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EDITORIAL

This is the third successive edition of the *Journal* to benefit from the generosity of an outside body. This time the debt is to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. Professor Sell's paper was originally prepared for an Alliance consultation. Its contents are firmly in the traditions of the *Journal* and its Presbyterian and Congregational predecessors. Its style reaches back particularly to that of the Congregational Historical Society's earlier *Transactions*. As a summation of the confessional development of the larger part of the English tradition of what is now the United Reformed Church, Professor Sell's essay is self-evidently important. Is it too much to hope that it will be required reading for each student in a United Reformed college and each minister in a United Reformed pastorate, as well as for this *Journal's* constituency which goes beyond United Reformed boundaries?

Dr. Sellers's paper is in suggestive counterpoint to Professor Sell's. It was delivered in May 1988 at Southport as the society's Assembly Lecture.

To join these hardened contributors we welcome as reviewers Mrs. Wildman, who is a postgraduate student at Bedfordshire College and Mr. Haydock, who is a postgraduate at the University of Sheffield.

CONFESSING THE FAITH IN ENGLISH CONGREGATIONALISM

English Congregationalism exemplifies the truth that it takes more than the possession of credal formulae – more than subscription to such formulae – to make a confessing church; and that, conversely, there can be manifold ways of confessing the Christian faith in “orthodox” terms even where the classical creeds are not used as tests of church membership, or as items in a liturgy. Twenty years ago Geoffrey F. Nuttall surmised that “few Christian communions can offer so much confessional material of a communal character as Congregationalists can”¹. What follows is not the comparative study which would be required to show that Congregationalists have amassed as much, if not more, communal confessional material than those of other communions. It is the more limited task of presenting and discussing the ways in which Congregationalists have in fact confessed the faith. This will permit the drawing of some lessons relevant to current ecumenical discussion.

Congregationalism made confessing at once the most personal and the most corporate activity in the life of the Church. The Church, after all, was the gathered company of the converted. It had been gathered by the grace of God, and the saints, united to the Father by the Spirit on the ground of the redeeming work of the Son, made their covenant under God and each one signed it for himself.² We shall examine some of these covenants – and note their decline; and we shall then consider some examples of the confessing that was done by those wishing to join the covenanted family (for though baptism was regarded as the placing of the one baptised under the care and nurture of the Church, it by no means precluded conversion or the personal profession of faith; on the contrary). Next we shall note the corporate confessing of the faith through hymnody. In all of these ways every Christian was invited – even required – to make a good confession.

We shall then turn our attention to the ministers. We shall examine some of the ordination statements which were made in relation both to the kind of education given in the dissenting academies and (in some cases) to funeral orations delivered on the death of ministers. The covenanted people of God had a right to hear the confession of the one they had called as preacher and pastor; and they did hear it – often at considerable length.

Finally, we shall consider what might be called the most global form of confessing: that represented by the declarations and statements of faith which were drawn up by groups of ministers (and latterly laymen) by way of expressing the faith commonly held by the Congregationalists.

We take as our terminus the year 1972, in which the United Reformed Church

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1. G.F. Nuttall, *Congregationalists and Creeds* (the 1966 W.M. Llewelyn Lecture), 1966, 11.
 2. For an account of the Congregational idea of the Church from the sixteenth-century Separatists to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972 see A.P.F. Sell, *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic*, Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed churches and Allison Park, Pa., 1986. For the idea of “covenant” in the seventeenth century see G.F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, Oxford, 1957, 75-8.

was formed by the union of the vast majority of the English Presbyterians with a sizeable majority of English and English-Speaking Welsh Congregationalists.

As we find our way into the material some words which J.A. Macfadyen uttered in his address from the Chair of the Lancashire Congregational Union in 1879 may ring in our ears:

as a matter of history, so far is it from being true that Congregationalism has no confession, there is no body of churches in Christendom which is richer in confessions than our churches are. Every member of a church before being received to fellowship makes his confession. Every student before entering college makes a confession. Every minister before accepting his pastorate makes a confession. Every congregation in laying the foundation stone of its meeting-house makes a confession. As circumstances have arisen that seemed to necessitate it, the churches have united to raise their testimony, and to leave it embodied in declaration or confession.³

The tinge of triumphalism at the end of Macfadyen's first sentence may ruffle modern ecumenical feathers; but what is more disturbing is that by the time Macfadyen wrote the range and content of Congregational confessing (though to be revived as far as formal declarations were concerned) was, by earlier standards, slight, as we shall see.

I

Among the harbingers of English Congregationalism was Richard Fitz, who, with fellow-believers covenanted together in 1567, and at the same time justified their separation from the established church:

Being thoroughly persuaded in my conscience, by the working and by the word of the almighty, that these relics of Antichrist be abominable before the Lord our God... and inasmuch as by the working of the Lord Jesus his holy spirit, I have joined in prayer, and hearing God's word, with those that have not yielded to this idolatrous trash, notwithstanding the danger for not coming to my parish church & c. Therefore I come not back again to the preaching &c, of them that have received these marks of the Romish beast...⁴

With Robert Browne (c. 1550–1633) we come to a more extended treatment of the covenant theme. Christians, he declares, are those who "by a willing

3. Quoted by A.Mackennal, *Life of John Allison Macfadyen, M.A., D.D.*, 1891, 184.

4. C. Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters*, Cambridge U.P. 1912, II, 13. Spelling is modernised in quotations, but the original spelling is retained in the titles of works.

covenant made with our God... are under the government of God and Christ, and thereby do lead a godly and christian life."⁵ The Church is the gathered, covenant family. In *The True Church and the False Church* Henry Barrow (c. 1550–93) affirmed that "The true planted and rightly established church of Christ is a company of faithful people; separated from the unbelievers and heathen of the land; gathered in the name of Christ..."⁶ Such were the ideas which bore fruit when in 1616 Henry Jacob and his fellow believers joined hands in a circle, professed their faith, and "covenanted together to walk in God's all ways as he had revealed or should make known to them."⁷ These were the ideas in the minds of the Pilgrims who set out for the New World in 1620; and these were the ideas underlying the Congregational covenants of subsequent years. They were, of course, biblical ideas, but they were topical in the seventeenth century too. The theory of the covenant between sovereign and people was regularly expounded and, in turn, it influenced theology along the lines of federal Calvinism: the Calvinism of the one Covenant under the two aspects of works and grace. It is interesting to note that whereas some of the Congregational church covenants emphasize the compact between believers, others begin from the initiative of God to whose gracious initiative human covenanting is the proper response. So to the covenants themselves.⁸

On 28th June 1643 ten believers in Norwich, together with their minister William Bridge (1600?–1670)⁹ resolved as follows: "We, being desirous in the fear of God, to worship and serve Him according to His revealed will, do freely, solemnly, and jointly covenant with the Lord, in the presence of His saints and angels."

They further said that they "shall at all times account it our duty to embrace any further light on truth, which shall be revealed to us out of God's Word."¹⁰ The Canterbury Covenant of 12th December 1645, by contrast, sets out from self-abasement: "We poor Creatures being by the spirit of God convinced of our lost and undone condition by nature... acknowledge ourselves unworthy to

5. R. Browne, *A Booke which sheweth the life and manners of all true Christians* (1582), in *The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne*, eds. A. Peel and L.H. Carlson, 1953, 226.
6. *The Writings of John Greenwood, together with the Joint Writings of Henry Barrow and John Greenwood*, ed. L.H. Carlson, 1962, 98. Greenwood may have shared the writing of this tract.
7. B. Hanbury, *Historical Memorials of the Independents*, 1839–45, I, 292. For more of the background and relevant literature see A.P.F. Sell, *Saints*.
8. Since the covenants discussed here are noted, with sources, in the Appendix, I shall not further attribute quotations here.
9. For Bridge see *D[ictionary of N[ational] B[iography]*.
10. They here echo the words of John Robinson's farewell address to the Pilgrims in Holland. See A. Young, *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*, Boston, 2nd edn. 1844, 396–8. Quoted (inaccurately) by Robert Ashton in his Memoir in Robinson's *Works*, 1851, I, xliv–xlv.

Enter Into, and Insufficient to keep covenant with the Great God, yet (By the help of the Spirit of God) our desire is to Take hold on the Covenant of Free Grace..."

At Bury St. Edmunds eight Christians signed a separatist-flavoured covenant in 1646, and the names of their six children were added too; but the cause failed. Two years later, on 21st December 1648, ten people subscribed to the following covenant, which is typical of a number of brief, formal, statements: "We whose names are here subscribed do resolve and engage, by the help of the Spirit of God, to walk in all the ways of God, so far forth as he hath revealed, or shall reveal them unto us by his word; and in all duties of love and watchfulness each to other as become a church of Christ."

The note of self-abasement is sounded by seven persons at Cockermouth at 2nd October 1651:

We poor worms, lost in Adam, being by the grace of God, through the Spirit, called to be saints, conceiving it to be our duty to observe gospel ordinances, for the future do agree together to walk as a people whom the Lord hath chosen, in holy communion of saints; and we do mutually promise to watch over one another in the Lord, and to do all such things, according to our best light, that are required of a church in order, and to submit to our lawful officers that shall be chosen out from among us. And this, in the presence of the Lord, we resolve and promise, hoping that of His goodness and according to His wonted dealing with His people, He will carry us on to His praise.

At Woodbridge, Suffolk (1651), the members included in their covenant a promise to obey their governors in the Lord; at Rothwell (1655) they vowed to hold "communion with all other reformed Churches of Christ in the world"; and at Axminster (1660) they knew where the initiative lay:

The Lord having called us into fellowship with His Son, and convinced us of the necessity of church fellowship we do solemnly profess in the strength of Christ, the accepting of the Lord for our God, and the giving up ourselves to Him to walk, through the strength of Christ, together in all His holy commandments and ordinances according to the rule of His word. And we do likewise give up ourselves to one another in the Lord, to walk together in the exercise of all those graces and discharging all those duties that are required of us as a church of Christ.

This covenant was subsequently renewed on a number of occasions.

In the Angel Street, Worcester, covenant of 1687 we have a much fuller doctrinal statement. This merits full quotation:

1687. - The record of a particular Church of Christ at Worcester, consisting of Pastor and people united in the Christian profession and covenant following.

We do believe that there is one only God; the Father, Infinite in being, wisdom, goodness and power; the maker, preserver and disposer of all things, and the most just and merciful Lord of all. We believe that mankind being fallen by sin from God and happiness, under the wrath of God, the curse of his law, and the power of the devil: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to be their Redeemer: who being God, and one with the Father, did taken to him our nature, and became man, being conceived of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary, and born of her, and named Jesus Christ: and having lived on earth without sin, and wrought many miracles for a witness of his truth, he gave up himself a sacrifice for our sins, and a ransom for us, in suffering death on the cross. And being buried, he rose again the third day, and afterward ascended into heaven, where he is Lord of all in glory with the Father: And having ordained that all that truly repent and believe in him, and love him above all things, and sincerely obey him, and that to the death, shall be saved; and they that will not shall be damned; and commanded his ministers to preach the gospel to the world. He will come again, and raise the bodies of all men from the dead, and will set all the world before him to be judged according to what they have done in the body. And he will adjudge the righteous to life everlasting, and the rest to everlasting punishment, which shall be executed accordingly.

We believe that God the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Father and the Son was sent from the Father by the Son, to inspire and guide the prophets and Apostles that they might fully reveal the doctrine of Christ. And by multitude of evident miracles and wonderful gifts to be the great witness of Christ, and of the truth of his holy Word: and to dwell and work in all that are drawn to believe, that being first joined to Christ their head, and into one Church which is his body, and so pardoned, and made the Sons of God, they may be a peculiar people sanctified to Christ: and may mortify the flesh, and overcome the world and the Devil; and being zealous of good works; may serve God in holiness and righteousness: And may live in the special love and communion of the saints, and in hope of Christ's coming and of everlasting life.

We do heartily take this one God for our only God and our chief good, and this Jesus Christ for our only Lord, Redeemer and Saviour, and this Holy Ghost for our Sanctifier; and the doctrine by Him revealed and sealed by His miracles, and now contained in the Holy Scriptures we do take for the law of God and the rule of our faith and life. And repenting unfeignedly of our sins, we do resolve through the Grace of God sincerely to obey Him, both in holiness to God and righteousness to men, and in special love to the Saints, and

communion with them, against all the temptations of the Devil, the world, and our own flesh, and this to the death.

There are many interesting things here. Negatively, the saints at Worcester do not claim to be “poor worms” and this affects the tone of the covenant. Positively, it is a staunchly trinitarian statement: every paragraph has a trinitarian reference. The saints at Worcester are not *en route* to Arianism. Many others were; and four years after the signing of this covenant the proposed Happy Union of Presbyterians and Independents foundered in London because the former suspected the latter of undue doctrinal rigidity – even of antinomianism, while the latter charged the former with undue doctrinal latitude. Richard Baxter’s Worcestershire scheme of 1652 had already made for clerical fellowship, and Baxter’s Kidderminster was but ten miles from Worcester.¹¹ Despite Baxter’s zeal for union his attacks on what he perceived as the antinomianism of some of the brethren were counter-productive. The Angel Street Congregationalists are no antinomians, however. They aim to be “a peculiar people sanctified to Christ”; they intend to “mortify the flesh, and overcome the world and the Devil”, to be “jealous of good works”, and to “serve God in holiness and righteousness.” We are not yet into the federal language concerning works and grace, but miracles are regarded apologetically as evidence of the truth of revealed doctrines.

On 30th May 1690 we find the saints at Market Harborough “humbly avouching the Lord to be our God, and humbly hoping that he hath avouched us, though most unworthy, to be his people.” Was there a concurrent concern for assurance in Northamptonshire at that time? By comparison the covenant at Poole, Dorset (1704) is much more full-blooded, and it puts first things first: “Seeing it hath pleased God to call us by His grace into fellowship with Himself, and with His son – Jesus Christ – through his Spirit, we do promise our hearty acceptance of the Lord for our God.” After a stormy period during which Matthew Towgood was ejected largely for offending those who wished to practice occasional conformity in order to qualify for municipal offices, and after the brief ministry of Thomas Rowe, Samuel Hayward became the minister at Poole. On 28th August 1741 he called a Church meeting at which a covenant was entered into. Densham and Ogle report that “its vagueness is its principal characteristic,” and they attribute this to differences of opinion as to whether those who had not been baptized in the name of the Trinity were eligible for Church membership. A codicil to the 1741 covenant of 30th October 1763 (Samuel Philipps now being the minister) declared that baptism in the name of the Trinity was the prerequisite of church membership.¹²

11. For Baxter (1615-91) see *DNB*.

12. See J. Densham and J. Ogle, *The Story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset*, 1899, 194-6.

The Potterspurty covenant of 1740 also refers to baptism: "we recognize our baptismal covenant, and give up ourselves to God the Father, Son, and Spirit... in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten." The members also promise "loyalty and allegiance to his sacred Majesty King George"; and they "promise to cultivate the duties of the closet, and to promote family prayer." Of the same vintage (1746) is the Deptford covenant, but here Arian enemies of the faith are clearly in view, and the language is more technical: "whereas our lot is fallen on an age wherein the important doctrines of revealed religion are denied... we do renew, and enter into a solemn engagement to Almighty God and one another, to maintain and continue in the profession and practice of the reformed religion..." The Deptfordians are avowedly trinitarian, and they affirm "That the Second Person assumed human nature, and is true God and real man in one person." They refer to Christ's active and passive obedience, and to the covenant of free grace. The Walsall Covenant (1763), drawn up by those who had seceded from Arian Presbyterianism uses the language of federal theology: Adam is "the federal, or covenant head of all his posterity." There is no antinomianism here: "Though salvation is absolutely of grace, yet, We are firmly persuaded, that it is the indispensable Duty of everyone that believeth to maintain good works."

It would seem that the opposite of good works were in vogue at Ramsgate, which church addressed a call to David Bradbury in 1767.¹³ Bradbury, converted under George Whitefield, was disinclined to accept the call, and only did so after gaining the church's assent to nine articles, of which the first eight were staunchly Calvinistic, while the last read: "That you will discourage the infamous practice of smuggling, as contrary to God's word." This clause was lengthily debated, and finally all the clauses were approved. The very next year, however, the anti-smuggling clause was deleted as being the occasion of much deception and hypocrisy. This is the only case we have discovered in which a prospective minister imposed a confessional statement upon a church as the condition of his accepting the call.

Smuggling does not appear to have been a confessional concern of those who in 1769 seceded from Dagger Lane Presbyterian church in the port of Kingston-upon-Hull. They built a small chapel in Blanket Row, and entered into covenant in 1770.¹⁴ To their covenant is appended an exceptionally long confession of faith in twenty articles. They first explain the reason for drafting the confession:

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13. For Bradbury (1735-1803) see *DNB*; J.Julian, *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, 2nd edn. 1907, 168; G.F. Nuttall, "Baptists and Independents in Olney to the time of John Newton," *The Baptist Quarterly*, XXX no.1, Jan. 1983, 37.
 14. Their minister was John Burnett (d.c. 1782), for whom see J.G. Miall, *Congregationalism in Yorkshire*, 1868, 290.

The frequent exhortations which we meet with in the Scripture to unity of faith and sentiment, together with the express command we have to contend earnestly for it, as once delivered to the saints, leads us to conclude the Necessity there is, that in every Church of Christ, formed on a Gospel-Plan, there should be a regular, methodical, and scriptural confession of the faith of that society; because it is impossible there should be a united contention for the faith, if there is not a united profession of it.

The following are the section-headings of the confession: Of the being of a God; Of the persons in the Godhead; Of the word of God; Of election, &c.; Of providence; Of the fall; Of Christ the mediator; Of effectual calling; Of justification; Of adoption; Of sanctification; Of good works; Of perseverance; Of the law of God; Of the sacraments; Of the power of the Church; Of church officers; Of the state of man at death; Of the judgment; Of the after-state. The confession sets out in the typically eighteenth-century apologetic style (unlike the Savoy Declaration, which begins from the Scriptures) from "a Being, which Nature teaches, Reasons approves, and the Scripture affirms."

Predestination is declared, and theology is of the federal sort:

We believe, that God, from all Eternity, by the most wise and holy council of his will, did freely and unchangeably fore-ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so that God is neither the author of sin, nor is any violence put on the will of the creature. By his decree, God fixed upon a remnant of mankind, of his own pure, free, and sovereign mercy, whom he hath fore-ordained to receive grace in time – be made a happy people – preserved to the end – and obtain everlasting life through Jesus Christ, in whom they are chosen. And when God conferred this high favour on this remnant, according to the election of grace, he left others in that state in which they were considered as fallen: so that, in consequence of their going on in sin, they will become monuments for the glory of his justice. – Eph.i.,4; Rom.viii., 30.. We believe that God, having created man, did enter into a covenant with him, called the Covenant of works, or the Covenant of nature, in which life was promised on his obedience, but deaths, of all kinds, denounced on his disobedience; he being seduced by the subtlety of Satan, did wilfully transgress the law of creation, and break the Covenant by eating of the forbidden fruit.

There is no antinomianism here; on the contrary the saints at Hull regard their doctrines as a spring to good works, and they invoke nature to assist our comprehension:

We believe, that good works are the necessary and inseparable fruits of true faith, evidencing our sonship and love to God; we believe we are ordained to the performance of good works, yet not saved for or by them, as our best duties are insufficient for our

acceptance, yea, they are as filthy rags, and therefore cannot justify. And we further believe, that the doctrines of election, effectual calling, justification, adoption, perseverance, &c., are so far from tending to give liberty in the ways of sin, that all those who really believe them, will find that they are the grand spring to universal obedience, and the more we look to, and depend upon those precious truths, the more honourable our lives and conversation will be, to the glory of our heavenly Father.

