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THE PRESIDENCY OF THE LORD'S TABLE  
AMONG NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH BAPTISTS

The attitude of Baptists towards their ordained ministry underwent a radical change in the nineteenth century from what it had been in the seventeenth and eighteenth.(1) Two over-simplifications in assessing this development need, however, to be avoided. The first is that, prior to the nineteenth century, there had been universal agreement amongst Baptists concerning the nature of the ordained ministry and its role in relationship to the Lord's Supper; the second, that change came about solely in reaction to the catholic revival. In the case of the first, there is evidence that Baptists held differing views about the ministry prior to the nineteenth century and, in the case of the second, differences were already being argued before the emergence of the tractarians.

In a study of the presidency of the Lord's table amongst Baptists in the seventeenth century, E. P. Winter has argued that, whereas there was not universal agreement whether only an ordained minister might preside at the Lord's table, there was that only a person recognized by the church might do so. This would normally be the minister but, in his absence, say through illness or, in times of persecution, imprisonment, another officer of the church might be delegated to preside. Not all churches agreed in this practice, however, as some went without communion in the absence of the minister.(2) This latter practice was not uncommon in the eighteenth century.(3) Certainly, the Baptists of the eighteenth century were agreed on the seriousness with which they viewed the ordained ministry and its necessity for the maintenance of proper order in the life of the churches. It was on these grounds that Daniel Turner argued for a recognized ministry of word and sacrament in 1758.(4) The influential Calvinist, John Gill, was even more specific in his description of the ordained ministry. He argued that the ordinand was to be a member of the church to which he was called to minister *before* being ordained, that he was not to preside at the Lord's table in any other church than his own and that he was not to move on to another church to exercise his ministry there.(5) Gill lent his theological weight to the Baptist practice of inviting ordained ministers from a wide area to be present and responsible for the laying on of hands at the ordination of a new minister. The presidency of the Lord's table was the sole prerogative of the ordinand in the church to which he was ordained and the church was not at liberty to depute a private member to preside in his place. Clearly, Gill based his view of the ministry on the local church and gave no encouragement to the idea of an ordained ministry which was universally recognized though, arguably, his insistence on the role of other ordained ministers in the ordination does concede a degree of recognition beyond the boundaries of the local church. Within the church, the function of the minister was that of, in the classic Calvinist sense, minister of word and sacrament.

Features of this pattern survived well into the nineteenth century. The extent to which it was to be discarded is evidenced by a leader in

the *Freeman* on 5th February 1869. Even allowing for that journal's indifference to nuance and subtlety in theological matters, the length of the stride taken from the views held at the turn of the century can hardly be exaggerated

It was once a common notion in our churches that any one could pray in a prayer meeting, but that only an 'ordained minister' ought to 'administer', as it was inappropriately expressed, the Lord's Supper. Churches used to send for such a one, if their pastor was absent, or even defer the service till his return, as if we too had some slight belief in the magic of consecration by ordained men! That superstition, we presume, is now wholly gone. When the usual president of the church is present he presides; but we suppose that no Baptist now thinks that Christian brethren meeting together are incompetent to break bread in memory of their Lord, or that without an official administrator His presence would be wanting.

Reaction to catholicism had become the starting point from which definitions were framed and theologies worked out. Indeed, the Baptist practice was susceptible to misunderstanding, but instead of clarifying the minister's role later Baptists were content to minimise it, if not dispense with any traditional understanding of it altogether. The sole right of the ordained pastor to preside at the Lord's table or for someone recognized by the church to do so had been defended on the grounds of right *order*. Faced with the challenge of the catholic revival that same insistence upon the role of the ordained minister as the only proper president of the Lord's table could be construed as sacerdotalism by those who had forgotten its original intention. Further, the renewed emphasis on apostolic succession amongst anglo-catholics cast its shadow on the Baptist practice of placing ordination in the hands of already ordained ministers. The catholic revival, however, simply gave impetus to a process of re-shaping that was already underway in the earlier years of the century. In 1838, J. H. Hinton complained that

... on (ordination) great differences of opinion prevail among Nonconformists; that many, even of our own ministers, have scarcely a definite idea about it of any kind, and that it has of late been all but abandoned, as by common consent, to an almost helpless obscurity. (6)

That the malaise over ordination was something shared by all nonconformist churches was true. By the end of the century the dissenting churches had all down-graded their concept of the ministry in reaction to the catholics. (7) That the situation was quite as parlous as Hinton portrayed it is more open to question, though its shortcomings as a statement of historic fact are more than compensated by its accuracy as prophetic prediction.

