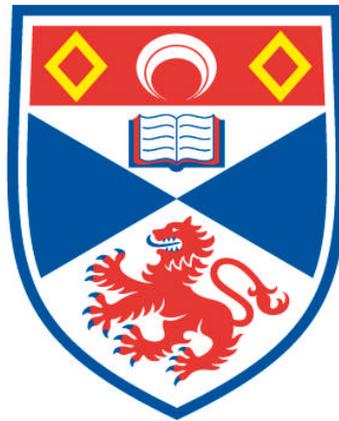


**VOLUNTARY SAINTS: ENGLISH CONGREGATIONALISM  
AND THE VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE, 1825-1962**

**Kenneth Gordon Brownell**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



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"VOLUNTARY SAINTS:  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the theory and practice of the voluntary principle in English Congregationalism between 1825 and 1862. The voluntary principle came to be seen in this period as of the essence of Congregationalism and its Congregationalist adherents sought to achieve its consistent practice in every aspect of denominational life.

Chapter 1 describes the breakdown of the old 'catholic' consensus in British evangelicalism. By the mid-1820s the cooperation born of revival was being sorely tested on a number of fronts. Politics was certainly important, but there was also growing denominational self-interest. This was particularly the case in home and foreign missions and Congregationalists, perhaps the most 'catholic' of bodies, were under pressure from within and without to pursue a more partisan policy. Out of these practical concerns emerged, as chapter 2 points out, a more clearly articulated theory of voluntary churchmanship. Of course voluntarism had been a principle of Congregational Independency since the 17th century, but some adjustment was needed to the new circumstances of the 19th century. Congregationalist and other Dissenting apologists honed and refined the principle and gave it a sharpness and comprehensiveness it had never had before. Even such a 'catholic' Nonconformist as John Angel James saw the need to instruct his congregation in its Dissenting principles. He and many others provided the theoretical basis for the practical exercise of the voluntary principle.

With chapters 3 and 4 I turn to the internal consolidation of the Congregational community. The Congregational Union (chapter 3) provided an agency for denominational activity and a focal point for an otherwise highly decentralized community. In our period the union was only moderately successful in realizing its objectives, but it provided a forum for discussion even if it showed the limitations of Congregational voluntarism. By the late 1850s the union was seriously threatened by its too many commitments, local indifference and internal strife. Perhaps more successful was the Dissenting and denominational press (chapter 4) in consolidating the community. Congregationalists were active in both the wider Dissenting press as well as their own denominational press.

The voluntary principle was seen to be of great importance in the areas of education and chapel building. It was in both these areas that Congregationalism was most seriously challenged by the Establishment and it was here that the voluntary principle was most evidently curtailed. The education battle (chapter 5) was a valiant one, but it was doomed from the start. The Congregationalist system simply could not sustain a viable alternative to the state-supported system. Chapel building (chapter 6) was more successful, but its success was itself a recognition of the limited resources of the Congregational community and therefore of the voluntary principle.



PREFACE

The purpose and scope of this thesis will be described in the Introduction. I would like here simply to acknowledge my indebtedness to several institutions and people. My interest in British Nonconformity was nurtured while an undergraduate and I am thankful for the opportunities afforded me to pursue that interest as a postgraduate. In particular, I am grateful to my parents for their support and continual patience and to the Inter-collegiate Studies Institute of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania for electing me to a Richard M. Weaver Fellowship. Numerous people helped me along the way and I would like to thank especially Dr. Sheridan Gilley, Dr. David Hempton, Dr. David Bebbington and the Rev. Dr. Clyde Ervine for helping me to sharpen my ideas when I was beginning my research. Of course an immense debt is owed to various libraries and their long-suffering staffs. The majority of my research was done at the Congregational Library, London, Dr. Williams's Library, London and the University Library, St. Andrews. I am also thankful for the facilities and aid offered by the libraries of Cambridge and London Universities, Homerton College, Cambridge, the Institute of Historical Research, London, the School of African and Oriental Studies, London, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland and the United Reformed Church of England and Wales, as well as to the Evangelical Library, London and the London City Mission, London and the Dorset Congregational Union, Boscombe. For help and support of a very different order I owe more than I can express to my wife. She has learned to live with my inordinate interest in almost anything that has to do with Protestant Nonconformity. I trust that this thesis in some small way will reward her patience.

ABBREVIATIONS

- B.A.S.C.A.: British Anti-State Church Association  
 B.F.B.S.: British and Foreign Bible Society  
 B.F.S.S.: British and Foreign School Society  
 C.B.E.: Congregational Board of Education  
C.I. & C.M.: London Christian Instructor and Congregational Magazine  
 C.I.S.: Christian Instruction Society  
 C.L.Mss.: Congregational Library Manuscripts  
C.M.: Congregational Magazine  
 Colonial M.S.: Colonial Missionary Society  
C.P.M.: Christian's Penny Magazine and People's Friend  
 C.U.E.W.: Congregational Union of England and Wales  
C.Y.B.: Congregational Year Book  
Documents Relating: Documents Relating to the Formation of the  
Congregational Union of England and Wales  
 D.W.L.: Dr. Williams's Library  
E.M.: Evangelical Magazine  
E.R.: Eclectic Review  
 H.C.Mss.: Homerton College Manuscripts  
H.M.M.: Home Missionary Magazine  
 H.M.S.: Home Missionary Society  
 I.E.S.: Irish Evangelical Society  
J.Eccl.H.: Journal of Ecclesiastical History  
 L.C.M.: London City Mission  
 L.M.S.: London Missionary Society  
N.: Nonconformist  
 N.C.L.C.: New College London Collection  
 N.C.L.C., B.P.: New College London Collection, Blackburn Papers  
P.: Patriot  
 R.T.S.: Religious Tract Society  
 S.S.U.: Sunday School Union  
T.C.H.S.: Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society  
 V.I.A.: Village Itineracy Association  
 V.S.A.: Voluntary School Association

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to investigate the borderland between the internal religious life of one dissenting community, Congregationalism, and its external political and social life. Many years prior to the period covered in this thesis Robert Browne referred to his fellow dissenters as the 'willing sorte', by which he meant that they were voluntary members of free Christian communities who refused to bow before the coercive powers of any religious establishment. For Congregationalists the voluntary principle came into sharpest focus in the autonomy of the local church, or as John Robinson put it in 1616 in a petition to James I, 'the right of spiritual administration and government in itself and over itself by the common and free consent of the people, independently and immediately under Christ'. My purpose is to show something of the way in which this principle was reaffirmed and practised by Congregationalists in mid-19th century England.

Relatively little attention has been paid to the way in which Congregationalists practised their voluntary churchmanship in the wider context of society and politics. Denominational historians have either tended to be inward-looking and domestic in their treatment or have stopped short of investigating the full social significance of the institutions and movements they were writing about. Examples of the former category would be an older history such as John Waddington's Congregational History or a work of the present century such as Albert Peel's These Hundred Years, a History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831-1931. Peel's work is the standard history of the union, but it unfortunately suffers from being pedestrian, unimaginative and lacking in almost all references to his sources. In the latter category would be R.W. Dale's monumental History of English Congregationalism (1884) which was the product of a lively and reflective mind passionately committed to voluntary independancy.

In his other works Dale saw both the significance of the decline of the pan-evangelicalism of the early 19th century and the rise of a more decided churchmanship.<sup>1</sup> R. Tudur-Jones's more recent Congregationalism in England (1961) attempted to break out of the mould of many church histories, but the scope of his work precluded closer examination of the practice of voluntarism. F.R. Salter's article 'Congregationalism in the Hungry Forties' (1955)<sup>2</sup> was particularly perceptive and beamed some light into the world of Congregational historiography. Salter recognized the importance of the voluntary principle in integrating the diverse activities of the Congregational community in the face of multiple challenges to its mission. Following the insights of Elie Halévy Salter elucidated the particular institutional tension within Congregationalism between the independence of the local churches and the common interests of the whole body, not least as they related to the wider society outside. Congregationalists felt this tension acutely in the 19th century as they sought to vindicate themselves as a voluntary community by establishing their own alternative organizations to those of the Establishment and as they sought to tackle the political obstacles that lay in the way to the full realization of their principles. In this light the agonized debates in the Congregational Union assemblies and the long string of articles and books on church polity take on a deeper significance than being merely a prolonged discussion of family affairs. Perhaps more than they were willing to admit (though Anglican critics were always ready to point this out) the Congregational community was engaged in an exercise of adjusting the classical doctrine of the church that they had inherited from their Puritan forbears to the new circumstances of 19th century Britain.

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1. See R.W. Dale's The Evangelical Revival and other Sermons (London 1880); Manual of Congregational Church Order (London 1884, 8th edn. 1898); The Old Evangelicalism and the New (London 1889).
  2. F.R. Salter, 'Congregationalism in the Hungry Forties', T.C.H.S., XVII (1955).

The evangelical revival, political and ecclesiastical reform, the growth of the towns and cities, the industrial revolution and much else all made up a world in which Congregationalists had to come to terms with their own expansion, home and foreign missions, elementary education and competition from other communities in a pluralistic society. To meet these challenges it was necessary to consolidate their strength and perpetuate and build up their institutions. All the while the voluntary principle was being refined and stretched to the limit both as an apologetic weapon and as a practical tool.

It is not surprising that there was a loosening of the ties with the older pan-evangelicalism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries along with the reassertion of the distinctives of Congregationalism. This was a fairly widespread process that was regretted by some but was perhaps the natural response of the various evangelical groups in wanting to capitalize on what they had gained during the period of expansion. Home missions was of course the most vulnerable area since there the question of polity was of paramount importance. But in fact almost every area where evangelicals had traditionally cooperated was affected. It was not, however, simply a matter of a practical recognition of denominational realities, but by the 1830s also a question of the voluntary versus the establishment principles. Dissenters felt keenly the oppression of the Established Church through the legal disabilities and Anglicans felt the challenge of Dissenters in political agitation that threatened their privileges. Evangelicals of both parties were torn in their loyalty to a common gospel and their fidelity to their ecclesiastical principles. By the 1850s the heat of controversy had subsided and there was a new coalescence of evangelicals, but the new unity was as much a reaction to Romanism, ritualism and incipient liberalism as a reaffirmation of a common faith. In the meantime Congregationalists had built up their denominational organization upon the foundations of the old pan-evangelicalism. Many Congregationalists saw the union of 1832 as a repudiation of their evangelical catholicity, but others recognized it as the only way to maintain that catholicity on realistic terms in a world that was not always to their liking.

Overshadowing almost everything that the Congregational community undertook was the Church of England. Not only was the Church of England the dominant religious body, but as the established church it called the tune to which the Dissenters danced. As much as they would have liked to have practised their voluntarism in a manner similar to their Puritan cousins in America, English Congregationalists were hemmed in on all sides by the Establishment and its active support by the state. As such Congregationalists partook of a certain defensiveness that manifested itself in the polemical character of voluntarist writings and the call for a more distinct, if not strident, churchmanship. Do whatever they would Congregationalists saw themselves in relation to their dissent from and nonconformity to the Anglican church. Yet one marked feature of our period, and a contributory factor to the strength of the voluntary cause, was the renewed integrity of Congregationalism as a polity. The attempts to forge links with continental Reformed communities, with the American churches and the interest in the colonial mission where almost all were on an equal footing did much to boost the denomination's self-esteem. In spite of the handicaps Congregationalists seemed to speak, particularly in the late 1830s and 1840s, as if the future was theirs. Indeed, much of early Victorian Congregationalism can be best understood in terms of its attempts to put its voluntarism into practice - whether in home missions or in political agitation - in a society that was no longer conducive to an old-fashioned religious establishment. Thomas Binney articulated this attitude clearly in his address from the chair of the Congregational Union in that fateful year in European politics of 1848. Seeing the question of the separation of church and state at the heart of the events on the continent, Binney declared, 'Revolutions are convulsing the world and they are doing so partly through the medium of ideas consecrated by us'. As Christians they were to preach the gospel, but as Dissenters they had 'a peculiar calling and special work, viz., to testify against certain errors and institutions; and it must be confessed, that if our ideas be right, or, whether right or wrong, if they should predominate, our mission ... would seem to be revolutionary.'<sup>3</sup>

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3. C.Y.B. (1848), p.8.

As it was the Church of England showed remarkable resilience, but at the time the outcome of the conflict with Dissent, reform and secularism could have been anyone's guess. The result was in fact a greatly limited establishment that was able to keep Dissent at bay and curtail the extent to which Dissenters were able to practice their voluntarism in its purity. In these circumstances voluntarism provided Congregationalists with a convenient chimera - an idea that could be only distantly or imperfectly realized here below and its failures explained by the fact that it was but a seedling in a garden full of briars and thorns. Even so the voluntary principle provided Congregationalists with the sort of belief that could support and give meaning to many of their activities.

It has taken writers on the edges of church history to describe the importance of the voluntary principle for the Congregational community. Two collections of Nonconformist documents, Victorian Nonconformity edited by John Briggs and Ian Sellers and Nonconformity in the nineteenth century edited by David Thompson, have given due place to the voluntary principle in both church and public life in our period. Otherwise helpful works such as Kathleen Heasman's Evangelicals in Action or K.S. Inglis's Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England at best give only a nodding recognition to what Congregationalists would have seen as a clear vindication and a challenge respectively to voluntarism. Clyde Binfield's delightful and impressionistic So down to prayers has reminded us that Dissent, and Congregationalism in particular, was very much a community with its own distinct ethos rooted in its voluntary churchmanship. This is important to remember when we consider Congregationalism in its wider evangelical context. An important figure such as Andrew Reed, pastor of Wycliffe Chapel and founder of several orphanages, can only be understood when we see him as a thorough voluntarist and ecumenical evangelical who felt deeply the controversies of the age. John Bossy's study of English Roman Catholicism and several studies of Wesleyan Methodism have in a different way shown the importance of a community's self-understanding in shaping its place in society.<sup>4</sup>

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4. John Bossy, The English Catholic Community 1570-1850 (London 1975); John Kent, The Age of Disunity (London 1966); E.R. Taylor, Methodism and Politics (London 1935); Robert Moore, Pitmen, Preachers and Politics (London 1974); W.R. Ward's Religion and Society in England, which deals largely with Methodism, will be noted below.

Political and social historians have seen the importance of Congregationalism's understanding of the church in its activities. Elie Halévy's third and fourth volumes of his History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century recognized the significance of denominational consolidation in the union and its various societies for political Dissent.<sup>5</sup> R.G. Cowherd's Politics of Dissent and G.I.T. Machin's Politics and the Churches in Great Britain have both illuminated the place of Congregationalism in the politics of the day, though they have refrained from going too far into the internal denominational developments that lay behind the politics. Machin sees the impetus of political Congregationalism in the voluntary principle and the tension between radicals and moderates. Prof. Norman Gash's Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics has probed more deeply in this regard. In particular he has shown the negative effect of the voluntary principle as a place of retreat for political Dissent when it found itself isolated from the mainstream of British politics in the late 1830s and 40s. At a time when Dissent was internally fragmented as to political objectives and tactics, 'Retreat into voluntarism in fact was a retreat from politics.'<sup>6</sup> During the 1830s the voluntary principle was sharpened, clarified and impressed upon the Congregational community by its leaders, but at the expense of constructive politics. Voluntarism proved to be an unworkable political concept in its fullness, but part of the purpose of this thesis is to show that it also proved to be almost as unworkable in underpinning denominational consolidation and advance. Congregationalists were not only to find limitations to their political aspirations, but also limitations on what they could do in realizing their vision of a comprehensive voluntary community. The external and internal effects of voluntarism were closely linked and this was nowhere more clearly the case than in the difficulties the denomination faced over elementary education.

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5. Elie Halévy, History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century (London 1962), six vols., vol. III, p. 137; vol. IV, p. 385f.

6. Norman Gash, Reaction and Reconstruction in English Politics (Oxford 1965), p. 76.

Prof. Gash also points to the lack of unity, organization and 'human material' in hampering Dissent's political prospects. Much of this thesis is concerned with the development of the appropriate organizations to channel the voluntarist vision. Congregationalists were not a ghetto people; rather they possessed a broad, open catholicity that encompassed the nation and the world in its outlook. In order to make their impact it was necessary that they appear and act as a united community and that they be able to deliver the goods commensurate with their principles and aspirations. Therefore organization was important and that is why it is necessary to examine Congregational voluntarism by means of its central denominational organizations and institutions. There is of course a danger here in that we could be tempted into thinking of Congregationalism in the same way one would think of connexional Methodism with its conferences and circuits. There is no real parallel. The Congregationalists never had the sort of organization that could either enjoin local action or represent the feelings of its clergy like the conference or the sort of towering figure like Jabez Bunting. Nevertheless organizational Congregationalism cannot be neglected since it was both what the larger world saw and heard and an expression of the denomination's desire for consolidation and concerted action. To the extent that it was possible given the decentralized character of the community, bodies such as the union and the various chapel building and home mission societies directed and channelled Congregational activities.

Three books in particular have sought to come to terms with this matter of voluntarism and organization. William George Addison's Religious Equality in Modern England 1714-1914 (1944) sees the political impotence of the dissenting communities in their lack of denominational stability. Dissenting leaders channelled their energies into inter-denominational activities and were generally indifferent to theories of church polity. We will see that this was not wholly the case, but Addison is right in pointing to the subtle shift that occurred in Dissent by 1830. Congregationalists became the 'backbone of the new denominationalism'

and the battle for the union 'the necessary prelude to the advent of the later powerful and polemical Nonconformity'.<sup>7</sup> A more recent work is W.R. Ward's Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (1972). Ward has linked the transformation taking place within the dissenting communities, and for our purposes within Congregationalism, to the wider social and political movements of the day. By the 1830s Congregationalists had tired of the older evangelical catholicity and had begun to consolidate as a denomination through the development of their own organizations and by 'anathematizing' those on the outside. The previously prevailing loose structure of the denomination was tightened up and everything was brought into the service of denominational advance. What Ward has done has been to remind us of what drove Congregationalists during the ecclesiastical controversies of the 1830s and 40s and how the denominational structures came to channel that drive. He has not, however, looked as closely at Congregationalism as he has at Methodism.<sup>8</sup> A.D. Gilbert's Religion and Society in Industrial England (1976) has also put Congregational organizations in their proper context in the movement towards denominational consolidation. In particular he has shown the importance of chapel building for the Congregational community.<sup>9</sup>

My purpose then is to explore and bridge the gap between Congregational life and the public practice of voluntarism in its many facets. I have had to limit my study in a number of respects. The dates 1825 and 1862 are to some extent arbitrary. Much of what I touch on came before 1825, but it is around that year that I believe we can discern a shift from the older evangelical catholicity to a more denominational

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7. William George Addison, Religious Equality in Modern England 1714-1914 (London 1944), p. 33.
  8. W.R. Ward, Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (London 1972).
  9. A.D. Gilbert, Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914 (London 1976), pp. 156-7, 161.

interest. 1862 is a good year to conclude in that as the bicentenary year of the Great Ejection of 1662 it not only summoned up a good deal of dissenting triumphalism, but also many practical expressions of voluntarism, particularly in the area of chapel building. Furthermore, we see soon afterwards the full flowering of politically liberal Non-conformity and a new era for political Dissent. As to the subjects covered in each chapter I have already intimated that I will be largely concerned with Congregational organizations. Because of the source material available and the limitations of space I have dealt with the union, chapel building, elementary education and the press. I have been able to use some previously unused material in the collections of the Congregational Library, New College London at Dr. Williams's Library and the Congregational Board of Education at Homerton College, Cambridge. These provide valuable insights into some of the central institutions and principal characters in 19th century Congregationalism. The papers of Thomas and Joshua Wilson at the Congregational Library and those of John Blackburn in the New College collection touch on many areas of Congregational life. In the absence of a strong organization the life and work of such men was indispensable to the consolidation of the denomination. Fortunately I was also able to make use of some of the remaining documents relating to the establishment of the Congregational Union, the operations of the Congregational Magazine and the Patriot and the proceedings of various societies. I have felt it necessary to include two initial chapters on the decline of evangelical catholicity and the rise of denominationalism and on the voluntary principle. Nothing of what I describe afterwards would be explicable if we do not first understand the change that occurred in early 19th century evangelicalism and the concept that came to fill the void for Congregationalists. I do not know of any attempt to expound the voluntary principle from the sources of this period and I have tried to provide this. More than any other dissenting community Congregationalists were marked by their adherence to the voluntary principle and any attempt to understand their place in 19th century society must take this into account.

Finally a word about terminology. In this thesis I use the words 'Dissent' and 'Nonconformist' interchangeably. Through the 1830s 'Nonconformist' was coming to be preferred by those it described. Further, I use 'Dissent' to mean orthodox evangelical Nonconformity unless otherwise specified and over against either Roman Catholic or Unitarian-Presbyterian Dissent. For the purposes of this thesis the word is used in close conjunction with the Congregational body. This is not to exclude the claims to the name by Baptists and others, but rather for convenience's sake and to assert the way in which Congregationalism expressed the aspirations of Dissent in this period. The other prominent word is 'voluntarism'. 'Voluntarism' and 'voluntaryism' can be used interchangeably and strictly mean the principle that the church and related institutions should be supported exclusively by voluntary contributions and not by the state. However, like so many terms that designate a specific doctrine or theory it came to stand for a whole range of attitudes predicated by the refusal to accept state funds - the separation of church and state, spiritual independence of the individual and congregation and the free market of religious ideas. In this thesis the word 'voluntarism' is used in this latter sense. Congregationalists had always prided themselves for being visible saints within a nominal Christendom. They saw themselves as a covenant community of active and rigorous believers. Just as their visibility marked them in the Commonwealth and Restoration eras, so in the 19th century the voluntary character of their churches marked their witness and activity. They were voluntary saints.

CHAPTER IDOCTRINE AND DISCORD: THE DECLINE OF THE OLD CONSENSUS

The formation of the Congregational Union in 1832 was not one of the more notable events in that very notable year. Many Congregationalists objected to the idea of a denominational union and many more were indifferent. But like the Reform Act of that year the importance of the Congregational Union was more in the long process, before and after, for which it stood as a symbol. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the consolidation of the Congregational denomination into a relatively cohesive community with all the requisite institutions and theological underpinnings that gave to it both viability and identity.

This consolidation, which had so much importance for the politics of the day, was only possible as the pristine Congregational polity inherited from the 17th century was transformed to meet the new religious, social and political exigencies of the day. Already in 1800 this was happening in the wake of the evangelical revival of the previous century. Congregationalism had been deeply affected not only in its worship, preaching, pastoral structure and evangelism, but in its relations with other religious communities. Congregationalists were at the centre of that loose axis of Calvinistic Methodists, evangelical Dissenters in the Puritan tradition and Calvinistic evangelical Anglicans. Consequently there was an emphasis less on impeccable church order and more on the unity of faith and evangelistic concern. While on the one hand this challenged the traditional Congregational understanding of the church as an autonomous assembly of believers, on the other it enabled Congregationalists to establish institutions and societies for every purpose and on every level that would provide the foundation for denominational stability and activity later in the century. This is what Walter Wilson, the author of the History of the Dissenting Churches, failed to see when he criticized Congregationalists for selling their Puritan birthright for a mess of ecumenical potage:

Dissenters, unhappily, have lost much of the spirit that distinguished their forefathers ... The spur given to religious feeling by the apostles of Methodism, and fostered by the various religious societies that have sprung up in our own day has also contributed materially to sink the value of ecclesiastical questions and to promote an indifference to them in the estimation of non-established Christians. But, upon them only has it operated. For episcopalians, whether clergy or laity ... are as zealous for their church as ever were their forefathers ... I wish Dissenters would take a leaf out of their book.<sup>1</sup>

Many of those very 'religious societies' would be denominationalized in the course of the voluntarist controversy of the 1830's and provide the basis for the organized Congregationalism Wilson longed to see. Nevertheless, this letter, written to the editor of the Congregational Magazine in 1830, prophetically summed up the impending conflict within the Congregational community itself and between the Established Church and Dissent. The beguiling naivety of the evangelical catholicity of revival would give way to the hard reality of ecclesiastical loyalty and politics.

It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that even after pan-evangelical cooperation became less frequent and the lines between the denominations more marked, there was still a good deal of good will. The catholic evangelical ideal remained a constant one in Congregationalism. Representatives of other denominations usually graced the platforms of denominational societies and brought fraternal greetings. This was the case with the missionary societies which early on showed the impracticability of interdenominational cooperation. For example, Congregationalists often attended the meetings of the Church Missionary Society and Anglicans, Wesleyans, Baptists and others sat on the platforms of the annual meetings of the largely Congregationalist

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1. Walter Wilson, 'Letter ... on the history of dissenting churches', Congregational Magazine, (1830), p. 194.

London Missionary Society. At its Jubilee celebrations in 1844 such eminent figures as the Anglican Edward Bickersteth, the Wesleyan Jabez Bunting and the Baptist Joseph Angus were present and participated.<sup>2</sup> John Liefchild of Craven Chapel, London exclaimed that he had 'done with controversy on the lower points of religion' and Bickersteth rejoiced in 'such an accession of Protestant zeal and love.' What is significant is the note of anti-catholicism in the speeches.<sup>3</sup> After the tension of the 1830's and early 1840's evangelicals were regrouping in the face of Roman Catholic advance in Britain, Anglo-catholicism in the Church of England and theological liberalism within Dissent. The result would be the founding in 1846 of the Evangelical Alliance and a renewed self-consciousness of evangelical unity, albeit one defined more in terms of what it opposed than what it advocated.

Evangelical catholicity was most visibly seen in the numerous voluntary societies founded at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries in which the Congregationalists played an important part. These societies varied considerably in size, purpose and catholicity of constituency. The largest and wealthiest societies tended to be the most broad in constitution and to perform a function that could command the widest support. Such societies included the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), the Religious Tract Society (1799) and the Sunday School Union (1803) and later the London City Mission (1836). Another group consisted of nominally non-denominational societies such as the London Missionary Society, the Irish Evangelical Society and the Home Missionary Society. As we will see these societies to a large extent evolved into Congregationalist organizations when the nonsectarian middle-ground of evangelicalism was disappearing in the 1820's and 1830's. Finally there were the distinctly denominational

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2. The Jubilee Services of the London Missionary Society, (London 1844), p. 44, R. Lovett, History of the London Missionary Society, 1795 - 1895, (London 1899), p. 674.

3. Jubilee Services, pp. 45, 53, 76, 85.

societies which were established with clear sectarian interests in mind. So for example, soon after the London Missionary Society was founded in 1795 the Anglican Church Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Missionary Society were founded not so much in opposition as out of practical ecclesiastical considerations. Likewise, among Congregationalists societies emerged to facilitate itinerate preaching and church planting, as well as theological colleges for the training of the ministry and the education of laity who could not attend the universities. As a movement evangelicalism was found in almost all the different religious communities, each of which for various reasons hampered the evangelicals' freedom of movement. The Anglicans had their parochial structure and hierarchy and the Nonconformists their independency. The societies enabled them to transcend these obstacles and to unite together in order to carry on their mission to transform the nation.<sup>4</sup>

The involvement of Congregationalists in these societies was extensive. They were present on the committees of most of the societies and actively promoted their interests among the general public and in their churches.<sup>5</sup> The Congregational and Nonconformist press carried

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4. For a general survey of British evangelicalism and its contribution to politics and society see, Clyde Binfield, George Williams and the Y.M.C.A.: a study in Victorian social attitudes (London 1973); Ian Bradley, The call to seriousness (London 1976); Ford K. Brown, Fathers of the Victorians: the age of Wilberforce (Cambridge 1961); Kathleen Heasman, Evangelicals in action: an appraisal of their social work in the Victorian era (London 1962); E.M. Howse, Saints in politics: The 'Clapham sect' and the growth of freedom, (London 1953). There are numerous other studies, though few of them do justice to the contribution of Protestant Nonconformity.
5. Religious Tract Society, Annual Report, (London 1827), p. iv. There were 5 Congregationalists on a committee of 13, including Dr. Philip, John Pye Smith, William Ellis, Thomas James and Thomas Pellat. In 1808 the Bible Society had 4 Congregationalists on it: William Alers, Samuel Mills, Thomas Pellat and Joseph Reyner.

comprehensive coverage of the annual May meetings of the societies.<sup>6</sup> Underpinning this involvement were the friendships that existed between the evangelical leaders. Particularly Dissenters of a more moderate cast of mind like the Clayton family, John Angel James, William Jay and Thomas Raffles had many Anglican, Baptist and Methodist friends. William Jay, minister of the respectable Argyle Chapel in Bath, had many Anglicans attending his ministry and kept up a wide correspondence with many leading public and religious figures in his day.<sup>7</sup> John Clayton, senior, minister of King's Weigh House Chapel in London, was a member of the predominantly Anglican Eclectic Society and was known for his Tory attitudes and uncritical spirit towards the Establishment.<sup>8</sup> David Bogue at Gosport had the confidence of the Clapham Sect banker Henry Thornton and many Anglican clergy.<sup>9</sup> Such relationships were confirmed at the May meetings in London. Many clergy, ministers and laymen spent several weeks each year in London doing the rounds of the various annual meetings of the societies. The prayer meetings, breakfasts, sermons and public meetings all afforded opportunities for fraternizing.<sup>10</sup> There was a similar spirit on the local and provincial level. In 1813, for example, Thomas Raffles attended the founding of the Bible Society auxiliary in Northwich and afterwards recorded in his diary:

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6. Reports were usually carried in the May and June editions. See for example: Congregational Magazine, 1826, p. 276; 1827, p. 398, 1828, p. 501; 1830, p. 333; Home Missionary Magazine, 1828, p. 221; Patriot, 1832, May 2, p. 99; 1833, May 9, p. 107; 1834, May 10, p. 162; May 19, p. 174; May 21, p. 186; 1835, May 16, p. 171; May 18, p. 180; 1837, May 11, p. 300; May 18, p. 314.
  7. William Jay, Autobiography, ed. by George Redford and John Angel James, (Edinburgh 1974), pp. 91f, 483ff.
  8. T.W. Aveling, Memoir of the Clayton Family (London 1867), pp. 145, 191, 508.
  9. David Bogue and James Bennett, History of the Dissenters (1825), vol. III, p. 141; John Newton, Letters to William Bull (1847).
  10. John Stoughton, Religion in England, two vol. (London 1884), I, p. 86.

Spoke at the meeting on moving a vote of thanks to the chairman the Rev. Edward Stanley. Dined with several clergymen. Preached at six at Mr. Wilson's chapel. Heard Mr. Braithewaite at the Methodist chapel, at half-past seven. This has been a day of delightful union of Churchmen and Dissenters of all parties.<sup>11</sup>

It is not surprising that denominational differences were played down and the central points of agreement exalted. John Clayton desired that the 'greatest stress might be laid upon the truth, life, spirituality and the least stress upon modes, forms, and non-essentials...'<sup>12</sup> After a meeting with the local clergyman in 1811 in order to found a Bible Society auxiliary, Richard Cope of Cornwall noted with excitement in his diary that 'Union is glorious!... How happy should I be to see the day when all parties, and names, and sects were consolidated and lost in the expressive name Christian!'<sup>13</sup> David Bogue, co-author of the History of Dissenters and tutor of the college at Gosport, pronounced the 'funeral of bigotry' at the founding of the London Missionary Society in 1796.<sup>14</sup> The reason a visible display of unity was necessary was not only in order to facilitate cooperation, but as Andrew Reed pointed out, 'for the purpose of moral conviction.' He pleaded for a 'true and earnest piety, otherwise while the church is divided into parties, and distracted by disputation, the world will remain scandalized or indifferent.'<sup>15</sup> Reed's sermon before the annual meeting of the London Missionary Society typified the priority evangelicals gave at this point to a spirituality that transcended the denominational lines. The Anglican clergyman, Baptist W. Noel, who was later to secede from the Church of England, followed this principle through to its logical conclusion. In a widely read and controversial book published in 1834 entitled The Unity of the Church, Noel argued that the common beliefs of evangelicals should be the basis of actual and visible unity and that issues of polity and order were not sufficient grounds for separation. 'Believers are not ONE' he stated, 'if they are divided in heart, in profession, or in action.'<sup>16</sup>

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11. T.S. Raffles, Memoir of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Thomas Raffles (London 1864), p. 93.
  12. Aveling, Clayton Family, p. 217.
  13. Richard Cope, Autobiography and Select Remains, ed. by his son (London 1857), p. 51.
  14. London Missionary Society, 1st Annual Report, (1795), p. 5.
  15. Andrew Reed, Eminent piety essential to eminent usefulness (London 1831).
  16. Baptist W. Noel, Unity of the Church (London 1834), p. 7.

Most evangelicals were not willing to go so far as to melt all their denominational distinctions. As we will see matters of church polity were still argued with the conviction of infallibility and of the jus divinum. Noel's critics thought that his ideas were impractical, if not irrelevant. One such critic, 'M.A.', thought that Churchmen and Dissenters should simply 'agree to differ' and rather strive to be 'but good Christians.' External order was important and this meant distinct views on polity.<sup>17</sup> Congregationalists agreed with this view, but unlike many Anglicans did not see cooperation in the interdenominational societies as a compromise of their principles. Thomas Stamford Raffles pointed out this characteristic in the life of his father in reference to the Bible Society:

The catholicity of principle on which it was founded, was in thorough union with his own views and feelings, for throughout his long life, much as he loved and laboured for the Christian denomination with which he was immediately associated, and firmly as he cherished the opinions which he had conscientiously embraced as a Congregational Dissenter, he loved the Church of Christ above and beyond everything else, and was never happier than when he was cooperating with the various sections of that Church for <sup>18</sup>the common object of promoting the spread of religion.

Belief in the compatibility of evangelical unity with denominational awareness was the unwritten rule of early 19th century evangelicalism. Ralph Wardlaw of Glasgow, not one known for his equivocation on the principles of Congregational Dissent, believed that a catholic spirit 'ought to be reckoned among Bible evidences of interest in Christ.'<sup>19</sup> The bounds of liberality were set by the pages of Scripture: 'The catholicity of the Christian must not have wider bounds, nor ought the conscientiousness of the Christian to have narrower, than those which that record has fixed ...' William Jay was more candid than most of his dissenting brethren in perceiving that no denomination had a monopoly on the truth. By the time he died in 1853 the next generation had hardened

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17. 'M.A.', A letter to the Hon. the Rev. Baptist W. Noel, M.A. (London 1837), p. 10.

18. T.S. Raffles, Memoir of Thomas Raffles, p. 111.

19. Ralph Wardlaw, 'The catholic spirit - its consistency with conscientiousness,' in Essays on Church unity (London 1845), p. 287.

considerably in their attitudes. He did not expect the day would come when all differences in matters of religion would disappear, nevertheless he did perceive a real unity existing among evangelical Christians:

God promised to give his people one heart and one way; and our Saviour prayed that all his followers may be one. Can we suppose that the promise and the prayer have never yet been accomplished? But if they have been fulfilled, we may reason back from the fulfilment, and see what was the oneness intended. We perceive that it was not a oneness of opinion, or a ritual oneness; but a oneness of principle, and affection, and dependence, and pursuit, and cooperation. For this has taken place among the real followers of the Lamb, and among them only.

As such denominations were not inconsistent with this already achieved unity. Rather they would stir Christians on to greater activity:

by the excitements they favour, and the mutual zeal they kindle, and tempers they require and exercise, as far more useful than would be the stagnancy of cold and dull uniformity, the idol of every bigot; and which must always be so much real as professed, and held in hypocrisy where there are numbers...<sup>20</sup>

Jay's rationalization of denominationalism made cooperation among evangelicals possible. The theme was reiterated for the faithful at the public meetings of the societies in speeches, sermons and annual reports.<sup>21</sup>

Evangelical unity centered on a common body of religious beliefs. More than anything else this bound British evangelicals regardless of denomination. The doctrinal formularies of the various societies, institutions and periodicals varied considerably. The Bible Society, for example, had a very broad foundation that allowed the widest possible support, a state of things that caused some discontent among the more rigidly orthodox members, coming to a head over the issues of whether

20. Jay, Autobiography, p. 163.

21. L.M.S. 9th Annual Report (London 1803), p. 176; 27th Annual Report (London 1821), p. 4; Four Sermons of the ... Missionary Society (London 1796); R.T.S. 5th Annual Report (London 1804), p. 63; 9th Annual Report (London 1808), p. 28; 14th Annual Report (London 1813), p. 196; 17th Annual Report (London 1816), p. 280; Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society, with extracts of correspondence, 1800 - 1820 (London 1830), passim.

to publish the Apocrypha, to have prayer at general meetings and to admit Socinians.<sup>22</sup> The importance of the Bible Society was in the priority evangelicals gave to the Bible in their lives and mission and therefore to the need of its distribution. Thus while the Society drew from a wide spectrum of supporters, it was the evangelical society par excellence in its function and comprehensive catholicity. This is clear in the statement that the central committee issued in 1831 after a good deal of soul-searching and controversy. The Society had been the means whereby 'sincere Christians of different denominations' had been able to meet and 'enjoy a delightful communion of brotherly love for one another.' The point of communion was in their reverence for the Bible and as such no one was expected to relinquish any opinions at variance with those of others, but simply to tolerate the views of other Christians.<sup>23</sup>

The functional unity of the Bible Society was not sufficient for most other societies. The Religious Tract Society did not have a formal creed, but rather stated it in more general terms that actually comprehended the evangelical faith. The R.T.S. committee's annual address of 1827 sought to clarify any theological ambiguity. The tracts of the Society were to consist of 'Pure Truth' which flowed from 'the sacred fountain of the New Testament.' No shibboleths were to be allowed. Rather the R.T.S. was to promote in its publications 'that unity of principle, whereby all who are looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life, can unite with pleasure, as in one great common cause.' Specifically this meant 'those EVANGELICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE REFORMATION in which Luther, Calvin, and Cranmer were agreed ...'<sup>24</sup> Other institutions such as the Village Itineracy, the Gospel and Evangelical Magazines and a number of county

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22. B.F.B.S. 1st Annual Report (London 1805); 27th Annual Report (London 1831), p. xvii.

23. George Brown, The History of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 2 vols. (London 1859), pp. 127-129.

24. R.T.S., 28th Annual Report (London 1827), p. 88.

associations stipulated acceptance of a harmonized creed. The object of the Village Itineracy was 'the promulgation of the Gospel according to the doctrinal articles of the Church of England and as set forth in the Assembly's Catechism.'<sup>25</sup> County associations in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Hampshire drew on the generally accepted creeds for agreement.<sup>26</sup> The Sunday School Union had a policy of publishing and distributing all the creeds and catechisms used by the churches of sponsoring schools.<sup>27</sup> The nondenominational press of the early part of the century sought similar common ground. Though the Eclectic Review later became a leading periodical among Nonconformists, when it was founded in 1805 it sought neither to exclude or admit 'indiscriminately the sentiments of any party, religious or political, nor aiming at innovation.' Sufficient foundation for cooperation could be found in 'the Doctrinal Articles of the Church of England, which we conceive to be congenial with those of the Kirk of Scotland, or the principle Churches of Europe and America, and of a vast majority of those Secessions which have occurred wherever Britons have dwelt.'<sup>28</sup> The Evangelical Magazine, which was able to maintain greater neutrality than the Eclectic along with decreasing sales, professed to be for 'true believers' of 'evangelical sentiments ... devoid of personality and acrimonious reflections on any sort of professing Christians.'<sup>29</sup> Evangelical cooperation had its unity in moderate Calvinism.

Societies that had for their business home, city or foreign missions were in a particularly sensitive position in regard to evangelical cooperation. The problem rested in the establishment of churches and not

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25. Village Itineracy Association, Draft case for opinion of Mr. Preston re. legal position of V.I.A.', n.p., N.C.L.C., 42/30, May 1836. See also Matthew Wilks to Mr. Chaffey, May 18, 1825, N.C.L.C., 42/30, in which Wilks points out that candidates for the itineracy must subscribe to the confessions and articles 'in their acknowledged Calvinistic sense.'
26. Home Missionary Magazine (1820), pp. 49, 161, see also John Brown, Centenary Celebrations of the Bedfordshire Union of Christians: the story of a hundred years (London 1896), passim; John Brown and David Prothero, The History of the Bedfordshire Union of Christians (London 1946), p. 49.
27. William Henry Watson, The History of the Sunday School Union (London 1853), p. 35
28. Eclectic Review (1805), Preface, p. iii.
29. Evangelical Magazine, (1793), Preface, p. 2.

surprisingly it was here that the evangelical consensus began to tear. To make cooperation possible their directors devised the 'fundamental principle.' In general terms this meant, as the Eclectic put it, 'Things in which we differ from each other, we agree to leave undecided.'<sup>30</sup> Specifically it meant that on matters pertaining to church order no questions were asked. Soon after it was established in 1796 the London Missionary Society spelt out its policy propagating church order on the foreign mission field. The resolution stating the policy and passed at the organizing meeting in May 1796 was in agreement with the prevalent catholic spirit of the times:

As the union of God's people of various denominations in carrying this great work, is a most desirous object, so, to prevent, if possible, any cause of future dissention, it is declared to be a fundamental principle of the Missionary Society that our design if not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, and any other form of Church Order and Government but the Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God to the Heathen.<sup>31</sup>

That it was the policy of the Missionary Society to unite all evangelical Christians in the missionary enterprise was evident from a circular sent that same year to pastors entitled an 'Address to Christian Ministers.' Baptists were not expected to join as they already had their own society and the question of baptism was thought to be insuperable. It was hoped, however, that not only paedo-baptist Dissenters would join, 'but that many members of the Established Church, of evangelical sentiments, and of lively zeal for the cause of Christ, will also favour us with their kind cooperation.' The result was expected to be an 'increase of union and friendly discourse among Christians of different denominations ...'<sup>32</sup> The catholic vision of the Missionary Society was not to be realized fully in the years ahead. Denominational pressures at home and practical contingencies abroad fragmented the missionary movement. The L.M.S., however, retained its original ideal. In the 1830's there was a good deal of discussion in the Nonconformist press as to whether the L.M.S. should become more Congregational in affiliation as it had become in

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30. E.R., (1805), p. iii.

31. Lovett, L.M.S., p. 49.

32. L.M.S. 1st Annual Report (London 1795), p. 5.

practice. The Society decided against any alteration in the fundamental principle and continued to instruct its missionaries to allow new converts to establish whatever order they desired. There was some naivety in this attitude which seems to have been recognized in an early set of instructions. Missionaries were told to 'give way to the conclusions of the majority' but also to exercise 'prudential regulation.' In 1838 a similar qualification was put on the fundamental principle. Candidates were instructed:

Should a Christian Church be formed from among those who have been converted by your instrumentality, we have merely to remind you that Fundamental Principle of our Society leaves the external form and constitution of that church entirely to their and your choice. To the word of God alone your attention on the subject will be directed.<sup>33</sup>

To a large extent the whole question of the break-down of the evangelical consensus can be summed up in the answer this candidate would come to in the heart of Madagascar or Demeraraaland.

The London City Mission had a similar policy to that of the L.M.S. Founded in 1836, the L.C.M. was a witness to the tenacity of the catholic evangelical ideal even in a time of strong sectarian feelings and political hostility. It is significant that the founder of the L.C.M., David Naismith, found a good deal of opposition from both Anglicans and Nonconformists when he initially proposed a City Mission for London on the lines of one he had established in Glasgow.<sup>34</sup> Eventually quite a wide inter-denominational group of supporters were enlisted to back the new venture. At the 1836 annual meeting participants included the Anglicans B.W. Noel, Sir Andrew Agnew, Charles Lushington and J.M. Rodwell;

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33. C.M. (1831), p. 208f. Four Sermons and the Annual Report of the L.M.S. Directors (London 1796), p. 56. Letter of Instruction, printed (London 1838), addressed to John Lumb and signed by William Ellis.

34. John Campbell, Memoir of David Naismith (London 1844), p. 330. London City Mission, 1st Annual Report (London 1836), p. 100.

the Presbyterian J. Cumming; the Baptists H. Townley and F.A. Cox; the Calvinistic Methodist J. Sherman; and the Congregationalists John Leifchild and Joseph Fletcher. Like the other societies evangelical unity in the L.C.M. seemed to be born out of the pressing needs which the individual churches and denominations could not meet on their own: in this case the failure of the churches to reach the working-class inhabitants of the cities.<sup>35</sup> The City Mission Magazine in 1836 carried an article entitled 'The importance of union among Christians' which implored evangelicals 'to learn the secret of presenting the truth under one and the same aspect' in order to achieve 'extensive conversions' in the inner cities. The 'trifling differences' among evangelicals had not only 'varied the aspect of truth itself, but because of those differences have so separated' one group from another. This familiar call for unity was in the face of danger from other quarters which were to come to play an increasingly important role in evangelical thinking from the late 1830's on:

... if we hope to be enabled (under God) to scatter the clouds which are rapidly gathering over us from Popery, Infidelity, and Ungodliness; the Protestant Churches must exhibit a more decided union against their common foes.

To facilitate this united action in the L.C.M. Naismith included the fundamental principle in the 1835 constitution. The object of the L.C.M. was 'to extend the knowledge of the Gospel irrespective of the peculiar tenets in regard to Church government ...'<sup>36</sup>

There were a considerable number of smaller and not so small but unfamiliar societies which were established on the same basis as the L.M.S. and the L.C.M. Like the L.M.S. many of these were closely affiliated with the Congregational community, while some others were not. In the latter category were, for example, the Evangelical Magazine and the Continental Society. In the former category were many of the home

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35. H.M.M. (1822), p. 155; (1827), p. 217; (1836), p. 1.

36. L.C.M. Committee minutes, October 4, 1836. L.C.M. Committee minutes, May 20, 1835, 'Instructions to agents'.

evangelistic organizations which arose in the wake of the evangelical revival. One of the earliest was the Village Itineracy Association, founded in 1796 by the evangelical Anglican John Eyre 'with a view of spreading the knowledge of Christ among the poor, by preaching the Gospel and teaching their children to read the Scriptures.' In an age when these things were much less problematic, the V.I.A.'s constitution clearly foresaw the establishment of churches as the result of its activities: 'As souls are converted they shall be formed into societies ... and when a sufficient number are collected to support a stated ministry, the preacher shall be removed to another spot, the design of the institution being answered, which is to raise churches, where Christ is not named ...'<sup>37</sup> No questions pertaining to church order were to be asked, but as we will see such neutrality was impossible to maintain. This was borne out in two other societies, the Home Missionary Society and the Christian Instruction Society. The H.M.S., which was to become the 'inner mission' of Congregationalism, was founded in 1819 with no denominational distinctions or conditions. James Bennett, a leading Congregationalist pastor and historian, claimed that its 'principles and spirit are catholic.'<sup>38</sup> The C.I.S. was founded in 1826 by John Blackburn, editor of the Congregational Magazine, in order to spread the Gospel in London 'irrespective of the peculiar denominations of Christians.'<sup>39</sup>

The importance of the nondenominational societies for the local congregations cannot be underestimated. Particularly Congregational churches, with their lack of national organisation, found in these societies a means of communication with other churches and for expressing concerns larger than the confines of their localities. Conversely, the societies depended for their support and manpower on the local churches. The result was a widespread network of churches, societies, ministerial associations and auxiliaries that crossed denominational boundaries and theological differences.

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37. Village Itineracy Association papers, N.C.L.C., I.n.49.

38. James Bennett, History of Dissent in the last thirty years (London 1839), p. 327.

39. Christian Instruction Society, 1st Annual Report (London 1826), n.p.

The connection between the societies and the evangelical public was maintained primarily by the system of local auxiliaries. Through these subscribing churches and individuals provided a constant source of funds. The Bible Society auxiliaries were organized on a geographical basis with a reasonable degree of local autonomy. Some, like the parent Society, divided their committees equally between Churchmen and Dissenters, while others made no distinctions at all. So, for example, the auxiliaries in Bristol and Exeter left the question of churchmanship aside, whereas at Nottingham, Leeds and Kendal the committees were divided in half.<sup>40</sup> Committees also varied as to whether they were made up of all clergymen or of both laity and clergy. Congregationalists appear regularly in the auxiliary reports both in office and on the committees. Most prominent Congregational ministers served some function in the Bible Society. In 1808 William Alers, Samuel Mills, Thomas Pellat and Joseph Reyner served on the central committee and in 1809 Richard Alliot, Congregationalist minister in Nottingham, was elected secretary of that city's auxiliary.<sup>41</sup> We have seen how Richard Cope cooperated in founding an auxiliary in Cornwall of which he remained secretary for many years. But while Dissenters served many functional capacities in the Bible Society, they were conspicuously absent from the honorary positions both on the national and auxiliary levels. The Vice-Presidents of the Society were consistently Anglicans, particularly bishops and leading evangelical peers and public figures such as Admiral Lord Gambier, Henry Thornton, William Wilberforce, Lord Barham, Charles Grant and others. Locally the Presidents tended to be a local peer or the Anglican incumbent. The Bible Society was too respectable for anything else.

The London Missionary Society established its first auxiliary in 1807 at William Roby's church in Manchester, followed soon thereafter by churches in London, Cambridge, South Molton and Colchester. By

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40. B.F.B.S., 5th Annual Report (London 1809), p. 264; 6th Annual Report (London 1810), pp. 333-335, 345-348.

41. B.F.B.S., 4th Annual Report (London 1808), p. 163; 5th Annual Report (London 1809), p. 264.

1814 the Directors reported that they were 'highly gratified' with the success of the auxiliaries.<sup>42</sup> The auxiliary soon became an integral part of the life of the Congregational churches with the pattern of missionary sermon, annual collection and deputation. There was a constant demand on preachers for annual missionary sermons and for deputations, particularly if they were eminent ministers or famous missionaries like Dr. Philip of South Africa. Eminent Congregational ministers undertook extensive preaching tours for the L.M.S. In 1814 Thomas Raffles was preaching in Lincolnshire for the Society and William Roby was covering Lancashire.<sup>43</sup> Andrew Reed, pastor of Wycliffe Chapel in London and the founder of the London Orphan Asylum, regularly toured the leading provincial cities, as did Ralph Wardlaw who was in constant demand both north and south of the border.<sup>44</sup> Needless to say there were not enough missionaries on leave or prominent ministers with the time to spare to oblige the needs of the auxiliaries. John Arundel, the L.M.S. home secretary from 1819 to 1846, was kept busy by arranging deputations as his correspondence bears out. And Thomas Wilson, the liberal patron of many a new Congregational cause, was constantly being asked for preachers for L.M.S. collections in the chapels he supported.<sup>45</sup>

Besides the L.M.S. auxiliary most Congregational churches had numerous other auxiliaries and societies to supplement the traditional ministrations of pulpit, table and catechesis. Most churches had some form of Sunday school and many had a day school. There were usually visitation, poor relief, Bible and tract distribution societies as well as the support auxiliaries of the larger organizations. Often the societies

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42. L.M.S., 13th Annual Report (London 1807), p. 267; W.G. Robinson, William Roby (1766-1830) and the Revival of Independency in the North (London 1954), pp. 105, 139. L.M.S., 20th Annual Report (London 1814), p. 525.
43. T.S. Raffles, Memoir of Thomas Raffles, p. 134; Robinson, William Roby, p. 139.
44. Andrew and Charles Reed, Memoirs of the life and philanthropic labours of Andrew Reed (London 1863), p. 262; W. Lindsay Alexander, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Ralph Wardlaw (Edinburgh 1856), pp. 171, 343, 359.
45. John Arundel correspondence, C.L.Mss. 45, passim; See Wilson Papers, C.L.Mss. II.c. 34 passim.

in churches were established to meet particular local needs. Andrew Reed saw the need of people living around Wycliffe Chapel in East London for a savings bank. After it was founded he saw further possibilities in extending the bank to serve dock workers and sailors in the docklands.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Raffles set up a Female Domestic Mission in Great St. George St. Chapel, Liverpool for the servants of wealthy members.<sup>47</sup> As in so much auxiliary work William Roby in Manchester instituted societies for specific age groups. The Youth Auxiliary Society at Moseley St. Chapel took from each member one guinea per annum in support of the London Missionary Society, the Lancashire Congregational Union, the Religious Tract Society and the Bible Society.<sup>48</sup> This was a pattern followed elsewhere. Archibald Jack in North Shields founded a Young Men's Christian Instruction Society as a branch of the London society founded by John Blackburn. The Christian Instruction Society was one of the most active on the congregational level. Originally the C.I.S. was intended for London only, but in 1828 a branch was founded in Coventry on an interdenominational basis followed by many others. By 1830, four years after its founding, it had fifty-four local auxiliaries visiting 101,000 families.<sup>49</sup> The rapid growth of visitation societies is understandable as it was an effective means of deploying the laity in local evangelism. One of the chief proponents of lay-agency, as it was called among Congregationalists, was John Campbell, the stormy minister of Tottenham Court Chapel and Whitefield's Tabernacle in London. He was the anonymous author of the celebrated Congregational Union essay on the subject entitled Jethro. He argued that the laity should, like Moses's father-in-law, assist the stated ministry in the work of church extension and as such he wanted to organize the individual churches in

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46. A. and C. Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 339.

47. T.S. Raffles, Memoir of Thomas Raffles, p. 476.

48. W.G. Robinson, William Roby, p. 85.

49. C.I.S., Annual Report, (London 1828), p. 33; Annual Report (London 1830), p. 21; Peter Lorimer, A good and faithful servant; Memoir of the late Rev. Archibald Jack of North Shields (Edinburgh n.d.), pp. 126, 166.

order 'to convert them to a moral phalanx, well-disciplined and capable of hard and perilous service for the Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>50</sup> Those words sum up the purpose of the auxiliaries in the Congregational churches as a means of concentrating and directing the activities of the Congregationalists.

All these societies and auxiliaries not surprisingly made their competing demands on the congregations. In 1848 John Sherman listed thirteen societies that had been operating in Surrey Chapel, London, in addition to the various schools and classes.<sup>51</sup> These included auxiliaries of the London Missionary Society, the Christian Instruction Society, the Y.M.C.A., and the London City Mission. Of these the L.M.S. received the largest amount of support with £744.2.3 that year. Other societies did not fare as well. The Home Missionary Society consistently fell far behind the L.M.S. in contributions from Congregational churches in spite of appeals to the faithful of the equal importance of home and foreign missions. In 1816 the L.M.S. was outdistancing the other societies usually supported by Congregationalists with an income of £37,129.13.3, £4,302.6.7 of which was raised from auxiliaries.<sup>52</sup> To remedy the situation the Home Missionary Society, the Irish Evangelical Society and the Colonial Missionary Society were linked together in 1839 to form the British Mission in connexion with the Congregational Union. Together they made a united appeal in October, but the experiment proved ineffective. In 1840 the income of the H.M.S. was £8,043, declining in 1843 to £3,917 and rising again in 1846 to £6,976.9.10. Throughout the 1850's the income of the H.M.S. hovered around £5,000. The annual October collections only took in £5,161 in 1853, £4,852 in 1854 and £5,000 in 1855.<sup>53</sup> The I.E.S. and the Colonial M.S. were even more chronically short of funds than the H.M.S. The

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50. John Campbell, Jethro: a system of lay-agency in connexion with the Congregational churches (London 1839), p. 156.
51. Henry Allon, Memoir of the Rev. James Sherman, including an unfinished autobiography (London 1863), p. 333.
52. L.M.S., 21st Annual Report (London 1816), p. 32.
53. C.M., (1840), p. 73; (1843), p. 179; (1844), p. 536; C.Y.B., (1853), p. 25; (1854), p. 25; (1855), p. 25.

pressure under which the congregations were brought in order to support what Thomas Williams called 'the great moral machinery' was immense.<sup>54</sup>

In 1824 John Griffin wrote to E. Spicer complaining of how difficult it was to keep all the auxiliaries going in his church:

indeed it is no small difficulty to keep our numerous charitable institutions going - our Sabbath school - Day school, Lancastrian school - Ladies Benevolent Society - Samaritan for poor sick & school - our county academy - county mission - and the missionary Society and the auxiliary Bible Society and also the Naval and Military Bible Society, all of which call on me and my friends for annual subscriptions and all but three for annual collections, besides the tract society, the Irish Evangelical Society and cases for building of places. So that as a congregation it is utterly out of my power to get another<sup>55</sup> object before them ... no one seems to have any money to spare.

By the 1820's the catholic nature of Dissent was under stress. The reasons were manifold, but two stood out. First, there were the increasing demands of congregational needs. The necessity of training the ministry, building chapels, raising money for the various societies, establishing home missions and schools and much else required greater cohesion within the various denominations, and particularly within Congregationalism. Second, there was the shift in the nature of political participation. Traditionally evangelicals united on issues like the abolition of slavery, the admission of missionaries to the colonies and opposition to infringements to the liberty to preach and gather conventicles. By the 1820's the situation was changing. Lord Sidmouth's bill in 1810 to restrict itinerant preaching was a warning to Dissenters, and though resisted by most evangelicals, the agitation gave birth to the Protestant Society for the promotion of religious liberty which was later to play an important role in voluntarist politics. Legislation in the areas of education, support for the Established Church, colonial religious establishments and by 1824 the spectre of repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Catholic emancipation had the effect of fragmenting the evangelical political

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54. T. Williams, Constitutional politics; or the British constitution vindicated (London 1817), p. 14; see C.Y.B. above for I.E.S. and Colonial M.S. statistics.

55. John Griffin to E. Spicer, April 23, 1834, C.L.Mss. 8(1).

consensus. There would be occasions when the broad evangelical alliance would reappear as in the opposition to the Maynooth grant in 1845 and to Papal aggression in 1850. But like the Evangelical Alliance, this political cooperation was largely negative and lacking the constructive agitation exemplified in the campaign to abolish slavery. As we will see, the participation of Dissent in these later manifestations of evangelical political unity was less than wholehearted. Dissent in the 1840's was not the Dissent of the earlier part of the century. Its evangelicalism was at the breaking point confronted with new doctrinal developments and its political consensus divided within itself between moderates and radicals.

The connection between denominational demands and political contingencies lay in the ever present reality of the state establishment. As Congregationalists consolidated their strength as a denomination with home missions, chapel building, seminary training and ministerial sustentation they confronted the strength of state support for the Anglican Church. The voluntarism that marked the Congregational community from the 1830's on was born in the crucible of meeting the challenge of a state supported church that was beginning to reform itself from its 18th century sleep. The parliamentary grants that began in 1809, the attempt to charge the Dissenting chapels for the Church rate in 1813 and the renewed interest in church accommodation and building beginning with the founding of the Church Building Society in 1818 all pushed Congregationalists, as well as other Dissenters, to see the need of strengthening their own interests. The voluntary controversy of the 1830's and 40's and the fragmenting of the evangelical consensus had its roots in the challenge posed to the pastoral and evangelistic structure of the Congregational community. The older catholic spirit was not wholly eclipsed by the new sectarianism. Men like John Angel James were able to ride out the storm, maintaining an open spirit but also actively promoting the new denominational structures.

Nevertheless by the end of the 1830's it was apparent that David Bogue's eulogy for the 'funeral of bigotry' was premature. In the changed mood in Dissent we see the revival of the older Puritan conscience that had been eclipsed for a while in the evangelical revival. This was attested by the renewed interest in this period in the Puritan divines.<sup>56</sup> The Puritanism of the mid-19th century was a tempered one, marked by both a revival piety and a political involvement not known by post-commonwealth Congregationalism. But it was strongly Puritan in its concept of the church as the gathered voluntary community and after 1828 and the repeal of the Test Laws this aspect of Congregationalism became even more marked.

The watershed between the older evangelical catholicity and the growing concentration on denominational concerns came around 1830 as the rift between the Church and Dissent became more clear. Already the interdenominational societies had felt the sectarian tension and continued to do so into the following decades.

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56. See Walter Wilson, History and Antiquities of the dissenting churches and meeting-houses in London, Westminster and Southwark (London 1808-1814); Benjamin Hanbury, Historical Memorials of the Independents, 3 vols. (London 1839-1845); John Waddington, Congregational History, 5 vols. (London 1869-80); during this period separate volumes of Puritan works were being published such as George Burder's edition of John Owen on the Holy Spirit in 1816 and in 1842 the Wycliffe Society was founded under the auspices of the Congregational Union to do for Nonconformist Puritan works what the Parker Society did for Anglican Reformation works. The character of this Puritan impulse was expressed in the words of John Blackburn in 1846: "We are a people who have a history, but we neglect our documents. Let us awake to a consciousness of our own history as doing much to teach statisticians and legislators that, after all, the Kingdom of Christ is best governed by its own laws, and sustained by its own resources - resources not wrung from a reluctant contributor by the force of law, but cheerfully given by the force of love." See Congregational Year Book, Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, (London 1846), p. 90. The Religious Tract Society was also publishing the 'Doctrinal Puritans', i.e. without reference to church polity or politics, William Jones, The Jubilee Memorial of the Religious Tract Society (London 1850), p. 125.

The Bible Society for the reasons already mentioned was spared much of the sectarian strife. The attitudes of adherents, however, betrayed the differences between Church and Dissent. In a leader supporting the new Congregational Union in 1832 the Patriot looked for confirmation of the principle of union from the Bible Society, 'the noblest institution of our age.' Its chief virtue was its 'truly voluntary character' which was 'determined not by the manner in which its power is dispensed, but by the principle of union, which is, that none are compelled to join it; that a man who has joined it can leave it when he pleased, and employ his guinea in any way he thinks proper.'<sup>57</sup> On the other side many Anglicans had their qualms about the propriety of the Bible Society. While many bishops and dignitaries held high office in the Society, others felt that their churchmanship was compromised and some went so far as to resign.<sup>58</sup> At issue was whether the Bible should be published with or without comment or accompanied by the Prayer Book. During 1811 - 1812 there was a heated controversy between Churchmen over membership in the Bible Society. The controversy was launched by Christopher Wordsworth's Reasons for declining to become a subscriber to the British and Foreign Bible Society, which was in turn answered by Lord Teignmouth, a vice-president of the Society, and William Dealtry.<sup>59</sup> The following year Bishop Marsh of Peterborough entered the fray with An enquiry into the consequences of neglecting to give the Prayer Book with Bible and was met by a barrage of pamphlets from Dealtry, Charles Simeon and Nicholas Vansiltart.<sup>60</sup> Commenting on Wordsworth, the Eclectic Review apologized to its readers for bringing up the subject of controversy involving 'such a good and acceptable cause' and concluded that he 'must be a bold man who would impeach such an institution.'

Of greater consequence was the Apocrypha controversy of 1825 when the Society decided to publish the Bible on the Continent with the

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57. P., May 9, 1832.

58. E.R., (1831), 3rd S, VI, p. 277.

59. E.R., (1811), 1st S, VII, p. 59.

60. E.R., (1812), 1st S, VIII, p. 120; (1813), 1st S, IX, p. 580.

Apocryphal books in order to facilitate distribution in Catholic countries.<sup>61</sup> The dividing line was not, however, between Church and Dissent, but rather between pragmatic and rigorously orthodox evangelicalism. Defenders of the decision to publish the Apocrypha pointed to the wishes of the Society's continental representatives and the fact that the constitution did not forbid it.<sup>62</sup> The socinian controversy of 1830-31 was of a similar character. The Bible Society had been constituted so that there were no theological stipulations on membership, but only a reverence for the Bible. To that end prayer, which would have necessitated permitting the invocation of the Trinity, was not permitted at the general meetings of the Society. As often happened, however, auxiliaries brought pressures to bear. In 1830 the Guernsey auxiliary protested against the union in the parent Society of orthodox Christians with socinians. The central committee refused to alter its policies and resolved that 'the sound principles of Christian faith, as well as Christian charity, are more likely to be promoted by an adherence to our parent constitution.' At the annual meeting in May that year the committee announced its final decision. The fundamental principle of the Society would stand since it had been the means whereby 'sincere Christians of different denominations have been enabled to give to each other the right hand of fellowship and to enjoy a delightful communion of brotherly love one for another.' The introduction of a trinitarian doctrinal standard was rejected because it would compel one of the uniting parties in the Bible Society to relinquish its beliefs.<sup>63</sup> Consequently the dissentients established the Trinitarian Bible Society and the dispute petered out, the usually uninformative Annual Report of the Society for 1832 admitting that 'a few things of a painful character ... have occurred.'<sup>64</sup>

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61. Alexander Haldane, Memoirs of the lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey, and of his brother James Alexander Haldane (London (1852), p. 536; E.R., 1825 (XXIV) New Series, p. 377; Brown, Bible Society, p. 99.

62. Ibid., p. 377.

63. Ibid., p. 126, 134.

64. B.F.B.S., Annual Report (London 1832), p. xvii.

The Society could not escape some sectarian disruption. The committee of the parent Society in 1818 found it necessary to recommend to the auxiliaries that they apportion half their offices to Dissenters and half to Churchmen.<sup>65</sup> In Ireland Congregational missionaries complained of the bias of the Hibernian Bible Society. The veteran Irish evangelist William Cooper, then an itinerant with the Irish Evangelical Society, wrote to John Blackburn pointing out the qualms some Churchmen were having about the I.E.S. magazine being published by the same firm as published the Bible Society's magazine:

What a pitiful proof of Episcopal intolerance! We do not think they will dare more than show their teeth, but if they proceed to bite - six sturdy non-con persons (for so many of us are leagued in the magazine) determined yesterday to bite them in return<sup>66</sup> - by publishing their conduct to the whole community.

When the new magazine did appear a month later Cooper wrote again to Blackburn exclaiming that 'it bangs the Church one' and thumps 'the steeple party.'<sup>67</sup> Later the Baptists objected to the various translations of words relating to baptism in Bibles published by the Society.<sup>68</sup>

Not surprisingly the apologetical offensive of Dissent in the late 1830's and the rivalry in home missions helped to fray the bonds of unity, though not to the point of severance. William Youngman, a Norfolk pastor and secretary of the Norwich auxiliary, brought upon himself a bitter reaction from Churchmen within the society because of a letter he had written 'to the dissenting body respecting the Wardlaw lectures.' The Wardlaw lectures were those given by Ralph Wardlaw in 1838 in response to the famous series delivered by Thomas Chalmers the previous year in defence of the Establishment. Youngman wrote to John Blackburn that 'some warm-hearted Churchmen, and Churchified, Toryified dissenters' wanted to arrange his 'expulsion from the Secretaryship of the Norwich

65. B.F.B.S., Annual Report (London 1818), p. 293.

66. William Cooper to John Blackburn, Jan. 7, 1815, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/38. N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/38. Cooper was also of the opinion that Congregationalists needed to take a stronger stand for their principles in Ireland. See N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/7.

67. Cooper to Blackburn, Feb. 1, 1815, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/42.

68. EM (1840), p. 267; Brown, Bible Society, p. 166.

and Norfolk Auxiliary Bible Society.' In the end the local committee stood by him and he retained his post. For his part Youngman was surprised because his own position was not that extreme:

This was a little ungrateful (of) them for I have always advocated the pacific system with respect to the Church. This I did both from precedence and principle. I thought the safest course for Dissenters was dignified moderation, and that they have many flaws in what they call their principles, for active warfare.

A combination of both accentuated churchmanship among Anglicans and pressure on rural Dissenters moved the Staffordshire Association in 1842 to pass a resolution specifically protesting against Anglican attitudes to the Bible Society. The annual meeting resolved that the 'period of union with advocates of State establishments is passed. They have sacrificed union with us for the sake of their church; let us be content to lose fellowship with them for the sake of Christ.' The particular grievance was the instruction given to the clergy of the diocese to abstain from Bible Society proceedings. This was seen to be symptomatic of the 'incessant, mean and bitter annoyances Dissenters in agricultural districts were enduring' and of the 'soul-destroying assumptions of the episcopal clergy.'<sup>70</sup> As with Youngman this reaction reflected local conditions and was not generally repeated across the country, but it did reflect the manifestation of the wider rift between Church and Dissent.

The Religious Tract Society likewise found itself tainted by the sectarian feelings since it was even more susceptible to controversy because of its wider brief. Founded in 1799, the R.T.S. was at first mostly patronised by Dissenters, but with the accession of Leigh Richmond to the secretaryship in 1812 a growing number of Anglican evangelicals began to support the Society. The R.T.S. tried in vain to keep sectarian

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69. William Youngman to John Blackburn, September 12, 1834, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/62.

70. A.G. Matthews, Congregationalism in Staffordshire (Manchester 1924), p. 198.

feeling out of its proceedings. In 1816 the committee rejected a proposal to divide itself equally between Churchmen and Dissenters, stating that, 'this principle of assimilation is preferable to any determinate division of the committee because it precludes any direct idea of opposition of character and interest.'<sup>71</sup> Later that year the committee changed its mind and decided on a division. While the R.T.S. was never torn asunder by sectarian strife, and indeed became a showpiece of evangelical unity, it did suffer some strains. In 1826, for example, the Congregational Board protested to the committee about plans to republish the Anglican Joseph Milner's Church History. Milner's work was deemed 'not purely religious' in line with the Society's policy to publish material that was non-sectarian and broadly evangelical. The Board was 'surprised at the laudatory strain of the address respecting a work avowedly written with unfriendly feeling towards dissenters from the National Church ...' Three members were deputed to consult with the R.T.S. committee. In the meantime the Congregational Magazine wondered whether dissenting ministers connected with the R.T.S. would support the committee's decision to publish or the Congregational Board. In the end the R.T.S. rescinded its decision and the matter was laid to rest.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless a good number of Congregationalists were dissatisfied with the state of affairs. Earlier in 1821 Thomas Craig wrote to

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71. Jones, Religious Tract Society, p. 72,75. Like the B.F.B.S. the R.T.S. had a number of prominent people among its supporters and holding high office. Among the chairmen were Viscount Mandeville, the Marquis of Cholmondeley, W.B. Gurney, J.J. Gurney, J.P. Plumptre, M.P., John Labouchere, the Earl of Chichester, Sir Edward North Buxton, Samuel Morton Peto and J.G. Hoare. Among the literature published by the R.T.S. were: William Wilberforce's Practical Christianity, John Campbell's Happy Death of James Steven, Philip Doddridge's Principles of the Christian Religion, Isaac Watt's Divine Songs, George Burder's Village Sermons and the popular Bible commentaries of Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott. See William Jones, R.T.S., pp. 125-133.

72. C.M. (1826), p. 110; Congregational Board, Minutes, Nov. 15, 1825.

Thomas Chaplin, minister in Bishops Stortford, forwarding a number of letters from John Blackburn, then a minister in Finchingfield in Essex, in which he discussed the idea of a Nonconformist tract society. Craig wanted to see such a society with its headquarters in London and 'under the care and patronage of very discreet men' in order 'not to have the idea to go forth that we are either dissatisfied with the Religious Tract Society or entertain any sectarian values or views.'<sup>73</sup> Chaplin in turn wrote to Blackburn on December 7, 1821, expressing his disappointment with Craig's non-sectarian attitude. Craig, wrote Chaplin, 'seems to set aside the whole project. I thought the project was professedly sectarian. Mr. Craig seems to disown everything of the sort - and if so I see no need for any new tract society.'<sup>74</sup> Blackburn himself expressed his doubts about the viability of such a society in a letter to the Rev. W. Shansfield in March 1822.<sup>75</sup>

In 1827, amid the agitation to repeal the Test Laws, the annual meeting of the R.T.S. showed the strength of evangelical unity, or as the resolution reaffirming the catholic foundation put it, the 'zealous cooperation of their Christian brethren.' The R.T.S., even more than the less doctrinally rigorous Bible Society, saw itself occupying 'this large portion of common ground, which the Churchman, the Dissenter, and the Foreigner jointly occupy' so that 'Christian Union may be established and cherished, and Christian Zeal concentrated, and rendered proportionately effective.'<sup>76</sup> Two years later the Ecclesiastical Knowledge Society was founded by a group of Nonconformists. The founders disclaimed any specific sectarian interest or intention to compete with similar evangelical societies. John Blackburn supported the new venture and sought to expound the need for the publication of specifically Non-

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73. Mr. Craig to William Chaplin, no day or month given, 1825, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/4/17.
74. Chaplin to Blackburn, Dec. 10, 1821, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/4/21.
75. Blackburn to W. Shansfield, March 1822, no day given, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/4/25.
76. R.T.S., Annual Report, (London 1827), p. 88.

conformist literature:

It has long been felt by many Evangelical Dissenters in different parts of the kingdom, that while they are cordially engaged with Christians of other denominations in diffusing ... the principles of 'the common salvation', ... they were neglecting to make known, through the press in the same cheap and popular form, those principles of church polity ...- principles for which their fathers suffered cruel privations, and which their children have maintained in the face of many privations, and at the price of many sacrifices.

A circular letter sent to dissenting ministers in London expressed the concern of the founders that 'the great nonconforming principles of our ancestors are but imperfectly understood in the present age.' The reason for this was seen in the greater toleration of the present day and the fact that Dissenters 'have perhaps sometimes allowed candour to smile away consistency.' This last statement pinpoints the growing feeling that evangelical cooperation was not enough and that consistent churchmanship needed to be emphasized. There was some reaction to this new turn in attitude. In August 1829 'W.H.' of Glasgow wrote to the Congregational Magazine warning Congregationalists of too great an emphasis on their peculiarities and of a tendency to look at the law before the spirit.<sup>77</sup> Anglicans saw in the formation of the E.K.S. both an attack on the catholic principle and a sharpened criticism of their own Church, and as such the new society was warmly criticized in the Anglican evangelical press. The object of much of this criticism was Thomas Wilson, who made the speech from the chair at the annual meeting in 1831 in which he criticized the constitution and ritual of the Church of England. One Anglican correspondent charged him with 'stirring up a spirit of extermination against the Church of England.' Wilson replied by disclaiming any such intention and stated the purpose of the E.K.S. as simply 'to diffuse information concerning the principles on which nonconformity is justified.'<sup>78</sup> When the E.K.S. began to publish material that directly attacked the Establishment, a number of the more

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77. C.M. (1829), p. 339, 422.

78. Joshua Wilson, The life of Thomas Wilson (London 1846), p. 436.

moderate Nonconformist members left the society concerned that its positive aims had been sacrificed.

Sunday school education was both an area of extensive evangelical cooperation and one fraught with sectarian pit-falls, particularly as education became one of the most divisive issues between Church and Dissent. The Sunday School Union was able to survive as a nonsectarian alliance because of the limited goals it set in its schools and the close affiliation of those schools with the local churches. The twenty-fifth jubilee of the Union in 1829 was a great show of evangelical strength and unity, but that was not achieved without a struggle. Various Government proposals for educational reform threatened the unity in the S.S.U. and its system of voluntary education. The central committee sent a deputation to Henry Brougham in 1820 to point out the dangers of his education bill to the voluntary teachers upon which the S.S.U. depended. Later proposals proved to be even more trying, particularly Sir James Graham's bill of 1843 which exacerbated the tensions between Anglicans and Dissenters with its proposals on church attendance and inspection. The Union's initial objection was on the proposal for school attendance on Sundays. Unsatisfied with Graham's reply they petitioned him again stating that they had 'no reliance on the voluntary principle as regards the general education of the people, but the principle is the life and essence of the Sunday school.' Needless to say that would not have pleased the Nonconformists who were violently opposing the Government at this point. Later resolutions seemed to more closely reflect dissenting concerns, as well as those of conservative Anglicans. It was feared the bill would place education in the hands of those who opposed the Protestant religion and thus undermine the efficacy of sound education. Furthermore, the proposals would 'violate the principles of religious liberty and Christian union, by placing the sole superintendence, and practically the entire management of education, in the hands of one section of the Christian church.' Specifically the S.S.U. objected to the clauses on Dissenters' rights as being 'inefficient in practice' and to education being committed into the hands of those who 'conscientiously disapprove of all lay-agency in religious teaching.'

After 1843 Anglican discontent became more visible and the S.S.U. was divided on issues such as baptismal regeneration and the use of the Church catechism.

One particular source of internal tension was the relationship between the local Sunday school auxiliaries, the local church and the parent society. A feature of nineteenth century Sunday schools was the regular collection of money from the scholars for various good causes. Problems arose when there was a conflict of loyalties between the nondenominationalism of the S.S.U. and the interests of the congregation. In 1823, for example, the predominantly Congregational Home Missionary Society sought to take weekly collections at a S.S.U. auxiliary in South London. The S.S.U. committee felt that this would jeopardize the neutrality of the society, compromise its aims and possibly sap its funds. As a result the committee resolved that such collections with sectarian overtones were unlawful and:

calculated to interfere with the plans of the Auxiliaries connected with the Sunday School Union, and to diminish their funds and to distract the attention of the Sunday School teachers from their present objects.<sup>79</sup>

The signs of fragmentation were to be seen on a number of other fronts. When it became clear to Nonconformists that the Jews Society was becoming more orientated to Anglicans the founding of a specifically Nonconformist society was discussed.<sup>80</sup> Several Congregational churches in the City of London also supported the work of a converted East European Jew in a disused chapel in the East End.<sup>81</sup> A broad cross-section of evangelicals supported continental missions, particularly in countries with a strong Roman Catholic church and beleaguered Protestant minorities. Evangelicals found in the 'Réveil' in the Netherlands, France and Switzerland a parallel

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79. Watson, Sunday School Union, pp. 41f, 47, 88, 123, 124, 126.

80. C.M. (1843), p. 154.

81. Thomas Binney to John Blackburn, April 2, 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/21.

to their own revival tradition as well as living roots in the continental Reformation. These connections were strengthened by the network of continental auxiliaries of the Bible Society and Tract Society, and in specifically missionary institutions such as the Continental Society.<sup>82</sup> Continental Protestant leaders were warmly welcomed in Britain, particularly men like Merle d'Aubigné, the author of the best-selling History of the Reformation, and Cesar Malan, both of Geneva, and Adolphe Monod of France. The religious press was full of accounts of persecution of Protestants in France, Switzerland and Italy. Congregationalists had a strong interest in this regard. They saw in the sufferings of their Protestant brethren at the hands of oppressive regimes a reflection of their own condition. The Congregational, the Eclectic and the Patriot kept up interest in these persecutions.<sup>83</sup> Congregationalists were also taking a denominational interest in continental missions. In 1825 a Congregational church was established in Paris under the care of Mark Wilks and in 1834 a church was founded in St. Petersburg. The English Reformed Church in Hamburg was Congregational and opened by Dr. Henderson of Highbury College. The Congregational Union sent a deputation to the continent under Joseph Turnbull in 1837 in order to establish links with like-minded communities. Several Congregational theological colleges had European students and the famous pastor of the High Alps, Felix Neff, was ordained at Poultry Chapel by John Clayton.<sup>84</sup> The importance of these connections for the Congregational community was in the way they undergird its identity as a truly Reformed church in its own right and not only as one seen in its dissent from the Church of England.

One of the clearest instances of the ruptured relationship between Anglican and dissenting evangelicals was in the case of Andrew Reed and

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82. London Charities Almanack for the year 1825 (London 1825), n.p. The annual meeting was chaired by Sir T. Baring, addressed by Lord Powerscourt and in attendance were Spencer Percival and William Wilberforce.

