
A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

INDEPENDENCE OR CO-OPERATION?

The Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1880-1914

Recent historians have emphasised the social function and context of church life rather than treating churches as isolated institutions. Where once the main concern was with ecclesiastical politics or doctrinal controversy, the aim now is to examine the social characteristics of church membership, the relationship of the churches with the local community, and the meaning and influence of religion for people in general and the working classes in particular. Arising from this has been a new interest in the effects of urban growth and social change on church life and religious practice.(1)

The aim of this paper is to examine the effects of urban growth and social change on one organisation - The Yorkshire Baptist Association. The period 1880-1914 was an important one for the Association. Social and economic changes were making new demands upon it. Effective action seemed increasingly to demand greater organisation, more co-ordinated activity, more central direction. The period was one in which the Association sought constantly to expand its role and extend its powers. Yet, whereas other organisations such as the Wesleyans might readily adapt to changed circumstances, because their polity had a confessedly pragmatic basis, such changes were not easily achieved among churches whose government claimed to rest on Scriptural foundations, and at the heart of whose theology lay a belief in the independence of each 'gathered' church. The areas where co-operation, or 'interdependence' was felt to be necessary; the arguments put forward in support of joint activity; the changes accomplished; and the tensions aroused among churches with an independent tradition, are accordingly the subject of this article.

Before turning to the Association in detail, it will be helpful to consider, briefly, the concerns of churchmen in general, and Yorkshire Baptists in particular, in the context of which the Association was seeking to be more effective.

The late nineteenth century can no longer be regarded as an age of 'religious boom', or a 'golden age of churchgoing'. Certainly, the churches were influential in society. In Bradford, ministerial pronouncements were recognised as 'an unmistakeable power in the town'.(2) Earnest laymen held important civic office. Most Bradford adults had spent some of their childhood at Sunday School, and sent their children in turn. Religion was important as a means of identity; the parents of local Labour man, Fred Jowett, were not considered 'religious', but 'if they had been asked, they would have described themselves as Chapel Folk; everyone then was either Chapel or Church'.(3) Looking back over the past century, Nonconformists were proud of their rapid expansion from relative obscurity and regarded with satisfaction their newly-won social recognition. 'The world now smiles instead of frowning. It opens fair and easy paths before us, and heaps on us and our people wealth, honour, offices and dignities'.(4) For Baptists, the civic reception granted for visitors to the Baptist Union assembly in Bradford in 1884 was a time to reflect:

'It was not always thus. Only of late years have Baptists received these marks of civic favour, and been received by the Mayor'.(5)

Despite their acknowledged social influence, a study of Bradford at least suggests that the churches faced difficulties in a number of areas. Already, in the late nineteenth century, the membership figures of many denominations were falling. In Bradford, Baptist membership fell almost continuously from 1886 until 1897, and in 1896 the Bradford district of the Yorkshire Association reported that 'special attention has been publicly called to the fact that the Baptists in Bradford have been losing ground during past years'.(6) There was some recovery until 1906, but the peak of 1886 was never regained. Members of central churches moved to the suburbs, and in the absence of new recruits, left ageing city centre congregations and figurehead churches in financial difficulty.(7) At the same time the decline of the churches in central Bradford was not counterbalanced by progress in the suburbs, since some members of the central churches, moving to the suburbs, broke their denominational ties or ceased worshipping altogether. As the Yorkshire Baptist Association acknowledged, 'far too many of our members removing from one district of the county to another, fail to identify themselves with the denomination in the places to which they remove'.(8) Many members simply became non-resident at the churches to which they were originally attached, especially if they found no Baptist church (or no Baptist church to their liking) in their new location. Others took the opportunity to register in their new situation a denominational loyalty more in keeping with their new social status. Within Nonconformity, the children of church members were particularly at risk: denominational journals lamented 'the transfer to the Established Church of many of the younger members of old Dissenting families'.(9) Far from being evidence of prosperity, many late nineteenth century chapels were built in anticipation of congregations, rather than in response to actual demand. Having been built in faith - and on credit - one minister remarked that they were paid for in repentance.(10) The burden of building often left churches in desperate financial straits.

