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# Samuel Pearce (1766-99): An Example of Missional Spirituality

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## I Introduction

In March 1815 the English Particular (Calvinistic) Baptist journal, the *Baptist Magazine*, carried a review of a volume of missionary correspondence, published the previous year, which included some letters written by the late Samuel Pearce (1766-99). The anonymous reviewer commented especially on these letters, declaring that, like their author, they were full of 'tender' benevolence and 'ardent' piety. He further commented that if his readers already had in their possession the 'excellent Memoirs of [Pearce's] life, published by Mr Fuller' then the letters in this new volume would need no recommendation from him.<sup>1</sup> Andrew Fuller's (1754-1815) *Memoirs of Pearce* had first been published in 1800 and had enjoyed a wide circulation, with a sec-

ond edition appearing a year later.<sup>2</sup> The review concluded with the following words,

[T]he spirit which animated Pearce did not die with him. His falling mantle, through the publication of his memoirs, has descended upon others; and we know there are some young men, now in the ministry, whose thoughts were first directed to the sacred employment by reading the letters of Samuel Pearce. May similar beneficial effects attend the present publication.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *Baptist Magazine* (BM), Vol. VII (London: W. Button, 1815), 119. The volume reviewed was *Missionary Correspondence: Containing Extracts of Letters from the late Mr Samuel Pearce... and from Mr John Thomas* (London: T. Gardiner and Son, 1814).

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Fuller, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Samuel Pearce... with Extracts from Some of his Most Interesting Letters* (Clipstone: J.W. Morris, 1st edn., 1800; 2nd edn., 1801). I have worked from the first edition. The 3rd edn. (Dunstable: J.W. Morris, 1808) is an important one as it was the last over which Fuller had control. He may also have had some input into the fourth edition (London: W. Baynes *et al*, 1816), which appeared the year after his death. Michael A.G. Haykin is preparing a critical edition of the *Memoir*, due to be published by Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>3</sup> BM, Vol. VII, 119.

Sixteen years after Pearce's death, he was still being held up as an example of piety to be emulated;<sup>4</sup> fifteen years after they had first appeared, Fuller's *Memoirs* of the man who had been his close friend remained influential.

As this review in the *Baptist Magazine* suggests, Samuel Pearce was a significant figure in eighteenth-century Particular Baptist life, despite his having died so young. This article firstly offers a brief biographical sketch of this neglected but important Baptist pastor, one which sets the man in his wider context and seeks to show why he was considered so noteworthy, especially as an exemplar of spirituality.<sup>5</sup> In the second half of the article Fuller's *Memoirs*, upon which Pearce's reputation largely rested, are analysed, with key themes isolated and evaluated. Fuller was himself one of the foremost Calvinistic Baptist ministers of his day and alongside the cross-cultural missionary William Carey (1761-1834) probably the best known. He was a pastor, theologian and missionary statesman of the first rank.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a range of positive references to Pearce scattered throughout Vol. VII of the *BM*. See, for example, 228; 295; 489.

<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed treatment of Pearce's life, see the fine biographical sketch by Michael A.G. Haykin in, *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2012), 1-41. The rest of the book is a carefully edited collection of Pearce's letters, many of which are published in Haykin's book for the first time.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of Fuller, see Peter J. Morden, *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754-1815)* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015).

In the analysis of the *Memoirs* offered here the focus is, once again, on spirituality (with 'spirituality' understood as more than just the 'interior life of the soul'; it also encompasses the way that life is expressed and, crucially, lived<sup>7</sup>). In Fuller's view, Pearce embodied the ideal of evangelical Particular Baptist spirituality. In writing his friend's *Memoirs* he wanted to encourage others to emulate his piety,<sup>8</sup> the same concern which was later expressed by the *Baptist Magazine* reviewer.

Consequently, as well as illuminating Pearce's life and ministry, the *Memoir* gives us a window onto the practical piety that leading Particular Baptists valued. This was the type of missional spirituality they believed had underpinned a period of great advance for the churches and one which they sought to commend to a new generation.

## II Biographical Sketch

Samuel Pearce was born on 20 July 1766, in the town of Plymouth in the south west of England. His parents were Particular Baptists but, according to his own testimony he turned from his Christian background, and followed 'evil' and 'wicked inclinations',<sup>9</sup> although he continued attending chapel. His conversion came in 1782 when he heard a sermon from Isaiah Birt

<sup>7</sup> Cf. my comments in Peter J. Morden, 'Communion with Christ and his People': *The Spirituality of C.H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010), 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Memoirs*, 288.

<sup>9</sup> *Memoirs*, 73-74. For the information in this paragraph, see *Memoirs*, 73-76.

