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W.T. WHITLEY

A Commemorative Essay

1 EARLY LIFE

William Thomas Whitley¹ was born at Mildmay Terrace, Islington, on 16 May 1861. His father, Thomas, was a London manufacturer, owning two factories, and the son, who was to marry twice and marry well on both occasions, came to enjoy a modest private income: a fact which may be of some significance in understanding his later career, particularly the expenses involved in pioneering historical research. The Whitley family moved to Epping and the young William began his schooling at Chigwell. Another move followed, to Highbury, and a transfer first to University College School and then to a boarding establishment in Hastings. By this time the adolescent William had been converted and baptized in the new Highbury Hill Baptist Church which his family attended. The church had as yet no organ but Alfred Rooke, William's architect uncle, conducted a choir in the front pews. It was here that Whitley discovered he had a fine singing voice.

He secured entry first to Cavendish Hall and then Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he read Mathematics and enjoyed a successful, if not spectacular, academic career. He joined the congregation at St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, where once again his fine tenor voice earned him a place in the choir, and he sang also in the University Music Club under the direction of Charles V. Stanford. His nonconformity was no problem, though his installation of an harmonium in his room provoked some mirth. On graduating his first thought was to follow many of his mother's family, the Rookes, into the Law; his cousin, Cecil Rooke, served as a devoted legal adviser to the Baptist Union from 1917 to 1934. Instead he chose the teaching profession. Here, however, he found his ambitions thwarted at every turn by Anglican obstructiveness. In desperation he even tried for a post in Delhi but the same obstacle stood in his way. This had a profound effect on the young Whitley and, after a spell tutoring the four sons of Mr John Roberts MP in Abergele and Enfield, he entered Rawdon College where his uncle, Thomas G. Rooke, was Principal. He enjoyed Rawdon and worked hard both on his college course and for his Cambridge LLM which he took in 1889.

His first pastorate was at Bridlington (1888-1891), though he travelled back to Rawdon each week to lecture part-time. These were eventful years for the young student-pastor: the church was undergoing a severe financial crisis thanks to the chicanery of one of its trustees. The young Whitley, with his previous brief foray into legal matters, was able to put things right. In the background the Downgrade controversy raged. There was courtship and marriage in 1889 to Miss Alice Goodman of Belvedere, who engaged strenuously in social work in the poorer end of the Yorkshire fishing port. In 1891, through the good offices of Dr MacLaren of Manchester and though only thirty years of age, he was offered the Principalship

of the Baptist College of Victoria, Australia, which he accepted although, it seems, a full-time post at Rawdon was his for the asking.²

Whitley's decade of service in Australia is the subject of a separate study by Dr Manley. Here it suffices to observe that his interest in the affairs of Britain did not wane during his absence, either before or after the death of his wife in October 1894. He wrote for the *Baptist Magazine* in 1896 a series of articles adumbrating the themes later taken up in his important book of 1903, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, while *The Witness of History to Baptist Principles* (1897), which was another taster for this work, was issued simultaneously in Melbourne and London. In 1902, hearing that the trustees were seeking to close the college because of its parlous state, Whitley made a short trip to America and then accepted a call to the Fishergate Church, Preston. For ten years he had worked in a 'frontier' situation in Melbourne, the archetypal 'boom town' of the late Victorian period and in a very young university which had awarded him its LLD. Now, accompanied by his second wife, Sarah (née Walker) whom he had married in January 1897 and his young family, he sailed back to England.

While in the Americas, visiting his elder brother, Charles, 'by the side of a broad Canadian river' he had written *Church, Ministry and Sacraments in the New Testament* with nothing but a Greek New Testament, a Concordance and an English Bible to help him. This work may not be a classic of Baptist apologetic but it is certainly a period piece, a reflection of the bitterness Whitley still felt at his humiliation at the hands of a proud Establishment. The book appeared between the passing of the Education Act of 1902 and the gathering storms of the Passive Resistance Movement. It was a time when Nonconformist protestations were at their most shrill and vehement - and perhaps at their most negative. Whitley's study is in the form of a commentary on each book of the New Testament. Its purport is to demonstrate that the 'twin errors' of sacerdotalism and sacramentalism rise and fall together. They are in the patristic Church the result of infiltration by heathen and heretical elements, the Fathers being the 'perverters' rather than the 'purveyors' of the truth. The classical Reformers, Luther in particular, were unable to escape from this baleful influence, though Zwingli pursued a sounder course. Unhappily, so far as the 'Ordinances' were concerned, Whitley prised the sign and the thing signified so far apart that they became, as for Erasmus, merely didactic objects to behold and ruminant upon. Despite the vigour with which their proper administration was defended,³ their celebration was in the end hardly of much significance. 'What', he asks, 'is vital - a rite or a refusal to adopt it? Neither, [but rather] the new life from above.' In like manner, the church had a purely functional role: its inner life, particularly the fruitless arguments over privileges and precedence in which it indulged, was of minor import compared to its outward task - to win individual souls, at home and overseas, for Christ and his kingdom (whatever 'kingdom' in the strange world of Edwardian religion happened to mean).⁴

Whitley wrote his polemical work in 1903 at the age of forty-two. Within a couple of years his career had taken an entirely different turn as he embarked on the most fruitful and most balanced phase of his life's work.