> What preacher or place is there without its debt, in slow process of being wiped off? [asked one reporter in 1895] There are plenty of religious teachers who are so thoroughly accustomed to the chronic impecuniosity of their charge, that if by some extraordinary accident they could ever suddenly find it absolutely paid up to date, they would have to invent straightway a new liability before they could rest.(11)

His judgement may have been harsh, but it captured the way in which, for many Bradford churches and churchmen, debt had become a way of life.

Given all these difficulties, it is not surprising that 'non-churchgoing' featured high on the agenda at many church meetings. The 'reasons and remedies' for non-churchgoing inspired a whole literature in this period. Questions such as 'Why are the churches empty?' regularly filled the columns of the religious press. They formed the basis of numerous sermons, were a perennial subject

for papers, resolutions and conferences at denominational gatherings, and acted as a spur to ecumenical endeavours.(12) In 1886, Samuel Myers, a manufacturer of 'Italian' linings, School Board chairman and Wesleyan local preacher, issued a circular to the principal laymen of Bradford, seeking their opinions on some of the explanations most commonly put forward for non-churchgoing. As a result, evangelical laymen from many denominations met to consider the causes of non-churchgoing, and appointed a sub-committee to interview 'representative working men' on the subject.(13) Nothing further seems to have come of these discussions, but in 1891 another series of conferences between local Nonconformist ministers and 'representative working men' resulted in a house-to-house visitation. 34,000 houses in Bradford were called on by 1500 visitors, representing almost all the Nonconformist churches in the Borough.(14) The state of the Bradford churches was seen to merit extraordinary measures.

When churchmen discussed non-churchgoing they almost invariably meant the non-attendance of working men. Surveys of the churches showed them to be weakest in the poorest parts of the town, and amongst the male population. The desire to reach working men was deepened by the widespread belief that non-attendance was an inevitable sign of irreligion and by extensions in the Parliamentary franchise. Speakers in debates on non-churchgoing argued that greater political power had been placed in the hands of working men, 'In the coming time the people are to rule'. It was therefore all the more important that this group should be subject to religious influences. 'The one need of the day' was 'that the class which has the whole future of this country in its hands, in these days of a democratic franchise, should be attracted and held to the House of God'.(15) By the 1880s it was clear that church building alone did not guarantee increased attendance. New measures must be tried if the people were to be reached.(16) It was against this background that the Yorkshire Baptist Association sought a more positive role and a modification of existing organisation; more co-operation and less independence.

The majority of Baptists(17) shared with Congregationalists a tradition of independence which rested on two main principles. The first of these was a belief in the 'gathered church', that is, the church as a 'fellowship of believers', from which all not professing faith in Christ were excluded. The second was the belief that church organisation had its basis in Scripture, and that the congregational polity represented the intentions of Christ as mirrored in the apostolic churches of the New Testament.(18)

The logical corollary of both these principles was to attach great importance to the local churches, each of which was regarded as a complete entity in its own right, possessing 'the Scriptural right to maintain perfect independence in the government and administration of its own particular affairs'.(19) The exact degree of independence to which each church was entitled was not precisely defined. Independents did not always take it to mean the rejection of all authority beyond the local church. Positively, it was argued, independence carried with it the duty of 'inter-communion'; an

obligation to be concerned for other churches, and to co-operate in furthering the Christian cause.

Indeed, practical considerations had long necessitated a degree of inter-communion. The Yorkshire Baptist Association had had a continuous existence since 1787 as a 'Christian association for the promotion of the communion of Churches'.(20) The Baptist Union, first founded in 1813, performed similar functions at a national level.