(1758-1837), a young man who was 'on trial' as potential co-pastor of the Plymouth church. 'I believe', Pearce said later, that 'few conversions were more joyful. The change produced in my views, feelings, and conduct, was so evident to myself, that I could no more doubt of its being from God, than of my existence. I had the witness in myself, and was filled with peace and joy unspeakable.'<sup>10</sup> On his seventeenth birthday he was baptised as a believer and became a member of the Plymouth church.<sup>11</sup>

Pearce was working as an apprentice silversmith but a call to pastoral and preaching ministry was soon discerned. In 1786 he was sent to the Bristol Baptist Academy to train.<sup>12</sup> This Academy had been established thanks to a deed of gift given in 1679, although it was only from the 1720s, under the leadership of first Bernard Foskett (1685-1759) and then Hugh Evans (1712-81), that the vision truly became a reality.<sup>13</sup> The Bristol Academy that welcomed Pearce had never capitulated to the 'high Calvinism' which had become the dominant theol-

ogy in many Particular Baptist churches in England.

High Calvinists held it was not the 'duty' of the unconverted to believe the gospel, since total depravity rendered them incapable of doing so. Consequently, it was not considered the duty of preachers to offer the gospel to all. This belief helped foster an insular ecclesiology and militated against vigorous evangelistic activity; indeed, in the church in which Andrew Fuller grew up in Soham, Cambridgeshire, the pastor 'had little or nothing to say to the unconverted'.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Bristol was committed to a more expansive, evangelistically minded brand of Calvinism.<sup>15</sup> By the time Pearce arrived as a student, leadership of the Academy had passed to Hugh Evans' son, Caleb (1737-91). Caleb Evans was a committed evangelical and an enthusiast for the writings of the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58).<sup>16</sup>

At Bristol, Pearce's passion for evangelism grew. On one occasion he preached in a simple hut to a group of between thirty and forty coal miners, reducing them to tears and weeping himself as he spoke of the cross of Christ.<sup>17</sup> Understandably, he was high-

<sup>10</sup> *Memoirs*, 75.

<sup>11</sup> Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism Among Eighteenth-Century Baptist Ministers Trained at Bristol Academy, 1690-1791* (Didcot: Baptist Historical Society, 2006), 225.

<sup>12</sup> *Memoirs*, 73; 76.

<sup>13</sup> See Anthony R. Cross, 'The Early Bristol Tradition as a Seedbed for Evangelical Reception among British Baptists, c.1720-c.1770', in Anthony R. Cross, Peter J. Morden, and Ian M. Randall (eds), *Pathways and Patterns in History: Essays on Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Modern World in Honour of David Bebbington* (London: Baptist Historical Society / Spurgeon's College, 2015), 50-77.

<sup>14</sup> John Ryland, Jr., *The Work of Faith, the Labour of Love, and the Patience of Hope Illustrated in the Life and Death of the Rev. Andrew Fuller* (London: Button and Son, 2nd edn., 1818), 11. For more on high Calvinism and the extent to which Particular Baptists had adopted this theology, see Morden, *Fuller*, 15-20; 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> On this see, Hayden, *Continuity and Change*, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> For Caleb Evans, see Cross, 'Early Bristol Tradition', 66-70; 74-76.

<sup>17</sup> *Memoirs*, 108, 247; S. Pearce Carey, *Samuel Pearce M.A., The Baptist Brainerd* (London: Carey Press, n.d. [1922]), 83.

ly regarded in the Academy.

It is worth pausing to note the evangelical nature of Pearce's early experiences, training and developing ministry. The evangelical revival of George Whitefield (1714-70), John Wesley (1703-91) and Howell Harris (1714-73) had been sweeping through the British Isles since the 1730s.<sup>18</sup> By Pearce's day it was beginning to have a significant, shaping effect on Particular Baptist life, with the influence of high Calvinism diminishing, although it remained strong in some areas.<sup>19</sup> The evangelical movement was both doctrinal and experiential, emphasising the Bible, the cross, conversion, and activity in the cause of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Pearce's conversion was due to evangelical, invitational gospel preaching: Birt was himself Bristol-trained, and had imbibed Caleb Evans' theology and practical, applied approach.<sup>21</sup> Pearce's description of his conversion, with the emphases on felt joy and assurance of faith was typical of evangelicalism too; indeed, elements of his experience are redolent of that of John Wesley's, who, in 1738, had felt his heart 'strangely warmed' and 'felt

[he] did trust in Christ', receiving full 'assurance' of salvation.<sup>22</sup>

Pearce's experience fitted the classic evangelical mould. He then followed Birt by studying under Caleb Evans himself. Finally, his approach to preaching, typified by his experiences with the miners, was evangelical, both in content (the focus on the cross), in delivery (applied), and in effect (his hearers were deeply moved). The young Samuel Pearce was both Baptist and evangelical.