2 THE HISTORIAN

A passion for history grips some of us in adolescence and comes to others in retirement years. Rarely does it arise in one's mid-forties and Whitley's sudden emergence as the leading British Baptist historian deserves a word of explanation. One pointer is the collapse of the Nonconformists' secular idealism in the wake of frustration with the Liberal government's failure to satisfy their expectations after 1906. This forced them to turn from politics to their spiritual mission - and their spiritual roots.⁵ Stemming from this a large number of Free Church scholars seemed suddenly to be at work, particularly on sixteenth and seventeenth-century origins where Whitley's interests were to be at first concentrated: H.W. Clark and B. Nightingale (Congregationalist), G. Lyon Turner and W.H. Burgess (Unitarian) and, in particular, that advanced American Baptist, Champlain Burrage. It is no accident that Whitley's first truly academic essay on Baptist history was published in the *Review and Expositor* in January 1906, replying to one by Burrage in the same journal for October 1905. It would also seem that Whitley's concern for Baptist missions, and the history which lay behind them, began now to transfer itself to the country in which the whole enterprise had begun. It is significant that while in Australia he had visited every winter the Indian mission stations north of Calcutta and had in 1896 published *Our Indian Trip*. This missionary enthusiasm was never to leave him. However, as his typescript 'Reminiscences' make plain, his interest in Baptist history was aroused by conversations with A.H. Newman in Toronto and Waco during his American tour. He was at one stage approached with the suggestion that he be Newman's successor, but he declined: 'American conditions', by which he meant racial segregation, were abhorrent to him.

How may we best introduce Whitley the historian? According to Barrie White, with Whitley 'for the first time Baptist history was studied in a systematic way and by modern methods', a verdict with which Roger Hayden concurs.⁶ This is a sound judgement, though two qualifications are in order. We should never forget the outstanding achievement of E.B. Underhill and the Hanserd Knollys Society in publishing ten volumes of Baptist historical documents edited with a seriousness of purpose and critical accuracy which is a credit to these mid-nineteenth-century scholars. At the same time it must be acknowledged that Whitley as an historian has one decided peculiarity odd in a scholar who relied so much on original sources, namely his failure to provide footnotes and other references. This omission has perplexed and hampered later scholars, as Dr Nuttall once complained.⁷

Against this, however, must be set two other qualities which are the marks of a true historian. One is the meticulousness with which he edited original texts, earning the enduring gratitude of those of us who have, for example, used his two-

volume General Baptist Assembly Minutes or his edition of Smyth's works. The same is true of the care which he took over the *Baptist Bibliography*, which involved him in an enormous correspondence (some of it still to be found in the Angus manuscript collection) and much train travel, but not cycling - it would be hard to imagine Dr Whitley pedalling the length and breadth of England as did the redoubtable Lyon Turner in *his* quest to discover and record the documents and church plate of the Old (mainly Unitarian) Dissent.⁸

Secondly, there is in Whitley a most commendable independence of mind and fearlessness of interpretation. These qualities are seen especially in his differences with J.H. Shakespeare, who happened to be his brother-in-law (both had married Goodman sisters, as had also Whitley's uncle, Alfred Rooke). Shakespeare, who was himself historically inclined and who in 1906 published his *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers*, surveyed the early English Separatists - largely, it seems, through the testimony of John Robinson and Henry Jacob - and was convinced that these folk were reluctant Dissenters, still in a sense in fellowship with the Established Church and desiring only that its episcopate and liturgy be truly reformed, in which case their independency could be subsumed into the larger whole.⁹ This conviction was to be one of the sources of the argument of *The Churches at the Crossroads* (1918).¹⁰ Whitley would have none of this: he was apparently aware of what was subsequently defined as semi-separatism, but for him the later sixteenth and seventeenth-century Nonconformists were spiritually and organically the lineal ancestors of the Free Churchmen of his own day.

Then there is the problem of the Anabaptists. Interest in this form of radical dissent was now running high: it even served as ideological underpinning for the Passive Resisters. Despite the unhappy Whitsitt controversy (1896-98), the inspiration for this enthusiasm seems to have come as much from the United States as from European sources. W. H. Whitsitt, President of Southern Seminary, argued that English Baptists had emerged out of English Separatism and denied that they had immersed believers prior to 1641; this was a position that challenged both successionism and landmarkism and therefore drew fire upon Whitsitt who was forced to resign his position in 1898. Burrage's father had written his study of the Swiss Anabaptists in 1882, and in 1890 the Baptist Union of Great Britain had authorized a series of books contributing 'to the more general history of the denomination', under the editorship of George Gould, who was soon to become Tutor and later Principal of Regent's Park College. Two were biographies, and the third was Richard Heath's study of Anabaptism, 1521-36 (1895). Heath belonged to the Brotherhood of the Kingdom, a body founded by Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch, who has been called the 'Father of the Social Gospel', was the son of a German pastor who was one of the founders of the German Baptist movement in North America. Heath's interpretation was almost as radical as that of Belfort Bax, and he relied heavily on the 'wonderful martyrology' of J.T. van Braght, published by the Hanserd Knollys society. E.C. Pike's *Story of the Anabaptists*

(1903), one of the *Eras of Nonconformity* series, again relies on Heath and van Braght and is equally lyrical in its approval of the left-wing of the Reformation.