83. E.R. (1815), III, New series, p. 618; C.M., (1825), p. 435; p. 553; (1830), p. 610; (1837), p. 671.

84. C.M., (1825), p. 497; (1834), p. 186; (1834), p. 52.

the London Orphan Asylum. Reed was a Congregationalist minister who founded the L.O.A. in 1815 with a 'catholic' constitution. 'I felt,' he wrote, 'that the question of conformity and nonconformity might in the case of these poor orphans be postponed until their fourteenth year ...'<sup>85</sup> Accordingly he invited the Anglican the Rev. C.W. LeBas to be co-secretary and did not stipulate any specific form of worship in the orphanage. Reed eventually agreed to use the Prayer Book in order to retain Anglican support, but insisted that the Catechism be left out of religious instruction. His diplomacy was rewarded and the L.O.A. won widespread support across denominations and up to the Royal Family. The success of the L.O.A. set the momentum for other enterprises and in 1821 Reed founded the Infant Orphan Asylum, but it is symptomatic of the changing attitudes towards denominationalism that the project was almost destroyed by sectarian disagreement. Relations between Anglicans and Dissenters did not improve. In 1843 the usually magnanimous George Clayton wrote to Thomas Wilson complaining that 'Attempts have been recently made to bring that institution exclusively under the management of Churchmen and in public by advertizing for a new Master and Matron ...' The bone of contention was that the advertisement stipulated that they be members of the Church of England.

Now as the charity was originated by Dissenters, three of whom were members of my own church - as it has many supporters among dissenters and as the test and corporation acts have been repealed it seems to me a thing quite unconstitutional, indecent, and nothing better than a gratuitous insult to a large and respectable class of Her Majesty's subjects.<sup>86</sup>

That year Reed resigned from the secretaryship of the Infant Asylum because of the governing committee's new policy of religious instruction according to the Church's catechism.

Reed continued to be optimistic about the possibilities of evangelical cooperation. In 1844 he founded yet another orphanage, this time for

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85. A. and C. Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 90.

86. George Clayton to Thomas Wilson, Feb. 15, 1841, C.L.Mss. II.c.34, letter 28.

fatherless children whose mothers found it difficult to support them. In his appeal he touched on the problem of religious hostility and philanthropy:

This is a day of conflict; but let us rejoice that there are richly scattered through society the seeds of what is expansive, as well as what is exclusive. Who will doubt where the ultimate triumph will rest? May not all, the Conformist and Nonconformist, all who have any just pretension of a true and generous philanthropy, unite on such a platform, and thus show the world that whatever religion is besides, it is mainly essential love, visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction.

Reed's persistent efforts and his active support of the new Evangelical Alliance in 1846 reveal the intensity of his loyalty to the principle of evangelical unity. But he was also a firm and tireless voluntarist, though not as extreme as some provincial Dissenters at this time nor as the radical Congregationalist pastor Edward Miall who had recently come to London to found the Nonconformist. Reed had refused to go along with a scheme in 1836 to form an evangelical alliance because of the terms the Anglicans were demanding. And as we will see his writings on the subject left little doubt as to where he stood and caused no little stir in the Anglican press. His dual loyalty was what finally forced him to resign from his cherished L.O.A. in 1844. The problem lay in the hard feelings that remained after he severed his connection with the I.O.A. and he felt that the greater interests of the L.O.A. would be better served if he relinquished office. The current political and ecclesiastical climate had a good deal to do with it:

... the part I took against Sir James Graham's bill and the cry that I was an Anti-State-Church man, created a feeling, and, in these bitter days, one could not hope to carry even such a point; ... Thus is broken almost my last link of connection with the Church. No; I am still Secretary of the Bible Society Auxiliary, and I still subscribe to the Church Missionary Society. I have as much as any other living man laboured for union. I am myself a living instance of its impracticability at present. If I have erred, it has been in yielding too much ... More I cannot. The Churchman now will yield nothing, and yet he demands everything for the Dissenter. Well, any sacrifice but one would be worthwhile for union amongst all real Christians; but who does not see, after all, that it cannot exist on terms which make us less than men - less than equals.

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87. A. and C. Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 136, 223, 235, 239.

No citation could better express the position to which evangelicals had arrived in 1845. The Bible Society was able to hold them together and missionary activity to draw their assent, though now each denomination had its own society. Whenever the questions of church order, worship or education appeared divisions arose.

These divisions were not, however, only between Churchmen and Dissenters, but also between Dissenters themselves. Baptists and Congregationalists traditionally shared much in common, particularly in relation to theology, church polity and life. In several counties, such as Bedfordshire, Berkshire and Hertfordshire, there were unions of churches which made no stipulations on the doctrine of baptism and sought unity in classical evangelical doctrine. The Hertfordshire Union of Christians is a good example in its constitution and in its determination to remain nondenominational. The purpose of the Union as stated in the constitution was the 'diffusing of religious knowledge.' It did so on the basis of 'disclaiming all party motives, and only anxious to promote genuine religion' in order to unite 'as far as possible, good and zealous men of every denomination of Christians.' As a result there was no discipline on baptism and it was stated that 'all public discussions on the subject of Baptism in places assisted by the Union, shall be deemed entirely inconsistent with the spirit and plan of the Society.'<sup>88</sup> In 1831 the Union reaffirmed its nondenominational character stating: 'It is no part of our aim to promote the separate interest of any section of the Christian Church.'<sup>89</sup> Such unions were rare in the first place, and in the sectarian atmosphere of the 1830's and 1840's and faced with the process of denominationalization in other societies and associations they were under considerable pressure to come down on one side or another of the fence. The county associations of churches were generally moving towards a more distinct Congregationalist commitment. While some, such as

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88. H.M.M., (1820), p. 161.

89. H.M.M., (1831), p. 356.

Lancashire, had Congregational foundations, others took on a more denominational character through a process of affiliation to predominantly Congregational societies and finally to the Congregational Union itself.<sup>90</sup>

Divisions more often than not came on the local level as the result of evangelistic rivalry and competition for hearers and funds for new chapels. In Wigton the Congregational pastor faced the problem of an aggressive Baptist colleague as he tried to raise funds for a new chapel and day-school. He appealed to Thomas Wilson in 1832 for funds by arguing the need of a school in order to gain a foothold in the community.<sup>91</sup> The Baptists were gaining ground on the Congregational cause. The Baptist minister was rebuilding the chapel in Orton and planned to open a preaching room in Wigton, 'where he honestly tells me,' wrote Edward Leighton, 'he shall proselyte (sic) the county if he can. So essential does he conceive baptism, that none shall escape him ... without effort to their conversion to his principles.' This Baptist home missionary had been formerly with the Congregational Home Missionary Society, but having converted had been sent by the Northern Baptist Association to the area to the chagrin of many Congregationalists who believed the area to be Leighton's territory. Leighton wrote to Wilson that had the Baptist missionary 'shown himself a discreet man and a laborious evaneglist' he would have welcomed him to the district, but in fact he was a 'bigotted proselyter' who had succeeded in taking away

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90. W.G. Robinson, A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union (Manchester 1955), pp. 1-2. See also J. Robertson to John Arundel, Aug. 24, 1835, C.L.Mss. 31 (in relation to the affiliation of an association to the L.M.S.); W.E. Ellis to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 29, 1847, C.L. Mss. Gb. 12. Letter 52; John Woodward to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 27, 1861, C.L.Mss. II.c.39, (both on the affiliation of associations to the H.M.S.); for the affiliation of associations to the Congregational Union see C.M. (1835), p. 787; C.M. (1840), pp. 61, 68.

91. Edward Leighton to Thomas Wilson, June 11, 1832, C.L.Mss., II.c.33.

several people from the Congregational churches.<sup>92</sup> The Congregationalists for their part formed a county union at about this time. Leighton hoped that the new union would be 'attended with many and good advantages which for many generations have been lost to us by our ... isolated and scattered situation and condition.' With this sort of feeling it is not surprising that individual union churches also split apart. Congregational itinerant preachers reported the growth of stronger Baptist sentiments and problems with Baptist members, often with a distinct antinomian tinge.<sup>93</sup> In 1820, for example, W. Seaton of the Village Itineracy wrote to the Committee of that society complaining of the Baptist element in the mission church in Wandsworth. The church was in serious trouble. 'The only substantial reason I can give,' he wrote, 'is that the Church consists of many Baptists some of whom for months past discerned a strong disposition for a separate interest.'<sup>94</sup> In the end these Baptists remodelled a near-by room with the help of some London friends and called two pastors whom Seaton considered antinomian.

In addition to the multiplication of Baptist associations in the early 19th century, a number of other Baptist institutions emerged that revealed a parallel interest among Baptists to consolidate their denomination.<sup>95</sup> The Baptist Union was founded in 1813, though like the Congregational Union it did not really establish itself permanently until 1832. The main denominational periodical, the Baptist Magazine, was established in 1812 as a result of a charge of 'sheep-stealing' made in the Evangelical Magazine.<sup>96</sup> During the 1820's controversy between Baptists and paedo-baptists reached new peaks. In 1823-24 there was a heated exchange between Baptists and Congregationalists on the doctrine

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92. Leighton to Wilson, May 17, 1832, C.L., Mss. II.c.33.

93. Leighton to Wilson, June 11, 1832, C.L. Mss. II.c.33.

94. W. Seaton to the Committee of the Village Itineracy Association, Dec. 22, 1820, V.I.A. papers, N.C.L.C., 42/12.

95. A.C. Underwood, A History of the English Baptists (London 1947), pp. 160, 163, 174; S.M. Stone, 'A survey of Baptist expansion in England from 1795 to 1850, with special reference to the emergence of permanent structures of organization', unpublished M.A. thesis (Bristol 1959), p. 55ff.

96. E.M., (1812), preface, n.p.; R.H. Martin, 'The pan-evangelical impulse in Britain 1795-1830', unpub. Ph.D. thesis (Oxford 1974), p. 103.

of baptism beginning with the Rev. T. Esdell's First Principles of Christian Baptism. Before the controversy was over it had drawn out the Congregationalists Urwick of Dublin and Ewing of Glasgow and the Baptist F.A. Cox of London.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile within the Baptist fold itself there was a drawn out controversy over the terms of communion. The two main antagonists were Robert Hall of Cambridge and Joseph Kinghorn of Norwich, the former holding that communion should be open to all believers and the latter that only baptized believers should partake. The controversy highlighted the confessional differences between Congregationalists and Baptists, and lent itself to making a clearly demarcated line between the two communities.

Even within the ranks of orthodox paedobaptist Dissent there came a point of reckoning. Besides the Congregationalists there were a number of churches which were members of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, the Calvinistic Methodist Connexion and of independent, but non-Congregational foundation, such as Union Chapel, Islington, Whitefield's Tabernacle or Surrey Chapel. These churches occupied the middle ground of English religion, happily fraternizing with Churchmen and Dissenters and not very particular on matters of church order. Matthew Wilks of Whitefield's Tabernacle, London and Rowland Hill of Surrey Chapel, London both epitomized this tradition of Calvinistic evangelicalism. Hill was highly respected, but his ambiguous churchmanship was often the subject of comment and something for which his dissenting biographers felt obliged to apologize. Vernon Charlesworth described him as 'theoretically a Churchman, and practically a Dissenter - a Dissenter within the Church, a Churchman among Dissenters ...'<sup>98</sup> This tradition, either in individual churches or institutions like the Village Itineracy, was threatened by the sectarianism of the 1830's.

The history of Surrey Chapel and Whitefield's Tabernacle with its sister church Tottenham Court Chapel illustrate the changes moving the

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97. James Bennett, History of Dissenters, p. 230.

98. Vernon Charlesworth, Rowland Hill: His life, anecdotes, and pulpit sayings (London 1877), p. 76.

Calvinistic Methodist tradition closer to the Congregational community. Hill's successor at Surrey in 1833 was John Sherman, a man who stood firmly in the tradition having come through the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion, like many Congregational ministers, and thereafter moving freely between Congregational and Calvinistic Methodist churches.<sup>99</sup> Under Sherman's successor, Newman Hall, Surrey Chapel became Congregationalist in name as well as in fact. Matthew Wilk's two chapels had a stormier transition under his hand-picked successor John Campbell, a Scots Congregationalist of high principle and a sharp pen.<sup>100</sup> Campbell forcibly moved Whitefield's Tabernacle and Tottenham Court Chapel into Congregationalism after a bitter fight with the trustees in 1834 over the questions of the use of the Anglican liturgy and the nature of church discipline. As with most Calvinistic Methodist chapels the use of the liturgy was stipulated in the trust deeds and the government was vested in the hands of trustees who viewed their churches more as preaching stations than as churches ordered by a pastor and diaconate on the Congregational model. Campbell opposed this state of things and sought to change it. When he met opposition he tried to appeal to his hearers over the trustees and even at one point offered to resign when he was locked out of his pulpit one Sunday. Eventually an arbitration committee was appointed by the Congregational Board in an attempt to sort the matter out. Only one member was not a Congregationalist, though the rest were of a moderate temperament.<sup>101</sup> Thomas Wilson thought that Campbell had mistaken his ground in fighting the trustees and trying to undo the trust. One member of the Tabernacle wrote to Wilson complaining of Campbell's tactics:

Whether the Constitution of Tab & Tot<sup>m</sup> are what they should be, is one matter, and what they are, and ever were intended to be, is another. But can anyone, knowing as you and I know, suppose Geo. Whitefield intended them for Congregational churches ... Surrey Chapel might be in the same situation, by any resident minister who thought proper to quarrel with the managers. The whole connexion of the Countess of Huntingdon is the same. Mr. Campbell never had any call from the people. But from the managers.<sup>102</sup>

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99. Allen, John Sherman, p. 111.

100. Robert Ferguson and A. Morton Brown, Life and Labours of John Campbell (London 1867), p. 106ff.; Waddington, History, vol. II, p. 378.

101. Copy of the correspondence between John Campbell and the trustees of Tottenham Court Chapel, C.L.Mss. II.c.34 (item 11). The one non-congregational member was the Rev. John Broadfoot of Cheshunt College, though John Burnet and John Clayton would have been sympathetic to the Calvinistic Methodist tradition.

102. Michael Custteden to Thomas Wilson, Sept. 22, 1834, C.L.Mss. II.c.34.

The committee eventually decided for Campbell, who went on to use his pulpit as a sounding board of his own distinct brand of comprehensive Independency.

The significance of Campbell's victory was that it highlighted the dilemma of other nonsectarian institutions that found themselves in the no-man's land of religion. That same year, 1834, the Congregational Board in London decided to exclude from membership Spa Fields Chapel for the reason that it used the Anglican liturgy. In the heated ecclesiastical atmosphere for the 1830's this action aroused a great deal of controversy. The evangelical Anglican Christian Observer criticized the Board, drawing a reply from John Pye Smith, resident tutor at Homerton College, which pointed out that these Whitefieldian churches had a different basis of church polity which separated them from the Congregational churches. In addition they used the Book of Common Prayer in worship which many Congregationalists considered unscriptural. Not all Congregationalists agreed with this attitude. In 1835 John Morison upheld the right of Union Chapel, Islington to have adopted a liturgical form of worship since that was the prerogative of an independent church. But he had to admit that in so doing Union Chapel placed a rampart between itself and the Congregational churches.<sup>103</sup> The important thing was the separation of the church from the world upon which 'liberal yet Christian basis' the churches could withstand 'the scrutiny to which all institutions are about to be subject in our day.' What Morison had in mind with this somewhat apocalyptic vision is difficult to tell, but doubtless it had something to do with the deepening sectarian acrimony and hardening of denominational boundaries. We will see below the effects this had on home missions.

Far more fundamental was the break between orthodox and heterodox Dissent. The Presbyterians had traditionally provided Dissent with its political leadership, but by the 1830's orthodox Dissenters were increasingly uneasy with both their political moderation and their theological radicalism.

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103. C.M., (1835), pp. 223, 282; E.M. (1835), p. 538.

Closely related to the theological question was the issue of trusts and endowments, both of which were the source of much controversy well into the century. The Presbyterians had by the turn of the century been long committed to varying forms of arianism, socinianism and increasingly unitarianism. Congregationalists were particularly sensitive to Anglican charges of collaboration with heretics and responded by engaging Presbyterians in theological debate. There was a heated exchange in 1812 - 1814 when the issue of the civil toleration of unitarians and the freedom of itinerant preachers was being discussed in Parliament. The most celebrated exchange of pamphlets was that between John Pye Smith and Thomas Belsham, the unitarian minister of the Gravel-Pit meeting house in Hackney.<sup>104</sup> Pye Smith was a dogged controversialist and continued to battle away on several fronts during his lifetime. He was particularly concerned for the persecuted evangelicals in Geneva who suffered at the hands of the socinian state establishment. While removed from the theological debates in England, the interest of Congregationalists in the machinations of Prof. Chêviève cannot be wholly divorced from them.<sup>105</sup> In Birmingham the Congregationalist minister John Angel James carried on a debate with the local unitarian minister. The context was the Wolverhampton case in 1816 where the trustees of a Presbyterian chapel were being sued after dismissing the minister when he had been converted to trinitarian views. The case dragged on for many years and touched on a sore point in Dissent - the possession of chapels

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104. James Bennett, History of Dissenters, p. 217. See John Pye Smith, The adoration of our Lord Jesus Christ vindicated from the charge of idolatry (London 1812); Thomas Belsham, A calm inquiry (London 1812); John Stevens, A scriptural display of the triune God (London 1813); Robert Aspland, A plea to Unitarian Dissenters (London 1814). Some of the debate was over the trinitarian pedigree of some 17th and 18th century Dissenters such as Richard Baxter and Isaac Watts, see Samuel Palmer's Dr. Watts no Socinian. The debate would be revived in the 30's in relation to the trinitarianism of the Hewley family. See above.

105. Bennett, History of Dissenters, p. 220. See C.M. (1825), pp. 435, 497; (1837), p. 500. In 1825 the Congregational Board took up the cause of persecuted Swiss Dissent.

with trinitarian foundations by trustees of other theological convictions. Congregationalists saw themselves as the rightful heirs to the Puritan Presbyterians whose own descendants had lapsed from the true faith. By 1825 the case had not been settled and James expressed his impatience in a letter to the Congregationalist solicitor George Hadfield:

The conduct of the Socinians in appropriating and retaining for the denominations of their own sentiments, buildings and charities that were not for propagation of principles of a diametrically opposite nature, appears to me a gross violation of all the rules of honesty and honour. It is notorious that a vast majority of the places of worship used by them were built and endowed by Trinitarians for the dissemination of the Trinitarian faith.<sup>106</sup>

The Wolverhampton case was a harbinger of things to come, though a modicum of unity was maintained until after the repeal of the Test Acts. The Manchester socinian controversy broke out in 1825 over some rash comments made at a dinner for unitarian ministers.<sup>107</sup> More serious was the long-drawn out contest over Lady Hewley's charity which Congregationalists saw as the test case for their claim to be the true heirs of the trinitarian Presbyterians. The case began in 1825 and was not finally settled until Lord Lyndhurst's decision in the House of Lords in 1844, by which time any semblance of dissenting unity had evaporated. Many of the same characters who had fought in the Wolverhampton and Manchester skirmishes took up arms to rescue Lady Hewley's legacy from Unitarian clutches. The issue was over the control of a trust fund that had been left by Lady Hewley in order to assist poor dissenting ministers and their widows and orphans. Like so many such trusts it had fallen into the hands of men who strictly were not of the same theological convictions as the founder. Congregationalists found this situation intolerable for both theological and pragmatic reasons. The Congregational Magazine believed that unitarianism was 'like those parasitical plants, which gather not their moisture from the earth, but

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106. John Angel James to George Hadfield, Oct. 26, 1824, C.L.Mss., Gb 23, Letter 26. See also James to Hadfield, Dec. 8, 1824, C.L.Mss., Gb 23, letter 29.

107. George Hadfield, ed., The Manchester Socinian Controversy (London 1825); C.M. (1825), p. 561.

vegetate by the nutriment they steal from nobler and more ancient stocks.<sup>108</sup>  
 In spite of Presbyterian-unitarian protests to the contrary, the occupants of old Presbyterian chapels and the possessors of old trusts were not the rightful heirs. A great deal of effort was spent in discussing the progress of doctrine, but Congregationalists remained unconvinced. The Patriot pointed out to its readers that the parties holding these trusts were 'no more Presbyterian than they are Lutherans or Wesleyan Methodists: and they are employed chiefly to prop up a cause incapable of maintaining itself, to keep alive a paralytic heresy which still performs its frigid rites in the sepulchres of departed orthodoxy.'<sup>109</sup>

The Congregationalist press took up the cudgels. George Hadfield, fresh from the Manchester controversy which had touched on the Hewley dispute, pressed John Blackburn to include articles on the Hewley case, the state of chapel trusts and the history of Presbyterianism in England. Congregationalists needed to know:

the names of the original trustees first, & ... the present trustees second. Then a short acct. of (Hewley), the state of his will, the several charities founded by him, but above all give the repeated injunctions and directives left by him on doctrinal sentiments, then conclude with such information as you possess emphasizing the extent of his property and the mode in which it is now applied to the Socinians.<sup>110</sup>

The Congregational responded by giving extensive coverage to the Hewley Controversy.<sup>111</sup> Hadfield would continue to press Blackburn for more information and emphasize the importance that 'our official organs of publication' do not 'take a wrong view on the subject.' He commended Blackburn for speaking 'out manfully again against these frauds as did the Evan(gelical) last month.' He went on to say that he thought that 'the public frown will be effectually bestowed on these enemies

108. C.M., (1832), p. 38.

109. Quoted in W.R. Ward, Religion in Society in England (1790-1850), (London 1972), p. 202.

110. Hadfield to John Blackburn, Feb. 8, 1825, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/46.

111. C.M. (1825), pp. 322 'On the union between Presbyterians and Congregationalists towards the end of the 18th century.'

of the Saviour, that they never can recover from it, unless our periodicals, & some weak brethren who do not know how to distinguish between religious liberty and trust property, make a decision in their favour.'<sup>112</sup> This last reference to religious liberty touched the heart of the matter. As we will see when we come to discuss voluntarism itself the boundary between religious freedom and civil responsibility was much debated. The question of endowments was becoming a central feature of the Congregationalist understanding of the relationship of church and state.

The circumstances surrounding the case were to prove very trying, not least upon those who were put into an anomalous position in relation to the Charity. Though the Charity was controlled by unitarians, a number of orthodox Congregationalists were beneficiaries. John Cockin of Sheffield, for example, found himself caught between loyalty to his Congregationalism and due respect to those Hewley Charity trustees who helped to support him. He wrote to Thomas Wilson when the consequences of the Manchester controversy were beginning to be felt and the Hewley case beginning to cause concern:

You have doubtless heard of the controversy with the Socinians at Manchester, and probably saw the letters on both sides as they were published. It has since broke out in Sheffield with such acrimony, but there we unite under the cover of fictitious names. I was drawn into the affair at the urgent request of others, and in one respect it might be deemed imprudent in me to appear in it, for I receive five pounds annually from Lady Hewley's fund which our opponents distribute at their discretion.<sup>113</sup>

As the case dragged on it developed into a slogging match. Hadfield and the other contestants had a difficult time in finding the adequate documentation.<sup>114</sup> In 1836 a decision was made by the High Court in favour of the orthodox, but it took until 1844 for the final decision by the Lords. Hadfield plowed on with determination, encouraging

112. Hadfield to Blackburn, Feb. 21, 1821, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/46.

113. W. Cockin to Thomas Wilson, May, 1825, C.L.Mss., II.c.34.

114. Hadfield to Blackburn, March 26, 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/48. Hadfield believed that the Hewley case was 'the most important charity in England belonging to us.' Hadfield to Blackburn, Feb. 9, 1826, L52/2/47.

Blackburn and Josiah Conder of the Patriot to keep up interest and apologizing for the amount of space the case was taking in the press.<sup>115</sup> By 1842 a third party had entered the fray which went further to fragment Dissent. Scottish Presbyterians in England felt that they had an even greater claim to Presbyterian-unitarian property than the Congregationalists. In June 1842 as the Lords decision approached Hadfield wrote to Blackburn enclosing a list of Presbyterian chapels which he thought would be 'useful to us in our approaching contest with the Scotchmen in relation to Lady Hewley's Charity.' Possibly hinting at another source of tension he asked Blackburn for a list of Baptist chapels.<sup>116</sup>

The Lords decision came in July 1842 and was decided against the unitarians. Hadfield wrote to Blackburn in August encouraging him to make the decision fully known to the Congregational's readership. It was 'the most important step that has occurred in our denominational affairs in this way.'<sup>117</sup> Through the rest of the year Hadfield worked on the Scots case and the Government's proposed Dissenters' Chapels Bill which would have voided the Hewley decision. Hadfield's impatience with the way things were going as well as his dislike of the bitter disputes over property was expressed in a letter to Blackburn later that year:

We are in circumstances in the Hewley Charity suit and have the hateful conflict with the Scotch party, now to begin as to the appropriation of funds, which may last as long as the first suit has done. The court & every body gets tired of it, and this is a business I wish I was out of. I have not another nineteen years to give to it.<sup>118</sup>

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115. Hadfield to Josiah Conder, May 24, 1842, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/53. Hadfield, always the radical political dissenter, did not relent with this denominational issue even with the pressure of the anti-Corn Law and anti-State Church agitations. See Hadfield to Blackburn, October 4, 1839, Feb. 13, 1840, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/50-51.
116. Hadfield to Blackburn, Jun. 2, 1842, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/54.
117. Hadfield to Blackburn, Aug. 8, 1842, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/56.
118. Hadfield to Blackburn, Dec. 31, 1842, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/57.

When the Dissenters' chapels bill was introduced in Parliament in the beginning of 1844 Congregationalists were surprised and dismayed.<sup>119</sup> They saw it as an attack upon their religious liberty and organized opposition to the bill on those grounds. Hadfield again wrote to Blackburn protesting of how the unitarians 'are the only class of professing Christians who have usurped the property of other classes of the dissenting community.' 'I trust,' he wrote, 'the London ministers and friends, aided by their respective societies for protection of their rights and interests will resist the measure to the utmost of their ability.'<sup>120</sup> The vexed question of trusts was central to the Congregationalists' battle for religious liberty and defence of the voluntary system. The foundation of the free church was in the ability of members to finance and support its activities through giving and endowments. As Nonconformity advanced in the 19th century and spread the net of its activities it sought to establish the inviolability of trusts, particularly in relation to trust deed stipulations, and to prove the viability of voluntarism as a self-supporting system that was adequate to meet the needs of the British people. For this reason the struggle with the Presbyterians over old trusts and the question of endowments in the Anti-State Church agitation was part of a wider attempt by Nonconformists, and Congregationalists in particular, to undergird the application of their principles. If that meant severing ties with those who did not keep faith with trusts, as was the case with the Presbyterians, then that was the way it had to be. But there were modifications. In 1845 Hadfield would be pleading to drop action against the Scots Presbyterians because of possible repercussions on the formation of the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>121</sup> Evangelical unity was still important, though the issue of

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119. C.M., (1844), p. 89.

120. Hadfield to Blackburn, March 9, 1844, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/59.

121. Hadfield to Thomas Raffles, September 30, 1845, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/61.

trusts made the lines between the various communities much clearer.

The question of Presbyterian trusts also made itself felt in the political councils of Dissent. Two of the most important political bodies of Dissent were the Dissenting Deputies and the General Body of Ministers of the Three Denominations. Both were made up of members of the three main dissenting communities - the Presbyterians, the Baptists and the Congregationalists. The Deputies consisted of lay representatives of the churches in London and carried the most influence, largely because of its prominent lay membership and its political acumen nurtured over many years of representing the case of Dissent to Crown and Parliament. The General Body was less influential and consisted solely of ministers of religion who were primarily responsible to their denominational boards. Nevertheless the General Body was their political mouthpiece and possessed the same right to approach the monarch as did the Deputies. In 1836 the influence of these two bodies was to be seriously impaired and the unity of Dissent shattered by the departure with bitter feeling of the Presbyterian members.<sup>122</sup>

The Presbyterians traditionally chaired both bodies, but by 1830 it was becoming apparent that this was an historical anachronism and not adequately representative of dissenting interests. This uneasy accommodation was tolerable while Dissenters were still pressing for the fundamental alteration in their civil status that came with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828. A united front was necessary and all Dissenters had a common interest in repeal. Nevertheless there had been tensions prior to that. Evangelical Dissenters had not been

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122. Bernard Lord Manning, The Dissenting Deputies (Cambridge 1952), p. 21; Geoffrey Nuttall, The General Body of Dissenting Ministers (unpub. mss. at Dr. Williams's Library, 1955). K.R.M. Short, 'London's General Body of Dissenting Ministers: its disruption in 1836', Journal of Ecclesiastical History, (XXIV), no. 4, 1973, p. 1 ; General Body of Ministers of the Three Denominations, Committee Minutes, April 25, 1835; March 9, 1836, March 31, 1836; D.W.L.

entirely happy with the Presbyterian attitude to Lord Sidmouth's Bill in 1810.<sup>123</sup> More serious was the discontent of some Dissenters with the tolerant attitude of the Presbyterians towards Roman Catholics and the place this had in the repeal campaign. Prior to repeal this was simply inconvenient; all the leading dissenting political groups disowned any form of anti-catholicism. The Protestant Society, for example, resolved in June 1825 'that religious opinions alone should not qualify or disqualify for public office - that the right to religious liberty is a universal paramount, and unalienable right - that all restraints on their expression by penalties or exclusions are acts of oppression and wrong.'<sup>124</sup> Dissenting political leaders were working for repeal against a background of a Government that wanted Roman Catholic emancipation more than it wanted repeal and of strong anti-catholic feeling among the dissenting rank and file. Not everyone was happy with the linking of repeal with Catholic emancipation. To the chagrin of the dissenting leadership petitions were tabled in the House of Commons in 1828 opposing repeal on the grounds that it would promote Catholic emancipation.<sup>125</sup>

It was only after repeal that the real difficulties began to arise. With the prospect of Catholic emancipation legislation anti-catholic feeling crystallized in the Deputies. In 1829 the Baptist minister Joseph Ivimey published a book entitled Dr. Williams's Library and the debates on the Roman Catholic claims. The immediate reason for the book was Ivimey's complaint of unitarian possession of the library and its refusal to allow him access to documents relating to trusts deeds. But he also touched upon the two current issues of trusts in the possession of

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123. Manning, Dissenting Deputies, p. 132.

124. C.M., (1825), p. 322.

125. C.M., (1825), p. 553; The Irish Evangelical Society, for example, was sending home reports of Roman Catholic disruption of Protestant meetings, of 'priest-craft' and of the ignorance of the Irish peasantry allegedly brought about by the oppression of the priests, see C.M. (1824), p. 279. There were also reports from continental missionaries of persecution in predominantly Catholic countries, see C.M. (1824), pp. 334, 442. Significantly these reports appeared at the same time as those of the persecution of Swiss free church evangelicals by the Socinian state establishment, see footnote 128.

heterodox trustees and Catholic emancipation and rights. In Ivimey's mind and in the minds of many Dissenters the two issues were connected. Ivimey led a minor secession from the General Body of the Three Denominations. The Congregational Board that same year entertained a proposal to withdraw from the Body because of the 'anti-trinitarian' element.<sup>126</sup> After 1830 relations between the Presbyterians and the orthodox members of the Body reached a breaking point and in 1836 the Presbyterians withdrew from both the General Body and the Deputies.<sup>127</sup> The result was the breaking of the old dissenting political front and to the unity of Dissent. In reflecting upon the relative political failure of Dissent in the 1830's the Eclectic Review in 1839 pointed to the loss of the political acumen of the Presbyterians. Nevertheless the Presbyterians had been too moderate and unrepresentative and the orthodox had left everything in their hands. The reviewer concluded that 'the Dissenters, though not deficient in heart, have not yet found their hands' resulting in little political exertion on 'the side of liberal principles.'<sup>128</sup>

The two areas most affected by the fragmentation of evangelicalism were home and foreign missions. As we have seen societies with more general purposes were able to maintain some degree of unity, even though there was considerable stress and occasionally some divisions. Missions presented the difficulty of reconciling a generally accepted evangelical vision of spreading the gospel with the inevitable differences arising over church order. We can turn now to look more closely at the London and Colonial Missionary Societies and at several home mission organizations, namely the Home Missionary Society and the London City Mission. These

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126. John Stoughton, Religion in England from 1800-1850 (London 1884), vol. II p. 121.

127. C.M. (1836), p. 159; Short, 'General Body'; p. 3; Nuttall, 'General Body,' p. 55.

128. E.R., New Series V, (1839), p. 26.

societies were particularly vulnerable to sectarian pressures as they inhabited in varying degrees the twilight zone between distinctly denominational societies and generally evangelical societies.

The London Missionary Society from its founding struggled with official nondenominational position and the reality of its primarily Congregational constituency. The Society's annual reports reveal this. Several members of other denominations were directors, but they were few in number and usually members of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion or the Scottish Secession Church.<sup>129</sup> The annual meetings of the L.M.S. usually drew out a good array of evangelical worthies. In 1821, for example, at the twenty-fifth anniversary jubilee the platform was graced by the presence of the Baptist missionary William Ward of Serampore, the German Lutheran pastor in London C.F.A. Steinkopff, the Scottish Presbyterian John Brown of Biggar, the Methodists E. Philips, Esq. and the Rev. J. Taylor of the Wesleyan Missionary Society and the Anglican Isaac Saunders of St. Andrew-by-Wardrobe. The fourth resolution passed on that occasion testified to the ambiguity of the Society's position in relation to other missionary societies and denominational claims:

The liberal basis of this society and the catholic spirit which it was instrumental in diffusing at once suggested the formation of other highly benevolent and useful institutions on the same general principles and tended to dispose the members of various religious communities to cordial union and cooperation in the management and support.<sup>130</sup>

In spite of its official appearance and expressions of good will, the support of the L.M.S. was much more Congregational in orientation. Contributions and collections came mainly from Congregational churches, though occasionally a Calvinistic Methodist chapel would take a collection,

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129. L.M.S. 24th Annual Report (London 1819), p. 1; that year non-Congregational committee members included the Rev. W.F. Platt of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion and the Rev. Alexander Waugh of the Scottish Secession Synod church in London.

130. L.M.S., 26th Annual Report, (London 1821), pp. 2, 4.

particularly in Gloucester, Somerset or London; and even more rarely a Baptist chapel.<sup>131</sup> We have noted previously the close connection of the L.M.S. with Congregational churches through its auxiliary system, but the L.M.S. was also becoming intimately attached to the network of Congregational county associations. Many of these associations actively promoted the interests of the L.M.S. and not infrequently the annual meetings of the county auxiliary and the county association would be held together.<sup>132</sup> The Durham Association in 1826 took the initiative in forming a county auxiliary of the L.M.S.<sup>133</sup>

Among Congregationalists there was some dissatisfaction with the ambiguous position of the L.M.S. There was a general feeling that while other denominations had their own societies the Congregationalists were left without an adequate expression of both their missionary zeal and ecclesiastical principles. In 1818 John Blackburn wrote to the Secretary of the Essex auxiliary of the L.M.S. on this matter:

It has been frequently and greatly regretted that the Essex Auxiliary Missionary Society does not give to the religious public at large a more favourable view of the zeal and activity of the great body of Congregational Dissenters within its limits.

He went on to argue that it was a mark of reprobation for the Congregational community not to have a more clearly expressed missionary interest, particularly as found in the individual congregations.<sup>134</sup> This feeling became more acute when the idea of a Congregational Union was in the air. During 1831 there was a correspondence in the Congregational Magazine on the importance of denominational organization and the role of the L.M.S. In April of that year a long letter by 'Theologus' appeared

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131. L.M.S., 23rd Annual Report (London 1818), pp. xxxiii, xxxvii.

132. C.M. (1817), p. 17; that year the Kent Association and the county missionary society auxiliary held their annual meeting together.

133. L.M.S., 31st Annual Report (London 1826), p. xxxvii.

134. Blackburn to the Secretary of the Essex Missionary Society auxiliary, Nov. 12, 1818, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/95.

entitled a 'Plea for a Congregational Union.'<sup>135</sup> In the letter 'Theologus' put the case for a more extensive union than what existed informally on the national level and found imperfectly in the L.M.S. He felt that Congregationalism would have fared better had the institutions traditionally associated with the denomination had been more distinct in their witness:

... might not the interests of true religion, according to our Congregational views, have been more extensively promoted both at home and abroad, if our principles and order and discipline had been distinctly recognized by the Society.

The dilemma had been to appease Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians. But as few members of these groups were also members of the L.M.S. he wondered why such circumspection had to be maintained?

Let it appear that such a Society as the London Missionary Society is, for the most part, Congregational, and the effect must be to incite inquiry into those principles which have led to such happy results.

To the accusation that this was sectarianism, he replied, 'Well, let it be so. Suppose they should appear one great sect; Is not Christianity itself a sect in relation to other religions? A sectarian is not necessarily a schismatic.' The formation of the Congregational Union in 1832 took some of the pressure off the L.M.S. to become more denominational, but the question continued to be discussed. In 1849 a special committee was set up on the instigation of the Rev. J.S. Miall of Bradford and under the chairmanship of Thomas Raffles to inquire about the possibility of altering the Society's fundamental law in order to promote 'the stronger attachment to its constituents or increase its efficacy.'<sup>136</sup> The reasons given for the inquiry were the independence of the mission churches and the problems of Colonial education grants. The L.M.S. decided in the end to retain the fundamental principle.

The 1849 inquiry pointed to the challenges confronting both evangelical unity and Congregationalism after 1830. The concern of

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135. C.M. (1831), p. 208; E.R. (1837), N.S. III, p. 180, in which the writer sees the L.M.S. as a sort of Congregational union.

136. Lovett, L.M.S., p. 679.

Congregational members of the Society in regard to church polity on the mission field proved to be an increasing point of tension. The practical realities of missionary churches had to be accepted and usually some modus vivendi was reached mingling elements of congregationalism, presbyterianism and even episcopacy.<sup>137</sup> The famous L.M.S. missionary Dr. Philip was for a time pastor of the Union church in Cape Town. It was when the churches matured or contained a number of Europeans that problems tended to arise.

The case of the Congregational church in Georgetown, Demararaland illustrates the tension. The problem was that the L.M.S. board of directors sought to retain some control over the affairs of the church, while the pastor, the Rev. K. Kelty, and the congregation sought greater autonomy on traditional Congregational lines. At a church meeting on December 5, 1840 the congregation passed a resolution complaining of the 'anxiety, trouble, inconvenience and expense' to which they had been subject by the L.M.S. Kelty was sent to England to plead the church's case before the Congregational public. He was to press Congregational leaders with:

the importance of making themselves fully acquainted with the principles on which our infant churches at the Society's mission stations are formed; the extent to which self-support on Gospel principles are enjoined and carried out - And prosperity held with the means proposed for their becoming free and independent as the Churches of Christ ...

The issue was self-determination of church polity. Kelty complained in his appeal to English church leaders that the L.M.S. was violating its own stated policy in hindering the full development of independent polity in Georgetown. The directors were willing to grant the church a trust deed that vested ownership in the Society, but this would be simply to convey 'to my people', said Kelty, 'the bare name of liberty and independence.'<sup>138</sup>

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137. Ibid., p. 400. The case of the Samoan churches is interesting in relation to the developments of missionary church structures and questions of the missionaries own church principles.

138. Congregational church of Georgetown, Demararaland, Copy of the resolution of a church meeting, Dec. 5 1840, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/6/1.

Kelty's appeal was calculated to win the sympathies of the Congregational pastors who were strongly independent at a time when issues of church principles were of great importance. After returning to Georgetown he kept up a correspondence with John Blackburn. In April 1841 he complained of the way that the L.M.S. spent its funds and employed its missionaries.<sup>139</sup> Later in September he forwarded a copy of the church magazine for inclusion in the Congregational. Kelty reiterated his appeal to the Congregational principles of Blackburn and others in England to support his cause:

... our success in England must depend on the kind of interest of yourself & others who believe that the Congregational order is the most worthy of being accounted primitive & scriptural; as well as most adapted to the success of the missionary enterprise. But the Congregational order has been dishonoured by its professedly zealous adherents as far as missionary operations are concerned. Every attempt appears to be made to keep it down.

At fault were the burdensome committees and the 'Salaried Agency' by which missionaries were able to act free of obligation to their congregations. Not least was the fundamental principle itself which stifled missionary activity. Congregationalism

is frowned upon by the officials of the Society whose profound object is to maintain it (in) its general aspect though it send abroad no 'ism', professedly I regard its fundamental rule as directly bearing on the Congregational Principle - left as it ought to be left to the people ... We maintain the Gospel if only left to the operation of the voluntary principle!<sup>140</sup>

Kelty found a sympathetic ear in Blackburn who had for some time previously advocated a closer union of the L.M.S. and the Congregational community.<sup>141</sup> Other Congregational leaders felt the same. Walter Wilson felt that dissenting principles were being sunk by the evangelical societies.

139. J. Kelty to Blackburn, April 1841, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/6/13.

140. J. Kelty to Blackburn, Sept. 1841, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/6/19.

141. There were other problems on the mission field. James Waddington in Berbice came to blows with the L.M.S. and at one point resigned to serve as pastor of an independent black church. See Waddington, Congregational History, IV, p. 624. al

In contrast to Churchmen who stood by their principles, Congregationalists were indifferent to them. He suggested that these principles should become visible in dissenting assemblies and that Congregationalists should work toward some form of union among themselves. Response to Wilson was favourable.<sup>142</sup> Many Congregationalists increasingly felt that as a denomination they gave too much and received too little in return, not least public recognition for their good works.<sup>143</sup> More importantly, there was a growing conviction that Congregationalism was not only the most biblical polity, but also the most workable. We will look at this attitude more closely when we examine the theory of voluntarism.<sup>144</sup>

Because the L.M.S. stayed by its general evangelicalism there were inevitable divisions when the problems of polity could not be circumvented. This was particularly the case with Colonial missions where many of the difficulties found in England were transplanted. In Canada and Australia Congregationalists were confronted not simply with pioneer missions, but with the problems of retaining the loyalties of Congregationalist settlers, severe sectarian rivalry and Government colonial support and policies. The Congregationalist response was to form the Colonial Missionary Society.

Congregational interest in colonial missions intensified after 1825. Previous to that it was known that several Congregational churches had been started in Canada and Australia, but little was done to support them. In Canada Congregational churches could be found in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, southeastern Quebec and Montreal and in southern Ontario. Some of these churches were the result of immigration from the United States; others were the result of British migration in the 19th century. In 1826 the Canadian Congregational churches sent an appeal for French-

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142. C.M., (1830), pp. 194, 253.

143. C.M., (1839), p. 281.

144. E.R., (1833), N.S. v, p. 269.

speaking missionaries to work in Quebec. The London Missionary Society dealt with the request, but was unable to find any candidates.<sup>145</sup> The following year a Canadian Home Missionary Society was formed to encourage evangelisation in new areas of settlement and in 1831 two Canadian pastors, the Revs. John Smith and John Wilkes, visited London to press the case of Canadian Congregationalism and to appeal for funds. Their case was strengthened by the report of the official Congregational Union deputation to North America in 1834. Andrew Reed and James Matheson relayed the appeals of the Canadian churches back to English Congregational leaders,<sup>146</sup> as the result of which the L.M.S. gave £1000 to Canadian missions and sent two missionaries out. Concern for Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand developed in a similar way. Thomas Binney of King's Weigh House Chapel, London visited Australia in 1835 and upon returning actively promoted increased missionary activity.<sup>147</sup> Congregationalist settlers likewise appealed for ministers for their churches.

One of the stimuli to action was the activities of the other denominations on the colonial field. John Blackburn received complaints of Roman Catholic advances in New Zealand.<sup>148</sup> Various Anglican and Methodist societies were encouraging settlement and missions in the colonies. The Society for Promoting Education and Industry in Canada had the Duke of Sussex for its vice-patron and the Bishops of Durham and Salisbury, the Methodist Joseph Butterworth and Thomas F. Buxton and William Wilberforce as vice-presidents. Frederick Miller wrote to Thomas Wilson about the popularity of the Baptists in Tasmania, but felt that there was still a good deal to be done.<sup>149</sup>

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145. Francis Perrot to John Arundel, Nov. 28, 1826, C.L.Mss. 45.
146. Waddington, History, IV, p. 392, 457; Andrew Reed and James Matheson, A narrative of the visit to the American churches by the deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales (London 1835), passim.
147. E. Paxton Hood, Thomas Binney: His mind, life and opinions (London 1874), p. 220.
148. C.M. (1835), p. 190 for an appeal from Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) see Sarah Hopkins to Blackburn, May 1838, N.C.L.C., B.P. L52/5/79.
149. Frederick Miller to Thomas Wilson, May 3, 1836, C.L.Mss., II.33.e.12.

Initially the L.M.S. was seen as the vehicle of colonial missions, but this soon proved to be untenable. Thomas Binney pressed the L.M.S. to do something and through 1835 the directors considered the matter.<sup>150</sup> Towards the end of the year, however, it was becoming clear that something of a more denominational character was required. Earlier George Collison pointed out the need for action to Thomas Wilson. Wilson had written a letter on the subject of colonial missions to the Patriot, and Collison wanted to speak to him about the problems relating to Canada, particularly as 'the religious destitution of the Canadas is well known.' He was concerned to impress on Wilson the need to take some measures 'for the purposes of relieving that state of things.' There were, however, 'very great difficulties in linking such operations to any of the existing institutions.'<sup>151</sup> Wilson concurred that there was the need for an organization through which to channel missionary candidates and funds.<sup>152</sup> James Matheson saw clearly the issues involved in attaching Congregational colonial missions to the L.M.S. In a letter to Joshua Wilson in 1835 he expressed his satisfaction that the matter was coming before the L.M.S. directors, but he had his reservations about the success of the mission if it was undertaken by the L.M.S. First, he saw a problem in the L.M.S. entering a field where English was the predominant language since that would bring conflict with other churches and would be theoretically outside the Society's brief. If the Colonial mission was undertaken he queried if it would be done through a separate and semi-autonomous agency or more directly as were missions in heathen countries. He thought Canada merited a separate mission:

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150. Waddington, History, IV, p. 464; L.M.S., Board Minutes, June 2, 1835.

151. George Collison to Thomas Wilson, April 19, 1832, C.L.Mss. II.c.33.e.3.

152. Thomas Wilson to ?, Feb. 12, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.33.e.5. Wilson was generous in his giving for colonial missions, but he also had to carry a considerable burden of financial responsibility. See Henry Wilkes to Wilson, Feb. 4, 1834, C.L.Mss. II.c.33.e.6. and R. Miles to Wilson, Dec. 9, 1834, C.L.Mss., II.c.33.e.7.

With regard to the Canadas I think the field is so large & the duties connected with the right management of it so various - that it can hardly have justice done to it if added to the vast business of the L.M. Society ... But who is to direct or control this grant or any other monies that may be collected? Is it to be a sub-committee of the Directors acting on the Fundamental principles of the L.M.S. & employ all Denominations or will the money & responsibility be connected with the few persons formed into a Committee more than a year ago in London? Or will a new Society be formed by Congregationalists for the Religious benefit of the Provinces?

The problem was clear: would the fundamental principle work in a Canadian or Australian setting faced with sectarian rivalry and Government support for church building and schools? Matheson felt that it could not. He concluded, 'a distinct Denominational Committee or Society would be by far the most influential & the most likely to meet with success.'<sup>153</sup> Others were of the same inclination. Binney released a series of circulars proposing a Congregational colonial mission and it was noted in the L.M.S. directors minutes that some Congregationalists were planning something on these lines.<sup>154</sup>

No intimation was given by the committee of the Congregational Union that plans for a denominational colonial mission would be discussed at the annual meeting in May 1836. A few weeks previously on the 28th of April a provisional meeting was held in London under the chairmanship of George Clayton when plans for a Colonial Missionary Society were discussed. A large array of Congregational leaders were present, including Andrew Reed, John Morrison, John Henderson, George Burder, Thomas Binney, Thomas Morrell, John Blackburn and Arthur Tidman, the secretary of the Congregational Union. They resolved that 'it is desirable that a Society be formed for the promotion of education and religion in the British colonies.'<sup>155</sup> No mention was made in the official

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153. James Matheson to Wilson, Jan. 17, 1835, C.L.Mss. II.c.21.

154. Waddington, History, IV p. 464; L.M.S., Board Minutes, Nov. 3, 1835.

155. Colonial Missionary Society, Committee minutes, April 28, 1836.

proceedings of denominational affiliation, but in a memoranda to the minutes it was stated that, 'the opinion appeared very generally to prevail that the new Society should emanate from the Union.'

Subsequently a conference was held with the officers of the Congregational Union, most of whom were present, and the provisional committee of the Colonial Missionary Society was constituted a sub-committee of the Union.

In the course of the Annual Meeting of the Congregational Union on May 10 John Morrison rose to introduce a motion affiliating the Colonial Missionary Society to the Union.<sup>156</sup> George Redford and Algernon Wells objected and a debate ensued, the result of which was the appointment of a committee to confer with the Colonial leaders. It is difficult to know exactly what the disagreement centered upon, but it seems it had to do with the terms of affiliation. In the end the Colonial was accepted as a committee of the Union while at the same time retaining a large degree of autonomy. On the 13th a public meeting was held appropriately at Binney's Weigh House when the Society was officially formed. Binney gave the main address and Henry Wilkes was appointed the Society's agent in Lower Canada (Quebec).

The new Society immediately set about consolidating its position. It was decided in October to appoint a full-time secretary, a position held co-jointly with that of the Congregational Union. Though affiliated with the Congregational Union it was found necessary in April 1837 to affirm the Society's Congregationalism and that its purpose was 'to form Churches of Christ upon Congregational principles.' Perhaps most important was the need to raise funds. Andrew Reed undertook to introduce the new Society to the L.M.S. and Algernon Wells visited the Kent Association in 1838 where he found 'a very favourable feeling towards the Society.' Binney and Blackburn undertook preaching tours for the Society during the autumn of 1838 in Hampshire and the Hull area respectively.<sup>157</sup>

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156. Waddington, History, IV p. 465; Minutes of the 9th Annual Assembly of the Congregational Union (London 1839), C.M. (1839), p. 373. The Home Missionary Society and the Irish Evangelical Society were affiliated that same year.

157. Colonial M.S., Committee minutes, April 10, 1837, Feb. 20, 1837, July 23, 1838, Nov. 19, 1838.

It was not long before the Colonial hit a number of problems. The first was money which was to plague the effectiveness of the Society all its days. Along with the Irish Evangelical Society, the Colonial always ranked as the very poor cousin among Congregational missions.<sup>158</sup> Part of the problem was the long standing predominance of the London Missionary Society, as well as the multiplicity of societies making their demands on the churches. In 1838 the treasurer reported receipts of £1020.17.½., expenditure of £1977.16.7. and a balance due of £956.19.7½. As requests came in for more missionaries the Society found itself chronically short of cash. This note appeared in the Committee minutes for 27th February, 1839: 'Pecuniary - there being scarcely ground of hope that during the year in prospect more funds will be obtained.' The support of Canadian pastors had fallen almost completely on the Society and in Australia the unsatisfactory (from a Nonconformist point of view) solution of receiving state aid was being practised.<sup>159</sup>

Both these problems - lack of financial support and Government colonial policy - highlighted the need and difficulties of denominational mission and the cost of voluntarism. The question of colonial establishments was particularly awkward. The Canadian churches maintained a consistently voluntarist position, but probably at the expense of any large scale expansion. John Roaf forcefully resisted the Canadian Clergy Reserves Bill which would have given considerable parochial rights to the Anglican and Presbyterian churches in Canada. The Congregational Association of Upper Canada petitioned the Canadian Governor-General on the issue, as well as on the subject of schools. In the eastern Maritime provinces there was little love lost between the Anglican Bishop Inglis and his dissenting rivals. The position of the Canadian churches was discussed by the directors of the Colonial Missionary Society soon after its founding and in reference to the commissioning of Henry Wilkes to the church in Montreal. There was 'annual pecuniary aid to a considerable amount,

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158. C.Y.B. (1846), p. 67 (1847) p. 26; (1848), p. 22. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 153. Only about 250 churches regularly supported the British Mission.

159. Colonial M.S. Committee minutes, Nov. 19, 1838, Feb. 27, 1839.

afforded by the Colonial Government to Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, the Scottish Church, British Wesleyans, and Canadian Wesleyans.<sup>160</sup> Baptists, Scottish Secession Church ministers and the Congregationalists did not receive any Government aid for their activities. As we will see in a moment such a policy created immense difficulties for the Canadian churches and tensions within the Colonial over the degree of autonomy granted to churches relying on the parent society for support.

The Australian mission was much more willing to cooperate with Colonial authorities.<sup>161</sup> There were differing attitudes both in Britain and in Australia over Government grants. Thomas Binney, the leading advocate of the Australian mission, favoured a qualified establishment of Protestant religion in Australia and the taking of grants for church building and schools.<sup>162</sup> Frederick Miller, a Congregationalist missionary in Tasmania, granted the validity of the principles involved but thought that the situation was different. He wrote to Thomas Wilson in 1836 complaining of the lack of response to his request for missionaries and pleading for flexibility of approach:

All other bodies are advancing, but Congregationalism is at a standstill and principles which we regard as Scriptural, are not worthy to be disseminated, but serve only to keep up a party feeling at home.<sup>163</sup>

Miller was in two minds, pulled between a theoretical voluntarism and the exigencies of mission. Another Congregational pastor pointed out the complexities of the case to Wilson, including Miller's ambiguous position:

Our Government is as liberal as we can possibly expect it to be under the present constitution, & tho' there may be a leaning towards the Episcopalian, they do not share exclusively its favour. The Presbyterians & the Catholics receive Government aid. The Wesleyans do not refuse 400 £ per annum & the Baptist minister Mr. Dowling does not object to a yearly stipend. Nor have the Congregationalists, as perhaps you are aware, kept entirely free. Some assistance from the revenue was granted to defray the debt remaining on Mr. Miller's chapel, & some to erect Mr. Price's. Mr. Miller has always protested strongly against it, & proposes if he can effect it to return the money received for his place.

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160. Waddington, History, IV p. 626; Colonial M.S., Committee minutes, June 4, 1838, May 17, 1836.

161. Douglas Pike, Paradise of Dissent, South Australia 1829-1870 (Melbourne 1957), p. 88.

162. Hood, Thomas Binney, p. 220.

163. Frederick Miller to Thomas Wilson, May 3, 1836, C.L.Mss. II.c.33e.12.

Schools presented less of a problem. Grants were handed out to all the denominations and societies on a fairly impartial basis, though there was some rivalry between the various groups.<sup>164</sup>

Needless to say the Colonial M.S. in London was not pleased with these compromises on the field. At a time when British voluntary feeling was quite high the directors noted in 1839 in reference to Australia that, 'our friends seem already to have received aid towards the erection of places of worship.' An act in New South Wales giving aid to Congregationalists on an equal basis with other denominations was recognized with disapproval as potentially creating circumstances that would 'embarrass the Committee, and require grave consideration as well as correspondence and a clear understanding...'<sup>165</sup> In March a further committee meeting was held to discuss the matter at which a resolution was passed 'declaring it incompatible with the principles of the Colonial Missionary Society to bear part in any proceedings for the promotion of religion in the colonies, sustained in any respect by grants from the Colonial treasuries.' After further discussion it was decided that even that resolution was not firm and emphatic enough and the subject was left for further consideration. When the Committee met again in May it was finally decided to consult the Congregational Union as the Colonial grants issue had wider implications.<sup>166</sup>

The greater problem in Canada was one that plagued the Congregational oriented societies - the autonomy of the local churches in relation to the parent society. At the heart of the problem was the matter of finance and the difficulties raised by the attempts of the Colonial M.S. to administer the Canadian mission from such a distance. The Society's agent John Roaf pointed this out in a letter to the Committee in 1847.

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164. J. Nisbet to Thomas Wilson, September 24, 1840, C.L.Mss. II.c.33.e.15.

165. Colonial M.S., Committee Minutes, Feb. 27, 1839.

166. Colonial M.S., Committee Minutes, March 18, 1839, May 6, 1839.

While the Committee had ultimate responsibility for the mission, its judgement of issues was impaired by its remoteness and its effectiveness by the lack of financial support. Further, the Colonial's missionaries were not carrying their weight. Instead of establishing several stations that would support them, they concentrated on one church which made them dependent on the Society. One case in particular became a point of contention and eventually led to both the resignations of Roaf as Canadian agent and of two of the Colonial M.S. officers. Archibald Geikie was a Congregationalist missionary in Stratford, Ontario whom Roaf wanted transferred from the list of the Canadian Home Missionary Society to that of the Colonial. He was badly paid and Roaf hoped that he would fare better with a combined salary under the Colonial M.S. The Colonial M.S. was unable to take Geikie on because of financial stringencies. What the Society did not know was the degree of acrimony between Roaf and Geikie. In 1848 Geikie's brother sent Thomas Binney a letter in which he enclosed a correspondence between Roaf and Archibald Geikie. Roaf accused Geikie of deception and neglect of duties in absenting himself from his congregation for long periods of time. Geikie's brother on the other hand told Binney of his effectiveness, hard work and financial hardship. It was becoming clear that the agency system upon which the Colonial M.S. was founded was in need of revision. Roaf was at odds with most of the other missionaries who were increasingly going over his head in their appeals to their English brethren. Algernon Wells, the secretary, was hurt by the accusations against Roaf and the worsening situation. He wrote to Wilkes in Montreal, 'Do they really impute us at home to build up a tyranny or an indifference to the important application of all our principles and liberties to pastors and churches assisted by us?' (sic)<sup>167</sup> After Wells's resignation the new secretary Thomas James wrote to Roaf instructing him to transfer the oversight of the mission to 'fraternal supervision' of the Congregational churches in Canada.<sup>168</sup> The idea of a single agent was

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167. Waddington, History, IV p. 626, 633. Algernon Wells to Henry Wilkes, C.L.Mss. 45 ; C.M. (1840), p. 288.

168. Thomas James to John Roaf, April 4, 1851 in Waddington, History, IV, p. 648.

dead, and the majority of the committee now considered it a form of 'Diocesan episcopacy.'

The experience of the Colonial Missionary Society was further witness to the strains within mid-19th century Congregationalism. The fact of its existence revealed the failure of the principle of evangelical unity inherent in the L.M.S. The religious needs of the British overseas settlers was different than the evangelisation of pagan countries. In spite of initial attempts at nondenominational cooperation, Congregationalists found that they had to establish their own churches. The reasons lay in the problem of Government colonial policy and in the particular character of Congregational churches.

Home missions came under increasing stress during this period. As with foreign missions there was the conflict of the evangelical ideal with the reality of denominational needs. Many institutions such as the H.M.S., the L.C.M. and the Village Itineracy came to terms with the reality of denominationalism and in their different ways adapted accordingly. The H.M.S. became closely affiliated to the Congregational Union after some initial hostility to the idea. The Village Itineracy Association early declared its denominational leanings in spite of an impeccable nondenominational foundation. While following in the footsteps of George Whitefield, stated the Annual Report of 1811, and 'extending every Christian feeling to other Religious denominations, we ought to encourage our rays into our own focus.' Congregationalists needed a centre of union and action similar to those of other communities.<sup>169</sup> Several of the chapels of the London Itinerant Society became Congregational chapels.<sup>170</sup> This process of transformation, coupled with the emergence of new denominational institutions, created much hard-feeling between denominations. The Anglican British Magazine, for example, attacked the H.M.S. in 1832 for engaging in a 'more quiet and secret, but a more

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169. George Collison to the Committee of the Hackney Theological Seminary, N.C.L.C., V.I.A.Mss., I.n.19.

170. C.M. (1836) p. 10.

persevering and bitter warfare' against the Established Church. The Patriot responded to this broadside by pointing to the inadequacy and indifference of the Anglican clergy towards the religious needs of the population and to the evils of the patronage system.<sup>171</sup>

The evolution of the H.M.S. from a non-denominational to a Congregational society is as clear as that of similar societies such as the L.M.S., the main difference being that the H.M.S. formally recognized the fact by affiliating to the Congregational Union. There were several tendencies influencing the direction of the society. First, the H.M.S. was largely dependent for its funds on the Congregational churches and wealthy Congregational laymen.<sup>172</sup> Second, the H.M.S. developed close ties with the largely Congregational county associations. In the years following its founding numerous associations were affiliated to the H.M.S. and some even altered their constitutions in order to become auxiliaries. The link was a natural one with the H.M.S. providing support for weak associations and the associations giving the H.M.S. local bases and support. This fact was not lost on the society's supporters. One article in the Home Missionary Magazine in 1820 openly discussed the mutual benefits of cooperation between the society and the associations and in 1821 David Bogue of Gosport asserted that the H.M.S. was needed 'because the county associations have not strength enough and property to extend the gospel ...'<sup>173</sup> The North Bucks Association welcomed the new society in 1820 and within a couple of years was cooperating in the work of two of its agents.<sup>174</sup> That same year the Hertfordshire Union and the Surrey Mission affiliated to the society and auxiliaries were formed in Southwest London, Coventry, Wiltshire and exploratory visits were made to Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.<sup>175</sup> Several associations followed the example of the

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171. P., May 2, 1832.

172. J. Massie to Joshua Wilson, June 15, 1838, C.L.Mss.II.c.39. See also H.M.M. (1835), pp. 30,41,149,208; C.M. (1837), p. 93. It is interesting to note in the H.M.M. that most of the individuals connected with the H.M.S. and most of the churches that contributed to its operations were Congregationalist. See the proceedings of the Annual Meeting in H.M.M. (1821), p. 184.

173. H.M.M. (1820), p. 235; (1821), p. 189.

174. North Bucks Association, Annual Report (1820), p. 22; (1822), p. 19.

175. H.M.M. (1820), pp. 49,90,203,216.

Kent Association which met in July 1828 and agreed to a plan 'to render the Association more efficient as a county HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY...' <sup>176</sup>

In spite of its close connection with the Congregational community the H.M.S. continued to assert its catholic character in principle and practice. The society's agents were instructed not to evangelize in territory already catered for with an evangelical ministry, Anglican or otherwise. <sup>177</sup> Furthermore, the society's mission stations were to operate on the 'fundamental principle.' When the Northwest London auxiliary was founded in 1821 William Thorn extolled the 'liberal principles' of the society and concluded that 'the age of sectarian narrowness was in great measure passed by ...' <sup>178</sup> During the troubled 1830's the leaders of the H.M.S. took great pains to re-emphasize its catholic character. At the annual meeting in 1832 William Henry painted a picture of the moral and spiritual desolation of the country in order to 'disarm every feeling of hostility towards any section whatsoever of the Christian church.' Thomas Thompson, the secretary who only reluctantly conceded to the later merger with the Congregational Union, 'rejoiced in the nonsectarian character of the society ... (and) entertained the warmest regard for their excellent brethren in the established church, who cooperated with them.' <sup>179</sup> In his address the following year John Clayton junior pointed out that 'Union on such principles attracted the attention of angels ...', a theme that was picked up in 1834 in John Morison's widely acclaimed address 'Displace not! Disturb not! the Glory between the Cherubim.' Morison used the image of the two cherubim on either side of the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant as an illustration of Church and Dissent on either side of God's great work in home missions. 'Let conformists and nonconformists be still the true cherubim ... The glory has always been between the twin angels of

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176. H.M.M. (1828), p. 270.

177. H.M.M. (1827), p. 300; (1836), p. 35.

178. H.M.M. (1834), p. 157; see also (1821), pp. 91,225.

179. H.M.M. (1832), p. 198, 199.

conformity and nonconformity. Neither cherub has received or retained it alone.' And then to apply his point in the contemporary climate of hostility Morison pointed to the continuing value of the old evangelical consensus:

Let it be so still. Why should it be shifted or shaken? ... No new question has displaced our old faith. Even the new questions are only valuable, as their results involve the spread of the gospel. Neither the ascendancy nor the equality of churches is worth contending for, on its own account. Either would be a curse if it hindered, or did not help in, the evangelisation of the world ... Look at HOME! What but union of heart and hand, can fill its villages with the gospel, and its cottages with the word of God.

This was difficult to work out in practical terms but the H.M.S. soldiered on and in 1837 elected as its chairman the voluntarist Anglican Sir Culling Eardley Smith. He reasserted the catholic principle in such a way that more consistent churchmen would have disapproved. Where there was no evangelical ministry in the parish church it was the duty of all good Christian people to provide their own.<sup>180</sup>

The H.M.S.'s policy was severely strained by the pressure it was under from the Establishment. In the pages of the Home Missionary Magazine there were numerous reports of opposition and harassment from local incumbents who resented the society's intrusion into their parishes. Closely related to this was the fear on the part of the society's supporters of the growing influence of 'Puseyism' within the Church of England.<sup>181</sup> The H.M.S. came to see itself, as expressed in a letter from Thomas Thompson to John Blackburn in 1839, as the bulwark of Protestant liberty against the encroachments of Rome.<sup>182</sup> This was further complicated by the education controversies of the 1840's. But perhaps most challenging to the catholicity of the H.M.S. was the denominationalization of home missions generally. The Home Missionary Magazine noted the founding of the Church Home Missionary Society in 1835 by printing the report from the Anglican evangelical Record

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180. H.M.M. (1833), p. 191; (1834), p. 157; (1837), p. 85.

181. H.M.M. (1841), pp. 253, 276, 293; (1842), pp. 89, 265; (1843), pp. 34, 86, 112, John Waddington, Surrey Congregationalism (1866), p. 133.

182. Thomas Thompson to John Blackburn, April 18, 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/100.

which described the H.M.S. as 'under the management of Dissenters' and pointed out the impracticality of its catholic principles in regard to the formation of churches 'separated from the community and communion of the Church.'<sup>183</sup> The Congregational commented in a review of Hugh McNeile's Lectures on the Church of England that the H.M.S. was 'more for the sake of the Church, than that of the country or the Gospel.'<sup>184</sup> Significantly Richard Cope of Cornwall was calling for a distinctly Nonconformist home missions society in order to meet Anglican competition.<sup>185</sup> When the Church Pastoral Aid Society was founded the next year Thomas Thompson welcomed the prospect of cooperation and 'holy rivalry' between evangelicals. Perhaps a more accurate reflection of the thinking of many Dissenters was to be found in the succeeding article in the Home Missionary which pointed out that C.P.A.S.'s regulations 'exclude it from the places which want the gospel most.'<sup>186</sup> As we will see in a later chapter this process soon transformed the H.M.S. into a Congregational society, though not without some resistance.

The early history of the London City Mission, unlike the H.M.S., illustrates both the tenacity of the evangelical ideal and the many sectarian obstacles that lay in the way of its realisation. To some extent the several city missions established in various cities in the late 1830 's were attempts to overcome the entrenched sectarian differences that had developed and to renew the attack on the common enemy. At the beginning of 1837 the Evangelical Magazine, always one to see signs of unity, warned its readers that evangelicals were 'in no small danger of being alienated by the influence of party spirit.' For that reason it was happy to commend the new L.C.M. when it was founded later that year as a means of uniting all Christians.<sup>187</sup> Other nondenominational city missions also appeared, founded on the same basis as the L.C.M.

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183. H.M.M., (1835), p. 153.

184. C.M., (1841), p. 78.

185. Richard Cope to Thomas Wilson, May 28, 1838, C.L.Mss., GB.5 (8).

186. H.M.M. (1836), pp. 125, 133.

187. E.M., (1837), p. iii (preface), 292.

The interest in city missions and the willingness to cooperate even in a time of sharp sectarian awareness was largely due to the overwhelming challenge to the churches of large unchurched city populations.

David Naismith came to London in 1835 to establish a city mission on the same pattern as the one he had started earlier in Glasgow.<sup>188</sup> We have already noted the broad evangelical foundation of the L.C.M. Considering the growing importance of ecclesiastical questions it was not surprising that regulations had to be set down in order to maintain the L.C.M.'s neutrality on these matters. Early on the Mission's agents were instructed:

That this is a leading principle of the Mission, that its character is not controversial; and under no circumstances shall an accredited Agent of the Society be at liberty to hold a meeting for discussing the peculiar tenets of any religious community without first receiving the sanction of the managers in writing.<sup>189</sup>

The problem, however, was not so much with the Mission's agents as with its supporters. In an attempt to discourage sectarian squabbling the Committee decided that the annual meeting for 1836 would be largely devotional. The speakers were reminded:

to avoid all allusion to sectional differences and that they be requested in no instance to tell the meeting what section of the Church of Christ they belong - it having been already abundantly praised that Christians of different communions sought and can even in these times work together ...<sup>190</sup>

Ironically the constitution was changed in 1837 and the Committee divided between Anglicans and Dissenters, each having ten members. There was to be three secretaries: one Anglican, one Dissenter and a layman of unspecified persuasion. The examination committee had four of each, and each candidate for the position of agent was to be examined by at least two Churchmen and two Dissenters.<sup>191</sup>

188. Kathleen Heasman, Evangelicals in Action, p. 35.

189. L.C.M., Committee Minutes, 'Letter of Instruction to Agents,' May 20, 1835. For the Nottingham City Mission see Nottinghamshire Association, Annual Report (Nottingham 1839), N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/6.

190. L.C.M., Committee Minutes, Oct. 4, 1836.

191. Ibid., March 17, 1837.

As with the other nondenominational societies there was inevitably some discontent. The Committee expressed concern in 1839 with movements in Congregationalist circles that seemed to undermine the position of the L.C.M. In December 1839 they discussed remarks made in the Congregational Union prize essay on lay-agency, Jethro, by one of the Mission's strongest supporters, John Campbell. Reference had been made to the L.C.M. and the possibility of a denominational effort on the same lines. The Secretary corresponded with the Committee of the Congregational Union and received a reply that satisfied him as to the union's intentions. More serious was a correspondence in the Patriot in 1840, 'proposing a new society among the Congregationalists - & among the Baptists, - or that the Home Missionary Society should take up London denominationally.'<sup>192</sup>

The attitude of Anglican members more seriously threatened the operations of the L.C.M. Evangelical Anglicans were under pressure to sever their links with Nonconformists and only support the home missions of the Established Church. Taking the offensive Thomas Fowell Buxton defended the L.C.M., denying that it was 'opposed to the Church of England,' and suggesting that the Church needed all the help it could get. And A.F. Johnston, M.P., highly commended the work of the L.C.M. 'as well calculated to form a connecting link between the population and the clergy', and he was happy 'to have met on the same platform men of different denominations...' While the Rev. R.B.P. Kidd felt that 'no instrumentality appears more suitable than that of the Clergy of the Church established in these realms' for evangelizing the masses, he nevertheless felt 'able to work with Nonconformists' since he regarded 'all congregations of Christian Dissenters as Churches.'<sup>193</sup>

Just prior to the constitutional changes of 1837 the Committee received a letter of resignation from Mr. Robbins, one of the Anglican examiners. In

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192. Ibid., Dec. 16, 1839; Jan. 20; Nov. 30; Dec. 3, 21, 1840.

193. L.C.M. Magazine, (1836), p. 62, 64, 152.

a subsequent meeting between the Secretary and Robbins it was found that two other Anglicans, Baptist W. Noel and J. Rodwell, 'had signified their determination to withdraw also.' The Committee requested that all three meet with the Mission managers 'to state their opinions as to the best way of carrying on the objects of the mission.' The point of grievance was not stated, but it appears to have been the dominance of Dissenters on the Committee. Thereupon the constitution was altered. What peace was won was soon lost. In late March 1838 both Robbins and Rodwell resigned, leaving only Baptist Noel and P. Hall as the Anglican examiners. A sub-committee was set up to find replacements before Anglican confidence was eroded further. In the meantime the Anglican press, particularly the evangelical Record, stepped up its criticism of the L.C.M. and Bishop Blomfield of London instructed his clergy not to attend the L.C.M. prayer meetings and expressed his disapproval of the L.C.M. as a whole. Early in January 1839 another Anglican, the Rev. G. Garwood, resigned 'with the greatest pain.' He did not point out his reasons and indeed commended the Mission for having 'carried out (the) principles of its constitution with impartiality & without reasonable offense to (Chris)tians of any persuasion.' Such lack of criticism seems to point to pressure being imposed from above. Another reason for Anglican disaffection appeared in the Record in February in the form of a letter from the Rev. Rodwell in which he criticized the L.C.M. The Mission committee sent Capt. Harcourt, an Anglican lay member, to interview Rodwell and it transpired that 'he did not leave the Mission because he knew that it worked prejudicially, but on a/c of the Union of Churchmen & Dissenters which he actively disapproved - not only w(it)h (the) more 'violent Dissenters', but with Dissenters in general.'<sup>194</sup> Rodwell's attitude touched the nub of the controversy. The issue was not over the bias of the L.C.M., but over the principle of cooperation. Baptist Noel, though initially hesitant, stayed with the L.C.M. and became one of the

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194. L.C.M., Committee Minutes, March 8, 1837; March 28, 1837; April 18, 1837; March 5, 1839; Jan. 1, 1839; March 5, 1839.

leading advocates of united evangelical effort. His book on the subject not surprisingly received a hostile reception in much of the evangelical Anglican press and was warmly welcomed in the *Nonconformist*.<sup>195</sup> The L.C.M. survived because of people like Noel who held tenaciously to the ideal of evangelical unity.

The uneasy cooperation found in the L.C.M. well expressed the modus vivendi that prevailed by the mid-century in English evangelicalism. There was no longer the optimistic hope that cooperation and unity were possible without reference to ecclesiastical polity and principles. Instead, among Congregationalists, issues of polity became vital points of reference and identity within the congregations. Pastors began to instruct their flocks in the dissenting principles that had for so long been neglected. In 1833 John Sibree delivered a series of lectures to his congregation, apologizing for the need to do so, but pointing to the need of the times. Where once he would have called for united evangelical action, now he sounded a different tune:

I am more firmly persuaded than ever, that the diffusion and very existence of pure Christianity in the earth, are essentially connected with the grand principles of Protestant Nonconformity.

Dissenters had for too long been silent and had neglected their principles for fear of being charged with bigotry. Sibree desired unity, but not at the expense of truth. The superficial unity produced by the various societies had resulted in Churchmen being less than Churchmen and Dissenters less than Dissenters, and a failure to deal with the real source of disunity - the Established Church.<sup>196</sup> We will now turn to examine how Congregationalists sought to reaffirm the 'grand principles' of Dissent by a more comprehensive doctrine of the voluntary character of the church and society and by consolidating these principles in the form of the Congregational Union and its related organizations.

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195. Baptist W. Noel, The Unity of the Church (London 1834).

196. E.R., (1833), N.S. V, p. 269f.

CHAPTER IIDOCTRINE AND DISCORD: THE VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE AND THE CONGREGATIONAL WAY

At the heart of the political and social activity of Congregational Dissent in the 19th century was its understanding of the church and its place in society. Congregationalists persistently pointed out that it was for the voluntary character of the church that they dissented from the Church of England. While formally united in doctrine, on points of ritual, polity and, most important of all, the connexion with the state, Church and Dissent parted ways. In this chapter I want to argue that the voluntary doctrine of the church was central to the life and faith of the evangelical dissenting communities and therefore to their political activity. I do not intend to recount the political and ecclesiastical history of the period except insofar as it relates to the development of the voluntary principle. Rather, I will concentrate on how leading Dissenters, and particularly Congregationalists, formulated the voluntary principle and on what they saw as its salient features. The concept of the voluntary church had, of course, deep roots in the dissenting Puritan tradition, but it was only after 1815 that its political aspect came into prominence. Dissenting apologists increasingly saw the deficiency of merely pragmatic Dissent and sought to express a more comprehensive doctrine of the church. The repercussions were a more clearly delineated boundary between evangelical Anglicans and Dissenters and a clearer ideology for dissenting political activity. While Dissenters were by no means united on all the details, nor even on the tactics or practical outworking, there was nevertheless a discernible vision of free men and voluntary institutions within a liberal and pluralistic society.<sup>1</sup>

Congregationalists were formally committed to varying degrees of voluntarism at the turn of the 19th century. In practice, however, a good

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1. The importance of the doctrine of the church in Protestant Dissent has been relatively neglected by many historians who have tended to emphasize the social and political developments. Behind these developments was an ideology, or perhaps a theology, that had been developing since the 17th century and came to a substantial, if not brilliant, fruition in the 19th century.

deal was obscured by the stronger feeling of evangelical unity in faith and action. In the same section of his History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century in which he set out his famous thesis on evangelism and revolution, Elie Halevy pointed to the reason for this quietism:

As their interest in theological polemics had cooled, they had lost their old taste for discussion, their former love of argument. And as their prejudices in favour of ecclesiastical autonomy weakened, their individualism in politics weakened simultaneously ... During the first fifteen years of the 19th century only isolated and eccentric individuals among the Nonconformists demanded either a reform of the constitution of the national Church in conformity with their ideas, or disestablishment and equal right for all denominations.

Like his thesis on revolution, Halevy's account of Nonconformist quietism can be challenged. We will see that the root ideas behind the later voluntarist polemic were still to be found in several quarters. True there was a premium on evangelical catholicity, but it was at the expense of sharp debate and not at the loss of the rationale for Dissent. The shift that came after 1815 was away from exclusively theological and ecclesiastical concerns to a more political expression. Yet the political implications of Dissent were not missing in the earlier period, nor the ecclesiastical in the later period. After 1840, for example, there was a renewed interest in church order and polity. G.I.T. Machin is more accurate in his assessment. Before 1815 Dissenters were generally moderate, shocked into quietism by the 'Church and King' mobs of the 1790's and kept so by the Napoleonic wars, but they were slowly being goaded into action by political activity calculated to strengthen the Church of England.<sup>3</sup> More than anything else it was the challenge to the pastoral concerns of the dissenting communities that moved the Dissenters to take up the cudgels of controversy.

