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‘The Low Condition of the Churches’: Difficulties Faced by General Baptists in England – the 1680s to the 1760s

ABSTRACT

The English General Baptists of the mid seventeenth century had a number of things in their favour. They had some gifted leaders and they developed the role of Messenger as an evangelistic office. Orthodox beliefs were espoused. Oversight in the churches helped to ensure commitment. Spirituality appeared, in churches of which there are records remaining, to be quite vibrant. Yet one hundred years later there had been considerable decline. It is often thought that this decline was due primarily to theological weakness, to isolation and to the weariness that General Baptists felt after years of persecution. These were certainly factors, but they were not the only ones, and even these issues were complex. Other crucial reasons for decline are analysed in this article. In the critical area of leadership, few, if any plans were put in place to find new, younger leadership. Gifted leaders were lost. At local level and also nationally, spiritual oversight was exercised in a way that was too often rigid and oppressive. Spirituality became to a large extent inward-directed. In the mid eighteenth century a number of General Baptist pastors and churches were expressing deep dissatisfaction and began to take an interest in the new spirit coming from the Evangelical Revival. Among many of the original General Baptist causes, however, despite their earlier history as a very creative Baptist movement, the ‘low condition’ which had come to characterise them was not remedied. But General Baptist life did emerge in new forms.

The antecedents and the beginnings of Baptist life owe a great deal to the creativity of John Smyth (c1570-1612), who after having been a Puritan preacher established a Separatist congregation in Lincolnshire in 1606-7. The members of this group described themselves as ‘the Lord’s free people’ and they ‘joined themselves (by a covenant of the Lord) into a Church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known unto them, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it would cost them, the Lord assisting them’.¹

¹ W. Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, notes and introduction by S.E. Morison (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1959), cited by J.R. Coggins, *John Smyth’s Congregation* (Waterlooville, Ont.: Herald Press 1991), 33.

After fleeing to Holland in 1608 to escape persecution, Smyth formed and led the first congregation from which Baptists trace their roots. Believer's baptism marked the move from separatist to Baptist life. As another Separatist, John Robinson, reported, Smyth 'baptised first himself', then others, 'out of a bason'.² Smyth had a varied career as a Church of England clergyman, a Puritan lecturer, a Separatist pastor, a Baptist congregational leader and finally a Mennonite fellow-traveller. A.C. Underwood, in his book *A History of the English Baptists*, generously describes Smyth as having 'a singularly open mind'.³ Smyth's theological contribution was significant, and his legacy of independent thought was carried on by Thomas Helwys, who returned to England to establish the first Baptist church on English soil and who also wrote an enormously significant treatise on religious freedom.⁴

After Helwys' death in Newgate prison, what became the 'General Baptist' or Arminian expression of Baptist life in England, committed to the belief in 'general' (universal) rather than 'particular' redemption, was led by John Murton. The General Baptists probably numbered not much more than one hundred and thirty people in six congregations in the 1620s, but they emerged from obscurity in the 1640s, taking advantage of the era of freedom ushered in by the English Civil War. They had lively churches such as the Bell Alley church in Coleman Street, London, led by Thomas Lambe, who was joined by Henry Denne, a dynamic preacher who had previously been an Anglican clergyman. Denne seems to have started a church in Fenstanton in East Anglia, and detailed records of this church exist. It is clear that under Denne's ministry there was a strong evangelistic emphasis at Fenstanton, with the 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28:19 being used by Denne to encourage evangelism.⁵ The evangelistic concerns of the General Baptists were reflected in the way they introduced and utilised the office of Messenger. Edward Barber, who probably worked with Denne, argued that the office of apostle (or Messenger), had not ceased. A Messenger must be appointed by a church and must gather disciples.⁶ In line with this,

² John Robinson, *Of Religious Communion* (Leydon, 1614), 48, cited by B.R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 1996), 19.

³ A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1947), 37.

⁴ T. Helwys, *The Mystery of Iniquity (1612)* (London: Carey Press, 1935).

⁵ *Records of the Churches of Christ, Gathered at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham, 1644-1720*, ed., E.B. Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1854), 71-2.

⁶ White, *Seventeenth Century*, 28-32; 34-6; J.F.V. Nicholson, 'The office of 'Messenger' amongst British Baptists in the 17th and 18th centuries', *The Baptist Quarterly* [hereafter *BQ*] Vol. 17 (1957-8): 206-25.

significant church planting took place among English General Baptists in the 1640s and 1650s.⁷

However, in a circular letter in 1711 from the ‘Messengers, Elders and Brethren’ representing ‘several congregations of the baptized believers who own the doctrine of universal redemption’ the churches belonging to the General Baptists’ General Assembly – the body which had oversight of the congregations - were told about the ‘low condition’ of the churches and the ‘careless walking and deadness of spirit’ which apparently characterised the congregations. There was a call for a day of fasting and prayer.⁸ Why were the General Baptist churches in England in such a poor spiritual condition? From 1660 to 1688 they had, on the whole, stood firm under the severe restrictions and persecutions meted out to Dissenters and they welcomed the move to toleration in 1689 after William and Mary came to the English throne. Local General Baptist churches monitored these political developments closely.⁹ When freedom came, Thomas Grantham, a Messenger and the most gifted General Baptist leader of the time, wrote that ‘the most glorious and worthy work to be done by God’s people, is to advance his truth, and to seek the salvation of the world, by all possible means’. But the plea for advance seems, for the most part, not to have resulted in growth.¹⁰ The causes of weakness and decline from the 1680s onwards merit consideration.

Leadership issues

One important factor inhibiting the advance of General Baptists was a lack of visionary leadership. It is true that they took seriously the office of Messenger, recognising that some ministers should be engaged in church planting and supervision of the churches. In the later seventeenth century there was a system of visitation of the churches by Messengers. But by the mid seventeenth century churches were less willing to release and support their ministers or elders to fulfil the role of Messengers and the Messengers were less evangelistic than they had been before. By the

⁷ See Ruth Butterfield, ‘The Royal Commission of King Jesus: General Baptist Expansion and Growth, 1640-1660’, *BQ* Vol. 35, No. 2 (1993): 56-80.

⁸ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches in England, Vol 1, 1654-1728*, ed., W.T. Whitley (London: Kingsgate Press, 1909), 118.

⁹ See minutes of the Ford General Baptist Congregation, in *The Church Books of Ford or Cuddington and Amersham in the County of Bucks*, edited by W.T. Whitley (London: Kingsgate Press, 1912), 4, 7.

¹⁰ R. Brown, *The English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1986), 14.

end of the century General Baptists had lost leaders of the calibre of Thomas Monck, who led the churches of Buckinghamshire and Hertfordshire in the south of England, and Thomas Grantham, both of whom died in the 1690s.¹¹ General Baptists did not, unlike the large group of Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists, usually attract into their leadership those who had wider theological knowledge. The exception to the general picture of weakening leadership was Matthew Caffyn, minister of the Baptist congregation in Horsham (this became the Free Christian Church, Horsham), in the county of Sussex.¹² Caffyn, a prosperous farmer, had embraced Baptist views while a student in Oxford. He was minister in Horsham from 1648 to 1714 and had enormous influence in the counties of Sussex and Kent. His theology, however, and in particular his unorthodox view of Christology (see below), caused huge tensions within General Baptist life. Thomas Monck led those who opposed Caffyn in this area.¹³ Weakness and division in their wider leadership undermined General Baptist life.

The drawing together of translocal and local leaders in the regular General Assembly meetings of the General Baptists was intended to be something that contributed to unity among the churches. On many occasions, in fact, the reverse was the case. Assemblies had to listen to extended reports of trivial local disputes. Often personality issues were involved. In 1704 a question was put to the Assembly about whether churches that previously did not have elders and who then called an elder were at that point able to dispense with the pastoral service of a Messenger. Clearly the answer was 'no'. The real reason for the question was then revealed. One Messenger, Thomas Dean, 'thought himself not to be treated as he ought to have been' by two of the London churches. The Assembly listened to the evidence from both sides and ruled that Dean had not been mistreated. The verdict given was that Dean had listened to the views of a few people and the failure was on his side since he should have been 'exerting his office' – as it was described - by actively caring for the churches.¹⁴ Difficulties continued. Dissatisfaction with the Assembly's processes and decisions meant that in 1711 the Assembly, meeting at the Dunning's Alley church in London, agreed that as a body Assembly members had 'no authority over any particular

¹¹ *English Baptist Records, Vol 1: The General Baptist Church of Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring, 1712-1781*, transcribed by L.G. Champion (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1985), viii.

¹² See Emily Kensett, *History of the Free Christian Church, Horsham* (Horsham: Free Christian Church, 1921).

¹³ M.R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 298-301.

¹⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 112-13.

churches only to give their counsel and advice'.¹⁵ Nor did the Assembly manage to establish the General Baptists as a denomination with which the wider Dissenting community in England could do business. This was highlighted a few years later when, in spite of the efforts of one leading London Particular Baptist minister, Benjamin Stinton, the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists failed to achieve a working relationship over the administration of the Particular Baptist Trust Fund. Hopes for a monthly meeting which would cultivate better understanding between General Baptists and Particular Baptists failed. This united effort was, said Joseph Ivimey, 'of short continuance'.¹⁶ It seemed that the General Baptists lacked leaders who had the calibre to engage with wider ecclesiastical life.

Isolation of this kind from other Christians contributed to the loss of some General Baptist leaders to the Particular Baptists. The best known instance was Benjamin Keach, who became a Particular Baptist in the 1670s, when he was in his early thirties. By his prolific hymn writing Keach contributed significantly to the development of worship among Baptists.¹⁷ Over the next thirty years a number of other ministers left the General Baptists, some perhaps with Keach's encouragement, and a few became influential in Particular Baptist churches. For example, Mark Key, after leaving the General Baptists in 1702, ministered in the town of Reading, Berkshire, and then became senior pastor of the strategic Devonshire Square church in London from where he attempted to spread Calvinistic teaching to the General Baptists.¹⁸ Whereas experienced Calvinistic ministers often encouraged younger leaders, there was relatively little of this going on among the General Baptists. In 1702 it was proposed at the General Assembly that a theological academy – a 'school of universal learning' designed to 'bring up persons...to the work of the ministry' – should be established, similar to the Particular Baptists' Bristol College. Perhaps because of internal dissension, nothing was done.¹⁹ Often General Baptist ministers were engaged in farming or some other trade to support their families:

¹⁵ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 104.

¹⁶ Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists*, Vol. III (London: B.J. Holdsworth, 1823), 111-13.

¹⁷ For early Baptist hymnody see H. Martin, 'The Baptist Contribution to Early Baptist Hymnody', *BQ* Vol. 19 (1961): 195-208; cf. C.J. Ellis, *Gathering: A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition* (London: SCM, 2004).

¹⁸ B.R. White, 'The Baptists of Reading, 1652-1715', *BQ* Vol. 22 (1968): 154-68, 219-34.

¹⁹ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, p. 75; cf. H. Foreman, 'Baptist Provision for Ministerial Education in the 18th Century', *BQ* Vol. 27, No. 8 (1978): 358-69.

typically the churches did not have the money to pay them, and this caused frustration. In 1729 a Lincolnshire General Baptist pastor, John Hursthouse, who had been repeatedly chosen to be a Messenger but whose church would not release him, expressed his despair over the loss of 'so many of our best and ablest ministers' and the fact that there were 'so few to supply their places'.²⁰

The problem of wastage of leadership from General Baptist churches at local level is illustrated well by General Baptist church at Ford, near Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, an area of considerable Baptist strength. One of the leaders of the Ford congregation was Edward Hoare, from nearby Prince's Risborough. Meetings of the Ford congregation took place in homes in towns and villages in the area. In 1699 the church minutes noted that Hoare was one of those supervising church members and was involved in the administration of discipline.²¹ Later that year tensions boiled up within the church over some members, including Hoare, who held that 'Christ did not die equally for all mankind' (that is, who held Calvinistic beliefs). It was agreed that they should be 'borne with' but should not propagate their opinions.²² At a church meeting on 12 June 1700, however, Hoare was charged with 'denying that the Lord Jesus Christ died as a redeemer for all mankind'. He was also accused of withdrawing from a day of fasting and prayer because a prayer by Clement Hunt, the local Messenger, implied - as Hoare saw it - that the day would be devoted to prayer that God would remove 'the cloudiness of the minds of all Christians and enlighten them in the faith of universal redemption'.²³ A month later, at a meeting in Prince's Risborough, the question was put whether Ford members could 'sit under the ministry or break bread' with a schismatic group being led by Hoare, Thomas Norris and John Coker. It was made clear that it was unacceptable for any member to support 'disorderly separation'.²⁴ This stance was affirmed by the General Assembly in 1702.²⁵ The Ford church did not formally end communion with Hoare, however, until 1706, and sought to draw back members such as John Norris, Mary

²⁰ John Hursthouse, quoted in Adam Taylor, *History of the English General Baptists*, Vol 2 (London: T. Bore, 1818), 106-7.

²¹ *Church Books of Ford...and Amersham*, 30-1. Whitley's index suggests that he sees Brother Hore and Edward Hoare as different people, whereas my reading of the minutes leads me to believe they are the same person.

²² *Church Books of Ford...and Amersham*, 33-4. This minute was signed by seven of the congregation's leaders. I have modernised the spellings.

²³ *Church Books of Ford...and Amersham*, 35.

²⁴ *Church Books of Ford...and Amersham*, 36-7. See Assembly Mins, Vol 1, 65.

²⁵ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, Vol 1, 74.

Dagnall and Hannah Spreadborough who had joined Hoare's 'erroneous company'.²⁶

There were other kinds of local leadership problems. An example is the case of Jonathan Widmer who, in 1712, was nominated as an elder to serve the church at Chesham and Berkhamsted, about twenty-five miles outside London. At the time the church, which was formed in or soon after 1640, had a remarkably large membership of over four hundred, with three main congregations – Chesham, Berkhamsted and also Tring - and about eighteen preaching stations. The Minute Book exists, covering 1712 to 1781. The church had been well served by a team of elders – Thomas Monck had been one - but in 1712 only one of the elders remained. Despite the urgent need for new leadership, it took an astonishing seven years to complete the process of Widmer's appointment as various objections to him were raised. One story recorded in the minutes was that Widmer had been entrusted with some mince pies to pass to a well-known local person but that instead of delivering them Widmer and others ate them. In fact Widmer owned up to this misdemeanour, and because it had happened three or four years before and there was no other similar case the charge was dismissed.²⁷ More seriously, one member alleged that during the harvesting period Widmer had 'told some maids that if they would go on the other side of the hedge he would quickly warm them'. Widmer's defence was that he actually meant that the girls would be warmed up by their work although he admitted that he did kiss one or two of them. His defence was accepted. Widmer was finally judged to be acceptable as an elder.²⁸

The extraordinarily lengthy process through which the Chesham/Berkhamsted church went shows that the appointment of local leadership was subject to careful screening. However, it also indicates that a few people could act as a bar to new leadership emerging. It is clear that there were factional elements in the church which restricted Widmer's ministry. He himself believed that Mary Hobbs, an articulate church member, was one of the people fomenting public opposition to him. The church insisted that Widmer and Hobbs should meet and - according to the biblical pattern – sort out the differences that existed between them. At the same time the church agreed that Mary Hobbs 'sit down with her husband as a member in the Wycombe church'. It seemed that her husband was at another congregation, in

²⁶ *Church Books of Ford...and Amersham*, 54, 57, 61.

²⁷ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 7-8, 10-12; cf. G.R. Doster, 'Discipline and Ordination at Berkhamsted General Baptist Church, 1712-1718', *BQ* Vol. 27, No 3 (1977): 128-38.

²⁸ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, pp. 12-13, 46.

nearby Wycombe, and so she was being advised to join him. This outspoken lady disappeared from the scene in 1716. The Berkhamsted church meeting minutes recorded that she was ‘delivered to her husband for the future’, and someone added the telling note – ‘better than to Satan’.²⁹ It took a further two years (and a despairing offer by Widmer to resign from church membership) until Widmer became an elder, an office which he undertook with such effectiveness that in 1728 he was appointed by the General Assembly as a Messenger.³⁰ If he was in any way typical, the route to General Baptist leadership was a tortuous one and this did not encourage the recognition of gifts.

Doctrinal disputes

Theological issues constituted another problematic area. The most significant dispute which divided General Baptists in the period from the 1670s to the 1730s was over the nature of the person of Christ. There were Presbyterians and Anglicans who were questioning traditional Christological doctrine, and Kent and Sussex General Baptist churches were influenced by the Christology of Melchior Hoffman, an Anabaptist leader in Holland in the sixteenth century.³¹ At the General Assembly in 1693 various doctrinal questions were raised. Was Christ a created being? Did he take his flesh from Mary? Hoffman’s theory that Christ’s flesh was not taken from Mary was explicitly rejected. Orthodox belief about Christ’s full deity and true humanity, such as had been embodied in the important General Baptist *Orthodox Creed* of 1679, was affirmed. But at the same time Caffyn was acquitted of holding unorthodox views.³² It was an uneasy compromise. In an attempt to contain the controversy, the General Assembly did not meet for the following three years, but when it did convene again agreement was impossible. A rival Assembly, the General Association, met. There was a subsequent reconciliation in 1704, on the basis of a series of statements, including that Christ was ‘the second person of the Trinity and the only begotten Son of God and that he did in fulness of time take to himself of our nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary’.³³ But this was followed by further tensions in

²⁹ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 21.

³⁰ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 32-3, 68-9.

³¹ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 298-9. For Hoffman see K. Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Social unrest and apocalyptic visions in the age of Reformation*, transl. by M. Wren, ed. B. Drewery (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987).

³² *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 39-40. For the *Orthodox Creed* see W.L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Judson Press, 1969).

³³ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 87-91.

the next few years. It was clear by 1719, when out of a representative group of General Baptists only two were prepared to subscribe to a Trinitarian affirmation of faith (this became known as the Salters' Hall controversy), that General Baptist orthodoxy, particularly in the area of Christology, was extremely precarious.³⁴

It is not that General Baptists were embracing an explicit Unitarian position in this period, although later a number did. Rather, what was said increasingly by many General Baptist pastors was that the Christian faith should be expressed only in the words of scripture, not in the words of a creed, even a Baptist creed. This might have meant more room for doctrinal unity but in the event it spelled further rupture. In 1731 there was a division, much like the one in 1696 which had been healed temporarily in 1704. There were in fact virtually two General Baptist denominations over the course of at least three decades, the more orthodox churches being found mainly in Buckinghamshire and the Midlands, with the followers of Caffyn concentrated in Kent and Sussex.³⁵ The reason for the further dispute in 1731 was that at the Assembly it was resolved that 'no preacher or member of the churches, now belonging to this Assembly...shall preach, write or urge, in discourse, such controversy about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, which shall be unto the disturbance of the churches' peace...'.³⁶ Further discussions took place, with the Assembly members stating in 1733 that scripture, not a creed, was 'the only rule of faith and practice'.³⁷ This did not impress the churches that demanded an orthodox statement of faith and so the Assembly of 1735 declared unequivocally that 'we firmly believe in the Doctrine of the Trinity'. This was designed to bring the estranged churches – the Buckinghamshire churches were mentioned explicitly- back into Assembly life.³⁸ But the theological tensions were considerable and unity was fragile. Such unity as there was in the 1730s was not to last.

Despite the disputes about Trinitarian formulation, General Baptists all insisted that they were being true to their doctrinal heritage in respect of general or universal rather than particular redemption. The title they used to describe themselves continued to be 'Baptized churches who own the doctrine of universal redemption'. However, the stress on

³⁴ Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, 21-3. For further background see Underwood, *History of the English Baptists*, chapter 6.