As he came to the end of his course at Bristol, Pearce was recommended to the Particular Baptist church meeting in Cannon Street, Birmingham. He was called as their pastor, and ordained on Wednesday 18 August 1790. Caleb Evans preached at the ordination service, and the minister from a church some sixty miles away in Kettering, Northamptonshire—Andrew Fuller—led in prayer. Pearce submitted a report of his own ordination to the *Baptist Annual Register*. In it he said that 'Mr Fuller...implored the divine blessing on the new relation which the church had then formed.'<sup>23</sup> Such heartfelt prayer would have resonated with the new pastor.

This was probably the first time the two men met. As to theology and outlook, they held to similar beliefs. As a

<sup>18</sup> See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-74, for a description of the Revival and its characteristics which includes material on modern evangelicalism's impact on sections of 'Old Dissent', including the Particular Baptists.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in Suffolk and Norfolk in the east of England.

<sup>20</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 5-17.

<sup>21</sup> See Donald M. Lewis (ed.), *The Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860 (DEB)* (2 Vols; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), Vol. I, 101.

<sup>22</sup> *The Works of John Wesley* (eds Richard P. Heitzenrater and Frank Baker) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975- ), Vol. XVIII, 249-50. Whether Wesley's experience can rightly be described as his 'conversion' has been warmly debated. On this, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1989), 145-57.

<sup>23</sup> John Rippon (ed.), *The Baptist Annual Register*, Vol. I, 1790-93 (London: Dilly, Brown and James, 1793), 517.

youth Fuller had been brought up in a church that espoused high Calvinism, as already noted. But he had abandoned this approach to embrace an evangelical Calvinism, the contours of which were shaped by the theology of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>24</sup> This shift in thinking and praxis was facilitated, in part, by his friendship with the Bristol trained minister John Sutcliff (1752–1814).<sup>25</sup> Pearce and Fuller were like-minded and they would become firm friends.

Pearce was the evangelistically-minded pastor of the Birmingham church for the rest of his life. As a minister he gave himself wholeheartedly to his work. Birmingham was England's second city and the leading industrial centre of the Midlands. Birt visited his convert in 1792 and described the country near Birmingham as full of 'coal and iron works', speaking evocatively of a land of 'burning, of smoke, and of terror'.<sup>26</sup>

In this urban centre Pearce ministered with remarkable effectiveness. 335 new members joined the church during his pastorate.<sup>27</sup> In one five-month period he baptised almost forty people, nearly all of whom he described

as 'newly awakened'.<sup>28</sup> One of those who came to Christ in the early days of his time at Cannon Street was Sarah Hopkins (1771–1804), and in 1791 she became Samuel Pearce's wife. She was a woman of deep piety and their marriage was a happy one.<sup>29</sup>

One incident which helps illustrate his ministry also relates to Andrew Fuller and can be inserted here. Pearce was preaching in 1794 at Guilsborough, Northamptonshire, at the opening of a new meeting house. A number of other ministers were in attendance, among them Fuller. Pearce's sermon was so effective he was asked to speak again the next day, with the service beginning at 5.00 a.m.. The early start was to enable labourers to attend before they started work.

After this second sermon had been given, Fuller declared how much he had appreciated the content of the message. He suggested there were some issues with the structure however. 'I thought', Fuller said, 'you did not seem to close when you had really finished... you seemed, as it were, to begin again at the end—how was it?' According to Francis Cox (1783–1853), who was present, the preacher was reluctant to respond but after being pressed for an answer eventually said,

Well, my brother, you shall have the secret... Just at the moment I was about to resume my seat, thinking I had finished, the door opened, and I saw a poor man enter, of the work-

<sup>24</sup> See Chris Chun, *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Morden, *Fuller*, 56–59.

<sup>26</sup> Isaiah Birt, Diary entry, 7 June 1793, cited in John Birt, 'Memoir of the Late Rev. Isaiah Birt', *The Baptist Magazine*, Vol. XXX (London: G. Wightman, 1838), 107. Birt is describing the industrialisation that marked the landscape especially to the north and west of the city.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Ivimey, *A History of the English Baptists... Vol. IV* (London: Taylor Hinton, Holdsworth and Ball, 1830), 543.

<sup>28</sup> Pearce to William Steadman, 8 Feb 1793, *Memoirs*, 100. Probably the five-month period referred to was in 1792.