Those doctrines may be abused by those who have them in notion, but not at heart; but this does not overturn the Truth and Importance of them, but confirms it. The bee and the spider may apply at the same flower, the one to extract the balmy honey, the other to draw the deadly poison; but none will root up the blooming rose from their garden because it is abused. So these doctrines are to be preached and believed, and those that abuse them do it to their own destruction, while those who believe them, will find they tend to establish and confirm them in the good ways of God. - Eph.ii. 10; Tit.ii, 11, 12.

In the Huntingdonshire village of Bluntisham the Congregationalists likewise added eight articles of faith to their covenant of 28th December 1786. *Inter alia* they declare that "we propose to admit none to the Lord's table, but such as we believe have experienced a work of grace upon their souls, and shall be approved of by the church, and if approved of to be admitted." Though rural, they are not unaware of the temptations of the age, as the following clause makes plain:

As a church of Christ we desire through grace not to countenance the works of darkness such as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, murder, drunkenness and such like. And not to frequent public places of amusement such as horse-racing, playhouses, dancing, cardplaying, gaming, nor to frequent ale-houses, unless lawfully engaged, but according to that scripture, 'come out from amongst them, and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but reprove them.' But on the other hand to take the written word of God our Saviour and seek each other's edification, the increase of Christ's kingdom, and the good of mankind.

They emphasize that where disputes are concerned "*All church matters to be kept within the church.*"

That the Congregational villagers of Wisborough Green, Sussex, were in staunchly Calvinistic mood is clear from their covenant and confession of 17th May 1815.

We the undermentioned friends at Wisborough Green in the County of Sussex, Protestant Dissenters of the Independent Denomination meet to communicate to each other what great things the Lord hath done for our souls. The Rev. J. Chamberlain

being present. Maintaining the important doctrines of the three equal persons in the Godhead, eternal and personal election, original sin, full justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, efficacious grace in regeneration, the final perseverance of the saints, the resurrection of the dead, the future judgment, and the eternal misery of such as die in their sins; these are the doctrines we believe, and are willing to subscribe our names as follows.

There follow eight doctrinal articles.

Two years later the Congregationalists of Pateley Bridge, Yorkshire, entered into covenant:

We, who were by nature sinners ready to perish, having by the good Spirit and abundant grace of God been led to see our dreadful state by nature, as fallen in Adam, and far from God; and having, we trust, tasted of the grace of God in converting, promised, and communicated mercy; we do sincerely, unfeignedly and without reserve, desire to give up ourselves to the Lord, and to each other; to walk together in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless; to watch over one another in love; to exhort with diligence; rebuke with meekness and without partiality; and to pray for and seek the edification of each other in all things pertaining to life and godliness.

We profess ourselves to be of that persuasion which is generally called Calvinistic, though we call no man Lord or Master in what we profess, but receive the whole Word of God, as the rule of our faith, and the test of our experience. The Assembly's Catechism comes the nearest to our sentiments of any published opinions, as having a tendency to humble the sinner, exalt the Saviour, and promote holiness in heart and life.

With respect to our Church government, we call ourselves Independents or Congregationalists, readily receiving the advice of any other similar Society if we see that we need the same, but not to be under the jurisdiction of any other person or society whatever.

Until the 1820s covenants of a distinctly Calvinistic kind were being drawn up and entered into. There followed not so much the "watering-down" of the Calvinism,¹⁵ as the demise of the local covenant. A glance at the appended list of covenants (and assuming that the list is representative if not exhaustive) will reveal that the seventeenth century is prolific in covenants, the eighteenth strong, the nineteenth strong up to 1840. It is not the case that new churches were not formed from 1840 onwards: on the contrary a great many were. But many of them were mission stations of large churches (the rural "diocese" of the

15. See A.P.F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation*, Worthing 1982, and Grand Rapids 1983, ch. IV.

Guildford church comes to mind,)¹⁶ or distinctly new causes which arose from local evangelistic activity (as for example at Ryton-on-Tyne¹⁷). Of course, there were trust deeds which typically refer to congregations of protestant dissenters who believe and maintain such of the doctrinal articles of the Church of England as are specified in the Act of Toleration (1689);¹⁸ but whereas converts were brought in, it was not always clear that they were coming in to a covenanted fellowship, or that there was a connection between their coming in and the infant baptism which most of them had received.

The decline of the local covenant did not, of course, take place in an intellectual vacuum. If the Evangelical Revival encouraged the idea that the church was an aggregate of saved souls, Enlightenment individualism fostered the notion, for example, that Church Meeting was a "one man - one vote" democratic assembly, whose goal was not the unanimity of covenanted saints in Christ, but majority rule. The idea of the priesthood of all believers, which is properly construed corporately, thus sustained a serious blow.

After the Second World War there was a spasmodic revival of interest in the concept of the local church covenant. The church at Hinckley, Leicestershire, renewed its covenants on the occasion of its tercentenary; and the new churches at Banstead and at Broadway, Walsall, devised new covenants. It is significant that the ministers involved, C.O. Thomas, Daniel Jenkins and Hilary Wilson all had a deep knowledge of, and feeling for, the tradition. The Banstead draft covenant was "discussed phrase by phrase, amended and reconsidered by the church council"¹⁹; the Congregationalists at Hinckley resolved to welcome "the strangers and needy of any race or colour"; and the Walsall covenant is the most concise of all:

Believing in God the Father, Creator of all things, in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us and leads us into all truth, we solemnly covenant with God and with each other, to endeavour to the best of our ability and relying upon divine grace: to participate regularly in public worship; to attend the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the church meeting; to strengthen our spiritual life; to support the ministry of the Church and the work of the gospel at home and overseas; to love one another in Christ; and, as far as in us lies, to live at peace with all men.

We therefore commit ourselves to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think according to the power that worketh in us; to

16. See Joyce Reason, *A Fellowship of Churches 1662-1962* 1962.

17. See R.A. Hopley, *Annals of a Country Church*, 1938.

18. See e.g. A.P.F. Sell, *Congregationalism at Worplesdon, 1822-1972*, 1972, 3-4; "Nonconformity at Worplesdon," *Surrey Archaeological Collections LXIX* 1973, 101-2.

19. E.G. Tickner, *In the Beginning* 1966, 18.

Him be glory for ever.

By the 1950s the covenant idea was being considered in a more extensive sense. Many were coming to feel that the Congregational Union of England and Wales (1831) had developed such a corporate, churchly, life that a national covenant was the obvious way of giving expression to this reality. Accordingly in 1958 a series of Commissions was appointed, one of which examined the covenant concept *vis-à-vis* the denomination as a whole. The outcome was the formation in 1966 of the Congregational *Church* in England and Wales – a covenanted fellowship of churches in whose mutual relationships mutual *episkope* was to be a crucial objective.²⁰

II

Those wishing to join the covenanted fellowship were required to be living lives to which the adjective “godly” might reasonably be applied, and to make their confession of faith before the church. The covenant there made publicly was frequently made in private beforehand in devotions marked by soul-searching, sometimes of an agonised kind: if God knew the heart, the church members thought they knew a hypocrite when they saw one; accordingly, it was necessary to make a good confession – and a good case. Many a minister “improved” a death by speaking as Josiah Rogerson did at the funeral of Mrs. Rebekah Woolley of Derby in October 1716: the “Nature and Essential Parts of real religion” are “Uprightness, acting from right Principles, and with right Ends, attended with a suitable Conversation and Behaviour. An external Profession of Religion, without a Principle of inward vital Holiness, and an Universal steady Conformity to the Will of God, will not do. We deceive ourselves if we take up with anything short of this.”²¹

As for Mrs. Woolley herself, she “enter’d upon the ways of Religion betimes, under the Instructions, and Conduct of that pious Matron, Mrs. *Abigail Fowler*, her Grand-mother, and under the ministry of the Reverend and worthy Mr.

20. See further the reports of Commission I on *Oversight and Covenant*, 1960 ff, and the lively responses in *The Christian World* and *The Congregational Quarterly* for the period. Many felt that Congregationalism’s distinctive catholicity was at risk because of the interposition of a “church” between the local church and the *una sancta*. See R.W. Cleaves, *The Story of the Federation: Congregationalism 1960-1976*, Swansea: John Penry Press 1977; A.P.F. Sell, *Saints*, 112-13, 156-7.
21. *The real Christian’s character and comfortable End consider’d and improv’d in a Funeral Sermon, Occasion’d by the much Lamented Death of Mrs. Rebekah Woolley, Late Wife of William Woolley, Esquire, of Derby, Who Departed this Life, October the Twentieth 1716 in the Sixty Third Year of her Age. By Jos. Rogerson.* Nottingham 1716, 18-19. Rogerson (ordained c. 1707, d. 12.1.1762/3) was co-pastor at Friar Gate, Derby, from 1724, and pastor probably from 1746 to 1763. For a denominationally wider range of personal covenants see G.F. Nuttall, “Methodism and the Older Dissent,” *JURCHS* II no.8, Oct. 1981, 259-74.

William Cross... who spent the last part of his Days amongst you at *Derby*, as your Minister... There was found amongst her Papers a Form of Covenant, taken out of Mr. *Jos. Alleyn's Works*, and sign'd and seal'd by her, *Jan. 6 1691*. And she took all the Opportunities that offer'd to repeat that Surrender, she had made of herself to God, at his Table."²²

Three years before Rebekah Woolley died Theophilus Lobb (1678-1763), who trained as a minister and as a physician was converted:

Then did He, by his Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind, and give me to see the sinfulness and vileness of my nature, and the odiousness of sin. Then did he convince me of my absolute need of an interest in Christ. Then did I see his worth and excellence. And then, with an inexpressible dread of sin, and Satan, did I, through the help of the Holy Spirit, fly to Christ for refuge and salvation... Then did I go to God, in the name of Christ, and solemnly enter into covenant with him.²³

On 27th August 1713 he wrote out his covenant with God:

O most dreadful, and yet most gracious God! I beseech thee, for the passion of thy son, accept of thy poor prodigal, prostrating himself at thy door. I am, by my wicked practice a son of death, a child of hell: but, of thine infinite grace, thou hast promised mercy to me, if I will but turn to thee. Therefore upon the call of thy gospel, I am come in; and throwing down my arms, I submit myself to thy mercy.

I acknowledge that I have wickedly sided with thine enemies: but I here renounce them all, firmly covenanting with thee, not to allow myself in any known sin; but conscientiously to use all the means, I know thou hast prescribed, for the destruction of all my corruptions; and it is my resolution, through thine assistance, to forsake all that is dear to me in this world, watch against all its temptations, lest they should withdraw my heart from thee.

And since thou hast graciously offered to be my God through Jesus Christ, I do here call heaven and earth to record this day, that I do solemnly vouch thee for the Lord my God, and give up myself, soul and body, for thy servant, promising and vowing to serve thee in holiness righteousness, all the days of my life.

And I do here accept of Christ, as the only way by which sinners may have access to thee; and renouncing my own righteousness, depend on him alone for justification. And subscribing to all his

22. *Ib.*, 23-4.

23. J. Greene, *The Power of Faith and Godliness exemplified in some Memoirs of Theophilus Lobb*, 1767, 10. For Lobb see *DNB*.

laws as holy, just, and good, I solemnly take them as the rule of my thoughts, affections, words, and actions; promising, that tho' my flesh may contradict and rebel, yet, I will endeavour to order my whole life according to his direction, and will not allow myself in the neglect of any thing I know to be my duty.

I am indeed, subject to many failings; but the gracious declarations of thy word encourage me to hope, that unallowed miscarriages shall not make void this covenant.

O almighty God, the searcher of all hearts, thou knowest that I make this covenant with thee, this day, without any known guile or reservation. I beseech thee, discover to me whatever flaw of falsehood there may be therein; and help me to make and execute it aright.

And now, glory be to thee, O God the Father (whom I shall be bold, from this day, to call my Father, and look upon as my God, in Christ) that thou hast found out such a way for the recovery of sinners. Glory be to thee, O God the Son! who hast loved me, and washed me from my sins, in thine own blood, and art become my Saviour. And glory be to thee, O God the Holy Ghost! who, by thine almighty power, hast turned my heart from sin to God.

O merciful Jehovah, the Lord God omnipotent! thou art become my covenant friend, and I, through thine infinite grace, am become thy covenant servant; Amen, so be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Theophilus Lobb.²⁴

Lobb records in his papers and diary that on 16 March 1717, 15 April 1719, 16 May 1722, and 1 December 1751 he renewed his covenant with God. All of which, thinks his biographer, "may lead us to think, that the Doctor was sincere and hearty in covenanting with God"²⁵; and he adds the conventional warning, "It must needs be in vain to covenant with God, with our lips or with our pen, while our heart is far from him."²⁶

The closing years of the eighteenth century provide us with a case in which spiritual turmoil was directly related to the question whether or not to become a church member. The subject of these agonisings was John Pye Smith (1774–1851), later to become theological tutor at Homerton academy. On "Lord's-day Evening, August 19th, 1792" he writes:

To-night I read over the solemn covenant I made some time ago, wherein, 'I declare myself inviolably engaged on God's side;

24. *Ib.*, 11-14.

25. *Ib.*, 16.

26. *Ib.*, 17.

declaring irreconcilable war with the world, the flesh, and the devil.' O that this transaction may be more and more abidingly impressed on my mind every day! I have begun this week. O my God, keep me through the busy part of it in Thy fear, love, and fellowship. Should I see the next Sabbath-day, O let me not have to reflect on so ungrateful a week as the last has been.²⁷

On 23rd September he writes:

I am this week to confer with Mr. Brewer about that serious duty, Church fellowship. O may the Lord preserve me from all rash, hasty proceedings! May he give me His blessing! I would commit this and all my ways, to the hands of my faithful and compassionate Redeemer. O mould my spirit at thy will! Amen and amen.²⁸

The interview was successful, for the entry dated 7th October reads:

I have now before me a week of the most awful and important business. O my God, strengthen me! Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God. Amen and amen.²⁹

The reference is to Smith's reception as a church member on profession of faith. In a private paper dated 21st November 1792 he records his concerns before the event thus:

I was firmly persuaded that I could never have real religion unless I experienced far greater degrees of terror than I had as yet known... If it shall seem good to this Church of Christ to admit me into communion with them in divine ordinances, I solemnly call upon, and earnestly intreat every individual to deal faithfully with me; to warn, advise, reprove, and in every respect to watch for my soul, as we shall assuredly give an account to the Great Head of His body, the Church.³⁰

Smith was received into membership on a Friday, and on the Sunday immediately following he confirmed his action at the Lord's table: "This has been the long anticipated day on which I have sealed my engagements to my God by my first approach to His sacred table. Last Friday evening, our honoured pastor gave me the right hand of fellowship, in the name of the Lord

27. J. Medway, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of John Pye Smith, D.D.L.L.D.*, 1853, 21. For Pye Smith see *DNB*.

28. *Ib.*

29. *Ib.*, 22.

30. *Ib.*, 22-3.

and of his people to whom I am now joined.”³¹

From a theological point of view these testimonies can be disquieting. They suggest undue introspection. The discussion of the doctrine of assurance was rife in dissenting circles in the eighteenth century, and it mattered to people that they had a saving interest in Christ – *and knew it*.

No doubt some psychologists might wish to declare that accounts such as these are the stereotyped results of group pressure, and indeed there is a “family resemblance” between them; but from this it does not, of course, follow that the subjects were insincere.

As time went on Congregationalists themselves began to view “patterned responses” askance. Thus the young Joseph Parker (1830–1902), having read Bunyan’s autobiographical *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, felt that he would not be able to make adequate repentance because he had not sinned so greatly. “So I stood outside the gate, crying bitter tears, because I had not sinned accordingly to the magnitude of another man’s sins.”³² He subsequently left such “patterning” behind.

Nevertheless it was on the basis of God’s dealings with their souls that church members were received in Congregational circles. There is a charismatic emphasis here which was not present in eighteenth-century Presbyterian thinking. In the latter circles formal subscription would suffice to admit a person to membership, but the Congregationalists expected a personal testimony.³³ Is it possible that here lies part of the answer to the question “Why did eighteenth-century Congregationalists remain orthodox for the most part whilst most English Presbyterians became unitarian?” Could it be that the risk to orthodox doctrine posed by the possibility of stereotyping was less than that posed by the unfettered reason with its *avant garde* attractiveness? Perhaps such considerations were in the minds of the church members at Castle Gate, Nottingham, who, in opposition to the Arianism which was emerging in the High Pavement Presbyterian Church, resolved “that no person be received from the High Pavement congregation as a member of this congregation without giving in their experience, unless they have been received as members of that

31. *Ib.*, 24. For the personal covenant of a layman who worked in Kidderminster’s cloth trade see *An enlarged series of Extracts from the Diary, Meditations and Letters of Mr. Joseph Williams... By Benjamin Hanbury, A descendant of the author, 1845*. An earlier edition of 1779 is also extant.
32. A. Dawson, *Joseph Parker, D.D., His Life and Ministry*, 1901, 22. For Parker see *DNB*.
33. See e.g. A.G. Matthews, *Diary of a Cambridge Minister* (i.e. Joseph Hussey, 1659–1726), Cambridge U.P. 1937, 7; *id.*, *The Congregational Churches of Staffordshire*, 1924, 108.

church before the Rev. Mr. Hewes left that congregation."³⁴

We now turn to the requirements of local churches *vis-à-vis* those to be received as members, and to some of the actual professions made by prospective members. First, there is John Rogers (1627–1665?) and the Congregational church to which he ministered in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin.³⁵ In his book *Shes Ohel or Beth-shemesh. A Tabernacle for the Sun: or Irenicum evangelicum. An idea of Church-Discipline, In the Theorick and Practick Parts* (1653) he records the testimonies of twenty-one men (including himself) and seventeen women. It is clearly prescribed that “Everyone to be admitted” to the church “gives out some experimental evidences of the work of grace upon his soul,” thereby enabling the church to judge whether the candidate “is convicted of God.”³⁶ Those who testified before the church were “the ablest of the Brethren,” and Rogers was pastorally sensitive to those “as some Maids, and others that are Bashful” who could not submit to such public display. In such cases the church could appoint a member to converse in private with the candidate and either bring a written report to the church, or at church ask the candidate some “easier questions” on the basis of the earlier conversation.³⁷ That the latter course was preferred is, given the obvious pastoral concern of Rogers, a witness to the importance attached to the individual’s own account of God’s dealings with him, and to the obligation laid upon the church to ensure that the “world” did not find its way into the company of saints.

John Rogers’s own “Account of faith” was delivered in a public meeting on

34. Castle Gate Church Book, quoted by A.R. Henderson, *History of Castle Gate Congregational Church, Nottingham, 1655–1905*, 1905, 148. Obadiah Hughes left the High Pavement church in 1735. It is interesting to note that the perceived lack of *experience* in the church life of the times prompted the founders of Scottish Congregationalism, as the following entry for 1797 in the Church Book of George Street, Aberdeen, makes plain: “For some time past several persons here observed and lamented, that most churches or parties are remarkably strict in demanding assent and subscription to human creeds and confessions of faith, – remarkably lax in their inquiries into the knowledge, experience, and moral character of such as desire admission, –remarkably languid and indifferent about the one thing needful, and very zealous about some things needless. By searching the Scriptures and other books with attention, these persons conceived a high opinion of the Protestant dissenters called Independents. They conversed about these things occasionally, and although belonging to different communions, they perceived that the love of God in the heart is a more sweet and steady union than a professed belief of any human creed.” Quoted by A. Mackennal, *op.cit.*, 7-8.
35. For Rogers see *DNB*. He subsequently embraced Fifth Monarchy views.
36. J. Rogers, *Ohel*, caption to ch. VI bk.ii. For a careful analysis of Rogers’s work see J.H. Taylor, “Some seventeenth-century testimonies,” *T[ransactions] C[ongregational] H[istorical] S[ociety] XVI*, no. 2, Dec. 1949, 64-77.
37. *Ib.*, 293.