#### i) A Question of Right Order

It is clear that the controversies about ordination came before the catholic revival and that they dealt with questions of order, not whether or not ordination imparted some special character to the

ordinand. The discussions were engaged in, not at the level of weighty theological writing, but through the correspondence columns of Baptist magazines. The November 1815 edition of the *Baptist Magazine* featured a letter deploring the fact that young ministers, who had yet to be ordained, were administering the Lord's Supper. The magazine clearly shared its correspondent's unease and quoted a letter of Andrew Fuller in which he had expressed his objections to the practice. He wrote

I must say, it appears to me very wrong to administer the Lord's Supper without ordination, as it goes to render void that ordinance.(8)

He reasoned, not that the ordinance depended for its efficacy upon the priestly character of the president, but that right order had been set on one side. The purpose of ordination was 'to keep out unworthy characters from the churches'. The service of ordination required the presence of those already ordained and thus was a sign of their consent and approval of the one whom the church had called to be pastor. He cited the case of the ministers in a particular area refusing to attend an ordination because they had considered the prospective ordinand as unworthy, in consequence of which the ordination had been cancelled and the man had left the vicinity.(9) Where a person administered the Lord's Supper before ordination, there ordination itself was set aside, a practice that Fuller believed would be 'the source of many mischiefs in the churches'.(10) He cited the case of another church that had 'fallen prey to a designing man'. The local ministers had refused to attend the ordination, but the church had proceeded none the less. 'The consequence, I doubt not', wrote Fuller, 'will be mischiefs incalculable'. Fuller saw ordination as a means of safe-guarding the health and integrity of the churches. To admit someone as president of the Lord's table without ordination was to bypass that safeguard and therefore to expose the church to the risk of exploitation by pastoral hirelings.

The question of church order also appeared in a church dispute in which the Baptist Board was asked to intervene. In the autumn of 1811 a group of members seceded from the Prescott Street Church and met together in Artillery Street. They requested that the Baptist Board give them its 'countenance and support' as they sought 'the great head of the church... (to) direct one to us whom he has qualified for the office, and who shall prove a blessing to us'.(11) Before responding to the request, the Board approached the Prescott Street Church and asked them whether they were disposed to recognize the Artillery Street seceders as 'a church of Christ'.(12) The question of ministry lay at the heart of the reply they received.

We think it our duty under present circumstances to pause on this matter. Because we think it admits of considerable doubt, whether persons withdrawing themselves from a regular Church, and saying, they have formed themselves into a distinct church, is sufficient to constitute them such, in conformity with the prevailing and approved practice of Christian Society. A church having been *regularly organized, and settled under the care of a pastor*, may still be considered a church, if it be

deprived of its pastor, but whether that distinction is justly applicable to a body of persons, where *the organization has never been complete*, we are not full satisfied of. (13)

The concept of order underlying this reply is not easy to tease out. That it is a question of order can hardly be challenged. It would seem that the Prescott Street members argued that a rightly ordered church consisted of people and pastor. An interregnum did not disturb that order whereas a secession did, since the seceding group had no pastor and was therefore irregularly constituted. The argument is difficult to maintain in the light of Baptist history, since Baptist churches had themselves seceded from other churches and, having seceded, had appointed ministers from their own ranks. Except where the secession was led by leaders such as John Smyth who was pastor of the people who gathered about him, the order of events was first the community and then the pastor. The pastor derived his call from the community. It would appear that the Baptist Board either found themselves faced with a theological conundrum or were unprepared to involve themselves in other people's squabbles. In the event, the Artillery Street church, whatever its propensity for secession, was charitable enough to release the Board from any further involvement in the matter:

We lately made application to you for assistance in preaching and administering the ordinance among us... but lest a further consideration of our case should in the smallest degree interrupt that peace and harmony so desirable should continue amongst you, we withdraw our request... (14)

The *Baptist Magazine* in 1828 provides evidence that the need for order as it was embodied in ordination was not universally felt amongst Baptists. The magazine published an interchange of letters between two pastors who, in the fashion of the times, amply concealed themselves under the pseudonyms of 'Publicly Recognized Minister' and 'Country Minister'. The first of these initiated a correspondence with a letter deploring the fact that 'two young men who studied at one of our academies, have lately settled as pastors, without ordination'. He was not alone in his misgivings since 'some excellent men are pained with the fact... (considering it) a departure from the order of the New Testament'. (15) The rise of this departure from what he believed to be accepted practice he attributed to the growing tendency of men to move from one pastorate to another and to have no service of 'public recognition' in their new sphere of service. The reply of 'A Country Minister' throws interesting light on the diversity of practice that was already occurring in Baptist church life. Not only was it wrong to impugn the motives of the young, he wrote, it also had to be observed that 'some elderly ministers' had not received ordination. (16) He then went on to attack the notion of ordination implicit in his adversary's letter. The scriptural word for 'ordain', he argued, referred to 'appoint' and carried no sense of a public ceremony. It also implied 'a power and authority in the church which not even the most obstinate stickler for ordination, at least among us, ever pretends to'. (17) It is noteworthy that the correspondent was prepared to argue that a New Testament practice should not be followed because it did not match what was done in Baptist churches, rather than that the latter should be modified to fit the former. He

instead warned that the danger of the common form of ordination was that it should 'beget an idea that ordination (in our, not the scriptural sense of the word) is a divine ordinance; and that *it* and *not* the *choice of the church*, bestows the right to act as pastor'.(18) The mistake, he believed, was best corrected by omitting the ceremony altogether.

