

Presbyterianism and Independency

A Critical look at certain Principles of Church Government.

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Originally printed under the headings of Chapters IX and X in the author's prize-winning book "**The Government of the Kingdom of Christ**", first published in 1872 by Johnstone, Hunter & Co. of Edinburgh, and James Nisbet & Co. of London. The Rev. James Moir Porteus was Free Kirk minister sometime during the 1870's at the combined charges of Wanlockhead and Leadhills, in the lead and gold-mining districts of the Lowther Hills in South-Western Scotland, some 25 - 30 miles north of Dumfries. Porteus was the author of about seven books, and many booklets, all soundly in the Scots Calvinist tradition, and was awarded the degree Doctor of Divinity from the University of Edinburgh. *Editor.*

"The Church, which is His body" (Eph.1:23) **"Is Christ divided ?" (1 Cor. 1 : 13)**

SOCIETIES of Christians hold - (1.) that they are independent of each other, church organization being complete in each worshipping assembly; and (2.) That church members are entitled to regulate church affairs, the governing power resting solely in the brotherhood. These are the two leading ideas of the Independent or Congregational form of church government.

The first Independent congregation was formed in England in the year 1616 by the efforts of Henry Jacob. He embraced and improved the plan proposed by Brown of Norwich, which was very much a reaction from the prelatie persecutions of the period. This view was first broached by Morely of the French Reformed Church in 1561. In England it became a subject of controversial discussion. A considerable number of Christians have since embraced the Independent or Congregational plan and contend that it was prescribed by Christ and His apostles. Not only is this held by those bearing the name of Independents, but also by branches of the Church having other designations. As the peculiarities of this scheme are not laid down in

any common formula, creed, or confession, and as each congregation, isolated from all others, may differ widely in important points, their general principles alone can be gathered from the writings of particular advocates, and the practices of these Churches.¹

The designation 'Independent' arises from the assertion that each congregation is intrusted with its own local government, being in that respect complete and isolated from every other. Their fundamental position is, that there are only two senses in which the word 'church' is used in the New Testament : (1.) Either a single congregation, or (2.) The whole collective body of Christians. It is then maintained that the New Testament churches were local, isolated, and independent in government, unless for advice under difficulties.

This is not a full statement of the matter. It is true that congregations had then equal rights. No one congregation had a right of control over any other. The question necessary to be discussed properly is, whether the churches had a common government ? This is denied by Independents. The affirmative is provable by two propositions:-

First, The Church is one body, possessing a common government. The object of the apostles' care was not isolated churches, but parts of a whole - the one body of Christ. Paul authoritatively wrote to Rome before he had seen that church. So Peter (wrote) to others. Constantly, as far as circumstances permitted, they acted together as one governing body for that one Church. And that not merely as apostles, but as elders; for they associated the elders with them in acts of government, and commanded the elders so to act together.

It is true that New Testament churches met in one place for divine worship, or at least, for discipline and government. These churches are spoken of in the plural number; for every several assembly having legally constituted officers is a rightly constituted church. Still, it must be inquired whether, in particular localities, there were more Christians than one place could accommodate for divine worship, having a plurality of ministers, governed by one association of officers, and yet termed one Church ? The affirmative of this fourfold question has been amply substantiated from scripture in the previous enquiry.² A brief glance at the evidence alone is necessary here.

¹ Over one hundred years after Porteus wrote, one has to say that south of Berwick, as it were, independency has run riot, and more so sadly, amongst Evangelicals than anyone else. The Evangelical witness is therefore a multiplicity of disparate assemblies, at best linked together by very rough and ready "least-common-denominator" rules. One of the resultant effects of all this is that **no-body at all among them** feels, or takes, any official or organized responsibility for the welfare of those Christians who are isolated by virtue of distance from participating in any congregation, for whom the administration of the Sacraments and the preaching of the Word of God are but far distant dreams. Under a proper Presbyterian system of Church government responsibility extends outwards from the local congregation toward such people. *Ed.*

² Reference is here made to arguments in preceding chapters of Porteus' book. But as these arguments are presented hereon in abbreviated form, the reader will nevertheless be able to follow..

1. In many places there were more Christians than one particular place could accommodate for religious purposes. In other places the number would not be greater. In some it is impossible to suppose this. In Jerusalem, in a short time, three thousand, then five thousand, and afterwards whole multitudes, were added to the Church. Could upwards of eight thousand, at the lowest computation, properly assemble together for fellowship? If so, in what place? The historian Mosheim,³ whose leanings are not in the direction of Presbytery, ventures his reputation upon this impression:

“Either I perceive nothing, or this is certain, and most amply confirmed, that the apostles gathered together in Jerusalem the multitudes of Christians, and had them divided into many small communities, and that to each of these were appointed its own place of sacred fellowship, its own ministers, and its own presbyters”.⁴

The expression “in one place” found in Acts 2:1, must be balanced by the phrase “from house to house” found in Acts 20:20.⁵ (In Jerusalem) while they were permitted, the temple was the general place of resort. But that was only for a brief period. For celebrating the Lord’s Supper, for instruction, acts of worship and discipline, they were distributed from house to house. So expressions employed to describe the success of the gospel in Samaria, Antioch, Iconium, Lydda, Corinth, and other places are incompatible with the idea that only one congregation was formed in each city. Thus, at Ephesus, Paul and others laboured long and successfully. Not only Jewish, but Gentile converts were very numerous. These would naturally form separate congregations. Various places are mentioned, as at the school of Tyrannus, (Acts 19:9), and the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. (1 Cor. 16:19). There “mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed.”

2. In these places the multitude of disciples had a numerous body of pastors, or spiritual instructors. Estimate the number of ministers of the Word in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus, etc., and the fact is necessarily established that a plurality of congregations must have existed.

³ Johann Lorenz Von Mosheim, a German Lutheran, lived 1694 to 1755, was author of a famous, but now rarely obtainable set of volumes on Church History. Mosheim was Professor of Theology and Chancellor of the then new University of Gottingen, having been honoured with this appointment by King George II of England, founder of that said University. Mosheim’s Institutes of Ecclesiastical History are useful volumes, but are written from a Lutheran perspective.

⁴ We have not been able to locate the exact place in Mosheim that Porteus refers to here, partly because of highly variant pagination between the different English editions. But Porteus is right to point out that Mosheim was no friend of Presbytery. *Ed.*

⁵ These two references of course, refer, firstly to the small band of disciples meeting Pre-Pentecost, and secondly to the Apostle Paul’s ministrations in Ephesus, where it appears another large congregation developed, similar to that of Jerusalem post-Pentecost. Porteus is drawing attention here to the fact that large congregations gathered in one city consisted of many small ‘house-meetings’ or small congregations which were conceived as being all part of the one major congregation in that city, be it Ephesus, or Jerusalem.

