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The BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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Editorial

THE question of Christian political involvement is well to the fore today. In this country, E. R. Norman's 1978 Reith Lectures *Christianity and the World Order* articulated the undoubted sense of disquiet felt by many in the British churches at the alleged "politicization" of Christianity, seen as exemplified most clearly in the stance of the World Council of Churches on many world issues, above all in the W.C.C. Programme to Combat Racism. One does not need to agree with Norman, to acknowledge that he has brought out into the open an issue which needs facing squarely in the Christian community. But the discussion should not stop short at the pros and cons of deliberately political expressions of belief, without considering the part that unconscious or incidental political attitudes and assumptions also play in Christianity.

This issue of the *Quarterly* witnesses to the fact that an entanglement in, and sometimes a deliberate engagement with, politics, has long been part and parcel of the story of the churches and Christians in this country, and not least that of Baptists. Professor Richard Greaves deposits us in the middle of seventeenth century England, when religious and political allegiances were knotted in an often violent struggle. He introduces us to one Baptist in particular, Henry Danvers, who refused to take the restoration

of the monarchy lying down, and spent much of the remainder of his life plotting revolution, fleeing from the authorities, preaching, and writing theology. This must not blind us to the basic fact that, as Professor Greaves reminds us, after 1660 "most Baptists adjusted themselves to the new regime by practising quiescent obedience in political matters and worshipping as best they could in conventicles". Danvers was not typical. Yet, according to the account given here, he had a substantial following in London, to which on at least one occasion he owed his escape. One would like to know how he was actually regarded by his fellow-Baptists, or at least by those who had some inkling of his activities.

Then, Dr. David Bebbington takes us into the nineteenth century, with the second of his articles on Baptist M.P.s since the seventeenth century. Here of course it was no longer a matter of submitting to or resisting the existing order, but of exploiting the new and greater freedom of access to Parliament. Dr. Bebbington warns us against assuming too readily that a Baptist who became an M.P. did so out of a conscious desire to work out a political expression of his Christian commitment. But the conspicuous fact remains, that Baptists (voters and M.P.s alike) were so heavily identified with the Liberal Party as the century progressed. Some Baptists may have become M.P.s almost by default, but always *Liberal* M.P.s. Baptists of the time, as a whole, unashamedly took a party line.

The third article to be mentioned, by Philip Clements-Jewery, brings us up to date with a report on the World Council of Churches' conference on mission, "Your Kingdom Come", held in Melbourne, Australia in April 1980. It offers important perspectives on the so-called politicization issue within the W.C.C. In the first place, it was made very evident at that gathering, that in certain parts of the world for many Christians there is quite simply no choice about being "political" if a basic modicum of human dignity is to subsist. And it is because they are driven to being political that they are driven ever more closely to Christ who alone can save the political man and keep him truly human in the face of oppression. Second, there is a strong challenge to our assumptions as to how political power is to be sought and wielded — not least by the Church itself — as was made evident by the contribution of the Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama.

Finally, as this issue goes to press the United States presidential election draws near. By the time this is read, the result will already be part of history. In view of the evangelical background of both main candidates, and the rising wave of a fervent revivalism with declared political interests and ambitions in the United States, our reviews of two recent works on evangelical Protestantism in the U.S.A. are helpful and timely.