The leading moderate Dissenters are often pointed to in this period

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2. Elie Halévy, History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century (London 1960), vol. I, p. 423. Halevy's jibe at the Nonconformist middle-class despising the labouring class from which they came is unfair and inaccurate.
  3. G.I.T. Machin, Politics and the Churches in Great Britain (Oxford 1977), p. 14.

as exemplifying the dissenting spirit. These men were indeed the princes of the dissenting pulpits, but they were neither typical nor uniform in their views. The Clayton family, mentioned in the last chapter and presided over by John Clayton senior, were known for their undogmatic and accommodating Dissent.<sup>4</sup> John Clayton worked with John Newton, a leading Anglican evangelical of 'Amazing Grace' fame, in founding the theological academy at Newport Pagnell. The emphasis was on 'faith, life and spirituality' without reference to church polity and it was hoped 'to unite and coalesce the respectable Dissenters and Methodists.'<sup>5</sup> This tradition remained at Newport Pagnell and it is interesting to note that a student was expelled from the academy as late as 1847 when he spoke at a meeting on disestablishment.<sup>6</sup> Yet John Clayton himself held to firm voluntary principles. When at theological college in the 1790's he had debated with himself the merits of conformity and nonconformity, and finally opted for the latter as most scriptural. Micaiah Towgood's Letters to White were instrumental in convincing him.<sup>7</sup>

John Sherman of Surrey Chapel in London was of a similar cast of mind as Clayton. His biographer, Henry Allon of Union Chapel Islington, noted that his nonconformity was never of 'a vehement or constraining character.' Nevertheless he acted consistently on those principles when called upon. While he would have easily conformed in his youth, by 1843 he openly supported the moderate and broad-based Evangelical Voluntary Church Society.<sup>8</sup> His opposition to the State Church was more pragmatic than theoretical, forged by events and the growing alienation of evangelical Dissenters from a national church tainted by Tractarianism. Like many moderate Dissenters he was concerned more for reform and an adjustment of the ecclesiastical polity of the nation than for an out-and-out

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4. T.W. Aveling, Memoir of the Clayton Family (Oxford 1867), p. 191; John Waddington, Congregational History (London 1869-80), vol. IV, p. 627.
  5. Waddington, History, I, p. 628.
  6. Frederick William Bull, 'Newport Pagnell Academy,' T.C.H.S. IV, (1909-10), p. 305.
  7. Aveling, Clayton Family, p. 31.
  8. Henry Allon, Memoir of the Rev. James Sherman, including an unfinished autobiography (London 1863), p. 111.

attack on the Establishment and the pursuit of religious equality:

I object as an individual, to the alliance of the Church and the State, on this ground - viz. the difficulty of the Church in reforming itself. No corporate body ever reforms itself; if it be reformed it must be from without. The state of the Church of England at this time appears to me to be very alarming. I cannot, as a patriot, look upon it as a State Church without the greatest distress.

Sherman was particularly concerned about the injustice of a state endowment of religion and the unfair advantage this gave to the Church of England.<sup>9</sup>

William Jay's opposition took the same pragmatic turn. He disliked the state connexion, but was tolerant of various forms of church polity. Although Jay was the pastor of a Congregational church, he was personally inclined to a loose form of presbyterianism and did not object to episcopacy on the lines of the 17th century Archbishop Ussher of Armagh. 'None of them are absolutely perfect,' he wrote to his children, 'and none of them are entirely defective ... In consequence of this, I would never regard the differences of the truly godly as essential; and though I have had my preferences, they were never anathematizing or exclusive.'<sup>10</sup> Yet even Jay occasionally had to protest some forms of state intervention in religion.<sup>11</sup> A latter day example was Newman Hall, Sherman's successor at Surrey Chapel, who recalled dissenting from the conventional voluntarist line while a student at Highbury College in the 1830's. At his interview he was asked by the committee about his attitude towards the Establishment and replied, endangering his prospects, 'I think the Government should give official support to religion, and I do not approve the opinions and conduct of the political Dissenters.' His remarks did not go down well with Principal Halley, who concluded, 'He's only young; he does not understand the question. He'll improve when he has come to us.'<sup>12</sup>

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9. Ibid., pp. 112, 209.

10. William Jay, Autobiography, (London 1854), ed. George Redford and J.A. James, p. 165.

11. William Jay, An Attempt to regulate the claims of the Christian Ministry (London 1818, 2nd edition).

12. Newman Hall, Autobiography, (London 1898), p. 36.

More typical perhaps of the dissenting leadership, at least up to 1840, were men like John Angel James of Birmingham, George Redford of Worcester, Thomas Raffles of Liverpool and John Ely of Leeds in the country and Andrew Reed of Wycliffe Chapel, John Leifchild of Craven Chapel, John Stoughton of Kensington Chapel and John Pye Smith of Homerton College in London. These men and others like them were committed Dissenters, but restrained and moderate in their demands. Their position was neither an easy one nor black and white. The London ministers particularly came under a good deal of pressure in the late 1830's to take a more distinct line on the Dissenters' grievances and on the disestablishment of the Church of England. Nor was the boundary between moderates and radicals all that clear. The Congregational leadership contained within itself all varying shades of voluntarism and commitment to political action. It was in the area of political tactics and timing that the greatest division came. While Congregationalists had a reasonably united vision of the world they sought, they argued among themselves concerning what roads to take to get there. This was, for example, the point at issue between Robert Vaughan, principal of Lancashire Independent College and editor of the British Quarterly Review, and George Hadfield, the radical Manchester solicitor.<sup>13</sup> Congregationalists were never entirely satisfied with the political implications of their ecclesiology.

The voluntary doctrine of the church was known and held by early 19th century Congregationalists. The classical expression of it was Micaiah Towgood's A Dissent from the Church of England fully justified, first published in 1746 and thereafter going through many editions. Popularly known as Towgood's Letters to White, we have already seen how this book influenced the young John Clayton. His basic thesis was that Christ was 'the only Lawgiver in his Church' and that the Church of England

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13. Archibald Jack to John Arundel, n.d. (around 1846), C.L. Mss. 31.

in its polity and in its connexion with the state denied this. This doctrine meant that 'no man, no body of men upon earth, has any authority to make laws, or to prescribe things in religion, which shall oblige the consciences of his subjects.' Not only was the Church of England a political institution that constrained the private judgment of men, but it was unscriptural in its liturgy and rites. Towgood also sought to ward off the accusation that the Dissenters were schismatics and that the Puritans of the Cromwellian era had not been voluntarists and had recognised the legitimacy of established religion. The separation of Dissenters from the Church of England was justified because the Act of Uniformity of 1662 had sought to coerce private conscience and had forced the hand of the ejected ministers. It was 'a separation ... founded upon christian and just principles.' At stake was the freedom of the congregation which Towgood held to possess the right to choose its own pastor.<sup>14</sup> This exposition of Dissent established the two pillars of voluntarism that later writers used in their polemics against the Church of England - the theological objection to Anglican polity and liturgy and the ecclesiastical objection to the State Establishment. Each of these objections would be confused with and at varying times emphasized over the other.

Another popular exposition of the voluntarist creed was Samuel Palmer's Nonconformist's Catechism. The first edition was published in 1773 and the 29th in 1890. The catechitical form had the advantage of conciseness, order and easily remembered arguments, and though Palmer set a pattern for later writers his catechism was never really surpassed. Like Towgood, Palmer opposed the Establishment on the two grounds of polity and the state connexion. This was apparent from the introductory section. Question one asked, 'What are the grand principles on which

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14. Matthew Towgood, Dissent from the Church of England fully justified (London 1809, 11th edn.), p. 98.

the Protestant Nonconformists ground their separation from the Church by law established?' The answer came:

The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience, in opposition to all human authority in matters of religion; the supremacy of Christ as the only Head of his Church, and the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice.

He went on to argue that while all men are called to obey the government, in religion every man ought to judge for himself, since every man must render an account of himself to God.' To the question, 'What are the principle things in the Church of England on which the dissent from it is founded?', Palmer gave this answer:

1. Its general frame and constitution as national and established by law.
2. The character and authority of certain authorities appointed in it.
3. The imposition of a stated form of prayer, called the Liturgy, and many exceptionable things contained therein.
4. The pretended right of enjoining unscriptural ceremonies.
5. The want of liberty in the people to choose their own ministers.
6. The corrupt state of its discipline.

With some modification those six points touched on the issues raised by later writers.

The specific point at issue was the character of the Church. Question and answer seven provide a classic definition of the church as conceived in Congregational circles:

- Q. What do the Nonconformists believe to be the Scriptural idea of the Church of Christ?
- A. A congregation, or voluntary society of Christians, who commonly meet together to attend gospel ordinances in the same place. And they think every such society has a right to transact its own affairs according to the judgment and conscience of the members thereof, without being accountable to any but Jesus Christ, or restrained by any laws but His.

This was the concept of the church that Congregationalists were at pains to preserve and protect. Thereafter Palmer dealt with the offices and ceremonies of the Church of England. This aspect need not concern us in our discussion, but we should note what Palmer said on the choice of ministers as this was an important part of the Congregational way. After

lambasting the system of patronage in the Establishment he asked how Nonconformist congregations were to be supplied with clergy:

They think that no person whatsoever is authorized to impose a minister upon others, but that every congregation has a right to choose its own and to judge the lawfulness of his calling by comparison with the Scriptural marks of a faithful minister of Christ.

Palmer concluded that the Church of England was imperfectly reformed from Popery, that those within the church who had the means should strive to continue to reform it and that Nonconformists should be glad and thankful for their liberty in separation. And finally:

... they ought to be steadfast in their adherence to the cause of Nonconformity, zealous in maintaining the great principles of it, and active to support and increase it by all such methods as are consistent with peace, liberty and charity; still making it to appear that their zeal is principally directed to the cause of practical godliness, and the interest of Christ at large, even in the Church from which they dissent ... If the principles of dissent from the National Church be of any importance ... surely those Nonconformists act a<sub>15</sub> very inconsistent part, who are indifferent to them...

Palmer's call to consistent and vigilant dissent was clear and intended to inform and rally the faithful to their neglected principles.

At the end of the century in 1796 William Graham published his influential Review of Ecclesiastical Establishments in Europe.<sup>16</sup> Graham's purpose was not so much to teach the principles of Dissent as to record the abuses of establishments, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, across Europe. Coming when it did at a time of revolutionary paranoia Ecclesiastical Establishments was a bold undertaking.

The most common form for inculcating the principles of Dissent was the ordination services of Nonconformist pastors. Ordinations were the festival occasions for the dissenting community, bringing together members

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15. Samuel Palmer, The Nonconformist's Catechism in Sermons of the Great Ejection (London 1962), 201ff.

16. William Graham, Review of Ecclesiastical Establishments in Europe (London 1796).

of many churches in the area to hear prominent preachers. Their importance was related to the centrality of the pulpit in Nonconformity and the esteem in which its ministers were held. The services themselves were long and in addition to prayers and hymn-singing usually contained three or four sermons - minimally an introductory discourse, a charge to the congregation, a charge to the new minister and the sermon of the new minister. The introductory discourse almost invariably dealt with the principles of Dissent and church polity. Collections of ordination sermons abound which bear witness to the way opportunity was taken to instruct the people in the faith of the fathers. John Humphreys's discourse at the ordination of Frederick Hamilton at Brighton in 1799 illustrates this. The distinction between the spheres of church and state was clearly spelt out: the civil magistrate had no authority to interfere in the affairs of the church:

The sacred community is a voluntary society acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ alone, as its head, and united together to promote his glory and its own edification. Its laws and ordinances are purely spiritual.

The same idea was put across by Samuel Bradbury four years later at an ordination in Winchester presided over by William Roby of Manchester. No apology was needed for the old custom of discoursing on the nature of the church since 'many dissenters, in the present day, willingly remain ignorant of the principles of dissent from the establishment. They know only that they were brought up dissenters.' Bradbury covered a good deal of ground, including a history of the ancient church and the repercussions of its establishment under Constantine. Like Humphreys he distinguished the two separate realms of church and state. There could be no alliance:

Civil government was not intended to interfere with religious concerns. Its design is to secure our property and lives. It has no more to do with the kingdom of Christ, than the kingdom of Christ has to do with it. Both ought to be kept distinct.

No human authority, prelate or monarch, could assume dominion over the church and could not make and impose laws on it. The church 'is spiritual and needs not the aid of worldly policy.'<sup>18</sup>

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17. John Humphreys, Introductory Discourse (London 1799).

18. Samuel Bradley, Introductory Discourse (Manchester 1803), pp. 3, 6.

These early examples were echoed later in a sermon by John Pye Smith, tutor at the theological college at Homerton, in a sermon at the ordination Henry F. Burder to the ministry of St. Thomas's Sq. church, Hackney in 1814. The church was a gathered community of saints and as such a voluntary one. Members join 'from their own deliberate and free choice; and that they continue in membership and in the exercise of their duties with the same freedom.' This was pure Congregational voluntarism, though Smith was quick to point out its essentially spiritual character:

...religion is a PERSONAL and vital principle. Our churches are not formed as political units. Legislators cannot make Christians ... The very ground and form of our churches, the qualification for membership, the duties and the privileges of members - all rest upon the absolute necessity of inward personal godliness.<sup>19</sup>

This emphasis on the spiritual character of Dissent was a recurrent feature of the Nonconformist apologetic in the decades ahead, a fact that is easy to forget when looking at the Dissenters' political activity. As we will see even the highly political Anti-State Church Association went out of its way in 1846 to reiterate this cherished truth. The highly esteemed Joseph Fletcher was at pains to make this point at an ordination in Salford in 1820 before an illustrious company including William Roby, Robert Winter, Thomas Raffles, Robert Alliot and Richard Slate. Fletcher inveighed against the political claims of the establishment and its presumption to tamper with spiritual matters. The dissenting community was different:

We are non-conformists not for any political reasons, but because we object, on what we conceive as scriptural grounds, to the alliance of the church and the state, because such an alliance is unnecessary for the interests of religion, dangerous to the simplicity and purity of its institutions, an encroachment on the rights of those who cannot conscientiously conform to the requisitions of the privileged sect...<sup>20</sup>

From these ordination discourses it is evident that there was a subtle shift from the classical Congregational understanding of the church to the voluntarist position of the mid-19th century; that is, from a concern for the internal

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19. John Pye Smith, Introductory Discourse (London 1814), p. 7, 18.

20. Joseph Fletcher, Introductory Discourse (Manchester 1820), p. 18.

independence of the congregation to one that conceived that independence in relation to the society outside. The freedom of the church was both external and internal.<sup>21</sup>

Another forum for discussion of the nature of the voluntary church was the ministerial meeting or association. This institution took various forms, sometimes as a formal county association and other times as an informal fraternal as was the case in London. Addresses at these monthly associations usually dealt with doctrinal and pastoral problems, but some touched on the nature of the church. At one such meeting in London in 1817 George Burder preached on 'The Beauty and Glory of the Primitive Church.' Taking as his text the parable of the tares and wheat, Burder called for reformation in the Church of England. The need was great. 'Ambition seized the Clergy, as they were called, their princes became temporal princes; innumerable officers unknown to the New Testament, and a multitude of ceremonies invented by carnal wisdom were thrust upon the church.'<sup>22</sup> The next year Mark Wilks preached to the London association from Esther 3:8. That text itself is significant, describing as it does the persecution of 'a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people.' Wilks saw in the Church of England, and particularly in the episcopal visitation charges, 'the fires of bigotted, not to say, intolerant zeal.' This displayed itself in the civil penalties against Dissenters. But the question was not simply that of ceremonies and ritual, objectionable as they were. Rather:

... the question of ceremony becomes mixed with the highest questions of religious principle and moral obligation; and we cannot, my brethren, conform to a church which assumes a right to impose its decisions on others by civil sanctions; and secondly, imposes under these sanctions, ceremonies and discipline, which we believe to be contrary to the word of God.<sup>23</sup>

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21. See R.W. Hamilton, 'Ordination Discourse' in William Henry Stowell, Memoir of the Life of Richard Winter Hamilton (London 1850) p. 205f. On this external aspect of voluntarism: 'No ruler can compel per force a state of liberty; no sword can propagate just impressions of the respect which conscience deserves. The popular mind must be enlightened, and men be made capable of understanding and appreciating what they receive.' Hamilton saw in 1818 the voluntarist implications of education that later found expression in his Institutes of Popular Education, p. 206. See also Edward Williams, Charges and Sermons (London 1817).
22. George Burder, The Beauty and Glory of the Primitive Church (London 1817) p.22.
23. Matthew Wilks, Nonconformity (London 1818), pp. 2, 27.

This did not mean that Dissenters were disloyal and opposed the state. On the contrary, in 'maintaining this high and uncorrupted jealousy for the truth and the glory of the Redeemer, we feel that we are also the truest friends and the best supporters of the authority of civil government.' Wilks welcomed the zeal and piety of the evangelical party in the Church of England, but this did not hide the many things Dissenters had to suffer for their consciences. In particular he pointed to the burial laws, the imposition of the church rate and tithes and 'that foul stain, the sacramental test act.' With all these abuses, could Dissenters reconcile themselves to a national church that had entered into '... the willing barter of religious liberty, spiritual worship, voluntary association, elective pastorship and primitive discipline?'<sup>24</sup>

In 1821 James Bennett preached before the Associated Churches and Ministers of Yorkshire at the Nether Chapel in Sheffield. With his contemporaries Bennett emphasized the spiritual and unworldly character of the church, reminding his audience that 'religion was never placed by Jesus Christ under the administration of Caesar, but was kept entirely in the Saviour's own hands.' Bennett's immediate concern was for ministerial support. A church that was independent of both the state and of other churches had to support its pastor from free voluntary contributions that were the 'spontaneous effusion of a grateful heart.' This was the genius of the Congregational way over against the state system that depended on force and coercion for its sustenance.<sup>25</sup> As we will see this question of the church rate was to become central in the voluntary controversy of the 1830's and on. The issue touched on the hotly debated area of financial support for voluntary institutions and the extent to which a voluntary system could adequately provide for the religious and social needs of the population.

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24. Ibid., pp. 50, 117; Eclectic Review (1818) NS V, p. 487.

25. James Bennett, The obligation of churches to support their ministers, (Rotherham 1821), p. 20, 23.

Nonconformists were being challenged to expound their views by the threat that the State-Church alliance was posing to their own pastoral institutions. There were a number of Parliamentary measures designed to aid Anglican church extension in 1809, 1812, 1818 and 1824. Two acts of the Jamaica Assembly in 1809 effected missionary activity and Lord Sidmouth's bill in 1810 attempted to regulate itinerant preaching and conventicles. This more than anything else spurred the Dissenters into political activism and opened the way to the repeal campaign in the 1820's and voluntarist politics thereafter.<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly even moderate and temperate Dissenters were calling for greater conscientiousness in protesting infringements on religious liberty and in instilling the principles in the rising generations. R.W. Hamilton of Leeds challenged his hearers in a lecture at Heckmondwike College to be consistent and practising Nonconformists:

This is a cause of principles... It is a matter of conviction. But modern Dissenters are too much accidental Dissenters. They withdrew from an establishment, which they have never examined, and therefore cannot disprove. Family, custom, connections, are their only reasons for branding as unscriptural what they have never compared with Scripture; and as inexpedient what they have never weighed with expediency.

Hamilton desired to see greater catechetical instruction of children in Nonconformist principles without neglecting the basic evangelical doctrines.<sup>27</sup> The formally neutral Eclectic Review began to urge Dissenters to greater vigilance, regretting, in an article in 1814, 'that a considerable number of the practical Dissenters may be so incurious or uninformed in the history of their own portion of the Christian Church...'<sup>28</sup>

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26. See H.S. Skeats and C.S. Miall, History of the Free Churches (London 1891), p. 448. 336 petitions were gathered within 48 hours of the bill being published.

27. Stowell, R.W. Hamilton, p. 122ff.

28. E.R. (1814) 2nd S. I, p. 249.

By 1819 Josiah Conder, the Congregationalist editor, was urging his readers to give up the 'tenacity of a besieged garrison' and to launch out aggressively in claiming their rights. 'Protestant Dissenters,' a reviewer wrote, 'ought by this time to feel themselves secure enough and strong enough in their main position, the total independence of Christian Churches from the secular authority...'<sup>29</sup>

The examples of this shift in moderate dissenting opinion are manifold. In 1814 an anonymously authored book from the Anglican evangelical camp entitled the Velvet Cushion appeared that took a few sarcastic jibes at both Roman and Protestant Dissent. It was answered by two anonymous Dissenters in the Legend of the Cushion and A new Cover to the Velvet Cushion.<sup>30</sup> Of a more serious nature was Rowland Hill's Religious Freedom in Danger of 1816 which was concerned with the threat to dissenting worship posed by a bill in Parliament that would have raised the poor-rates levied on chapels. Hill, the most moderate and evangelical of men, argued that preaching was a charity and therefore should be exempted from the tax. He described several cases of 'oppression' and the experience of his own church at Surrey Chapel. The Eclectic was apologetic in its review, regretting that there 'should have been occasion to introduce such a subject to the notice of our readers' and expressing surprise at such examples of intolerance in the 19th century.<sup>30a</sup> The following year George Redford, minister in Worcester, published A defense of extempore prayer and Calvinistic preaching in which he sought to discuss two of the chief points of High Church criticism. Though he himself was writing in response to a tract by the Dean of Chester, Redford was critical of the way Dissenters tended only to write in reply to criticism and did not seek positively to present their case:

... the Dissenters of the present age have been almost silent on the topics of dispute between them and the Episcopalians; nearly all that has been written by the former has been in reply; whereas defence of the liturgy, and impeachments of extempore prayer, are found in almost every treatise and sermon that Episcopalians publish.<sup>31</sup>

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29. E.R. (1819) 2nd S. VI, p. 335.

30. E.R. (1814) 2nd S. I, p. 335.

30a. Rowland Hill, Religious Freedom in Danger (1816).

31. E.R. (1816) 2nd S. III, p. 221.

The Eclectic picked this up in its review of the book. Dissenters had to 'offer a defence of their own separation.' Accordingly Redford had written a lengthy critique of the Church of England, his chief objection being the lack of 'pure gospel' in Establishment pulpits. Over against this the dissenting churches stood in opposition to the hierarchy, prayer book and the 'foul alliance with the civil power.' Redford dismissed the claim of the Church of England to be obedient to Scripture by asking what of its obedience to the monarch?<sup>32</sup> Similar though somewhat milder in its criticism was William Jay's book An attempt to regulate the claims of the Christian ministry and Jonas Dennis's Gravamina Ecclesiae.<sup>33</sup>

About this time more systematic works were appearing that sought positively to expound the principles of Dissent. Palmer's Catechism was republished several times in the early 19th century and inspired similar endeavours. A new catechism was published in 1817 by R.M. Miller under the title of A Catechism on the nature of the Christian Church. Its spirituality and balance were commended by the Eclectic, the reviewer noting that too often Dissent was seen only as 'the form of polemical discussion.'<sup>34</sup> Several notable pastors were publishing books of instruction for their congregations. In 1817 Robert Winter's Pastoral Letters on Nonconformity appeared. Like many others he wanted to preserve the benefits of Christian unity without sacrificing important church principles. Evangelical unity, he said, 'cannot but be attended with favourable effects where the members of each denomination are well acquainted with the ground on which its own distinguishing views and practices are assumed.' Unfortunately such acquaintance was too little known among Dissenters and Winter charged parents with a 'culpable neglect' in not instructing their children.<sup>35</sup> The Eclectic pointed out in its review that Dissenters, even at

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32. E.R., (1817) 2nd S. IV p. 221.

33. William Jay, An Attempt to regulate the claims of the Christian ministry (London 1818, 2nd edn.); Jonas Dennis, Gravamina Ecclesiae (London 1819)

34. E.R., (1817) 2nd S. IV, p. 603.

35. Robert Winter, Pastoral Letters on Nonconformity (London 1817), pp. viii-ix; James Bennett, the History of the Dissenters during the last thirty years (London 1839), p. 221.

the price of union, should not compromise their principles or abandon 'any part of revealed truth.' A 'false candour' had become prevalent that simply confused issues and suppressed frank discussion. Both Winter and the reviewer pointed to the close attachments of many attendants on dissenting worship to the Establishment.<sup>36</sup>

John Angel James emphasized this last point in his well-known Christian Fellowship; or, a Church-member's guide, published in 1822 and republished in 1830. It was written as a hand-book on church polity and membership for the congregation at James's church at Carr's Lane, Birmingham. Like many evangelical Dissenters he was aware that there were many members of his church who were there more for the evangelical preaching than for any firmly held principles of nonconformity. James did not feel that the two were incongruous, but were rather complementary:

...there is far greater importance in the principles of dissent viewed in connexion with either the interests of vital religion at home, or the spread of the gospel abroad, than many persons perceive; and it is this importance, indeed, which constitutes their chief glory. The government of the church ought never to be viewed apart from its moral and spiritual improvement ...

This line of thought, that the principles of Dissent were of practical importance in those very areas that had been thought to be the preserve of a broader evangelicalism, was to become increasingly important in voluntarist thinking. It was part of the process of externalizing the voluntary community. James reaffirmed the voluntary nature of the church as a local community of visible saints. 'They are not,' he said, 'to be associated by act of Parliament, by ecclesiastical decree, or ministerial authority, or by any other power than that of their own unconstrained choice.' Such a church was complete within itself and any cooperation with other churches was purely voluntary. James was unsparing and comprehensive in his criticism of the Church of England, concluding, 'Away with that morbid sensibility which exclaims, 'It is of no consequence whether a man be a churchman, provided he be a christian.' Such a spirit is a conspiracy against the throne of truth,

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36. E.R., (1817), 2nd. S., IV, pp. 66, 68.

and is the first step toward a complete abandonment of the importance of right sentiments.' <sup>37</sup> The growing confidence of Dissent was seen in the Eclectic's review. It took Christian Fellowship both as a call to Congregational union as well as to greater integrity of principle:

Now, if we wish to see the dissenting community, as such bound up into more visible union, it must be by bringing more into view dissenting principles, by making them better understood, and by interesting Dissenters in them. God forbid that Dissenters should become more sectarian in their spirit! As their principles become more operative, they will rather become less so; for in proportion as a man holds fast what he himself deems right, will he feel able <sup>38</sup> to meet those of other opinions with candour and calmness.

Christian Fellowship was a harbinger of the future voluntary contest. Coming from the pen of one of the most respected and moderate of Congregationalists, it achieved a balance between Congregationalism's wider evangelical concerns and its own interests and values. For the next two decades at least Congregationalists would largely find the fulfilment of the older evangelical vision within their own institutions.

The definitive work in this period on voluntary theory was Josiah Conder's Protestant Nonconformity of 1818. The book became in subsequent years a touchstone for consistent moderate Dissent, partly, no doubt, because of Conder's prominence and his intention to produce a positive restatement of the Congregational way that avoided polemics as far as possible. Significantly Conder began by relating his subject to evangelical unity, pointing out that the 'unity of the Church of Christ is essentially connected with the spirituality of its nature.' It was this 'spirituality' that Congregational Independency sought to encourage and safeguard. The first volume dealt specifically with church polity, beginning with a discussion of the nature of laws and constitutions in human societies. While the state and other human associations were

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37. John Angel James, Christian Fellowship; or the Church member's guide (London 1830, 5th edn.), p. 3, 14. James later came to believe that he had expressed himself too unguardedly by criticizing some points of Dissent and thus opening himself to Anglican criticism. See R.W. Dale, The Life and Letters of John Angel James (London 1862), p. 119.

38. E.R., (1822), 2nd S. IX p. 333.

governed by humanly legislated laws, the church was in a different category since it was at one and the same time a human and divine institution. Conder, as a good Congregationalist, distinguished between the invisible catholic church and the visible local church. The church in its former sense, said Conder, 'in its genuine and most comprehensive signification, is not a human society; it is not susceptible to human government; its character is that of universality, and its members are attached to each other only by relations of a spiritual nature ...' But the church also consisted of local congregations placed within a larger human society and as such had to have laws to both govern itself internally and to order its relations with the world outside. These laws, however, were not arbitrary and expedient, but rather divinely sanctioned and therefore beyond the ken of any authority outside the community itself.<sup>39</sup> Conder went on to discuss the use of creeds, church officers and discipline. Naturally he gave a good deal of space to a discussion of the laws of admission to church membership, a subject that was crucial to the Congregationalists' understanding of the church. Since the church was 'an assembly of the professed disciples of Christ,' and such a profession was necessarily free and voluntary, it went without saying that no congregation could be forced to receive as a member someone unqualified for membership and that exclusion from membership was 'no infringement of his social rights.' This bore directly upon the divinely sanctioned purpose of the church. 'The purpose for which a society is formed,' said Conder, 'imposes a necessary restriction upon its reception of members by rendering some qualification in reference to that purpose a pre-requisite to admission.'<sup>40</sup>

The second volume was more particularly concerned with the implications for Congregational order of a state establishment of religion. While some gloried in Dissent, Conder saw it as 'a mere negation, an accidental predicament'<sup>41</sup>

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39. Josiah Conder, Protestant Nonconformity (London 1818), pp. 55, 60, 73, 77.

40. Ibid., pp. 79, 91.

41. Ibid., p. 605.

Dissent was not the natural expression of Congregationalism in a perfect world, but faced with an establishment Congregationalism could do nothing but dissent:

The grounds of Nonconformity are purely religious. It is a question of practical duty, which considerations of political expediency can have no share in determining. Nevertheless, when Dissenters are called upon to answer for the consequences of their opinions, as they bear upon the interests of society, and when what are imputed to their opinions as political consequences, are charged upon those who hold them as the ultimate object of their intentions, it becomes necessary for them, in self-vindication, to meet the difficulty in all its extent, and to defend their principles on the lower ground of expediency.

Conder pinpointed the problem in the differing conceptions of Churchmen and Dissenters as to the role and limitations of the state. Both agreed that the state had the right to 'ordain ... whatever it judges conducive to the good of society's, but unlike the advocates of the Establishment Conder did not include in this 'the right of conscience' and therefore religion. To substantiate this Conder resorted to the natural law argument of 'the inalienable rights of men as moral beings' and to Scriptural warrant. 'The New Testament,' he wrote, 'contains no direction or command on which it can be founded. The sacred writers abstain altogether from discussions relating to the politics of states, everywhere teaching us, that the kingdom of Christ 'is not of this world'. ' This last text, from John 18:36, was a favourite one of Nonconformists writers. Yet even granting the legitimacy of an establishment, on what grounds and with what competency, asked Conder, did the state decide on the truth of any particular creed? This question became acute in the area of religious education where the state, concerned for the spiritual welfare of the young, had to make a decision as to what was taught in the schools. The result was that the state could either choose a wrong religion and therefore consign the population to error or it could along with its instruction instil political disobedience for the sake of conscience.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless Conder believed that there was a sense in which an establishment was justified. Here he seemed

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42. Ibid., pp. 495, 504, 514-516.

unwilling to break completely with the political theory of the 17th century Independents who held to an establishment or to go to the logical conclusion of his own voluntarism. In the broadest sense religion could 'be established, by legal protection, and by endowments, to the extent that the Protestant Dissenters of this kingdom are now established, without the erection of an exclusive ecclesiastical incorporation, similar to the English hierarchy.' In a more particular sense it was the duty of the magistrate 'to do his utmost both to protect and to promote the true religion.'<sup>43</sup> How this 'philosophical' view of the establishment related to his arguments as to the competency of the magistrate to decide on the merits of religion Conder did not adequately explain. It would seem, however, that he was working within the spectrum of Protestant denominations and would have excluded Roman Catholics, infidels and pagans from any consideration within an establishment. As was seen later in the Maynooth controversy of 1845, many Protestant Dissenters were as much loyal Protestant constitutionalists as they were conscientious Dissenters.

The fact remained that English Protestant Dissenters still suffered civil penalties for their beliefs in 1814. Conder particularly objected to the Test Laws and to the compulsory support of the Establishment through the church rate and tithe. On the former, objection was taken to the misuse of the sacrament in making it a test of office. 'The ministry of the Gospel,' said Conder, 'was not instituted with any view to civil utility; it is a means of a purely spiritual character...' The question of compulsory support did not answer the purposes for which it was contrived. Conder estimated that about half the population attended a dissenting place of worship and asked that if that was the case whether the Church of England merited such broad financial support from men and women who also supported their own clergy? He did not advocate withholding the rate on the part of Dissenters, but wondered if some other and more fair arrangement could be worked out.<sup>44</sup> More fundamental was the principle behind the church rate which was the granting of 'a bounty upon a particular species of religious instruction...

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43. Ibid., pp. 508, 509.

44. Ibid., pp. 547, 553, 583.

for the production of a corresponding profession of belief.' Any such bounty was justified only insofar as it achieved the ends intended, and it was this Conder questioned. Taking the example of an oath, he pointed out that any man of religious principle could swear a binding oath as long as he was sincere. Was it necessary then officially to inculcate a particular creed? 'A system of belief is good exactly in proportion as it is true; it is influential only in proportion as it is believed. On this account a system of belief chosen by the individual himself, even although a false one, is more likely to have the desired effect to make him a good member of society, than the profession of the true religion imposed upon him by another.'<sup>45</sup>

As would be expected the Eclectic praised Conder's book. Significantly the reviewer concentrated on Conder's fundamental principle of sola scriptura. He believed that a good deal of the tension generated by the 'Nonconformist controversy' could be reduced if all concerned kept to the sufficiency of Scripture. Having said that, however, he proceeded to criticize Anglicans for appealing also to tradition and expediency. To admit that the New Testament was not sufficient 'would be to compromise the grand principle of Protestantism.' Conder's strength was that he sought to 'place Christianity, as it was at the beginning, entirely on its own naked merits, as a revelation of mercy to sinners, and add nothing to its Divine authority to enforce its claims...'<sup>46</sup> Protestant Nonconformity was a landmark in the dissenting apologetic leading up to the campaign to repeal the Test Laws. It marked a new positive self-confidence, unafraid to be self-critical, but unflinching in the assurance that its principles were sound and therefore would be vindicated.

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45. Ibid., p. 528.

46. E.R., (1819), 2nd S. VI, pp. 335, 405. Reviewed in this same article were Robert Winter's Duty of Christian Churches in reference to the admission of members; Ralph Wardlaw's Scriptural Duty of Churches illustrated; H.F. Burder's Obligation to the observance of the Lord's Supper and Samuel Sleight's The Importance of peace and union in the Church of Christ. It is interesting to note the tightening up of church practices and the renewed emphasis on Congregational distinctives.

Two further examples will suffice. The resolutions passed at the founding of the London Congregational Union in late 1826 expressed not only confidence in Congregational polity, but also its claim to the success and advance of evangelicalism. Congregationalism had helped to preserve truth and piety and had been 'effective in producing a truly liberal, unsectarian and general cooperation, for the diffusion of evangelical religion ...' Then came the clincher:

But it cannot be denied that amidst all the laudable and successful activity, the direct interests of that community, the principles of which supply so much the vigour and efficiency which mark their general and extensive operations, are comparatively neglected and disregarded. Every cause, however remotely connected with the promotion of evangelical religion, at once meets with support; but the adoption of practicable measures for increasing and strengthening the Churches of our own faith and order, by a zealous and affectionate cooperation, has never been sufficiently regarded as the immediate and imperative duty of the Churches of London and its vicinity.<sup>47</sup>

A review article in the Eclectic the next year effectively made the same point. Under the title 'The Evils of Dissent', the article reviewed several Anglican books, some by evangelicals, that were highly critical of Dissent. The reviewer made the point that in spite of its claims to the contrary, Dissent was performing many of the responsibilities that the national church should be doing but was not. What was more, if Dissent ever did decide to rejoin the Church the Church would then truly be in danger from being radically transformed from within.<sup>48</sup> Such was the new confidence of Dissent.

With the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 the climate changed and the voluntary question became even more central to Congregationalist thinking. In the years around the repeal campaign minds were concentrated to a large extent on the specific question of the Test and Corporation Acts. Subsequently there was a lapse of several years before controversy flared up again; largely no doubt because the Dissenters expected further redress of their grievances. When this failed to materialize by 1833-34 Nonconformist attitudes

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47. C.M., (1827) p. 53f.

48. E.R., (1828) N.S. XXIX, p. 110.

had hardened and feelings had become embittered. Thereafter dissenting and Anglican attitudes polarized around the ideas of a free church and an establishment.

Voluntarist literature multiplied during the 1830's, often feeding and fed by local controversies such as that at Durham with James Matheson or that between John Pye Smith and Dr. Samuel Lee. Symptomatic of the hardening attitudes was the discussion surrounding the republication of John Angel James's Christian Fellowship in 1830. What particularly raised Anglican ire was James's new preface which lodged sharp criticism at the Anglican Church. Claiming apostolic sanction for 'displaying evils in churches,' he sought 'publicly and fearlessly' to reveal 'the unscriptural nature of the alliance between church and state.' James's purpose was twofold: to vindicate the position of Dissent and positively to set out its claims. On the first point he recognized that 'political events had widened the breach between them (Church and Dissent) and made their separation more unfriendly than ever.' But while there were extreme elements among Dissenters, they certainly did not deserve the 'obloquy and hatred' poured out by the Establishment. Nonconformists were simply holding fast to their ancient confession of the freedom of the church and it was on this, a religious issue, that discussion should centre. That was why accusations of political Dissent were unfounded. While all Dissenters believed that the separation of church and state would strengthen the state and purify the church, no one in holding forth their principles wanted to 'touch a pinnacle of one of its churches, or destroy a prayer book, or insult a prelate, or silence a single clergyman, or appropriate to themselves a fraction of the tithes.' But while James eschewed active political opposition to the church he did advocate denominational activism, without apology and in the face of Anglican encroachments and hostility:

Let us then for the pure love of extending the gospel seek to extend our denomination... It seems to be the present policy of the church of England, to build us down, and build us out. Its members suppose that our congregations continue with us, only because there are no episcopal places to receive them; and acting upon this mistake, they are multiplying chapels and churches, many of which are erected in the immediate vicinity of ours ... To prevent this we must keep pace with them in this blessed spirit of building ...

We must catch the building spirit of the age. We must build, build, build. This should be our aim, more places of worship. It may be well enough to form protective societies for the defence of our civil rights, but our best defence under God<sup>49</sup> is our numbers. Numbers carry weight and influence.

James's reference was of course to church extension, a subject that we will look more closely at in a later chapter. It would be a mistake to see Congregational response to the claims of the Establishment only in terms of politics; it was much more extensive than that and involved the strengthening of the whole denomination. This was James's vision and perhaps the more inciteful of Anglican anger since it was calculated to challenge the Establishment's own institutions.

It was for evangelicals in the Establishment that James reserved some of his strongest criticism and firmest challenges. With a degree of irony he said that he was thankful 'for the increase of truly evangelical and pious ministers, in the Church of England; for the multiplication of places of worship, built for them on voluntary contributions; and for the consequent increase of true piety ...' But while evangelical Dissenters welcomed these developments, the question of 'the scriptural authority of state churches' remained and could not be passed over. James called his fellow evangelicals within the Church of England back to their common Protestant principle of 'sola scriptura.' Even more disheartening, however, was the manner in which the controversy was carried out. 'One of the darkest features of the times,' said James, 'and one of the most odious and astonishing effects on party feeling, even in some who profess to be under the influence of evangelical sentiments, is the spirit of untruthfulness and slander in which many indulge when speaking and writing of their opponents.'<sup>50</sup> If that was the case in 1830, it was to be even more so in the years ahead.

Christian Fellowship received a hostile reception in the Anglican press, most notably in a review article in the British Magazine entitled

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49. J.A. James, Christian Fellowship, pp. 193ff, 202, 313.

50. Ibid., pp. 201, 207.

'The Church of England and Dissent'. James replied with his fullest account of the Congregationalist position in Dissent and the Church of England. Again his working principle was the sufficiency of Scripture, by which he examined the rites and polity of the Church in considerable detail. In particular he attacked the theocratic pretension of the Establishment through which, over against the voluntary churches, it sought as a church to comprise 'the whole of the nation.' More importantly, however, was the effect the fact of establishment had on the Church of England itself and the way in which it militated against the Biblical character of the church. Establishments:

deprive the church of its essential character, as a spiritual, voluntary and independent body; they take from Christians the indefensible privileges of an unrestricted right of private judgment, of voluntary association, and of electing their own ministers; they tend to corrupt the motives of simplicity and spirituality of the clergy by the love they hold out of ambition, earthly mindedness, and the lure of secular pomp.<sup>51</sup>

Bishops, patronage and plural benefices were all too many examples to substantiate James's point. Nor was he uncritical of his own tradition, but he believed that when balanced Dissent far outweighed the Church in purity and truth. The system made for this:

The evangelical ministry, and all those means by which the diffusion of piety is carried on among us, are sustained by the very principles of our denomination. The mode of introducing candidates for the ministry into their office; their education; their election to the pastoral office by the people; the manner of their ordination; their dependence for their support on the free-will offerings of the flock; all so far as the pastorate is concerned, is adapted to keep up the tone and vigour of piety among us.<sup>52</sup>

In these words James summed up the Congregationalists' concerns in their controversy with Church and State. It was not an end in itself, but a means of seeking the evangelical freedom of the church.

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51. John Angel James, Dissent and the Church of England (London 1830) in Works (1862), pp. 46, 63.

52. Ibid., p. 149.

Perhaps the clearest expression of James's balance between evangelical and voluntarist concerns was his Pastor's Address to his People on the Principles of Dissent and the Duties of Christians of 1834. His arguments were much the same as those in his previous works; what was now significant was his reason for addressing his Carr's Lane congregation on this particular subject. Previously he had addressed them on the subject of revivals, but because the question of the church had become 'a momentous one' he felt constrained to address them on the subject of churchmanship. What concerned James was that many in his congregation were 'occupied ... with the doctrines of grace and the pursuit of salvation' but had remained ignorant 'of the reasons of their separation as dissenters'. At such a time as the present, he went on, 'no pious or even patriotic man should think that he can be neutral; a judgment must be formed, a side taken, and every legitimate weapon appropriated and employed.' Positively this meant a good grounding in the principles of Dissent and negatively a critical understanding of the Establishment. Not only was the Established Church inefficient in adequately providing for the religious needs of the population, but it was also a system characterised by inequity and oppression. It was 'a mere system of craft' by which the church was 'corrupted by its alliance with the state, by the introduction of great numbers of unsuitable ministers, who led by ambition ... press to her altars, although totally unfit to edify her members.' Evangelicals were, in contrast, a poor minority whose shining values were shadowed by the system within which they remained. In conclusion, James looked forward to the day when the Church of England would be disestablished and when all denominations would be put on an equal footing. That would be 'the trial of independency.'

Like most of his Congregationalist colleagues James was convinced of the superior virtues of the Congregational way and was convinced that it would be vindicated in the future. 'By removing religion from the jurisdiction of the civil power,' he wrote, 'and resting it for support and promulgation on the arm of God, and the voluntary zeal of its friends, we clear it from all suspicion, and by maintaining its spiritual purity increase its general efficacy ... It must stand clear of the suspicion of

being the tool of princes or the trade of priests.'<sup>53</sup> This theme of the efficacy of voluntarism in the free market of religion was to gain greater currency among voluntary writers in the following decade. Significantly James had come to see the establishment question to have higher priority than that of evangelical unity. In later years he would enter wholeheartedly into the founding of the Evangelical Alliance and R.W. Dale, his biographer and successor at Carr's Lane, noted his silence on ecclesiastical questions during the last years of his life.<sup>54</sup> But in the '30's James felt strongly that the defence, promulgation and practice of voluntary principles were closely related to the maintenance and interest of the evangelical faith. Looking forward to that day of free religion, he wrote, 'Then it will be seen whether Congregationalism can sustain the conflict with episcopacy, or be swallowed up in its imposing grandeur and extent. Men begin to cry out for a general union of Christians... Such a union I am afraid is a vision, bright and beautiful indeed, but never to be realized until the millenium.'<sup>55</sup>

Other voluntarist literature was also appearing. Of a similar nature with James's pastoral works was John Morison's The Church: A Manual intended as a present to candidates for Christian fellowship. Morison was not an accommodating sort and the voluntarist accents in the book were clear and direct. The church was 'a society of persons drawn together into holy fellowship, by the simple force of divine truth, acting on their wills and convictions, with 'no principle of human law', 'no secular powers or penalties', and 'self-supported by the free-will offerings of its members.'<sup>56</sup>

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53. John Angel James, A Pastor's Address to his People on the principles of Dissent and the duties of Dissenters (London 1834) in Works (1862), pp. 222, 235, 258. James made use of considerable statistics pertaining to the inefficiency of the Church of England. For example, he claimed that the Establishment provided only 300,000 seats for a population of 1,700,000 within an area of 8 miles of St. Paul's in London. In Birmingham there were 13 Anglican churches, and 30 Protestant Dissenting chapels.
54. R.W. Dale; The Evangelical Revival and other Sermons (London 1880), p. 21.
55. J.A. James, Pastor's Address, p. 258.
56. John Morison, The Church: A manual intended as a present to candidates For Christian fellowship (London 1836), p. 14.

In Durham James Matheson, the local Congregationalist minister and secretary of the Durham and Northumberland Association, stirred up the hornet's nest in 1830 with an ordination sermon entitled, 'Voluntary Churches the true Churches of Christ.'<sup>57</sup> This emphasis on the essential voluntarism of the church found expression in George Redford's The Church of England indefensible published in 1833. Both Matheson and Redford sought as far as possible to separate the religious and political issues involved in the controversy; that is, between their objections to the intrinsic constitution of the Church of England whether established or free, and their objections to it in its present established circumstances. As Redford put it:

... the controversy does not concern the national religion, but the circumstantials of public worship - the peculiar position in which religion is placed by the secular power - the tithes for the support of a Christian ministry - the supremacy of the crown over church affairs - the authority<sup>58</sup> of Parliament above all ecclesiastical authority, etc., etc.

This separation was necessary in order to be spared the accusation by their opponents that Dissenters were intent on subverting the Church of England as a religious institution. William Tyso made the distinction in 1835 in his Voluntary Principle, pointing out that God never intended the church to be supported by coercive means.<sup>59</sup> John Burnet did the same in a published lecture originally delivered before the Voluntary Church Society and entitled 'The Separate Province of Divine and Human Government.' Taking as his text Luke 20:25 ('render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's'), Burnet argued that the Government's role was to protect life and property and that politicians could not 'form from their own minds a religious system, neither is it the province of civil government.' When the province of the church was violated the result was confusion and declension, whereas the separation of church and state brought order and prosperity.<sup>60</sup> One further example will

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57. C.M., (1830), p. 650.

58. George Redford, The Church of England indefensible from the Holy Scriptures (London 1833), p. 21.

59. Joseph Tyso, The Voluntary Principle (London 1835), p. 1.

60. John Burnet, The Separate Province of Divine and Human Governments (London 1835), p. 3.

suffice. In 1831 William Newman's Protestant Dissenters' Catechism appeared and, though written by a Baptist, the book was one of the most popular expositions among Congregationalists of their principles. The first section was concerned mainly with the historical position of Dissent, but the second dealt with the church and its voluntary nature. This was the element missing in the constitution of the Church of England, as was spelled out in response to the question, 'Where does the Constitution of the Church of England differ from the account of the Church in the New Testament?' The answer was:

The Church of England is not a voluntary society, the whole nation being considered members of it, whether professedly or not ... (Dissenters) are equally destitute of the liberty, being all obliged in an absolute uniformity in faith, worship, and discipline.<sup>61</sup>

The obligation Newman complained of was the penalties suffered by the Dissenters. These were the teeth of the Establishment, which in the mind of Dissent voided the Church of England's claims and against which Dissent would fight.

Some of the literature took up the specific grievances that Dissenters campaigned against in the years following the repeal of the Test Laws. In 1833 Andrew Reed published his Case of the Dissenters, in a letter addressed to the Lord Chancellor in which he protested against the attitude of both the Church and the Government toward Dissenters. They were treated as second class citizens, deprived of their rights and had for too long suffered their claims being ignored. 'That the Dissenters have patiently endured these evils,' wrote Reed, 'while there was no remedy for them, is to their praise; if they should choose to endure them a moment longer, it would be to their disgrace.' He went on to list six grievances: the registration of marriages, births and deaths; the marriage laws; the burial laws; exclusion from the universities; the compulsory support of the Church of England in the form of

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61. William Newman, The Protestant Dissenter's Catechism (London 1831, 20th edn.).

the church rate and tithe; and finally, the 'State preferring one Denomination of Religion before others.' The effect of such a policy was injurious to religion in general and to the Anglican Church specifically.<sup>62</sup> The philanthropic Congregational layman Joshua Wilson wrote in the same year the Claims of Dissenters, particularly addressing himself to the subject of the church rate.<sup>63</sup> With his customary largesse he distributed hundreds of copies to his lay and clerical friends.<sup>64</sup>

Few Congregationalists were more identified with controversy or represented the deeper voluntary concerns of the Congregational community than Thomas Binney, the popular minister of King's Weigh House Chapel in London. Binney was by no means an extremist in these matters, but like many of his colleagues he was compelled to declare his colours in the heat of controversy. His writings were numerous and usually in pamphlet form. Among them was Two Letters, published in 1832 under the pseudonym of 'Fiat Justitia.' The first letter was addressed to a Churchman who had taken exception to Binney's strictures on the Church of England, particularly that the Church contained Socinians; and the second letter was written in reply to a Dissenter who thought Binney was too moderate. Binney did not believe that any system, not least Congregationalism, existed by divine right or was without mark or blemish. But he did believe that the Church of England was 'unscriptural and ruinous' and wanted to see the evangelicals within it secede and join the ranks of Dissent. The episcopal and establishmentarian character of the Church of England made it 'sectarian and schismatical' and therefore insuperably objectionable to Nonconformists.<sup>65</sup> It is important to note that Binney was reintroducing into the controversy objections to polity as well as to the Church of England's established status. This was to be seen in a number of other polemical works, reflecting the growing understanding among Congregationalists of the comprehensive significance of their own polity and order. Binney's own 1834 sermon entitled 'The Ultimate Object

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62. Andrew Reed, The Case of Dissenters (London 1833), pp. 8, 10, 37.

63. Joshua Wilson, The Claims of Dissenters (London 1833).

64. See Joshua Wilson Papers in the C.L.Mss., H.e.7. J.A. James wrote to Wilson: 'I most admire the temperate and the firm tone which you have given to our claims. You might have included admission to the universities among them.' John Angel James to Joshua Wilson, March 9, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

65. 'Fiat Justitia,' Two Letters (London 1832), p. 47.

of the Evangelical Dissenters' went far in this direction. The ultimate object was simply the unity of the Protestant faith, which would only come about when there was a system of equality among all denominations and the cessation of hierarchical distinctions. Such unity would permit diversity and not make for a uniform society and would find agreement in the fundamental Protestant doctrines.<sup>66</sup> Occasionally Binney had to defend against charges brought by Anglican antagonists, particularly that Dissent was schismatic.<sup>67</sup> Binney's defence was twofold. Negatively, Dissenters had been forced out of the Church of England by repressive legislation in 1662. Positively, it was evangelical Dissent that practised consistent, thorough and catholic Protestantism; whereas the Church of England maintained extra-biblical practices and unchurched other Protestant Christians. With his customary forcefulness he stated the difference dividing Church and Dissent in a sermon before the Monthly Meeting of ministers in London in 1835:

A church is composed of persons who, considered simply as men and as Christians, agree in the belief of certain articles of faith, and are united under a form of ecclesiastical order. - An establishment is this same body considered, not simply as men and Christians, but as Christians of a certain nation put in possession of the property devoted to religious purposes of which the nation has the control, and as regarded as presenting that form of religion which is to be taught and recognized as that of the country.

Binney was never a friend of the defenders of the Establishment, but what good-will there was was shattered by his famous 'soul-destroying' speech of 1833. The sermon, entitled 'On the Duty of Dissenters in the Present Crisis', was delivered at the stone-laying of the new Weigh House chapel and was immediately picked up by the religious press.<sup>68</sup> Dissenters were restless with the slow progress being made to redress their grievances and relations between Church and Dissent had reached their nadir. Binney

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66. Thomas Binney, The Ultimate Object of the Evangelical Dissenters avowed and vindicated (London 1834).

67. For another reply to this charge see John Hoppus's Schism as opposed to the unity of the church (London 1839). Hoppus was the first professor of History at University College, London; T. Binney, Dissent not Schism (London 1835), p. 32, C.M., (1835), p. 124.

68. P, October 4, 1833.

was able to catch the mood of Dissent and the increasing hostility towards the Church:

I have no hesitation about saying that I am an enemy of the Establishment; and I do not see that a Churchman need hesitate to say that he is an enemy to Dissent ... It is to me, I confess, a matter of deep serious religious conviction, that the Established Church is a great national evil, that it is an obstacle to the progress of truth and godliness in the land; that it destroys more souls than it saves.<sup>69</sup>

The last phrase was the one that incited an Anglican reaction that lasted through the decade. He went on to say that he desired Church reform, but not in the way envisaged by most Churchmen. Binney's reform would be radical, including: 'the entire and absolute dissolution of Church and State; the Establishment as such terminated; the episcopal community to become the episcopal denomination.' In the coming conflict no one could be neutral. Few, however, got far beyond the infamous phrase and the sermon was really the gauntlet thrown down in the face of the Establishment. After 1833 Dissenters were in earnest not only to readjust the relationship between the Anglican Church and the Nonconformist bodies, but also to seek disestablishment in practice as well as theory.

A strong reaction met these strong words. The editors of the hyper-evangelical Record and the more moderate Christian Observer condemned Binney's remarks; the Observer responding that, 'As a system, we believe Dissent to be an evil greater than we can express.' State Churchmen, both English and Scottish, such as Thomas Chalmers, Daniel Wilson, Henry Budd, Charles Bridges and Henry Melville issued pamphlets and statements opposing Binney's sermon. The controversy centered largely on defining the terms used in an attempt to arrive at what Binney actually said or meant to say; a situation made worse by the variable ways in which words such as 'establishment' and 'church' were used by the different parties involved. Neither side was willing to impugn the spiritual character of

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69. P, October 30, 1833, p. 370; 'John Search,' What? And who says it? (1837) passim. This contains a collection of defences and replies to Binney's address and thesis.

its opponents and therefore resort was made to speaking of 'systems,' but it was clear from the dissenting side that more than the alliance with the state was involved and that they thought episcopal hierarchy was part and parcel of the Establishment. Binney came very close to uttering the unutterable, though both he and his defenders insisted that he had referred to the Establishment as such and not to the Church of England as a body.<sup>70</sup> The controversy was still going on at the end of the decade. 'John Search' collected his materials on it in 1837 and the Congregational reviewed the literature in a long article in 1839 that Robert Ainslie offered to send to a number of Anglican clergy.<sup>71</sup>

The most celebrated exchange on the voluntary question came in the form of two notable series of lectures delivered in turn by Thomas Chalmers, the celebrated Professor of Systematic Theology at Edinburgh and leader of the evangelical party in the Church of Scotland, and Ralph Wardlaw, minister and principal of the Congregational Glasgow Theological Seminary. Chalmers had been invited in 1838 by the Anglican Christian Influence Society to deliver a series of lectures in defence of the Establishment. The lectures were delivered at the Hanover Rooms before large audiences that included members of the Anglican hierarchy and the Royal Family, as well as the disapproving young William Gladstone.<sup>72</sup> Chalmers's approach to the question was eminently pragmatic, born of his own experiences in Scotland in pressing for urban church extension. He argued not so much on theological grounds as on those of the need to reach

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70. 'John Search! What? p. 39; 'John Search', 'Strike, but Hear': a correspondence (Letters to the Christian Observer), (London 1837).

71. C.M., (1839), p. 107; Robert Ainslie to John Blackburn, 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P.

72. See Philip Magnus, William Gladstone (1954), p. 36. Gladstone, like many Churchmen, disapproved of Chalmers's pragmatic defence of the Establishment. In 1839 he published The Church in its relation with the State in which he argued that the church was the conscience of the state and that it was within the domain of the state to decide upon religious doctrinal issues. Gladstone's style and argument were difficult and the book received a mixed reception. The Eclectic disagreed with it from start to finish and the reviewer thought that the Reformation might have to be fought over again. Nevertheless he thought Gladstone had treated his subject 'both fully and fairly and not without ability.' E.R., (1839), 4th S.V, p. 365.

the ends in view. Therefore his concern was for what he called 'spiritual husbandry' - the guided spread of Christianity throughout the country by means of the historical and state-supported parochial system. In his first lecture he said:

It is our purpose to demonstrate, that this invaluable property of a full and universal diffusion belongs to a National Establishment; and to make it palpable, by all the lights of history and human nature, that it never is, and never can be, realized either by the Voluntary System, or by what has been termed the system of Free Trade in Christianity.

This was the point at issue between the defenders of the Establishment and the voluntary Dissenters - how was the greatest amount of Christian good to reach the greatest number of the population? Chalmers argued strongly that only an establishment could do what was necessary. He welcomed voluntary efforts and praised the good done by agencies such as the largely Congregationalist Home Missionary Society, particularly as they filled the gaps left by the deficiencies of the state system. Nevertheless, the voluntary system was not sufficient; it could neither sustain its own apparatus nor provide for the areas of very real need. The system was too tied to the resources of its adherents.<sup>73</sup> Chalmers particularly questioned the concept prevalent among Dissenters at this time of free trade in religion. The thesis went, reflecting liberal economic principles, that like commodities and goods in the open market, provision for religious and charitable needs could be met in the free exchange and competition of religious ideas and institutions. Chalmers believed that the analogy was inaccurate, pointing out that goods and services were not being exchanged but rather being freely given to the recipients. A case in point was support for home and foreign missions.

In opposition to free trade voluntarism Chalmers posed his own theory of endowed establishments. Separating the question from doctrinal considerations, he defined an establishment as 'a sure legal provision for the expense of its ministrations.' The theory was comprehensive and attempted

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73. Thomas Chalmers, Lectures on the Establishment and Extension of National Churches (Glasgow 1838), pp. 5, 56, 72. Chalmers admitted some weaknesses in establishments, but wanted to see reform rather than abolition.

to take the carpet from under the opponents' feet. He elaborated:

...whenever we have a certain legal provision for the ministrations of Christianity, there we have an Establishment of Christianity in the land... This idea of an Establishment may or may not imply what is commonly meant by a connection between the church and the state. If it be the state that maintains the church, we admit there is such a connection - whether this maintenance be the ancient and original gift, or a grant renewed every year, and which may or may not be recalled by the civil government. But the truth is, that the maintenance may have originated in other sources - in the bequests of individuals, or numerous private acts of liberality, prompted by the affection of the pious for the Christian good ... To realize our idea of an Establishment, it is enough that there be legal security for the application of certain funds to the maintenance of Christian worship or Christian instruction in a country...<sup>74</sup>

Chalmers's definition was novel and somewhat ahead of its time. Similar arguments would be put forward by J.N. Figgis and others after 1900 in connection with the claims of the remnant Free Church of Scotland.<sup>75</sup> From his definition Chalmers deduced the effective establishment of all churches, whether they enjoyed a direct gift from the state or the benefits of income from a trust. Unfortunately Chalmers's definition was almost too wide for his purposes, for when he came to address himself to the questions of territorial establishments and the manner in which the state chose a particular religion to endow, he had to fall back on the old arbitrary arguments that Dissenters traditionally attacked. His arguments were basically utilitarian: if there was a wise Christian ruler he would choose Christianity because of its superior benefits, otherwise 'enlightened men and women' could decide on the relative merits of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. He begged the question of other religions or of the distinctions between denominations.<sup>76</sup> Nor did Chalmers completely dismiss voluntarism, but rather distinguished between two kinds: internal and external. Internal voluntarism was the sort advocated by Dissenters and consisted of giving in return for the ministrations of a particular local church. External voluntarism, on the other hand, was expressed in giving to supply ministrations for others. This latter tied in closely with his

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74. Ibid., p. 6.

75. J.N. Figgis, Churches in the Modern State (London 1913).

76. Chalmers, Lectures, pp. 110, 120.

definition of an establishment in that whether through a gift or tax a legally secure endowment was being made for the support of religion.<sup>77</sup>

Chalmers's lectures were not well received by Dissenters. While they welcomed his tolerant attitude, they disliked his theory of endowed establishments. The Eclectic described it as 'a definition ... which takes it out of the class of things extant into that of hypothetical abstractions.'<sup>78</sup> The official response of Dissent came in the form of an invitation to Ralph Wardlaw to answer Chalmers in a similar series of lectures the following year. In his lectures, entitled National Church Establishments examined, Wardlaw expressed his substantial agreement with Chalmers's definition of an establishment, but disagreed in its application to private endowments. This failure to distinguish between state and private endowments was Chalmers's weak point which Wardlaw in turn sought to turn on its head. The definition, said Wardlaw, was 'a confounding of things that are naturally diverse from one another, and means the aspect of an anxiety ... to bring the principle of an Establishment into as near an assimilation as possible to the principle of voluntarism ...'<sup>79</sup> The reason, of course, was because of the efficacy of the voluntary system; but more was at stake than that. Wardlaw strongly affirmed that the controversy also involved important principles and was not simply a matter of ends and means:

The principles relative to the spiritual character of the kingdom of Christ we consider holding a place second only to the essential doctrines of salvation themselves - in close affinity with them - and bearing most directly and necessarily<sup>80</sup> on their effectual maintenance, exhibition, and advancement.

In his principled churchmanship Wardlaw had greater affinity to his High Church antagonists than to the pragmatism of his fellow evangelical Chalmers.

77. Ibid., p. 76.

78. E.R., (1839), 4th S. V, p. 1.

79. Ralph Wardlaw, National Church establishments examined (London 1839), p. 29. See also W. Lindsay Alexander, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Ralph Wardlaw (Edinburgh 1856), pp. 369, 373ff. For a response to Wardlaw see John Hoppus to Joshua Wilson, no month or day, 1839 in the C.L.Mss. II.c.34.

80. Wardlaw, National Church, p. 206.

His own theory was in the classic mould. Denying Chalmers's distinction between internal and external voluntarism, Wardlaw grounded the voluntary principle in the separate domains of church and state. This meant voluntary support. 'We hold the church's support and extension,' he said, 'to be the church's own concern... In its operation within the church, our principle is simply that of the strong helping the weak; of those who have imparting to those who have not...' <sup>81</sup>

Wardlaw was only the chief of several writers that had been influencing English voluntarist thinking through the decade. Around 1830 the Voluntary controversy flared up north of the border, the voluntarists drawing support from within the ranks of Scottish Congregationalism and the nonconforming Presbyterian bodies such as the United Secession and the Relief Synod. <sup>82</sup> While the circumstances of the Scottish controversy were very different from the English, two important aspects bore directly on English Dissenters. First, the Scottish voluntarist societies set a pattern for the organization of English agitation. We will look at this in more detail below. Second, the literature of the controversy was widely read in England. Among the most influential books was John Ballantyne's A Comparison of Established and Dissenting Churches, first published in 1829 and often referred to by later voluntary writers. Central to Ballantyne's thesis was the limited spheres of church and state. While recognizing the need of some superior power to prevent social disorder, Ballantyne believed that the state's power should be limited as far as possible to 'protection from foreign and domestic injury' and not interfere in fixing wages, subsidizing manufactures, agriculture and religion. The question was not that the state had some right to do good, but that 'beyond protection, this interference about some things would not do good, but evil.' <sup>83</sup> Ballantyne's concern was specifically for the church, whose relationship with the state he saw as

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81. Ibid., p. 39.

82. John Macleod, Scottish Theology (Edinburgh 1946), p. 249; Skeats and Miall, History, p. 476; W.L. Alexander, Wardlaw, p. 312; G.I.T. Machin, Politics and Churches, p. 25.

83. John Ballantyne, A comparison of Established and Dissenting churches (Edinburgh 1830, 2nd edn.), pp. 41, 123.

one of cooperation within their special spheres. The Church, he wrote, 'would stand in the same relation to the State as any other voluntary association - and be entitled to the same protection - would owe the same obedience - would be distinct from it in ecclesiastical matters, but dependent upon it in political...' Church and state were not hostile to one another, but neither were they similar: they were founded on different principles, directed to different objects and breathed different spirits.<sup>84</sup> The conclusion, therefore, was that any form of coercion by the state in matters of religion was wrong, be it to enforce conformity or to exact support from dissenters for the maintenance of the worship and instruction of another denomination. The principle at stake was clear:

Religion is so much a matter between man and his Maker, that here, we should imagine, if anywhere, he has a moral right to think and act for himself... The truth of religion must be a matter of conviction and choice, or it is not religion at all. In so far as it submits to human jurisdiction, it loses its distinctive character, and becomes obedient, not to God, but to man.<sup>85</sup>

This was apparent in the subserviency of the clergy to ruling interests. The voluntary system, on the other hand, maintained the freedom of the church. The cornerstone of the system was the voluntary support of the congregation of its ministers; the effect being independence from the state as well as the closest affinity between pastor and congregation. Like other voluntarists of the time, Ballantyne was enchanted by the rather naturalistic efficiency of the system. 'It is merely,' he wrote, 'that species of general dependence, or rather the reciprocity of good, which constitutes the soul of human intercourse, and by which the welfare of everyone is promoted.' This was not least apparent in the fact that the voluntarily supported minister took a greater interest in his congregation on whom he depended than the established minister who was financially independent of his. This was reciprocated by the ability of the congregation to secure 'those talents which are most useful to ... edification.'<sup>86</sup>

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84. Ibid., pp. 57, 107.

85. Ibid., pp. 84, 107, 155.

86. Ibid., pp. 158, 167.

Finally, Ballantyne argued, the voluntary system had the general effects of promoting unity among churches, social order, public intelligence and charity and poor relief.<sup>87</sup>

Of a similar nature to Ballantyne were Andrew Marshall's Ecclesiastical Establishments considered of 1831 and Hugh Heugh's Considerations on the Civil Establishment of 1833.<sup>88</sup> It was, however, an earlier work of Wardlaw, Civil Establishments of Christianity that crowned the field of early voluntary literature and established his reputation as a voluntary polemicist.<sup>89</sup> Thereafter he was frequently invited to England to speak, giving the Congregational Lectures in 1833, and was approached several times to become the resident tutor at Rotherham and Spring Hill colleges. At home he carried on the controversy with Chalmers through the Voluntary Church Association, founded in 1835, and in the pages of the Scottish Congregational Magazine.<sup>90</sup> In its review of Civil Establishments the Eclectic Review expressed the attitude of the dissenting community towards the Establishment and indicated the direction in which Dissenters were moving. The reviewer pointed out that Scottish voluntarists did not only want the separation of Church and State, but also the 'abandonment and annihilation of every state provision, or endowment or any description.' Establishments had utterly failed, which, if the case in Scotland where the Establishment was more Reformed and the penalties for dissent much fewer, was all the more so in England. English Dissenters must take their cue:

An Established Church which does not meet the moral wants, secure the general revenue, keep pace with the growing intelligence of the people ... has ceased to merit its high distinction, and to fulfil the conditions upon which it obtained its monopoly. The Church is a popular institution or it is nothing.<sup>91</sup>

The Scottish voluntary controversy provided an opportune example for English Dissenters who were growing restless at the slow pace of reform

87. Ibid., 191f, 207.

88. Andrew Marshall, Ecclesiastical Establishments considered (Glasgow 1831); Hugh Heugh, Considerations on the Civil Establishment (London 1833). Heugh's pamphlet received a poor review from the Patriot which believed that he confused the two separate issues of establishments and endowments. Patriot, October 16, 1833. See also Hugh Heugh, Civil Establishments tried and found wanting (Liverpool 1839).

89. Ralph Wardlaw, Civil Establishments of Christianity (London 1833).

90. W.L. Alexander, Wardlaw, pp. 312, 320, 334, 342ff.

91. E.R., (1833), 3rd S. X, p. 71.

after 1833. But while there was considerable consensus on voluntary doctrine and on the need for the redress of grievances, there was disagreement as to timing and the extent of demands. It is difficult to divide Congregational Dissent into neat parties since there was considerable overlapping of interests and concerns, new issues year by year that demanded different responses and relatively little ideological diversity except in a few eccentric cases. There were, however, moderate and radical tendencies insofar as political activity was concerned. The moderates tended to be concentrated in London, perhaps because they were nearer the fountainhead of power and were also somewhat protected from the worst effects of the Dissenters' penalties. The radicals, on the other hand, usually came from the provincial centres of Dissent and through the 1830's became increasingly restless at the passivity of their metropolitan brethren. During the decade political initiative passed from the moderate London ministers to the radicals, marked in 1841 by the arrival of Edward Miall in London to found the Nonconformist and in 1844 by the formation of his British Anti-State Church Association. Even so, by that time many moderates had radicalized, many radicals became part of the London establishment and others were concerned about more important issues such as evangelical unity and doctrinal declension.<sup>92</sup>

The concern of many moderate Congregationalists was that attempts to go too fast in pressing the dissenting claims, as well as agitation to disestablish the Church of England, would only jeopardize the redress of their grievances and alienate evangelical Anglican feelings. This was apparent in the correspondence of James Scott with Joshua Wilson. In May 1832 he was looking forward to the passing of the Reform bill. 'But you & I,' he wrote to Wilson, 'Look on this event as the near (sic) commencement of a day ... of improvement in things both civil and religious in this country. We hope to see the church placed in that very ground in which Jesus of Nazareth left it.'<sup>93</sup> The bill was passed and Scott wrote to Wilson in the June 1833 imploring him to take steps for further reform:

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92. G.I.T. Machin, Politics and the Churches, p. 161; H.R. Martin, 'The Politics of Congregationalism,' unpub. Ph.D (Durham 1972), p. 315.

93. J. Scott to Joshua Wilson, May 18, 1832, C.L.Mss., II.c.34, item C17.

'I hope you will lose nothing by waiting till the next session of Parliament. Everything however ought to be previously arranged & in readiness in the way of petitioning this the whole of the United Kingdom ... As to my brethren in the West Riding some of these to my surprise will need prompting, but the great mass, both clergy and laity, are ardent voluntaries ...<sup>94</sup> Yet in September Scott was writing in a more subdued tone. He had been speaking with George Hadfield and had tried to reach an accommodation between Hadfield's more radical root and branch position and his own pragmatic one. He wished Wilson better luck, concluding, 'But do not let us perplex government by petitioning for things as widely different & perhaps it will be better not to attempt to grasp at too much ... but if we succeed in the things which you & I have talked about all else I feel certain must follow. Let us have our rights secured by Act of Parliament & if others choose to be episcopalians that is not our concern.'<sup>95</sup>

Ingram Cobbin felt that some of the voluntarist literature was 'liable to the charge of bigotry.'<sup>96</sup> John Haddon, minister of Castle St. chapel in London, disliked the direction of dissenting political activity. 'I cannot,' he wrote to Wilson in May 1834, 'as an individual bring my mind to approve those root and branch Measures which many are now so fond of recommending. Ours is not a sufficiently dissenting nation to justify the legislature in passing such measures as those for which prayers are made.' He would have preferred to see more attempts at persuasion through the medium of tracts and the work of voluntarist associations.<sup>97</sup> Wilson himself favoured a cautious approach. In a letter to an unknown correspondent he wrote of steps being taken on the grievances, cooperation with the United Committee and that the time was 'now or never' to get redress from Parliament. 'But let us not ask too much,' he concluded, ' - at any rate more than we are strictly entitled to ... as Dissenters. The Separation of Church & State,

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94. J. Scott to Joshua Wilson, June 21, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.34, item 517a.

95. Scott to Wilson, September 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.34, item 517b.

96. I. Cobbin to Henry Thompson, December 1833, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

97. John Haddon to Joshua Wilson, May 16, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

the expulsion of the Bishops from the House of Lords & I must add the extinction of titles - are not any of our peculiar grievances. We would not carry them & the attempt to do so would in my opinion seriously injure our cause.<sup>98</sup>

There were others, particularly from the country, pressing for more radical action. J. Christopherson enquired of Wilson early in 1833 as to what steps 'the Deputies are taking at the present crisis for obtaining entire freedom from all grievances which as Protestant Dissenters we have ...'<sup>99</sup> John Kelly of Liverpool informed Wilson that Dissenters there were agreed in refraining for the time being from pressing for disestablishment, but wanted to see some concrete action taken to find redress and to have dissenting views clearly and forcefully articulated.<sup>100</sup> R. Lettling of Matlock Bath had even more pronounced views. He was of the opinion that the grievances would not be redressed until church and state were separated. 'The conflict is begun,' he wrote, '& we should never rest till the spiritual dominion of the Redeemer in his own church is fully acknowledged.'<sup>101</sup> Joseph Turnbull, minister in Brighton, was happier with the 'decided' views of Manchester, 'the proper centre of the dissenting world', than with those of the Metropolitan leaders. A firm policy had to be followed out and the utmost care taken by Dissent in its relationship with its Whig patrons in Government. They had to be careful:

that we are not again conjoled out of our claims and rights. I deprecate the thought that the Metropolitan Dissenters should neutralize the sentiments and the efforts of their country brethren as they have hitherto done, by their equivocal language and conduct on the great question of an Establishment of religion.

Thereupon he waxed almost apocalyptic:

We require all the talent and unflinching determination of character & principle that we can obtain preparatory to and through the coming conflict. The Commonwealth times are returning and its great and momentous questions,

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98. Joshua Wilson to \_\_\_\_\_, February 27, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

99. J. Christopherson to Joshua Wilson, February 19, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

100. J. Kelly to Joshua Wilson, February 6, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.E.7.

101. R. Lettling to Joshua Wilson, March 15, 1834, C.L. H.e.7.

political and religious - which have lain  
 dormant ... the Kingdom of Jesus must triumph -  
 'He must reign' - and all Heads of the Church -  
 whether Popes or Kings, 'must be under his feet.'<sup>102</sup>

Finally, there was R.M. Beverley, a Congregationalist layman from Beverley in Yorkshire and one of the most vociferous critics of the London dissenting establishment. In late 1833 he returned home from London 'fearfully disgusted and discouraged by the miserable mismanagement of the Dissenters.' To his mind the Dissenting Deputies were a farce and could well be dispensed with. Referring to their place of meeting, Dr. Williams's Library in Red Cross Square, he lamented, 'The poor Red-cross heroes will continue protesting and advertising, making speeches & passing resolutions, till no one but the printers Devils in the Patriot Office will deign to read their proceedings.'<sup>103</sup> He disagreed with Wilson's moderate line, pointing out in a letter the following January how hollow the Whig commitment to the dissenting cause really was:

I do not the least agree with you in your opinion of its  
 'Looking perfectly chimerical to make a direct attack  
 on the Establishment next Session' - neither do I  
 comprehend how this direct attack differs in any way  
 from a Voluntary Church Association - neither do I  
 like your treacle compliment to the Whigs for having  
 repealed the Test Acts, because dates will tell you  
 that the Whigs were not in favour when that was done ...  
 knowing ... how by interest and inclination and every  
 feeling that can animate them they are called on to  
 support, & embellish the Church Establishment. Time  
 will show you that not even the Bishops themselves  
 are more ignorant of the Church of Christ than those  
 same Whigs whom you would lecture into spiritual views  
 of our Lord's sceptre by calm discipline, etc. Time  
 will show you that their whole idea of reform consists  
 in chopping & changing, in commuting & plundering, in  
 robbing Peter to pay Paul ...<sup>104</sup>

The Nonconformist press, on the whole, tended to be cautious. We will look more closely at the press in a later chapter, but for our present purposes a few examples of its attitude will suffice. The Congregational

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102. Joseph Turnbull to Joshua Wilson, November 7, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

103. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, October, November (?), 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.22.

104. Beverley to Wilson, January 4, 1834, C.L.Mss. IIc.22.

Magazine, edited by John Blackburn, recognized the changed circumstances after the repeal of the Test Laws and Roman Catholic Emancipation and saw the need for denominational consolidation in order to meet the challenge. Nevertheless it was ambivalent in its attitude to organized political agitation. Until 1834 the policy was to support the accommodating approach of the United Committee, but thereafter there was some discussion in its pages as to the strategy of Dissent. That year an unsigned article appeared entitled, 'The conduct of the Dissenters of London.' Noting that London Dissenters had been charged by their provincial brethren with timidity and weakness, the writer defended the Dissenting Deputies, the United Committee, the Congregational Board and the Congregational Union. There had been a policy of restraint as long as the Government seemed favourable to dissenting claims, but with the introduction of the Marriages bill it had become evident that a stronger line was needed and that 'they must act towards their friends in power as their brethren in the country had done.'<sup>105</sup> Even so, the Congregational was only willing to go so far, as was spelt out in a long review of a book by 'A Protestant Dissenter', entitled The Designs of the Dissenters: A letter to the King. The reviewer pleaded for aggressive action lest the Government have no need to pay attention to their demands, but having said that he criticized many Dissenters for lack of discretion. 'We allude,' he wrote, 'to the injudicious and premature introduction of the question of a 'separation between Church and State' into the discussions on the best means of immediately obtaining redress to those grievances which spring out of the relation in which we stand to the existing establishment.' This threatened to split the dissenting community, particularly when Dissenters confused the religious and political aspects of the Establishment.<sup>106</sup>

The Eclectic initially took a very moderate line, steadily moving to a clearer position and in 1834 welcoming the increased discussion on voluntarism. In a review of John Pye Smith's Necessity of Religion to the

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105. C.M. (1834), p. 251.

106. C.M. (1834), p. 347.

Well-being of a Nation, the reviewer pointed out that the battle was not between forms of church politics, creeds and rituals. Rather, it was a battle for 'the principle of religious freedom against spiritual usurpation, - of free labour against corporate monopoly, - of voluntary contribution against inequitable taxation for purposes foreign from the legitimate purposes of civil government.' In short, the Dissenters' grievances were rooted in 'the evil of a national establishment.'<sup>107</sup> As books on the church question became more numerous, the pages of the Eclectic were increasingly given over to discussing voluntarism.<sup>108</sup> Significantly the Eclectic changed its editorial policy in 1837 with the accession to the editorial chair of Thomas Price, a Baptist of more radical stamp than Josiah Conder. Recognizing its primarily dissenting constituency, the Eclectic set out its guiding principle in the preface to the 1837 volume. Nothing 'but discussion - unintermitted, persevering, yet temperate discussion, - can bring about that happy consummation which Dissenters so devoutly desire - the dissolution of the disgraceful connexion between Church and State.'<sup>109</sup>

Conder retired from the Eclectic in 1837, but continued to edit the Patriot. Since the paper was overtly political and partisan the Church question was even more prominent in its pages. The Patriot was cautious and moderate and in its early days drew fire from those who criticized the metropolitan ascendancy and wanted to see a sharper policy taken. Its own policy was dictated by its dedication 'to the maintenance of the great principles cherished by Evangelical Nonconformists' and it backed both political and ecclesiastical reform.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless the tone of its leaders was to tread tenderly. In October 1833, for example, the leader urged its readers to separate their opposition to the Church of England and their opposition to the State Establishment, pointing to the failure of much recent literature to do so.<sup>111</sup> A similar approach was advocated a week later:

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107. E.R. (1834), 3rd S XI, pp. 319, 320.

108. E.R. (1834), 3rd S XI, pp. 43, 276; (1835), 3rd S XII, pp. 139, 241, 230; (1835), 3rd S XIV, p. 157; (1836), 3rd S XV, pp. 177, 165, 411; (1837) 4th S I, pp. 1, 200, 290, 375, 516; 4th S II, pp. 204, 516, 551; (1838) 4th S III, pp. 1, 432; 4th S IV, pp. 1, 245, 304, 393.

109. E.R., (1837), 4th S I, Preface, p. iv.

110. P., Feb. 22, 1832, p. 4. See also May 12, 16, 19, 28, 30; June 20, 27; July 11; August 1; September 12; October 10; March 20, 1833; May 1.