<sup>29</sup> *Memoirs*, 78. For more detail, see the evidence collected by Haykin, *Joy Unspeakable*, 18–24.

ing class; and from the sweat on his brow, and the symptoms of his fatigue, I conjectured that he had walked some miles to this early service, but that he had been unable to reach the place till the close. A momentary thought glanced through my mind—here may be a man who never heard the gospel, or it may be he is one that regards it as a feast of fat things; in either case, the effort on his part demands one on mine. So with the hope of doing him good, I resolved at once to forget all else, and, in despite of criticism, and the apprehension of being thought tedious, to give him a quarter of an hour.<sup>30</sup>

Pearce had finished his message, but continued preaching just for this man. This was an example of what Fuller would later term Pearce's 'holy love'—a heartfelt love for God, the gospel and people which was central to the piety they so admired.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to ministry at Cannon Street and his preaching elsewhere, Pearce was involved in the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society (henceforth the BMS) in 1792. He was present at the Society's founding meeting on 2 October 1792 at Kettering, Northamptonshire, and arrived at the second meeting at Northampton, which

was on 31 October 1792, with a gift of £70. This had been collected from his Cannon Street congregation in the intervening period.<sup>32</sup> £70 was an astonishing sum, given that the total amount of subscriptions raised at Kettering had been only a little over £13. Pearce's gift, said John Ryland Jr. (1753-1825), another prominent Particular Baptist who was present at both meetings, 'put new spirits into us all.'<sup>33</sup> The Cannon Street pastor came also with a proposal that an auxiliary society should be formed, based in Birmingham, to help support the new venture. This was accepted and Pearce was welcomed onto the full BMS committee.<sup>34</sup>

It is easy to underestimate the significance of the BMS, given its humble beginnings among a group of English Dissenters. Yet, as Brian Stanley states, the Society's foundation 'marks a turning point in the history of Christian missionary endeavour'.<sup>35</sup> There were precedents for Protestant cross-cultural missionary effort, for instance in the work of David Brainerd amongst Native Americans and in the efforts of the Moravians, for example in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, the BMS helped spark the formation of many other 'voluntary societies' seeking to engage in

<sup>30</sup> Francis A. Cox, *History of the Baptist Missionary Society* (2 vols; London: T. Ward and G. & J. Dyer, 1842), Vol. I, 52–53. It should be noted that Cox was only a boy at the time of the incident, and so it is unlikely he captured Pearce's actual words in his later account. Cox went on to train at Bristol and enjoyed a significant ministry in London. See *DEB*, Vol. I, 263–64.

<sup>31</sup> *Memoirs*, 242.

<sup>32</sup> Anon. [Andrew Fuller?], 'An Account of the Particular Baptist Society (BMS)...including a Narrative of its Rise and Plan', in Rippon (ed.), *The Baptist Annual Register*, Vol. I, 1790–93, 376; *Memoirs*, 99. The BMS was originally known as the 'Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel Among the Heathen'.

<sup>33</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 150.

<sup>34</sup> 'An Account of the Particular Baptist Society', 377.

<sup>35</sup> Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1792–1992* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), 2.



overseas mission, based both in Britain and North America.<sup>36</sup> Pearce was an important member of the group who helped to establish the BMS, and hence he was involved in something of global significance. More will be said about his passion for cross-cultural mission in the second half of this article.

Pearce's ministry in Birmingham continued, and in June 1796 he also visited Ireland and preached there, having responded to an invitation from the General Evangelical Society in Dublin.<sup>37</sup> The Christians in Dublin were so taken with Pearce that he was urged to stay, and offered a generous stipend to minister at a church in a well-to-do area of the city. When he demurred, arrangements were proposed which would necessitate the Englishman being in Ireland for only part of each year, perhaps for as little as three months. Again Pearce declined, this time after a short period of reflection and prayer. As we shall see, he had wanted to go overseas under the auspices of the BMS, but had not been accepted. Yet he could not be tempted away from his Birmingham congregation by what Fuller called 'the most flattering prospects of a worldly nature'.<sup>38</sup>

Pearce would almost certainly have been unsuitable for overseas service with the BMS due to his delicate health. From the early 1790s onwards he was often unwell, and in 1798 he was caught in a rainstorm, developing

a fever he could not shake off. In the final months of his life he spent some time in Plymouth in a vain attempt to recover some strength. From there he wrote to his church, a letter which included the following,

You, beloved, who have found the peace speaking blood of the atonement, must not be satisfied with what you have already known or enjoyed. The only way to be constantly happy, and constantly prepared for the most awful changes which we must all experience, is to be constantly *looking* and *coming* to a dying Savior... if you thus live (and oh that you may daily receive fresh life from Christ so to do) 'the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds', and you will be filled with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory'.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Pearce quoted the same text (1 Peter 3:8) he had cited in his earlier account of his conversion. He returned to Birmingham, but his condition continued to deteriorate. For the whole of August it seems he was unable to write, although he did receive visitors and was able to communicate briefly with some of them.<sup>40</sup>

The diagnosis was 'consumption' (that is pulmonary tuberculosis) and it was clear he was slipping away. He died on 10 October 1799. Fuller heard the news whilst he was on a speaking tour of Scotland on behalf of the BMS. On 19 October he composed a letter to Sarah Pearce which included the comments, 'Try, while your mind is warm, to draw [i.e. write a few lines on] his

<sup>36</sup> For more detail, see Morden, *Fuller*, 2; 97; 109-23; 162-81.