8th August 1651 “upon his entrance into Church-fellowship there.”³⁸ It is a strongly trinitarian statement; Christ is mediator; king, priest and prophet; and head of the Church. The Spirit “is sent by the Father and the Son to make application of the whole work of Redemption, to those whom the Father hath given to the Son by his decree; and whom the Son hath brought to the Father, by his blood, according to the everlasting Covenant, made between the Father, and the Son.”³⁹ The Scriptures are given “for our knowledge and practice, doctrine and Discipline, here below.”⁴⁰ By reason of Adam’s fall “we are all by nature the children of wrath”; those who die in their sins cannot be saved; and none can be saved except by regeneration or new birth.⁴¹ While there is but one Church, universal and catholic which comprises all the saints, past, present and to come, particular Congregational churches are biblically sanctioned, and together comprise the visible Body. The nature of Congregational order is then set down, and Rogers concludes by expressing his assurance he will have his place at the last day: “And this is my Faith, fetched from my very heart, and presented in the hearing of a heart-searching God, and all of you here present.”⁴²

By now a number of manuals of the Independent or Congregational way had been published, among them Stephen Ford’s. His guidance is in line with what actually happened in Dublin and, no doubt, elsewhere:

That when any persons are desirous to join themselves to the church; the said persons should first make known their desires to the Pastor or Elders... That if the Pastor or Elder be satisfied... (he) is to propose the said persons to the Church at their next meeting. That all the members... are upon Scripture grounds to be satisfied in the fitness and worthiness of the persons to be admitted; & also to give their free consent... That such persons as through modesty, or want of the gift of utterance, cannot by word of mouth declare the dealings of God with them to the satisfaction of the Church, that then the said persons have liberty to give satisfaction to the Church in writing, or otherwise.⁴³

We are fortunate in having a record of the words used on the admission of members at Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire, c. 1655 when Francis Holcroft was pastor:

When a member was afterwards received, the pastor used to say, ‘Brother, (or Sister) if you now in the presence of the Lord Jesus, the

38. *Ib.*, 350.

39. *Ib.*, 351.

40. *Ib.*, 352.

41. *Ib.*

42. *Ib.*, 353.

43. S. Ford, *Epistle to the Church of Christ in Chippin-Norton*, 1657, 35-6. Quoted by K.W.H. Howard, *Axminster Ecclesiastica* (See appendix) 240. For Ford (d. 1694) see *DNB*.

awful crowned King of Sion, &c. do now solemnly give up yourself &c. (*mutatis mutandis*) signify it by lifting up your right hand to the Lord;’ and then on the part of the church, the person admitting lifting up his right hand, said, ‘we likewise to the aforesaid awful presence do receive you into our communion, solemnly promising and engaging to carry it towards you as becomes a church of Christ, watching over you in the Lord as he shall enable us, and in testimony thereof do give you the right hand of fellowship.’⁴⁴

By the time of the following entry in the Royston Church book for 28th December 1705 there are three things to note: the attendance of candidates for membership at Church Meeting is now optional; there is an expression of a “catholic” spirit in a sense of “catholic” other than that used by Rogers: we now have “the three donominations”; and there is a clear statement on baptism as a necessary prelude to admission to the church:

December 28, 1705. The church agreed upon these following things:

1. That all persons to be admitted to this church, shall be at liberty to join themselves to it either by oral confession of faith before the whole society, or by making confession of faith more privately to the pastor and two or three brethren, (they communicating the sermon to the church,) or by giving in their experience in writing.
2. To manifest a true catholic spirit, it was agreed upon, that any godly persons of the Presbyterian, the Congregational, or the Baptist persuasions, if they desire to communicate with this church, either occasionally or constantly, shall not be debarred from such a privilege, provided they behave themselves peaceably and according to the rules of the charity.
3. No persons shall be admitted members of this church, that have not been baptized, either in their infancy, or when adult, until they submit to the ordinance.⁴⁵

The issue of the necessity or otherwise of baptism was a vexed one in Congregational circles. It was so with the church covenants at Poole and Potterspurty in 1740–1; and in 1938 Albert Peel could still say that the denomination was hopelessly muddled about it.⁴⁶ No doubt the Evangelical awakening contributed to the muddle insofar as it might have seemed ungracious – even against the Spirit – to raise the question of baptism when an infidel was now manifestly saved.

44. *The London Christian Instructor, or Congregational Magazine*, II 1819, 437. For Holcroft (1629-1693) see *DNB*.

45. *Ib.*, II 1819, 761.

46. A. Peel, *Thirty-five to Fifty*, 1938, 179.

Meanwhile at Castle Gate, Nottingham the pastor and elders were being accorded an important “filtering” role:

3rd October, 1751 At our Church meeting, after prayer, it was agreed that the pastors and elders shall declare what satisfaction they have received from all persons before they be propounded, and that the Church be asked if they be satisfied to have them propounded, and this to be done after the dismissal of the Congregation on the Preparation Day, and the brethren to be desired to stay for that end... 1st. April, 1752. At the Church meeting, after prayer, it was agreed that the experiences be read before the members of the Church, who are to be called into the vestry after service is over on Preparation Day, and the Church to be asked if they be satisfied or have any objection; the persons to be propounded six weeks before.⁴⁷

Among other churches which required baptism of prospective members was that at Clapton Park, London, the Church Book of which records that on 2nd July 1807: “Elizabeth Whitwell, one of the children of this church, gave a satisfactory account of her hope towards God and her experience of personal religion, which was corroborated by pleasing testimonies to the Christian propriety of her habitual deportment. She was, therefore, unanimously advanced to the full enjoyment of all the privileges of church-communion.”⁴⁸

During William Roby’s ministry at Grosvenor Street, Manchester, prospective candidates were proposed at Church Meeting and then visited by two deacons, or other appointed persons. They then appeared before the Church Meeting, read a written statement of their experience, declared their desire to be admitted to the church, and were duly informed of the outcome. The 1817 statement of a “reclaimed infidel,” which contained about six thousand words, was published by Roby in 1820 under the title *The Converted Atheist*.⁴⁹

Practice at Grosvenor Street notwithstanding, some clearly felt that the gate was becoming disquietingly less narrow, as witness this lament of 1821: “No person used to be admitted into the church without being examined as to knowledge and experience publicly, before a considerable congregation; and, yet, it was scarcely ever known, that any person was deterred from offering himself as a candidate for communion, on account of the strict mode of admission.”⁵⁰ Nor, as John Pye Smith had implied as early as 1808, was there smoke without fire: “Except in these societies (whose number, we hope, is

47. Church Book, quoted by A.R. Henderson, *op.cit.*, 128.

48. Quoted by A. Peel, “A Congregational church’s first pastorate,” *TCHS* X no. 5, April 1929, 237-

49. See W. Gordon Robinson, *William Roby, 1766–1830*, 1954, 76-7.

50. *The London Christian Instructor*, IV, 1821, 338-9.

comparatively very small) which have degenerated into a disgraceful and ruinous relaxation of discipline, the admission of our members is always preceded by a faithful inquiry into their moral character and religious knowledge. Such admissions are sanctioned by reasonable evidences of holy sincerity; and are accompanied with an honourable 'Confession of Christ before men' in the efficacy of his grace, either oral, written, or narrated by a competent testimony."⁵¹ Others took a different view, among them Robert Vaughan, the former minister of Angel Street, Worcester and the first President of Lancashire Independent College:

That the church should have some ground on which to believe that the persons desirous of being admitted to membership with it are pious persons is manifest; but it is left to the great law of Christian benevolence and sympathy to suggest, that the manner in which such knowledge may be obtained, so as to expose the feeling of the candidate to the least possible cost, is that which should in each case be adopted.

Widely different from this strictly Christian method of proceeding has been the practice of too many professed independents. The one fixed species of ordeal, to which our churches, or more frequently perhaps our deacons, have been disposed to subject all persons desirous of uniting with us, has operated in not a few connexions as though devised by some special foe to our body, for the purpose of letting all the ignorance and coarseness of society into our churches, and precluding all its intelligence and delicacy from them. In some cases it has been the rule that all candidates for church-fellowship, whether male or female, should make their appearance before the church, for the purpose of stating the ground on which they hope that they are Christians, being liable, at the same time, to answer any interrogations which the brotherhood at large might be disposed to put to them, for the purpose of electing the required information. In some churches, the parties are required to communicate statements to the same effect in writing; and in others, the deacons erect themselves into a necessary tribunal for the examination of such cases.

But concerning each of these methods of proceeding, if made to be indispensable, I do not scruple to speak as so much invention on the part of independents, and as no part of independency rightly understood... I do not merely say of them that they are no part of the law of Christ, I must condemn them as contrary to that law... Even the practice of requiring candidates to make their appearance at the

51. J. Pye Smith's Introductory Discourse at the ordination of John Bruce, Newport, Isle-of-Wight, 1808, 5.

church-meeting at the time when their names are approved, though very seemly and good in itself, I would rather we should be understood to recommend than to enforce... We should not do anything to confound the distinction between the church and the world. But we sin against Christ, against his church, and against humanity, when we presume to set up our own devices in the manner of laws, so as to cause minds to remain as though in the world, which might otherwise be among the visible ornaments of the church. While resolved not to open the doors of the church to the worldly, we should be careful that we do not close them against Christians.⁵²

These comments must be read in the light of Vaughan's desire to eradicate the barbarous and to reassure people of rank that although Congregational churches might have the reputation of being "a sort of rude commonwealth", "Distinguished laymen who take their place frankly among protestant dissenters, need not be apprehensive that the respect shewn to their civil rank elsewhere, will be wanting on the part of their new friends."⁵³

Where Vaughan spoke against the elevation of candidate-reception practice into an inflexible law, others came to abandon such practice altogether. In many, if not most, Congregational churches by the end of the nineteenth century a candidate was required neither to appear before the Church Meeting in order to confess his faith and experience, nor to write to the church, but simply to express his wish for membership and satisfy an appointed home visitor. If the visitor's report was satisfactory, the candidate was received. The practice of adding one's name to the covenant declined in churches which had a covenant, and in those which did not the church roll was normally innocent of doctrinal content. The question is not so much, Why did the practices decline; it is, What happened to the *experience*?

III

We turn now to the corporate confessing which was engaged in through the singing of hymns. Here, of course, our starting-point is somewhat later than it was in regard to the local covenants and related matters of church membership. It was only gradually that the English hymn developed out of the earlier metrical psalms, and

52. R. Vaughan, *Congregationalism: or, The Polity of Independent Churches, viewed in relation to the State and Tendencies of Modern Society*, 2nd edn. revised and enlarged 1842, 197-200. For Vaughan see *DNB*.

53. *Ib.*, 175-181.

it is well known that in that development the Congregationalist Isaac Watts (1674–1748)⁵⁴ played a pioneering and (at least as far as those of his hymns which have stood the test of time are concerned) a distinguished role. Watts's *The Hymns and Spiritual Songs* were published in 1707–1709; his *Psalms* in 1719. They came to be widely used among Congregationalists, and for some time *Supplements* to Watts were the order of the day, rather than entirely new collections. The latter eventually began to appear – Rowland Hill's of 1783, for example – but even then Watts was their theological and religious backbone. Among the first acts of the infant Congregational Union of England and Wales was the appointment of a committee under Josiah Conder⁵⁵ to compile a new hymnal. *The Congregational Hymn Book* of 1836 was the result, and it was followed by *The New Congregational Hymn Book* (1858), by a *Supplement* to that in 1874; by G.S. Barrett's⁵⁶ *Congregational Church Hymnal* (1887 and still in use in the 1960s); by *The Congregational Hymnary* (1922); and by *Congregational Praise* (1951). In the last mentioned are forty-eight of Watts's hymns – three more than those of Charles Wesley.

It would not be tedious, but it is strictly unnecessary, to quote at large from Watts, Philip Doddridge (1702–1751)⁵⁷ and their successors down to such living debtors to the Congregational tradition as Caryl Micklem (1925–), Fred Kaan (1929–), Alan Gaunt (1935–) and Brian Wren (1936–). All that needs to be asserted is that despite Watts's (now unsung) banalities, the more glutinous offerings of some Victorians – and the more robust items of others which perpetrated the misapprehension that *we* bring in the Kingdom – and the recent attempts to press the nuts and bolts of technology into hymnic service, a fairly strong line of orthodox doctrine is traceable through the hymns of the Congregationalists. Since Watts and Doddridge supply the foundation we may adduce some of their hymns still in use as evidence:

GOD: I'll praise my Maker while I've breath (Ps. CXLVI). *Watts.*

CHRIST: Hark the glad sound! the Saviour comes. *Doddridge.*

When I survey the wondrous Cross. *Watts.*

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun. *Watts.*

HOLY SPIRIT: Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove. *Watts.*

THE TRINITY: We give immortal praise. *Watts.*

THE SCRIPTURES: Lord, I have made Thy word my choice. *Watts.*

THE CHURCH: Lord of the worlds above. *Watts.*

54. For Watts see *DNB*.

55. For Conder (1789–1835) see *DNB*.

56. For Barrett (1839–1916) see A. Peel, *The Congregational Two Hundred*, 1948, 225–6.

57. For Doddridge see *DNB*.

BAPTISM: See Israel's gentle Shepherd stands. *Doddridge*.

LORD'S SUPPER: My God, and is Thy table spread? *Doddridge*.

COMMUNION OF SAINTS: There is a land of pure delight. *Watts*.

The conspectus of Christian doctrine is here memorably present.

In signing their local covenants, in their private and public testimonies, and in their hymn-singing those of the Congregational way confessed their faith. What, more particularly, of their ministers?

IV

Not surprisingly, churches whose members had responded to God's covenant call – sometimes at considerable personal cost, and in many cases after anguish of soul – were anxious to ensure that those settled over them as pastors were men of sound doctrinal and “godly walk”. The decision by a Church Meeting to call a minister was not lightly taken, and on occasion candidates would serve for weeks, months or even years before their futures were determined. Thus, for example, although Thomas Taylor of Norwich began to preach at Bury St Edmunds in 1653, he was not received into the fellowship there until 18th September 1655, or ordained until 3rd January 1656.⁵⁸ Again, in 1739 John Heywood came from Lincoln to Potterspury, Northamptonshire, and only “After preaching here for about twelve months, he was ordained September 25th 1740...”⁵⁹ On all of which Doddridge's general comment of 1745 is instructive:

First a minister has normally spent 4 or 5 years of preparation after Grammar School. They are examined by 3 or 4 senior ministers before they begin to preach. ‘An unordained Minister is seldom chosen to the Pastoral Office in any of our Churches,... till he has resided among them *some Months*, or perhaps *some Years*; preaching stately to them, and performing most other ministerial offices, excepting the Administration of the Sacraments.’

When called (normally unanimously) the minister who accepts ‘generally signifies that Intention to neighbouring Pastors; whose Concurrence he desires in solemnly *setting him apart* to that

58. J. Browne, *History of Congregationalism and memorials of the Churches in Norfolk and Suffolk*, 1877, 396.

59. T. Coleman, *Memorials of the Independent Churches in Northamptonshire*, 1853, 278.

Office.⁶⁰

The in-coming minister's confession of faith was regarded as of great importance. It was not delivered, as it might be in these latter days, with an eye to passing Anglicans or Roman Catholics, and with a view to reassuring them of Congregationalism's doctrinal soundness. It was done as in the sight of God, and for the edification of the church which had addressed the call: the members had a right to know (or to have confirmed on that solemn occasion what they already knew) details of their pastor's motivating convictions. As with personal testimonies, so here: there is a measure of stereotyping, but from this insincerity may not necessarily be inferred. There are subtle changes in content and style too, as we shall see if we take Thomas Bradbury's ordination confession of 1707 as starting-point, and then note selected examples from the remainder of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries.

Bradbury's confession runs to thirty-six pages, and the gist of it is as follows⁶¹:

He first declares that he will uphold the scriptures: "To this Law and Testimony *I profess to bring every Opinion.*" God's revelation in nature "*includes both his Eternal Unity, and a Trinity of Persons.*" God made the world, and rules it; he "*made a Covenant with our first*

60. 'An Appendix, relating to the usual methods of Ordination among the Protestant Dissenters,' dated 10th September 1745; appended to the published charge Doddridge delivered at Norwich on 20th June 1745 at the ordination of Abraham Tozer. We may also note that *some* academies required candidates to make a confession of faith before training. Thus, for example, at Blackburn Academy, founded in 1816, the following arrangements obtained: "In order to secure suitableness for the work in young men appearing as candidates, it was resolved, that each should be required to bring before the Committee, from the church to which he belonged, a testimonial to the suitableness of his character and qualifications, and that he present in writing a brief account of his views of Divine truth, of his religious experience, and of the motives which induce him to enter into the Christian Ministry; that he then deliver a short address; after which, and subsequent conversation, if he be approved, he shall be received for six months; and if he continue to give satisfaction, at the expiration of that period he shall be fully admitted." R. Slate, *A Brief History of the rise and progress of the Lancashire Congregational Union; and of the Blackburn Independent Academy*, 1840, 120. Other academies required attestation to such a printed declaration as *Declaration as to some controverted points of Christian Doctrine*, 1732; see New College London MSS at D[r.] W[illiams's] L[ibrary]. The applications of more than 500 candidates are to be found in these MSS. The academies in question are Coward College, Highbury, Homerton, Hoxton, New College, and Wymondley. For his part, John Pye Smith of Homerton declared that "satisfactory evidences of conversion to God" were essential in ministerial candidates. See G.F. Nuttall, *New College, London, and its Library*, Friends of DWL 1977, 11-13.
61. See *A Confession of Faith, at the Publick Ordination of Thomas Bradbury London, July the Tenth 1707. With an Exhortation to Minister and People by Mr. John Shower*, 1707. For Bradbury (1677-1759) see DNB.

Parents," who sinned and broke it. Then, "*I believe that God resolved to glorify himself by redeeming some of the lost Race.*" Indeed, God "*did from Eternity PREDESTINATE some to the Adoption of Children by Jesus Christ... This Election was free, and it will have a certain Issue. I believe that the Remnant are saved according to the Election of GRACE, not for the works which they should afterwards do, but according to his own Purpose and Grace, before the World began.*" This end could be attained only be the appointment of "one MEDIATOR between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus." "*I believe in the Divinity of our Great Redeemer. that he is over all, GOD blessed for ever.*" Christ is a teacher from God, a priest for ever, king of the saints. In his name alone we are saved. He was crucified, buried, raised, and is now ascended. He is the universal judge. Those who are predestinated are called, and those called are 'JUSTIFIED freely by his Grace.' *I believe that we lay hold on this Mercy by FAITH, and that is not of our selves, but the Gift of God.*" God's people receive "the ADOPTION of sons, and so are Joint-Heirs with Christ, called by his Name." All the partakers of this heavenly "calling are... washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus." They are "KEPT by the mighty Power of God through Faith unto Salvation. *They may indeed grieve the good Spirit of God, and so have their Iniquities visited with Stripes, but they are thus chastened of the Lord, that they may not be condemned with the World.*" Christ governs his people and "is to be worshipped with Reverence and a godly Fear." Everything we do individually and as a communion of Christ should be to God's glory. He will be with his people always, and has given several ordinances - baptism, hymns and psalms, the Lord's Supper, prayers - to help them. "*The Christian, at his Death, enters upon two blessings, a Complete Purity, and a satisfying Enjoyment.*" The righteous shall be raised at the last day, while the wicked "shall be punished with Everlasting Destruction."