111. P., October 16, 1833.

...Dissenters will do well to keep in constant view the important distinction between their ecclesiastical controversy with the Church, and the questions between them and the legislature ... The question to which Dissenters would do well to confine their attention at the present crisis, lies between them and the legislature. The Church-rate is a matter of comparative insignificance, except as connected with the principle of the Establishment, that of a dominant Church connexion with the State.<sup>112</sup>

But in terms of practical politics the Patriot urged a pragmatic approach over against confrontation with the Government. In the issue for November 20, 1833 the Patriot disassociated itself from the views of the radical R.M. Beverley, in whose 'political opinions, those Dissenters whose sentiments we speak, do not participate.'<sup>113</sup> More to the point was the leader for December 18 in which Conder defended the paper's moderate stance. There was, he said, almost complete unanimity among evangelical Dissenters on 'the grounds of Dissent, the superior efficiency of the voluntary principle, and the evils necessarily connected with all religious corporations in alliance with the State. But with regard to the political claims of Dissenters ... a very great diversity of opinion exists.' The Patriot had been reproached for its tameness and 'its solicitous discrimination', but Conder asserted that if it took a more radical line the result would be a 'disastrous schism' that would void all their gains and hinder further progress. 'Our advice,' Conder concluded, 'to the Dissenters at this crisis would be, to conceal none of their opinions, but to be cautious and moderate in their demands.'<sup>114</sup> It was this attitude, as we will see in a later chapter, that incensed Conder's critics. Eventually the Patriot and London Dissent were pushed by circumstances and the provincial challenge of Edward Miall and Edward Baines's Leeds Mercury to take harder line. Other periodicals were also appearing. In 1837 the Dissenter appeared in Stockport and in 1841 the Independent began publication in an attempt to educate younger Dissenters in their church principles.<sup>115</sup> Robert Vaughan's British Quarterly Review

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112. P, October 23, 1833.

113. P, November 20, 1833.

114. P, December 18, 1833.

115. The Dissenter (1837), I, published in Stockport; The Independent (1842), I, published in London.

commenced in 1845 and John Campbell's stable of periodicals - the Christian Witness, the Banner and the Christian's Penny Magazine - took a position that was both strongly evangelical and voluntarist.

Parallel to the discussions of voluntarism in the periodicals was the emergence of distinctly voluntarist organizations. These associations proliferated in the 1830s in response to the need for some sort of national organization to coordinate dissenting political activity. Unfortunately the tensions that existed within the dissenting community as to means towards their commonly desired ends brought most of these efforts to an early demise, almost all giving way in 1844 to Edward Miall's Anti-State Church Association (later the Liberation Society.)<sup>116</sup> One of the earliest was the Voluntary Church Society, founded in 1834 and taking its inspiration from the successful Scottish Voluntary Church associations. At its centre was Joshua Wilson who was well placed by his wide provincial correspondence and philanthropic connexions to spear-head such an organization. Several of Wilson's correspondents wrote to him concerning the need for a national organization after the London United Committee made a national appeal for petitions to Parliament on the dissenting grievances. J. Christopherson wrote early in 1833 'anxious that some prompt and extensive efforts should be made.'<sup>117</sup> John Kelly felt the same. After asking whether the London Committee could correspond with provincial committees in order to stimulate 'a general and simultaneous movement', he wrote, 'I feel persuaded that a quiet and well-arranged organization would ... facilitate the achievement of our purpose.'<sup>118</sup> R. Lettling was also concerned for this wider aspect. 'It is exceedingly desirable,' he wrote to Wilson, 'that the objects at which the Dissenters aim should be clearly defined & distinctly understood by the whole body ... One thing is clear we want some means we do not yet possess of giving a clearer (expression) of our views & a greater concentration of our efforts.' He advocated as a first step a national

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116. W.H. Mackintosh, Disestablishment and Liberation (London 1972).

117. J. Christopherson to Joshua Wilson, February 19, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

118. John Kelly to Joshua Wilson, May 31, 1833, C.L. Mss. H.e.7.

conference in order to unite the ideas and efforts of metropolitan and provincial Dissent. Such a meeting would decide:

on the constitution of some respectable body who w(oul)d act with firmness, discretion and energy at this critical moment. It appears above all things necessary to devise some plan for combining the intelligence & exertions of the Metropolis w(it)h the country in one great effort. The more united, decided & vigorous are our exertions in the present moment the sooner shall we arrive at the conclusion of our labours.<sup>119</sup>

Lettling was confident of the success of such a venture; R.M. Beverley was more sceptical. The idea was good, he wrote Wilson, but 'I hope it will not be only news.' Like the others he wanted a conference of Dissenters in order, he wrote, 'to unite on the great question of a voluntary system of Christianity to be carried out to its full extent.'<sup>120</sup>

The Voluntary Church Society was formed on May 9, 1834 at a meeting chaired by Thomas Wilson. The resolutions passed at the meeting noted the success of the Scottish associations and sought to impress on the public that evangelical Dissenters everywhere must unite 'at the present crisis; that their strength may not be divided.' A committee was appointed, including the Wilsons and John Blackburn, and auxiliaries were constituted throughout the country.<sup>121</sup> The response was good. John Haddon of Castle St. Chapel, London had been contemplating a voluntarist tract depot, but upon hearing of the new society had decided to throw in his support with it.<sup>122</sup> A voluntary society had been established in Monmouthshire by J. Crosbie, a Congregationalist minister, who wanted to establish contact with the London society.<sup>123</sup> The beleaguered Edward Leighton in Wigton welcomed the move and informed Wilson that progress was being made in gathering petitions against Lord Althorp's Church Rate bill in Parliament. Still he felt that Dissenters were deficient in organization. Churchmen had bishops and the Methodists conferences:

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119. J. Lettling to Joshua Wilson, March 15, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

120. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, January 4, 1834, C.L.Mss. II.c.22.

121. C.M. (1834), p. 370. The plan had been intimated a year before in the P, March 6, 1833.

122. John Haddon to Joshua Wilson, May 16, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

123. J. Crosbie to Joshua Wilson, June 18, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

Whereas we have no organized plan, many of our pastors are ashamed and afraid of avowing themselves comparatively ignorant of some of the questions discussed; and instead of seeking the direction of those who are fitted to inform and to lead, they stand supinely and suspiciously looking on, while others have to be charged with misrepresenting the opinions of Dissenters, or urging them forward to a length which they never proposed. On this ground if Voluntary Church Societies become general they will spread the information, infuse the principles and secure the cooperation which we now feel so much to need.<sup>124</sup>

J. Addington of Bristol recognized the problems of pursuing disestablishment through 'large public associations and assemblages'; nevertheless he was willing to join forces with any such association that had in view 'the prosecution of such measures as may ultimately bring about our entire emancipation from the shackles of a domination of exclusive & unscriptural Church pretensions of any kind.' Dissenters, therefore, had the obligation not only to enlighten the public mind, but to lead it.<sup>125</sup>

The Voluntary Church Society came to little and within a few years disappeared from the scene. It had sponsored lectures and had published several tracts, but that was about all. The tension between London and the provinces and the ambivalence of Dissent on the establishment question made any such coordinated action almost impossible. This had been apparent in the Voluntary conference of 1834 from which no concerted action had been forthcoming, even though disestablishment had been decided in principle.<sup>126</sup> In the breach of leadership the United Committee continued to provide a centre-point for political agitation, though already there was a slow shift of power to the provinces and local voluntarist committees. Nevertheless the need continued to be felt for a national organization. In 1838 an effort was made by several London Dissenters to establish the Religious Freedom Society. A provisional committee was constituted consisting of Josiah Conder, F.A. Cox, R. Peel, John Burnet, John Remington Mills, Andrew Reed, Thomas Price, Thomas Morrell, John Morley and Thomas and

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124. Edward Leighton to Joshua Wilson, June 26, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

125. J. Addington to Joshua Wilson, July 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

126. E.R. (1839), 4th S V, p. 545; Patriot, May 10, 1834; R.W. Dale, Life and Letters of John Angel James, p. 588; H.R. Martin, 'Politics of Congregationalism,' p. 117ff.

Joshua Wilson, and issuing in September that year a plan for 'A General Union for the Promotion of Religious Equality.' The projected principles and objects of the union were comprehensive: upholding the right of worship according to conscience, disapproving of establishments of religion and proposing to unite all voluntarists throughout the empire in working for political and ecclesiastical reform. It was intended to have central and local committees and to hold an annual conference.<sup>127</sup>

Joshua Wilson was only marginally involved and his personal papers (among them several annotated copies of the prospectus) reveal the growing reservations among some Dissenters in relation to a full-fledged campaign for disestablishment. He believed that the title should be altered to the 'Protestant or Trinitarian association' and that two of the declared objects of the society - that no one should worship according to rites he disapproves and that all establishments were wrong - had caused 'great offense & grievous umbrage to our Evangelical brethren.' He would have preferred to have seen a general declaration of objection to the Establishments in England, Wales and Ireland as they 'now exist', and as contrary to the will of Christ and 'injurious to the interests of vital piety & Evangelical Religion', as well as an assurance that no attempts would be made to destroy the Church of England by Parliamentary means. The purpose of such a society had to be practical and directed to maintaining 'the rights of private judgment & individual conscience' and 'resisting by fair, constitutional & Christian means all further imposition upon conscience or encroachment on the ... privileges or political immunities of any class or denomination & so accelerating the gradual & peaceable removal of all existing hindrances & obstructions to the full exercise of complete religious freedom.'<sup>128</sup> Further drafts suggested altering the name to the 'Religious Liberty' or 'Religious Equality' society. The tendency of Wilson's annotations was to tone down the out-and-out voluntarism of the society and assert its

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127. 'Plan of a General Union for the Promotion of Religious Equality,' September 17, 1838, C.L.Mss. H.e.7. See also Skeats and Miall, History, p. 489; E. Conder, Memoir of Josiah Conder (London 1853), pp. 15, 17; Andrew and Charles Reed, Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed (London 1863), p. 9. Reed went on a preaching tour for the R.F.S.

128. 'Plan ...', amended, no date, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

evangelical character. In the end Wilson did not throw in his active support behind the society, though he wrote to the Anglican Record in late November defending it. Early in December John Pye Smith wrote to him expressing his own reservations and his fears of becoming morally answerable for 'expressions & perhaps sentiments which I could not approve.'<sup>129</sup> Wilson himself wrote a letter that same day, apparently to the new society's committee, in which he said that he altogether disapproved of the plan, even though he had long been of the opinion 'that Union - organization - simultaneous effort - combined and systematic movement - have been deplorably wanting & are greatly to be desired - in our own denomination & among orthodox Dissenters generally.' Nevertheless his name had been placed on the published committee list without his permission and as he had come to disapprove of all political agitation he could not approve of the society. Concluding Wilson noted that he did not want to destroy 'but to build up & to plant new churches according to the primitive model ... & to do what I can to repair the awful breach which has lately been made among the disciples of a common master.'<sup>130</sup>

Unfortunately for Wilson he was too late. Correspondents from around the country began to write to him expressing their support for the venture and some requested that Wilson be their deputy to a proposed conference. John Kelly thought there were too many societies, Richard Slate mentioned that no churchmen had joined in Preston, and Thomas Stratten believed that Dissenters coped 'very unequally with their opponents.'<sup>131</sup> As usual R.M. Beverley found the society wanting, but now from the position of having given up any form of political activism. Not knowing Wilson's own feelings he wrote early in December 1838: I want to scold you a little about your Religious Equality Association. I doubt whether Christians ought to join such an association ...' In particular he objected to the possibility of socinians and Roman Catholics joining.<sup>132</sup> By February 1839 Wilson had to write to the Patriot saying that he had not

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129. John Pye Smith to Joshua Wilson, December 3, 1838, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

130. Joshua Wilson to \_\_\_\_\_, December 3, 1838, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

131. Thomas Stratten to Joshua Wilson, January 7, 1839, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.; Richard Slate to Joshua Wilson, January 8, 1839. For others see G.J. Metcalfe to Joshua Wilson, December 21, 1839; Josiah Conder to Joshua Wilson, January 3, 1839, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

132. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, December 9, 1838; January 6, 1839, C.L. Mss. II.c.22.

accepted appointment as the Hull delegate to the proposed conference and that he objected to some of the resolutions of the society in that they offended Anglican evangelicals.<sup>133</sup> Conder, the editor, wrote back to Wilson pointing out that he was placing himself 'unnecessarily in direct collision with the Society, & furnishing the Record with the opportunity of using you, as they will not fail to do, as an instrument of attack.'<sup>134</sup> It was naturally feared that lack of support from the Wilsons would have serious repercussions on the infant society.<sup>135</sup>

Wilson remained a voluntarist and not surprisingly participated in the formation of the even more moderate Evangelical Voluntary Church Society in late 1839. The E.V.C.S. was so constituted as to encourage Anglican membership and to campaign for disestablishment by passive, non-political means. The chairman was the moderate Anglican voluntarist Sir Culling Eardley Smith and the committee included John Campbell and the Baptist F.A. Cox.<sup>136</sup> James Matheson held out high hopes for the society, writing to Wilson soon after its founding:

My conviction is, that if the new Society is conducted according to the Spirit & Letter of the plan sketched out in the circular which has been issued by Sir Culling Eardley Smith, the greatest good will result to the cause of religious liberty in general & of true religion in particular.<sup>137</sup>

Four days later, however, he wrote concerned at the tone of some of the speeches at the first meeting, particularly that of Josiah Conder. Conder's remarks were 'injudicious and petty' and would only lead 'some of us to lose confidence in his temper if not in his principles.' He went on to suggest that the society take an office and appoint a permanent secretary. Whoever took on the job of secretary would need consummate tact and a wide knowledge in order to 'remove objections & introduce the Question into certain places...

133. Joshua Wilson to the Editor of the P, February 6, 1839, C.L.Mss.H.e.7.

134. Josiah Conder to Joshua Wilson, February 8, 1839, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

135. R. Peel to Joshua Wilson, May 21, 1839, C.L.Mss. H.e.7. Peel pointed out the outstanding financial obligations of the new society as well as its importance. There is an interesting short letter from Mrs. Thomas Wilson, Joshua's mother, expressing her agreement with Joshua's objections. She wrote: 'The word Equality connected with the second resolution seems to involve abolition of tythes which has never yet been openly attacked by Dissenters.' Mrs. Thomas Wilson to Joshua Wilson, n.d., C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

136. Skeats and Miall, History, p. 491.

137. James Matheson to Joshua Wilson, December 2, 1839, C.L.Mss. II.21.

where our members are Independent & cautious.<sup>138</sup> Like the Voluntary Church and Religious Freedom Societies before it, the Evangelical Voluntary Church Society did not last long and folded within a few years.<sup>139</sup>

By 1840 the moderate position was becoming untenable, or at least organizationally and tactically impossible. The following year, 1841, the Leicester Congregationalist Edward Miall came to London to found the Nonconformist and three years later formed the British Anti-State Church Association. Miall's activities have been covered elsewhere, but for our purposes it is simply important to see in the organizational success of the B.A.S.C.A. the triumph of radical Dissent. Josiah Conder sought to forestall this through reaching a modus vivendi in 1840 with the provincial radicals by visiting Leicester, it being thought as Conder put it, to come to a good 'understanding with the reverend Radicals of that place, and to put a stop to the petty warfare they are waging against the London committee ...<sup>140</sup> An agreement was reached to wage a united campaign against Sir Robert Inglis's pending Church extension measure, but the rapprochement was short-lived. By 1843 Conder's own R.F.S. had folded and the field was open for Miall and his associates. In the same crucial year that saw the battle over Sir James Graham's Factory Education bill, Andrew Reed also tried to found a comprehensive national society. He wanted an association that would carry on the struggle after the education controversy, and to that end he travelled around the country gathering information and support. On October 17, 1843 a meeting was held at the King's Head Tavern, Poultry, followed by a second meeting at the Congregational Library on November 7. It was decided then to call the organization the Free Church Society and to establish local auxiliaries with the purpose of enlightening the public mind, petitioning Parliament and fighting against all religious oppression. The plan never got off the ground. Reed later recorded:

I found that certain earnest friends at Leicester had taken an advanced step, as if in despair of London. They promised to wait for five or six weeks, to give us time to test public opinion; but instead of pausing, a claim was set up for precedence and the whole thing was committed. I resolved<sup>141</sup> most reluctantly to stand aside.

138. Matheson to Wilson, December 6, 1839, C.L.Mss.II.21.

139. Skeats and Miall, History, p. 492; R.W. Dale, The Old Evangelicalism and The New (London 1889), p. 17; Dale, The Evangelical Revival and other Sermons (London 1880), p. 16.

140. Conder Josiah Conder, p. 315.

141. Charles and Andrew Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 217.

Though the F.C.S. promised more action than earlier attempts it was clear that in the radicalized atmosphere of 1843-44 it could make little claim to the loyalties of the dissenting community.

Reed, like many other Congregational ministers, was suspicious of the B.A.S.C.A. Not only were they disturbed by the new strident political activism, but they were affronted by the way Miall almost went out of his way to criticize the Nonconformist establishment. In the first edition of the Nonconformist of May 5, 1841 he charged the body of Nonconformist ministers 'with unfaithfulness to sacred principles, evasion of noble mission, and seeming recklessness of all the mighty interests at issue.'<sup>142</sup> The consequences of this course were spelt out two weeks later:

The Establishment will be destroyed by revolutionary and infidel fury, unless it be first peaceably put an end to by enlightened religious men. Let not dissenting ministers be deceived. The storm which is gathering, and which they alone can prevent, will be indiscriminate in its ravages.<sup>143</sup>

Miall was unrelenting in his criticism of his Congregational peers, and in 1849 he lodged his British Churches in relation to the British People into their midst. While bringing all the churches and clergy under his scrutiny, Miall reserved most of his criticism for the Congregationalists. He indicted the churches for being not only indifferent to the working classes, but of actively cultivating an 'aristocratic sentiment' that placed an almost insurmountable barrier between them and the mass of the population. This was manifested in the professionalism of the ministry, particularly among Congregationalists who were putting a higher premium on educational attainments than on the suitability of a man for the work he was to do. Not surprisingly the State Church was not permitted to go free. He charged the Church of England with a 'legalized ecclesiasticism' that opposed all attempts except its own to provide for the religious needs of the land. 'The truth is,' Miall wrote, 'I cannot recognize civil establishments of Christianity as organizations for the extension of Christ's kingdom, in any sense.'<sup>144</sup> The

142. N., May 5, 1841.

143. N., May 21, 1841.

144. Edward Miall, The British Churches and the British People (London 1849) p. 345.

conservative dissenting British Quarterly Review characteristically disagreed with Miall on almost every point, but it was with the tone of the polemic that it took greatest issue. Miall was, said the reviewer, 'a conspicuous person in the section of orthodox dissent where the watchwords are all on the side of change, and of real or imaginary progress.' Miall pushed his views too far, to the point where 'the signs of a healthy piety among nonconformists, must it would seem, embrace their becoming reformers of the out-and-out school in matters of state, and zealous Anti-State-Church-Association men in matters of religion.'<sup>145</sup> The B.Q.R.'s estimate of Miall and the B.A.S.C.A. was widely held by many Congregationalists. While some such as Wardlaw, John Pye Smith and many country ministers supported him, a good many would have agreed with John Blackburn that 'ministers have better and nobler objects to pursue - that few are qualified for successful political agitation and that all may be more usefully employed.'<sup>146</sup>

The literature of B.A.S.C.A. was of a more strident tone than even Nonconformists were used to publishing. For example, a series of tracts published in 1846 sought to spell out a clear and consistent voluntarist position, insisting that it was fundamentally a religious question and not a political one. This was the subject of the tract by A.J. Morris, An Address to Dissenters on the Religious Bearings of the State Church Question. Against the charges that B.A.S.C.A. tended to political radicalism, Morris reiterated the fundamentally religious character of Dissent - the unscriptural nature of the establishment and the spiritual harm done by a religious monopoly in the hands of the Church of England.<sup>147</sup> Morris was also the author of the Anti-State Church Catechism. Unlike the earlier catechisms by Palmer and Newman, Morris's was more concerned with defining a state church and detailing its evils than in stating what the free church consisted of.<sup>148</sup> Brewin Grant's The Church of Christ - what is it? was a more positive restatement of the classic Congregationalist ideal. The twin

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145. B.Q.R. (1850), p. 251.

146. John Waddington, History, II, p. 572.

147. A.J. Morris, Address to Dissenters (London 1846)

148. A.J. Morris, Anti-State Church Catechism (London 1846).

pillars were the rights of private judgment and the authority of the Bible: '... the supreme tribunal to decide the cause is a man's own private judgment, and that the Bible is to be the statute-book by which this decision is to be regulated.' Grant also appealed for Christian unity, but with the crucial proviso of equality between denominations.<sup>149</sup> Edward Smith Pryce's State Churches not Churches of Christ questioned the credentials of the Establishment to be called a church at all. The issue was not between forms of polity, but on the 'confounding and mingling together of civil and religious authority.' 'The essence of a State Church,' wrote Pryce, 'consists in the blending of the state with the religious power ... showing itself equally in acts of the church on behalf of the state, or in acts of the state in behalf of the church.'<sup>150</sup> William Thorn, Congregational minister in Winchester, criticized the Evangelical clergy in his tract for having 'subscribed to all the errors, heresies and superstitions of the state religion.'<sup>151</sup> Miall's own tract in the series was Religious Establishments incompatible with the rights of citizenship.<sup>152</sup>

The B.A.S.C.A. and the Nonconformist were not alone in this period in advocating a more consistent disestablishment policy. The Eclectic Review under Thomas Price was doing likewise. In a review of John Harris's Union, or the divided Church made one in 1838, the Eclectic discussed the question of schism and separation in the light of the establishment. Any attempt at union was marred because the Church of England had been set up as 'one denomination above others and so enthroned ... by the side of the state.' The result was not only jealousy between denominations, but the secularization of society.<sup>153</sup> More significantly the Eclectic criticized the attitude of moderate Dissenters and questioned whether their politeness towards State Churchmen was 'courtesy or compromise?' A review of Robert Vaughan's Thoughts on the Present State of the Religious Parties in England denied his claim that some Dissenters wanted to destroy

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149. Brewin Grant, The Church of Christ - what is it? (London 1846), pp. 33, 40.

150. Edward Smith Pryce, State churches not churches of Christ (London 1846) pp. 98, 100.

151. William Thorn, On the Evangelical Clergy of the Church of England (n.d.), p. 34.

152. Edward Miall, Religious Establishments incompatible with the rights of citizenship (London 1846).

153. E.R., (1838), 4th SIV, p. 315.

the Church of England and criticized his view that the Church should be recognized as the religion of the majority, if not of the nation.<sup>154</sup> The following year, 1839, a long review essay reflected on the progress of Dissent and concluded that the moderate position, particularly that of the London party, had failed. Dissenters had to be more aggressive: 'It is high time that they become so as religious and from religious motives; high time that they evoke the duties, responsibilities and perils of their social position.'<sup>155</sup>

These and other pieces were too much for Vaughan and his colleagues. In 1844 he wrote to Blackburn complaining that the Eclectic 'has thrown itself into the hands of an extreme section of our body, and has no right to complain if the majority whom it no longer represents resolves to have a representative of its own.'<sup>156</sup> He proposed to start the British Quarterly Review as a scholarly alternative. We will look more closely at the B.Q.R. later, but for the moment it suffices to see it as drawing a clear line, as far as that was possible, across the ranks of Dissent. While holding to a form of voluntarism, it was moderate and broadly evangelical. Its pages reflected the growing concern of many Dissenters for evangelical piety and theological orthodoxy and away from the voluntary controversy.

The writings of moderate Dissenters after 1840 reflected several trends. Many were tiring of the voluntary controversy and reviving the older ideas of evangelical unity and cooperation, without giving up their Congregationalist or voluntarist sympathies. R.M. Beverley expressed something of this in his correspondence with Joshua Wilson. By 1840 he had given up politics in order to concentrate on preaching and pastoral work:

I know not what the Dissenters may be doing or attempting to do now in their corporate capacity as I never read the Patriot, but seeing them as ordinary spectators do I should say that the political current has been so long towing them back that they never can recover their advanced position again - Which is the best thing that can happen to them, as this struggle for place in the world ill befits the holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.<sup>157</sup>

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154. E.R. (1838), 4th S IV, p. 397.

155. E.R. (1839), 4th S V, p. 1ff.

156. Waddington, Congregational History, vol. IV, p. 575.

157. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, May 29, 1840, C.L.Mss. II.c.22.

A similar fear was expressed by Archibald Jack, minister in North Shields, in a letter to John Angel James in 1846:

I am sick of newspaper discussion of religious topics. The ground is bad. The general atmosphere of it is tainted. It is neither altogether political nor altogether religious - but a mixture partaking too often of an unfavourable proportion of the political which greatly lessens if it does not sometimes neutralize the influence of the religious and produces that very unseemly character - the religious demagogue - with all the features of O'Connerism - only put under the broad shield of a superior regard for truth and purity and principle. I much fear this spirit is on the increase among us - and I am sorry for it. It augurs little for peace - less for prosperity.<sup>158</sup>

James himself was withdrawing from the voluntarist battle.<sup>159</sup> He was increasingly concerned for evangelical unity contributing in 1845 to the volume Essays on Church Unity and helping the following year to form the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>160</sup> The B.Q.R. welcomed the Essays as a call to return to more pronounced evangelical principles without sacrificing diversity. 'That the church was designed to be ONE cannot be doubted by any Christian,' wrote the reviewer, 'The more intelligent and spiritual of all parties are persuaded that the substantial unity of the church is not destroyed by the divisions that exist. Yet all must acknowledge, that this unity ought to be rendered so visible as to make its impression on the world.'<sup>161</sup> An earlier sermon by R.W. Hamilton entitled 'The Inter-community of Churches' expressed a similar sentiment. 'Never,' he said, 'was all practicable union and fellowship among Evangelical Protestants more necessary than now. The pressure and alarm resulting from High Church pretensions, in the present rampant form, will have wrought a salutary result, should they force on the attention of divided churches the duty and blessedness of union.'<sup>162</sup> This was very much the milieu in which the Evangelical Alliance was founded, indicating the shift in concern of many Dissenters away from the Establishment issue as such to the threat of the Catholic tendency within it and the Roman threat

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158. Archibald Jack to John Angel James (n.d., probably 1846), C.L.Mss. 31.

159. Dale, Evangelical Revival, p. 21.

160. John Angel James in Essays on Christian Union (London 1846).

161. B.Q.R. (1845), p. 78f.

162. R.W. Hamilton, Intercommunity of Churches (London 1843).

from without.

Some Dissenters, such as John Blackburn, saw disestablishment as the only bulwark of Protestant liberties and the spectre of Popery was frequently touched upon in dissenting literature.<sup>163</sup> 'It exists therefore,' wrote one contributor to the Congregational in 1841, 'in all national church establishments, as the very principle of their being, however comparatively tolerant, and however orthodox the church established.'<sup>164</sup> In 1845 Thomas Stratten, minister in Hull, argued in his Scriptural Argument against the Apostolic Succession that the Congregational order of elders and deacons guarded against priestcraft and hierarchical pretensions. The Church of England was different; there 'the hot manure of priestly ambition has been skillfully applied to every part of the English ritual where a root of fibre of the old Roman stock could be found.'<sup>165</sup> J.W. Massie in his Liberty of Conscience illustrated of 1847 saw the principle danger of Roman Catholicism and Tractarianism, particularly in their established forms, in their threat to personal and national liberty.<sup>166</sup> So while the Catholic threat made for even more dissenting antipathy to the Establishment, it at the same time made for greater evangelical unity. This was particularly apparent in 1845 and 1850 with the Maynooth controversy and Roman Catholic Aggression respectively. The Anti-Maynooth conference, which radicals like Miall left in disgust, revealed the strong strain of anti-catholicism in Protestant Dissent. The Congregational Union committee passed a strongly worded resolution in 1845 condemning Popery as 'a system insatiably grasping at domination and aggrandizement.'<sup>167</sup> John Blackburn, who had come to accept a qualified establishment in Ireland in order to protect the Protestant constitution, aptly summed up the attitude of many Dissenters:

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163. C.M. (1841), p. 135.

164. C.M. (1841), p. 673.

165. Thomas Stratten, Scriptural Argument against the Apostolic Succession (London 1845), p. 126.

166. J.W. Massie, Liberty of conscience illustrated (London 1847), p. 192.

167. C.M. (1845), p. 314.

We are not such zealous Dissenters as to forget that we are Protestants, nor can we overlook the fact that the voluntary and established systems are but means to an end; the question at issue being, which method is more likely to preserve and extend the Protestant faith.<sup>168</sup>

Blackburn had almost gone full circle.

It would be a mistake to see the voluntary controversy as ended. Many Congregationalists continued to write and defend Nonconformist principles, not least Miall and his colleagues. Vaughan himself addressed the Congregational Union in 1841 on 'Congregationalism viewed in relation to the state, and tendencies of modern society.'<sup>169</sup> The education struggle, particularly in 1843, raised many of the old questions,<sup>170</sup> and the Disruption of the Church of Scotland that same year inspired many Congregationalists who warmly welcomed the Free Church's representatives and generously gave to the struggling cause.<sup>171</sup> Another influence in the 1840's were the works of leaders of continental free churches such as Merle d'Aubigne of Geneva, Alexandre Vinet of Neuchatel and Agenor de Gasparin of Vaud.<sup>172</sup> In 1845 and 1848 the North Bucks Association protested the tendency of the Church of England to take away the attendants on Congregational services.<sup>173</sup> The secession from the Church of England in 1849 of Baptist W. Noel and his reception as a Baptist minister caused some excitement. He published his new voluntarist views in his Essay on Church and State, which, though mild in temper, was highly critical of the effects of the state system on evangelical enterprise.<sup>174</sup> John Allen published his comprehensive and thoroughly Congregationalist

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168. C.M. (1845), p. 397. On the Maynooth controversy see Gilbert Cahill, 'The Protestant Association and the Anti-Maynooth Agitation of 1845', Catholic Historical Review (1947), E.R. Norman, Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England (London 1977), p. 23.
169. Robert Vaughan, Congregationalism viewed in relation to the State, and tendencies in modern society (London 1841).
170. R.W. Hamilton, Institutes of Popular Education (London 1843); see the E.R, P, C.M. and N. in this period.
171. William Lothian to Joshua Wilson, 1843, C.L.Mss. II.c.33. The anti-voluntarist attitude of Free Church leaders was discussed in the B.Q.R. (1849), p. 115. See also Andrew and Charles Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 221.
172. Alexandre Vinet, Essai sur la Manifestation des Convictions Religieuses et sur la Separation de L'eglise et de l'etat (1842); Agénor de Gasparin, Christianisme et paganisme, ou principes engagé dans la crise ecclésiastique du canton de Vaud...(1848), 2 vols; the French Swiss church historian Merle d'Aubigne visited England on many occasions and even published a tract under the auspices of the Anti-State Church Association. M. d'Aubigné Separation of Church and State (London 1846).
173. Annual Report, N. Bucks Association of Congregational Churches (1845)p.6, (1848), p. 9.
174. Baptist W. Noel, Essay on the Union of Church and State (London 1849).

State Churches and the Kingdom of Christ in 1853 and J. Guinness Rogers published his thoroughly voluntarist broadside the Established Church in 1861.<sup>175</sup> The next year, the bicentenary of the Great Ejection of 1662, saw the appearance of a number of works relating to the continuing Puritan tradition.<sup>176</sup>

A considerable amount of literature was devoted to the exposition of Congregational polity. This was a significant development in that for some years the voluntary issue had been discussed on the basic question of the separation of church and state with little regard to forms of polity. Earlier writers had emphasized this aspect of polity and treated the question of the establishment almost hypothetically. In the heat of the voluntary politics of the 1830's the means of disestablishment dominated almost completely. A few had protested, such as William Burder of Stroud, who complained to Joshua Wilson that his Voluntary Church Society in 1834 had 'not stood on ceremony.'<sup>177</sup> By 1840 a change was apparent. R.M. Beverley wrote to Wilson that year:

... I do not regret that within the last 2 or 3 years the contest has assumed a somewhat different form, & is now rather for the freedom & purity of the Church of Christ than for our minutes of counsel: this will have a decided effect on the churches all over the kingdom.<sup>178</sup>

The change was witnessed too in Robert Vaughan's Congregational Union address in 1841 which sought not only to display classical Congregational polity, but also to expound the relevance of Congregationalism to the times. Over against the exclusive pretensions of the Roman and Anglican churches and in line with the feelings that were making for the Evangelical Alliance, Vaughan argued for the true and real catholicity of Congregationalism. Congregationalism permitted diversity within the bounds of doctrinal truth and not uniformity based on the myth of apostolical succession. The essential voluntarism of Congregationalism promoted philanthropy and love of democratic

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175. John Allen, State Churches and the Kingdom of Christ (London 1853); J. Guinness Rogers 'The Established Church as it was, and as it is' in Lectures on Voluntaryism (London 1861).

176. Robert Vaughan, The Case for Dissenters (London 1861); English Nonconformity (London 1862).

177. William Burder to Joshua Wilson, May 6, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.e.7.

178. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, May 16, 1840, C.L.Mss. II.c.22.

freedoms and its strong emphasis on lay participation in church government popular intelligence and freedom of the press. By the time he finished Vaughan had brought higher education, peace, international relations and commerce within Congregationalism's wake.<sup>179</sup> Others argued on a similar line. J.W. Massie saw Congregational order at the root of wider civil liberties in its insistence upon the liberty of conscience and individual judgment of all men.<sup>180</sup> The venerable John Pye Smith saw the wider significance of church polity in his First Lines of Christian Theology, first published in 1854. 'If religion,' he wrote, 'had not some external institutions, it could not have a manifestation among men as a distinct, substantive important thing...'<sup>181</sup> John Allen's State Churches and the Kingdom of Christ took the classical Independent voluntarist position - a believers' church, strict admission, voluntary support, congregational order - but he also saw the wider implications. The end in sight was 'that the kingdom may be upheld in its simple purity; that Christ may indeed reign in our hearts and in the world, and that the happy consequences of his government may be experienced and diffused without curtailment and without adulteration.'<sup>182</sup>

The two standard works on polity were those of Ralph Wardlaw and Samuel Davidson, both appearing in 1848. Wardlaw's Congregational Independency in contradistinction to Episcopacy and Presbyterianism: Church polity of the New Testament was originally delivered as lectures to his own congregation. After dealing with the biblical foundations in a customary way, Wardlaw went on to discuss the two distinct principles of the system: congregationalism and independency. It had been customary to use the terms almost interchangeably, but Wardlaw revived the old Puritan distinction between congregationalism pertaining to the internal ordering of the church and independency as relating to the external freedom of the church from the jurisdiction of other churches and the world. Wrote Wardlaw:

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179. Robert Vaughan, Congregationalism viewed in its relation, passim.

180. J.W. Massie, Liberty of Conscience Illustrated.

181. John Pye Smith, The First Lines of Christian Theology (London 1861, first edition 1854), p. 626.

182. Allen, State Churches, p. 51.

... the church being a body per se, an association of spiritual people, united on spiritual principles, for spiritual ends, altogether distinct from the kingdoms of this world, and entirely independent of them - it follows, that the same constitution - the same ordinances and laws - which suited it originally, must suit it always and everywhere ... This independence of the world - this capability of reduction to practice in all places and in every age - without a question ever requiring to be asked about existing political institutions - is one of the marks by which we might, a priori, expect the government to be characterized of a community so actively spiritual and distinct from the world as the church...<sup>183</sup>

As such, the church could appoint its own officers, administer its own discipline and admit new members - all on the authority of its Head and with the concurrence of the collective assembly.<sup>184</sup> While admitting that the Congregational system as practised was far from perfect, Wardlaw nevertheless held that as opposed to the alternatives, particularly established churches, 'an independent church affords facilities still more ample, and checks still more stringent, for the end desired.'<sup>185</sup>

Critics of Congregationalism were inclined to charge its advocates with schism and separation from other churches and with a failure to be consistent in upholding the Congregational Union. Wardlaw rejected the first criticism out of hand, replying that Congregationalists did not cut off fellowship with other communions. Each church was treated on its own merits. Congregationalists were bound by a common faith and order which made for 'a union of fellowship and cooperation, but not a union of jurisdiction and authority,'<sup>186</sup> and if they excluded another church or body it was for pragmatic reasons and was not an essential judgment. Therefore the Congregational Union was not an institution that

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183. Ralph Wardlaw, Congregational Independency in contradistinction to Episcopacy & Presbyterianism: Church polity of the New Testament (Glasgow 1848), pp. 15, 16. John Cotton, for example, made this distinction between independency and Congregationalism in his Way of the Congregational Churches cleared of 1648.

184. Ibid., p. 230.

185. Ibid., p. 324.

186. Ibid., p. 347.

was inconsistent with Congregational ideals, but rather expressed the genius of voluntary cooperation. 'Independent' was not a term to be improperly understood. The key was the principle of voluntary consent. 'I plead,' he said, 'for the freedom, between churches and pastors, of mutual consultation and advice.' This meant not only remonstrance against error, but also a 'freedom of combined action for purposes of common interest.'<sup>187</sup> The best examples of this were the county associations and home and foreign missionary societies; yet these were not sacrosanct in themselves, but only as 'proportionally beneficial in their results...'<sup>188</sup> The basic unit in the system remained the congregation.

Samuel Davidson's Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament unfolded was based on his lectures on the subject at Lancashire Independent College in Manchester. He covered much the same ground as Wardlaw, except with greater system and clarity. Like all Congregationalists he grounded his argument upon the authority of Scripture and its regulative function in ordering the church.<sup>189</sup> Notwithstanding, he also argued that the principle of religious assembly was naturally inherent in man's social and religious nature.<sup>190</sup> This did not mean, however, that the church was to be established. On the contrary, while there was a religious obligation upon all men, rulers and ruled, there was a firm line of demarcation between the state's authority and voluntary religion. Membership in a Congregational church was wholly voluntary and for believers alone, as opposed to the principle and practice of comprehension in the established churches. What vital Christianity prevailed in the Church of England was 'an accident belonging to them, since it had almost obliterated the barrier between the church and the world and had become co-extensive with the population.'<sup>191</sup>

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187. Ibid, p. 365.

188. Ibid., p. 367.

189. Samuel Davidson, Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament unfolded (London 1848), pp. 29, 60. Davidson was reviewed in the B.Q.R. (1848) p. 311.

190. Ibid., p. 58.

191. Ibid., p. 69.

In addition to 'Scripturality,' Davidson also held out as principles of church order: simplicity, efficiency in maintaining and spreading the truth and the independence of the congregation. In the latter capacity each church could discipline members and was independent of the jurisdiction of all other churches. However, churches were not isolated. Churches could enter informal fraternal relations with one another and were free to meet voluntarily in association for mutual benefit and for the propagation of the faith.<sup>192</sup> These principles, particularly that of independence, promoted in Davidson's view civil liberty, general intelligence, the pursuit of excellence and self-government. 'All,' he wrote, 'are inherent in the Congregational polity.'<sup>193</sup> Davidson was at pains to keep Congregational polity from degenerating to the level of bare law. 'The spirit of religion is the chief thing demanded by Christ.' This was a salutary reminder to Congregationalists who tended to approach the Bible in reference to their principles as one would approach a constitutional document. Even so, Davidson believed that this promotion of the spirit of religion and not the form was the genius of Christianity. Congregational polity nurtured 'the spiritual nature of the Christian community.' Therefore flexibility was to be permitted in some matters of constitution and practice, but not in the overriding principles. There could be no indifference 'whether the government of the church rested in men elected by the members themselves...'<sup>194</sup> That was the heart of the matter.

Voluntary churchmanship reached its apôgee with Wardlaw and Davidson. While the system would substantially remain intact in the decades to come, cracks were already appearing. Few Congregationalists questioned the doctrine of the church, but not a few questioned its outworking in society. The education controversy had proved the severest test on both resources and principles. Yet even after the 1847 Minutes in Council when Vaughan converted

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192. Ibid., p. 400.

193. Ibid., p. 391.

194. Ibid., p. 38.

governed by humanly legislated laws, the church was in a different category since it was at one and the same time a human and divine institution. Conder, as a good Congregationalist, distinguished between the invisible catholic church and the visible local church. The church in its former sense, said Conder, 'in its genuine and most comprehensive signification, is not a human society; it is not susceptible to human government; its character is that of universality, and its members are attached to each other only by relations of a spiritual nature ...' But the church also consisted of local congregations placed within a larger human society and as such had to have laws to both govern itself internally and to order its relations with the world outside. These laws, however, were not arbitrary and expedient, but rather divinely sanctioned and therefore beyond the ken of any authority outside the community itself.<sup>39</sup> Conder went on to discuss the use of creeds, church officers and discipline. Naturally he gave a good deal of space to a discussion of the laws of admission to church membership, a subject that was crucial to the Congregationalists' understanding of the church. Since the church was 'an assembly of the professed disciples of Christ,' and such a profession was necessarily free and voluntary, it went without saying that no congregation could be forced to receive as a member someone unqualified for membership and that exclusion from membership was 'no infringement of his social rights.' This bore directly upon the divinely sanctioned purpose of the church. 'The purpose for which a society is formed,' said Conder, 'imposes a necessary restriction upon its reception of members by rendering some qualification in reference to that purpose a pre-requisite to admission.'<sup>40</sup>

The second volume was more particularly concerned with the implications for Congregational order of a state establishment of religion. While some gloried in Dissent, Conder saw it as 'a mere negation, an accidental predicament'<sup>41</sup>

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39. Josiah Conder, Protestant Nonconformity (London 1818), pp. 55, 60, 73, 77.

40. Ibid., pp. 79, 91.

41. Ibid., p. 605.

to a voluntary system of education, others such as R.W. Dale, James's successor in Birmingham, stood firm. He realized the limits to voluntary activity and its inability to meet the needs of the nation and would live to see his own principles prevail. Dale was nevertheless a firm voluntary churchman which he sealed with his own book on Congregational polity in 1892. In the meantime voluntarism in church and society lay at the heart of Congregational activity and thinking through most of the 19th century.

CHAPTER IIICONSOLIDATION: THE FORMATION OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION

The formation of the Congregational Union in 1832 was the most significant indication of the consolidation of the Congregational community. To a large extent the union failed to fulfil the expectations of its founders and it took decades for it to win the confidence of the churches it sought to unite. Congregationalists were a staunchly independent lot and for the union to be effective required a considerable modification of the traditional pattern of Congregational church life, in attitude as much as principle. Of course the advocates of union disclaimed any intention to undermine the independency of the churches, but their efforts were in fact an admission of the limitations of the old Independent order and the need for adjustment to new circumstances. The proponents of union saw it as a purely functional agency to promote the denominational interest. Unfortunately, it was in this functional aspect, even more than the ecclesiological, that the union was most vulnerable. It was founded to promote a distinct form of voluntary churchmanship and not surprisingly was weakest at those very points where the practice of the voluntary principle was weakest. Nevertheless, both as a symbol and as an agency, the union provided Congregationalists with a central institution through which to channel their efforts to build their community on thoroughly voluntarist foundations.

Prior to its founding in 1832 several attempts had been made to form a national organization. The idea had deep roots in Congregational history. The Savoy Declaration of 1659 and a number of Congregationalist divines had conceded the right and desirability of independent churches meeting together in synod. Thereafter the institution had fallen from favour and for reasons of polity and politics Congregationalists did not meet in a national ecclesiastical assembly until the 19th century. The principle of assembly was more commonly practised in the loose associations of churches in towns and counties which sought to provide fraternal fellowship for ministers and

a structure of support for weaker churches and for evangelisation. Soon after the Great Ejection of 1662 several of these associations appeared in areas of high Nonconformist concentration.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter associations appeared and disappeared, both called into being and terminated by the difficulties faced by Dissent in a period of persecution. One of the most prominent was the Exeter Assembly, founded in 1691, but like many early Nonconformist institutions it evolved in the course of the 18th century to Socinian Presbyterianism.<sup>2</sup>

More directly relevant to the Congregational Union were the numerous associations of churches that emerged in the wake of the evangelical revival towards the end of the 18th century. For the most part they sprung not as much from ecclesiastical motives as from the pragmatic needs of organizing for evangelism.<sup>3</sup> The Warwickshire Association, established in 1792, was closely associated with the London Missionary Society and was committed to county itinerant evangelization.<sup>4</sup> The Somerset Association, founded in 1797, had a 'missionary design' for 'village preaching'.<sup>5</sup> The Bedfordshire Union of Christians united Baptist and Congregational churches and occasionally received the support of local Anglican evangelicals for village preaching and church planting.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Geoffrey Nuttall, 'Assembly and Association in Dissent, 1689 - 1831', in Studies in Church History (VII), p. 289; Alexander Gordon, Freedom after Ejection (London ); Alexander Gordon, ed., Cheshire classis minutes, 1691-1745 (London 1919); J.G. Fuller, Brief History of the Western Association (Bristol 1845); W.T. Whitley, Baptist Association Life in Worcestershire, 1655 - 1926 (Worcester 1926).
  2. A. Brockett, Nonconformity in Exeter (Manchester 1962), p. 64ff; Brockett, ed., The Exeter Assembly: the minutes of the assemblies of United Brethren of Devon and Cornwall, 1691 - 1717, as transcribed by the Revd. Isaac Gilling (Torquay 1963).
  3. During the 1790's eleven Congregational associations are known to have come into being. See Nuttall, 'Assembly and Association,' p. 306; Evangelical Magazine, (1805), pp. 284, 380, 524; (1811), pp. 323, 359, 442.
  4. Edward Williams, 'A circular letter from the Independent ministers assembled at Nuneaton, August 6, 1793, to the Associated churches of Warwickshire' in Works, ed. Evan Davies (London 1862), p. 412.
  5. E.M., (1797), p. 117.
  6. John Brown, Centenary Celebrations of the Bedfordshire Union of Christians, the story of a hundred years (London 1896), pp. 20, 38.

Many of the associations represented at the second founding of the Congregational Union in 1832 had their roots in this tradition of evangelical cooperation. As the process of denominationalization went ahead the associations became more clearly Congregationalist in purpose and operation. The Lancashire Congregational Union was founded in 1795 as a general itineracy society, but soon after the first founding of the Congregational Union in 1806 altered its constitution to become a county Congregational association of churches.<sup>7</sup> The situation was different in London where there was no metropolitan association except for the loose fraternals of ministers. There was, however, the London Board of Congregationalist ministers which dealt with public questions and some cases of arbitration, but did not seek to provide an organization for denominational action.<sup>8</sup>

Another element making for Congregational consolidation were the various societies, particularly the L.M.S. While denominational matters were not discussed at L.M.S. meetings, those same gatherings provided a meeting place for Congregationalists and afforded the most prominent considerable visibility. There were also the network of auxiliaries and deputations to the churches which helped to give the dispersed ranks of Congregationalism a sense of community. The 1806 Union was established during the missionary week in May on the premise that Congregationalist ministers would be attending the annual meeting of the L.M.S.<sup>9</sup> The pattern was also being set by other denominations. Congregationalists had a strong dislike of Presbyterianism and many feared that any attempt to organize would inevitably lead to a hierarchy of church courts. The New England system of Congregational consociations was looked upon in a more favourable light, though not without some reservations since Congregationalism was the established religion in several states.<sup>11</sup> There was

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7. W.G. Robinson, A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union, 1806-1856 (Manchester 1955), p. 28f; J. Waddington, Congregational History, II, p. 126.
  8. See John Stoughton, Religion in England from 1800-1850 (London 1884), p. 104; Geoffrey Nuttall, The General Body of Dissenting Ministers (unpub.ms. at Dr. Williams's Library, London 1955).
  9. Waddington, History p. 126.
  10. C.I. & C.M. (1818), p. 187, (1824); pp. 352, 468; C.M. (1845), p. 697.
  11. C.I. & C.M. (1818), p. 154; (1823), p. 469; C.M., (1845), p. 477.

also the parallel developments among the Baptist churches that finally issued in their own union in 1813. Perhaps of the greatest influence was the organization of the Methodists. While disagreeing with Methodists in regard to their views on church polity, Congregationalists noted the advantages of connexional cooperation as they saw Wesleyan Methodism spread.<sup>12</sup> Of more direct bearing on the Union of 1806 may have been the formation in 1805 of a London connexion of Calvinistic Methodist churches.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of a union seemingly originated in London and probably within the Congregational Board.<sup>14</sup> In April 1806 intimation was given that a meeting was to be held on May 17 to discuss the possibility of union. The reason given was the 'want of a General Union among the Congregational or Independent churches in Great Britain has long been felt and lamented...'<sup>15</sup> The tentative proposal was far more comprehensive than either the resulting union or what most Congregationalists would have been willing to tolerate. The convenors of the meeting had in view pecuniary assistance to new congregations, advice to churches on the making of trusts, encouragement to candidates for the ministry, the facilitation of correspondence between the county associations and the metropolitan churches, an annual conference and generally anything connected with the spread of the gospel.<sup>16</sup>

The meeting was held on May 17 at St. Paul's Coffee-house in London with a considerable number present. There is no record of attendance, but it is believed that William Roby was present and undoubtedly there was a considerable representation from the London churches.<sup>17</sup> It was resolved that 'such a union is highly desirable' and the Congregational Board was asked to draw up a plan to be submitted at a meeting the following year.<sup>18</sup>

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12. C.I. & C.M. (1824) p. 132. The question was hypothetically asked why the author was not a Methodist? His answer was 'for I love order, propriety and consistency.'
13. T.G. Crippen, 'The Associate Congregations, London 1805,' Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society (VIII), pp. 318.
14. Stoughton, Religion in England, I, p. 104; E.M. (1806), p. 234.
15. E.M., (1806), p. 234.
16. Ibid.
17. W.G. Robinson, William Roby, p. 102.
18. E.M. (1806), p. 334.

In the course of the year the Board met to draw up the plan and duly submitted it to a similar assembly on May 18, 1807. The meeting was held at the Congregational Meeting-house at New Broad St., London and the Evangelical Magazine noted that it included lay and clerical, town and country delegates. The general object of the projected union was to 'combine influences and give great energy to the exertions of the denomination of Dissenters in the great object of enlarging and extending the Redeemer's kingdom.' After the plan was discussed and amendments made it was resolved to establish the union and appoint a committee.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hill, the classical tutor at Homerton College, was appointed secretary.

The Plan of Union was circulated among the churches and responses were solicited. It was discussed in Lancashire and Cheshire during the summer, having first been intimated in a local circular letter distributed soon after the London meeting. The result was, as we noted earlier, a reorganisation of the county itineracy into a county union.<sup>20</sup> Other churches and associations expressed their approbation and consent to cooperate; nevertheless it was necessary for the London committee to issue a circular in order to allay the fears of those who suspected ecclesiastical domination, pointing out that the Union was far from perfect and inviting critical comment.<sup>21</sup>

The Committee undoubtedly received a number of replies that are no longer extant. Among them was that of the Rev. Edward Williams, at that time the minister of Carr's Lane Chapel in Birmingham and later principal of Rotherham College in Yorkshire. Earlier, in 1793, he had authored a circular explaining to the churches in Warwickshire the basis of their country union. 'Our immediate object,' he pointed out, 'is the revival of true religion in all the churches with which we are connected.'<sup>22</sup> In a postscript addressed to other associations Williams suggested a pattern of annual meetings, in which would be included a sermon and a discussion of the state of the churches; support for weak churches; circular letters; days of prayer and fasting and charitable collections for poor ministers and missions.<sup>23</sup> Two significant points stand out in the circular that had

19. E.M., (1807), p. 286.

20. Waddington, History, IV, p. 126.

21. E.M. (1808), p. 140.

22. Williams, 'A circular letter,' Works, p. 413.

23. Ibid., p. 419.

importance for later developments. First, Williams noted the poor attendance at most associational meetings and saw the problem chiefly laying in their unrealistic aims. 'A connexion formed on principles merely sentimental is far more likely to be broken than that which has an explicit and invariable boundary.' The viability of Independent associations was in their limited objectives and therefore complementing the strong independency of most Congregational churches. This was to be an issue in 1806 and again in 1832. Secondly, Williams argued for the necessity of denominational action. There was still considerable inter-denominational feeling and the onus was on those who favoured specifically sectarian enterprises to justify themselves. At the annual meeting of the L.M.S. in 1805 the point was made that many retained their religious prejudices, refused interdenominational intercourse and charged catholic spirits 'with being the enemies of all discipline and good order ...'<sup>24</sup> Williams wanted to maintain a broad catholicity, but pragmatically saw that specialization was necessary. Charity must be given to all:

but we wish the churches in our own immediate connexion to act without the least dependence of supplies of so precarious a nature. Though a union of different denominations, in promoting any charitable end is desirable, yet it must be granted by all who consider attentively human nature, that an effect really superior may be expected from each denomination exciting itself separately.<sup>25</sup>

This articulation of the union principle lay at the back of the 1806 union. Thomas Gilbert said as much, pointing particularly to the ideas of monthly meetings and foreign missions.<sup>26</sup>

Williams's critique of the 1806 circular revealed a similar pragmatism wedded to the principle of association on the national level. His pamphlet was published anonymously under the pseudonym 'A true Friend to the Union.' Few Congregationalists, he believed, disapproved of the scheme, though he admitted that some viewed it with suspicion and believed 'that union implies power, and that power so obtained will be misapplied.' Williams's concern was the means of effecting such a union and not the

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24. E.M., (1805), p. 204.

25. Williams, 'A circular letter', Works, p. 425.

26. Ibid.

principle itself. A balance between simplicity and complexity of organization had to be struck:

And although simplicity of construction being a high recommending quality, it must not be so simple as not to be firmly connected, or not to produce the effect proposed.

On the one hand the union could not 'require strenuous and lasting exertions,' but on the other hand it also needed to provide 'some superintending care.'<sup>27</sup>

To Williams's mind the London committee's proposals aimed too high. A union of independent churches was justifiable only if agreed objects 'cannot be obtained without it.' The over-all purposes were good - the 'natural benefit of the churches... and the advancement of the Redeemer's cause, in all places, and by all spiritual and laudable means.' In other words the purpose of the union was the promotion of fraternity and missions. Specifically, Williams extolled plans to encourage newly raised congregations and interests. What bothered him was the projected means. It was said that the union would be able to give advice to the churches, but Williams wondered how this would be possible without becoming tedious and complicated. And why should churches, he asked, want to refer local problems to a distant and little informed committee?<sup>28</sup> On the matter of coordinated financial support for new causes Williams agreed with the need but believed that some serious rethinking had to be done first. Raising funds from London would be hopeless and unrealistic. Specific needs had to be dealt with on the local level by those who knew the situation. Williams suggested as an alternative that money could be collected for chapel cases,

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27. Edward Williams, 'Thoughts on a "General and explicit union of the whole body of Congregational churches"', occasioned by an address from the London Committee to Ministers of the Congregational order, in Evan Davies, ed, 'Works (London 1862), p. 432. Williams's stated reason for committing his 'Thoughts' to publication was in order to attract public attention to union proposals and to allow the committee to reflect upon his suggestions.

28. Ibid., p. 434.

approved by the county association and national union, by local itinerants who could present each case to be interested churches in the area. 'Hereby an incomparably larger sum may be raised with the most cheerful concurrence.'<sup>29</sup>

There were several other areas from which Williams felt the Union should stay out. Theological education was already tied to regionally associated colleges and academies; advice on trust deeds was already given by the London Dissenting Deputies and the General Body of Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations and arbitration was unrealistic as the congregations were too far removed from London. The chief contribution the Union could make would be in regulating petitionary chapel cases. Working with the county associations the union would approve cases and allow only a few petitioning ministers at a time to come to London, therefore benefitting both petitioners and benefactors.

In a subsequent open letter to the Rev. George Burder entitled 'Hints proposed to the consideration of a committee in London' Williams reiterated many of the same points. He saw the union as 'favourable to personal religion' since it would 'cement the affections of Christians of every name and clime,' and as 'perfectly consistent with Christian liberty.'<sup>30</sup> The question had to be asked, however, whether a union was necessary since Congregationalists were united on a wide range of points - doctrine, discipline, institutions and missions. Williams believed that there was reason, though it had to be realized that 'no national religious union, founded on voluntary promises alone, can be lasting.'<sup>31</sup> The key issues were financial support for weak and new causes and chapel debts. Williams saw this as 'the mainspring of the national union' and to which

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29. Ibid., p. 435.

30. Edward Williams, 'Hints proposed to the consideration of a committee in London formed for the purpose of digesting a plan for a national union between the Evangelical Congregational churches, etc. through England and Wales,' addressed to George Burder, first published Rotherham, 1807, Works p. 440.

31. Ibid., p. 441.

end he suggested several lines of action. The union should originate in London and be administered by a committee that would include a secretary and a treasurer.<sup>32</sup> The secretary was particularly important since he had to keep up the momentum and correspondence and as such should be salaried and provided with an office.<sup>33</sup> The central committee would then work with district and county associations in regulating chapel cases. A corollary of this was communication between churches which Williams believed would be a most important aspect of the union's work, particularly in directing home missions.<sup>34</sup>

By the beginning of 1808 the new union was operating. The annual meeting was held on May 18 at Mr. Well's chapel, Moorfields when Williams preached on the character of Christian and Congregational unity. He pressed his points of limited objectives and the importance of pecuniary considerations.<sup>35</sup> Consequently several of the articles of constitution were dropped and the twofold aim of evangelism and chapel cases re-emphasized. The Rev. Charles Buck, pastor of the Princes St., Moorfields church, was appointed co-secretary of the union with Hill. This first full-fledged meeting of the union was an undoubted success. Thomas Wilson noted in his diary for May 21, 1808 that: 'We are likely to get on in the Congregational Union.'<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately it was evident within a few years that the union was not getting on at all well. Only two further annual meetings are on record as having been held - in 1809 at the New London Tavern when David Bogue preached and in 1810 when Dr. Winter preached.<sup>37</sup> By 1811 the London Congregational Board announced that thereafter it would deal with all

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32. Ibid., p. 442.

33. Ibid., p. 445.

34. Ibid., p. 444.

35. E.M. (1808), p. 272. In my research I came across a catalogue in the Congregational Library with reference to the Report of the General Union of Congregational Ministers and Churches throughout England and Wales (Shacklewell 1808). Unfortunately, it has been lost.

36. Joshua Wilson, The Life of Thomas Wilson (London 1852), p. 266.

37. E.M., (1809), p. 262; (1810), p. 253.

chapel cases coming up to London.<sup>38</sup> It seems that the machinery of the union in this crucial area had failed and that the old system had been restored. Through 1809 the central committee had issued a number of directives explaining the application procedure to the churches, but it was apparent that the procedure was being violated and the committee had to respond by tightening regulations.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the churches resented these measures and saw in them an attempt to gain ecclesiastical dominance. As far as home missions were concerned the union made little headway. The one station that had either been established or remained was taken over by the new Home Missionary Society in 1820 and what remained of the union was merged with the H.M.S. in 1827.<sup>40</sup>

The reasons for the failure of the union are only as good as the meagre evidence that survives. Both secretaries died soon after their appointments, Hill in 1813 and Buck in 1815. This would have caused a disruption of leadership, though a more healthy institution would have survived. More importantly perhaps was the considerable opposition from both Anglicans and Congregationalists. Soon after the union was founded the High Church Anglican barrister James Sedgwick wrote a pamphlet against the county associations and the national union. He referred to this development as 'a most illegal, as well as insulting, violation of the British Constitution, that any class or order of men in the kingdom should dare to erect themselves into a society for the purpose of exterminating doctrines which in their judgments are unsound.' The ministers involved were referred to as a 'bloated crew of lay priests... upstart, untaught mechanics.'<sup>41</sup> Sedgwick's diatribe reflected the wider hostility of high churchmen to evangelicalism generally and Dissent specifically at the turn of the century. The legislative manifestation of this was Lord Sidmouth's 1810 bill to regulate itinerant preaching and the licensing of ministers.

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38. E.M. (1811), p. 485.

39. E.M. (1809), p. 86; 169; 302; 438.

40. R.W. Dale; History of Congregationalism (London 1884), p. 688.

41. John Waddington, History, IV p. 218; Albert Peel, These Hundred Years (London 1931), p. 36.

From within Congregationalism there was also opposition to the union. George Burder saw the failure of the union in the lack of support given to it by Congregational leaders. The result in his view was 'injury to the cause of religion' and a disadvantage to Independents compared to other denominations.<sup>42</sup> Burder's assessment was perhaps too pessimistic. Other denominations such as the Baptists and the Calvinistic Methodists had similar organizational difficulties. Wesleyan Methodists were divided by schisms and secessions and the Establishment needed considerable administrative reforms.<sup>43</sup> The failure of the Congregational Union was not so much due to a failure in structure or support as to the unreadiness of Congregational institutions. The most important development that had to take place was the consolidation of the county associations. By 1806 most of these institutions were less than twenty years old and hardly had enough time to establish themselves as an integral part of Congregational life. The Congregationalist historian Albert Peel was correct in seeing the associations and particularly Williams's thinking on them as fundamental to the 1832 Congregational Union, but in 1806 Congregationalism was unprepared for effective union. The benefits of the 1806 union were less direct. As a result of the 1806 attempt a county association was formed out of the old itinerate society of Lancashire and Cheshire which was later to prove a strong pillar of the 1832 union.

In spite of the 1806 failure the notion of union was not dead and periodic attempts were made to revive it. The historian Walter Wilson broached the subject in his Antiquities of Dissent in 1814 in which he bemoaned the lack of ecclesiastical order in Congregationalism and looked forward to something more akin to Presbyterianism than Independency as a remedy.<sup>44</sup> In 1816 the association of churches in Nottingham, Derby and Leicester issued a plan for union that was printed in the Evangelical Magazine. The

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42. H.F. Burder, George Burder (London 1833), p. 159

43. For Baptists see A.C. Underwood, A History of the English Baptists (London 1947), p. 183; Joseph Ivimey, History of the English Baptists, four vols. (London 1830), p. 117; for Methodists see W.R. Ward, Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (London 1972), pp. 75ff; Maldwyn Edwards, After Wesley (London 1935), p. 46

44. Walter Wilson, History and Antiquities of the Dissenting Churches and meeting-houses in London, Westminster and Southwark (London 1808-1814), preface.

plan sought to tie the proposed union to local needs and suggested a connexion of small districts, each of which would raise funds for home missions, ministerial superannuation, charity and education. The reason given for the union was that among Congregationalists a less perfect union existed in comparison with other denominations. As a result Independents had shown less concern for their denominational welfare and had allowed things to seriously decline. It was noted that some felt that Congregational unity had been laid to rest with the failure of the 1806 plan, but the writers believed that the object remained the same and an altered plan was practicable. Looking at the existing state of affairs they concluded:

How much good might the great body of Independents have done, if some regular system had been laid down and observed, to excite, concentrate and direct their energies, but for about a century and a half they have acted in<sup>45</sup> a desultory manner, without union, without plan.

Nothing is known to have resulted from this plan.

Of greater importance were the growing number of books, pamphlets and printed sermons that supported the idea of association. In 1822 John Angel James, minister of Carr's Lane, Birmingham, published his popular Christian Fellowship: or the Church member's guide in which he argued for a clearer witness to dissenting principles. While enjoining a broad evangelical catholicity he pointed out that there was not any incongruity between that and vigilant nonconformity:

...there is far greater importance in the principles of dissent, viewed in connexion with either the interests of vital religion at home, or the spread of the gospel abroad, than many persons perceive; and it is this importance, indeed, which constitutes their chief glory. The government of the church ought never to be viewed apart from its moral and spiritual improvement... The Head of the church arranged its government with a direct reference to its purity and peace, and that the system he<sup>46</sup> had laid down is the best calculated to promote those ends.

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45. E.M. (1816), pp. 146, 150.

46. John Angel James, Christian Fellowship: or the Church member's guide, first published 1822 (London 5th edition 1830), p. 3.

The Eclectic Review took up James's call for a more clear-cut nonconformity and saw in it the basis for union. There was the danger that union would isolate the Congregational churches, but this was not necessary and a 'moral cohesion arising from the influence of common sentiments and interests' could produce a union at once both open to other evangelicals and serving the needs of the Congregational community:

Now, if we wish to see the Dissenting community, as such, bound up into a more visible union, it must be by bringing more into view Dissenting principles, by making them better understood, and by interesting Dissenters in them. God forbid that Dissenters should become more sectarian in their spirit! As their principles become more operative, they will rather become less so; for in proportion as a man holds fast what he himself deems right, will he feel able to meet those of other opinions with candour and calmness. Bigotry is doubly a crime in a Dissenter.

As Congregationalists grew in the unity of their convictions the time would come for a more concrete scheme of association.<sup>47</sup>

Two related institutions in London helped to provide impetus. The first was the Monthly Exercise of Congregational ministers, held at various chapels and usually consisting of a lecture by one of their number. Two lectures were of particular importance. In 1821 the Rev. John Morison delivered a celebrated lecture at Stepney Meeting-house entitled, 'On the Best Methods of promoting an effective union among Congregational churches without infringing on their independence.' Morison sought to deal with the thorniest question facing the union of churches. He first made a vigorous defence of catholic evangelicalism and disclaimed any sectarian hostility. An 'illiberal spirit' was the 'very spirit of Anti-Christ':

So long as I hold to the HEAD - even Christ - I will not venture the daring act of excluding them from the communion of saints, nor will I refuse to hold fellowship with any of their members, who are conformed in disposition and character to the image of our common Lord and Saviour.<sup>48</sup>

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47. E.R. (1822), 2nd S XVIII, pp. 324-333.

48. John Morison, On the best methods of promoting an effective union among Congregational churches (London 1822), p. 8. Delivered as the lecture before the monthly association in 1821.

Nevertheless Congregationalists needed to take heed of their own interests. This was not 'widening the breach' between evangelicals, but was rather an affirmation of their unity. By its nature Congregationalism was catholic and liberal and its chief feature was 'the adaptation ... to the diversified characters and wants of mankind. There is so much simplicity and so little cumbersome political arrangement about a church of this order, that it would seem to stand in self-convincing harmony with the gospel itself.' Congregational order was apostolic order in its purity:

Did I not perceive in the simple, unsecular and voluntary character of our churches, a moral engine of exquisite construction, for promoting the interests of truth and holiness in the world, I should think that any struggle to propagate the system would be utterly unworthy of the disciples of the Holy Saviour.<sup>49</sup>

To Morison's mind the voluntary character of the church was 'too little attended to.' He disliked the term 'Independent' since it was 'friendly to an insulation of churches.' Rather he preferred to use 'Congregational' and would promote an effective union conducive to 'the sacred ends of Christian fellowship.'<sup>50</sup> To accomplish this Congregationalists had to see that the church was fulfilled not only within itself, but within the larger context of churches of a similar order:<sup>51</sup>

In nothing will the effectiveness of congregational union more evince itself, than in the rapid spread of the great cause of truth and holiness which it will beyond doubt occasion. What a formidable front might our combined forces present to the various enemies of truth were they marshalled with greater skill, brought together in closer array, and animated more by the command of the Great Leader, and less by the spirit of petty jealousy.<sup>52</sup>

Morison foresaw a union of county associations for the purpose of consultation, mutual discipline and the defence of principles. The problem with the older union was that it had attempted too much and achieved too little. The key

49. Ibid., p. 14.

50. Ibid., p. 19.

51. Ibid., p. 25.

52. Ibid., p. 40.

to success was in narrowing the union's objectives.<sup>53</sup> The union would meet in annual conference which would have no pretensions of legislative authority or power. This line of thought was taken up by Robert Winter in his Monthly Exercise lecture in 1826 entitled The Beneficial tendencies of Christian association.<sup>54</sup> Both Morison and Winter conceived of union within the context of evangelical unity.

It was not surprising that with the idea of union being discussed in the Monthly Exercise that it was also discussed in the Congregational Board of Ministers. In 1817 the Board announced that henceforth it would deal with all questions of a public nature relating to the community and thereafter took the initiative in most political and ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>55</sup> During 1825 the Board discussed at some length the question of a new Congregational union. A meeting was called to discuss 'whether or not some plan might be adopted for extending the information regarding our denomination.' The customary assurances were given that congregational liberties would be protected, but nevertheless it was stated that 'we should employ means to become better acquainted with those churches in different parts of England ...' The proposal was that each Congregational association would send a representative to an annual meeting in London. In the meantime a meeting during May 1824 was intimated, but nothing came of it in spite of John Blackburn's efforts in the Congregational Magazine to arouse interest.<sup>56</sup>

Several developments were making for a renewed attempt to establish a union. The Congregational Magazine appeared in 1824, succeeding the old

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53. Ibid., p. 50.

54. Robert Winter, The beneficial tendencies of Christian association... (London 1826). See also Winter's Pastoral Letters on Nonconformity (London 1817).

55. E.M. (1817), p. 126, 132, 213, 355; Stoughton, Religion in England, I, p.104. In 1819 the Congregational Board approached the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning a bill that would have provided for the erection of Anglican churches at the state's expense. The Board also took the initiative for calling the denomination to days of fasting and prayer. See C.M. (1829), p.177.

56. C.M. (1824), p. 220, 352; (1825) p. 220.

London Christian Instructor and providing Congregationalists with the central voice they needed.<sup>57</sup> John Blackburn, the first editor, did much to encourage progressive developments in Congregationalism and Congregational institutions. He worked hard at gathering accurate statistics about the churches and corresponded with his readers about denominational affairs and particularly about a national organization.<sup>58</sup> The founding of the Home Missionary Society in 1819 provided Congregationalists with a national society, similar to the London Missionary Society, for home evangelization and church planting. The London Congregational Union, founded in 1826, prospectively gave the London churches more coherence.<sup>59</sup> In Scotland a national union was formed in 1813 combining the functions of both a fraternity and a home mission;<sup>60</sup> and in Ireland the Congregational Union was established in 1830, though there was to be some later trouble with the rival English supported Irish Evangelical Society.<sup>61</sup> Parallel developments were also taking place among the Baptists with the founding and maturation of county associations, periodicals and a Baptist union in 1812.<sup>62</sup>

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57. C.M. (1826), preface.

58. Charles Surman, 'The Rev. John Blackburn (1792-1855): Pioneer statistician of English Congregationalism,' Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society, (1955) p. 353. See a letter from the Rev. J. West to Blackburn, January 18, 1817 for an example of correspondence. West saw that union could result from the gathering of statistics:...'then perhaps,' he wrote, 'a union might take place with the prudent advice and management of some of our senior brethren.' In N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/84. In addition to articles such as C.M. (1825), pp. 387, 606-7, 781, Blackburn usually had a large statistical section in the annual magazine supplement.

59. C.M. (1827), p. 53; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 42. Blackburn was the secretary pro tem and the purpose was 'the adoption of particular measures for increasing and strengthening the churches of our own faith and order by a zealous and affectionate cooperation...'

60. Waddington, History, IV p. 233.

61. C.M. (1830), p. 49.

62. Stoughton, Religion in England, I p. 280; Underwood, English Baptists, pp. 185, 212.

Most importantly were the growing denominational needs that made some form of a national union desirable. After 1810 and the Sidmouth bill there were a growing number of political issues that needed a larger and more representative body than the Congregational Board to oversee and take action on. The campaign for the repeal of the Test Laws and the growing number of chapel cases revealed both the distance between metropolitan and provincial Dissent and the need for broad-based cooperation. There was the further pastoral problem confronting Congregationalists of weak interests and poor and destitute ministers, both of which touched upon a much repeated criticism of Congregationalism that it fed the strong and starved the weak. These problems had been raised in 1806 and continued to feed subsequent discussions. John Wilks, for example, wrote to Blackburn in 1818 decrying the condition of the poor ministers and welcoming an advertisement he had seen for a new society for ministerial superannuation. Congregational ministers needed this:

Unbeneficed because conscientious, unprovided with those revenues which the Ministers of the Establishment Church partake to the end of their lives. They appear to press a claim on the liberality of their Brethren which we most cheerfully admit. As an additional means of Union among Protestant Dissenters<sup>63</sup> at a period when such union seems especially required.

Ministerial superannuation was to remain a thorn in the side of Congregationalism for many decades since it carried with it the implication of supervision and centralized control. In 1825 a Society for the Relief of Aged and Infirm Ministers was founded, but such societies were wholly charitable, received relatively few funds and barely met the great need.<sup>64</sup> In 1826 a proposal for a more comprehensive scheme was put forward, but nothing came of it.<sup>65</sup> The state of poor churches presented much the same problem. Andrew Reed saw the need for a union in 1828 for the very reason of helping these churches. He noted in his journal:

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63. John Wilks to John Blackburn, June 2, 1818, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/89.

64. C.M. (1826), p. 404.

65. C.M. (1826), p. 250.

I think our Independent churches are too independent. If they flourish within themselves they are too often content. Many of them will, perhaps, require to know that others prosper likewise; but they have not entered on any regular method to nourish weak congregations, or to plant new ones ... This is one evil existing among us.<sup>66</sup>

By the end of 1829 more and more voices were being raised in support of the idea of a denominational union. The Dorsetshire Association was particularly interested and during May 1829 a member of the association visited London in order to gauge opinion on the matter. Later in October the question of union was raised at the ordination of James Brown at Wareham.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile in London the question was actively being discussed during 1830. In May that year a provisional committee was formed consisting of an equal number of prominent London ministers and laymen, including James Bennett, Thomas Binney, John Blackburn, Andrew Reed, Arthur Tidman, Robert Winter and Joshua Wilson.<sup>68</sup> A larger public meeting was held on June 28 in Poultry Chapel from which emerged a circular to the churches entitled 'Principles of the Proposed Congregational Union.'<sup>69</sup> The platform set out three fundamental principles of union: (1) that the national union consist of county associations, (2) that the union would not interfere in the affairs of either the associations or the local churches, and (3) that an annual assembly of churches be convened, equally divided between ministers and laity. The objectives of the union were fivefold: evangelism, fraternity, defence of civil rights, chapel building and financing and correspondence with other denominations at home and abroad. Responses were solicited and a meeting set for May 1831.<sup>70</sup>

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66. Andrew and Charles Reed, Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Labours of Andrew Reed (London 1863), p. 64.
67. Waddington, History, IV, p. 248.
68. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 48.
69. C.M. (1830), p. 554.
70. Waddington, History, IV, p. 236.

Concurrently a great deal of correspondence was going on in reference to the proposed union. John Blackburn actively pressed its case in the Congregational and after the Poultry Chapel meeting he published some of his own thoughts on the subject.<sup>71</sup> He recognized some of the difficulties and objections, particularly in relation to congregational autonomy and the possible domination of the metropolitan churches over the provincial churches. To overcome this all concerned had to realize that 'the only valuable union of our body must be through the sympathetic, unassuming, voluntary, unpaid, and persevering activity of our local associations' and through correspondence. Blackburn conceived of union through the associations and seemingly looked to them for the initiative in commencing the union.

The tradition of anonymity in 19th century periodicals makes most attempts to discern Blackburn's hand in the Congregational difficult. His sympathies lay with the letters and articles which favoured union and which he backed up with reports on other related activities and institutions such as the Scottish union or the American Congregational associations.<sup>72</sup> Throughout the year several articles dealt with the union, both before and after the Poultry chapel meeting. In May one contributor posed the question:

Can no plan be devised by Congregationalists to unite the scattered parts and energies of our numerous and increasing denomination? Can no methods be adopted, by which a real and extensive union may exist and prove to our adversaries that our unity in faith and practice is more than a name? Can no plan of amalgamation be proposed, which, while it never for a moment affected the independency of our churches, would produce us the following practical results?

Those results were mutual acquaintance of the churches, help for poorer churches, chapel building and the diffusion of Congregational principles. This had to be seen in the light of Roman Catholic and Anglican advance. Those bodies knew the advantages of cooperative unity within themselves

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71. C.M. (1830), p. 362.

72. C.M. (1830), p. 631, 664.

and were 'trying in every possible way to "stop the progress of Dissent".' Significantly the writer included evangelical Anglicans in this opposition to Dissent. 'Let not our denomination,' he wrote, 'be the last in the race of combined and extensive movements.'<sup>73</sup> In the June issue another anonymous writer advocated union, seeing the reason in the 'new state of things' resulting from the constitutional changes of 1828-29 - repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and Roman Catholic emancipation. He also looked at the state of the various denominations and the advantages to several of connexional union, particularly singling out the Wesleyan Methodists of which 'no case can more clearly illustrate the advantages of union and consolidation.' While Congregationalists could not copy the Wesleyan churches they did provide 'an impressive example of the results of union before us, does it not become us to inquire, if there is not some way, in which, without a compromise of principles, we may, by a voluntary and harmonious federation, cooperate in their support and extension?'<sup>74</sup> The foundation of the union was to be in the unity of Congregationalists in doctrine and order. If such a structure for unity was provided it would 'impress the imagination, enlist the sympathies, and excite the energies of the youthful members of our families' as well as others in order to create a 'firm phalanx' for action. The impulse for union issued from a conviction that Congregationalists were losing out in the expansion of the early 19th century for lack of organization and from a growing denominational militancy in the face of the Establishment and the incursions of Popery into English religious life.

After the Poultry chapel meeting positive responses continued to appear in the Congregational. 'Erastus' wanted to see some order to help the current confusion with chapel cases.<sup>75</sup> Two letters appeared in the November number, the writer of one of which echoed earlier correspondence and stated his belief that Congregationalists were at a disadvantage and needed a union to begin redressing the imbalance and to advance as a denomination. 'T.Q.S.' warned that the Congregational Union had to avoid

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73. C.M. (1830), p. 254.

74. C.M. (1830), p. 305.

75. C.M. (1830), p. 446.

interference with local churches and institutions and would need to have enough business in order to be credible and worthwhile. He saw the advantage of the Union in promoting colonial missions as well as keeping a check on the Establishment.<sup>76</sup> It is important to note that these correspondents were expanding the older idea of the union from that of a strictly denominational pastoral agency to one that also included the advocacy of dissenting rights. Congregationalists were clearly seeing themselves as a community with a distinct identity and with the means of concerted action.

Not everyone favoured union. Early in 1830 a letter appeared in the Congregational questioning the assumption that the want of union was the bane of Congregationalism. 'Unus Fratrum' believed that the county associations were remedying the disparateness of the denomination, being 'characterized by all those features of union of which our denomination is perhaps capable.'<sup>77</sup> Others objected to the specific features of the proposed union. The antiquarian Walter Wilson felt that a mere union of congregations did not go far enough. Wilson criticized the loss of the old Puritan spirit among Congregationalists and their absorption of 18th century evangelical pietism. This only 'contributed materially to sink the value of ecclesiastical questions, and to promote an indifference to them in the estimation of non-established Christians.' Anglicans on the other hand were zealous for their church. The remedy was for Dissenters to 'become visible in their public assemblies' through a 'closer union', though Wilson had a form of Presbyterianism in mind that went beyond what most Congregationalists would tolerate.<sup>78</sup> One of Blackburn's

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76. C.M. (1830), p. 589.

77. C.M. (1830), p. 126.

78. C.M. (1830), p. 194; a reply to Wilson appeared in the May number of the C.M. (1830), p. 253 by 'M' who agreed with him on most points.

personal correspondents feared just this, that a union consisting of associations would be tempted to become a synod. William Chaplin, minister in Bishops Stortford and a later chairman of the Union, adopted a cautious attitude to the plans:

It has struck me that the union of Associations would accomplish the object only in a very defective manner. Associations are themselves partial, not universal, and some of them comprise others besides those of our Denomination, as in Beds and Herts. Nor do they in all cases include all the ministers within their nominal bounds ... It seems to me that the plan proposed would lead to a sort of synodical union instead of a Congregational one, and even that would be imperfect.