3. That one association of officers governed these congregations in each locality is undoubted. The elders of Ephesus were together exhorted by Paul, so to govern "all the flock". So for all the flock at Ephesus, this was the common council, (Acts 20:28). So Peter, in writing to the elect strangers scattered in various places, calls them "the flock", (Compare 1 Peter 1: 1, addressed to the "elect strangers scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia...etc," with 1 Peter 5:2, that the elders should "feed the flock of God which is among you"..), not the "flocks" and commands the elders among them to feed and oversee that one flock, as accountable to Christ. (1 Peter ch. 5). This union of those holding the same essential principles by subjection to a common government, was and is the outward evidence that these several congregations were one Church. Persecution, pestilence, the want of a suitable house of worship, and other causes, ⁶ prevented them assembling together; notwithstanding, by one common government, their outward unity was attested. Single congregations possessed their own elders; others were unitedly governed by associated elders as their representatives. Hence -

4. These associated congregations are addressed as the one Church of that locality. This is no mis-use of the word. Though composed of many parts in its essential conditions, the Church of Christ is one. All who are united to Christ by the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit, are portions of that one Church which He has purchased with His blood. So the Church visible is one - one in a locality - one in a nation - one in the world. Gaius is not only the host of Paul, but of "the whole Church" (Rom. 16: 23). This Church is to be told of offences, its decisions are to be heard (Matt. 18:17). Though scattered by persecution, its members are mutually addressed as the flock of Christ put under the care of shepherds. It is recognized in Jerusalem, in Corinth, in Ephesus, and elsewhere, as one Church, though embracing a plurality. The self-same decisions apply to that one Church, whether found in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Derbe, in Lystra, in Iconium, throughout Phrygia, or the region of Galatia (Acts chapters 15 and 16). There are "churches" in Judea, Samaria, Macedonia, for each separate congregation is still a Church. So (also) several together are a Church, and the Churches of all countries are still the one Church of Jesus Christ, according to His Word: "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold;them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd". (John 10 : 16).

The Church of a nation is not less a proper and scriptural expression. Stephen

⁶ This is an important point. In an age when Christianity can settle peacefully in a community, it is relatively easy to build chapels and churches and organize 'local' congregations. When Christianity comes under attack, however, believers get harried from pillar to post, as it were, and chapels get burned down. The organization of nice, neat little 'local' congregations under such circumstances is either outright impossible, or next to impossible. Believers have to meet under such conditions where they can, how they can, and when they can, often in remote mountain conventicles, in forest glades, or in caves. Scots Presbyterianism is historically a magnificent example of how the Presbyterian system can cope with this kind of situation, and maintain a decent order and structure with co-ordinated action, features impossible under independency in such circumstances.

declared of Christ, "This is He that was in the Church in the wilderness" (Acts 7 : 38) This application of the word is to the entire nation of the Jews, which, in the wilderness, could not number less than two millions. The same term is also applied to that nation when settled in Canaan in the days of David, and numbering many millions ; "In the midst of the Church will I sing praise unto thee" (Psalm 22 : 22-25; Heb. 2:12)⁷ .As correctly then as the term "church" is applied to the nation of Israel, so then, may the entire Churches of any other land - subject, as that of Palestine, to one common government - be designated as "the church" of that country. And so the Church throughout the world. The one meaning, "society of believers" is in each case preserved.⁸

These explicit declarations of Scripture being unsuitable to the plan devised and adopted so recently as seventeen hundred years after Christ, special efforts are made to destroy their force.⁹ Thus it is asserted that there was no such Church in the house in the city of Ephesus. It is said that Ephesus stood within the Asia of the Scriptures, and that Paul's salutation from the Asiatic Churches included the Church in Ephesus. (See 1 Cor. 16 especially verse 19). This is too forced to be accepted. Continually that apostle is found sending salutations from Churches widely separated, and yet singling out individuals : "The Churches of Christ salute you.....Gaius mine host, and of the whole Church, saluteth you" (Romans 16:16 and 16: 23.) So, in writing from Ephesus to the Church in Corinth, with one dash of his pen he sends the salutations of the Churches of Asia; but he does not forget that small congregation assembling in the house of his friends, a beloved portion of the saints and faithful at Ephesus. (1 Cor. 16:19). Then, it is maintained (by some) that their (that is, Aquila and Priscilla's) house and Church were not within the limits of Ephesus; because if it was, the salutation was unnecessary, (it being already included under the salutation from "the Churches of Asia" *Ed.*)

⁷ The word used in the Greek N.T. for "church" is ἐκκλησία also used to refer to the congregation of Israel in the LXX or Ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament. In the LXX it translates the Hebrew קָהָל . (Pronounced roughly as "KA - HAL) Both words carry in their meaning the notion of being "called", and are used especially of a gathering of the people as God's Assembly, "called" that is, by Him. This is a distinctively religious usage of the word in Scripture, where one finds that its usage is avoided in respect of any other kind of assembly. At the root of the greek word ἐκκλησία (pronounce it EK-LAY-SEE-A), is the verb ἐκ-καλεω which in Classical greek means " to call out / call forth/ summon/ call out to oneself". In all this one sees how appropriately the term is applied to both Israel and the Church. Both are, of course, the One Church. (Cf. **Liddell-Scott: Greek-English Lexicon**, and Colin Brown et al translation of **Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament**:Zondervan 1986.) *Ed.*

⁸ We have edited this paragraph of Porteus' original, shortening it and thereby excising what we are convinced was his faulty, and unnecessary reference to a textual variant in the Greek manuscripts. As was the trend in his day, he held the new manuscript researches in high regard, as did the Hodges in the USA and eventually Warfield. What he has to say on this account does not, in our considered opinion materially advance, or attenuate his case in respect of the argument he is raising here concerning "national churches". *Ed.*

⁹ Porteus has accumulated a powerful phalanx of scriptural evidence in support of Presbyterianism, which is we believe, impregnable. In previous chapters he gives the details of the arguments of which we have presented here in brief. We hope to publish these details in issue 12..*Ed.*

So, St. Paul, inspired though you were, you are to submit, (it seems) to the correction of the uninspired in the modern age ! You are, it seems, guilty of redundancy ! Aquila and Priscilla, it seems, never had a church at Ephesus !

Paul is therefore made out (by these people) to have erred. But who will believe this ? What Paul does do, writing from Ephesus, is to send Salutations to the Church at Corinth. He says, "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the Church that is in their house". (1 Cor. 16:19). That he speaks of a Church at Ephesus is evident : "I am glad", he says, "of the coming of Stephanus, and Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for they have refreshed my spirit.....All the brethren greet you." (1 Cor. 16: 18 - 21). Can anyone, realizing that Paul was then in Ephesus, understand that 'coming' as to any other place, or that these brethren were not the faithful in that city ?¹⁰ The other reference must, therefore, (concerning the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila , ch. 16, v. 19) also be to Ephesus. This passage proves that, when the first Epistle to the Corinthians was written, there existed at least this Church in the house, as well as the larger Church in Ephesus.¹¹

To whatever extent, then, that union of congregations under one government of associated elders can be carried, such a united body may be lawfully termed 'one church'.