If we juxtapose Thomas Hadfield's ordination confession of 1726 we experience a dramatic change of content and mood:

As the being and existence of God is the foundation of all religion, I am abundantly persuaded, that there is a God. When I seriously consider the visible constitution of nature: for instance, the number, magnitude, distances, motion and uses of the heavenly bodies: when I survey this earth, and reflect upon its figure, gravity, and marvellous situation, with regard to the fountain of light and heat; and the properties of the air, that full of life which encompasses it: when I behold the furniture of the earth in plants of diverse kinds, all of them most admirable for their exquisite structure and beauty in leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds: when from these I descend to the ocean, and consider its wonderful aspect, its amazing flux and

reflux, and the numberless astonishing variety of great and small beasts inhabiting this watery region: farther, when I contemplate the fabric of animal bodies, particularly the body of man, the exquisite perfection, beauty, order and aptness of its parts to their proper and respective ends; contemplating these things with the subordination of one creature to another, and the joint concurrence of all to one common end, the glory of God in serving his vicegerent man; nay, and when to the foresaid consideration, I yet add the common consent and tradition of all ages, and the many indisputable proofs we have from history, of supernatural events; weighing all these articles in my thoughts, I am hereupon fully convinced, that from all eternity there must have existed a Being of absolute perfection, whose existence is necessary and uncaused, and which it must be a contradiction to suppose not to exist. For if ever there was a time when there was nothing, there never could have been anything, unless we can reconcile this contradiction, that nothing could of itself arise into being; that is, that it might both be, and not be at the same time. Nor is it less absurd to affirm, that there has been an infinite series of changeable dependant beings, produc'd one from another in an eternal progression, as natural causes and effects, without anyone prime independent cause of their existence: for this assertion supposes such beings to exist without any ground or reason of their existence.⁶²

Passing by the reflection that such a modern Reformed thinker as John Hick does not think it at all fanciful to suppose an eternal series of overlapping events⁶³ we come to the main point: whereas with Bradbury we were in the realm of the seventeenth-century confessions and declarations, with Hadfield we have arrived in the age of the "evidences." His statement opens with a mixture of cosmological, teleological and ontological considerations which became increasingly common as the century wore on. This was the age of the Anglican

62. *A Sermon Preach'd at the Ordination of Thomas Hadfield, M.D. at Peckham in the County of Surrey, October XIX, MDCCXXVI. By Joseph Hill, 1727.* 41-3. Hadfield was baptised at Chesterfield, 9.10.1701; d. 1741.

63. J. Hick, *The Philosophy of Religion*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1964, 22.

Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), whose apologetics were widely influential;⁶⁴ by now Locke was being studied in the dissenting academies; the revival of scholastic natural theology was in full swing. The Calvinistic scheme follows in Hadfield's confession, but the basis in natural theology is first laid. The same may be said of the confessions of John Notcutt (1735),⁶⁵ John Angus (1748)⁶⁶ Thomas Williams (1759)⁶⁷, James Rooker (1751),⁶⁸ Edward Harwood (1765)⁶⁹. Thomas Gibbons (1743) was in the same general mould, though he did open with a cautionary quotation from John Howe: "Schemes, or Collections of Doctrines reduced into an Order, may be of Use... more distinctly to inform Others

64. See A.P.F. Sell, "Samuel Clarke on the existence of God," *Enlightenment and Dissent* III, 1984, 65-75. For Dale A. Johnson on "The end of the 'Evidences': A study in nonconformist theological transition," see *JURCHS* II no. 3, April 1979, 62-72. Johnson shows the importance of D.W. Simon (1830-1909) in prompting the transition. It is interesting to note the way in which Philip Doddridge set his course of 230 *Lectures on the Principal Subjects of Pneumatology, Ethics, and Divinity* (1st edn. 1763; 4th edn. 2 vols. 1799) in perspective. In the Introduction he writes, "let it be remembered, that the student is supposed to be already acquainted with many things here brought into question. It would be almost fatal mistake, to act as if nothing were known of God and Christ, till the chief doctrines relating to both came to be examined in this course." He further exhorts the reader: "I would remind you, dear Sir, (whoever you are that are going over these lectures) that you may enter eternity, long before you can have attended, or even transcribed them: and therefore I would beseech and charge you, by all your hopes and prospects there, that it be your daily and governing care, after having solemnly devoted your soul to Christian covenant, to live like his servant, and to endeavour in all things to adorn his gospel."
65. See *A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. John Notcutt at the Meeting-House in Green-Street, Cambridge, on July 22, 1735, by William Ford. With the Charge then given him by the Revd. Mr. Tobias Wildboar; and Mr. Notcutt's Confession of his FAITH*, 1735. Notcutt became Socinian, left the ministry for business in Ipswich, and died in 1778.
66. See *A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of the Reverend John Angus, October 26, 1748, at the Meeting at Bishop-Stortford, by John Guyse, D.D. Together with an Introductory Discourse By Thomas Gibbons: Mr. Angus's Confession of Faith: and a Charge delivered by Samuel Price*, 1748. For Angus (1748-1801) see *DNB*.
67. See *A Sermon Preached at Gosport, at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Williams, June 6, 1750. By John Cumming, A.M. Together with an Introductory Discourse, by Samuel Hayward; Mr. Williams's Confession of Faith; and a Charge delivered by Nicholas Pearson*, 1750. Williams died 1770, aet. 45/6.
68. See *Mr. Hayward's Introductory Discourse at the Ordination of Mr. Rooker*, with Rooker's Confession, the elder John Lavington's Sermon, and Richard Pearsall's Charge. For Rooker see A.P.F. Sell, "The Walsall riots, the Rooker family, and eighteenth-century Dissent," *South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, XXV, 1983/4, 50-71.
69. See *A Sermon preached at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. Edward Harwood, of Bristol, and the Reverend Mr. Benjamin Davis, of Marlborough, October the 16th 1765, in the Old Jewry, London. By the Rev. Mr. Thomas Amory. To which is annexed, the Rev. Mr. Harwood's Confession of Faith, and a Charge delivered by Samuel Chandler, D.D.*, 1765. Harwood (1729-94), is described as "An eminent scholar but a poor theologian," W. Wilson mss., DWL A8.61.62.

concerning our Sentiments, provided, they be avowed to be looked upon but as a *Mensura mensurata*, reserving unto the Scriptures the Honour of being only the *Mensura mensurans*.”⁷⁰

In the Confession made by John Fell at Thaxted, Essex, on 24th October 1770, there is a different tone. After an introductory paragraph he continues (unlike many): “I believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired and holy word of God; wherein he hath been pleased to reveal the glories of his own nature, and to make known the gracious purposes of his mercy and goodness, with respect to men.” Here the bible comes before contemporary apologetics, and Fell is less scholastic in other ways too. He does not use the term “predestination”, and says that God “hath chosen to himself a great multitude of our race to be redeemed” – others spoke of “some” as elected to redemption. Again, in a note not hitherto struck Fell declares, “I am sensible that the gospel is to be “preached to every creature,” that “the Children of God, who are scattered abroad” among all nations, may be gathered from the world into separate societies...” He has relatively much on, and in defence of, infant baptism, but only half a sentence on the Lord’s Supper as a commemoration of the Saviour’s sufferings and death. He concludes with references to death and judgment, heaven and hell.⁷¹

To repeat: here natural theology gives way to scripture at the beginning of the statement; the ordered natural system of the Augustan Age is not so evident; some of the traditional theological phrases are modified; and with the concern for “every creature” we realise that the evangelical awakening has arrived.

For his part Sir Harry Trelawny began his ordination confession by criticising the Latinate curriculum under which ministers were trained: “Our seminaries are under the direction of heathen authors. Hence it is that pulpits are filled with the same stuff, – Divinity I dare not call it. A moral essay on the dignity of man, and the beauty of virtue, is all that can be expected from such heathen-taught gentlemen! ... The Triune God, (the God of the Bible), is without ceremony set aside. His covenant religion is either forgotten or denied, and a supreme being

70. See *A Sermon preached at the Ordination of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Gibbons, October 27, 1743. At Haberdasher's Hall, London. By John Guyse, D.D. Together with an Introductory Discourse by Richard Rawlin, Mr. Gibbons's Confession of Faith. And an exhortation to him by Thomas Hall, 1743.* For Gibbons (1720–85) see *DNB*. Gibbons quotes Howe’s *Carnality of Religious Contention*.

71. See *An Introductory Discourse by John Angus, Mr. Fell's Confession of Faith; a charge by Thomas Davidson; and a Sermon by Thomas Towle, B.D., all delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Mr. John Fell. In Thaxted, Essex, October 24th 1770, 1770.* For Fell (1735–97) see *DNB*.

in *one* person, held up for adoration in his stead.”⁷²

Not all were so *avant garde*. Although John Bruce in 1790 did not use the technical terms of Calvinism in his confession, and spoke of the influence of Hervey’s *Theron and Aspasio*⁷³ upon him, he nevertheless answered to the question why he opted for the dissenters rather than for the established church in typically eighteenth-century order; he valued “The right of private judgment and liberty of conscience with regard to religious sentiment and duty; the supremacy of Christ as the only Head of his church; and the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as the rules of faith and practice... I also esteem their mode of worship and administration of the ordinances of the New Testament, more consonant with the simplicity of the Gospel, and the practice of the primitive churches, than those which are adopted in the national establishment.”⁷⁴

By the time we come to William Jay’s confession of 1791⁷⁵ we are entering a period in which such statements become less stereotyped. God had been dealing with souls in the evangelical awakening, and more intimate declarations were called for. There is no departure in Jay from a non-technically construed Calvinism: “the depravity of man,” for example, “is a very material article in an evangelical creed”; but the flavour is less formal and more adapted to the circumstances in which the call was given.

Thomas Raffles’s confession of 1809 incorporates both the missionary mandate and a proper agnosticism concerning the decrees of God:

as God, who is infinite in mercy, did foresee what should thus come to pass, I believe that from all eternity, he determined the salvation of our fallen race; But, as, on the other hand, his justice demanded, either from the guilty or from a substitute, an atonement equal to the extent and enormity of the crime they had committed... Jesus Christ, the eternal son of God, the second person in the adorable Trinity, not from *compulsion*, but from *his own will*, generously offered himself as that substitute... persons who should eventually participate in the blessing of that atonement, were also predetermined

72. See *A Sermon at the Ordination of the Rev. Sir Harry Trelawney, Baronet and A.B. (late of Christ Church, Oxford) To the Pastoral Office in the Church of CHRIST, In WEST LOOE, CORNWALL. Preached at SOUTHAMPTON, April 22, 1777.* By Edward Ashburner, A.M. 1777. Ever an ecclesiastical pilgrim, Trelawney was brought up Anglican, became a Methodist, then a Calvinist, and ended as Vicar of Egleshayle, Cornwall. He died in 1834.

73. For James Harvey (1714–58) see *DNB*.

74. *Discourses delivered at the Solemn Separation of the Rev. John Bruce to the Pastoral Office over The Congregational Church assembling in St. James’s-Street, Newport, Isle of Wight, On the Twenty-fifth of May, 1808.* By The Rev. John Pye Smith, D.D., Homerton. Rev. Samuel Bruce, Wakefield, Rev. James Bennett, Romsey. To which is added *A Sermon preached in the Evening of the same Day, by the Rev. Robert Winter, London, 1808, 15.* For Bruce (1782–1874) see *Congregational Year Book*, 1876, 319.

75. See *The Autobiography of William Jay* (1854), Edinburgh 1974, 76–88.

and ordained... I believe, however, that in preaching the gospel, its invitations are to be published indiscriminately to all, – that *in this connection*, we have little or nothing to do with the decrees of God – that he who rejects the Saviour, does it with the full consent of his will, and is therefore as culpable as though no such decrees existed.⁷⁶

Finally, Henry Forster Burder's confession of 1814⁷⁷ by implication modifies a number of the points of classical Calvinism. He sets out from the scriptures; he agrees that since the entry of sin man has been "radically and universally depraved"; and there is the free call of the gospel. Interestingly, he speaks of the Lord's Supper before baptism; and he thinks that the impenitent will at the last be consigned to "deserved" – though not "never-ending" as others had it – punishment.

The question arises how far the ministers to whom we have referred *kept* the faith once declared as their ministries proceeded, and as the currents of Arianism and deism swept around the land. In some cases funeral orations provide clues towards an answer; and while we need to allow for the disinclination to be beastly to the departed – and for the inclination to eulogise them – many eighteenth-century funeral orations are, to use a good eighteenth-century word, surprisingly candid.

Thus it appears that Thomas Bradbury was a Mr. Valiant-for-Calvinist-Truth to the end. Thomas Hall praised him for the "*useful Pieces* which he published *against the Enemies* of God and their Country, who have endeavoured to revive and propagate the *destructive Notions* of the *Arians* and *Pelagians*, and the *enslaving Doctrines* of *Passive Obedience* and *Non-Resistance*."⁷⁸

Of Thomas Gibbons it was said that

His hopes and expectations were founded on the gospel; and his spirit appeared to be cast in its mould... In his ministry he was truly *evangelical*, and bore an unambiguous testimony to the grace of God and the atonement of Christ, as the grand and sole foundation of the sinner's hope. And in connection with this, he maintained the

76. *Discourses delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Thomas Raffles, over the Congregational Church at Hammersmith, late under the Pastoral Care of the Rev. William Humphryes, on Thursday, June 22, 1809. The Introductory Discourse By the Rev. John Humphrys, of Union Street, Borough, The Charge By the Rev. William Bengo Collyer, D.D., of Peckham. And the Sermon to the People, By the Rev. Robert Winter, D.D., of New Court. Together with a Confession of Faith, &c, by Thomas Raffles, 1809, 33-5. For Raffles (1788-1863) see DNB.*

77. *See Discourses delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Henry Forster Burder, M.A., to the Pastoral Office at St. Thomas's Square, Hackney, March 2nd, 1814, 1814.*

78. *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Bradbury, who departed this Life Sep. 9, 1759, in the 82d Year of his Age: Preached at New-Court on Lord's-Day Afternoon, Sept. 16. And Published at the Request of the Church, By Thomas Hall, 1759, 35.*

absolute necessity of genuine *holiness* and *piety* as an essential part of the great salvation, and the evidence of our title to live and blessedness... Among his Sunday evening meditations he says 'May I live, and preach, and visit, with growing holiness, and a better preparation for celestial enjoyment!'⁷⁹

For his part John Angus managed to marry Calvinism with a good grace: "His own confession contains a clear and sensible statement of his religious sentiments, which were what are commonly called *calvinistic*, and to which he invariably adhered through life... But he always discerned great charity and candour towards those who conscientiously differed from him; and was willing to give the *right hand of fellowship* to serious persons of different persuasions."⁸⁰

Nor was there any doubt where John Fell stood: "Mr. Fell, it is well known, was a firm and strenuous assertor of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. I will not apply to him the quaint epithets of Orthodox, or Calvinist, terms which, in the estimation of some, imply all that is silly and foolish, and of others, all that is venerable and dignified"⁸¹

With Thomas Hadfield the case was different. It would seem that he had caused finely-tuned doctrinal antennae to twitch:

In the latter part of his life he altered his sentiments in some of the obtruser points of religion... I am well assured this alteration did not proceed from fickleness and levity of temper, or a love of novelty, but from the full persuasion and maturest conviction of his judgment and conscience... An alteration of sentiments in such circumstances, must I think create a real esteem for his memory, even amongst such of you, should there be any such, to whom such alteration might not be altogether so agreeable...⁸²

It is interesting to note that of the four ministers mentioned who were educated at English dissenting academies (Angus was at Edinburgh University) Bradbury was under Timothy Jollie at Attercliffe; Gibbons proceeded from

79. *Israel's Testament. A Sermon preached at Haberdashers Hall, London, on account of the much lamented death of The Rev. Thomas Gibbons, D.D. Who departed this life Feb. 22. 1785. By B. Davies, 1785, 21-3.*
80. *The Memory of the Just. A Sermon preached Jan. 3, 1802, at Bishop Stortford, Herts, on the death of the Rev. John Angus, upwards of 54 years Minister of the Gospel in that Town; Who died Dec. 22, 1801, in the 78th year of his age. By William Chaplin, 1802, 30.*
81. *The Intellectual and Moral Difference between Man and Man: A Sermon, preached at the Old Jewry, Sept. 24th, 1797, on occasion of the death of the Reverend John Fell, Formerly of Thaxted in Essex, lately of Homerton, in Middlesex. By Henry Hunter D.D., Minister of The Scots Church, London Wall, 1798, 47.*
82. *Death the Wages of Sin, and eternal life the Gift of God by Christ Represented in a Sermon Preached at Peckham in Surrey, March 8, 1741. On Occasion of the Death of the late Reverend Thomas Hadfield, M.D., Who died February 21, 1741, in the 46th Year of his Age. By Samuel Chandler, 1741, 60-1.*

Abraham Taylor at Deptford to John Eames at Moorfields, where he later taught Fell, who himself became classical tutor at Homerton academy (1787–97). All of these were Calvinists. Hadfield, however, was trained at Findern under Thomas Hill and Ebenezer Latham, of whom it was said that “His determined resolution never to make his instructions subservient to a narrow-spirited party and supposed want of entire orthodoxy made several of the Dissenters in London and other places rather averse to sending pupils to him, and the growing reputation of Dr. Doddridge’s Academy, together with some pecuniary advantages attending it which Dr. Latham had not drew many of them who might otherwise have been sent to him, to Northampton.”⁸³ Not indeed that rigid drilling in the “old paths” kept all in the narrow doctrinal way. Thomas Secker (later to become Archbishop of Canterbury) experienced considerable relief on passing from Jollie to Samuel Jones at Tewkesbury; and it was during the ministry of another Attercliffe student, Joseph Mottershead, at Cross Street, Manchester (1717–71) that that church left Calvinism for Arianism.⁸⁴

As the nineteenth century progressed the practice of publishing ordination confessions declined. To the end of the Congregational Union of England and Wales the (non-prescribed) service books in wide use required a confession from the ordinand.⁸⁵ But the first *Book of Services* of the United Reformed Church only says that “the minister-elect may make a personal statement.”⁸⁶ It cannot be that today’s ministers have nothing to confess; what is rather indicated is a further stage in the movement towards “set” liturgies (free or conceived prayer being another casualty); a weakening of the concept of catholicity of the local church – the minister is a “(wider) church professional” in any case, and does not become a minister by virtue of this particular call; and the influence of past Presbyterian practice in which the minister’s church membership was not held among those who called him. Be this as it may, for a large part of their history Congregationalists heard detailed and personal doctrinal confessions from those whom they called to be their ministers; and by those confessions they were edified.

V

Our last category of material comprises the most global examples of Congregational confessing: the declarations of faith. It is not difficult to imagine that were we considering the Christian confessing of other Christian communions

83. *An Account of the Dissenting Academies from the Restoration of Charles the Second*, DWL mss. 3.59.

84. For these academies and tutors see H. McLachlan, *English Education after the Test Acts*. Manchester University Press 1931, 106–9, 175–88, 131–4. Jollie, Taylor, Eames, Hill, Secker and Mottershead are in *DNB*.

85. See *A Manual for Ministers*, 1936, 134; and *A Book of Services and Prayers*, 1959, 93.

86. *A Book of Services*, Edinburgh: 1980, 113.

we should begin from the most universal declarations, for these often provide the confessional parameters. But Congregationalism does not begin “from the top down”: wherever the saints gather there is the catholic church. Accordingly, the major declarations have no more status than the local covenant. Indeed, while adept at devising statements on the things commonly held among them, Congregationalists have been equally adept at making scant use of the affirmations thus compiled.

In 1658 two hundred representatives from one hundred and twenty independent churches met at the Savoy Palace with a view to drawing up a declaration of faith and a statement of their church policy. Prominent among them was John Owen (1616–1683), and also involved were Philip Nye (1596?–1672), Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) and William Bridge (1600–1670) – all of whom had been among the Congregational representatives at the Westminster Assembly.⁸⁷

Doctrinally, the *Savoy Declaration*⁸⁸ follows the Westminster Confession to a large extent. Among *Savoy* additions to *Westminster* is an underlining of the fact that the “Doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable Dependence upon him” (chap. II). In chap. VI the technical language concerning the “Covenant of works and Life” is introduced; chap. IX refers to “Christ’s active obedience unto the whole Law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness.” The *Savoy* divines revised *Westminster’s* chapter “Of Repentance Unto Life” under the heading “Of Repentance unto life and salvation” as follows:

Such of the Elect as are converted at riper years, having sometimes lived in the state of nature, and therein served diverse lusts and pleasures, God in their effectual calling giveth them Repentance unto life.

