationalism as a democratic polity and telling the membership they were by no means meant to remain "silent" partners.

By 1730 the century-long effort to strengthen the Congregational ecclesiastical structure came to an end. A series of alterations had been sought, most notably through the Heads of Agreement, the Proposals of 1705, and the Saybrook Platform which would not only strengthen interchurch relations but also buttress the ministers' authority as well. The Heads of Agreement were adopted by both Massachusetts and Connecticut and increased interchurch activity through the creation of ministerial associations. The associations also increased the ministers' authority as a group by giving them the right to "license" candidates to the ministerial profession. The Proposals, which would have given Massachusetts the authoritative councils she needed to maintain order among the churches, failed; foundering on Congregational independence and the lack of sufficient legislative support. The Proposals were incorporated into the Saybrook Platform, however, and adopted by Connecticut, giving that colony a more Presbyterianized form of government. Still even in Connecticut the plan for a more centralized system of church government met with stiff resistance in many of the churches.
Emerging out of the factionalism over questions of church government and in response to the changing realities of the late seventeenth century, three different schemes of church government offered themselves to the New England churches: strict Congregationalism or Independency as represented by John Wise; the voluntary consociated authority or associationalism of the Mathers; and the Presbyterianized polity of Solomon Stoddard. The very fact that New England Congregationalism had fractured into three different camps is sufficient testimony to the failure of the system of church government as outlined in the Cambridge Platform to maintain unity and verity among the New England churches.

If the historian had to look for a controlling principle governing the notions of church government found in the Cambridge Platform, he would undoubtedly find it in the principle of voluntarism; the idea that the saint had the freedom to voluntarily consent to all matters of faith. It was a naive faith in the principle of voluntarism out of which many of the problems which plagued the New England churches throughout the seventeenth century arose. It was out of the principle of voluntarism that the saints drew together into covenanted
societies. It was the principle of voluntarism which gave these saints the liberty or freedom to consent to all church acts, including the election of their minister and matters of church discipline. This privilege of consent introduced an egalitarian element into Congregational church order. What good was the ministers' authority if the majority of the brethren could make a church act in face of the ministers' opposition? The voluntaristic ethic posited the liberty or freedom of the members against the authority of the minister. The dilemma for the New England Congregationalists was to find the proper balance between liberty and order within the congregation: between the power of the fraternity and the authority of the minister. The New England divines tried to answer this problem by giving the minister a "negative voice" or veto over a majority of the members' votes. The veto was challenged throughout the seventeenth century by the brethren who contended that a majority of the members' votes made a church act even though the minister did not give his consent.

The voluntaristic ethic also produced another dimension of the liberty versus order problem. The Puritans who settled Massachusetts during the 1630's came as heirs of the Reformation. They came to New England to carry out the reformation of the church that they saw being impeded in Old England. They sought to create a society in covenant with God which would live according to God's law and which would establish that reformed church polity which alone had exclusive divine
approval. Uniformity of reformation was one of their major goals. Yet, at the same time, they had an abiding respect for the integrity of the individual congregation. They believed that the Bible did not give warrant to any church organization higher than the particular congregation. A serious problem arose at this point for the Congregationalists. If each congregation was an independent, self-governing unit standing in way of subordination to no higher church body, what was to keep it from defining truth in a way quite different from its neighboring congregations? What uniformity of reformation would there be then? The incongruity created out of the principle of Congregational independence and the principle of Congregational uniformity produced a tension or conflict in values between the concepts of liberty and order. In order to reconcile these two values, it became apparent to the New England divines that they would have to weigh the legitimate claims of the congregation against those of a community of churches in covenant with God and create some form of consociated authority which would insure uniformity.

The Cambridge Platform of 1648 sanctioned the advisory synod, made up of lay as well as ministerial representation from each church, as the main instrument of consociated authority (the ministerial meeting, comprised of the ministers only in a given vicinity, was not recognized as an instrument of consociation in the Platform but was sanctioned by law in 1641 and again in 1648). The ethic of voluntarism which
governed synodical consociation tended to protect the principle of Congregational independence. What subordination as existed to a synod's determinations was entirely voluntary as consociated authority in New England was advisory and could not be coerced upon the churches. The critics of the New England Way could see no possible way of concord among churches in which synodical authority did not have a compulsory jurisdiction. The New England divines, however, relieved the consequences of their voluntaristic ethic by giving the civil magistrate the coercive power that their synods lacked.

The New England leaders soon found that a voluntary system of consociated authority, even if backed by the sword of the magistrate, could break down in the face of a major divisive force such as that created by the controversy over the half-way covenant. What magistrate would dare enforce the decision of the Half-Way Synod upon a dissenting minority led by such eminent divines as John Davenport and Charles Chauncy? Congregational independence proved to be the death of consociated authority and uniformity.

