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

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

OTHER TIMES, OTHER MINISTRIES

JOHN FAWCETT AND ALEXANDER McLAREN

Fawcett and McLaren: two names which are household words among northern Baptists yet about whom most can say little more than that the one came from Yorkshire and wrote a famous hymn and the other served in Manchester and delivered a vast series of expository addresses which today are as seldom read as they are often cited as monuments of Victorian pulpit oratory. A vast gulf seems to separate us from these two giants of the past, rendered all the vaster in that neither has a modern biography nor indeed is a particularly rewarding subject for biographical treatment.(1) Yet in both cases a reappraisal, however tentative, is both feasible and overdue. Particularly in this bicentenary year of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Associations their works are well worth recalling, not least because they helped shape the patterns of church life and Christian understanding to which we on both sides of the Pennines remain indebted.

I 'A steady and glorious lustre'John Fawcett at Wainsgate and Hebden Bridge - 1764-1816

'His talents emitted a steady and glorious lustre in the house of God'. Thus the Rev. Isaac Mann on the greatest of Yorkshire and one of the greatest of British eighteenth century Baptist leaders.(2) Expressed in more prosaic terms it is the kind of verdict which is given still. In what precisely did Fawcett's greatness consist?

The period of his ministry spanned the transition in the northern shires from a predominantly agricultural to an urban and industrial economy. It saw the slow death of handicraft industries, particularly handloom weaving, the emergence of industrial villages on the Pennine slopes where water power was cheap and plentiful, the corresponding growth of market towns, distribution centres and population in general. Suddenly the pace of change quickened, people became more mobile and the environment altered radically, as a new consumer society emerged out of a slow-moving, tradition-bound and for the most part subsistence peasant economy..(3)

The Baptists of Yorkshire and Lancashire were ill-prepared for such dynamic change. Their chapels, possibly because their tenets struck others as somewhat exotic, tended to be located in less approachable, out-of-the-way places, 'in a solitary and dreary situation', as Fawcett's son and biographer put it.(4)

The image of the Baptists themselves was hardly more encouraging than that of their places of worship. Samuel Medley of Watford who came to Liverpool in 1772 was not the first pastor from the Home Counties to be rather startled by the type of men who passed for Baptist ministers in northern parts; the speech and attire of John Parker of Barnoldswick who had been a former farm apprentice appalled him - until the man began to preach with a rare unction which disarmed the southerner (who was himself considered rather

'rough' by 'fastidious persons').(5) In like manner Joseph Piccop, pastor at Bacup from 1745 to 1772, often visited London, became friendly with Dr Gill and began to preach for fund-raising purposes in the churches of the capital. He too had been a day labourer; his speech, appearance and deportment caused embarrassment.(6)

The northerners' theological outlook seemed equally limited and obtuse. John Johnson, a hyper Calvinist of startling supralapsarian convictions, had set the churches of the North by the ears in the mid-eighteenth century decades - but though he had opponents in plenty he had only confirmed his fellow pastors in their obstinate High or Hyper Calvinism and their refusal to 'offer' the Gospel to needy sinners. So tenacious was the hold of 'Gillism' that Fawcett believed himself constrained to begin a 'new work' among the northern Baptists, evangelising the churches before they could begin to evangelise others.(7)

Earlier on some preachers had discovered that to embrace Evangelical Calvinism was a sure road to evangelistic success: Joshua Wood of Salendine Nook was one such. Yet the two great contemporary leaders on either side of the Pennines, Hirst of Bacup and Crabtree of Bradford, hesitated to offer the gospel freely till they were quite old - and not even then with complete conviction that this was the true and orthodox way.(8) Hyper Calvinism had unfortunate side-effects also: there was always the possibility (as in the case of Crossley of Rossendale, now cited as an awful example) of a reversion to Antinomianism: several churches were in fact wrecked by Antinomian schisms. There was also the sourness and contentiousness which the hypers seemed to bring in their wake. John Hirst, brought up among the Wesleyans, hesitated to join the Baptists as they had 'but little heart religion', and the Independent minister at Bolton considered the Baptists among 'the more whimsical, speculative and unsettled sort of professors', a not unfair assessment of the situation with which Fawcett had to contend.(9)

Across these waste places fresh winds were blowing. Two were particularly strong. From Haworth the influence of the outstanding Anglican vicar and evangelist, William Grimshaw, was seminal for Baptists in the north. Among Grimshaw's converts was John Fawcett himself (though he owed something to Whitefield also), Charles Bamford of Halifax, Oakenshawe and Accrington, William Crabtree, Richard Smith, first pastor of the new church at Wainsgate which sprang directly out of Grimshaw's ministry, and James Hartley of Haworth who revitalised that ancient cause into an independent church in 1752.

A second influence, hardly less powerful, was John Wesley's Methodism. There is no need to believe the rather negative tale that Joseph Piccop, the Calvinistic Baptist minister at Bacup, once encountered Wesley at Booth Bank, rode with him some way and 'stopped his (Arminian) mouth' - the Wesleyan impact was much more positive than that. Joseph Macgowan of Hill Cliffe (and later Devonshire Square, London) was an ex-Wesleyan convert to Baptist principles, so too were Benjamin Dickinson who pioneered the work in Sheffield and William Hague, founder and for forty years pastor of the new Baptist church in Scarborough (1771). Charles Whitfield of

Newcastle-on-Tyne was another ex-Wesleyan; in 1772 he became pastor at Hamsterley, Co. Durham, and planted a number of village causes in the North Riding.(10) And though the lifework of Dan Taylor is intimately bound up with the personal history of Fawcett himself, we should not overlook the earlier or contemporary connections of Wesley with the older General Baptist causes of Lincolnshire, and especially with Gilbert Boyce and William Thompson.(11)

It was amid the tensions of a world in social and spiritual ferment that Fawcett lived and ministered. Since he was honoured with an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* the outlines of his career have been well known, but how manifold, considerable and lasting was his impact on the churches of the northern shires?

Fawcett's theological contribution was the greatest and the one without which all his other endeavours would have been unavailing. His discovery of evangelical Calvinism came partly from contacts with the Particular Baptists of the East Midlands and the metropolis, partly from his own studies and experience. The older Puritans and the ejected divines particularly attracted him: Flavel, Gouge, Matthew Henry and above all Oliver Heywood, one of whose diaries he possessed and whose life he published in 1796. Here in mainstream Puritanism he found the free offer clearly explained and advocated. At the same time, his pastoral experience confirmed the conclusions of his wide reading. In the Bradford church where he was a member from 1758 to 1764 he encountered the morbid introspection, interminable grieving and excessive argumentation of the hyper-Calvinist system. But the young man was helped by pastors like Jackson and Parker of Barnoldswick and Wood of Halifax to a better way. Even before his call to Wainsgate in 1764 he had made his position plain:

To be brief, my dear friends, you may say what you will,
I'll ne'er be confined to read nothing but Gill.