Every emblem employed proclaims that the visible Church is one. It is the "Kingdom of Heaven", the "olive-tree" (Rom. 11:17), "one body" (1 Cor. 12:13) And there must be no schism in this one Church of Christ. These declarations cannot refer to the Church invisible, for therein are found members good and bad, wise and foolish - gifts bestowed even upon those who are unbelieving - offices instituted for the instruction, conversion, and sanctification of many, while others are cut off. These members are addressed by Christ and His apostles as genuine saints, for they are treated according to their profession. Even were it possible that the branches of the Church were composed of none but saints, where were its unity if these were totally independent of each other ? The term "independent" as applied to the Church, is unscriptural; and the thing is both contrary to Scripture and to right rea-

¹⁰ Note should be taken here of 1 Cor. 16: 8 and 9, where the apostle says he will "tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." Obviously Paul was at Ephesus when he wrote this Epistle, the Greek here reading "επιμεινω" which means : "to remain", or "to continue". The AV translates this as "tarry". But some readers may have a print of the AV which carries an appendage note after the last verse of 1 Cor.16, which says that 1 Corinthians was "written from Philippi by Stephanus, and Fortunatus...etc" . Such notes are not part of the inspired Scripture, and were added centuries later than the originals, and are not accurate. Porteus elsewhere points this out himself. *Ed.*

¹¹ One ought to take serious note here of the kind of Scriptures Porteus examines carefully in this matter. What are, on the surface of it, obscure texts, like " Aquila and Priscilla salute you...etc." are in fact vital clues that reveal all kinds of details concerning life in the early Church, as to matters of organisation, protocol, and many many other things. No Scriptures are redundant ! But not all Scriptures catch our interest ! Porteus has, in his book, by careful study of the "uninteresting" Scriptures, uncovered a mine of vital details concerning Church government that is of paramount concern to all Christians, especially relevant to us today. *Ed.*

son. It is impossible to regard a number of entirely different fractions, distinguished by a variety of different practices, as one.¹² The body of Christ has members in particular, but that body manifests its oneness by one doctrine and one common government.

Secondly, CHURCHES WIDELY SCATTERED WERE GOVERNED BY REPRESENTATIVE ASSOCIATED ELDERS. Following from the first proposition (pages 3 - 8 above *Ed.*) it is necessary to apply special attention to the fact that a common government, over those maintaining the same essential truth, being the outward bond of unity, was exercised in apostolic times, and that not only where congregations were near each other, but over those far removed. The assembly or council of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem is a sufficient example, applicable to all the exigencies of the Church in every place and period.¹³

Independents generally maintain that the 15th chapter of the Acts is either an example of an infallible decision, or of the advice of one Church at the solicitation of another. Consideration of this important passage will show rather that it gives authority for representative associated government by the elders of the Church. Thus it is firstly important to note that (the Council of Jerusalem narrative in Acts 15) is :

NOT AN EXAMPLE OF AN INFALLIBLE DECISION

The Church at Antioch might have had a decision given with infallible certainty without any such assembly.¹⁴ The miraculous works of Paul were sufficient to prove that he was divinely appointed and inspired. He could have given an infallible decision at once, had the will of God been so. It was solely because the matter was not so decided, after "no small dissension and disputation", (Acts 15:2), that Paul and Barnabas agreed, along with others, to go up as deputies. When they came to Jerusalem, and were met with the apostles and elders, there is no indication that they were solely guided by miraculous influence. The reference it

¹² One might also add, with a multi-variety of different fundamental beliefs, too, if one checks out the huge spectrum of variations manifest in modern "Independent" churches, a spectrum that stretches all the way from Unitarianism on the one hand, through multiple species of Arminianism and Amyraldianism, Calvinist Orthodoxy (of varying sorts), a broad and insipid style of Evangelicalism, to a mad-galloping charismatism on the other hand.

¹³ Porteus is here refering to the "Council of Jerusalem" of Acts. 15. Elsewhere in his volume, he draws attention to some vitally important truths that arise out of this Assembly, which we hope to publish in Issue No.12. For the moment we produce hereon two very important rebuttals of Independency which he draws from these salient scriptures. *Ed.*

¹⁴ By "infallible decision" Porteus means a deliberation on the controversy which exercised the church by means of direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit on the Apostle Paul. It is notable that God could have delivered infallibly the correct decision over the matter in dispute directly, and *theopneustically*, (II Tim. 3 : 16) as He did when inspiring Paul to write Scripture. The fact that God DID NOT bring about resolution of the issue in this way, but by way of bringing about a general council to debate the issue, is an important point which Porteus has brought to our notice here. *Ed.*

-self, the mode of procedure, and the express testimony recorded, all concur in disproving the Independent's supposition.

It is unaccountable to think that now infallibility would be manifested, when it had been denied amidst the discussions at Antioch. That the question was referred at all - and then not to the apostles only, but to "the apostles and elders" (Acts 15:2), to the **ordinary** as well as the extraordinary officers of the church - proves that, up to its consideration by the assembly, an infallible decision had not been pronounced.

The mode of procedure adopted cannot be reconciled with the supposition of miraculous inspiration. The ordinary elders are called together, are allowed to deliberate and to give judgment, on a footing of perfect equality with the apostles. But uninspired men cannot give any addition to the voice of inspiration. And nothing occurs to give an impression that these elders were inspired. Then, apostles and elders come together to consider the matter, and there was much disputing (Acts 15 : 6 & 7). All the ordinary appliances of evidence, reasoning and citation of Scripture, were employed.¹⁵ But this is never the manner of inspiration. In all the reasonings of the apostles in the epistles, it is manifest that they were convinced that what they decided was the mind of God. Where is there one instance of a gathering, consultation, and much disputing amongst the apostles by themselves, before any epistle was written ? Do they not rather proclaim, as the Old Testament prophets - "Thus saith the Lord"; and "I have the mind of Christ" ?

The testimony of the divine record is no less express. James stated that his sentence or proposal was, that they should write indicating that the Gentiles should not be troubled with circumcision, but that other restrictions should be laid upon them. This proposal pleased the assembly, with this addition, that a deputation should communicate their decision. As "it seemed good unto us being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men", (Acts 15: 25), so, it is stated that "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," thus to decide. (Acts 15 : 28). These words, "seemed to us", are equivalent to this : *Such is our opinion or judgment, after the most careful examination.* Could it be possible to use these expressions were this an inspired decision ? Did the Old Testament prophets, or the apostles, on other occasions, in giving infallible utterances say, "Thus saith the Lord and we?"

Manifestly, the apostles, in this case, acted, not as pronouncing an inspired and infallible judgment, but as ordinary ministers, so that the judgment of the elders might coincide with theirs, and for an example in the future government of the Church. The expression "seemed good to the Holy Ghost", is appropriate to the decision, in accordance with the mind of the Spirit, in the passages of Scripture adduced. It indicates nothing more.