Stoddard's changes in church government were simple answers to the problems which had been raised by a voluntaristic ethic. In response to the growing pretensions of the laity for a greater share or even control of the internal government of the congregation, Stoddard simply transferred the power of the keys to the minister thus depriving the brethren of their privilege of voluntary consent to all church acts. In so doing he
departed from the concept of mixed government as laid down in the Cambridge Platform. At the same time, however, he solved the problem of how much liberty and how much order there would be within the congregation by placing the balance of power in the minister's hands.

Stoddard solved the vexing problem a voluntaristic ethic posed to finding a viable mode of consociated authority by merely giving the Congregational synod the compulsory jurisdiction of a Presbyterian classis. He was able to do so by negating the church covenant and placing emphasis solely on the national covenant which permitted him to bring his churches under the direction of a centralized, national church. In so doing, he compromised the principle of Congregational independence (a principle he felt was too lordly and arrogant in the first place). For Stoddard, the claims of a community of churches in covenant with God took precedence over the integrity of the local congregation.

The Mathers' plan of organizing the churches of eastern Massachusetts into voluntary associations did not enjoy the same measure of success as Stoddard reaped by his changes. By giving the associations the right to license all candidates for the ministry, they did gain some assurance that only orthodox ministers would be placed in the pulpits. The Proposals of 1705, however, which intended to organize the ministerial associations into consociations over which there would be a standing council failed to win acceptance by the churches. Even if the Proposals' plan for a federation of associations and a standing council had
not failed, it would have been severely compromised by the voluntary basis on which it was organized. Although the Proposals theoretically would have transferred a considerable degree of sovereignty from the local congregation to the consociation and its standing council, it still lacked the necessary coercive agency to enforce its decisions. The success of the plan as a functional mode of interchurch organization was still contingent upon the voluntary cooperation of the local churches. Even the system of advisory synodical authority as outlined in the Cambridge Platform, although also governed by the principle of voluntarism, would probably have been a more reliable instrument of extracongregational control as it could rely on the agency of the state to sanction its synodical decrees. The Proposals, unsupported by the state, would have had to rely on the power of persuasion and the voluntary cooperation of the local churches to maintain uniformity, a form of cooperation which had proven throughout the seventeenth century to have been a weak reed, indeed.

The Proposals did nothing to redress the power struggle that had been going on within the congregations throughout the seventeenth century between minister and flock. Even on this issue the Proposals remained tied to the principle of voluntarism and merely reaffirmed the brethren's right to a voluntary consent in all church acts. In short, even if the Proposals had been accepted by the churches, they would have done little to solve the dilemma of how much freedom and how much order
there would be in the New England Way.

If Stoddard's changes in church government solved the liberty versus order dilemma by placing the emphasis on order, John Wise's defense of democracy within the congregation and Congregational independence placed the emphasis on the side of liberty. Wise was certainly no foe to the concept of order, but he was vehemently opposed to any form of centralized authority. As a defender of Congregational autonomy, he reasserted the Congregational tenet that there was no ecclesiastical authority higher than the individual church. He saw in the Mathers' associationalism another attempt to rob the individual congregation of its rights. Although he defended the concept of mixed government, he clearly emphasized the power and rights of the brethren. In his defense of the power of the fraternity, Wise tipped the scales in favor of the democratic impulse in Congregationalism. Wise's Congregationalism undoubtedly won a strong following among the laity, who had grown increasingly more ambitious during the latter half of the seventeenth century for a greater share in the government of the congregation.

New England's attempt to make a voluntaristic mode of associated authority into a viable means of intercongregational control had been continuously vitiated throughout the seventeenth century by the principle of Congregational independence. Only Solomon Stoddard of Northampton met with success in the attempt to find the necessary extracongregational machinery to insure verity and unity among the several churches (Connecticut followed
his lead by accepting the Saybrook Platform which met with a cer­
tain measure of success). Stoddard's success was due largely to
his decision to jettison the principle of voluntarism. The Mathers
could see the problem that a preoccupation over the principle of
Congregational autonomy could impose upon a community of churches
in covenant with God and sought through their plan of voluntary
associationalism to transfer a certain degree of sovereignty from
the local congregation to the association and its standing council.
In their desire to retain the principle of voluntarism they stood
in a position between Wise and Stoddard, but stood opposed to Wise
in their desire to create a more formal, definitive plan of con­
sociated authority over the local churches. In Wise's Congregation­
alism, New England had gone full circle. The Puritans religious
enterprise had begun with a church polity which emphasized the prin­
ciple of liberty over that of order. It was a polity which empha­
sized the liberty of the church members to consent to all church
acts. It was a polity which emphasized the liberty of the local
congregation in relation to the interests of the community of
churches. As the New England divines began to become wary of the
degree of liberty they saw within the New England Way they began
to urge the necessity of creating some form of consociated author­
ity over the churches and ways of strengthening the minister's
authority within the church—in short, they became concerned with
how much liberty and how much order there would be in the New Eng­
land Way and welcomed ways of tilting the scales in favor of the
principle of order.
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