Shakespeare did not care for this. As a Baptist statesman, hobnobbing with the leaders of mainstream churches, he was unwilling to acknowledge any link between Anabaptists and Baptists.¹¹ Indeed he once, rather sourly, wrote of the 'gold' of Baptist principles being separated from the 'dross' of Anabaptist extremism. Once more Whitley begged to differ. His positive attitude to Anabaptism was evidenced by his judgement in the introduction to the General Baptist Minutes where he argued that the General Baptists were 'an English outgrowth of the Continental Anabaptists acting upon the Lollards'. However, it was a series of lectures Whitley gave in Liverpool in 1910 which revealed how deeply he was committed to the idea of Anabaptism as the root of later Baptist witness. He used a botanical metaphor: Lollardy was the 'native pistil' which needed to be fertilized by 'pollen from abroad'. Citing Lord Acton, he defended even the Münsterites from the 'obloquy' which had fallen on them but should more aptly attach to their enemies. Robert Browne grew up in an Anabaptist atmosphere (Norwich, Plymouth, Middleburgh) and was subconsciously influenced by them. The General Baptists arose 'from the direct influence of the Anabaptists'.¹²

Yet on this subject Whitley was later to change his mind completely. 'Baptists', he wrote in 1923, 'are to be sharply distinguished from the Anabaptists of the Continent' and it 'is inexcusable' to confuse them. 'Anabaptists have no cause to be ashamed of their history . . . but they are as independent of us as are Unitarians or Congregationalists'.¹³ Why this *volte face*? Cynics might suggest that Whitley too had by this time become a denominational statesman, moving in circles where the Anabaptists were an embarrassment. More generous interpreters could point to his growing conviction, based on his study of the English Bible, that Baptist communities arose in England from the study of the Scriptures in the vernacular and not through inspiration from a foreign source.¹⁴ The evidence is far from clear.

The early Whitley found no difficulty in having Anabaptists as bedfellows, nor did he have any problem about admitting close relationships with the Unitarians. He frankly recognized that the General Baptists were a grouping which spanned both denominations. It is significant that W.H. Burgess was of General Baptist stock,¹⁵ that he and Whitley corresponded, that Burgess contributed to the early *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, and that both men were particularly interested in the General Baptists of Kent and both wrote a history of the Eythorne church. Nor is it without significance that the works of John Smyth were only published thanks to a grant of £50 from the Unitarian Hibbert Trust.

In 1908 Whitley persuaded the Baptist Union Council to sanction the formation of an Historical Society with himself as Secretary (not at this stage Editor, as is sometimes stated). This marked the beginning of two decades of unstinting service to Baptist historical scholarship, both in separate publications under the auspices of the Society and in the pages of first the *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*

and, from 1922, of the *Baptist Quarterly*. Whitley rapidly became Baptist history personified and the signed and unsigned articles in the first seven volumes of this Society's journal sometimes suggest that he wrote the whole thing himself! The same was said of H.L. Short in the final years of the *Hibbert Journal*.¹⁶

What did Whitley actually achieve between 1908 and 1928 when he retired from pastoral work? Several large books, including *The Minutes of the General Assembly of General Baptists*, Volume 1 (1909) and Volume 2 (1911), an invaluable source for Baptist historians, though they should now be supplemented by the original documents published in two volumes by the General Baptist Assembly (which still continues) under the editorship of Leonard Maguire.¹⁷ There followed the Church Books of Ford or Cuddington and Amersham (1912), a venture which links the Hanserd Knollys Society's publication of the Fenstanton Church Book with the recent individual church records, of Chesham (1985) and St Andrew's Street, Cambridge (1991), appearing under the auspices of the Baptist Historical Society and with Roger Hayden's Broadmead, Bristol (1974).¹⁸ The tercentenary edition of the works of John Smyth appeared in two volumes in 1915. Then came the *Baptist Bibliography*, Volume I to 1776 (1916) and Volume II to 1837 (1922). The magnificent card index of Baptist ministers in the Angus Library, a by-product of all this research, is the equivalent of the Surman Index of Congregationalists in Dr Williams's Library.

The *Bibliography* is a real labour of love and remains a useful tool for the Baptist historian. It was adopted, perhaps a little uncritically, by E.C. Starr as the basis for his huge, international *Baptist Bibliography*. Whitley's card index for a third volume, covering the period 1837 to 1939 remains in the Angus Library. Dr Payne believed that Whitley would have published this projected work but was persuaded by Shakespeare to write his *History of British Baptists* as the more urgent task. There is also some evidence that Volume III was about to appear in 1939 when the war prevented its publication. Whitley may still be used, if Starr is unavailable, if one can crack his highly individualistic classification code. Fortunately Starr, in the introduction to his first volume, shows how it can be done and Susan Mills helpfully provides guidance also.¹⁹

Also from his pen are two regional histories which, as Dr Payne again recalled, Whitley regarded as of equal importance to his national survey in understanding English Baptist history. *The Baptists of London* (1928) is a thorough, if unexciting, work which probably deserves Karen Smith's description of his writings as being rather too 'denominational' and 'institutional'.²⁰ *Baptists in the North West*, published as a single work in 1912 and in a joint publication with C.E. Shipley and others' *Baptists of Yorkshire* in 1913, is significantly different. Here Whitley, with a popular, northern clientele in mind, adopts a plain, homespun, almost conversational style, and adds a mass of illustrations of persons and chapels. The book merits comparison with the very similar approach adopted by H.B. Kendall in

his *History of Primitive Methodism*: perhaps the targeted readerships were not dissimilar.

