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EDITORIAL

Of our contributors Dr. Jenkins is minister-in-charge at Paddington Chapel, Dr. Cornick is chaplain at Robinson College, Cambridge. Professor Ferguson was until recently President of the Selly Oak Colleges and Professor Davie is at Vanderbilt University, Tennessee. Dr. Jenkins, Dr. Cornick and Professor Ferguson are contributing articles for the first time.

The conversation between Dr. Jenkins and Professor Davie, which moves from Protestant aesthetics to Nonconformist poetics, introduces a tone new to the *Journal*, to which pure historians might object. It is to be hoped that the conversation will continue, perhaps on architecture, or music, or indeed that vanishing art-form, the sermon. Professor Ferguson also introduces a new note: that of reminiscence. His stance is in a firm tradition, not too far removed from that of William Baines, as described by Dr. Cornick. "Abney and the Queen of Crime" provides ammunition for one of Dr. Jenkins's criticisms.

A PROTESTANT AESTHETIC? A CONVERSATION WITH DONALD DAVIE¹

Talk of a Protestant aesthetic sounds to many people like a contradiction in terms. The stereotype has long been established by anti-Protestant propaganda, both ecclesiastical and secularist, that Protestantism is anti-artistic and that Puritanism is a synonym for hatred of pleasure. Giggling London critics on safari still produce their routine sneers about John Knox and the Edinburgh Festival, never raising the question of how it comes about in the first place that Edinburgh manages to mount the most comprehensive artistic festival in the world. Things are beginning to change now, not least through the efforts of Donald Davie himself, but as yet the changes have hardly begun to reach the lumpen-intelligentsia.

Irritating as all this ignorance of Protestant attitudes and artistic achievements may be, it has to be admitted that we can point to very little in the way of Protestant aesthetic theory, especially if the broadly Calvinist tradition is taken as the most characteristic form of Protestantism. P.T. Forsyth's *Christ on Parnassus*, which is still worth reading, contains some valuable hints among much that now seems dated. The French Léon Wencelius produced a careful but less than sparkling book on Calvin's aesthetic in 1937 and the very conservative American Calvinist Henry Van Til offered a few observations in a book on *Calvinism and Culture*, but Donald Davie was breaking new ground for most of us when, in *The Gathered Church*, he asserted that there was such a thing as a Protestant Calvinist aesthetic and that it expressed the virtues of simplicity, sobriety, and measure. These he found exemplified most clearly in the eighteenth century in England, especially in the poetry and hymns of Isaac Watts and in the brief comments Watts made on them.

This is illuminating and exciting, and we can be deeply grateful to Davie for the way in which he called attention to such unfashionable notions in his Clark lectures at Cambridge. He did not elaborate, however, on what simplicity, sobriety, and measure mean outside the area of his own literary concern nor on how they are related to distinctively theological insight. I am incompetent to attempt such elaboration but am convinced that those concerned for Protestant theology should try to respond positively to Davie. I shall suggest some ways in which simplicity, sobriety, and measure might be further analysed and also what else may be said about them. I shall also offer a few comments on some of Davie's other and more contentious statements about the relation between English Dissenting Protestantism and culture.

The roots of simplicity, sobriety, and measure are, indeed, to be found in Calvin but there is not much on which directly to build in Calvin himself. These

1. This paper was originally given at Mansfield College, Oxford, to the John Owen Society.

qualities are not discussed in the *Institutes*, which contain very few references to beauty. I am no Calvin scholar but I understand that what few references there are occur in Calvin's letters and refer to literary style, in particular to the rediscovery of the classics, especially Seneca, than to anything obviously inherent in Reformed theology itself. What can be claimed, and Watts's practice can be adduced in justification of the claim, is that an emphasis on simplicity, sobriety and measure is congruous with Reformed theology. Let me, greatly daring, try to indicate where that congruity lies, and then go on to make an important proviso.

Simplicity I take to refer not so much to the plainness with which a Puritan style is traditionally associated, whether in preaching, conversation or dress, as to sincerity and purity. This may naturally find expression in plainness but it arises out of a concentration on what it believes to be essential. "Purity of heart", as Kierkegaard said much later, "is to will one thing". It is of a piece with that singleness of eye of which the Sermon on the Mount speaks, which enables the whole body to be full of light. Seeing things steadily and seeing them whole, we have no need for covering things up, either by deviousness and guile or by elaborate surface decoration which may possibly conceal defects. "Every thing is what it is and not some other thing" may have been said by an Anglican bishop but it was no accident that he was educated in a Dissenting academy in Isaac Watts's time. Having courage through justification by faith to submit our inward parts to scrutiny by the light of truth, we can dare to let our yea be yea and our nay be nay.

This aspect of our Protestant tradition has been most self-consciously expressed in our own country by the Quakers, the more easily perhaps because of the selective levels on which they moved, but it suffused the style of most Dissenting churches until they met all the complications created by industrial development, popular success and political influence in the nineteenth century. It is this quality which André Gide recognised in the style of Mark Rutherford, possibly because he already knew it in its French Protestant form, and which produced that "renunciation of false riches" which led Donald Davie to speak, in a memorable phrase, of "a sensual pleasure, deployed with an unusually frugal, and therefore exquisite, fastidiousness".

Sobriety I like to relate to the apostolic injunction not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Thinking soberly means doing so with a humble recognition of our creaturely status, and fallen creatures at that, who have the capacity to act creatively only by grace. This leads both to a realistic estimate of our own capabilities and to a generous acknowledgement of our dependence on the gifts of others in the coinherence of Christ's Body. It carries a sharp warning against the dangers of romantic individualism, with its self-preoccupation and the claims it often makes to excessive moral privilege and the right to exploit others in the interest of one's "art". It can refuse to be mesmerised by "the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" and will always check that he is not suffering from intoxication with another spirit than that of the Muse. If Peter had to endure such a check even on the day of Pentecost, those fired by a

lesser inspiration cannot demand exemption. With that most splendid exemplar of the Protestant aesthetic virtues in our own time, Marianne Moore, they will say to themselves, "Poets don't make a fuss".

It is the humility which goes with sobriety which gives the artist the self-transcending courage to make his art "sink", as Davie has shown us Watts did, in order to make it more accessible to those who may lack the ability to rise to the heights on their own. As Barth says, in commenting on the relevant passage on sobriety in Romans 12, the Protestant artist should be delivered from the temptation of "Titanism". At the same time, artists will not succeed in being truly creative unless they first are made aware, as we learn that Paul was in chapter eight of the same letter, of how difficult a virtue sobriety is to acquire when one has drunk the wine of true inspiration.

The artist can be helped to do so by a realisation of how important a virtue our third quality is and how much discipline is necessary before it can be achieved. "Measure" is more characteristically a classical than a Biblical quality and there are few Biblical passages which can be taken to refer to it directly. That in the epistles about keeping the proportion of faith comes readily to mind but perhaps the reference in the Sermon on the Mount to the consequence which follows from seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness may be more apposite. When that is done, the rest of life is seen in the right perspective and all manner of good things will be added unto us. It may not be fanciful to see in the preceding reference to the beauty of the lilies of the field a hint that aesthetic good things are among them. I think also that the Biblical references to time, on the importance of timing and on the notion of the fullness of time, as in Ecclesiastes and Galatians, have aesthetic implications. To be able to bide one's time requires not only patience but vigilance, the attentiveness, what the Gospels call watching, which is much closer to intense artistic alertness than most excessively pious interpretations of Scripture allow.

Calvin did lay emphasis on order, which is clearly related to the notion of measure. To set things in order is one of the first steps in achieving new creation. Disorder harks back to the primeval chaos out of which creation emerged, according to the Genesis story. To establish order presupposes a set of priorities which enables things to be in a fruitful relation to one another, and if it is a good order they can be harmonious and aesthetically pleasing. If the order is an inadequate, oversimplified or spurious one, it becomes sentimental, or else it is oppressive, concealing disorderly and unconstructive turbulence or quenching creativity. This is why Reformed theology has to insist that the order which controls Christian measure is not that of nature or of political imposition, such as that of feudalism, in which "prince and priest and thrall" are bound in a living "tether", but that of the coming kingdom, an order which is never fully realised on this earth and which is constantly challenging and stimulating.

This is a place where aesthetic theory comes very close to some familiar subjects of the theological debate. Theology has to be preoccupied with order, especially as it affects the shape of Christ's Body in the world, what we call church order. Classical Catholicism has criticised Protestantism for being

disorderly. Protestantism has traditionally responded by saying that it appears disorderly only because Catholicism has a static, historically conditioned, form of order which it claims wrongly to be of divine institution. Protestantism itself appeals to the more spontaneous and dynamic kind of order which it claims to find in the primitive church. In the past, however, this also has been thought of in excessively static terms and without a sufficient eschatological reference. Church order is not primarily designed to keep the earthly camps of the pilgrim people of god efficiently administered, with careful attention to the fences which mark the boundary between the Church as an institution and the world. Its main purpose is to ensure that the pilgrim people are kept on the move, with scouts moving ahead of the main body into unknown territory but also retaining contact, so that the main body does not lag too far behind. This means that as an earthly institution it may lack superficially pleasing aesthetic qualities such as more permanent institutions may possess. To change the metaphor, it is more like a building site than a monument. But the discerning eye should be able to discern some of the ultimate glory of the building even in its unfinished state. The way in which the diversities of gifts in the whole body are co-ordinated with each other, "fitly framed together", as Ephesians says, should also produce its own kind of aesthetic pleasure. It does suggest a way in which the classical and romantic elements in the aesthetic imagination can be related to each other.

It is at this point that the important proviso concerning simplicity, sobriety and measure has to be made. I have tried to show that they are patent of interpretation in terms of Reformed biblical faith, but what is essential is that their context must be that of living faith, which is enlivened and disciplined by living theology. When it is not, the tension relaxes. The artist no longer has to struggle, as Watts did, to confine his inspiration within the bounds of his intention. It becomes only too easy to do so. Simplicity, sobriety and measure become smoothness, safeness and predictability. Protestant art then ceases to have the intensity of the classicism admired by Davie and becomes tamely respectable, as much of it has. When it is influenced by romanticism in reaction against this, it becomes merely sentimental. It lacks the "controlled turbulence" which Patrides found in Herbert and Marvell, the former of whom Barbara Lewalsky had claimed to be more Protestant than is usually supposed, and no effort needs to be made to make it "sink" because it has already averted its eyes from the heights.