Chaplin wanted to see instead a union of individual churches as was the case in Scotland and in many associations. He further doubted whether the proposed union would have enough business to justify 'so formidable a system of public meetings ... somewhat resembling the Methodist conferences.'<sup>79</sup>

Back in Dorset discussion continued through 1830. A group of four ministers had met the previous December to discuss plans and had solicited responses from the churches. The replies were generally favourable and a synopsis was published in the World newspaper in London in January. In March the letters were collected and sent as a paper under the pseudonym 'Merinio' (the Roman name for Wareham, the town of origin of the paper) to the Congregational, but were not published until the July after the Poultry chapel meeting. The proposal was simply that the churches and associations meet in annual assembly, triennially in London, in order to discuss mutual problems.<sup>80</sup> In the meantime the question came up at the annual meeting of the Dorsetshire Association in April at Sherborne when it was agreed to discuss it extensively at the autumn meeting. Soon afterwards the Rev. J.E. Good, one of the authors of the World articles, attended a meeting in London at Claremont Chapel, Pentonville called by

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79. William Chaplin to Blackburn, Nov. 27, 1830, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/26.

80. C.M. (1830), p. 364.

Blackburn to discuss the union and was pleased to report back to his colleagues that 'many highly influential and worthy persons in London were favourable.'<sup>81</sup>

In October the Dorsetshire Association met in its autumn session in Shaftesbury to discuss the union. A committee was appointed and given instructions to bring 'under the consideration of the religious public of the Independent denomination' the ideal of a national union. It was foreseen that the existing structure of county associations would be left intact. The union would enable the churches to draw together, to address religious and public issues, to promote Congregational principles and to organize ministerial superannuation and pensions.<sup>82</sup> A circular was drawn up and sent out in November to 1,500 churches in order to gauge national opinion. Meanwhile John Brown, minister of Wareham, wrote to several leading London Congregationalists advocating the plan. He explained to Robert Winter the purposes of such a union as being to gather accurate statistics, to remedy the problem of chapel-begging, to issue an annual letter to the churches, to remedy Dissenters' grievances, to advise on chapel trust deeds and to make occasional recommendations to the churches. As far as political activity was concerned he saw the union taking steps in urging political reforms and Sabbatarian observance. 'In one word,' he wrote, 'to form a Representative Body, by which the Churches should be acted upon as by an electric shock from Sutherland to Land's End.'<sup>83</sup> Brown's conception was markedly comprehensive and reflected what at least one association saw as the organizational response needed to strengthen the national Congregational community.

The proposals themselves reflected this comprehensivity. Seventeen objects were set out including evangelistic itineracy, chapel building,

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81. Waddington, History, IV, p. 349.

82. W. Densham and J. Ogle, The Story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset (Bournemouth 1909), p. 239.

83. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 50. I have not been able to find this letter in the Congregational Library collection.

arbitration between churches, charity, week-day schools, advice to the churches and correspondence with sister bodies and other denominations. Thereupon followed numerous details on application and procedure.<sup>84</sup> While the Dorset Association was pleased with the response received, Congregational leaders in London were stunned by this apparently brash provincial initiative appearing before their own plans. Blackburn received Brown's request to publish the circular in the Congregational in mid-December, but nothing came of it except a stern rebuke from Blackburn in the January number against the attitude and action of the Dorset brethren.<sup>85</sup> What annoyed Blackburn was that the subject of union had been discussed at length in the Congregational and that a coordinated plan had been initiated the previous May, leading to the publication of the various responses in October 1830 and the projected submission of a detailed plan the following May. While Blackburn must have known of the Dorset discussions and the visits of Dorset ministers to London, he made no mention of this and saw the proposals as undermining the whole concept. He felt that the efforts of the Congregational had been ignored, but more importantly that the Dorset plan would 'do much to impede the cause we all have at heart' by arousing controversy and by shifting the centre of initiative to the provinces where there would be no hope of concerted action. In fact the Dorset plan hardly touched the issue of a denominational centre, but Blackburn saw in the initiative a threat to the metropolitan ascendancy. The 'Alpha' letters in the World the previous year had contained some murmurings by provincial Dissenters alleging the mishandling of funds by metropolitan trustees. Blackburn asserted on the contrary that metropolitan Dissenters had been active in promoting union and were not guilty of delay.<sup>86</sup>

A good deal of bad feeling and aggravation was caused by the conflict between Brown and Blackburn. One of Blackburn's former Essex colleagues

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84. John Brown to Blackburn, Dec. 6/13, 1830, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/27. The letter included the printed Dorset proposals. See also C.M. (1831), p. 373.

85. C.M. (1831), p. 66.

86. C.M. (1831), p. 68.

wrote to him in January 1831 regarding the plans for union since they were 'now in a peculiar and precarious position.' He had received the Dorset circular and had understood that it had met with a good response, but he had held back from endorsing it having suspected some rivalry with the London plans. Though he sympathized with Blackburn, Chaplin thought the circumstances did not bode well for the prospective union. As far as Essex was concerned he could assure Blackburn of support as they had not been much affected by the Dorset circular.<sup>87</sup> Henry Rogers was as concerned about the breach but hoped that some form of reconciliation could be reached. Rogers had been approached by the Dorset people to act as an intermediary since he was on friendly terms with both parties. Writing to Blackburn, he saw the root of the problem in misunderstanding and not in either subversion or high-handedness and expressed his view that if both sides did not come to an agreement the controversy could boil over into 'real offences and irretrievable errors.' Rogers pointed out that the Dorset people 'scarcely care by what means (the union) was effected'; both wanted union and it was needless to squabble about who was first in moving the idea. Blackburn's postscript in the January Congregational did not help matters and deeply offended the Dorset ministers having charged them with duplicity. In fact they had taken their cue from several London ministers who had implied that the initiative would have best come from the country. On Blackburn's criticism that the Dorset proposal was too long and detailed, Rogers agreed but pointed out that the proposals were only intended for public debate and not for final adoption. Finally, for the sake of peace Rogers thought Blackburn should make a gesture of conciliation by inserting the Dorset circular in the Congregational.<sup>88</sup> On the other side Robert Winter wrote to John Brown to assure him that the metropolitan ministers were not trying to impose a union scheme on the country and asked him to be patient and wait until the provisional committee had met in the new year before doing anything else.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile

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87. William Chaplin to Blackburn, Jan. 15, 1831, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/28.

88. Henry Rogers to Blackburn, Jan. 1831, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/107.

89. R. Winter to John Brown, C.L.Mss. IIc34; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 52

Brown himself sought support in other quarters. He wrote to Thomas Wilson in late January complaining of his handling by Blackburn. He denied the charges that he and his colleagues were trying to undermine the union and assured Wilson 'that I take the deepest interest in the proposed Cong'l. Union.'<sup>90</sup>

Blackburn acquiesced and in February the Congregational carried an explanation from the Dorset Association stating that the association had been considering the subject of union for eighteen months and disclaiming 'all idea of circumvention, all desire of priority.'<sup>91</sup> The actual proposals were printed in June, but by then the controversy had passed.<sup>92</sup>

At the centre of the controversy was the distrust between metropolitan and provincial dissent, though the demarcation was not always clear. Ministers of large provincial cities such as Birmingham and of some counties such as Essex were very close to the thinking of the London clergy. The Rev. Joseph Fletcher understood this tension. He believed that the Dorset proposals were causing discord, but advised his London colleagues that because of the 'rural jealousy of Metropolitan influence ... we should bear our faculties very meekly on this point.'<sup>93</sup> One particularly contentious issue was the new Congregational Library which was opened at this time as a denominational centre. While the issue was not raised by the provincial circulars, the popular World newspaper sought to exploit the issue and picture the Library as a bid by the London ministers for centralized control. Early in 1830 a committee was formed to establish a library consisting of Thomas and Joshua Wilson, John Blackburn, Benjamin Hanbury, John Pye Smith and several provincial leaders such as George Hadfield of Manchester. A prospectus was issued pointing out the need of a library. Many Congregationalists were uneasy with using

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90. J. Brown to Thomas Wilson, Jan. 22, 1831, C.L.Mss. II.c.34 (B.19).

91. C.M. (1831), p. 120.

92. C.M. (1831), p. 373.

93. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 52.

the Unitarian controlled Dr. Williams's Library and others felt that something other than the L.M.S. headquarters was necessary for denominational meetings and offices. Furthermore, other denominations had their own libraries and offices.<sup>94</sup> It was envisaged that the new library would provide a repository for books, manuscripts and trust-deeds.<sup>95</sup> While plans were being made for the new union, a building was procured on Blomfield St. near Finsbury Circus in London and the library opened in early May 1831, just before the meeting to form the union.<sup>96</sup> The library was generously patronized by the Wilson family and generally welcomed by the Congregational community.

There was not extensive public discussion about the library. Blackburn had several correspondents who made practical suggestions on its operation and how to make it most useful. R.M. Beverley, an avid voluntarist who later turned to a Quakerish mysticism, welcomed the parting of ways with the Socinians at Dr. Williams's.<sup>97</sup> Others, however, were less sure. Walter Wilson, writing to Joshua Wilson, expressed his concurrence in the general idea, but would have preferred to have seen the library opened to all orthodox Nonconformists and not only to Congregationalists.<sup>98</sup> The World newspaper was totally opposed to the idea. Stephen Bourne, the editor, took up the cause of the Dorset proposals, wedded them to the new library and charged the metropolitan Dissenters with being heavy-handed and domineering. John Blackburn was particularly criticized for his attempts to bring the two movements together, which he believed would 'greatly increase the interest of each.' The library would provide 'a place of conversation, and a depository for archives, and would give the General Congregational Union "a local habitation and a Name."<sup>99</sup> Bourne believed just the opposite and fumed against the decision to take rooms for the library:

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94. C.M. (1831), p. 251; Stoughton, Religion in England, I p. 103; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 48.

95. C.M. (1831), p. 251.

96. C.M. (1831), p. 369. £2,150 was collected, £1,000 of which was from the Wilson family. Several appeals were made for books. A large amount of the C.L.'s present collection came from the library of Joshua Wilson.

97. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, Oct. 29, 1834, C.L.Mss., II.c.22.

98. Walter Wilson to Joshua Wilson, July 6, 1830, C.L.Mss., II.c.22.

99. C.M. (1830), p.

Now we beg to ask whether the authority to fix a place of meeting, not yet constituted, has been decided? Was it from the Pope of Rome? The first teachers of Christians needed no splendid buildings to nurture their plans ... (T)hey met in an upper room to transact the greatest business ever entrusted to the management of human beings.<sup>100</sup>

In spite of such protestations the new library provided Congregationalists with a meeting place, though it was soon to prove too small for their needs.

At the turn of 1831 the provisional committee met at Poultry Chapel on January 10 and in adjourned sessions on the 17th and 24th. The first object had been to obtain the reactions of the various local associations, which had been assured that their communications had been received with 'serious attention.' The conclusion of the committee's deliberations was that the 'desirableness of uniting in the closest possible alliance the churches of our country maintaining a common faith and order ... requires no argument to commend it to a serious and reflecting mind.'<sup>101</sup> The independence of the churches could be maintained and was reconcilable with the purposes of the union: evangelism, fraternity, gathering of statistical information, defence of civil rights, chapel building and correspondence. The idea of superannuation had been dropped. Finally, the associations were again invited to send the results of their own deliberations to a meeting of delegates to be called in May.

In the meantime associations and individuals responded to the plans. Several had already done so. The Kent Association had approved the principle of a national union at its annual meeting in Tonbridge Wells, followed by other associations or conferences of churches in Shropshire, Coventry, Hampshire, Gloucester, Sussex, Warwickshire, Staffordshire and Worcestershire.

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100. Waddington, History, IV p. 351.

101. C.M. (1831), p. 121. The communication was signed by James Bennett, Thomas Binney, John Blackburn, H.F. Burder, John Clayton, J. Dean, J.P. Dobson, J. Fletcher, John Morrison, Andrew Reed, Robert Winter, Joseph Turnbull, James Baldwin Brown, Benjamin Hanbury, William Alers Hankey, John Remington Mills, Henry Parker, Apsley Pellatt, Thomas Piper, Thomas Wilson, Robert Winter, jnr. and William Yockney.

The Hampshire Association meeting in Christchurch in September called the proposed union 'a most important and desirable measure', and the Gloucestershire Association believed it 'exceedingly to be desired.'<sup>102</sup> The London Congregational Board approved the union at a meeting one day after the meeting of the provisional committee with many of the same people present. It was resolved that 'in the opinion of this Board, it is highly desirable to endeavour to form a General Union of the Congregational Churches and Ministers of England,' and a sub-committee appointed to monitor the union's progress.<sup>103</sup> The Durham and Northumberland Association met on January 18, 1831 at Monkwearmouth when it was resolved that 'We are of the opinion, that the time has arrived when a union should, if possible, be formed of all the Congregational or independent churches of England and Wales.' Their concern was that the independence of the churches should be preserved and that no existing institutions should be interfered with.<sup>104</sup> James Matheson, one of the guiding spirits of the Durham and Northumberland, pointed out in a letter to Joshua Wilson that the subject had concerned the Association for some time and that it was 'ardently desired.' In Wales the Denbigh and Flintshire Association expressed its approval.<sup>105</sup>

Not all were in agreement on the need of union. One of the most prominent opponents was the Rev. John Ely of Leeds. The Yorkshire Congregational churches were reluctant to throw in their lot with the movement for union and none were represented at union meetings until 1834, two years after the formation of the union.<sup>106</sup> Ely expressed his reservations in a letter to the Congregational published under the pseudonym 'Roffensis.'

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102. C.M. (1830), pp. 503, 681.

103. C.M. (1831), p. 122.

104. C.M. (1831), p. 123.

105. C.M. (1831), p. 124.

106. J.G. Miall, Congregationalism in Yorkshire (London 1868), p. 201; in 1834 R.W. Hamilton and Thomas Stratten attended the C.U.E.W. meeting in London. The Yorkshire Congregational unions joined the C.U.E.W. in 1843.

He had four primary objections: the union would be detrimental to the independence of the churches as it would necessarily possess some form of authority; its organization would be 'cumbersome and useless' and in conflict with already existing societies; it would sacrifice the already existing harmony; and it would constitute Congregationalism a sect and obscure its essential catholicity. He saw in the union the seed-bed of hierarchical episcopacy.<sup>107</sup> In the following number 'Dunelmisis,' undoubtedly James Matheson, replied to Ely's four objections. The union was not intended to be a court of appeal and would therefore not possess ecclesiastical authority. And whether the union was cumbersome depended on what sort of organization was established. Instead of burdening the churches the Congregational Union 'will rather unite our energies, and secure concentration, where there is now division and weakness.' It was here that the union would be most useful. At present many of the societies and associations were weak and struggling. Church extension was hampered by the lack of support by the stronger churches. The county associations in particular were in need of a cooperative union:

... there are many County Associations that cannot extend the Gospel through their counties, though they may desire to do so. The churches of which they are composed are either few in number, or through poverty hardly able to support the ministry of the gospel among them without foreign aid.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, on the sectarian question 'Dunelmisis' asked whether Congregationalists were not already a sect and suggested that it would be wiser to act as a denomination towards other denominations.

'Roffensis's' rejoinder was to state that he was unconvinced. A union was fine if it were merely a home missionary society, but on 'Dunelmisis's' own admission it was to be more than that. It was also to be an agency to diffuse information and to undertake fellowship with other church bodies. To do so the union would have to speak with an authoritative voice which, as a Congregational union, it was theoretically unqualified to do. More important was the question of admission and discipline:

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107. C.M. (1831), p. 94.

108. C.M. (1831), p. 160.

On what principle are the churches to be admitted to the union... and what, I ask, shall be the role of admission? What symbol of orthodoxy shall be proposed? And what tribunal shall be erected to decide the question of Christian purity?

And what happens when error appears in the churches?

I cannot conceive how appeal is to be avoided: should division of feeling result in the formation of a separate church, such an investigation must take place as shall determine whether the separating community is to be recognized or rejected.

Ely would have preferred to have seen a 'coalition of evangelical denominations, than a new sub-division of any of them.' His fear was that the Congregational churches would be split between those in and out of the union. Schism, he reminded his brethren, was not only a vice of the Establishment. The Congregational Union would be an artificial barrier which would force the Congregational community into 'a reluctant and disadvantageous separation.'<sup>109</sup> The importance of Ely's criticisms were not lost on the union's proponents, and were given particular weight by his standing as a minister and popular preacher. William Newick wrote to ask Blackburn whether as a result he would have difficulty bringing all the churches and ministers to agree on union. 'Roffensis' would not help Blackburn in converting 'the sceptical, the suspicious, or the lukewarm.'<sup>110</sup>

Another contributor on the subject was 'Theologus' who grounded his argument on the principles of Congregational order. Far from being hostile to independency, union was the natural expression of Congregationalism's unity of belief and principle. To back his point 'Theologus' looked to the Puritan divines Ames, Owen and Hooker and to the experience of American Congregationalism. Moreover, many societies such as the London Missionary Society and the Home Missionary Society already expressed Congregational unity in practice, which if better known would impel people to enquire

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109. C.M. (1831), p. 282.

110. William Newick to John Blackburn, March 1, 1831, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/9.

as to the principles behind their success. Might not, he asked, 'the interests of true religion, according to our Congregational views, have been more extensively promoted, both at home and abroad, if our principles of order and discipline had been distinctively recognized...?' The more our principles are held up to view the more they command the homage of the enlightened mind.'<sup>111</sup> Was this attitude sectarian? 'Well, let it be so. Suppose they shall appear one great sect; Is not Christianity itself a sect in relation to other religions... A sectarian is not necessarily a schismatic.'<sup>112</sup> Later 'Theologus' contributed a piece on the connection between the Congregational Union and Christian fellowship, seeing the union less in terms of a denominational structure as in those of a means of mutual sympathy, advice, admonition and edification:

The Congregational mode of Christianity is clearly the primitive and original form in which it was established by the apostles; and the essence of this mode is union and fellowship among all congregations of God throughout the world. Let congregational unions be formed in regions, districts, counties, according to the model set before us in the New Testament...<sup>113</sup>

Elsewhere Josiah Conder's Eclectic Review looked favourably on the advent of the union, in spite of the magazine's declared policy of neutrality on ecclesiastical issues. In an article entitled 'Advantages and disadvantages of Dissent' the reviewer defended Dissent in general and Congregationalism in particular as 'a system of faith and practice, as positive and tangible, and well defined as that of any church in the world.' Against charges of individualism he saw in Congregationalism a 'mutual independency' of churches expressed through a national union and resting upon 'catholic principles'. In this he was in agreement with the 'Remarks' by 'One of the Laity.' Congregationalism was too democratic and defensive of its

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111. C.M. (1831), p. 212.

112. C.M. (1831), p. 213.

113. C.M. (1831), p. 675.

rights when what was needed was more positive evangelical action. This was the true character of Congregationalism as exemplified by the Puritan divines. 'Independency has its principle of adhesion in that mutual communion of churches, which the system by no means leaves optional, but makes imperative.'<sup>114</sup>

The organizing meeting of ministers and officers of the churches was held on May 13 and 14 at the new Congregational Library in London. The Rev. A. Douglas of Reading presided over the meeting with 101 in attendance, 82 of whom were ministers and the rest laymen. The greatest number came from the south of England and the Midlands, with the heaviest representation (44 delegates) from London and vicinity. There were no representatives from Yorkshire, nor from Manchester and many large northern towns. John Angel James, Robert Harris and J. Phipson were present from Birmingham, Thomas Raffles from Liverpool, John Sibree from Coventry, Thomas Stratten from Sunderland and William Griffith from Holyhead in Wales. Thirty-four were representatives of county associations and 13 were members of the London Congregational Board.<sup>115</sup> At the start of the meeting communications from seventeen associations as well as the Congregational Board were submitted expressing their concurrence in the projected union. Letters from the ministers of Cambridgeshire and Lancashire and verbal consents from Derby, Wiltshire and Essex were also presented.<sup>116</sup> Thereafter followed a lengthy discussion after which John Angel James moved, seconded by John Baldwin Brown, Esq., a resolution expressing the desirability of forming a union 'founded on the

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114. E.R. (1831) 3rd series V, p. 415.

115. Minutes of the first meeting of delegates, May 13, 1831, in Documents relating to the formation of the Congregational Union (London 1839), p. 8.

116. Ibid., p. 3. The associations were those of Kent, Berks., Leicestershire, Surrey, East Devon, Durham, East Sussex, Somerset, Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire, Shropshire, Dorsetshire, Worcestershire, Cumberland, Staffordshire and Cornwall.

broadest recognition of their own distinctive principle, namely the scriptural right of every separate church to maintain perfect dependence in the government and administration of its own particular affairs.' A subsequent motion determined that the union consist of county associations. Finally a committee was formed to consider the communications from the associations and to draw up a plan to be submitted the following Friday at the adjourned session. The sub-committee consisted wholly of London men, 10 from the provisional committee and 8 from the Congregational Board, though its meetings were left open for others to attend.

At the adjourned meeting Joseph Fletcher was in the chair. The plan was read and each article was discussed separately. Article I remained the same as passed at the previous session, but now with the added assurance 'that the Union shall not in any case assume legislative authority, or become a court of appeal.' The union was to consist of county associations and its objects were: to promote evangelical religion generally, fraternity between Congregational churches and with foreign bodies, to publish an annual letter to the churches, to obtain and diffuse accurate statistical information, to regulate chapel cases and promote chapel building and to assist in maintaining and defending the civil rights of Protestant Dissenters. To meet these ends it was decided to hold an annual meeting in London, consisting of an equal number of ministers and laymen, with each association appointing as many delegates as desired and each church officer having the right to vote. A new provisional committee was appointed to communicate with the associations and to revise the plan for final adoption. The committee again consisted largely of London men: James Bennett, George Burder, Joseph Fletcher, John Blackburn, George Clayton, Andrew Reed, Thomas Challis, H. Parker and John Brown from Dorset. Joseph Turnbull, Algernon Wells and Joshua Wilson were appointed co-secretaries, with Benjamin Hanbury as treasurer. The Congregational Magazine was designated as the official organ. <sup>117</sup>

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117. Ibid., p. 11, 12. The provisional committee for the ensuing year were J. Bennett, G. Burder, J. Fletcher, J. Blackburn, J. Clayton, A. Reed, J. Brown, T. Challis, Esq., J. Parker, Esq. The provisional secretaries were Joseph Turnbull, Arthur Tidman and Joshua Wilson. Benjamin Hanbury was the treasurer pro tem.

Reactions to the meeting and the resulting plans were numerous. The plan was discussed in the associations with varying degrees of interest. There are no records of any deliberations in the association meetings of North Bucks, Hampshire or Durham and Northumberland. The Herefordshire Association met in June and decided to correspond with the provisional committee.<sup>118</sup> Unfortunately most of the associational annual meetings had already been held so that the provisional committee found it necessary to remind association secretaries early in 1832 to bring the matter up at the spring meetings.<sup>119</sup> At its meeting in April 1832 the Monmouthshire Association approved the plan<sup>120</sup> and in early May the Essex Congregational Union consented.<sup>121</sup> Most associations seemed to have taken a cautious position, waiting to see the results of the May assembly. At the assembly no mention was made of new association support and afterwards only a few formally approved the union.<sup>122</sup> It seems that most associations had already expressed their consent by participating in the 1831 meeting, though the subsequent lack of support from associations and churches possibly revealed a deeper indifference to the union at the grass-roots.

Those who were concerned saw the danger to the union in its potential ineffectiveness and not in the threat to independency. This may have been the thrust of an article in the Congregational in January 1832 entitled the 'Communion of the Church' in which New England Congregationalism was examined. The author stated in his preface that the study might be helpful to the English Congregational churches in the light of union.<sup>123</sup> There was a further suggestion from 'Z' of Islington for a Congregational ministerial super-annuation fund. The author pointed out that the Congregational Union was

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118. C.M. (1831), p. 443, 504.

119. C.M. (1832), p. 121.

120. C.M. (1832), p. 315.

121. C.M. (1832), p. 383.

122. C.M. (1832), pp. 376, 786. The Kent Association approved. Blackburn preached at the annual meeting of the North Lincolnshire Association and seemed to have clinched its approval.

123. C.M. (1832), p. 8.

'seen to be deficient in objects' and proposed that such a scheme would greatly help both the union and poor ministers.<sup>124</sup> Josiah Conder in the newly established Patriot welcomed the union 'notwithstanding the failure of previous attempts.' He believed that the 'circumstances of the religious world have so much changed since the last movement for a union, that a previous failure should be no argument against probable success in the present case.'<sup>125</sup> As the May meeting approached the Patriot urged its Congregationalist readers to support the union. The union was seen in terms of concrete practical common objects of all the churches: 'the more complete evangelization of the country - the building of new chapels - or a comprehensive system of itineracy - or the abolition of the abominable system of begging.' While the scruples of individuals and churches had to be heeded, the Patriot did not see any real danger of an incipient hierarchy. The check on this was in the voluntary and free character of association: member associations entered on their own volition and could withdraw themselves and their funds on their own volition. It was, however, the ends for which the union was to be founded that commended the support of all Congregationalists: '...while it will compromise no principles and can awaken no jealousy, it will bind together the divided energies of the Congregational Body, and give unity and purpose of will, and ... an accession of strength and vigour to its every future effort in the course of truth and benevolence.'<sup>126</sup>

The Congregational Union was formally founded at the second meeting of delegates on May 8 and 11, 1832 at the Congregational Library. Blackburn's friend William Chaplin of Bishops Stortford was in the chair. 116 delegates were present, many of whom had been present the previous year - 82 ministers, 26 laymen and 8 visitors. Among the visitors bringing fraternal greetings from other bodies were three Americans including Asahel Nettleton of Portland, Maine, three ministers from Ireland and the independent Lutheran Theodore

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124. C.M. (1832), p. 292.

125. P., May 2, 1832.

126. P., May 9, 1832.

Fliedner of Prussia. The American delegation brought a letter from the General Association of Massachusetts extending the congratulations of the New England churches and giving some details of their activities. The secretary, Dr. Snell, questioned the wisdom of having unlimited delegations and of foregoing arbitration; otherwise he was in agreement with the proposed plan.<sup>127</sup>

It was reported by the provisional committee that during the previous year it had communicated with the editors of the Congregational and Evangelical magazines, the Congregational Board, the secretaries and officers of the Scottish and Irish Congregational unions and the county associations and with missionaries and individual churches. The response from the 34 associations in England were twenty-six in favour, four opposed and four indifferent. The committee concluded that as the response was so good 'that the time had fully come when all who profess Congregational principles, and feel their worth, should come forward with one accord to avow them to the world.'<sup>128</sup> John Angel James, seconded by James Baldwin Brown, Esq. and the Rev. John Brown of Warsham, moved the simple resolution that 'THE UNION BE NOW FORMED.' In his speech moving the resolution James tried to allay any triumphalism and to correct any misconceptions about the purpose of the new union. 'Nor are we,' he said, 'about to form a union of mere parade, to exhibit on field days our martial strength. Nor are we, I trust, animated by a secular or political spirit, though we shall, I hope, if necessary, concert measures to enlarge our rights and privileges.' The over-riding purpose of the union was 'to present to the world the appearance of a united body.' This was made all the more necessary by the critical character of the times in which they found themselves:

Another and very important object of this Union, as it appears to me, is to improve, as well as to consolidate, our denomination ... I will not scruple to avow my conviction, that our wisdom, to say nothing of our duty, our policy as Congregational Dissenters, in the present critical juncture of the ecclesiastical affairs of this country and of the world, is to improve ourselves...<sup>129</sup>

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127. C.U. Minutes, May 8, 1832, Documents relating, p. 15. The Patriot reported only two objections. See P, May 12, 1832

128. C.U. Minutes, May 8, 1832; Documents relating, p. 18.

129. Patriot, May 12, 1832.

James's speech is crucial to understanding the momentum behind the union and its relation to the larger social and political concerns of Dissent in this period. The union was a conscious undertaking on the part of Congregationalists confronted by their own denominational needs and by the challenge to their role in society. Denominational consolidation was very much part of their growing sense of importance and of their vision for a voluntary society. Far from being inward looking, the establishment of the union was part of the Congregational advance.

The constitution and objects adopted in 1831 were ratified.<sup>130</sup> The third resolution moved by T.P. Bull of Newport Pagnell recommended regular financial support from the churches, but according to the nature of the union no binding regulation on this matter could be enacted. Finally the meeting appointed the first official committee for the following year: H.F. Burder, Joseph Fletcher, John Clayton, jnr., John Blackburn, John Burnet, W.S. Palmer, Thomas Wilson, Thomas Challis, Mr. Coombs, Samuel Morley, Mr. Coles, Mr. Jackson and W. Wright. Benjamin Hanbury remained treasurer and Turnbull and Joshua Wilson remained secretaries, with Algernon Wells being replaced by Arthur Tidman.

On Friday an adjourned meeting was held to discuss faith and order with T.P. Bull in the chair. The previous Tuesday James had brought up the subject of a declaration of Congregational faith and order and had intimated that a draft had been prepared. After it was read and discussed it was resolved to print the proposed declaration and send it with an accompanying letter to the churches for consideration. The meeting was concerned that the churches concur in the necessity of publishing a declaration and considered it 'in accordance with the example of our Nonconformist ancestors.'<sup>131</sup>

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130. C.U. Minutes, May 8, 1832, Documents relating, p. 19.

131. C.U. Minutes, May 11, 1832; Documents relating, p. 20.

It is not my purpose to examine the theology of the proposed declaration, but rather to see it in its context. While not one of the finest confessions ever to be produced, and certainly a far cry from the Congregationalists' own Savoy Declaration, the 1833 declaration did not merit the apologetic attitude of many later critics.<sup>132</sup> It expressed a modified Calvinism, generally in accord with the New Light in the U.S.A. and the thinking in Britain of the late Edward Williams and the Scottish theologian Ralph Wardlaw, who was later to have a hand in revising the document.<sup>133</sup> The main tenets were firmly in the orthodox Protestant tradition, with several of the harder edges that disturbed the 19th century Christian mind filed away.<sup>134</sup>

The declaration was just that, a declaration and not a confession or creed. To Congregationalists who were always sensitive to ecclesiastical formalism and creedalism it was necessary to emphasize that this was simply a common declaration of the 'doctrines generally held and maintained by the

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132. See Williston Walker, Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, first published 1893 (Boston, U.S.A. 1960), p. 542; John Stoughton, Religion in England, I, p. 109.

133. Writing in 1884 John Stoughton, minister of Kensington Chapel, London, said, 'No member of the denomination who had reached an advanced age can deny that these articles set forth the current belief of fifty years ago.' ibid., p. 109. By then Congregationalists were champing at the bit of the older Calvinistic Congregationalism and were somewhat embarrassed with their 1833 Declaration. For the theological background see R.W. Dale, The Evangelical Revival and other Sermons (London 1880), pp. 16, 21; Dale, The Old Evangelicalism and the New (London 1889), p. 17; Willis B. Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century (London 1954), passim; John Macleod, Scottish Theology (Edinburgh 1974). The last, though dealing with the history of Scottish theology, has some judicious comments on trends in 19th century English Nonconformist theology. After all, one of the chief revisers of the 1833 Declaration was Ralph Wardlaw of Glasgow.

134. Ibid., See Original Draft of the Declaration of Faith and Order, Minutes, Second Meeting of Delegates, May 7 - 11, 1832, Documents relating, p. 24.

Congregational denomination.' It was not a confession with which to demand creedal obedience. This was expressed in the 'preliminary notes' of the declaration sent to the churches. No more was intended than a statement of doctrines, no scripture proofs or scholastic defences were to be given and no attempt was to be made to iron out the smaller points of disagreement. Creeds and articles were not to be used 'as a bond of union,' rather each congregation was to maintain 'the most perfect liberty of conscience.' The invalidity of creeds was seen in the fact that communions with official creeds contained great doctrinal differences, whereas Congregationalists were solidly united on essentials of orthodox Christianity. The second section stated these essential beliefs and the third section stated the principles of Congregational church order. To a great extent these 13 articles in section III were the most important part of the declaration, forming in spite of intentions, a standard of voluntary churchmanship.<sup>136</sup>

The other items of business were the exchange of greetings with the sister bodies represented, the decision to hold a religious service thenceforth before the commencement of the annual meeting and the consideration of a proposal to build a denominational building for not less than £10,000. The purpose for the building was to secure 'the permanency and efficiency of their operations.'<sup>137</sup>

Within a few weeks after the close of the assembly the secretaries sent out a letter relating to the declaration and pointing out that the document was not so much for the use of Congregationalists as for the

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135. Ibid., p. 23.

136. Ibid., p. 26.

137. Ibid., p. 21.

information of others. Appeal was made to the Savoy Declaration of 1658, but it was pointed out that it was 'almost obsolete' and 'though most orthodox ... too wordy and too much extended for our purpose.'<sup>138</sup> All the associations, including the eight that did not join in May 1832, were sent this letter. We have knowledge of the response of twelve, including four Welsh associations and the Congregational Union of Ireland.<sup>139</sup> The English associations included those of Surrey, North Lincolnshire, Sussex, Berkshire, Worcestershire, Nottinghamshire, Kent and Essex.<sup>140</sup> Undoubtedly other associations discussed the new union and the proposed declaration.

Elsewhere there was a warm, if sometimes critical, welcome to the union. John Blackburn noted the deliberations of the various associations and the general acceptance of the declaration by Congregationalists as a whole.<sup>141</sup> In the pages of the Congregational there was relatively little discussion about the declaration. An article appeared in the September number by 'M.S.' in which the author objected to clause V and to the words 'placed ... over' in reference to the relationship between pastors and churches. He also did not like the new distinction between Congregationalists and Calvinistic Methodists.<sup>142</sup> The Patriot favoured the union, though not without some words of caution as we have noted earlier. Concerned with the political and social advance of Dissent, the Patriot saw the union binding 'together the divided energies of the Congregational Body, and (giving) unity and purpose of will, and ... an accession of strength and vigour to its every future effort in the cause of truth and benevolence.'<sup>143</sup> Both the proceedings and the declaration were printed in the Patriot.<sup>144</sup> The Evangelical likewise welcomed the union, but continued to favour a wider union of evangelical Christians.<sup>145</sup>

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138. Letter of the Secretary relating to the Declaration, etc., Documents relating, p. 29. Dated June 4, 1832.

139. C.U. Minutes, 3rd General Meeting, May 7, 8, 10, 1833, Documents Relating, p. 29

140. C.M. (1832), p. 283; (1833), p. 491; (1832), p. 789, 576.

141. C.M. (1832), p. 513.

142. C.M. (1832), p. 535.

143. P., May 9, 1832; see also May 2, 1832.

144. P., May 12, 1832; July 4, 1832.

145. E.M. (1832), p. 9.

George Redford, minister in Worcester, was hopeful for the union. 'But hitherto,' he wrote to Joshua Wilson, 'we have been a miscellaneous body, without any coherence. I hope the Cong'l Union will draw us some degrees nearer to one another, & teach us at least a policy of cooperation for great & common ends.'<sup>146</sup> The Scottish minister John Watson saw the same possibilities, though with some reservations:

I hope much good will issue from the Constitution & operations of the Congregational Union for England and Wales, tho' I have all along seen difficulties in the way; the principle of which is the extent of the Union.

To his mind two things were of chief importance for the Union's effective operation: 'the strictness of the County Unions in recognizing ministers' and the union 'acting fully on the Liberal principles in regard to other denominations.'<sup>147</sup>

Both these points were significant objections to others. R.M. Beverley wrote to Wilson, 'I have studied your system sufficiently to find out that in all federal objects it is unmanageable. As district churches the Independent platform is good, as a united church Catholic it is perfectly unmanageable. You will gain nothing by your own exertions.'<sup>148</sup> The thrust of Beverley's objections was that the national union was too far from local needs to be administratively effective and that the denominational character of the union breached evangelical catholicity and therefore was an ecclesiastical hybrid. Walter Wilson felt similarly, believing that the catholic character of Congregationalism was at stake and that the union itself provided an insufficient structure for a united orthodox Protestant church.<sup>149</sup> John Neale went so far as to suggest that only a modified form of episcopacy could do what the union was intended to do in uniting the churches in faith and action:

Some future historian may probably observe (that the Congregational Union) was conceived in folly, brought forth in pride and expired in ignorance. I should very much like to see a new order of Dissenters sprung

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146. George Redford to Joshua Wilson, Dec. 21, 1832, C.L.Mss. G.b.26.

147. John Watson to Wilson, Dec. 29, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.33.c.

148. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 25, 1835, C.L.Mss. C.22.6.

149. Waddington, History, IV p. 373.

up out of the bosom of the Church to rescue scriptural religion out of the hands of sectarians, whether Independents or Baptists, and form not a Congregational Union, nor a consolidated Union, but a Christian Union.<sup>150</sup>

Other Congregationalists such as John Angel James and Thomas Raffles did not disparage this sort of catholicity and spear-headed the efforts to form a united evangelical front against infidelity and popery in the Evangelical Alliance, but neither did they see their concern in that area as conflicting with a stronger denominational coherence among Congregationalists.

A further objection was the modified doctrinal standards some perceived creeping into the fold. Not surprisingly, it was from a Yorkshire minister, R.W. Hamilton, that a protest came against the toned down Calvinism of the declaration. To Hamilton and his Yorkshire colleagues the union represented not only a declension from pure Independent churchmanship, but also from full doctrinal orthodoxy.

Writing several years later to Algernon Wells he said:

I do fear that there is creeping among us a refining method as to the great propoundings of the Gospel. The full-blooded dogma of the old school must be revived ... Our Congregational Union symbol of faith is to me unsatisfactory and lamentable. Doctrinal and experimental purity ought to be everything to us as ends - Nonconformity but means to it. We are under close microscopic inspection. Many would come over to us, but they think there is a falling off from our rigid patristic theology; not with me or you, but some departments are tainted.<sup>151</sup>

Already in the 1830's there was a widening range of theological perspectives within Congregationalism which in the 40's and 50's would severely torment the denomination. In Hamilton's concern we see the pull of the older evangelical tradition and a falling back from a full-blooded denominationalism. Congregationalists boasted of their doctrinal consensus over that of more confessional bodies, but it would become apparent this was far from reality.

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150. Ibid., p. 375.

151. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 76

The union committee took up its responsibilities with diligence. During the first year it undertook extensive correspondence with the American Congregational and Presbyterian churches.<sup>152</sup> On the political front the committee took the initiative of passing a resolution in favour of Marriage law reform 'as will save Dissenters from being compelled to worship, contrary to their consciences, at the altar of the Church of England.' Joseph Turnbull, one of the secretaries, was in communication with Thomas Lay Hodges, M.P. in relation to a motion to this effect in the House of Commons.<sup>153</sup> By January 1833 a new initiative was being taken by the dissenting Deputies to redress the Dissenters' grievances and the Congregational Union was solicited to support them.<sup>154</sup> In addition to correspondence from the country, the committee discussed the possibilities of a Congregational Fire and Life Assurance Society. The purpose was to insure Congregational ministers; to which end the committee sought the opinion of the associations.<sup>155</sup> Initiative was also taken to form a London association of churches. The plan was to unite the London churches in one metropolitan union divided into four districts in order 'to enjoy the cooperation of the Metropolitan churches of our denomination.' A general meeting was called on March 18, 1833 when fourteen ministers and eighteen laymen discussed the idea, formulated a plan and sent it back to the churches for consideration. The question of a hymn book to supplement Isaac Watts's collection was also broached.<sup>156</sup>

The third annual meeting met May 7 - 10 in London with Joseph Gilbert of Nottingham in the chair. 146 delegates were present: 66 ministers, 28 laymen and 55 visitors, including 12 divinity students. In the course of the first day the declaration was officially accepted and the plans for an insurance scheme and hymn book supplement approved. The declaration had been revised on several minor points, mainly to give it a better wording.

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152. C.U. Minutes, 3rd General Meeting, May 7, 8, 10, 1833; Documents Relating, p. 10.

153. Ibid., p. 22; E July 9, 1832.

154. Ibid., p. 20.

155. Ibid., p. 23. It was reported that the £10,000 expected for denominational building had not materialized and that therefore the funds raised for that purpose would go to establishing an insurance scheme.

156. Ibid., p. 25.

There was, however, a greater accent in the 'Preliminary Remarks' on the distinctively Congregational character of the declaration, particularly that it was what 'the denomination at large' believes, rather than being a binding creed.<sup>157</sup> The assembly took action to expand the committee. To the original seven, six more were added: W.S. Palmer dropping out and Thomas James and John Morison being added. Three additional laymen were also appointed. Arthur Tidman resigned as secretary and joined the committee, being replaced by Palmer.<sup>158</sup> Thomas Craig, J. Carter, A. Wells and William Chaplin were appointed to draw up the annual letter to the churches and submit it to the next meeting.

Three actions of the assembly merit particular attention. While the contacts with other churches were largely formal, they had some importance to Congregationalists as they viewed themselves in the world. Congregationalists were coming to see themselves not only in terms of their dissent from the Church of England and their parochial relationships to other dissenting bodies, but also as an ecclesiastical community in their own right. This lay at the back of attempts to establish fraternal relations with like-minded communities farther afield. At the third meeting it was decided to establish relations with the United Associate Synod of Scotland, the result of the merger of the 18th century secessionist churches. The reason was given in the effecting resolution:

That, as the Union is bound to fraternize with all denominations of Christians, holding the faith of Christ in purity, and also avowing their belief in the unlawfulness of the secular power in the kingdom of Christ; and, as the third object of our union is 'to establish fraternal correspondence with other bodies of Christians throughout the world' ...<sup>159</sup>

As members of the Associate Synod were at this time spear-heading the voluntary agitation in Scotland, this relationship was of importance in light of the increasing voluntarism of the English Congregationalists. More dramatic was the decision to send a delegation in the coming year to America to attend the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church and the

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157. Ibid., p. 32.

158. Ibid., p. 46.

159. Ibid., p. 39.

annual meetings of the New England Congregational Associations.<sup>160</sup>

Secondly, the assembly appointed a committee to enquire into methods of collecting funds for chapel building. The members came entirely from Dorset and included the Rev. John Brown and John Brown, Esq. from Wareham.<sup>161</sup> Finally, on a motion by James Baldwin Brown, Esq. the assembly adopted a statement clarifying its position on the role of the churches in relation to dissenting grievances. There were seven clauses. The first four expounded the voluntary nature of the church:- Christ as the sole head of the church; the unlawfulness of the secular connection of the State Establishment; the incumbancy of 'all who value the honour and glory of the Lord our Lawgiver, King and Judge, to deny and protest against this interference'; and the duty of the Congregational churches, in agreement with its ancient standards, 'to protest with meekness, with firmness, and unanimity, against this aberration from the purity of the gospel church.' The fifth clause dealt with the six grievances propounded by the United Committee and the sixth and seventh committed the Congregational Union to working with other Dissenters in the campaign for Dissenters' rights.<sup>162</sup> Political and public questions figured regularly in union meetings, but the nature of Congregational Union involvement was more supportive than active. Issues relating to Dissenters' rights were mainly dealt with by the United Committee, made up of representatives of various dissenting groups, or by voluntary societies such as the Protestant Society or later the British Anti-State Church Association of Edward Miall. As time went on the union was seen more as a religious organization that had relatively little to do with secular politics. On some issues, however, the union took a very active role. This was the case in the education controversy of the 1840's, but this bore directly on the interests of the churches and their mission.<sup>163</sup>

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160. *ibid.*, p. 40.

161. *ibid.*, p. 41.

162. *ibid.*, pp. 41, 51. The grievances listed were: the persecution and contempt of the Established Church, the exclusion of Dissenters from the universities, Church rates, the tithe, registration of births and marriages and marriage law. The dissenting Deputies listed only five grievances.

163. See Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 105; the chapter below on the education controversy.

The organization of the deputation to the United States consumed much of the committee's energy during the ensuing year. The deputation was successful, though much criticized and taxing on the union's meagre financial resources. Initially John Liefchild and John Blackburn were approached to undertake the mission, but Blackburn declined whereupon John Angel James was asked. James likewise refused to go, asserting that he was not 'physically, intellectually, and morally qualified for the arduous, and sacred, and most important office.'<sup>164</sup> Liefchild eventually had to back out and in the end James Matheson of Durham and Andrew Reed of London were asked to go.<sup>165</sup> The trip went smoothly, though Reed found upon arriving in New York that the Congregational Union's credit meant little in the banks.<sup>166</sup> Reed and Matheson were able to meet President Jackson, to visit Congress where they were officially welcomed, to attend the annual meetings of the churches and voluntary societies and to visit Canada where they saw the need for a Congregational colonial mission. Upon their return they reported their findings to a public meeting at Poultry Chapel and to the union committee. This was followed up by a book which was in itself a considerable apologetic for voluntarism.<sup>167</sup> Both the trip and the book were criticized on a number of counts. R.M. Beverley found the book 'in many places mendacious, in many shiftling, in many evasive of the truth ... a book of varnish stuffed with vanity & egotism.' His particular bone of contention was slavery and he would have preferred the delegation to have rebuked the churches tolerating slave-holders.<sup>168</sup> There was also criticism in the Anglican press, particularly Fraser's Magazine, the Record and the Christian Guardian. Two grounds stood out: the credentials

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164. The Committee of the Congregational Union to John Blackburn, June 4, 1833, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/47; John Angel James to Blackburn, Nov. 25, 1833, L52/5/47.

165. A. and C. Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 162.

166. Andrew Reed to Blackburn, March 15, 1834, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/53; also Reed to James Matheson, April 16, 1844, L52/5/57.

167. A. and C. Reed, Andrew Reed, p. 163; Andrew Reed and James Matheson, A Narrative of the visit to the American churches by the deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, 2 vols (London 1835)

168. R.M. Beverley to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 5, 1836, C.L.Mss. 22.

of the delegation to represent non-Congregationalists before the American evangelical societies and the voluntarist propaganda it afforded the Congregationalists.<sup>169</sup> Blackburn defended the deputation in the Congregational, pointing to the deputation's official accreditation from several evangelical societies and their right to bear 'a conscientious testimony to what they know and believe.' At the heart of the matter was the voluntary question which Anglican critics were concerned was confusing the broader evangelical unity. Blackburn was unashamed: the Congregational Union, he said, 'looks toward America as the great field of voluntary Christianity' and the main object of the deputation 'was to collect a body of evidence, or to make out a case, for the Voluntary System'<sup>170</sup> Later the union sought to forge links on the continent by sending Joseph Turnbull to visit various Reformed communities there armed with the Declaration of Faith and Order.<sup>171</sup>

Meanwhile the union was consolidating. Considerable difficulties lay ahead - financial stringency, the lack of participation by the associations, doctrinal tensions and a general loss of direction and sense of purpose. The 1840's were to prove particularly difficult with many of the more ambitious plans of the union coming to nought. The union proved singularly ineffective in the face of doctrinal controversy and in fulfilling the expectations of its constituency in politics, chapel building, home missions and education. This largely reflected the ambiguity within Congregationalism itself as to the role of a national union, though by the 1850's this was changing and the union began to come into its own as a means of expressing Congregational views and fermenting Congregational action. Nevertheless this later invigorated union was built on the foundations laid in the 1830's. In the succeeding chapters I will look more closely at other areas of Congregational life that touched closely upon the union - particularly the press, chapel

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169. C.M. (1836), p. 28.

170. C.M. (1836), p. 62.

171. C.M. (1837), p. 58.

building and education. For the present I will examine two aspects of the union in greater detail: its administrative framework and its home mission.

Central to the union's life of course was the annual meeting. As the union was only the collective representation of the associations, and later the churches, so only the annual meeting was able to speak for Congregationalism as a whole. George Redford was chairman of the 1834 assembly when 231 delegates were present. John Blackburn had written to Redford impressing upon him the importance of the upcoming meeting for 'the prominence and stability of the Union' and the need of a good chairman. Redford had his reservations about his own abilities:

Now all this alarms me. I am quite unfit for any critical situation that may require a display of extraordinary powers. Pray don't think of putting me in any Chair - for my nerves will not bear it. Before I consent I must beg a little explanation. Is any conflict pending? Are any new views implicating the principle of the Union to be brought forward? As to the ordinary business which I have in former years criticized, I should certainly not shrink from that - but for extraordinary, trying situations I am unfit.

The 'ordinary business' that concerned Redford was the extensive denominational affairs dealt with at each meeting. Several ministers were concerned that these took up too much time when the assembly should be primarily spiritual and fraternal in character. Redford informed Blackburn that he would push for this, even to the extent of 'slighting something else.' Already a public service for worship had been connected with the union proceedings on the evening before the first business session. Redford also saw some particular needs of the denomination that had to be met, especially the regulation of ordination and the promotion of theological training. He did not want the 'establishment of any rule,' but would rather have the assembly consider recommendations to the churches so that only the best qualified would be ordained for the ministry. He further wanted stronger links with American and continental Protestants faced with the advance of Popery. Redford suggested a meeting of churches in Paris or Geneva,

thereby anticipating the Evangelical Alliance of 1846.<sup>172</sup>

The 1834 assembly itself showed the usual self-confidence of a new enterprise. Plans for various projects undertaken in the last meeting were finalized and approved. The chapel cases committee submitted a plan which was left to the central committee to deal with.<sup>173</sup> The ministers' insurance scheme was put into effect and the various deputations reported strengthened links with other communities.<sup>174</sup> The proceedings were marked by a triumphal voluntarism, particularly in relation to the attempt to gather statistics. The committee had sent out circulars and forms to the associations 'designed to elicit information on the relative strength of the Established and Voluntary Churches,' of which 200 were returned that 'exhibited the proportions of the Sabbath-observing population greatly in favour of the Voluntary Churches.'<sup>175</sup> The importance of these statistics was evident in the overture made by the committee to the assembly, relating the welfare of the churches to the campaign for Dissenters' rights:

The rapid march of events has brought the Voluntary Churches of this country under the penetrating eye of public observation, and if the Congregational Churches who form so important a section of the voluntary religious communities of this empire, do not with Christian humility seek to correct that which is faulty, to strengthen that which is weak, and to raise that which is debased among them, in fact, to adopt every method that the New Testament will sanction to increase the knowledge, the holiness, and the efficiency of their connection, they will lose an opportunity of usefulness which the present crisis of our ecclesiastical affairs bestows, and will be thrown back from the vantage ground they now occupy, and suffer that dishonour which must ever attend those who are unfaithful to their principles and to their times.

To this end the committee proposed six lines of action: the publication of tracts

172. George Redford to Blackburn, Apr. 16, 1834, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/101.

173. C.U. Minutes, 4th Annual Assembly, May 13, 1834, Documents Relating, p. 14.

174. Ibid., p. 6, C.U. Minutes, May 16, Documents Relating, pp. 15, 20.

175. C.U. Minutes, May 13, Documents Relating, p. 8. The returning associations were Buckinghamshire, Herts, Essex, Cumberland, Sussex, Kent, Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Nottinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire.

on the 'duties and circumstances of Congregational churches'; the publication of catechisms 'containing the doctrinal sentiments and ecclesiastical polity of our churches'; the publication of a history of the denomination; the collation of statistics; the upgrading of ministerial selection and training; and the 'extension and more complete organization of the Union.'<sup>176</sup> The assembly subsequently moved to authorize the publications and to urge a more comprehensive network of associations, but nothing was done on the complex question of ministerial education. What the overture and proposals signified was an official acceptance of the close link of voluntarism and the welfare of the churches. Voluntarism did not only involve a political position in relation to Dissenters' rights, but also the care of the churches and the ability of Dissenters to respond adequately to the needs of those about them.

Subsequent assemblies grew in size and prestige until the end of the decade. In 1835 228 were in attendance; 220 in 1836; 262 in 1837; 255 in 1838; 267 in 1839; and 233 in 1840. The proceedings were marked by a high degree of expectancy, with plans being formulated and institutions formed to advance and strengthen the denomination. For the Congregational leadership, with a few exceptions, the union's annual meetings were an opportunity to meet and confer with colleagues and old friends and publicly to exhibit the confidence of the Congregational community. The procedures were established early on. After 1834 a public meeting was held on the Monday evening preceding the first business session. The assembly then met all day Tuesday, adjourning until Friday and Saturday when the meeting closed. In the meantime delegates attended the meetings of other societies. Occasionally the delegates would meet as a committee of the whole, as they did in 1837 when considering union publications, or as the general meeting of an affiliated society, as they did in 1840 with the Colonial Missionary Society.<sup>177</sup>

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176. Ibid., p. 13.

177. Minutes, 7th Annual Assembly, May 9, 12, 1837, Documents Relating, p. 18; Minutes, 10th Annual Assembly, May 12, 15, 1840, Documents Relating, p. 30.

Initially the officers of the union were honorary. The chairman was elected for the duration of the assembly, though from 1839 the same man usually served as the chairman of the autumnal meetings. He carried no priority over other ministers and did not have any of the traditional aura of a Scottish Presbyterian moderator. The chairmen were invariably distinguished ministers such as Archibald Douglas and Joseph Fletcher (1831), William Chaplin (1832), Joseph Gilbert (1833), George Redford (1834), T.P. Bull (1835), George Payne (1836), Joseph Fletcher (1837), John Angel James (1838), Thomas Raffles (1839) and James Bennett (1840). Of greater importance, however, were the secretaries. The first three co-secretaries were Arthur Tidman, Joseph Turnbull and Joshua Wilson. Tidman and Turnbull dropped out in 1834 to be replaced by W.S. Palmer and John Blackburn. Wilson resigned in 1835 and was succeeded by Joseph Wontner, Esq. Though the office stayed within a relatively small circle of London ministers and laymen, it was becoming evident that there was a need of continuity and that the work was too much to bear in a part-time capacity. By 1837 it was decided to appoint Algernon Wells as permanent secretary, the honorary secretaryship varying year to year.<sup>178</sup> Wells was well suited for the job: highly respected, energetic, capable of chairing large meetings, with a great vision for the union and with the ability to defuse explosive situations and to get the most awkward Independents to work together. Until his death in 1850 he was present at all the union meetings and it was largely due to him that the early stability of the union was owed. His successor George Smith of Plymouth was much less successful in consolidating the union.<sup>179</sup> The secretary of the union was severely limited in effectiveness, being restricted to administrative and moral influence and with little opportunity of becoming a Congregational Jabez Bunting.

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178. C.M., (1837), p. 395.

179. Stoughton, Religion in England, I p. 113; R. Tudor Jones, Congregationalism in England 1662-1962 (London 1962), p. 244; Peel, These Hundred Years, p.83. There appears to have been no biography of Wells written. Such is the fate of church administrators.

The 1830's and 40's proved the limitations of a centralized administration of Congregationalism. Various schemes completely failed and others only partially fulfilled their initial intentions. The original plans for a denominational building costing 'not less than £10,000' came to nothing.<sup>180</sup> The funds raised for that were used to finance the insurance scheme, but it failed from lack of additional support in 1836.<sup>181</sup> Remediating the dual problem of chapel begging and chapel cases proved as difficult. Churches and associations were uncooperative in forwarding the necessary statistics and the problem was left to local chapels.<sup>182</sup> The difficulties were reflected in the poor financial condition of the union. Benjamin Hanbury, antiquarian and author of the Historical Memorials, was the treasurer of the union from 1832 until he retired in 1864. In 1833 the income was a mere £9 with an £18 deficit; in 1834 income rose to £202.1.0., but because of heavy expenses, particularly the deputation to America, the deficit increased to £243.8.9. In 1835 income was £440.13.10., but the deficit was £330.8.3. By 1836 income was to fall to £254.4.8., the Annual Report stating that the 'funds of this Union have not received that assistance which is necessary to its vigorous movements.'<sup>183</sup> The union was continually burdened by its debts, even after its publications began to return a steady income in 1838. That year income was £334.18.8., with Hymn Book sales contributing £134.18.8., but the deficit remaining at £254.13.0. The Annual Report complained that year of the shortage of funds and the committee informed the churches that the union could not 'be efficient unless an entirely new and different course for the future be adopted in this respect, from that which has hitherto prevailed.' The union needed regular contributions and the churches were each urged to give several pounds annually.<sup>184</sup> Income rose to over £400 the following year, but so did the deficit. In 1840 Hymn Book sales contributed £380.8.6.<sup>185</sup> Income from other sources was meagre and by the 1840's the union would be under severe financial strain.

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180. C.U. Minutes, 3rd General Meeting 1833, Documents Relating, p. 23 See the reprinted correspondence between A. Wells and a critic of the union in the supplement to the 1840 volume of the C.M.
181. C.U. Minutes, 6th Annual Assembly, 1836, Documents Relating, pp. 10, 15, 34ff. The target was £5,000 in order to provide 300 assurances.
182. C.U. Minutes, 5th Annual Assembly, 1835, Documents Relating, p. 25, 'Report of the Committee on the subject of chapel cases'; C.U. Minutes, 7th Annual Assembly, 1837, p. 8
183. C.U. Minutes, 6th Annual Assembly, 1836, Documents Relating, pp. 13, 14. The income amounted to £254.4.8., with a deficit of £282.7.8.
184. C.U. Minutes, 8th Annual Assembly, 1838, Documents Relating, p. 21.
185. C.U. Minutes, 9th Annual Assembly, 1839, Documents Relating, p. 51; Minutes 10th Annual Assembly 1840, Documents Relating, p.55, In 1839 income was £462.17.2½; deficit £457.3.0; in 1840 income £478.7.3½., deficit £577.16.9.

The difficulty lay in two sources. The Union was committing itself to more and more projects in fulfilment of its brief. From 1838 £150 per annum had to be paid out to remunerate the secretary. New projects such as the Congregational Almanack in 1839, the Colonial Missionary Society in 1837 and the Hymn Book project meant heavy outlays. Of greater significance was the fact that the union's own constituency was not forthcoming with funds. Every year only three or four associations sent contributions: in 1838 as few as two did so, while in 1837 eight made payments. Likewise, only a few of the affiliated chapels gave annual donations and these were usually from the prominent London chapels or leading provincial churches such as Carr's Lane, Birmingham, John Sibree's in Coventry or the large Liverpool churches such as Great George St. Chapel.<sup>186</sup> Even so, the committee felt compelled in 1838 to exhort the country churches to contribute their fair share.<sup>187</sup>

The union's publications were generally successful, though some later ran into difficulties. The Declaration of Faith and Order of 1833 met with wide acceptance. By May 1834 it had gone through five editions with 20,000 copies sold. A one page edition had been published and 5,000 Welsh language copies distributed.<sup>188</sup> Sales continued to remain high and in 1838 the committee reported that the declaration had vindicated the orthodoxy of their body.<sup>189</sup> Plans were made in 1834 to publish a short history of the Congregational body and summary of principles, and a series of tracts, including several catechisms, 'explaining the principles of congregational churches and adapted to the relations and duties of their officers and members.'<sup>190</sup> Topics would include the methods of choosing pastors and deacons, church discipline and the sacraments. It was not until 1840 that the catechisms and tracts were produced on the instigation of John Angel James. By this means the union sought to instil

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186. C.U. Minutes, 9th Annual Assembly, 1839, Documents Relating, p. 55.

187. C.U. Minutes, 8th Annual Assembly, 1838, Documents Relating, p. 21.

188. C.U. Minutes, 4th Annual Assembly, 1834, Documents Relating, p. 4.

189. C.U. Minutes, 8th Annual Assembly, 1838, Documents Relating, p. 10.

190. C.U. Minutes, 4th Annual Assembly. 1834, Documents Relating, p. 16.

the principles of Congregational Dissent - paedobaptism, church polity, nonconformist historical roots and the voluntary principle - in the faithful.<sup>191</sup> Preparation of the Historical Sketch was committed to Benjamin Hanbury, from whose hands it eventually emerged after much delay as the much larger than planned tomes entitled Historical Memorials of the Independents - a solid and uninspiring compendium of Congregational historical documents and commentary.<sup>192</sup> Sales were disappointing.

The Hymn Book was by far the most important publication undertaken. Not only did it help to unify the worship of the churches, but it provided the union, as noted above, with a steady source of income. A committee of eight under the chairmanship of Josiah Conder compiled the book, submitting a specimen edition in 1835 and finally going to press in 1837.<sup>193</sup> Related to the Hymn Book were the plans to publish a revised edition of Watts's Psalms and Hymns in 1838. Finally there were the regular publications of the union. The annual letter was not successful. In 1836 the 5,500 printed copies of the letter were only partly sold. The fourth annual letter in 1838 only sold 2,500 copies. It was decided that year to commit the writing of the letter to a local committee and to make the subject matter more spiritual in nature. Prior to that the letters had been more practical and pointed, the letter in 1837 pressing hard the claims and 'the necessity of union and of the need of strong and efficient local association.'<sup>194</sup> However the plan did not work and only 3,000 copies were sold in 1839. The Congregational Calendar, established in 1839, was more successful and sold 5,000 copies the first year. It met a very practical need in providing information of both a denominational and general nature.<sup>195</sup> In 1846 it was succeeded by the more comprehensive Congregational Year Book.

The weakness of the union was in the lack of support from local associations. The union was founded in 1832 as a union of associations

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191. C.U. Minutes, 10th Annual Assembly, 1840, Documents Relating, p. 13.

192. Benjamin Hanbury, Historical Memorials of the Independents, 3 vols., (London 1839-1845); Minutes, 7th Assembly, 1837, p. 7; C.U. Minutes, 9th Annual Assembly, 1839, Documents Relating, p. 11.

193. C.U. Minutes, 5th Annual Assembly, 1835, Documents Relating, p. 16; C.U. Minutes, 8th Annual Assembly, 1838, Documents Relating, p. 10; C.U. Minutes 9th Annual Assembly, 1839, Documents Relating, p. 11.

194. Minutes, 7th Annual Assembly, 1837, p.42, 'Address of the Committee... to all the pastors and churches of the denomination.'

195. Congregational Calendar and Family Almanack (London 1839-1845).

and with the consent of 26 of the 34 in the country.<sup>196</sup> We have seen that few associations supported the union with funds, but likewise few supported the union with their presence at the annual meetings. Twenty were present in 1834, 13 in 1838 and 17 in 1839.<sup>197</sup> Accessions to the union were a trickle; Lancashire joined in 1834, Leicestershire in 1835, East Devon in 1837 and Northamptonshire and Derbyshire in 1840. Others remained on the periphery. Norfolk intimated interest in 1839 after initial reservations and the Yorkshire associations did not join until after the autumnal held in Leeds in 1843.<sup>198</sup> The union went out of its way to encourage the associations. It was resolved in 1834 that steps had to be taken to establish associations where none existed and in 1838 the committee impressed upon the annual assembly that the welfare of the 'Congregational body ... most ultimately depended on the efficiency of our local associations.'<sup>199</sup> This meant more associations and greater communication between the existing ones and the union committee. Algernon Wells undertook preaching visitations to several counties in 1839 in order to promote the union. But there was growing dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of many associations, and a writer in the Congregational in 1838 saw them as inefficient and 'merely meetings for mutual edification and improvement.'<sup>200</sup> Finally in 1846 it was decided to alter the constitution by changing membership from that of associations to churches and charging an annual subscription.<sup>201</sup> This alteration did little to improve the union's position and was more an admission of failure to attain to all its founders had intended than a positive step towards further denominational consolidation. It signalled the change that had been developing for some years of a distinctly more religious agency with less comprehensive goals as seen in 1832.

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196. C.U. Minutes, 2nd General Meeting, 1832, Documents Relating, p. 15, 18.

197. C.U. Minutes, 4th Annual Assembly, 1834, Documents Relating, p. 14; 8th Annual Assembly, 1838, Documents Relating, p. 23; 9th Annual Assembly, 1839, Documents Relating, p. 30.

198. C.Y.B. (1846), p. 94.

199. C.U. Minutes, 4th Annual Assembly, 1834, Documents Relating, p. 18; 9th Annual Assembly, 1839, Documents Relating, p. 13; See C.M. (1837), p. 507, 'Hints on Congregational Associations'.

200. C.M. (1838), p. 241.

201. C.Y.B., (1846), p. 32.

The failure of the union to bring together the associations and to stimulate them to carry out home missions and chapel building gave rise to demands that the union either establish its own home mission or absorb the already existing Home Missionary Society. Already in 1837 the Colonial Missionary Society had been founded and affiliated to the union. We saw in an earlier chapter how close the H.M.S. was to the Congregational community and it was clear that by the end of the 1830's that the interests of the society and the union were converging. From the perspective of the H.M.S. it was felt that some alterations were necessary if it was to carry out its work in an effective manner. Even with several significant legacies the society was receiving an annual income far below what was necessary to maintain its operations and there was therefore the constant threat of closing some of its stations.<sup>202</sup> As such some voices were heard advocating closer ties with the society's natural constituency in Congregationalism. But the financial problems were merely symptomatic of the society's flagging spirits. Thomas Thompson, the founder and secretary of the H.M.S., wrote to Algernon Wells in 1839 in order to ask his advice on the situation. 'Our society cannot go on in its present inefficient management,' he wrote, 'We have little or no spirit, no interest...'<sup>203</sup> Perhaps as a result of this letter an overture of merger was made by the union to the H.M.S. in the spring of 1839. The H.M.S. turned down the offer, but not without some misunderstanding and hard-feeling. Thompson felt that certain Congregationalist leaders, particularly John Angel James, had been too high-handed in their dealings with the society and had been insensitive to the concerns of its agents. While Thompson saw the reasonableness of the proposal, many of his associates were 'obstinate folks' and did not want to rush matters.<sup>204</sup>

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202. H.M.M. (1836), pp. 81-82; (1837), p. 96; (1839), p. 91.

203. Thomas Thompson to Algernon Wells, Feb. 3, 1839, in Waddington, Congregational History, IV, p. 524.

204. Thompson to Wells, March 12, 1839, Ibid.

Meanwhile several Congregationalist leaders were proposing to establish a distinctly denominational society in connexion with the union. The matter was discussed at the annual meeting that May and it was proposed to continue discussion at the October meeting in Birmingham.<sup>205</sup> That meeting revealed the depth of dissatisfaction with the H.M.S. and the desire for Congregational alternative. George Smith, a future secretary of the union, pointed out that the H.M.S. 'had not answered the expectations of its friends, or done all the good that its friends could desire.' The results of its labours were meagre and the society lacked the confidence of the most influential ministers and the active support of the churches. The assembly resolved to 'unite in home missionary efforts conducted in entire harmony with their distinctive views of the truth, ministry and ordinances of the gospel, and of the constitution, discipline and liberty of Christian churches.' The new society would be formally undertaken by the union, but it would maintain a degree of operational and administrative autonomy. Not everyone present agreed with this proposal, particularly those individual members who were also members of associations not in the union and those who feared its centralizing tendencies.<sup>206</sup>

The question was what was to happen to the old H.M.S.? Were there to be two societies operating in the same country and competing for the same funds? Some felt that the two societies would be complementary with the H.M.S. working primarily in the villages and the Congregational society in the towns and cities. Others wanted to see the merger of the two societies. Those who inclined to the latter view believed that if a merger took place it would be necessary to alter the ways in which the old H.M.S. operated. James Matheson had spoken to a number of eminent ministers - J.A. James, James Stratten, W.H. Stowell and others - and concluded that any continuity

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205. C.M., (1839), p. 373.

206. C.M., (1839), p. 375.

with the old society, which was optimal, would only be possible if there was a change in leadership. While he thought that Thompson was indispensable, he had no time for the editor of the Home Missionary Magazine (which he referred to as a 'miserable concern') and considered most of the directors time-servers.<sup>207</sup> All things considered the two societies should be merged in order to have a 'foundation on which to build' the union, although Matheson recognized that there would be a good deal of resistance from the H.M.S. agents as well as from many Congregational ministers.<sup>208</sup> Elsewhere other leading ministers were advocating a merger. John Sibree and J.A. James wrote on the matter to the editor of the Patriot. Sibree suggested that the old H.M.S. could retain something of its autonomy, but failing that he predicted its demise.<sup>209</sup>

Resistance to the merger from within the H.M.S. was considerable. Thompson wrote a long letter to John Blackburn expressing his own reservations about the 'denominational principle' in the proposition. Since the society was practically Congregational as it was Thompson did not see why it could not work in partnership with the union much on the lines of the L.M.S. However, if the merger would gain support for the society and its work he would support the proposition and do what he could to 'soften' the opposition within the society.<sup>210</sup> His colleague Charles Hyatt argued that the catholic principles of the society were at stake and urged continued separation from the union.<sup>211</sup>

By April 1840, with the union's annual meeting only a month away, the directors of the H.M.S. agreed to the merger and issued a joint statement with the officers of the union. The reason for their acceptance of the merger

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207. James Matheson to Joshua Wilson, Dec. 6 1839; Feb. 14, 1840; March 13, 1840, C.L.Mss. II.c.21.

208. Matheson to J. Wilson, Dec. 6, 1839.

209. H.M.M. (1840), pp. 8, 42.

210. Thomas Thompson to John Blackburn, April 18, 1840, N.C.L.C., B.P. L52/5/100.

211. H.M.M. (1840), p. 34. See also the letter from 'Philadelphia' in H.M.M. (1840), p. 42f.

proposal was straightforward: two societies doing the same work and competing for funds from the same constituency would be self-defeating. Instead of a new society the rules of the H.M.S. would be altered and the society would thenceforth be conducted 'in connexion' with the Congregational Union. The society's annual meeting would be held at the same time as that of the union and its report would be read at the latter. All the officers of the H.M.S. would be ex officio members of the union committee. The H.M.S. would work hand in hand with all the affiliated associations.<sup>212</sup> The 'conjugal union' was duly effected at the May meetings of both the union and the H.M.S. At the union assembly a considerable amount of time was spent discussing the importance of asserting Congregational principles and the exact relationship between the union and the H.M.S. J.A. James argued for a more distant relationship while Algernon Wells with considerable emotion argued for an intimate connexion. Something of a compromise was reached with the formula: 'a Home Mission should be undertaken by the Union with the title Home Mission of the Congregational Union of England and Wales.'<sup>213</sup>

The response to the merger was favourable. The South Devon Association rejoiced in the revival of home mission work and the Bristol auxiliary expressed its 'peculiar satisfaction.' Carrs Lane Church in Birmingham welcomed the merger and the prospect of 'the more extensive diffusion of divine truth, and the establishment of churches of the Congregational order.' The Hull and East Riding Association of Congregational Churches and Home Missionary Society Auxiliary expressed in its resolution the relief undoubtedly felt by many Congregationalists:

Affiliated as our Association is, both to the Congregational Union, and also to the Home Missionary Society, it would have been very embarrassing to us, as well as detrimental to the progress of truth in the country, had there been two separate Societies seeking the same general objects, supported by the same denomination of Christians, and working with all, the rivalship and collision in the same field of labour.<sup>214</sup>

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212. H.M.M. (1840), p. 49ff.

213. H.M.M. (1840), p. 88ff.

214. H.M.M. (1840), pp. 55, 128, 141, 142.

The relationship of the union and the H.M.S. was a cordial one. Their mutual needs cemented the partnership - the union needing aid for its small congregations and weaker associations and the society needing the support of the Congregational constituency.<sup>215</sup> Algernon Wells drove the lesson home at the 1840 autumnal meeting in Bristol. 'I have a strong conviction,' he declared, 'that our union is right. It is right to unite... we are undeniably right in directing our first efforts to our native land.' While great pains were taken the following May in both annual meetings to assert the denomination's complementary support of both home and foreign missions, speakers reiterated the need of specifically Congregational advance at home. George Smith put it forcefully:

I think the case has been well proved, that this society ought not to sail under doubtful colours, but be recognized as purely Congregational, and for this reason - all its operations are Congregational, and all its supplies are Congregational. Besides, if ever there was a time, when anything was to be gained by keeping back part of the truth, that time was now departed, and perhaps forever.<sup>216</sup>

But while the merger worked in theory it did not produce the anticipated benefits in terms of support. After the first flush of jubilation the H.M.S. faced, along with the union, the problems of relatively little financial support from the churches at a time when its work was expanding. The income in 1841 amounted to £8,603.15.2., falling to £7,337.11.5. in 1842 and plummeting in 1843 to £3,917 with a deficit of £3,148. Thereafter income remained under £7,000 per annum for a number of years. Appeals were regularly made to the churches for support, but to little avail.<sup>217</sup> In October 1840 the H.M.S. was placed on the same footing as the Colonial Missionary Society and the Irish Evangelical Society under the common title

215. H.M.M. (1841), p. 169.

216. H.M.M. (1841), p. 146.

217. H.M.M. (1841), p. 141; (1842), p. 146; (1843), p. 139; C.Y.B. (1846), p. 67; (1848), p. 22; C.M. (1840), p. 634; (1843), p. 179; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 198. At its peak the H.M.S. was supporting about 150 stations and 130 agents.

'British Mission'. This was done in the context of a wide-ranging review of the position and prospects of Congregational work and with the purpose of coordinating the finances of the various societies. The societies remained administratively distinct, but together made a united appeal to the churches every October. The results were not satisfactory and the arrangement came to be seen as superfluous. By 1856 there were increasing complaints of the length of the British Mission reports in the union's annual meetings and in 1858, on the recommendation of a special committee, the societies were severed from the union.<sup>218</sup> The H.M.S. continued to face the same problems that had dogged it from the beginning. In 1859 Samuel Morley was hoping for a 'fresh start' for the society under its new secretary J.N. Wilson, and John Sugden was desirous of some practical scheme of evangelisation on the part of the union.<sup>219</sup>

The merger of the union with the H.M.S., as well as with the Colonial and Irish Evangelical, was in part to make the union a more effective agency for denominational consolidation. Wells had argued in 1840 that the union was nothing if it was not a home missionary society. The outcome of the merger did not fulfil the expectations of its advocates. The H.M.S. continued to operate relatively independently and with financial difficulties. The union continued to search for its own role and instead of the 1840's and 50's being a period when the union spear-headed denominational advance, it almost crumbled under the burden of its commitments. What the merger did do was to mark the end of a process of denominationalization and the beginning of a period of consolidation. Even if this was not in as systematic and cultivated a fashion as many would have liked, it was to bear fruit in the areas of education and chapel building.

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218. C.Y.B. (1858), p. 59.

219. Samuel Morley to Joshua Wilson, Sept. 5, 1859; John Sugden to Wilson, Aug. 6, 1860, C.L.Mss. II.c.39.

CHAPTER IVCONSOLIDATION: CONGREGATIONALISM AND THE PERIODICAL PRESS

An established press is one of the earliest and most fundamental features of consolidation in a movement. Congregational Dissent was no exception and in the 19th century produced its own denominational press and fed the broader dissenting press. The intention of this chapter is not to analyze the literary quality or even the political positions of Congregational periodicals, but rather to concentrate on their development and function within the voluntary community. For, as we will see, the Congregational press was largely directed towards the building up and directing of the denomination. Its existence, as with so many other Congregational and dissenting institutions, was at once both a symptom of the fragmentation of the old catholic evangelical consensus and of the ascendancy of denominational interests. As Owen Chadwick has pointed out, 'The weight of the press was not argument, but assertion; not the working of opinion, but strengthening. It confirmed viewpoints, brought like-minded men into association, and so made their opinion more potent in action.'<sup>1</sup> To see how this applied to Congregationalism we will look at both Congregational periodicals and at those dissenting periodicals that were both influenced by and influential upon Congregationalists. Of course some limitations have to be drawn. Therefore while in the latter category the Patriot will be examined in detail, the Nonconformist will not. This selection is in part due to the availability of source material, the existence of other studies of the Nonconformist and the Liberation Society and the greater independence of the Nonconformist from the internal interests of the Congregational community.<sup>2</sup>

As far as Congregationalists were concerned the early years of the

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1. Owen Chadwick, The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century, (Cambridge 1975), p. 39.
  2. For two examples see W.H. Mackintosh, Disestablishment and Liberation (1972) and David M. Thompson, 'The Liberation Society, 1844-1868', in Patricia Hollis, Pressure from Without (London 1974). Another point of Congregationalist influence was Edward Baines, senior at the Leeds Mercury.

19th century were dominated by the catholic evangelical press. Chief in the field was the Evangelical Magazine, founded in 1793 and edited at first by John Eyre and Matthew Wilks. The Evangelical's preface in 1793 firmly nailed its catholic colours to the mast:

Bigotry gradually diminishes, and good men of all denominations, laying aside party distinctions, begin to embrace each other with fraternal affection; and we hope that the present work will accelerate the destruction of that contracted disposition...

To this end the Evangelical was to be 'devoid of personality and acrimonious reflections on any sect of professing Christians.'<sup>3</sup> The magazine strove to live up to its principles and its contents were of a general and edifying character. Nevertheless the Evangelical was infected by the growing denominationalisation. In 1802 Eyre was succeeded by the Congregationalist George Burder and it was becoming apparent that the magazine was losing its Anglican readership.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Baptist supporters withdrew support in 1812 over an injudicious comment in the magazine and went off to found the Baptist Magazine. They were replaced by Congregationalists and the tone of the Evangelical reflected the interests of paedobaptist evangelical Calvinism. Yet through the 1830's and 40's the Evangelical maintained an even keel in the troubled waters of sectarian rivalry and the voluntary controversy.

There were other periodicals that shared the Evangelical's catholic heritage. The Home Missionary Magazine remained in the middle ground of evangelical Dissent until the Home Missionary Society was merged with the Congregational Union in 1839. Till then the Home Missionary kept away from controversial topics and concentrated on the customary features of news, Biblical and theological articles, pious biographies and religious poetry.<sup>5</sup> The greatest dissenting journal until the 1830's was the Eclectic Review, founded in 1805. The Eclectic was intended to be a comprehensive review of literature and like the Evangelical it originally was intended for Anglicans and Dissenters. Taking as its credal basis

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3. E.M., (1793), preface, p. 3.
  4. Francis E. Mineka, The Dissidence of Dissent: the Monthly Repository, 1806-1838 (Chapel Hill 1944), p. 65.
  5. H.M.M., passim.

the doctrinal articles of the Church of England, the Eclectic's policy was neither to 'exclude nor admit indiscriminately the sentiments of any party, religious or political' and to leave controversial questions undecided. And as if to confirm this policy it was stated that the proceeds from the sale of the review would go to that most catholic of organizations, the Bible Society.<sup>6</sup> The editorial approach of the Eclectic was straightforward: every edition carried lengthy, unsigned review articles on current books, as well as some 'religious intelligence.' Unfortunately the Eclectic hit the same rocks as the Evangelical and within a year of its founding the Anglicans had withdrawn from the enterprise. After a succession of editors, including Samuel Greatheed, the magazine was about to fold when the Congregationalist Josiah Conder was appointed to the editorial chair which he kept for 23 years.<sup>7</sup>

Conder proved to be the Eclectic's greatest editor and he made the magazine into one of the leading dissenting journals of the century. He committed himself to combatting 'the dogmatism of superficial critics, and the irreligious influence of a semi-infidel party.' To this end he sought to reconcile religion and literature and to nurture a love of good books among orthodox Christians.<sup>8</sup> Conder maintained a non-sectarian editorial policy and refused to side with the hotter heads among Dissenters.<sup>9</sup> He also employed the services of writers as different as the Cambridge Baptist minister Robert Hall, the essayist John Foster and the poet Robert Southey. Conder's correspondence reveals him tempering his dissenting contributors and complaining of being found 'not decided enough'. But he established the Eclectic as Dissent's most respectable and authoritative review.