So considerable was Whitley's acquaintance with the facts he was recording that he often gave the impression that he had lived through these past years himself. This can leave his less well-informed readers confused. A single sentence may serve as an example (he is writing about John Fawcett): 'Wainsgate was not finding 10/- a week for its pastor, so he opened a school, and Medley presently drummed up pupils, getting the Walleys to send a lad across and inviting Fawcett to come for a round of preaching in Lancashire and Cheshire'.²¹ This begs at least three questions which the uninitiated might well not be able to answer. Who was Medley? - Samuel of Liverpool. Who were the Walleys? - of Brassey Green, Cheshire. What was the object of the preaching tour? - presumably to raise money to supplement his income. The Lancashire and Cheshire book, however, which again came about fortuitously from J.R. Birkenshaw of Bradford's lending him the original records of the Yorkshire and Lancashire Association, 1787-1836²² is still useful, not least for its two appendices listing the Association's annual meeting places and lectures, and the 'careers of the Churches', i.e. potted histories of each congregation mentioned in the text.

Baptists in the North West was, however, compiled in haste: the six pages of Addenda and Corrigenda which Whitley felt compelled to insert only a year later into the joint volume underlines this. Fortunately the author had much more time to prepare his *History of British Baptists* (1923), which was based on his Angus Lectures given at Regent's Park College the previous year. This standard denominational history, replacing for the earlier period Evans' two-volume work written as long ago as 1864, had considerable strengths. It certainly filled in the religious, social and economic background to Baptist development - if anything, the writer was sometimes led into unhelpful digressions. Again the word 'British' in the title should be emphasized: it was not purely English (as was Dr Underwood's 1947 volume) and paid much attention to growth in the colonies, in the USA and, above all, on the mission field. Baptist Bible translators and Baptist missionary progress formed the concluding section of the book. It was sound too on periodicals and hymnody and on the Baptists' contribution to national politics and culture. One or two of the author's pet themes emerged - like his pessimism over the Victorian Baptists who 'retrograded', especially in regard to the urban masses. There was the customary evocation of 'life' as opposed to 'organization', while the writer's own specialisms showed clearly in the confident handling of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the less firm grip on the later period when the artist tended to paint with much broader strokes. Even so, in regard to the Downgrade, for example, which occurred when Whitley was still a student pastor, he made the interesting suggestions that the growing estrangement between Spurgeon and Parker and the failure of Cuff of Shoreditch to back Spurgeon were key elements in the

controversy; a bundle of notes he wrote on the whole business was used by Dr Payne in his important revisionist postscript on the Downgrade.²³

The *History* reveals that its author was uninterested in and rather suspicious of theological enterprise. His impatience is marked, not just with the High Calvinists, Gill and Brine, but with men such as Isaac Watts and Robert Robinson who spent time on the academic problem of the Person of Christ rather than on converting England. In another work, *Calvinists and Calvinism in England* (1933), he elaborated on this theme: by the 1790s 'the era of creeds and confessions was past for the mass of the Baptists'. Deed now replaced creed. Association Letters were never digested into one Body of Divinity. Fuller and Booth were great writers but their pastoral efforts outshone their literary labours and happily gave them no time to elaborate 'one general Dogmatic Theology'. But is it true to say, as Whitley does, that Fuller taught 'essentially' what Richard Baxter had taught or that Bishop Butler owed much of his inspiration to the Baptist, James Foster? As for the strange chapter with which the 1933 book ends - on the freewill/determinism debate in the twentieth century which begins with James Drummond, ends with Einstein, and takes in A.H. Strong, A.C. Underwood and Wheeler Robinson en route - this is certainly not Whitley at his best.²⁴

He wrote in a dry prose style and his Angus Lectures were recalled by Dr Payne, then a student, without pleasure.²⁵ Yet there was in Whitley a certain sense of sardonic humour which, when it surfaced, could lead, as often happens with men of letters, to penetrating historical appraisal. Two examples must suffice. On Baptist achievement in the sphere of popular education: they have historically been far better at opposing Anglican domination than at evolving a constructive programme or doing much themselves.²⁶ On the Nonconformist Conscience, he notes 'the well-known triad of evils, drinking, gambling and whoring', but laments that there was not enough 'corporate wisdom' to pronounce on matters of social legislation 'where the interests of labour are concerned'.²⁷ Was Whitley among the first Free Churchmen to recognize just how selective and peculiar the Conscience could be?

The *History* was a considerable publication success and was obviously a response to a felt need. It went out of print within three years and a second, revised edition appeared in 1932 with a few emendations, a note on a number of recent books, and a more thorough treatment of Abraham Booth.