³⁵ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 300. Watts and Brown disagree about the position of the churches in Essex.

³⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly of the General Baptist Churches, Vol 2*, 2.

³⁷ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 2*, 16-17.

³⁸ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 2*, 32-3, 37.

study of the Bible alone could yield unwanted results when it came to Arminian-Calvinist debates. One Berkhamsted church member, Sister Butler, testified in 1718 that she had ‘turned over her Bible and found God had a chosen people in the world’. The doctrine of election was associated with Calvinism, and she therefore asked to leave and join a Particular Baptist church. The Berkhamsted leadership questioned this move, arguing that ‘we as much as they [the Particular Baptists] did own that God hath a chosen people in the world’. Not surprisingly, when asked to explain the different views of election that were being advocated Sister Butler was unable to do so. In a fascinating episode, three ‘Particular Brethren belonging to Dunstable Meeting’, a minister, elder and a member, attended a meeting with the Berkhamsted church leadership to discuss certain charges that had been made against Butler.³⁹ Calvinistic Baptists, although theologically troublesome, were seen during this episode as ‘brethren’ who shared a common belief in a disciplined church. But anti-Calvinism was still a strongly-held General Baptist distinctive.

Both Particular and General Baptists were to feel the effects, and especially the challenge to their traditions, of the Evangelical Revival. This created new vitality within Particular Baptist circles, which had been hindered by a high, non-evangelistic Calvinism. The new vitality was expressed most famously among Particular Baptists through the Northamptonshire Association. Andrew Fuller, as part of that Association, became the leading theologian among Particular Baptists.⁴⁰ Among General Baptists it was Dan Taylor, born in 1738 and converted at the age of fifteen in a Methodist class meeting, who injected new energy into General Baptist life. After his baptism in 1763 he was ordained as a General Baptist pastor by Gilbert Boice, the Lincolnshire Messenger, and two years later Taylor attended his first General Assembly. He soon became upset by the doctrinal deficiencies of the General Baptists, writing in his diary on 27 August 1765: ‘I am now returned from Gamston [from a General Baptist meeting] where I have had much disputing for what I call the truth...I see how easy it is to perplex when we cannot refute the plain truth of the gospel. Lord help me to hold fast by thy word.’⁴¹ Dan Taylor attended General Baptist

³⁹ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 48-9.

⁴⁰ For Andrew Fuller see P. Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller and the Revival of English Particular Baptist Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

⁴¹ Adam Taylor, *Memoirs of the Rev. Dan Taylor Late Pastor of the General Baptist Church Whitechapel, London* (London, 1820), 21-2. For Dan Taylor and the New Connexion see F. Rinaldi, *The Tribe of Dan: A Study of the New Connexion of General Baptists, 1770-1891* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, forthcoming).

Assemblies as well as local Association meetings in the later 1760s, and found, as Adam Taylor recorded in his history of the General Baptists, that there were debates about doctrines such as the atonement and regeneration, doctrines which he regarded as ‘absolutely essential to Christianity’. In 1769, Adam Taylor wrote, ‘disputes ran so high, both at the Lincolnshire association and the general assembly...that many of the friends of the great truths already mentioned were led to conclude that a separation was necessary’.⁴² Gilbert Boice tried hard to prevent the separation, but at a meeting in Lincoln it was resolved that a ‘New Connection’ of General Baptists be formed. This Connection was formed a year later, ‘with a design to revive Experimental Religion or Primitive Christianity in Faith and Practice’.⁴³

The practice of church oversight

Church oversight and discipline was often carried out in a way that weakened the General Baptist churches. At the 1668 General Assembly it was pronounced that ‘for a believer to marry an unbeliever is a sin against the law of God’. The unbeliever was defined as someone who was ‘not a member of the visible Church of Christ’, but in fact the Church was restricted to the General Baptist denomination.⁴⁴ The policy of ‘endogamy’, as it is termed, was to remain unchanged over many decades, although it was gradually softened to allow marriage to members of churches other than General Baptist causes. It was mirrored in other Dissenting denominations such as the Quakers.⁴⁵ In 1704 it was agreed at the General Assembly that marrying ‘out of the Lord or out of the Church’ was a cause for discipline, it would not be called ‘fornication’, as had previously been common.⁴⁶ It seems according to the Chesham/Berkhamsted church meeting minutes that at their baptism members who were unmarried made a vow not to marry outside the church. In 1714, however, both Sister Cattlin and Elizabeth Rudrupp ‘married contrary to the law of God’ and contrary to their ‘covenant in baptism’.⁴⁷ The policy created great tensions. No other issue crops up so often in the discipline of these congregations. Men as well as women married ‘outside’. Even one of the church’s elders, Brother Foster,

⁴² Taylor, *History of the English General Baptists*, Vol 2, 133-5.

⁴³ Taylor, *History of the English General Baptists*, Vol 2, 136-9.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, Vol 1, 23.

⁴⁵ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 329-31. For more on marriage debates see J. Caffyn, *Sussex Believers: Baptist marriage in the 17th and 18th centuries* (Worthing: Churchman Publishing, 1988).

⁴⁶ *Minutes of the General Assembly*, Vol 1, 93.

⁴⁷ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 17.

married 'out of the way of the Lord', and at a church meeting in Chesham in 1719 he was 'withdrawn from in the name of the Lord until he shall be enabled by the grace of God to make satisfaction to the church'.⁴⁸ In many cases, as with Foster, the way was open for member to repent of the sin after their marriage. In Fenstanton, for example, Rebekah Andrews, from St Ives, acknowledged her 'evil' in 'marrying outside the church' and was received back.⁴⁹ One can only imagine what effect this kind of process had on the marriage.

One brave church, in the village of Bessels Green, near Sevenoaks, in Kent, queried the strict endogamy ruling in 1744. The very restrictive policy had meant a continual loss of members. Given the generally small congregations within the General Baptist denomination it was likely that marriages outside the denomination were going to take place frequently, and they did. A detailed and impressive reply was given to the Bessels Green church by Matthew Randall, who was a leading General Baptist Messenger. Randall emphasised the problems with 'mixed marriages' but he then went on to suggest a more open policy than was currently the case. He believed that there was nothing in scripture to stop two Christians marrying each other even if they were from different denominations. Indeed the idea of a denomination, he argued, was not known in Scripture. Excommunication for 'marrying out' was, he acknowledged, draining away church members and also discouraging others from becoming members of General Baptist churches. If a Christian woman could not marry within the church, asked Randall, was there not another option? He asked: 'Must they, on pain of excommunication, refuse every sober, virtuous Christian-like person merely because he has not happened to be baptized by immersion or profession of faith? Is this consistent with Christian charity and forbearance?'⁵⁰ It was sound and sensitive pastoral wisdom, but a long history of unsympathetic approaches to oversight and discipline within General Baptist congregations had already taken its toll.

General Baptist church discipline, as indicated by an analysis of the Chesham/Berkhamsted church records, covered at least six main areas. A careful check was made by the elders of attendance at worship by the members. There might be valid excuses, such as that offered by Sister Foster who could explain her absence by saying that 'nursing did prevent her from God's worship on Lord's Days'. But frequent non-attendance generally resulted in being put out of membership. Sexual

⁴⁸ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 51.

⁴⁹ *Records of the Churches...at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham*, 263-4. This was in 1677.

⁵⁰ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol. 2*, 72-5.

misconduct also incurred discipline. Cases of debt were regularly dealt with, although one member, Sarah Seer, was handled more leniently because she was borrowing from her husband. Other areas of misbehaviour that appear in the minutes are lying and cheating, fighting and drunkenness. The proof that a charge was justified did not mean automatic excommunication. Whether or not there was evidence of repentance was a crucial issue.⁵¹ On occasions, as can be seen from all General Baptist congregational records, there was disagreement about discipline. In the mid-1650s Robert Haines joined the General Baptist meeting in Horsham, Sussex. He was a wealthy and inventive farmer and after discovering a way to improve hop clover seed he applied for an official patent. Matthew Caffyn, the Messenger, who may have been jealous of this discovery by Haines, insisted in 1672 that Haines should be excommunicated for greed. A decade of wrangling followed, including hearings at the General Assembly and threats of legal action. Eventually Haines was vindicated.⁵² Enormous energy had been expended on a mistaken application of discipline. The strength of discipline when properly applied could become a dramatic weakness when it was misused.

Questions of spirituality

The final area where General Baptist weaknesses became apparent over time was that of spiritual experience. It might be expected that there would be an emphasis in the church records on the experience of baptism and its relationship to conversion, but in the Chesham/Berkhamsted records, for example, surprisingly little mention is made of baptism. An example of a baptism in the records of the General Baptist Church in Fenstanton, however, is illuminating. The entry notes that John Copper was baptised at Spalding, by Luke Copeland, a deacon of the Fenstanton church, in the winter of 1694, at the age of twenty-two. Despite the hard frost and deep snow Copper was, the record comments, protected from any harm to his health. This was presumably an outdoor baptism. 'Let none be afraid to venture into the water when the season is cold', said the senior elder of the church, 'lest they be laid in their graves before the weather be warm'.⁵³ Here a high view was clearly being taken of baptism. There was controversy, however, over the General Baptist practice of laying on of hands, at

⁵¹ L.G. Champion, 'The Chesham and Berkhamsted church book', *BQ* Vol. 31, No. 2 (1985): 74-82.

⁵² *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 2*, xii-xv.

⁵³ *Records of the Churches...at Fenstanton, Warboys and Hexham*, 264.

baptism, for the gift of the Holy Spirit. In 1704 there was discussion at the General Assembly as to whether there should be ‘two lawful administrators’ to lay hands on the baptismal candidate.⁵⁴ At the Amersham church the practice that developed was to have a Messenger lay hands on those baptised. Thus in 1724 when Henry Saxton was baptised by Jonathan Widmore he then ‘came under hands in order to communion’, the laying on of hands being conducted by John Britain of Stony Stratford, a Messenger. A decade later Joseph Hobbs, a Messenger from Wycombe, laid hands on a couple in Amersham ten days after they had been baptised by one of the Amersham elders.⁵⁵ Baptism and the laying on of hands should have been a practice that emphasised spiritual experience but the focus seems to have been increasingly on external ritual.

Spiritual life in congregations was nourished by the Bible and by celebrating the Lord’s Supper. One important way by which the Bible was mediated was through preaching. Sermons were generally long. When John Stanger, who in 1766 became the minister at the Bessels Green General Baptist Church, Kent, preached his ‘trial sermon’ (to test his ability as a preacher), it was no less than two hours in length. Even then he did not get through all his material.⁵⁶ There is no evidence as to whether all the members of the congregation kept up their concentration. However, it does seem that members at times lacked enthusiasm for preaching. In 1755 Thomas Brittain, an experienced minister from Leighton Buzzard who served as scribe of the General Assembly, recorded that on one occasion when he came to his church to preach ‘there was nobody to hear me’. He went home ‘sorely disappointed’.⁵⁷ Instruction in biblical knowledge also took place – in theory at least - in the home. Catechisms were produced, but by 1715 congregations were being told that there was ‘great neglect’ in the catechising of children and that many young people were abandoning their faith. Ministers were urged to preach on family worship.⁵⁸ Early General Baptist preaching was probably spontaneous, with no notes being used, but prepared sermons became more prevalent. Linked with the ministry of the Word was the observance of the Lord’s Supper. The Chesham/Berkhamsted church gave priority to arrangements for

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 85.

⁵⁵ *Church Books of Ford...and Amersham*, 245, 247.

⁵⁶ E.A. Payne, ‘The Venerable John Stanger of Bessels Green’, *BQ* Vol. 28, No. 7 (1978): 306.

⁵⁷ T. Brittain, *The Theological Remembrancer* (1900), cited by Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, 66.

⁵⁸ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 129-30.

preaching, but also brought together from time to time 'all the members from all parts' (from the different congregations and preaching stations) so that they could 'break bread as one Church'. This was a complex arrangement, and reflected the need for an elder to preside.⁵⁹ Where there was a shortage of elders, as was often the case, Messengers attempted to fill the gap.⁶⁰ Sustaining the inner life of the churches was difficult.

There was concern about how worship should or could be expressed when unbelievers were present in the Baptist meetings. Since many meetings were held in private houses, the presence of unbelievers may have been less frequent than if the churches had met in public buildings. These debates reflected the way in which the early evangelistic spirituality of the General Baptists had become to a large extent inward-looking. How could a 'mixed congregation', it was asked, with believers and unbelievers both present, offer up worship that was truly spiritual? One solution was to have only solo singing. It was agreed in 1689 at the General Assembly that just as prayer offered by one person in the church was the prayer of the whole, so the singing of one person was the singing of the whole.⁶¹ Like the Quakers, the General Baptists in this period did not place strong emphasis on the use of song in worship. Perhaps meeting in homes did not encourage the use of congregational songs. James Rolph, a member at Berkhamsted, obviously rather frustrated by his experience of Baptist worship, decided to try out worship in a church of a different denomination - probably the Church of England - which used an organ and liturgy. He was censured by his own church, and having refused to come and explain himself to the members (and also having married 'out of the communion of the Church' - perhaps a related issue if he had married someone from the Church of England) he was expelled from membership.⁶² Possibly following the example of the Particular Baptists, some General Baptist churches did introduce congregational hymn singing in the early eighteenth century, much to the disgust of the Northamptonshire churches, which in 1733 dismissed hymns as 'other men's composures', and condemned such 'innovations which do easily find a way in to the Churches of Christ'.⁶³ The contempt that was shown for hymns raises fascinating questions about what style of singing was adopted by soloists.

⁵⁹ *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 74.

⁶⁰ Nicholson, 'The office of 'Messenger' amongst British Baptists in the 17th and 18th centuries', 218.

⁶¹ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 27.

⁶² *Berkhamsted, Chesham and Tring*, 32.

⁶³ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 2*, 15-16.

By the 1730s some General Baptist churches were being given more freedom to innovate in their worship and to enrich their spirituality, but it was a freedom which came too late for others.

For almost all General Baptists, true spirituality meant living a life which was seen as separate from the world and in which the believers devoted herself or himself to Christ. What about Christians who indulged in 'worldly' practices? The General Assembly was asked to rule in 1711, in answer to questions from churches in Lincolnshire, about the acceptability or otherwise of playing cards, or even condoning card-playing. It seems that ministers were not guiltless in this particular area and that it was even known for ministers to approve of cockfighting. The question was asked whether such 'vices', even though 'moderately used', were a sufficient cause for a church to deprive someone of communion. The answer was in the affirmative. Ministers who countenanced such vices, said the Assembly, rendered themselves unfit for ministerial office. The letter from the Assembly that year reflected the serious discussions that had taken place and drew attention to the 'deadness of spirit in the churches'.⁶⁴ There is little evidence of improvement over the succeeding years. The Assembly of 1732 mentioned, with evident anxiety, the 'very great decay of holiness and piety in many of the members of the baptized churches and rising generation'.⁶⁵ Twenty years later concerns about the level of spirituality were still being voiced. The 1755 Assembly asked that one of the Messengers present, Matthew Randall, should revise a book by Francis Stanley, *Gospel Honour and the Church's Ornament*, so that it could be republished. Stanley, a Messenger of a previous generation, taught in this book the importance of being a 'well disciplined Christian'.⁶⁶ A General Baptist church was still seen an alternative community, spiritually set apart from the world, but this standard was hard to maintain.

Conclusion

The English General Baptists of the mid seventeenth century had a number of things in their favour. They had some gifted leaders and they developed the role of Messenger as an evangelistic office. Orthodox beliefs were espoused. Oversight in the churches helped to ensure commitment. Spirituality appeared, in churches of which there are records remaining, to be quite vibrant. Yet one hundred years later there

⁶⁴ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 1*, 115, 118.

⁶⁵ *Minutes of the General Assembly, Vol 2*, 7.

⁶⁶ Brown, *English Baptists of the Eighteenth Century*, 65.

had been considerable decline. It is often thought that this decline was due primarily to theological weakness, to isolation and to the weariness that General Baptists, together with other Dissenters, felt after years of persecution. These were certainly factors, but they were not the only ones, and even these issues were complex. Other crucial reasons for decline have been analysed here. In the critical area of leadership, few, if any plans were put in place to find new, younger General Baptist leadership. The financial support of elders and Messengers was an ongoing problem. Gifted leaders were being lost to the Particular Baptists. The lack of engagement by General Baptists with the wider Christian community and their many internal squabbles hindered the development of the denomination from the 1680s onwards. At local level and also at the General Assembly, spiritual oversight was exercised in a way that was too often rigid and oppressive, especially over the matter of those who married outside the General Baptist fold. Spirituality became to a large extent inward-directed. In the mid eighteenth century a number of General Baptist pastors and churches were expressing deep dissatisfaction and began to take an interest in the new spirit coming from the Evangelical Revival. The leader of what became a fresh movement of General Baptists, Dan Taylor, modelled himself on John Wesley. In 1770 nineteen General Baptists, led by Taylor, signed a statement which affirmed orthodox Christian teaching, together with traditional General Baptist distinctives. The six articles of this statement dealt with the fall of humanity, the moral law, the person and work of Jesus Christ, salvation by faith, regeneration by the Holy Spirit and believer's baptism. These signatories were the 'fathers' of the New Connexion of General Baptists.⁶⁷ Among many of the original General Baptist causes, despite their earlier history as a very creative Baptist movement, the 'low condition' which had come to characterise them was not remedied, but General Baptist life did emerge in new forms.

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⁶⁷ Taylor, *History of the English General Baptists*, Vol 2, 139-43.

SOCIAL CONSCIENCE AND POLITICAL POWER AMONG NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH BAPTISTS

ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century, the forces of industrialization and rapid population growth greatly transformed England, and the Baptist denomination in that country experienced extraordinary changes as well. As the denomination increased rapidly in size and as political enfranchisement was extended to include men of the middle and working classes, Baptists were transformed from a disadvantaged outsider minority into a significant political faction within national political life. As they surveyed the increasingly desperate conditions of urban poverty from their new-found position of influence, Baptists became increasingly concerned for the material as well as spiritual well-being of the poor. Most Baptists came to believe that education and temperance were two of the most important and effective mechanisms for improving the condition of the poor in England. The dominant force behind the Baptist decision to emphasize these social causes was the principle of self-improvement. But if self-improvement was the guiding principle behind the development of the Baptist social conscience, that of church/state separation shaped their attitude towards legislation aimed at social problems. Ironically, this commitment to keeping the state from meddling with the church or infringing upon individuals' freedom of conscience caused Baptists in the 1870s to oppose the Liberal government's attempts to confront the social problems that had become such a concern of English Baptists.

Introduction

Baptists in England experienced a drastic and fundamental transformation during the nineteenth century in terms of their role in and relationship to society. Like other religious dissenters, Baptists began the century as both religious and political outsiders, relegated to the sidelines of politics and society as a penalty for their desire to follow their religious conscience. By the end of the century, however, Baptists and their fellow nonconformists had long since left the periphery and constituted a significant segment of English society and a powerful political force. The Baptist ranks swelled with new members, new

Baptist chapels multiplied rapidly, political reform gave Baptists unprecedented political enfranchisement, and Baptists found a new home as a valued constituency within the Liberal Party. The numerical expansion enjoyed by Baptists did not happen in a vacuum, though. Industrialization and urbanization reshaped and reorganized English society almost beyond recognition during the years between 1800 and 1900. Situated primarily in industrial areas, Baptists saw the urban poverty that was a by-product of this rapidly changing society and recognized the need to assist those it mired. Over the course of the nineteenth century Baptists developed a stronger sense of social conscience, embracing causes such as education and temperance as the key means for improving the lot of the poor around them.

