
Defending Congregationalism and Baptism

Even while John Davenport and his fellow colonists presented their New England Way to England as a model for reformation, they were still working to refine that system. Although most agreed that the privileges of church membership should be limited to those deemed worthy, each congregation reached its own decisions as to what the standards of worthiness were and how they were to be applied. While most agreed that a Congregational polity was most in keeping with God's way, individuals differed over issues such as how congregations should relate to one another and the precise division of authority between laity and clerical elders within a congregation. Over time some individuals began to reconsider the procedures they had first developed. Davenport was deeply involved in the effort to perfect the New England Way and advance the New Jerusalem.

Presbyterianism as generally promoted at this time differed from Congregationalism in three key respects. Presbyterians opened membership to all who lived in a town or parish while restricting the Lord's Supper to those deemed worthy; Congregationalists limited membership to the godly and allowed all members to partake of communion. Presbyterians emphasized the governing role of the clerical and lay elders within an individual congregation, whereas Congregationalists were insistent on the power of the laity in governance. At the heart of this particular debate were the meaning of "the church" and the issue of whom Peter represented when Christ bestowed upon him the power of the keys in Matthew 16:19. Davenport, as he had stated during the church trial of Anne Hutchinson, believed that the power of a congregation was "in the whole church," and not just its officers.¹ This was a position he