Nor were all churches totally independent in practice. The Yorkshire Baptist Itinerant Society, founded in 1809 to preach the Gospel in places without minister or church, had distributed grants-in-aid to needy pastors since 1827. By 1881, as many as thirty churches or 'aided stations' were in receipt of grants ranging from £5 to £50 for each half year, with provision for the supervision and periodic visitation of each beneficiary.(21)

However, both Associations and the Union had traditionally had a consultative rather than an initiating role. Their main aim was 'to promote sympathy and brotherly feeling'. 'The brethren were to meet and pray, hear addresses and sermons, pass resolutions, and then return home and act out the quickening influence which they had received'.(22) Furthermore, there is plentiful evidence to suggest that reconciling independence with effective co-operation was always difficult, and that the member churches were often jealous of interference. The tendency to emphasise independence, and to neglect the dual responsibility of inter-communion, led to periodic complaints that 'individualism, independence and liberty are the idols of the day'.(23)

In the late nineteenth century, improvements in transport and communications, and changes in the scale and perception of problems, were leading many bodies towards stronger, more central administration. In common with other organisations, the Yorkshire Baptist Association was seeking more corporate action and greater powers of intervention. Co-ordinated activity was seen to be necessary in all of the Association's spheres of responsibility.

The first area in which co-operation was required was church building. By 1880, the main period of church building was over, but more buildings were needed, if only to keep pace with the growth of population and accommodate the rising suburbs: in 1881, 41% of the Bradford population could be seated in church at once.(24) To maintain this level of provision in 1911 would require 17,000 extra sittings.

There were other reasons why founding new causes and erecting new buildings were regarded as particularly important. Church building, or extension, was necessary on strategic grounds: the population was increasingly concentrated in the towns, and the capture of the towns was seen as vital to the future of Christ's kingdom, and the place of Baptists in Christ's kingdom. Baptists were warned that 'if we fail in the great centres of population we .... doom ourselves to denominational impotency in days to come'.(25) Building was a financial necessity, since 'all our institutions must

suffer if we fail to reach the wealth of the towns'. It was necessary to ensure that a denomination was not left behind in what was perceived as a great 'Forward Movement', - 'which, thank God, other Churches are beginning, whether we join them or no'.(26)

Perhaps above all, building gave visibility to Nonconformist principles, and although the term 'church extension' was most widely used to mean building chapels, it in fact meant the extension of all that might encourage 'the inculcation and acceptance of the principles for which we contend'.(27) Speaking at the Yorkshire Baptist Home Mission meeting in 1879, one advocate of an expansionist church building programme clearly regarded it as symbolic. It was a statement - a vindication of independence.

> When you plant a Dissenting church in a hitherto neglected place, you accomplish three things. You take an argument from the lips of pro-State-Churchmen, who are perpetually saying that voluntaryism is incapable of providing for the wants of destitute localities. You remove a difficulty from the minds of timid churchmen, who say that if the church were disestablished it could not be sustained, at any rate in their neighbourhood, by showing them how the thing is done... [Finally] If any really want to leave the Church because it is not what it once was, or what they once thought it to be ... you provide them with facilities for so doing. (28)

Advocates of churchbuilding argued that at no time was the exposition of Nonconformist principles more necessary than in the late nineteenth century, when the spread of ritualism and sacerdotalism in the Church of England placed Protestant values at risk. Moved by these convictions, denominational leaders urged the need for action on the churches: 'Let us ... who believe that our progress is the progress of the Kingdom of God, "arise and build".'(29)

Yet it was increasingly recognised that traditional methods of church extension were inadequate for the needs of large towns. A method of church extension based solely on local initiative was workable in established communities; it was *not* suited to rapidly expanding urban areas, in which the totally new districts created could seldom if ever supply the resources necessary to found a new church. Baptists who addressed this question noted that members migrating to the suburbs were being lost to the denomination, and put this down to the superior organisation of other denominations which enabled them to act more quickly in new areas. The Church of England was held up as a shining example. Whereas, in the Baptist denomination, almost everything had been 'left to chance and private enterprise', 'no suburb rises in which a Church is not immediately placed'.(30) They noted too, that the central churches, already suffering from the migration of their members to the suburbs were unlikely to promote the formation of a suburban cause, which would draw away some of their own best supporters.(31) Methods acceptable in times of expansion, when a church might eagerly foster new causes, were no longer viable in days of diminishing vitality.