II. Whereas there is none that doth good, and sinneth not, and the best of men may through the power and deceitfulness of their corruptions dwelling in them, with the prevalency of temptation, fall into great sins and provocations; God hath in the covenant of Grace mercifully provided, that Believers so sinning and falling, be renewed through repentance unto Salvation.

III. This saving Repentance is an Evangelical Grace, whereby a person being by the holy Ghost made sensible of the manifold evils of his sin, doth by Faith in Christ humble himself for it with godly sorrow, detestation of it, and self-aborrencey, praying for pardon and strength of Grace, with a purpose, and endeavour by supplies of

87. For Owen, Nye, Goodwin and Bridge see *DNB*. For recent works on the Westminster Assembly see *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, ed. A.I.C. Heron, Edinburgh 1982; R.S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the “Grand Debate”*, Edinburgh 1985.

88. The most useful edition is that of A.G. Matthews, 1959.

the Spirit, to walk before God unto all well-pleasing in all things.

IV. As Repentance is to be continued through the whole course of our lives, upon the account of the body of death, and the motions thereof; so it is every man's duty to repent of his particular known sins particularly.

Savoy's chap. XX is an entirely new section, designed to make good what was held to be an unfortunate omission in *Westminster*.⁸⁹

Of the Gospel, and of the extent of the Grace thereof.

The Covenant of Works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable unto life, God was pleased to give unto the Elect the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling them, and begetting in them Faith and Repentance: in this promise the Gospel, as to the substance of it, was revealed, and was therein effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.

II. This promise of Christ, and salvation by him, is revealed only in and by the Word of God; neither do the works of creation or providence, with the light of nature, make discovery of Christ, or of Grace by him, so much as in a general or obscure way; much less that men destitute of the revelation of him by the promise or Gospel, should be enabled thereby to attain saving faith or repentance.

III. The revelation of the Gospel unto sinners, made in diverse times, and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein, as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God, not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men's natural abilities, by virtue of common light received without it, which none ever did make or can so do: and therefore in all ages the preaching of the Gospel hath been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitning of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God.

IV. Although the Gospel be the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving Grace, and is as such abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in trespasses, may be born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual, irresistible work of the holy Ghost upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life, without which no other means are sufficient for their conversion unto God.

Whereas in *Westminster* the civil magistrate may take action to maintain

89. See A.G. Matthews, *op.cit.*, 67.

church order, suppress heresies, and call synods, in Savoy chap. XXIV his powers are much curtailed:

III. Although the Magistrate is bound to encourage, promote, and protect the professors and profession of the Gospel, and to manage and order civil administrations in a due subserviency to the interest of Christ in the world, and to that end to take care that men of corrupt minds and conversations do not licentiously publish and divulge blasphemy and errors in their own nature, subverting the faith, and inevitably destroying the souls of them that receive them: Yet in such differences about the doctrines of the Gospel, or ways of the worship of God, as may befall men exercising a good conscience, manifesting it in their conversation, and holding the foundation, not disturbing others in their ways or worship that differ from them; there is no warrant for the Magistrate under the Gospel to abridge them of their liberty.⁹⁰

Savoy, unlike Westminster, omits the children of believers from those who comprise the catholic church, and adds a novel paragraph to chap. XXVI "Of the Church":

V. As the Lord in his care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the later days, Antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the Kingdom of his dear Son broken the Churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.

In the appended *Savoy Declaration of the Institution of Churches, and the Order appointed in them by Jesus Christ* the concept of covenanting is present though, surprisingly, the term is not:

VIII. The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ, who being further known to each other by their confession of the faith wrought in them by the power of God, declared by themselves or otherwise manifested, do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves to the Lord, and to one another by the will of God in professed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel.

90. This section did not please the American Congregationalists. See A.G. Matthews, *op.cit.*, 108-9 n.

Overall, then, there is substantial doctrinal agreement as between *Savoy* and *Westminster*, the major differences, apart from church polity, being *Savoy's* use of the more technical language of federal theology; and its concern both for the extent of the grace of the gospel and for the limits of magisterial authority.

On 8th May 1832 Congregationalists meeting in London voted to form a national union of churches, and at the same meeting a draft Declaration, drawn up by George Redford⁹¹ of Worcester, at the request of "several brethren," was read out. The Declaration was sent to the churches for their consideration, and in an accompanying letter of 4th June 1832 Joseph Turnbull⁹² the Secretary of the Union said that although "it was felt that such a document was but little required for our own information, and must necessarily be an imperfect statement of the sentiments held by us," nevertheless "for the information of others, not of our denomination, it was essentially requisite" – not least because many brethren felt that "a very large proportion of our countrymen take us to be either SOCINIANS or METHODISTS." Since the *Savoy* Declaration was now scarce – almost obsolete – some new initiative was needed, said Turnbull. After study by the churches and slight verbal revisions the Declaration was unanimously adopted on 10th May 1833. It was published as a tract, of which over twenty thousand copies were sold before the 1834 Assembly.⁹³

The Declaration's "Principles of Religion" were prefaced by seven notes, among them a disclaimer to the effect that "It is not intended that the following statement should be put forth with any authority, or as a standard to which assent should be required." Forty years on John Stoughton⁹⁴ opined that the Declaration could not have been "put forth" at all in his day: it would be regarded as an imposition upon religious freedom.⁹⁵

The "Principles" may be described as the epitome of moderate Calvinism. There is a reference to the covenant of grace, but not to that of works; and, indeed, at a number of points what is *not* said is significant, as the following clause, which makes no reference to preterition will indicate: "They believe that God having, before the foundation of the world, designed to redeem fallen man, made disclosures of his mercy, which were the grounds of faith and hope from the earliest ages."

91. For Redford (1785–1860) see *DNB*. For the founding of the Union see A. Peel, *These Hundred Years, 1831–1931*, 1931.

92. For Turnbull (1780–1861), who does not appear in *Congregational Year Book* after 1857, and has no obituary therein, see *Evangelical Magazine*, 1812, 483; 1821, 155, 291; *Congregational Magazine*, 1831, App.; 1833, 568; 1837, 140; 1839, 608.

93. The Declaration was printed in the *Congregational Year Book* from 1858 to 1918. The most recent reprint is in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* 1893, Boston: The Pilgrim Press 1960.

94. For Stoughton (1807–97) see *DNB*.

95. See P. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, I*, New York 1877, 833–5.

They do, however, in article XIX say that the wicked will be consigned to “everlasting punishment.” They believe in “the perpetual obligation of baptism”, but do not mention it in their thirteen appended “Principles of Church-Order and Discipline.”

As Stoughton’s comment suggests, many Congregationalists of the second half of the nineteenth century became so wary of *subscription* that they would not have welcomed the devising of new declarations of faith. Theology was experiencing an unprecedented period of shifting landmarks: modern biblical criticism, evolutionary thought, growing dissatisfaction with the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement – all of this and more had to be reckoned with and adjusted to.⁹⁶ In the wake of two World Wars, however, a different mood prevailed. There was the impact of the so-called theology of the Word associated with the name of Barth, but which many Congregationalists found prefigured in the works of P.T. Forsyth⁹⁷ many of which were reprinted between 1946 and 64. It became more fashionable to affirm the faith. There was also the increasing sense of fellowship among the world’s Congregationalists epitomised by the International Congregational Council, which first met in 1891, but which secured a permanent office and Secretary only in 1949. In that year, at its sixth meeting, the Council approved a statement entitled, “Congregationalism in itself, in its significance for the universal church and for the political and economic life of the world.”⁹⁸ The emphasis is upon the Congregational polity and its implications for liberty. It is said that Congregationalists “have never differed from other Christian communions in respect of the great doctrines of the faith,” but those doctrines are not here spelled out.

Again, following the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948 that body’s Faith and Order Commission invited member churches (and unions) prepare statements of their positions for the mutual edification of all. The Congregationalists duly prepared their paper on *Congregationalism*, which was published in 1951. Like the ICC statement this is not a full doctrinal statement: the Congregational heritage, polity and present attitudes are to the fore.

In connection with the Congregational Union’s “The Next Ten Years” programme, launched in 1958, a much more ambitious *Declaration* was prepared for the churches which were now on the point of covenanting together

96. See A.P.F. Sell, *The Great Debate*, ch. IV; *id. Theology in Turmoil: The roots, course and significance of the conservative-liberal debate in modern theology*, Grand Rapids 1986; *id. Defending and Declaring the Faith: Some Scottish examples, 1860–1920*, Exeter: 1988; “Henry Rogers and the eclipse of faith,” *JURCHS* II 1980, 128–143.

97. For Forsyth (1848–1921 – unaccountably omitted from *DNB*) see G. O. Griffith, *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*, 1948; W.L. Bradley, *P.T. Forsyth, The Man and His Work*, 1952; John H. Rodgers, *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*, 1965; A.M. Hunter, *P.T. Forsyth: Per Crucem ad lucem*, 1974.

98. See *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congregational Council*, 1949, 38–9.

at the national level. The *Declaration* followed upon *A Short Affirmation of Faith* (1961), and was intended to do for its time what *Savoy* had done for its.⁹⁹ It is among the most substantial of such texts produced during this century. In the words of one of the chairmen of the responsible committee, "Its theism is thoroughly Christocentric – but it is theocentric religion which is declared."¹⁰⁰

The *Declaration* is both rooted in the tradition of the ages and sensitive to the circumstances of the time. Thus: "Since God is Lord of all, we expect the thoughts of men everywhere to turn towards God.. But we are obliged to make plain that our own assurance of God has its particular ground of confidence, distinct from grounds shared by all religious men."¹⁰¹ Again, "Christians cannot afford to boast of their own spirituality. Religion may be the channel of the human spirit's response to its Creator and Redeemer; it may also be the channel of idolatrous distortions of human life. From such idolatrous distortions the practice of the Christian religion has been by no means free."¹⁰²

As of old, grace is central:

God, known and worshipped through Jesus Christ, is before all else a God who gives himself with unlimited and overflowing generosity. The name of this free self-giving is grace. The grace of God calls forth our utmost gratitude and trust.

Christians know God and his grace because he has created through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ a new relationship between man and God. Disqualified as sinners for life with God, living at peace with him.¹⁰³

Sin receives properly serious attention, and the person and work of Christ are treated in some detail, as is that of the Holy Spirit. God's sovereignty over the universe and over the Church is proclaimed; scripture and tradition are held together: the former "is not free from human error and confession and contradictions"; the latter directs us "to the Bible's whole message" and we follow the creeds and confessions of Christendom "in so far as they lead us to God in Christ."¹⁰⁴ God's final triumph is affirmed and so are the obligations which rest upon Christians meanwhile: these include obligations to society, family, animals – indeed, to the whole created order. The challenge of Christian discipleship is spelled out, and the whole is set within a doxological context. As in 1832 all churches were invited to comment on the work in progress, and of course – to repeat what begins to become boring – no attempt was made to

99. See *A Declaration of Faith*. 1967; reprinted in *Reformed Witness Today*, ed. Vischer, Bern, 1982.

100. W.A. Whitehouse, "Making the Declaration of Faith," in *Christian Confidence*, ed. F.R. Tomes, 1970, 23. This is a collection of essays on the Declaration.

101. *Declaration*, 10.

102. *Ib.*, 12.

103. *Ib.*, 13

104. *Ib.*, 28-9.

records of what has been attained; they are not measures of attainment."¹⁰⁶

5. Creeds can over-emphasise the importance of the intellectual aspect of faith. (Though for Congregationalists to say this in view, for example, of some of the ordination confessions we have reviewed is the pot calling the kettle black.)

As a gloss on these matters we may note P.T. Forsyth's point which was made when talk of Christian reunion and the recognition of ministers was in the air in 1917: "if we are driven to choose, may I say that in our view the unity of the Church is founded in the creative act of our moral redemption which creates our faith today and which created the Church at first; it is not in the traditional polity, creed, or cultus we inherit. If unity is in polity Christ died in vain."¹⁰⁷ Perhaps the most serious charge ever laid against creeds was once again Forsyth's:

What wonder that the moral authority of the Church has proved such an unstable thing in the course of history when her ecumenical symbols not only do not start from the real source of authority in Christianity, but scarcely allude to it. I mean, of course, redeeming grace... There is far too much said, even among ourselves, about the Creeds and their simplicity and the way they keep to the Christian facts. Yes, and all but ignore the one fact on which Christianity rests – the fact of redemption by grace alone through faith. It is the supreme Catholic error.¹⁰⁸

Our point is that none of these reservations concerning the content and use of creeds has prevented English Congregationalism from confessing the orthodox faith. Thus when F.H. Klooster laments the fact that some Reformed Churches wish to "remove the binding character of the confession," and remarks "That proposal would, in my judgment, mean the end of a confessional church"¹⁰⁹ we have to ask, "Would it *necessarily* mean the end of a confessing church?" A study of English Congregational Confessing suggests that it would not, but that the risks are great. This must be spelt out with some care.

In two different books P.T. Forsyth presents the two poles of the discussion:

a Church must have a creed, either tacit or express, else it is no church. Christianity is certainly more than its truth, but there is no Christianity apart from its truth.¹¹⁰

106. F.J. Powicke, "The Congregational Churches," in *Evangelical Christianity*, ed. W.B. Selbie, 1911, 118.

107. P.T. Forsyth, *Congregationalism and Reunion*, 1952, 21.

108. P.T. Forsyth, *The Church, The Gospel and Society*, 1962, 124.

109. F.H. Klooster, "Theology, confession and the Church," in *Church and Theology in the Contemporary World*, Grand Rapids; 1977, 30.

110. P.T. Forsyth, *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* 1909, 1961, 214.

impose the Declaration upon any, nor was it used as a condition of fellowship.

VI

There is thus a considerable amount of evidence to show that those of the Congregational way were a confessing people, and that what they confessed was the orthodox faith of the ages. This general statement must shortly be qualified, but for the present it may stand.

We have seen that Congregational confessing was done in a variety of ways: corporately, by covenanting; in private wrestling before the Lord; before the Church Meeting on candidacy for membership; and in the "sung creeds" of hymnody. The faith once delivered was declared, often at length, in the ordination confessions of those called to minister, and the fidelity or otherwise to it of the departed saints was rehearsed in funeral sermons. On three distinct occasions: during the Commonwealth, following the formation of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, and at the time of the national covenanting to form the Congregational Church in England and Wales the Congregationalists produced major declarations of the faith commonly held among them. In a word, the covenant ecclesiology of the Congregationalists was inherently confessional (there was no other way in), as was their corporate praise.

It is against this background that we must view the general Congregational attitude to the *use* of creeds and confessions. Clearly, it is a slander to suggest (and it has been suggested - and some individual Congregationalists have invited the suggestion) that Congregationalists are conspicuous for their lack of belief. G.F. Nuttall has discussed the traditional Congregational grounds of disquiet concerning creeds, and we may enumerate them thus:

1. Congregationalists resist the imposition of creeds as tests or conditions of membership. In the early days they resisted to the death attempts to impose uniformity on political grounds, but they have ever been on guard against "vain repetition" and hypocrisy.
2. Christians are expected to make their own confession.
3. Creeds are "man-made", whereas scripture is the Word of God. This conviction explains the traditional reluctance to use creeds liturgically. Gradually, however this argument lost force as novel hymns displaced all but the choicest metrical psalms, and as modern understandings of the Bible came into vogue.¹⁰⁵
4. Once established, creeds can be appealed to above Scripture, and can inhibit fresh responses to the Spirit: "Creeds, therefore, are only good, at best, as

105. However, in recent issues (1985/6) of *The Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland exclusive metrical psalmody is still being ardently contended for.

Where you fix a creed you flatten faith. Where dogma is idolized, life is sterilized.¹¹¹

Congregationalism has sought to follow the risky road of combining corporate confessing with liberty under the gospel. Not surprisingly there have been casualties from time to time, but these should be balanced by the hypocrisies of some in communions which have made more of subscription.

Positively, Congregationalism at its best has known that its freedom was founded in the gospel. Small wonder that Forsyth quoted Thomas Goodwin on *Ephesians* with approval: "If Christian judgments be well and thoroughly grounded in the doctrine of God's free grace and eternal love and redemption through Jesus Christ alone, and in the most spiritual inward operations of God's Spirit, that will fence them against all errors."¹¹²

On this basis English Congregationalists have confessed the faith of the ages more or less faithfully and from their confessing may be drawn some cautions for today's confessing. First, exceptions such as John Notcutt apart, Congregationalists as a whole kept the orthodox trinitarian faith during the eighteenth century. They did this at a time when some were moving to Arianism and thence to Socinianism and Unitarianism. Among those on the latter progression were most of the English Presbyterians, the Westminster Confession notwithstanding. We cannot here raise the question why the Presbyterians moved in the direction they did,¹¹³ but we must offer suggestions as to why the Congregationalists did *not* for the most part follow suit. This is not to deny that Congregational *individuals* - including such prominent ones as Nathanael Lardner, Caleb Fleming, Joseph Priestley and Thomas Belsham - made the journey away from trinitarian orthodoxy,¹¹⁴ but the present concern is to local *churches*). The inescapable conclusion is despite all the possibilities of stereotyping the Congregationalists continued as regular confessors of the trinitarian faith. The covenant fellowship was open only to those who confessed that faith; likewise the pulpit; and the hymns made it possible to rejoice in that faith. There was a built-in *conserve-atism* in the covenanted fellowship, aided by generally static community life, which enabled older saints to nurture the young and ensure that their walk was godly and their experience sound. It was the quality of the fellowship *qua* covenanted that secured the faith of the ages. From reflection on this eighteenth-century experience in the light of the contrary experience of the Presbyterians the following moral may be drawn which is apposite to present-

111. P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* 1907, 1964, 141.

112. P.T. Forsyth, *Faith, Freedom and the Future* 1912, 119.

113. See C.G. Bolam *et al.*, *The English Presbyterians*, 1968. American Unitarianism came indeed largely out of American *Congregationalism*; but this merely shows that neither the presence *nor* the absence of a prescribed confession by itself guarantees orthodoxy.

114. For all of whom see *DNB*.

day ecumenical discussion: it ill behoves us to speak as if creeds and confessions – or, for that matter, bishops – *guard* the faith (though many ecumenical documents do speak in this way). The lesson of eighteenth-century Congregationalism is that it takes more than that to keep the faith –indeed, that without formally subscribed creeds and confession, and in the entire absence of bishops, the faith can be kept, whilst those who have these things (for there were Anglican “Arians” too) can be doctrinally at risk.

With the nineteenth century a very different situation emerges. By the 1840s very few local covenants were being written, and the route into full membership of the church (or, as we should probably say today, the route towards the completion of one’s Christian initiation) was becoming less strict. In the wake of the Evangelical Revival sinners were being saved, and that was enough. So there developed the notion that the church is not so much the *election* of grace as the aggregate of saved souls who have made their decision for Christ.¹¹⁵ While Congregationalists continued to sing Watts and Doddridge on the great doctrines of the faith, they ceased to sing their words concerning covenant particularity:

The sovereign will of God alone
Creates us heirs of grace,
Born in the image of his Son,
A new, peculiar race.