Meanwhile Whitley's contributions to the *Transactions* and *Baptist Quarterly* continued, containing some of his best work, later incorporated into his larger volumes. Some of his more significant research deserves to be recalled. Occasionally he errs on details but rarely can such a careful scholar be wrongfooted.²⁸ One of his earliest pieces is a pioneering essay on historiography, the question of Crosby's use of Stinton's manuscript as a source for his *History*. The thesis which has been tested at greatest depth, the dependence of the 1644 London Confession on the Amsterdam Separatists' Confession of 1596, led Barrie

White to vindicate Whitley's conclusions as certainly more plausible than sundry other 'unconvincing suggestions'.²⁹ His belief that the practice of laying on of hands at baptism might reflect the former confirmation practice of Anglican priests turned Baptist was perhaps not so convincing, but his locating the origin of Associations in the defence structures of the Cromwellian armies was sound enough.³⁰

He worked hard to reconstruct the life story and assess the significance of Samuel Eaton and proved that Praise God Barebone was not a Baptist.³¹ Many years before the Abingdon Association manuscript came to light, he had written a fine study of Benjamin Cox, concentrating particularly on his controversy with Collier.³² He solved the mystery of the 'Bunyan christening'³³ and painted a deft portrait of the Paul's Alley church - 'the most learned, the wealthiest, the most progressive of the London Particular Baptist churches'. Mostly his choice of words was eminently judicious: on Keach's authoritarianism, for example: 'he was intolerant of meeting others as equals'.³⁴ A study of George Gosfright, the patron of the Duke of Monmouth, revealed his Baptist background.³⁵ He was sound on the 1689 settlement, noting that the erection of a central meeting place plus a house for the pastor could often cause the outstations of a Baptist 'circuit' to wither away, and that the Baptists seemed hesitant in organizing themselves properly after the weariness engendered by the Great Persecution.³⁶ He rescued the important Loughwood (Devon) church book which had been lost for a hundred years (some of that time spent lying in a barrel), repaired it, read and transcribed it and wrote on its significance.³⁷ He considerably expanded the Evans' list of 1715 as far as the Baptists were concerned and raised the tally of Particular Baptist churches in the 1715-18 period from Evans' meagre figure to a total of 220.³⁸

For the later period his historical judgements became more generalized. As one who exalted life above systems and organization he was impatient with the arid theology of the period up to the 1780s and seemed anxious to hurry the Baptist community out of it. Missionary work and church planting at home and overseas were at the heart of his nineteenth-century concerns: detail began here to take more of a back seat.

Two additional perspectives which Whitley brought to his task deserve to be noted. The first was his reluctance to pursue 'bypaths' of Baptist history, 'billabongs', as he called them. Hence he left Johnsonians and Gadsbyites, but not the Seventh-Day people, to others. The second was his determination not to write Baptist history from a ministerial perspective but to do full justice to the role of lay men and women. Here again his approach was obviously moulded by his earlier study of the history of Christian missions.³⁹

Missionary history was an early enthusiasm which Whitley kept very much alive through these years, and in 1908 he published a really significant book, based on the Gay Lectures delivered the previous year at Louisville, a volume which now seems to be very scarce. His approach to 'missionary achievement' was original, radical

and well ahead of its time. The very arrangement of the book (which contains something about Carey but does not mention the Baptist Missionary Society) was singular. A chapter on 'Failure in Asia' (the ancient Near Eastern Churches, mainly monophysite) was followed by 'Success in Europe', 'The Struggle for Africa', 'Expansion in America' (Latin lands were dealt with before the Anglo-Saxon), and 'Replanting in Asia'. The European contribution was certainly cut down to size. Some of his arguments we have met before: the Persian Church failed because it had no vernacular Bible; missionaries needed only 'the New Testament in all its God-given simplicity', not creeds and confessions, sacramentalism or sacerdotalism; Calvinism was one of the 'three yokes' under which the missionary thrust groaned, the other two being Canterbury and Rome.⁴⁰

Some ideas, however, were new and unexpected. Rome and Islam were seen as very similar and Whitley was prepared to pay tribute to the strengths of each: the heroism of the early Catholic missionaries all over the world, the remarkable Paraguayan experiment, the way the Catholic faith persisted even after the most ferocious persecution. Islam succeeded, especially among black people, because it could offer an egalitarian message and did not try to impose an alien, 'denationalizing' culture, as did so many white Christian missions, while its modern spread was secured by the quiet and confident witness of ordinary lay people, especially traders whose faith was not a private concern as it seemed to be for their European equivalents. Throughout the history of the Church, he identified the Christian faith as being most successfully propagated by lay agency;⁴¹ Roman Britain he saw as a particularly apposite example. At the same time he recognized that exploiters and slave-traders with their evil deeds could rapidly undo the good which others had done.

At the end of the day, in Roman and Islamic societies, 'they have received enough of the truth to be inoculated against it mildly and to be fortified against it in an unadulterated form'.⁴² Whitley frankly recognized that world religions were eclectic and borrowed shamelessly from each other, while the older beliefs and practices persisted for centuries in degraded forms. The Christian mission should therefore appraise other religions, particularly Islam, in depth. It clearly had to be prepared to utilize the printing press, education, medicine and, above all, female gifts and graces in its evangelizing task.⁴³ The missionary should adapt and incorporate rather than condemn and decry: 'the Pauline lesson is to be all things to all men'. Different peoples had different religious needs. Even the congregational form of church polity, 'blindly adopted from Robert Browne', might, if necessary, be discarded. The believers' churches of one town or area could well be regarded as one church; the work of twenty-five different missionary societies in the Malay peninsula could well be subsumed into one church, 'compromising on many details and producing a type of Christianity conducive to local habits'. In India the Christian missionary should not hesitate to aim for the lowest classes, in China for the highest. At all times he or she should build up a native church as quickly as

possible and then pass on to other fields.⁴⁴ All this led to the conclusion that mission should become a scientific study and missionary principles be based not just on New Testament precedents but on the guidance provided by an Augustine, a Gregory the Great, a Daniel of Winchester or an Alcuin.⁴⁵