By the time he wrote his *Advice to Youth* in 1778 his theological system had matured to the extent that he could expound the free offer within a broadly Calvinistic setting a good decade before Andrew Fuller had accomplished the same feat in his writings. A Fullerite long before the term was used as one of approbation or of abuse, Fawcett thus freed in his son's words 'many from those shackles which had cramped their energies'.(12) The revolution was not of course accomplished overnight: as late as 1781 Crabtree erected on an open place in Bradford a stage for a Calvinist/Arminian showdown with two Wesleyan ministers. But this was a lingering expression of bigotry in a growingly eirenical climate, as Crabtree himself seems to have recognised a little later.(13)

Hard on the heels of theological renovation came that of the internal organisation of the northern Baptist churches. The Yorkshire and Lancashire Association of 1719 had been virtually wrecked by John Johnson's activities in the mid-century, and despite the efforts of John Oulton to revive it in the 1760s it was now but a shadow of its former self. With the support of such earnest evangelical Calvinists as Abraham Greenwood of Barnoldswick, Thomas Langdon of Leeds and Charles Whitfield of Hamsterley (14), Fawcett at the Association

meetings at Preston in 1786 pressed strongly that a determined effort be made before the next meeting at Colne the following year; to revitalise the whole Association principle, secure a bigger attendance and adopt a more powerful missionary thrust. He himself had been responsible for planting new churches at Rochdale, Bingley and Lockwood (15) - what could the churches not accomplish unitedly? To this end Fawcett was himself invited to contribute the Circular Letter on the *Duties and Privileges of Christian Churches*. Though sadly Manchester, Liverpool and all the Cheshire churches held aloof, seventeen causes altogether were represented at Colne. It was the start of a new era. (16)

The churches' needs extended far beyond a reassertion of the Association principle. Internal ordering was a pressing matter. In place of the chaotic individualism of the past a model constitution to be adopted by existing and by the growing number of new churches was now required: this Fawcett provided in his *Constitution of a Gospel Church Considered* (1797). Another contentious issue was the relationship in a Baptist context between settled pastors and itinerant evangelists. Again Fawcett gave a clear response, both in the *Constitution* and in his *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion* (1802). Here he paved the way for David Douglas' (of the Northern Association) more extensive treatment of the subject later on. (17)

The churches, in Fawcett's eyes, had still wider responsibilities. The times demanded that support be given to the Bible Society through local auxiliaries such as that launched at Halifax in 1796 and others east of the Pennines. Nor could a deaf ear be turned to the needs of the Baptist Missionary Society, for William Ward, who accompanied Carey to India, had been educated at Ewood Hall by Fawcett himself in the closing years of the century. Thereafter the Yorkshire Baptist's zeal for the work overseas never abated: he was primarily responsible for founding an auxiliary of the Missionary Society, again at Halifax (with William Crabtree) and a later one at Manchester in 1811. He corresponded personally with Carey, collected for the B.M.S. and had sent £200 to Serampore by the year 1794.

Fawcett's third contribution to the northern churches was in the field of ministerial education. Here there was a deep-rooted prejudice to be overcome. Hirst of Bacup despised 'human learning' in himself and in others till he was quite old, (18) and as late as 1826 William Steadman spoke of the prejudice in the north against academic training which still persisted. (19) But from the early days at Wainsgate when he and Dan Taylor studied the scriptures together through to 1773 when the idea of a seminary was first mooted, to its transfer to Brearley Hall in 1776 and to Ewood Hall in 1796 and so on to the launching of the Northern Education Society at Rochdale in 1804 and the laying of the foundation stone at Horton, near Bradford, a year later, Fawcett had had a small group of ministerial candidates in his own home, somehow managing to fit their training into his other multifarious labours. Slowly the 'northern prejudice' was broken down and the way cleared for William Steadman's (and Rawdon's) achievement.

Fourth, there is the geographical significance of Fawcett's work.

Then as now a great gulf separated the two Englands of north and south, the 'two countries', as Andrew Fuller called them in a letter to his Yorkshire friend.(20) The latter had realised in his struggles against the hypsters that this gap had to be bridged, and set about doing so. Sutcliff, whom he himself had trained and whom he had sent off to the Bristol Academy in 1770 (the walk took the young student seven days), was the link man in these new-found contacts. A close relationship was forged with Bristol (where Fawcett, then on a meagre stipend of £25 p.a., was later invited to become principal but declined to go), with Bristol men such as William Steadman himself, with the moderate Calvinists of the Rippon/Sutcliff circle, with Andrew Fuller and with the Particular Baptists of the capital. Going to London to preach for the dying Gill(!), Fawcett was approached as to whether he might succeed the great doctor but once again the lure of the north proved too strong. By the time of his own death in 1816 a trickle of southern-born or southern-trained pastors had begun to flow northwards, men like Adam Holden who returned to his native Lancashire to pastor Blackburn in 1765, Samuel Medley invited to Byrom Street, Liverpool, in 1772, Langdon who came to Leeds in 1779 and John Sharp who took over the enfeebled Manchester cause in 1787. Out of these interchanges grew a heightened denominational consciousness.

Fifth, reference must be made to Fawcett's intelligent awareness of the realities of social class, for his ministry spans the years of transition from what Harold Perkin sees as a society divided vertically into 'interest groups' and one divided horizontally into classes.(21) Though among the Baptists, particularly in the hill country and the river valleys, the old patterns persisted, new ones were breaking in with striking suddenness, as at Preston where a group of immigrant Baptist families from London moved en bloc to a newly opened calico works in 1783 and promptly founded a church, or at Oakenshaw where one of the more thrustful members, Richard Fort, himself opened a new calico works in Broad Oak, Accrington, in 1765, and moved chapel and congregation to a new location - perhaps an early example of 'industrial feudalism' among the Baptists.(22)

Fawcett's response to his swiftly changing world was not a nostalgic retreat into a vanished past, nor a Canute-like bidding the new forces begone, but one of considered, deliberate adaptation to what he saw about him.