(Watts)

The Declaration of 1833 softened the older Calvinism; Erskine of Linlathen (1788–1870), John McLeod Campbell (1800–72) and F.D. Maurice (1805–72) were to reorientate the views of many concerning the atonement; some Congregationalists veered in an universalist direction; some, under the impact of evolutionary thought gave themselves in institutionalised activity to the purposes of God which they were sure were being worked out, but which were more likely to be worked out at an interdenominational level “higher” than, or parallel to , the local covenanted fellowship; in evangelism the emphasis was increasingly thrown upon the individual and his “decision”; and not one of a representative selection of manuals on Congregationalism of the period 1900–1940 so much as refers to the concept of the covenant.¹¹⁶ It is not too much to say that if in the eighteenth century Congregationalists maintained the orthodox faith *because* they knew that they were the covenant people of God, in the

115. See R.W. Dale, *The Old Evangelicalism and the New*, 1889.

116. There is in this respect nothing short of sea-change between Albert Goodrich, *A Primer of Congregationalism* (1902), Ernest J. Price, *A Handbook of Congregationalism* (1927), A.D. Martin, *The Principle of the Congregational Churches* (1927) on the one hand, and John Marsh, *For the Church Member* (1946) on the other. The last is full of the initiative of God even if the term “covenant” is not prominent.

nineteenth century (certain extreme liberal manifestations apart) they generally managed to proclaim the trinitarian faith whilst sitting loose to their ecclesiological *raison d'être*. Not surprisingly the Church Meeting was among the casualties. Far from being the place where the saints, nourished by Word, bread and wine, sought under God his will for their corporate life and mission, it became in many places a rather dull business meeting attended by some only out of a sense of duty.

The covenant idea was revived after the Second World War¹¹⁷ and it is highly significant that this revival coincided with a fresh theological grasp upon the divine initiative in redemption. It would seem that Congregational confessing can survive without credal or confessional subscription, but it cannot survive if the saints are not gripped by the essential truth which underlies the doctrine (however sadly it has been mangled) of predestination: that God from eternity has desired to have a people for his praise, and that in Christ he has done all that is necessary to secure this end in every generation by the Spirit.

How does such an idea strike us in a time of theological relativism, when we are anxious not to appear exclusive among other Christians, or to seem impolite to those of other faiths? How practical is the covenant idea in mobile societies where people come and go - often with little regard to doctrinal considerations? It may be that the Reformed family at large needs to reflect upon such questions; for if its Congregational wing poses these problems its more "folk-church" expressions are currently having none too easy a time in maintaining their credibility. How are we to be the church-in-the-place today?

Perhaps having recorded so many testimonies of others the writer may make that of his late College Principal his own: "Such a genuine trust in the operation of the Holy Spirit, held humbly, prayerfully and expectantly by ministers and people in their private devotion and in their gathering at worship and in the Church Meeting is not only our ultimate safeguard in matters of faith. Even to call it a safeguard is to speak on too mean a level. It is of the essence of our existence."¹¹⁸

ALAN P. F. SELL.

APPENDIX: CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH COVENANTS

The following is a list of those covenants which have been consulted in the

117. For some post-War reflections on "Affirmations of faith" see Charles S. Duthie's paper in the *Bulletin* of the Department of Theology of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, VII no.3, Spring 1967, 1-8.

118. W. Gordon Robinson, "Congregationalism and the historic Faith," *The Congregational Quarterly* XXIX no.3, July 1951, 213.

course of preparing this paper. The list is not exhaustive, though it is representative of the centuries, and of village, town and city churches in various parts of the country. Printed sources are given. Cf. E. Surman, "Taunton Church Covenant, 1654," *T.CHS.* XX no.4. Oct. 1966, 139-43.

- 1643 Yarmouth/Norwich. J. Browne, *History of Congregationalism and Memorials of the Churches in Norfolk and Suffolk*, 1877, 211; *The Old Meeting House, Norwich: The Building and its Story* (pam. n.d.), 5-6; *Chronicles of the Old Congregational Church at Great Yarmouth, 1642 to 1858*, privately published in Yarmouth, 1906, 13-14.
- 1645 Canterbury. *T.CHS.*, VII, 1916-18, 183-6.
- 1646-48 Bury St Edmunds. J. Browne, *op.cit.*, 394-5; A.J. Grieve and W. Marshall Jones, *These Three Hundred Years, 1946*, 19-22; G. F. Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, Oxford, 1957, 49 (extract, 1646), 79 (1648); *TCHS* II, 1905-6, 333-5; A.P.F. Sell, *Saints: Visible, Orderly and Catholic: The Congregational Idea of the Church*, Geneva and Allison Park, Pa. 1986, 44 (1846 extracted, 1848 in full).
- 1650 Wrentham. J. Browne, *op.cit.*, 426; G.F. Nuttall, *op.cit.*, 79. Rotterdam, J. Rogers, *Una Ohel or Beth-Shemesh, 1653*, 457-8. Dublin *ib.*, 459-61.
- 1651 Altham. *The Altham and Wymondhouses Church Book*, bound with *The Note Book of the Rev. Thomas Jolly, A.D. 1671-1693*, ed. Fishwick, Manchester: The Chetham Society 1894, 123-4.
- 1651 Cockermonth. W. Lewis, *History of the Congregational Church, Cockermonth*, 1870, 6; G.F. Nuttall, *op.cit.*, 79-80; A.P.F. Sell, *op.cit.*, 44-5.
- 1651 Woodbridge, Suffolk. J. Browne, *op.cit.*, 452.
- 1654 Market Weston (later Wattisfield). J. Browne, *op.cit.*, 466; G.F. Nuttall, *op.cit.*, 79.
- 1655 Bassingbourn, Cambs. *The London Christian Instructor, or Congregational Magazine* (CM) II, 1819, 437. Repeated by Croydon and Great Gransden, Cambs.; the latter transcribed by H.G. Tibbutt (copy at Dr. Williams's Library).
- 1655 Rothwell, Northants. T. Coleman, *Memorials of the Independent Churches in Northamptonshire*, 1853, 47-8.
- 1658 Bideford. *The Great Meeting (Now Lavington Congregational Church) Bideford, 1648-1948*, 1948, 7 (renewal of former covenant); G.F. Nuttall, *op.cit.*, 81 (extract).
- 1660 Axminster. *The Axminster Ecclesiastica, 1660-1698*, ed. K.W.H. Howard, Sheffield: Gospel Tidings Publications, 1976, 29 (and subsequent renewals); G.F. Nuttall, *op.cit.*, 80.
- 1670 Denton. J. Browne, *op.cit.*, 335.
- 1681 Deal, Kent. T. Timpson, *Church History of Kent*, 1859, 405.
- 1682-3 Clavering, Essex. H. Bromley, *A Brief History of the Congregational Church, Clavering, Essex*, 1873, 3-4.

- 1687 Angel Street, Worcester. J. Noake, *Worcester Sects; or A History of the Roman Catholics & Dissenters of Worcester*, 1861, 111-114; W. Urwick, *Nonconformity in Worcester*, 1897, 75-82 (including facsimile); A.P.F. Sell, *op.cit.*, 45 (extract).
- 1690 Market Harborough. T. Coleman, *op.cit.*, 126-7.
- 1695 Northampton. T. Coleman, *op.cit.*, 11.
- 1695 Guestwick. *Guestwick-Briston* (pam.c. 1952), 5 (extract of renewal of covenant).
- 1700 Horsleydown (Parish Street), Southwark. J. Jacob, *The Covenant and Catechism of the Church... at Horsly Down*, 1700.
- c.1702 Mill Brow, Derbyshire. W. Urwick, *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester*, 1864, 334n.
- 1704 Poole. W. Densham and J. Ogle, *The Story of the Congregational Churches of Dorset*, 1899, 191, 194-6.
- 1705 Royston, CM, II, 1819, 761.
- c.1740 Potterspurty. T. Coleman, *op.cit.*, 279-80.
- 1741 Dedham. *TCHS IX*, no.6, Sept. 1926, 261.
- 1746 Deptford. T. Timpson, *Church History of Kent*, 1859, 348-9.
- c.1750 Sutton in Ashfield. A.R. Henderson, *History of Castle Gate Congregational Church Nottingham*, 1655-1905, 1905, 128-9.
- 1757 Sherborne. J. Densham and J. Ogle, *op.cit.*, 258.
- 1763 Walsall. A.P.F. Sell, "The Walsall Riots, The Rooker family, and eighteenth-century Dissent," *South Staffordshire Archaeological & Historical Society Transactions*, XXV, 1983-4, 61-2.
- 1766 Hinckley. C.Thomas, *The History of the First Nonconformist Congregational Church in Hinckley*, 1962, 37-9.
- 1767 Ramsgate. A.G. Hurd, *These Three Hundred Years* 1962, 4 (extract).
- 1770 Blanket Row, Kingston-upon-Hull. *TCHS IX*, 1924-6, 248-9 (with appended Confession of Faith).
- 1772 Mattishall. J. Browne, *op.cit.*, 352.
- 1786 Bluntisham, Hunts. R.W. Dixon, *A Century of Village Nonconformity... 1787 to 1887*, 1887 155-8.
- 1804 Homerton. *TCHS X*, no.4, Sept. 1928, 161-3.
- 1812 Wellingborough. T. Coleman, *op.cit.*, 247.
- 1815 Wisborough Green. *TCHS XX* no.12, Oct. 1970, 316-2 (extract).
- 1817 Bere Regis. J. Densham and J. Ogle, *op.cit.*, 22.
- 1817 Pateley Bridge. T. Whitehead, *Illustrated Guide to Nidderdale and a History of its Congregational Churches*, Keighley 1932, 128-30.
- 1823 Buxton. *TCHS XIV* no.2, Nov. 1941, 103.
- 1838 Upwey. J. Densham and J. Ogle, *op.cit.*, 323.
- 1946 Banstead. E.G. Tickner, *In the Beginning... The history of the first quarter of a century of Banstead Congregational Church* 1966, 17-19.
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ZION, HULME, MANCHESTER : PORTRAIT OF A CHURCH

I A BUILDING AND A NEIGHBOURHOOD.

The ancient township of Hulme iuxta Manchester was an island between three rivers. It contained Hulme Hall, latterly the residence of the Duke of Bridgewater of canal fame, a barracks, a number of houses, including from about 1800 the beginnings of an overspill from the adjoining town, and an irregular spread of small arable farms. Though efforts to plant the gospel (with the barracks particularly in mind) had been made by William Roby and his students from at least 1812, it was five years later that Roby, the deacons of Grosvenor Street chapel and a number of students from the Blackburn Academy saw to the erection of a school-chapel in Jackson's Lane, named after the most considerable farmer in the area whose hay wains still went along the bumpy cart tracks and were to do so till urbanisation triumphed and the lane emerged as a major urban artery - Great Jackson Street.

The whirlwind ministry of the first pastor to be called, George Rogers, a young man from Rotherham College, resulted not only in a crowded chapel but in the erection of a third storey whose ugliness (conspicuous even today, for the chapel, situated in a twilight zone between the city and the nearest housing estates, survives as a warehouse) provoked controversy and the dissolution of the church a year later (1822). Though it was reformed in 1825 with seven members by the second minister, John Smith, a student from Blackburn Academy, the despairing trustees, mainly Grosvenor Street men, put the debt-ridden building on the market in 1828. Only the persistence of the congregation and the generosity of the Fletcher family prevented its sale. Under the third minister, James Gwyther, yet another student from Blackburn, the congregation grew from just over a dozen to several hundred and in 1841 Great Jackson Street was sold to the Welsh Independents and a site taken on the then undeveloped Stretford Road. The stately £4870 Zion chapel, classical with its Corinthian pillars, was opened by Dr Raffles on 5 May 1842. The Hulme church now seemed assured of future prosperity.¹

The most misleading guide as to what Hulme was like when Zion opened is Engels who lumped the township together with Salford and Ancoats as "really one big working-class quarter," damp cottages, back alleys, cellar dwellings, even the better houses "surrounded by filth".² Whatever Hulme may have become, this is untrue of the 1840s. A study of Manchester's overspill in 1850 reveals Hulme as an area partly of industrial development, partly of artisan-type dwellings, but mainly of lower middle-class residences with upper middle-class

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1. B. Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, Manchester, 1893, V, 174; *Manchester Guardian*, 5 May 1842.
 2. F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Classes in England in 1844*, ed. W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner, Oxford, 1958, 55, 73.

housing spreading southwards down Oxford Road. Some of the workers' houses conform to Engels's description. The lower middle-class houses on the other hand had strips of garden at the front and rear and an attic room for a servant. But they were built in discontinuous blocks, and as population pressure mounted these were filled in with meaner houses, so that by the 1870s the whole of Hulme had acquired the character well summed up by Michael Rose as "grey, uniform, if more sanitary" than the notorious slums of Knott Mill, Greengate and Angel Meadow.³

The membership of Zion, which by 1850 had reached 252, reflects this morphological pattern. Hulme in the '50s and '60s was a stable community of families employed mainly in cotton mills, factories and gasworks, interspersed with shopkeepers and skilled craftsmen. The early baptismal registers record parents' occupations mainly as labourers, spinners, weavers, moulders, gardeners, shopkeepers, travellers, agents, schoolmasters, gasworkers, tailors and bakers. For three generations or more a prospering Zion would seem to confirm the thesis of Principal Vaughan from the college just down the road at Whalley Range that the independent polity was the natural religious expression of the age of great cities.

II A VENERABLE SUCCESSION

"The life of a pious minister", wrote Richard Hooker, "is visible rhetoric", and the careers of the first four ministers of Zion, men who tower over the church life so many Colossi, are eloquent of the four major thrusts of Congregational life, thought and practice in Victorian England.

George Rogers, whose uneasy pastorate lasted for only two years (1820–22) stands for a continuing Calvinism slowly transmuted into a Puritan backlash against the liberalising tendencies of the day. After his pastorate at Zion he served as John Clayton's assistant at the King's Weigh House and later at Upminster and Camberwell. Then he encountered a kindred spirit in the rising young Baptist preacher, C.H.Spurgeon, who in 1856 appointed him first Principal and Theological Tutor of Pastors' College. Rogers represents old-fashioned Puritan Dissent at its most winsome. He was learned, orthodox (he stood by Spurgeon during the Downgrade controversy), judicious in college administration, humorous, devout, tolerant of human foibles and perennially young at heart. His Wednesday morning lectures at the College transmitted to a British student auditory the theology of Warfield and Hodge. He was a father figure and counsellor to a whole generation of Spurgeon's men, his ordination

3. H.B. Rodgers, "The Suburban Growth of Victorian Manchester", *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, 58, (1961–62), pp. 6f; M. Rose, in A.J. Kidd and K.W. Roberts ed, *City, Class and Culture*, Manchester, 1985, p. 104. Two of Engels's contemporaries, Mrs Gaskell (in *Mary Barton*) and A.B. Reach, give a more balanced portrait of life in Hulme.

addresses (themselves a curious survival in an age careless of such formalities) were of a rare and memorable quality, as were his speeches at the annual reunions of college students.⁴ He became the life-long mentor and correspondent of most of the young men who passed through his hands. He placed the college on firm foundations and was one of the very small number of Spurgeon's bosom friends. He died at the age of 93.⁵

John Smith, the second minister, pastored Zion from 1823 to 1827. His career signals the missionary thrust of nineteenth-century Nonconformity. His sister Mary was the wife of Robert Moffat and his niece, another Mary, married David Livingstone. Smith it was who first gave Zion its enthusiasm for the mission field, so that for most of the nineteenth century between a third and a quarter of its income was earmarked for the L.M.S., there was a stream of volunteers for missionary service and the church produced at least one martyr (John Perry, who perished in the jungles of East Central Africa in 1874). Grief-stricken by the death of his wife in 1827, Smith himself volunteered for missionary service, requesting that he be not spared a difficult or dangerous station. His offer was accepted. He was sent to India and died aged 42 at Madras in 1843.⁶

James Gwyther was minister at Zion for no less than forty-two years (1828-70) and was the man responsible for the move to Stretford Road in 1842. He represents both the first phase of the "institutionalising" of Victorian Congregationalism and also of individual churches' and pastors' absorption into the wider sphere of County Union affairs. The church under Gwyther became active in novel ways within the local community and responsive to the varying needs and pressures of the churches of urban and rural Lancashire. The first of these trends is shown by the building of a schoolroom in 1831 and a Lecture Room in 1852, the latter at an estimated cost of £700,⁷ the employment of a paid home missionary (even as early as when the church was still in Jackson's Lane), the addition of extra classrooms, a gallery for juvenile worshippers on Sunday evenings (so constructed that they could be neither seen nor heard), the addition of extra classrooms and the opening up of the gaunt Sunday School premises in Mulberry Street behind the chapel as a day school in the closing years of Gwyther's pastorate.⁸

4. I owe these impressions of Rogers to the Rev. M. Nicholls, Vice Principal and historian of Spurgeon's College.
5. *Congregational Year Book*, 1892; *Sword and Trowel*, 1892, p. 383.
6. B. Nightingale, *op. cit.*, V, p. 175; J.A. Chambers, *A Pageant of Zion*, (typescript, n.d. but 1952).
7. Costs as usual escalated and a debt of £1000 was finally cleared in 1857, an item which constituted the only Manchester reference in the first number of the *Christian World: Zion Centenary Souvenir*, 1921.
8. *Zion Bazaar Album*, 1907. Day classes had been held in the basement schoolroom since 1844.

By this date the church had doubled its membership from the 139 when Zion was first built; it had 400 Sunday and 450 Day School pupils, a Young Men's Grammar and History Class, a Chapel Library (subscription 1825, made free 1862) and a Sunday School Preparation Class established by S.B. Driver who served as Gwyther's assistant from 1866 to 1869.

In the wider church Gwyther made a significant impact by the force of his personality which was an intriguing blend of the humble, unaffected and conciliatory with the awe-inspiring, if not positively minatory. Congregational meetings at Zion were ritualistic events when everyone would sit at tables to await the flinging open of double doors and the entry of the Gwythers, at which, as polite applause turned into cheering and all eventually stood, the revered couple took their places on a high podium, and a hushed silence fell. Little wonder that this formidable person was elected Secretary of the Lancashire Congregational Union in 1853 and remained its trouble-shooter for two decades till 1874 or that he did a similar work in the north-west for both the College and the Bible Society. Unfortunately overwork, plus a serious accident at Heaton Norris Railway Station in 1862 and the bronchitis which was ever the Zion minister's lot, had led by the early '70s to a marked deterioration in his health.

There is a third feature of Gwyther's ministry which calls for comment. The church meeting Minute Book for his later years shows the beginning of a movement away of leading families, the many-branched Masseys to Wilmslow, Bowdon, Openshaw, Rusholme and Union (Maclaren's) chapels, the Wattses to Chorlton Road and Bowdon, the Waterses to Wilmslow. It is significant that when Gwyther announced his intention to retire it was the Woodward's of Chorlton Road and not the members of his own church who guaranteed his pension. The flight to the suburbs was now a fact of Zion Chapel's life.

At this last church meeting Gwyther lyrically expressed the hope that his successor would be one "who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks and holds the stars in his right hand."⁹ Coincidentally or not, the young minister elect, a student from the Lancashire College, stepped down: a Springhill man was clearly called for, and Edwin Simon arrived in June 1870. Over the first half-century of Zion's history a puritan had been succeeded by a missionary enthusiast and he by a denominational activist. Now came a representative of that exquisite Simonite¹⁰ blending of advanced scholarship and social idealism.

Edwin Simon was a native of Little England beyond Wales. His wife, Frances Allsebrook, hailed from Chadwick Manor, Worcs. The pair were cultured, well-

9. Zion Church Meeting Minute Book, 10 Dec 1879. The Zion archives are in the City of Manchester Record Office, and have the shelfmark, M 187.
10. Dr Binfield informs me that there is no apparent relationship between Principal D.W. Simon and Edwin and his three brothers who also entered the ministry.

connected, dedicated and intense. They arrived at Zion at a time when the neighbourhood was changing rapidly. Better-off artisans and the swelling number of Manchester clerks were beginning to move out of the town to the fringes of Hulme or adjacent areas, Greenheys and Moss Side, Old Trafford and Brooks Bar, as the wealthier families in turn moved out further along the Withington Road, to Whalley Range, Chorlton, Manley Park or Alexandra Road. Soon the middle stratum of shopkeepers, clerks and engineers would be strengthened by the burgeoning ranks of schoolteachers and local government officers – who would in their turn become the backbone of Zion.¹¹ The leading families of the church were now firmly identifiable: Lightowler, Oddy, Mounsey, Dyer, Evans and Harrison. The tutors and domestic staff of the Lancashire College had seats here also: Professor Rogers was frequently to be seen in the congregation. Zion, though, was now for the most part a one-carriage church, Samuel Callender and his family displaying, unlike so many of their peers, no anxiety to move elsewhere.