Fears that the Baptists were not taking their share as a

denomination in providing for large towns were given statistical backing in figures presented to the Yorkshire Baptist Assembly in 1896. These showed that by then only one in every 230 inhabitants of Leeds was a member of a Baptist church compared with one in 200 in 1875. In Bradford, only one in 75 was now a Baptist, compared with one in 40 in 1875; and in Hull, the ratio had fallen from one in 200 to one in 400 over the same period. The statistical evidence merely added to the conviction that 'the spiritually destitute parts of this great County can never be reached by individual churches'.(32)

A second development requiring greater 'co-operation' was the emergence of rural churches which had little or no prospect of becoming self-supporting. As has been noted, grants-in-aid had been issued to needy causes since 1827. However, these were always given on the basis that the church would ultimately be self-supporting. From the 1880s, due to the effects of agricultural depression and rural depopulation, some churches seemed unlikely ever to attain independent status. Their plight was reflected in the increased use of lay preachers, along Methodist lines, to supply small churches unable to support a minister. In 1888 the Home Mission committee noted as a 'matter for anxiety' that some places remained so long on the list of aided stations.(33)

Rural churches were highly regarded. They were valued as a source of recruits for town churches, since many church members were migrants who had been nurtured in a country cause.(34) Moreover, rural chapels often had historical associations as Puritan strongholds. Their tenacity in the face of persecution or discrimination was idealised as a reminder of the distinctive and disappearing Nonconformist heritage.(35) Village chapels would be needed if and when the tide of rural depopulation was reversed. Finally, if church building was a statement of principle, the closure of rural chapels was an admission of failure. If Nonconformist chapels in rural areas died out, weight would be added to the argument put forward by supporters of a National church that voluntary effort was inadequate, and that if the Church of England were disestablished, such districts would lack spiritual care.(36)

Baptists agreed that the survival of village churches was important, and recognised that their continuance depended on denominational aid. Yet the provision of aid to permanently dependent churches called into question many widely held assumptions about the essence of independency.

> The real question which has to be settled before they are efficiently dealt with is one which constantly recurs to those who seek practically to help them. Is a self-supporting community necessary to our ideal of voluntaryism in religion? It is so in many minds; therefore, where, on our congregational system, we cannot have a self-supporting church, or one reasonably expected to become so, we have been content to have no church at all, or it has been allowed gradually to die out.(37)

The number and financial demands of dependent churches also

required that changes be made in the way village churches were run. Severe strain was placed on limited Association funds. If the Association was to continue to subsidise ailing causes, some rationalisation was necessary to eke out the money available; a course which would necessarily undermine the real independence of many small churches in favour of more central authority. The need, it was said, was for 'radical changes in our system, a modification or development of our congregationalism, so as to leave outlying places less isolated, and to make our agents more itinerating'.(38)

Other demands on Association finances encouraged the view that rural causes should be re-organised, and made more economically viable. The feeling prevailed that Association funds might be better, or more profitably spent on church extension in large towns. A report on the Yorkshire Baptists in 1902 summed up the conflict of priorities. Baptist workers and leaders in the county were said to be pre-occupied with the question of 'How best to employ the slender resources of the Association in the dual work of assisting weak churches and church extension. Certain churches in every Association would always require assistance. This being given, the Association stands with empty purse, helplessly contemplating great opportunities'. For the reporter, the solution lay in 'some more economic method of maintaining our rural churches' - possibly a Methodist circuit system - and in greater controlling power being vested in the Associations.(39)

The plight of the rural churches affected *all* denominations. However, their need for permanent support had particular implications for Baptists, with their traditional conceptions of independence. The same was true of a third problem with which all denominations were grappling, the desire for a more efficient ministry.(40) At a time of educational progress, and increasing demands on the minister, it seemed imperative that ministers should be adequately trained and paid. Failing that, good men would be lost to the denomination. Increased ministerial efficiency also required some better system of removal and settlement. The frequency of ministerial changes was described on occasion as 'excessive and alarming'. The unsatisfactory relations between minister and congregation which such changes were taken to indicate, coupled with a large number of vacant pastorates, led to calls for some better system of introduction. So too did the feeling that efficiency would be improved if a minister was able to move more easily from one sphere of labour to another when he felt that his work was done.(41)

