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REVIEWS

D. E. Meek, *Island Harvest: A History of Tiree Baptist Church 1838-1988*, Tiree Books, 1988, 60pp.

A small island off the west coast of Scotland with a Baptist Church celebrating an hundred and fifty years of witness, which peaked in membership at 160 members, is the subject of this remarkable story by Donald Meek, Lecturer in Celtic in the University of Edinburgh. The origins of the church are to be found in the labours of Dugald Sinclair of the Scottish Itinerant Society, a home missionary organisation largely maintained through the labours of Christopher Anderson of Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh. Sinclair first preached in Tiree in 1814 when he addressed a congregation of 'perhaps a thousand people' in the open air in Gaelic. He was followed by Alexander Grant, a Baptist itinerant stationed at Tobermory, who began visiting from 1822 and in 1828 baptised two females and celebrated the Lord's Supper on the island. From 1824 onwards the work was consolidated by the efforts of Duncan Macdougall, who came as Gaelic schoolmaster but developed *de facto* into a full-time missionary and, after 1838, pastor of the Tiree Church. The secular aspects of the early growth of the church are related to the development of the labour-intensive kelp industry which took the population to a peak of just under 4,500 in 1831. But the price for kelp was moving in an opposite direction, declining from £20 a ton in 1810 to £3 per ton in 1834. This led to an alternative economy in potato growing, with its vulnerability to blight. Such secular changes, it is argued, 'helped to loose the fabric of community life', encouraged the growth of individualism, and loosened the hold of the Established Church. In such a context, both Baptist and Congregational Churches began to witness remarkable growth through the spiritual phenomenon of revival. This, in its turn, had to face the impact of emigration as two-thirds of the hundred-strong church of 1846 emigrated to Canada, indicating that it was the economically vulnerable who had made the most ready response to the witness of the Baptist church. In the 1850s the church recovered, building two substantial meeting houses, and its minister used Tiree as a base for summer missionary activity in other islands and on the mainland of Argyll. Migration still continued to deprive the island church of valued members. A key part of the story is the embracing of Gaelic culture, with fervent Gaelic preaching and memorable Gaelic hymns often locally composed as powerful vehicles for the various revival movements that, with strong local leadership, stimulated the life of the church up to the years immediately after the First World War so that, emigration notwithstanding, the membership remained at 129 until 1920. After the Second World War the congregation was not renewed by revival movements and the live membership became older and the Sunday School smaller. The island population continued to decline and in 1965 regular Gaelic services ceased. Thereafter ministry has increasingly depended upon the support of the Union and friends from the mainland and on devoted lay leadership on an island no longer isolated from the rest of Scotland but linked to national life by rapid communications and the mass media. This is an excellent local study: the only dimension which this reviewer missed was some account of the development of the churches in the twentieth century which would have helped answer the question whether there was anything distinctive in the way Baptists adapted their mission to changing situations.

JHYB

John Bunyan, *Seasonable Counsel* and *A Discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publicane*, ed. Owen C. Watkins, *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, Volume X, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988. ISBN 0-19-812738. £35.

John H. Taylor, *Come Wind Come Weather: Bunyan's Pilgrim in Today's World*, The United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1987. ISBN 0-902256-82-3. £2.75.

The latest volume in the Oxford *Miscellaneous Works* contains two texts from 1684 and 1685 respectively. 1684 was also the year of the Second Part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but perhaps more important as a context for *Seasonable Counsel* is the increased persecution of Nonconformists during the period, and behind that, the example of the martyrs in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Owen Watkins is good on both the history of the persecution and the pastoral and theological response to it by Bunyan and his fellow sufferers. It was not just a question of endurance but of understanding, not just of recognising Satan's work, but welcoming the discipline, the 'bitter pills' that would lead to purity and fruitfulness.

Seasonable Counsel is an interesting read, with plenty of vigorous writing against those who 'whinch and shuck' at trouble, and a stunningly concise account of John the Baptist's execution to make the point that there is no time for the servants of God to prepare for death when merciless men strike - 'the first word he salutes him with, is, Sir, strip, lay down your neck; *For I am come to take away your head.* But hold, stay, wherefore? pray let me commit my Soul to God. No, I must not stay, I am in hast; slap, says his sword, and off falls the good mans head'. Those who have puzzled over the fate of Ignorance in *The Pilgrim's Progress* will find an interesting discussion of presumption here. And the advice about submitting to the Magistrate, and being a private Christian, fills out our sense of Bunyan's response to the persecuted Christian's dilemma: those who persecute are ordained by God and yet are implacably or arbitrarily hostile to his children. The book concludes with advice not to be angry or discontented, even as one is led to the scaffold.