Anxiously the Simons bent their energies to the service of the community, self-consciously repudiating a Lord and Lady Bountiful image but befriending the people, giving them a glimpse of the “life beautiful”, inviting lonely young clerks newly arrived in Manchester to supper in their dingy rented house,¹² delighting to bring the country joys of Chadwick Manor to the ugly schoolrooms and dull surroundings of Zion chapel, a process which culminated each year in the dubiously Christian Festival of Spring when hampers of flowers, mosses and singing birds in wicker baskets would festoon the premises, poetry would be written and recited, tea served to the sound of violins at 6 am when the only intrusions on this rustic paradise would be the sound of the knocker-up going his rounds in the grim streets beyond.¹³ The Mayday merrymaking in 1879 was especially memorable. A competition was held for the best poem on the Return of Spring, to be adjudicated by E Paxton Hood, then minister at the nearby Cavendish Street. Mrs Simon won with a romantic, heart-rending tale (set not in Victorian Manchester but in medieval England) of a penurious family and a dying mother waiting for the coming of Spring “to bring back work and bread”.¹⁴

Within the life of the church Simon was similarly innovative. His preaching

11. J. Roberts in *Manchester Memoirs*, 124 (1964–5), 60; see also G. Crossick ed. *The Lower Middle Class in Britain*, 1977, p. 134f.
12. This home was nevertheless a “place of enchantment” to a future Lord Chancellor: John Simon, *Portrait of My Mother* privately printed, 1936, pp. 13, 25. Fanny Simon was the great aunt of the Catholic dramatist and propagandist Hugh Ross Williamson. See H.R. Williamson, *A Walled Garden*, 1956, pp. 21, 57. I owe this reference to Clyde Binfield.
13. *Zion Grand Autumnal Fair and Bazaar Souvenir*, 1931: Manchester City Library, MSC 285.8/2.
14. Competition Poems (1897). There is a copy in the Zion archives.

and his personality attracted large numbers of younger folk (who however did nothing for the finances of the church: there was a big deficit when the Simons left, and his £300 salary was scaled down to £240 p.a. for his successor). He campaigned vigorously against pew rents, succeeded in replacing life- by six- and then three- year diaconates, launched a chapel magazine, a Dorcas Society, a Band of Hope, a Young Men's Missionary Society, a Literary and Debating Society, and even a Nigger Minstrels Band which performed in Hulme Town Hall. He also persuaded the church to hand over the Mulberry Street Day Schools to a sympathetic School Board in 1875, the year impressive Jubilee Services were held at Zion and £1109 raised after a special appeal.

Yet despite or perhaps because of the influx of young people there is evidence that Zion was beginning to acquire a drive and an ethos of its own, to flex its muscles as a Congregational Church, to generate its own enthusiasms, and chafe at dwelling under the shadow of its minister, however eminent and pious he might be. The Deacons and Church Meeting Minute Books of this period reveal tensions between pastor and people and a certain resentment that the church is being run by one man and a handful of monied supporters. There was one particular flashpoint which could well have had theological undertones. Simon was not very keen on cottage meetings and tract distribution, his wife even less so: it was the diaconate and the church meeting which pioneered this innovation in 1871. By 1883 when his wife's deteriorating health determined Simon to say goodbye to Manchester, there were no less than twenty-one tract distributors covering the forty areas into which the whole of Hulme had been divided. Zion was preparing for a great advance.

Before he left for Bath in 1883 Simon produced a Church Handbook whose contents highlight what was afoot. Alongside an exciting programme of weeknight lectures and debates on topics ranging from Ancient Peruvians to Thomas Carlyle, from Tithes to Women's Rights, was a lament that hitherto only "spasmodic efforts" had been made to reach "the working classes by whom the chapel is now mainly surrounded", and even in this limited endeavour "we are grown weary".¹⁵ Perhaps Springhill and Hulme did not really mix. A new, very different type of minister was needed for the changed course on which a church growing in numbers and self-confidence was now determined to embark.¹⁶

III THE JOYS AND TRIALS OF SERVANTHOOD

After Zion had tried to secure the services of James Patterson of Dumbarton, an invitation was extended to a young Yorkshireman, still at Airedale College, Henry Hutton Brayshaw. Few could have guessed that a pastorate was now

15. *Zion Handbook* for 1882.

16. For Simon's later career see his obituary in *C.Y.B.*, 1921.

beginning which would exactly equal Gwyther's in duration and would raise the church to the forefront of both Manchester and denominational life. Nor could it have been surmised that so energetic would Zion become that in 1905 it would be felt opportune to engage the services of a deacon, David Ness, as assistant minister, or that he, with a short break between 1906 and 1911, would serve to the end of Brayshaw's pastorate and beyond.

Brayshaw and Ness were a near-perfect Mary and Martha type partnership, living proof that Nonconformity could produce the sort of slum parsons who graced the contemporary episcopal churches. The tall, handsome Yorkshireman with his kindness and approachability, his ever-listening ear and readiness to advise and console, his ministry nourished by a happy home life, an earnestness in prayer and an ability to relax at cricket or golf, was partnered by a Glaswegian woodturner, short in stature, loyal and dutiful to a self-sacrificial degree, generous and humble almost to a fault, a handyman, ever ready on his pastoral visits to mend a gaspipe, do some joinery or salvage a family's finances. Soon the poor of Hulme would be debating which of the two ministers was the greater saint.¹⁷

For Brayshaw the first four years at Zion were a time for taking stock. The local community was stirring. The Hulme Healthy Homes Society was founded in 1890 by Joe Waddington and there was agitation for the local Council to apply the Artisans and Labourers Dwellings Acts. Between 1870 and 1910 thousands of people moved out to other districts, though after this demographic stability returned. Still, Zion's achievement in this period must be seen against a population decline from 86,000 in 1870 to 46,000 in 1914.¹⁸ There was political ferment too. Hulme Liberal Club stood next door to Zion: two of its most prominent deacons, Alderman Evans and Councillor Oddy, were on the City Council, the Church Meeting officially appointed delegates to the Manchester School Board Progressive Party's executive, and around the turn of the century gave strong backing to Purity candidates in local elections.¹⁹

Political agitation was, however, very low on the list of Brayshaw's priorities. First and foremost came "our influence upon the large population surrounding the chapel".²⁰ With the backing of his deacons, John Dutton, Thomas Elson, F.A. Mounsey, J.S. Wood, Alfred Evans, R.H. Harrison, George Oddy, William Okell, Fred Dyer and Alfred Simon, a social meeting on Saturday evenings, "cheerful and bright", was introduced in February 1887 together with an informal Wednesday evening service, extensive tract distribution, a "Clothes Cupboard" and free Christmas breakfasts for a thousand or more poor children.

17. Obituaries in *C.Y.B.* 1933, 1938.

18. Even after the dense overcrowding had been thus relieved Hulme remained notorious as possessing no open space of any kind.

19. Church Meeting Minute Book (hereafter CMB), 29 Sep 1897, 1 Oct 1902. There is no record of Zion's showing any interest in the Passive Resistance movement.

20. CMB, 11 Feb 1885.

The idea of the Zion P.S.A. was born. Soon there was to be added a women's organisation, the Pleasant Monday Evening (P.M.E.).

A considerable influx of folk who were unused to the Congregational way was a challenge to Zion. The newcomers demanded the ending of pew rents and even of the envelope system as socially divisive, though every revolution has its limits – an attempt to remove the pew doors had to be abandoned when it was found they would not unscrew. Their singing habits too upset the older congregation, for, contradictorily, they had both a penchant for chants and a sung Lord's Prayer (which made some deacons fear "ritualism") and for Sankey and Moody as opposed to the *Congregational Hymnary*. It was Brayshaw's task to smoothe ruffled feathers and work out a compromise. By 1895 he could claim that in the past two years the church had been "transformed into a missionary camp", with a PSA and a PME numbering jointly 3,300 members, a Sunday School up from 500 to 760, the whole of Hulme now divided into districts each under a deacon and one or two women visitors and a membership which had grown from 210 to 302.²¹ By the time the next *Manual* was issued in 1901 the church had acquired a Boys Brigade, Band of Hope, Cycling, Cricket and Football Clubs, Sewing and Helping Hand Circles and a Penny Bank, and the minister could confidently predict: "the best is yet to be".²² A building was hastily erected in the school yard in 1903 to house some of these varied activities.

The scene now shifts to one of those legendary Edwardian garden parties, this one for a thousand Manchester Congregationalists, held in the grounds of Longford Hall one Saturday afternoon in June 1906. To the throng which included two newly-elected MPs, Arthur Haworth and Henry Nuttall, it was announced that Mrs John Rylands, too frail now to appear in person, was prepared to give £25,000 towards institutional work in central Manchester, Hulme and Salford, provided the churches and the Manchester Congregational Board through its Forward Movement raised another £75,000.²³ Spontaneous applause broke out, though in the sober light of the following day, the Zion deacons realised that they would now have to surrender some of their independence to the Board and work out a constitution defining their changed status. Subsequently Zion held a gigantic four-day Bazaar which included a fishpond, a Café Chantant, a weighing machine and a shooting gallery towards the purchase of six adjoining cottages which would have to be demolished to make way for a new Church and Institute.

Whence came this idea of an Institutional Church? Brayshaw himself

21. *Zion Manual* for 1895. It was to grow steadily to its peak of 506 in 1909.

22. *Zion Manual* for 1901. This booklet reveals that of the twelve deacons none now lived in Hulme itself.

23. *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 14 Nov 1907; Manchester and District Congregational Board, *The Churches and the People* (1907), p. 11 – copy in the possession of Mr G. Frazer.

declared that it was the Wesleyan Central Hall movement which suggested the need for a counter-attraction to the 250 public houses of Hulme, providing games (with billiards a special emphasis) and reading rooms, five courts, a gym, a library and a smoking room, separate facilities for young men and girls, the premises to be open every night, including Sundays after Church.²⁴ Others suggested a specifically Congregational inspiration for the new Zion and its sister institutional church at Salford: Sylvester Horne was popularising the idea, and Whitefields (London) and Salem (Leeds) were already in existence.²⁵ Perhaps, more immediately, the emergence of the new Zion was simply a response to the intolerable physical pressures being put on the old.

Zion Institute and Church, designed by Bradshaw and Gass of Bolton who were also responsible for Milton Hall, Deansgate, opened at the same time, bears a striking resemblance to the County Secondary Schools which were erected following the 1902 Education Act. The old Zion had been demolished and the foundation stone of the new chapel laid in October 1910. While it was in building the congregation met in Hulme Town Hall and it was not till 1911, a year after the Institute was opened, that the people moved into their spacious, 1200-seat, galleried church.²⁶ The whole complex had cost £29,000. At once all the existing activities were transferred to the new premises and others were added, notably Saturday Silent Films and a Crippled Children's Guild. All the institutions were brought under the control of the House Committee of the church which also appointed a House Steward responsible for lettings, cleaning and discipline.

The work continued and its momentum was maintained till the outbreak of the First World War.²⁷ Naturally after 1914 all the organisations suffered, 611 men went to the front and 81 were killed (mercifully a small fraction by the standards of some other churches). Even so Zion emerged from the War with 456 members, 400 scholars and 450 in the Childhood (i.e. special Sunday evening children's services), and all the organisations in working order. The Brayshaw-Ness partnership was more highly regarded in Hulme than ever before. A new problem - worklessness - was now in evidence. Ominously the Minute Book for 28 September 1921 records the church's first steps in providing for the needs of the unemployed who were to figure largely in the records from

24. *Zion Bazaar Album Souvenir*, 1907.

25. *Zion, Old and New*, (n.d. but 1912).

26. *Manchester City News*, 13 March 1909; *Zion Centenary Souvenir*, 1921. In 1911 also a small mission church in Vine Street, founded by Mr J.S. Naphtali, and known as Naphtali's Mission, closed and united with Zion.

27. Analysis of the records of all the Zion institutions (which have survived voluminously) reveals that support climaxed about 1909-10, in line with the membership of the church. This particular phase of popular, folksy, happytime Christianity could thus have been coming to an end even before the new building erected to give it institutional expression was opened.

that point onwards. In addition Hulme, after twenty years' stability began to lose people again: about 8,000 moved out in the 1920s and their going told heavily on the church. Brayshaw struggled on against these odds. In 1922 he generously welcomed Ness as his co- rather than his assistant pastor, and in 1926 he tendered his resignation. He was then 68 and was the elder statesman of Manchester Congregationalism in which Zion (321 members) could still hold its own alongside the suburban churches, Chorlton (396 members), Chorlton Road (515) and Dickenson Road (322) and the downtown but still fashionable Cavendish (357).

Stanley Perkins followed from 1928 to 1942. His was a controversial ministry, echoes of which were still in evidence when he returned in 1964 as minister of the nearby Cavendish Street. On the surface all seemed well. The Manchester Congregational Board was within sight of paying off the remaining debts on Milton Hall, Salford and Zion,²⁸ and a Grand Autumnal Bazaar in November 1931 (for which a gift was solicited and received from the Queen) raised over £1,000. Lady Nall, the wife of the local Conservative M.P. and a generous patroness of Zion, presided.

Perkins was responsive to trends within the Zion Institute. The three Regnal Circles were now particularly active, and from the P.S.A. emerged a Sportsmen's, a Policemen's and an Unemployed Sunday. An orchestra was formed, relief work was stepped up as local joblessness soared, and the Hulme Poor Man's Lawyer was permanently based at the Zion Institute which could still claim contact with no less than 6,000 persons.²⁹ Social pressures were not however allowed to impinge on Zion's character as "a real church". "It must never", averred its minister, "become a social club with a chapel attached". Finally Zion took the lead in protesting against what was to become a marked feature of municipal policy in later years: removing families to the new "garden city" of Wythenshawe, clearing streets and creating acres of dereliction, what in the mid '30s was called locally the "Medlock Street policy". A petition against this was organised from Zion in 1936: over 8,000 people signed.³⁰ Hulme lost, by removals, over 14,000 people in the 1930s, and few of the newcomers, despite being canvassed, showed much interest in the work at Zion.

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28. *Manchester Congregational Board Extension Movement*, Manchester, 1927, p. 43. The Board still continued vigorously, though its records (now in the Lancashire Records Office) show it to be by now totally dependent on the wealth of Bowdon Downs and its daughter church at Hale. But Sidney Berry was correct when he told the Congregational Union Assembly in Manchester in 1931: "You come to a city full of anxiety for its economic life but still containing a corporate Congregational spirit" - *Centenary Assembly Year Book*, Manchester, 1931, p. 3. A few years and the latter would be receding fast.
29. *A Family of Friends*, (1935); *Zion Annual Report*, (1937).
30. *Zion Annual Report* (1938). The Hulme Housing Association's report, *Housing in Hulme*, (1932), while painting a grim picture of living conditions, acknowledges the "considerable repugnance" local people felt at being "compulsorily transplanted".

So numbers dwindled, from 350 members in 1928 to 267 in 1942,³¹ from 380 scholars to 132, while latterly church meetings fell to single figures. War saw the evacuation of large numbers of Zion children, the disappearance of another generation of adult Zionites on war service, and severe bomb damage to the premises in 1942 imposed further strains. The evening congregation now met in Mr and Mrs Mayor's drawing room.

The people of the '30s, especially the young people, seemed to Perkins "a baffling generation",³² a description which would never have occurred to Ness or Brayshaw who took all sorts and conditions of men in their stride. In truth their successor was not the man for the hour. His forcing Ness into retirement in 1931 and the latter's death in 1932 aroused bitterness in the church. His ethical rigorism, campaigns against the Sunday opening of parks, Sunday cinemas and especially Sunday boxing (he brought a court action to put a stop to that), his fierce anti-drink stance (Brayshaw and Ness had, Salvation Army-style, distributed tracts and held services in local pubs) were not beneficial to Zion's image at this juncture. Certainly Perkins brought to Zion a type of intellectual preaching absent since Simon's day, and he encouraged church and deacons' meetings to debate a wide range of contemporary issues in the light of Congregational principles. But the former did not fill the pews and the latter provoked argument and the voicing of unhelpful opinions. The tactic misfired. Perkins clearly found the strain of Zion too great for one man to bear alone and unsupported. He became ill, underwent major surgery – and, in the opinion of some, emerged a different person, more concerned now for people than for principles. To give the church a fresh start he removed in 1944 to Montrose Street, Glasgow.

Church history is sometimes written as if from about 1908 all is a tale of decline, but the years of austerity during and after the Second World War were not unpropitious and Zion experienced a kind of minor revival in this period. For Hulme too life could resume its pattern: the City of Manchester Plan which threatened in 1945 to tear the heart out of the community and reduce its population by two thirds lay dormant for fifteen years.

Alan Chambers of the Lancashire College was called in 1944, at a reduced stipend of £350 p.a. Chambers, young and enthusiastic, attracted much larger evening (though not morning) congregations, drew to his services numbers of Manchester University students, revitalised the youth work with a particular emphasis on summer camps, saw one or two young people go into full-time Christian service, resumed the regular visitation and periodic evangelistic campaigns, restored contact with the unchurched through the public houses,

31. Not even this figure was realistic, for in 1935 the church roll had been divided into three categories: regular members, country members (who lived away) and suspense members (who attended rarely): CMB, 26 Feb 1935.

32. CMB, 2 Nov 1938.

and embarked on fruitful inter-church co-operation with Bridgewater Hall (Methodist) and St Stephen's (Anglican).

This involvement with the local community culminated in the formation on the Zion premises of the Hulme Community Council in 1948, its guiding light Harold Hill, the Corporation's chief Rating Officer, and the last of the professional men to be in membership at the church.³³ Will Griffiths, now the local Labour M.P., held his surgeries at Zion, Trade Union meetings began to be held there also, and the Probation Service started to use Zion as a base. Above all Chambers inspired Zion with confidence in its future: the regular street processions, now revived, were a source of legitimate pride, the rebuilding project to heal the scars of war damage fired the people's imagination,³⁴ and the dramatic performance "A Pageant of Zion" (1948) drew a wide audience.

Equally exciting was the American connexion. Desperate for funds and for pastoral assistance, Chambers in 1947 approached the American Council of Congregational Churches and received not only food parcels but Richard D. Hunter who served as his assistant from 1947 to 1949, bringing with him a number of young Americans who entered enthusiastically into the work. So buoyant did Zion feel by this time that to succeed Hunter the congregation voted for a second paid ministerial appointment, and Cyril Nicholas of the Northern College, a young man well known to the church, was chosen.

Chambers and Nicholas were an unusual combination, the former a gentle ex-Methodist and a conscientious objector, the latter forthright, a thoroughgoing Congregationalist and a former National Serviceman. The two disagreed privately on many matters but publically presented a united front and were at one in the urgency of their gospel preaching and evangelistic ardour. Nicholas left for Belfast in 1951 and was succeeded by George Rotherham, another ex-Methodist, an older "B-List" man, and a former engineering worker whose partnership with Chambers reminded many of that of the legendary Ness and Brayshaw. The work was harder than ever, especially since, as its reponse to the C.U.E.W.'s Forward Movement of 1950-51 Zion had set itself the target of attaining a membership of 500. For a year or so it actually strove to reach that impossible figure. In 1953 Chambers resigned, having accepted a call from the Lancashire Congregational Union to become its assistant secretary. The post-war recovery was now over. Pinching days were on their way again.³⁵

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33. Two papers read by Mr Hill to the Council in 1952 and 1954 provide the best, indeed the only, history of Hulme which exists - copies in City of Manchester R.O., M187, (additional deposit).
 34. Not till 1951 was a grant of £1500 towards War Damage repairs received from the C.U.E.W. This was insufficient and a "Save Zion Gift Day" had to be held in May 1951: CMB, 2 May 1951.
 35. Chambers was not to hold his new office for long. He died of a pulmonary complaint in June 1954.