The depth of the gulf separating the adherents of each opinion was illustrated in a further letter from 'Publicly Recognized Minister'. Scripturally understood, he wrote, 'ordination is a divinely instituted ordinance' and it 'can only be scripturally performed by Christian ministers themselves ordained'.(19) He challenged his opponent's view that ministry was validated by the call of the church and not by the act of ordination. There was a distinction between choice and appointment: '... I contend that the choice of the people is not ordination, but that the *appointment* or separation to the office to which they are chosen is the work of those previously in office'.(20) He concluded, 'I deeply regret the introduction into our Denomination, of what I consider a very unscriptural practice'.(21) The interchange ended with a letter from 'A Country Minister' making the exegetical point that the Greek word *cheirotonesantes* in Acts 14.23 meant 'the stretching out of the hand in voting' and not 'appointment',(22) reflecting the Baptist method of reaching decisions in Church Meeting by the casting of votes.

## ii) The Laying on of Hands

Baptist uncertainties with regard to ordination were sometimes focused on the issues of laying on of hands and the presence at ordinations of other ordained ministers. In the first of these, they found themselves in a dilemma, torn between what they believed to be loyalty to apostolic practice and the desire to avoid any erroneous interpretation that might be placed upon the act. The traditional practice of Baptists had been to ordain by prayer and the laying on of hands. The accounts of ordination services carried in the *Baptist Magazine* invariably record this procedure until the middle of the century when ordinations begin to appear that omit the laying on of hands. Disagreement on the matter had already appeared in the correspondence columns of that journal earlier in the century. A dispute between two contestants who identified themselves simply as 'T.T.' of Peckham and 'W.N.' of Stepney may, in fact, have reflected a discussion taking place in Stepney College, if 'T.T.' is identified with Thomas Thomas, the College secretary from 1813-1819, and 'W.N.' as William Newman, its Principal from 1811-1826. Writing on the subject in 1814, Thomas contended that the mode of ordination 'has generally been by prayer and the *imposition of hands*'.(23) To depart from this practice would be a 'deviation from primitive example, and a violation of the divinely established order'. The correspondent was aware that objections had already been raised against the practice on the grounds that, in the New Testament, it implied 'the conveyance of extraordinary gifts', an argument which Thomas rejected, citing the appointment of the seven deacons in Acts 6.6. Others had contended that the laying on of hands was no more than 'a trivial ceremony and matter of indifference'. Both objections were swept aside, on the grounds of apostolic order, for

... it is a very dangerous thing for us to make comparisons of one duty and another, especially with a view of *dispensing* with any of them, or *altering* their order.(24)

Thomas received a reply to his letter from Newman in the September edition. Whilst supporting the necessity of setting apart those who were to 'sustain the character of public teachers', Newman challenged the use of laying on of hands. He took up the cry of those for whom the rite was no more than a ceremony and what it signified more important than the sign itself. 'Economy is unallied to ceremony', he wrote, 'simplicity and spirituality are its prominent features'.(25) He also questioned whether the practice could be supported on the grounds of apostolic example. The fact that the early Christians practised laying on of hands was not sufficient, since they also washed each others' feet and saluted with a holy kiss:

In such things I apprehend they are to be considered as men conforming to the customs of the country in which they lived; and these customs were sanctioned and sanctified by their religion.

Apostolic practice could also claim to be unique, since 'they can have no successors, to the end of the world'.(26) The significance of the apostolic example inevitably gave rise to conflicting claims in a church polity which, whilst striving to translate eldership into contemporary terms, had left apostolicity either unobserved or ill-defined. In his reply in the October issue, Thomas was not prepared to accept Newman's limitation of various rites to the social norms of the first century or the duration of the apostles' lives. Apostolic example, he asserted, rendered 'any rite of a religious nature... of perpetual obligation'.(27) The imposition of hands was 'a rite, accompanied with prayer, used in the designation of persons to any sacred work or office, in exercise of which a divine blessing was involved'.(28) In the continuing practice of the church, such a rite was given added solemnity 'when it receives the concurrence of several persons', that is, when a number of ministers were present at ordination.

The continuing practice of imposition of hands was again called into question in a dispute between J. H. Hinton and Joseph Angus. The setting of the dispute was extraordinary. Hinton had preached at Angus' ordination and, in view of the confusion that he believed to exist amongst nonconformists on the question of ordination(29) offered a *resume* of his sermon to the columns of the *Baptist Magazine*. This appeared in March 1838. In April, a letter from Angus revealed that he had disagreed with Hinton's views on the occasion of the ordination, and had told him so. He then proceeded to give his own opinion in the matter. One can only applaud Hinton's imperturbability in offering to clarify the thinking of a wider audience when he had so singularly failed to persuade the man he was ordaining at the time. Hinton claimed that 'the laying on of hands in ordination had no necessary or ordinary connexion with the communication of supernatural gifts'.(30) What it signified, in his view, was the allocation of certain tasks. Amongst these was administration of the word and ordinance, though only in a qualified way:

I cannot admit ... that ordination was ever intended to confer the right of administering the word and ordinance of the gospel. Every disciple of Christ has a right to do so, if endowed by gifts, and moved by love.