I am sure that Davie would agree with this. His own poetry and many of the poems he chose in the *New Oxford Book of Christian Verse*, going against much current fashion in doing so, clearly indicate as much. But if he had paid more attention to this side of the matter, it might have qualified his strictures on Romanticism and modified his assessment of what happened in the nineteenth century. Living faith in its Protestant mode is born out of a fresh awareness of the sovereign holiness of God, which awakens the conscience, and a realisation of the exceeding sinfulness of sin and of the judgement which this involves. It is this situation of crisis, in which a knowledge of the atoning and redeeming work of Christ is born, which lifts the burden of sin from our shoulders. We are

justified, set right, with God not through any meritorious achievement of our own but only in the act of commitment we call faith, in which our own selves are transcended. Traditionally, this has been seen and analysed only in moral terms. This is understandable, the moral dimension is primary, but it is helpful to see that it has an aesthetic dimension as well. The roots of creativity lie in the awakened imagination, born of wonder and of doubt, which sees possibilities of new creation together with the threat of failure. Only when artists transcend themselves is a genuine new creation achieved. Even then, their situation becomes perilous in a new way, because, like the old Israel in the Promised Land, they can turn to self-congratulation and say that it is by their own genius alone that this has been accomplished. The Christian believing artist knows that the way in which our redemption was achieved rules out such an attitude. In his great hymn, "Nature with open volume stands", Watts sees the redemptive act as the work of a great artist, achieved at infinite cost, and dares to say,

Here His whole Name appears complete:
Nor wit can guess, nor reason prove,
Which of the letters best is writ,
The power, the wisdom, or the love

To see the divine beauty in the Cross is the reverse of sentimentality. It is to see a redemptive purpose at work despite human failure to rise to the height of our calling and to see that it has reference to the natural world around us as well as to human relationships. That not only delivers us from the perils of a narrow moralism, from which Protestantism has often not been exempt, but also from philistinism. If the divine glory can radiate even from Christ's passion, then we, who enjoy the fruits of that passion, should seek opportunity to show forth a reflection of that glory along the whole range of life. Just as Protestant worship has few external aids and adornments, not out of imaginative poverty but because the riches of the Word are sufficient, making additional visual or auditory images unnecessary and probably anticlimactic, so the simplicity of a Protestant style of life should be the product of a discriminating choice among a multitude of possibilities. We can reject all manner of secondary goods in order to concentrate on the best. Our simplicity is meant to be the expensive simplicity of fine breeding, the product of costly grace, which shows its appreciation of the price paid for the gift of salvation by the care and attention we give to its proper appropriation and use.

This comes near to the heart of the matter, as a recent article on Protestant aesthetics which approaches the subject in another context makes clear. Daniel Smith of the University of New Hampshire in the September 1985 number of *Art History* on "Towards a Protestant Aesthetics: Rembrandt's 1655 Sacrifice of Isaac" picks out another classical formal principle as distinctive of Protestantism, that of antithesis, known as *contrapposto* in the visual arts. Its guiding dictum of *harmonia est discordia concors* Augustine had already seen expressed in Christian terms in the nature of Christ's Incarnation and of the cross. He adduced the familiar paradoxes of 11 Corinthians 6 but could also have referred to the second chapter of Philippians. Smith analyses the way in which this

harmony in discord is expressed in the late Rembrandt's great etchings in the British Museum. He goes on to remind us, however, that the tension expressed in the awareness of discord can also achieve resolution even in this life through reconciliation, shown by Rembrandt in the moving embrace with which the Father enfolds the returned Prodigal, as in the drawing on that subject now in Vienna and in the famous painting in the Hermitage in Leningrad. Smith observed that this kind of embrace is not characteristic of classical art, suggesting that the Protestant understanding of harmony in discord in the most radical terms is also to realise all the more fully what it means to be human in the most specific and personal way.

I am sure from the way in which he understands simplicity, sobriety and measure that Davie would not wish to deny this but it may be that by his concentration on these qualities as they are expressed in the old Dissent of the first half of the eighteenth century he has not done enough justice to all that is involved in the tension. Art should be more than "tense with all the extravagances it has been tempted by and has denied itself", as he so finely says. It should also be aware that it requires effort to reach out to what is always likely to remain beyond its grasp and that, therefore, an element of untidiness, a hint even of extravagance, can rarely be entirely absent. This does not absolve later Romanticism from the strictures which he and other Christian critics pass upon it but it may prompt us to look upon it with a slightly more sympathetic eye.

Here let me make a digression which Davie himself virtually compels one to make but which must be limited on this occasion lest it takes us too far from our main theme. Davie emphasised in reply to his critics in *The Dissenting Voice*, myself not least, that his main concern was aesthetic but he did, in fact, make many political and theological judgements as well, some of them bewildering. For example, he criticises later Evangelical orthodoxy for failing to come to terms with the Enlightenment. Yet the Presbyterians who became Unitarians get no marks from him for trying to do so, even though we can agree that their effort did not turn out to be successful. He also does not admit the possibility that it was limitations in Old Dissent itself which may have been a factor in preparing the way for Evangelicalism and Romanticism nor that, with much that was deplorable, some of the results of these may have been beneficial. We can be enthusiastically grateful for Davie's rehabilitation of Watts and his discriminating praise of Doddridge and yet still wonder whether Dissent was already beginning to show signs of a relaxation of tension from which it was partly rescued by Evangelicalism and Romanticism. Watts's greatest hymns were written when he was relatively young and could almost be thought of as late seventeenth rather than eighteenth-century products. Admittedly Blake should not be claimed as a Dissenting cult figure, as many people would like to make him, but perhaps we need not go quite to the lengths of starting a movement for the removal of his bones from proximity to those of John Owen and Daniel Williams in Bunhill Fields.

Similarly, there were elements in later nineteenth-century Dissent which

suggest that not all aspects of a characteristically Protestant aesthetic were entirely lost in a flood of philistine populism. Clyde Binfield's wonderfully detailed studies of particular Nonconformist families show that Watts's Mark Lane congregation would not have felt entirely out of place in Bowdon Downs or Brixton Independent or even Carrs Lane. The political and religious judgements of creative artists are always interesting but tend to be unduly personal, and that may be as true of Mark Rutherford as it was later of T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence. Rutherford seems, for example, to have little knowledge of what is going on in the great cities of provincial England.

Davie's strictures may be more applicable to the Nonconformity of the first half of the twentieth century than to that of the later nineteenth. Some of the opportunities for growth towards greater theological, liturgical and cultural maturity created in the later century were taken but many were not, partly, and here I agree with Davie, because of a disproportionate preoccupation with politics. Forsyth, our most searching internal critic of this period, said that our churches were dying of their moral success. They were also suffering from the consequences of a measure of relative social and economic success, having shaken off most of the legal and educational disabilities which had both restricted and stimulated them in earlier times. What they lacked was a theology which could have enabled them to cope with the dangers and rise to the fresh opportunities of success, so that too many of them settled for a tame and relaxed suburban respectability, qualified only by a marginalised pacifist idealism. They still provided an excellent context in which young children could be reared but failed to keep pace with those children as they moved into a wider and more complex world, with the result that many of those children kicked away the ladder on which they had risen. In today's harsher and less civilised world the virtues of our churches even in this period, like those of the suburban communities in which they flourished, are more visible than they were to us who reacted against them. The face remains that they have left us with greatly diminished communities whose popular base has been eroded, and with a much smaller institutional role.

That is a partial digression, although Davie virtually invites one to make it. Its justification is that it helps us see that we have now come again into a situation in which the churches of orthodox Dissent are in a position more like their eighteenth rather than their nineteenth-century forbears. Of course there are differences but there are significant similarities. The old Dissenting interest which became so powerful in the nineteenth century as almost to become a majority interest, has largely dissolved and can no longer be reconstituted. Partly because of that, we have achieved a safe respectability denied to militant nineteenth-century Nonconformity. Several recently deceased or retired orthodox Dissenters who have occupied chairs at Oxford and Cambridge enjoy a degree of esteem among all the churches comparable to that of Watts and Doddridge in their own time, but that is partly because they no longer represent a counter-culture. There is an analogy in the fact that children of Dissenting families today occupy many places in the highest reaches of the civil and

political Establishment in a way that would have astonished their far more numerous forbears in the nineteenth century. But this has made so little difference even when they remain church-going Dissenters, that few people of different background are worried and not many have so much as noticed. If, unlike those who advocated the ill-fated Covenant, we are not content to be absorbed into Anglicanism on Anglicanism's own terms because we believe that we still hold something distinctive in trust which is essential for the health of church and society, we have to ask how we can again become a creative minority.

To attempt an answer would take us beyond the scope of this paper. Let me only say this, with special reference to the aesthetic dimension. We have to begin by striving to recapture the attitudes expressed in the tension of Rembrandt's "Sacrifice of Isaac" rather than, at the outset, seeking to cultivate simplicity, sobriety and measure. Otherwise we shall only do so in a bland, innocuous way. The basic trouble with our churches is that we have not believed deeply and radically enough in God made known in the crucified and risen Christ. We are not unique in this but the ensuing spiritual and cultural poverty becomes more quickly visible with us than with many others because we have chosen to surround ourselves with few of the secondary symbols of faith, like highly developed liturgies and creeds and great buildings and music which still testify to ages of stronger faith. We can learn much from these but we cannot become creative simply by imitating them, even if we any longer had the resources to do so. What we still have is a stronger tradition of critical biblically based preaching than the other main-line churches in England, backed by greater sympathy with the great Reformed and Lutheran theological work of the recent past. These can lead us to the inescapable *contrapposto* inherent in living faith which can alone make our simplicity, sobriety and measure truly creative. It may even ultimately make it possible for us safely to express them in a seemingly new Anglican dress in a re-united English church, although one more like that of the Book of Common Prayer than of the Alternative Service Book.

This will not be possible, however, if we assume that it can be easily achieved. It will be a costly business and another of our troubles, consequent upon our first, is that we have lost some of our eye for quality and have been reluctant to pay the price for it. In our efforts to regain our lost popularity we have for too long been inclined to say, "Never mind the quality, feel the width", like a cheap jack salesman. The failure of these efforts should make it easier for us to accept the fact that we shall not win, or deserve, popularity without first obtaining respect, respect compelled by regained authority, authority derived from a faithfulness to our calling which is initially indifferent to popularity. We belong to the modern world and it is only in that world that we can fulfil our own vocation. But we have our own independent place within it, which means that we do not necessarily take it on the terms laid down by the most fashionable or the most assertive elements within it. That goes for the academic world and the arts as well as the glossy superficiality of the large-scale media of communication. We, of all people, should be aware that all that glisters is not gold, and it was

never more necessary to remember it. Those familiar with the argument of *Equality and Excellence* will know that this is not to suggest that we strive to become self-consciously Superior Persons, guilty of élitism, that currently fashionable smear word. Sobriety should make that impossible. What I am arguing for is that we serve the whole Body best by striving to be faithful to the best insights of our past in a situation where they are urgently needed and largely misunderstood or ignored, even by many of ourselves.

In his splendid account of the artistic achievements of the Manchester Armitage family and their connections in his essay on "The Shores of Philistia", Clyde Binfield says that at its best, "it was a consummation of the Puritan virtues; for the achievement of integrity demands grace combined with reserve and a sense of discipline verging on repression". We can assent admiringly to the second part of that sentence and yet wonder whether "consummation" in the first part is not too strong a word. Did all this not happen on too limited and domesticated a scene? How much tension was there and was there so much vitality that it needed all that discipline? If we are to express *contrapposto* again we probably have to move into a larger and more dangerous world than that of textile design and domestic architecture, good though these may be. We and our children move in that world, and Barth and Niebuhr and Ellul and many others have helped to give us the equipment to find our way through it. It is time we made more determined efforts to appropriate and use it.