Thus by the end of the century two major alterations had occurred in Baptist life: one in terms of political clout and the other in terms of social concern. In addition to surveying these changes in Baptist life and thought, this essay hopes to resolve two main questions. First, what forces influenced the Baptist social conscience to develop in the way that it did during the nineteenth century? That is, why did Baptists embrace causes such as temperance and education as the best means to alleviate the social problems of industrialization? Second, how did Baptists act on their social conscience once they had achieved greater numerical strength and political influence? How did they react when their social conscience was wedded to their newly-gained political power? An examination of Baptist activities during the decade of the 1870s will shed light upon the interplay of social conscience and political power among nineteenth-century Baptists and reveal how one of the earliest Baptist principles—separation of church and state—controlled much of this interaction.

Politics

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, most English Baptists were content just to be ‘tolerated’ by their country’s government. From their humble beginnings, Baptists had been on bad terms with the Crown. The first congregation of English Baptists formed not in England at all, but in Amsterdam. This is a significant fact, as it points to the estrangement from their native government that English Baptists would feel for almost two and a half centuries. John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, two separatist ministers who had fled to Amsterdam for safety, formed a congregation there in 1609, based upon beliefs that the only true baptism was adult believer’s baptism and that a true church is one made up of converted believers in Christ. Helwys led the group back to England a few years later, and they were immediately subjected to

persecution and hardships that would persist throughout the seventeenth century and beyond.¹

Baptists particularly earned the disdain of the Crown through their indefatigable commitment to the separation of the state from religion. The principle of church/state separation has deep roots in Baptist life, going all the way back to Thomas Helwys. Upon his return from Amsterdam with the first congregation of English Baptists, Helwys published a book entitled *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*. In this work, Helwys argued that the King of England was merely an ‘earthly king’, and that religion is a private matter between God and an individual. Helwys’ revolutionary plea went beyond demanding religious equality merely for Christian dissenters; he also argued for toleration of all religions. ‘Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever’, he wrote, ‘it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure’.² Though James I was not swayed by Helwys’ appeal, and Helwys spent the few remaining years of his life in prison, the principles laid out in his bold work became a cornerstone of Baptist conviction for the generations that followed him. Like Helwys, subsequent Baptists suffered persecution from the government for their dedication to religious freedom. All nonconformists, not just Baptists, experienced especially harsh oppression following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. It was not until the Toleration Act of 1689 that nonconformists finally advanced from a state of being persecuted to that of merely being oppressed and discriminated against.³

By the early 18th century Baptists could follow their conscience peaceably, though as second-class citizens. The laws that barred them from public office and muffled their political voice were never repealed in the eighteenth century. Baptists still lacked political enfranchisement and representation. Thus at the dawn of the nineteenth century Baptists occupied the marginal position in society to which they had grown accustomed in the eighteenth century. Baptists tended towards political quietism during this period, rarely speaking out on secular political issues. As George Machin puts it, Baptists had developed a ‘judicious

¹ Barrington R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 27-9.

² Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, ed. by Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 34, 53.

³ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 102-4; John Coffey, “From Helwys to Leland: Baptists and Religious Tolerance in England and America, 1612-1791,” in *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies*, vol. 1, ed. by David W. Bebbington (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2002), 14-5.

resignation to adverse political circumstances'.⁴ Between 1800 and 1832 only one Baptist served as a Member of Parliament.⁵ Nonconformist political leadership during this period generally came from the Unitarians. As the century wore on, however, the Baptists' principled objection to political involvement would soften as they began to view government less as a threat and more as an aid to the spread of Christianity.

In 1800 the population of England was around nine million. At that time Baptists numbered only about 24,000—or about one fourth of one percent of the total population. During the first half of the century, however, the effects of the evangelical revival were felt as Baptists and other nonconformist denominations grew at a rate that greatly outpaced the population growth of England. Though the nation as a whole doubled in population between 1800 and 1850, membership in nonconformist chapels during that time grew by 500 percent.⁶ Baptists benefited equally from this growth, quadrupling in size during the first half of the century.⁷ By 1850 there were between 100,000 and 150,000 Baptists in England and Wales, and on Census Sunday in 1851 Baptist churches attracted over half a million worshippers.⁸ Baptist growth was particularly astounding in relation to the size of the Church of England. Though Anglicans held a three to one majority over nonconformists in England in 1800, by 1840 the number of nonconformist chapels had surpassed that of Anglican churches.⁹ In 1851 nonconformists outnumbered Anglicans in almost every large industrial city in England. The growth experienced by Baptists, like that of the nation as a whole, took place primarily in the midland counties, which experienced the greatest amount of industrialization and urbanization.¹⁰

⁴ G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1832 to 1868* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 14.

⁵ David W. Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience in the Nineteenth Century,' *Baptist Quarterly* 34 (January 1991): 13.

⁶ Richard J. Helmstadter, 'Orthodox Nonconformity', in *Nineteenth-Century English Religious Traditions: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. by D. G. Paz. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 69.

⁷ John D. Gay, *The Geography of Religion in England* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1971), 121.

⁸ J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 264.

⁹ Helmstadter, 'Orthodox Nonconformity', 69.

¹⁰ Helmstadter, 'Orthodox Nonconformity', 69. Bebbington notes that on Census Sunday 'nonconformist attendance exceeded Anglican attendance in twenty-one of the twenty-nine towns designated the chief manufacturing

Baptists' rapid growth during the first half of the century, coupled with their dense distribution in the industrial towns of the Midlands, put them in a position to benefit immensely from political reforms taking place in this period. Political enfranchisement first came to the Baptists in 1828 with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, which opened up public offices to nonconformists on both the local and national level. It was the Reform Act of 1832, however, that finally made Baptists legitimate players in the political system. This Act affected both the distribution of Parliamentary seats and the voting eligibility requirements in ways that, albeit unintentionally, were extremely favorable to Baptists and increased their political power. Parliamentary representation was redistributed from the sparsely-populated southern counties to the urbanized northern counties and, consequently, to areas of Baptist strength. The Act also doubled the number of citizens who could vote - from ten percent of the male population to about twenty percent - by allowing any man who owned property worth at least ten pounds per year in rent to vote. Thus artisans and other working-class and middle-class citizens now made up much of the voting population.¹¹

Some Baptists continued to debate whether or not Christians should be involved in politics, but many soon embraced this newly-afforded opportunity to effect political change. Baptist ministers, too, became increasingly political. At least twenty-five percent of Baptist ministers between the years 1810 and 1850 were actively involved in politics.¹² It was during the decades following the 1832 Reform Act that Baptists ceased to be political outsiders and, along with Congregationalists, replaced the Unitarians as the political leaders of English nonconformity.¹³ The political causes that Baptists rallied behind during these years centered on disestablishment of the state church. They used their new political voice to attack the favored status of the Church of England and to rectify the disadvantages they faced as a result of what they saw as 'penal codes' written into English law in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A desire to see the Church of England disestablished and disendowed led a group of Baptists, Congregationalists, and a few other nonconformists in 1844 to form the Anti-State Church Association, later

districts.' David W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 2.

¹¹ R. A. Rees, *Britain 1815-1851* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), 25.

¹² Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 209.

¹³ Helmstadter, 'Orthodox Nonconformity', 57.

to be called the Liberation Society. As they had been since Helwys' day, Baptists were very much in the vanguard of the movement to separate the state from religion as they now pushed for disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England. The Baptist Union, the national denominational body with whom most Baptist churches in England and Wales affiliated, immediately endorsed the Anti-State Church Association.¹⁴ The Union noted that Baptists were 'deeply convinced of the unscriptural character of national establishments of religion' and believed that such establishments functioned 'to sanction aggressions such as are continually made upon the peace and property of dissenters'.¹⁵

Baptists tended to view the state's support of the Church of England as the root of all political and civil injustice in England, towards dissenters as well as non-Christians. When the House of Lords rejected a bill in 1851 that would have allowed Jews to serve in Parliament, the editors of *The Baptist Magazine* denounced such exclusion as 'the barbarous relic of a barbarous age'.¹⁶ Baptist minister J. H. Hinton argued that a state church, even one tolerant of other sects, creates an unjust social inequality, a 'system of bribery and oppression', and 'a feeling hostile to social improvement'.¹⁷ Baptists felt that the disendowment of the state church was the key to bringing about religious, political, and legal equality in England, and they used their new political voice to push for such reform. By the 1840s the Baptist Union had dedicated itself to 'the disenthralment of Christianity from the secular associations into which it has been forced'.¹⁸

Their commitment to disestablishment and to separation of the state from religion made Baptists ideological soulmates with the Liberal Party in the mid-nineteenth century. As David Bebbington has pointed out, Baptists wanted to end the privileges of the state church just as the Liberal Party wanted to end the 'feudal' privileges of the upper class. Likewise, just as the nonconformists wished the state not to interfere with religion, so the Liberals wished for the government to take a *laissez-*

¹⁴ William H. Mackintosh, *Disestablishment and Liberation: The Movement for the Separation of the Anglican Church from State Control* (London: Epworth Press, 1972), 28.

¹⁵ *The Baptist Magazine*, June 1844, 294.

¹⁶ *The Baptist Magazine*, September 1851, 586.

¹⁷ John Howard Hinton, 'The Social Influence of a State Church', in *The Theological Works of the Rev. John Howard Hinton*, vol. 7 (London: Houlston & Wright, 1865), 159.

¹⁸ *The Baptist Magazine*, June 1842, 292.

faire attitude and allow free trade to flourish.¹⁹ Like the Liberals, Baptists embraced the principles of free trade, an unobtrusive government, and lower taxes.²⁰ Baptists believed it natural to extend this *laissez-faire* attitude to cover not only trade and commerce but also religion. Just as the government should not interfere in trade, they argued, it should also stay out of religious matters. In a tract on 'Free Trade and Church Establishment', J. H. Hinton linked the two by arguing that 'government bakeries and government churches are founded on the same principles, and productive of similar mischiefs, and they ought to stand or fall together'.²¹ Such commitments to the principle of government non-intervention helped wed Baptists to the Liberal Party during the second half of the nineteenth century. It was a marriage that was mutually beneficial. The Liberals provided a national political body that championed causes dear to Baptists; Baptists and other nonconformist voters were likewise vital to the party's success during the mid-Victorian years.²²

Baptists received another major boost to their political strength with the Reform Act of 1867. Though this reform did not significantly redistribute Parliamentary seats, as had the 1832 Act, it did expand the franchise to encompass almost all middle- and working-class men in towns.²³ Again the number of Baptist voters increased significantly. Baptists were now a legitimate and significant political force. Unified almost totally behind the Liberal Party, they played a significant role in sweeping William Gladstone into power in the 1868 election.²⁴ Baptist partisanship was so strong that after the election a Baptist association in Monmouthshire passed a resolution reprimanding any Baptists who had not supported Gladstone and the Liberals during the 1868 election, calling them traitors who had 'spat in the face of nonconformity'.²⁵ By the end of the 1860s membership in Baptist churches exceeded 200,000, Baptists were comfortable with the notion that a Christian could serve as a politician, and the denomination was a significant voting bloc within

¹⁹ Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, 9.

²⁰ David W. Bebbington, *Victorian Nonconformity* (Bangor: Headstart History, 1992), 62.

²¹ John Howard Hinton, 'Free-Trade and Church Establishments', in *The Theological Works of the Rev. John Howard Hinton*, vol. 7 (London: Houlston & Wright, 1865), 172.

²² Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776-1988* (London: Longman, 1997), 53.

²³ Mackintosh, *Disestablishment and Liberation*, 117.

²⁴ Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1958), 103.

²⁵ Quoted in Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience', 19.

the ruling political party. During the decades that followed, Baptists would exercise their new-found political sway on a number of issues and, for the first time in their history, have an audible voice in the political process.²⁶ A closer examination of this political activity is warranted, but first one must consider another major development that had been taking place within Baptist life during the first seventy years of the nineteenth century: that of a distinct social conscience.

Social Conscience

During the first half of the eighteenth century, spiritual and numerical decline greatly weakened Baptists in England. While hyper-Calvinism and antinomianism took its toll on Particular Baptists (the Calvinistic wing of English Baptists) socinianism sent its Arminian wing, the General Baptists, into a spiritual malaise. During the second half of the century, however, the fires of evangelical revival spread throughout Baptist churches, bringing new life and vitality to the denomination. Dan Taylor, a General Baptist, and Andrew Fuller, a Particular Baptist, led revivals that infused renewed evangelical fervor into their respective denominations.²⁷ As the nineteenth century approached, Baptists were more committed than ever to spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth, making evangelism and foreign missions the primary emphases of the denomination.²⁸ Consequently, evangelism became the defining characteristic of Baptists in the early nineteenth century. Their vision of proselytizing was not limited to evangelical preaching. It also incorporated charitable activities on behalf of those in need, such as widows, orphans, out-of-work labourers, and famine victims in Ireland.²⁹

One social issue that captivated the conscience of Baptists and other nonconformists early on was the lack of educational opportunity for working-class children. The Sunday School movement had begun in 1780 and served as the first significant instrument for the education of the masses. It gave children from the labouring class an opportunity to learn to read and write on their one day off from work. The movement quickly spread throughout the nation and continued to grow through the nineteenth century. By 1851 some 2,400,000 children were enrolled in

²⁶ Briggs, *English Baptists*, 254; Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience', 18.

²⁷ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 154-61, 172-4, 181-3.

²⁸ Ernest A. Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (London: S. C. M. Press, 1944), 99-101.

²⁹ Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience', 18.

Sunday Schools.³⁰ Baptists were early supporters of this movement. In 1785 William Fox, a Baptist deacon in London, formed the Sunday School Society to sponsor Sunday Schools in the city.³¹ In 1803 another Baptist, William Brodie Gurney, founded the Sunday School Union, which did much to spur the growth of Sunday Schools in various denominations throughout the country.³² In the nineteenth century Baptists and others concerned with the educational needs of the poor desired to have schools not only on Sunday but also throughout the week. Many Baptist ministers started their own academies: day schools that usually met in the minister's home. Baptists and other dissenters also founded the British and Foreign School Society, which made affordable education available to lower-class children. Many Anglicans opposed such initiatives to educate the masses, but felt that if the poor were to be educated, it should at least be done by the clergy of the established church. The Baptists therefore spent much of the middle decades of the nineteenth century quarrelling with the Church of England over who should educate the poor and how such education should be funded.³³

The Church of England came to dominate elementary education in England, which led Baptists to be wary of education acts passed by Parliament. As early as 1833, the government established policies to support church-run schools, and other education bills followed in the 1840s and 1850s. Baptists resisted government offers to provide funding for denominational schools because of their disdain for government entanglement in the affairs of churches. Because the vast majority of such funding would go to Anglican schools, they feared that this involvement would further entrench the favored status of the Church of England. Baptists clung increasingly to the principle of voluntarism in education. Just as Baptist theology held that the local church should be a voluntary organization of individuals, neither supported by nor interfered with by the state, so schools—an extension of the church—

³⁰ Raymond G. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: The Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 37.

³¹ Thomas Walter Laquer, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 33. The Society's formal name was The Society for the Support and Encouragement of Sunday Schools.

³² R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and the Evangelical Revival 1760-1820* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1989), 236-7.

³³ Raymond G. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: The Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (London: Epworth Press, 1959), 38-45.

should be neither funded nor overseen by the national government. When a group of Baptist churches in Manchester resolved in 1851 to start schools for the city's poor, the editors of *The Baptist Magazine* lauded them for recognizing that 'the education of the people is a social duty' of the church. The churches are to carry out this duty, they continued, 'apart from any legislative interference whatsoever'.³⁴

This sentiment encapsulates three main characteristics of the Baptist attitude towards education during the early and middle years of the nineteenth century. First, education of the masses was viewed as the responsibility of the churches, not the government. Secondly, churches were to fulfill this charge without receiving aid from the state, lest the separation between the two be compromised. Finally, the task of education was seen as a 'social duty', a means of helping the poor by equipping them to succeed in life. By the end of the 1860s, Baptists would modify the first of these three beliefs about education, conceding the necessity of government involvement if children of all social classes were to be educated. The other two beliefs would continue to undergird the Baptist desire to see a nationwide system of free elementary education established. They would continue to insist that the state not subsidize religious education and to view education as a means of improving the conditions of the poor. Education was for Baptists a means of helping the poor to help themselves, much like another social cause dear to Baptists in the nineteenth century: temperance.

During the middle third of the century, Baptists and other nonconformists began to embrace temperance reform. The temperance movement began to gather steam in the early 1830s, with some individual Baptists pioneering in the movement. In the 1830s, the Baptist church pastored by Jabez Burns was one of only two pulpits in London open to temperance speakers.³⁵ Baptist minister George Smith is considered to have written the country's first temperance tract. Another Baptist pastor, Benjamin Godwin, was a key supporter of the first temperance society in Britain. Still another Baptist minister, Francis Beardsall, produced the first temperance hymnbook and edited an early temperance magazine.³⁶ By the late 1860s, temperance was the leading

³⁴ *The Baptist Magazine*, November 1851, 719.

³⁵ Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), 179.

³⁶ While many Baptists viewed temperance as the most pressing social issue of the day, the denomination as a whole was slow to act as a body against drinking. 'The widespread identification of Baptists with teetotalism', says one historian, 'was relatively late and more conspicuously an urban phenomenon, as the impact of drink in the lives of the industrial poor became more and more

social concern of Baptists in England.

J. Briggs argues that ‘it was intrinsically a social conscience rather than a moralistic peccadillo that aroused’ Baptist concerns over intemperance. ‘The movement represented a genuine attempt in a drink-sodden society to help the poor’, he contends, ‘not a conspiratorial attempt to impose middle-class manners on a reluctant working class’.³⁷ Though Briggs does not offer any primary evidence supporting his claim, there are sources that suggest his analysis is on the mark. *The Baptist Magazine* called temperance ‘by far the most important of social questions’ and expressed its conviction that it was ‘intimately bound up with the interests and progress of Christianity’.³⁸ Likewise, delegates to the Baptist Union’s meeting in 1871 passed a resolution noting their dismay at ‘the degraded condition of our population’, which they believed was ‘largely the result of intemperance’.³⁹ Baptists recognized a direct causal link between alcohol and poverty, and thus viewed their temperance efforts as an attempt to change not only the immoral behavior of the drunkard but also the economic circumstances of his family.⁴⁰

When addressing the subject of temperance, Baptists usually emphasized not the fact that drinking was immoral, but rather that it was a social crisis that adversely affected both the body and soul of the poor. Drinking destroyed family life and caused individuals to waste money that should be spent on food and clothing. Charles Spurgeon, Victorian England’s most prominent Baptist minister, warned of alcohol’s dangers in his works *John Ploughman’s Talk* and *John Ploughman’s Pictures*. These tracts celebrated the benefits which hard work and clean living offered to both the body and the soul. He cautioned his readers that ‘the ale-jug robs the cupboard and the table, starves the wife and strips the

apparent.’ So while many Baptists were already actively involved in the temperance movement in the early 1830s, it took the entire middle third of the century before the denomination fully embraced the cause. Briggs, *English Baptists*, 329-32.

³⁷ Briggs, *English Baptists*, 330.

³⁸ *The Baptist Magazine*, June 1874, 359 (as quoted by Bebbington, ‘Baptist Conscience’, 19).

³⁹ *The Baptist Handbook for 1872*, 42.