On the one hand, Fawcett moved boldly into the world of the propertied, the rising and the successful. He was at his ease in Anglican Evangelical circles where 'the power, life and spirit' of religion appeared as conspicuous as among the Dissenters, and was introduced by Henry Foster, a friend of his youth, to the Clapham sect, especially the Thornton ménage. He drew the sons of 'respectable families' to his well-run school at Wainsgate, and attracted 'young persons in the higher walks of life' to his services in Brearley. He successfully sought permission to dedicate his *Essay on Anger* (1788) to George III. He shared the penchant of cultured persons of his day for romantic scenery and the seclusion of bower and hermitage. Even his three-volume *Devotional Family Bible* (1811), though written in plain style and intended for 'families in the lower walks of life', selling

as it did at five guineas (or seven guineas 'on superior paper'), must have found favour with a somewhat superior social stratum. (23)

On the other hand, Fawcett felt deeply the needs of the poorer classes, as his tract, *The Attention And Compassion Due to the Children of the Poor* (1808), makes plain. It was for the sake of such unfortunate children that he encouraged the founding of Sunday Schools and ran his own private printing press between 1795 and 1800, from which emerged *The History of John Wise* and *Hints on the Education of Children, Particularly the Children of the Poor*, a tract designed, as its preface makes clear, 'for the lower class of people'. Fawcett was, however, no revolutionary: Sunday Schools were necessary instruments of social control, useful for promoting 'the security of our persons and property from the violence of wicked men'.

Finally there is Fawcett's contribution to Baptist hymnody, which is rightly to be set alongside that of Beddome, Stennett or Anne Steele. For a self-taught man the development of his literary style was astonishing. He was a keen student of Dr Johnson (he actually corresponded with Boswell) and of Dr Blair, and his *Hymnal*, published in 1782, shows a clear transition from the awkward fumbblings of youth to the assured productions of the accomplished poet. The earlier work can be substandard: even the scansion can be troublesome, as in the long metre hymn which begins

Depraved minds on ashes feed
Nor love nor seek for heavenly bread.

The imitations of other hymn writers are also only too obvious: Watts ('What scenes of horror and dread'), Robinson ('I my Ebenezer raise'), Wesley ('Behold the sin-atonng Lamb'), Cowper ('Thy way, O God, is in the sea'), but later on a plain, straightforward vocabulary and imagery emerge, well suited to blunt northern tastes:

Like the rough sea that cannot rest
You live devoid of peace;
A thousand stings within your breast
Deprive your soul of ease.

At the same time there develops a bold grappling with metres other than the long and the common. 'O my soul, what means this sadness?' is 878747, and there is an interesting anticipation of the future in hymns with a refrain ('Afflicted saints to Christ draw near') or choruses ('Thy presence, gracious Lord, afford'). As for the content of Fawcett's sacred verse, there are hymns specially written for his beloved young people ('With humble heart and tongue'), for the opening of worship ('Thy presence, gracious Lord, afford'), for times of prayer and fellowship ('Bless'd be the tie that binds') and a fine baptismal hymn ('Humble souls who seek salvation').

Two themes, however, predominate: the atonement and correspondingly the joy of the believer and the wretchedness of unbelief ('How did the powers of darkness rage', 'Thus far my God hath led me on', 'With melting hearts and weeping eyes'); and the

beauty and plenitude of God's grace in the gift of his Son ('A fulness resides in Jesus our Lord', 'Jesus the heavenly lover gave', 'Infinite excellence is thine', 'Thou lovely prince of grace!'). It is among this last group of hymns that a heightened emotion discloses the depth and completeness of that evangelical experience which Fawcett longed to share with others and which underlies all aspects of his work as pastor and apostle:

Millions of happy spirits live
On thy exhaustless store;
From thee they all their bliss receive
And still thou givest more. (24)

II 'Earnest and Uncontroversial Proclamation'

The Reverend Alexander McLaren at Union Chapel, Manchester - 1858-1903

In June 1858 to Union Chapel, Oxford Road, Manchester, a cause 'put on the map' by its first minister, Francis Tucker, there came a young Scotsman who had made quite a name for himself in Southampton where he had transformed a run-down and almost extinct congregation(25) into a numerous and enthusiastic band of Christian workers and worshippers. The young man was Alexander McLaren, (26) who had the reputation of being both pre-eminently able and also 'advanced'. (27)

Of his singular talents there can be no doubt. One can picture the scene on a Sunday morning in the great Union Chapel, the £20,000 building on the opposite side of Oxford Road into which the church, by then 340 strong, had moved in 1869. A crowded congregation (occasionally bribes were fruitlessly offered to the pew openers for good seats) awaited expectantly the appearance of the pastor. Quickly he would mount the pulpit steps, a slight figure with a visage both gaunt and kindly. The hours of careful preparation in the study made for a beautifully structured service and an address of rare eloquence. Very quickly those personal traits which led J. H. Shakespeare to bracket him with Liddon and Spurgeon as the three pulpit giants of the century would be manifest. There was the shyness which led him to prefer the anonymity of a vast congregation rather than face the intimacy of a small one ('little flocks' plainly terrified him), the same shyness which made pastoral visiting and above all greeting the congregation at the end of the service a real agony; (28) there was the toughness (not for nothing was his mother a Wingate, and his father, a businessman/pastor, one of the pioneers of the city of Adelaide as well as of Baptist witness in Australia); there was the learning (the prize awarded with his London B.A. in 1845 was not given lightly nor was the invitation to preach the Jubilee Sermon for Owen's College in 1877 nor the Edinburgh D.D. awarded the same year). There were also the aloofness and unapproachability, for outside his own closely-knit family (his wife was also his first cousin) he had few real friends.

Doubtless, too, his pulpit manner would betray the pastor's solitariness (his people would tell of their meeting him in the streets of Manchester or in the countryside where his nature-mysticism had free rein, a pile of books under his arm, lost in his own private

reverie).(29) The deep cultural interests would be apparent also; his acquaintance with English poetry, especially with his hero, Browning, his love of European art and of music - he was one of the first and most loyal of the patrons of the Hallé concerts.(30) Nor would McLaren's unaffected humility and diffidence be lost on his congregation: the unwillingness to read anything about himself in the newspapers, the heartfelt and spontaneous abasement before other great preachers, particularly Spurgeon and Moody.(31)

But then, after the soul-searching prayer, came the sermon. What, his hearers would muse, would it be this week? A pure 'expository' address with a text of ten to twelve verses, often a narrative passage, a 'textual expository' address where one short text (one to three verses) suggested a three, four or five fold division based on individual words, phrases or ideas, or perhaps a 'textual topical' sermon, taking just one idea from the text, or two, often contrasting, ideas from two separate texts, and dealing with the subject under several heads?(32)