DANIEL T. JENKINS

NONCONFORMIST POETICS: A RESPONSE TO DANIEL JENKINS

I have been instructed by Daniel Jenkins in the past, and I am ready to be instructed now. I think he is right to say that the Isaac Watts who wrote the great hymns and poems was a seventeenth-century rather than eighteenth-century mind; and I agree that Evangelicalism, notably in the persons of the Wesleys, represented originally a just and necessary protest against the inertness that had settled on much English Protestantism by the time Watts died. There are other matters on which I am prepared to kiss the rod, and confess myself in the wrong. But rather than hold up my end in a debate, making whatever concessions are called for, I prefer to endorse heartily some points that Daniel Jenkins makes, and try to push them a little further.

Of these, the most important to my mind is also the homeliest: "we can dare to let our yea be yea and our nay be nay." What Daniel Jenkins does not care to bring out is that at the present time most if not all influential students of language declare this to be an impossibility, based on an unacceptably naive understanding of how language works – in particular, on a failure to understand how our language uses us, more than we use it. The deservedly well-regarded poet Geoffrey Hill has an essay, "Our Word is our Bond",¹ which argues – so far

1. *AGENDA* 21.1 (1983), reprinted in *The Lords of Limit* (1984)

as I understand it, for it is dense and difficult – that our word never *can* be our bond, since it is not in the nature of language to be thus in the service of any one speaker's intentions. The authorities that Geoffrey Hill cites and draws on for this view are mostly English. But far more generally influential among us are certain French thinkers who, as disseminated among us by their translators and epigones, may be called "the gurus of *franglais*". They are many, but the names most often genuflected to are those of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. They differ widely among themselves. But they speak with one voice when they tell us that we do not command language, because language commands us; that our *yea* can never be *yea*, nor our *may* be *nay*, because our language – whether English or French or whatever other – mutinously refuses to be thus univocal.

The voice that condemns these disseminators of Parisian frivolity (a brutal phrase, but that is what they are) ought to be for preference another French voice. And happily so it proves: the voice of Jacques Ellul, whom Daniel Jenkins rightly named, along with Barth and Niebuhr, as a foreign thinker whom English Protestants cannot afford to ignore. Ellul has named Lacan and Derrida and Foucault in order to say to them: "These writers constitute in themselves a demonstration of what they say about all individuals who speak."² And what they say is, in Ellul's words, that "no person is speaking, nor is there any content to communicate... we must recognize that in the strict sense, *it* speaks, or *one* speaks". That is to say, we may suppose that we read Lacan or Foucault or Derrida (or Ellul). But no! What we read is French, or French translated into usually American English. *It* speaks, the language; and it is presumptuously absurd to think that *it* – the language, French or English or whatever, with all its copiousness of vocabulary and wealth of nuance, translated moreover with or without scruple and sensitivity into this or that idiom of another tongue – can ever be bent to the conscious intention of any individual speaker. Thus is derision heaped upon us by Derrida or Foucault or Lacan, or any one of their many Anglophone disciples. But Ellul soberly remarks (more elegantly I suspect in French than in the English of his translator): "for our society and our epoch, for our intellectual or bourgeois groups, they are correct, but this is a sociological observation rather than something linguistic or psychoanalytic." And he expatiates:

In our day, in this place, a sort of social discourse flows endlessly and is repeated twenty hours out of every twenty-four, expressed by individual mouths. The discourse is completely anonymous, even though it may sometimes be affirmed with force and conviction by a particular individual... The word has become anonymous and therefore has no importance, since its only reality involved the meaning of two living persons who needed to know and recognise each other and to exchange something. Words are just wind. They pass by and have no importance: as long as no one puts the weight

2. Ellul, *La parole humiliée* (Paris 1981), tr. by Joyce Main Hanks as *The Humiliation of the Word* (1985), p. 157.

of his entire life behind the word he speaks, how can one take one statement more seriously than any other?

The rupture between the speaker and his words is the decisive break. If a person is not behind his word, it is mere noise.

The cases of language-use that Ellul has in mind, as distinctive of our time and place, may be exemplified at the extreme by the situation of the television newscaster addressing a faceless audience of thousands or even millions. In such a case there can be no question of a transaction, a contract implying good faith, between speaker and auditor. To take such situations as the norm (as, so Ellul implies, Lacan and Foucault and Derrida do) is to prejudice the issue; in all such cases the speech-act is indeed grossly indeterminate. Only in the crucially different situation of an implicit contract between speaker and auditor, or (to specify what particularly interests me) between poet and reader, can there be any question of the speaker putting "the weight of his entire life behind the word he speaks". So long as the poet addressing his reader is seen as not essentially different from that of the newscaster addressing his audience, the case is gone by default from the first; there can be no question of the poet's *yea* being *yea*, and his *nay*, *nay*.

"If a person is not behind his word..." This is something that common sense finds immediately and momentarily meaningful, as does theology; but modern linguistics and semiotics can find no place for, and therefore no meaning in, such a saving clause. And it may be saving indeed; for without it, it is hard to see how any speaker can have salvation. Lacan's structure of ideas, Foucault's and Derrida's are all necessarily irreligious. Perhaps nobody ever doubted this. But Ellul's point is that, in being irreligious, they are necessarily also inhumane – because they rule out of court the human situation of "two living persons who needed to know and recognise each other and to exchange something". What is shocking is the purring equanimity with which the English-speaking world has agreed that that human desire or need is naive and delusory. Because of that equanimity, now long established, Daniel Jenkins's demand that our *yea* be *yea*, and our *nay* be *nay*, is challenging a consensus more powerful and more entrenched than he cares to acknowledge.

There are poets, as there are (more numerous) evangelists, who have become stars of "the media", as there are many more who show themselves qualified for that status by treating their printed pages as if they were so many minutes of prime-time broadcasting. Their language, whether they are poets or pastors, is characteristically hortatory. And Ellul, when he implies, as he plainly does, that such poets and pastors have betrayed their separate vocations, is surely near to re-asserting the centuries-old distinction between the preacher and the orator, the poet and the rhetorician. This distinction however is not, and never has been, clear-cut; as we are made aware when we ponder the difference between reading Watts's hymn, "Nature with open volume stands", in the solitude of our study and singing it in and with a congregation. It is only the first situation – of the solitary devotee with the silent text before him – that seems to answer to Ellul's rubric: "two living persons who needed to know and recognise

each other." (For Watts of course is still "living", in the words on his page.)

Daniel Jenkins is inclined to think that my formula for a Protestant, at least for a Calvinist aesthetic – simplicity, sobriety, and measure – is inadequate. And he may well be right; certainly the formula needs to be amplified and spelled out, along the lines that he follows in his essay. I will go so far to meet him that I will offer for admiration a modern artist who was, in everything except his art (and even in that art, on first inspection) rather conspicuously un-simple, un-sober, and un-measured: the Quaker poet, Basil Bunting.

Quakers of course are not Calvinists. Daniel Jenkins, having exhorted us to let our yea be yea and our nay be nay, remarks that "this aspect of our Protestant tradition has been most self-consciously expressed in our own country by the Quakers", adding however a reservation that I do not wholly understand: "the more easily perhaps because of the selective levels on which they moved." However that may be, the poet Bunting – who was in any case, we are given to understand, an "attender" rather than a "member" of the Society of Friends – was certainly heterodox, if not unruly, in that communion, as he would have been in any other. His recorded statements not only leave yawning gaps where most Christians would require avowals – for instance about the Crucifixion and Redemption – but also disclose preferences that most Believers must find offensive, for instance for St Cuthbert, and St Francis of Assisi, over Jesus Christ. In no way can he be taken as an accredited spokesman for the Society of Friends.

Yet he was stubborn and insistent in declaring that allegiance. One among many such almost resentful protestations occurs in his reminiscences of W.B. Yeats, whom Bunting knew in Italy in or about 1930³: "I wonder whether Yeats ever discovered that I was a Quaker, if not in intellectual persuasion, at least by temperament and education." And elsewhere in this originally informal lecture the note of disagreement is sharpened. This happens when Bunting tells of engaging Yeats in conversation about St Catherine of Siena:

But St Catherine didn't impress Yeats. His mysticism was not of that kind. His God was not real, but an escape from reality. He was impatient of discussing St Catherine, as he was impatient of discussing George Fox's very immediate dealings with God. Compared with these, Yeats's mysticism was trivial. If he believed it at all, he believed it for his own ends; he sought it, it was not forced upon him.

Bunting's Quakerism, it seems clear, was in sympathy with the turbulent seventeenth-century witness of George Fox, not the later Quakerism moderated so as to fall into line with eighteenth-century notions of decorum, rhetorical and other. From that point of view Bunting cannot regard Yeats's *fin-de-siècle*

3. *AGENDA* 12.2 (1974), reprinting a talk given in Sligo in 1973. Yeats's brief account of their association (in "Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty", 1944, reprinted in *Explorations*, 1962) is hard to square with Bunting's account of it.

dabblings with the occult and with diabolism as anything but trivial. And of course one need not be any sort of Quaker, nor even a believing Christian of any kind, to reach the same conclusion; most admirers of Yeats's poetry (though not quite all, alas) regard Yeats's addiction to this mumbo-jumbo as a tiresome obstruction that they must learn to climb over or to skirt around. However, Bunting's repudiation of it has a special quality that, I will argue, derives quite directly from his sense of himself as a religious Dissenter. Moreover, unless I am mistaken, it has an immediate application to some of the most illuminating and far-reaching sentences in Daniel Jenkins's essay.

This emerges when Bunting shifts key so as to talk of Yeats's, also Pound's and Eliot's sympathy with Fascism:

What these poets and many other writers really had in common was a love of order. With order in society it matters little whether you are rich or poor, you will not be harassed by perpetual changes of fortune...

...Weighing this up, if it is worth weighing at all, you must of course allow for my conviction that 'God is the dividing sword', and that order is no more than a rather unfortunate accident that sometimes hampers civilization. But my purpose is only to remind some critics that Yeats's love of order is something he shared with Dante and Shakespeare and probably far more than half of the world's great poets, as well as with nearly all the philosophers and historians.