⁴⁰ Richard J. Helmstadter, ‘The Nonconformist Conscience’, in *Religion in Victorian England: Volume IV, Interpretations*, ed. by Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 81, agrees that temperance was ‘the most characteristic nonconformist effort at social reform in the early and mid-Victorian periods.’

children'.⁴¹ Spurgeon also quoted some verses intended to draw attention to the dangers that alcohol poses to both the family and future of the drinker and to mock those who would criticize temperance reformers:

What! Rob a poor man of his beer,
 And give him good victuals instead!
 Your heart's very hard, sir, I fear,
 Or at least you are soft in the head.

What! Rob a poor man of his ale
 And prevent him from beating his wife,
 From being locked up in jail,
 With penal employment for life!⁴²

For Spurgeon and his fellow Baptists, temperance was a key means of bettering the condition of those mired in poverty. Drinking was viewed not simply as a moral failing, but also as an obstacle standing between the drunkard and prosperity.⁴³

Having looked at the development of the Baptist social conscience and the issues that moved them to action in the nineteenth century, one can begin to find answers to one of the questions this article seeks to resolve: what forces influenced the Baptist social conscience to develop as it did? In his study of 'The Baptist Conscience in the Nineteenth Century', David Bebbington argues that 'two fundamental features of their existence shaped' Baptist attitudes towards society: they were dissenters—and therefore excluded from full citizenship—and they were evangelicals. He believes this second element of the Baptist nature is the key to why Baptists emphasized the social issues that they did. 'Evangelicalism', Bebbington says, 'was the factor most responsible for moulding the Baptist conscience in the nineteenth century'. He maintains that Baptists' commitment to causes such as temperance simply reflects their 'evangelical imperative to eliminate sin'.⁴⁴ While evangelicalism was undeniably a powerful part of the Baptist character, it seems that Bebbington may be oversimplifying the matter by isolating it as the singular factor shaping the Baptist attitude towards social

⁴¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *John Ploughman's Pictures: More of his Talk* (London: Lakeland, 1970), 47.

⁴² Spurgeon, *John Ploughman's Pictures*, 47.

⁴³ J. M. Gordon, 'The Later Nineteenth Century', in *The Baptists in Scotland: A History*, ed. by David W. Bebbington (Glasgow: The Baptist Union of Scotland, 1988), 53.

⁴⁴ Bebbington, 'The Baptist Conscience', 13, 16, 22.

problems. An important force that contributed to the Baptists' social conscience taking the form that it did was their commitment to the potential for human self-improvement. A significant theological shift within nineteenth-century Baptist life allowed many Baptists to overcome their traditional objections to the idea that humans were capable of bettering themselves by any means other than accepting Christ.

The fact that temperance and education were the two main issues that piqued the social conscience of Baptists reflects this increased emphasis upon individual self-improvement. Issues related to the negative results of industrialization—such as poor working conditions, low wages, long hours, or substandard housing—rarely elicited a strong response among Baptists in the nineteenth century. They focused instead on social problems that could be mended by reforming the individual rather than ones that would require systemic changes in industrial society. Baptists were not, as Bebbington implies, simply trying to eliminate sin and reshape the morals of others. They wanted to improve people's lot in life by removing the barriers that kept them down, such as illiteracy and drinking. Like other nonconformists, Baptists believed that the primary cause of poverty was not industrial society, but 'the individual moral weakness of each poor person'.⁴⁵ They believed that individual sin, not industrial society, kept people mired in poverty. Acceptance of the gospel and moral self-improvement promised to bring not only spiritual salvation but material salvation as well. For the nineteenth-century Baptists, then, issues such as temperance and education were just as much social issues as they were moral or religious ones.⁴⁶

The 1870s

Given the increased political enfranchisement that Baptists came to enjoy and the social issues that they came to embrace, the interesting question is, what happened when these two converged? The decade of the 1870s is a particularly enlightening and significant period in this

⁴⁵ Helmstadter, 'Nonconformist Conscience', 80.

⁴⁶ Baptist concern about Sunday opening laws reflects a similar understanding of the interconnectedness of religious and social issues. As with temperance, it was an issue that appeared on the surface to be purely religious in nature but that was often couched in terms of social concern. Baptists viewed attempts to force people to work on Sundays as not only a violation of the Fourth Commandment—which mandated keeping the Sabbath holy—but also as an unfair additional burden upon the working class.

respect. Following the Reform Act of 1867 and the Liberal victory in 1868, the Baptist denomination had finally ‘obtained its due political weight in the country’, according to *The Baptist Magazine*.⁴⁷ Additionally, Baptists could now shift their political focus somewhat, having accomplished much of their agenda of overturning the ‘penal codes’. Baptist historian E. A. Payne has called the 1870 repeal of laws denying dissenters access to Oxford and Cambridge ‘the last major battle’ in the Baptist struggle for full civil and religious equality.⁴⁸ As a consequence, the 1870s opened as a decade in which the Baptists could focus their attention on broader political issues facing the nation. Furthermore, during the 1870s education and temperance, the two social concerns dearest to the Baptists, were more prominent than ever on the national scene. Though they would enjoy continued growth and political clout until the end of the century, it was during the 1870s that Baptists first had the opportunity to utilize their political influence to satisfy their social conscience. Ironically, they soon found that the old Baptist commitment to church/state separation made it difficult for them to use the power of the state to address the social issues that most concerned them.

Education came to the fore of national politics in 1870 with the passage of the Elementary Education Act by Parliament. The Act insured that the state would make elementary education available throughout England, a goal the Baptists had sought to accomplish for years. Nevertheless, Baptists and other nonconformists were deeply disappointed with the Act, concerned that it failed to create a system of education that was nonsectarian. They were particularly angered by Clause 25 of the Act, which allowed for the use of tax money to pay the tuition of poor children attending sectarian schools.⁴⁹ This clause ‘became a symbol of discrimination against nonconformists’ because the bulk of the state’s aid would go to support Anglican-run schools.⁵⁰ Baptists strongly opposed the Act not only because it favored the established church over nonconformists, but also because it allowed for religious instruction of any kind in a state-supported school. The Baptist Union registered its disapproval of the 1870 Education Act—especially Clause 25—at its meeting in September of 1871. The delegates passed a

⁴⁷ *The Baptist Magazine*, July 1868, 455 (as quoted in Bebbington, ‘Baptist Conscience’, 18).

⁴⁸ Ernest A. Payne, *Free Churchmen, Unrepentant and Repentant, and Other Papers* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1965), 59.

⁴⁹ Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism*, 77.

⁵⁰ David W. Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone: Faith and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 151.

resolution stating that the Union ‘repeats its protest against those clauses of the Elementary Education Act which empower school boards to give religious instruction in rate-supported schools, and emphatically protests against the 25th clause of the Act’. In this resolution they opposed not merely the fact that the state’s support of Church of England clergy would be strengthened by the Act, but also the idea of using tax money to support any sectarian schools, including their own.

Baptists had come reluctantly to accept the fact that the government must be involved in the education of the masses, but they continued to draw the line when it came to state support of religious education. Most Baptists believed that ideally, education would be the task of the family in conjunction with the church. They recognized that the work of educating the labouring class of the entire nation, however, was too large for the churches alone. At the 1872 Baptist Union meeting, national education was the subject of the inaugural address. In it the speaker lamented that ‘now we must, unhappily, accept government influence [in education] as an accomplished fact’. But he and most other Baptists believed firmly that the education provided by the government must be purely secular in nature. The speaker went on to urge Baptists that ‘no effort should be spared to free religion from its [the government’s] unhallowed influence’. ‘Let us endeavor to compel our legislators to withdraw their hands from the ark of God’, he continued, ‘and to confine themselves to their secular work’.⁵¹ Commitment to the principle of church/state separation meant that Baptists would not be satisfied with any state-sponsored educational system so long as it contained any religious or moral instruction.⁵²

It was not long before the Conservative government passed an education bill of its own, and the Baptists were again outraged. The Elementary Education Act of 1876 continued the policy of using tax dollars to support religious schools and elicited ‘a chorus of nonconformist denunciation’.⁵³ The Baptist Union passed a resolution in opposition to the Act, claiming that it discriminated against nonconformists and extended the authority of the Established Church.

⁵¹ Payne, *Baptist Union*, 40-1, 103.

⁵² The controversy surrounding the Elementary Education Act of 1870 caused an ‘evangelical revolt’ within the Liberal Party that deeply divided Baptists and other nonconformists from the Party for several years. Baptists felt deeply betrayed by Gladstone, who shared their evangelical principles but was ultimately loyal to the established church. See Bebbington, *William Ewart Gladstone*, 152.

⁵³ G. I. T. Machin, *Politics and the Churches in Great Britain, 1869 to 1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 102.

‘The Elementary Education Act of 1876 is unjust to nonconformists’, they resolved, ‘inasmuch as it shows great favor to denominational schools, which are almost wholly in the hands and under the control of the clergy of the Established Church’. The government’s desire to continue supporting all denominational schools angered Baptists, who recognized that because Anglican schools would receive the bulk of such aid, their status as the established church would become increasingly entrenched. The delegates feared that the new Act would lead to ‘continual recurrences of oppression towards nonconformists’ and reiterated the argument that any education provided by the state should be purely secular.⁵⁴ The objections raised by Baptists against the 1876 Act were basically the same as those which they had raised against the 1870 Act: religious education must be provided by the churches and it must be provided with absolutely no financial support from the state, and any education provided by the government must be purely secular.

Even though education had been a major social concern of Baptists since the late eighteenth century—one they considered it crucial to the material and spiritual well being of society—they resisted efforts to establish a national system of state-supported schools. Part of this opposition stemmed from their continued antagonism towards the state church and their belief that the national education acts served to strengthen the Anglican connection to the state. Like other nonconformists, Baptists had exerted much of their political energy during the middle third of the century struggling to disestablish the Church of England, meeting with considerably success. They certainly did not want to take any chances in the 1870s of the state church regaining any of its lost hegemony. More importantly, though, the Baptist attitude towards national education legislation reflected a continued commitment to the separation of the state from religion, and vice versa. Despite the desire of Baptists to see the children of all social classes provided with an education, the state’s support of any religious group—or even its support of all religions equally—violated the Baptist conscience and compelled them to oppose the Education Acts.

The desire to keep the state separate from religion also dominated Baptists during the 1870s as they confronted legislation addressing another social issue that deeply concerned them: temperance. Given the fact that Baptists were so firmly convinced that intemperance was the major social problem facing England at that time, and given the fact that they now held enough political sway to influence changes in English law, it seems somewhat natural to assume that they might push for legal

⁵⁴ *The Baptist Handbook for 1877* (London: Yates & Alexander, 1877), 91.

prohibition of alcohol. Indeed, numerous nonconformist and evangelical groups who shared the Baptists' concern about the evils of drink had by now thrown their support behind prohibition. The Baptist response, however, was not necessarily the same as these other groups with whom they are often lumped together by historians.⁵⁵ Temperance reform was often a topic of discussion at Baptist Union meetings in the 1870s, and by looking at some of the discussions and resolutions about temperance one can begin to see the distinctiveness of the Baptist position.

At their 1870 meeting, the Baptist Union passed a resolution expressing that while they 'deeply lament[ed] the terrible evils resulting from intemperance', the delegates felt that the best means for ending this evil was not legal prohibition. Rather, the resolution argued that 'the chief agencies for securing the much-needed reformation must be found in the spread of education, in moral suasion, and in the growing influence of Christian truth'.⁵⁶ Baptists believed that temperance reform should be the work of the churches and individual Christians. They refused, however, to use the power of the state to impose temperance upon the nation. Likewise no mention of prohibition occurred in 1874 when the Baptist Union finally established its own denominational temperance society, the Baptist Total Abstinence Association. While Baptists were convinced of the importance of temperance for the well-being of both individuals and society, they did not think the state had the right to impose such moral discipline on its citizenry.

Baptists also resisted pressure from other nonconformist groups that wanted them to support prohibition. At its October 1876 meeting the Baptist Union received two 'memorials' from temperance organizations urging them to take a stand in support of current prohibition legislation. The United Kingdom Alliance urged the Union to throw its support behind a current bill in Parliament that would restrict the sale of alcohol. The memorial noted that 'the leading minds in religion, philanthropy, and science' have endorsed the plan, and that

⁵⁵ As Timothy Larsen has observed, many scholars have erroneously assumed that because Baptists 'embraced and preached rigid standards for personal behaviour, they inevitably must have wished to impose those same standards on their neighbours through legislation.' In reality, however, their 'commitment to religious equality and state non-interference in matters of religion, along with other influences, made many nonconformists wary of projects for moral reform that involved government action.' Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 152-4.

⁵⁶ *The Baptist Handbook for 1871*, 62.

Methodists, Presbyterians, evangelicals within the Church of England, and numerous other denominational bodies and temperance societies had endorsed the bill as well. The Baptists, it seemed, were the lone holdouts within British nonconformity. The memorial urged the Baptists to take up the issue and pass a resolution in support of the bill. The Baptist Union, however, declined to give any such official endorsement of this prohibition bill. Rather, they passed a resolution reasserting their conviction that intemperance was ‘a great and widespread evil, ruinous alike to the bodies and souls of men’, but left it as ‘the solemn duty of its members to do all in their power’ to suppress intemperance.⁵⁷ They did not voice the denominational support for prohibition for which the United Kingdom Alliance had wished.⁵⁸

The way that Baptists dealt with both education and temperance in the 1870s indicates that they were reluctant to use their new political strength to force their moral or social agenda upon society. The result was what appears to be a contradiction between what Baptists said they wanted and what they actually supported politically. Baptists advocated free, national education for children of all classes for decades, but then opposed major education reform acts in the 1870s. Likewise Baptists were in the vanguard of the temperance reform movement, yet they refused to join other temperance advocates in supporting prohibition legislation in the 1870s. One explanation is that Baptists were not as sincerely committed to social causes such as temperance and education as they had claimed to be throughout the mid-nineteenth century. More plausible, however, is that something overrode the ‘evangelical imperative to eliminate sin’, which Bebbington views as so influential among nineteenth-century Baptists. It appears that what guided Baptists more than anything as they dealt with legislation aimed at alleviating social problems was their long-standing aversion to state involvement in religion.

Even in the 1870s, despite all the changes Baptists had experienced in the centuries since Thomas Helwys’ *Mystery of Iniquity*, the Baptist principle of church/state separation guided how Baptists in England responded when given an opportunity to effect social change

⁵⁷ *The Baptist Handbook for 1871*, 92-4.

⁵⁸ When Baptists did express some desire to see the liquor traffic restricted through legal means, it usually dealt with strengthening the licensing laws. In 1870 the Union had urged the government to reform and strengthen the existing licensing system for pubs. A year later the Union passed another resolution calling for stricter licensing regulations and restrictions on the sale of alcohol on Sundays. *The Baptist Handbook for 1871*, 62; *The Baptist Handbook for 1872*, 42.

through the power of the state. This is important to realize, as there seems to be a general consensus among many historians that as Baptists gained political enfranchisement and numerical strength they became more comfortable with Christian involvement in politics and, consequently, less wary of government involvement in religion. By the latter third of the nineteenth century, most Baptists had certainly abandoned their belief that Christians ought not be involved in politics. This does not mean, however, that they had learned to accept government interference in religious issues. It is important to note that within the mainstream of Baptist life, the principles inherited from Helwys of church/state separation and freedom of conscience lived on. That their disdain of church/state entanglements continued to be a guiding force for English Baptists in the 1870s is significant. No longer were Baptists a whining minority who knew that championing the principle of church/state separation could only benefit them and hurt their Anglican adversaries. Now they were a significant force in society and politics. Upholding the principle of separation meant denying themselves the opportunity to use the power of the state to alter and uplift public morality. By refusing to support legislation that would provide religious education or that would prohibit the sale of alcohol, English Baptists resisted the temptation to impose their morals upon society by legislative fiat.

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Free Church Ecclesiology and Public Policy in New Zealand 1890-1914

ABSTRACT

Baptists in Colonial New Zealand faced unexpectedly acute issues of church and state relations. Many, arriving from England in the later nineteenth century, naturally eschewed any state involvement in religious matters. Gradually, however, a nuanced adaptation to the exigencies of colonial life merged. This essay traces the nature of that adjustment, across the contested public policy landscape of religion and education. As Baptists acclimatized to the possibilities and limits of their new environment a compromise between ecclesiology and pragmatism emerged.

The twenty-three Baptist delegates meeting in Nelson, New Zealand, in December 1893 concluded their conference divided. They had failed to agree on the place of religion in state schools. The division revealed a gap between radical Baptist views and the emerging ecclesiology of the colonial churches. In this essay I will explore the parameters and consequences of this divergence of view. The need for colonial baptists to adapt ideas to an environment which was short on resources and infrastructure will be noted, as will the implications of Baptist approaches for our understanding of the dynamics of wider evangelicalism in such societies.

Timothy Larson has recently argued that the political positions taken by the Free Churches in Britain in the nineteenth century have not been properly understood. He traces this to a failure by historians to appreciate the significance the ecclesiologies of these denominations, suggesting that this is especially true for the gathered churches of 'old dissent' (notably Congregationalists and Baptists). Unlike other 'evangelical' groups, such as the Wesleyan Methodists, these argued consistently for the removal of state influence from religious matters. This was not merely disestablishment (although it included that) but extended to divorce laws, Jewish emancipation, education, even liquor laws. What Larsen's analysis suggests is that, especially with regard to

public policy issues, 'evangelicals' should not simply be lumped together, with the aim of identifying *the* evangelical attitude or response.¹

The term 'evangelical' is of course slippery to begin with. As an interdenominational designation it has been notoriously imprecisely classified. David Bebbington's inclusive definition includes no ecclesiological element. In New Zealand the popular (as against the historian's) use of the word has taken a number of trajectories. From the 1920s, with the influence of Rev. Joseph Kemp and the founding of the Bible Training Institute in Auckland, the term took on for some a sharper doctrinal content, increasingly defined over and against 'modernism'. In the colonial period its meaning appears to have been looser. In 1902 Presbyterians approached other 'evangelical' groups for discussion over the possibility of Church Union. Those deemed 'evangelical' were the Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists, along with some Anglicans. Baptists were not approached on this occasion and, in any case, made it clear they did not see any chance of Union. The meaning of the term at this time seems to have orbited around two suns. The first, evangelistic fervour, was common to all parties. Preaching to win souls for Christ was crucial. The second centre of gravity varied. For Presbyterians the word carried the memory of the magisterial reformation, a heritage within which, in different ways, each of its preferred conversation partners could be held to fit but in which Baptists, with their roots in the radical reformation, looked uncomfortable. They might be included as evangelicals, but not for the purposes of union. There was little argument from Baptists themselves. Happy to count themselves as evangelicals, Baptists too knew evangelism alone was not the total picture. For Baptists the necessary extras were adult conversionism and voluntarism. On these grounds Paedobaptists inevitably had ground to make up but, on the evangelism measure, Congregationalists and Methodists (especially Primitive Methodists) ranked well. Presbyterians were a bit suspect but, given the strong voluntarism of the colonial church, they could be accorded the benefit of the doubt. Anglicans on the other hand, with what Baptists rated as merely a territorial approach to salvation, failed to make the cut. Divergences within evangelicalism thus turned on convictions about the church. The key issues may be identified through an examination of a

¹ Timothy Larsen, 'Free Church Politics and the Gathered Church: The Evangelical Case for Religious Pluralism', *Fides et Historia* XXXIII, 1 (Winter/Spring 2001): 109-19, reprinted in *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 145-156.

public issue which all the churches of the time agreed was of huge significance.