It is difficult to see what functions ordination entrusted to the few that love had not already entrusted to all. He nevertheless regarded the office of the ministry as of sufficient importance for great care to be taken in recognizing those who felt called to it. For those so called, ordination was to be 'in the primitive manner, by prayer and the laying on of hands'.(31)

In his reply, Angus dealt with the question of imposition of hands. If, in scripture, he argued, laying on of hands was used to impart a miraculous gift, divine approbation, or full permission to enter upon the duties of office, in the sense that a master delegated trust and authority to his servant (Matthew 24.45, Acts 7.10, Daniel 2.24), then it should be discontinued, since there was only one Master, Christ himself. If, on the other hand, no such intentions were attached to the laying on of hands and it was simply a 'form of salutation, or a dignified expression of fraternal love, then it should be set aside as nothing more than eastern custom ... liable to misrepresentation and abuse'.(32) Further, if ordination was to be administered by 'inspired men only' then it could not 'consistently be practised by those that deny apostolic succession'. What was handed down from the apostles, he argued, were the truths they taught and not the authority with which they taught them.(33) As far as ordination was concerned, though it might mark the entrustment of qualification and duties of office, those should never be entrusted 'through the intervention of any third person, or class of persons'.(34) He concluded:

I cannot but wish that the solemn assumptions of modern ordination were exchanged for the affectionate greeting of public recognition.(35)

Between them, Hinton and Angus left little intact in the theory and practice of ordination that Baptists had inherited from the earlier centuries. Hinton, whilst arguing for public recognition of ministers, had nevertheless emphasised the inner constraints of love which required only the response of the individual. Though he stressed the importance of wider recognition of the individual's call, by his claim that the ministry of word and sacrament had its origin in a right conferred upon all believers, if endowed with gifts and motivated by love, he had undermined the role of the church in its custody of the Lord's table and in its responsibility, under Christ, solemnly to delegate those who were to preside at it. Similarly, Angus had reduced the church to the role of an intrusive third party in the rite of ordination. Indeed, the rite itself was redundant where the emphasis was to be placed upon the individual's response to his Master and his personal submission to his authority, and upon the church's fraternal interest as opposed to its authority, under Christ, to appoint those called to solemn office. Thus, with the catholic revival barely begun, some Baptists had moved from the concern for right order and apostolic precedent that characterised earlier generations, to an emphasis on the 'rights' of individuals and only the vaguest



generalisations when describing the role of the church. The significance of this shift is heightened when it is recalled that the combatants in this case were two men who were both destined for high office in the denomination. The changes that were taking place could not but be given added impetus by the advocacy of those who led the denomination and, presumably, rose to positions of leadership because of an increasingly widespread assent to the views they represented. An anonymous writer in the *Baptist Reporter* probably spoke for a declining minority:

I have attended many ordinations, and have found them most solemn and impressive services, leaving a savour in the minds of multitudes for many days to come; ...I have no wish to retain scriptural usages, or relics of popery in the church of God; but in our rage for change we must be careful not to remove ancient landmarks of the divine word. (36)

### iii) Ordination by Ordained Ministers

Another issue over which there was growing uncertainty concerned the presence of other ministers and their role in the service of ordination. We have already examined the testimony of Andrew Fuller. For him, the presence of other ministers signified the recognition and approval of the wider church and safeguarded individual churches against errors of judgment that would lead to exploitation by unworthy characters. Earlier, Thomas Gill had argued for the presence of ministers from a wide area who were to be responsible for the act of ordination. As far as Robert Hall was concerned, a correspondent in the *Baptist Reporter* claimed that Hall, amongst others, did not accept the practice of ordination. (37) A. H. MacLeod argues that Hall was opposed to large numbers of ministers being present at ordinations (38) on grounds similar to those later stated by Joseph Angus, namely that ministers were appointed to their office by Christ. Hall was concerned, however, that there should be 'a wholesome check on the abuse of the popular suffrage'. (39) Invited to share in an ordination at Salisbury, after his removal to Bristol, he declined on the grounds that ordinations were best conducted 'by the presbyters or elders of the immediate vicinity of the party'. (40) Stepping beyond that circle meant that its chief benefit was impaired, which was to make it impossible for 'a minister to establish himself at the head of a congregation, without the approbation and sanction of the circle of pastors with whom he is to act'. (41) MacLeod claims that at Hall's own ordination at the Baptist church in Cambridge no neighbouring ministers were invited to attend. (42) Perhaps on this occasion Hall felt that there was no need for a wholesome check on any abuse of the popular suffrage! Others were emphatic that ordination should be conducted by already ordained ministers. As we have seen, the 1828 correspondent in the *Baptist Magazine* had stated clearly that ordination was a divinely instituted ordinance which could only be scripturally performed by Christian ministers, themselves previously ordained. (43) Similarly, in the 1814 correspondence in the same magazine, it had been argued that it was 'the province of pastors of other churches to *ordain*, or set [the ordinand] apart for his office'. (44)