<sup>37</sup> *Memoirs*, 146. Birt, who spent two months in Dublin with the same Society in 1792, had probably recommended his friend. See 'Memoir of Isaiah Birt', 107.

<sup>38</sup> *Memoirs*, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Pearce to the 'Church in Cannon-street', 31 May 1799, in *Memoirs*, 224-25.

<sup>40</sup> *Memoirs*, 238-39.



character. Memoirs of his life must be published.<sup>41</sup> Soon he would personally make good on this commitment.

### III Andrew Fuller's Memoirs of Samuel Pearce

Fuller had been thinking of Pearce's *Memoirs*—and indeed about writing them himself—for several months before he wrote to Sarah from Scotland. In a letter to his ailing friend on 30 August, he declared his intentions, reassuring Pearce,

[Y]ou need not fear that I will puff [up] your character, any more than you would mine. We are all of us, God knows it, poor unworthy creatures. Yet the truth may be told to the glory of sovereign grace; and I long to express my inextinguishable affection for you in something more than words, I mean by doing something that shall be of use to your family.<sup>42</sup>

In his final comment, Fuller indicated he would donate the profits from the sales of any work to Sarah, as indeed happened.<sup>43</sup> Despite his eagerness to write Pearce's life, and the benefits he thought would accrue from it—financial in the case of Sarah; spiritual in the case of the reading public—he did

not find the book easy to write due to the pressures he was under. He was working full tilt in the years 1799-1801 as he gave himself increasingly to the work of the BMS as its secretary, whilst continuing as pastor at Kettering. A letter from March 1800 captures his dilemma,

Pearce's memoirs are now loudly called for. I sit down almost in despair... My wife looks at me with a tear ready to drop, and says, 'My dear, you have hardly time to speak to me.' My friends at home are kind, but they also say, 'You have no time to see us or know us, and you will soon be worn out.' Amidst all this there is 'Come again to Scotland—come to Portsmouth—come to Plymouth—come to Bristol'.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, as already noted, Pearce's *Memoirs* did appear later that year. It was the only book-length biography Fuller ever wrote. It is to three of the central themes of these *Memoirs* which we now turn.

### IV A Biblical, Calvinistic, Evangelical Theology

Fuller included much material which emphasised the essential biblicism of his subject. For Pearce, the Bible was an 'inspired book' which should be received 'not as the word of man, but as the word of God'.<sup>45</sup> This commitment was deeply held. As part of a day of fasting and prayer in October 1794 he read the whole of Psalm 119. As he did so he found its focus on God's 'law' res-

41 Andrew Fuller Letter to Sarah Pearce, 19 October 1799, in Carey, *Samuel Pearce*, 216.

42 Andrew Fuller Letter to Samuel Pearce, 30 August 1799, as cited in Ernest A. Payne, 'Some Sidelights on Pearce and his Friends', *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. VII (1934-1935), 275. Fuller appears to have written 'puff off your character'. Probably he meant to write 'puff up', i.e. 'inflate'.

43 See the 'Advertisement' immediately after the title page of the *Memoirs*.

44 Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Andrew Fuller* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), 91-92.

45 *Memoirs*, 269-70.

onated—had much ‘congruity’—with the ‘breathings of [his] own heart’.<sup>46</sup>

His particular approach to the Bible was christocentric. For him, both the Old and New Testament scriptures pointed to Christ. Some lines he composed around the time he started work as pastor serve to highlight this, as well as illuminating other dimensions of his biblical theology. The verses were entitled ‘On the Scriptures’, the second, third and fifth stanzas of which ran,

*Here in those lines of love I see  
What Christ my Savior did for me;  
Here I behold the wondrous plan  
By which he saves rebellious man.*  
*Here we may view the Savior, God,  
Oppress'd by pain, o'erwhelm'd with  
blood;  
And if we ask the reason, why?  
He kindly says, 'For you I die.'*  
*O boundless grace! O matchless love!  
That brought the Savior from above,  
That caus'd the God for man to die,  
Expiring in an agony.*<sup>47</sup>

The scriptures, the ‘lines of love’ pointed to Christ, in particular to Christ crucified. The cross was the fulcrum of God’s ‘wondrous plan’ of salvation. The horror of the cross is not sidestepped: Christ was ‘Oppress’d by pain’ and ‘o’erwhelm’d with blood’. But it is the theology of the atonement that is the central concern here. The ‘boundless grace’ of God led Christ to die for ‘rebellious’ sinners; indeed, Pearce has Christ saying, ‘For you I die’, applying the message of the cross in a way that is intensely personal.