The 1893 Baptist Conference was one of the smallest since the formation of the New Zealand Baptist Union a decade earlier. It generated, however, one of the livelier debates. The question was the place of religion in state education. Larsen has identified this as a key point of difference between evangelical Free Churches and other evangelicals in Victorian Britain, citing those who ‘became convinced that no religious instruction should be offered at all in state schools.’² The question provides a useful test case in New Zealand, as the importance of ecclesiology in the debates has already been established. As is often the case with New Zealand religious history, we are indebted to Ian Breward, whose 1967 study *Godless Schools?* set a benchmark for insightful analysis of an important and long-running controversy.³ This study will revisit those issues, exploring further than Breward was able to the nuances and variations of Free Church positions.

The 1877 Education Act excluded religious instruction from state primary schools. However, various moves had been made to soften or confuse the purity of this principle. In 1890 a Private Schools Bill had been submitted. Regarded as a screen for state funding of Catholic and Anglican schools, this was opposed by other protestant groups. Nevertheless, some protestants sought the inclusion of Bible teaching in the state curriculum. In order to track these debates it is helpful to note the models of religious instruction in schools which developed over the period. Five models, ranging from least to greatest religious input, may be identified.

1. No religious element at all in state schools – (the *status quo* under the 1877 Education Act).
2. The ‘Nelson System’ whereby schools could elect to open late or close early on one day a week to allow for religious instruction outside the state curriculum. (This exploited a loophole, identified by the Nelson Presbyterian Minister James McKenzie, and gradually gained official acceptance from 1897).
3. The use of the Lord’s prayer and scripture readings to begin the day.

² Larsen 153.

³ I. Breward, *Godless Schools?: A Study in Protestant Reactions to the Education Act of 1877* (Christchurch: Presbyterian Bookroom, 1967). The description here of the general course of the controversy is drawn from Breward.

4. Bible knowledge as part of the curriculum but with no instruction or explanation of the religious meaning of the text.
5. Full religious instruction as part of the curriculum (possibly following the system implemented in New South Wales, whereby clergy might supplement general lessons from teachers).

The Presbyterians petitioned Parliament for religious instruction in 1892, with an extra specificity being added from 1893 with the advocacy of an 'Irish Text Book' (of scripture portions) which would supply the necessary teaching and learning resource. This was model four. Anglicans and Methodists took a similar line. Catholics, stung by the repeated denial of state funds, vigorously opposed these moves, suspecting a protestant plot (a view only strengthened by the reference to the Irish text). The move failed but agitation on the issue continued. In 1903 a 'Bible in Schools League' was formed to promote religious instruction and to seek a referendum on the question. Lacking success, the movement faded. It was revived from 1912, only to again fall short of its target with the outbreak of War in 1914.

Catholics, with their developing parallel system, maintained strong opposition to these campaigns. The Presbyterians and Wesleyan Methodists consistently backed them, as did the Anglicans (although with some equivocation as to whether proposals went far enough). Notably, each of these protestant groups operated out of an ecclesiology which assumed a role for the state in the preservation of true religion. Anglicans and Presbyterians had a history of establishment; Wesleyans, of the Methodist groups, had maintained the strongest attachment to the state. Wesleyan Missionaries were, for instance, on the whole more fervent advocates for the Crown during the New Zealand Wars than many from the Church of England.⁴

If there were passionate advocates, there were also opponents of the Bible in Schools movement within New Zealand protestantism. There is a correlation between these and those who gravitated towards a Free Church ecclesiology. James McKenzie, instigator of the Nelson system, had roots in the voluntarist United Presbyterian Church, which combined groups which had seceded from the Church of Scotland in the eighteenth century over the issue of establishment. McKenzie saw no gain in churches seeking state backing. 'Let the church turn from the door of Caesar, with its broken wire bell, and attended to what is her

⁴ See Y. L. Sutherland 'Te Reo O Te Perehi: Messages to Maori in the Wesleyan Newspaper Te Haeata 1859-62' (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1999), 132-168.

happiest and most imperative duty' (the nurture of children).⁵ The Primitive Methodists were another case in point. The 'Prims' had separated from the British Methodist Connexion in 1811 over concerns that the Connexion was too willing to follow the state's direction. New Zealand Primitive Methodists James Guy and E. Drake made submissions against the Bible in Schools movement in 1895.⁶

Congregationalists and Baptists had a more obvious heritage of dissent from state interference in religion. On the Bible in Schools issue, the positions of each evolved between 1893 and 1913.

Congregationalists began the period adamantly opposed to any religious instruction in schools in the conviction that 'it is not the duty nor the right of the state to teach or control religion.'⁷ By 1903, however, a change was evident. The Congregational Union joined the Bible in Schools League and indicated an openness to model four. A decade later, having in the meantime seriously considered union with the Presbyterians and Methodists, the Congregational Assembly expressed 'cordial approval' of the revived league. Whilst remaining committed to model four and rejecting model five the Assembly now favoured a referendum to determine the question. In both 1903 and 1913 there was significant opposition within the denomination to these concessions to State religious instruction, but this was a clear minority.⁸

From the start, the Baptists were divided on the questions. This is evident in the debate at the 1893 Conference. Rev A. H. Collins of the Ponsonby Baptist Church put forward the motion

That this Assembly, being convinced of the urgent importance of the adequate religious instruction of the young, we unanimously affirm: (1) That it is not the function of the State to teach religion and that it has neither the right to control nor enforce it; (2) That in view of both open attempts and covert desires to obtain State aid on behalf of denominational teaching, it is a public duty to resist every effort to alter the present Education System of the Colony; (3) That, while recognising the supreme value of home

⁵ *Christian Outlook*, 28 April 1894, cited Breward 38.

⁶ Breward 33-34. The Primitive Methodists merged with the Wesleyans in 1913 and their individual voice on the issues disappeared.

⁷ Resolution of the 1895 Congregational Assembly cited J.B. Chalmers *'A Peculiar People': Congregationalism in New Zealand* (n.p.: Congregational Union of New Zealand, n.d.), 171.

⁸ See Chalmers 171-3.

training, it is the duty and within the power of the churches to provide religious teaching for the young.⁹

Collins' motion contains a number of crucial elements to which I will return. It was not, however, accepted by the Conference. An 'amendment' (so called, although it effectively negated the motion), promoting the use of the Irish Text of Bible selections, was put but it gained only the vote of its mover, Rev James Blaikie. Next, Rev. Alfred North moved that schools be allowed to open with Scripture and the Lord's prayer (model three). This too was lost, though narrowly. In the end the Conference, again by a small margin, made a very Baptist decision not to decide.

This Assembly declines to commit itself, or the Union it represents, to any action in regard to the Bible-reading-in-Schools movements, and leaves each individual member a liberty to act as his (*sic*) judgement and conscience dictate.

In terms of the models identified above, the Baptist Conference was in 1893 divided between models one and three. Model four was clearly rejected; models two and five were not considered.¹⁰

As was the case with the Congregationalists, by 1903 the situation had changed considerably. R.S. Gray, formerly minister at Nelson and now at Christchurch had secured support for religious instruction in schools at the 1902 Conference.¹¹ He and other Baptists attended the Bible in Schools League conference in 1903 and, at the Baptist Conference in November that year, he and H.H. Driver of Dunedin, presented a report endorsing the work of the League and favouring model four, the model least approved a decade earlier. After 'a long, but able, debate' the report was adopted. The opposition, led by Rev. T.A. Williams of Thames was, however, significant and controversy carried on in the pages of the *N.Z. Baptist* for several months thereafter.¹²

The matter resurfaced with the revival of the League in 1912. H.H. Driver moved 'That we give general approval to the platform of the league.' An amendment offered by R.S. Gray to exclude the 'right of

⁹ See the account in *The New Zealand Baptist* [hereafter *NZB*] December 1893, 185, 188.

¹⁰ Versions of the 'Nelson System' were emerging as a pragmatic solution in some places but it had not been formally defined and proposed in 1893.

¹¹ *NZB* Supplement, January 1903, 9.

¹² *NZB*, December 1903, 188-189. See also *NZB*, February 1904, 219; March 1904, 236; April 1904, 252-253; May 1904, 267; June 1904, 284 for a vigorous exchange between T. A. Williams and H.H. Driver.

entry' provision in model five was passed but the Conference was once again so divided over the substantive issue that, as in 1893, it was decided that 'no official pronouncement be made.'¹³ A year later the same level of disagreement emerged. No policy on the Bible in Schools League could be adopted. However a motion seeking positive official provision for the Nelson System (model two, the least intrusive change) was adopted with only one dissenting vote.¹⁴

The Baptists had in many ways followed a path similar to the Congregationalists, only with greater internal division. From effective opposition to any but the most minimal religious element in 1893, to a majority for model four in 1903; too divided to endorse the League in 1912 but virtually unanimous over the Nelson System in 1913. The vacillation and indecision should not be allowed to mask the issues. It is clear that the views of Baptist advocates for the League like Gray and Driver matched almost exactly those of the Congregational majority. On the other hand the opponents in each denomination were very strongly opposed indeed. Some (e.g. the Baptist T.A. Williams and the Congregationalist W. Saunders) became active in the National Schools Defence League, a body in direct opposition to the Bible in Schools League.¹⁵

How are we to interpret these events? In particular, what do they say of the usefulness of Larsen's thesis for understanding Baptists in colonial New Zealand? Presbyterians and Wesleyan Methodists generally favoured religious instruction in state schools. Congregationalists and Baptists initially opposed the notion and at best were cautiously supportive. This appears to fit Larsen's pattern reasonably neatly, with 'gathered' churches preferring greater distance from the state. Yet the reality is more complex than that simple reading allows. By the early years of the twentieth century the Free Church tradition in New Zealand had evolved in ways which made it quite different from its antecedents in mid-Victorian Britain. A closer examination of the debates reveals the extent and significance of this transformation.

We must first note the precise nature of the caution expressed by Congregational and Baptist supporters of the Bible in Schools League in 1912-13. Those advocating endorsement of the League's platform in both cases added the rider that they rejected the New South Wales provision of 'right of entry' for clergy. Their objection, then, was not to

¹³ *NZB*, November 1912, 214. See also *NZB*, December 1912, 224.

¹⁴ *NZB*, November 1913, 210.

¹⁵ *Breward* 60.

religious instruction by the state as such, but instruction by other *denominations*. The issue was more sectarian than a mere matter of separation of church and state. These advocates (a majority among Congregationalists and probably the stronger group among the Baptists) seem not to fit Larsen's pattern at all. They were as disturbed as any Methodist or Presbyterian at the absence of religion from the public square in New Zealand. They were more worried however, that Anglicans or Catholics might proselytise their children. As the observer of the 1912 Baptist Assembly assessed the situation,

the dread of the priest lies heavily on these people, and though they dearly love the Bible and long that all children should read and obey it, they fear lest the priest should gain undue influence over the pupils of the Primary Schools.¹⁶

A glance beyond the issue of religious instruction, to other public questions of interest to Baptists, confirms the suspicion that Larsen's thesis does not sit tidily with the New Zealand experience. On the one hand Baptists were certainly opposed to any state subsidy of churches but, unlike Larsen's mid-Victorian Free Churchers, both Baptists and Congregationalists in New Zealand vigorously opposed liquor licensing and gambling from the outset. There was little reluctance to legislate for morality in 'Greater Britain'.¹⁷

Yet it is just as clear that a purist Free Church ecclesiology of the type Larsen identifies did exist among those opposed to the Bible in Schools League. Here we return to the 1893 motion from A.H. Collins. It begins with obvious Free Church positions. The state has 'neither the right to control nor enforce' religion and there should be no 'state Aid on behalf of denominational teaching'. This much is fairly familiar, but there are added twists.

Firstly, it is a 'public duty' to oppose moves to compromise the existing secular system. There is no hint in Collins' motion of a withdrawal from society. Indeed, far from it. Collins himself was an activist who took a leading part in labour questions of the day. There was no shrinking pietism in this approach. Larsen identifies a 'fresh sense of self-confidence' among British Baptists and Congregationalists in the

¹⁶ NZB, November 1912, 214.

¹⁷ New Zealand Colonists often used such phrases as 'Greater Britain', 'Brighter Britain', 'Better Britain' to communicate their sense that they could create a parallel but improved society in their new setting. On the significance of this concept for colonial New Zealand history see J. Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin, 2001).

nineteenth century. The new assurance came from the embracing of evangelicalism and the rise in numbers this generated. 'They now saw themselves as a force in the land that had the potential to provoke change.'¹⁸ This reforming activism need not be seen as an abandonment of Free Church principles. Indeed it could be a fulfilment. Taking up Troeltsch's analysis of 'church-type' and 'sect-type' groups, Larsen pinpoints an important and largely unexplored possibility.

Much has been written about the process whereby a sect evolves over time into a church. Those who narrate this trajectory often take great delight in chronicling the increasing worldliness and respectability of such groups. There is a much more complicated and interesting process than this one, however, in which a sect, finding it has become considerably larger and more influential, then seeks to use its new position to apply sect-type values and insights to the structures of society.¹⁹

Baptists, at 2.3% of the population in 1896, were not a large group in New Zealand, but they were present in greater proportion than in England. Moreover, they had an added factor which could generate the sort of self-confidence that evangelical revival had done for an earlier generation: they had come to a country with no established church. This they took to be an epochal endorsement of their position. They began to wonder if the whole world might not become Baptist and they began to shed the negative trappings of their past. In response to the Bible in Schools debate at the Baptist Conference of 1903, for instance, Rev. John Muirhead saw no need to be defined by anyone else, pointing out that 'in England Non-episcopalians are Free Churchmen and Nonconformists; in New Zealand they are Free Churchmen but not Nonconformists....The fact is there are no Nonconformists in New Zealand.'²⁰

With such a sense of new possibilities Collins regarded it as a 'public duty' to resist the erosion of secular state education. Williams, too, openly opposed the Bible in Schools League, aligning himself with rationalists and atheists if necessary. J.K. Archer arrived from England in 1908 to be minister of the Napier Baptist Church. A disciple of the radical Baptist John Clifford, Archer became a leading labour activist, eventually being appointed to the Legislative Council (N.Z.'s upper

¹⁸ Larsen 146.

¹⁹ Larsen 151

²⁰ J. Muirhead, 'Nonconformist or Free Churchman', Letter to the Editor, *NZB*, December 1903, 181. See similar arguments raised earlier by Bible in Schools advocate J.G. Fraser *NZB*, September 1896, 129.

house until 1952.)²¹ The nature of this activism needs to be understood. It was not of the type Breward identifies in Rutherford Waddell who declared ‘we refuse absolutely to regard the state as a secular institution.’²² The state was not regarded as a key partner. Rather, this assertive ecclesiology placed the state perpetually under the judgment of Christ, exercised through his church. Williams, writing in 1896, allowed no concession to an ungodly magistrate.

The state is Christian only so far as it submits to the will of Christ in its legislation and policy....The state is divine only so far as it is imbued with Christian principles. If the state refuses this submission, and violates any of these principles it becomes in that measure unchristian and undivine.²³

In 1910 J.K. Archer put it this way.

Moses appeared to Christ [in the transfiguration] because all law worth calling law came from Christ. Moses disappeared from Christ because all legislative functions are now merged in Christ. No law can have the consent of Christians unless it has the assent of Christ. Antiquity, ubiquity, utility do not count.²⁴

This approach deeply qualified the standard protestant political ecclesiology which accorded the state a providential dynamic of its own. In the radical Free Church model the state was not a main act. The real action was in the new society, coming to be in the gathered church. The state was always on probation. It had, in the interim, a separate set of responsibilities, but the church was charged to call it to account at all moments, and to resist it when it failed to measure up.

This radical commitment to the gathered church is a characteristic of Free Church ecclesiology which is not always fully appreciated. It is emphasised in the second twist in Collins’ motion. The final clause reads ‘That, while recognising the supreme value of home training, it is the duty and within the power of the churches to provide religious teaching for the young.’ This reservation of a role for the church in religious education beyond the family – an opportunity denied to the state – is

²¹ On Archer see M.P. Sutherland, ‘Pulpit or Podium? J.K. Archer and the Dilemma of Christian Politics in New Zealand’, *N.Z. Journal of Baptist Research*, Vol. 1 (Oct. 1996): 26-46.

²² *Outlook* 13 August 1912. See Breward 41.

²³ T.A. Williams, ‘Religious Instruction in State Schools’ *NZB*, November 1896, 165-167, 166.

²⁴ J.K. Archer, ‘Jesus Only’ (Union Sermon to the 1910 Baptist Assembly), *NZB*, January 1911, 11-13, 11.

another connection with Larsen's analysis. As he points out 'Dissenters believed firmly that they knew what the church was'.²⁵ The church was thus the 'starting point' for theology and practice. The gathered, covenanted community was a new society, which would flourish if freed from the pernicious effects of state interference. Collins had contended that religion 'can only be learned when the fire leaps from heart to heart, and the emotions of the scholar are touched by the emotions of the teacher'.²⁶ Williams similarly declared 'I regard religion as too sacred and too exalted to be entrusted to the keeping of state-paid agents, that I demand that none but the religious shall teach it'.²⁷ An 1898 Leader in the *N.Z. Baptist* declared that only by the removal of religion from the state 'shall we be able to boast that we have shut out the secular intruder from God's holy temple'.²⁸ This was the flip-side of what has been taken to be a process of secularisation to which the Free Churches unwittingly contributed. Larsen contests this view.

They saw the separation of church and state, not as the creating of a godless government, but rather as the creating of a purified church....What some might see as the church's retreating from its strongholds in society, evangelical Dissenters viewed as the state's being forced to retreat from its squatter holdings in the land of Zion.²⁹

This strand of Free Church thinking might have led to a radical form of church, prepared to stand over and against both the state and prevailing structures of society. Collins for instance looked for a time 'when the capitalist will cease out of the land'.³⁰ Williams called for a brave rethink on the plight of New Zealand Maori.³¹ But these were minority voices. What actually developed was more like militant sectarianism than insurgent Christianity - identifying its enemies more in other faith communities than in the systemic evils of society. That Gray and Driver were more concerned about blocking denominational interference in religious education than in seizing the initiative from the

²⁵ Larsen 150.

²⁶ A.H. Collins, 'Our Secular Education – A Reply to 'Holdfast'', Letter to the Editor, *NZB*, May 1894, 78-9.

²⁷ T.A. Williams, 'Religious Instruction in State Schools' *NZB*, August 1896, 113.

²⁸ J. Thomas, 'Our Message for the Times' *NZB*, January 1898, 1. This was an English piece reprinted in *NZB*.

²⁹ Larsen 155-6.

³⁰ Cited M. Davidson, *A History of the Ponsonby Baptist Church*, 6.

³¹ T.A. Williams *NZB*, May 1900, 66-67. See Driver's reply *NZB*, June 1900, 82-83.

state was a symptom of this drift. Even such apparent radicals as A.S. Adams were deflected into single issue activism.³²

Why did the Free Church social radicalism described by Larsen fail to flower in New Zealand? Among the Baptists at least the gradual change from an imported to an indigenous leadership was a crucial factor. In 1893 Collins had just arrived from Britain, as had his key supporter at the Conference that year, Rev. W. Drew. Both spoke out of their English experience. Williams too had been formed for the ministry in England. He arrived in 1895. Archer, similarly, was radicalized in Britain and came to New Zealand in mid-career. These men may be seen to have represented the after-guard of the radicalism Larsen finds. They found surprisingly little fertile ground for their radical visions and lost heart in their chances of propagating them among New Zealand Baptists. Collins left the country in 1902; Williams in 1919. J.K. Archer came to see little hope for progress through the churches and invested his energies into secular politics.