The early advocates of ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands, administered by already ordained ministers from a wide area, believed they were defending a scriptural view of ordination and one that was jealous for the right order and integrity of the church. The practices associated with ordination were being questioned before the coming of the catholic revival. Attitudes that played their part in the debate over open and closed communion spilled over into the question of ordination. The nineteenth century was the century of the individual and the voluntary society and some Baptists in the early years of the century saw themselves as pioneers breaking away from the old ways. Impatience with forms and ceremonies and emphasis upon the inner and spiritual forces at work in the life of the individual were to be the hallmark of a new breed of Christian men, a breed that was to find its most eloquent spokesman amongst the Baptists in John Clifford. The church, too, believed that it was discovering a new freedom, liberated from the restraints of the past, the concern for right order and what was viewed as the theological bickering that went with it. This process could only have greatly accelerated with the coming of the catholic revival. To the existing case against rites such as the laying on of hands and the presence of other ordained ministers at ordination, could be added far more telling arguments. The laying on of hands could be misconstrued as a priestly act, especially when it was used to delegate men to the ministry of word and sacrament. Did not the priest alone celebrate the holy mysteries within catholicism? Were Baptists to be infected with the same poison? Did their ministers, also, have sole right to preside at the Lord's Table? Was not the ministry of word and sacrament one that was entrusted to every believer? And did not priests receive their ministry at the hands of bishops in the belief that this placed them in direct succession to the apostles? And did it not seem that Baptists were of a similar persuasion when they limited the act of ordination to the hands of those already ordained? For Baptists, distance from present error came to be valued more highly than identity with past practice.

#### iv) The Presidency of the Lord's Table

The question of the presidency of the Lord's table moved with the ebb and flow of the ordination debate. Chiefly concerned with right order within the church it inevitably involved discussion of the presidency of the Lord's table. Gill had contended that only the person ordained to the ministry within a particular church might preside at the table, the church not being at liberty to depute someone else in his absence.(45) Similarly, Andrew Fuller had deplored the practice of some churches in allowing men to preside at the table without ordination.(46) The rigour with which his stand was shared by those of similar persuasion is illustrated in the situation that arose, following his death, at the Baptist church in Kettering of which he had been minister. Fuller was taken ill during April 1815 and died early in May. A diary kept by George Wallis, a member of the Kettering church, recorded that on the 'Ordinance days' held on Sundays 28th May, 25th June, 30th July, 27th August and 24th September there was no celebration of the Lord's Supper. In June, Wallis reflected:

Ordinance day at Kettering; but no Minister to preside at it -  
O Lord may the absence of these means make us prize them  
more highly.(47)

The rigorous withholding of the Lord's Supper is further highlighted by the fact that Fuller had an assistant, John Keen Hall, who had served with him for three years. Hall, however, had never been ordained. In the autumn of 1815, he was given a by no means unanimous call to become minister of the Kettering church and was ordained there on 12th November. Then, and only then, did the church believe it permissible to celebrate the sacrament, and this they did on 26th November. (48)

Some churches, such as the church at Melbourne in Derby, followed Gill in requiring that a man be a member of a church for a period prior to his ordination to its ministry and that the administration of the Lord's Supper should be restricted to the one ordained. The Melbourne church invited J. Gilchrist to preach and subsequently received him into membership in August 1809. The church minutes recall that he was to serve the church on trial for an unlimited period in the hope that this would result in 'a unanimous call to the ministry among them'. As only 'regular' ministers were allowed to serve at communion, it needed a special ruling to allow Gilchrist to preside, a step that was taken only after he had been amongst them for a year. (49)

Amongst the General Baptists, right order maintained a generally stronger hold well into the nineteenth century. This may owe something to their concept of the church and ministry. The church was more central to their understanding of baptism than had been the case amongst the Particular Baptists for whom the death-burial-resurrection motif had provided the dominant theme of believer's baptism. Since the seventeenth century they had also recognized a three-tier ministry, apostolic ministry being embodied in the Messengers who were responsible for planting new churches and encouraging existing congregations, whilst care of the local churches lay in the hands of ministers and deacons. The district associations played a significant role in their church life, presenting opportunities for discussion of matters of discipline and church order and providing guide lines for individual churches. Examples of the way this related to the presidency of the Lord's table can be seen in the minutes of the meetings of the New Connexion Leicestershire Association. In 1794 it was ruled that a minister who was not ordained might administer the Lord's Supper only in cases of necessity. In 1810, the Association made it clear that they believed that ordination to the office of deacon did not qualify a person to administer the Lord's Supper, whilst in 1815 the practice of men taking upon themselves the office of minister without being ordained was rejected 'with the affectionate request that those who have followed this practice should seriously reconsider'. (50) The issue of ordination appeared in the pages of the *General Baptist Repository* in 1834, where the question was raised as to what works ordination qualified a minister to perform. The reply limited itself to the question of presidency at the Lord's table and endeavoured to make clear what it considered to be the General Baptist position in the matter. The notion of moral or intellectual qualification was rejected. However,