In the light of these problems, the question of organisation received a good deal of attention at County and at District level. Papers given to the Bradford District of the Yorkshire Baptist Association included: 'Congregationalism versus Connectionalism, or weak points in our Church polity', and 'Is a closer organisation of the Churches in the Baptist Union desirable and practicable?'(42) The interest in the subject is apparent in the reception by the Association in 1898 of a paper by the Reverend Robert Herries of Leeds Road, Bradford, entitled: 'Wanted! Less Independence, and more Inter-dependence in our Church Polity'. In his paper, Herries referred to:

> a widespread and growing feeling that our Congregationalism has carried us a little too far in the direction of independence, and that for the welfare of the Churches it would be wise to review our principles, revise our system and improve our practice in the direction of an Interdependence.

The Secretary was requested to secure its speedy insertion in one of the denominational journals, and the paper was re-read at the autumnal meetings in Ossett, later that year.(43)

Successive speakers pointed to the failure of independency to cope with present needs, and called for greater co-operation, for 'denominational solidarity' in place of 'selfish isolation'. By 1907, the question being asked was not 'whether' but '*what* modifications in our system are needed to meet the requirements of today?'(44)

Advocates of stronger organisation backed their case with a number of distinct and potentially contradictory arguments. It was often contended that the changes envisaged left essential independence intact. Some emphasised the voluntary union for mutual benefit which had always been a congregational ideal. They quoted sixteenth century divines in support of this claim, and called for a 'blending [of] our love of independence with the voluntary and, therefore, welcome bonds of mutual responsibility'.(45) Others maintained that small, weak churches, paralysed by poverty and isolation, could never be truly independent.(46) It was stressed that as long as any governing body was freely elected by the membership, its true liberty was unimpaired:

> Churches are just as free, and in the truest sense just as self-governed when they delegate certain matters of business to a joint Committee or Council, as when every detail is brought before the whole body of members'.(47)

Others justified tighter organisation on pragmatic grounds, arguing that the benefits of association outweighed the drawbacks, and that it was necessary to sacrifice individual preference for the good of the whole. In this latter position, they buttressed ecclesiastical arguments with current political theory, echoing the position of many New Liberals. Faced with a growing awareness of social problems, 'New Liberals' stressed that the well-being of individuals was inextricably linked with the well-being of society, insisting that 'claims or rights of self-development must be adjusted to the sovereignty of social welfare'.(48) Baptists were reminded of this fact. The principle that 'the rights of the individual are always limited by considerations that make for the general good' was one which obtained in every other association of individuals or societies, but which Baptists had neglected in denominational life.(49)

Other arguments reflected the impact of Biblical criticism in questioning whether a system of government could have literal Biblical justification. Baptists including Herries argued that the system was not heaven-sent, nor divinely ordained. 'Congregationalism is not a system of government which has been framed in heaven and sent down to men, addressed - "Care of the Baptist Churches"'. The great

test of any system of church order was utility, and once a system ceased to be useful it was open to alteration or improvement.(50)

Finally, the imposition of central controls was justified on the grounds that those responsible for distributing grants had an obligation to their subscribers to steward their resources, and to allocate grants in the most economic and effective way possible. The attachment of conditions to grants-in-aid was no infringement of independence, since no church was obliged to accept a grant. Conversely, no church had the right to demand a subsidy for a course of action that was generally considered unwise.(51)