In contrast to these imported ministers. Gray and Driver were colonials, home grown. These men were comfortable seeking legislative change on the very questions (religious education, prohibition, gambling) which Larsen's free radicals wanted removed from state interference. The difference of context is profound. The New Zealanders did not have the automatic bogey of an established church against which to define their approach. On the other hand, by the mid-1890s, they did have before them the record of an interventionist Liberal government. Far more than in Britain, the resources of colonial society were concentrated in central government. In the debate over religion in schools, Dunedin layman J.G. Fraser made these differences specific. In the colony, he pointed out, the state was different, more democratic and inclusive, than that in Britain. Moreover, only the state had shown itself capable of providing free, 'commodious and well-equipped' schools.³³

Few Baptist leaders were willing to retreat to a pietistic separatism by which 'the church can sustain no relation to social problems.'³⁴ Yet engagement in the New Zealand context would inevitably entail interference by the state. A half-way house, with only some elements of the stance that Larsen identifies, developed. The generation of Gray,

³² Adams, a Dunedin solicitor, was a leading Temperance advocate until appointed to the Supreme Court Bench in 1921.

³³ NZB. September 1896, 129.

³⁴ A.S. Adams 'The Relation of the Church to the Social Problems of the Age' (Presidential Address, 1906) *Baptist Handbook* (Wellington: N.Z. Baptist Union, 1907) 9-23.

Driver, J.J. North and A.S. Adams did, in a real sense, set out to ‘apply sect-type values and insights to the structures of society’. However Free Church values in the New Zealand of 1900 had developed a different set of priorities from those in Britain in 1850. In the absence of an established church, pure separation of religion and state was less critical. The opportunity was taken to attempt to impose other ‘sect-type values’ such as positions on drink and gambling. These became the focus of the social conscience of New Zealand Baptists.

But this was a half-way house. Calls for state-led solutions tended to halt at these points. On other matters, notably those relating to labour, Baptists held back. Adams called for the relief of oppressive conditions but specifically eschewed any entry ‘into the strife of class with class’.³⁵ There was plenty of interest in the issue. A public ‘mass meeting’ on the relation of Church to Labour was held during the 1907 Assembly. A panel of ministers ‘displayed...a sympathy with the aspirations of Labour, and a hostility towards the iniquities which selfish capitalism inflicts on the toiler.’ Nevertheless the way forward was not connected to legislation. The panel operated ‘with a belief that the solution of all economic difficulties must be a moral and religious one.’³⁶ Disruption of public life and militant unionism drew little support. H.H. Driver had no sympathy with the Unions during the maritime strike in 1913.³⁷

Ambivalence over labour issues was common to all the churches before World War One. Gradually, however, a point of contrast emerged. Baptists did not adopt social gospel approaches in the way that other ‘evangelical’ bodies such as the Methodists and Presbyterians did from the 1920s. In 1922, as the Methodists at their Conference were adopting a new Social Creed, the Baptists, at theirs, were being reminded of ‘the pre-eminence of the spiritual.’³⁸ In his Presidential address of 1932, J.J. North called for a renewed church, centered on Christ, and was lukewarm on social radicalism.

We shall utterly fail if we merely preach a social gospel. That would be an attempt to bribe the democracy. Others will outbid us there....The social results that are visualized by our religion, and they are very precious results, are fruits from deep roots.³⁹

³⁵ Adams 22-3.

³⁶ NZB, November 1907, 262, 274.

³⁷ NZB, December 1913, 225-6.

³⁸ See A. Davidson, *Christianity in Aotearoa: A History of Church and Society in New Zealand* (Wellington: Education for Ministry, 1991), 107; NZB, November 1922, 297.

³⁹ NZB, November 1932, 352.

The importance of ecclesiology in this divergence of approaches between 'evangelical' groups must be recognised. Evangelicals may have been united on matters relating to conversion, even personal morality but there were clearly *evangelicalisms* with regard to public policy. For a generation after World War One Baptist evangelicals became less prominent in public debates, beyond a narrow compass. This was not because they were uninterested in the issues, but because they saw the solutions in different places. Only with the arrival of an ecumenically-minded leadership in the 1940s did Baptists as a group again engage directly with government.

In the mean time, New Zealand society has become more and more secularized. In 1967 Ian Breward noted that, 'Britain has had the kind of religious instruction asked for by the Bible in Schools League early this century since 1944. It has done nothing to arrest the development of secular attitudes or to enable the churches to appeal to a more educated pool of potential converts.'⁴⁰ Similar conclusions might be drawn about the effects of the social gospel. It is certainly arguable that society itself has improved. Church engagement with public policy may have aided that process, although that assessment awaits convincing evidence. What is clear is that Christianity has faded as a factor in New Zealand public life. This slide has caused considerable distress to the churches, although to different degrees. Until the 1980s (when homosexual law reform galvanized a new activism) Baptists were less troubled by this trend, and less affected numerically, than Presbyterians and Methodists – but, then, they had not expected much in the first place. The state's slide into 'godlessness' was mere confirmation of what they essentially believed of it anyway.

Baptists in New Zealand failed to develop an approach to public issues which radically reflected their ecclesiology. What emerged instead was a colonial compromise, a willingness to seek political backing on a few things, whilst withdrawing from meaningful engagement on others. This essentially defensive strategy preserved for a long time a sense of identity and coherence but it did little to transform the social order and carried only the vestiges of the Free Church vision.

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⁴⁰ Breward 112.

‘A Conflict of Ideologies: New Zealand Baptist Public Discourse on the Vietnam War.’

ABSTRACT

In the 1960s and 70s New Zealand society was undergoing major social changes. Long-held beliefs on almost all fronts were being challenged. A new New Zealand was being birthed. In the midst of this period, New Zealand went to war in Vietnam. The Vietnam War divided the nation. Behind these opposing beliefs lay much deeper ideologies about how the world is viewed and the future of New Zealand society. This essay explores the New Zealand Baptist public response to the war and argues that their response was trivial and vague because of a fear that a stronger statement would have divided the denomination along broader ideological lines.

In 1970, a frustrated *New Zealand Baptist* correspondent wrote a letter to the editor complaining that although there were many significant social issues that the secular press were addressing at that time, the only recommendation from the Baptist Assembly that year was to condemn the explicit material in a University capping magazine. ‘How pathetic! How irrelevant! While we and our allies were napalming Vietnamese women and children, New Zealand Baptists were concerned with an annual student publication.’¹ This letter articulates the dichotomy that existed among New Zealand Baptists between concerns of personal morality and those of systemic morality. Whilst Baptists could be generally assured of denominational unity on issues of personal morality, such harmony collapsed when it came to volatile issues of systemic morality such as the Vietnam War. Behind the debate about the morality of the Vietnam War lay strong and differing ideological views on justice, politics, the direction of New Zealand society and the very meaning of the gospel itself. Behind the Vietnam War lay a war of ideologies.

This essay explores the New Zealand Baptist public discourse in response to the New Zealand involvement in the Vietnam War (1965-72). It situates the Baptist response within the changing New Zealand society of the 1960s and 1970s. The public discourse in this essay is split

¹ *The New Zealand Baptist*, [hereafter: *NZ*] July 1970, 7.

into 'official' public discourse and 'unofficial' public discourse. The official discourse will focus on the New Zealand Baptist Public Questions Committee's (PQC) response to the issue of the Vietnam War and especially on a 1967 resolution, which was the only resolution that was passed on the issue at a Baptist Assembly. Unofficial public discourse is found in the debates and issues raised within the pages of the denominational newspaper *The New Zealand Baptist*. Throughout the essay comparisons will be drawn between the Baptist response and the New Zealand Methodist Church response. It is important to note however, that this essay only researches the Methodist Church for comparative purposes and does not attempt to draw significant conclusions regarding the Methodist position.

New Zealand Society at the time of the Vietnam War

Michael King notes that '[if] the 1940s and 1950s could be regarded as hinged moulds of conformity for most New Zealanders, then the 1960s were to see those moulds smashed.'² Keith Holyoake's National party slogan of 'Steady Does It' in 1963 summed up the government's view of their role as 'conservator of the *status quo*'.³ However, during the period of the Vietnam War (1965-1972) Holyoake's slogan 'steady does it' neither accurately described nor suited the immense changes that New Zealand society was undergoing.

James Belich notes the variety of influences that shaped the changes of this period. There were those 'coming in' from the outside such as television, air travel, the contraceptive pill, drugs and louder popular music, whilst at the same time there were those influences of difference and diversity that were 'coming out'. Issues such as women's liberation; youth culture; homosexuality; sexual awareness; the extension of hotel drinking hours and a resurgence of the Maori people and Maori issues. All of these challenged the assumptions of the 'tight society'.⁴ It was like a tsunami of change had hit New Zealand shores. Some of the changes appeared as great waves that crashed upon the shores of New Zealand society, whilst others appeared much smaller. However, all of

² Michael King, *After the War: New Zealand Since 1945* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 91.

³ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 451.

⁴ James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders From the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: The Penguin Press, 2001), 463-65. See also Laurie Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand, 1960-1986* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002), 48-63.

them contributed to a great surge of change that reshaped New Zealand society. King writes that '[it] was as if New Zealand, after two decades of somnolence, was suddenly advancing on dozens of fronts simultaneously.⁵ New Zealand society was like a pregnant woman who was beginning to groan with labour pains as it awaited the delivery of a new society. Many, in this birthing process, acted as excited midwives keen to help with the birth of this new society, whilst others acted as disappointed grandparents awaiting the birth of an illegitimate child.

The churches were not immune to the changes that New Zealand society was undergoing. Laurie Guy, in his study on the Homosexual Law Reform Bill, argues that there were also major shifts taking place in the mainline churches in the 1960s. 'There was a much greater liberal-conservative ecclesiastical divide, leading to a 'collapse of the theological middle'.⁶ Indicative of this was the refusal of the National Council of Churches' to endorse a second Billy Graham crusade only ten years after endorsing his first New Zealand crusade. Guy rightly argues, 'Billy Graham had not greatly changed, but much church thinking had.'⁷

Paul Reynolds suggests that, during this period, Presbyterians and Methodists had a liberal theology that meshed with conservative political views. However, with Baptists, a conservative theology meshed with a conservative political view.⁸ Baptists would therefore appear to sit more comfortably in the camp of disappointed grandparents than excited midwives to the new society. Whilst Baptists tended to be a conservative denomination, they too had some who were more open to the encroachments of the new society. A letter to the editor in 1970 would seem to fit all stereotypes of Baptist conservatism. A correspondent wrote, 'I turned my T.V. on this afternoon for a little relaxation, only to find a Roman Catholic priest parading across the screen; and naturally I, being a Baptist, blotted him out.'⁹ However, another Baptist responded by rebuking the author. 'By presenting such a one-eyed view as this, you...provide the not inconsiderable number of critics of Baptist narrow mindedness yet further rope with which to hang us.'¹⁰ Similarly, the coming of the mini skirt brought one disgusted correspondent to write

⁵ King, *After the War*, 91.

⁶ Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 62.

⁷ Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 61-65.

⁸ Paul Reynolds, 'Religion and Politics in Auckland: A Study of the Socio-Economic Composition, Voting and Religious and Political Attitudes of Activists in a Sample of Auckland Nonconformist Churches' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1970), 51-52.

⁹ NZB, January 1970, 5.

¹⁰ NZB, March 1970, 5.

‘[a]ll this bare expanse of upper leg makes me want to either vomit or burst out crying.’¹¹ Another Baptist mourned such views. ‘When, Oh WHEN are some of us poor dear Victorian-minded Baptists going to come out of our shells and become part of the present-day world?’¹²

Many of the beliefs of the ‘tight society’ were now under threat. This was especially true when it came to the role of women in church and society. One female correspondent was frustrated at the lack of volunteers in churches. She argued that many women are getting jobs and that this had repercussions on the number of volunteers in the church. She asked that women, instead of getting jobs, think seriously about taking an active voluntary role in the church.¹³ A minister’s wife agreed and stated ‘A minister’s wife has too many opportunities for service at home...to be away all day working...We are to be help-mates to our husbands in their service to God. Let us get our priorities right.’¹⁴ Other women clearly rejected these views of the role of women. One female correspondent fought for greater female representation of women on the Union Council. ‘[U]nless women are voted on to that male stronghold, I feel Baptists must concede that what they really believe in is the priesthood of all male believers.’¹⁵ The beliefs of the ‘tight society’ were under threat. A Baptist female correspondent argued for the right of women to the freedom of choice when came to abortion. ‘If we want a better community, with wanted people in it, then a pregnant woman must be allowed the choice as to whether she will take on the huge task of giving birth and coping thereafter effectively or whether she will terminate the pregnancy before it is too late.’¹⁶ At the 1969 meeting of the Canterbury-Westland Association it was inevitably noted that the churches were not doing as well statistically as they could be. In the debate as to why, a reporter noted that ‘some fresh air was blown into a rather static discussion by Mr Pollock, a student, who let fly on why he thought churches were making little appeal to so many young people. He felt young people (especially students?) are deeply concerned about the vast problems facing mankind today and cannot be bothered with churches which seem introverted and pre-occupied with petty affairs.’¹⁷ The surge of change was impacting Baptists as much as anyone else.

¹¹ NZB, January 1971, 20.

¹² NZB, February 1971, 20.

¹³ NZB, March 1970, 5.

¹⁴ NZB, July 1970, 7.

¹⁵ NZB, March 1969, 11.

¹⁶ NZB, October 1970, 4.

¹⁷ NZB, August 1969, 4.

Baptists were divided over whether the church's responsibility was simply to save souls or whether the gospel included social responsibility. Some argued that '[o]ur main task is to preach the Gospel, and involvement in controversial social issues only serves to obscure our mission,'¹⁸ and others 'that in proclaiming Jesus Christ, public questions are irrelevant and so not included in the Word of God.'¹⁹ To other Baptists, such reductionist views were ultimately a denial of the gospel. The editor of the *New Zealand Baptist*, Rev H. Whitten, noted with sadness the lack of people volunteering for the Public Questions Committee compared to the number volunteering for the Evangelistic Committee. 'As a people we are too prone to regard our mission... much in terms of soul saving, and too little in terms of social responsibility.' Whitten argued that such an emphasis represents 'a dangerous imbalance' and leads to the church becoming 'more and more irrelevant and ineffective in the present day world.' Touching on a key argument of this essay Whitten stated that when it comes to social issues, 'we seldom have anything to say – or, if we do, we say it so tentatively and so differently, that it becomes quite ineffective.'²⁰ The perceived Baptist apathy to social issues caused a correspondent to comment that 'the only morality that concerns Baptists is sexual morality. Apart from sexual ethics, we as a Denomination offer no other standards or values to our society.'²¹ Baptists were divided between, those who emphasised personal morality and those who stressed the social implications of the gospel.

New Zealand intervention in Vietnam and the public response

On 27th May 1965, the New Zealand Government announced that it would be sending troops to Vietnam in a combatant role. David McCraw argues that New Zealand's commitment to Vietnam was based on two key principles: 1). New Zealand was too small to defend itself and therefore relied on larger allies, especially America and Australia, for its security and it was important therefore to maintain these relationships. 2). The acceptance of the 'domino theory' which believed that if left unchecked, Communism would spread throughout the world and into New Zealand.²² This led to the Government's policy of 'forward

¹⁸ NZB, January 1971, 20.

¹⁹ NZB, February 1971, 20.

²⁰ NZB, August 1970, 1.

²¹ NZB, July 1970, 7.

²² David McCraw, 'Reluctant Ally: New Zealand's Entry into the Vietnam War' *The New Zealand Journal of History* 15 (1981): 49.

defence' – a defence strategy aimed at halting the spread of Communism and keeping it from New Zealand shores. It is important to note that this was the first time New Zealand was pursuing a war where the Government and the Opposition disagreed with each other over its merits.²³ It was also the first time New Zealand had entered into combat without Britain, revealing the way that New Zealand was forging new political and economic relationships. Such a move showed how the new New Zealand society was trying to move out from under the arm of the Mother Country and assert its independence.²⁴ These alliances through ANZUS and SEATO placed pressure on the New Zealand Government to commit combat troops in what American President Lyndon Johnson hoped to be a strong 'show of flags' in Vietnam as a sign of international political support.²⁵ However, the New Zealand commitment to Vietnam (3890 military personnel in total and no more than 543 at any one time)²⁶ was always minimal and ultimately token.

The issue of the Vietnam War divided households, communities and the nation. Within days of the announcement to send combat troops to Vietnam the Prime Minister's suite in parliament was invaded by protesters and thus begun a long anti-war campaign of protest.²⁷ Those who were hard line anti-communists felt that the commitment was token and should be increased, whilst anti-war protesters denied the 'domino theory' and argued that it was a civil war to which New Zealand should only supply humanitarian aid.²⁸ Opposition to the war was dramatically shaped by the influence of television which brought shocking and immediate images of the war and also revealed the scale of international and especially American protest.²⁹ An article in the *New Zealand Methodist Times* speaks of how the vivid images glued people to their seats and they 'felt' the war.³⁰

²³ Jack Elder, 'The New Zealand Labour Party and the Vietnam War: Traditions and Policy until 1973' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1973), 254-64.

²⁴ King, *History of New Zealand*, 453.

²⁵ Roberto Rabel, 'Vietnam and the Collapse of the Foreign Policy Consensus' in Malcolm McKinnon (ed) *New Zealand in World Affairs Volume II 1957-1972* (Wellington: New Zealand Institute of Internal Affairs, 1991): 45.

²⁶ Deborah Challinor, *Grey Ghosts: New Zealand Vietnam Vets Talk about their War* (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett Publishers, 1998), 37.

²⁷ King, *After the War*, 116.

²⁸ King, *History of New Zealand*, 453-54.

²⁹ Claire Loftus Nelson, *Long Time Passing: New Zealand Memories of the Vietnam War* (Wellington: National Radio, 1990), 39. See also Rabel, 'Vietnam', 57.

³⁰ *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 18 August 1966, 3 (hereafter NZM).

Claire Loftus Nelson remarks that the protest movement brought together a diverse group of people ranging from militaristic radical youths through to Christian pacifists in an uneasy alliance.³¹ Roberto Rabel notes that '[the] extent of this support [for the anti-war movement] was illustrated during the nationwide mobilisations of the early 1970s and was especially evident amongst younger people in higher education: the so-called Vietnam Generation.'³² He goes on to argue that a significant lasting effect of the anti-war movement was that thousands of New Zealanders viewed their country's place in the world differently from the way the Government viewed it.³² The birthing of the new New Zealand, where the country asserted its independence as a nation, had begun to express itself in these political and ideological differences. Behind the public reaction to the Vietnam War lay a conflict of ideologies about the nature of New Zealand society.

Official Baptist public discourse on the Vietnam war:

After the announcement that the New Zealand Government were sending combat troops to Vietnam, the New Zealand Baptist PQC reported that it was preparing a statement for the Union Council Meeting in June.³³ The then editor of the *New Zealand Baptist*, Rev. N. R. Wood, wrote a report following the proceedings of the Union Council. He lamented the fact that the PQC resolution failed to pass the Council, which felt unable to make a statement at this juncture, and suggested it raised far-reaching questions. 'Is this a sign of a malaise near the heart of the Union? Has the Baptist Union lost its social conscience?'³⁴ The Wellington Baptist Association passed their own motion that year on the issue of Vietnam, appealing for all Christians to work for peace on earth, protesting against open warfare and the situations that give rise to war, recommending New Zealand increase its aid to South East Asia,

³¹ Nelson, *Long Time Passing*, 43. See also P. R. H. Jackman, 'The Auckland Opposition to New Zealand's Involvement in the Vietnam War 1965-1972: An Example of the Achievements and Limitations of Ideology' (Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1979). Jackman notes the eventual split in the anti-war movement due to differing views on whether protests should be violent or non-violent.

³² Rabel, 'Vietnam', 58.