When it is said to be irregular for an unordained minister to administer the Lord's Supper, the meaning is, we suppose, that such a practice does not accord with Scripture precedent. (51)

The article went on to warn of the unfortunate consequences of departure from right order in this matter:

Experience has also shown, that when apostolic constitution has been departed from at this point, serious mischiefs have ensued: ordination itself has been neglected, contentions have, we believe, risen among leading members who should be the administrator, and churches have been split up into small parties, each having its own separate tables.(52)

Whilst unwilling to rule that churches should in no circumstances allow an unordained person to administer the Lord's Supper, the writer nevertheless claimed that

We view the practice as an irregularity which churches ought to prevent when they are able, and which it is proper to check in the use of scriptural means.(53).

The magazine's successor, the *General Baptist Magazine*, returned to the question in 1852 when reporting an address on 'Church Order' by John Wallis, prefaced by an editorial dissociating the magazine from the views put forward in the address. Wallis argued that only the local church had the authority to appoint a minister and that only a minister so appointed had the authority to administer the Lord's Supper. The local church, however, was not under necessity to appoint a pastor and could, presumably, appoint someone from amongst its own members to administer the sacrament.(54) It is not clear from which of these views the magazine dissented. In a later edition, however, a Thos. W. Matthews identified the editor's hesitancy with Wallis' contention that if a church were to choose not to call a pastor it might appoint anyone to preside at the table. He himself expressed agreement with Wallis that anyone might be appointed and continued

... might he not have added, that anyone by appointment may perform this act; because this ordinance above all others exhibits the *entire equality of all members*. In baptism the administrator confers something on the recipient, in the Lord's Supper *both* are recipients...(55)

Clearly, the General Baptists were liberalising their practice with greater reluctance than the Particular Baptists.

A small contribution to the colourful variety of practice amongst English Baptist churches was added by the Scotch Baptists. Founded through the influence of Archibald McLean they were to be found in parts of Yorkshire and North Wales.(56) McLean's Presbyterian background was evident in the resemblances with presbyteral church order amongst the churches which he founded. No ministers were ordained in these churches, but there was a plurality of elders who, amongst other functions, were responsible for the administration of the Lord's Supper. If no elder was available then the Supper was not observed.(57) The Scotch Baptists had a minimal influence on other Baptist churches but some survive into the twentieth century. The Baptist church in Haggate, near Burnley, for instance, founded on Scotch Baptist principles was administered by elders who alone could

preside at the Lord's table until the church made a break with tradition in 1953 and called their first minister. (58)

The attitude of the closed communionists to the question of the ministry was increasingly shaped by the difficulty they faced in finding ministers of their persuasion to preside at their communion tables. This shortage of ministers led some strict churches to invite ministers of the opposite persuasion to conduct the Lord's Supper for them. Their action would suggest that for some, at least, the need to observe order in the matter of administration outweighed in importance the question of who might attend. For the *Primitive Church Magazine*, the journal of the strict communionists who remained in fellowship with the Union, the shortage of strict-communion ministers was a problem that deserved better solutions than the expediency, as they viewed it, of calling open-communion ministers to preside at the Lord's table with 'all the evils which ensue'. (59) Correspondents were quick to support the editorial stand arguing that this practice simply 'fed the flame that is destroying the denomination' and would lead to its 'annihilation'. (60) The 'non-theological' factor of ministerial shortage evoked two reactions. The first was a growing attitude of mistrust towards a trained ministry. The movement amongst Baptists generally to secure an educated ministry had gathered momentum from the establishment of dissenting academies for the training of ministers throughout the nineteenth century. No attempt was made to conceal the contempt that one contributor to the magazine felt for the syllabus that was customarily followed in the colleges:

It is no direct recommendation that a person has read the heathen classics, or studied natural, mental or moral philosophy, or gone through a course of logic, rhetoric or mathematics; the grand end being the simple inculcation of the truths of the New Testament 'not with wisdom of words', but 'with plainness of speech'; confidence of success being placed, not in the power of men, but 'in the demonstration of the Spirit', and of the power of God. No 'degree' will be available but that of 'ministers of the word of God' and this is not as attached to the name, but engraved in deep characters on the broad 'tablet of life'. (61)

The second reaction was more theological and called into question the idea of a separate ministry of word and sacrament. The magazine's leading article for November 1845 saw the retraction of ministerial functions to the few as a reflection of Roman Catholic practice:

Instead ... of enjoining it as every brother's duty to preach and teach Christ to the world in every way possible, many of our churches regard it as *sin* for any person to do so without special *licence* from the church. Can anything be more injurious to the spread of Christianity? (62)

The theme was to be taken up again in the leader of August 1846, but this time it was challenged by a reader who contended that there was a distinction to be observed between the duty of every Christian to preach the gospel and the appointment of men to a public office for that purpose:

There is, in the church of Christ, a divinely appointed order, and a rule and authority established, which, whenever violated, confusion and disorder follow. (63)

The editor attacked the views expressed in his correspondent's letter, seeing in them evidence of 'a tinge of Puseyism in the constitution of the dissenting churches, which, in some measure, may tend to mar the progress of the gospel'. (64) Both these reactions of the strict Baptists, suspicion of learning and the claim that all were equally called with its attendant erosion of any distinction between the calling of a minister and the calling of other Christians within the church, were to be taken up, from time to time, by some in the wider fellowship of the Baptist churches.