Elsewhere in the *Memoirs* Fuller includes a letter in which Pearce states his belief in the atonement as the ‘leading truth of the New Testament’.<sup>48</sup> There is much evidence to support Fuller’s own comment on his subject, ‘Christ crucified was his...theme, from first to last’.<sup>49</sup>

Further theological emphases can be discerned in the lines of ‘On the Scriptures’. Pearce’s essential Calvinism is hinted at by the emphasis on God’s sovereignty: God put *his* ‘plan’ of salvation into effect; salvation was all dependent on God’s grace. If his biblicism and crucicentrism were typical of evangelicalism generally, Pearce here reveals himself to be a particular type of evangelical, a Calvinistic one.

His predecessor as pastor of Cannon Street left because he had embraced Wesleyan convictions,<sup>50</sup> but this did not happen with Pearce. Elsewhere in the *Memoirs* there is material indicating his firm rejection of Arminianism,<sup>51</sup> although he could still appreciate and be influenced by the preaching of Arminians, for example the Wesleyan Methodist Thomas Coke (1747–1814).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, he always sought to distinguish between principles and personalities.<sup>53</sup> This was typical of the evangelical Calvinism which character-

<sup>48</sup> Letter ‘To a young man...’, n.d., *Memoirs*, 269.

<sup>49</sup> *Memoirs*, 247.

<sup>50</sup> Ivimey, *History of English Baptists*, Vol. IV, 542.

<sup>51</sup> *Memoirs*, 84–86.

<sup>52</sup> *Memoirs*, 108. For Coke, see *DEB*, Vol. I, 238–39.

<sup>53</sup> A trait that was also evident in his relationships with many Anglicans. See *Memoirs*, 253.

<sup>46</sup> *Memoirs*, 129.

<sup>47</sup> ‘On the Scriptures’, *Memoirs*, 97. The spelling of ‘Savior’ is original to the British first edition.

ised late eighteenth-century Particular Baptists.

Finally, the striking Christological statements in Pearce's stanzas can be noted. Christ came 'from above'; indeed, on the cross 'God' could be viewed. There 'God' was dying for 'man'. The language is explicit; for the author of 'On the Scriptures' there could be no ambiguity. In other poetry he emphasised the humanity of Christ, speaking of him as the 'Friend of sinful man' whose 'humble love' and commitment to do his 'duty' were examples to all.<sup>54</sup> But here it was his divinity which was boldly stated, and this in the context of eighteenth-century debates concerning Christ's deity.

One of the effects of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment was a growth in Unitarianism, a doctrine which ravaged many English General Baptist congregations and influenced some Particular Baptists as well (for example, Robert Robinson [1735-90], the minister of St Andrew's Street Baptist in Cambridge, who became unorthodox on the Trinity later in life). True, Pearce was influenced by the 'enlightened' culture of his day,<sup>55</sup> and he was not immune to some brief doubts about the deity of Christ, confessing to a friend that he had been 'perplexed' about Christology for a short period which coincided with his reading of several Socinian authors, including Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), who between 1780 and 1791 was based in Birmingham.

But Fuller makes it clear his subject decisively rejected Priestley's ap-

proach.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, according to him, this short struggle led to Pearce holding even more 'firmly' to orthodox views of the person of Christ.<sup>57</sup> In an age when Unitarianism was culturally attractive, he remained wedded to an orthodox Christology and to Trinitarianism. Thus, the *Memoirs* contain much material illuminating the essential content of their subject's theology.

## V A Spiritual Theology

Yet the *Memoirs* reveal something further: Pearce's theology was not only 'orthodox' but deeply 'spiritual'; we might say that his was an approach which encompassed both 'head' and 'heart'. So, whilst his vision of doctrinal orthodoxy was essential to his spirituality, the truth had to be prayed and sung and lived. In his reading of Psalm 119 on the aforementioned fast day, he took care to pray slowly through the Psalm, meditating on particular verses. 'Often with holy admiration I paused and read, and thought, and prayed over the verse again', he declared.<sup>58</sup> This same commitment to reflect on truth so it became deeply embedded in his own experience is evident in 'On the Scriptures', with the appreciation of Christ's 'kindness' and the emotional exclamations, 'O boundless grace! O matchless love!' brought on by meditation on the atonement.<sup>59</sup>

Study and devotion were closely integrated in his approach to theology. In

<sup>54</sup> See the verses, 'Excitement to Early Duty: Or, The Lord's-day Morning', *Memoirs*, 96.