¹⁵ That this is so is evident from the considerations employed by St. James' in his speech, from verse 13 through verse 21 of Acts 15. James quotes in his speech from Amos 9:11 - 12 as in the LXX, not the hebrew, thus suggesting the discussion was technical and scholarly. *Ed.*

Again, this example in Acts ch. 15 is :

NOT THAT OF ADVICE BY ONE CHURCH,

given at the solicitation of another. *Firstly*, The reference was not made to the Church 'or congregation' of Jerusalem, as Independents allege. The reference was not sent to a congregation ; and there is no account that the members were summoned. Being sent to the apostles and elders, (Acts 15 : 2), **they only** are said to have come together to consider the matter. (Acts 15 : 6). These alone discuss and settle the question. "The multitude", (v. 12), "the whole church", (v. 22), "brethren" (v.23), who kept silence, are mentioned as concurring in the decision and letter. This evidently indicates that many members of the Church were present. Allowing that this discussion proceeded in the hearing of those members who could be present, and that their concurrence was obtained - this is all that the words will bear. Without a violent wresting of Scripture, they cannot be made to mean that the entire membership of the Church at Jerusalem were summoned, or that they were constituted judges in the case by apostolic authority. It was important to show to the Gentiles that the whole Church at Jerusalem agreed with the decision, still that decision was come to by the apostles and elders, to whom alone the question had been submitted.

Secondly, It was not a mere declaration or advice, but an authoritative decision. An advice was not sought, it was the decisive and authoritative settlement of this question affecting their salvation that was requested by the Church at Antioch. A simple advice was unsuitable, and was not given. It was a decree ordained, and which was implicitly obeyed.¹⁶ It is called a "decree" in similar terms, and, consequently, was as authoritative as those of the Roman Emperor, ¹⁷ or the commandments of the ceremonial law. It is styled a decree "ordained" (Acts 16 : 4). This expresses as decided an exercise of authority, as the decision of the Persian court against Queen Vashti, or of the Jewish Sanhedrim in the condemnation of Christ. That 'decree ordained' laid a necessary burden upon the Gentile Christians. On Independent principles, the members could not have been concerned in this

¹⁶ Reference is made here to Acts 16 : 4, "And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" The Greek word here used for "decrees" is *δογματα* (pronounce it DOG-MA-TA). It is listed in the lexicons of New Testament Greek as meaning "a law", or "a decree". Porteus is absolutely correct to draw attention to this factor, something which many miss, that the deliberations of this great "SYNOD" of Acts 15 were held to be "law" for the Churches. *Ed.*

¹⁷ The same Greek word *δογμα* is found at Luke 2 : 1, and is used of the "decree" of Caesar Augustus concerning the Empire-wide Census. Porteus says here in effect that just as Caesar's "decrees" held all-powerful authority in civil matters, so likewise the "decrees" of the Apostles and Elders carried similar authority within the Church. Notice that in Acts 16 verses 1 through 4 these "decrees" were carried out from Jerusalem to the churches in the cities of Asia Minor, as well as Antioch, indicating that the scope of the synod's authority extended not only over the church at Antioch which made the initial request, but over ALL THE CHURCHES ! *Ed.*

transaction as judges. They were not entitled to lay a burden upon another congregation. The formula, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things" (Acts 15 : 28), cannot be interpreted to mean anything else than a judicial decision. So it was received by the Churches at Antioch, and throughout Syria and Cilicia. When the decrees were delivered, the membership of the Churches were simply summoned to hear and obey, which joyfully they did. Were the Independent view taken, that, instead of an authoritative court, this indicates how one Church may deal with another - then, fairly taken, the argument goes too far even for themselves. It will not only warrant one Church to sit in judgment upon another, but will authorize the continued authoritative supervision of "a mother Church" over those that have arisen out of the missionary zeal of her members. Will it be allowed that the Church of Jerusalem held a universal episcopacy for some thirty years ? Instead of these unsupported suppositions, the record proves that -

VARIOUS CHURCHES WERE SUBORDINATE TO THE ASSEMBLY

A court, composed of representative officers, met at Jerusalem. They decided upon a particular case referred to them for that purpose, and that decision was uniformly binding on the Churches. Hence this is an example and authority, both for a reference from an inferior to a superior court, and for the review authoritatively of all Churches represented by such an assembly.

Besides the deputies from Antioch, and the elders, who are named without limiting them to Jerusalem, the apostles acted there on the same platform as elders, which elsewhere they claim to be. (Cf. I Peter 5 : 1). As they had a universal commission, they represented the entire Church, and, consequently, sent forth their decrees to Churches everywhere (Acts 16 : 4 - 5).

The entire proceeding proves that the members of that assembly were not guided by miraculous influence, but by the common operations of the Holy Spirit, enabling them to perceive and apply the general principles of the Scriptures. If, then, ordinary presbyters will decree and determine nothing but what is authorized by the Divine Word, examining every question thereby, and will follow implicitly the voice of Scripture, under the guidance of the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, **this example is for perpetual guidance.** (Emph. mine, Ed.). The assembly claimed and exercised the power of determining according to Scripture what was to be proclaimed as the means of salvation.

Had a decision been given at Antioch in which the Church could not concur, this reference warrants the belief that an appeal would, in like manner, have been taken. Had the decrees been disobeyed, their authoritative issue further supposes that an assembly might have again been constituted to inquire into and try such a case. Consequently, there is an equal warrant here for courts of appeal and review,

embracing all necessary jurisdiction. A governing body, comprehending in it many congregations, had authority over all those so comprehended.

Every congregation is equal in power, the smallest with the largest. No authority is given to any one to command another. But there is warrant in Scripture for the rule that what belongs to all, should be participated in by all. Consequently, as ordinary members are subject to their representative elders ; so congregations are subject to their representative elders, associated together in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Were the apostles alive, they would, as then, meet and act along with the elders for the settlement of all difficulties, which would as certainly be referred to them for decision. Although dead, they yet speak. Personally absent, by their inspired writings, and the record of their actions, they are still in our midst. When, then, difficult matters are referred to the assembled elders - when they are guided by apostolic utterances and actions - when obedience is rendered to these decisions, this is to comply, in as far as it is possible, with the spirit and letter of the apostolic example. Such decisions are also to be received with reverence and submission, not only - (1.) For their agreement with the Word of God ; but (2.) Because of the power of this ordinance of God. These are the two grounds on which such decisions become binding upon the consciences of churches and members. Besides -

THE NECESSITIES OF THE CASE ARE NOT MET BY THE INDEPENDENT SYSTEM

Look at the practical working of this scheme, and it will be seen that it is defective - especially in cases of difficulty and of general interest.