The problem of ministerial shortage led the strict Baptists to what was, in effect, a downgrading of the ministry. Similar problems led others to a wider concept of the ministry of word and sacrament. Gill had argued that only a minister, ordained to the pastoral oversight of a particular church, might administer the communion within that church. Furthermore, his ordination did not grant him the right to administer it beyond his own church. (65) Inevitably, adherence to this opinion could only lead to difficulties. There would be times when a church was without pastoral oversight, either through a temporary indisposition of its minister or during an interregnum. Some solved this problem by rejecting Gill's restriction of the presidency of the table to the church's pastor and inviting a minister from another church to preside for them. A correspondent in the *Baptist Magazine* of May 1815 examined two reasons why some churches withheld the observance of the Lord's Supper during a pastor's absence because of illness. The first, that the communion was a *feast of joy* and therefore inappropriate in view of the pastor's condition and the second, that only the pastor of the church might preside. In reply to the second objection, the correspondent distinguished between the authority that a pastor exercised within the congregation to which he was called and his calling as a minister of the word and sacrament. The first could not be extended beyond his own congregation; however

The gift of preaching and administering the Lord's Supper... is not limited to the one congregation and, therefore, a pastor who administers the ordinance in another church does not violate any engagement he has with his own. (66)

The same distinction was drawn by a correspondent in the November edition of the same year, taking issue with Gill's restricting statute. Whatever ruling function a pastor might perform in the congregation to which he had been called, the administration of the Lord's Supper was a pastoral act and equally valid in whatever church a pastor presided. To invite another pastor to preside at the Lord's table was far preferable to the congregation going without. The dangers could not be ignored:

The neglect of any duty must have a serious effect on the mind; and it will be owing to irresistible grace, if the importance of the ordinance is not undervalued in consequence; and it may be feared, that our gracious Lord, who is jealous of

his honour, may resent such inattention to his commands, and withdraw the smile of his face. (67)

It could be argued that the recognition that a minister was called to an office and function which could be exercised within the wider church, as well as the church of which he was pastor, was implicit in his recognition by other ministers at his service of ordination. So, whereas the Catholic revival rang alarm bells for many Baptists who took the defensive action of almost obliterating altogether any distinction between minister and people, at other levels the wider recognition of ministerial calling, allowing ministers to administer the word and sacrament in churches other than their own, led to a wider concept of the Christian ministry as the servant of all the churches and not just of one.

#### v) Conclusion

The warning, given at the outset, that oversimplifications need to be avoided in assessing Baptist attitudes to the ministry during this period, is adequately confirmed by the evidence we have examined. It is not a question of tracing the earlier Baptist doctrine of the ministry and identifying the changes it underwent with any one historical development in the nineteenth century. In the first place, it is clear that there was no single concept of the ministry to which universal Baptist assent was given during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Secondly, it would be inaccurate to claim that there was a Baptist *doctrine* of the ministry. The one underlying concern that held together Baptist churches until the end of the eighteenth century, despite a limited diversity of practice, was that of *church order*. Their understanding of the ministry has to be related to that concern. Baptist attitudes to the ministry, like Baptist beliefs about baptism, can be understood only in relation to their view of the church. The controversy over open and closed communion represented, in part, a challenge to that concept of order. Hall's willingness to admit 'sincere' Christians to the Lord's table whether, by his own presuppositions, erroneously baptized or not baptized at all, and his insistence that 'ceremonies' were secondary to the inner, spiritual reality of personal experience meant that the church abdicated its role of guardian, under Christ, of the Lord's table and threw the onus of responsibility on the shoulders of the individual.

There followed a growing lack of interest in matters of church order, a devaluation of the role of the church and a contempt for 'ceremonies' and forms in favour of an inner, more spiritual, religion. Given that the Baptist understanding of the ministry was shaped entirely by their concern for church order and that there was no real doctrine of the ministry that had been biblically and theologically defined, the growing impatience with the restraints of church order and 'ceremonies' meant that practices associated with the ministry fell into disarray. If baptism could be seen as a 'ceremony' of less importance than the inner sincerity of the individual Christian, then what hope was there for ordination, with its rite of laying on of hands and the acknowledgment of the role of the wider church expressed in the crucial involvement of other ordained ministers, unsustainable as it was by a coherent theology of the ministry *per se*? The Baptist church

at the turn of the century followed previous custom in the matter of ordination and made little attempt to discover *why* things had been done in this way. For some, Gill's teaching on the subject continued to influence their practice, but his works were not given everyone's unqualified admiration. Hall, who can fairly be said to represent the new attitudes that were to gather momentum during the nineteenth century considered Gill's theological works to be a 'continent of mud'.(67) The correspondence columns of the various Baptist journals reveal a changing situation in which some believed that custom reflected apostolic order and should be upheld and others saw no need for custom, including a few for whom even the evidence of apostolic order could no longer claim to be binding in the changed circumstances of the nineteenth century. None, either the advocates of ministerial order or its detractors, made any sustained attempt to define a theology of ministry with its attendant questions of ordination, laying on of hands, ministerial 'succession' and the presidency of the Lord's table.

