

**A MANUAL FOR
YOUNG
CHURCH-MEMBERS**

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A Manual for Young Church-Members by Leonard Bacon

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LEONARD BACON

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Congregational church-polity

A

MANUAL

FOR

YOUNG CHURCH-MEMBERS.

BY LEONARD BACON,
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN NEW-HAVEN.

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P R E F A C E .

THE substance of the following chapters, was addressed to my own people, a few months since, in a course of Sunday evening lectures. The reason which induced me to attempt, in those discourses, a plain exhibition of the nature, design, and rights of christian churches, and of the duties and relations of church-members, was not any desire to waken the spirit of sectarian controversy, but a conviction that church-members generally, need plain and practical instruction on these subjects; and that in my own church, to which about one hundred and fifty had then recently been added, such instruction was at that time especially appropriate. Every pastor has occasion to see how liable the members of the churches are to fall into serious errors of practice, through the want of distinct information. Every pastor knows that when new members are received into the church, and are

called to bear their part in its duties, there is peculiar need of instruction on these subjects. And there are few pastors, I believe, in New England, who have not at some time looked round for some popular exhibition of the principles of our church order, and of the corresponding duties of church-members, which they might recommend to their people.

There are several books in circulation which touch upon these subjects ; but not one I think which occupies precisely the same ground with the little treatise now submitted to the public. Dr. Hawcs' "Tribute to the memory of the Pilgrims," is an eloquent vindication of the Congregational churches ; but it goes into no details respecting the duties of church-members. Professor Upham's "Ratio Disciplina," is a guide for students, and ministers, and ecclesiastical councils, but probably was not designed for popular use. Mr. Harvey's "Obligations of Believers, to the visible Church," studiously avoids all questions about ecclesiastical order, and touches on none of the topics which I have attempted to exhibit, except in the able chapter

on discipline. Mr. James' "Church-Members Guide" is a book of great usefulness, and had it been written with express reference to the wants of the New England churches would have left no room for this humble effort.

Had I written with a view to controversy, the aspect of these pages would have been very different,—the margin would have been duly fortified with an array of authorities,—and here and there might have been a sprinkling of Greek, signifying the state of the author's equipments for disputation. But writing first for a popular audience, and then for readers of common learning, I have chosen to omit all those citations, and all those references to learned authors, which to such readers would be altogether unprofitable.

I do not expect that every reader will be pleased with every thing which he may find in this book; nor have I written with any such design. The book is designed for the use and benefit of Congregational church-members; if they read it, and profit by it, I shall not be solicitous about its reception in other quarters. It may be thought that in speaking of the opinions

and practices of other evangelical denominations, I have spoken with little ceremony ; but I trust none will say that I have spoken in the style of bigotry or ill-nature.

The question may be asked, Why treat of the peculiarities of Congregationalism ? Why not take common ground, and illustrate the duties of church-members without reference to any form of ecclesiastical organization ? My answer is, The views which we take in respect to the organization of churches, must needs modify very materially our views of the duties of church-members. What are the duties of a church-member according to the system of the church of England, or of the Episcopal church in this country ? What are the duties of a church-member according to the system established by Wesley ? What are the duties of membership in a Presbyterian church ? Let the answers to these several questions be drawn out, and exhibited side by side with the duties of a Congregational church-member ; and, if I have not mistaken the facts in the case, you will have a striking exhibition of the practical importance of

the question about the proper organization of churches. To make that question fundamental in the christian religion, and to unchurch all who do not agree with ourselves concerning it, is one error. To imagine that because the question is unessential, it is therefore unimportant, and ought never to be agitated; and that all forms are of course equally right and equally valuable, is another error,—I do not say a greater. The former is the error that most easily besets some churches; the latter is not unfrequent among Congregationalists.

Our fathers, it may be, attached too much importance to inquiries of this nature. Yet I cannot but think that their zeal for the principles of Congregationalism, was as wise as the indifference of some of their successors; for in its results that zeal of theirs has greatly benefitted the cause of christianity. I cannot but think that if the Congregational organization should be extensively adopted by evangelical christians every where, the result would be not only a vast extension of the principles and of the life of rational liberty, but a great developement of the