The *Discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publicane* is an extended meditation on the parable, again for the benefit of 'such of the Saints, that are under hard usages, by reason of evil Men, their *Might* and *Tyranny*'. The Pharisee is, interestingly, characterised as a Sectarian, though in a rather special sense. Even so, his prayer is taken, amongst other things, as an example of the dangers of hypocrisy in extempore prayer. But the main emphasis of the book is on justification; and, as Owen Watkins points out, contains an element of antinomianism in its analysis of faith as a sign of justification rather than its cause. There are some interesting flashes of characterisation within the point-by-point structure; and Bunyan is, as so often, cuttingly adept at distinguishing between outward religiousness and the deep conviction of God's judgment and mercy.

If the Clarendon Press *Miscellaneous Works* represents all the scholarship that is properly trained on Bunyan these days, *Come Wind Come Weather* represents another tradition of writing about Bunyan, the devotional commentary. It is a series of reflections on *The Pilgrim's Progress* arranged for daily reading in Lent, with some questions at the end for group as well as personal study. Each reflection on an episode or character in the book takes about two pages, and within that John H. Taylor is remarkably eclectic. Perhaps I was reading it through too fast, but there were times - as in the piece on crisis (What shall I Do?) - where it confuses and disperses, rather than stimulates thought. To be bounced from Bunyan to Alvin Toffler, Morris West, Thomas Merton and Elizabeth Jennings back to Bunyan again

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University of Edinburgh. See also Meek, **Island Harvest**, pp.24-6.

30. This is probably true of other denominations operating in the Highlands. The idea that Evangelical bodies consistently opposed Gaelic secular tradition in all its forms is certainly not borne out by the Gaelic evidence, although it is (hitherto) firmly entrenched in the minds of some commentators.
31. **BHMS Reports**, 1838, pp.9-10.
32. Sinclair, **Journal**, I, p.19.
33. **BHMS Reports**, 1829, pp.9-20.
34. Ibid., 1840, p.9.
35. Sinclair, **Journal**, III, p.29.
36. Ibid., IV, p.13.
37. **BHMS Reports**, 1832, p.5.
38. Bebbington, op.cit., p.302, fig.15.2.
39. Cf. the summary of Alexander Brown's account (1895) of his labours as a missionary in the Ross of Mull: 'The population was very scattered, and some had to be reached away from the main roads by climbing dykes, jumping ditches and crossing bogs. This work of visiting was important and interesting... On Monday and Tuesday following he would stay in the district, visiting among the twenty-five families there, and holding cottage meetings. He was sometimes astonished that there were no more definite results from those cottage meetings...'. See the **Scottish Baptist Magazine**, 1895, p.293.
40. Bebbington, op.cit., pp.290-3.
41. C. N. Peckham, **Heritage of Revival**, Edinburgh, 1986, pp.161-80.
42. Meek, **Island Harvest**, esp. pp.45-8.
43. Bebbington, op.cit., pp.303-4.
44. **BHMS Reports**, 1929, p.19. For nineteenth-century attitudes to emigration, see Meek, 'Evangelicalism and Emigration', pp.32-3.
45. Bebbington, op.cit., pp.299-301.
46. Ibid., pp.297-8.
47. Pastorates of an average length of four to five years were very common in Britain from at least 1911, according to figures presented by Dr Kenneth Brown in his paper, 'Patterns of Baptist Ministry in the 20th Century', presented to the Summer School of the Baptist Historical Society at Dunblane on 23-26 June 1988 (See BQ 33, Apr.1989).
48. This leaflet was written by James Hair. In several respects its style resembles that of a tourist brochure from the 1930s, and the portrayal of the Highlands is tinged noticeably with the romanticism of that era.
49. Bebbington, op.cit., p.301.
50. Ibid., pp.299-301. For the influence of visitors at the Kilnave station of the Bowmore (Islay) church in 1898, see **BHMS Reports**, 1898, p.25.
51. Letter from H. M. Meek to G. C. D. Jeffrey, 18 August 1959. Copy in writer's possession.
52. An earlier draft of this paper was presented to the Summer School of the Baptist Historical Society at Dunblane on 23-26 June 1988.

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in the space of a page is just a bit too much. And in any case, it is not really a recommendation that a book was compulsory reading for President Nixon's cabinet (Toffler rather than Bunyan, alas). But if one sticks with the book, it develops a more coherent expository-cum-reflective style which works well as a trigger to thought and re-reading. He is particularly good at characterising the mixture of fearfulness, coping with hostility and sheer effort on the one hand, with the experience of forgiveness and friendship on the other, which is so important to Bunyan's truthfulness and appeal. There are times when John Taylor backs away from Bunyan's position, as in the piece on The Arbour (flesh), where he advocates a Benedictine rhythm of work and rest more than a Puritan horror of sloth. But it is not an airy modern dismissal of Bunyan: there is a serious evangelical (not in the party sense) spirituality behind the project. As he admnits, it is odd to make a Lent book from a man whose church kept neither Christmas nor Easter; but it works most of the time.

ROGER POOLEY