The challenge posed by the Catholic revival led the majority of Baptists to move even further away from the faith and practice of their fathers. To a growing impatience with forms was added a deep mistrust of what they represented. If ordination granted an exclusive right to preside at the Lord's table then it was but a short step from sacerdotalism and the priestly pretensions of the Catholics. If only ordained ministers were to administer the laying on of hands at ordination, then Baptists could be accused of practising a form of apostolic succession, a notion that became increasingly obnoxious the more it was re-affirmed by the Catholics. As with much else, Baptists distanced themselves from Catholics at the cost of distancing themselves from their own heritage. A sober concern for order within the body of Christ stood little chance against the ringing summons to individual freedom and the strong, Victorian manliness of prophetic religion.

## NOTES

- 1 See E. A. Payne, 'The Ministry in History', BQ 17, No.6, 1958, p.264.
- 2 E. P. Winter, 'Who may administer the Lord's Supper?' BQ 16, No.3, 1975, pp.129f.
- 3 F. M. W. Harrison, 'The Life and Thought of the Baptists of Nottinghamshire, 1770-1914', Dissertation, Nottingham 1972, pp.334-339.
- 4 Daniel Turner, *Compendium of Social Religion*, 1758, pp.49-50, cited by E. A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers*, 1944, p.48.
- 5 John Gill, *Body of Practical Divinity*, 1770, cited by E. A. Payne, *op.cit.*, p.48f.
- 6 *Baptist Magazine*, 30, 1838, p.100.
- 7 See J. W. Grant, *Free Churchmanship in England, 1870-1949*, n.d., pp.80-81.
- 8 *Baptist Magazine*, 7, 1815, p.454.
- 9 *Ibid.* p.455.                      10 *Ibid.*, p.455.
- 11 'The Minutes of the Baptist Board', *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 6, 1918-19, p.101f.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.102.                      13 *Ibid.*, pp.103-4 (italics mine)
- 14 *Ibid.*, p.105.



- 15 *Baptist Magazine*, 20, 1828, p.63.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p.150. 17 *Ibid.*, p.151.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.152. 19 *Ibid.*, p.152.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p.251. 21 *Ibid.*, p.252.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p.493. 23 *Ibid.*, 7, p.268.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp.269-70. 25 *Ibid.*, p.364.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p.366. 27 *Ibid.*, p.415.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p.416. 29 See above.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 30, 1838, p.102. 31 *Ibid.*, p.102.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p.147. 33 *Ibid.*, 148.
- 34 *Ibid.* 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 *Baptist Reporter*, 1848, p.107.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p.68.
- 38 A. H. Macleod, *op.cit.*, p.379.
- 39 R. Hall, *The Works of Robert Hall A.M.*, ed. Olinthus Gregory, 1846, I, 374.
- 40 *Ibid.* 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 Macleod, *op.cit.* p.379 43 See above.
- 44 See above. 45 See above.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 The diary of George Wallis is now kept in the Fuller Baptist Church in Kettering.
- 48 The entry for 12th November gives a detailed account of Hall's ordination.
- 49 Thomas J. Budge, *Melbourne Baptists (Derby)*, 1951, p.29.
- 50 Cited by J. Osborne, *The First Two Hundred Years*, Hinckley 1966, pp.37-8.
- 51 *General Baptist Repository*, 1834, p.100.
- 52 *Ibid.* 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 *General Baptist Magazine*, 14, 1852, p.235.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p.292.
- 56 D. B. Murray, 'Baptists in Scotland before 1869', BQ 23, No.6, p.256; A. C. Underwood, *History of the English Baptists*, 1947, pp.188f.
- 57 A. C. Underwood, *ibid.*, p.190
- 58 W. Shutt, *Haggate Baptist Church*, n.p., 1961.
- 59 *Primitive Church Magazine*, March 1846, p.83.
- 60 *Ibid.*, April 1846, p.130. 61 *Ibid.*, February 1847, p.47.
- 62 *Ibid.*, November 1845, p.390. 63 *Ibid.*, September 1846, p.320.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p.321. 65 See above.
- 66 *Baptist Magazine*, 7, May 1815, p.194.
- 67 *Ibid.*, November 1815, pp.460-461.

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#### ANNUAL MEETING 1988

This will take place in the Lloyd Jones Hall at Westminster Chapel on Monday, 25th April, at 4.30 p.m. The Annual Lecture will be given by the Reverend Roger Hayden, M.A., B.D., Secretary to the Baptist Historical Society. His subject will be: 'Recalling the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession for Today's Baptist Family'.