First, Individual cases do arise when a member or a minister feels and declares that, by local judges, he has been grossly mis-understood, maligned, and injured. But there is no higher jurisdiction to which he can appeal. The advice of a neighbouring congregation is not likely to have weight, and is not sought. Consequently, the tie must either be broken between that individual minister or member and the congregation and district, or he remains an injured man to his dying day. It is said, If he is right, and the congregation are in error, it is no longer to be held to be a Church of Christ by the person wronged. So, very probably, he will feel. But will the congregation cease to regard themselves as a Church ? or will his personal estimation at all rectify the evil ? Were there a court of appeal to dispassionate judges, would there not be hope for him that he would be justified ?

Secondly, cases arising affecting the Church at large. A pastor, it may be, becomes heretical or immoral. If the members are not entitled, in the first instance, to enter upon the case, and if no officers are left who retain their integrity and authority, no cognisance can be taken of the evil. It must be allowed to spread, or the pastor resigns and goes elsewhere as if free from stain.

Again, a congregation, it may be, departs from the faith, the great body of the members are contaminated. Who shall call them to account ? Or, if so, what power exists to pass censure ? Is it so that our Lord has appointed the exercise of discipline for the reclamation of individuals, and none for offending congregations ? The evil spreads. Other congregations are infected with the same leaven. Is this to go on without the power of arrest ? Are the least faults of members to be visited with penalties, and the greater of congregations to escape all condemnation ? ¹⁸ Inattention to gross crimes is accounted one of the most radical defects of any government. Can it be so that an evil of such magnitude can be found in the kingdom of Him who is infinitely wise, just, and good ? No doubt advice and admonition may be tried. If, however, experience proves that mere advice without the power of punishment fails to reclaim individuals in extreme cases, what hope is there that this extreme case in regard to congregations will prove an exception ? It is not sufficient to say that, in such cases, spiritual judgments sooner or later will fall upon the offending. Such judgments may and do fall upon offending individuals, and yet a course of discipline is persevered in as absolutely necessary. Hence, a superior tribunal is required for the supervision and reclamation of congregations. Strength and energy sufficient for the prevention and suppression of such evils are most important, and are supplied in representative courts. Every reason that may be urged why a believer should submit to a particular church, requires that the particular church should submit to the whole Church. No obligation can rest short of this.

Thirdly, Local judges are ill fitted to secure an enlightened administration in every case. This arises from local prejudices and passions. If it is the case that where men of acknowledged ability alone are selected, courts of review and appeal are still necessary. How can it be otherwise, when every individual member of the Church is admitted to be a judge ? If it would be considered unwise to admit each one of these same persons to manage civil matters, why consider them capable, without supervision, of managing all Church matters ? Do no intricate cases ever come up in which every one is not fitted to judge ? Are there not matters of faith, worship, controversy, external order, or policy which require discrimination, and clear appreciation of the rules of Scripture applicable thereto ? These, in addition to the matters of ordinary discipline and government, may surely suffer where power is unlimited. Suppose difficulties to exist between officers and people, or

¹⁸ A very important point this. One only has to research the spread of heterodoxy amongst Independently governed churches and compare it to the much more sustained orthodoxy of Reformed and Presbyterian churches to see how the latter are vastly superior in this respect, and in all those cases where such Reformed Churches have apostasized badly, it has been either through State intervention and meddling with the internal affairs of those churches, as with Scotland's afflictions from Laud and Episcopacy, then over "patronage", or the meddling of the state in Holland's Reformed Church post - Napoleon, or in cases where Presbyterian denominations have, through a misplaced piety, "gone soft" and treated the rising heretics in their midst with cotton wool, as it were. These types then generally get "hard" on the faithful.

that the congregation is much divided, then no judgment can be arrived at. As it is professed that no vote ought to be taken, either the matter must remain unsettled, or some party must withdraw. In either case religion suffers. Would it not be more for the interests of truth and justice to remove the cause out of the region of local prejudices and party spirit ? This is provided for in representative associated action. Without this, testimony proclaims that, frequently, Independency degenerates into, either absolutism in the pastor, tyranny in the deacons, or anarchy and continual schism amongst the people. Of this, examples are not wanting - but we refrain.¹⁹

It is true that no form of government can be absolutely free from corruption ; for the carrying out is in the hands of men naturally depraved and fallible, and at the best but partially sanctified. But if it is found that in this system there is practically no means of checking, or of rectifying acknowledged evils ; and if, on the other hand, it is found that with acknowledged equality of pastors and congregations - ample scope for consultation, brotherly dealing, admonition, and persuasion - a further power is available authoritatively to deal with persons and with congregations ; surely right reason counsels the adoption of the latter method. Much more when it is found that Scripture sets forth that - (1.) The Church is one body, possessing a common government ; and (2.) That churches widely separated were governed by a body of representative associated elders - there is conclusive proof that the perfect condition of the visible Church cannot be found in churches totally independent, and possessed of absolute power in themselves. That is rather in the administration of government by associated representative presbyters. It is impossible that any one portion of the Church should be independent of all the rest. The Church is one body, united to the one Head, pervaded by one Spirit, governed by the same laws. An independent church is therefore as great an absurdity as an independent Christian.

"But now are they many members, yet but one body"

"That there should be no schism in the body ;"

St. Paul, to the Corinthians 1st epistle, Ch. 12.

¹⁹ Porteus is right. Independency has divided, and divided, and divided. The splits 'split'. All over England and Wales the sad tale is repeated. But it is necessary to rebut here, those certain jibes made against Scots Presbyterianism, jibes made, in the main by "Independents" concerning such sad schisms as have taken place amongst Scotland's Presbyterians, the latest being in 1989 at the time of the emergence of the Associated Presbyterian Church from among the Free Presbyterians. The fact is, that for all these sad divisions, they are yet very few in number, and mostly caused by unwarranted State intervention in the case of earlier divisions (See note 18), and amount to "peanuts" compared to the mad galloping schismatitus evident in too many "Independent" quarters.. Then again, one knows only too well the cases of "Little Hitlers" in some Independent pulpits, or of cartels of high and mighty deacons who rule some independent churches like some kind of spiritual Mafia. We have seen marriages and families smashed by the activities of such like, and God's sheep pushed out of churches to wander in a wilderness. At least, in a Presbyterian situation, whatever faults may develop, (and faults *do* develop, nothing can be perfect on this earth), at least there is in place an administrative machinery which can be utilized to at least *try* and eradicate the problems. In Independency there is nothing, absolutely **nothing**. *Ed.*

TABLE OF SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES—HOW REGARDED BY THE CHURCHES.

| SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES. | GOVERNMENT CENTRALIZED. | | GOVERNMENT LOCALIZED. | GOVERNMENT HARMONIZED. |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| | <i>The Papacy.</i> | <i>Prelacy.</i> | <i>Independency.</i> | <i>Presbytery.</i> |
| 1. The only King and Head of the Church is the Lord Jesus Christ. | Repudiated by substitution of the Pope. | Repudiated. In England the civil monarch substituted. | Accepted. | Accepted. |
| 2. The visible Church is the organized society of those professedly believing in and bearing testimony unto Christ. | Repudiated by rejection of all not subject to the Pope. | Repudiated by High Church. All rejected not subject to prelates. | Accepted. | Accepted. |
| 3. The Scriptures are the only ultimate standard of law to the Church. | Repudiated by adding to and subverting its teachings. | Accepted, but power retained to decree rites and ceremonies. | Accepted. | Accepted. |
| 4. Apostolic scriptural practice is of universal and perpetual obligation. | Repudiated, preferring patristic practices. | Professedly accepted, but patristic preferred. | Accepted. | Accepted. |
| 5. The office of elder is essential and permanent in the visible Church. | Practically repudiated. | Practically repudiated. | Teaching elder allowed. | Accepted. |
| 6. The office of the ministry is divinely authoritative and permanent. | Repudiated by changing to sacrificing priests. | Accepted but in name changed to priests. | Almost fully accepted. | Accepted. |
| 7. The office of elder or bishop is identical. | Repudiated. | Repudiated. | Accepted. | Accepted. |
| 8. Every congregation should have a plurality of elders, among whom the duties of teaching and ruling are distributed. | Repudiated. | Repudiated. | Partially accepted. Ruling elder disallowed. | Accepted. |
| 9. The highest position is that of elder or bishop, whose rule is wholly ministerial. | Repudiated. | Repudiated. | Accepted. | Accepted. |
| 10. Every church should have a plurality of deacons conjoined with the elders, specially intrusted with temporal affairs. | Repudiated. Changed to inferior ministers. | Repudiated. Changed to inferior ministers. | Partially accepted. Deacons elevated to the eldership. | Accepted. Not carried out by some branches. |
| 11. The election of all officers is an inherent right of the members of the Church. | Repudiated in practice. | Repudiated. | Accepted. | Accepted. Not carried out by some. |
| 12. Admission to office must be by prayer, and the imposition of the hands of the body of elders. | Repudiated: prelatie only valid. | Repudiated: prelatie only valid. | Repudiated, or only partially accepted. | Accepted fully as to ministers. |
| 13. The course of administration in every congregation is by representative associated elders. | Repudiated. | Repudiated. | Repudiated. People substituted. | Accepted. |
| 14. The congregations of a locality form one church, which is governed by their associated elders. | Repudiated as to government. | Repudiated as to government. | Repudiated. | Accepted. |
| 15. Administration in difficult cases of doctrine, discipline, worship, and government, is authoritatively effected by assemblies of representative elders. | Repudiated, giving power to prelates and the Pope. | Repudiated, giving power to prelates. | Repudiated. | Accepted, and nationally exercised. |
| Summation, . . . | 7. Repudiated. 8. Perverted. | 7. Repudiated. 8. Perverted. | 5. Repudiated. 3. Changed. 7. Accepted. | All Accepted. |

Westminster Confession
Presbyterian (1647)

v Savoy Declaration
Independent (1658)
Institution of Churches.

XXXI Of Synods & Councils.

I. FOR THE BETTER GOVERNMENT, and further edification of the Church; there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils.

II. As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with about matters of religion ; so if magistrates be open enemies to the church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons upon delegation from their churches, may meet together in such assemblies.

III. It belongeth to synods and councils ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience ; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of His Church ; to receive complaints in cases of mal-administration, and authoritatively to determine the same : which **decrees** and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in His Word.

IV. All synods and councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred : therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both.

V. Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical ; and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs, which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition, in cases extraordinary ; or by way of advice for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.

VI. Besides these particular Churches, there is not instituted by Christ any Church more extensive or Catholic intrusted with power for the administration of His Ordinances or the execution of any authority in His Name.

XXV. As all Churches and all the members of them are bound to pray continually for the good or prosperity of all the Churches of Christ in all places, and upon all occasions to further itso the churches themselvesought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.

XXVI. In cases of Difficulties or Differences, either in point of Doctrine or in Administrations, wherein either the Churches in general are concerned, or any one Church, in their Peace, Union, and Edification, or any Member or Members of any Church are injured in or by any proceeding in Censures not agreeable to Truth and Order, it is according to the mind of Christ that many Churches holding communion together do by their Messengers meet in a Synod or Council to consider and give their **advice** in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the Churches concerned : Howbeit, these synods so assembled are **not intrusted with any Church Power** properly so called, or with any Jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise **any Censures**, either over any churches or Persons, or to impose their determinations on the Churches or Officers.

XXVII. Besides these occasioned Synods or Councils, there are not instituted by Christ any stated Synods in a fixed Combination of Churches or their Officers in lesser or greater Assemblies, nor are there any Synods appointed by Christ in a way of Subordination to one another.

Westminster versus Savoy

Editor

A perusal of the twin columns on the page opposite will yield a direct contrast, highlighted at apposite critical points by the words in heavy type. One sees Westminster's **decree**, which corresponds to the Greek $\delta\omicron\gamma\mu\alpha\iota$ of the Textus Receptus in Acts 16 : 4, juxtaposed with **advice** given in the Savoy article **XXVI**, which latter corresponds with nothing anywhere in the Textus Receptus with respect to the matters of Synodical Church Government.

Notwithstanding the fact that we have yet to print the full details of Porteus' massed phalanx of evidence drawn from the New Testament with regard to the existence of several congregations being under the rule of one group of elders, enough has already come to the fore to indicate the **Scriptural solidity** of the Presbyterian system (and of course, of the Continental Reformed System.). One might ask the following pertinent questions :

(i) Does Scripture teach us of "Synods" or "Assemblies" ?

Yes. Scripture says yes, Westminster says yes, and *even Savoy admits it, though in some watered down fashion.*

(ii) Does this Scriptural Synod issue **decrees** or **advice** ?

Scripture says **decree**, Westminster says **decree**, Savoy says *advice.*

(iii) Which Confessional standard is therefore **Scriptural** ?

(The reader can answer this for himself).

But there are further matters of note in this comparison. Article **XXV** of the Savoy Declaration makes a fatal admission. It speaks of "all Churches and all the members of them are *bound to pray continually for the good or prosperity of all the Churches of Christ in all places, and upon all occasions to further it*", and that they "ought to hold communion amongst themselves for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification". Now all such admonitions are well encompassed within the Presbyterian system, but under Presbyterianism all such inter-church fraternisation is under the controlling discipline of the Synodical codes of practice and the Doctrinal Standards. Under the Savoy teaching, such inter-church relationships are left under the vague but sugary recommendations of Article XXV with no controls on procedure, protocol, legalities, co-ordination, finance, and above all, Doctrinal Orthodoxy. Under the Savoy rules one could find (and in English Dissent, *did find*), orthodox churches fraternizing with heterodox, and consequent intermingling of believers and pseudo-believers under the aegis of one congregation. And how is one to pray intelligently for other churches, if the churches do not, as a body, organize synodically and circulate information concerning various churches

¹ See footnote 16 on page 10 of this Journal.

and their needs ? How can there be intelligent missionary activity, or training of office bearers, printing of Bibles, or practical operations of material relief for Churches where natural catastrophes, or war, or persecution wreak havoc in the lives of God's dear people ? Under the Savoy system, all this is left very much on an ad hoc basis, even though article XXV exhorts that these things be done. But under the Westminster system, deliberate, intelligent, and co-ordinated operations in all these spheres can be promoted and maintained, and backed with the decrees issued at Synodical level.