Whatever the choice, as the Word was unfolded and expounded the preacher was transported, transfigured almost, as he led his congregation with him to the very gates of heaven. Once the preliminaries were over and the pastor had brought the whole weight of his philological knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and of his reading, especially in German, to the meaning of his text and its context, distinguishing figurative from literal meanings, noting the various usages of the same expression in other parts of Scripture, once, in other words, the force of the text had been established, McLaren would turn to the message. Now the hours of spiritual wrestling and intellectual concentration in the study and the time spent with treasured volumes of Carlyle and Browning bore fruit in what Robertson Nicoll once called a 'brusqueness, a fierceness, a cutting to the heart of things', (33) which reached a crescendo as exposition turned to application and finally to appeal and the Word was transformed from external authority to a dynamic penetrating the preacher's and his hearers' innermost being.(34)

In effect, the achievement of McLaren's mightiest sermon, the very late and widely acclaimed address on 'Evangelical Mysticism' with its challenge to the fin de siècle mood of uncertainty and its itch for 'topicality' and to the 'flaccid and molluscuous' Christianity he saw everywhere about him was to bring to a head the rationale of all the 1900 odd sermons which he had preached in Manchester: 'when so many brethren are speaking to the times, let one poor brother speak of eternity'.(35)

Perhaps, however, it was only in the last years of his life when the evangelical consensus was being challenged, battered and bruised from all quarters that McLaren's distinctiveness, simply because it now wore a rather old-fashioned air, suddenly became conspicuous. It was while addressing the Baptist World Alliance in 1906 that he rather startled the assembled delegates in two ways: by bidding them all rise to say the Apostles Creed and then by preaching on the 'two crystal phrases - in the name of Christ and by the power of the Spirit', a plea not first and foremost for a cosmic vision of a world won for

Christ but for what McLaren regarded as its preliminary, a deeper devotion among the existing churches, an infusion of the 'fiery Spirit, the spirit of burning and holiness, a blessed baptism of fire'. (36)

So much for the pastor's abilities. But what of that other whispered rumour about him heard a great deal on his arrival in Manchester in 1858: that here was one of the 'advanced' young men of the denomination?

Three elements of novelty in McLaren's make-up had been in evidence in his Southampton pastorate. First there was his style. It was the style of a young man in his 'sturm und drang' period, who cultivated an unclerical, indeed Byronic, appearance, peppered his addresses with strong dashes of Carlyle, exalted the ethical content of Scripture and neglected the salvational, fell under the spell of Edward Miall and lectured on quasi-political topics at the local Athenaeum. (37) By the mid-50s there was something of a crisis at Portland Chapel: the older members were fretting for somebody more orthodox (they got James Spurgeon, a fact which more than any other led some to regard McLaren as radically inclined), (38) but the departing pastor was big and discerning enough to recognise his folly: 'I have abjured for ever the rubbish of intellectual preaching'. (39) Manchester would see a very different kind of ministry.

Second there was the question of literary form. Baptist sermons to date had generally been either a medley of biblical texts employed to support or controvert a particular theological tenet (as in the case of Fawcett's predecessors) or else, in the hands of outstanding men like Robert Hall, rolling classical periods directed to the same end but with less obtrusive scriptural reference. McLaren's addresses were markedly different. For the stringing together of texts he had no time, particularly when such arrangements offended his philological sensitivity; nor had he much room for rhetorical padding or Johnsonian eloquence, 'swelling and sonorous'. (39) The novel feature of his sermons was, as F. B. Meyer once remarked, 'the illustrations' which complemented 'the architecture' of his masterful exegesis, or, in Mackennal's words, 'the sidelights focussed on the central theme', the telling yet unaffected word pictures drawn from life or from nature (but never from personal experience: McLaren abhorred anecdotes), the poetic fancies, the winsomeness, the beautifully apt choice of simile and metaphor. (40) This was, as J. C. Carlile correctly observed, the 'new dress' in which the old evangel was clothed by the Manchester minister.

Third there is McLaren's ecclesiology which is at best reductionist, at worst dismissive. On sacraments and church order he never shook off the influence of his Quaker ancestry. The Lord's Supper was 'a memorial rite and as far as I know nothing more whatsoever', (41) 'a memorial feast appointed to keep up the vivid remembrance of the historical fact to which redemption is traced'. (42) As for believer's baptism, he accepted and practised it, but here was another 'externality' from which the Quaker part of him somehow recoiled. As for other occasional services he was plainly unhappiest with marriages. Weddings at which he officiated took seven minutes flat, which may account for their rarity at Union Chapel.

Thus McLaren conforms to Dr Payne's portrait of the nineteenth century Baptist ministry 'lacking serious ecclesiological interest'. But what of Payne's other charge: that theological concern was lacking too, that doctrine in Augustine Birrell's words was by this time 'devitalised'?(43) In McLaren's case the charge is plainly misdirected, for as Christian teacher and biblical expositor he emerges from his voluminous writings as both surprisingly conservative, deeply concerned that correct exegesis find its outworking in true and vital doctrine and its application in holy living, hostile to the destructive tendencies at work in his day, and possessed of clear convictions concerning the preacher's high calling. His teaching may best be examined under each of these four heads.

McLaren's hermeneutic was submissive and reverent. Special pleading was unnecessary: 'the exposition of Scripture is its own defence'. Biblical revelation was valid and sufficient for all men. Scripture was not a handbook of moral teaching but the record of the unfolding of God's purposes in history: 'Christianity as a revelation is not so much the utterance in words of great religious thoughts as the history of a life and death, a fact wrought upon the earth, which is at once the means of revelation and the means of redemption'.(44) God's love was first displayed in Creation: McLaren welcomed the discovery of the Babylonian and other creation narratives as they threw the awe-inspiring biblical account into sharper relief.(45) He accepted the Fall of man, while admitting the difficulty of locating it within the historical process.(46) He believed in a distant universal Flood of which the biblical story is the best record.(47) Questions of date and authorship in the Old Testament troubled him little: the important thing is what is said, not who said it or when: chronological, historical, critical, philological and scientific questions were subordinate to the purposes of Scripture. 'We hold a ground of certitude from which none of the strife of tongues is able to dislodge us'.(48)

So with the prophets also. The prophets were more than foretellers of the immediate future or preachers of moral righteousness. Underlying all were bright anticipations 'not only of a future kingdom but of a personal king and not only of a king but of a sufferer'.(49) The messianic hope is the 'cord of gold' which runs through the Scripture and links the two Testaments. In the New Testament the supernatural element, the Virgin Birth, the Divine Claims, Miracles and Resurrection, Ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit, was primary: 'expunge any of these elements and you will not have much difficulty accounting for the rest, and it will not be worth the accounting for'.(50) McLaren made only passing reference to New Testament critical problems. He accepted an underlying oral tradition - otherwise he had no difficulty in harmonising the Gospels; he believed the fourth Gospel to be the work of the Apostle John; he was particularly keen to counter any threat to our Lord's divinity, kenotic, adoptionist, humanitarian or whatever: all such challenges were 'ludicrously inadequate',(51) and the resultant Christology bound to be a 'shallow, starved and lifeless' construct.