Some of the specific recommendations have already been noted. Supporters of organised church extension urged that each large town should have a committee to co-ordinate building activity, and stressed the importance of a central building fund, 'disbursed by a popularly elected and thoroughly representative committee'.(52) Rural re-organisation involved linking strong churches with weak, and creating rural circuits.(53) Ministerial efficiency would be increased by the formation of a ministerial settlements committee, which could introduce candidates to vacant pastorates. This suggestion was not adopted.(54) The most far-reaching suggestion was that put forward by a Baptist layman in 1907 for the predominantly rural district of Craven which offered a solution both to the problem of ministerial efficiency *and* to the plight of struggling village churches. The plan incorporated many features of Methodism. The key to the scheme was the formation of a Central Committee, elected by the members of each church in proportion to their contribution to a common fund. The amount each church should contribute to the fund was to be independently assessed. Once the committee was formed, the churches would need its approval before appointing a minister. The committee would guarantee each minister a minimum salary. It might suggest to a church that the removal of its minister was desirable. It could organise churches into groups. It would arrange a preaching plan and take responsibility for the general oversight of the district. By this scheme of assessed contributions and preaching plan, the strong would help the weak, and the best use would be made of ministerial time and talents. The layman in question offered £200 each year for ten years that this arrangement might be tested.(55) The scheme was never implemented because it was overtaken by the nation-wide scheme for ministerial settlement and sustentation, but interest was sufficient for the Association to give the proposal serious consideration and indeed to consider adopting it for the county as a whole.

To some extent, the Association *was* able to extend its influence and impose order. The Association exercised considerable financial power and on several occasions its officials were able to bring about change by attaching conditions to grants and loans. Applicants for building loans were required to have sought the advice and obtained the sanction of officers of the District and Association before they began to build.(56) The loans committee could and did suggest changes in building plans. The rules of both the Loan and Building funds first encouraged and later required that applicants adopt a standard trust deed, by which the property was vested in trust for the perpetual benefit of the Baptist denomination.(57)

New stipulations were attached to grants-in-aid. Rules introduced in 1898 provided that work and finances of each assisted church be supervised by an Association sub-committee. Aided churches were to consult with their sub-committee over any special difficulties connected with their work, and before incurring any important or extraordinary expense. They were to co-operate with their sub-committee in securing pulpit supplies during a pastoral vacancy, obtain its assent before asking a minister to 'preach with a view', and have Association consent before issuing an invitation. The churches were assured that this was not 'a dash of Presbyterianism', but merely 'an infusion of the apostolic principles of mutual help'.(58)

In some cases the officers of the Association made full use of their financial power. In Bradford, grants were withheld from Marshfield and Ripley Street until an amalgamation of the two churches had been secured.(59) Committee minutes show at least one instance where a grant was withdrawn after a church had appointed a pastor of whom the committee did not approve.(60) Mostly the power of the purse was more subtle. Churches complied with conditions attached to grants, knowing that unless they did so the grant would be withheld. The ability to attach conditions to grants for dependent churches created precedents and established machinery that could later be applied to the churches as a whole.

The national fund-raising campaigns of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century also promoted Association activity. The financial achievements of the Church Extension Fund, established in 1893 after agitations by J. H. Shakespeare, were small, and Yorkshire participation in the campaign was minimal. Fearing that a national campaign would damage its own building society, the Yorkshire Association only joined after protracted negotiations.(61) However, several local councils or committees to co-ordinate church extension were formed as a result of Shakespeare's initiative.(62) Less tangibly, it was argued that the campaign had roused denominational consciousness. In the large towns touched by the campaign, and visited by national delegations, Baptist enthusiasm had been raised, and Baptist principles expounded.(63)

Administrative changes also made the Association more effective. The organisation had grown in size and its business had expanded. The number of member churches rose from 87 in 1881 to 131 in 1901. This was partly a result of church extension and partly a result of the union with the General Baptists in 1891. In 1902 measures were adopted to make its operation more efficient. Chief among these was the appointment of a full-time secretary, without pastoral charge, responsible for publicising and co-ordinating the work of the Association, and promoting fund-raising efforts on its behalf.(64)

The strengthening of institutional machinery was apparent in every area. In 1902 an Association sub-committee was appointed 'to facilitate wise pastoral settlements'. This role was further developed in 1909 with the formation of an Advisory and Arbitration Committee to provide a moderator for and introduce suitable candidates to any church without a pastor.(65)

Concerning rural stations, the most far-reaching proposal, made in 1902, that pastors of aided stations be regarded as agents of the Association, liable to removal from one station to another at the discretion of the committee, was never taken up. However, a rural circuit was created at Boroughbridge, joint pastorates were encouraged, and strong churches were linked with weak. In this context, the church at Eccleshill was linked first with Idle, under one pastor, and later placed under the supervision of Leeds Road.(66)