By the 1830's the strain between Church and Dissent was becoming greater. In 1833 Conder took on the additional editorial responsibility of the new

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6. E.R. (1805), preface, pp. ii, iii.
  7. Mineka, Dissidence, p. 68. The Eclectic seemed to be fighting a losing battle in regard to its catholic policy through 1805-7. See for example E.R. (1805), p. 544; (1806), preface, which sought to remind the readers of its non-sectarian policy.
  8. Eustace Conder, Josiah Conder: a Memoir (London 1857), p. 125.
  9. John Stoughton, Religion in England, two volumes (London 1884), vol. II, p. 268. Conder deeply disliked the extremism displayed by the Ecclesiastical Knowledge Society and with several other Congregationalists withdrew his support.

dissenting political newspaper, the Patriot. But by 1837 this dual editorship was proving too much to bear and Conder relinquished the Eclectic. Not least in his considerations were the accusations being brought against him by radical Dissenters. In 1832 he complained, perhaps to John Blackburn, that his position on the Church question was completely misunderstood. He had to adhere to the principles upon which the Eclectic was established and therefore, while advocating the 'broad principles of religious liberty,' he had to refrain from taking a hard party line. The tension persisted after he took over the Patriot and in 1837 admitted the 'burden of my editorial honours.' He felt the 'constant stretch of anxiety and exertion, and yet being unwilling to give up either the Eclectic or the Patriot.'<sup>10</sup> By the time he gave up the Eclectic it was declining in public appreciation, no doubt due in part to the polarization of views on the Church question and Conder's own conflict of interests. Robert Vaughan felt that both the Patriot and Eclectic were losing influence and faced possible extinction.<sup>11</sup> James Matheson of Durham aired the ambivalence undoubtedly felt by many Dissenters in a letter to Wilson in 1833. Wilson had proposed a periodical of more decided views, to which Matheson replied:

I am afraid it wd. not do. I do not think we could manage to get many circulated. The Eclectic as it is, is read a good deal. The change you refer to would by many be considered as a proof that it was declining & I have little doubt wd. be laid hold of by our Church folks to injure the circulation; & I don't know if some of the dissenting folks wd. not like to give it a kick likewise if they cd. do it conveniently. I shd. not do so tho' I think our good friend the Editor has not during the two last years acted so judiciously - I will almost say consistently in the insertion of certain articles - as he did in former years.<sup>12</sup>

Not surprisingly, therefore, Conder looked with favour upon the offer of the Baptist Thomas Price to take over the Eclectic in 1837. He was confident that Price would give the Eclectic the editorial leadership that it needed and he was satisfied that it would 'undergo no change of

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10. E. Conder, J. Conder, p. 278.

11. Robert Vaughan to Joshua Wilson, Sept. 4, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

12. James Matheson to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 16, 1832, C.L.Mss. Ha4

character or principle.'<sup>13</sup> That the tensions of the voluntary controversy had something to do with his resignation is clear from Conder's correspondence soon thereafter. Conder found the controversial side of the Patriot ungenial and preferred the theological and literary quiet of the Eclectic. But the work of the Patriot was 'at this juncture more important and less thanklessly received by the public. 'I regard myself as called to the post,' he said, 'It is "a sad strife, and yet a noble cause." And I only wish the Dissenters would not mistake selfish supineness for spirituality, and worldliness for catholic liberality.' Conder also found that he had a greater liberty in preaching on the voluntary principle.<sup>14</sup>

The Patriot had been established in 1832 by a group of Dissenters, mainly Congregationalists, who were concerned that Nonconformists should have a political weekly of some stature similar to the evangelical Anglican Christian Observer. The idea had been put forward some years before, in 1819, by the Rev. Ingram Cobbin, but nothing came of it.<sup>15</sup> In December 1831 a meeting was held in the Congregational Library under the chairmanship of Thomas Wilson when it was resolved 'to establish a weekly newspaper advocating the religious & political principles generally entertained by Evangelical Dissenters & furnishing correct reports of the proceedings of Religious & Benevolent Institutions.<sup>16</sup> A sub-committee was appointed which decided to raise £1,000 to cover costs over the first year, to appoint a permanent committee of four Baptists and twelve paedobaptists and to establish a joint-stock company. Contributions of over £25 were to be treated as loans. Initially the paper was to be conducted by a committee, but this soon gave way under opposition and Josiah Conder was appointed editor.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Josiah Conder to \_\_\_\_\_, Jan. 7, 1837, in E. Conder, J. Conder, p. 279.
  14. Josiah Conder to \_\_\_\_\_, Feb. 13, 1837, in E. Conder, J. Conder, p. 279.
  15. John Leifchild to Ingram Cobbin, April 12, 1819, C.L.Mss. II.c.62; Thomas Raffles to Ingram Cobbin, May 14, 1819, C.L. Mss. II.c.62.
  16. Minute Book, Patriot committee, Dec. 19, 1831, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  17. Apsley Pellat to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 25, 1832; Henry Thompson to Thomas Challis, n.d., C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

The Patriot made its appearance on February 22, 1832. Its stated editorial policy struck a firmly moderate tone. The Patriot would be directed to 'the maintenance of the great principles cherished by Evangelical Nonconformists' and would be maintained in a spirit at once 'constitutional but independent, candid but decided, and liberal though firm.' On the chief question of the age, at least as its supporters saw it, the Patriot would stand up for orthodox Protestant Dissent. As such the Patriot would attempt both to diffuse dissenting principles and correct distortions propagated by others. Faithful to its principles, the paper went on to call Dissenters to their political duty in supporting the pending Reform Bill before Parliament.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter the Patriot was published variously once or twice a week and sometimes thrice a week during the Parliamentary session.

The public response to the new paper was generally favourable, though it took several years to obtain enough subscriptions to sustain itself. Most Congregational leaders believed that the new paper filled a gap in the religious-political press and tried to secure subscriptions to it. Since the radical and generally pro-dissenting World had recently folded it was felt that many of its readers would go over to the Patriot. The extent to which this happened is difficult to tell. William Roby thought that this would be the case and noted several friends who he believed would switch. William Ellerby wrote that the forty subscribers to the World in his church would 'prefer the new paper.'<sup>19</sup> Numerous other Congregationalists expressed their approval and support. William Holmes in Wisbech thought that the Patriot's political and foreign coverage would make it supersede the other papers, though he pointed out that many Reform minded Dissenters already took the leading newspapers.<sup>20</sup> Thomas Jones

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18. P, Feb. 22, 1832.

19. William Roby to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 15, 1832; W. Ellerby to Wilson, Feb. 6, 1832, H.a.4.

20. W. Holmes to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 17, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

in Woolwich felt that the paper was 'worthy of us both politically and ecclesiastically' and Benjamin Brooks in Birmingham saw it as the paper he longed for and 'worthy of the orthodox Dissenters.'<sup>21</sup> W.B. Leach was glad to find the Patriot 'respectable and well conducted' and fit to represent Congregational Dissent, though later he wrote to say that Dissenters around him in Connaught Square in London were too 'churchified' to appreciate it.<sup>22</sup> John Burder found that the Patriot met his 'views exactly' and the Rev. W. Crowe of Kingston-upon-Thames regarded 'the paper as ably conducted, the only accredited organ in which, as Protestant Dissenters, we can fairly and fully, give expressions of our sentiments' and he encouraged the editors to keep the political department up.<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Scott put his appreciation of the Patriot in the context of current political and religious reform:

I have disposed of N<sup>bs</sup> of the Patriot that you gave me, & am glad to say that it now comes into our publick news room & one or more of my friends take it in. I sent two numbers to Heckmondwike where I think it will find readers. The political and religious sentiments ... in the Patriot are eminently true and benevolent & must ultimately prevail. I suppose it is considered that the Reform Bill must pass not in the slightest degree impaired. But you and I look upon this event as the near (sic) commencement of a day of improvement in things both civil & religious in this country. We hope to see the church placed in that very ground in which Jesus of Nazareth left it...<sup>24</sup>

James James undoubtedly expressed the feelings of many Congregationalist ministers in commending 'the firm but temperate spirit' of the paper and its rejection of the violent agitation of some more radical Dissenters.<sup>25</sup>

The primary need of the new paper was to build up its circulation, but this proved to be more difficult than anticipated. The letters of

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21. Thomas James to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 17, 1832; B. Brock to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 17, 1832 C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
22. W.B. Leach to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 24, 1832; Dec. 10, 1833, C.L.Mss H.a.4.
23. John Burder to Joshua Wilson, March 24, 1832; W. Crowe to Wilson, n.d, Crowe to Wilson, Jan. 8, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
24. J. Scott to Joshua Wilson, May 18, 1832, C.L.Mss. II.c.34.
25. J. James to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 22, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

support informed the committee of the difficulty in procuring subscribers. Some already took political and religious newspapers, others were not committed Dissenters and still others were loath to subscribe to such a new venture. The Rev. M. Perks summed up a general attitude when he pointed out that his people were 'too cautious' and that 'the Dissenters here are not sufficiently active to the value of their principles, as to induce them to support a paper which advocates them with so much ability.'<sup>26</sup> The difficulty was to know what to do. Initially it was expected that Dissenters would respond to a general appeal and perhaps that ministers would recommend it to their congregations. To some extent this happened and many subscriptions came through ministers.<sup>27</sup> Indeed James Matheson raised the matter with the Durham and Northumberland Congregational Association. 'The result was,' he wrote Wilson, 'that we formed the same opinion respecting the necessity of a journal being published like the one announced & that it was our duty to promote its circulation as widely as possible.'<sup>28</sup> Others felt differently. William Roby of Manchester wrote: 'Ministers cannot of course recommend such a publication from the pulpit; & they are commonly too much occupied in other duties to allow them to go from house to house to solicit the patronage of the journal.'<sup>29</sup>

By late 1833 financial difficulties were coming to a head because of the lack of subscribers. As early as February 1832 the treasurer, Robert Charles, had threatened to resign if the initial £1,000 were not raised.<sup>30</sup> In October 1833 Wilson wrote to Samuel Fletcher and pointed out that while support for the Patriot was encouraging, it was also very inadequate and an appeal had to be made to 'our wealthy & liberal friends.' Every effort had to be made to raise the circulation to 2,000 and if funds and subscribers were not forthcoming it was likely that the Patriot would have to fold.<sup>31</sup>

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26. M. Perks to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 4, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  27. H. Rogers to Joshua Wilson, March 31, 1832; T.W. Jenkyn to Wilson, Feb. 17, 1832; R. Vaughan to Wilson, Feb. 20, 1832; J. Trueman to Wilson, Oct. 26, 1833; J. Foster to Wilson, Dec. 5, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  28. James Matheson to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 16, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  29. William Roby to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 13, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  30. R. Charles to Joshua Wilson, Feb. 1, Feb. 8, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  31. Joshua Wilson to Samuel Fletcher, Oct. 7, 1833, copy, C.L.Mss. H.a.4. For an example of the feeling of those concerned see James Matheson to Wilson, Feb. 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.21: 'a shame'; John Harris to Wilson, Jan. 1, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.: 'Oh how would the uncircumcised rejoice, & not without grounds at its cessation.'

Many constructive suggestions and criticisms were forthcoming as to what to do and what had to be corrected, from cutting back the paper's frequency of publication to establishing promotional districts across the country.<sup>32</sup> Matheson complained that distribution was bad and John Blackburn suggested that publication be moved up earlier into the week since it was coming out after the majority of weeklies.<sup>33</sup> Finally a meeting of proprietors was held on November 19, 1833 to discuss the problems. It was decided to circulate a private letter of appeal and to advertise in the religious press, with particular attention given to procuring a commendation from John Morison in the Evangelical Magazine.<sup>34</sup>

The Patriot continued to face numerous difficulties until well into 1834. Behind the technical problems lay the fundamental issue of policy. From the beginning the managers were caught within the tension that Congregationalism itself was experiencing as to its attitude to church and state. In the end this came down to the issue of the editorship and the suitability of the moderate Josiah Conder to fill the post.

The Patriot's supporters all had their ideas of what the paper should say and what features it should carry. J.K. Clement would only support it if it carried the Times death notices; John Sibree wanted market prices; John Frost wanted agricultural news and the Baptist Joseph Ivimey hoped that the paper would take a strong anti-slavery line.<sup>35</sup> Others lent their reluctant support, but were not optimistic about the leadership of London Dissent in political matters. J.M. Morris, from radical Leicester, wrote that his 'hopes are very low as to the political energies of the London Dissenters; these are not the times for half measures, half words & sentences,

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32. J. Foster to Wilson, Dec. 5, 1833; T.H. Boykett, Dec. 13, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
33. James Matheson to Joshua Wilson, Dec. 21, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.31; John Blackburn to Wilson, Jan. 8, 1834, C.L. Mss. H.a.4.
34. Minutes, 'Meeting of Friends of the Patriot', Nov. 19, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4. J. Baldwin Brown was in the chair and Andrew Reed, Thomas Binney, Thomas Challis, Joshua Wilson and John Brown in attendance.
35. J.K. Clement to J. Wilson, Feb. 4, 1832; John Sibree to Wilson, Feb. 15, 1832; J. Frost to Wilson, Jan. 23, 1833; Joseph Ivimey to Wilson, Feb. 18, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

and yet for a great while past they have been accustomed to nothing else.' Morris wanted to see careful reporting of 'all the movements of the establishment, all the secessions.'<sup>36</sup> J. Peele wanted aggressive opposition to the calumny of the London press and Isaac Tobet thought that the paper, if anything, should be more political and less religious, like the Sheffield Iris.<sup>37</sup> George Hadfield, as one would expect, pressed on Wilson the need of a clear, uncompromising message and accurate, comprehensive reporting.<sup>38</sup>

Yet it was precisely here that the Patriot fell foul of both conservative and radical Dissent. Several early correspondents expressed their disapproval of the Patriot's political position, however moderate.<sup>39</sup> A considerable number objected to the political and sectional character of the paper. Thomas Thompson was a 'Dissenter at heart and when absolutely necessary,' but he would not support the Patriot because what was needed was not a paper that would 'advocate dissenting principles as such' but rather one that would 'be a healer of the breaches so unhappily prevalent.' In the best catholic evangelical tradition Thompson wanted to see a paper that would emphasize the work of home and foreign missions.<sup>40</sup> James Heron did not believe that religion and politics mixed and were completely heterogeneous.<sup>41</sup> The Rev. J. Claypon saw the need of a paper to oppose infidelity, but not one to support political Dissent. And M.B. May believed that the attitude of the Patriot on the Dissenters' grievances was opening 'the flood-gates of all insubordination in the state!'<sup>42</sup>

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- 36. J.M. Morris to Joshua Wilson, March 17, 1832, C.L.Mss., H.a.4.
  - 37. J. Peele to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 6, 1833; Isaac Tobet, Oct. 30, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  - 38. George Hadfield to Thomas Wilson, Dec. 3, 1833, with an added note to Joshua Wilson, C.L.Mss, II.c.34 (H15).
  - 39. Mr. Ryley to J. Wilson, March 6, 1832; E. Maitland to the Committee, October 14, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  - 40. Thomas Thompson to J. Wilson, Jan. 23, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  - 41. James H. Heron to J. Wilson, Feb. 16, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.
  - 42. J. Claypon to the Committee, Oct. 21, 1833; M.B. May to W.B. Gurney, Oct. 31, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

On the other side were those who thought that the Patriot was too mild in its attitude to the church question. Edward Leighton wrote to Joshua Wilson while on a voluntarist lecture tour of Scotland and pointed out that 'a more bold and uncompromising advocacy of dissenting principles will secure the paper a wider and surer circulation.'<sup>43</sup> Joseph Turnbull encouraged Wilson to make the Patriot 'more decided' and urged him to aim at Manchester and not at Metropolitan Dissent, who, he believed, were likely to neutralize the agitation for Dissenters' rights.<sup>44</sup> R.M. Beverley was more blunt. 'Is it true,' he asked Wilson at the nadir of the paper's fortunes, 'that the Patriot's pulse is running low? Its speedy death would be the best thing that could happen to your cause. It has done infinite mischief & squandered great sums of money.'<sup>45</sup> One of the Patriot's most persistent critics was the Liverpool Congregationalist John Kelly. He was particularly annoyed by an article in November 1833 that entertained the possibility of the Church of England retaining its endowments after disestablishment. The Patriot's position had occasioned some surprise in Liverpool. Kelly carried on a correspondence on the matter with Wilson, but by March 1834 his patience had come to an end. Together with Thomas Raffles and other members of the Liverpool Association of Trinitarian Dissenters he sent a strongly worded letter and resolution to Wilson and the Patriot committee expressing their disapproval. Exception was taken to the moderate tone of the leaders and they felt that they could no longer recommend the paper to their church members and feared that those who did take it would soon give it up.<sup>46</sup>

The editorial tone of the paper was indeed moderate and reflected the generally Whig and reformist tendency of the London dissenting ascendancy. Dissenters' grievances were deplored and rights pressed,

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43. Edward Leighton to J. Wilson, Dec. 12, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

44. Joseph Turnbull to J. Wilson, Nov. 7, 1833, C.L. Mss. H.e.7.

45. R.M. Beverley to J. Wilson, Oct. 29, 1834, C.L. Mss. 22.

46. J. Kelly to J. Wilson, Nov. 15, 1833; Dec. 5, 1833; March 1, 1834, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

but in a manner that was less 'than angrily aggressive.'<sup>47</sup> It was not that the Patriot disagreed with the concept of political Dissent; on the contrary, its leaders advocated political activity and the imperative of seizing the opportunity. Where the Patriot differed with its critics was over tactics. The December 18, 1833 leader pin-pointed this difference by indicating the broad unity of sentiment, but marking the manner in which 'zealous friends ... reproach us with the calmness of our temper, the tameness of our remarks, or our over solicitous discrimination between points not only logically but politically distinct.' Defending itself, the Patriot said that it was not going to cause a schism in the ranks of Dissent. 'Our advice to the Dissenters at this crisis would be,' the leader concluded, 'to conceal none of their opinions, but to be cautious and moderate in their demands.'<sup>48</sup> By 1835 the voluntary controversy had sharpened and the Patriot itself was taking a more distinct line, but even so it lagged behind the vanguard of radical political Dissent.<sup>49</sup>

Behind the policy disputes was the person of the editor, Josiah Conder. I have mentioned that the paper was originally edited by a committee and that there had been objections to this arrangement. Henry Thompson was 'sanguine' about the paper's success under a committee and J.B. Brown, one of the leading trustees, pressed for a 'thorough Dissenter' as the editor.<sup>50</sup> The administration was soon altered and Conder was appointed to the editorship in January 1833. He himself later claimed that he only took the job with the greatest reluctance, but was

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47. Patriot, May 16, 19 (on Lord Grey's victory: 'the people have triumphed') 30, June 13, 20, 27, July 11, Aug. 1, Oct. 10, 1832; March 20, May 1, 15, 1833. An example of the Patriot's moderation can be seen in the leader for Oct. 23, 1833 on the Dissenters' political duty. The readers were reminded to maintain a distinction between their ecclesiastical controversy with the Church of England and their controversy with the Government and Establishment. Further, the Church Rates issue was a relatively subordinate issue to the 'principle' of Establishment of which it was a symptom.

48. P, Dec. 18, 1833.

49. P, Jan. 7, 1835. The paper wanted to see no talks with the Dissenters' so-called Whip political allies.

50. Henry Thompson to Thomas Challis, n.d.; J.B. Brown to \_\_\_\_\_, July 1832; Apsley Pellat to J. Wilson, Jan. 25, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

convinced that he was the right man.<sup>51</sup> Conder's appointment was greeted with widespread approval, particularly by moderates. Thomas Thompson, who had previously expressed his disapproval of the venture, was pleased and reassured that Conder had got the job.<sup>52</sup> For his part Conder was able to put the paper on a sure footing. At the time of his appointment the Patriot's circulation was about 1,587, but by the end of 1834 it had climbed to 2,400 where it continued to fluctuate. He also published the paper twice weekly and later thrice weekly.<sup>53</sup> Joshua Wilson was enthusiastic about the impact of the new editor. To one correspondent he wrote, 'You are probably aware that Mr. Conder is now Editor & I am happy to inform you that the sale has considerably increased since the beginning of the year when he commenced his labours. We hope it will succeed in his hands & the prospect is at present encouraging.'<sup>54</sup>

By the autumn, however, things had begun to sour somewhat. Conder got into a dispute with the committee over his salary. It had been proposed to reduce his salary but Conder insisted that he could not go below his already inadequate £400 per annum. 'I ... should never have undertaken it (the editorship) had I supposed that the minimum guaranteed to me be converted into the maximum.' He further disagreed with the committee's disinclination to promote the paper in a way he thought necessary.<sup>55</sup> Robert Vaughan noted the difficulties faced by both the paper and its editor. 'With regard to Conder,' he wrote Wilson, 'I am really sorry for his present circumstances - the Patriot drooping his influence with Dissenters, and the Eclectic nearly extinct. With all his faults ... he has deserved better than he has found.'<sup>56</sup> Conder himself later confessed to being sorely tried during this period and having contemplated resignation.<sup>57</sup> And it would seem that the committee had contemplated dismissal, but any suggestion to this

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51. E. Conder, J. Conder, p. 276, J. Conder to \_\_\_\_\_, Feb. 6, 1835.  
 52. T. Thompson to J. Wilson, Dec. 21, 1832, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.  
 53. E. Conder, J. Conder, p. 273.  
 54. J. Wilson to \_\_\_\_\_, Feb. 25, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.  
 55. Josiah Conder to Joshua Wilson, Sept. 4, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.  
 56. Robert Vaughan to J. Wilson, Sept. 4, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.  
 57. J. Conder to \_\_\_\_\_, Feb. 6, 1835, in E. Conder, J. Conder, p. 276.

effect was met with strong disapproval by close advisers to the paper. John Angel James feared that with Conder gone the Patriot would become more violent which would 'hurt our respectability, and thus ensure the cause's ruin.' Moreover the moderate 'multitudes' of Dissent would forsake the paper.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless Wilson and the committee were faced with the growing discontent of radical Dissenters. Wilson had received a letter from James Matheson in Durham in which he was told that among Manchester and Liverpool Dissenters there was 'a general fear of Mr. C(onder) being 'unsound' on the great question of the Voluntary support of Religion.' Communicating this to another committee member, Thomas Challis, Wilson continued, 'I confess to you that I cannot help having my doubts & fears. I am sure that unless he be quite orthodox on that point he cannot permanently continue Edr. of the Pat<sup>t</sup>, if it is to be the organ of the Evangelical Dissenters.'<sup>59</sup> Samuel Hillyard expressed a similar sentiment in a letter to Thomas Wilson at this time. 'The editor of the Patriot has vexed me a good deal by his stupidity...' he wrote, 'What do you think of Mr. Conder's leading articles yesterday? I wish he would either give up the editorship or do his duty in it - he seems resolved to let us down.'<sup>60</sup> In the event Conder continued as editor, and while the Patriot took a clearer line on the church question Conder remained a thorn in the flesh to radical Dissent. His line was one of firm moderation even after Edward Miall founded the rival Nonconformist in 1840.

Meanwhile the Eclectic, left by Conder in the hands of Thomas Price in 1837, took a much more radical course than some Dissenters liked. In the last years of Conder's editorship it had been declining in quality and influence and there was some talk of founding a new literary and theological review. During 1835 several Congregationalists discussed the possibility.

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58. J.A. James to \_\_\_\_\_, Dec. 29, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

59. J. Wilson to Thomas Challis, March 18, 1834, rough copy, C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

60. Samuel Hillyard to Thomas Wilson, Nov. 21, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.34 (H13).

Robert Vaughan wanted to see a quarterly with 'the style and learning of it equal to the Edinburgh or Quarterly,' but he was pessimistic whether this could be done. The estimated costs for one quarter would be £1,508.2.0. and there was little chance that such support would be forthcoming.<sup>61</sup> James Matheson was likewise discouraged. 'I am afraid it wd. not do. I do not think that we could manage to get many circulated.'<sup>62</sup> The plan lay dormant for several years until the early 1840's. By then conservative Congregationalists, such as Vaughan, were deeply distressed over the 'violence' of the Eclectic and other dissenting journals. In 1844 Vaughan wrote to John Blackburn with a proposal for a new review. The reasons he gave are revealing of the rifts that had developed within Protestant Dissent and had come to be reflected in its periodicals:

The only difficulty seems to be about the Eclectic. But the Eclectic has thrown itself into the hands of an extreme section of our body, and has no right to complain if the majority of those it now misrepresents resolve on having a representative of their own.

Vaughan was willing to buy Price out, but he thought that it would be impossible. So in the new year the first edition of the British Quarterly Review would appear and doubtless cause some consternation:

All sorts of gloomy prophecies and croakings will be called forth no doubt by this next undertaking. Time will tell on which side there is wisdom. If something vigorous is not done to furnish a ... strong rallying point to sober thinking and sober acts among us, the time of our strength has passed. If the ship is not to weather it gallantly<sup>63</sup> yet it shall not be from want of effort on my part.

The B.Q.R. duly appeared and soon took its place as a solid and respectable theological journal. Its articles were long, prolix and staid, but the review's breadth of interests testified to the cultural awareness of orthodox Dissent and to the fact that it had achieved at

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61. Robert Vaughan to J. Wilson, Sept. 4, 1833, C.L.Mss. H.A.4. See also Howard Parsons to John Pye Smith, Jan. 6, 1802, N.C.L.C., 184/38. Parsons had planned a 'theological spectator' but had given up.
62. James Matheson to J. Wilson, Oct. 2, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.21.
63. Robert Vaughan to John Blackburn, July 1, 1844, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/13.

least the apparel of intellectual respectability that it had for so long desired.<sup>64</sup> For the most part the B.Q.R. stayed out of politics, but when the subject did arise it took a moderate and catholic line. Vaughan, as the editor, was sympathetic to evangelical Anglicanism and in the revived spirit of evangelical catholicity in the 1840's he encouraged the sentiments that upheld the Evangelical Alliance. Vaughan warned against undue party spirit and advocated a strong stand against Popery and infidelity. In an unsigned article on the Evangelical Alliance the B.Q.R. accurately assessed the dilemma facing Dissent in the 1840's:

The nonconformist feeling in this country, as a strictly religious feeling, has become greatly more definite and aggressive within the last thirty years; and as a political feeling, its increase is still more observable. While it remained weak, it was an object of contempt; since it has ceased to be weak, it has become an object of alarm. The parties, moreover, have become considerably divided among themselves, each including, in respect to this controversy, its extreme men and its moderate men.<sup>65</sup>

What was to bridge this gap? The B.Q.R.'s answer was the Evangelical Alliance, but others were of a different opinion and the Alliance, like the B.Q.R., came to represent the moderate opinion of still otherwise antagonistic communities.

Not surprisingly, therefore, some Congregationalists disliked the new review. John Campbell, who was sympathetic to its theological conservatism, dismissed it with the disdain of a populist. 'What Nobles have done for nations may be ascertained from history; but what Quarterlies have done for religious bodies we have yet to learn.' What he wanted to see instead was a popular Christian press of cheap weeklies and monthlies.<sup>66</sup> More serious were the criticisms from politically radical Congregationalists. The

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64. See Willis B. Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century (London 1954), p. 41f. Theologically the B.Q.R. was very conservative and took a stand against German theology and Biblical criticism. But as Glover points out, in so doing the B.Q.R. became a prime agent for the spread of 'German neology' in Great Britain.

65. B.Q.R. (1845), p. 102; (1846), p. 525.

66. C.W. (1845), p. 343.

Eclectic appealed to moderate Dissenters to act consistently with their convictions, and, in noting the 'more moderate sentiments' of the B.Q.R., defiantly asserted that 'We have taken our ground and on it we shall abide.'<sup>67</sup>

The greatest strain occurred in Lancashire where both Vaughan and George Hadfield resided. In 1843 Vaughan accepted an appointment as principal of the new Lancashire Independent College, of which Hadfield was treasurer. As a minister and university teacher he was a natural choice for the job. Everything seemed to work out until 1844 when it became known that Vaughan was intending to set up a rival to the Eclectic. Hadfield disapproved of Vaughan's course and in late 1844 wrote to the college committee stating that the principal's activities would 'very much risk the prosperity of the college.' A battle ensued between the two. In September Hadfield wrote in distress to Thomas Raffles:

My opinion is that the undertaking would be incompatible with Dr. Vaughan's duties, and by no means a suitable engagement as the Divinity Professor ... I also think his production would divide the feelings and neutralize the energies of many of our friends - when union is indispensable.

Raffles tried to mediate, but to no avail. Raffles, John Kelly and Robert Fletcher did not think that Hadfield was correct in his criticisms of Vaughan. Nevertheless Hadfield persisted and in October wrote again to Raffles to inform him that Vaughan's work was 'beginning to work its mischievous course. My belief is (that) Dr. Price is right, and that Dr. Vaughan's opinions on Church and State will ruin the college subscription list. The bulk of our subscribers are voluntaries ...' The matter came to a head at the committee meeting on November 11, 1844. Hadfield put forward a motion of censure on Vaughan. John Kelly then moved an amendment that effectively nullified Hadfield's motion by disavowing any attempt to meddle in Vaughan's affairs. Kelly's amendment was carried with the result that

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67. E.R. (1844), 4th S. XVII, p. 350.

Hadfield dropped out of the college's activities for some time.<sup>68</sup> In the background, of course, were the debates within Congregationalism concerning church and state. A modus vivendi was only achieved after 1846 when Vaughan and other moderates took up the voluntarist education banner in opposition to the Government's Minutes in Council.

The denominational press for the most part trod a more careful path. Local journals such as the Essex Congregational Remembrancer avoided political and ecclesiastical controversies altogether and instead concentrated on printing sermons, poetry, news, aids for Sunday School teachers and the like.<sup>69</sup> One small London paper, the Independent Magazine, was directed towards 'earnest, enquiring, docile YOUTH'. Its purpose was more than to prevent Congregational youth from being drawn away by pleasure and worldliness. Its introductory address asked, 'How many ... have left the sacred principles of liberty - liberty the bulwark of truth - for which their fathers bled? ... We shall try to train you in the love of firm principles.'<sup>70</sup>

Until its effective demise in 1846 the leading Congregational periodical was the Congregational Magazine. The paper had been founded earlier as the London Christian Instructor and Congregational Magazine in 1818 by a group of Congregational ministers and laymen, including John Angel James, John Harris, John Leifchild, John Morison, George Redford and Apsley Pellat. Editorial policy was originally in the hands of a committee composed of Redford, Joseph Turnbull and Thomas Fisher.<sup>71</sup> Early in 1818 steps were taken to secure the new magazine's success by placing advertisements in the Times and News Chronicle, as well as other papers, and by cultivating the patronage of Congregational ministers. At a meeting

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68. Joseph Thompson, Lancashire Independent College, 1843-1893 (1893), pp. 85-98.
69. Essex Congregational Remembrancer (1832, 1839, 1841, 1843). In 1843 the Remembrancer contained an extract from John Locke's Treatise on Toleration.
70. The Independent Magazine (1842), pp. 1, 2. The Independent was founded in 1841.
71. Minute Book, London Christian Instructor and Congregational Magazine, book II, Dec. 8, 1817, C.L. Mss. I.c.12.

on January 26 George Redford raised the question of 'what plan sh<sup>d</sup> be pursued during the public meetings etc ... to increase the circulation & promote the general interest in the work?' It was decided to hold a breakfast for interested supporters during the May annual meetings of the great and not so great evangelical societies.<sup>72</sup> The proprietors were also sensitive to the wishes of the readers. In 1818 a section on 'domestic religious intelligence' and wood-cut illustrations were introduced. Later in 1820 the editors circulated a questionnaire to the churches and readers to gauge interest and to solicit suggestions.<sup>73</sup>

From the beginning the London Instructor never sold the full number of copies printed of each number and as such suffered financial losses. In November 1818 500 copies were printed and increased to 2,000 in 1820. Yet on October 1820 it was reported that there were 3,000 accumulated unsold copies being returned by the printer to the committee. Even so the losses sustained by the committee were not enough to force the committee to discontinue publication. In 1820 the income was about £428 with expenses of £459; and in 1822 income came to £374.12.0. with expenses of £403.17.0. Thomas Fisher's conclusion in 1820 was that 'the work should stand and he conceived that if the Mag.<sup>e</sup> continued at its present state it would stand, but whether it would return any money profit he c<sup>d</sup>. not tell.'<sup>74</sup>

The editorial management of the Instructor was not wholly satisfactory. Within a year of its founding Redford indicated that he wanted to resign from the editorial committee. The proprietary committee responded with a proposal that Redford be made the sole remunerated editor, but he refused and consented to serve another year with Fisher and Turnbull.<sup>75</sup> In spite of further efforts to procure Redford's sole editorship, Redford gradually withdrew from all editorial responsibility. After 1820 Fisher and Turnbull

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72. Ibid., Jan. 26, 1818; April 27, May 11, Dec. 29, 1818; April, 1819.

73. Ibid., Jan 26, 1818; Albert Peel, These Hundred Years (London 1931), p. 16.

74. Ibid., Nov. 13, 1820; Nov. 1822, Oct. 23, 1820.

75. Ibid., Sept. 30, 1819; Oct. 18; Nov. 8, 1819.

carried the burden of the work. New life was infused into the Instructor by the man who came to dominate the magazine and through it to become one of the most influential figures in the Congregational community. While still a minister in Essex John Blackburn began to contribute to the statistical section.<sup>76</sup> However, it was not until he arrived in London in 1822 to become minister of Claremont Chapel in Pentonville that his influence became formative. Over the next eight years the editorship seemed to evolve upon Blackburn. Exactly when he took sole responsibility is difficult to determine. In 1825 the Rev. J. Freeman was congratulating Blackburn on taking the editorship, yet it was clear that he still shared responsibility with others. For example, in 1827 Thomas Binney wrote to William Orme as editor in order to correct a mistake in an article. That same year however, Binney also wrote to Blackburn 'instead of the editors' since he supposed that Blackburn had 'such an interest in the Mag(azine) as to act as an editor.' By 1830 it was clear that Blackburn was in full control. Binney again wrote to him to encourage him in his work and to offer any assistance that he could. '(W)hen I think of the labour that must have evolved upon you,' Binney wrote, 'I feel that you have a right to look to your brethren for assistance...'<sup>77</sup>

There is no indication that Blackburn took up his responsibilities reluctantly. He certainly saw the potential of the Congregational as a force within Congregationalism for denominational consolidation and advance. All the more, then, was his disappointment at the widespread indifference on the part of many Congregationalists. The preface to the 1826 volume, which Blackburn almost certainly wrote, regretted this lack of support. Other denominational periodicals did better. 'Still, with respectful urgency, they would remind the Ministers and Members of the Congregational Churches that theirs is the only Magazine which furnishes an appropriate medium for the explanation and defence of those principles

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76. Thomas Fisher to John Blackburn, March 13, 1818, N.C.L.C., B.P. L52/3/88.

77. J. Freeman to John Blackburn, Dec. 6, 1825, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/4/56; J. Cockin to Thomas Wilson, May 1825, C.L.Mss. II.c.34; Thomas Binney to William Orme, Feb. 22, 1827, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/12; Binney to Blackburn, May 28, 1827, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/13; Binney to Blackburn, Jan. 3, 1830, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/16; Binney to Blackburn, n.d., C.L.Mss. H.a.4.

on which their fellowship if established.' This attitude was bewailed also by a number of correspondents.<sup>78</sup> To render the Congregational, as it soon came to be known, more useful Blackburn set himself the task not only of explaining and defending Congregationalism, but of reporting Congregational activities, introducing its institutions and encouraging improvements in its operations. Early on he opened up the vexed questions of chapel cases and theological training.<sup>79</sup> In addition, there were general biblical, theological and pastoral articles, book reviews, historical accounts, biographies and records of the proceedings of various societies.<sup>80</sup>

One of the greatest services Blackburn provided in the Congregational was the record it kept of denominational proceedings. The activities of county associations, colleges, schools and itineracy societies, the openings of new chapels, the ordinations of ministers and much else found

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78. C.M. (1831), p. 158. The article was written by 'Dumelemsis', the pseudonym for James Matheson of Durham. See also M.A. Gathercole to Blackburn, May 15, 1833, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/46: 'Your account of the Congr'l Mag. is very discouraging; nay more, highly disgraceful as it respects the Congregational body.'
79. C.M. (1826), preface, p. i; (1826), p. 412 - support of retired ministers; (1827), p. 53 - London Congregational Union; p. 253 - theological training; (1828), p. 52 - chapel cases.
80. Blackburn's correspondence reveals the difficulty he had in procuring articles and reviews. Some reviewers failed to get their pieces finished in time, and others withdrew them before publication because of possible repercussions. Blackburn was also criticized for the brevity of the reviews and for his failure to recognize certain works. He was also the recipient of numerous personal requests to review books from both eminent authors such as John Morison and Thomas Binney as well as from lesser ones. See Andrew Reed to Blackburn, Feb. 5, 1840, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/115; John Morison to Blackburn, Dec. 11, 1838, L52/5/89; George Redford to Blackburn, April 5, 1838, L52/5/78; J. Innes to Blackburn, Nov. 16, 1836, L52/5/71; George Payne to Blackburn, Dec. 26, 1836, L52/2/99; Thomas Milner, Feb. 12, 1833, L52/5/41; Thomas Morrell to Blackburn, Nov. 9, 1826, L52/5/2; Robert Vaughan to Blackburn, Dec. 7, 1842, L52/3/12; B. Barton to Blackburn, Nov. 2, 1827, C.L.Mss. 4. IV; H. Burder to Blackburn, Jan. 19, no year, C.L.Mss. 4 IV.

their way into its pages. In this way communication was greatly facilitated between churches and the Congregational body consolidated. Orlando Dobbin thought that the intelligence section was one of the Congregational's most valuable.<sup>81</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, Blackburn became something of a central resource for information. Thomas Binney, for example, enquired of Blackburn for information about the London poor and the efforts of Congregational churches to meet their needs. Others, such as Henry Rogers, sought Blackburn's advice on ministerial movements.<sup>82</sup> George Hadfield both sought information about chapel trusts and pressed upon Blackburn the need of publicizing the fight over Lady Hewley's charity.<sup>83</sup> He also used Blackburn to supply information about the statistics of dissenting chapels in order to inform the voluntary fight in the North.<sup>84</sup>

It was in this area of statistics that Blackburn made the Congregational one of the most essential dissenting periodicals of the day. He worked hard to procure and publish accurate statistics concerning Congregationalism. This was no easy task since Congregationalists, unlike Methodists or the Friends, possessed little connexional machinery by which to keep local and national records. Blackburn relied largely on local correspondents to send him statistics. Some counties, such as Essex, Hampshire and Durham, were more responsive than others.<sup>85</sup> Occasionally Blackburn would undertake a comprehensive statistical survey. In 1825 he began with Berkshire and Devon and in 1836, in the middle of the voluntary controversy, he published 'The position and prospects of the voluntary churches of England at the end of 1835.'<sup>86</sup> Beginning in 1835 he included an annual statistical account of all the

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81. See C.M., (1830), pp. 222, 278, 446, 503, 558, 611.

82. Thomas Binney to Blackburn, 1830, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/15; Henry Rogers to Blackburn, Feb. 1830, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/105.

83. George Hadfield to Blackburn, June 2, 1842, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/54; June 18, 1842, L52/2/95; Aug. 8, 1842 L52/2/56; July 17, 1843, L52/2/58; March 9, 1844, L52/2/59; July 1, 1844, L52/2/60.

84. Hadfield to Blackburn, March 9, 1840, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/52.

85. C.M. (1828), p. 502; (1831), p. 504; (1832), pp. 33, 315, 383, 666.

86. Blackburn began his statistical surveys with Devon in 1825, C.M. (1825), pp. 386, (1836), p. 10; Charles Surman, The Revd. John Blackburn (1792-1855), pioneer statistician of English Congregationalism (1955), p. 356.

county associations and churches. Whatever he did, however, Blackburn could be assured of correspondents with corrections to his published results.<sup>87</sup>

As far as politics was concerned Blackburn took a cautious line. This was in part due to the character of the Congregational as a denominational periodical and in part to Blackburn's moderate temperament. Throughout the troubled years of the 1830's and 40's Blackburn consistently refused to press for a more extreme and radical policy. At first there was a good deal of consensus on political matters, particularly in the period around the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and until it became clear that Dissenters were not going to have their grievances speedily redressed. Indeed the Congregational's political content for 1833 was in the front line of dissenting political thinking. Blackburn called the recently enacted Reform Bill 'fully justified in the hopes it inspired' and looked forward to church reform and the abolition of slavery. Later he complained that 'the "Grievances" of Dissenters, it is feared, do not meet with very much sympathy from the present ministry, who are too much engaged with the innumerable embarrassments of their own situation to remember those friends who proved staunch supporters in the very crisis of their fate. - Dissenters therefore must depend on themselves.' He even went so far as to state that Dissenters were doing 'ALMOST NOTHING' to press their grievances on Parliament.<sup>88</sup> Even then there was a note of moderation. Dissenters, Blackburn said, had to 'calmly urge (their) claims from unjust imposts, and to leave church reform in the hands of churchmen.' And at a meeting of the Monthly Meeting of Ministers and Churches Blackburn insisted that the spiritual well-being of the church was independent of the political fortunes of Dissent.<sup>89</sup>

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87. Robert Halley to Blackburn, Feb. 7, 1837, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/71; Theophilus Davies, Jan. 6, 1842, L52/6/24.

88. C.M. (1833), pp. 61, 308.

89. C.M. (1833), pp. 126, 246.

By 1834, however, Dissenters were aware of the difficulties they faced in furthering their political aspirations. Not only were they divided on tactics, but there was disunity on what should be aimed for, reform or disestablishment. The Congregational reflected this change. Thomas Binney's infamous sermon on the tendency of the Church of England to destroy more souls than it saved was printed in the 1833 supplement. On the other hand, Blackburn urged a calm consideration of facts as well as a stand for principle, and he tried to deflect the charge brought against London Dissent of being less than enthusiastic in the campaign to redress the grievances. Blackburn pointed out that moderate Dissenters agreed with the radicals in principle, but that they 'only deny that they are at present in sufficient strength to attempt (an) immediate appeal to the legislature.' Later he made the point that London Dissenters had refrained from action because they were waiting upon the Government to act, but as this did not happen it was now time for town and country, moderate and radical, to act together, albeit with discretion.<sup>90</sup>

Such discretion was not forthcoming and Blackburn increasingly found himself on the right wing of Dissent as the spokesman of the moderates. His and the Congregational's voluntarist credentials were never in doubt, but it was clear that Blackburn was uncomfortable with a highly politicized Dissent. An example of this attitude can be seen in Blackburn's reluctance to support ministerial involvement in the Anti-Corn Law League. In spite of an appeal from George Hadfield, couched in the most religious terms, Blackburn declined to publish a circular from the League in the Congregational in 1839.<sup>91</sup> Two years later Robert Halley had to write to Blackburn to assure him that he did not support the League's conference for ministers in Manchester. Nevertheless, Halley went to the conference as an observer and his correspondence with Blackburn from Manchester reveals the ambivalence of moderate clerical

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90. C.M. (1834), pp. 59, 241, 347.

91. Hadfield to Blackburn, Oct. 4, 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/50.

Dissent towards political activism. Both Halley and Blackburn realized that the Corn Law question had assumed 'a fearful importance to the character of Dissenters' and as such felt that ministers had to take up a position. What disturbed them was the tendency towards radicalism and the failure of Congregationalists to act together instead of cooperating with other bodies. Halley pointed out that the proceedings of the meeting could not be said to express Congregational convictions. 'I felt rather jealous for the honour of our own body and did not quite like the multitude of sects with which they were mingled, and the persons of all sorts who called themselves preachers.'<sup>92</sup>

In a similar vein Blackburn opposed Edward Miall and the British Anti-State Church Association. Commenting on the first Anti-State Church Conference in 1844, Blackburn called the convenors a small minority of Dissent and castigated them for representing their views as those of the majority of Dissenters. He insisted that Congregationalists had to distinguish between the religious and political aspects of the Establishment and urged them to press their claims on religious and not political grounds.<sup>93</sup> Reflected in Blackburn's position was the same denominationalism that marked Halley's reservations about the Anti-Corn Law League. Blackburn objected to the B.A.S.C.A.'s inclusion of Unitarians and its flirtation with Roman Catholics and radicals. The reactions to Blackburn's comments were many, but he refused to retract anything and maintained that he stood by his historic dissenting principles.<sup>94</sup> Considering the number of prominent Congregationalists who gave the B.A.S.C.A. their initial approval, it would seem that Blackburn was in the minority. Yet Blackburn had his finger on a deeper nerve of popular Dissent in the sense that he discerned, in a way that many other Congregationalists leaders did not, the dual loyalty of Dissent both to voluntarism and Protestantism. The degree to which this was so was seen in 1845 over the Maynooth College question and

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92. Robert Halley to Blackburn, April 3, Aug. 17, 19, 24, 1841 N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/70-73.

93. C.M. (1844), p. 392.

94. Ibid., p. 472.

in 1850 over Papal Aggression. On both occasions Blackburn took strongly anti-catholic positions, perhaps reflecting his earlier missionary experience in Ireland. The Maynooth question disrupted dissenting unity on the State Church issue when, against the position of the B.A.S.C.A., many Congregationalists opposed the grant not only on voluntary grounds but also on the grounds of disapproval of state support for Roman Catholicism. The Congregational Union committee itself passed a resolution to this effect and Blackburn actually came out in support of the Protestant Establishment in Ireland. 'We are not,' he wrote, 'such zealous Dissenters as to forget that we are Protestants, nor can we overlook the fact, that the voluntary and established systems are but means to an end; the question at issue being which method is more likely to preserve and extend the Protestant faith.'<sup>95</sup> This was a significant turn-about in voluntary thinking and dangerously argued from the premise that English voluntarists had traditionally fought tooth and nail.

Blackburn retired in 1846 and the Congregational was published thereafter as a strictly theological journal under the title: The Biblical Review and Congregational Magazine. As a denominational periodical the Biblical Review no longer reflected the events and politics of the Congregational community.

The Congregational's effective demise as a popular denominational organ was partly due to the success of two other journals which tried to do separately what the Congregational had done in one periodical. The B.Q.R. has already been noted. More closely tied to the Congregational Union was the highly successful Christian Witness. There seems to have been a general discontent in the early 1840's with the denominational literature, and particularly with the periodicals. Algernon Wells, the

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95. C.M. (1845), p. 397.

union secretary, complained of the 'want of energetic action' in this area and asked, 'Where the constant supply of weekly and monthly papers exhibiting or defending Congregational principles...?' Wells's proposal for a cheap denominational press initially fell on deaf ears.<sup>96</sup> By 1843, however, the union committee decided to go ahead and establish a new paper and took steps to find a suitable editor. Their choice fell on the fiery and staunchly orthodox minister of Tottenham Court Chapel and Whitefield's Tabernacle, John Campbell. Campbell agreed to become editor on the condition that the proposed journal was popular and cheap. Campbell was a natural choice as an extraordinarily hard worker, a prominent figure in Metropolitan Dissent and a man of strongly orthodox and Nonconformist views. Indeed Campbell thoroughly believed that Congregational Dissent was the most perfect and balanced system of church order and the one with the most to offer the modern world. This belief was evident in the first issue of the Christian Witness that appeared in the spring of 1844. In a style that became characteristic of the Witness, Campbell declared that the paper took its stand on 'great and immutable principles' that constituted 'the distinguishing character, and ... glory of the Congregational community.' He then went on to position the Witness in relation to the other dissenting periodicals and to castigate Congregationalists for not supporting their own press, particularly when the press was one of the most powerful tools of influence at hand. 'Our counsel, therefore, to our people is, to seize the Printing Press, and to bring its utmost power to bear upon the millions of the British Empire.'<sup>97</sup> The format of the Witness was not that dissimilar to the later Congregational and included a regular spread of Biblical and theological articles, biographies, obituaries, correspondence, book reviews and the reports of various societies. The main difference came in the sharpness of tone and the inclusion of a regular feature on church and state. Campbell did not shrink from being controversial. For example, in April 1844 he criticized the new Evangelical Alliance on the grounds that it unrealistically believed that members of

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96. Peel, These Hundred Years, pp. 125, 126.

97. C.W. (1844), preface, pp. iii, vii.

of the Established Church could be encompassed within it.<sup>98</sup>

The Christian Witness was an undoubted success. While the circulation never reached Campbell's desired 100,000 it soon attracted 30,000 subscribers and was making a healthy annual profit, all of which went to a fund for retired Congregational ministers. Within two years, Campbell went on to establish, with the cooperation of the union committee, an even more popular paper entitled 'The Christian's Penny Magazine and Friends of the People'. The C.P.M. was more devotional, contained shorter and simpler articles and was less denominationally oriented. Its first number contained a devotional piece, an article on parental duty, a number of letters on the importance of church membership, several poems, a section of anecdotes called 'the Fragment Basket', and an article on the voluntary principle entitled, 'Why I dare not conform to the Church of England.' The C.P.M. was exceedingly successful and by its second year had a circulation of over 100,000.<sup>99</sup>

As successful as Campbell was as an editor and publisher, not everyone appreciated his contribution. John Angel James complained to Joshua Wilson in 1845 that Campbell was endangering the Congregational Union by his candid comments on men and affairs in the Witness. There was even more objection to Campbell taking on the C.P.M. in 1845. Robert Halley did not think that Campbell was the right man and James believed that Campbell would make the C.P.M. 'too liberally charged with the democratic element, and prove the instrument of over-stimulating the lower-classes of the people.'<sup>100</sup> The B.Q.R., and therefore Robert Vaughan, thought that Campbell's connection with the Union was a great mistake.<sup>101</sup> However, the greatest objections were reserved for Campbell when he founded the British Banner in 1848 while he was still the editor of the Union's

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98. Ibid., preface, xi, 17, 169.

99. Ibid., preface, pp. vii; Peel, These Hundred Years, 126, 127; C.Y.B. (1845), p. 192, C.P.M., (1847), preface.

100. J.A. James to J. Wilson, Dec. 8, 1845, C.L.Mss. H.e.8.

periodicals. His motive, like that of his prominent backers, was to set up an alternative to the godless Sunday press. What disturbed his critics was the manifest conflict of interests between the editorial content of the Congregational periodicals and that of the independent Banner. What Campbell held back in the Witness and C.P.M. he thundered forth in the Banner with little hesitation or reserve. Moreover, the Banner shared the same proprietors as the Patriot which became the source of many tensions since the Patriot was the voice of more liberal Dissent and the Banner of more conservative.<sup>102</sup> It was this conflict of interest that caused the great controversy in 1856 when Campbell, as editor of the Banner, criticized the Eclectic Review for tending to favour the new German theology. Campbell was particularly outspoken on the question of liberalism in Congregational theological colleges and its influence on the rising generation of ministers.<sup>103</sup> The whole issue came to a head in what became known as the 'Rivulet controversy.' It centered on a collection of rather mystical, undogmatic hymns written and published by the London Congregational minister Thomas Toke Lynch. Campbell came into the conflict with the Eclectic and a number of leading London ministers, particularly Thomas Binney, and implied that they were less than orthodox since they refused to outrightly condemn the work. The controversy became so heated that the churches in Cheltenham

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101. Robert Ferguson and A. Morton Brown, The Life and Labours of John Campbell (1867), p. 282.

102. Ibid., P. 365.

103. Ibid., pp. 393 ff; Samuel Davidson, An Autobiography (London 1899), pp. 96ff; Brewin Grant, The Dissenting World: an Autobiography (London 1869), pp. 98, 109. Grant, of one of Campbell's loyalist admirers, had a particular concern for the Congregational mission to the urban working-classes and was responsible for the Congregational Union's effort to reach this section of society. At the same time he vigorously opposed theological liberalism and in 1862 came to blows with Prof. Godwin of New College, London.

retracted an invitation to the union to hold its autumnal meeting there and many felt that the unity of Congregationalism was threatened.<sup>104</sup> In the end something of a solution was worked out to the theological question, but the matter had raised the whole issue of the union's periodicals and Campbell's editorship. The question was first broached in the May assembly of 1856. It was the usual practice of the union to vote a resolution of thanks to the editor, but that year several of the younger ministerial delegates present moved that Campbell be removed from office and that the magazines be separated from the union. The motion was defeated, but the union committee took up the subject after the adjournment. When a special meeting of the union was held in January 1857 to resolve the 'Rivulet' controversy, the committee announced that the proposal to separate the magazines was a good one and should be pursued. Campbell sent a letter to the meeting vindicating his conduct of the Witness and the C.P.M. and bitterly complained of his arraignment before the union as 'a violation of justice, and an outrage on propriety.'<sup>105</sup>

The deliberations of the January meeting were inconclusive and all that was achieved was a remit to a special committee to report to the annual meeting in May. The question of theological orthodoxy dominated the May meeting, as was witnessed by Archibald Jack's address from the chair, and the matter of the periodicals was considered in this atmosphere. But it is also necessary to keep in mind that the magazine controversy was as much related to the other issue under consideration: the relationship of the union to its affiliated societies. In January the question had been raised as to whether the union should be of a more devotional and fraternal character and less an agency for denominational action. Not a few felt

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104. Ferguson and Brown, John Campbell, pp. 322, 374; C.Y.B. (1857), pp. 46; Peel, These Hundred Years, pp. 221, 266. The controversy revealed the deepening theological cleavage within the denomination. In his address to the Annual Assembly that year John Stoughton emphasized the importance of the 'truths of our common salvation.' C.Y.B. (1857), p. 7. In early 1857 it was deemed necessary to hold a special meeting in order to come to some resolution on the matter. C.Y.B. (1858), p. 1.

105. C.Y.B. (1858), pp. 11, 13.

that the growing organizational commitments of the union threatened 'the compatibility of the independency of our churches with their intercommunity with each other ...' When the matter again came up for discussion in May with the report of the special committee it was agreed to sever the connection with the societies and simply retain a friendly relationship free of responsibility. A committee was appointed to effect the needed constitutional changes and the special relationship was formally ended in October. The arrangements for the Witness and C.P.M. were more complicated, particularly because their profits went into the retirement fund. Four trustees were appointed for the two periodicals and 48 trustees for the Christian Witness Fund, half of whom were to be laymen and one third of whom were to be from London. No money in the Fund was to be spent on the magazines themselves.<sup>106</sup>

Campbell continued to edit the Witness and C.P.M. until his retirement in 1864, after which the Witness became the English Congregationalist under the more tactful editorship of R.W. Dale. Meanwhile Campbell was fighting another battle. Since the Banner's founding in 1848 Campbell's relationship to its proprietors had been a stormy one. Several libel charges had been made against him, particularly in the case of the London City missionary Edward Davies. The tensions reached breaking point during 1856-7 when the Banner took a different position than the Patriot on the Rivulet controversy. Campbell decided to buy out the Banner and re-establish it as a wholly independent paper. When the proprietors rejected his offer, Campbell resigned and immediately set up the British Standard, 'entirely independent of all Proprietary Bodies, Committees and Contractors.' In the preface to the new periodical Campbell expressed his intention of producing a magazine for all classes of society which would 'meet the wants of all responsible, enlightened, humane, patriotic and Christian men.' 'With respect to Religion,' he went on, the Standard would be 'Liberal, Scriptural, and thoroughly Protestant.'

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106. Ibid., pp. 38, 44, 59.

By 'Liberal' Campbell did not mean the progressive Christianity that he battled against, but rather that blend of political liberalism and religious Nonconformity that was to forge the so-called Nonconformist conscience. Just how conservative on theological issues the Standard was could be seen in Campbell's campaign against the Congregational Old Testament scholar Samuel Davidson, tutor at the Lancashire Independent College. The Standard ceased when Campbell died in 1871. Brewin Grant, one of his younger admirers, bemoaned the loss of an orthodox periodical among Congregationalists to watch for 'departures from the truth.'<sup>107</sup>

The Congregational Union's experiment with periodicals should not obscure its other publications. Closely related to the union, though not officially published by it, were the Congregational Lectures delivered every year in London at the Congregational Library by a distinguished minister and called by James Matheson 'our Bampton Lectures.'<sup>108</sup> The union published an annual pastoral letter to the churches as well as an account of its proceedings during the previous year. One of its earliest efforts was a Congregational hymn book. In 1833 a committee was appointed to compile a book to supplement Watts's Hymn and Psalms. Appearing in 1835, the union had sold 40,000 copies of the book by 1939. In 1855 the union commissioned a revision that would encompass Watts.<sup>109</sup> As has been pointed out already, the importance of the Hymn Book lay not only in its influence on Congregational worship, but in the profits it produced to pay the union's deficits. In 1858 the union received £368 from Hymn Book sales and between 1854 and 1858 a total of £1,311 was received.<sup>110</sup> Union leaders did not consider this state of affairs satisfactory since it was letting the churches off from carrying their fair share of the financial responsibilities. The matter was brought to the attention of the union in 1848. The committee wanted to see the publications department built up with its own profits and the maintenance

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107. Brewin Grant, Autobiography, p. 155.

108. James Matheson to J. Wilson, Oct. 2, 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.21.

109. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 95, C.Y.B. (1848), p. 16; (1850), p. 18; (1851), p. 21; (1853), p. 21; (1855), p. 21.

110. C.Y.B. (1859), p. 16.

of the union left to the support of the churches. Unfortunately this was little more than wishful thinking and it was not for many years that the annual contributions of the churches was adequate to the needs of the union.

The union published tracts and books designed to state Congregational principles and to provide practical aids to the churches. Soon after its founding in 1832 the union published its Declaration of Faith and Order, for which there remained a good demand from congregations.<sup>111</sup> There was also the need for cheap, practical literature. George Payne offered to have one of his books published by the union, but he doubted whether the committee would agree to it. And the Rev. S. Sturtevant thought that his book would help the union to encourage local evangelization.<sup>112</sup> By 1840 pressure was mounting for such literature. Some wanted aids for village preachers and George Redford and Robert Vaughan argued that the union had to state its principles more clearly than it had heretofore.<sup>113</sup> Not surprisingly, then, the union began to publish a tract series in 1840. Titles included: 'The duties of churches in reference to their own spiritual prosperity' (1840); 'An affectionate address to church members on the choice of pastors' (1840); 'The office, duties and qualifications of deacons' (1841); 'A declaration of views and principles on various questions agitated at the present crisis, which affect the duty and reputation of Independent churches' (1841); 'Baptismal regeneration freely considered' (1842); 'The Congregational ministry' (1843); and 'Hints on the conduct of public worship.'<sup>114</sup>

Of a very different nature was the union's short experiment in 1846 with the publication of Reformation and Puritan divinity. Already the union had undertaken the publication of Benjamin Hanbury's rather heavy and stiff Historical Monuments of the Independents in 1839, 1842 and 1845,

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111. James Matheson to J. Wilson, 1834, C.L.Mss II.c. 12.

112. George Payne to Blackburn, n.d., N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/98; S. Sturtevant to Blackburn, June 14, 1838, L52/5/81.

113. G. Aldridge to Algernon Wells, 1841, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/6/14; C.M. (1840), p. 490.

114. These and other pamphlets are part of the C.L.Mss (h) 7.

but the response and sales had been very poor.<sup>115</sup> Several Congregational antiquarians wanted agency similar to the Anglican Parker Society, and in 1846 founded the Wycliffe Society to publish by subscription the works of mainly Puritan worthies. But in spite of appeals and wide publicity the Wycliffe Society never had more than 950 subscribers. The only works that it published were those of John Wycliffe and David Clarkson. It was pointed out at the time that the society had been badly mismanaged.<sup>116</sup>

Finally, mention should be made of the annuals. Initially union proceedings and statistics were either published separately or encompassed in the Congregational and its supplements. But in 1840 Blackburn began to publish an annual Calendar for the churches. The Calendar was appreciated but was only marginally successful, partly due to its very eclectic character.<sup>117</sup> In 1846, however, Blackburn published the first Congregational Year Book. For the first few years sales were slow, but after 1850 the C.Y.B. sold very well. Blackburn edited the C.Y.B. for the first two years, after which it was edited by Samuel Palmer, Algernon Wells and Robert Ashton.<sup>118</sup> Perhaps more than any other Congregational publication the C.Y.B. gave the best over-all account of the travails and fortunes of Congregationalism.

Periodical literature played an important part in the consolidating of Congregationalism. It was a free press for a free religious community. From its beginnings within the pan-evangelical world it became increasingly denominational in orientation and was effective in impressing a sense of community upon a disparate fellowship of independent churches. Even the nonsectarian magazines reflected and in turn influenced the Congregationalism of the editors and contributors. Congregationalism was at once catholic and sectarian and it was this that seemed to stamp the

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115. Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 91; C.Y.B. (1846), p. 7.

116. C.Y.B., (1846), p. 7; Peel, These Hundred Years, p.123; George Redford to Blackburn, Aug. 14, 1846, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/2/104. Redford was very critical of the project.

117. R. Davison to Blackburn, 1841, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/6/9; C.Y.B. (1848), p. 16.

118. C.Y.B. (1846) pp. 1f; (1850) p.v.

dissenting press of the mid-19th century. There was an awareness of the wider world of literature, theology and politics, and yet a narrower concern with the vindication of the separated community. John Blackburn represented the denominational concern, but it was Josiah Conder and John Campbell who prodded Congregational Dissent to confidently vindicate itself in the public eye. Unfortunately the disturbances within Congregationalism itself weakened their ability to put the case of the voluntary alternative.

CHAPTER VCONTAINMENT: CONGREGATIONALISM AND ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

The Congregational practice of the voluntary principle came under its most severe test in the educational controversies of the 1840's. For most Congregationalists voluntarism related not only to the life of the local congregation, but also to any area influenced by religion. And since in the 19th century education and religion were very closely related, in most minds education became an area in which the voluntary principle could be applied. As the controversy took hold most Congregationalists came to see their voluntary principles as rising or falling by their ability to make adequate provision for the educational needs of the nation. I do not propose to repeat a history of the educational controversy. Rather, my purpose here will be to look at the relation between elementary and secondary education, the voluntary principle and Congregational institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Congregationalists had always been interested in education. The Test Acts had forced them in the 18th century to establish academies. For the most part these were of a relatively high academic standard, many becoming in time institutions of higher learning and most ending up by 1800 in Unitarian-Presbyterian hands.<sup>2</sup> In addition to private academies and tuition provided by poorly paid ministers, Congregationalists also founded boarding schools such as Mill Hill, Silcoates and the Congregational School in Lewisham. Mill Hill, or as it was called 'The Protestant Dissenters' Grammar School,' was founded in 1809 to provide the equivalent of a public school education for the children of wealthy Dissenters. It was not notably successful until later in the century, but it did draw wide and distinguished support, including Andrew Reed, John Pye Smith and John Blackburn. Blackburn sent his sons to Mill Hill, but was not always happy

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1. For detailed accounts of the educational controversies see G.I.T. Machin, Politics and the churches in Great Britain 1832-1868 (1977) pp. 155, 183; H.R. Martin 'The Politics of the Congregationalists' (unpub Ph.D. Durham, 1972), p. 377f; R.G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent (1959), p. 118ff.
  2. I. Parker, Dissenting Academies in England (1914), p. 45.

with the standard of education. Another distinguished Congregationalist supporter, Thomas Binney, wrote to Blackburn in 1833, regretting 'the dissatisfaction which you feel at the state of your children's education.' Blackburn apparently disliked the curriculum and the arrangements for study.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless Blackburn later held Mill Hill up as a shining example of the voluntary principle at work. At the school's prize day in 1843 he asked his audience the question, why should Dissenters have such a school? He answered: 'the fact that we are Protestant Dissenters is an additional reason why we should uphold an establishment like this, in complete efficiency.'<sup>4</sup> The Congregational School at Lewisham was originally intended for the sons of ministers and was charitably supported.<sup>5</sup>

In the course of the 19th century Congregationalists were not only concerned for the education of ministers' children or the children of the wealthy. In line with the evangelicalism of the day they were also concerned with the education of the children of the working classes. One aspect of this concern was the Sunday school movement which was closely related to the day-school movement. Originally the Sunday schools had both secular and religious interests, but as educational needs became greater and day schools were founded the Sunday schools became more religious in character and more closely aligned with particular churches. My purpose is to concentrate on the day schools, though it is important to keep in mind that Congregationalists saw the voluntary principle at work in the Sunday schools.<sup>6</sup> Congregationalists were equally active in attempts to establish day schools, including local proprietary schools and Lancastrian schools. In most of these efforts Congregationalists cooperated with Anglicans and other Dissenters, and in the case of some Lancastrian schools even with Unitarians. But as the evangelical movement spread and orthodox Dissent revived such alliances became less and less tolerable, particularly when it came to agreeing on campaign strategies on education. Early on Anglicans and Nonconformists effectively divided

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3. Thomas Binney to John Blackburn, August 8, 1833, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/44. See Norman Brett-James, History of Mill Hill School (1909).

4. C.M. (1843), p. 545.

5. Caterham School 1812-1912, no author (no place 1912).

6. William Henry Watson, The History of the Sunday School Union (1853), p. 42  
Kathleen Heasman, Evangelicals in Action (1969) p. 69.

into the National and British and Foreign societies respectively. And before long even the latter exorcised radicals and infidels. The West London Lancastrian Association, for example, successfully rid itself of Francis Place in 1813.<sup>7</sup>

The British and Foreign School Society was founded in 1814 and primarily served the needs of evangelical Dissent. The purpose of the B.F.S.S. was not so much to provide voluntary schools as to provide schools with religious foundations and committed to no particular creed or denomination. This sentiment was expressed in the Eclectic Review for 1812 in reference to the Lancastrian schools:

The education of the poor, though now so cheap, can never become general without vast expense. It is desirable, therefore, that all persons who have anything to share for charitable purposes, should contribute for the good work. But then to unite charitable persons of all sects and parties, a common ground must be chosen.

To the reviewer's mind the Lancastrian system was the best in its comprehensivity and methods. Lancaster was criticized by others on the grounds of tolerating too wide a spectrum of orthodox Christianity and of seeking to educate the poor, but the Eclectic believed these charges to be unfounded. The uniting principle was sola scriptura, though it was open to question just how many Churchmen would throw their lot in with Dissenters in such an enterprise.<sup>9</sup> An example of a British school was the Homerton Row school in Hackney, London. Educating about 200 boys, the school operated on the basis of being open to all denominations, applying no creeds, teaching the B.F.S.S. curriculum and maintaining daily reading of the Bible. All the officers and trustees were Dissenters and some, such as William Rutt, John Morley and Andrew Reed, were to play leading parts in the Congregational educational movement. The local B.F.S.S. auxiliary was heavily influenced and supported by Congregationalists, even after the setting up of Congregationalist schools.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Brian Simon, Studies in the History of Education 1780 to 1870 (1960) p. 150
  8. The British and Foreign School Society's progenitor was the Royal Lancastrian Society, founded 1808. The National Society was founded in 1811.
  9. E.R. (1812), VIII, p. 790f.
  10. Annual Report, Homerton Row School (1822) p. 3, Homerton College Collection KB 1101-1112; 10th Annual Report, Homerton and Clapton British School (1830) KB 1109-1118; Minute Book, North East London Auxiliary of the British and Foreign School Society (1818-1824), ACa53.

Congregationalists continued to work on the general open policy through the 1830's. With other Dissenters, Congregationalists opposed Henry Brougham's education schemes in 1816 and 1820 which would have placed the appointment of teachers and the control of state supported schools in the hands of the Established clergy. Edward Baines, senior, later a leading opponent of government financed education, vigorously objected to the measure, predicting that the scheme would either fail or be 'productive of serious and ceaseless animosities between Churchmen and Dissenters.' As well as that, he saw in it an attempt to 'oppress and vex' the dissenting poor.<sup>11</sup> Andrew Reed, the philanthropist and minister of Wycliffe Chapel, London, did what he could to awaken the dissenting community to the threat and urged the General Body of Ministers of the Three Denominations to make a survey of dissenting educational establishments.<sup>12</sup> The 1833 Parliamentary grant of £20,000 to both the National and British societies was generally accepted by Dissenters, though it was objected to by some Churchmen. Such a measure was inadequate to the pressing educational needs of the population, but Dissenters were generally happy that the two voluntary systems received state funds without any strings attached.

The correspondence of Thomas and Joshua Wilson reveal the importance of B.F.S.S. schools and of the Government grant to many chapels throughout the country. James Scott in Shropshire wrote to Wilson in 1834 to inquire about receiving part of the B.F.S.S. grant: 'We have no school of any kind here of a public character except the Sabbath Schools (two in number) which belong to our place. I am informed that the Government have appropriated 20,000 for the establishing of Lancastrian and National Schools. We have some very High Church people here who will certainly apply for aid to establish a National School ... We wish to be before them in our application.'<sup>13</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by Job Wilson in Cheshire several years later. He pointed out the need not only of a new chapel, but also of one with school

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11. Edward Baines, junr., The Life of Edward Baines (1851), p. 114.

12. Charles and Andrew Reed, Memoir of the Life and Philanthropic Labour of Andrew Reed (1863), p. 202.

13. James Scott to Joshua Wilson, September 1833, C.L.Mss. II.c.34. (517b).

rooms attached. Already the parish church was building a National school and Dissenters had to rise to the challenge.<sup>14</sup> Provision of elementary education was becoming essential to the expansion and ministry of the Congregational churches. The Wilsons themselves gave generously to the building and equipping of schools in addition to aiding chapel building. Thomas Wilson helped Edward Leighton to do just this in 1832. Leighton had written to Wilson and pointed out that 'we cannot do without a school much longer.' Like Job Wilson he was faced with the challenge of the Anglicans.<sup>15</sup> Joshua Wilson had a particular interest in voluntary education in the area about his summer home in Tunbridge Wells and accordingly provided for a school with a master and 70 pupils that opened in 1835.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless through the 1830's, under the pressure of political circumstances and an increasingly more sharply defined voluntarism, Congregationalists were coming to repudiate any form of Government involvement in education. There was some pressure in this direction from the Congregationalists' Irish Mission, though this was more for reasons of anti-catholicism than for a vigorous defence of the voluntary principle. In early 1832 the Government decided to make provision for Irish elementary education by granting funds to both Protestant and Catholic schools. English Dissenters approved the scheme. The Congregational Board expressed its conviction that many of the problems in Ireland could be ascribed 'to a deficiency of moral and religious education' and that therefore provision had to be made for schools of all denominations. The Dissenting Deputies agreed.<sup>17</sup> Irish Congregationalists did not. The Dublin minister William Urwick objected to the proposed system because it would have 'recognized and inculcated Popery.' The Patriot, in a leader dated April 25, believed Urwick's objections to be unfounded. Rather, the Government scheme 'professes to be chiefly a system of general education, imparting that knowledge of the first great principles of morality and religion which all parties admit to be essentially necessary.' Government sanction did not mean approval, but simply permission. Significantly, in the light of later views, the Patriot

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14. Job Wilson to Joshua Wilson, September 30, 1835, C.L.Mss. Gb.4.1.

15. Edward Leighton to Thomas Wilson, June 11, 1832, C.L.Mss.II.c.33b, letter 6b.

16. Charlotte Stapley to Joshua Wilson, March 27, 1835, C.L.Mss. II.c.35, letter 525.

17. C.M. (1832), pp. 316, 325. See also P., March 22, 28, 1832.

asserted that education was the Government's business as long as it did not interfere with religion.<sup>18</sup> Another Irish Congregationalist, William Newick, objected to the scheme on clearer voluntary grounds, pointing out that English Congregationalists were acting inconsistently with their principles:

They approve of a system as calculated to apply the want of religious instruction to the poor of this country, and whatever be the policy or allowableness of the scheme considered in itself to recognize the magistrate as having power to establish any system of religious instruction is an approval of the connection between religion and the state ... Rely upon it they have considered the main principle. Expediency, not awfulness, has been the sole consideration.

Newick believed that the Congregationalists were lacking clear vision in 'the present crisis.' 'Paddy laughs at John Bull's credulity. Our denomination had well look to itself now ... I fear two evils as a result. First, our losing spirituality and becoming secular; second, our losing the independence in which we have gloried, and (taking) state patronage and connexion.'<sup>19</sup>

By 1839 Congregationalist attitudes on education had hardened considerably. That year the new Government education proposals were generally accepted by Congregationalists but opposed by Anglicans. The plan, proposed by Lord John Russell, would have given aid to all schools of all denominations. In addition it was proposed to establish a Committee of the Privy Council to oversee educational affairs. Nevertheless there was opposition to the measure from several quarters. John Pye Smith found the Bill distressing and sought to mobilize his congregation to oppose it. He was coming to oppose the idea of any Government subsidy for religious education, though he still favoured some state action. 'My own opinion,' he wrote to Samuel Morley, 'is decidedly in favour of a national measure of purely secular education, which millions would cry down as infidel and atheistic. But I am persuaded that it would draw after it religious

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18. P, April 25, 1833.

19. William Newick to John Blackburn, May 25, 1832, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/10.

exertions of a kind which would have holy life in them; whereas those proposed by the Bill would, I fear, have turned out to be generally formal, pharasaical, anti-Christian, and having a name to life, but being dead to any truly spiritual and evangelical effect.<sup>20</sup> Andrew Reed, on the other hand, objected to the centralizing tendencies manifest in the proposal for a Privy Council committee.<sup>21</sup>

Several issues were coming to a head at the end of the decade that were to sharpen the Congregational position on education. Congregationalists were conscious of the pressing need of education, but this was coming to be seen in the light of their own denominational position. John Thompson wrote to this effect in a letter to John Blackburn in 1839:

If energetic measures are not taken by our body - the education of the rising generation will be greatly taken from us & the (evil) will take deeper & wider root & the oppression of the poor will increase with the growth of Church influence. Talk of Dissenters' grievances whilst our peasantry are oppressed as they are is no honour to 19th century Christians.<sup>22</sup>

Some questioned the viability and principle of such action. 'A Dissenter' in Truth not favour went against the trend among Congregationalists in opposing both wholly secular and wholly church sponsored education. Russell's 1839 proposals were best and most Christian in that they gave the greatest possibility of meeting the country's educational needs. The anonymous writer pointed to the ambiguity of the position of most Dissenters who wanted Christian morality inculcated but not the teachings of Christianity. This was impossible. He rejected purely voluntary action as inefficient and urged Dissenters to accept the fact that Anglicanism was the majority faith and as such had the right to dictate the terms of public religious instruction.<sup>23</sup> Such a position was unpopular and over against its view of voluntarism relegated solely to local church government, most Congregationalists were

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20. John Pye Smith to J. Morley, June 7, 1839, in Edwin Hodder, Life of Samuel Morley (1887), p. 68.

21. Andrew and Charles Reed, A. Reed, p. 202.

22. J. Thompson to John Blackburn, April 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/100.

23. C.M. (1840), p. 773.

coming to see the voluntary principle applied to wider spheres. At its Autumnal in 1840 the Congregational Union called for church based education aside from that provided in the Sunday schools. James Matheson spoke to the motion calling for recommendations for week-day education. Several succeeding speakers agreed; James Bennett emphasized the importance of the subject, and J. Barfitt of Salisbury pointed out how children were being drawn away from the Congregational churches by Anglican schools. The Rev. J. Edwards lent a note of realism by pointing to the expense involved and the fact that a school was beyond the means of most churches, particularly those in the country where the challenge of Anglicanism was the greatest. John Blackburn, on the other hand, raised the question of Government financing of school buildings, asking the assembly whether the Congregationalists should press the Government on the matter. Perhaps as significant as the discussion itself was its context in a searching review by the assembly of the denomination's pastoral needs and concerns, particularly in regard to the poor.<sup>24</sup> A similar sentiment prevailed the following year in the Staffordshire Association when a resolution was passed stating that 'No congregation ought to be without one or more day schools.' If only one were possible then it was recommended that it be an infant school.<sup>25</sup>

These sentiments were not consolidated until 1843 when Congregationalists were brought up against Sir James Graham's Factory Education Bill. Graham's Bill, supported by the Government, sought to reduce the minimum working age from 9 to 8 years of age and working hours for those under 13 years from 8 to 6½ hours daily. In addition, it sought to provide 3 hours of education, 5 days a week. Herein was the rub. Knowing that secular education was politically unacceptable Graham sought to find a middle way between Church

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24. C.M., (1840), pp. 394ff, 773ff.

25. A.G. Matthews, Congregationalism in Staffordshire, (1924), p. 196.

and Dissent by stipulating that only the Bible be used in religious instruction and the Church Catechism used only on Church holy days. Students could be dismissed from the latter exercise on grounds of conscience. Inspection of the schools and the appointment of teachers would be vested in 7 trustees, the chairman being the parish incumbent.<sup>26</sup> Though the scheme appeared to be a reasonable compromise to a man like James Graham, it proved anathema to Anglicans and even more so to Dissenters. Churchmen disliked it because it limited Anglican control and Dissenters because the Bill permitted such control. The Bill was eventually withdrawn, Graham noting that 'the enmity of the Dissenters is aroused to the uttermost.'

Reaction to the Bill was swift and condemnatory. Both the General Body and the dissenting Deputies deplored the measure.<sup>27</sup> The London Congregational Board held a special meeting on March 17, 1843 to discuss the bill. While recognizing the need of 'useful and religious education' for factory children, the Board deplored the Bill's education clauses as both 'sectarian and oppressive'. In particular the Board objected to the appointment of clergy and churchwardens as trustees, the appointment of additional trustees by magistrates, the appointment of the local incumbent as chairman and the almost exclusive control by the Church of England of the curriculum and inspection of religious teaching. In short, the scheme was 'calculated to maintain and diffuse a sectarian and anti-social feeling in the community - to establish clerical domination - to oppress the conscientious dissenter, and utterly to prostrate the independent spirit of the people.'<sup>28</sup> The committee of the Congregational Union expressed similar sentiments. Meeting on April 4 it resolved opposition on several grounds - the centralizing of power in the hands of the Church, the control of the clergy, the danger of Puseyite

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26. J.T. Ward and J.H. Treble, 'Religion and Education in 1843: Reaction to the Factory Education Bill', Journal of Ecclesiastical History, (1969) XX, p. 80ff; R.W. Dale, History of Congregationalism (1884), p. 598.
27. Bernard Lord Manning, The Protestant Dissenting Deputies (1952), p. 338. Ward and Treble 'Religion and Education.'
28. C.M. (1843), p. 382.

teaching, the compulsion of law upon the poor, the lack of instruments of popular control and its foundation on the premise of religious inequality. The key clause was the first one which pin-pointed the kernel of Congregationalist education policy in the years ahead. As Protestant Dissenters they objected to the Bill:

Because in respect to the education of the people, the Bill places all Dissenters under heavy disadvantages. It will be impossible that a Dissenter should be a Teacher, and all but impossible that a Dissenter should ever be a Trustee of any school established by the act; while should Dissenters find themselves unjustly compelled by this exclusive scheme to establish separate schools at their own cost, after paying the tax levied for the government schools, even then education in such schools will not form a legal qualification for factory employment, unless they shall be reported by inspectors, not likely to regard them with favour, to be efficiently conducted.