At the same time he taught the idea of 'progressive revelation' then current in evangelical circles and accepted even by doughty conservatives such as John Stoughton.(52) He uses the term more than

once. It took both a 'revealing light' and a 'beholding eye' to make a revelation. The history of God's self-revelation was matched by that of man's reception thereof: 'revelation is measured by the moral and spiritual capacities of those who receive it'.(53) But in Christ revelation is complete and final for all time.(54)

From Benjamin Davies at Stepney College, McLaren had derived not only his philological interests but a love for the theology of St Augustine, an emphasis on the majesty of God and the awfulness of sin, which never left him. Though he believed the Bible to be silent on many of the questions which troubled later theologians and though all systems must be tried and tested by biblical revelation,(55) the Word was not something to be hidden away from the strife of men within the believer's heart,(56) but was to be proclaimed doctrinally if it was to encompass 'the moral and religious perfecting of men into assimilation with the divine love'. True theological understanding was in fact the necessary undergirding of the whole process by which the biblical revelation of God in Christ both redeems the individual and builds up the kingdom, for 'the Bible is first of all an historical revelation, then a religion and a morality'.(57) The text, however, suggests the doctrine: the latter should never be imposed on the former or be made the main subject of the preacher's address, for 'creeds separate: Christ unites' and 'it is possible to hide the Cross behind the cobwebs of doctrine, be it ever so orthodox'.(58) Nor should the preacher in his exposition of the great evangelical truths ever resort to polemics: controversial preaching does no good for 'only highly cultivated minds are interested in the movements of thought - not the majority'. Even controversial essays in proof of orthodoxy can be self-defeating: 'we are so often busy in proving the Gospel that we forget to preach it'.(59) The dangers of intellectualising the faith were never far from McLaren's mind.

This was only one, though one of the most perilous, of the 'dangerous tendencies' at work in his day against which McLaren was constantly on his guard. He realised fully the 'great storm thundering over the Christendom' of his age, and he appealed to his fellow Baptists to listen to 'the voices of their time', though not at the expense of their main task - 'the earnest and uncontroversial proclamation of the crucified Christ'. The pulpit was not the place for grappling with critical or scientific problems, particularly when very few preachers were intellectually equipped to deal with them and a superficial treatment only exaggerated the evil.(60) The best answers to destructive criticism were first a bold assertion of the fundamental truths of revelation, and second 'a quickened church which could point to itself as a witness for the truth revealed'.(61) But destructive criticism there was a-plenty, enticing many, particularly the young, appearing sometimes in the form of a 'tone of tolerance', a 'genial glow of liberality', sometimes as 'a fierce blast', taking sometimes the guise of false science, at others that of the humanitarian Back to Jesus school,(62) leading some to call for a second Reformation whose upshot would be 'a toothless, impotent, unreal faith' and others to amuse their flocks with 'moralities' or bore them with 'philosophical dissertations',(63) and tempting yet others into 'an exaggerated conservatism which does not love the old so much as it hates the new and which understands neither'.(64) McLaren never ceased to warn

against capitulation to the Zeitgeist, a term recently imported and of which he was rather fond, whatever form it happened to take. (65)

From the foregoing it should be clear what, according to McLaren, was the preacher's task. Just as the apostles were 'witnesses whose business was to tell the truth, not speculators, moralists, philosophers or legislators but witnesses', (66) so a minister's role was to expound and apply the Sacred Book. Armed with Lexicon and Concordance and with as large a degree of theological training as circumstances allowed, the preacher should 'immerse himself in the Bible 'and stretch his mind to the widest and embrace it to the firmest to grasp and preach the gospel'. (67) He should not relate anecdotes about himself or his contemporaries nor would he preach with one eye on the daily newspapers - the latter in fact should be excluded from his study (how different would be the advice given a generation or two later!). Though conscious of the appalling problems of the hour he should not preach on specific personal, social or ('that tabooed word' (68)) political themes. The spiritual truths taken to heart by the lay members of his congregation could be entrusted to them to be applied in their workaday world. Dr Insko's summing up of McLaren's conception of the preacher's calling is succinct and judicious: 'the preacher was God's man, commissioned to deliver God's message. He was not a philosopher or reformer... He was a herald of the good news of salvation to all men'. (69)

Union Chapel lay within an area of the most desirable suburban residential development in Manchester. The membership rose from 240 on McLaren's arrival to 700 on his resignation, but it was a highly mobile congregation which changed almost completely three times over during the forty-five year pastorate. The numbers of attenders was thrice the membership - which led the pastor to conclude, probably wrongly, that this was true of the denomination as a whole. (70)

As a Union Chapel its diaconate was open to non-Baptists: Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians served in this capacity, while in the congregation sat men and women of all religious persuasions, from Roman Catholics to Brethren. It was, however, markedly wealthy and bourgeois: perhaps 'McLaren's' was part of what a recent historian has seen as 'the institutional underpinning of middle class control of Manchester through churches, schools and institutes'. (71) Not that the Manchester middle class, though enormously self-confident and powerful, presented a united front: particularly after the rout of Cobden and Bright in 1857 there was the real threat of revived Toryism, (72) and always the possibility of Liberal fragmentation into very wealthy, cultured families of generous social concern, a lower middle class 'shopocracy' of a rather mean, cheese-paring sort which seemed in fact to dominate the Town Council, and advanced radicals. Even though the years of McLaren's ministry, particularly its mid-years, coincide with the Liberal middle class's apogee, its victory was never total or assured. (73)

There were some families of great commercial and political influence in Manchester which attended the Union Chapel, and rendered it by their presence a close runner-up to Cross Street Unitarian in point of social prestige. W. R. Callender, the cotton

spinner, was a veteran of the struggle for incorporation in 1838 and had gone on to do his best work as councillor for St James Ward, Police Commissioner for Chorlton and as a member of the Rusholme Board of Health. He had partnered William Bickham, another member, in the Anti-Corn Law League and yet another, Neil Bannatyne, in propagandising for that noted educational pressure group, the Lancashire Public Schools Association. Others of McLaren's flock were at once less partisan and more attuned to the real needs of the city's poor.(74) One was F. W. Crossley, a relative of McLaren's by marriage, a great industrialist and pioneer of the Otto gas engine, but whose clubs at his Openshaw works, orphanages at Altrincham, work for slum-clearance and Anti-sweating campaign, and personal labours at the Star Hall in Ancoats make him the one Victorian businessman who approaches most nearly the ideal of St Francis.(75)

Another was John Thompson, banker and calico printer, thrice chairman of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, founder of the Boys' Refuge at Strangeways, the Business Young Women's Institute and promoter of sundry other good causes. Other members were Peter Spence, who built up his huge chemical plant at Pendleton, having discovered a new method of processing alum and then proceeded to campaign vigorously against atmospheric pollution and water-borne diseases; Richard Johnson, founder of the world-famous telegraph and rope-wire manufacturing firm, and a generous benefactor of Owen's College and Manchester Grammar School; Alexander, the son of J. A. Beith, India and China merchant and the brother of 'Ian Hay',(76) and Henry Dunckley, one-time pastor of the Salford church and now editor of the Manchester Examiner and Times, while in the congregation were regularly to be seen Principal Hopkinson of Owen's College and his right-hand man, Professor Thomas Jones.