Here Bunting's intention is attractively generous: he wants to shield Yeats from the vengeful self-righteousness of hindsight, on the part of commentators who are sure that if they had lived through the 1930s they would have read the signs of those times more wisely than Yeats did. However, Bunting is not throwing together a merely expedient and *ad hoc* apology. This became clear three years later, when an interviewer pressed him on this passage.⁴ Bunting replied to the interviewer: "'God is the dividing sword' is a quotation from my poem 'The Spoils'... That order is an unfortunate accident you can verify at once by seeing what happened when the Roman Empire succeeded in establishing itself a 'pax Romana' on Mediterranean lands. Everything went flat. Things had been going fine up till then." As always with Bunting, one must beware of misconstruing the throw-away colloquialism of his style; Bunting means what he says, and his verdict on the *pax Romana*, the "Augustan peace", is deeply considered. It sets him irreconcilably at odds with another poet who had been in some technical respects his master: not Yeats, and not Pound, but T.S. Eliot. For Eliot, the editor of *The Criterion* and author of "What is a Classic?" (1944), had declared himself fully persuaded by Virgil's vision of the *imperium* of Augustus as a world-rule divinely appointed, that divine appointment acknowledged through later centuries by the appellation, "The Holy Roman Empire". What

4. Dale Reagan, in *Montemora* (1977), excerpted in C.F. Terrell (ed.), *Basil Bunting: Man and Poet* (1981), pp. 409-410.

remained to be done, and had never yet been securely effected, was a wedding of that inspired institution, the *imperium*, with another, the *ecclesia* – a consummation that Eliot went so far as to think had been foreseen and foretold by Virgil in the famous Pollio eclogue. In all this Eliot was proudly aware of thinking along the same lines as Dante and many mediaeval jurists; it remained for Frances Yates and Frank Kermode⁵ to bring out the extent to which the conception had been held to through the post-Reformation centuries, in English not just by a poet like Dryden who has been frequently tagged “Augustan” but also by an Elizabethan Calvinist such as Edmund Spenser. Bunting was surely not exaggerating much if at all when he quietly acknowledged that his own repudiation of such visions of world-order (devoted though he was to Dante) set him at odds with “more than half of the world’s great poets, as well as with nearly all the philosophers and historians”.

Yeats reported loftily in 1930 that Bunting “calls the ultimate reality anarchy”, meaning by that word “something which for lack of metaphysical knowledge he cannot define”. What it could mean for anarchy to be “the ultimate reality” is something that might tax the ablest metaphysician. What “anarchy” in normal usage refers to is a socio-political condition, mostly held to be undesirable. And in that sense it is the brickbat habitually thrown at leaders of Dissenting communions by such guardians of civic order as persecuted George Fox and many another more temperate figure. Dissenters have just as regularly denied the charge, as Bunting can be seen to do if we look where he directs us, at a passage of his own poetry:

For all that, the Seljuks avoided
 Roman exaggeration and the leaden mind of Egypt
 and withered precariously on the bough
 with patience and public spirit.
 O public spirit!

Prayers to band cities and brigade men
 lest there be more wills than one:
 but God is the dividing sword.

This is from *The Spoils* (1951), not one of Bunting’s happiest productions. (He admitted himself that its three long sections are musically “lop-sided”.) If the passage is returned to its context, it becomes plain that Bunting is praising – temperately to be sure, and with reservations – one sort of civic order, that of Persia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries under the originally Turkish Seljuk dynasty. The Seljuk rulers are praised for not seeking to impose a monolithic public order like that of the Roman Empire or of ancient Egypt. The Seljuks’ civic order, it seems fair to say, is akin to that advocated by responsible spokesmen of those communions best described in this context as “nonconformist”: an imposed conformity or uniformity is what they must and will resist, even as they deny that such uniformity is a prerequisite of any effective and effectively

5. See Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (1975), *passim*; and cf. Gareth Reeves, “T.S. Eliot, Virgil and Theodore Haeccker”, *AGENDA* 23, 3–4, 1985/86.

humane order in the state. "God is the dividing sword" because He divides the "gathered churches" of Dissent from the majority not so "gathered"; and also, perhaps less happily, because He divides one such ingathering (for instance, Presbyterian) from another (for instance, Baptist). The divisions that He makes compassionately acknowledge the diversity of human gifts and callings; and the divisions are not such as to prevent Baptists and Presbyterians and Anglicans from being of one mind and acting together in the maintenance of public order, so long as that order is sufficiently elastic.

It is here that some sentences of Daniel Jenkins seem especially illuminating:

Theology has to be pre-occupied with order, especially as it affects the shape of Christ's Body in the world, what we call church order. Classical Catholicism has criticised Protestantism for being disorderly. Protestantism has traditionally responded by saying that it appears disorderly only because Catholicism has a static, historically conditioned, form of order which it claimed wrongly to be of divine institution. Protestantism itself appeals to the more spontaneous and dynamic kind of order which it claims to find in the primitive church... Church order is not primarily designed to keep the earthly camps of the pilgrim people of God efficiently administered, with careful attention to the fences which mark the boundary between the Church as an institution and the world. Its main purpose is to ensure that the pilgrim people are kept on the move, with scouts moving ahead of the main body into unknown territory but also retaining contact, so that the main body does not lag too far behind. This means that as an earthly institution it may lack superficially pleasing aesthetic qualities such as more permanent institutions may possess. To change the metaphor, it is more like a building site than a monument. But the discerning eye should be able to discern some of the ultimate glory of the building even in its unfinished state. The way in which the diversities of gifts in the whole body are co-ordinated... 'fitly framed together', as Ephesians says, should also produce its own kind of aesthetic pleasure. It does suggest a way in which the classical and romantic elements in the aesthetic imagination can be related to each other.

Daniel Jenkins will not expect me to concede that classicism is a prerequisite of Catholicism. That misapprehension (for so I take it) was what I particularly girded against in my Clark lectures, *A Gathered Church*; and I remain impenitent. (Catholicism may have a monopoly of Virgilianism, though even that may be disputed; but in any case, despite T.S. Eliot's propaganda, Virgil does not comprehend and consummate all of even *Roman* classicism - Bunting for his part seems to have preferred Lucretius, and the logic of that preference is well worth teasing out.) More to the point, every student of poetry will protest that when a metaphor is changed, meaning is changed; and Jenkins's change to

the metaphor of Protestant building site opposed to Catholic monument seems ill-advised and unacceptable. On the other hand his first metaphor of "the pilgrim people... on the move" strikes me as genuinely illuminating, and worth dwelling on.

If we secularize and dehumanize this metaphor, abandoning with regret the affecting and time-honoured image of "the pilgrim people of God", we find Protestant church-order identified with the sort of order that obtains in insect or perhaps bird populations when migrating. And we must reflect at once that the sort of order which obtains or is enforced in such cases may be, so we are informed, very strict indeed. In many insect populations, it seems, the organisation is rigidly hierarchical - to the extent that the social organisation of ants is a byword and dead metaphor for all such too onerous social forms, whether those of industrial capitalism, of state socialism, or of ancient Rome and Egypt. Jenkins's metaphor of scouts and "main body", and of communication between them, implies if we take it at all seriously some differentiation of functions, accordingly some sort of hierarchy; and to be sure even the Quakers differentiate the office of *elder* from that of *overseer* and that of *minister*.

However, our present interest is not in communal or ecclesiastical orders as such, but in the aesthetic orderings which may seem to correspond to those, to the extent of mirroring them. And it seems that from Protestant artists we might expect such an order, for instance in the formal structures of poems, to combine a quite firm or even rigid framework on the large scale with maximum freedom or waywardness or optionality within that frame. Such, it seems, ought to be characteristic of a Nonconformist poetics; and sure enough, it is what we find in the poems of Bunting. It should go without saying that when Bunting distances himself from poets with "a love or order", he does so not on behalf of disorder but on behalf of an order that shall be, in Daniel Jenkins's words, "more spontaneous and dynamic"; and we may have got to the point of envisaging what that more dynamic order would be like.

Bunting claimed for his poems a character so far from informal that on the contrary he has been objected to as "formalist". Sonata-form was what he most insisted on; his poems, he said, were structured like musical sonatas. As it happens, my ear for music is seriously deficient, and has never been educated; so I do not experience this dimension of his achievement, at least not consciously, and certainly I am not competent to comment on it. I can make more headway when he represents such a structure graphically, as he did when he rapidly drew a few pencil-strokes on a scrap of paper to represent, so he claimed, the original conception of his longest poem and his masterpiece, *Briggflatts*. His interlocutors could not believe their eyes or their ears. Did the poet seriously maintain that his first idea for the poem came in that form, as an abstract structure that could be thus summarily graphed, not in any item of the affectingly recalled human experience with which that structure was subsequently "filled in"? Yes, so Bunting sturdily maintained, that was so; and the human experiences, the subject-matter of the poem, were indeed no more than

"filling in".⁶ In this there was without doubt an element of provocation and polemical over-emphasis. As on other occasions, Bunting was trailing his coat, and deliberately inviting the charge "formalist" that later was duly levelled at him. And yet he was too consistent on this issue for us simply to disbelieve him: for him, form came before "content" – he insisted on it. How then could this be a poet whose *yea* was *yea*, and his *nay*, *nay*?

Very simply, really, if we think about it. And Bunting was at pains to make us do so. If our *yea* is to be *yea*, and our *nay* is to be *nay*, both "*yea*" and "*nay*" must be in short supply. If a poet is to put "the weight of his entire life behind the word he speaks", we cannot expect him to speak many words. And Bunting accordingly asserted that even the most gifted poets wrote and published too much. The poet of this Protestant sort must be chary of expressing affirmations and negations alike, since whenever he does so his entire person will be behind his words. Or else again, he may make affirmations, but they will be modest ones. On a hot day, after strenuous exertions, is not a draught of cold spring water something to be grateful for? Who will not answer "*Yea*"? And in Bunting's poetry generally, in *Briggflatts* particularly, that is the *Yea* that is most often said. Moreover it is always worth saying, since we are so ungratefully indifferent to the bounties with which we are surrounded and supplied. Nothing so nourishes that indifference as our belief that we have a right to more portentous *Yeas* and *Nays* on matters that we choose to think of more moment. And Bunting's modest but heartfelt affirmations (negations too, sometimes) serve the rhetorical and didactic purpose of cutting us down to size. Considering the complexities of life, no self-respecting person has the right to many certainties, and this should make us contemptuous of the hortatory certainties so readily trumpeted from many a pulpit and many a poet's rostrum. All this lies behind Bunting's refusal, in *Briggflatts* or any other poem, to deliver "a message". Supposing that we have such a message to deliver, or that there is one which we may imbibe, distracts us from the many small messages that we can in decency promulgate: for instance, such an inexhaustible commonplace as the goodness of sweet drinking-water. Form came before content for Bunting, because the content was seldom more (or less) than the accumulated homely wisdom of mankind through the ages. The form, the external frame, could be rigid, could be elaborate (even arbitrarily so), not because the content that would "fill in" that frame was of no account, but because it was permanently available in a common stock. It was optional whether a particular human experience be incorporated at this point or that other, not because the poet didn't care, but because he cared equally for and about each item of his experience that he thought it proper to celebrate or castigate. To be sure, the time-tested truths or truisms would in every case be coloured by diffraction through this poet's distinctively Northumbrian sensibility. But if his readers set great store by that, the poet did not. Nothing was said that he would not "stand behind"; and if he found that what he could stand behind was mostly massive commonplaces –

6. See *Georgia Straight Writing Supplement 6* (Canada). And cf. my "English and American in *Briggflatts*", in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum* (1977).

that cold spring-water is good to drink, that life and loves are short whereas death is certain – why should that surprise us? The “fill-in” is optional, is interchangeable between this place in the poem and that other one, precisely because the over-arching form of the poem is so firm. (As verse-line turns into verse-line, not just the content but also the small-scale rhythmical form is optional, in the sense that it is unpredictable; but Bunting’s metrics are a distinct topic – let it suffice that he strenuously denied practising *vers libre*.)