This was the heart of the matter. Not only had Dissenters to support a system of education they opposed in principle, but the proposed scheme would undermine their own schools, that is, church affiliated and British schools. Not surprisingly the B.F.S.S. also opposed the Bill.<sup>30</sup>

Individual churches backed up the actions of central agencies with their own petitions to Parliament.<sup>31</sup>

The majority of Congregationalists opposed the Bill. Edward Baines, senior, hammered away on the education issue in the pages of the Leeds Mercury, particularly emphasizing the efficiency of the voluntary system. Baines gathered a considerable amount of statistics to substantiate Congregationalists' claims, though these were hotly disputed by his opponents.<sup>32</sup> Andrew Reed was very active in the campaign against state interference in education, both on a Congregational and on a public level. As soon as the Bill was intimated he called a meeting of East End ministers

29. C.M. (1843), p. 369.

30. Ward and Treble, 'Religion and Education.'

31. C.M. (1843), p. 382; E.R. (1843), new series XIII, pp. 697, 766. It was estimated that 13,766 petitions were sent to Parliament.

32. Baines, E. Baines, p. 314.

in his vestry in order to form a committee. Meeting daily at 7.00.a.m., the committee drew up its own manifesto and supported wider efforts to defeat the Bill. Reed was particularly conscious of the unpreparedness of Dissent and of the need to organize an effective defence of its interests. Writing in his personal journal in August that year he reflected on the events surrounding the controversy:

I have been deeply engaged in the Factories Bill ... Instantly the Leeds Mercury and the Patriot noticed it and the next day had it up before the Board of Ministers. Five spoke, and three against any action; but we carried a vote for a special meeting. There was no time to be lost. Our forces were all scattered, many not realising the danger ... I scoured the town, and prevailed upon our various religious and educational bodies to delegate representatives to a United Committee.

In the event Reed was appointed chairman of the committee. 'It was much to destroy the Bill,' he wrote, 'but more to show our strength, and to educate our people and representatives in the struggle.' It was no easy task, as Reed found out in working with the Methodists. He wrote to Baines, 'It was not easy to keep our forces together. Some would dispute and not work ... Our enemies chiefly sought to separate the Wesleyans.'<sup>33</sup>

While there were some Congregational leaders who favoured some form of state support for education they remained a relatively small if articulate minority. Robert Vaughan, Edward Swaine and R.W. Dale were three notable advocates of state aid to church schools. Several ministers found themselves in the position of having accepted state aid when it was still acceptable to do so only to have the tide of opinion turn back on them. Jonathan Glyde, pastor in Little Horton, had trouble finding enough funds to open a school attached to his chapel. He finally had to accept a grant from the Privy Council education committee in 1843. Admitting the possible dangers, Glyde maintained that it could still be beneficial given the proper conditions. A letter to the Bradford Observer

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33. Andrew and Charles Reed, A.Reed, pp. 202, 206.

in the middle of the controversy carefully spelled out the position of moderate educationalists:

I agree with you, that society may legitimately act on itself, through the legislative and administrative organs, in aid of education; and I think that on certain conditions and within due limits it may do so with great advantages. If the principle of free trade seems abandoned by such an admission, it is equally abandoned by all who, instead of leaving the education of the people to the natural operations of demand and supply, establish benevolent societies for its promotion. We are told indeed that the principle of State interference with education, once admitted, no limits can be put on its application, no developments too monstrous to be expected.

Glyde did not share in the general foreboding and he objected to the common dissenting argument that as the state had no prerogative in religion, and whereas education was necessarily religious in character, that therefore the state could have no role to play in education. To Glyde's mind the object of Graham's Bill was not an oppressive educational establishment, but simply the provision of daily elementary instruction.<sup>34</sup>

Joseph Parsons, another pastor who had taken state aid, came later to oppose the 1843 bill. He had opened a school at Ebley Chapel in Gloucestershire in 1840 with the help of a state grant. This fact was later used to charge him with being inconsistent in his application of the voluntary principle, but Parsons was unapologetic:

I do not wish it to be understood that all this money has been subscribed by the people attending Ebley Chapel. It has often been urged against us as a reproach that the committee accepted of a grant from Government towards the erection of the school building. It is well-known that many of the most zealous advocates of Voluntary Education of the present day did not at first perceive the inconsistency of taking money of the State for the erection of a school; and therefore it is not to be wondered at, if the friends of Ebley were deceived. As soon as they discovered their error they refused any further assistance and have never received a penny towards the expense of supporting the schools.

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34. G.W. Conder, Memoir and Remains of the late Reverend Jonathan Glyde (1858), p. 107.

This attitude is important to note. The opposition to the 1843 bill was the result of a widening of the voluntary principle into education. This was itself a response to the threat to the schools posed by the Bill. Parsons particularly disliked the manner in which inspection was to be placed in the hands of the Church of England, especially as it was in danger of being abused by 'a bigotted, Puseyite or tyrannical ministry.'<sup>35</sup>

If some Dissenters objected to pure voluntary education and others admitted an evolution of thinking, others gave the impression of a solid phalanx. A host of books and pamphlets were published as the bill passed through its first two readings. John Hinton, in A Plea for Liberty of Conscience, saw the bill 'not so much to correct Ignorance, as Nonconformity - not so much to destroy Vice, as Dissent.'<sup>36</sup> George Payne, theological tutor in Exeter and later chairman of the Congregational Union, believed the bill to be a reaction of the Establishment against expansion of Dissent. What was the purpose of the bill, he asked?

Evidently to recover for the church its lost ground in the country, by taking the young under its fostering care, and by forming a second established church for them ... Its object is to close the doors of the existing dissenting schools - to extinguish dissent itself, - and to force back again, by indirect and Jesuitical means, those wanderers from the fold of the<sub>37</sub> establishment who would never voluntarily return.

It was this apparent onslaught by the Establishment that most upset Dissenters. The Eclectic compared the bill to Lord Sidmouth's 1810 bill and Reed and others worked hard to get the technically non-denominational B.F.S.S. behind opposition to the bill for this reason.<sup>38</sup>

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35. E. Paxton Hood, The Earnest Minister: A record of the life of Benjamin Parsons, (1856), p. 73.

36. E.R. (1843), new series XIII, p. 582; J. Hinton, A Plea for Liberty OF Conscience (1843).

37. E.R. (1843); new series XIII, p. 697.

38. E.R. (1843), new series XIII, p. 576.

There were several particular objections to the bill. Most fundamental was the belief that education was intrinsically religious and thus outside the domain of the state. The Eclectic saw the controversy as the natural issue of the increasing ascendancy of voluntary principles. 'The province of Government,' one reviewer wrote, 'respects simply the persons and property of the subjects. The protection of these constitutes its legitimate object, and is clearly enforced by the nature of the relation subsisting.'<sup>39</sup> J.H. Hinton declared, 'I repel this intrusion of the secular power into the sphere of religious duties the more jealously, because it lays the foundation of further interference.' While admitting the relative liberality of the Bill, with Hinton most Congregationalists saw it as the thin edge of the wedge. State control and religious competition were incompatible. To advocates of state supported non-sectarian education Hinton replied, 'Only education! Education, more than all things besides, moulds the character and makes the man.' Parsons shared this sentiment and clearly saw the options open for Congregationalists:

I have said, that for the support of our schools, we always set ourselves against any Government grants. At an early period we saw that only one of four courses, with respect to Education, was open to the state. 1st To teach one religion. 2nd To teach no religion. 3rd To teach all religions. 4th to have nothing to do with teaching. To teach one religion, and tax all parties to pay for it, would be persecution. To teach no religion would be Atheism, and could neither make the people moral nor religious. To teach all religions was to proclaim to the nation that all creeds, however contradictory, were equally true and binding on the conscience of the pupils. And, therefore, we saw no other rational way but for the Government than to leave the people to educate themselves.<sup>40</sup>

This purely voluntary theory of education was more clearly defined in the period following the withdrawal of the Bill. Later that year the

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39. E.R. (1843), new series XIII, p. 579; Hinton, A. Plea p. 12.

40. Hood, Parsons, p. 75.

Eclectic declared that prior to the Bill 'All was still and quiet, the calmness of death seemed to prevail, and the few who deeply felt the enormous wrongs of the nation, mourned in private, in very bitterness of soul, over the criminal supineness of their brethren. We were drifting in the direction, and strong conservative tendencies were evinced by some of our leading men.'<sup>41</sup> All that had now changed and by the end of 1843 there was a reinvigorated militancy among Congregationalists. Charles Hindley, M.P., had addressed the May meeting of the union when a resolution was passed opposing the Bill.<sup>42</sup> It was at the Autumnal meeting the following October in Leeds, however, that the union began to formulate an aggressive educational policy. The assembly expressed 'the gravest doubts whether any compulsory interference can take place without establishing principles and precedents dangerous to civil and religious liberty, inconsistent with the rights of industry, and superseding the rights of parents and churches.' It was noted that most educational plans were opposed by either Churchmen or Dissenters and that therefore education ought to be 'chiefly provided and conducted by the voluntary efforts of the various denominations of Christians.' The Congregational Union's position was firm, but restrained compared with what was to come later. In essence it was saying that the voluntary system in education was the only way out of the dilemma of mutually contradictory claims by Churchmen and Dissenters. Having arrived at this point the union set out to establish a viable alternative, or at least something that would augment what already existed. To this end a Committee on General Education was established to formulate and oversee a denominational policy.<sup>43</sup>

The new committee met several days after the close of the Autumnal. At its first meeting John Remington Mills was in the chair and the Revs. J. Aveling, Samuel Martin, Samuel Palmer, Algernon Wells, John Stoughton,

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41. E.R., (1843), new series XIII, p. 697.

42. Albert Peel, These Hundred Years, (1932), p. 177.

43. C.M., (1843), p. 843

J. Pritchard, James Matheson, and T. James and Messrs. Samuel Morley, Edward Swaine, Josiah Conder, Joshua Wilson and Charles Hindley in attendance. After discussing their principles, officers were chosen and steps taken to immediately inaugurate a denominational policy. The plan was threefold: first, to assist in training teachers; second, to help in paying teachers' salaries and third, in extreme cases to aid in establishing new schools. The question of inspection was to be taken up later. An appeal was to be made to the churches and consultations were to be held with Wesleyans and Baptists.<sup>44</sup> By the next meeting on November 22 plans had already been made to hold a conference on education. Apparently it had been felt necessary to consult the wider constituency on the crucial issues of teacher training, raising local funds, the propriety of accepting Government grants for school buildings, the advantages of denominational over general action and whether or not to cooperate with the B.F.S.S.<sup>45</sup> That there were differences of opinion was more than apparent. In early December George Hadfield reported the division in ranks among Manchester Congregationalists - not particularly surprising since both Hadfield and Robert Vaughan resided there. A special invitation to the December conference was issued to Manchester educationalists, as was one to the B.F.S.S. The B.F.S.S. delegation, interestingly enough, was to consist of Thomas Binney, George Clayton and Robert Foster, all Congregational moderates. But already the common ground looked like it was quickly disappearing. The December 7 meeting of the Committee resolved to confer with the B.F.S.S. in order to explain to them the principle upon which the Congregational Union's policy was being conducted.<sup>46</sup> What this principle was became clear at the December conference. On December 13 and 14 336 Congregational pastors and laymen met at the Congregational Library in London. The size of the representation - 203 from London, 133 from the provinces and with delegates from 26 counties

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44. Minutes of the Committee on General Education (1843-45), Oct., 1843, H.C.Mss.ACa54.

45. Ibid., November 22, 1843.

46. Ibid., December 7, 11, 1843.

excluding London and Wales - reveals something of the urgency with which Congregationalists faced the education question. Charles Hindley chaired the conference, with John Remington Mills as his deputy and Samuel Morley as treasurer. Almost all the important Congregational leaders were present, with an unusually large number from Lancashire and Yorkshire. The basic lines of denominational policy were laid down during the first morning's deliberations. In a resolution moved by Thomas Raffles of Liverpool the conference recognized that in addition to the perennial reasons in support of extensive public education that the present crisis required immediate action. Not only so, but in a motion moved by John Angel James such action was to be specifically Congregational action. Finally, a subscription fund was opened, discretion being left to the donor as to how to divide the money between the Congregational education fund and that of the B.F.S.S.

The discussions the next day were the most vital and the decisions taken then were to be hotly debated in the years to come. In the morning Algernon Wells, the secretary of the Congregational Union, moved a resolution concerning Government aid to schools which was passed with only one dissentiant vote:

That this meeting, utterly repudiating on the strongest grounds of Scripture and conscience, the receipt of money raised by taxation and granted by Government, for sustaining the Christian religion, feels bound to apply this principle no less to the work of religious education; and considering that the education given by the Congregational churches must be religious education, advises most respectfully but most earnestly, that no Government aid be received by them for schools established in their own connexion; and that all funds confided to the disposal of the central committee, in aid of schools, be grants only to schools sustained entirely by voluntary contributions.

Therein the voluntary principle as applied to education was clearly spelled out and henceforth the Congregational churches committed themselves, as far as that was possible, to its thorough application. The churches were encouraged to continue supporting the B.F.S.S. and to cooperate with other

Dissenters, but it was clear that two different paths were to be taken. The conference went on to urge the collation of accurate statistics, the establishment of an inspectorate and to urge that a school be founded wherever there was a Congregational church or mission. Pains were taken to point out that the new day schools were not intended to conflict with the already established Sunday schools. On the contrary, it was hoped that the day schools would be able to relieve the Sunday schools of their secular educational responsibilities and thus to render them more distinctly religious in character.

To make the proposed system work it would be necessary to raise considerable funds and it was to this that the conference next addressed itself. A five year plan was proposed during which churches and individuals would contribute to a central fund. Significantly it was realized that such a fund would be unlikely to provide for all the needs of the schools and thus was limited in its objectives. 'The meeting advises, that the central fund be employed to aid - never in any instance to meet the entire charge - but always to assist local efforts ...' The objects for assistance were the procuring of school buildings, the provision of apparatus and books, the support of students in normal schools and the support of a stipendary secretary. The fund was to be administered on the local level, but the central committee was to provide an inspectorate, to maintain correspondence, to gather statistics, to advance the cause of education by various means in the churches, to report annually to the Congregational Union and to collect funds. The committee that was finally appointed had Charles Hindley as chairman, J.R. Mills as deputy, Samuel Morley as treasurer, as well as 28 members representing 19 provincial towns, including H.O. Wills of Bristol and George Hadfield of Manchester, and 38 prominent ministers and laymen representing London.<sup>47</sup>

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47. Minutes of the Proceedings of December 13 conference, H.C.Mss. ADa71.

The new education committee immediately set to work. Andrew Reed was approached to become the permanent secretary, but he agreed to do so only if he could work with a co-secretary. It was only in the following October that the services of Robert Ainslie were procured, who was then left alone in the position within a month upon the resignation of Reed.<sup>48</sup> In the meantime funds and applications were coming in, churches were holding meetings pursuant of the December conference's resolutions, new schools were being built and old debts paid off.<sup>49</sup> By early 1844 £500 had been raised to repay the debts on new schools in South Islington. £2,000 was raised by John Liefchild's Craven Chapel in London, £4,000 by Mosley St. Chapel in Manchester and £3,000 by Grosvenor St. Chapel in Manchester. In Bath £1,500 was raised at a meeting addressed by William Jay of Argyle Chapel.<sup>50</sup> By May £47,000 had been raised and by October £70,000. It appeared, however, that the burden was being carried largely by the big London and provincial churches, with many country and smaller churches contributing little or nothing.<sup>51</sup> Something of this can be attributed to the continuing cooperation with the B.F.S.S., but it also must be seen that such concerted denominational effort was still a novelty and went against the independent grain of the Congregational churches. The leaders of the movement sought to draw a parallel between the education movement and the events surrounding the birth of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. To provide for its ministry the Free Church inaugurated a Sustenation Fund that successfully raised more than a million pounds within a few years, much of it raised among English Congregationalists.<sup>52</sup> The first annual report of the Committee on General Education pointed to this connection and saw in the Nonconformist education

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48. C.M. (1844), p. 242. Reed resigned in November 1844. See Minute Book of the General Meetings Committee of General Education (1843-53), November 20, 1844, H.C.Mss. ABa17.

49. Minutes of the Committee on General Education (1843-45), January 2, 1844; January 10, 1844; February 14, 1844; November 5, 1844. H.C.Mss. ACa54.

50. C.M. (1844), p. 829, 945.

51. Ibid.

52. Andrew and Charles Reed, Andrew Reed, p.221.

movement 'the hand of God.' However the committee queried the ability of the Congregational churches to maintain its commitment to voluntary education:

But can these burdens be borne? Can these resources be obtained? Will not the voluntary system become oppressive until it eventually weakens if it does not destroy itself? Are not the times so trying to the classes constituting the great numerical strength of the evangelical bodies, as to render such appeals and pressure very unreasonable?<sup>53</sup>

The attempt to provide schools wholly free of state control would prove to be an immense strain upon the voluntary system. There were other competing claims and the education movement was itself fraught with divisions on the extent to which the voluntary system could be applied. But in the wake of the education controversy of 1843 the prospects were hopeful.

Through 1845 the education movement was slowly consolidating. Funds continued to come in, though the amount was insignificant compared to the intentions of the committee. More importantly, perhaps, was the way in which the movement was spreading out, though, as the committee reported early in 1845, it encountered both opposition and resistance from Churchmen and in some places 'little sympathy and less help' from their own ministers. That aside, others were 'feeling deeply and anxiously' on the subject and influential laymen were helping in many ways. The Central Fund was seen as helping poorer churches in maintaining their own schools, the wealthier congregations being left to themselves. 'It would be a source of great joy to the Congregational Board of Education,' an appeal declared, 'if it had an adequate fund to assist in erecting school-houses, in sustaining schools which are in a drooping and dying state, and in educating teachers. At present such pleasure is only in prospect.' Signs from the provinces were more hopeful. In

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53. C.M., (1844), pp. 153, 241.

Cambridgeshire 100 Congregational and Baptist ministers met in conference in order to form an education committee. By October 1844 a large public meeting was held in the Guildhall, Cambridge which was addressed by leading figures of the Committee and the B.F.S.S. The conference proposed to raise an education fund of £3,000. The situation in Yarmouth was desperate, there being no school either under the auspices of the National Society or attached to an Independent congregation. The school, aside from the Sunday schools, was a boys' school belonging to the B.F.S.S. that was not prospering. On November 25, 1845 a public meeting resolved to establish a Congregational School. The cost was estimated at £700, £150 being collected at the meeting and further being promised by the Committee. In Romsey in Hampshire Congregationalists joined with other Dissenters in founding a B.F.S.S. school. The Committee itself urged ministers in each county to hold conferences in order to assess local educational needs. Interest was good, wrote Ainslie in a circular letter addressed to Congregational ministers, but 'what is chiefly wanted is, that their affections and labours be concentrated upon one common plan, by which they can best promote the good cause.' The Committee also tried to stimulate interest in Wales by suggesting a conference and the establishment of a normal school. Finally the Committee sought to register all schools built by Congregationalists and to establish a school in London as 'a model for economy and convenience as to its structure.' The plan was to locate the school in Deptford where there was neither a Congregational nor a British school.<sup>54</sup>

By April a number of conferences had been held. The most prominent was in Essex where the Congregational churches had met in conference on

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54. C.M. (1845), p. 312. In Essex a statistical committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Rev. Charles Riggs of Tiptree-heath. The committee oversaw two notably efficient schools in Wivenhoe and Tiptree-heath. See Minutes of the Committee on General Education (1843-45), December 4, 1844, H.C.Mss. ACa54.

March 18 and 19. Essex was to take the lead in local Congregational educational affairs, though unfortunately most of the records of its educational committee have been lost.<sup>55</sup> Similar conferences were held in Wiltshire, Norfolk, Surrey and in South Wales.<sup>56</sup> Steps were also taken to educate teachers at the Borough Road training school of the B.F.S.S. Twelve female students were chosen for the first year who, in addition to attending classes at Borough Road, also attended lectures in the rooms of the Committee.<sup>57</sup> Even so the committee was not satisfied that the response of the churches was commensurate with the needs around Congregational churches. This was pointed out at the May assembly of the Congregational Union in 1844. In a survey of 90 towns and villages it was found that only a little more than half of the potential day-scholars were receiving any education, and of that 27,182, 16,756 were in Anglican schools, 6,152 in Congregational or British schools and 4,274 in others. In order to remedy this situation more funds were needed, but the committee found that it was competing for these funds with a host of other societies such as the London Missionary Society and the Bible Society.

Relations with the B.F.S.S. in regard to funds were particularly difficult. The constituencies of both societies overlapped considerably and they both cooperated in teacher training and in numerous schools. It was the decision of the B.F.S.S. early in 1845 to accept Government aid for the maintenance of its normal school that forced the Board more than ever back upon its Congregational support and further hardened the denominational policy. The Board at its May 12 meeting officially expressed its 'deep regret', the reason being expressed in the resolution to that effect:

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55. Minutes of the Committee on General Education (1843-45), May 19, 1844; March 19, 1845, H.C.Mss. ACa54. Unfortunately the Minute Book of the Essex Education Committee, originally held in the Congregational Library, has been lost.

56. Ibid., May 19, 1844, March 19, 1845.

57. Ibid., February 14, 1844; March 3, 1844; C.M. (1845), p. 313.

That this meeting, utterly repudiating on the strongest grounds of Scripture and Conscience the receipt of money raised by taxation & granted by Government for sustaining the State religion, feels bound to apply this principle no less to the work of religious education; & considering that the Education given by the Congregational churches must be religious education, advises most respectfully, but most earnestly, that no Government aid be received<sup>58</sup> by them for schools established in their own connexion.

The matter rested until mid-June and received hardly a mention at the May assembly. At the June 17 meeting of the board, however, the question of the Committee's relationship with the B.F.S.S. was raised, particularly in relationship to training at Borough Road.<sup>59</sup> A correspondence was opened with the British Society. The B.F.S.S. received the communication with 'great regret' and replied that it could 'only express its anxiety to meet the wishes of the Board by any special arrangement.'<sup>60</sup> On July 8 the board discussed the results of the correspondence, reaffirmed its belief in 'unfettered education' and reiterated the principle that the board would not touch Government money nor aid those schools that took it. To the compromise proposal that the Committee pay the full costs of educating teachers at Borough Road to the amount of the Government grants, the board expressed its belief that this solution would compromise the Committee in the eyes of its constituency and infringe upon its fundamental regulations. The only alternative was to withdraw its students.<sup>61</sup>

In the meantime several leading Congregationalists wrote to Robert Ainslie to express their views on the matter. John Campbell stated that

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- 58. Minutes of the Committee on General Education (1843-45), May 12, 1845, H.C.Mss. ACa54.
  - 59. Minute Book, Congregational Board of Education (1845-51), June 17, 1845, H.C.Mss. ABa18.
  - 60. Extract from the Minutes of the British and Foreign School Society, June 20, 1845, H.C.Mss. DA320.
  - 61. Minute Book, Congregational Board of Education (1845-51), July 8, 9, 1845, H.C.Mss. ABa18.

acceptance of the grant and the continued participation of the Committee in Borough Road was for it to become party 'to the sacrifice of a fundamental principle.' One hundred pounds was equally as bad as one hundred million pounds. Campbell advocated secular education, but while a religious establishment remained he wanted to see no state subsidies to various religious parties. To his mind the chief objection was the lack of control: the whole subsidy scheme was too anomalous. Nevertheless he did not want to see the Committee sever its relations with the B.F.S.S. Rather every effort should have been made to have the society rescind the decision. In the circumstances some anomalies had to be accepted:

It is not to be forgotten that the bulk of our schools have been in part reared with Government money & a portion of our teachers will be called to labour in those very schools. Now if for a time, our teachers are trained in an institution partly supported by Government money, I do not think that there is any fresh infraction or the introduction of any new principles; but if we shall pay in full for their instruction, I consider that there is, at least, a very slender participation in the transaction which we disapprove.

Once the Committee was strong enough it could provide for its own instruction.<sup>62</sup>

John Remington Mills shared this attitude. He regretted the tone of the resolutions and was concerned that they appeared to leave 'no possibility of arrangement between your Board & the B.F. School Society.' To his mind there was considerable difference between a Normal School and a local school, the former being purely functional whereas the latter contained religious instruction. 'The noninterference of Government with religious education,' he wrote, 'is a principle we are bound to uphold, but just in proportion to

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62. John Campbell to Robert Ainslie, July 21, 1845, H.C.Mss. DA322.

its importance and the difficulties opposed to it should we be careful not to couple with questions which are not really affected by it...' Mills touched on the nub of the issue by pointing out that the Committee's action was founded more on 'sound political philosophy but not on any religious principle.'<sup>63</sup>

Edward Swaine, another moderate, felt that while cooperating with the B.F.S.S. was not wrong in itself, circumstances were such that the Committee should sever its relations. The voluntary principle was in too much danger and the Board, and thus Congregationalism as a whole, might find itself compromised further down the line when the Government grant for training grew to the point where the B.F.S.S. would be dependent on it. The danger to the Committee would be of 'rolling the sweet morsel of Govern't pay under the tongue if not actually swallowing it.'<sup>64</sup> John Copper was even more firm and backed the Board's decision to make a complete break with Borough Road.<sup>65</sup>

When the Committee finally met on July 23 the consensus was clear. While expressing its gratitude and support for the aims of the B.F.S.S., the Committee had to dissent from its policy of accepting Government funds. And as this went against the fundamental rule of the Committee it was decided to discontinue teacher training at Borough Road.<sup>66</sup> It was decided to consult the Committee's constituency as to the next step, but other than that surprisingly little was done to establish its own school until March the next year.<sup>67</sup> By then the greater issues of Lord John Russell's 1846 Minutes in Council confronted educational voluntarists of all stripes. In the meantime steps were also taken to strengthen the education committee's denominational position. The committee now became the Congregational Board of Education with a strong London based central committee of 42. Henceforth the Congregationalists would pursue a much more vigorously denominational and voluntarist policy.<sup>68</sup>

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63. J.R. Mills to Robert Ainslie, July 22, 1845, H.C.Mss. DA 323.  
 64. Edward Swaine to Robert Ainslie, July 23, 1845, H.C.Mss. DA 325.  
 65. John Capper to Robert Ainslie, n.d. H.C.Mss. DA 324.  
 66. Minute Book, Congregational Board of Education, July 23, 1845, ABa18.  
 67. Ibid., March 11, 1846.  
 68. C.M. (1845), p.312 ; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 179.

The denominational trend immediately became apparent in the Congregational and educational literature. One of the most notable works was R.W. Hamilton's Institutes of Popular Education, first published late in 1844. In its review of the book, the British Quarterly Review, a distinctly moderate dissenting journal and edited by the conservative Congregationalist Robert Vaughan, summed up the trend in Congregationalist thinking since 1843 and particularly as expressed in Hamilton's book:

They have not only declined the overture made by the state in the form proposed, but, as the effect of the discussion, have become much more decided than previously in their opposition to state interference with the education of the people in any form. It should be carefully remembered, however, that having precluded the state from doing this work, it will behove them to see that it is done, and done at least as effectually by some other agency. They have never stood so committed to effort of this nature, either by avowed principles, or by circumstances, as at the present moment. <sup>69</sup>

Hamilton made much the same point, albeit in a more round-about and more positive fashion. Beginning with the challenge of growing urban populations and the peculiar problems presented by the poor, Hamilton went on to give force to the Congregationalists' argument that education was by nature religious. What he meant by this was not that religion contributed anything in particular to the various sciences in themselves, but rather that they should be taught within the context of Christian truth and morality. 'That all knowledge should be accompanied by Christianity,' Hamilton wrote, 'is only saying that Christianity is so important that it should give temper to all other pursuits. To say that all knowledge should be based on Christianity, is little short of absurd ... Christianity ... cannot be too public and disciplinary in moral training.'<sup>70</sup> For that reason there could never be wholly secular education, and therefore Hamilton rejected the much vaunted American state system as leading only to secularism and moral decay. On the other hand he also rejected the highly centralized

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69. B.Q.R. (1845), p. 143.

70. R.W. Hamilton, Institutes of Popular Education (1844), pp. 61,62,79.

Prussian and French systems. The alternative that the Congregationalists offered was wholly voluntary education founded on Christian morality:

If the dissenters accept the pay of government, if they do not firmly and inflexibly abjure it in all shapes and pretexts, their prevarication will cover them with infamy ... They cannot touch stipend or gift and their hands be clean. The moment they take it, the most important grounds of private judgment and uprightness are abandoned ... They will deserve to be reviled for hypocrisy; the mummers of principle, the swashers of conscience... They will have yielded to a bribe, while their fathers shrink not from death.

Hamilton's conclusions, and Hamilton was in the mainstream of Congregationalist thinking, were becoming more generally accepted. The Eclectic criticized him for inconstancy on the question of poverty, pointing out that he adopted both a radical view on property rights and common ownership and a patronizing attitude to the working classes. But otherwise the Eclectic agreed with Hamilton's thesis and call to consistent voluntarism.<sup>72</sup>

By May the following year, 1846, the C.B.E. had collected the £100,000 initially appealed for two and a half year ahead of schedule. As such a good amount of work had been accomplished in spite of 'some circumstances ... unfavourable to the prosecution of the work with the vigour and uniformity which its importance required.' The Congregational Union's accomplishment was modestly impressive - 100 new schools, 47 adapted for the purpose, and accommodation for 25,552 children. Significantly, however, the Annual Report of the C.B.E. that year recognized the limitations upon the Congregational community. Not only could the C.B.E. not support as many schools as it wanted to, but once schools were built it was proving difficult to sustain their operations. 'Congregationalists never arrogated to themselves,' the report pointed out, 'the power nor the purpose of educating all the neglected children of our cities, towns and villages.'<sup>73</sup> If this was an admission of some limitation of the application of the voluntary principle Congregationalists were nevertheless determined to

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71. Ibid., p. 282.

72. E.R. (1845), new series, XVIII, p. 22f.

73. C.Y.B. (1846), p. 46.

press on. At the autumnal assembly at Plymouth in October Josiah Conder tried to rally the troops and urged upon the nation 'a more active cooperation with the Board of General Education.' Significantly, however, the discussion on education came within the more general context of a discussion on the affairs of the denomination. Of particular concern was the increasingly heavy financial burden being placed on the churches by the demands of the various Congregational societies and missions. The delegates discussed the disparity between the large contributions to societies and the miserably low salaries of pastors of small churches.<sup>74</sup> The cost and effect of voluntarism was high.

The picture changed dramatically the following year. In February the Government announced its Minutes in Council. The Congregationalist reaction was swift and vigorous in both the dissenting press and in public meetings held to protest this latest onslaught against Nonconformist interests.<sup>75</sup> The Baineses, father and son, inveighed against the measures in the pages of the Leeds Mercury. The older Baines had now been converted to the principle of thoroughly voluntarist education, whereas previously he had thought that the Government should assist in school building. Robert Vaughan had a similar conversion, though not so much from principle as from exasperation with the Government's attitude.<sup>76</sup> Edward Baines the younger took up the cause with enthusiasm, appealing for funds and collecting statistics to substantiate the Dissenters' case. The Congregational Board, the Deputies, the General Body of Ministers and the committees of the Congregational and Baptist Unions and the Wesleyan Conference all lent a voice of protest.<sup>77</sup> A

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74. Ibid., p. 74.

75. E.R. (1847), new series XXI, pp. 636, 637; Patriot, February 18, April 16, 1847; Nonconformist, February 10, 1847.

76. B.Q.R., (1847), p. 543.

77. E.R. (1847) new series XXI, p. 636.

large public meeting was held in Exeter Hall with John Bright, M.P., in the chair. 4,203 petitions containing 559,977 signatures were submitted to Parliament.<sup>78</sup> Another opponent of the Minutes was Samuel Morley, who wrote to Joshua Wilson in March 1847 concerning the attitude of Congregationalists towards the crisis. The Congregational Union's education committee was to meet in Birmingham to consider matters. 'I want to procure the opinion of a few men such as Drs. Redford, Wardlaw, Alexander, etc.,' he wrote, 'as to the best mode of dealing with the question of future operations.' A delegation had met with Lord John Russell only to be impressed 'with the idea that the withdrawal of the education scheme will only be the result of a hard fight. Its enormity becomes more apparent with every fresh investigation.'<sup>79</sup>

Naturally the Congregational Union took up the matter at its May assembly. The C.B.E.'s annual report pointed out both the underlying principle involved and the danger that the scheme was already presenting to the churches and schools. 'Here again to tax all, to help all, and so to control all, is the wisdom of the day. The sentiment is taking ... It is admitted by many in its applications to schools, who reject it in reference to churches.' It was at the session on May 15 that the union passed a resolution rejecting the Government proposals out-of-hand. The resolution was significant in the manner in which it linked voluntarism in churchmanship with voluntarism in education:

That whereas the recent Parliamentary grant in aid of popular education, made in accordance with the minutes of the Committee of Privy Council for distribution thereof ... is to be applied in support of strictly religious teaching in the schools, by the catechetical and other forms of various bodies of Christians without distinction - and, whereas on no solid ground of principle can state support of religion in churches be resisted by those who acquiesce in its introduction into schools - and whereas it is believed that Congregationalists are unanimous and resolved in conscientious opposition to state support of religion in any form, - and whereas their testimony on this great principle is felt to rest

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78. Edward Baines, E. Baines, pp. 332, 333.

79. Edwin Hodder, S. Morley, p. 97.

on sacred allegiance to Christ ... and whereas finally the moral power of the Congregational body is believed to consist chiefly in consistent, unwavering maintenance of principle; and that this power is very great and will ever grow while maintained ... therefore this assembly most earnestly conjures Congregationalists universally and with one consent to preserve themselves clear of the least sanction of the grant thus offered by Government in support of schools, by refusing to receive the smallest sum for any school which is entirely their own, or by distinct protest against any participation therein in schools in the maintenance of which they are associated with Christians of other denominations.

The message was clear and unequivocal. And while it was admitted that some Congregationalists did not apply the voluntary principle to education, the consensus and policy of the union was now more than ever behind comprehensive voluntarism. What was at stake was the fundamental principle of Congregationalism.<sup>80</sup>

The debate within Congregationalism regarding educational voluntarism was heated. At the turn of the year Robert Vaughan and Edward Baines were locked in combat, representing the moderate and comprehensive forms of voluntarism respectively. In a review article in the British Quarterly Review towards the end of 1846, reviewing among other things Baines's Letters to Lord John Russell, Vaughan noted the voluntarist sympathies of most Congregationalists and expressed his opinion that they were 'in the main mistaken.'<sup>81</sup> Baines took issue with Vaughan's article in a letter to the Patriot later in December in which he expressed his pain in becoming an opponent to Vaughan. But Baines's position was clear. All agreed on the need of educating the people, but the way could not be by means of 'either a Government sponsored secular or religious system.' While admitting some room for improvement, Baines did not agree with Vaughan that the statistics revealed inadequate provision and appalling

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80. C.Y.B. (1847), pp. 19, 31.

81. B.Q.R. (1846), VIII, p. 444. Hereafter references to Edward Baines are to Edward Baines, junior.

quality. On the contrary he asserted that the means of education do actually exist in this country, very nearly, if not quite, adequate to the wants of the people.' The people, insisted Baines, could provide for themselves. 'It is proved that the voluntary and independent action of the people in the cause of education, morals, and religion, is transcendently more powerful than would be required to perfect the means of education in England.'<sup>82</sup> Voluntary education was therefore the path to freedom, whereas state education was, as the Eclectic put it in commenting on Baines's letter, 'fraught with serious peril to our civil liberty, and to the integrity and diffusion of our religious faith.'<sup>83</sup> 'My own profound conviction,' wrote Baines, 'is that the fate of the voluntary principle is involved in the fate of this education question; - that if the voluntary principle should be decided to be incompetent to the education of the people, it will be argued, and with truth, to be still more incompetent to their religious instruction.'<sup>84</sup>

Vaughan and others did not agree with this deduction. For example Edward Swaine argued forcefully that equity could be achieved - for rich and poor, Churchman and Dissenter - without any compromise of principle. It was possible, he wrote, to combine 'the energy, unity, and amplitude of operation (obtainable only through a central power) with the security from abuse' that came from local control.<sup>85</sup> Again the Eclectic disagreed. 'The education question involves, to a considerable extent,' a reviewer pointed out, 'the same principles as those of religion. Let government interference be admitted in the one case, and it will be tenfold more difficult to withstand in the other.' In the new year Baines took the argument a step further in his Letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne. He saw the education scheme as an attempt to form a secondary establishment, supported by a compulsory tax and dominated by the Anglican clergy. While

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82. Patriot, December 9, 1846; Edward Baines, Letters to Lord John Russell (1846)
83. E.R. (1846), new series, XXI, p. 106.
84. Patriot, December 14, 1846.
85. Edward Swaine, Equity without compromise; or Hints for the construction of a just system of national education (1846), p. 22.

recognizing that the scheme would provide for all groups and classes, he saw that it would be effectively Anglican since all conscientious Dissenters would refuse Government grants. Dissenters had been wrong in the past to take grants from the Government for school buildings and should therefore take steps in the present to redress past indiscretions. 'I myself in my profound sense of the value of liberty,' he wrote, 'should have gone much further and have maintained that, even though education was less extensive than was to be desired, and though less perfect than under a great government system, yet that freedom of education was to be guarded as a sacred thing, because forming an essential branch of civil freedom.'<sup>86</sup>

The actual proposals as they became known, however, had the effect of converting even such a moderate advocate of state supported religious education as Vaughan to public opposition. This was confirmed at the Congregational education conference held at Crosby Hall in London on April 16. There Vaughan, Blackburn, Raffles and Kelly all added their protest.<sup>87</sup> The Eclectic found it particularly gratifying to see Vaughan's change of heart. In his speech describing his conversion Vaughan declared that 'some course must be devised by which the agency of the state may be made to act as a wholesome stimulus to voluntary effort in this field of labour.' This was the ideal, but in the present circumstances such cooperation was impossible and Dissenters could no longer look to the state for help. 'It must be our fixed resolve that all we do in education shall be done wholly by ourselves...'<sup>88</sup> This was the substance of the resolutions passed by the conference, pointing out the new alliance between church and state in education and the impossibility of cooperation with the Government.<sup>89</sup>

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86. Edward Baines, Letter to the Marquis of Lansdowne (1846), p. 3; Edward Baines, jun., E.Baines, p. 331.

87. Nonconformist, April 16, 1847; Patriot, April 16, 1847.

88. E.R. (1847), new series, XXI, p. 508.

89. E.R. (1847), new series, XXI, p. 635.

This new educational consensus among Congregationalists made possible united action in relation to the General Election that summer. The Eclectic pointed out that the Congregationalists' 'power ... is far greater than we commonly imagine,' and later in the spring of 1847 urged the faithful to have 'no scruple about requiring a pledge against state-churchism,' in other words state-supported education.<sup>90</sup> By July meetings were being held around the country to impress upon ministers and people their electoral responsibilities. Commenting on the movement the Eclectic said, 'It partakes of the old Puritan spirit, improved and modified by the bitter experience of two centuries. It is the religious freedom working itself free from impurities and claiming to require the political duties of its professors.'<sup>91</sup> It would only be with the failure of the education enterprise several years later that Congregationalists would realize the limitations of such action. For the moment this was not the case. The outcome of the election was a moderate success, the Nonconformist declaring that the 'ice is broken ... The spell which sealed the eyes and paralyzed the will of the Nonconformist body is dissipated.'<sup>92</sup>

My purpose is not to examine the political movement of Congregationalism. The political crisis, however, both stimulated renewed denominational activities as well as denominational thinking. The Autumnal meeting of the Congregational Union that year in York helped to consolidate the renewed militancy of the denomination and to strengthen the C.B.E. R.W. Hamilton's speech from the chair set the tone. While admitting that

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90. E.R. (1847), new series, XXI, pp. 369, 638.

91. E.R. (1847), new series XXII, p. 109. Meetings were held in, among other places, York, Essex, Norfolk, Bedford and a large British Anti-State Church Association meeting was held in London in May that year. See Edward Baines, jun., E. Baines, p. 332. The Dissenters' Parliamentary Committee was chaired by the prominent supporter of the Congregationalist cause, Samuel Morley. Of the 15 candidates supported by the Dissenting Deputies, 14 were elected. For this moderate success see G.I.T. Machin, Politics and the British Churches, p. 184f.

92. Quoted in G.I.T. Machin, Politics and the British Churches, p. 184f.

there were yet differences of opinion, expression and temperament, he urged the assembled delegates not to 'judge one another and to tolerate diversity.' Nevertheless he was clear as to the denomination's responsibilities:

The question of the day, that of education, will come before us. We are solemnly, irrevocably pledged to repudiate all aid towards a religious education. Here we have made our stand. We need not perplex the simplicity of this vow. Some would wish, perhaps, to argue that it is not the province of legislation to interfere in any form with education. Others gain, might desire to prove, that secular education of the people falls within its certain scope. But why lose time - it may endanger temper - over matters which are not before us? Let the two parties, which possibly exist among us, waive a more extreme and abstract view. The only education proposed is religious - the only subsidy offered is in behoof of <sup>93</sup> a dictated, controlled, centralized religious education.

This then was the ground of Congregational unity in education. Neither moderates nor radicals were satisfied that religious liberty would be protected in any government scheme.

What this precisely meant was spelled out in the assembly's resolutions originally passed by the union committee in July, but now ratified by the delegates. What delegates particularly objected to was a supplementary minute of the Privy Council committee published in July that would permit the granting of funds to school managers even though they objected to such grants in principle. The assembly rejected this out of hand and reiterated their former position that schools of a religious nature should not receive Government aid and that any Dissenters who took such aid would only be ensnared and appear to the public as seeking a mere pretence in order to compromise. Congregational schools combined religious and secular instruction and as such, according to the first resolution, in 'accordance with their known ecclesiastical principles, the religious character of these schools determines the source from which alone support for them must be desired, and necessarily excludes all aid from the Government.'<sup>94</sup>

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93. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 38.

94. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 57.

It was decided by the October assembly to follow up its deliberations with a further conference later in December to be held in Derby in order to discuss at greater length the future form of Congregational education. The conference was held on December 14 and though the numbers attending were not great - 37 ministers and 24 laymen - the deliberations were decisive. The first day of the conference was spent discussing the progress of the C.B.E. since its founding four years previously. £130,000 had been collected through its agency for all forms of voluntary education. Robert Ainslie was able to declare confidently: 'Faithful to the principle on which you founded it, it has helped those who helped themselves; and it has again and again protested against any interference on the part of the State with education of the people.' While Ainslie affirmed the 1843 principle that it was impossible to separate religious and general education, his argument took a distinct utilitarian turn. Voluntary education was founded not only on the grounds of religious conviction, but also upon the principle of self-help. He admitted that some felt that voluntary education was inadequate to the need. Strangely he did not so much refute the charge as express the fear that Government aid would 'expose the integrity of the Dissenters and lead to further compromise.'<sup>95</sup>

The two questions facing the conference were whether to merge the C.B.E. with the non-denominational Voluntary School Association or to go it alone as a denominational enterprise. The advantages of the former option were the enlarged treasury and a common voluntarist front. The disadvantages were significant. Not only did several denominations such as the Free Church of Scotland and the Wesleyan Conference support their own denominational systems, but such cooperation would require compromise or doctrines taught and prayers offered on public occasions, as well as the 'constraints of neutrality in local and general management.' The consensus was clearly behind denominational action, both in conference

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95. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 62.

and in resolutions sent up from local churches.<sup>96</sup> Yet such an undertaking was to be denominational in management and curriculum, while maintaining the most catholic outlook on the 'Education of all classes of children.' The advantages were clear, particularly as it promoted 'Combined and well-regulated denominational movements' in relation to day, infant, Sunday and Normal schools, as well as 'Unfettered teaching; accurate statistical knowledge and a deputational and representative connexion with any general society founded on the principle of not receiving Government money.' Having decided to remain denominational, the conference then went on to discuss the form this denominational activity should take. Was the C.B.E. to remain under the aegis of the Congregational Union or was it to become a separate yet denominational society? And further, was the brief of the C.B.E. to be expanded to include aid for building and maintaining schools?<sup>97</sup>

A lengthy debate ensued which was concluded by a motion from Joseph Fletcher and Josiah Conder that would recognize the gravity of the education crisis and its bearing on the Congregational churches and reaffirming the fundamental principle of non-interference. The denominational option was formally adopted by a resolution introduced by Edward Baines and Benjamin Parsons. Declaring that 'the time has arrived when practical measures must increasingly occupy the attention of Congregationalists', it was envisaged 'to enter upon more vigorous organization; and more extensive operations.'<sup>98</sup> What this meant organizationally was spelt out over the next two days. The following day the position of the C.B.E. was reaffirmed unanimously as 'the recognized organization of the Congregational Union for the advancement of popular education.' There was greater 'diversity of opinion' however, over the board's constitution, though the nature of that diversity was not detailed. It would seem that there was some dissent over the question of

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96. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 20.

97. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 64.

98. Ibid., p. 64.

membership in the Board of members of other denominations and of cooperation with other agencies. A sub-committee consisting of Robert Ainslie, Joseph Fletcher, Andrew Reed, Algernon Wells, Edward Baines, Josiah Conder and Dr. Massie was appointed to consider the matter. The fruit of their labours found expression in the resolution introduced at the beginning of the Wednesday morning session the next day. The constituency for electing members of the board were to be the members of the Congregational Union; donors of £5 or more to its funds; subscribers of £10 per annum and delegates from local committees. The conference went on to resolve that C.B.E. schools would have preference in electing teachers trained at the board's training college and links with the Congregational Union were confirmed by the stipulation that the C.B.E. would have to report annually to the Assembly. A resolution moved by George Hadfield seemingly was intended to allay the fears of the out-and-out voluntarists by its insistence that 'in no instance, or circumstances whatever, shall any aids from grants of public money, administered by the Government be received.' Other resolutions went in the other direction in order to assure moderates that the C.B.E. was not sectarian. Robert Goshawk of Leek moved a resolution insisting that while the management of the schools was in the hands of Congregationalists and that evangelical religion would be taught in classes, no denominational catechism would be used nor would there be insistence upon attendance on any particular form of public worship. Conder moved that applicants to the Normal school should simply be in attendance at a Christian church and John Sibree expressed his hope that while the proceedings of the conference were clearly denominational, that they would also be 'a practical demonstration of the catholicity of its operations.'<sup>99</sup>

As far as administration was concerned the conference decided to maintain the C.B.E.'s decentralized and locally controlled structure.

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99. C.Y.B. (1847), pp. 65, 66.

The C.B.E. itself would maintain a distinctly supportive structure. John Cooke's resolution saw the board's functions as sevenfold: maintaining Normal schools, providing inspection, gathering and publishing statistics, establishing and aiding schools in desirable localities for the children of the working classes, granting funds for school equipment, selecting books and promoting the educational cause by means of public meetings, deputations, and through the press.<sup>100</sup>

The final public meeting, held on the Wednesday evening, summed up the Congregationalists' position as it would be expressed in the forthcoming years. Edward Baines moved a resolution that reaffirmed the place of education in the world-view of the Congregational community, and as such made a statement about Congregationalism's place in the larger society. There was, the conference moved, 'no portion of the community more deeply interested in, and favourable to, the enlightenment of the people than the Congregational Dissenters of this land; which they have proved by their long and strenuous efforts in the work of popular education.' R.W. Hamilton asserted that such education 'must partake of a religious character and influence' and reject any Government aid. Finally Josiah Conder moved that Congregational churches must 'prosecute educational labours on their principles with the utmost zeal and vigour.'<sup>101</sup> In short, the Congregational community had now come to profess a distinct educational policy: wholly voluntary and religiously grounded education. But Congregationalists were also coming to be aware of the enormity of the task before them. In the coming years just what that meant in terms of commitment would become apparent and many proponents of voluntary education would considerably alter their outlook.

In spite of this forceful denominational policy there was still considerable debate within Congregationalism about education. Robert

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100. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 67.

101. C.Y.B. (1847), p. 68.

Vaughan was still at the centre of the controversy. In the British Quarterly Review for the last quarter of 1847 he defended himself against charges of inconsistency in having previously changed sides in the education controversy. The reason had been simple: the Government's Minutes in Council were clearly unacceptable and in this light he desired, while still holding to his original principle, that the government would leave the education of the people in future wholly to themselves. Nonconformist schools in any scheme had to be exempted from all state interference and for the present this was not guaranteed. What Vaughan disliked most was the centralizing role of the state over against the responsibilities and duties of individuals and voluntary associations. Practically, the Government scheme was unworkable and effectively barred Dissenters because of their strongly held principles. As such the scheme did not achieve its purpose and therefore those left outside its operations had to look to an alternative. Vaughan saw this as the only possibility for Congregationalists and asserted 'that our own principles shall be protected in our own schools.' Nevertheless Vaughan refused to go all the way with out-and-out voluntarists. While several leading Congregationalists had petitioned the Government for a more open policy, Vaughan believed that the Congregational body as a whole had not adequately presented its case. How much more, he wrote, 'might have been accomplished, if as dissenters, we had been wise enough to have employed ourselves in stipulating for honourable terms, instead of presenting the front of indiscriminate opposition which many were so anxious to sustain.' For the moment at least few would have agreed with Vaughan on this point, but he accused them of having an 'intolerant and harsh spirit.' Charged from both sides with inconsistency and compromise, Vaughan in conclusion pointed to what he saw as the false premise of completely voluntary education - to wit, the impossibility of separating secular and religious education within a school. Not only so, but Congregationalists held a multiplicity of educational views which would give little coherence and force their movement.<sup>102</sup>

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102. B.Q.R. (1847), XII, pp. 528ff.

Vaughan's ambivalent attitude and pointed criticism was not widely appreciated, particularly after the first flush of joy over his conversion to the cause. The Eclectic criticized his B.Q.R. and accused him of 'applying scornful and injurious language to his brethren.' Perhaps more serious was his unapologetic attitude to his former position, and his seeming disregard for the decisions of the 1847 Autumnal meeting. Indeed the Eclectic went so far as to attribute to Vaughan the disunion among Congregationalists over the question.<sup>103</sup> As far as the Eclectic was concerned the Congregational denomination was on the right path, particularly after the B.F.S.S. decided to accept Government aid. The area open for discussion was on the question of whether a denominational or open policy should be pursued by voluntary educationalists. An open policy was being advocated in Lancashire, particularly as embodied in the 'Manchester Resolutions' and in the steps being taken to form a general county society on the lines of the B.F.S.S. Whatever was done the Eclectic urged immediate action as several Dissenters were being forced by circumstances to take Government aid. The union had been correct to uphold the voluntary principle in 1843 and was correct to reaffirm it in 1847, now all that was needed was a consistent policy.<sup>104</sup>

Yet Vaughan did have those who sympathized with his concerns and shared some of his reservations. John Hoppus, professor of History at University College, London, wrote a generally voluntarist book entitled the Crisis in Popular Education, which to the Eclectic's mind conceded too much on principle and statistics. 'Will anyone deny,' Hoppus wrote, 'that the best government is that which is best adapted to develop the greatest amount of social good? There are circumstances in which this good can only be promoted by state-education in the strict sense, by the government taking the education of the people into its own hands.'

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103. E.R. (1847), new series XXI, pp. 125, 508, 527.

104. E.R. (1847), new series XXI, p. 94.

This was to Hoppus's mind the necessary role of Government if it was to govern a literate citizenry. 'Governments are described as sent ... for the praise of them that do well. Is government a mere brute force? ... Is it to be restricted from promoting, in any way, the intelligence which is necessary to render men capable of being governed as other than brute beasts? If this was not to be the case then Government would have to support some form of state education or at least assure that it was taking place.<sup>105</sup>

Thomas Binney took a similar line. He wrote: 'As circumstances may be such as to make it the duty of government actually to feed some of the community, and to see to it that others be fed; so it may be its duty, from other circumstances, to educate some, and to secure and promote the education of all, or all of the poorer and humbler classes.' Such action on the part of the state might not be optimally desirable, but Binney recognized like Hoppus that the state had wider responsibilities for the public welfare. For that reason he could not join in the general hostility of his fellow Congregationalists against the Government.<sup>106</sup>

Much of the debate related to the statistical evidence which all parties tried to use to substantiate their claims. The thorough-going voluntarists tried to play down the educational needs, the moderates to increase them a bit and the advocates of state-subsidized education were at pains to prove the crying greatness of the need. Most Congregationalist writers on the subject dealt with the statistics at one point or another. The degree of accuracy was not great, due no doubt to both the imprecision of their early statistical methods and to the ambiguous institutional affiliations of many schools. It was often notoriously difficult to determine what was a Congregational school and what was a non-denominational school.

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105. John Hoppus, Crisis in Popular Education, (1847), pp. 62, 192.

106. Thomas Binney, Education (1847), pp. 61, 62, 69.

The chief statistician from the Congregational side was Edward Baines, editor of the Leeds Mercury. From 1843 onwards he strove hard to make the case that voluntary educational efforts were meeting the needs of the country. This took a twofold form. First, Baines tried to show that Dissenters provided more Sunday schools than Churchmen, his statistics revealing 389 Anglican schools with 123,451 scholars and 1,273 dissenting schools with 285,080 scholars. Day school education was less satisfactory, but Baines estimated that in 1843 210,592 scholars were receiving a voluntary education, 86,702 of them in schools of either the National or British societies.<sup>107</sup> As controversy grew more heated he revised his figures. In 1847 Baines estimated, in his Letters to Lord John Russell, that 674,883 children were receiving day school education in 1818, whereas 1,276,947 were receiving such education in 1833 and 2,000,000 in 1846 - the latter figure representing a ratio of one child attending school for every eight and a half others in the country.<sup>108</sup> For his part Baines considered this ratio equitable and concluded that 'The means of education do actually exist in this country, very nearly, if not quite, adequate to the wants of the people.'<sup>109</sup> In his 1853 address before the Autumnal meeting of the Congregational Union, Baines reaffirmed his confidence in the voluntary principle on the basis of the statistics. Having striven to calm any doubts about the voluntary system from the point of view of principle, he moved on the counter a charge by Lord John Russell that Congregational efforts were falling behind. Baines's reading of the statistics proved otherwise. There was one day scholar for every 8.36 school-age children, that is 2,144,377 out of a population of 17,927,609. 'The friends of the voluntary system,' wrote Baines, 'may feel their confidence in their own principles established...' While there was no reason to be satisfied yet, there was also no reason for an expensive and oppressive system of national education as proposed by Russell.<sup>110</sup> Baines's conclusions did not, however, go unchallenged and from 1847 on he was locked in controversy with Robert Vaughan over the statistics themselves

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107. Edward Baines, jun., E. Baines, p. 316.

108. E.R. (1847), new series XXI, p. 122.

109. Ibid., p. 125.

110. C.Y.B. (1854), p. 69f.

and their interpretation. Vaughan was not satisfied that with even 2,000,000 children in schools, if that figure was correct, that the educational needs of the poor were being met.<sup>111</sup>

The Congregational Board of Education's part in the wider voluntary education movement was never as great as many of its supporters contended. This was partly due to the fact that the Congregational education movement was never self-contained on strictly denominational lines and as such it is difficult to determine the extent of its influence. There seemed to be about 453 schools affiliated to the C.B.E. by 1856 and by 1849 about £120,000 had been raised in support of wholly voluntary education. But while a large proportion of this was raised by Congregationalists, only a fraction benefitted C.B.E. schools. Most funds were either contributed directly to the schools themselves, given through local education committees or given to schools with no attachment to the C.B.E. So, for example, in 1846 £38,559.5.3. was raised for wholly voluntary schools, but of the £33,391.11.8. raised by Congregationalists, only about £2,000 passed through the C.B.E.'s Central Fund. By 1848 the accumulated income of the C.B.E. was £6,900, of which £2,000 had been granted for the building and maintenance of schools.<sup>112</sup> This pattern persisted with the Board taking an income of about £2,600 each year.<sup>113</sup> Several local committees in association with the C.B.E. had greater success. The Essex churches were particularly aggressive and in the five years up to 1848 had raised £10,000 for various educational purposes and had built twenty-eight day schools. In 1847 the income of the Essex Education Committee was £2,202.<sup>114</sup> The number of schools affiliated to the C.B.E. was relatively small in comparison to the extent of its influence or to the number of schools in the country. Horace Mann's education census in 1853 recorded 50,000 scholars in 453 schools. This was in comparison with 20,000 National schools

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111. Robert Vaughan in B.Q.R., (1847), p. 102.

112. Education Reports, Congregational Board of Education (1844-54), H.C.Mss. ADa74; First Annual Report (1845), Congregational Board of Education, p. 10; Fourth Annual Report (1848), p. 8; H.C.Mss. ADa72(2).

113. C.Y.B. (1848), p. 10; (1855), p. 30; (1853), p. 33.

114. C.Y.B. (1848), p. 119.

supported in part by the Government.<sup>115</sup> However the board's influence went further afield than that. Teachers educated at its Borough Road Normal School (after 1852 at the old Homerton College) were placed in schools besides those of the C.B.E. The board further made grants to schools outside its affiliation as long as they did not take Government grants.<sup>116</sup>

The C.B.E. reached the height of its influence after the Derby conference and in the early part of the 1850's. While certain obstacles remained, not least Government policy, differences of opinion among Congregationalists, and poor finances, education was seen as a genuine part of the Congregationalist mission to the nation.<sup>117</sup> These ambiguities and strengths were apparent in the May assembly of 1848. Significantly the educational moderate Thomas Binney was in the chair. Binney's address sought to define the place and responsibilities of the Congregationalist community in that year of upheaval across Europe. Thanking the assembly for electing as chairman one known for his dissenting views on the education question, Binney went on to exclaim, 'Revolutions are convulsing the world; and they are doing so partly through the medium of ideas consecrated by us.' He then went on to make his famous assertion that the mission of the Congregational denomination was to the middle classes. The assembly picked up from there. The union Committee's report saw education, among the other Congregational missions, as a means to 'enlighten, to conciliate, to influence the working classes for good.' To this end the union recommitted itself to the principles of action laid down two years before, as did subsequent assemblies. The C.B.E. report to the May assembly in 1849 touched on the strained consensus:

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115. Horace Mann, Education Census (1853), p. CXXIV

116. Minute Book, Congregational Board of Education (1851-58), H.C.Mss. ABa19; Annual Reports, Homerton Row School (1822-1843), H.C.Mss. 1101-1119.

117. There was a C.B.E. report in every C.Y.B. up to 1858. See for example C.Y.B. (1849), p. 88.

Whatever difference may now exist in reference to matters of detail, it is with the members of the Board, at least, a settled conviction, which every month confirms, that the education which they ought to aim at imparting should be religious in spirit; and that for such a religious spirit it is in vain to look elsewhere than to the operation of Christian and voluntary benevolence.<sup>118</sup>

Similar calls to unanimity, or at least to a united front, were issued at almost every Meeting and conference, but the fact was that it was simply not forthcoming. The C.B.E. criticized those who advocated secular education and reminded others who opposed denominational action of the patterns established and decisions made since 1843.<sup>119</sup>

The lack of consensus was perhaps reflected in the financial difficulties faced by the C.B.E. There was simply not enough income to sustain local schools and, after 1846, to support the Normal Schools. A Normal School for male teachers was founded early in 1846 which necessitated the temporary curtailment of grants to local schools. In September it was still being hoped that grants would soon be recommenced.<sup>120</sup> By the new year, 1847, the C.B.E. committee was informed that by Samuel Morley that the estimated costs for running the two Normal schools, the model school and meeting office expenses, exclusive of grants, would be £1,245. The difficulty was that to date only £711 had been received.<sup>121</sup> Yet in spite of the financial condition of the C.B.E. it was decided in October to purchase the Homerton College site for £5,000 in order to provide facilities for a combined Normal School. The funds were raised through 1850 after a vigorous campaign throughout the country.<sup>122</sup> After Homerton was set on its feet finances continued much as before. In 1857 the Finance and Deputation Committee reported an average deficit for the previous four years of £300 per annum and by 1858 the deficit had reached £500.<sup>123</sup>

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118. C.Y.B. (1849), p. 84.

119. C.Y.B. (1851), p. 96; (1853), p. 20.

120. Minutes, C.B.E., August 23, 1848; September 13, 1848; H.C.Mss. ABa18.

121. Minutes, C.B.E., January 17, 1849, H.C.Mss. ABa18. This condition prevailed throughout the year, with income falling far short of expenditure. In June expenses were estimated at £500, and yet there was only £160 in hand.

122. Minutes, C.B.E., May 1, 1850; November 13, 1850, H.C.Mss. ABa18.

123. Minutes, C.B.E., June 5, 1857; April 21, 1858, H.C.Mss. ABa18.

Numerous steps were taken to redress this perilous state of affairs. At stake of course was the credibility of the voluntary principle. This was hammered home at almost every public meeting. Periodically the board would arrange a meeting of friends and subscribers to promote its interests. Sometimes such meetings had a political character, while on other occasions they were of a pecuniary nature. The message was the same. At a meeting to oppose Fox's education bill in 1850 the classic line on voluntary education was reaffirmed. The bill proposed, said the resolution, to give the Government 'unconstitutional & irresponsible authority.' Over against this the conference declared: 'Perfect freedom of Education is a safeguard of political and religious liberty.'<sup>124</sup> In 1851, after the purchase of Homerton, the C.B.E.'s resources were severely strained. The annual meeting that May was presented with a paper laying out the Board's condition and prospects. The successful fund-raising efforts of the Free Church of Scotland were held out as an example and it was proposed to raise the board's income to £10,000 per annum. To accomplish this a further meeting was held that year for friends and subscribers of the C.B.E. On June 26 a meeting of friends was held at the London Tavern when Edward Miall, editor of the Nonconformist, spoke on the evils of endowing religious education. The purpose of the meeting was largely to reaffirm the convictions of the faithful and to impress upon them the urgency of raising funds. Thus the meeting passed a resolution expressing its belief 'in favour of Voluntary & Religious Education as best adapted to promote the intellectual, moral & religious interests of the community and to sustain the spirit of freedom & self-reliance.' Even so there was some dissension. A motion was made to delete the word 'voluntary' but it was decisively defeated. The following day a meeting was held at the Congregational Library for subscribers to the C.B.E. The principle paper was read by William Tyso on 'The interests of our churches and Sunday Schools intimately related to the maintenance and vigorous extension of a Voluntary System of Popular Education.' Tyso's paper was a further

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124. Minutes, C.B.E., April 15, 1850, H.C. Mss. ABa18.

attempt to bind Congregational concern for the church's freedom and prosperity to the education movement. John Liefchild followed on with an appropriate resolution expressing Tyso's concerns and advocating 'the progress of primary education imbued with evangelical truth.' More modestly than the previous day's meeting, the friends of the C.B.E. committed themselves to providing an income for the C.B.E. of £4,000 per annum, to be raised by dividing the country into four districts each with its own education committee.<sup>125</sup> Yet with all this activity it was becoming apparent that the C.B.E. could not compete with the state-aided societies. At the 1858 annual meeting Edward Miall inveighed against the inequity of the system. The initial Government grant had grown from £20,000 to each of the two societies to a combined grant of £1,000,000 in 1858, all of it calculated to lead 'the people of this country to undervalue independence and self-reliance and to crave help from the Government to do that which is essentially the duty of the individual.'<sup>126</sup>

Other tactics were adopted to raise funds and to further spread the education movement throughout the country. In March 1848 the possibility of district meetings was raised, but nothing was seemingly done about it. When things were looking grim in January 1849 steps were taken to form local auxiliaries, but these did not really get off the ground and only a few were established in Manchester, Liverpool, Essex and in several other places.<sup>127</sup> To promote them and the cause generally deputations were organized which proved to be more successful. In 1849 deputations were sent to Yorkshire, Norfolk, Essex and Bath. When considerable funds were required to purchase Homerton College in 1850 a delegation was dispatched to Manchester, Aston and Liverpool as well as to various metropolitan Congregational chapels.<sup>128</sup> The board also sought to persuade the Congregational Union to institute an annual collection

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125. Minutes, C.B.E. May 17, 1851; June 26, 1851; June 27, 1851; H.C.Mss. ABal8.

126. Minutes, C.B.E., May 12, 1858; May 9, 1860, H.C.Mss. ABal9.

127. Minutes, C.B.E., March 1, 1848; January 24, 1849, H.C.Mss. ABal8.

128. Minutes, C.B.E., February 21, 1849; March 21, 1849; April 11, 1849; April 25, 1849; October 11, 1849; April 17, 1850; May 22, 1850, H.C.Mss. ABal8.

specifically for the education movement, but this did not meet with a favourable response.<sup>129</sup>

In this context of financial stringency and continuing disagreement over the virtues of denominational action the board again considered the possibility of merging with the non-sectarian Voluntary School Association. The idea had been rejected at Derby in 1847, but the board reconsidered the proposal in late 1850 upon the receipt of a letter from the V.S.A.'s secretary G.W. Alexander. Alexander's letter emphasized the need for both societies to economize on funds and to eliminate any duplication. 'I confess,' he wrote, 'that I have sometimes been much disenchanted by this division, and the reflection that so large a part of our contributions and efforts are wasted as its consequence. Besides this I have no love of denominational action either within or without the body to which I belong unless for denominational objects, or where it is manifestly needful.' He proposed a conference of deputations from both parties and further pointed out the effect of the scarcity of funds had upon the general quality of education, and particularly in providing for voluntary education in the colonies. The C.B.E. agreed to a conference on September 25.<sup>130</sup> The results were reported back to the board at its October 9 meeting, it being recorded that '... there is unanimity of sentiment between the two societies.' Even on the vexed question of public prayer the Quakers in the V.S.A. raised no objections so long as they were not made mandatory. A second consultation went well and the C.B.E. delegation recommended to the board 'that under all the circumstances of the case, it is expedient to accede to the proposition of the Voluntary School Association for a union between the two societies.'<sup>131</sup>

In the meantime the board put the matter into the hands of the Finance and Deputation Committee which reported back on November 13. While

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129. Minutes, C.B.E., February 13, 1850, H.C.Mss. ABal8.

130. Minutes, C.B.E., September 18, 1850; September 25, 1850, H.C.Mss. ABal8.

131. Minutes, C.B.E., October 16, 1850, H.C.Mss. ABal8.

recognizing the advantages of affiliation to the union, there were also advantages of 'a more open platform.' The reason was clear and reflected the Congregationalists' attitude to both secular and state subsidized education. 'Secular schemes, if made national, would abandon the mass of youth to the uncertain cultivation of parents, or the erroneous teachings of other parties. It is the province of the friends of Religious Education to present an antidote to popish and semi-popish errors which are insidiously taught in so many ways. But to effect all this, vigorous union and extended cooperation are required.' As any such merger would require separation from the union, the committee recommended that the C.U.E.W. maintain its educational interests by appointing an educational committee to watch over various developments in education. More difficult would be the place of Homerton College. £5,000 had been raised on the condition that the institution belonged to the union. The committee recommended that the college be put into trusteeship for the use of the united association and that in the case of its dissolution the college would revert back to the Congregational Union.

Several further meetings were held on the proposal, but on November 27 W.D. Alexander proposed a new scheme. The records are not particularly informative here, but it seems that the proposed merger had met with some opposition from the C.B.E.'s constituency. Alexander's scheme was for the two societies to merge their teacher training institutions, but to remain otherwise organizationally separate and for the C.B.E. to retain its link with the union. A sub-committee was appointed to confer with the V.S.A. A report was heard at the December 4 meeting of the board when it was agreed to go ahead with Alexander's plan, putting Homerton under joint supervision and sharing the costs for the adaptation of the premises from a theological college to a Normal School. The justification for this course of action was made known at the December 18 meeting. Correspondence with the C.B.E.'s constituency had revealed deep reservations and led the board to decline the V.S.A.'s offer. But the implications of this drawing back were just as apparent. It was desirable, the board

resolved, 'to press upon the attention of the Committee of the Congregational Union the necessity and importance of promptly using all its influence with the churches of the Congregational Body to sustain the Board in its operations.' As we have seen, however, such support was not readily forthcoming. A further unsuccessful attempt was made to effect a merger at the May assembly in 1851 by Dr. Brown of Cheltenham and John Burder of Bristol. While unsuccessful this attempt revealed the continuing lack of unanimity in the councils of Congregationalism.<sup>132</sup>

The subsequent history of the C.B.E. was less dramatic than the period of its formation and growth in the 1840's. The annual meetings were regularly reminded of the board's needs, but the C.B.E.'s financial position remained precarious. The denomination was effectively caught between the financial burden of supporting a comprehensive voluntary system of churches, schools, colleges, associations and charitable institutions and its avowed commitment to principle. The moderate Edward Swaine warned in 1852 of the limitations of supporting such an extensive system; and yet the same assembly at which he spoke declared its opposition to the state endowment of religion or education and affirmed its confidence 'that the Voluntary principle, if fully developed, is capable of supplying amply the spiritual necessities of mankind.'<sup>133</sup> By 1854 the weaknesses in the system were apparent when the C.B.E. reported that many schools were in danger of extinction or of succumbing to the temptation of state aid.<sup>134</sup>

The weakening position of the C.B.E. was exemplified in a vigorous address given by Edward Baines in its defence at the 1853 Autumnal in Manchester. Entitled 'Practical Suggestions on the duty of Congregationalists to education' Baines admitted that Congregationalists had not kept up with other groups in the education battle and that there were deep differences on the subject within the denomination. Nevertheless there was substantial agreement on the need of religious education supported by voluntary means and that in the adverse circumstances the voluntary principle was working:

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132. Minutes, C.B.E., November 20, 27; December 4, 9, 18, 1850; H.C.Mss.ABa18; January 2, March 5, May 13, 1851, ABA19.

133. C.Y.B. (1853), pp. 37, 47.

134. C.Y.B. (1855), p. 30.

Opinions may still differ as to the speculative possibility of accepting State money without violating Nonconformist principles by excluding religion from the school; but whatever theories may form, this would not at present be practicable, inasmuch as both the great parties in Parliament concur in saying, that if we excluded religion, we shall not have the money. Congregationalists then, have no choice, but if they would help education at all, to help it in connexion with religion. Their own body will not dispense with the religion; and, if it would, the state would not. They are, therefore, happily, shut up to the best and most unexceptionable of courses, the support of religious education by voluntary means. <sup>135</sup>

More than this, the voluntary system was in fact working. There were 2,144,377 day scholars in England and Wales, that is, one student for every 8.36 children of school age. As the ratio of 8 to 1 was the satisfactory figure set by James Kay Shuttleworth, the secretary of the Privy Council Committee on Education, Baines considered his opponents' objections answered. The lesson for Congregationalists was that the voluntary system was viable and that the churches should give the schools greater support.

But others were not so sure and Baines' plea did little to stem the loosening of the C.B.E.'s denominational and voluntary ties. In 1858 the C.B.E. along with other Congregational missionary societies, was severed from the Congregational Union in a policy change determined to keep the union's sphere of activity restricted to purely connexional affairs. More serious, however, was the changing attitude of many Congregationalists to voluntary education. Already in 1850 Samuel Davidson favoured a secular system of national education.<sup>136</sup> John Campbell, on the opposite end of the theological scale from Davidson, wanted to see a secular system like that in the United States, though he went on to say that 'so long as there is an established Church we utterly despair of such a system'.<sup>137</sup> Others simply came to see the desirability of state support. Newman Hall

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135. C.Y.B. (1854), p. 67.

136. Samuel Davidson, Autobiography and Diary (1899), p. 1.

137. Robert Ferguson and A. Morton Brown, The Life and Labours of John Campbell (1867), p. 494.

had declared his dissent from the consensus when still a young minister.<sup>138</sup> Even more notable was John Angel James's change of mind. Writing to the Anglican J.C. Miller in 1855 James said that he had almost been persuaded of the desirability of state aid by Miller's pamphlets. State aid was necessary, though, he wrote, 'I feel a theoretic perplexity on the question, whether the education of the people is indeed a matter within the jurisdiction of the Government, especially their religious education.' His change of mind was pragmatic and he continued to object to the place of the Prayer Book and the Catechism in religious instruction.<sup>139</sup>

By the 1860's the tide was definitely turning. R.W. Dale openly challenged Robert Vaughan on the subject in the annual assembly of 1860.<sup>140</sup> The end came in 1867 when Baines himself conceded defeat and the C.B.E. began to accept state funds. The voluntary principle had been pushed back into the chapel.

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138. Newman Hall, An Autobiography (1898) p. 91.

139. R.W. Dale, Life of John Angel James (1862), p. 457.

140. A.W. Dale, Life of R.W. Dale of Birmingham (1898), p. 162.

CHAPTER VICONTAINMENT: CONGREGATIONALISM AND CHAPEL BUILDING

Chapel building was one of the most widespread and important expressions of Congregational voluntarism throughout the 19th century. This was due largely to the expansion of orthodox Protestant Dissent and the need to provide for new places of worship. It was also owing to the growth of the towns and the movement of Congregationalists into new residential areas. It is very difficult to estimate the number of new chapels built in the 19th century. The Congregational Year Book did not begin to record the number of chapels until 1861 when it noted 2,337 self-supporting congregations. There were, in fact, more than that number of chapels since Horace Mann noted 3,244 Congregational chapels in 1851, although this would have included smaller edifices and mission halls. More significant perhaps as a guide was the estimated growth of Congregational membership. From an estimated 35,000 in 1800, Congregationalists grew to around 127,000 in 1838, 165,000 in 1851 and 180,000 in 1863.<sup>1</sup> A somewhat concurrent growth in the number of chapels can be assumed. But it was well-accepted among Congregationalists that chapel building was not keeping pace with numerical growth.<sup>2</sup>

What marked Congregational chapel building well into the century was its almost haphazard and unplanned nature. Chapels were built to accommodate the results of evangelisation or to fulfil the vision of a particular congregation, association or individual, but rarely in reference to other efforts and movements. Nevertheless chapel building was taking place on a wide scale. Collective and individual efforts brought new congregations into being that in turn necessitated new chapels.

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1. Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, Churches and Church-goers: patterns of church growth in the British Isles since 1700 (Oxford 1977), pp. 147, 213, 216.
  2. See C.Y.B., (1847) p. 25; (1855), p. 84; (1857), p. 28; J.A. James, 'Preface to the Ninth and Enlarged Edition of Christian Fellowship, or the Church Member's Guide (1839), in Works (1856), p. 193.

For example, in Lincolnshire, where Congregationalism was notably weak, the work of individuals, congregations and the county association resulted in numerous new chapels. For years the only Congregational church was in Stamford, but by 1818 there were ten churches in the county. Instrumental in this growth was the London philanthropist Thomas Wilson. He initially helped the struggling cause at Wisbech by sending down a student, a Mr. Evans, from Hoxton College to preach in a barn. By 1819 a chapel had been built with the costs being divided between the congregation and Wilson. Mr. Evans then went on to Boston where he rented a room at Wilson's expense. In 1820 Wilson sent another student, a Mr. Soper, to the Boston church. He was later able to build a chapel with a contribution of £100 from Wilson.<sup>3</sup> On a greater scale was the work in Lancashire where the efforts of William Roby of Manchester and others resulted in many new chapels. When the Lancashire Congregational Union constitution was revised in 1817 it was done in such a way as to give the union the tasks of ascertaining what were the desolate areas requiring itinerating and regulating chapel building.<sup>4</sup> The case of the Congregational Church in Highworth, Wiltshire can be taken as an example of the efforts of one particular congregation. The work had begun as a result of the labours of itinerants associated with the Countess of Huntingdon. By 1819 the cause had become a station of the Home Missionary Society and by 1822 it had become a Congregational church. A new chapel was constructed in 1824 at the cost of £600, half of which came from local contributions.<sup>5</sup>

The growth of chapel building confronted the Congregational community with considerable difficulties. Congregationalists, like the other denominations, recognized the need for extensive chapel building, but unlike most of the other denominations they did not possess the machinery to facilitate it. Unlike the Church of England, Congregationalists did

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3. J. Barker, Congregationalism in Lincolnshire (London 1860), p. 24.
  4. W.G. Robinson, A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union (Manchester 1955), p. 53.
  5. J.A. Clapham, 'How a dark corner of Wiltshire was evangelized.' Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society, IV (1908-9), p. 371.

did not have the state to fall back on and unlike the Methodists they did not have the advantage of a reasonably efficient and centralized denominational organisation.<sup>6</sup> The result was a chaotic system, if it can be called that, of independent chapel cases and chapel begging that was only slowly harmonized by mid-century. On top of that was the problem of chapel debts that came to drain the resources of the denomination.

The chapel-begging procedure was straightforward enough. A provincial congregation would decide to build a new chapel and then send its pastor off to the larger provincial towns and London to collect funds. Several examples can be noted. Usually the chapel begging pastor had a letter of introduction to one or several leading Congregationalists in the city. George Payne of Blackburn sent such a letter to John Arundel of the L.M.S. in 1825 introducing the Rev. E. Miller. 'He comes,' Payne wrote, 'as a Mendicant to your great city and it would be of considerable importance to him to get introduced to some of the pulpits of the Metropolis.'<sup>7</sup> Several years later Robert Miall introduced Mr. Davis, the minister in Ormskirk, to John Blackburn. Davis was 'about to visit London under the sanction of the Board for the purpose of soliciting contributions towards the erection of a chapel in that place.'<sup>8</sup> The young John Campbell, later minister of Tottenham Court Chapel and Whitefield's Tabernacle, came to London from Kilmarnock on a chapel begging case in 1828. He wrote back to his wife and mentioned that he had been introduced to Dr. Henderson who promised to bring his 'case with Mr. Orme's letter' before the Congregational Board.<sup>9</sup>

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6. See G.F.A. Best, Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Church of England (1964); A.B. Webster, Joshua Wilson, 1771-1855 (1954); W.R. Ward, 'Scottish Methodism in the Age of Jabez Bunting,' Records of the Scottish Church History Society, XX (1978) p. 47; G.W. Rusling, 'Dissenting Mendicant Friars,' Baptist Quarterly XXIV (1971), p. 1.
  7. George Payne to John Arundel, July 16, 1825, C.L.Mss. 45.
  8. Robert Miall to John Blackburn, January 28, 1834, N.C.L.C., Blackburn Papers, L52/5/49.
  9. Robert Ferguson and A. Morton Brown, The Life and Labours of John Campbell (1867), p. 66.