By 1900 the congregation was not quite what it had been. There were still large numbers of professional men, particularly accountants and doctors. The pew openers in that year were two solicitors, a bank manager, two city merchants and a contractor - but the grandees were disappearing. For the Nonconformist Simultaneous Mission of 1900 the plush Victoria Park (Manchester's Hampstead) was assigned to Union Chapel. J. E. Roberts, the co-pastor, dutifully went round, was everywhere politely received but came away with an impression of cold indifference on the part of the very rich.(77) It is not without significance that one of the original residents of Victoria Park had been W. R. Callender (d.1872): his sons had turned Tory and Anglican.

No-one knew better than McLaren the great gulf of indifference and hostility existing in Manchester between the middle and working classes, a gulf highlighted by the work of recent historians. Nor did he have to exhort his wealthy flock to interest themselves in the condition of the poorer areas:(78) by the fruits of their inspired labours he trusted his ministry would be best remembered. But how successful was Union Chapel in its social witness? McLaren himself did not directly address working men in special services or by means of uplifting tracts: here the leading Manchester Baptist figure (the equivalent of Hugh Stowell Brown in Liverpool) was Arthur Mursell. Nor was Union Chapel the great 'colonising' church of Manchester: the latter's equivalent of Liverpool's Myrtle Street was undoubtedly

Grosvenor Street Chapel.(79) Nor of course did McLaren excel as a face-to-face evangelist: here the Mancunian equivalent of Liverpool's W. P. Lockhart was William Birch of the Homer Street Mission.

Though it was not a great colonising or evangelising church, Union's extra-mural achievement was, though highly concentrated, impressive enough and answered to its pastor's aspirations. Old Wilmot Street, Hulme, taken over by Union Chapel in 1871 and under the constant superintendence of Mr and Mrs Thompson, attracted about 800 children and 400 ladies (though few adult males); the Rusholme Mission or People's Institute in Nelson Street (founded 1872), where Mrs McLaren till her death in 1884 and thereafter her son both laboured lovingly, was hardly less successful.(80) The third venture was the factory room taken in Clowes Street, Gorton, in 1862: a Sunday School and chapel were later built. A fourth was the Jackson Street Ragged School, seventy per cent of whose workers were Union Chapel members. It is not a grandly memorable tally, but is substantial nonetheless.

The final and possibly least significant aspect of Dr McLaren's work is that as a denominational statesman. Here, though he hated committee work and was unwilling to spend his time or energies on the scale of Charles Williams of Accrington, his interventions, though occasional, were always judiciously timed and purposive.

His contributions were of two rather different sorts, reconciliatory and enabling. In two crises the former were apparent, though in neither particularly successful. In the Downgrade controversy which greatly distressed him, he sided neither with Spurgeon nor his critics. He strove for peace behind the scenes and signed the joint letter with Angus and Aldis affirming that the Baptist Union had always been and still was an evangelical body,(81) but in the end declined to go on a deputation to plead with Spurgeon. This was not funk, nor particularly because confronted with giants like Spurgeon and Gladstone he became tongue-tied and diffident, but because he considered such a move would only widen the breach which had already opened up.(82) Likewise over the Boer War crisis he strongly opposed bringing up the question at meetings of the Baptist Union: so divided was Baptist opinion that nothing but heated conflict would ensue and no-one's views would be changed.(83)

As for the doctor's inspirational gifts ('he is a benignant presiding genius, his influence is felt everywhere'(84)), these are in evidence first in the founding of the Manchester and Salford Baptist Union in 1867:(85) having helped launch it by his own powerful advocacy he characteristically withdrew and let others get on with the work; in the development of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association where, apart from his occasional addresses his chief contribution was a self-effacing tabling of agenda, especially for the powerful Association (executive) Committee,(86) and in the Baptist Union itself, of which he was twice President. Capitalising on the denominational reputation of the Lancashire Baptists for rapid numerical growth, evangelistic success, Association-mindedness and general pace-setting, McLaren with Williams of Accrington and Birrell of Liverpool pioneered in the 70s and then built up the Baptist Annuity Fund, to consolidate the

work of and to revitalise the Union, a success for which Lancashire Baptists at once claimed credit.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Similar magisterial interventions helped in the formation of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, the planning and building of Baptist Church House (which McLaren formally opened on 25th April 1901), the Twentieth Century Fund and the first congress of the Baptist World Alliance which he chaired. So far was he willing to detach himself from his primary task in Manchester but no farther.

For all our efforts at critical understanding, McLaren is a baffling and quixotic figure. How can one who is two generations nearer to us than Fawcett yet seem the more remote? How can one so self-effacing have become so pre-eminent? How could the pulpit giant adapt so readily to become an éminence grise in denominational affairs? How could one whose message is so conservative have attracted a local Nonconformist intelligenzia whose attitudes had been radicalised by A. J. Scott, the first Principal of Owen's and his friend George Macdonald, not to speak of the delicious heresies of Cross Street Unitarian? Above all, why, for all his voluminous writings, do we never really get to know the man himself - a dilemma we share with his contemporaries? McLaren remains one of the most enigmatic and paradoxical of Manchester's adopted sons.