Two subsidiary interests pursued by Whitley throughout this period were education and the history of the Bible in English. In both his major pastorates he served on County Education and University Committees; during his Droitwich pastorate he served as Worcestershire County Council's representative on the Council of Birmingham University. As early as June 1915 he had written for the *Educational Record* an article on 'The Contribution of Nonconformity to Education until the Victorian Era'. At a very busy period of his life he won the Jay Gould Prize of \$1000 for an essay on the Douai Version (published in *Roman Catholic and Protestant Bibles*, edited by M.J. Jacobus, 1905), and in 1910 he collaborated with the Rector of Wavertree and the Revd W. F. Moulton (Wesleyan) in giving a series of lectures on 'Modern Christendom' in Liverpool under the auspices of Trinity College, Dublin. The lectures were published and the two authors, who were judicious and fair-minded throughout, paid tribute in their preface to the ecumenical spirit currently prevailing. This marked a considerable liberalization of Whitley's attitudes compared with the intensities of the recent past.

3 THE PASTOR

A mellowing is observable in other spheres also. From 1902 to 1917 Whitley was minister at Fishergate, Preston, an important pulpit in the North West. Here his personal qualities, pleasantness, humility, generosity and a quiet sense of humour, came to the fore. His ministry was not spectacular but the church responded well to his learned preaching. In a strongly Catholic town he felt the need for fellowship with his fellow evangelicals, Nonconformist and Anglican alike. On one occasion, provoked by the Jesuits, he challenged the Catholic community with a series of Protestant lectures. His pastoral ministry in the war years, especially to families bereaved by the fighting, was long remembered, as was his canvassing on behalf of the National Savings movement.

Droitwich too was a significant appointment. Here Whitley, who had quit Preston in grief over his second wife's death in childbirth, served from 1917 until his retirement in 1928. *The Story of Droitwich* (1923), *Baptist Association Life in Worcestershire* (1926) and *Baptists in Stourbridge* (1929) are memorials of his work here. Most notable was his friendship with the Bishop of Worcester who, noting his interest in ancient buildings, gave him a supervisory role over threatened and already redundant churches in one Deanery.

All this time he was moving ever closer to the centre of denominational life. It is not often realized that the highly successful organization of the first Baptist World Alliance Congress in London in July 1905 was largely Whitley's work. Shakespeare had pressed him to do this and his church generously gave him three days a week

leave in the early months of 1905 to attend to the vast amount of correspondence involved. Later on he was to act as minutes secretary for several more BWA Congresses and to edit the Reports of the Third (1923) and Fourth (1928). To accompany the latter, he produced an *International Baptist Calendar, Catalogue and Map*. His role within the world Baptist community was now assured. So too at home: elected a personal member of the Baptist Union in 1888, a Council member in 1905, and an honorary member of the Council in 1933, he was for many years Chairman of the Education Committee and a member of the Ministerial Recognition Committee. There are ministers alive today who recall being interviewed by him. In 1905 and again in 1912, at the request of the BU Publications Department, he revised Charles Williams' *Baptist Catechism*, while in 1929 he drew upon his pastoral experience to write, with M.E. Aubrey, *The Work of a Minister*. In 1927, disappointed that the Baptist Union was not to be represented at the Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne, he and Dr J.E. Roberts of Manchester attended unofficially and at their own expense.⁴⁶ The following year, aged sixty-seven, he retired and removed to Chelmsford to be closer to two of his children, his daughter, Carey, who was by this time looking after Romford's housing stock, and his son, Theo, who was medical Superintendent at St John's Hospital, Chelmsford.

4 LATER YEARS

The final phase of Whitley's life was not as productive as he and others might have hoped. Retirement began in vigorous style, as he revived another of his life-long interests, hymnody. He was a keen member of the Hymn Society and the Hymn Tune Association. He had been made a member of the Psalms and Hymns Trust in 1926 and served on both the Hymns and Tunes Committees, working on the *Revised Baptist Church Hymnal*. When this came out in 1933, Whitley published a small book, with a brilliant final chapter by Eric Thiman, on the history of congregational hymn singing. This was remarkable for its range and its appreciation of the significance of Luther, Calvin, the Anabaptists and Black Americans in the evolution of the hymn. Unhappily, women hymn-writers were almost totally neglected: perhaps Whitley had transferred his personal dislike of Mrs Dutton⁴⁷ to the whole genus! Two years later he pressed his encyclopaedic knowledge of individual Baptists and others of the past into good service when he produced with Carey Bonner, *A Handbook to the Baptist Church Hymnal*, a good 'Companion', despite Hugh Martin's later strictures on it. This in turn inspired him to research in depth the Rippon *Selection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes* of 1791, about which he wrote an important article for the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1941.