If the terms “romantic” and “classical” have any longer usefulness, I conceive that the poet I have been describing is classical. Certainly his conception of how poems and other art-works are ordered is quite at odds with that “organic form” which has been vaunted ever since S.T. Coleridge down to the latest American poetaster. For what is axiomatic in all theories of organic form is that form, if it is to be honest, must be an extension of, or an outgrowth of, *content*: and Bunting, as we have seen, proceeded on a quite opposite principle.

In doing so Bunting is, it must be confessed, proceeding far more as does the Anglican priest, directing devotions always within the set forms of the Book of Common Prayer, than as does the nonconformist pastor, extemporizing (or pretending to) as the spirit moves him. It is that pretence of extemporizing, in the hortatory tone which it demands, that is the baleful legacy of the Evangelical Movement, whatever its other achievements; just as it is the baleful legacy of the Romantic Movement, whatever its other achievements, to poetry at the present day.

And yet, between “A Protestant Aesthetics” and “A Nonconformist Poetics” there is, or I intend there to be, a wide gulf. T.S. Eliot was a Protestant poet. Yet his idea of order, whether in civil society or in poetic compositions, is incompatible with that of the Protestant because Nonconformist poet, Bunting. There truly are the two conceptions of order that Daniel Jenkins discriminates: the one, monumental; the other, fixed as to its frame but optional as to its contents. I write as an Anglican when I exhort my brothers and sisters in Dissent not to minimize that difference. Eliot was an Anglo-Catholic; but Jonathan Swift was not an Anglo-Catholic when he hammered the Dissenters in the lifetime of Isaac Watts, nor is C.H. Sisson when in our own day he can find little civic place for Nonconformists. These Anglicans are men of principle who push the matter frankly, by their Anglican lights. Bunting, who respected Eliot, knew better than to give way to him. The Nonconformist option remains a real one, even in poetry. Its adherence to sobriety means an avoidance of immodesty, as much in intellectual and imaginative matters as in habits of costume and sexual display.

DONALD DAVIE

ABNEY AND THE QUEEN OF CRIME: A NOTE

Admirers of Janet Morgan's *Agatha Christie: A Biography* will have noted frequent references to Abney Hall, Cheadle. Reformed admirers will have a particular interest in Abney Hall.

The house began life as The Grove, built in 1847 by a former mayor of Stockport. It became Abney Hall after its purchase in 1849 by a future mayor of Manchester, James Watts (1804-1878). His surname explains The Grove's change of name, for just as Sir Thomas Abney protected Isaac Watts and nurtured London's Dissenters, so Sir James Watts, as he became in 1857, nurtured Manchester's Dissenters and sheltered its ministers. The Watts family had a careful sense of history and a due sense of its drama. They freely annexed the former and generously displayed the latter at Abney Hall.

John, Samuel and James Watts were partners in J.S. and J. Watts, wholesalers. Their great warehouse in Portland Street, 300 feet long, each storey expressing a variant of Italianate architecture, was Manchester's grandest, a monument to its mercantile spirit, built in that most romantic of mercantile years, 1851. It was a palace. It is now a hotel. Abney Hall was another such monument.

James Watts, the youngest partner, moved to it from Heaton Villa. That house, although six miles south of Manchester, already commanded from its gentle hill a clear view of "tall chimneys and church spires and *smoke*" and while "the prospect, of its kind, is beautiful," it was a prospect which embraced the mounting noise of machinery. Abney was further out and in 350 acres. James Watts set to work on his new property with that determined and up-to-date historicism which marked the true Manchester merchant prince. He enlarged it. He transformed its interior. His architects were probably Travis and Mangnall, the builders of the Portland Street warehouse, but theirs are not the names most enduringly associated with Abney. For those, one has to go to J.G. Crace of Wigmore Street, John Hardman of Birmingham, George Myers of Lambeth and John Minton. They decorated, fitted and furnished the house between 1852 and 1857. All had exhibited at the Crystal Palace, where Watts bought furniture. All had worked with Pugin, most notably in the Houses of Parliament; and it was Pugin's spirit which stamped Abney's interior. Indeed, Pugin's drawings for Abney were among his last work, for he died in 1852.

Pevsner described Abney's drawing-room as "Puginesque Gothic at its most sumptuous and hence its most oppressive". Yet it is hard to imagine a more lively combination than this creation of Manchester commerce, Puginian medievalism, and the spirit of the Crystal Palace set within the twin contexts of high fashion and a rebuilding Parliament. Abney Hall, like the Palace of Westminster, was a monument to Whiggish history and industrial art. Its collections naturally included Isaac Watts's writing desk (at least, it was inscribed "I.W. 1709") but they also included "Cromwell dictating letters to Milton", Cromwell's sword, Cromwell's baby clothes, one of Cromwell's letters and a rapier worn at Charles 1st's execution.

The Wattses took their Politics and their religion as seriously as they took

their art and their history. Sir James was a Manchester councillor and alderman from 1848 to 1865, mayor from 1855 to 1857 and high sheriff in 1871. He was a founder and guarantor of the Manchester Reform Club. His son, the second James Watts of Abney (1845–1926), however, left the familial Liberalism in 1910, scared by Lloyd George's budget and more than half convinced by Tariff Reform. In January 1910 he went out of town rather than vote against a Liberal. This political change was completed by the third James of Abney (1878–1957), but it was his son, the fourth and last James (1903–1961) who took this Conservatism back to Westminster. He became M.P. for Moss Side in 1959.

As for their Congregationalism, the Wattses married into a formidable phalanx of Congregational families, the Buckleys, Carltons, Brownes and Hadfields. The Samuel Wattses, senior and junior (who were also founders and pillars of the Manchester Reform Club), were particularly associated with the churches at Burnage and Rusholme; the James Wattses with the church at Heaton Mersey. Sir James was a founder of the Lancashire and Cheshire Chapel Building Society and – as churches in Crewe, Knutsford, Gatley, Oldham and Cleckheaton as well as Manchester bore witness – he belonged to that necessarily munificent brigade of stonemasons, trustees and benefactors-in-chief. He was also on the Lancashire College Committee at the time of the Samuel Davidson affair and he took Davidson's part, at least to the extent of heading a testimonial for him. Eight years earlier when Alexander Raleigh, then a student at the college, had a breakdown in health it was at Watts's Heaton Villa that he recuperated.

These interests were sustained by James Watts II. Indeed, in 1892–1893 Abney was further enlarged, in part to house religious and political meetings and in part to house the growing Watts treasures. This time the architect was Faulkner Armitage, the Bowdon Congregationalist who came from just such a background as his client's. Armitage's work demonstrated that though he was a dear man and a good interior decorator he could be a horrible architect. It also prepared Abney for its oblique immortality, with all the luxury as well as all the heaviness of that prosaic fantasy, the greater Manchester house.

In September 1902 the heir to Abney, James Watts III, married Margaret (Madge) Miller of Torquay (1879–1950), the eldest child of an anglicised American of apparently comfortable means. Their meeting was natural: Margaret's mother and James's mother had been at school together. The bridesmaids included Madge's twelve year old sister Agatha who was a regular visitor to Abney for the next fifty years.

Like many grand Mancunians, the Edwardian Wattses were addicted to the theatre. Madge Watts, who wrote short stories, also wrote a play, *The Claimant*, which was produced in the West End in 1924; but it was Agatha – Agatha Christie as she became in 1914 and the world's best-selling author as she became in the 1960s – who, thanks to Madge and James Watts, was Abney's most notable achievement. It was Madge Watts who urged Agatha to try her hand at detective fiction and to whom she dedicated *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and it was on Madge Watts's typewriter that Agatha wrote what emerged as *The Mysterious*

Affair at Styles. It was James Watts III who suggested the formula for *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and to whom she dedicated *After the Funeral*. It was Abney Hall which provided Chimneys in *The Secret of Chimneys*. It was at Abney that Agatha recovered from her celebrated "disappearance" to Harrogate; at Abney that she had a miscarriage after her second marriage; at Abney that she shared in the gargantuan Christmases enjoyed by the Mancunian clans. And if Hercule Poirot first took shape on Mrs. Watts's typewriter, Miss Marple surely took her name from one of Abney's larger neighbours, Marple Hall.

Abney was sold by Agatha's nephew, James Watts IV, in May 1958. It then ceased to be a private house and in 1959 it became Cheadle Town Hall, a characteristically useful and historically neat development of private opulence into civic style.

Note on sources. The three main sources used for this Note were:

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CLYDE BINFIELD

WILLIAM BAINES IN LEICESTER GAOL - A NOTE

"Mr Baines suffers for carrying out the fundamental principle of Dissent, namely, that in religion, any authority exercised by man is a usurpation of divine prerogative and ought to be resisted."¹ So wrote Edward Miall, the self-appointed campaigning voice of provincial Dissent in the first edition of *The Nonconformist* in April 1841. William Baines, a Leicester draper and member of Bond Street Chapel where Miall had recently ministered, had by then been in Leicester gaol for five months because he refused to pay his church rate. The case against Baines, combined with the influence of Scottish voluntaries such as Wardlaw and Ewing and the agitation against church rates which had been prominent in Leicester since Miall became minister of Bond Street in 1834, led to Miall's courageous decision to forsake a financially cushioned yet politically

1. *The Nonconformist* vol. 1, no. 1, 14 April 1841, p. 2.

confining ministerial career for the insecurity of campaigning journalism and political agitation.²

By 1836 the church rate was levied in only two of Leicester's five parishes. It continued in St. Martin's parish in spite of the efforts of the Whig vicar, the Hon. and Revd. H.D. Erskine, son of the former Whig Lord Chancellor.³ Baines was a parishioner of St. Martin's. He disputed the legality of the rate and was cited before the Court of Arches, whose authority he refused to recognise. In his absence judgement was given against him for £2-5s rates and £125-3s-0d costs. A battle raged in the Court of Queen's Bench which finally judged against him for contempt in June 1840 and on 13 November 1840 he was imprisoned in Leicester gaol where he remained for 31 weeks until he was released under Thorogood's Act after the anonymous payment of his fine.⁴

A week after he was imprisoned his wife gave birth, three months later he was elected a town councillor by Leicester's largest ward, and Edward Miall made him a not unwilling nonconformist martyr. It was a busy incarceration. In between playing cricket in the yard he received some "thousands" of visitors,⁵ and conducted a voluminous correspondence. Four letters from this period have been deposited in the library of Westminster College, Cambridge by Mr. Robert Ogden of Radlett, a descendant of Baines,

1. *Baines to the Hon. and Revd H.D. Erskine, County Gaol Leicester, 1 January 1841 (a copy)*. Erskine had visited him in prison. He was about to leave Leicester. Baines asks him to reform the system of church rates under which Dissenters were in effect paying for the bread and wine used in the sacrament at St Martin's where conscience forbade them to worship.