NOTES

- 1 See BQ, 26, No.5, 1976, p.198.
- 2 I. Mann, *Memoirs of the late Rev. William Crabtree*, 1815, p.33.
- 3 See W. B. Crump, ed., *The Leeds Woollen Industry, 1780-1920*, 1931; M. M. Edwards, *The Growth of the British Cotton Trade, 1780-1815*, 1957, and especially M. B. Gleave, 'Dispersed and Nucleated Settlement in the Yorkshire Wolds', *Institute of British Geographers Transactions*, 30, 1962, pp.105f.
- 4 J. Fawcett jr., *An Account of the Life and Writings of John Fawcett D.D.*, 1818, p.57.
- 5 Fawcett, jr., op.cit., p.190. J. Fawcett, *Letters and Sketch of John Parker*, 1794, p.36.
- 6 J. Hargreaves, *Life and Memoir of the late Rev. John Hirst*, 1816, p.407.
- 7 Fawcett jr., op.cit., pp.97-98, 237-238.
- 8 See E. A. Payne, 'John Wesley and Some Baptist Encounters', *Epworth Review*, 7, No.2, 1980, p.60f.; Hargreaves, op.cit., p.275; Mann, op.cit., p.49; W. R. Ward, 'Baptists and the Transformation of the Church', BQ 25, No.4, 1973, p.167f.
- 9 Hargreaves, op.cit., pp.72, 176.
- 10 Ibid., pp.112, 157; Fawcett jr, op.cit., pp.31, 76, 90, 296; BQ 19, No.8, 1962, pp.367-8; Mann, op.cit., p.16.
- 11 Payne, op.cit., pp.64-5.
- 12 Fawcett jr., op.cit., pp.106,237; J. Fawcett, *Advice to Youth*, 1778, preface.
- 13 Mann, op.cit., p.49.
- 14 See E. Clipsham, BQ 20, No.6, 1964, p.270.
- 15 Fawcett jr., op.cit., p.154.
- 16 R. J. Baldwin, BQ 23, No.5, 1970, p.212.
- 17 *Constitution*, pp.41-2; *Thoughts on Revival*, p.16.
- 18 Hargreaves, op.cit., p.232f.

- 19 BQ 21, No.8, 1966, p.342.
- 20 Fawcett jr., op.cit., p.296.
- 21 See H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society, 1780-1880*, 1969, passim.
- 22 W. T. Whitley, *Baptists of North West England*, 1913, p.130f.
- 23 Fawcett jr., op.cit., pp.142f, 189, 223, 271, 284, 324, 354.
- 24 All the Fawcett hymns referred to above are found among the twenty-one which appear in the Watts and Rippon collection of 1787.
- 25 Portland Street Chapel had on McLaren's arrival a membership of 20 and seating for 300: see E. T. McLaren, *Dr McLaren of Manchester*, 1911, p.31 for the pastor's own verdict on his first charge.
- 26 He always spelled his name thus, but believing Maclaren looked better in print he used this alternative spelling in his publications, E. T. McLaren, op.cit., pp.31-2.
- 27 In what follows I have relied heavily on (a) my all too partial acquaintance with McLaren's vast literary output (b) the three biographies, by his cousin and sister-in-law, E. T. McLaren (obviously a more intimate sketch than the others), by J. C. Carlile, *Dr Alexander McLaren, the Man and his Message*, 1901, unusual in that half the book is devoted to his career before he came to Manchester, and the least well known of the three but incomparably the best, D. Williamson, *Life of Alexander McLaren*, 1910 (c) two fine American doctoral dissertations and one British, C. A. Insko, *The Biblical Preaching of Alexander McLaren* (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950), R. A. Hancock, *Alexander Maclaren: his techniques of pulpit mastery* (New Orleans Baptist Seminary, 1953), and J. Lea, *Baptists in Lancashire, 1837-87* (Liverpool, 1970).
- 28 Williamson, op.cit., p.31. Journalists were his particular bête noire; he could not abide 'the noisome pestilence of the interviewer', *ibid.*, p.51.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp.32, 46, 67.
- 30 McLaren was once described by the Principal of Owen's College as 'one of the chief literary influences in the city of Manchester', *ibid.*, p.88. Nothing could have been more hurtful or misconceived than the Catholic Bishop of Salford's press attack on McLaren in 1900 for his alleged Nonconformist contempt for the visual arts, *ibid.*, p.122.
- 31 E. T. McLaren, op.cit., 244. On Spurgeon: 'There is a passion of love to Jesus and a grand fullness of trust in Him which have stirred and rebuked me'. On Moody: 'What a wonderful man! I seem to have done simply nothing in my long life', Williamson, op.cit., p.89.
- 32 Acts 7.58 and Philemon 8 provided the texts for the famous address on 'The Young Saul and the Aged Paul'.
- 33 *Princes of the Church*, 1921, p.245.
- 34 See *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, John 16.23-4, p.142. McLaren, conscious of the force of the Hebrew 'Dabar', was fond of the expression, 'the engrafted Word' - see *Expositions*, Ephesians 6.17, p.377.
- 35 See Lea, op.cit., pp.214, 498; E. T. McLaren, op.cit., p.185; Williamson, op.cit., p.152. The address was delivered to the Baptist Union meeting in Edinburgh in 1902. It was the occasion when Lord Halifax on behalf of his fellow Anglo Catholics expressed his personal admiration of McLaren's sentiments. But the whole

sermon is more than a distillation of the preacher's readings in Quaker and Quietist mysticism: it is evangelical through and through. Perhaps his fellow Scots appreciated the primacy of the experience of the indwelling Christ for McLaren better than the English: see T. H. Martin in the *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, 17, June 1910, p.106: 'he was born to teach men what they ought to know about their spiritual being'.

- 36 The evangelistic passion of his addresses around the turn of the century was commented on. Three such were especially notable: that in the Metropolitan Tabernacle (1900), that to the United Methodist Conference of 1901, a defence of the old evangelicalism and rejection of attempts to 'restate the gospel', and that delivered in the Free Trade Hall the same year in place of Samuel Chadwick who had just died, advertised as 'A Great Question and A Plain Answer'.
- 37 D.N.B.; Carlile, op.cit., p.66; Williamson, op.cit., p.29; McLaren, op.cit., p.62.
- 38 But not C. H. Spurgeon himself who specifically excepted McLaren from his list of Downgraders - see *Autobiography*, 1897-1900, 4, p.262.
- 39 Carlile, op.cit., p.74.
- 40 R. A. Hancock, thesis cit., passim; A. Mackennal, *Life of J. A. Macfadyen*, 1891, p.115; Carlile, op.cit., pp.49, 74, 127; Williamson, op.cit., pp.71, 203. *The Best of Alexander Maclaren* was the title of an anthology compiled by G. G. Atkins and published as late as 1950. It contains such onomatopoeic gems as 'the love of Christ leads the lion with a silken leash'.
- 41 *A Year's Ministry*, 1st Series, p.101, quoted in E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers*, 1944, p.69.
- 42 *Expositions*, Exodus 13.9, p.48.
- 43 E. A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History*, 1959, p.124; A. Birrell, *Things Past Redress*, 1913, p.11.
- 44 *Expositions*, Exodus 13.9, p.48.
- 45 Ibid., Genesis 1.26, p.1. 46 Ibid., Genesis 3, 1-15, p.10.
- 47 Ibid., Genesis 3, 1-15, p.12.
- 48 Ibid., Psalm 119, 126-8, p.310. McLaren was sufficiently conservative to argue that the superscriptions to the Psalms were at least of some worth in determining authorship and date - McLaren, *Psalms (Expositor's Bible ed. W. R. Nicoll, 1893)*, Vol.2, p.143. In any case the 'most precious elements in the Psalms' were 'unaffected by questions of date and authorship'.
- 49 *Expositions*, I Peter 1, 10-12, p.42.
- 50 Ibid., Matthew 12, 24, p.176. 51 Ibid., Matthew 12, 24, p.176.
- 52 W. B. Glover, *Evangelicals and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*, 1954, p.105.
- 53 e.g. *Expositions*, Luke 9, 30-31, p.291; John 16, 12-15, p.112; *Psalms* 17, 15, p.54. Commenting on Joshua 20, 1-9, he cites the provisions of the cities of Refuge as an illustration of the people's inability at that time to receive a higher revelation and attain a more civilized pattern of behaviour.
- 54 *Expositions*, Ephesians 6, 17, p.376.
- 55 Ibid., John 20, 30-31, p.330f.; John 16, 23-24, p.142.
- 56 *After the Resurrection*, 1902, p.260f. This work is one of the most decisive of McLaren's disavowals of the 'quietist tendency' which was one part of his spiritual make-up.