The Association itself undertook building projects at Ilkley and at Hull. Local councils were established for church extension. The achievements of the Bradford Baptist Union, formed in 1894, in promoting church building were either small, or non-existent. However, the churches did co-operate on supervising a short-lived central mission. In 1897 the formation of a building sub-committee at Leeds and united meetings in Sheffield were seen as evidence that 'our churches are becoming more denominational'. Again in 1909 the General Report noted as 'a pleasing feature' the united efforts in some districts on behalf of some special church or work in their area.(67)

However, the growth of denominational activity was by no means as smooth as the mere description of organisational developments or the view from headquarters might suggest. In 1907 the Association President recognised that 'many of our people are afraid of making any new departure in Church organisation lest we interfere with what they describe as "The glorious independency of the Churches"'.(68) United action was not arrived at without considerable resistance and debate in the local churches.

The ministerial settlements committee, suggested in 1881, had been rejected on the grounds 'that the action of the Association could not wisely be invoked in this matter...'.(69) Even when provisions were made, the signs are that the churches were reluctant to make use of the facilities offered. The members of the committee had to report in 1908 that, whilst doing something to help vacant churches towards suitable settlements, much more could be done if the churches would 'freely avail themselves of their confidential assistance'.(70)

In considering remedies for rural churches, the Association was anxious to avoid antagonising the churches. It resolved that measures such as the grouping of churches and the employment of lay preachers would best be implemented at local level, since 'the neighbourly character of such action will more thoroughly disarm any feeling as to interference with the independence of the churches'.(71) Even so, the Bradford and Craven district reported difficulties in effecting change in the smaller churches and warned that any system which appeared to interfere in any way with the independence of the churches would be unlikely to succeed.(72) The Local Preachers Association encountered a similar jealousy of interference with 'local management and independence', and was regarded with distrust by some of the smaller country churches.(73)

Nowhere was the resistance to centralised activity more apparent than in the failure of calls for church extension on a denominational basis. Despite repeated stress on the importance of a central building fund, the reports and minutes of the Building and Extension Fund show that from its beginning in 1876 it was constantly hampered by a lack of support.(74) In 1888, with attention diverted to a centenary appeal to increase the capital on the loan fund, its income fell to £4 19s 2d.(75) The fund enjoyed only a narrow basis of support. In 1891 and 1892 more than two-thirds of its income was given by thirteen individuals, eighty churches making no collection at all.(76)

Because *loans* for church building were more readily available, a nonsensical situation arose whereby money was transferred from one Association fund to another. A church received a building loan. To pay off their loan, they often needed a Home Mission grant-in-aid. What little money was available to the Church Extension Fund was often earmarked, not for any new cause, but for the repayment of loans so that a Home Mission grant would no longer be required.(77)

The failure of the Building Fund to attract the support of the churches was seen as evidence in the Bradford district that the churches had not been 'soundly converted' to the movement. Officials complained that 'The attitude of many of the leaders of our churches in regard to the Extension Fund is greatly to be deplored', called for the raising of denominational 'esprit de corps', and warned that unless its basis was generally accepted, the Fund was certain to collapse. In 1907 they admitted that 'the Society has failed to accomplish the objects for which it was founded.'(78)

Opposition to denominational interference was aggravated by the vague definition of independence which left scope for divergent interpretation. In some cases the local church was simply too preoccupied with its own problems to show interest in Association affairs. It had little enough money for its own needs without the burden of subscribing to Association funds. The Yorkshire Baptist Association showed much the same attitude in its dealings with the Baptist Union.(79) The extension of Association power was also rejected on doctrinal grounds. Opponents, reflecting the more persistent conservatism of lay members than of ministers, maintained that independent principles were divinely given.(80) Theological objections might be articulated. The prosperous Bradford Baptist, J. R. Birkinshaw, explained that organised church extension ran counter to the logic of the gathered church: 'wherever there is a true church, a suitable place to meet in will undoubtedly follow'.(81) More often, resistance was simply an instinctive reaction to infringements on 'our blood bought independence'.(82)