³³ *NZB*, July 1965, 174.

³⁴ *NZB*, August 1965, 202.

commending the Government for their concern in the area of aid and technical assistance and asked that they take every step to end the war.³⁵

In 1966, the PQC declared that if any statement was to be made in regard to Vietnam that it must be the committee to do so.³⁶ However, there was no mention of Vietnam at the 1966 Assembly and no resolution was passed. Following this there was a growing discontent among some Baptists and an increased demand for some form of statement from the PQC and the Baptist denomination as a whole. In July 1967 the Public Questions Committee received a copy of correspondence from *The Nelson Press* concerning Baptist attitudes to the war in Vietnam from Rev. F. Duncan.³⁷ In November 1967, the Ranui Baptist Church wrote a letter to the PQC urging them to present a resolution to Assembly regarding Vietnam (its minister, Rev I. S. Macdonald had already written into the *New Zealand Baptist* in August³⁸ expressing his shock that the 1966 Assembly had mentioned nothing about Vietnam). These were important influences in provoking the PQC to resolve that draft resolutions on the issue of Vietnam be prepared for their next meeting.³⁹ This became the only resolution that New Zealand Baptists passed on this issue. Because this is the central resolution regarding the response of the Vietnam War, and due to the circumstances surrounding its drafting, it is important to explore it and its passing at the 1967 Assembly in some depth.

The initial wording of the PQC draft resolution, presented by Rev A. L. Silcock, specifically expressed 'its support of the N.Z. Government and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and other Christian communions, in their efforts to end the conflict and urges that these efforts be continued.'⁴⁰ This original draft was influenced by the Baptist resolutions from both Great Britain and Victoria, which both expressed their misgivings and distress about the war and aligned themselves with public figures and organisations that opposed the war. The PQC debate of the initial resolution is not accounted in the minutes. But, in the next meeting of the PQC a second draft of the resolution was made which had two vital amendments. The PQC withdrew its support of the New Zealand Government's attempts to create peace and it added in a clear

³⁵ Assembly Minutes 1965, Session VI, New Zealand Baptist Archive (NZBA), File A45 Book B1/125: 3.

³⁶ Minutes of the Public Questions Committee 3 November 1966, NZBA, File A/N 1552, Vivienne Boyd's Correspondence.

³⁷ Minutes of the Public Questions Committee 18 July 1967.

³⁸ NZB, August 1967, 12.

³⁹ Minutes of Public Questions Committee, 19 September 1967.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Public Questions Committee 10 October 1967.

call for the Government to take the initiative in moving toward peaceful negotiations (see appendix). The minutes note that there were alterations made to the wording of the prepared resolution. The words 'N.Z. Government and' were deleted from the second sentence. At the same time the second paragraph was amended from having no mention of the New Zealand Government to now having a significant sentence inserted. It added in '[In] particular the Assembly urges the N.Z. Government to take the initiative by calling on both sides of the conflict to demonstrate their desire for peace by indicating by word and deed their readiness to move toward negotiations.'⁴¹ The accumulated effect of these two changes forms a censure by the PQC of the Government's attempts to create peace and hints at an opposition to the Government's position on the war itself. These changes are highly significant and contributed to the final draft becoming very contentious at the 1967 Assembly.

The resolution passed at the 1967 Assembly by 128 votes for and 90 votes against, showing its contentious nature and the denominational disagreement over it. When Rev Silcock presented the resolution he revealed the leanings of the PQC towards opposing the war. In putting forth the motion, he noted that '[in] the minds of many it is now more a moral issue than a military one.'⁴² He also correctly noted that whilst most people agree that this war must cease, '[it] is when we begin to talk of how we are going to stop it that we fall into strong differences of opinion...The resolution therefore avoids any attempt to fix blame or indicate methods.'⁴³ The PQC felt that the need to avoid denominational conflict came before the need to make a clear concise statement either in opposition or support of the Government and its policies. However, the debate that developed at the Assembly led to newspaper headlines reading 'Baptist Division on Vietnam War', with another noting that there was 'a sharp division of opinion' on the question of Vietnam.⁴⁴ Behind the differing stances New Zealand Baptists had on the Government's military intervention in Vietnam, stood differing worldviews. Rev I. S. MacDonald, who had already written a letter to the editor of *The New Zealand Baptist* in August 1967 expressing some people's shock at the fact that nothing was said on Vietnam in the 1966 Assembly, said 'Baptists hitherto had been silent on this issue, and this was to their shame...Our participation in Vietnam might have been politically expedient but it was morally wrong.' In contrast, Mr N.

⁴¹ Minutes of the Public Questions Committee 26 October 1967.

⁴² NZB, January 1968, 12.

⁴³ NZB, January 1968, 13.

⁴⁴ Various unreferenced newspaper clippings cited in NZBA File B1/58 Box 0022.

Sorenson and the Rev L. S. Armstrong expressed their unhappiness at the implied condemnation of the attitudes of the Government and proposed an amendment that assured the Government of their support. 'Mr Sorrenson said that in Vietnam we are fighting an anti-god foe who aims at world conquest.' Clearly this only represented one extreme of Baptist opinion. Rev T. Cadman and Rev G. Smith protested that such an amendment was self-contradictory. 'Mr Smith said, 'When we support the Secretary-General of the United Nations *we are condemning the actions of our Government.*'⁴⁵ Both those who opposed the resolution and those who supported it viewed it as a censure of the Government.

Rev A. J. Gibbs asked the vital question of the PQC as to whether this was a motion of censure against the Government? In answering Rev Silcock, replied that the committee had been careful not to censure anybody. Publicly the PQC wanted to reassure the denomination that it was not censuring anyone. However, in light of the drafting and editing of the resolution at the PQC meetings, their public profession does not appear to represent fully the exact intent of the PQC. For the sake of denominational unity the PQC had to try to reassure people that they were not censuring the Government. Opinion on the war was divided into those who supported the Government and those who did not. However, as has been argued earlier and will be argued further later, behind debate about the Vietnam War was a much broader debate about worldviews and ideologies. If the PQC were to be seen as publicly censuring the Government they would have been seen to have a more liberal worldview than that of what Reynold's stated was a conservative denomination. If this were the perception of the denomination it would effectively pigeonhole the PQC as 'liberal' and cause even greater division. The PQC worked hard at making their censure of the Government more implicit than explicit in order to make the resolution more acceptable to the wider denomination and maintain denominational unity, but in the end the PQC's position on Vietnam, seen in light of the editing and drafting of the resolution, was further 'left of centre' than that of the conservative denomination.

Rev F. McKean insightfully summed up the feeling of some that 'the resolution, amended or otherwise, was just a 'paper tiger' which would be ignored by everybody because it was such a compromise motion and completely wishy-washy.'⁴⁶ The resolution attempted to censure the Government implicitly, in an attempt to please the polarised parties for the sake of denominational unity, but at the same time it

⁴⁵ NZB, January 1968, 13.

⁴⁶ NZB, January 1968, 13.

pleased no one. The result *was* a paper tiger that *was* completely wishy-washy and said nothing.

It is useful to contrast the Baptist resolution on Vietnam with the Baptist resolution on the proposed introduction of legislation to make blood, breath or urine tests compulsory for people arrested or suspected of drink driving. Both of these resolutions were passed at the 1967 Assembly and followed one another in the *The New Zealand Baptist* report on the Assembly. The Tests for Blood Alcohol Concentration was clear, specific and concise in its 'warm commendation' for the introduction of this legislation. Added to the 'warm commendation' the Assembly suggested that it would support legislation which made provision for degrees of seriousness, and they also gave 5 points of background information on drink driving and its effects on society.⁴⁷ When it came to the issue of drink-driving the PQC could be assured of the unanimous support of the denomination and could therefore speak clearly and specifically. The PQC could be assured that Baptists would be united over issues of personal morality (such as drink-driving) but such unity did not exist on issues of systemic morality (such as the Vietnam War). This allowed Baptists to speak out loudly and boldly against issues of personal morality but to whisper ambiguously about issues of systemic morality.

Following the 1967 resolution, the denomination did not officially address the issue of Vietnam again. There was a letter sent to the PQC from three members of the Thames Baptist Church, where Herbert Whitten, the editor of *The New Zealand Baptist* and strong opponent of the Vietnam War, was minister. The letter requested a detailed factual survey, covering twenty-four given headings, of the course of history in Vietnam over the last twenty-five years. The PQC decided that they could not deal with such a remit because 1). It asked for information that was simply not available. 2). It was worded in terms which already prejudged some of the issues involved. 3). It required a level of qualification which few N.Z. Baptists possessed to evaluate the evidence available, and anyone with that level of competence is unlikely to have time to produce yet another book on the subject.⁴⁸ At the same meeting the PQC were advised of the possibility of a delegation to the 1970 Assembly concerning the Vietnam War. The Secretary was advised to write to Rev H. Nees, the General Secretary of the New Zealand Baptist Union at the time, expressing their concern that both viewpoints should be included in any presentation to Assembly. The PQC judged

⁴⁷ NZB, January 1968, 13-14.

⁴⁸ Minutes of the Public Questions Committee 15 September 1970.

that the remit on Vietnam presented to the 1967 Assembly still represented the view of the PQC. The demands of the Thames Baptist Church were excessive and impracticable. However, in light of American invasions of Cambodia and Laos; the impact in New Zealand of the killings of student protestors at Kent State University by National Guardsmen; the violence between police and anti-war protestors in New Zealand during the visit of United States Vice President Spiro Agnew and the evolving discontent in the wider New Zealand public, it is questionable how well the 'paper tiger' resolution of 1967 represented the complexity of these issues. Perhaps it was better for denominational harmony for the PQC to avoid reopening the Vietnam War issue.

The New Zealand Methodist Church was much more specific, definitive and proactive in its stance than the Baptists were. It immediately took a stance of opposition to the Vietnam War. The Methodists released detailed resolutions every year and sent their President to Vietnam to be able to provide first hand information regarding the war.⁴⁹ By 1967, the same time as the Baptist resolution, the Methodist Church, whilst sending chaplains to serve in Vietnam, 'strongly protested' against the Government sending more troops to Vietnam.⁵⁰ By 1972, after the withdrawal of New Zealand troops, the Methodist President stated: 'The war in Indo-China, carried out with our connivance and support has become an obscenity and a nightmare, an offence against everything we stand for...Therefore, Conference calls on all Christians strenuously to oppose any future involvement of our country in any similar military adventure.'⁵¹ Whilst Baptists need not have held the same position as the Methodists, they could have learned much from their Methodist friends. The official Methodist response was far more concerned, involved and detailed than that of the Baptists. As will become clear in the next section, Methodists too were split denominationally over the issue of the Vietnam War but this did not deter them from making a clear stance, either way, on the war.

Unofficial Baptist public discourse

This section focuses on the discourse on the Vietnam War that came from the pages of the denominational magazine through editorials, articles and correspondence with the editor.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of New Zealand 1970:155 (hereafter MOC).

⁵⁰ MOC 1967, 116.

⁵¹ MOC 1972, 167-68.

After the announcement of the New Zealand Government that it was sending combat troops to Vietnam, the then editor of *The New Zealand Baptist*, Rev N.R. Wood, wrote that the Vietnamese had the right to settle their own affairs and that armed intervention will only create such havoc that both sides will be pleased to come to the table.⁵² As noted earlier, Wood was frustrated at the failure of the 1965 PQC resolution to pass the Union Council. He questioned the Council's social conscience. 'What future is there for a Union of churches that is concerned with administration and evangelism but fails to relate these to the burning issues of the modern world?'⁵³ From the beginning important Baptist figures, especially those who did not support the war, felt that the issue of the Vietnam War would only highlight the denominational dichotomy that overemphasised evangelism and personal morality to the detriment of justice and systemic morality. Other key Baptist figures publicly opposed the war. Dr Bob Thompson and Dr Stan Edgar, lecturers at the Baptist Theological College, signed a statement in 1972 from the Christian Peace Movement that asked the Government to dissociate itself with the American policy of massive aerial bombardment on North Vietnam and to replace military aid with medical aid. Rev Angus MacLeod was, at this time, both the Baptist representative on the National Council of Churches (N.C.C.) and chairman of the Executive of the N.C.C, which opposed the war in Vietnam.⁵⁴

By December 1965, the Roslyn Baptist Church, whilst not wanting the denomination to condemn the war, were so concerned that the denomination had not protested against the inhumane practises that were being reported as common on both sides of the war, that they released their own resolution in *The New Zealand Baptist* forum deploring these practises and the fact that New Zealanders might be forced to take part in such actions.⁵⁵

In November 1966 there was a change in editorship of *The New Zealand Baptist* from Rev N. Wood to Rev H. Whitten. Whitten had served in WWII where he became a prisoner of war for four years. He had served five years as R.N.Z.A.F. chaplain and was the current minister of Thames Baptist Church. Whitten became a key figure of

⁵² NZB, July 1965, 168.

⁵³ NZB, August 1965, 202.

⁵⁴ National Council of Churches in New Zealand. *To Church People re Vietnam* (Wellington: National Council of Churches, 1967).

⁵⁵ NZB, December 1965, 308.

protest against the Vietnam War and with his military background his opinion carried significant weight.

The tone *The New Zealand Baptist* newspaper took was one of opposition to the war. It printed many statements from international bodies that condemned the war.⁵⁶ It published articles by key figures and bodies that spoke of the demoralisation of the Vietnamese people,⁵⁷ another article urging America to allow Asian nations to decide on whether America should pull out of the war,⁵⁸ and an article advocating that Vietnamese religious leaders should play a dominant role in bringing peace to Vietnam.⁵⁹ The explicitness of Whitten's statements against the war evolved in conjunction with public opinion. Initially, in 1967, he stated that the Vietnam War must be brought to an end as quickly as possible and that the only hope was negotiated peace. He called on Baptists to pray.⁶⁰ The article provoked no correspondence. Whitten's next editorial on the Vietnam War, in 1970, was more direct. Annoyed at the silence of the 1969 Assembly on Vietnam, Whitten called the war iniquitous and that every Christian voice should be raised against it.⁶¹ This article received one reply of support.⁶² Following the spilling over of the war in Laos and Cambodia, Whitten dedicated a full-page editorial to the war entitled 'This War must be Stopped.' In the article, Whitten, horrified at the suffering, degradation, brutality and death, called this war the greatest crime against humanity of this generation and that those supporting the war could not escape condemnation for it at the bar of history. Whitten proposed the withdrawal of American forces and their replacement by United Nations troops. Finally he noted the silence of the Baptists and solemnly said 'By our present silence about this war, we deny all the New Testament principles upon which we profess to stand.'⁶³

The replies to this editorial highlight the irreconcilable differences in worldviews that lay behind opinions on the Vietnam War. One Whitten supporter declared that people should not pray about it unless

⁵⁶ The World Council of Churches, *NZB*, May 1967, 16; The Southern Baptist Convention, *NZB*, November 1967, 7; The Christian Peace Movement, *NZB*, 1972, 12; The American Baptist Convention, *NZB*, August 1972, 11; and Baptists in U.S.S.R., *NZB*, September 1972, 13.

⁵⁷ *NZB*, January 1968, 27.

⁵⁸ *NZB*, February 1968, 13.

⁵⁹ *NZB*, August 1971, 15.

⁶⁰ *NZB*, April 1967, 2.

⁶¹ *NZB*, January 1970: 2.

⁶² *NZB*, February 1970, 4.

⁶³ *NZB*, June 1970, 1.

they are willing to do something about it like meet with local Members of Parliament or form discussion groups.⁶⁴ Three correspondents opposed Whitten's editorial. All three spoke of their fear and hatred of Communism. One wrote, 'Are we to choose God and democracy, or Communism and atheism?' Another agreed with the Government's domino theory. 'Given unhindered progress, the Communists would sweep through the East and on down to Australia and New Zealand.' An editor's note was added to this letter which showed the differing worldviews and ideologies that were at work behind this correspondence. Whitten replied 'We may add here also that we do not share our correspondent's opinion'.⁶⁵ An advocate of Whitten wrote of his detractors 'The sentiments expressed are indistinguishable from those outside the church. In fact they would look entirely in place in the pages of an R.S.A. publication or the Reader's Digest.'⁶⁶ Behind the Vietnam War lay a conflict of ideologies. Behind statements linking Communism with atheism and the democratic West with God lay ethnocentrism and privilege. With such views being foundational to people's belief systems, the Vietnam War exposed these beliefs and ultimately exposed the irreconcilable differences that lay between those who supported such views and those who opposed them. Whitten entitled his final editorial on the Vietnam War in this period 'When Will They ever Learn?' In counting the human cost of the war, Whitten asked 'who, with any compassion at all, can possibly believe that, in any way at all, this war has been worth it?...Surely, of all wars, this has been the least justified, and the most futile, the most cruel and the most wicked.'⁶⁷

Like the soldiers and the rest of the New Zealand public, the Baptists had to choose to be involved in the Vietnam War. The official Baptist discourse chose to act as conservators of denominational harmony rather than speak out, either in support or opposition, and run the risk of polarising the denomination. In the vacuum that was created by the lack of a clear and concise denominational voice, Whitten was able to utilise his role as editor and his *mana* as an ex-military fighter and chaplain to act as prophet to the people and attempt to probe the Baptist denomination out of political apathy.

The sheer weight of Methodist engagement on this issue, in terms of resolutions, articles and correspondence, far exceeded that of the Baptists. The Methodist position was clearly against the sending of

⁶⁴ NZB, July 1970, 6.

⁶⁵ NZB, August 1970, 4.

⁶⁶ NZB, October 1970, 4.

⁶⁷ NZB, June 1972, 4.

combat troops to Vietnam and remained so throughout the war. The Methodist President responded immediately to the news of the commitment of combat troops to Vietnam by stating that the decision by the Government 'will be as deeply regretted as it has been strongly opposed by a large cross section of New Zealand Citizens.'⁶⁸ The war of ideologies was not limited to the Baptists. One correspondent opposed the President's statement citing that the Vietnam War was an ideological war between those who supported Communism and the subjection of the white people of the world and those who did not.⁶⁹ Another Methodist correspondent felt that the Conference decisions on the Vietnam War were wholly divorced from a majority of lay opinion.⁷⁰ This raises the question of whether leaders of both denominations were acting as priests of the *status quo* or prophets to the people. Along with opposing the war, Methodists sent padres to Vietnam. This placed the Methodist Church in the difficult situation of sending personnel to a war they condemned. At the same time, it also gave a breadth to their understanding of the war. Padre M. L. Dine wrote back to the church with a plea from the soldiers to remember that they were simply New Zealanders who were doing what the Government asked them to do and to pray for them.

The differing approaches of the Baptists and the Methodists to the Vietnam War are highlighted in two letters. One is to the *New Zealand Methodist* and the other to *The New Zealand Baptist* from people who felt that their worldview was not being fairly represented within their respective denominations. A Methodist correspondent, in light of the Methodist refusal to support Billy Graham, wrote how they had received debatable Vietnam addresses and exhortations about ethical responsibility, but in the last twenty years could remember only two occasions when they had been challenged to make a commitment then and there to Christ and his work.⁷¹ Comparatively, a Baptist correspondent, appalled by the complete indifference of the Baptists to the human suffering in Vietnam, wrote, '[As] a member of one of the larger Auckland churches, I can recall only one occasion when a public prayer was offered for Vietnam.'⁷² There were those among the Methodists who felt there was an overemphasis on justice and systemic morality to the detriment of evangelism and personal morality. Among the Baptists there were those who felt that there was an overemphasis on

⁶⁸ NZM, July 1965, 91.

⁶⁹ NZM, August 1965, 134.