2. *Thomas Binney to Baines, Kennington, 30 March 1841*. Binney felt himself unable to approve of Baines's actions and refused to "rouse the sympathy of the denomination to demand in effect, your discharge". He hoped that "none of those who are called on for rates in your parish will pursue precisely your plan", although he expressed personal sympathy for Baines and his family.

Congregationalists as a denomination were far from approving the provincial radicalism of Baines and Miall. Miall and others were exasperated by the

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1. *The Nonconformist* vol. 1, no. 1, 14 April 1841, p. 2.
 2. A. Miall *Life of Edward Miall* (1884), pp. 37 ff; 48.
 3. G.I.T. Machin *Politics and the churches in Great Britain 1832-1868* (Oxford 1977) p. 105. Machin discusses the case in detail. It is briefly considered in C. Binfield *So down to prayers* (London 1977), pp. 110-111 and in W.H. Mackintosh *Disestablishment and liberation* (London 1972), pp. 11ff.
 4. The details are taken from Machin *op cit.* pp. 105-6, and from *The story of William Baines (of Leicester). The prisoner for conscience' sake* National Passive Resistance Tracts no. 7 (London n.d.), first published in *The Liberator* February 1891. Contemporary accounts, for example *The Nonconformist*, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 2; pp. 17-8 emphasise that Baines was faced with a choice between distraint and imprisonment and that he chose the latter.
 5. *The Nonconformist* vol. 1, no. 3, 28 April 1841, front page.

caution of the London denominational leaders, who were characterised by Dr. George Legge, Scottish minister of Gallowtree Gate chapel in Leicester, as "white-livered, pigeon-hearted, addle-headed, power-worshipping, rank-adoring, money-loving, knee-cringing, mealy-mouthed Dissenters".⁶ In 1841 the Congregational Union issued a statement explaining its Nonconformity as purely religious. It is hardly surprising therefore that Binney wrote in such terms. In spite of his robust defence of Dissent and his reputation as a polemicist Binney (as befitted the minister of such as Samuel Morley) consistently eschewed the wilder fringe of political Nonconformity. He objected not to the principles which led Baines to Leicester gaol but to his deliberate flouting of the law. He appears to have been the author (under the pseudonym "A. Balance of the Middle Temple") of *Remember my bonds* (London 1841), justifying the cautious response of Dissenters to Baines's case whilst strenuously arguing for his release.⁷ Thus, Baines's imprisonment reflected the conflict between two kinds of Congregationalism, the increasingly respectable, judicious, almost elegant London chapels and the growing, aggressive, political voice of the provinces, soon to gain dominance through the pages of *The Nonconformist*.

3. *John Grundy to Baines, Ramsbottom-under-Bury, 9 April 1841.*

Grundy was facing a claim for church rates, and wrote to Baines asking about the legality of supplying communion wine, paying the clerk, cleaning the church and washing surplices from the church rate.

John Bright cut his political teeth on the church rate. His father Jacob had had his goods distrained twenty-one times between 1811 and 1833.

4. *John Bright to Baines, Rochdale, Tues 11(?) 1841.* Bright introduces himself as a friend of Miall and expresses sympathy with Baines and his family, offering financial support "if the circumstances of thy imprisoned family be such as to need it". He enclosed a "tract I have lately written". The letter was addressed to "Mr William Baines (Imprisoned by the State Church, Leicester)".

Four envelopes without accompanying letters have also been deposited. Some are embellished with Scriptural quotations. One, dated "London Nov 16 1840 - query 1640!!", three days after his arrest, is addressed,

For Mr W Baines
Confessor, who,
Fearing God - but not fearing *Man*;
is committed to the Common Gaol,
as a Church Rate *Recusant*.

6. Quoted by R. Tudur Jones *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (1962), p. 216.
7. *Remember my bonds* was reviewed in *The Nonconformist* vol. 1, no. 1, 14 April 1841. The accusation that Binney was the author is made in vol. 1, no. 9, 9 June 1841, p. 162. Binney did not refute the charge. Elaine Kaye, *The History of the King's Weigh House Church* (1968) p. 82 notes "A. Balance" amongst Binney's pseudonyms. No source is given. For Binney's career, see E. Paxton Hood *Thomas Binney, his mind, life and opinions* (1874); John Stoughton (ed.) *A memorial of the late Thomas Binney LL.D.* (1874); C. Binfield *George Williams and the YMCA* (1973) pp. 24-34.

This seems to be from John Childs of Bungay who had also been imprisoned for refusal to pay church rates, and who was to lend his business and printing expertise to the foundation and production of *The Nonconformist*,⁸ for the handwriting is identical with that on another envelope dated Bungay 19 January 1841, addressed,

Mr William Baines
In the County Gaol
"Near the Church"
Leicester.

and sealed with the stamp "JC".

Baines's imprisonment is notable because it co-incided with the growth to maturity of militant provincial Dissent. It had an abiding influence on Edward Miall, set the radical campaigning tone of *The Nonconformist* and became one of the foundation stones of the Liberation Society. Some fifty years later Baines himself was near death, church rates were but the receding memory of a previous generation, and the Liberation Society was a spent political force. In 1890 the Leicester branch recalled the very different world of 1840 in the words of a resolution to Baines expressing their sympathy at the death of his wife and,

...their profound and grateful sense of the service he rendered to the cause of Religious Freedom and the honour and welfare of our own Country by the sacrifice of personal liberty which he made when resisting the imposition of Church Rates.⁹

A little over a year later *The Times* unwittingly revealed just how different were the two Nonconformist worlds. In its fleeting report of Baines's death¹⁰ it recalled the great protest meetings in Leicester in 1840 and 1841 addressed by (amongst others) Joseph Hume MP, James Mursell – and Daniel O'Connell. The same issue was rife with speculation about Parnell's influence on an election at Hartlepool. Men legally convicted of contempt in the 1830s and 1840s had helped forge the bonds between Nonconformity and Liberalism, but in the 1890s "Men legally convicted of immorality will not be permitted to lead in the legislation of the kingdom".¹¹ The Nonconformity of "the Liberator's" day had become the Nonconformity which ousted Parnell as a libertine.

DAVID CORNICK

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8. H.S. Skeats and C.S. Miall *History of the Free Churches in England 1688–1891* (1891) p. 486; A. Miall *op cit* pp. 38–9.
 9. Letter, Geo. Stevenson to William Baines, 10 De Montfort Square (Leicester) 18 April 1890. Also deposited at Westminster College.
 10. *The Times* Jan 17 1891 p. 10. I am grateful to Dr. Binfield for drawing my attention to this reference.
 11. Words of the Baptist John Clifford, *The Times* Nov 24 1890, quoted in D.W. Bebbington *The Nonconformist Conscience* (1982) p. 100.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION: A PERSONAL RETROSPECT

In July 1914 as the clouds of war darkened over Europe a German Lutheran pastor, chaplain to the Kaiser, Dr. Friedrich Siegmund-Schültze, whom we were privileged to know in his later life, and an English Quaker, Henry T. Hodgkin, shook hands on Cologne railway station, knowing that war was coming, and said "Nothing is changed between us. We are one in Christ and can never be at war".

Henry Hodgkin was a huge man, large of frame and thought and generosity and warmth. In journeyings often, he used to describe a night in a railway sleeping-car as "the double-diagonal doze". He with a number of other Quakers published a pamphlet on the incompatibility of the Christian faith with participation in war. A copy of this reached Siegmund-Schültze via Switzerland, and he published it in German. As he expected, he was summoned for questioning by the police. After a while a curtain at the end of the room was withdrawn to reveal a full-scale military tribunal, who condemned him to death for high treason. Somewhat taken aback, Siegmund produced letters of approval from a member of the Reichstag and a Baron. These were dismissed. He then produced a letter from the Kaiser, saying "What you write is the only true Christianity, but as Head of State I dare not practise it". In telling us of this forty years later Siegmund said that he was never so ashamed of his country. At the name of the Kaiser the tribunal not merely rescinded the death-sentence, but they offered him a senior post in the Ministry of Information – which he did not accept.

Henry Hodgkin got together with Richard Roberts, a Presbyterian minister in North London with a huge congregation, which had included a number of young Germans. Suddenly he found that they were no longer there, and realized with horror that members of his church might shortly be destroying one another. They talked with a number of churchmen of liberal views, William Temple, who later became Archbishop of Canterbury, George Bell, who in the view of many ought to have succeeded him, Edwyn Bevan and others. But this group held to the classic doctrine of the just war, and thought that Britain's part was relatively just. They did not foresee the later degradation; war was to them the lesser of two evils. Hodgkin and Roberts sought a more radical statement. With Lucy Gardner (later a key-figure in COPEC) they called a conference in Cambridge in the last days of 1914. A student named Rendel Wyatt, whose sister attended the meetings as a schoolgirl and is still alive, saw to the arrangements, using the good offices of Ebenezer Cunningham, a young fellow of St. John's, and one of the few English mathematicians who could understand Einstein.

Cunningham was a remarkable man. He lived to a great age, becoming by a long chalk Senior Fellow. His church life was associated with Emmanuel Congregational Church, of which he was to be a notable church secretary, holding the church together during the long ministerial vacancy which followed the thirty-two years' ministry of Henry Child ("Polly") Carter. He was one of the

comparatively few laymen to be Chairman of the Congregational Union. During the 1930s he passed through the Oxford Group and came out the other side with deeper insights. This period saw one delectable episode. The Cunninghams had a cook and housemaid at loggerheads. One evening Mamie called Ebenezer and said: "This can't go on. We have a peace meeting in the drawing-room and war in the kitchen." They realized that it was living a lie to talk international peace and not to practise personal reconciliation. Those who talk lightly about the UN failure to reconcile Iran and Iraq have never tried to reconcile a cook and housemaid. It took weeks of patient, gentle firmness, but they won through, and their peace witness was strengthened.

The 130 who gathered in Cambridge included many who were to be well-known later. George Lansbury became leader of the Labour Party. W. Fearon Halliday was a notable Presbyterian minister, closely associated with Selly Oak, and an eloquent preacher. Maude Royden was perhaps the most eloquent woman of her time. W.E. Orchard exercised at the Weigh House a curious blend of Congregationalism and Catholicism. I knew him slightly, and his successors Claud and Constance Coltman well. Leyton Richards later exercised a notable ministry at Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham, not least as a pacifist in the Second World War. Alan Knott, whom I first met when I was a schoolboy, and who incensed one of my more militant teachers by wearing a white poppy on Armistice Day, moved from Bishop's Stortford Congregational Church to become Richards's associate minister. They left their mark through the Seventy Club, and the young people they helped to train there moved into positions of responsible leadership. The combination of Carrs Lane and Quakers made Birmingham in many ways the centre of the Christian Peace Movement right through the 1950s.