The problems experienced by the Yorkshire Baptist Association were also faced by Congregationalists, and a Congregational incident provides the best example of the strident mood that could be encountered in the churches. In 1871 it was proposed at the meetings of the West Riding Congregational Union that a Council be established to arbitrate in disputes among associated churches. Mr Tattersfield of Heckmondwike rose to protest. He took this proposal to mean interference with the churches in their choice of pastor, and hastened to assure the assembly:

> that they in Heckmondwike could settle their own differences, and could act independently. They wished to be free, uncircumscribed, untrammelled, and to have the liberty of acting for themselves. They did not want to submit their affairs to anyone. If any man, or body of men, came there and said 'You shall have this man or that', they would say, 'No we shall not; we shall do as we think'. They would agree to no submission of that kind. Such interference would be a violation of the principles of independency.(83)

The 'spirit and requirements of the times' demanded greater organisation. To some extent closer co-operation was achieved but, as one historian of independency concluded, 'the individualism of independence still clings to us with unfortunate persistency'.(84)

NOTES

1 E.g. H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, London, 1974; S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis*, London, 1976; J. Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth 1870-1930*, Oxford, 1982.
2 *Bradford: A Review of Social Affairs*, 4 Jan.1896.
3 F. Brockway, *Socialism over Sixty Years: The Life of Jowett of Bradford 1864-1944*, 1946, p.26.
4 *Quarterly Review*, 145, Apr.1878, p.356.
5 *Freeman*, 10 Oct.1884.
6 *Yorkshire Baptist Yearbook* (YBY), 1896, pp.33-4.
7 E.g. Horton Lane Congregational Chapel. Minutes of the Church Meeting and Executive Committee.
8 YBY 1882, p.30.
9 *Baptist Times and Freeman* (BT&F), 23 Mar.1900; *Freeman*, 21 Nov.1890.
10 *Bradford Observer*, 2 Mar.1891.
11 *Bradford: A Review of Social Affairs*, 7 Dec.1895.
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56 YBY, 1884, p.50.
57 YBY, 1909, p.104.
58 YBY, 1898, pp.9 and 49.
59 Minutes of the Executive Committee and the Advisory and Arbitration Committee.
60 Minutes, Advisory and Arbitration Cttee, 15 Dec.1910.
61 *Freeman*, 21 June 1895; Minutes of the Building and Extension Fund. The Yorkshire Association was seeking to withdraw from the national scheme when the Fund was suspended. (Minutes, Building and Extension Fund, Nov.1898).

62 *Freeman*, 8 Apr.1892; 3 Feb.1893; *B.U.Annual Report for year ending 31 Dec.1897*.
63 *Freeman*, 7 May 1897.
64 YBY, 1902, p.59.
65 YBY, 1902, p.59; 1909, p.50.
66 YBY, 1902, p.59; 1896, p.52.
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68 YBY, 1907, p.24.
69 YBY, 1881, p.36.
70 YBY, 1908, p.33; Minutes, Advisory and Arbitration Cttee, 28 Oct.1910.
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72 YBY, 1883, p.20.
73 Ibid., p.36.
74 E.g. YBY, 1890, p.48; 1896, p.59; 1898, p.52; 1900, pp.59-60. The Fund, originally known as the Chapel Building Fund, was amalgamated with the Loan Society in 1884 and reconstituted as the Building and Extension Fund in 1889.
75 YBY, 1907, p.38.
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This paper was delivered to the Baptist Historical Society Summer School at Bradford, July 1985. The author has just completed a D.Phil. thesis on the Bradford churches at St Hilda's College, Oxford.

NOT STRANGERS BUT PILGRIMS

The Lent '86 studies based on *What on Earth is the Church for?* were part of the first year of the three-year inter-Church process called 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims'. Those who shared in these studies were invited to complete a questionnaire. Significantly, more than 100,000 replies were received. These were analysed and the findings presented in the joint BCC/Catholic Truth Society publication *Views from the Pews*.

The theological faculty of Nottingham University have generously agreed to store the questionnaires for the next five years at least. Researchers may apply to the University for access to them.

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