<sup>55</sup> On this, see Morden, *Fuller*, 190-91.

<sup>56</sup> *Memoirs*, 84-85.; cf. 247. Socinians rejected, amongst other things, the doctrine of the Trinity.

<sup>57</sup> *Memoirs*, 247.

<sup>58</sup> *Memoirs*, 129.

<sup>59</sup> 'On the Scriptures', *Memoirs*, 97.

a letter dated 19 August 1793 he wrote of the need for both more 'light' (i.e. truth) and 'heat' (meaning 'sincerity and ardour'). Whilst pursuing these twin goals himself he sought to commend them to others. In the letter he spoke also about his preaching to his people 'urging the necessity of *heart religion*'.<sup>60</sup>

Here was what evangelicals habitually called an 'experimental' faith. It was not enough to know about some aspect of doctrinal truth, important as that was. That truth had to be known and experienced in ways that fired the heart and shaped the inner and outer dimensions of Christian discipleship. This was a trait exemplified by Pearce as he appears in the pages of the *Memoirs*. For Fuller, his friend's 'religion was that of the heart'.<sup>61</sup>

The corporate dimensions of learning and devotion were important to Pearce. He was committed not only to 'secret', private prayer but also to family prayer.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, he engaged wholeheartedly in the corporate prayer meetings of his church. On 10 October 1794 he wrote,

Whilst at the prayer meeting to-night, I learned more of the meaning of some passages of Scripture than ever before. Suitable frames of soul are like good lights in which a painting appears to its full advantage. I had often meditated on Phil. iii. 7, 8. and Gal. vi. 14: but never *felt* crucifixion to the world, and dis-

esteem for all that it contains as at that time.<sup>63</sup>

A number of points can be made in respect of this entry from his diary. Firstly, here is further evidence of the importance to Pearce of 'experimental' religion: 'crucifixion to the world' was a truth, the importance of which he had known previously, but he had never 'felt' it in the way he did in this meeting. Secondly, prayerful meditation on the scriptures can be seen again, as was the case with his approach to Psalm 119. Thirdly, and perhaps most strikingly, corporate worship and prayer are the contexts in which a deeper learning is experienced. The meeting had got him into a 'suitable frame of soul', thus shedding 'light' on verses of scripture so they could be seen more clearly.

Pearce's theology then, was doctrinal, 'experimental' and applied. For him the ideal was for God's truth as revealed in Christ to penetrate deeply into heart and mind by the Holy Spirit. To miss this is to fail to understand the man; to grasp this takes us towards the heart of his spirituality.

## VI Outwardly focused

Already the emphasis on the application of scripture to the Christian life has been seen. Truth had to penetrate both mind and heart and then make a difference to the way life was lived. There were some in Pearce's congregation who were, as Fuller put it, 'infected' with an 'antinomian spirit'—they did not believe that Christians were called to obey the moral law. 'Sooth-

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Pearce Letter to William Summers, 19 August 1793, *Memoirs*, 88. Italics original.

<sup>61</sup> *Memoirs*, 242.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, *Memoirs*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> *Memoirs*, 120. Italics original.

ing doctrine was all they desired.' By contrast, Pearce exhorted his Christian hearers to press on in 'practical godliness'.<sup>64</sup> Antinomianism was a significant problem in eighteenth-century Particular Baptist life,<sup>65</sup> with antinomian preachers such as William Huntington (1745-1813) popular.<sup>66</sup> Yet this was a movement evangelicals in the Pearce / Fuller circle were determined to resist.

For Pearce, the Christian life had to be lived with a passion, and so a vital dimension of his 'practical godliness' was activity in the cause of Christ. On the day of prayer and fasting during which he meditated on Psalm 119, he also gave time to 'visiting the wretched, and relieving the needy'.<sup>67</sup> His activity here included a strong social element—'relieving the needy'—but evangelism was the overriding concern of the Pearce presented to us in the *Memoirs*. He engaged in vigorous evangelistic ministry at home and had a deep concern for such work overseas.