Meanwhile his ecumenical involvement continued. In an article in the *Quarterly* for April 1931 he took up the theme of his original Melbourne LLD, the idea of federation as the key to the Churches' working together, political co-operation down-under serving as a model for denominational rapprochement at home. He appealed to political, economic and trade-union history to prove the feasibility and success of

the federal ideal. The Churches' agreement on an efficient and intelligent pooling of resources was an imperative in an increasingly secular world. Again in a series of articles in the *Quarterly*, he sought to bring to the attention of a Baptist readership the debates currently going on in the Anglican and Orthodox Churches.

This all culminated in 1932 with his editing *The Doctrine of Grace: A Report and Papers of a Theological Committee of the Faith and Order Movement* (SCM Press). Much water had flowed under the bridge since the strident days of 1903. Now the Baptist man of letters found himself successfully requesting a Foreword from Archbishop Temple and corresponding with an Orthodox Bishop, the Anglican Bishop of Gloucester, and the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, concerning their respective contributions to the book. An essay from a Roman Catholic was sought but was declined.

All this time his old love, the English Bible, continued to fascinate him. His new home in Essex suggested a further line of research: in 1935 he contributed to the *Essex Review* 'Thomas Matthew of Colchester and Matthew's Bible of 1537', published in book form in Chelmsford in 1935, to be followed by *The English Bible under the Tudor Sovereigns*, a Quadricentennial Celebration (1937). The typescript for another book, 'Gathering and Using the New Testament' (1939) is preserved in the Angus Library: the war apparently prevented publication.

Nor did his interest in British and, particularly, American Baptist history decline. In 1934, for example, he produced his richly illustrated study of Thomas Helwys, later reprinted from the *Baptist Quarterly* in booklet form. There was at this late stage in his life an added urgency to his historical enquiries, an endeavour to relate them to the problems of his own day: the experience of long pastorates in the past had much to teach in an age of short ones; old church covenants gave guidance on how they might be reformulated for a later age.⁴⁸

In the mid-1930s Whitley became ill and his literary productivity began to decline. He resigned both as Secretary of the Baptist Historical Society and Editor of the *Baptist Quarterly*, having held the latter position since 1918, and was elected Vice President as a tribute to his services. He recovered sufficiently to travel to Carmarthen in 1937 to lecture to the Old Students there on 'Welsh Influence on American Religious Life', a lively address which amply shows that his sense of humour had not deserted him. Knowing of his recent research into Keach's hymns,⁴⁹ his friends suggested that one ought to be sung at the opening of the Baptist Union Assembly with Whitley as precentor. Smilingly he referred to some of Keach's more outrageous verse and concluded that this was not a good idea.

In the summer of 1946 he wrote his typescript 'Reminiscences', a copy of which is preserved in the Angus. Though occasionally reticent on important matters, his autobiographical sketch reveals a gentle scholar with a thirst for knowledge of all kinds - historical, legal, zoological, armorial, industrial and agricultural. We meet in him a man with a zest for travel, with a remembered enjoyment of scrapes and adventures which seemed to attend him everywhere. There is the sensitive widower,

mourning over family losses, particularly the death of a favourite daughter. And there is a man conscious of the significance of his varied achievements, yet modest and self-effacing for all that. It was his swan song.

Late in 1947 this outstanding scholar-statesman was taken ill again. He died on 18 December at the ripe old age of eighty-six.

NOTES

- 1 William Thomas Whitley, the Baptist historian, should be distinguished from a namesake of approximately the same period who was an art critic and historian. In some library catalogues the two are conflated into one person. Neither secured an entry in the DNB supplement, but both appeared in *Who Was Who 1941-50* (1952).
- 2 A brief summary of Whitley's career was contributed by J. Seymour Price. *BQ* 12, 1946-48, pp.357f.
- 3 *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 1903, p.280. On the next page the Church is defined as 'Christ's agent on earth to win all men to Himself'. The book was never reprinted, though its predecessor of 1897 was reissued by the Kingsgate Press in 1914.
- 4 For two recent critiques of Whitley's ecclesiology see M. Walker, *Baptists at the Table*, 1992, p.8f, and J.H.Y. Briggs, *English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century*, 1994, p.27.
- 5 This is demonstrated by the dates of the founding of the various denominational historical societies: Congregational (1901), Baptist (1908), Presbyterian (1914), and Unitarian (1917).
- 6 B.R. White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, 1983 edition, p.19; R. Hayden, *English Baptist History and Heritage*, 1990, p.9.
- 7 *BQ* 30, 1983-4, p.37.
- 8 Yet Whitley was an out-of-doors man, a keen amateur archaeologist (while in Droitwich he discovered a Roman villa) and a fighter for public rights of way.
- 9 *Baptist and Congregational Pioneers*, 1906, p.10.
- 10 See R. Hayden in ed. K. W. Clements, *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 1983, p.43. Shakespeare's thesis has been taken up again recently by S. Bracklow in his *Communion of Saints*, 1988.
- 11 See I. Sellers, 'Edwardians, Anabaptists and the Problem of Baptist Origins'. *BQ* 29, 1981-2, p.97f; P. Toews, *Mennonites and Baptists*, 1993, p.63f.
- 12 Vol.1, 1909, p.ix; W.T. Whitley and W. F. Moulton, *Studies in Modern Christendom*, 1910, pp.100-16.
- 13 *History of British Baptists*, 1923, p.17; *BQ* 2, 1924-5, p.30.
- 14 *History of British Baptists*, 1923, p.18. There is some suggestion that later still, in the 1930s and 1940s, Whitley returned to a more favourable attitude to the Anabaptists/Mennonites, especially their peace testimony.
- 15 The importance of General Baptist studies, as part of the Unitarian tradition, only emerges with Burgess. He too only comes into his own after the death in 1900 of James Martineau who had a curious aversion to this little group of churches.
- 16 H.L. Short of Manchester College, Oxford, edited the *Hibbert* from 1962 to 1968, when the Trustees ceased to support it on the grounds that it was no longer economically viable.
- 17 Mr Maguire assures the present writer that the ethos of the surviving General Baptist churches is still rather different from that of the wider Unitarianism of which they find themselves a part. The same is even more true of the now evangelical Mill Yard Seventh-Day Church, once a member of the Assembly and currently meeting within the shadow of Tottenham Hotspur Football Ground. During the past few decades it has been joined by at least three other new Seventh-Day Baptist causes, mainly Afro-Caribbean, a fact which might surprise readers of *The Seventh-Day Men* by Bryan Ball (1994), who seems anxious to hasten all these churches to their demise. Two typescript histories of the Seventh-Day Baptists, written by Whitley, survive in the Angus Library.
- 18 These original church books were 'loaned' to Whitley by Eustace Little who farmed near Princes Risborough: a good illustration of the haphazard nature of record-keeping and research in those far-off days.
- 19 *BQ* 34, 1991-2, pp.282-3.