But Savoy's Article XXV is a give-away ! It takes a huge step in the Presbyterian direction, as if tacitly admitting that, well, yes, these Presbyterians *have* got something, after all ! Churches must be concerned about each other ! But then it leaves the whole thing up in limbo without a scrap of rights or powers of enforcement, or any controlling disciplinary procedures ! A toothless tiger, indeed !

But Savoy article XXVI is an even bigger give-away ! Herein is the full admission : Yes, well you know, one just has to have Synods ! It *is* there in the Scriptures after all ! And, you know, they *can* be useful, if only on an occasional basis, without any **decretive powers** ! Just to give **advice**, and not to be **intrusted with any Church Power...** ! And all those, of course, who are not of a mind to take such a Synod's "advice", need not bother to take it. Nobody can make them. What a synod ! What a system !

Savoy Article XXVII is a thorough recipe for chaos. Synods, it says, yes, but only occasionally, nothing must be fixed, and no authority ascribed thereto. No regular Synodical meeting every quarter, or yearly, or whatever. Only as occasioned ! Nor any fixed "combination of churches or their officers in lesser or greater assemblies", nor any differential levels of subordination. Herewith, reader, behold the formula for organised ad - hoc -ery ! Official ! Thou shalt be ad hoc and disorganised ! And this *is a decree*, the only one you'll get out of a Savoy Synod ! We decree that we shall not issue any decrees !

One can imagine under this farrago of half - truth, some poor Church member, suffering some grave injustice from his minister and elders, trying to get the ministers and elders of his whole, or just part, of his denomination together, to get the matter resolved ! Will they all meet, at great expense, and inconvenience, to sort out this one poor fellow ? More likely they will just fob him off, human nature being what it is, especially when no doubt his miscreant minister and elders will be denying the whole thing to their colleagues in other churches. Or at best, they might make a note of his complaint, and store it until enough other material accumulates to warrant calling a Synod ! Poor chap will wait years, and all he'll get at the end of it all, is **advice** ! His minister and elders will be able to just carry on and blithely ignore Synod if they wish !

Under the Westminster system of fixed Synods and Presbyteries, with fixed boundaries of authority, fixed frequencies of convocation, decretive power, and

the back-up of Ecclesiastical Sanctions to *enforce* the Synod's deliberations on the matter, the miscreants would thereby be unable to elude justice any longer, or indeed, to impede the plaintiff's complaints from reaching Synodical level in the first place.

Likewise, the plaintiff, and the defendants, would have the benefit of independent, detached, wise, highly qualified, and experienced Synodical Officers as judges in the affair. Local prejudices would be thereby obviated.

Under the Savoy system, which in effect, is **the** commonly accepted principle of today, the poor plaintiff will find out something of what St. Paul meant, when he wrote in II Timothy 3 : 5 :

"Having a form of godliness....."

but

"denying the power thereof :"

Sure, a Savoy style of Synod is just that. An overall lip-service is made in concession to the Scriptural form, but then this form is evacuated of all power. The Presbyterian and Reformed Synodical system alone grants form **and** power to these Scripture-mandated Councils, and alone can take proper Scriptural steps to ensure that the relationships between individual churches are to be maintained under the same discipline as relationships entailed within a congregation, in the true spirit of the Apostle, when he said :

"Let all things be done decently and in order"

I Cor. 14 : 40.

CONCLUSIONS :

The reader will note that the above material is provocative and is a direct polemic against the style of churches that most evangelical people in England are familiar with in these modern times. Free Evangelicals, Reformed Baptists, Pentecostals, Plymouth Brethren (open), and certain various 'house-church' movements all practice, in effect, the provisions of the Independent creed, the original Savoy declaration made in 1658, in Puritan England, and made under the guiding hands of certain eminent Puritans of those days, men of unimpeachable standing in the Reformed Faith, prominent amongst whom were no less than John Owen and Thomas Goodwin. It may well be asked, "how dare we criticise such great and godly men ?" But four vital considerations arise in this respect. **First**, the Holy Scriptures are paramount over all else, no matter what great reputations are at stake. **Secondly**, the framers of the Savoy Declaration went a long way in *admitting* the Scripturalness of Synods. **Thirdly**, the Puritanism of the Cromwellian period was suffering a reaction against "over-bearing" and "dictatorial" attitudes (plus downright pernicketyness, heterodoxy, and effective treason) that was manifest amongst English Presbyterians, and **Fourthly**, the two principals in all this, Owen and Goodwin, expressed certain pro-Presbyterian inclinations which we examine, as far as space will allow, on the following pages.

FORUM : Discussion Point.

JOHN OWEN & THOMAS GOODWIN : Only Quasi-Independents ?

Thomas Goodwin :

“As we acknowledge elective occasional Synods of the elders of many Churches, as the Churches have need to refer cases of difference to them ; so in case of maladministration, or an unjust proceeding in the sentence of excommunication, and the like, we acknowledge appeals or complaints may be made to other Churches ; and the elders of those Churches met in a Synod, who being offended, may as an ordinance of Christ, judge, and declare that sentence to be null, void, and unjust ; and that not simply as any company of men may so judge, giving their judgments of a fact done, but as an ordinance of Christ in such cases, and for that end sanctified by Him to judge and declare in matters of difference.”

*Cited on p. 205 “The Government of the Kingdom of Christ”
by James Moir Porteus.*

John Owen

In 1689, some thirty years after the Savoy declaration, John Owen’s treatise “The True Nature of a Gospel Church”, was first published. According to the Prefatory Note, printed on page 2 of Volume 16 in the B.O.T. edition, which volume begins with this treatise, it is really necessary to read first the treatise Owen had printed in 1681, entitled “Inquiry concerning Evangelical Churches” (printed in Vol.15), then to follow on with this, in order to gain a proper and comprehensive appreciation of Owen’s doctrine of Church structures and government. But the editor here also draws attention to an anecdote about how the dying Owen is supposed to have said to a Mr. George Redpath that “he had seen his mistake as to the Independent way” and that now (a day or two before Owen’s death) Owen had said that “after his utmost search into the Scriptures and antiquity, he was now satisfied that Presbytery was the way Christ had appointed in his New Testament Church.” This anecdote is given little credence by Goold, the 19th century editor of Owen’s Works, since he points out that (a), a full reading of the two treatises together establishes Owen to be indubitably an Independent, and (b), that Owen corrected, for his publisher, this treatise, immediately before his death, something unthinkable, he claims, if Owen had undergone so radical a change in his views, “he was not the man to quit the world in a spirit of dishonourable reticence, but would frankly have avowed to what extent his previous convictions had been modified or abandoned”. But this is a simplistic view, if anything, which requires in order

to accept Goold's position that one set of evidence, that of Redpath, be dismissed out of hand. This is totally unsatisfactory, and careful rumination concerning the two disparate sets of evidence yields the result that *both* testimonies can be true, and that this is arguably supported by certain statements in the second of Owen's treatises, where, if anything, he manifests an observable *vaccillation* and *ambivalence*, if not outright *self-contradiction* in these matters. This would then accommodate both sets of evidence harmoniously. The man was but human, after all, and he was in his dying days.