- 57 Insko, op.cit., p.21, citing *Expositions*, Exodus 13.9
- 58 Carlile, op.cit., p.130. McLaren used the occasion of his ministerial jubilee to underline the fact that he preached a Person, not a theological system nor a species of morality, E. T. McLaren, op.cit., p.210.
- 59 Carlile, op.cit., pp.115-6.
- 60 Williamson, op.cit., p.82; *Baptist Handbook*, 1876, pp.27-41. Many wished that McLaren who had such scholarly gifts had dealt more fully with the Higher Critical debate, Carlile, op.cit., p.132.
- 61 *Expositions*, Psalm 119, 126-8, p.130.
- 62 Ibid., Genesis 1, 26, p.4f.; John 8, 42, p.362.
- 63 *Baptist Magazine*, 1864, pp.340-1; *Circular Letter of the Lancs. and Ches. Association*, 1887, p.26.
- 64 Carlile, op.cit., p.9.
- 65 It was McLaren's awareness of the whole range of late Victorian challenges to orthodoxy and his oblique references to them which led contemporaries like W. R. Nicoll to hesitate whether to label him a traditionalist or an innovator. Their dilemma is shared by modern scholars such as W. B. Glover who at one and the same time has McLaren 'rejecting inerrancy' (which he most certainly never did) and writing a profoundly conservative commentary on the Psalms, acting as a mediator between the old and the new and yet declining a mediatorial role, Glover, op.cit., pp.139, 173, 190, 229.
- 66 *Expositions*, Luke 24, 48-9, p.380.
- 67 A. McLaren, 'Counsels for the Study of Life', *Review and Expositor*, 22, 1925, p.164.
- 68 E. T. McLaren, op.cit., p.156. Once again many wished he had used his gifts to expound his views on questions of political and social reform, Williamson, op.cit. p.247.
- 69 Insko, op.cit., p.128f.
- 70 *Baptist Handbook*, 1876, p.54; *The Freeman*, 25th June 1875.
- 71 D. Fraser, *Municipal Reform and the Industrial City*, 1982, p.20.
- 72 H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management*, 1959, pp.314-6.
- 73 Fraser, op.cit., p.44f.
- 74 Despite his admiration for these men, McLaren only very rarely relaxed his personal 'no politics' rule. Though a paid-up Liberationist, he refused staunchly ever to criticise the Established Church: 'as a Christian community we magnify the grace of God in her and desire only its prosperity and increase'. He was conspicuously silent during the educational controversies of the early 70s and absent from the meetings of the Manchester Nonconformist Association, which fact drew a hostile comment from *The Freeman*, 2nd February 1872, p.49. McLaren, however, felt more strongly over the Education Bill of 1902 and towards the end of his ministry was willing to write for and in 1902 actually to speak for Purify candidates in local elections, so jealous was he for the reputation of his adopted city, Williamson, op.cit., p.175.
- 75 See *Lives* by Anon, 1897, and J. R. Harris, 1899.
- 76 I am indebted for information on the Beith family to Dr D. A. Farnie.
- 77 F. E. Harmer, 'Dr Alexander McLaren', *British Monthly*, Dec.1900, p.31f.; M. Spiers, *Victoria Park, Manchester*, Chetham Society, 1976, pp.5-6.
- 78 See his address to the Baptist Union in 1876: *Handbook*, 1876, p.33

- and Williamson, op.cit., p.110.
- 79 Grosvenor Street was like Myrtle Street largely lower middle and artisan class. There is no Liverpool equivalent of Union Chapel, though Princes Gate tried its best.
- 80 Lea, op.cit., pp.76, 180. The £2000 McLaren Jubilee Peoples Institute was built in Rusholme in 1909.
- 81 *The Freeman*, 18th November 1887, p.759.
- 82 BQ, 28, No.4, 1979, p.153; BQ 26, No.5, 1976, p.226.
- 83 Williamson, op.cit., p.218.
- 84 *Baptist Magazine*, 1872, p.709.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 1867, p.677. 86 Lea, op.cit., pp.217, 222.
- 87 Payne, *Baptist Union*, p.105; *Circular Letter of the Lancs. and Ches. Association*, 1877, p.11.

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THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE FOR EAST EUROPEAN BAPTISTS

THE BARCLAY COMMENTARIES IN RUSSIAN

In 1979, during the European Baptist Congress held in Brighton, a small group of people met to try to implement a plea made by the Russian Baptists there for a Bible commentary in their own language. Apart from the early Church Fathers and occasional articles in religious journals, practically no help of this kind was available to them. Their pastors and preachers had their Bibles and concordances, but their ministries would be greatly enriched if only they had access to books like these.

A small group, consisting of Baptist and Mennonite Church leaders, pledged their support and the long and painstaking work began. Which commentaries should be chosen? Some of the Russian pastors who understood English had found William Barclay's New Testament *Daily Study Bible* of great help in their private devotions and in their sermon preparation. Careful scrutiny was made of this and other possibilities in both English and German and the decision to translate Barclay was finally taken.

A contract was negotiated with the St Andrew Press for publication rights; an able translator was engaged to be responsible for all the volumes of the New Testament commentaries; a general editor, Dr Henry Wiebe, and a production editor, Miss Mary Raber, were appointed to oversee the complicated task of preparing the text and of liaison with the Russian Baptists; financial arrangements were approved by the Baptist World Alliance and the Mennonite Central Council amounting to between 400,000 and 500,000 dollars and a careful programme worked out covering a period of four years (subsequently extended).

The whole project was a remarkable international enterprise. The