On 10 October 1794 he recorded: 'Enjoyed much freedom today in the family [i.e., family devotions]. Whilst noticing in prayer the state of the millions of heathen who know not God, I felt the aggregate value of their immortal souls with peculiar energy.'<sup>68</sup> Pearce threw himself into the work of the BMS and, as already noted, wanted to go overseas himself. In fact, a significant amount of space in the *Mem-*

*oirs* is taken up with letters relating to this and entries from a diary he kept as he waited for the decision of the rest of the BMS committee.<sup>69</sup>

The Cannon Street pastor believed the Great Commission (Mt 28.19-20) was binding on his own generation,<sup>70</sup> a view which was by no means universally held, and he wanted to play his part in fulfilling it.<sup>71</sup> Even when he was turned down by the BMS, he continued to give himself zealously to the cause; in fact, a central reason he was rejected was because he was so important to the promotion of the work of the Society at home.<sup>72</sup> Pearce's piety was an active piety.

At one point in the *Memoirs* Fuller made an important observation, declaring, 'Mr Pearce has been uniformly the spiritual and the active servant of Christ; but neither his spirituality nor his activity would have appeared in the manner they have, but for his engagements in the *introduction of the gospel among the heathen*.'<sup>73</sup> Note first of all that Fuller's understanding of 'spirituality' is different from the one I offered in the Introduction to this article. He appears to limit its meaning to 'spiritual exercises' such as prayer, fasting and meditative Bible reading, together with one's 'heart' relationship with

<sup>64</sup> *Memoirs*, 86-87.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, the comments of Ryland, *Fuller*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> *Memoirs*, 248. For Huntington, see *DEB*, Vol. II, 586-67.

<sup>67</sup> *Memoirs*, 129.

<sup>68</sup> *Memoirs*, 120.

<sup>69</sup> *Memoirs*, ch. 2, 98-141. Fuller's comments are interspersed with these.

<sup>70</sup> *Memoirs*, 122; 124.

<sup>71</sup> See Ronald Davies, 'The Great Commission from Christ to Carey', *Evangel* 14.2 (1996), pp. 46-49.

<sup>72</sup> *Memoirs*, 103; 114.

<sup>73</sup> *Memoirs*, 98. Fuller and Pearce's use of the term 'heathen' can sound pejorative, but it was deployed simply to denote someone who was 'without Christ'.

God: hence the distinction between 'spirituality' and 'activity' which is one I am reluctant to make.

Having established this difference in meaning, Fuller's comments about Pearce can be analysed. I believe they are astute. Firstly, he recognises that both 'spirituality' (as he understands it) and 'activity' were crucial to Pearce. Secondly, he sees both Pearce's 'spirituality' and 'activity' have been decisively shaped by the context of the foundation and development of the BMS, specifically by his own 'engagements' in this work. His was a missional piety. Mission was the outworking of his prayer and devotion but it was also the essential context which shaped that devotion.

In fact, the broader but still focused understanding of spirituality I am working with fits Pearce very well. Even as he endured the illness that would eventually claim his life he would say, 'My soul pants for usefulness more extensive than ever: I long to be an apostle to the world!'<sup>74</sup> To the very last he was expressing an evangelical desire to be active in the pursuit of conversions. This was a crucial dimension of his 'practical godliness'.

If we want to understand Pearce's conception of the spiritual life we need to see him not only in private prayer but as he solicits funding for the BMS, preaches for conversions and gives himself in a whole range of gospel activity. The Pearce that Fuller commended in the pages of his *Memoir* was a man of prayer *and* action, with the two dimensions of discipleship informing and shaping each other. Indeed,

in Fuller's view, 'There have been few men in whom has been united a greater portion of the contemplative and active.'<sup>75</sup> Here was one of the central reasons he wanted to commend the example of Samuel Pearce to others.

## VII Conclusion

Pearce was regarded as having exemplified the spirituality—the practical godliness—which represented evangelical Particular Baptist life at its best. This spirituality was evangelical, with a strong focus on conversion, the Bible and the message of the cross. It was also deeply felt with an emphasis on both personal and corporate devotion. And, perhaps above all, it was active, both moulding and being moulded by missional concerns.

The same 1815 volume of *The Baptist Magazine* in which the review of missionary correspondence appeared also included much material on Andrew Fuller, who died in the May of that year. Fuller's death, coming right at the end of the so-called long eighteenth century, represented a watershed moment in English Particular Baptist life. Leadership of the churches at home and of the BMS was passing to a new generation.

For a whole host of complex factors the evangelical Calvinism typified by Pearce and Fuller fell out of vogue in Baptist life as the nineteenth century progressed (although it enjoyed a significant resurgence in the person of C.H. Spurgeon [1834-92], albeit in a slightly different form). Fuller's *Memoirs* of his friend provide a snapshot

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74 *Memoirs*, 255.

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75 *Memoirs*, 245.



of the spirituality which both helped shape a period of hugely significant missional activity and was in turn shaped by it. It was a spirituality embedded in a particular time and con-

text. And yet there are broad principles here which have the potential to enrich those seeking to pursue 'practical godliness' today.

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