The lot of the chapel beggar was a miserable one. The Rev. W. Dove of Thornbury in Gloucestershire had difficulty in collecting enough funds even to cover his costs and he resigned himself to having to go up to London annually.<sup>10</sup> One agent of the Village Itineracy Association actually seceded to the Church of England over chapel begging. Writing to Matthew Wilks, William Seaton pointed out that while he had been contemplating going over to the Establishment for some time, 'no certainty attended the matter till after I had undertaken to beg for the Chapel.'<sup>11</sup> In Stafford the Congregational Church almost disintegrated over the matter. The pastor, a Mr. Dorman, refused to beg until forced to by his congregation. In the end he was successful and raised £500 to meet the debt, but he never forgave the people who had pushed him into it.<sup>12</sup> It was generally admitted all around that chapel begging was not good for those begging. In response to an inquiry on the matter in 1833 Thomas Luke of Taunton wrote to the Rev. John Brown of Wareham that no 'work in which I ever engaged as a Minister has been so unpleasant and hurtful.' George Hadfield of Manchester wrote in a similar vein: 'I fear the effect on the minds of truly good & useful men who are sent out is exceedingly humiliating.' Another northerner, James Matheson of Durham, believed that the whole system was 'injurious to all parties and especially to the persons applying.' George Redford of Worcester called the system 'uniformly bad, very bad - most deplorable.' The worst affected were young ministers. 'I have known some,' he wrote, 'who are corrupted & utterly wrecked by a long begging case & many who were unsettled & greatly injured.'<sup>13</sup>

Chapel begging was as much a problem to those being asked to contribute. Redford saw the difficulty acutely. 'I know not what the effect is,' he wrote, 'except that nine out of ten are tempted by the application to tell lies for they always begin by saying that they cannot afford it. It is a rare thing

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10. William Dove to Thomas Wilson, Feb. 11, 1835, C.L.Mss. Gb.10.
  11. William Seaton to Matthew Wilks, May 20, 1825, N.C.L.C., V.I.A. Papers, 42/31.
  12. John Chalmers to Thomas Wilson, May 12, 1835, C.L. Mss. Gb.23.44.
  13. Thomas Luke to John Blackburn, Aug. 27, 1833; George Hadfield to Blackburn, Aug. 29, 1833; James Matheson to Blackburn, Sept. 20, 1833; George Redford to Blackburn Aug. 26, 1836, C.L. Mss. II.c.31.

to be received as a minister ought to be received by Christian people even if they cannot give.' Liberal givers such as George Hadfield, Samuel Morley and Thomas and Joshua Wilson were continually appealed to for funds. The Wilsons, who we will examine more closely below, were notably generous and a call on them was a mandatory stop for any chapel-beggar. An example can be taken from one case in Kent, a county that both Thomas and Joshua particularly patronized. In 1853 John Barfitt of Bexley wrote to Joshua: 'Having been kindly furnished with your name by Mr. Gilbert, I take the liberty of urging upon your kind consideration the claims of this new and interesting cause.' Six days later Barfitt arrived at Wilson's Highbury home only to find him out. 'You will excuse my sending you a line,' he wrote afterwards, 'earnestly entreating that you will consider the case of our new chapel - and do for us as liberally as you can.' Others wrote in a similar vein and it would seem more often than not received some gift for their pains. There even grew up a tradition of largesse. One Isaac Brown appealed to Joshua Wilson when he needed help in 1848 on the grounds of his father's earlier aid.<sup>14</sup>

Closely related to chapel building was the problem of chapel debts.<sup>15</sup> Few chapels were built for which the expenses had been paid off by the day of opening. In most cases the chapels were built and the congregations spent many years paying off the debts which annually increased with mounting interest charges. This was, of course, a long standing problem that transcended denominational lines. In 1808 Edward Williams was promoting a Congregational Union partly to redress the debt problem facing many churches.<sup>16</sup> Many Baptist chapels were encumbered by debt. The Wesleyans faced serious debt problems in Scotland and Jabez Bunting complained of the debt burden to the churches.<sup>17</sup>

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14. John Barfitt to John Blackburn, April 19, 25, 1853, C.L.Mss. 36, see also John Blackburn to Joshua Wilson, April 25, 1855; H. Cresswell to Joshua Wilson, June 7, 1859; J. Spurgeon to Joshua Wilson, Sept. 25, 1863; Isaac Brown to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 10, 1848, C.L.Mss. 36.
  15. Albert Peel, These Hundred Years (1931), p. 150f.
  16. Edward Williams, 'Thoughts on a General Union' in Works, vol. IV, (1862), p. 431.
  17. W.R. Ward, Religion and Society in England 1790-1850 (1972) p. 88; Ward, 'Scottish Methodism,' Ward, ed., Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting (1976).

The debt problem went straight across the board. The hardest hit were the provincial churches, particularly those in the country. Metropolitan churches tended, on the whole, to raise adequate funds to cover the costs of erection. James Bennett, for example, was able to build his chapel without any debt whatsoever. John Sherman at Blackheath and Newman Hall in South London were able to do the same, but they both ministered to wealthy congregations.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Raffles, in Liverpool, on the other hand, found himself with a debt of £2,000 when his old chapel burned down and he had to replace it.<sup>19</sup> Newman Hall, at an earlier pastorate in Hull, saw the completion of the new Albion Chapel at the cost of £12,000 and an £8,000 debt. Even with the wealthiest Dissenters in town in the congregation that was still a daunting sum.<sup>20</sup> In Shropshire in 1845 the 32 Congregational churches carried a collective debt of £2,210 with the debts of individual congregations ranging from £10 to £250. This was occasioned by the fast growth of Shropshire Congregationalism and the consequent chapel building.<sup>21</sup> In Staffordshire the Vine St. Chapel, Stafford carried a debt of £1,400 towards which the pastor could only collect £200.<sup>22</sup> In Wales the situation was critical with many chapels encumbered with large debts that their congregations were unable to meet.<sup>23</sup> Chapels in the Durham and Northumberland Association had debts totalling £7,477.<sup>24</sup> It was estimated in England and Wales in 1853 that Congregational churches were carrying collectively a debt of £100,000.

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18. John Waddington, Congregational History (1868-80), vol. IV p. 200. Newman Hall, An Autobiography (1898), p. 312, ; Henry Allon, Memoir of the Rev. James Sherman (1863), p. 382.
  19. Thomas Stamford Raffles, Memoir of the Life and Ministry of the Rev. Thomas Raffles, D.D., LL.D. (1864), p. 364.
  20. Newman Hall, Autobiography, p. 62.
  21. Ernest Elliot, A History of Congregationalism in Shropshire (1896), p. 8.
  22. A.G. Matthews, The Congregational Churches in Staffordshire (1924), p. 192.
  23. Patriot, Jan. 28, 1835.
  24. C.Y.B. (1853), p. 283. Not all the county associations returned the enquiries. Of those that did the following estimated debts were reported: Cheshire £5,000; Derby £2,000; Norfolk £1,200; Shropshire £2,000; Staffordshire £2,050; Surrey £4,000; North Yorkshire £1800.

The debt problem threatened to wreak a good deal of damage. John Chalmers' church in Stafford was threatened with foreclosure.<sup>25</sup> And even the beneficent Thomas Wilson had trouble keeping the debt ridden Newark Chapel going. At one point the chapel was to be put up for auction.<sup>26</sup> Joseph Shaw in Guisborough found that his large debt hampered congregational giving. In response to an appeal from John Arundel of the L.M.S. for a collection he wrote: 'Our people have recently made a strenuous effort for the extinction of the debt on our chapel ...'<sup>27</sup> No collection was possible.

Shaw's church had just disaffiliated from the Home Missionary Society, but many other mission churches faced similar debt problems. Jesse Hopgood, the H.M.S. agent in Brentford in Essex, wrote a desperate letter to John Blackburn in 1839 pointing out the importance of keeping the mission going:

But what can I do unless my brethren will help me. We must redeem the mortgage & set the chapel free from debt; or give up the cause. To pay an annual rent is impossible, and should we not succeed in our present attempt, the chapel must be sold ... My health, my mind, my time, my duties, the claims of my station will not<sup>28</sup> allow of my spending weeks in going from house to house.

Another of John Blackburn's correspondents, John Goulty, painted a bleak picture of the Sussex churches. He estimated that there was a collective debt of not less than £5,000. What augured ill was that a general appeal to the public had brought promises of £1,439 but only £2 in actual cash. One chapel, Hanover in Brighton, had a debt larger than the building could fetch on the market.<sup>29</sup>

The Village Itineracy Association had similar difficulties in its many scattered missions. The Societas Evangelica, the V.I.A.'s predecessor,

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25. Matthews, congregational Churches in Staffordshire, p. 187.  
 26. Joshua Wilson, Life of Thomas Wilson (1852), p. 187.  
 27. Joseph Shaw to John Arundel, Apr. 1, 1845, C.L.Mss. 45.  
 28. Jesse Hopgood to John Blackburn, April 11, 1839, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/98.  
 29. J. Goulty to John Blackburn, Aug. 29, 1840, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/5/128.

had to deal with several cases of chapel debts but had decided that it was not within its power to make grants towards liquidating them.<sup>30</sup> The mission in St. Ives in Cornwall had a debt in 1820 of £354.16.0. When asked how he was planning to meet the costs, the pastor, Timothy Wildbore, suggested that the V.I.A. take possession of the property. That was not possible and the building was only saved at the eleventh hour when a local worthy paid off the debt.<sup>31</sup> A similar pattern appeared elsewhere. John Shepherd in Torpoint found himself personally responsible for a debt of £161 on a new chapel costing £400.<sup>32</sup> William Wheeler in Wells appealed to the V.I.A. in a letter that expressed the wider motives behind chapel building:

The alterations and repairs which the interest awakened among the people & the dilapidated state of the Chapel demanded (that it be) thoroughly completed (sic.) Our place of worship, instead of being both inconvenient for those disposed and repulsive for others, is now made strong, commodius and respectable ... and I may add that the progressive increase in numbers & piety, considering the sulley<sup>33</sup> bigotry, opens a bright & encouraging prospect for future.

The anticipated debt was £150. More sobering was Rowland Hill's complaint about the attitude of the V.I.A. agent in Leamington who apparently did nothing about his chapel's debt and allowed interest to mount. But Hill's complaint was as much against the V.I.A. committee which put heavy restraints on the agents' access to London chapels in order to beg.<sup>34</sup>

The history of one particular chapel will help to illustrate the debt crisis. Albany Chapel in Brentford was built in 1829 at a cost of £1,000. By 1840 the original congregation had removed to an old Unitarian chapel and the old chapel was allowed to pass through the hands of the Baptists and Methodists and finally closed altogether. In the meantime

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30. Societas Evangelica, Minute Book, Jan. 29, 1802, N.C.L.C., V.I.A. Papers, 122/1.
31. Timothy Wildbore to Matthew Wilks, April 29, 1820, N.C.L.C., V.I.A. Papers 42/6; Wildbore to Wilks, June 10, 1820, 42/8; William Hickens to Robert M'All, May 2, 1820, 42/7.
32. J. Shepherd to the Committee of the V.I.A., Nov. 14, 1828, N.C.L.C., V.I.A. Papers, 42/68. The chapel was built in 1820 at a cost of £400. Contributions from the Hackney Itineracy Society and J.B. Wilson and the proceeds of the sale of the old chapel brought £239.
33. W. Wheeler to J. Ashby, June 4, 1829, N.C.L.C., . . . , V.I.A. Papers 42/81.
34. Rowland Hill to J. Ashby, Nov. 11, 1830, N.C.L.C., V.I.A. Papers 43/5.

its debt had risen to £1,700 and the building required costly repairs. During this period Lady Amelia Shaw and Joshua Wilson had become benefactors of the chapel. In 1850 Lady Shaw wrote to Wilson saying that she would not assist the upkeep of the building any longer as she was owed £600 with interest. Wilson's intention was to reopen the chapel in 1852 under the pastoral care of the Rev. James Charles Cane.<sup>35</sup> The financial commitments were considerable: £150 were needed for repairs, both Wilson and Cane wanted to remove the debt and Cane needed additional support for himself and his family. '(M)y great difficulty,' he wrote to Wilson, 'is to provide actual necessary existence till the place produces something to keep me & my family.'<sup>36</sup> He wanted support from the H.M.S. but the H.M.S. did not want to get involved with a church heavily in debt. By the summer of 1852 Wilson could not see his way to continue supporting the chapel and Cane had decided to leave. 'It has been impossible,' he wrote, 'for me to give the time and energy necessary to the gathering and retaining of a congregation at Albany Chapel owing to the necessity of my devoting my whole time from one end of the week to the other to securing donations...'<sup>37</sup> It was further becoming apparent to Wilson that Cane was himself inadequate for the job and that the original trustees made matters even more difficult. Wilson's efforts to get the H.M.S. to support the cause foundered on the society's objections to Cane. James Massie, the secretary, suggested that aid would be considered if Cane was removed and that an H.M.S. agent took over.<sup>38</sup>

The chapel officially reopened a year later in July 1853, but things improved very little. Some felt strongly that the cause was doomed, but others urged Wilson to continue his support. Joseph Robinson of the London City Mission regretted that he had to withdraw his support. J.H. Wilson of the H.M.S., on the other hand, felt that Brentford should be given another

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35. Lady Amelia Shaw to Joshua Wilson, Aug. 20, 1850, C.L.Mss. H.b.7.

36. J.C. Cane to Wilson, Jan. 14, 1852; Feb. 23, 1852; March 27, 1852, CLMssHb7

37. J.W. Massie to Wilson, April 21, 1852; J.C. Cane to Wilson, May 27, 1852; Wilson to Lady Shaw, June 17, 1852; Cane to Wilson, July 2, 1852, C.L.Mss. H.b.7.

38. Wilson to Massie, July 5, 1852; Massie to Wilson, July 8, 1852; Cane to Wilson, July 24, 1852, C.L.Mss. H.b.7.

trial. Joshua Wilson himself came around to this view and was convinced that the problem lay in a succession of poor ministers.<sup>39</sup> Edward Swaine concurred. 'Who or what is served by the Chapel,' he asked Wilson. 'Inefficient ministers have succeeded each other & only embarrassment & I fear, not creditable reflection on Congregational ability have followed.' Swaine initially advocated closure, but within a few years had changed his mind, perhaps moved by the desire to vindicate Congregational polity. In December 1860 he was heartened by the news that repairs had been finally carried out, but his new expectations were not reciprocated by the locals. In June he complained to Wilson that the 'Brentfordians are timid, being poor & poverty has terrible might to make cowards.' With Wilson he tried to keep the cause going, but in the end he found himself fighting to keep the chapel out of the hands of the Roman Catholics.<sup>40</sup>

What was at stake in the matter of chapel debts and chapel building was the credibility of the voluntary principle and it was this that moved many Congregationalists to take some steps to redress the problem. Chapel cases were easier to regulate. The county associations were the first to take steps. One of the earliest was the Lancashire Congregational Union, which we have noted already as having reorganized in 1817 in part to deal with the issue of chapel building and debts. A motion passed at the April 9, 1817 meeting of the Union resolved that no 'chapel should be erected or purchased at the expense of the union; and that no case receive the sanction of the Committee, till the title of the premises be conveyed over in trust.'<sup>41</sup> As such no union funds were to go towards chapel building and cases could not be put to the public indiscriminately. Within the county there were further localised attempts to regulate chapel cases. In 1831 the Manchester churches set down their own regulations. As with the county union all the cases were to be investigated and had to be properly vested in trustees. In addition the churches had to 'maintain

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39. J.H. Wilson to Jonathan Ward, March 23, 1860; J.H. Wilson to Joshua Wilson, Aug. 13, 1860; Joshua Wilson to P. Ibbotson, July 5, 1860; Joseph Robinson to Joshua Wilson, July 21, 1860, C.L.Mss. H.b.7.

40. Edward Swaine to Joshua Wilson, Dec. 20, 1860; Jan. 24, Oct. 14, Nov. 6, Dec. 8, 1861, H.b.7.

41. Robinson, Lancashire Congregational Union, p. 41.

the doctrinal sentiments expressed in the Assembly's Catechism, and in the Articles of the Church of England, according to their Calvinistic interpretation.<sup>42</sup> The Lancashire churches had a relatively united and comprehensive approach to chapel building; other county associations did not. Some set down no regulations while others applied only general ones. In Staffordshire the association simply sought to subsidize the poor churches and, as we have seen, left many pastors to fend for themselves. The pattern in Dorset was similar with aid being given to local churches, but leaving chapel beggars to appeal to the largesse of local patrons such as Timothy Durant.<sup>43</sup>

Elsewhere there emerged a pattern whereby the local association initially took on some responsibility for chapel-cases, but later applied tighter regulations. In 1828 the Hampshire Association considered a certain case and decided to recommend it to the churches for support. By 1849, however, the regulations had become much tighter and the onus was on the congregation to produce satisfactory evidence that the chapel was in the hands of proper trustees. Moreover, 'all CHAPEL CASES within the limits of the Association requiring assistance' were to be presented to the Committee of Business. Even then only two cases were permitted to go before the public at any one time.<sup>44</sup> The North Bucks Association found itself faced with a number of debt problems almost from the beginning. The Association's policy was to give grants only to ministers, but the debts on so many chapels 'made it necessary to establish some regulations.' At the Annual Meeting in 1823 it was resolved 'that no application for pecuniary assistance, in the building or improving of any place of worship, unless under very peculiar circumstances, shall be patronized by any minister of the Association, without being previously approved and recommended by the Committee.'<sup>45</sup> This regulating role of the association affected not only

42. C.M. (1831), p. 59.

43. W. Densham and J. Ogle, The Story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset (1909), pp. 204, 227.

44. Memoranda of the Public Meetings of the Associated Congregations of Hampshire, Sept. 24, 1828; Annual Report of the Hampshire Association (1850), p. 11.

45. Annual Report of the North Bucks Association (1823), p. 5.

internal cases, but also those from outside the county. Significantly such a ruling, albeit the decision of independent churches, went some way towards limiting that independence.

It was the London churches that faced the greatest problems from chapel case begging. By the late 1830's it was becoming clear to all concerned that something had to be done. As early as 1825 John Clayton junior and John Boadley Wilson were complaining about the system in the Evangelical Magazine.<sup>46</sup> The following year Congregationalists noted the founding of the London Baptist Building Fund. The Congregational Magazine saw the Fund as 'most laudably formed to supersede... that system of religious mendacity which has so long and disgracefully prevailed in London by which the ministerial character has been degraded and frequently injured.'<sup>47</sup>

Congregationalists tended to be cautious in these sorts of cooperative ventures. Traditionally cases had been handled through the Congregational Board which was representative of London Congregational churches but carried little influence over chapel beggars or the activities of the individual churches. In 1827 it was discovered that the 'Rev. Mr. Wilson of Montrose' was a fraud and had collected £100 for a pretended case. It was this that apparently moved the board to tighten its regulations. At its December 11 meeting the board resolved that in order to protect the public and to aid legitimate and worthy cases that in the future all cases had to be submitted to the board for approval and the chapels' trust deeds examined by the board's solicitor. In addition the board stipulated that cases could not come to London independently but had to be recommended by local ministers and supporters.<sup>48</sup> Even with these reforms complaints were still to be heard against the system. A correspondent in the

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46. E.M. (1825), p. 99.

47. C.M. (1826), p. 276. See also Seymour Price, A Popular History of the Baptist Building Fund (1927).

48. C.M. (1828), p. 52.

Congregational with the pseudonym of 'Phobus' proposed in 1829 that a Congregational Building Fund be formed and that it be financed by subscriptions. He wrote from the perspective of a provincial minister and conceived the idea not only in order to make chapel begging more efficient, but also to contribute actively to the expansion of Congregational chapel building. The plan was not taken up, but in 1830 another correspondent by the name of 'Erastus' appealed again for Congregationalists to devise a new method of dealing with chapel cases. 'That there is great need of reform in this department of our dissenting economy,' he wrote, 'is universally acknowledged. As things now are dissenting chapels are built where they are not needed; or such as are large and costly, where small ones, erected at a trifling expense, would be more appropriate.' Furthermore, the time of ministers was wasted by begging trips. In other words, not only chapel begging itself had to be dealt with more adequately, but greater efforts had to be made to develop a more systematized plan of chapel building. The Congregational Board attempted a further reform of the procedure in 1833: limiting the number of cases before the London churches in any one year to twelve, demanding that the Board receive copies of the trust deeds and stipulating the times of the year when each case could be presented.<sup>49</sup>

In the meantime some Congregational leaders were discussing a plan for the whole country. The instigator seems to have been the Rev. John Brown of Wareham in Dorset. When the Congregational Union was formed in 1832 he was given the task of investigating the need and reaction to a united effort. His correspondence on the matter, already noted, revealed a widespread discontent with the system as it existed, but at the same time no clear alternative and a reluctance to change a system that at least worked in some cases. So for example, George Radford of Worcester

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49. C.M. (1833), p. 120.

believed that 'with the present state of the body we must go on upon the system of personal application.' While he granted that improvements were necessary, he did not see any other means that would be as productive. As improvements Redford recommended the wider use of laymen in begging, a more thorough system of application with recommendations, the establishment of local examining committees and the mandatory approval of local associations. He wanted to see the Congregational Union involved by publishing a list of approved cases. Redford was particularly concerned to limit the number of rash ventures by insisting on local accountability and the setting<sup>v</sup> of building and design guidelines in order to introduce economy in expenditure.

The Rev. George Gawthorn did not agree with Brown's plans to divide the country into districts for chapel cases since this would have tended to undermine the new Congregational Union without any outstanding improvement to the method of application and collection. The alternative would be to link these districts to the union. This would help to prevent imposters, to stimulate neighbouring congregations to assist local cases and to strengthen the union itself. But such an idea was perhaps too advanced for the jealous independents within the Congregational Union. As far as a building fund was concerned Gawthorn was sceptical. The General Baptist Fund had folded and the Particular Baptist Fund was languishing. Ironically he felt that such a fund would fail because future generations would not know the evils of chapel begging. George Hadfield, who was no foreigner to chapel building affairs, believed that a formal fund would reveal the paltry giving of Congregationalists and 'so lower the boast we make of the voluntary principle.' He had particularly in mind Thomas Chalmers' strictures against the system. Others concurred that the alternatives would be unlikely to raise sufficient funds and that the old system should be retained in spite of the hardships and inefficiency it involved. After listing the amounts of contributions towards chapel building in Bristol, Samuel Newell stated that nothing like half those sums would have been obtained through a more centralized fund and reaffirmed his belief in personal application. Newell

conceded, however, that such a fund would be helpful for smaller causes. James Matheson of Durham pointed out the same difficulty but saw no alternative. Like Gawthorn he suggested a committee that would work in close cooperation with the Congregational Union and through which cases could be channelled. John Angel James favoured a change but pessimistically believed that in the present state of the denomination that it would be impossible.<sup>50</sup> With this sort of response it was not surprising that the new union did little at first to remedy the problem.

Closely related to the concern to remedy chapel-begging was the concern to liquidate chapel debts. Most attempts to remedy the problem were local ones. The Leeds churches made a concerted effort to discharge the local debts in 1845. Two Congregationalists contributed £2,000 each towards the East Parade Chapel's £6,000 debt.<sup>51</sup> The Sussex Congregational Society decided in 1835 to tackle chapel liabilities as well as to promote new cases.<sup>52</sup> The only national effort was one in aid of the Welsh Congregational Chapels in the late 1830's. In an article entitled 'The Voluntary Principle' the Patriot noted an accumulated debt in South Wales of £36,000 towards which the Welsh churches had already contributed £18,000. The debt was due in part no doubt to the fast expansion of Welsh Congregationalism in the early 19th century. In thirty years the number of chapels had grown from 17 to 174. The success of the Welsh campaign, both within Wales and without, inspired many Congregationalists in England to think that they could do the same.<sup>53</sup>

It is not without significance that the concern about chapel building and debts arose during the 1830's when Congregationalists were beginning

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50. George Redford to John Brown, Aug. 26, 1833; Thomas Luke to Brown, Aug. 27, 1833; George Hadfield to Brown, Aug. 29, 1833; D. Gawthorn to Brown, August 26, 1833; Samuel Newell to Brown, Sept. 7, 1833; James Matheson to Brown, Sept. 20, 1833; John Angel James to Brown, Oct. 1, 1833; Thomas Binney to Brown, Oct. 7, 1833, in 'Letters and Manuscripts relating to the inception of the English Chapel Building Society, 1833-35, C.L.Mss. II.c.31.

51. Edward Baines, The Life of Edward Baines (1851), p. 319.

52. C.M. (1835), p. 640.

53. C.M. (1835), pp. 256, 640; Patriot, Feb. 25, 1835. The plan was to be closely linked with the C.U.E.W. and was to include agents and local committees.

to become embroiled in the voluntary controversy. That the credibility of the voluntary principle was at stake was not lost on many. The context for this was twofold: the political confrontation between Church and Dissent in regard to church support and extension, and the competition on the local level between Church and Chapel. On the first point Congregationalists consistently opposed any efforts of Parliament to vote grants to the Church of England for the purposes of church extension. For example, in 1837 the Eclectic Review pointed out the duplicity inherent in what it called the 'compulsory system,' that is, appeals for both public voluntary contributions and state aid. The compulsory system was defined as 'that system which throws the support of religion upon taxation ... which compels men to contribute to the maintenance of forms of faith to which they may be indifferent, or to which they may be conscientiously opposed.' The particular object of the Eclectic's attack was the Bishop of London's proposals for church extension. The reviewer pulled out all the stock arguments against state aid to churches. It was admitted that the voluntary system left much to be desired in rural areas, but this could easily be remedied by a few modifications and adjustments. Nevertheless the reviewer believed that, even with the inequities and iniquities of the compulsory system, the voluntary principle would vindicate itself in the race to build places of worship.<sup>54</sup> Similar objections were raised the next year to Thomas Chalmers's appeal for Scottish Church extension and again in 1840 in opposition to Sir Robert Inglis's Church Extension Bill. Edward Baines took a leading role in opposing the latter in the House of Commons and numerous dissenting bodies sent up petitions.<sup>55</sup>

The battle was even more distinct on the local level. Every new chapel was seen as a trophy of the voluntary principle. When a new chapel

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54. E.R. (1837), 4th S, I, p. 220.

55. E.R. (1837) 4th S, I, p. 100; (1838), 4th S, III, p. 1; (1840) 4th S, VII, p. 207; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 145; Memoranda of the Hampshire Association, April 22, 1840.

was opened in 1835 in Coleshill in Warwickshire the Congregational commented that it was 'a pleasing and striking illustration of the beneficial operation of the voluntary principle.' A year later the Rev. John Harris took the opportunity at the opening of Claylands Chapel in London to extol the virtues of voluntarism:

To say that we are building a house for the worship of God, would only be saying that we are Christians and not heathens. To say that we are Protestant Christians would be only saying that we are not Papists. To say that we are Protestant Dissenting Christians would be only to distinguish ourselves from the Episcopal Establishment. We add, therefore, that we are Protestant Dissenting Christians of the Congregational Denomination.

The new chapel enshrined this belief and the 'simplicity and spirituality' of Dissent.<sup>56</sup> R.S. M'All was even more forthright in his opening sermon at Belgrave Chapel in London that year. The public were:

...beholding in this edifice an evidence and promise of our religious freedom... To all domination over the conscience, and all interference with individual responsibility, you declare yourselves, brethren, as Protestant Dissenters, by every observance - but never more decisively than by the preparation of places wherein to worship God according to your own unbiased conviction - irreconcilably and forever enemies. Here, therefore, is not<sup>57</sup> more truly the altar of your religion than your liberty.

Thomas Raffles made much the same point when he opened the new chapel in Oswestry in 1837.<sup>58</sup>

Behind the rhetoric and principle was the reality of sectarian competition for adherents. John Blair of Wigton wrote to Thomas Wilson in 1837 in a letter in which he set the debt problem in the context of local denominational rivalry. Instead of advancing, all the time and energy of the congregation was expended on trying to liquidate the encumbering debt:

56. C.M. (1836), p. 97.

57. William Henry Stowell, Memoir of the Life of Richard Winter Hamilton (1850), p. 327.

58. Patriot, May 11, 1837

Dissent ... is almost in its infancy and the opposition of the Church of England very strong. On the other hand almost the whole town is before us, could we but make the Voluntary System a little more popular by not levying such frequent contributions as we have hitherto been obliged to do. The Clergyman in the Establishment does not preach the Gospel and he is besides an exceedingly illiterate man, and the Methodists already divided into three sections have little or no influence.

Not only did the debt hinder the prosperity of the congregation, but it put off most candidates for the Wigton pastorate. J. Reeve found the debt to be his biggest objection to going to Wigton and had found on his visits that it had seriously affected the success of the previous minister.<sup>59</sup>

Some churches found their main rivals in other Nonconformist groups. Henry Baker wrote to Joshua Wilson in 1862 to point out that the Wesleyans in New Brompton in Kent were 'moving heaven and earth to make it one of their strongholds.' Other correspondents reported competition from Baptists.<sup>60</sup> More often than not however the competition was with local Anglicans. Jonathan Scott in Shropshire reported to Thomas Wilson in 1830 that he was gathering good congregations but that three new Anglican churches were being built nearby. While confident that he could hold his own, Scott believed that 'the church people ... will compass sea & land to make a proselyte.' Richard Cope in Cornwall appealed to Wilson's aid because of the aggressive activity of the Church of England in his district. And one correspondent of Joshua Wilson cast the problem in an almost ridiculous light. 'I am sure,' wrote F.S. Williams, 'that we shall have families come to us if we have a steeple, & they won't if we haven't. Such is the tone of the Church of England here.'<sup>61</sup>

Both Thomas and Joshua Wilson had to deal with this rivalry, and perhaps in some cases encouraged it. Thomas Wilson gave generous support

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59. (no name) to Thomas Wilson, 1837, C.L.Mss. II.c.33b.

60. Henry Baker to Joshua Wilson, April 8, 1862, C.L.Mss. 36; Edward Leighton to Joshua Wilson, 1837; C.L.Mss. II.c.33b.

61. Jonathan Scott to Thomas Wilson, July 28, 1830, C.L.Mss. II.c.34. (S16); F.S. Williams to Joshua Wilson, March 3, 1859, C.L.Mss. Gb.4 (19); Richard Cope to Thomas Wilson, 1838, C.L.Mss. Gb.5 (1).

to a church in Long Sutton that had been the result of a secession from the State Church. Joshua Wilson did much the same in 1830 when he, along with James Bennett, Thomas Raffles and Robert M'All, helped a seceding congregation in Macclesfield.<sup>62</sup> Such activity was not calculated to improve relations with Anglicans, but neither did outright chapel building. Thomas Wilson aroused the ire of the local Anglican incumbent, Basil Woodd, when he opened Paddington Chapel in 1813. Wilson had to explain to him that no other land had been available.<sup>63</sup> There was, however, the other side of the coin. Ralph Wardlaw, the doughty defender of voluntarism, cited a letter by William Wilberforce, the prince of evangelical Anglicanism, in his 1839 National Church Establishments examined. 'I am meditating,' wrote Wilberforce, 'a visit to the Archbishop, to press again the proposition you recommended, of authorizing the building of chapels of ease, to fall into the mother-church, after an interim of years. The increase of dissenting chapels, wherever the dissenters have entered on the plan of village-preaching, is beyond measure great; in one year I think ninety in the diocese of London and near fifty in that of Sarum.'<sup>64</sup> All fraternal feelings aside, the competition was a heated one.

With these sentiments it is not surprising that Congregationalist leaders began to link voluntarism and chapel building as a distinct platform for denominational action. Edward Miall disparaged the constant pleas for funds and urged political action as the only way to secure a voluntary church, but his views were not general.<sup>65</sup> Of greater weight would have been John Angel James's plea for an advance in chapel building in 1839 at the Congregational Union assembly:

It seems to be the present policy of the Church of England to build us down and to build us out. Its members suppose that our congregations continue with us, only because there are no episcopalian places to receive them; and acting upon this mistake they are multiplying chapels and churches, many of which are erected in the immediate vicinity of ours, for the purpose of gathering into them the people we have gathered.

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62. Joshua Wilson, Thomas Wilson, p. 372; Rev. J. Harris. Circular sent to Joshua Wilson, March 3, 1859, C.L.Mss. Gb.4.14.
63. Joshua Wilson, Thomas Wilson, p. 310.
64. Ralph Wardlaw, National Church Establishments examined (1839), p. 299.
65. Edward Miall, The British Churches in relation to the British People (1849), p. 396.

To prevent this we must keep pace with them in this blessed spirit of building. Enlargement, re-erectations, and new erections must go on amongst us, according to our ability, and with our energy in some measure resembling the Church of England ... We must catch the building spirit of the age. We must build, build, build ... We cannot multiply our persons, unless we multiply our places. We must not wait for congregations to be gathered before we build to gather ... For this money, much money, far more money will be wanted; we must give it. The time is come when Nonconformists must prove their love <sup>66</sup> for their principles by the sacrifice of poverty ...

We have seen how James's pastoral concerns led him to a more distinct and aggressive Independency. So now, the Anglican challenge to Nonconformist congregations moved him to a more aggressive policy of chapel building. What he did not see was that there was a contradiction in his proposals that threatened to do the reverse to Anglican churches.<sup>67</sup> What James's speech signalled was a new concerted effort in Congregational chapel building. By the time that J.C. Galloway, the secretary of the new London Congregational Chapel Building Society, made his speech on 'Congregational Chapel Extension' in 1851 several attempts had been made to advance chapel building in London, larger provincial towns and throughout the nation. Galloway's address before the Congregational Union was intended to encourage wider support for chapel building as an expression of voluntarism. He gave several reasons for what he called 'aggressive efforts': first, to 'furnish a standing advertisement of religion'; second, to engender interest and respect for Christianity; third, to evidence the 'earnestness and benevolence' of Congregationalism; fourth, to induce the public to listen to preaching; and fifth, to provide facilities for public worship. These five reasons are significant insofar as they reveal a subtle shift in priorities. Whereas the fourth and fifth reasons would have been paramount 25 years previously, now the physical presence of a building was seen to be vital in itself to Congregational witness. The whole point, however, was

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66. C.M. (1839), p. 512; Albert Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 149.

67. See Joshua Wilson to J. Burder, May 20, 1846, C.L.Mss. Gb. 12.32. Wilson had discussed with John Angel James the possibility of building a chapel in Lathbury in Gloucestershire before a church was gathered.

to extend Congregationalism and Galloway was in no doubt that the time was right. Puseyism in the Establishment, divisions in Methodism, the free trade movement, the expansion of the electorate, the progress of education and much else all joined 'in doing their work in breaking up the last stronghold of religious bigotry' and in promoting 'sentiments and principles which we have for generations practically and thanklessly maintained.' As such the chapel building movement was to become 'practical evidence of the power of the voluntary principle.' Galloway saw the need of building up a physical base for advance in other spheres, particularly home and foreign missions and education. But to do this it was necessary to change traditional patterns of church-planting and that meant building first and gathering later. To this end he suggested that each county should have a Chapel Building Society with a national Chapel Extension Association coordinating the whole movement.<sup>68</sup> The thrust of Galloway's address pointed to a much greater degree of organizational cooperation than Congregationalists had hitherto known. But it also revealed, as had the education movement, both a confident assertion of the voluntary alternative to the State Establishment as well as the limitations on the voluntary system.

The actual process of chapel building was divided between the efforts of individuals and those of associations and societies. Individual efforts were especially important during the earlier part of the century and eventually dove-tailed into the work of the local associations and national societies. Most benefactors of chapel building concentrated on the local level. Timothy Durant was known as the Thomas Wilson of Dorset and the Rev. N. Pugsley noted to John Blackburn the liberality of his wealthy flock in Stockport in their support of chapel-building efforts.<sup>69</sup> One of the most prominent supporters of local causes was the wealthy

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68. C.Y.B. (1851), p. 84.

69. Densham and Ogle, Dorset, p. 204, N. Pugsley to John Blackburn, July 29, 1815, N.C.L.C., B.P., L52/3/55.

Manchester solicitor George Hadfield. He had entered the chapel building movement slowly. In 1824 he contributed to the new cause at Charlton Road, Manchester. The case had originally been Thomas Wilson's and as such Hadfield corresponded with Wilson on how to proceed.<sup>70</sup> By 1837 he was initiating the building of six new chapels around Manchester and preparing at the same time to challenge the privileges given to the Establishment of being excepted from some of the duties on building materials.<sup>71</sup> The plan was simply to build six chapels in areas of increased population, one of which would be able to hold larger denominational meetings. The difficulty was the effect that the current economic slump was having on the giving of wealthy northern Dissenters. Nevertheless Hadfield was convinced of the pressing urgency of the cause. 'I can scarcely imagine a more important measure for our denomination,' he wrote to Wilson in September 1837. If all went according to plan Congregationalists would be blessed with 'spiritual prosperity' which would give 'new powers & new ideas to proceed onwards more rapidly in order to meet the religious wants of our vastly increasing population.' Later, in 1853, Hadfield offered to give £5,000 towards the erection of 50 new chapels in Lancashire, although some felt that 20 new chapels would be a more realistic number.<sup>72</sup>

Another generous supporter of Congregational causes was the wealthy hosier manufacturer Samuel Morley. His position and wealth made him a natural object of appeals for new and struggling causes. Richard Knill of Wooton-under-Edge presented him with a cause in 1846 that had started with one man and a Sunday School and was now overflowing the house in which it met. He asked for £5 towards a new chapel and added that 'as soon as we begin another I will ask you again for help ...' Morley complied and Knill responded by urging upon him the pressing needs of Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. Morley's approach to chapel

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70. George Hadfield to Thomas Wilson, Sept. 11, 1824, C.L.Mss. II.c.34. For Hadfield's wide influence see Benjamin Nightingale, Lancashire Nonconformity; or sketches Historical and Descriptive of the Congregational and Old Presbyterian Churches in the County, four volumes (1893), I, p. 31; II, p. 164; p. 200; III, p. 228.

71. George Hadfield to Thomas Wilson, April 8, 1837, C.L.Mss. II.c.34. (H18); Hadfield to J.H. Hulme, April 8, 1837, II.c.34 (H18).

72. Benjamin Fletcher to Joshua Wilson, April 21, 1853, C.L.Mss. Gb.15 (49).

building was from a national and organizational perspective. As such he worked closely with the Congregational Union and the various chapel building societies to advance the good work. In 1844, for example, he visited Wales to see the needs the English-speaking Congregationalists. But his particular concern was for London. In this he worked closely with another chapel patron, J.N. Wilson, secretary of the Home Missionary Society, in coordinating the work and devising a 'cheaper order of chapels' devoid of 'useless ornament.' To this end he promised £500 for every new chapel built. Eventually 24 chapels were built and it was estimated that Morley spent about £14,000 in chapel building in the years 1864-70.<sup>73</sup>

The greatest benefactors of chapels were the father and son Thomas and Joshua Wilson. Wilson had made a considerable fortune early in life and retired in 1798 to give himself to good works. His philanthropic labours had commenced in 1794 when he helped Andrew Fuller get the Baptist Missionary Society off the ground, though most of his later work was directed to Congregational causes. His interest in chapels began in 1796 when he backed the effort to convert a small building attached to Hoxton College into a chapel. Thereafter he did not look back and church after church benefitted from his assistance.<sup>74</sup>

Wilson's chapel support can be generally divided into three categories. The first was for struggling causes; the second was for the purchase and reopening of disused chapels; and the third was for the establishing of completely new causes. Examples of the first and second categories are numerous. In 1798 Wilson found two chapels in Brentwood in Essex closed. He proceeded to send David Smith, a Hoxton student, to reopen the work with the promise of £60 support. Likewise in 1799 he was visiting Harwick and noted that the local meeting-house

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73. Edwin Hodder, Life of Samuel Morley (1887), p. 95, 158.

74. Thomas Wilson, 'Autobiographical Notes', C.L.Mss. II.d.5.

'was small and in very bad repair.' Thereupon he bought and repaired the building for £200.<sup>75</sup> Not infrequently Wilson took over disused chapels of other denominations and reopened them for Congregational worship. In 1801 he paid £20 for the trust deed of a chapel in Reigate and later paid out £150 for the repairs. When in 1827 John Burder needed funds for the purchase of a disused Episcopal chapel in Cheltenham Wilson generously sent him £1,200 without any conditions.<sup>76</sup> Many of the chapels that Wilson purchased, such as those in Lynn, Guildford, Epsom, Portsmouth and Liskeard, were originally in Presbyterian hands and were only released after long and painful negotiations.<sup>77</sup>

Wilson's greatest influence was on starting new causes. In 1808, for example, he noticed that there was no Congregational church in Lichfield. He wrote to a Mr. Salt stating that he trusted that 'the time... has come to favour Lichfield with the proclamation of the Gospel. It is an important station and doubtless you will reap if you faint not.'<sup>78</sup> Several years later he corresponded with the eminent David Bogue of Gosport about the state of religion in Oxford. Wilson was confident that 'if an Independent congregation was established there, it would flourish.' It took several years to get the new cause off the ground, but by 1831 there was a congregation and by 1835 a new chapel had been built with a £500 donation from Wilson.<sup>79</sup>

Of particular concern to Wilson was the growing suburbs of London and he came to assist chapels in Holloway, Kentish Town, Marylebone,

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75. Joshua Wilson, Thomas Wilson, pp. 213, 216. Another example is Dudley in Worcestershire where Wilson gave a student £20 to aid the people as well as £200 to remove the debt.
76. Ibid., p. 216. For a chapel in Leeds see p. 390. Other examples were Kemington Common (1816) at £800; West. St. Walworth (1818) at £500; Market Deeping (1813) at £100; Dereham (1816) at £10 and Wells (1816) at £50. Ibid., pp. 362, 363.
77. Ibid., pp. 216, 228, 233.
78. Ibid., p. 241.
79. Ibid., p. 300; C.M. (1835), p. 132.

Paddington, Islington and many surrounding towns such as Richmond. Writing again to Bogue in 1815 concerning chapels and ministers in London, Wilson insisted that 'on every vacancy that they should seek to have men of the first talents, energy, and zeal, to fill the places ... Great things might be done by such persons in the metropolis.' London was the face of Congregationalism and one of the areas of fastest growth and therefore Wilson undertook a large effort to build and supply chapels in important districts. In this way Wilson consolidated an informal connexion within the bounds of Independent communities and ministers who all had their common point in the largesse of their benefactor. At the root of this was Hoxton College which Wilson oversaw with a close eye and an open purse. Wilson supplied many of his chapels with Hoxton, and later Highbury, students who retained a loyalty to the man throughout their ministries. The tripartite relationship between Wilson, Hoxton and his ministers was often a stormy one that was due not a little to congregations, students and ministers chaffing under Wilson's rather authoritarian and interfering manner. Nevertheless his large-hearted generosity and evident concern for local Congregational interests cemented and bound together his 'connexion.'<sup>80</sup>

Three London examples will show something of the extent of Wilson's influence and control in the affairs of chapels he assisted. The first was Paddington Chapel which had been opened in 1813 at a cost of £7,000. Wilson's purpose had been, as he put it in the Evangelical Magazine, to supply 'a Gospel ministry to the comparatively destitute parts of London's western suburbs.' The first pastor was Henry Townley who later went out with the London Missionary Society to India. Thereafter Wilson had difficulty finding a permanent minister until 1818 when James Stratten came to the pulpit. Before Stratten came one of the candidates, John

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80. For Wilson's relations with his students and ministers see his correspondence: C.L.Mss. 4.IV.10; II.c.33.; N.C.L.C., 137/1; 184/6.

Sibree of Frome, had preached on three consecutive Sundays in 1816. Wilson sought to entice him by pointing out that having started with no one there were now 100 members and the 1,400 seats were almost full in the evenings.<sup>81</sup>

Another cause dear to Wilson's heart was Claremont Chapel in Pentonville. The chapel, completed in 1818, cost over £7,000 and opened with all the panoply that Metropolitan Dissent could muster. Thomas Raffles and John Leifchild were the preachers. Nevertheless Wilson had trouble finding a pastor for the church. His eye was on the young Essex minister John Blackburn with whom he opened a correspondence in 1820. By 1822 Wilson was able to inform Blackburn that the church had called him to its pastorate.<sup>82</sup> The third metropolitan church that Wilson took a keen interest in was Craven chapel situated near Oxford Street. After purchasing the land Wilson and the other patrons built a chapel at a cost of £11,000. By the time that John Leifchild became pastor in 1830 there were nearly 300 in attendance.<sup>83</sup> Through all these exertions the hand of Wilson in the affairs of these congregations can be seen. He often acted as church secretary of several churches at the same time and big congregational decisions were always taken in consultation with him.

Joshua Wilson followed closely in his father's footsteps, with some of their work overlapping several years. His correspondence is full of numerous requests for assistance in building chapels and liquidating debts.<sup>84</sup> Joshua tended to remain more aloof from the internal operations of congregations and only involved himself when there were difficult problems of one sort or another. One area close to his heart was Kent where he worked closely with the county association

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81. Joshua Wilson, Thomas Wilson, pp. 311, 314; J. Stratten to T. Wilson, May 18, 1818, C.L.Mss. II.c.336 (2d).

82. J. Wilson, Thomas Wilson, p. 316.

83. Ibid., p. 321; C.L.Mss. II.c.33.

84. See C.L.Mss. 4.I and 4.II.

to establish and strengthen chapels.<sup>85</sup> On occasion Wilson was drawn into local difficulties such as the messy merger of two chapels in Crambrook. One party had only agreed to the merger after the H.M.S. had said that it would no longer recognize the old church. Wilson agreed to assist the new cause, but found himself with a languishing congregation, discontent and obstinacy.<sup>86</sup> Elsewhere, such as at Stamford River in Essex, Wilson found himself with chapels occupied by obstinate congregations who did not take to the pastors he sent to them and objected to any attempts to merge small congregations together.<sup>87</sup>

Much of Wilson's efforts were directed towards denominational associations and societies for chapel building on both the local and national level. Thomas Wilson had been somewhat involved in early efforts to encourage systematic chapel building, particularly through itinerant societies and county associations and he took an interest in the early Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund. But by the late 1830's he was getting old and it was Joshua Wilson who contributed most to organized chapel building. One of the most important developments was the formation in 1832 of the Congregational Union. One of the motives behind the union was the desire for some rationality in Congregational chapel building and to that task the new union almost immediately gave itself. The problem arose from the difficulties faced by various home mission societies such as the H.M.S. and the V.I.A. Not only were they faced with a shortage of funds to carry out their work, but many of their mission stations and chapels were chronically indebted. We

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85. See C.L.Mss. 36, 'Sundry letters relating to churches in Kent.' These are mainly from Henry Baker to Joshua Wilson in 1861.
86. Ibid., George Amos to J.W. Massie, March 19, 1857; December 3, 1855; Nov. 27, 1857; M.R. Jull to A. Turner, April 11, 1844.
87. Samuel Conway to Joshua Wilson, Jan. 11, 1841; J. Gilbert to Wilson, July 8, 1852; Sept. 8, 1852; M.J. Haughin to Wilson, Feb. 5, 1853, C.L.Mss. 12.

have already noted how the union had appointed a committee under the Dorset Congregational leader John Brown of Wareham and that he had corresponded with a number of leading Congregationalists concerning the matter. Brown's report repeated the customary criticism of the chapel-begging system, held out the examples of the Baptists and Welsh Congregationalists and urged greater cooperation between county associations. The amount of debt in England was about £57,000. The recommendations of the committee were far-reaching: more control on chapel building by the associations, itemized expenditure, the raising of at least half the required funds from within the county concerned, a general collection for chapel building and debts in all the churches every year, a general investment fund and a national committee to examine all cases.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately little was done and concern shifted from the union, to separate societies for that express purpose. Even so the union occasionally took some steps to deal with the problem. In 1853, for example, the union deputed Samuel Morley to investigate the plight of English-speaking Congregational chapels in Wales. More problematic was the difficulty with the H.M.S.'s chapel liabilities while that society was affiliated to the union. The point came up in discussion during the 1839 negotiations for affiliation. At the Birmingham Autumnal meetings that year it was decided that the union would not be responsible for any financial obligations arising from the H.M.S. chapels and missions. Some delegates, such as John Blackburn, objected to this decision and reasoned that if Congregationalism was to advance chapels had to be built before congregations were gathered. But such was the fear of debt and centralized control that Blackburn was in the minority.<sup>89</sup>

With the union backing away from active involvement in chapel building the impetus went to local associations and societies. Outside London the most active chapel building societies were in Lancashire. Congregationalists

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88. Mss. copy of the Committee report on Chapel Cases, C.L.Mss. II.c.31; Peel, These Hundred Years, p. 100.

89. C.M. (1839), p. 841.

early on took an interest in building chapels in Liverpool. In 1836 the old board for examining chapel cases was terminated and its functions taken over by the Liverpool Association. With this change new regulations also came into force: only two cases were to be presented in each quarter, no case was to be considered that was not properly in the hands of trustees and that possessed a Sunday school, preference was to be given to those cases nearest Liverpool and account was to be taken of those chapels that could contribute some of the costs. Interestingly enough the association was not limited to building chapels in Liverpool.<sup>90</sup> By 1843, however, the Association was replaced by the more specialized Liverpool Congregational Chapel Fund Association. The rules were much the same, except that a two year moratorium was put on appeals for cases from outside Liverpool. The Association's object was twofold: 'to aid the liquidation of debts on Chapels of the Independent order, and to promote the erection of suitable places of worship in destitute parts of Liverpool and vicinity.' The fund was to be annually divided between these two objects and in the first year £800 was distributed. By 1847 the Association was able to report that most of the debts had been liquidated and that the emphasis should now be placed on chapel building. As the L.C.C.F.A. moved towards church extension it did so in cooperation with the Associated Churches of Liverpool in order to promote ministerial benefit, lay agency and education. The Association was conscious that it could not 'increase our sanctuaries merely for denominational extension.' It had to do so cognizant of the over all needs of Liverpool and the ability of other denominations to meet them.<sup>90a</sup>

Such cooperation was not, however, easily forthcoming, largely because of the weakness of the Associated Churches. The 1849 annual meeting of

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90. C.M. (1836), p. 257.

90a. Second (1844), Fifth (1847), Seventh (1849), Tenth (1852) Annual Reports of the Liverpool Congregational Chapel Fund Association, C.L.Mss. Gb.15.

the L.C.C.F.A. was asked to account for this weakness and in 1852 it was seen as necessary to call for the revival of the Associated Churches. The L.C.C.F.A. continued its work building new chapels and liquidating debts. In 1849 it reduced the debt on the chapel in Ormskirk from £1,050 to £450 with the help of the Lancashire Association. But it was admitted that chapel building efforts in Liverpool were languishing. In 1852 the General Fund contained £92.16.3. when there was still a debt on the Liverpool-Birkenhead chapels of about £5,000. In 1844 Great George Street Chapel had contributed £444.18.10. to the Fund, in 1847 £315.13.0. in 1849 £79.1.0. and in 1852 £10.2.0. And while the number of churches had increased from six in 1844 to nine in 1852, only two, Great George St. and Claremont, contributed anything to the Fund in 1852.<sup>91</sup> When Joshua Wilson enquired of the Rev. W. Crosfield in 1861 about the state of chapel building in Liverpool Crosfield had to confess that little was being done. He pointed out that this reflected the sorry state of Liverpool Congregationalism itself, where except for the two main chapels and one in the suburbs the rest were in 'a very languishing condition.' What disturbed him particularly was that little was being done for the working classes. Plans to build a chapel in a working class area from the proceeds of the jubilee of Thomas Raffles had fallen through and the funds had gone to Lancashire Independent College in Manchester. It was out of this concern that a new Liverpool Congregational Aid and Chapel Building Society was established in 1857, but its effectiveness seemed to be limited.<sup>92</sup>

Chapel building efforts were little better off in Manchester. The efforts of George Hadfield and others led to the founding in 1852 of a chapel building society 'for the purpose of promoting the erection

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91. Ibid.

92. W. Crosfield to Joshua Wilson, July 21, 1861; leaflets of the Liverpool Congregational Aid and Chapel Building Society, C.L.Mss. II.c.17.

of new chapels in Lancashire and its immediate neighbourhood.' The plan was to assist in building fifty new chapels in five years. To secure its success the Lancashire society was determined only to assist new causes that already existed and not to build up from nothing. Funds were collected to the sum of £35,000. The difficulty came when Lancashire was hit by a severe trade slump in the mid-1850's that had the effect of sapping up most of the new society's support and led finally to its demise in 1857. Richard Slate, one of the Lancashire Congregational Chapel Building Society's leaders and a minister in Preston, wrote to Joshua Wilson in 1857 concerning the crisis:

The dreadful state of commercial affairs in Lancashire, especially in Preston, for the last nine months, has been a very great hindrance to our intended new chapel. During all the years in Preston we have had nothing like it. For the last three months we have been at a complete standstill, but hope soon after the commencement of the new year to recommence our efforts, and when we do we shall be obliged to look for increased help from our friends at a distance.

In spite of all the effort the problem of chapel cases seemed almost to be back at the point from which it started.

Another example of a county effort to tackle the chapel debt and building problem can be taken from Sussex. In 1836 the Sussex Congregational Society met and discussed the question of chapel debts and the possibility of

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93. Richard Slate to Joshua Wilson, April 30, 1839; Jan. 13, 1853; August 13, 1855; Dec. 9, 1859, C.L.Mss. II.c.17. Manchester area Congregationalists were active in chapel building. In 1837 the Congregational noted that the Manchester and Salford Congregational Association had been responsible for the construction of six new chapels, C.M. (1838) p. 812. But their concern was not only with chapel building. In 1838 local Congregationalists sent a petition to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in regard to duties charged to Dissenters on chapel building materials, C.M. (1838), p. 189.

setting up a debt liquidation fund. This was in response to the proposals of the Congregational Union to liquidate debts on a county basis. As such the Sussex Society resolved to 'establish a fund for liquidating all debts on the present chapels of the Congregational order in the county of Sussex, and for the erection of an enlargement of other such chapels, together with school rooms attached, in those parts of the county where they may be required.' Subsequently meetings were held in 1837 with the result that the Sussex Chapel Building Fund was established in September that year. Of the twenty-five chapels that had been built during the previous twenty years, twelve had debts totalling £2,896.11.10.<sup>94</sup>

It was to London that the majority of chapel appeals came and it was from London that a national solution to the chapel problem would originate. There had always been some local cooperation in chapel building, particularly through the metropolitan itinerating societies and individual cases. Therefore it was with interest that Congregationalists noted the new London Baptist Chapel Building Society in 1826.<sup>95</sup> Perhaps it was this that moved the London Congregational Union to open a chapel in 1827, though later similar efforts failed.<sup>96</sup> Little more was done until 1838 when the Metropolitan Chapel Building Fund was established. Initially its aim was nonsectarian, disavowing, as its prospectus said, 'every feeling of rivalry or sectarian partisanship.' Even so, the Fund was intended for the erection of dissenting chapels 'in the race to supply the religious needs of the Metropolis.' The fund's first efforts were in Lambeth and Regents Park and sites were being sought in 1840 in Camden Town and Westminster. By 1840 £1,693.9.5. had been collected for the Fund.<sup>97</sup> Thomas Wilson was one of the Fund's most active supporters, for which he opened chapels and seemingly oversaw the finances for a few years.<sup>98</sup>

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94. C.M. (1836), p. 655; (1837), p. 665.

95. C.M. (1826), p. 275

96. C.M. (1827), p. 511

97. Circular, Metropolitan Chapel Fund Association, 1840. N.C.L.C., B.P. L52/5/90; J.C. Galloway to John Blackburn, Feb. 27, 1834, L52/5/95.

98. N.C.L.C., B.P., 986/1-42.

The Fund went on to establish itself. In its 1851 report the Fund, now the London Congregational Chapel Building Society, declared an income of £5,912.12.0. and expenditure of £4,621.14.4. Two new chapels had recently been completed in Somers Town and on City Road and plans were being laid for fifty new ones. The purpose of the chapels was that they would be 'fortresses of evangelical truth - points of resistance to the assaults of Romanism, Puseyism and Infidelity...'<sup>99</sup>

Parallel to these local efforts was a growing concern for coordinated action across the nation as a whole and by the late 1840's concern was being expressed in the higher councils of Congregationalism over the continuing plight of many chapels. In 1843 the union committee again considered the problem but nothing came of it.<sup>100</sup> John Ely brought the subject out into the public in 1846 when he gave a lengthy paper at the Annual Meeting of the union entitled, 'The Economics of Congregationalism.' Faced as the Congregational Union was with an increasing number of societies that required considerable financial support the Union had appointed a committee with Ely as its chairman to review its various commitments. Among the subjects considered were the two related areas of the ministry and chapel debts. Chapel debts, the report concluded, depressed the effectiveness of the ministry and hampered Congregational prosperity. Nevertheless Ely did not see a national organization as the way ahead and expressed his preference for local and county efforts. The same applied to chapel building. Ely wanted town and city congregations to undertake rural church extension. In all this it must be remembered that Ely was only a reluctant supporter of the Congregational Union and was highly suspicious of all centralized organizations.<sup>101</sup>

The questions that Ely raised were not taken up until 1849. In the May Assembly the union committee reported that far from engendering a

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99. C.Y.B. (1849), p. 22; (1851), p. 271; (1857), p. 5.

100. C.M. (1843), p. 958

101. C.Y.B. (1846), p. 30ff.

spirit of independency the multiplicity of small chapels was creating a body of weak dependent congregations.<sup>102</sup> A paper delivered at the October meeting that year probed deeper into the problem. Significantly the paper signalled a rethinking on the nature of voluntary support. Chapel extension and ministerial support could not be based on the principle of supply and demand. Rather, Congregational voluntarism had to be grounded in 'the tendencies and energy of religious benevolence.' This in turn required 'a permanent community, strengthened by combination and wise plans, to maintain the truths and interests committed to their trust.' In short, Congregationalists needed organization. The paper's conclusion was important:

(W)e must continue an organized community, with common sentiments, objects and resources - all essentially voluntary. Also that this involves the necessity for constant, aggressive efforts ... that to continue we must grow and that to grow we must labour ...

The difficulty was that resources were scarce and needed to be apportioned between the various good causes. Regard had to be paid on the one hand 'to our free principles' and on the other to the possibility of abuse of funds. The answer was in regulating the communication of such aid through the cooperation of churches, associations and national societies.<sup>103</sup> This theme was further developed in the Congregational Union's letter to the churches that year. Robert Halley, the author, pointed out that even Congregational principles could be stretched beyond their legitimacy when no room was left for 'practical suggestions in our arrangements for doing the work of the Lord.' While needing to guard their principles, Congregationalists had to adapt to the times. Halley held out a vision of 'intimate and harmonious relations' between churches in order to secure the interests of Congregationalism.<sup>104</sup>

The decisive event leading to the founding of a national chapel building society was J.C. Galloway's paper on the subject at the 1851 Autumnal meeting which we have already noted. According to Galloway

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102. C.Y.B. (1849), p. 17.

103. C.Y.B. (1849), pp. 61-62.

104. C.Y.B. (1849), p. 72, 'Letter to the churches on their position and duties relative to the present times.'

everything was in the Congregationalists' favour and as such it was all the more urgent to take hold of the opportunity. 'We are voluntaries,' he said, 'We need the practical evidence of the power of the voluntary principle in addition to the verbal.' He went on to press for more extensive chapel building, although he pointed out that Congregational attitudes did not make for the sort of concerted action required. His proposal sought to meet this difficulty. The burden of the work was to be carried by county chapel building societies whose efforts would be coordinated by a national chapel extension association. The latter would become the repository of information and an agency to point out areas of need, assist local efforts and in some cases to take total responsibility.<sup>105</sup>

The committee of the Union followed up Galloway's address by sending it to the churches for consideration. The response was good and in May 1852 the Assembly was asked to establish a society for chapel building. Membership was to be open to all the churches with no stipulated subscription. The society was intended to supplement other efforts, to be based on regional associations and to be separate from the union. At the 1852 Autumnal meetings the English Congregational Chapel Building Society was officially formed for the purpose of 'originating movements of chapel extension...' Contrary to the May meeting it was decided to charge a subscription of one guinea for each church. The committee was to consist of 36 members - one third ministers, two thirds laity - and with an equal representation from the country and London. The committee's responsibility was to investigate applications and to ensure the suitability of the cause. No funds were to go towards school buildings, manses, chapel debts or enlargements.<sup>106</sup>

The new society advanced rapidly. The public response was good and within the first six months almost £1,000 had been collected. Nevertheless

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105. C.Y.B. (1851), p. 84.

106. C.Y.B. (1853), pp. 18, 98f.

it was necessary to assure Congregationalists that while the E.C.C.B.S. was based on 'systematic and general action' it was also compatible with the due maintenance of our distinctive ecclesiastical polity.' The society sought to avoid potential dangers through the composition of its committee and its supplementary character to local efforts. The benefits were numerous, the first report stated, not least in proving through its efficiency 'the viability of the voluntary principle.'<sup>107</sup> In addition to its work of general promotion, fund-raising and coordination, the E.C.C.B.S. dealt with some individual cases according to a strict procedure:

Each grant is uniformly voted on the most productive principle compatible with the real ability of the parties aided. It is voted at all only on the condition of the satisfactory character of the entire local chapel-building movement - satisfactory in respect of its origin; the real need of the erection; its approval by neighbouring pastors and churches; the accommodation, cost, style and position of the building; the amount of local contributions; the willingness of the parties to abstain from general personal applications in aid of the case; the satisfactory nature of the tenure of the land, and of the provisions of the deed of trust.

All the projects were visited. The society also tried to supply all the information necessary for local churches on employing architects, drawing up trust deeds, securing builders and the like.<sup>108</sup>

The success of the society was evident in its funds and in the number of cases it was able to take on. The chapel building cause was given a stimulus in 1854 when the returns of the 1851 religious census were released. Congregationalists, while pleased at their relative strength, were shocked at their weakness in the larger towns and cities where they had thought that they were strong. George Smith, the union secretary, recommended that Congregationalists meet the challenge not through the founding of another society, but through augmenting the ones that already existed, particularly the E.C.C.B.S.<sup>109</sup> That year the society reported

107. C.Y.B. (1854), p. 75, 80.

108. C.Y.B. (1856), p. 76.

109. C.Y.B. (1855), pp. 33, 83.

that it had been able to make nineteen grants totalling £5,000 and that to date five chapels were in the process of being built.<sup>110</sup> The following year the society's income came to £5,345 with a total for the previous three years of £12,245. Since 1852 the E.C.C.B.S. had received eighty applications and made conditional grants to forty-one. Sixteen new chapels had been opened, twelve were being built and thirteen were in preparation. J.C. Galloway, the secretary, was able to report that the society was in a good financial position and that accordingly it had planned fifty chapels to be completed by 1857. This required a great increase of funds and he suggested to this end an annual collection in all the churches.<sup>111</sup> In 1856 it was reported that the E.C.C.B.S. had undertaken the erection of fifty-nine chapels and that the income that year amounted to £6,017.1.8. With such progress the 1857 Report could confidently look at the Society's contribution:

By advice and influence, the Society had greatly aided the work of chapel extension; by discouraging the old begging system, it has economized the means of the churches, and checked a great and growing evil; and by its plans and pecuniary aid, it has enabled many congregations to carry into effect their cherished desire of building an appropriate Christian sanctuary.

By then sixty-two chapels had been aided.<sup>112</sup> Within four years seventy-four more chapels had been assisted.<sup>113</sup> Income through these years remained around £5,000.<sup>114</sup>

Behind these figures was the jostling for grants. Joshua Wilson was continually appealed to to exercise some of his considerable influence with the E.C.C.B.S. W.E. Parrett wrote to him in 1859 concerning a new chapel in Stillingbourne in Kent and his need of £450. Whether Wilson

110. C.Y.B. (1855), p. 79.

111. C.Y.B. (1856), p. 76.

112. C.Y.B. (1858), p. 43.

113. C.Y.B. (1862), p. 325.

114. C.Y.B. (1863), p. 346. 1862 saw both a new movement to build chapels in commemoration of the Great Ejection of 1662 and Parliamentary legislation, some of it introduced by the Baptist Sir Morton Peto and George Hadfield, intended to simplify many of the building laws that affected Dissenters. See C.Y.B. (1863), p. 388 and Henry Baker to Joshua Wilson, April 8, 1862, C.L.Mss. 36.

said anything or not, John Stoughton opened the chapel in 1860.<sup>115</sup> Others were not as fortunate. John Davis wrote to Wilson in 1855 requesting his advocacy with the E.C.C.B.S. When he received his grant he was disappointed as he did not have enough to build the school rooms he desired.<sup>116</sup>

Chapel building, perhaps more than any other field, sharply focussed both the importance of the voluntary principle for Congregationalism and the difficulties of putting it into practice. If anywhere voluntarism should have been most clearly expressed in the provision of places of worship. While Congregationalists had a strong challenge in this area from an Establishment that enjoyed State patronage, the challenge was neither as strong nor as crippling as what they faced in the area of elementary education. Even so, Congregationalists had to come to terms with limited resources to build their chapels and advance their home mission. The regulation of chapel begging and the control of chapel debts was necessary in order to make this exercise of the voluntary principle more efficient. With that accomplished Congregational chapel building became a reasonably successful enterprise. We will see this as we now turn in conclusion to the Bicentenary commemoration of 1862. But there were limits as was witnessed to by the Congregationalists' own claim that each chapel was a monument to the voluntary principle. Like most monuments there was more than one story to be told. Alone each chapel showed the voluntary principle's vitality in that locality, but together they were a witness to its limitations.

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115. W.E. Parrett to Joshua Wilson, July 1, 1862, C.L.Mss. 36. See also Henry Baker to Joshua Wilson, Nov. 6, 1862, C.L.Mss. 36.

116. James Davis to Joshua Wilson, no day or month, 1855; Feb. 25, 1856; March 1856; Feb. 1857. C.L.Mss. 36.

## CONCLUSION

On August 24, 1862 Congregationalists throughout England and Wales commemorated the ejection two hundred years before of nearly 2,000 Puritan clergymen from the Church of England. Throughout the year this commemoration occasioned numerous efforts, notably by pen and mortar, intended to vindicate the voluntary principle and to strengthen the denomination. Yet the Congregationalists' bold triumphalism told only half the story. It was true that the community was in a better condition than it had been for almost two decades. Its colleges and schools were relatively healthy, new chapels were being built and no one could doubt the importance of Congregationalism as a religious and political force in the land. But on the other hand, and behind the confident face, were financially pressed societies, theological tensions, a failure to reach the working classes, still unsteady denominational machinery and numerous unfulfilled expectations. Political Dissent was in the doldrums. Dissenters had failed to make any gains in representation in the 1859 General Election and several legislative measures had come to nought, most notably in the areas of church rates, Dissenters' burials and admission to Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>1</sup>

As Congregationalists remembered 'Black Bartholomew' they could reflect on how the stance their ancestors took in 1662 had been and was to be expressed in the very different world of the nineteenth century. As we have seen, Congregationalism had undergone a profound transformation since 1800. Classical Independency had been modified to meet new challenges and this was manifest in the formation of a national union, county associations, the various societies and united endeavours in areas such as education. In spite of this transformation,

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1. G.I.T. Machin, Politics and the Churches in Great Britain (Oxford 1977), pp. 309-310, 322.

however, Congregationalists held firmly to the voluntary principle as expressed in their polity. Not everyone read ecclesiastical history and the current state of religious affairs in the same way. 1862 also saw an Anglican attack on the Congregationalist heritage at the point where it was weakest - to wit, the fact that the Puritan Independents were state churchmen without the least suggestion of 19th century voluntarism. This was somewhat embarrassing for their descendants who had to admit that it was at least in part true. Robert Vaughan, in the Congregational Union's official memorial volume, English Nonconformity, conceded the point and could only find comfort in the fact that the circumstances of the times had not permitted 'the full development of the principles of religious liberty.' Voluntarism was a small seed that took a long time to grow. Vaughan preferred to see the vindication of Dissent in its successes in the present age and that when it had been weak it had been despised but that now that it was strong it was feared.<sup>2</sup>

It is not surprising that the controversy was most heated when Congregationalists engaged evangelical Anglicans in debate. Evangelical Anglicans were among the most hostile to the Bicentenary commemorations as well as to the general political aspirations of Dissent.<sup>3</sup> For their part Congregationalists were quick to point out the inherent contradictions in the Anglican position. Much of the work of evangelical Anglicans was based on the voluntary principle in practice, if not in principle, and many had profound reservations about 'Popish' elements in the Prayer Book and influences in the Church. In an address at the 1861 Autumnal meeting of the Congregational Union in Birmingham Vaughan asked at what price evangelicals remained in the Church of England. 'The principles as Evangelical clergymen - the very principles held by the Puritan clergymen of 1662 - oblige us to look with painful feeling

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2. Robert Vaughan, English Nonconformity (London 1862), pp. 339, 972.

3. B.Q.R. (1862), p. 213. This reference is to a review essay on eight books on the Bicentenary.

upon the assent and consent they profess to give.'<sup>4</sup> R.W. Dale, who hosted the meeting, pitched into evangelical Churchmen with even greater vehemence. In response to a tract by his Birmingham colleague Dr. Miller, Dale called on evangelicals in the Establishment to come out. He sought to go beyond points of polity and politics and to show instead the way in which the two communities had evolved very different spirits that emanated from their conformity and nonconformity respectively. Sir Culling Eardley Smith tried vainly to calm the controversy and Vaughan regretted the renewed fragmentation of the evangelical consensus.<sup>5</sup> But in fact the evangelical world was divided by the much deeper cleavage between Church and Dissent which would only begin to be healed later in the century.

Meanwhile Congregationalists sought a practical expression of their voluntary churchmanship. As one would expect Joshua Wilson was intimately involved in the Bicentenary plans. In 1861 he delivered a paper to the autumn assembly in which he proposed several possible ways to celebrate. In addition to the apologetical offensive, the two other proposals were for one hundred new chapels around the country and a denominational headquarters to be named the Memorial Hall. The hall did not materialize until 1872, but the new chapels were another matter and perhaps more than anything else symbolized the condition of Congregationalism in 1862. This was recognized by J.G. Miall in his address from the chair. After admitting that it had taken Congregationalists since 1832 'to reconcile ourselves to our shadow', he went on to assert that time was past concentrating upon 'the morbid autonomy - of religious and ecclesiastical life,' and that time had come to advance through 'a large and generous union'

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4. Robert Vaughan, The Case of the Ejected Ministers of 1662 (London 1862), p. 15.
5. A.W. Dale, The Life of R.W. Dale of Birmingham (London 1898), pp. 162, 172; B.Q.R. (1862), p. 220. 'It appears sufficiently that, not merely in the ecclesiastico-political questions which are not prominent but in the main issues which divide our parties, Church and Dissent are respectively the constituent elements of both.'

of churches, societies and agencies. Miall had chapel building specifically in mind which had and would continue to 'enlarge the spiritual borders of Dissent.' Wilson echoed the chairman by seeing chapel building as the key area of advance and pressed the union to concentrate on London and the large towns.<sup>6</sup>

Wilson had a good deal of support for his efforts. Samuel Morley wrote to him in 1862 saying that he was 'very anxious that such measures should be adopted as will leave us, as a denomination, stronger for our great work at the end of the year or two during which we shall be engaged, not only in spreading information, but in wisely expending money which will, I trust, be raised as an expression of gratitude.' Morley wanted to see the funds applied to local projects designated by the donors and not by a central London committee. He personally pressed the case for building cheap chapels in London in conjunction with the Home Missionary Society.<sup>7</sup> Henry Baker, a leading figure in the Kent Association, advocated a similar policy. While appreciating the spiritual character of the commemoration he believed that it should not be to the exclusion of practical good works. As far as Kent was concerned this should take the form of chapel building, the extinction of chapel debts and the promotion of home missions. Unfortunately, Baker had a hard time convincing the county association of his views when it met at Chatham.<sup>8</sup>

The chapel building programme was moderately successful. Since it was highly decentralized it is difficult to arrive at an exact figure for the amount of money raised or the number of buildings built. Robert Vaughan

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6. C.Y.B. (1862), pp. 46, 60. Wilson proposed to celebrate the Bicentenary by chapel building, the erection of a Memorial Hall, the propagation of the principles of the Ejection through lectures and literature, the erection of a monument in the Bunhill Burial Fields.
  7. Edwin Hodder, The Life of Samuel Morley (London 1887), p. 156.
  8. Henry Baker to Joshua Wilson, April 8, 1862, C.L.Mss. 36.

estimated that £150,000 was raised by Congregationalists. By October 1862 £100,000 had been raised for the Memorial Fund and the union estimated a figure of £151,774 for all new (96), enlarged (38), altered (73) and improved chapels. Of course some of this building would have occurred anyway, but much was undoubtedly stimulated by the Bicentenary.<sup>9</sup> An ambitious scheme was undertaken by the Lancashire Congregational Union with the intention of building thirty new chapels. In spite of the poor economic condition of the county the chapels were built with the aid of a memorial fund that collected £12,000 in its first appeal.<sup>10</sup> It was widely felt, however, that Congregationalists were overstretched and that little more could be exacted from the churches. The Rev. J. Woodwark apologized to Joshua Wilson for the meagre contributions from the Hampshire churches and pointed out that 'the principle Congregations are already engaged in costly undertakings in connection with their own places and neighbourhoods.'<sup>11</sup>

Demand on the various Bicentenary funds was considerable. F.S. Williams pointed out to the 1862 autumn assembly that applications for grants far exceeded the subscriptions to the Memorial Fund.<sup>12</sup> Charles Gilbert of the Metropolitan Chapel Building Society found ample needy cases for the funds, but complained that too much was ear-marked for special projects in areas that least needed assistance. In response to an appeal by Wilson for more chapels, Gilbert wrote back that all the work the society had in view would 'require all the money they can expect to realize either from the ordinary or Bicentenary contributions of their friends.'<sup>13</sup> The price of the voluntary principle was seemingly limitless.

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9. Albert Peel, These Hundred Years: a History of the Congregational Union of England and Wales 1831 to 1931 (London 1832), p. 385.
  10. W.G. Robinson, A History of the Lancashire Congregational Union (London 1952).
  11. J. Woodwark to Joshua Wilson, May 26, 1862, C.L. Mss. Gb11 (6).
  12. C.Y.B. (1863), p. 65.
  13. Charles Gilbert to Joshua Wilson, May 8, June 19, 1862, C.L.4II. Gilbert had to persistently appeal to wealthy contributors in order to top up the available funds. For one London chapel £250 each came from Wilson and the Bicentenary Fund and £1,000 from Samuel Morley, Gilbert then asked Wilson for £500 more. Gilbert to Wilson, April 24 1862, C.L.Mss. 4II.

The Bicentenary emphasis on chapel building highlighted the limitations on the practice of the voluntary principle. The political war was far from over and it was to take dogged persistence to achieve final redress of the Dissenters' grievances. Indeed the greatest battle was yet to be fought in 1902 over the old chestnut of elementary education. In the meantime Congregationalists had to build up their denominational organization. Certainly they were the stronger for their denominational institutions however much there was left for improvement. There is no doubt that the union itself provided, with all its weaknesses, the cohesion necessary for active involvement in public affairs. After 1870 the union would be ably led for thirty years by its secretary Alexander Henny. There were still some difficulties, but the undisciplined Independency of the earlier part of the century had been largely tamed and the denominational institutions given a stability that they had previously lacked. In short, Congregationalists had worked out a way of being a Christian community in the equipoise of late 19th century England. Like the society about it Congregationalism had weathered a period of adjustment and had emerged with perhaps a more limited vision of its mission but with greater confidence in doing what it could well.

This stability and confidence would not have been possible had Congregationalists not discovered the boundaries to their voluntary churchmanship. The rather sweeping voluntarism of some early apologists and the hotter heads associated with Edward Miall gave way to the more measured voluntarism of Ralph Wardlaw and R.W. Dale. This was reflected in politics by the stalemate that existed between Church and Dissent from the last 1840's on. Both Church and Dissent recognized that neither could have its own way; both were limited by the strength of the other and by changing social patterns that neither could control. The crisis in faith, beginning with theological tensions in both camps and later taking on the threatening forms of infidelity and Darwinism, not to mention the shadow of Rome, provided English Protestantism with a challenge that transcended the older differences. Of course the old antagonism remained and if anything the dissenting world became even more distinct and self-contained.

But the differences became more and more peripheral to the larger concerns of society. With a limited Establishment religion became more of a private and less of a public concern.

The limitations of voluntarism were discovered in various spheres. In chapel building Congregationalists simply could not keep up with the challenge of the Establishment. They looked with some envy upon the successes of the Free Church of Scotland which was able to plant alternative parishes all over Scotland. English Congregationalists had to content themselves with the multiplicity of Nonconformity and their own 'mission' to the middle classes. Some leaders, such as Brewin Grant and Samuel Morley, were concerned with the failure of the denomination to reach the labouring classes, but in the end Congregationalists rallied around Thomas Binney's concept of a special mission to the respectable middle of English society that was somehow inherent in the character of Congregationalism. Congregationalism was strongest where the middle-classes were strongest. Earlier it had been expected that if a chapel was built in a mission area and the right minister was procured then a congregation would be gathered and a church formed. Unfortunately this did not always work. The character of Independency, even organized Independency, militated against an effective comprehensive mission. Chapels rose and fell as their congregations migrated from one place to another. Even the great John Angel James was left with a depleted congregation at Carr's Lane in the 1850's.<sup>14</sup> The corollary of this was the fact that benefactors gave to churches in areas where Dissent was strong and not in areas where it should have advanced. The weakness of Congregational chapel building was further attested to by its dependence upon a relative few wealthy men such as Thomas and Joshua Wilson, Samuel Morley and George Hadfield. Joshua Wilson pointed out in 1861 that his father built every new chapel in London between 1800 and 1840.<sup>15</sup> This was corrected somewhat by the chapel building

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14. John Angel James to Joshua Wilson, January 23, 1847; January 3, 1853, C.L.Mss. H.e.8.

15. C.Y.B. (1862), p. 62.

societies, but these only further indicated the limitation of resources.

Education was the other area of concentrated voluntary endeavour. Here too the task was beyond the resources of the Congregational community. Congregationalists were torn between principle and need. Principle drove the union to establish its own committee of education in 1843 and further drove a wedge between Congregationalism and the British and Foreign School Society in 1845. All but a few moderates were compelled to become educational voluntarists in 1847. Yet in spite of all the work Congregationalists had to concede that the task was too much and were forced by need to accept some state aid in 1867. The churches simply could not support a thoroughly voluntarist system of education, though the principle continued to be maintained with vigour. And what obtained in education obtained elsewhere. Home and colonial missions confronted the opposition of the Establishment on several fronts as well as the inadequacy of the support of their own constituency. Perhaps the only area in which a thorough voluntarism could be practised was in the pages of the dissenting periodicals.

What we have seen then is the containment of the voluntary principle as practised by the Congregational community. The principle emerged from the evangelical consensus largely as a defence of the community's pastoral structure against the threat of the Establishment and the competition of other Nonconformist bodies. Its roots were in the puritan tradition and it was presented with an impeccable Congregationalist pedigree, but it was carefully tailored to the needs of 19th century Independency. As the evangelical consensus splintered Congregationalists consolidated their own denominational structures and the voluntary principle was sharpened and applied. Political events forced the community to take a more militant stance. But by the 1850's the voluntarist experiment had come to an end. Congregational institutions were strengthened and Congregationalists remained staunch Nonconformists, but now their Nonconformity was accommodated to the wider concerns of politics and religion.

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