IV FINALE, 1954-1974

For the last twenty years of its existence Zion was served by a succession of hard-working ministers who should not have been recruited to the task of propping up a cause so obviously doomed. George Rotherham (translated to the A-List in 1954) stayed till 1956 when deteriorating health forced his removal to Lytham. He had been joined in 1954 by Donald W. Pipe of Nottingham, an enthusiast for youth work. Now Zion throbbed to the sound of skiffle and rock n' roll. He left for a pastorate in the United Church of Canada in October 1959. J.R. Beayers from Douglas, Isle of Man, served from 1960 till April 1965 when he died from a lung complaint, the first Zion minister to succumb to the Hulme climate while still resident there. It was Beayers's duty to wind up the remnants of the P.S.A. and the P.M.E. David Nevard arrived in June 1966 on the very day the Boys Brigade went into liquidation. Despite his efforts the situation was now hopeless: to pave the way for the inevitable he resigned in September 1971. After a brief interlude when the church nearly obtained the services of Arthur Chadwick, one of its best friends and wisest counsellors, A.J. Burnham and David Jenkins, two Moderators-to-be, took over the reins for the last few months. By this time Zion was in the United Reformed Church, though that fact had scarcely been noticed amidst all its other concerns.

Two questions stand out from the records of the last twenty years of Zion's history: how did the church manage to prolong its life artificially when its natural life-span had so manifestly run out, and what more immediate factors provoked its final closure?

The answer to the first question is complex. Despite crippling deficits Zion survived through its lettings, and a particularly useful one came its way in 1962 when the Hallé began to use the premises for rehearsals. The Northern Ballet followed a little later. In the early '60s also Fram, the construction company, contracted to rebuild the new Hulme, established its office and depot at the Institute. This too was a form of artificial respiration for a dying cause. Again Zion was sustained by a number of legacies: £500 in 1961 from Sarah Buckley, formerly Child Welfare Superintendent of Manchester Corporation.³⁶ Thirdly Zion received a small influx of new members and an injection of money when in November 1964 the nearby Russell Street Chapel closed. Fourthly, the church in its death throes could not ignore the fact that "we are Congregationalists, not Zionites",³⁷ and readily grasped the lifeline which this realisation seemed to provide. From the late '50s Chorlton Road, Zion, Tatton Street, Russell Street and Moss Side acted closely together in the Hulme Development Group Committee which in turn in 1963 became the South West Manchester Group. The discovery of the team ministry principle with joint services and flexible

36. Miss Buckley was the foster child of Miss Sophia Okell, daughter of W. Okell, a former Jamaica missionary (d. 1892) and one of the original founders of Zion.

37. CMB, 27 June 1962.

pastoral arrangements enabled the churches to lean on one another, share resources, and survive.

Finally Zion continued to be heavily subsidised, not so much by the Congregational Board (now hard-pressed itself: nothing is more eloquent of changed relationships than to discover Zion in 1957 holding jumble sales to support the Board's tottering finances), but from individual sympathisers among the "country members", from the C.U.E.W.'s Home Churches Fund, from the Manchester University Rag Week Appeal and from collections in local pubs. It was a hand-to-mouth existence, but somehow Zion under its astute treasurer, Graham Frazer, struggled on.

What led Zion to close and sell its property to the Corporation for £50,000? A minor consideration may have been the decision of the Methodists to combine their ten Hulme causes into one and the Anglicans their nine parishes into one and both rebuild very close to the Zion premises. This might have produced awkward rivalry – in any case from the very first Hulme Wesley and the Church of the Ascension suffered severely from vandalism and physical deterioration – a fact not lost on the Zion members.

Secondly there was a new factor. Into Hulme now came numbers of poor Jewish families, rehoused from Cheetham Hill. They too were given refuge in the appropriately named Zion. It was the spectacle and testimony of this shattered, pilgrim people which suggested to the Zionites (the Old Israel bearing witness to the New) that they should be on their travels while yet there was time. Then there was the rebuilding of Hulme itself, which to add to all its other problems deprived Zion of vehicular access to the premises for a short time in the mid '60s.

In 1961 the 1945 Manchester Plan at last received government approval. Hulme and Zion were at first hoodwinked into believing the community would be rebuilt around its existing road structure. The truth dawned swiftly. The Mancunian Way was to be driven on concrete supports through the heart of the community. All around were to be erected Lewis Womersley's crescents, a parody of London's and Bath's.³⁸ The official description is in retrospect a litany of horrors: medium-rise, high-density, deck-access, concrete-construction, systems-built housing units. Soon the tenants could add a litany of their own: incurable damp, cracked walls, astronomical fuel bills, vandalism, problem families, emptiness and decay.³⁹ Zion could do nothing here, as David Nevard

38. In fairness these civic enterprises had been fermenting in the official mind since 1906 when T.C. Horsfall had written his *Housing Question in Manchester* which foreshadows them all.

39. See Manchester Housing Workshop, *Hulme Crescents: Council House Chaos in the 1970s*, (1980), for a stern indictment. Visitors could be deceived. "Hulme", wrote Michael Kennedy in his *Portrait of Manchester*, London 1970, "once a blot upon the city's name but now totally cleared of its horrible if friendly squalor. In its place are blocks of flats, impersonal and antiseptic, but necessary."

recognised.⁴⁰ Rival fundamentalisms, black and white, would henceforth constitute the most vital Christian presence in Hulme.

Fourthly, as a final blow, came the great inflation of the early '70s. Gently Arthur Chadwick pointed out that a handful of worshippers with no remaining contact with the local inhabitants could not long survive soaring maintenance costs. The resolution agreeing on closure is telling: it trusted their final services would be held "before the boilers had to be started up again".⁴¹

By this time the remnant of Zion had the consolation of knowing that it would have a new and welcoming home. Tatton Street, just rebuilt, lay in an obscure corner of Hulme, in the shadow of the magnificent but redundant St George's, and where a few of the old streets still survived Planners' Blight and a community ethos persisted. It was to Tatton Street, renamed Hulme U.R.C., that the members took themselves in September 1974 and where, though now reduced to less than half a dozen, they may still be found. Their old Institute remains, and the Hallé and the Royal Northern Ballet still have their home here. But their appeal, like the later Zion's, is not to what a contemporary French poet has called the "appartements assourdis" of Le Corbusier; urban landscape, the new cruel habitations of the very poor, which stand as monuments to Functionalist perversity. Meanwhile gentrification is nibbling at the fringes of Hulme, a process which even in this most unpromising of terrains, could carry all before it.

IAN SELLERS

40. CMB, 1 Sept 1971.

41. CMB, 27 Feb 1974.

REVIEWS

John Bunyan. His Life and Times. By Vivienne Evans. Pp.216. The Book Castle, 12 Church Street, Dunstable, 1988. £10.95 hardback; £6.95 paperback.

1988 saw the celebration (if that is the right word) of the tercentenary of the death of John Bunyan, and it was to be expected that the occasion would be marked by the publication of biographical and theological studies. Vivienne Evans concentrates on the former, assembling the available historical evidence in a chronological narrative and placing it within the framework of the wider national picture.

The author has overcome the paucity of information on Bunyan's early life by attempting a reconstruction based on details in some of his works, particularly his less well-known children's verses and his personal testament *Grace Abounding to the Chief [not church!] of Sinners*. Unfortunately its fictionalised presentation combined with the use of over-simple language produces an effect which does not marry with the well-documented second half. Neither is it devoid of error: for example she states (p.102) that Bunyan "never discloses his attitude to Mary" his blind daughter, but in *Grace Abounding* he tells of his distress at being parted from his wife and children by imprisonment and his dread of the hardship they would face "especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all besides", upon whom "I cannot endure the wind should blow".

More importantly one has to cavil at some of her comments. To introduce the suggestion, both in relation to the ejected ministry and to Bunyan himself, that a man might "do more good by continuing to hold office rather than being incarcerated in prison" points to lack of understanding of the driving-force behind the refusal to conform with its insistence on the supremacy of the individual conscience over authority. And the idea that Christian's "abandonment" of his family can be a stumbling-block to appreciation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* ignores both the Scriptural injunctions and the allegorical basis of the Dream.

One is left to wonder at the kind of readership envisaged: the guide-book appendix and illustrations suggest that this book is aimed at the visiting tourist, while the mass of local material points to the interested Bedfordian. It is a useful collation but there is little otherwise of value for the serious Bunyan student.

L.M. WILDMAN

Our Heritage: The Baptists of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire, 1647-1987. Edited by Ian Sellers. Pp.179. The Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1 South Parade, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3LF. £4.50

Here is a volume which neatly marks two major anniversaries in the history of the northern Baptists. In 1787 representatives of seventeen churches, under the leadership of the energetic John Fawcett, gathered at Colne to re-form the moribund Lancashire and Cheshire Association and the Yorkshire Association. These remain essential features of the Baptist scene.

Under Ian Sellers's supervision, the contributors to *Our Heritage* have shaped a concise, readable narrative, balanced by judicious comment and complemented by illustrations which nicely reflect changes in style and word of chapel architecture. As a denominational history which is of more than denominational interest, it deserves a place on the bookshelves of Baptist and non-Baptist readers alike.

From "Humble Beginnings" during the upheavals of the Civil War, Ian Sellers traces the story as far as the 1837 separation. There is a sharp description of John Johnson, whose hyper-Calvinism was a divisive influence in the mid 1700s, and a sympathetic portrait of John Fawcett, as Yorkshire visionary and denominational statesman. The "Strict and Particular" Baptists retreated from the newer evangelism of Fawcett into a sectarian exclusivity which has barely altered. The General Baptist New Connexion, which eventually merged with the mainstream, is treated fairly, but I would have liked to read more about the esoteric Scotch Baptists.

Ernest Clipsham surveys the "glorious" years of expansion, revivalism, civic zeal and administrative consolidation up to 1887. There is an interesting account of Charles Williams, the "Pope of Accrington". As pastor, preacher, political agitator, industrial mediator, he embodied the spirit of Victorian Nonconformity. As Secretary of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, he defined a pattern of Baptist churchmanship, a careful blend of independence and interdependence, organisation and piety. Less exalted, but equally remarkable, was the witness of Robert Spurr. A long-suffering shoemaker from Bramley, he discovered in Christ the strength to endure and persevere through unemployment, poverty, family illness and bereavement.

Alexander McLaren, speaking at the centennial celebrations of 1887, looked to the next hundred years with prophetic anticipation, but the tide of events, as related by Keith Jones and John Nicholson, soon began to flow the wrong way. After 1900, memberships, baptisms and Sunday School attendances started a remorseless decline. The war was a devastating shock and the churches never recaptured the lost generation. Rural causes closed, new ventures on municipal housing estates failed, experiments in team and group ministry were frustrated, pastors simply left. Members recruited by a vigorous "Baptist Advance" drive in the 1950s from the social penumbra of chapel activity "were swept out a decade later in the questioning era of the 'Honest to God' debate". Even the architecture of the 1950s and 1960s had a dreary secularity, poised somewhere between "a local authority clinic and a Scout hut".

The final chapter, covering the decade to 1986, is entitled "Signs of Hope - and No more False Dawns". It is too early to tell whether such a judgement is justified, but the vortex of change on both sides of the Pennines has released a new vitality. Even those stubborn membership statistics have begun to show modest gains. Charismatic worship, the challenge of Restoration house-churches, local ecumenical projects, the church growth movement, the stirrings of Kingdom theology and political witness, a greater emphasis on mission and

community care, especially in the inner cities, demand much of this present generation of Baptists. They seem eager to respond.

MARK HAYDOCK

Papers of British Churchmen 1780-1940 (Guides to Sources for British History 6). Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, 1987. £7.95

The introduction to this volume begins with a claim that it "describes the papers of over 800 churchmen and women active during the period 1780-1940, selected on the basis of their significance for the study of British ecclesiastical history". What it fails to mention is that only twelve entries are for women, and several of those only appear because a male relative was already included. Only Priscilla Lydia Sellon managed to appear without assistance - neither of her clergyman ancestors (who were of some significance) are to be found here. To the readers of this *Journal* the most surprising omission is that of Lady Huntingdon. She can hardly be said to have had no significance in the Methodist movement and she has left behind a large quantity of personal papers. Since many of these papers have been reported to the Commission there would seem to be no reason why she does not appear. If the compilers had really intended to include churchwomen the three Methodist Ladies - Huntingdon, Glenorchy and Anne Erskine - would have been obvious choices.

The introduction follows this with a second controversial statement. "The opening date was chosen in order to include those who took part in the eighteenth century movements..." Because 1780 was chosen to begin the guide, Griffiths Jones and Howell Harris from Wales, William McCulloch from Scotland and George Whitefield and John Cennick from England, to mention only a few of the evangelicals, have been automatically excluded. Instead we have a very unbalanced list of some of those Methodists who managed to live until the last two decades of the century. Both the Wesleys are there, and so is James Hutton, but they can hardly be called representative of the eighteenth century movements. The result is distinctly unhelpful to anyone not acquainted with the early records of Methodism. It is not difficult to trace the major repositories of the Wesleys' and Hutton's papers, but those of Whitefield, for example, are very difficult to find.

The remarks of the Commission's Secretary in the preface confirm the impression given by this guide. It began as a subject list extracted from the voluminous materials kept by the National Register of Archives. It is probable that the original list confined itself to churchmen and the few token women were added at a later stage. Now the National Register, which is kept by the Commission, is an extremely helpful source of information, but it cannot be described as complete. Record offices do not always forward their reports of collections regularly or systematically and printed guides do not always come to the Commission's attention. The appearance of such minor characters as William Wilson and Cecil Wray here can only be attributed to the fact that the Register has reports on both, and some of the serious omissions are probably caused by the absence of reports. The draft guide therefore required

considerable editing if it was to be at all comprehensive. This has not been done, and it is now incomplete for National Register holdings as well as for printed guides. Anyone using this guide must remember that while it is good evidence for the existence of some records, it is not evidence of the non-existence of others. On occasions this caveat applies even to persons named in it.

Despite these criticisms this is still a useful book and it will be of value to all those interested in the ecclesiastical history of the period covered. It seems to be particularly comprehensive for Roman Catholics, Unitarians, Friends and (inevitably) Anglicans, but this reviewer is not sufficiently expert to say that there are no notable omissions from their ranks. Congregationalists and Presbyterians are less well represented, and Edward Irving is noticeably absent from the ranks of both the Presbyterian and Catholic Apostolic churches.

Producing a guide such as this is not an easy task. It will usually be out of date before it appears in print. The compilers recognise this when they appeal for extra information. The guide also requires a clear mandate, and that was absent here. Is this a guide to tell historians the obvious – John Wesley’s papers are in the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands University Library? Or should it be directed towards the more obscure – the Thomas Haweis’ papers in Sydney and Dallas? Should any attempt be made to include archives and libraries outside the British Isles? In this guide both Emory and Duke university in North America are included, but Drew and the Southern Methodist are not – even though they both hold substantial quantities of English Methodist records. Perhaps a second edition will more closely define what is included and what is excluded. It would also be helpful to have a beginning which is either earlier or later than 1780. Much could be said in favour of an eighteenth- and a separate nineteenth-century volume, even though cross references would be required. In the mean time we must be grateful for the Commission’s attempt to assist the work of church historians.

EDWIN WELCH

Business and Religion in Britain. Edited by David L. Jeremy. Pp.216. Gower, Aldershot, 1988.

What is the Christian businessman? Is he the hypocrite of Marxist imagination, cloaking oppression and exploitation in a veil of religious sentiment? Or the intense, self-directed paragon of self-help, so lionized by Samuel Smiles? If he is none of these things, how does he reconcile efficiency and compassion, success and service, spirituality and the spirit of this world?

Historians cannot offer definitive answers – nor can theologians – but this fine volume of essays offers revealing and novel insights into how nineteenth century captains of industry, finance and commerce experienced and worked out ethical tensions. It also succeeds in meeting the editor’s aim of opening up for discussion and research the “vital frontier” between religion and business – a vast, uncharted territory.

The Victorian owner-entrepreneur was lord of nearly all he surveyed. Unhampered by government interference, meddlesome legal restrictions, overblown management structures, quarrelsome trade unions and impersonal multi-national corporations, he had ample scope to exercise an earnest calling as a responsible custodian of wealth. He may or may not have used religion as a tool of social control in the factory and the local church as a personal monument or fiefdom of capital. He was certainly judged – often harshly – by the highest standards of Christian morality.

John Briggs's affectionate portrayal of the Ridgways, the radical pottery family of Shelton, shows that accusations of hypocrisy were accepted with quiet fortitude, even encouraged as an incentive to match religion and business behaviour. John Ridgway openly lived a public life "in the eye of the whole district" as humane employer, imaginative designer, industrial innovator, reform agitator, educational pioneer and local statesman. His influence spread wider, for this eminently "administrative mind" imposed business order on the fledgling Methodist New Connexion in the early 1800s.

The Peases of Darlington, on the other hand, came from that remarkable extended Quaker family which nurtured a generation of industrialists. Maurice Kirby highlights the dynastic sway which "Peasocracy" held over South Durham railways, mining and liberal politics and the philanthropy which aimed to create "good men". But the "inner light" failed Sir Joseph in the crucial area of business rationality. The collapse of his diverse empire in 1902 arose from what Kirby calls a "singularly inappropriate" sense of public duty expressed in a reluctance to eliminate loss making units and an over indulgent attitude towards organized labour. This is a rather glib description of a general failure of stewardship: cost cutting does not always mean moral amnesia.

Stewardship, though, is just one of many dimensions in the career of Halifax toffee king, John Mackintosh. David Jeremy's study is an unusual and fascinating attempt to identify precisely what Mackintosh got from institutional religion, and what *it* got from *him*. His success was helped by vigorous publicity techniques imbibed from Queen's Road Band of Hope – "telling good news" was how his son described the Mackintosh philosophy of advertising caramels – while his intensive marketing of a bazaar in 1910 injected a frankly commercial note into the management of this Methodist New Connexion Chapel.

There is much more of interest in this book. Clyde Binfield eloquently pays tribute to the Congregational ideal – "an equipoise of mutual responsibility" – and even suggests that it brought warmth and humanity to grimy factory floors, like the Masseys' Openshaw Canal Iron Works with its prayer meetings, its Bible classes and its ethos of a gathered church. T. Corley counterposes plain, worldly and lapsed Quaker manufacturers, an exercise which enhances the already high reputation of the Cadburys and Rowntrees for factory welfare, garden villages, systematic benevolence and progressive social thought. Anthony Howe and Jane Garnett show that many cotton masters were Anglicans and the "pre-eminent" church-builders in the late nineteenth century, an achievement which saved the Church of England from eclipse in

Lancashire, and helped save Lancashire from “dechristianization”. Professor R.H. Campbell contributes a sprightly defence of wealth creation as a “legitimate good, even a Christian duty for some”. Cutting costs may have to take priority over job-preservation, and re-investment over munificence, yet Campbell reminds us that the businessman is in trust to consumers, employees and (in joint stock companies) shareholders. Finally, there is a useful appendix compiled by David Jeremy which exhaustively lists the religious upbringing and adult allegiance of individuals mentioned in the *Dictionary of Business Biography*.

The deliberate lack of focus in this volume does not detract from its worth. Quite rightly, it asks as many questions as it answers and stimulates many more in the reader’s mind. Here are two. Why did Christians this century hesitate to follow their distinguished predecessors into business, especially manufacturing industry? Medicine, missions and teaching are “legitimate” vocations; industry generates polite indifference, even fears of worldly contamination. Why has God’s call been felt less strongly than in Victorian times?

MARK HAYDOCK