Those who met at Cambridge decided to form the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The name was carefully chosen. It marked the new body off from the old peace societies. It was scriptural (2 *Cor.* 5,17-9) and positive. The agreed statement consisted of five points which still form the Basis of the Fellowship:

1. That Love, as revealed and interpreted in the life and death of Jesus Christ, involves more than we have yet seen, that it is the only power by which evil can be overcome and the only sufficient basis of human society.
2. That, in order to establish a world-order based on Love, it is incumbent upon those who believe in this principle to accept it fully, both for themselves and in relation to others, and to take the risks involved in doing so in a world which does not as yet accept it.
3. That, therefore, as Christians, we are forbidden to wage war, and that our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal, and to Jesus Christ our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life-service for the enthronement of Love in personal, commercial and national life.
4. That the Power, Wisdom and Love of God stretch far beyond the limits of our present experience, and that He is ever waiting to break forth into human life in new and larger ways.

5. That since God manifests Himself in the world through men and women, we offer ourselves to Him for His redemptive purpose, to be used by Him in whatever way He may reveal to us.

This is a remarkable statement, as those have found who have ever dared to try to rewrite it. It is a positive expression of a total view of life, of which the repudiation of war is only a small, though an integral part. It shows a confidence in the Power, Wisdom and Love of God derived from the Christian scriptures and from faith in Christ, which is sadly lacking in too many professedly Christian responses to violence. It does not deny that violence, oppression, military aggression exist: how could it in December 1914? It affirms that in Jesus Christ there is the answer to the evils of a fallen world.

A General Committee was formed. Henry Hodgkin was naturally Chairman. Lucy Gardner was the first Secretary, but Richard Roberts had to take over from her six months later for geographical reasons; he in turn was succeeded by Leyton Richards. Much voluntary labour went into the work. Among the helpers was Lewis Maclachlan, a pawky Scots Presbyterian minister who was still editing *Reconciliation* after the Second World War with a dry sense of humour, and who died not long since. Another great figure was George Llewellyn Davies, a Welshman with a striking presence, a Territorial officer, whose conscience was convicted and led him to resign and face a prison sentence. He was a great figure at the Eisteddfod, and a great reconciler in industrial disputes. I recall him with much respect and not a little awe.

Polly Carter was my own beloved minister at Cambridge when I was first up in 1939-41. At the beginning of the war he had taken the conventional patriotic line. Ebenezer told me once of his conversion by Maude Royden: her words had such power that he was literally writhing in agony. Polly was an unaffectedly great pastor. When he led worship the hungry sheep were sure of sustenance. A woman once said to him: "Well, Mr. Carter, God bless your feeble efforts!" Father Henry in telling the story would add: "The wonderful thing about the ministry is that He does!"

Polly wrote one of the great pacifist hymns of our time, based on *Ephesians* 6. It should be better known:

Give me to see the foes that I must fight,
 Powers of the darkness, throned where Thou shouldst
 reign,
 Read the directing of Thy wrath aright,
 Lest, striking flesh and blood, I strike in vain.

(*Congregational Praise* 532 v. 2)

The Fellowship grew in numbers. Less than a year after the foundation meeting there were 1500 members gathering in 55 branches. The names of those listed in *The Venturer* (the original journal) as imprisoned for conscience's sake make poignant reading. In leafing through the pages I spotted the name of Arthur Eddington, later to receive the Order of Merit (one of the few pacifists to do so: Michael Tippett is another). Much work went in support of conscientious objectors. There was witness round the country, and courageous facing of the

hostile mobs who burned their caravan. There was support for a negotiated peace.

The war had seen the growth of similar movements in the United States, the Netherlands and Sweden. After the Armistice, in October 1919, Henry Hodgkin (tireless in his work and witness) joined with Kees Boeke in summoning an international gathering at Bilthoven in Holland. Siegmund-Schültze was there. So was the legendary Pierre Cérésolle, founder of the IVSP, "the supreme conscience of Switzerland". So was J.B. Hugenholtz of Holland who was to welcome us to a similar reunion after World War II. They faced the tragic facts of the past five years and said: "We all stand condemned before God. None can cast a stone at his brother." Lilian Stevenson, that gracious figure, still known for her translations in *Cantate Domino* and elsewhere, whose light burned steadily, said: "We met as strangers: we parted a Fellowship." They formed "The Movement Towards a Christian International", today the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. They formed reconciling groups visiting France, Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia. They supported Pierre Cérésolle's "pick-and-shovel" peace-making. They bore testimony at the Oberammergau Passion Play and the Geneva Disarmament Conference. They served the unemployed. They worked for the rights of conscientious objectors. As tensions grew they brought Japanese and Chinese together, and essayed political mediation in Europe. They failed to avert the Second World War, but at least there were signs of a different spirit.

I myself became exposed to the Fellowship in about 1937 or early 1938. There was a strong group in Bishop's Stortford where I was at school, led by Alan Knott, the Congregational Minister, and a Quaker family named Strachan, who were among our closest friends. An enlightened Nonconformist school (I was a day boy, but we were subject to school rules) encouraged attendance at meetings in the town. The FOR brought Charles Raven, and he changed my life.

Raven was a remarkable man, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, an able natural historian and an outstanding historian of science. A verse of the day ran:

Canon Raven
Has no haven,
But he has a perch
In the Anglican Church.

In the First World War he was an army chaplain, and his experience in the trenches left a deep impression on him. He had been involved with Lucy Gardner in COPEC, but it was not until 1930, under the influence of the self-effacing Quaker, Percy Bartlett, that he became a pacifist. Thereafter he was the leading spokesman of the movement. He had a striking presence - someone described him as "St. Sebastian just after the first arrow struck him", and a magnificent voice. He was arguably the finest public speaker of the day. He did not sweep you off your feet on a tide of emotion, like Lloyd George. He convicted your inner soul, and sent you away to work it out for yourself. For years I never heard him without having to rethink some part of my life. He showed me that

the way of Christ and the way of war were incompatible. I wrestled with myself for days and weeks, but could not deny it.

The following year the FOR brought another remarkable man, an elder of St. Columba's Presbyterian Church, Cambridge, Alex Wood. He was the best-integrated man I have ever known. Old John Oman once said: "When I say a Christian, I mean one with whom to see is to act. I've only known three, and one of them's Alex Wood." Alex Wood served his Lord through St. Columba's, through his work as a teacher of science in the Cavendish Laboratory, and through his activity as a member of Cambridge Town Council. He was a severely practical man. Raven had led me to a commitment. Wood helped me to see how to live it out.

At Cambridge in 1939-41 I moved from the Church of England to Emmanuel Congregational Church. I had joined the FOR early in 1939. Father Henry's ministry meant that the witness was strong in "Congsoc". The FOR used to meet in my rooms. We lunched off bread and marg. and huge pots of jam, apples and biscuits (later of charcoal which are "disconcerting to the uninitiated, being blackish in colour"). Among those from the Congregational fold were Paul Rogers (now Dr.), Jack Newport (later President of Cheshunt, and my closest friend), Dorothy Havergal Shaw (later a China missionary and minister at Moss Side, Widnes, Buckhurst Hill and Ware), Max Walters (later Director of the Cambridge Botanic Garden), Geoffrey Whitehouse (later a headmaster in the North-East, and brother to Alec, the theologian), Michael Horne (later Professor of Engineering at Manchester and an expert on box-girder bridges), and many others. The only Presbyterian I recall is Chris Porteous (later a headmaster) but there must have been others. I suppose the most eminent of us all was Charles Carter, a Quaker, the economist who became Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster. Our Senior Friend was J.B. Skemp, a Baptist, later Professor of Greek at Durham. We deepened our commitment; we studied together how to build a better world; we prayed.

As a conscientious objector I served in the London Civil Defence Services. Afterwards I returned to Cambridge, and after graduating, from 1948 to 1956, till I went to Nigeria, was very much in the central councils of the Fellowship, becoming a very young and inexperienced Chairman in 1953. It would not be unjust to say that Congregationalists played a disproportionately large role in the Fellowship. The General Secretary was Clifford Macquire, a man of all the talents. He had a deep commitment to the total nature of Christ's claims on his life, and a warm relationship with people. He was a first-class administrator, a good writer, an outstanding speaker, a sensitive, concerned, and cheerful pastor to the office staff and the members. One of his endearing traits was his fund of anecdotes. His practice was, if he heard a good story, to repeat it to the next three people he met: too bad if one of them happened to be the original *raconteur*. He had an astonishing fund of party games which enlivened conferences, sometimes to the puzzlement of serious-minded continental visitors. He was marvellous to work with. As Chairman, my main function was to lunch with him once a week to allow him to let off steam, for he was a bundle of nervous

energy. He was the finest administrator of a Christian organization I have known or can imagine.

My predecessor as Chairman was Alan Balding of Poplar. He was a man who spoke the truth in love; he could tell you that you were a fool without breaking friendship. I learned a deal from him about straightness in personal relations. I learned too how to wait upon the Spirit for unity without a divisive vote. I learned how to use the harsher parts of scripture as signs of the human weakness of the writers who none the less had a true vision of God.

As Vice-Chairmen I had Richard Wood and Hampden Horne. Dick Wood's gifts were never fully used by the church, perhaps because of his forthright pacifism. There can have been few finer preachers; I could have wished to see him at the City Temple. He served in three pastorates only, Hertford, Kingston upon Thames, and Bexhill. In each, an already prospering church added fifty per cent to its membership. In his young days he was sometimes awkward in personal relations, but marriage changed that. Hampden succeeded me as Chairman, a less dominating figure than Dick, but a man of great grace and commitment. He had the misfortune to be Labour candidate in Saffron Walden, where no-one stood any chance against R.A. Butler.

Two Presbyterians must be mentioned. One was Lewis Maclachlan. The young recruit had by now become an elder statesman. His life was marked by sensitivity to prayer and faith in Christ as healer. He wrote a magnificent book *Defeat Triumphant*, but its title was against it, and it never sold. G.H.C. MacGregor of Glasgow was the heaviest gun among our New Testament scholars, and his two books *The New Testament Basis of Pacifism* and *The Relevance of the Impossible* (a critique of Reinhold Niebuhr) remain among the classics of Christian pacifist writing.

Witness through public meetings all over the country, and through writings, was the main activity of the Fellowship at this time; we were less activist, more reflective, not necessarily less effective but differently. The Fellowship published a series of books at reasonable prices, with a good chance of selling a thousand or two. E.L. Allen, another leading Presbyterian, said his sales were higher through the FOR than through other publishers. (Allen was an existentialist, who used to claim that the whole of philosophy was summed up in the *Punch* cartoon in which He and She arrive in a sleepy city on a tandem bicycle, and He says to Her "Well, baby, which is it to be, ham-and-eggs and the cathedral, or roll-and-butter and the movies?" Life is choice.) Leaflets and pamphlets abounded. Unsatisfactory or sub-Christian reports, such as the Anglican *The Church and the Atom* or the British Council of Churches' *The Era of Atomic Power* (whose blandness and blindness make sombre reading today) were challenged by searching Open Letters written in Christian fellowship.