⁷⁰ NZM, 8 December 1966, 2.

⁷¹ NZM, 27 March 1969, 2. cf. Guy, *Worlds in Collision*, 62.

⁷² NZB, February 1970, 4.

evangelism and personal morality to the detriment of justice and systemic morality.

Conclusion

The official Baptist public discourse on the Vietnam War was poor. It lacked clarity and did not provide a forum in which Baptists could express their views in search of discerning Christ's mind among them; an act that is central to a Baptist gathered theology.⁷³ When it was clear that a large dichotomy of beliefs existed, the issue was glossed over to maintain denominational unity. Official Baptist public discourse tried to present a middle road between the divisions out of a fear of splitting the denomination. This led them to produce a resolution, which had the intent of censuring the Government, but which said little. The implicit censure of the Government and the closeness of the vote points towards a PQC that tended to be further left of centre than its right-of-centre denomination. However, they could not allow this to become the impression the denomination had of the PQC; otherwise the resolution would have been rejected. In the vacuum left by the official Baptist resolutions and voices, Whitten used his position as editor of the denominational newspaper to provide unofficial public discourse which opposed the war and acted as prophet to the Baptist people to try and raise their consciences out of what he perceived as political apathy. Whitten provided a forum in which it was revealed that a deep dichotomy existed in Baptist views on the Vietnam War and ultimately much deeper ideological views of the world, the future of the nation and the meaning of the gospel. The unofficial Baptist public discourse revealed the irreconcilable differences that existed on both sides of the issue. At the same time, whilst greatly weighted in opposition to the war, Whitten allowed a forum for Baptists to engage in the issues surrounding the war rather than suppress these views for the sake of a false unity. Methodists too were split on this issue. The firm opposition to the war that the Methodist leadership took upset those among their denomination who supported the war but it at least allowed them to engage in the issue and avoid the paralysis of engagement that the Baptists suffered.

Baptists needed to engage more deeply in the issues surrounding the Vietnam War. In order to do so, they would have needed to

⁷³ Martin Sutherland, 'On Method: A Baptist *Tikanga*' in Martin Sutherland (ed), *Talking Theology: 2001-2002 Proceedings* (Auckland: R. J. Thompson Centre for Theological Studies, 2003), 120-129, 127.

recognise that behind the beliefs regarding the Vietnam War lay much broader ideologies, ideologies that differed on issues such as Communism, race, nationalism, the future of the nation and the very meaning of the gospel itself. Behind the Vietnam War lay a conflict of ideologies that Baptists preferred not to enter into. Whilst this preserved some form of denominational unity, it came at the expense of seeking Christ's mind on the Vietnam War and an opportunity to speak on behalf of God's people.

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APPENDIX:

1967 New Zealand Baptist Resolution on the Vietnam War:

'That this Assembly of the Baptist Union of New Zealand affirms its growing distress at the continuance and escalation of the war in Vietnam. It expresses its support for the [New Zealand Government and]⁷⁴ Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Christian communions, in their efforts to end the conflict and urges that these efforts be continued.

That this Assembly appeals to **all** involved, in view of the increasing suffering in both North and South Vietnam, to make such concessions as may be necessary as a basis for a just settlement – [in particular this Assembly urges the New Zealand Government to take the initiative by calling upon both sides of the conflict **to demonstrate** their desire for peace by indicating by word and deed their readiness to move towards negotiations].⁷⁵

The Assembly also appeals to Churches and individual Christians to continue to pray for peace and to use every opportunity for expressing their concern.'

⁷⁴ This was included in the original draft of the PQC resolution but was deleted in an amendment.

⁷⁵ This section was not part of the original draft of the PQC resolution and was inserted in the amended form.

REVIEWS

**Ian M. Randall, *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century*,
Didcot: The Baptist Historical Society, 2005, ISBN 0-903166-35-6
(600pp)**

This is a long-awaited history to bring the century-by-century Baptist Historical Society series up to the near present. This sort of book is difficult to write; so full credit to the author for his work.

Randall has chosen to order his work in chronological decade-by-decade fashion. Contrast this with Brigg's companion volume of the nineteenth century English Baptists, which takes a thematic approach. Randall's approach has the advantage of being more comprehensive, of 'telling the full story'. The weakness is that there is therefore far less analysis, far less exploring particular trends and issues in depth. For my part as a lecturer in Baptist history I would have opted for Brigg's approach over Randall's. Randall will touch on issues and point to wider resources for exploration; but commonly there is not the detailed analysis or the answer to the question that his material evokes in a reader like me.

Of course, Randall's work does not and cannot tell the full story. It must necessarily be selective. What one best gets through this book is what happened at the co-ordinating centre of Baptist life, rather than the perspectives of grassroots Baptists. The book is excellent in exploring the ecumenical vision of John Howard Shakespeare, key general secretary of the Baptist Union, 1898-1924. From a much later perspective, Shakespeare's willingness to give away much Baptist identity in favour of a proposed United Free Church and even to accept episcopacy if that was the price of union with the Anglican Church is remarkable. Those of us who know something of Baptist ethos and ecclesiology will not be surprised that Shakespeare's vision ultimately bore little fruit within his denomination.

Why did Shakespeare put so much effort into that vision? Randall notes that Shakespeare professed himself in private, 'at heart an Episcopalian' (p.126). I wish that Randall had provided a footnote reference to the source of that key statement. Randall's narrative of the ecumenism not only of Shakespeare but also of other Baptist leaders throughout much of the twentieth century underlines, however, the much stronger influence of ecumenism in English Baptist life than in the 'down-under' life of her antipodean offspring. Why is there that difference? Randall does not answer that question, but it may have something to do with the ongoing gravitational pull of the Anglican Church for bodies and individuals that had left her but were constantly reminded of her dominating presence as the national church.

Another strand of Baptist life well narrated by Randall is the controversy generated by Michael Taylor's address to the 1971 Assembly on the topic, 'How much of a man was Jesus Christ?' Randall ably explores the controversy that broke over Taylor's inadequate Christology (it only doubtfully supported the full divinity of Jesus) and its causing 52 churches to leave the Baptist Union. Should Henton Davies, the then Union President, have taken some of the blame for this? After all, he should have known something of Taylor's theology (Taylor then being the principal of Northern Baptist College) and it was Davies who named the topic on which Taylor was to speak. Randall simply unfolds the story and leaves readers to work out for themselves the issue of blame.

A weakness of Randall's approach is that in order to unfold his story chronologically, he opts to do this decade by decade. Randall himself acknowledges that such a schema is somewhat arbitrary: 'Baptist life does not shift gear every ten years' (p.3). Thus World War Two, for example, does not neatly fit within one of Randall's decades and his material on this topic is found in two separate parts in succeeding chapters.

What is more disconcerting is that Randall's chapters have all been given headings that are 'sound bites' from a larger quotation of that time, even though the heading may then give a misleading impression of the contents of the chapter. This misleading impression is very marked with the chapter on the first decade which is headed, 'The future rests with the Free Churches'. The subsequent material shows that the future did not in fact rest with those churches.

Overall, I would have liked greater historical depth from Randall and less plotting of screeds of events. I was intrigued with Randall's noting how English Baptists counted Lloyd George (Prime Minister of Britain, 1916-1922) as one of their own, notwithstanding his philandering, particularly his affair over thirty years with his private secretary, Frances Stevenson. Given the propensity of Baptists to view sexual sin as particularly serious, I would have liked some comment as to why English Baptists seemed to turn a blind eye to the situation. Maybe they were keener for their denomination to have a place of reflected glory in the centre of English life than to apply consistently the values that they otherwise held.

One crucial theme that keeps re-appearing in the book is the ongoing numerical decline of the English Baptist Churches in the twentieth century, notwithstanding repeated denominational attempts to arrest and reverse the decline through evangelistic and other strategies. The book does, however, note that the downward trend may have been reversed in the 1990s, research indicating that notwithstanding total British church attendance dropping by 14% in that decade, Baptist attendance increased by 13%. It is a pity that Randall does not explore more factors both in the decline and in the apparent turn-around.

Clearly I would have liked a different approach from the one Randall has chosen to deliver. At the same time I recognise the richness of resource he has provided us with in this voluminous work. In the end, where I was expecting a destination, Randall has provided me with a signpost, a pointer to lots of material, to lots of issues and to the interpretation of other scholars that I need to follow up. It remains a 'must-get' book for serious students of English Baptist history.

Laurie Guy

P.E. Thompson and A.R. Cross (eds) *Recycling the Past or Researching History: Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 11*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2005, ISBN 1-84227-122-9 (331 pp)

This valuable series continues to present new material to the Baptist historian and theologian. This collection of essays, timed to coincide with the centenary meetings of the BWA, 'seeks to recover a sense of communal power through an interrogation of certain portions of the

Baptist past.'(xix). As the title suggests, the burden of some of the essays is iconoclastic, the questioning of myths which the authors discern to be too readily uncritically accepted. So, Clive Jarvis re-examines Particular Baptist Calvinism, suggesting that the picture of a fundamental shift from High-Calvinism to Fullerism has been overstated. In similar vein, Anthony Cross tackles the alleged non-sacramentalism of English Baptists and Ian Randall their supposed impoverished spirituality in the early part of the twentieth century. These and other specific essays - from studies of seventeenth-century soteriology, to the lives of Baptist women, to instances of episcopal function in Britain and Georgia - helpfully uncover poorly recognized aspects of the Baptist past or cast familiar questions in a new light.

The fifteen essays in this volume thus provide a stimulating look at a range of questions, often based on original research and fresh perspectives. It is the type of material which has been obscured or just plain lacking in Baptist historical literature. The gathering of a strong collection like this in one place highlights the worth of this focused series. Of the two threads suggested in the title historiography and myth, the second is well addressed. A number of assumed interpretations will need to be revisited in light of this and other research. The outcome with regard to the historiography side of the equation is not so satisfying, although this perhaps cannot be laid at the door of the editors and contributors. 'Historiography' is addressed here primarily in its relation to the 'myth' question. The focus of some of the studies is the way in which earlier historical writing has misrepresented or misjudged the complexities of Baptist life thought and practice. A good example is Mike Broadway's essay which identifies the blurring of categories like voluntarism into individualism and the acceptance of the latter tag by many commentators and historians. On this level Baptist 'historiography', is indeed addressed and at times fairly criticized.

Yet there is another, theoretical, level of historiography which needs to be tackled if the editors' ambition of speaking for the Baptist religious tradition is to be fully realized. Drs Thompson and Cross accept E.S. Gausted's point that Baptists struggle to grasp 'that essence, that defining difference which constitutes being Baptist.' (xvi). This the editors put down to the multivalency of Baptist origins and the pragmatic concerns of Baptists themselves. The second factor, they conclude, makes it all the more imperative that the stories of Baptist origins be rigorously studied and related. Hence the attention in this volume to historiography in its literary sense.

There remains, however, a clear need for attention to historiography in its theoretical sense. Baptist historians have not satisfactorily wrestled with the philosophical task of understanding a Baptist way of doing history. This is a pity, as it is more than possible that the pragmatism - even (at times, let's face it) Philistinism - of Baptists may be found to be not merely an unfortunate additional barrier to understanding, but perhaps an intimate pointer to the nature of the Baptist view of the past.

A nod in this direction is found in Phillip Thompson's essay on 'the myth of changelessness in Baptist life and belief'. Addressing the role of tradition in the North American context, Thompson suggests that there is a deeper problem than mere 'amnesia', the forgetting of the past. Rather what is at work is a 'paramnesia', 'remembering of the wrong thing', an incorrect version of the past. Tradition continues to function in a sociological sense as a source of assurance which enables the 'communal embodiment' of belief. However it can detract rather than support the formation of a truly Christian identity when it propounds a false perception of the past. Thompson argues that Baptists need to re-envision the authority of tradition as a 'moral claim' on the present.

Thomson's interesting study is useful. It goes some way in grasping the dynamics of Baptist engagement with the past. There remains much ground to cover. The work of Baptist theologians across the centuries who have pointed forward, rather than backward for the organizing principles of Baptist thought needs to be incorporated in Baptist historiography. Even more so, the particularity of Baptist thought and experience must be more positively acknowledged. Baptist ecclesiology understands the church to be continuously created by the Spirit in the gathering of believers. This ongoing manifestation of the Kingdom is real, flesh and blood real. It thus involves decisions, choices and practical action. Until Baptist historians take seriously the inherent immediacy of the Baptist vision of Church and Kingdom then the apparent tension between a rich past and a pragmatic present will not be resolved.

Martin Sutherland

S.J. Grenz, *The Social God and Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. ISBN 0-664-22203-X (345 pp.)

Out of the enchantment of the trinitarian renaissance of the past few decades a number of seminal and highly influential works have appeared which challenge the received tradition in a number of ways. One such work is that of Baptist theologian, the late Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*. In 1994 Grenz published his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994). In that work it was made explicit that the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation for any truly Christian theology and hence the concept of community was adopted by Grenz as his explicit integrative motif; that which holds together in coherent fashion his entire theological enterprise. Since then Grenz has explored the postmodern turn of western civilization and sought to bring Christian theology into dialogue with the philosophical challenges postmodernity raises. This resulted in a number of works, most important of which was his *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, with J.R. Franke (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), in which an entire Christian epistemology was outlined, largely based upon a trinitarian – community oriented theology. While *Theology for the Community of God* contained many unique insights it was largely a work aimed at the undergraduate student, thus, it was more a survey of theology from a community centred perspective. The book currently under review is not a survey of the literature nor is it aimed at the undergraduate student. This book represents volume one of a projected six volume series entitled *The Matrix of Theology*. The express aim of this series, Grenz tells us, is constructive, it ‘involves portraying Christian beliefs as a comprehensive, coherent whole, as well as relating the Christian belief mosaic faithfully and relevantly to contemporary culture’ (ix). Other projected volumes would have included the doctrine of God, Christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Hence a new, more informed, and positively constructive theology is initiated by Grenz in this volume. No claim to comprehensive coverage of each topic is maintained, rather, ‘each volume seeks to engage with the most far-reaching challenge the postmodern context raises for the specific section of the theological corpus under study’ (x). As many readers will know, Grenz passed away unexpectedly earlier this year (March 11), making this and the second volume on the doctrine of God the only volumes in the series to see publication.

The Social God and the Relational Self is a work of theological anthropology viewed in light of the doctrine of the Trinity. Because God is a ‘social God’, a social unity made up of three persons in one being,

the image of God in humans is inherently social as well. This leads Grenz to re-examine views of human sexuality; male and female, views of ecclesiology; the body of Christ, and views of community more generally; the social-cultural identity of beings, individuals, souls, and the self. According to Grenz, the postmodern turn has resulted in a profound realization that we are social creatures on the one hand, and yet on the other we experience isolation and what he refers to as the 'dissipation of the soul'. These are the issues postmodernity raises: What is the soul? What is the self? How do I define myself from another? In theological language these questions have to do with one thing, 'an intellectual experiment that seeks to extend the insights of contemporary trinitarian thought to theological anthropology, with the goal of developing a social or communal understanding of the concept of the *imago dei* as a response to the dissipation of the self in modernity' (3). This is a highly engaging and timely foray into what it means to speak of being human in today's world.

Grenz divides this work into three sections; Context, Texts, and Application. Context deals with trinitarian theology and the self in modern thought. Texts provides a comprehensive survey of what the Christian tradition has meant by the *imago dei*, but then goes further by examining the significance of the incarnation for an understanding of true humanity. The fundamental contention of the work is that the image of God is ultimately an eschatological concept, it is what the human person is to become rather than simply what they currently are. A comprehensive biblical theology is provided from which Grenz develops part three of the book, the Application, a new social conception of the image of God that may be understood from within a thoroughly postmodern context characterized by relationality in community.

There is much in Grenz's work to commend but it is not without criticism. One wishes Grenz had interacted more thoroughly with the theological anthropology of Eastern Orthodoxy, particularly as he applies the concept of *perichoresis* to God and human social constructions. If Grenz wishes to replace a substance ontology of God with a relational ontology, many would want to see a more robust delineation of his theology in light of the criticisms levelled at the similar theologies of Moltmann and Pannenberg. Finally, I for one wanted Grenz to clarify his position on biological evolution, surely a constituent feature of the postmodern mind. However, as one would expect from Grenz, his work spans the disciplines of theology, sociology, psychology, biology, epistemology, and many other sciences besides. Along the way the biblical text is interacted with in detail along with the best in the Christian tradition. This really is a seminal work and would have

provided a profound introduction to successive volumes in the series. One can see where Grenz may have wanted to develop other theological *loci* like Christology or pneumatology, and for that we are in his debt. The task of developing these other *loci* will, however, fall to the many who will take up Grenz's social vision of God and the self in His image.

Myk Habets

International Conference on Baptist Studies IV

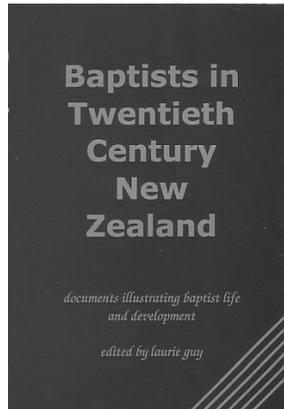
**Wednesday 12 – Saturday 15 July 2006
Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada**

There have been three previous International Conferences on Baptist Studies, at Regent's Park College, Oxford, in 1997, at Wake Forest University, North Carolina, in 2000 and at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, in 2003. The fourth in the series is to be held in July 2006 at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada, helping to mark the centennial celebrations of the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. All the conferences take the Baptists as their subject matter but are not restricted to Baptists as speakers or attendees. The theme this time is 'Mission', which includes home and foreign mission, evangelism and social concern. What has been the Baptist experience of mission in different lands at various times? The theme will be considered by case studies, some of which will be very specific in time and place while others will cover long periods and more than one country.

Thirteen main speakers will address many aspects of the subject, but offers of short papers to last no more than 25 minutes in delivery are welcome. They should relate in some way to 'Baptists and Mission'. The title should be submitted to Professor D. W. Bebbington, Department of History, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4TB, Scotland, United Kingdom (e-mail: d.w.bebbington@stir.ac.uk). We are planning that a volume containing some of the conference papers will appear in the series of Studies in Baptist History and Thought published by Paternoster Press. Papers from the first conference have appeared in that series as *The Gospel in the World: International Baptist Studies*, edited by David Bebbington, and volumes representing the second and third conferences will also be published.

By the generosity of the Convention and the university, the charge for the whole conference will be kept at under \$US 200 for full board over three days. There are reduced charges for those wishing to attend for up to 48 hours rather than the whole conference and it will be possible to remain until the morning of Sunday 16 July at no extra cost. Programmes and application forms are expected to be available by July 2005.

NZ Baptists - in their own words!



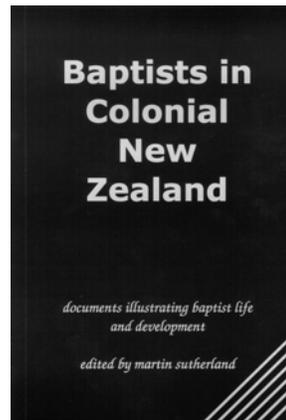
*Baptists in Twentieth-Century
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Baptist life and development*

Edited by Laurie Guy,
Carey Baptist College, 2005,
ISBN 0-908649-08-8 (284 pp)
(includes biographical appendix)

Price: US \$30.00 plus p & p

*Baptists in Colonial New Zealand:
documents illustrating
Baptist life and development*
Edited by Martin Sutherland,
Carey Baptist College, 2002,
ISBN 0-908649-07-X (224 pp)
(includes biographical appendix)

Price: US \$25.00 plus p & p



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