- 20 *BQ* 34, 1991-2, p.80. 'London' takes the temperature of the denomination in the metropolis at several dates: 1641, 1691, 1741, 1841, and does not go much beyond the formation of the London Baptist Association in 1865. The lists of churches, ministers and sites of previous buildings at the end of the book are still valuable.
- 21 *Baptists of Yorkshire and the North West*, 1913, p.137.
- 22 *BQ* 23, 1969-70, p.212.
- 23 *BQ* 28, 1979-80, p.146f.
- 24 *History of British Baptists*, 1932 edition, p.214; *Calvinism and Evangelicalism in England*, 1933, p.33f; *The Doctrine of Grace*, 1932, p.170.
- 25 *BQ* 22, 1967-8, p.390.
- 26 *History of British Baptists*, 1923 edn., pp.324-5.
- 27 *Baptists of the North West*, p.284.
- 28 Instances of this would be his confusion of Normanton-on-Stour with Normanton le Heath (*BQ* 25, 1973-4, p.377), of Abraham with Timothy Ransome (*BQ* 12, 1967-8, p.175), and his omission of the Bedmond Road General Baptist Church from his London history.
- 29 B. R. White in *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS 19, 1968, pp.570f.
- 30 *BQ* 26, 1975-6, p.151; B. R. White, *English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, p.66.
- 31 *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society*, 1, 1908-9, p.219f.
- 32 *ibid.*, 6, 1918-9, pp.50-9.
- 33 *ibid.*, 2, 1910-11, pp.255f.
- 34 *History of British Baptists*, 1923 edn, pp.201, 178.
- 35 *Baptist Bibliography I*, 1916, p.218.
- 36 *History of British Baptists*, p.215. Stephen Copson, however, believes that Baptist difficulties after 1689 were more likely due to lack of resources, both financial and administrative (*English Baptist Records*, 3, *Northern England*, 1991, pp.6-9).
- 37 *Transactions* 4, 1914-5, pp.129-44.
- 38 *ibid.*, 2, 1910-11, p.95f.
- 39 *History of British Baptists*, 1932 edn, p.viii.
- 40 *Missionary Achievement*, 1908, pp.21, 52, 69, 101, 154, 181.
- 41 *ibid.*, pp.141, 145, 154, 198-9, 227-9. See also *History of British Baptists*, 1932 edn., p.80.
- 42 *Missionary Achievement*, p.173.
- 43 Christianity, Whitley believed, had one supreme advantage over all its rivals: it had a message for women. *ibid.*, pp.40, 94, 142.
- 44 *ibid.*, pp.51, 87, 216. 'Studies' describes the missionary as a 'passing phenomenon'.
- 45 *Missionary Achievement*, pp.105, 188. There is in this book a marked anti-Germanism, directed both against German Higher Criticism, 'conducted in a spirit which has nothing Christian about it', and against the Kaiser's patronizing the Islamic world.
- 46 ed. K.W. Clements, *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 1983, p.56.
- 47 *History of British Baptists*, p.214.
- 48 Whitley's correspondence on this and other matters has never been properly sorted and indexed but is to be found in the Angus Archivist's Room, Box II 390/391.
- 49 *BQ* 6, 1932-33, pp.370f; 7, 1934-35, pp.227f.
- 50 *BQ* 10, 1940-41, p.369f.

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CUMULATIVE INDEXES

Cumulative Indexes to Volumes XXI-XXXI and to Volumes XXXII-XXXVI will be available from mid August on disc in ASCII format. These will cost £10-00 each and may be obtained from the Treasurer, Revd T.S.H. Elwyn, 28 Dowthorpe Hill, Earls Barton, Northampton, NN6 0PB.

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NB: In bibliographic references in the *Baptist Quarterly*, if the place of publication is not given, London should be assumed.