The theological leadership was strong, not least in the Congregational and Presbyterian churches. The British signatories to the document presenting the pacifist case to the World Council of Churches meeting at Amsterdam in 1948 were A.M. Chirgwin, A.C. Craig, H.H. Farmer, L.W. Grensted, G.H.C. MacGregor, D.M. Mackinnon, George MacLeod, Charles Raven and William

Robinson. That is a weighty group by any standards.

From 1950, when we spent part of our honeymoon at the International FOR Conference in Holland, starting as we meant to go on, I was closely involved with the IFOR. There was a marvellous group of French Reformed Pastors. André Trocmé, born of a French father and Russian mother, had practised nonviolent resistance to the Nazis at Le Chambon, while rescuing Jews and smuggling them into Switzerland. The astonishing story has been told in Philip Hallie's *Lest Innocent Blood be Shed*. André was another with whom to see is to act. Henri Roser was the doyen of them all. He had a rich sense of humour. I remember him at a French-speaking consultation speaking of the joy of being free from the tyranny of Anglo-Saxon linguistic imperialism. Jean Lasserre was a man who worked where there was need, among prostitutes and alcoholics. His book *La Guerre et l'Évangile* is a fine statement of the Christian pacifist position. Impossible to go into all the people we met, though they would include our own Muriel Lester, friend of Gandhi, with her enthusiasm ("Millions of Buddhist priests are witnessing to the cause of peace"). From America came John Nevin Sayre, who first travelled round the world in 1910 - with no passport, and visas for two countries only - and A.J. Muste ("There is no way to peace. Peace is the way") and John M. Swomley, whose *Liberation Ethics* is one of the most powerful expositions of practical pacifism, and John Howard Yoder, a learned, persuasive and voluminous writer from the Mennonites. This was the time too when Martin Niemöller came out as a Christian pacifist. Among the younger members were Jean Goss, perhaps the most pugnacious pacifist I have known, and his wife Hildegard, daughter of the Austrian Kaspar Mayr, a lovely and lovable man. They subsequently through contact with Cardinal Ottaviani challenged the Roman Catholic Church, and have done notable work in proclaiming nonviolent Christian methods of liberation in Latin America.

In 1956 we left for Nigeria, and our connection was inevitably less close, though we toured South Africa for the FOR there, helped to form a group in Nigeria, and occasionally spoke at conferences in Britain. In Britain the General Secretaryship passed first to Max Parker, a strong gentle Methodist layman, who became an Anglican cleric, then briefly to Peter Jenkins, followed by David Harding and more recently a Church of Scotland Minister, Hamish Walker. In recent years one of the most imaginative actions was the Peace Pilgrimage from Iona to Canterbury, when the Dean, Victor de Waal, welcomed the pilgrims and preached an outstanding sermon. Another has been the often unobtrusive presence in Northern Ireland, not least through the astonishing work of a maverick Quaker, Will Warren, who won the confidence of extremists on both sides.

The FOR has in some ways had a less weighty theological leadership, though the work of George Caird should not be forgotten. Brother-in-law to Jack Newport, he was Principal of Mansfield, and the first Nonconformist to be appointed to the Oxford Chair of New Testament Studies. His spoken words exuded charm and clarity. His Penguin commentary on *Luke* leaves no doubt as to the pacifist implications of the Gospel. Donald Soper is today President. But

the FOR presence is always there, at Molesworth or Greenham Common, in campaigning against the Arms Trade or for the Nuclear Freeze. Harold Dixon, now URC minister in Hereford, was for some time Chairman of the British Fellowship. Another URC minister, Gordon Smith, is the current Chairman. Another, John Johansen-Berg, has been a lively catalyst. It was his initiative which led the URC to sponsor the ecumenical report on *Nonviolent Action: A Christian Appraisal*. I was rapporteur, and other URC members were Ralph Bell of Otterburn Hall, Philip Eastman, himself a former General Secretary of the IFOR, a minister born in New Zealand and trained at New College, and Arthur Macarthur, an ecumenical statesman who was at the time Joint Secretary of the URC. Apart from this, Elnora and I have been editing *Reconciliation Quarterly* since our return, and not infrequently addressing meetings. Our other main work for the Fellowship has been giving peace concerts with Hilary and Dick Franks. Over the years we must have given towards a hundred of these, a different form of witness, speaking to different people. There have been some new members, the dissemination of literature, and collections which have helped Fellowship funds.

Internationally, apart from Philip Eastman, a strong British contribution has come from Ronald Beasley of Edinburgh and Diana Francis of Bath. URC minister Geoffrey Beck has played his part in international conferences. There has been deeper involvement with those of other faiths, especially with the Buddhists of Vietnam (including the poet Thich Nhat Han) and of Japan. Among the most important work has been the support for Martin Luther King in the USA, for Danilo Dolci in Sicily, for Dom Helder Camara and Nobel prize-winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel in Latin America, all noteworthy exponents of Christian nonviolence. Niemöller's disciple Gustav Heinemann actually became President of the German Federal Republic and in taking office avowed that he would never sign a bill to introduce military conscription or nuclear weapons.

The witness is still needed. It is needed because of the mushroom cloud of the nuclear winter which hangs over us. It is needed too because of the Church. We must still ask what Christ means when he calls us to love our enemies, whether we are true to him if we do not make him Lord of our politics, whether (as Gandhi said) in relying on soldiers – or nuclear weapons – for our defence we are not untrue to our own doctrine of the cross, whether we think that the Russians are stronger than God, whether we really believe in the Incarnation if we say that it is impossible to live out God's way in a human life, whether our unity in Christ with fellow-Christians in Poland or East Germany is to depend upon precarious political jockeyings for power. The FOR in a once familiar phrase still challenges the Church to the Church.

JOHN FERGUSON

REVIEWS AND NOTES

Wiltshire Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates and Registrations 1689-1852. Edited by J.H. Chandler. (Wiltshire Record Society, Vol. XL, 1984.) Pp. xxxvii, 226, Devizes 1985. Obtainable from M.J. Lansdown, 53 Clarendon Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 7BS, £15 plus postage.

This book, thanks to Dr. Chandler's masterly editing, is an indispensable tool for Wiltshire readers of this *Journal* and an extraordinarily useful tool for other readers. It lists 1,780 Meeting House Certificates issued between 1689 and 1852. It contains three vital indexes (of denomination, occupation, and people and places). It has an introduction which stands in its own right as a study of this aspect of Dissenting history as well as providing a necessary brief for the Wiltshire researcher.

The period covered is that for which the Toleration Act was in force (there is an appendix of registrations under the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence, but this was unsanctioned by Parliament). Before 1812 registration was not compulsory. After 1812 it was compulsory for assemblies of more than twenty people other than the household resident at the certified premises. Registration was extended to Roman Catholics in 1791 and to avowed Unitarians in 1813. The system ended in 1852, partly because central government now had the apparatus and partly because Anglican authorities found it distasteful to license premises for "Dissenters", a word which could embrace all manner of extremes. A licence implied approval, and how could Anglicans approve of Mormons? What happened before 1852 was that meeting places were first certified to and then registered by the bishop or archdeacon or quarter sessions who licensed them accordingly.

Obviously such licences must be a first port of call for any chapel historian. What can be inferred from them - going well beyond names of people or places - is both judiciously and tantalisingly suggested in the introduction. It is to be hoped that other Record Societies will emulate Wiltshire and Wiltshire's Dr. Chandler.

J.C.G.B.

Churches of Christ in Leicestershire Between the Wars. By Bernard and Muriel Waterton, Pp. 16. Churches of Christ Historical Society Occasional Paper No. 2, 1986.

Joseph Bryant Rotherham: Pilgrim and Translator 1828-1910, Pp. 16. Occasional Paper No. 3, 1986, obtainable, £1.50 each, from 66 Windsor Road, Cambridge CB4 3JN.

Because the Churches of Christ are the smallest of the United Reformed Church's constituent parts there is the danger that their distinctive witness will be submerged. Words and ways of doing things will lapse unprofitably and there will be no sharing of the witness of the past. David Thompson's *Let Sects and Parties Fall* should prevent this from happening at least in our manse studies and the Churches of Christ Historical Society is a continuing guarantee. For

this reason its Occasional Papers need a wide circulation in our own society. Mr. and Mrs. Waterton's paper looks locally into what was the Churches' Black Country during their Blackest years (the reference is to John Wycliffe Black) and it is to be hoped that more such studies will follow. In J.B. Rotherham, the Biblical scholar, the Churches of Christ drew from the Wesleyans via the Baptists. This paper is an exemplary study of a man who needs to be more widely known and its value is enhanced by David Thompson's appreciation of its author, the late Arthur L. Brown.

J.C.G.B.

NOTES

Capel: City United Reformed Church, Windsor Place, Cardiff, was the setting on 3 May for the inaugural conference of Capel: The Chapels Heritage Society. The interaction of Welsh and English Nonconformity is so intimate that it is easy to forget or underrate the separateness of the two national Nonconformities. This applies particularly to their architecture. Welsh chapels are as much at risk as English ones, even if their place in the national consciousness might seem to be stronger. The variety and quality of Welsh chapels is second to none (just think of Salem, Senghenydd; and, come to that, of the Welsh Church on Charing Cross Road, London, now revived as a night club). Further details of Capel may be obtained from its secretary: Gerallt D. Nash, CAPEL, Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans, Cardiff, CF5 6XB.

Diaries: Ministerial diaries might be dynamite or they might be Kilvert. Then again, they might be laundry lists. They are godsend to chapel historians, or they would be if prudence released them. The Revd. J.B. Geyer alerts us to his diaries. Begun in 1947, they currently run to fifty volumes and they have been accepted by Queens' College, Cambridge, to be lodged in due course in the college archives.

The Mediators: The brief notice in the last issue (Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 362) of Henry David Gray, *The Mediators* (American Congregational Center, Ventura and South Pasadena, California, 1984) was misleading, because incomplete, when it stated that the book "explains the attitudes of those Congregationalists who were opposed to" the merger which produced the United Church of Christ in 1957. The views of those who opposed the Union may be followed in Malcolm Burton, *Disorders in the Kingdom*; and the views of those who supported union may be found in Louis Gunneman, *The United Church of Christ. The Mediators* describes those who neither supported (although most of them ultimately found membership in the U.C.C.) nor opposed this particular union but who sought a way into a free church union which cherished both the Church Universal and

the Church Particular, that outcrop of the Church universal. In Dr. Gray's words:

It was the conviction of 'the Mediators' that wide-armed, inclusive one-ness in Christ is achievable across a broad spectrum of denominations through common recognition of ministries, complete intercommunion, the widest feasible cooperation in proclamation of the Word, witness to the Spirit, and work for whatever God makes possible as the earthly counterpart of the ultimate Realm of God in which peace, justice, goodwill, holiness, wisdom and love are the ambiance of life.

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