Accordingly, we provide herewith certain extracts from Owen's treatise on "The True Nature of a Gospel Church", with reference to Owen's views on Synods. The reader is asked to study them carefully, with a view to noting any internal contradictions or ambivalence. All references are to Owen's Works, Vol. 16 in the B.O.T. reprint edition of 1968. Though still evidently clinging, to some extent at least, to the Savoy Declaration, there are certain "give-aways" evident, and even contrary propositions. Words in bold type indicate our emphasis :

(1.) "This communion (between individual Churches) is **incumbent on every Church** with respect unto **all** other Churches of Christ in the world equally. (p. 183)

(2.) "Wherefore such a communion of Churches is to be enquired after as from which **no** true Church of Christ is or can be excluded". (p. 185).

(3.) "The communion of churches is *their joint actings in the same gospel duties towards God in Christ, with their mutual actings towards each other with respect unto the end of their institution and being, which is the glory of Christ in the edification of the whole catholic (not R.C.) church.*" (p.191).

(4.) "Churches have communion unto their mutual edification by **advice** in **Synods** or **Councils** Synods are the meetings of diverse churches by their messengers or delegates, to **consult** and **determine** of such things as are of common concernment unto them all by virtue of this communion which is exercised in them." (p.195)

(5.) This *acting in Synods* is an **institution of Jesus Christ**.....fortified with apostolic example; for having erected such a church-state (!), and disposed all His churches into such order and mutual relation unto one another as that none of them can be complete or discharge their whole duty without mutual **advice** and **counsel**, He hath thereby **ordained** this way of their communion in Synods, no other being possible unto that end. (p.196).

(6.) "Synods are consecrated unto the use of the Churches in **all ages**, by the example of the apostles in their guidance of the first churches of Jews and Gentiles, which hath the force of a *divine institution* as being **given under the infallible conduct of the Holy Ghost**" (Acts 15). (p. 197).

(7.) "Considering what we have learned in these later ages, by woeful experience, it were not amiss if those churches who do walk in express communion would *frequently meet in synods*, to enquire into the spiritual state of them all, and to **give advice** for the correction of what is amiss...." (p. 199).

(8.) "Hence it is evident what are the ends of such synods.....

- (i) to prevent divisions from differences in judgment & practice
- (ii) to avoid or cure offences
- (iii) to advance the gospel by **Joint Confession** and agreement in the faith.
- (iv) to give concurrent testimony against pernicious heresies or errors
- (v) to relieve such by **advice** as may be by any Diotrophes unduly cast out

(Summary from p. 199).

(9.) "There is a threefold power ascribed unto synods....

- (i) **Declarative** consisting in an authoritative teaching and declaring the mind of God in the Scripture
- (ii) **Constitutive appointing and ordaining** (!) things to be believed, or done and observed, by and upon its own authority (!!)
- (iii) **Executive** in acts of Jurisdiction towards persons and churches (p.205)

(10.) "The power of a synod for the **execution** of its **decrees** respects

- (i) The things or doctrines declared, and is **recommendatory** of them,
- (ii) Persons, to **censure, excommunicate, or punish...**(!!!) (p.206)

(11.) "The authority of a synod declaring the mind of God from the Scripture in doctrine, or giving counsel as unto practice synodically, unto them whose proper representatives are present in it, whose **decrees** and **determinations** are to be **received and submitted unto** on the evidence of their truth and necessity, as **recommended** by authority of the synod" (p.206)

(12.) "Hence it will follow that a synod convened in the name of Christ..... may **declare** and **determine** the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture and **decree** the observation of (such) ...which are to be **received, owned** and **observed** on the evidence of the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, and on the **ministerial authority of the synod itself**" (last para. p.208).

Enough ! Owen in paragraphs 1, 2, and 3, may be still within the confines of Puritan Independency, but certainly not **all** of today's Independency !

The fact is that in taking the steps Owen outlines in these three initial paragraphs, one has already made a giant leap away from the fundamental ideal of Independence. But Owen is still in line with Savoy here, though it must be said that many modern Independents are not, and are locked in an “our little chapel down the road” mentality, to the exclusion of the rest of God’s churches district-wide, let alone nation-wide or world-wide !

In paragraphs 4 and 5, note how Owen is clinging on to the idea of Synods delivering just **advice** and **counsel**. But note how he asserts in 4 that mutual inter-church communion is to be **via** the Synod, and in 5 he asserts that Synods are **God-ordained**.

Then, by paragraph 6, while reasserting the God-ordained basis of Synods, he asserts also how they are to be regarded as **instituted for all ages**, and then in paragraph 7 he **recommends frequent Synodical gatherings**, this latter being a definite move away from Savoy’s “occasional Synods”, which are “not” even “instituted by Christ”. (Savoy Article XXVII. See page 16 herein). Still, Owen only allows such synods to “**give advice**”.

Paragraph 8 expands Owen’s ideas on the purposes of Synods. An excellent adumbration it is, but vitiated at the end by that word **advice** again. But one wonders how the purposes listed (i) to (v) could ever be effectuated just by advice.

In paragraph 9, Owen is really talking Presbyterianism ! He has come a long, long way from Savoy at this juncture, using words like “Constitutive appointing and ordaining” and “**executive (!) acts of Jurisdiction** towards persons and churches”.

In paragraph 10 Owen talks in Westminster style of “the power of a synod for the **execution** of its **decrees**”, and to “censure, excommunicate and **punish**” (!). In fact, at this point, Owen sounds more Westminster than Westminster does ! (Check article III of Westminster Ch. 31, herein on page 16). But yet, in the middle of all this, Owen has “recommendatory”. I ask, how can one have the “execution” of “decrees” which are only “recommendatory” ?

Paragraph 11 betrays the same ambivalence. “**Decrees and determinations** are to be **received** and **submitted** to as recommended by authority of the synod” How can one only “recommend” obedience to a “decree” ?

And as to paragraph 12, Owen’s last words on this subject, one can only say : “Spoken like a true Presbyterian, Sir !”

I ask, did Owen veer away from the Independent position in his last days ? Can one accept Redpath’s evidence as being an indication, possibly over-stated, that Owen’s views were *in process of shifting* strongly in a Presbyterian direction, and that this explains both the ambivalence in his final treatise, and the fact that he did not, as Goold says he would have, make a radical break when checking the printers proofs? **We open this forum for readers to write in to give their considered views**, which we hope to publish, in Forum Response in Issue 12.